



Great Basin Bicycles

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Colorado – Leadville 50 Mountain Bike Race

Everyone knows about the Leadville 100 mile mountain bike race, but this is the shorter 50 mile mountain bike race. I have always wanted to do the 100 miler, and that was even before Lance Armstrong did the race. So, I decided to ride the 50 miler first, and then consider the 100 miler. I looked everywhere for information on the 50, and all I found was contradicting information, but everyone agreed that the Leadville 50 was more or less the 100 miler with out the flats of the 100. While doing the race, I ran my GPS, so I am offering the GPS track via Geoladders.com.

http://www.geoladders.com/show_route.php?route=38051 At this link, you can download the track into your GPS, and you can also playback the ride.

One interesting point, I always ride with a trail bell, and I used it for this race. It was just amazing; I never had to tell people to move left or right while passing.

They would hear the bell, and just move out of my whey when ever I was passing. It worked great. I even had other racers comment that they were going to use one next year because it worked so well.

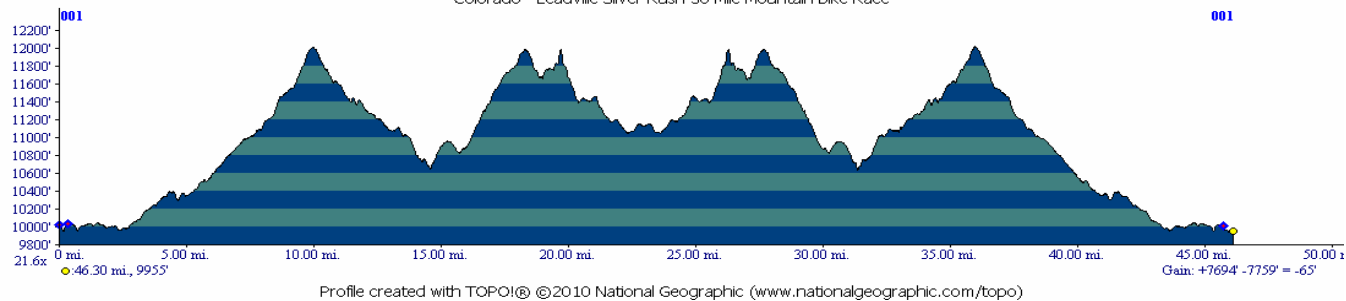
Although there are no hikers or horses on the race course, when you are out on the trail, please be wary of hikers and horses, and when ever possible, please ride with a trail bell. You can get a small bell at Great Basin Bicycles. This little bell helps take away any negative impact of biker and hikers/horses interaction because they can hear you approaching. I have had hikers and horseback riders stop me on the trail to thank me for the bell. Please consider using one.



Colorado – Leadville Silver Rush 50 Mile Mountain Bike Race (Black Trail) (Advanced)

46.30 miles 7694 ft. total elevation gain

Colorado – Leadville Silver Rush 50 Mile Mountain Bike Race



I have to be honest, this ride scared me. I live in Reno, Nevada, and I can only ride my bike up to about 10,100 ft by riding up to Relay Ridge above Mt. Rose Highway Summit on Hwy 431. I had been training from my house up to Relay Ridge, back to the highway, back up to the Ridge, then across and up to the top of Slide Mtn, then back home. I was getting in 8800 ft of climbing in 50 miles at 6:45 hrs of riding. So I knew that I could finish the race, but the start of the Leadville Silver Rush 50 is at 10,000 ft, and everything is uphill from there. I had searched the internet for information on the race, and all I found was contradicting information about the race. Everything I read about the race from other people put the climbing somewhere between 7000ft – 10,000 ft of climbing. That is a huge difference. The only commonality was that everyone agreed that the Leadville Silver Rush 50 was very similar to the Leadville 100, but without the flats of the 100.

So, on the early morning of July 17th, I left Colorado Springs for Leadville. When we got there, it was simple to find the start. Leadville is like going to Austin, Nevada (If you live in Nevada.) It is really just a 1 street road. It goes straight through town from one side to the other. Not many people live there, so all you do is look for the one spot in town where there is a collection of 10 people or more, and you are at the start. When we came into Leadville from the south, the start was easy to locate on the right (east) side of the road. We then went into town for breakfast before the race. After breakfast, we headed down to the start/finish line, and got ready to ride. I filled a camelback up with water (mistake), and took a full water bottle on the bike. My pack had a jacket shell, tights, and tons of food, spare tubes, and the regular flat fixing stuff with a pump on the bike. There were aid stations, but I had no idea where they were, or how far apart they would be, or how easy it would be to get to them. So, I figured it was

better to carry too much stuff, than not enough.

Once at the starting line, everyone lined up behind the start banner. There were 604 of us at the line. It was a 300 yard dash to the top of an old ski run, and the first one got a silver coin. Well, since all my training was below 10,100 ft, I decided to walk this 300 yd dash. This put me in about 300th place once up the 300 yards, then you are on the trail. At this point, the trail is about as wide as a Quad, or just a little narrower than a jeep road. So there were 2 single file row of riders heading out with no room to pass on either side. The trail is mostly moderate up and downs (with one steep downhill exception) for 2.4 miles. Then the road



takes a 90 deg left hand turn. Here the trail turns into a wider jeep road double track. Still 2 single file lines of riders, but you can pass in the middle. From the start, you are really stuck in what ever position you are in. But now, there is some passing, and this is where the climb starts. Here you follow a pole line access road up to the top of your first climb. From the start, the top of the climb is exactly 10 miles

away. Once you hit the hill, you have an average of a 7% grade. The problem is that it gets much steeper the closer you get to the top. When you are 1.5 miles from the top of this climb the average jumps to 14%. The steepest part of the grade, right at the top, crests at about 20%. The other problems are that this last 1.5 miles is not just steep, but very loose, with tons of baby head rocks, and tops out at 12,011 ft. The air is thin, your heart is pounding out your ears, and you are just slow, and walking. Everyone, even the leaders walked the very top of all 6 climbs, 3 out, and 3 back. Once you hit the 10 mile mark from the start, you are on this very beautiful downhill dirt road. It looks and feels like a freeway compared to what you were on. You do have to watch out for big rocks in the road, and I did see about 8 people changing pinch flats. In 3.5 miles (13.5 miles from the start) you hit your first aid station. I just blasted right past this aid station, as my full camelback was still mostly full. Now, you have a very quick down hill section. It has some quick turns, and a little loose and rocky in section s, but not bad. I was surprised, because on your return, you have to climb this downhill, and it was not as bad as it looks when you are going down. Anyway, once past the Aid Station, you head downhill, and in 1.12 miles (14.62 miles) you will hit your 10,644 ft above sea level, or your lowest point of the race outside the start/finish line. Once down, it is right back up again.



This is a short quick rideable climb. In .68 miles (15.3 miles) you will crest this climb, and start a very short downhill. Once at the bottom of this downhill, .48 miles (15.78 miles) it is right back up to 11,984 ft above sea level. This climb is 2.61 miles long (18.39 miles) and averages 9%, however, again the climb is rideable all the way except the last .2 miles. This section is a 13% grade, loose, and rocky, and everyone walks this section. Once up this climb, you have a short respite, and it is back downhill on a non technical jeep road, and in .63 miles (19.02 miles) you will be at the bottom, and heading back up again. The good news here is that this is your last climb before the turnaround point. This climb is not too bad. It is mostly rideable, except for the very last section. The climb is .76 miles (19.78 miles) long, and averages 10% from the bottom to the top. The 10% is the easy part, but the last section averages 26%, and again is loose and rocky, and everyone walks, and you are at 11,991 feet above sea level when



you cross the top of the climb. Now this is where things get a little dicey. Because this ride is an out and back, you will start to encounter racers that are heading back from the turnaround point at the bottom of this downhill. This downhill is a double track. So you now have uphill traffic

in one of the double tracks, and downhill traffic in the other double track. So if you are going to pass anyone, you have to do it in the middle of the road which is full of loose baby head rocks. It makes it tough to do. I ended up riding this middle section all the way down, and almost hit someone coming up when they lost their front wheel on a rock, and turned right in front of me. Some very quick ninja moves on my part avoided blood shed. So, be wary of uphill traffic. This section does have some flat,



and a couple short rollers, but is mainly downhill. In 2.72 miles (22.5 miles) you will be at the bottom of the hill, and then you have .57 miles (23.07 miles) of slightly uphill to the turn around point which sits at 11,133 ft. above sea level. After a quick refuel of food and water, you turn around and ride back. There is one more thing here. You have to reach this turn around point in under 4 hrs. If you don't make the 4 hour cut off time, you have to ride back down a different jeep road back to Leadville. So, make sure you are here in less than 4 hrs. Once you leave the turn around point, it is back up to 11,991 ft in 3.35 miles (26.42 miles,)

or what you just came down. Again, it is mostly rideable with an average gradient of 8%, but the last 1/2 mile is 17% loose, and rocky, and is a hike a bike. Once on top, you get a .78 mile (27.2 miles) downhill before the next short uphill climb. This climb is .63 miles (27.83 miles), it is an average of 10%, but I was able to ride the entire climb. It was slow at 11,984 ft, but it is a smooth rideable climb. Once on top, then you drop back down. You ride around an old mine that you passed on the way up, and loop around the mountain, then down the loose and rocky jeep road. This downhill is fairly technical. It is not technical by itself, but after riding 30 miles at elevation, you really have to force yourself to stay awake. As I was flying down the hill, I had a rider in front of me roll his front tire on a rock, lock up the bars, and fly directly into a tree. He broke his arm, and I would bet he broke at least 2 ribs as well. After staying with him for about 8 minutes to make sure he was ok, I continued down the trail and sent help back up. In 3.67 miles (31.5 miles) with one short climb in the middle, you will be at the bottom of your last climb. This climb is right below the first aid station you passed on the way out. It looked much harder than it was. I was able to ride the whole thing at an average gradient of 9%. In .96 miles (32.46 miles) you will reach the aid station mid way up the climb. Here you drop back out on the nice wide and smooth jeep road. This last big climb is deceiving. It looks like it is a 3-4% grade, but it is actually 8%. Because you are now above tree line, it makes it hard to access how steep the road really is. I was climbing this section very slowly. I kept thinking that I should be able to ride this section faster, but as soon as I started to push harder, my heart started to pound out my ears, and I almost immediately felt like I wanted to puke. So I slowed down, and looked at the other riders around me. Many were walking, a couple were puking on the side of the road, and there were quite a few just sitting there waiting for cramps to let up so they could continue. In 3.66 miles (36.12 miles) you will be at the top of the climb, sitting at 12,011 ft. Again, this downhill is not that technical by itself, but after 36 miles, and elevation, you really have to force yourself to stay awake. The upper half of the downhill is again loose and rocky, so you really have to force yourself to stay awake. Once you clear the rocky section, there are a couple of rollers, up and down, but nothing technical. These little rollers start to suck any energy out of you that you have left. Then you continue weaving through the trees, and head back the way you came out. Then just for fun, there is one last steep and loose climb that you have to walk, but it is just before the finish line. So hike the bike up, roll along for just a little bit, then you will drop right down on the finish line.



This was one of the most rewarding races that I have ever done. It wasn't that hard overall, but the elevation took its toll. In Reno, Nevada, I can only get up to about 10,000ft. This is where the race in Leadville started, and it went up from there. Once above 11,000 ft, I had plenty of energy, just no power. But, I would do this race again anytime.

TOPO! map printed on 08/07/10 from "Leadville Co SilverRush 50.tpo"

