

KOKOPELLI'S TRAIL

It's What Volunteers With a Vision Can Accomplish

BY GARY SPRUNG

The dedicated group that developed Kokopelli's Trail has set an example for mountain bike trail builders around the world. It created a 125-mile-long, off-road route from Grand Junction, Colorado, to Moab, Utah, in only six months with no budgeted funds. The effort was fueled by an inspired vision and hundreds of positive-minded volunteers.

The project originated when the Bureau of Land Management observed numerous incursions of mountain bicycles into the Black Ridges wilderness study area. This use is legal, but the BLM is responsible for preventing impairment of wilderness values. Some not-so-enlightened cyclists were leaving the trails and riding cross-country, often trampling the delicate desert flora and cryptogamic soils.

BLM area manager John Singlaub chose a positive approach to the problem. Instead of erecting "No Having Fun" signs, he opted to provide a better cycling opportunity in a nearby locale. He directed recreation planner Carlos Sauvage to study the possibility of placing a mountain bike trail on non-wilderness lands along the opposite side of the Colorado River.

But the BLM had no money for the project. "We're pulled in every direction," Singlaub says. "We [couldn't] provide that energy."

Enter local lawyer Timms Fowler, eager to get his hands on a new, big, fun project. In November '88, he

and Sauvage decided to go for it.

"I then approached the three bike shops in Grand Junction," he recalls. "Their eyes all bugged out." A subsequent meeting established four major goals: 1) Make the trail a regional project, including Moab; 2) Establish a route using existing jeep roads so the trail could be completed with a minimum of effort and time; 3) Generate public support for the trail; and, 4) Provide for long-term planning.

The first step involved studying maps and driving the jeep roads, tasks undertaken by Sauvage and his counterparts at the BLM office in Moab. In

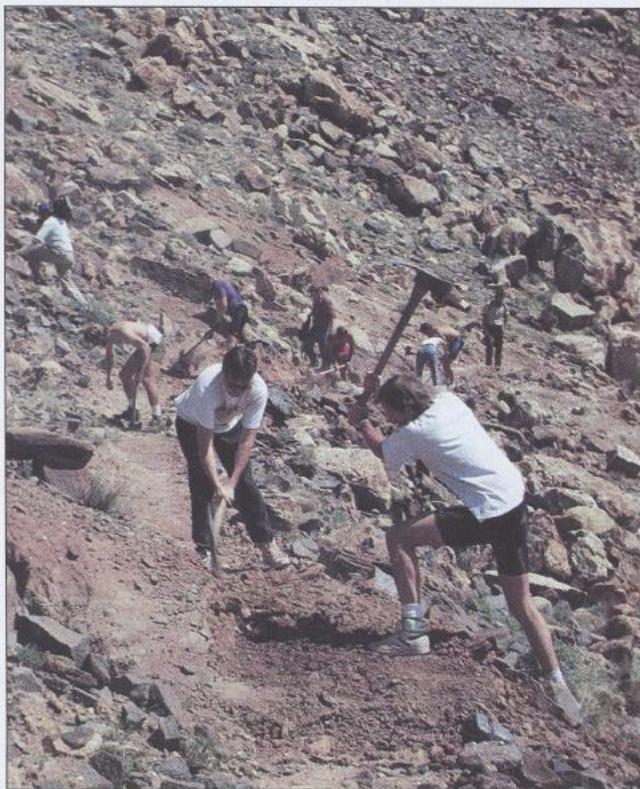
addition, bike shop personnel in both towns began reconnaissance in the dead of winter, riding over snow. Soon the cyclists and BLM had identified the basic route and decided to construct 10 miles of new singletrack to access more scenic vistas.

Simultaneously, the trail committees began a publicity effort. First, they needed a good name and settled on "Kokopelli's Trail" as a way of honoring the cultural heritage of the area. Kokopelli is a magical being primarily associated with the Flute Clan of the Hopis. He was a humped-back flute player who could drive back winter with his sounds.

As winter of '88-89 ended, the group got down to the hard work. It scheduled six trail-building weekends, and volunteers arrived in droves. Some were not even cyclists. An elderly couple journeyed 80 miles to join the team of "precision rock rollers."

Sauvage remembers that at the end of the day volunteers would be "delirious" with their accomplishments. "They would thank me for having so much fun. It almost seems that people work better for free than if you pay them." The BLM's small budget for feeding volunteers was quickly exhausted, so the local land managers scrounged money from other departments. Fowler praises the BLM managers "who weren't afraid to reach through the bureaucratic barbed wire and make it happen."

The trail opened on May 6



An enthusiastic band of precision rock rollers—all volunteers—labored six weekends to clear the Kokopelli's 125-mile path.



Instead of erecting "No Having Fun" signs, the Bureau of Land Management steered mountain bikers away from a wilderness study area to a new trail on the other side of the Colorado River.

with a beautiful ceremony at Ciccso, Utah, the halfway mark. Nineteen Hopi adults and children came from Arizona to consecrate the trail. Elder Ebin Leslie said his people felt honored that the trail recognized the significance of the Hopi culture to the area. They gave Fowler and Sauvage sacred ears of corn and directed them to plant the kernels in private pre-dawn ceremonies at spots of their choosing. The Hopis also blessed the trail with turkey feathers for wisdom and eagle plumes for strength and courage.

Only the Beginning

The future looks bright for Kokopelli's Trail. Congressmen from Colorado and Utah are working to obtain money for building campgrounds, cattle guards, a small bridge, and trail extensions. The BLM hopes to construct another singletrack to a dinosaur bones site.

The trail also has provided inspiration for several similar projects, which together will constitute a Colorado Plateau mountain bike trail network. Plans are coming together for routes from Moab to Natural Bridges National Monument; from Grand Junction to Montrose, Colorado, via the Uncompaghe Plateau; and from Moab to Telluride, Colorado. In each case, local volunteers and imagination are moving the trails forward.

Behind this story are insights as important as the trail itself. Fowler and Sauvage offer the following advice for other groups of trail-building volunteers.

- A trail can provide education. Every map and pamphlet about Koko-

pelli's Trail includes a panel on cycling and camping ethics.

- The regional approach has proved valuable. State boundaries were not heeded during planning, and maps of Kokopelli's Trail have no state lines. Moab benefits from Grand Junction's population center, while Junction benefits from Moab's cycling reputation.

- Don't strive for perfection. "It's nothing but a way to block the project," Fowler says. "We don't need perfect, we need pretty good." Improvements can be instituted after the basic route is established.

- A volunteer who shows up is by definition "on time." Leaders should offer praise and credit to volunteers at every opportunity.

- Think positively. Focus on what you can accomplish, not on what you

can't. With most efforts, 50 percent of time and energy goes into planning, 35 percent into decision making (usually a process of arguing and ego fights), leaving 15 percent for doing. So, little gets done.

- Have fun. If you're not, you'd better rethink what you're doing.

- Don't be afraid to take a chance. Let your imagination run wild. It pays to dream, because dreams can come true.

Trail builders who want more advice on the process may contact Fowler at 303/243-0405. To obtain a free map of Kokopelli's Trail and information about the Colorado Plateau Mountain-Bike Trail Association, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to COPMOBA, Box 4602, Grand Junction, CO 81502.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

I urge you to think about the ethics of the incredible mountain bike journey across the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountains of Alaska, presented in the story, "Live to Ride, Ride to Die, Mountain Bikes From Hell!" in the September/October issue of MOUNTAIN BIKE. The authors bragged, "Our route would follow no pavement, no graded road, no maintained doubletrack, no market trails. For 150 miles we would bash over river bar boulders, crash through wild game trails."

There is a generally accepted mountain bike ethic: "Don't ride cross-country, off trails." Should we be proud of "bashing and crashing" over terrain?

Perhaps this incredible journey

(which I confess I would have loved to participate in) was an inappropriate use of our new bicycle technology. We should have learned by this point in the 20th century that what we *can* do is not necessarily what we *should* do.

Trail Testers Needed

The Bureau of Land Management is looking for mountain bicyclists to test ride possible new trails in the Dolores River area of southwest Colorado. Most of the routes once served the uranium mining boom of the 1950s. Contact Sally Wisely at the BLM office in Durango, Colorado, by calling 303/247-4082.

—G.S.