

Day 6 Update

Durango, CO to Alamosa, CO
Rocky Mountain High

In the surprisingly cold morning air, the Alumni Bike Race Team members gathered in the Durango motel parking lot to pack their vans and discuss the day's arduous bike route. Tired and aching from the near 850 miles covered in the previous five days, many of the riders were slow to rise from their beds and unfortunately, Bruce the captain of the Penn team, fell ill and was unable to partake in the day's miles. In order to compensate for the team's significant loss, Bucknell junior alumni rider Pat hopped over to the Penn van and Bucknell alumni support crew member Jay rotated into Pat's position as a rider.

As with the previous day, the total scheduled bike course was split into four sections with each group taking on half the load. The Penn team, consisting of riders Murray, Mike, Nir, and Pat started the morning by riding out of Durango while the Bucknell Group drove on to the small outpost town of Ignacio. Upon leaving the bustling downtown of Durango, the Penn group rolled through amazing green expanses of farmland and pine trees, with horses and cattle acting as a mildly perturbed audience. Mountain lakes and rambling meadow streams appeared for the first time during the trip and highlighted soul-refreshing views.

Further on up the route, the Bucknell group rode along the Old Spanish Trail, a historic trade route that connected 1,200 miles between the Mexican settlement of Santa Fe, New Mexico and Los Angeles from the late 1770s to the mid-1800s. With a route bearing a resemblance to that of the Alumni Bike, the riders couldn't help but feel a connection with the storied history of the American West. Walt, Frank and Jay whipped up and down the rollers towards the foot of Wolf Creek Pass in the San Juan Mountains, conserving some of their energy for the afternoons endeavors.

The Penn team rode the remaining distance to the base of mountain pass with their usual trio, single driver rotation. A mile outside of the upgrade, the Bucknell team launched their attack with a 15 minute rotation that started with Kyle, who galloped up the first couple miles. Walt and Frank each pumped their way up the multiple switchbacks through San Juan National Forrest. Then Jay took a turn before returning to Kyle for an additional stint. Walter finished the ascent, which culminated with the triumphant crossing of the Continental Divide. The members of Team Bucknell stopped at a metal bar imbedded in the ground that delineates the flow of watersheds west to the Pacific Ocean and east to the Atlantic via the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi river. Once across the divide, which stands at nearly 11,000 feet on Wolf Creek Pass (a long climb from Durango at 6,500 feet!) the Bucknell riders celebrated with pictures and high-fives.

Once finished with the difficult climb through the foothills, the Penn Group joined the Bucknell team in celebrating the monumental accomplishment. After a extended break for pictures and congratulations, members of both groups, Bruce,

Murray, Nir, Pat, Frank, and Walt soared down the eastward side of the pass, through Rio Grande National Forrest on a lightning-fast ride through mountain tunnels and swiftly winding turns. The elated riders coasted for over ten minutes down route 160, 3,000 feet from the summit of the course. With a punishing trip up Wolf Creek Pass that conceded few miles for the amount of exertion it demanded, the senior riders managed to get their mileage in on the long downhill. Murray, Frank, Mike, and Walt logged 70, 58, 65, and 63 miles.

The last 45 miles of the 170 total miles was pleasantly flat as both Penn team riders and Bucknell riders (rejoined by Pat) strode speedily through golden fields and horse pastures. With yet another clear day of ideal temperatures (mid to low 70s) and an unbelievably blue and cloud-filled sky, the riders couldn't help but smile at Colorado's pastoral beauty. Upon entering their destination in Alamosa, CO both groups relaxed with the knowledge that, although day seven would bring more challenging climbs (two over 10,000 feet), they had taken on the highest ascent and emerged victorious.

Jay Kosa from Alamosa, Bucknell '07

Photography by Jake Alba and Frank Arentowicz