
Ferry County Cycling Federation

Barstow Dispatch

Early Spring 2021



Dreaming of summer: Lee cruising Taylor Ridge, KCT. Summer 2020. Photo: Rory Cameron

If you're lucky, you've been spending the winter enjoying the snow and not really thinking much about proper riding.

(Snow biking is not proper. It can be sort of fun in a novel way. But that wears off after a season. At best, it's really just a stop-gap solution for actual, fun riding.)

But as winter winds down, you inevitably begin to ponder some broad-stroke ride planning for the warm months ahead. For example, a common deep winter thought around here is to imagine mountain biking the Kettle Crest Trail (KCT) in shirt sleeves and shorts. Or climbing Boulder Pass at 6 am on a bright July morning.

“But as the snow fades and the monochrome of grey-brown emerges from under the melt...”

But as the snow fades and the monochrome of grey-brown emerges from under the melt, seeing bits of pavement and dirt force your mind into the specifics: Early spring becomes all about poring over maps and planning specific routes.

It’s also about riding lots of hills. Hills hills hills.

So: Spring Planning and Spring Hills. Those are the topics for this mewling inaugural FCCF Barstow Chapter Dispatch you now hold in your hands. This is not an ambitious first issue. And as a newsletter it’s perhaps only marginally interesting to some small sliver of people who ride bikes, or wish to ride bikes, in Ferry and Stevens counties. But what it does well is be finished. It shipped. And that was the primary goal for Volume 1 Dispatch 1.

Perhaps the next one will be more ambitious and interesting. But that’s doubtful. If you want the next one, send a postcard with your shipping address. If you sent a postcard for this one, we’ll send you the next one. If you want out: send us a postcard. No hard feelings.

Send it to:

John @ FCCF, Barstow Chapter
1 Rooner Way
Kettle Falls, WA 99141

The staff wishes to thank Lee for the final nudge in making this dumb thing happen.



Lisa enjoying the long descent down Deadman Creek, June 2020.



Fancy Fred and John climb up to Taylor Ridge on your basic NF road. Late summer 2020.
Photo: Rory

Ride and route planning: maps and such

Here's how we do route planning this time of year.

Step 1: Consult the big Maps

There is no better way to start ride and route planning than laying out big ass paper maps. The Metsger Ferry and Stevens county maps are ideal if you can get your mitts on them. But the Colville National Forest map is fantastic for this region too. Big maps allow you to view at once, the entire scope of regional context along with trail-level detail. There's no better way to imagine and figure the bigger picture route. That's a fact. It's science.



FCCF World HQ route planning station. A plexiglass panel hangs on the wall. Maps: Metsger Ferry County above, KCT Trail 13 (NFS) top right, and Metsger's Steven's County below.

subject, but at a minimum, you want to route with something free like Google maps to vet your ideal. But consider paying Gaia GPS (or similar) a small yearly fee to get access to private property boundaries and

Protip: A useful thing to do is to lay a big slab of plexiglass over your map and use dry erase markers to sketch out routes.

Step 2: Break out the map software

With basic routes figured out on your paper maps, you could call it a day. For some, the basic sketch on a paper map IS the plan. Part of the fun for these types is muddling through half-baked "idea of a plan," and reveling in the joy of exploration and discovery. Nothing wrong with that approach, as long as you're ok with terminating bits of your ride in dead end turn-arounds, or suddenly finding yourself in some creepy front yard deep in the forest.

For those without as much time to spare or who might find enough adventure in the known unknowns of a well-mapped route, map software coupled with a GPS is a Good Thing.

There's potentially another Dispatch column on this

“...as long as you're ok with suddenly finding yourself in some creepy front yard deep in the forest.”



Maddie rolls down a section of KCT between Old Stage and Stickpin in Summer 2017, two years after the Stickpin fire.

multiple layers (Forest Service, topo, historical, public land, are some of more interesting layers) for your route planning.

Step 3: Rank those routes

Next step would be creating a route and dumping it on some kind of device. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. The point of Spring Route Planning is to get those big loops figured out and mentally stack-ranked.

Those routes that make the cut are the ones you obsess over – they draw you back to the map for more imagining, while other routes will keep getting pushed back into the “gotta ride there one day” mental queue.

Then, sometime in June, after your early hills spring riding program, and when the clouds part and the spongy forest roads dry out a bit, you can import the route into your GPS and go do it.

“You’ll wonder what the hell is wrong with the world when you see exactly no one for the entirety of the climb.”

Two routes

The routes listed here are obsession-worthy. They've been culled from a list of hundreds of potential routes and vetted by a team of in-house experts, whereupon they were sent to THE top tier of Instagram Influencers for deep analysis. These are two of handful that made the cut.

Mayhaps you should ride them.

Route 1: Up n' o'er the KCT Loop

This route is more of an outline at this point. It will take some scouting trips to nail down the middle bit.

Shorthand route: Barstow General Store > US 395 > South Boulder Creek Road > Old Stage Trail > SOME TBD ROAD/TRAIL COMBO > Highway 21 North > Long Alec Creek > FS Road 700 > Sentinel Peak/ Boulder Pass > Barstow General Store

Miles: ~ 70-80 miles

Elevation guess: 9000-10,000 feet

Type: Epic

Like the best rides, this one will penalize you for taking a road-shaped bike or a mountain bike. There's no perfect bike. But in our opinion, it penalizes you just a bit more for the mountain bike.

This route leaves the Barstow General Store at about 1300' elevation and heads north up 395 for 5 miles to Boulder Road. After a two mile climb, the route goes up the old South Boulder Creek road access.

South Boulder Creek is a classic Colville National Forest road: the majority of the 20 mile gentle climb is adjacent to or above the South Fork of Boulder Creek. (Yes – lots of hungry small brook trout in there – they'll hit any small pattern.) Thick forest, at least one peek-a-boo beaver pond, sweeping views of Larch and pine, and excellent rutted, eroded sections of shite forest road will make you wonder what the hell is wrong with the world when you will see exactly no one for the entirety of the climb.

(You will want to filter water and fill up bottles as you get to the top of this climb. Strategic fill spot TBD in a future Dispatch).



South Boulder Creek Road in early spring.

At the top of South Boulder, you'll cut to the Old Stage Trailhead. At this point you're at about 5500 feet. Old Stage is a narrow double track that is one of the first routes cleared every spring by the Backcountry Horsemen. The first section of Old Stage is about 1.5 miles and another 500 feet elevation to the Kettle Crest Trail.

The KCT intersection would be a good spot for a rest and some food before bombing down the other side of the mountain into trails unknown. No one on the staff has been down the west side of the Old Stage trail. We can be reasonably sure that the top section of the west side of the Old Stage Trail will be sort of technical.



Standard KCT view. Looking east from Taylor Ridge. Spring 2020

When the time comes to ride this sucker, we'll map it and bring our trusty homemade custom maps (more on this in a future Dispatch). But the idea is to get down to Malo neighborhood (at about 2100 feet elevation), head north on Highway 21 to Curlew and then back up a fine NF road (Long Alec Creek/700 – topping out at about 5500 feet) and over Boulder Pass.

The loop, as all proper FCCF Barstow Chapter rides: ends at the Barstow General Store.

Route 2: Beardslee loop

Shorthand route: Barstow General Store > Barstow Bridge Road > Bridgeman-Rettinger Road > McNitt Road > Beardslee Road > hill Loop Road > Bridgman-Rettinger Road > Barsow Bridge Road

Miles: 11.5 miles

Elevation: 1600 feet

Type: Daily driver

On paper, this ride may seem like a bit of a sleeper. But we think there's a combination of features that make it special. For one, it's close to FCCF World HQ. For two, it's relatively short with some punchy climbing. These first two features make it a great low-bar quicky loop that also serves up a nice bite of Steven's County. Add some amazing scenery overlooking the Kettle River valley, a bunch of ungulates and bovines, a couple nice descents on middling dirt county roads, and you've got a ride to look forward to.

Spring hills

We believe that the point of good living is riding bikes. And the best living is riding bikes far away in the hills of Colville National Forest. Not surprisingly, we think the Goldilocks season of great riding here is from from about mid-June to mid-September.

There is no enjoying riding the Colville National Forest if you don't enjoy riding hills. Up them. Down them. On some of the most blessedly torn up rutted rocky deep woods forest roads. And grinding up and flowing down the glorious trails of the KCT system. Not to belabor the point: but this sort of riding *is* the point of pretty much everything.

We've found that the key to Goldilocks season riding nirvana is to do hill dumbness as early in spring as possible for as long and far as possible. But this is no hammer fest – we're all about slow-twitch muscle development. Climb slowly. Climb frequently. Climb purposefully. Just climb!

If you do this right, then by the time July hits, you'll be slotting right into the best season: happily spinning up Trail 82 to the Kettle Crest to loop Jungle Hill. Or looping the Ferry County metros in a day: Barstow > Republic > Curlew > Bartsow.

“Climb slowly. Climb frequently. Climb purposefully.”



Spring 2016 was a particularly good morel year after the Stickpin Fire of Summer 2015. This ride, formerly referred to as “Hodgson Loop,” became the “Morel Loop” in 2016.

We have two favorite early spring climbs. We ride them frequently:

The Morel Loop

Shorthand route: Barstow Store > North 395 > Hodgson-Lakin Road > NF Road 705 > Matsen Creek Road > North 395

This is a 19 mile loop with about 2100 feet of climbing. Five miles paved, all the rest is mostly forest road in all states of forest road glory.

This is a wonderfully secluded loop with a fun forest road descent. We ride this loop more than any other single ride.

It's got something to give in every season: early season snow mud ratty blown-out creek goodness. Spring mushroom flushes. Cool respite of canopy climbs on early summer mornings. And the first kiss of snow as you pedal over the flat summit in the late fall. God we love this ride.

Boulder Pass

Barstow Store > 395 North > Left on Boulder Creek Road

This is a 34 mile out and back from the Barstow Store. It climbs from the river to the top of Boulder. All up, about 3100 feet. All paved. The first 5 miles is relatively flat, which makes for a nice spinny warmup. The climb spans a steady grade 11.6 miles up to Deer Creek Campground and Snopark.



This is a great ride to build into as the season starts. Go hit that hill and see how far you go. Then hit it again in a couple days and go a mile further. Repeat this process until you've got to the top. Then do it a couple times a week.

Early season descents can be shockingly cold — amplified by a damp base layer from the steamy climb, and mercilessly prolonged by the 12 mile roll out to the valley below.

Mile marker 14. Boulder Pass, March 2020. Bring gloves and a shell for the descent.

John@FCCF, Barstow Chapter
1 Rooner Way
Kettle Falls, WA 99141