
Ferry County ♥ Cycling Federation

Barstow Dispatch #3



June 2021



LXM FTW! Spring 2020

The Summer of 2015 brought a terrible fire to NE Ferry County. The Stickpin Fire burned over 35,000 acres. In some areas around Boulder Pass, the fire incinerated everything, leaving a moonscape of ashy dirt.

In the Spring of 2016, as I rode the inaugural Lakin-Renner Loop (see Dispatch #1 “Morel Loop”), I came across a curious situation. I’d ridden the Lakin-Renner Loop a dozen or so times a year for the past few years. In all those rides, I encountered

4-5 cars. An essential quality of this loop is its guarantee of solitude. Entranced by the forest, I often lose myself in thought through long sections of the 7 mile climb. I’ll pop out at the top of the climb, on a flat shelf overlooking the Kettle River valley, and wonder how that happened so quickly. It’s the best kind of riding.

So on an early May morning of 2016, when I passed a handful parked cars at about the 3 mile mark of the climb, I was sort of surprised. I was then passed by a

car, and saw more cars ahead, and people. They were all clearly foraging something. Looking more closely at the ground as I climbed, I was amazed to see a flush of morels right along the roadside.

This began a season of morel madness. It seems to be common knowledge that morels will follow forest fires. I think I'd known that—but 2016 drove it home in the most thoroughly material way. From that day forward, I scoured the forests for morels. They were everywhere. We ate morels with everything. My favorite is to fry them in butter and add them to our breakfast potatoes with a couple fried eggs.

By the end of 2016 summer, I considered myself an expert morel hunter, as one might who has been so successful. So my disappointment was all the more crushing when Spring of 2017 brought no morels. I went to the Lakin-Renner spots with my bag and my knife and came home empty-handed. I went every week, finding just a few morels: a pittance compared to the embarrassment of riches we'd gleaned the previous year.

In the years that followed, I'd research where fires had burned the year previous and seek out morels in the aftermath. But that took too much driving and the strategy is an obvious one. I didn't like being part of the descending hordes—it feels sort of tone deaf to show up in someone's neighborhood where the devastation of fire is followed by strangers crashing through the charred detritus scooping up morels.

So in the last few years, I've stayed local. Basically, I look for morels in the

same areas I love to ride. It's a win-win. But damn these morels.

I've learned that morels are maddeningly everywhere and nowhere. And for that elusive magic quality, I've come to love and respect them all the more.

Here is all I think I know about finding morels in NE Ferry County and NW Stevens County.

Early season: In late April-early May we find morels at our elevation on Kettle River (about 1300 feet). Elevation is important. It seems morels will pop when conditions are right. You basically want to “follow spring” up into the mountains.





In situ: the field of dreams.

A lot of the morels that we find in early spring are the paler, almost yellow, morels. They tend to come up in fields where the wild grass has laid down from the previous year and just before the new growth starts up. Ground temperature of around 50F is what you're after, and they often pop after the first week or so of warm weather, where lows are 40ish and highs are 70ish. Add a good rain, and you should be in business.

Spend a lot of time walking through different types of growth in your area. Cover lots of ground and keep your eyes peeled. You may be surprised by a small flush of morels.

We also run into them around stands of birch, often close to the base of young trees, and gathering around some deadfall birch.

Spring and into summer: follow the elevation. This year, in early June, we had worked our way to about 3000-3400 feet and have found the best morels of the year. We have found success when some or all of the following variables are true, in order of what I think are probably most important:

- Minimal ground cover growth: most of the mushrooms at elevation are coming up in parts of the forest where the floor is not actively in green growth. Look for semi-shady areas where the ground is covered with needles or decaying matter. Follow game trails into these areas. Morels are often on and around these faint trails.
- Diversity of trees: Morels in this region seem to prefer proximity to fir trees. Cedar and birch are good markers too, but they should be commingling with fir. We've not had luck when pine is the only tree around.
- Moisture: I think there may be a misconception that mushrooms need to grow in overly wet areas. It seems there certainly needs to be some moisture nearby—and that's where birch trees are a good marker if you don't see obvious

Morels are maddeningly everywhere and nowhere. And for that elusive magic quality, I've come to love and respect them.

surface water. But we don't find morels in squishy, muddy areas.

- Other mushrooms. It's always a good thing to see other mushrooms. Polypores are good markers because they're easy to see and they're proof that mushrooms can grow in the area. Fresh ground

mushrooms seem to be a better sign. And this year, coral mushrooms have been a consistent marker at elevation.

- Mosquitoes. Often (not always) we're getting bit by mosquitos when we've really hit pay dirt. But there's always ticks, so dress for 'em!

Go here for morels...

We're not big on "secret spots." In our experience, morels are not very consistent. We know of a couple tiny patches that seem to pop yearly, but generally, where we've found a field of dreams one year is barren the next.

But the area we are about to describe here is generally productive. It's not a spot or a patch, but a good area that is all on public land and a happens to be a fantastic ride too.

Tuck this one away for next year. This is gold.

But first a request: the primary reason we print and send this Dispatch is to keep it off the internet. Please keep this analog!

And if you come visit Ferry County next year for morel riding, let us know and maybe we can go with you.

This route takes you up into Colville National Forest on the Steven's County side, in an area known as "The Wedge." It's a solid bit of climbing: about 2000 feet over 7 miles or so.

Shorthand route: Barstow General Store > Barstow Bridge Road > Bridgeman-Rettinger Road > McNitt Road > Beardslee Road

Follow Beardslee into the National Forest. Depending on the time of year — figure out your elevation target and forage the forest along the road as you work your way up the climb.



South Boulder: Early spring. Go ride that sucker.

Contact us

Subscriptions are free: send us a postcard with your mailing address.

Want to cancel? Send us a postcard.

Want to connect on the information super highway? Send us your email too and we'll email you back.

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

Magic jackets

We have two go-to jackets that we need to rave about. They're both magic. And like any good magician, they don't give up their secrets in explaining the "how." Both of the tags on these jackets hide the details of the material by simply listing the contents as "100% Nylon." This is like the "natural flavor" of sleazy food labels. Perhaps there's beef tallow in these jackets. Frankly, we don't have a clue how these jackets are able to do what they do, so naturally, we conclude that they are made by wizards and they are magic.

First up is the relative new-comer to the magic jacket club: the Outdoor Research Helium rain jacket. This is a bonafide waterproof jacket. Why is it magic? Because it actually breathes and it actually keeps you dry, even in a miserable downpour. So often rain jackets are great at keeping the water out whilst keeping your sweat locked in, thereby creating a perfect steam bath situation. By some magic miracle, this OR jacket is able to do what has so far been elusive in our experience: keep you dry when you're pedaling hard in the rain. We realize that this does not sound magic. It simply sounds as if the jacket fulfills the promise of all rain-jacket-ad copy, but here's the kicker: the jacket appears utterly wetted out in the first few minutes of a downpour. It looks as if it's soaked through almost instantly. And it's not!

The Helium saved our buddy on a late season September ride up and over Copper Butte. We had rain for nearly the entire 3 hour ride. We rode up to 7100 feet where the wind was pushing rainy sleet sideways. The descent down to Old Stage was in a frigid downpour. It would be a damn lie to say he finished this ride dry, but the jacket held up and kept him from abject misery, which when compared to other possible outcomes, should be considered an honorary magical experience.



Outdoor Research Helium. Keeping John dry in June downpour on Deadman Creek descent. Photo: Lisa Sunderman.

The jacket is \$159 MSRP, but can be found for around \$130. It's super light. It packs down to the size of about a soda can. It belongs in your stash if you can swing it.

The second magic jacket is our original magic jacket: the aptly named Houdini from Patagonia (\$100). We've packed this sucker around since 2013. It's got a hood. We figured that's why it had the funny name. But no—it's magic. Seriously. What is this 100% Nylon miracle infused with? It can only be magic wizard threads.

That said, it's important to realize that this jacket is not for wet situations. Not at all. Pack the OR Helium if rain is in the forecast. Otherwise, the Houdini travels with us on pretty much every ride outside of July-August. And if we're going way up in the hills in July-August, then the Houdini is stuffed in a seat bag, back pocket, or feed bag, because it stuffs down to about the size of a mini-soda can.

The Houdini is exactly what you want as an outer wind block layer for any sort of chilly situation. Paired with the right wool jersey, the Houdini will save you on descents down to about 25F. It keeps just enough of your body warmth in to keep you from freezing on early spring Boulder Pass descents, but somehow breaths out to keep you from overheating on chilly climbs. It's uncanny. It's magic. If you have only one riding jacket, this should be it.

While not strictly magic, an honorable mention goes to the O2 paper rain jacket. If you can't swing both of the aforementioned jackets, then get the Houdini and then get an O2 paper rain jacket until you can buy the OR Helium. The O2 used to be about \$25. It's \$40 now, but given how light, packable, and water resistant it is, it's a great value, if not magic in its breathability.



Patagonia Houdini in packed mode.



O2 jackets with a strong 2/3 majority showing at a typical National Forest ride from 2010. This photo was taken in Couer d'Alene NF by Pat "The Legend" Sprute.

The O2 paper rain jacket is a classic standard bit of gear that we've used for about 15 years. It's waterproof. Verily.

Given it's papery construction, the O2 jacket will inevitably rip. Most rips can be easily patched with duct tape. But because it's a relatively cheap jacket, it lends itself to hacking. Rips also afford one the opportunity to chop the the sleeves off and make a wind vest.

We love the O2.





Salt preload

If you haven't had a near-death experience from dehydration whilst cycling, than either you're too smart for this game, or you're not doing it right.

It seems we've all got stories of at least *that one time* where we've been seized by crippling cramps and left for dead on the trail, praying through salty, parched lips for another chance.

Been there! So hydration is often on our minds as we plan routes that probe deep into trails unknown, often at elevation far from easy water, and always in the dry summer heat of Ferry County.

Planning must include water management: How much to bring, where to find more, and a filer plan.

And then there's always the question of supplements, because salt and electrolytes! Electrolytes!

As it turns out, water *is* important. It's like, you know, 70% of life or whatever. But the money here, apparently, is water + salt. This is not news. We've been tossing a Nuun tablet in each water bottle on "big" rides for years. But there's more here. Salt is really important. Water ain't enough. Want proof? One word: *hyponatremia*. And if that doesn't sound important, then you're really one of us: Go Ride!

Our Expensive Consultant Bill (see his arse on the cover of Dispatch #2) turned us onto the concept of hyponatremia, which is basically too much water, not enough salt. A common scenario where hyponatremia can occur is when you attempt to stay hydrated by drinking a bunch of water, but end up peeing out too much salt. We've done this. In preparation for a big ride, we focus on hydrating by drinking tons of water. We pee and pee and

keep drinking water and pee some more. Then still get bonky on a hot long day in the saddle. There's a bunch of "biology," "chemistry," and general "science" around why salt matters, but it turns out all of this witchcraft may add up to something.

We know this because we've been getting weird with pre-salt hydrating this spring. Our conclusion? In addition to saltiness, there appears to be magic in salt.

We've been starting "big ride" days with a cup of V8 spicy tomato juice (648 mg of sodium) and then a cup of cheap French onion soup mix (650 mg) followed by a couple quarts of water. Wait an hour or so. Then ride.

On paper, it all sounds pretty awful. And it kind of is. But it gives us wings! Then, on rides, we do the Nuun (or similar salt tablet) thing in each water bottle.

In the past we've experimented with canned, diluted chicken stock in our water bottle. Gross, but cheap, pre-mixed, and salty! And naturally, we will always stand by

the convenience store hook-up: potato chips and chocolate milk.

Bill has gone from recommending the salt preload to swearing by the preload. One might say he's religious in his salt preload zeal.

We're still early converts with the preload and we'll continue to experiment as the summer comes in full stride. We'll report back. So far it's a Good Thing and we endorse it.

Got a hot weather, long distance cycling hydration ceremony we should know about? Send it our way.



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