

WE'LL TAKE YOU THERE

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**MAPPING EVERY MILE**  
THE AMBITIONS OF LESLIE KEHMEIER

**INTO THE FRYING PAN**  
GIVE AND TAKE IN IDAHO'S PANHANDLE

**UNWIND UNDER THE STARS**  
10 WEEKEND BIKEPACK TRIPS

**COME HELL OR HIGH WATER**  
REBUILDING AFTER THE BOULDER FLOODS

Discontinues until February 25, 2014.



# A FEW NIGHTS UNDER THE STARS

Words & Images  
by Cass Gilbert



**Bikepacking Escapes  
for Mere Mortals**

Soul replenishing: a night under the stars on  
the Coconino Loop in Arizona.



# Forget

Forget the Tour Divide for now; no need to punish yourself with days of sleep deprivation to reach a nonexistent podium. No time for that multi-week adventure across the state? Then just go ride your bike and spend a few nights outside.

Bikepacking's not just about racing or tackling vast tracts of ground. It's about tapping into that adventurous spirit that resonates so strongly when we mountain bike and taking it to a whole new level. It's about the empowering sense of self-sufficiency born from a bike tour, teamed with the thrill of riding singletrack—technical or otherwise—on a laden bike that's still light enough to enjoy. And most of all, it's about not having to go home for the night, just when things are getting really good.

Thanks to a fantastic trail network and the hard work of volunteers, along with acres of national forest and BLM land prime for camping, the Southwest is blessed with some of the best long-distance bikepacking routes in the world. And for the very same reasons, it's also peppered with some of the finest long weekend escapes you could wish for; each one a compressed, time-friendly adventure just waiting to be savored.

So slow down and delve deeper. Discover the real backcountry and find new trails. You don't need weeks, just a few days. Pack your stove, pitch your tarp and soak up those starry nights. And don't go home.





A lightweight setup makes extended climbs all the more manageable on the AZT.

### 1. GILA RIVER RAMBLE, ARIZ.

If you don't have time to ride all 800 miles of the Arizona Trail ([www.aztrail.org](http://www.aztrail.org)), then try the more compact Gila River Ramble ([www.bikepacking.net/routes/gila-river-ramble](http://www.bikepacking.net/routes/gila-river-ramble)), which borrows some of the very best sections of the AZT as its backbone. The main loop is about 80 miles in length, but there are various spurs and interconnecting trails to weave in if you want to get more out of a visit to the area. Set in the ever-craggy Superstition Mountains, terrain includes corridors of mighty saguaro cacti and stunning box canyons, spread over some 10,000 feet of challenging climbing. The word "ramble" is, without doubt, a modest definition for the steep, rocky grades involved, the lofty ridge rides, the precarious, whirling switchback descents, and the endless singletrack alleyways that wend through forests of prickly cholla cacti. So despite its mild-mannered title, think more along the lines of weekend epic than casual saunter. The Gila Ramble is straightforward, logistically; the start and end points are Kelvin, near Phoenix. Temperature-wise, October to April is the best season. For wildflower action, ride this loop in the spring. Be aware that the terrain can be hard on tire sidewalls. And don't forget, running tubeless is a prerequisite on the AZT.

### 2. THE BLACK CANYON TRAIL, ARIZONA

The Black Canyon Trail ([bctaz.com](http://bctaz.com)) is a multi-use route that provides the perfect introduction to bikepacking. Running from the small settlement of Mayer to the northern fringes of Phoenix, its 78 miles of sublime, flowing, desert singletrack are easily split into two days, with a convenient resupply point at Black Canyon City, where food and water is available. Flanking the foothills of the Bradshaw Mountains, the route is clear to follow and well-signposted, and there are maps/gpx files available from the BCT website, too. Plans are afoot to eventually extend the ride to Prescott, where an extensive trail network already exists in the surrounding Prescott National Forest—easy enough to tack on a couple of extra days to your road trip. GnarGnar Tours offer a shuttle service for \$15 (\$2 of which goes to the Black Canyon Trail Coalition), making it a logistically straightforward weekend foray. Or stick your thumb out and hitch. Temperatures soar in the summer, so the Black Canyon Trail is an ideal winter escape.