Get Out
Mountain Biking to the Top of White Mountain via Silver Canyon
by Alan Jacoby

This was one of those “once in a lifetime” rides. Doing it once was plenty for me. I don’t ever want to see Silver Canyon again. EVER. Although I wouldn’t mind hiking White Mountain with the family and taking them to Patriarch Grove to share the beauty of the ancient bristlecone pines, it will definitely be accessed via car, and not by riding my bike up 12,000’ into the sky. That being said, I’m reveling in the rare satisfaction that is only achieved through immense mental and physical suffering leading to successfully completing a lofty goal…and then whining about it after.

The amazing landscape and scenery are second to none. The ancient bristlecones and moonscapes up high are unreal. The first time White Mountain comes into view after climbing past Patriarch Grove is magical. I’m gonna ride to the top of that? SWEET!!!

Looking down off the top of White Mountain in all directions is spiritual. With all the adrenaline, oxygen deprivation, and overall cracked-out mental state I was in, it was quite emotional. Something everybody needs to do.

When I arrived at the summit, there were six people there clapping and cheering, hooting and hollering at me. Turns out, they were the same group that drove past as I was sitting on a stump eating my chicken cesar wrap at Patriarch Grove hours before, and remembered me. They were all mountain bikers (who were just hiking for fun) and understood the feat of climbing up Silver Canyon. Sharing that moment with them was great. I should have had a beer with them, but I needed to keep my remaining wits intact for the descent.

Riding down Old Silver Canyon. That wagon road was so much fun and offered up unique views compared to the traditional route. Seeing the old cabin, and imagining this area in the mining heyday, is always fun for a history buff like me.

In closing, if ultra-endurance adventure riding is your thing, this ride is for you. Otherwise, drive your car up to the locked gate, and hike or bike to the top of White Mountain Peak. It’s worth every penny of flesh and blood and sweat left on the trail—no matter how you get there.

Getting there: The version I did starts at Laws Railroad Museum, approximately four miles north on Highway 6 from the Highway 395/Highway 6 intersection in Bishop. Climb up Silver Canyon to White Mountain Road (6,400’ climb over 11 miles). You then continue up White Mountain Road past the Patriarch Grove turnoff, through the locked gate, up to the Barcroft Laboratory, and eventually to the summit of White Mountain Peak at 14,252’—the highest peak you can ride your bike to in the contiguous United States. Then comes the down. For a more enjoyable descent, make a right on Old Silver Canyon—a mining-era wagon road that goes down the north side of the canyon and reconnects with Silver Canyon about five miles from the end. The whole ride is 65 miles long, with around 12,200’ of elevation gain. Not for the faint of heart. Enjoy!

Alan Jacoby is a founding member of the Sierra Eastside Mountain Bike Association, an avid mountain biker, owns the Maven Bike Shop, and is a long time Mammoth resident.