

# RIDING INTO NEVADA'S HISTORY

Finding A Mother Lode Of Trails And Ghost Towns

Story and photos by Karel Kramer

**I** can't say that I've ever been highly amused by a KTM speedometer before. Our group of five riders and three Trac-On (Trail Ride Adventure Circuit of Nevada) support staff were clicking off roughly 35 mph atop a decommissioned 1870s railroad bed. This was on the final leg of the private, custom trail ride Trac-On calls the Treasure Hill Run. Mentally, Treasure Hill is like two rides in one. One aspect is four days of submerging the theater of your mind in the rough-and-tumble history and ghostly relics of East Central Nevada. The physical parallel universe is the sensory overload of over 400 miles of amazing trails and roads that threads the old-timey stuff together. An argument could easily be made that wildlife spotting was an additional (though smaller) facet of the ride. We saw small herds of wild mustangs at several points, caught a glimpse of antelope, got close to deer, spooked many rabbits, enjoyed the soaring predator birds and even the unexpected-in-Nevada waterfowl.



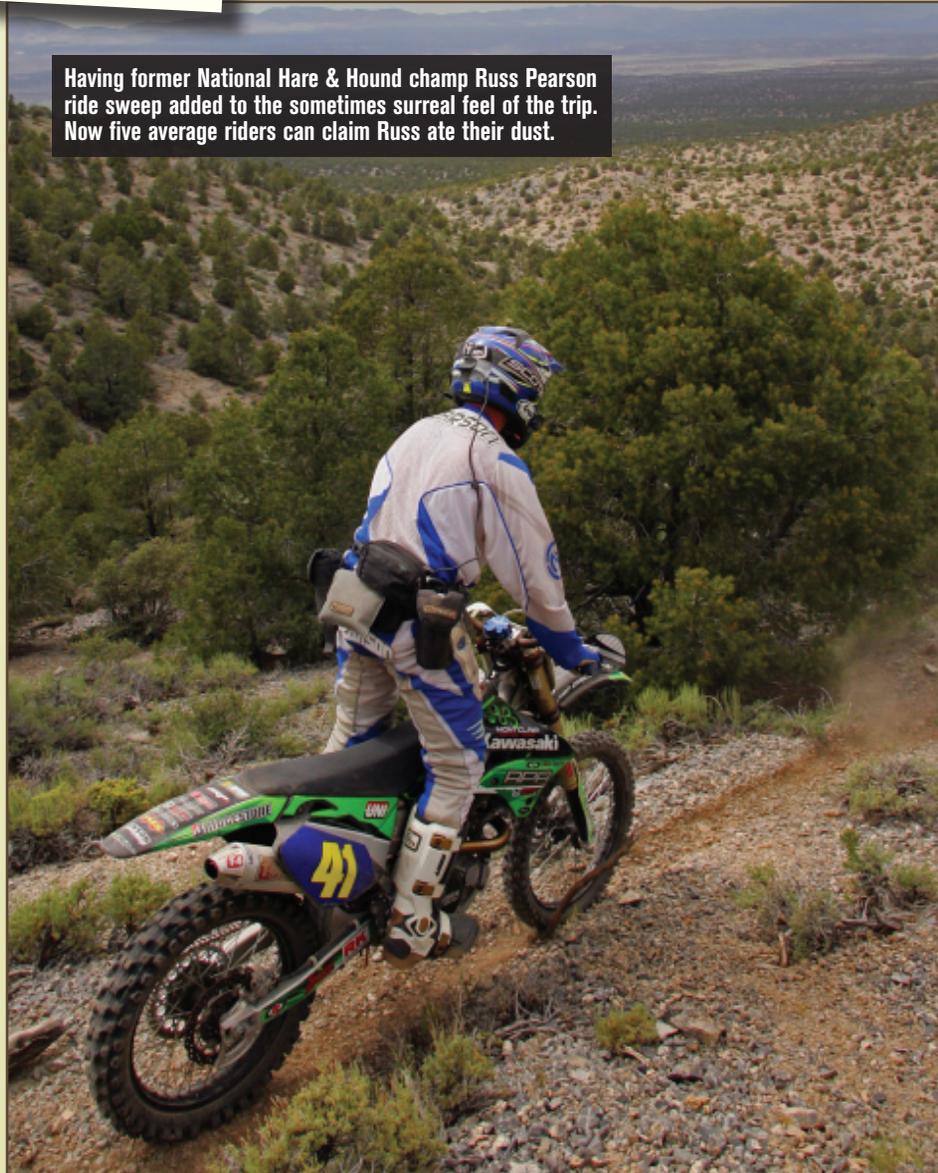


After our history tutorials of the area in general and Pioche in particular, it seemed fitting that we were making the final miles on the ancient raised railroad bed. In other words, entering town along the same route as so many earlier men who found themselves pulled inexorably toward old Pioche by the siren song of silver. We were no less drawn to modern Pioche, but it was no hunger for precious metal; we could taste the steak sandwiches and sweet potato french fries waiting. The distraction of hunger and the care needed to navigate a narrow-gauge railroad bed on a 530 XC-W left just enough brain cells unoccupied to marvel at the dedication and work ethic of the early settlers and miners. Today the rail bed looks like a largely overgrown ridgetop two-track, since it was long ago stripped of rails and ties. Only the regularity of the sides and the steadiness of its aim for Pioche name it a man-made artifact. I tried to imagine throwing up a similar earthwork with rude tools and four-legged horsepower, and the idea isn't pretty. Like most dirt riders, I prefer a softer sort of saddle and my horsepower packaged much differently.

The Treasure Hill Run can be three to five days, and the routes are designed to provide optimum riding experiences while linking up the series of ghost towns, camps and mine sites. From a modern dirt rider's perspective, the cool thing about 1870s silver miners is that they needed a lot of stuff, so they used wagons.



Having former National Hare & Hound champ Russ Pearson ride sweep added to the sometimes surreal feel of the trip. Now five average riders can claim Russ ate their dust.





**We got to see several herds of wild mustangs, but this group was the largest and let us get a camera out.**

Plus they were willing to go anywhere for silver, so they created a spider web of roads around mining areas. In 140 years those roads have faded to primitive and faint two-tracks. In real 2008 life that means single-track turns with a choice of two single-tracks linking the turns.

No doubt a horse, being slower, was a more intimate way to experience the Pioche area, but the back of a dirt bike is a grand way to relive the feeling of the colorful, often violent history of Nevada without the actual pain and discomfort. You feel the same wind and smell the same cedars and pines as those early riders did, and as I stole that look at the speedo heading into Pioche, I saw that we were easily riding at velocities the early steam engines would've struggled to duplicate. The whole trip was a dichotomy. We couldn't have been more modern with radio communications, ample food and drink and a luxurious, even opulent motor home waiting at every stop no matter how remote, but the feeling of riding into history was so tangible that a Rod Serling appearance wouldn't have been a surprise.

Pioche is located at over 6000 feet elevation, and it's famous for being the roughest and toughest mining town in Nevada's western frontier history. In the early boom years 72 men died in shooting incidents before a single person died of natural causes! Even getting to Pioche must've been an epic journey 140 years ago. Just traveling from Las Vegas was a life-threatening week on horse-back battling exposure, pugnacious wildlife and perhaps disgruntled and even then displaced Native Americans. The same trip had cost me three hours of comfort in a Dodge Quad Cab with the Cummins Turbo-diesel humming, A/C purring and books on tape minimizing the miles. For myself and the paying customers on the ride, the time, effort and expense were well worth it.

The inspiration for these small private group rides came from a Trac-On client who had spent a lot of time



**While the majority of the trails were primitive and fun two-track, we did get in a good amount of great single-track.**

on private rides in Mexico but wanted a change of scenery, a better feeling about safety and a way to spend his riding dollars in the United States. Trac-On already had a series of affordable, technical rides with marked trails for large groups, but these private custom rides are a new and different story. Once you arrive in Vegas with your bike and gear or arrange for a Trac-On rental (four-stroke KTM or Husky) your worries are over. The tour provides all transportation until you return to Vegas, and it covers lodging, food and fuel for the bikes. You don't open your wallet unless you want an adult beverage.

The comparison to Mexico ends at the riding. Trail boss Daryl Folks has 14 desert No. 1 plates, and the rides he's put together are far tougher and more techni-





Miners needed charcoal to make enough heat to smelt silver. These kilns turned most of the area's trees into charcoal.

In addition to the Treasure Hill Run, you can choose from four other rides of similar scope and historical interest. Four of the five private rides have all of their trails over 5000 feet elevation. One even includes short sections of the Pony Express route. If you're looking for a private adventure ride with the emphasis on the ride, Trac-On is a great option.

**INFO:**

[www.trac-on.com](http://www.trac-on.com); 702.641.6401 or 702.232.6680

**APPROXIMATE PRICES:**

\$1650–\$2900, depending on the number of days and riders. The suggested maximum number of riders is 10–12. Add \$185 a day for bike rental. The only rental bike on our trip was a brand-new Husqvarna 450.

**AREA ATTRACTIONS:**

Small museum tours and antique shops.

**LODGING:**

Pretty limited.

**ACTIVITIES FOR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS:**

Not really.

**RIDE RATING:**

Can be structured for a pretty wide range, but generally best for accomplished riders with off-road-prepared bikes and equipment. Be ready for long days on the bike.

**SUPPORT RATING:**

Considering the rural setting, the accommodations were quite nice, but the lodging was rudimentary by modern standards. No pool, laundry or Internet. The chase riders were well equipped and prepared, and the support truck was first-rate. The food was basic but good, and we had plenty to eat and snack on.

cal than the typical Mexico tour. We were on the trail before 8 a.m. each morning, and after squaring the bikes and gear away and cleaning up, we never got to dinner before 8 p.m. on the full ride days. The first and last days are abbreviated for travel time to and from Vegas, but they are still long, tough days. This isn't Erzberg, but it's no dual-sport ride. Some elaborately maintained dirt roads were aimed at covering miles, and we cranked up the speeds, but many other sections were far slower and more technical. In addition to primitive roads, we traveled a fair amount of single-track, a bit of a desert racing course and Nevada's own diabolical version of a sand wash where control is merely a slogan.

Some trails and roads were extremely rocky (silver comes in rock form, you know), there were brief sections with silt and some of the climbs were technical. Considering the general terrain conditions in Nevada, Folks has done an admirable job of avoiding the worst of the rocks, and in 400 miles we saw less than a mile of whoops, and they were small and left over from desert events in the 1990s.



Considering the high-desert nature of the region, many areas of the ride were surprisingly green.