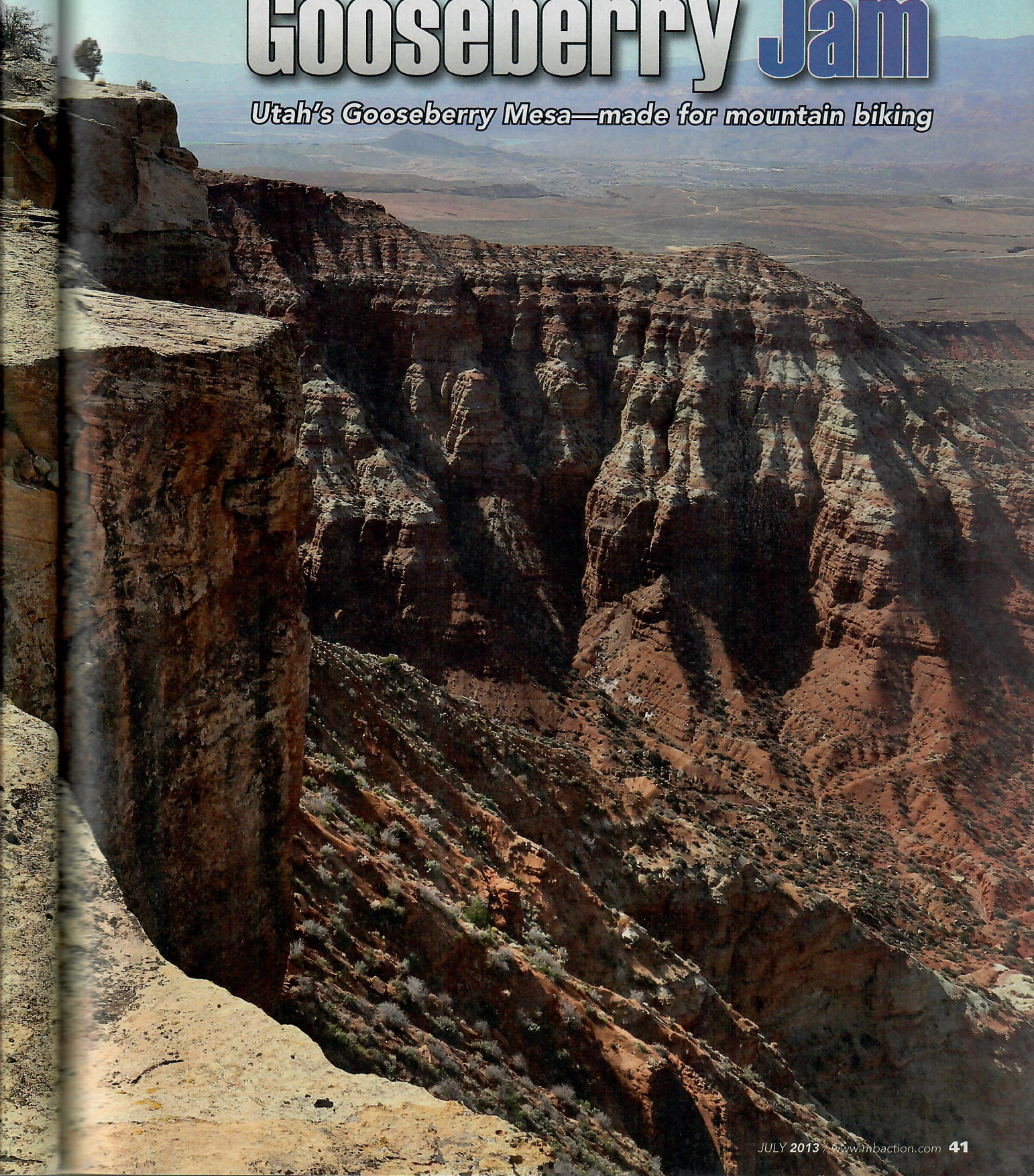


Harris brothers Morgan and Michael used to hunt on top of Gooseberry Mesa outside the town of Hurricane, Utah, located in the southwest corner of the state. The guys used motorcycles to get around the mesa ("mesa" means an isolated, flat-topped hill with steep sides found in landscapes with horizontal strata) and became well acquainted with every nook and cranny of the 24-square-mile plateau.

When mountain bikes became all the rage, the brothers headed to the much-hyped Moab, Utah. The trip was an eye-opener. They realized their Gooseberry Mesa hunting ground had the potential to rival anything they had ridden in Moab. They went home, got some paint, and marked a trail that snaked over and around the slickrock, gullies and washes found on top of the Goose.

Making Gooseberry Jam

Utah's Gooseberry Mesa—made for mountain biking



Gooseberry Mesa



Tastes so good: The five-month-pregnant DJ Morisette and her husband Quentin (owners of Over The Edge Hurricane bike shop) lead Jimmy Mac on the Guacamole Trail, located north of the Goose. If you plan to spend more than a few days, exploring this riding area is worth the side trip.

Not long after laying out their trail, the brothers spotted a newspaper account of riders who had done something similar and were fined thousands of dollars for marking illegal trails on public lands. Instead of covering their tracks, the Harris brothers called the BLM and said, "We may be in trouble with you guys."

The BLM arranged to meet with them to see what damage had been done. The result of the meeting was not what anyone had expected. They were not fined, arrested or told never to set a knobby on the Goose again. They were congratulated! The BLM was so impressed with their trail-building skills that the place was designated an official mountain biking destination, and money was found for a bathroom, signage and a parking area.

Accessibility: The closest decent-sized city to Hurricane is St. George, Utah. It has an airport, but flights are limited. Riders coming from far-off places will get the best deal by flying to Las Vegas, Nevada,

and renting a vehicle (preferably an SUV or jeep) to road trip to Hurricane.

Driving distances to the town of Hurricane are:

- 19 miles from St. George, Utah
- 141 miles from Las Vegas, Nevada
- 291 miles from Salt Lake City, Utah
- 292 miles from Park City, Utah
- 327 miles from Moab, Utah
- 366 miles from Fruita, Colorado
- 405 miles from Los Angeles, California

Lodging and camping:

Hurricane offers plenty of hotel rooms, but be sure to check ahead. Hurricane is aggressive about holding events, and if something big is happening (like trail runs or a triathlon), the place can fill up. Hotels also bump their rates for special-event weekends.

To really experience the Goose, we recommend that you make a long weekend out of your visit. Stay in Hurricane or St. George on Thursday night, cruise out to the Mesa on Friday morning, and plan to camp two nights before heading home on Sunday. Gooseberry Mesa offers pitch-it-wherever, fee-free campsites, and the sunset on the surrounding buttes and star-filled night sky are amazing.



Gooseberry Mesa

The payoff: Brian Sweaney and Pat Carrigan take a minute to enjoy one of the seemingly infinite viewpoints around the Mesa. There are plenty of campsites that afford views like this one.



Eats: St. George is loaded with places to eat, but Hurricane leaves a lot to be desired, especially if you arrive late. The town closes up early.

We highly recommend one spot—the Main Street Café, owned by MBA “Rider Who Inspires” Kevin Talbot (August 2008) and his wife Pam. The place serves breakfast and lunch, and you’ve got to eat at least one meal there on your way out to or back from the Goose.

Bike shops: Over The Edge Sports is located on the last block of town before you head up the grade to the Goose. For such a small town, the Edge is a well-stocked bike shop (that serves a mean cup of coffee or

espresso). The staff is knowledgeable and active in preserving the Gooseberry experience. They also maintain a sizeable rental fleet that’s set up perfectly for riding the Goose. You can call them at (435) 635-5455.

Maps: Adventure Maps, Inc. offers a detailed map of the St. George, Hurricane and Springdale trails. Over The Edge carries the map, or you can order it directly.

The weather: Snow and heavy rains strike often in the winter months, so skip that time of year if you are traveling from a distance. Spring and fall are the best times to experience Gooseberry Mesa. The elevation is 5200 feet, though, so summer is not out of the question if you are willing to get your rides in early.

Special gear: Riders with elbow and knee/shin pads do not look out of



Local guide: Jordan Rarick (front) is a local who gets to play on the Goose any time he can sneak away. His partner in crime is Arthur “Biscuit” Smith, a BMXer who is learning the big-wheel ropes. Both of these guys see the Goose for what it is—a giant playground.

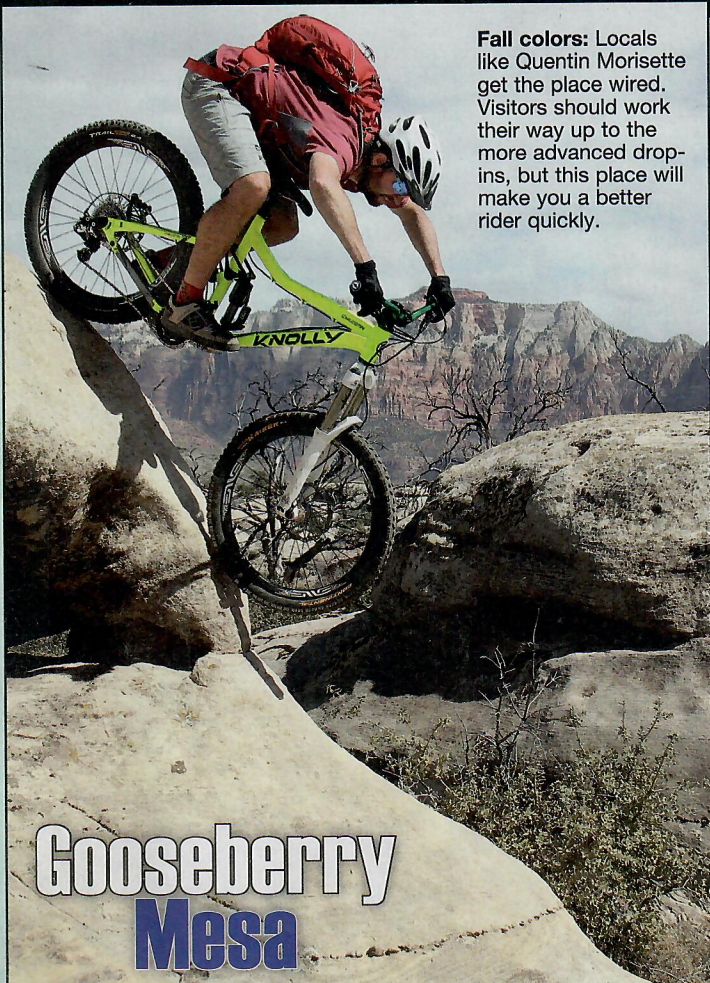


Good eats: Little Creek Station in Apple Valley (on Highway 59 before the Goose turnoff) has great-tasting sandwiches with very interesting names. Please remember to tip the sandwich chef.

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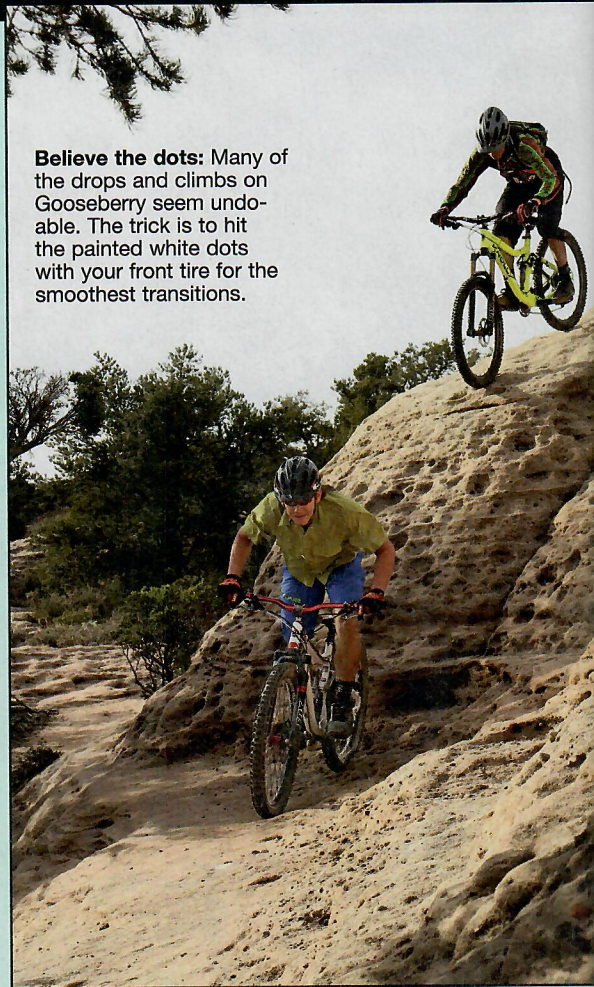


Watch your step: Sections of the Rattlesnake Rim Trail are not intended for riders afraid of heights. "It could be bad if you look over the edge," explained an acrophobic rider. "I just looked down the trail and was fine."



Fall colors: Locals like Quentin Morissette get the place wired. Visitors should work their way up to the more advanced drop-ins, but this place will make you a better rider quickly.

Gooseberry Mesa



Believe the dots: Many of the drops and climbs on Gooseberry seem undoable. The trick is to hit the painted white dots with your front tire for the smoothest transitions.

place on the trails of Gooseberry, but if you know your limits, pads are not required equipment.

Bikes: Long-travel trailbikes are fun to ride in these conditions. There are no extended climbs, so the added weight of fat tires and more travel is not going to handicap you. That said, some locals do just fine with single-speed, cross-country bikes. You just better be on your game.

Guides: Guide companies like Rim Tours, Utah Mountain Biking Adventures and Hermosa Tours offer trips in and around Gooseberry Mesa. Utah Mountain Bike Tours offers more customized trips, and Mountain Bike Buddies offers shuttle service to lots of southern Utah ride destinations.

Getting to the Goose: Gooseberry Mesa is about 18 miles outside of Hurricane. From Hurricane, take Highway 59. It is a right turn off Highway 9, and then



Time for reflection: If you get to the Gooseberry area before the summer heat hits, it is not uncommon to find inviting hot tubs that Mother Nature left for you.

Gooseberry Mesa

almost an immediate left turn up a climb (look to the right and you'll see Chums, the makers of eyewear retainers, and then Over The Edge Sports bike shop is on the right before you start the grade). Follow Highway 59 (that's Gooseberry Mesa towering off to your left) for 14.5 miles. When you pass the convenience store in the middle of nowhere, you are getting close. Between milepost eight and nine, just past the scenic byway sign, make a sharp left onto Smithsonian Butte Road. It is not well-marked, so go by our mileage cues. Follow this dirt road 2.8 miles and turn left at the gate, where you will cross over a cattle guard. They say there is a sign, but we've never seen it. If you start going downhill on Smithsonian Butte Road, you've missed the Gooseberry Mesa turn.

Once you've crossed the cattle guard, you've still got 3.6 miles until you'll see the bathrooms. Go left at the fork and follow the dirt road to the main parking area by the South Rim Trail trailhead. By the way, the road is rough and rutted. If your car is lowered, forget it. It helps to have good ground clearance or a rent-a-racer.

Riding the Goose: There are no extended climbs on the relatively flat mesa top, but you're still going to get a workout. New riders should check out the Practice Loop



Long miles: Mileage gets tossed out the window on the Goose. Think of your rides in terms of hours, not miles. To put it in perspective, a 15-mile ride here is like a 30-mile ride on a flowy, dirt singletrack. OTE's Clayton Coleman leads the group.



Eats: The best little café in Hurricane is owned and run by MBA "Rider Who Inspires" Kevin Talbot and his wife Pam, a transplant from Vancouver Island in British Columbia.

Get to the point: The goal of any Gooseberry ride needs to be, get to the point. It is the Mesa's most western point, where riders feel like they are standing at the end of the earth.



Gooseberry Mesa

Trails to get a feel for the place. Experienced riders can jump on the Cattle Grate Trail from the parking lot and connect to the black-diamond South Rattlesnake Rim Trail to The Point. This tight, twisty, middle-ring singletrack puts tremendous stress on your frame and wheels, as well as your tires, drivetrain and legs, as you negotiate impossible turns on the slickrock. We say "impossible" because so many sections look impassable. Don't listen to your brain. Try to keep your front wheel on the white dots (this is the last place in Utah where the BLM is allowing the paint markings) and go for it. You will be amazed by what a mountain bike can clear with a little effort, momentum and luck. Straying from the white dots can lead to some rather harsh transitions from slickrock to desert dirt, so stay glued to the dots. Take the North Rim Trail back to base.

The beauty of Gooseberry is that riding the trails in the opposite direction feels totally different, so on day two you can ride the same trail backwards or explore trails on the interior of the mesa, like Hidden Canyon, Yellow Trail or Windmill Trail, which has plenty of cliff exposure too.



White-dot fever: Gooseberry is the last Utah riding area where painted markers, called jeeps, are permitted (see the white dot to the right of the rider's front wheel). Cairns (rock piles) are how new trails are marked.

Travel advisory: Do not try to compare your normal riding mileage with the mileage on Gooseberry. A 15-mile ride on the tight, twisty and punchy Gooseberry Trails will work you more than a 30-mile ride on most trails. We are not exaggerating. Give yourself plenty of time.

If it starts raining hard, plan on spending the night or getting out fast. The dirt roads to the Mesa can turn into a quagmire in heavy rain, and you will get stuck.

Other attractions: There are so many riding opportunities that you could easily spend a week exploring the other options. We do not recommend riding the Little Pine Trails (adjacent to the Goose) without a guide. It is still in development. We can recommend The Guacamole Trail off Highway 9 outside of Virgin, Utah. It's a mountain biking playground with a slightly different flavor from Gooseberry.

Zion National Park is 24 miles from Hurricane. While it is not a mountain biking destination, it is worth budgeting a day off the bike to explore it. □



Brian Sweaney (left) and Pat Carrigan.