



PASSING THE TORCH

THE 2015 COLORADO 600 TRAILS AWARENESS SYMPOSIUM

Story And Photos By Sean Klinger

Oftentimes when we, or anyone for that matter, start talking about land management and dealing with the serious issues of our sport's future, people begin to get squeamish, with feelings of guilt and denial. The purpose of this story is not to guilt-trip you or ask for your money, but hopefully it will paint a better picture of why you should participate in the Colorado 600 and what the future of off-road riding on public land holds.

For those unfamiliar with the Colorado 600, the first thing you should know is that it is a fan-freakin'-tastic event. At its core, the 600 is a four-day trail ride through the ridiculously cool single- and two-track of the Rocky Mountains with a select group of about 75 riders. When we say "select group," it is because participants must apply to ride the event. The TPA (Trails Preservation Alliance) has set up the event to always include about a third returning invitees, a third core industry people, and a third

new participants. This guarantees a good mix of people of many different experience levels, in both riding and dealing with land management.

Each day, multiple group rides start and end at the same location and range from dual-sport, easy rides to expert level, borderline EnduroCross rides, all depending on the guide you choose to ride with and where they are going that day. There are about 10 dedicated guides who know the area extremely well, and the casual nature of the 600 encourages riders to seek other people to ride with and make some great friends in the process.

Brad Schluter, first-time participant, shared his experience with this sort of organization: "I think it is slightly less of like, 'Here's a beginner ride. Here's a tough ride.' Since all these guys are friendly it's more, 'Hey, join up in our group, and here's what we are doing.' Also, it has been great to meet new guys to ride with. I've already met four or five guys who live within an hour of where I do and who ride a lot. I imagine I'll end up



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OF TOMORROW BY EVADING IT TODAY."
—ABRAHAM LINCOLN



Dunlop is a sponsor of the event and is on hand to help riders select and mount their next set of rubber.



Stan Simpson (right) and Don Riggle (left) amuse the crowd at the riders banquet.

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riding with them. Meet some new people, ride new trails, hang with guys who ride, and have a good time.”

Each morning, all riders gather for breakfast, and Don Riggle, director of operations for the TPA, leads a discussion of current land-management issues, past defeats and victories, and upcoming matters that should be on our radar. There are also guest speakers who share what has and hasn’t worked in their particular riding areas.

At this year’s event there was a distinct theme to much of what was discussed: perspective. If you don’t know that you lost anything, how can you miss it, right? Unfortunately, the fact that so many trails have been closed over the years is something that is lost on the younger generations of trail riders. They have a modern perspective of the trails that we have and think that if we are just keeping the existing single-track, we are in good shape, but that isn’t the reality.

“Sadly what we have done is, we’ve gone on the defensive,” John Sawazhki, longtime CO600 participant, says, “And at the end of the year we say, ‘Well, we’ve only lost 20 percent.’ Somewhere along the line we need to go on the offensive and get some of it back. In Colorado, the TPA has done that, so there is some hope.”

At one breakfast discussion, we talked about the 2005 Travel Management Rule put in place by the Department Of Agriculture. Before this, the

general rule of thumb was if an area, trail, or road isn’t specifically marked closed, it is assumed to be open for off-road use. But the Travel Management Rule basically reverses that idea. Now, if it isn’t specifically marked for off-road use, it is to be assumed closed. This is a major difference between the generations of trail riders. Many of the older guys talked about how they used to just ride from their garage and pretty much go where they wanted. This is a foreign concept to many younger riders because they’ve always had to load up the truck and go somewhere specifically marked to ride.

“Look around the room,” Don said at breakfast one morning. “We are the old guys in this fight, and we need younger guys involved. I don’t have all the answers; I don’t have all the new ideas. That needs to come from the new guys.” The simple fact of the matter is that Don and his cohorts in the TPA and other organizations fighting for off-roader’s rights are pretty much the first generation that has done this. They are all getting into their 60s and 70s, and although they can ride like the best of them, they aren’t going to be around forever. Simply, they need new members. “We are in a unique position as the old guys who have some income, some money,” Sawazhki continues. “We probably have more money than we have life left, so we can help with the money. But young guys, the new guys, they can help with the backbreaking work and fighting the establishment, if you will.”

Along those same lines, Scott Bright, ISDE and Enduro racer, wants

younger riders to get involved. “Perspective is something that is lost on people who never saw what it used to be,” Scott says. “If you have a local riding area that you love to go to right now, and everybody has one, and somebody came in and had way more money than you did and they decided that they wanted to shut that down and wanted to use it for a nature preserve, how would that make you feel? Where would you go ride then? How big of a defense would you put up? That’s what the TPA is all about: making people aware of what’s going on. It’s really helpful for the younger generations to learn about all of the trails that were available 20, 30 years ago and the massive amount of trails that we have lost since then. If it weren’t for the organizations like the TPA there wouldn’t be anything left.

“Something else, the Colorado 600 is about single-track,” Scott continues. “We are not out here fighting battles for ATVs or UTVs, or four-wheel drives, or snowmobiles, or anything like that. It’s all about preserving single-track for guys on motorcycles. If anyone cares about riding single-track on motorcycles on public lands, then they need to be aware of what the TPA is doing.”

With all this emphasis on getting new blood into these organizations, we don’t want to downplay the value of experience, both on and off the bike. Now is an absolutely great time to ride the Colorado 600 because there is so much to learn from the returning riders. Tim Haight, first-time participant, explains: “I was actually surprised at some of these riders’ abilities. Just looking at some of these guys, you wouldn’t expect it, but you find out that they are phenomenal riders. It’s really shocking. At the end of the day, I had a lot of new-found respect for a lot of guys. They were really great.”



Brad Schluter had a similar sentiment. "It's cool to ride with these more experienced riders," he says. "You get the feeling that a lot of these guys have a lot of history in motorcycling, and they are willing to teach what they know. You learn a lot. Bike stuff to riding skills, you always learn a lot from riding with guys with more experience than you, how they tackle stuff on the trail. It was awesome."

THE NEXT STEP

Here at *Dirt Rider*, we don't have an easy answer because there is no one answer. But one thing we can say is that the guys and gals on the front lines fighting for the right to ride are going to be hanging up their hats soon, and we, the current riders and trail users, need to figure out the solution. After all, the future belongs to the young, as they say, so it is the young who have to protect it.

We understand that teenagers and even twentysomethings don't have thousands of dollars lying around to donate. But, hopefully, they want to ride as often as possible. Joining a club is one way to not only help the sport but also to ride—a lot. Clubs put on races, clear trail,

work with local land managers, and go on a lot of rides together. This is a great option for those who are "short on money but long on time."

Another way to help the sport without changing much is to make sure all of your bikes are properly registered and make sure to pay the day or camping fees at OHV parks. Most of the money from permits and vehicle registration goes back to trail systems. Also, shop where you ride. Get your ice, water, food, and other ride day necessities at establishments around where you ride. That supports the local community and makes business owners see that off-road riders are a positive customer base.

Lastly, go on rides like the Colorado 600. Yes, it costs money and takes time, but the riding is absolutely incredible. And probably more importantly, the experience, the friends, the connections, and the knowledge gained are all way more valuable than the money you spend to get there. The bottom line is that the future is in our hands whether we like it or not, and we all have to decide what we are willing to do to make it a better and brighter place for the off-road community. **DR**

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THANKS!

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