

During my teenage summers I was riding my mountain bike a great deal in the hot, dry pine forests of the Pike National Forest near where I was born. One of our primary 'maintenance' rides, the necessary rides to maintain fitness for more extensive riding, was also a route we utilized to access more remote trails. This 25-mile stretch of unremarkable gravel road gradually heads to the south and west by tracing the topographic contour of the foothills of Colorado's Front Range; a strand of mountains that divide the state and limit the expansive flatness of the Great Plains. Gold Camp Road was, during the mining boom in the late 1800s, a railroad grade that carried gold ore from Cripple Creek to the larger world. But I have only known it long after the tracks were pulled up. Drivers toured it as a leisurely alternative to the highway, an experience I remember as a passenger when I was a child.

Numerous tunnels punctuate this route. By shortcutting acute contour lines and penetrating the hillside directly, they normalize anomalous terrain and maintain the riverine course of gentle arcs and incremental inclines trains require. In the late 1980s, the tunnel leading to the overlook of Cheyenne Cañon unceremoniously collapsed; an eventuality perhaps contingent on a brief heavy rainstorm. Unlike the stents and detours that established new passage following the collapse and blockage of tunnels much further up the road, the broad face of smooth, steep granite flanking the eastern side of this tunnel prevented any viable bypass. This fortuitous event left the section of road beginning at the opposite end of the tunnel to the junction of Old Stage Road impassable to all traffic except hikers, mountain bike riders and those on horseback. It became a long, quiet swath of decomposed granite whose edges softened as car tire treads and plows no longer differentiated its surface.

Other tunnels on this now idle aspect of the route stood intact. The threat of their impending collapse remained a question, but their arched entrances extruded into walls of solid granite that hadn't quivered for nearly a century; so outwardly stable that timber reinforcements weren't a necessity. Our relative safety didn't dampen the exhilaration of making their passage. One tunnel in particular is memorable because of its length. It couldn't span more than a quarter mile, but its path curves slightly over this distance. Upon approaching the entrance its eastern wall eclipses its egress. Riding into the expansive opening one sees only a carbon darkness.

Cool air never warmed by sunlight occludes the warmth of the day. The onrush of darkness amplifies the

indirect light from behind. Its deflection reveals the various planes of basement rock left when dynamite cleft the way -- blast by blast, boulder by boulder. The space resounds with revolutions of rubber drifting on wet gravel; the reverberation articulating the predominant curvature and irregular planes of the enveloping surface. Obstructed by the curve, the light behind now ceases to reach this point. Air and the absence of light become enmeshed ... a buoyant velvety mass. The way is clear only because of what is behind and the promise of what is to come. 'Front' and 'back', 'left' and 'right' are no longer discernible relations. Only bearing point is bottom - weight on ground. Opposing it - the sense of an undifferentiated volume. And there is movement. Nothing is still. An unmoored afferent core moving amongst multiple movements. Knowledge of vision but nothing to see. A tensile eye suspended and waiting.

Then, a white luminescence disturbs what was only darkness. Remarkably this light is only light. It does not illuminate, but rather only 'is'; a facet on par with the air, the darkness and the resounding revolutions of rubber drifting on wet gravel. By impelling vision, this light begins to pull. A field incurves around it to establish a horizon with the bearing point below. The shape gradually becomes a continuing extrusion of the form that before framed darkness. Color disperses its whiteness and the deflection of its light reveals the arching variation of granite planes that surround it. I can see my left hand and my right hand resting on the handlebars in front of me. My knees move up and down in time with the regular glint from the left crank then the right crank until I feel the warmth of sunlight and continue on the way forward following Gold Camp road through the dry, hot pine forest to more interesting riding...

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