

by Nick Legan



The beauty of bike overnights is that you don't have to pack much. All you'll need are the basics to get you to your overnight destination and back.



## A REMEDY FOR CABIN FEVER: A CABIN

➔ AFTER a long week of work, it's always nice to start the weekend early with a bike ride. But your Friday-afternoon ride doesn't have to finish at your house. Instead, I like to head up into the mountains, bringing along the bare necessities for a night outdoors and start my Saturday with a different perspective.

Although this formula worked well for me during the warm months, as winter's chill arrived, I found myself enjoying the warmth of my bed instead of a campsite bedroll. This is partly due to the fact that my girlfriend Kristen and I aren't seasoned winter campers, thanks to a lack of suitable gear and, frankly, interest. But winter is also when we start to get cabin fever.

As I thought about this, I came up with an idea for a hybrid form of bikepacking, something more akin to credit-card bikepacking. Near my home in Boulder, Colorado, is a fantastic state park: Golden Gate Canyon. The park has both cabins and yurts available for overnight stays and longer. The accommodations are more rustic than a hotel (no showers in winter and no running water in the cabins) but better than a backcountry bivy (heated, with bunks and electric lights), so we wouldn't need to carry a shelter, sleeping pads, or heavier sleeping bags. This way I could use most of my summer gear and throw in a few items to stay cozy at the park.

With snow on the ground and a

hilly, predominantly dirt road and trail route, mountain bikes were the obvious choice. They make great touring bikes whether on or off road, thanks to the low gearing and upright position. We left our knobbies on to help deal with the snow.

Kristen had just received a Revelate Designs Viscacha seat bag for her birthday, her first dedicated bikepacking bag. She added a hydration pack, a top tube Bento box, and a stuff sack strapped to her handlebar. No need for more than that. In fact, I've seen some riders getting very creative with a stuff sack as a seat bag, thus avoiding the cost of purpose-built bags. Because I have a full complement of Revelate bags, I used them to help pack a few more creature comforts.

Planning for food, we stayed as light and yet calorie dense as possible. Dinner consisted of a delicious

burrito, purchased before we left town, and re-heated on the cabin's heater. For dessert we had gummy bears and energy bars. Starbucks Via instant coffee, instant oatmeal, and a Ziploc full of salted almonds and dried cherries made for a great breakfast.

I carried an Esbit tablet stove for boiling water, and we each had a small plastic cup that served as both a bowl and coffee cup. We forgot spoons, but a tire lever got the job done. In fact any time something can serve double duty, you're saving weight and making the riding more enjoyable.

This setup, a bike overnight with a pre-set destination like a cabin, is great for both first-time overnights and bikepackers used to summer outings. It requires minimal gear but still makes for a great short adventure. Though Golden Gate Canyon is only 30 miles from our house using the most direct route, we instead explored roads and trails that are outside our normal rides.

What really amazes me is that I've lived in Colorado for over a decade and never thought of going to Golden Gate Canyon. For those of us with a case of wanderlust, it's easy to overlook our own backyard. But one of the best trips of the year was riding roads with my lady just outside our normal circle, and spending quality time away from the distractions of home. So get out there! No excuses.

### TOP TIPS:

**Go light:** One reason to go light on a sub-24-hour overnight trip is because you can get to trails that aren't part of your daily rides. Keeping the bike light and handling well means that you'll enjoy the new trails more.

**Stay safe:** A Spot tracker is an amazing piece of kit. It not only tracks your movements, which is great for hikers, kayakers, mountaineers, and cyclists, but you can use it to send for help or to assure

your loved ones that you're safe and sound. The cost of the device varies by model and you must pay a service fee, but a Spot tracker is one of the best insurance plans an overnight cyclist can carry.

I also carry a small first-aid kit, matches, a compass, and a map. I let my loved ones know where I'm heading and stick to the plan as closely as possible.

Bringing more clothes than you think you'll need is always a good idea. That doesn't mean that the clothing has to be bulky though. Emergency blankets, or a piece of one, can act as a vapor barrier worn under clothes and keep you extra toasty if the weather takes a nasty turn.

**Document your trip:** Bring along a camera when you go for a bike overnight. I just got Sony's new TX20 waterproof, shockproof, dustproof, point-and-shoot camera — and I love it. Bringing a camera motivates me to stop and take pictures of the ride's highlights, whether I encounter something funny along the way (you wouldn't believe some of the high-mountain yard art in Colorado), something breathtaking, or just something I want to avoid doing again (such as putting toilet paper in a Ziploc bag).

**Entertain yourself:** Most phones these days play music. Putting on some tunes at the cabin is a nice way to relax and watch a sunset. A magazine isn't a bad idea either. Kristen brought along *National Geographic*, and its photography and stories kept us both entertained for hours. It also helped inspire new ideas for trips. Next time, we'll bring *Adventure Cyclist* magazine. **AC**

*Nick Legan lives in Boulder, Colorado but firmly believes that adventure is a state of mind and has little to do with geography. As a former pro cycling team mechanic, he's seen parking lots the world over and a few great roads along the way.*

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