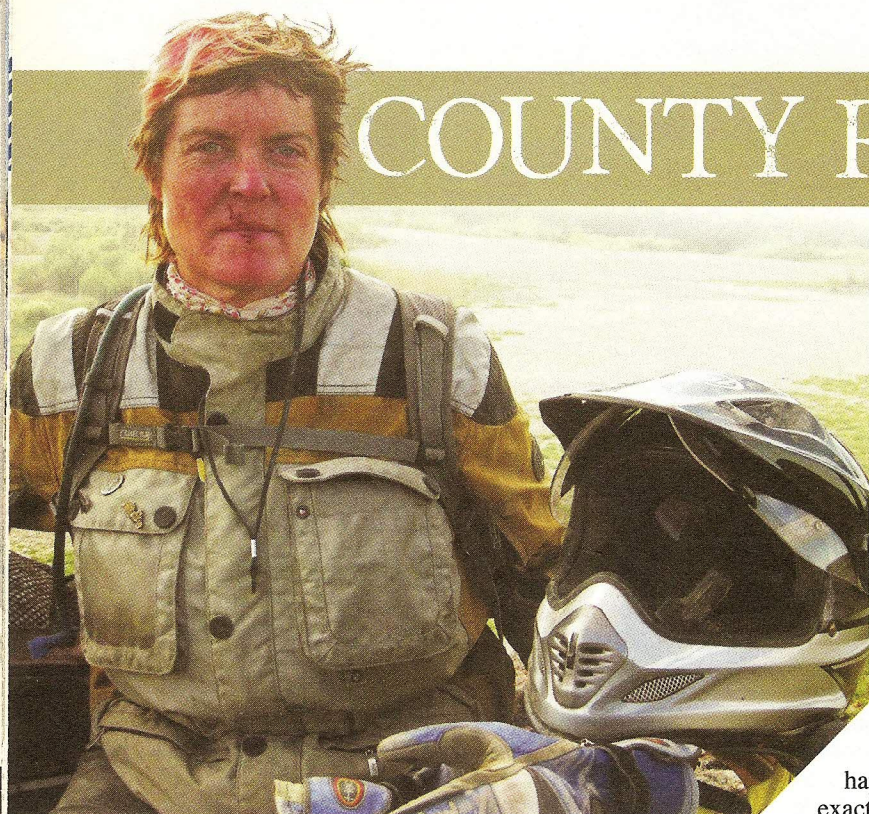


## COUNTY ROAD

199

by Alisa Clickenger



Black Dragon Canyon is located near Green River, Utah



It's either deep sand, rocks or boulders in Dragon Canyon wash.

I AM SITTING on the seat of my little Suzuki DR350, hungrily forking tuna fish from a foil packet and watching the sun go down. Edward has been after me for weeks to throw the tuna away, yet for some reason I've hung onto these two pouches for over 3000 miles, burying them in the duffle bag that I call my motorcycle luggage. I smile a smug smile, watching him eat from the other one I've carried all this time. They may be the last bit of food we eat for days.

We've just ridden up the Black Dragon Canyon, one of the toughest sections yet of the Trans-America Trail (TAT), a 5000-mile off-road route that crosses the United States from Tennessee to Oregon. Wanting to be no-pavement "purists" while riding the TAT's network of dirt roads, gravel roads, jeep, forest and farm roads, we did not choose the "go-around" that perhaps smarter travelers use. Instead, we followed the trail exactly as laid out on the roll charts, riding every sorry mile of every single section.

We'd been riding since dawn, skipping both breakfast and lunch, because we'd made a monumental mistake and not stocked up on supplies in the last town. That's because, although we were purists, we were also budget travelers and could not afford to sleep in hotels each night. That meant that instead of riding the route as Sam Corroero had laid it out ([www.transam-trail.com](http://www.transam-trail.com)), with a stop in a town every night, we'd ride until we were exhausted, and then ride some more to find free camping. It also meant that we'd sometimes go without a meal because we weren't near a town at mealtimes.

As I said, we'd been riding since dawn, covering not too much ground as we continually backtracked while trying to navigate County Road 199. In fact, County Road 199 wasn't actually a road at all, but rather a stream bed that was called a road. The terrain alternated between sand, sharp rocks, baby head boulders and about a half-mile of even deeper sand.

I should probably tell you that I'm one of those people that gets really grumpy without food. So is Edward, come to think of it. Add a scorching hot sun threatening to bake us into oblivion, GPS units that kept changing their minds about which direction we were heading and, well, you can imagine some of the things that were said between us. But I was too hot, too challenged by the terrain, and too hungry to think of turning off the headset as I'd done on earlier occasions.

As the road, really a streambed, led up into a steep canyon, we noticed dark, angry clouds gathering overhead. We could see a sheet of rain briskly advancing towards us. We knew about flash floods and how a storm would whip up and dump a whole lot of rain on ground that wasn't accustomed to accommodating large amounts of water. The water then follows the path of least resistance...which, in this case, was the canyon we'd just entered.

As the rain advanced toward us, we quickened our pace. We were almost out of the canyon when I went down. Edward must have heard my "oof" and subsequent cursing as the breath was knocked out of me. He circled back to find my bike and my person both splayed out on our sides. He hopped off his bike, picked up mine and yelled at me to get up and ride. "Cry when



we get out of the canyon if you have to, but we have to get out of here. Now!"

He was right, and for a moment I hated him for it. It was my seventh "off" of the day, and I was feeling mighty sorry for myself. And yes, damn him, I did want a good cry. We sped up the canyon another five miles and broke out onto the open desert plain. The storm suddenly changed direction and blew south, leaving us dry with nothing but the scent of rain in the air. We were relieved, yet now had a difficult decision to make.

We'd traveled more than 150 miles that day. Even though we both had aftermarket fuel tanks on our bikes, we didn't know how much gas I'd lost in my various spills. Our options were to head north and bypass a very scenic section of the TAT, or to continue on and risk having to push the bike back to civilization. Like I said; we were purists so really it was no choice...we continued down the trail.

We rode for another 20 miles or so and entered the area through which the storm had passed. The road surface turned muddy and slick, offering a not-entirely-welcome change from the bucking and grappling I'd become accustomed to as my tires struggled for purchase in the shale and rock. We followed the road as it turned nearly 90° to the right and skidded to a stop just before our front tires entered the turbulent water in a once-dry wash.

While we were contemplating our chances, a car pulled up on the other side of the wash. We looked at them, they looked at us, and then we watched them reverse and disappear back in the direction they came. We decided it was most likely not safe for us to try crossing either, and after some discussion and much cursing we, too, turned around looking for higher ground.

Which is how I came to be sitting on my bike eating tuna fish out of a foil pouch, smiling my smug smile and staring off into the vast desert plain watching the sun go down. My nearly empty tank of gas now dictated our only option, which was to camp on the muddy plain while we waited for the raging waters to recede. In spite of the day's challenges, I admit that I was pleased to be there, sitting on my bike eating a smuggled ration of tuna.

I also admit that I'm pleased to be where I am today. I'm now a full time writer living in Southern California near the heart of the US motorcycle industry. I ride and I write, hopefully inspiring others to follow their own dreams or helping them to make informed decisions about motorcycles and gear and accessories. I lead motorcycle tours and march to the beat of my own drum, all thanks to the transformation that's taken place as I've explored on two wheels. And it all started with that trip.

Our TAT ride was in 2009, and it was the first big trip Edward and I had taken together. We'd met in the fall of the previous year after we'd both quit our "corporate" jobs. We were both in this place of redefining ourselves. I already had a dual-sport bike, my 1998 Suzuki DR350, and it wasn't too hard to talk Edward into getting one for himself. It took him about a week to source a Suzuki DR-Z400 whose year I don't remember.

We spent the winter and spring practicing riding on my farm and attended a couple of local dual-sport events, building our skills. I'd already taken the MSF dirt-bike school before meeting Edward, and with practice my confidence grew. I'd been a road rider for over a decade, and I'd taken up off-road riding in order to improve my on-road riding skills, and it was working.

Early on we discovered that we had mutual friends, David and Francine, who had ridden the Trans America Trail. They were an inspiration to us individually, and now as a couple they were the fuel for our TAT dreams. Edward and I spent the winter planning our trip, making modifications to our bikes and building GPS files off of the roll charts we'd bought from Sam.

What a summer! We spent three months riding across America, all on dirt roads. First from East to West on the Trans America

Trail and then we hustled up to the Montana border and decided to cross America again, this time from North to South. By the time we returned to Connecticut, I'd put more than 15,000 miles on my little DR350.

Making the decision to step out of everyday life and go on a long riding adventure isn't something that everyone does, nor would every person want to do it. Yet there's something about completing such a trip that fills us with a profound belief in the unbounded possibility that exists in our lives. And which is why we love reading about them.

I wish I could give you a road map for coming to the decision to take a long trip and how to make it happen in your own life, if that's what you are yearning to do. Each person's circumstances are different, and I admit that I might not have made the same choices if I had children. But what I can share with you are the three steps that I think are essential to getting on the road, and that really apply to accomplishing anything you want in any area of your life.

1. State your intention out loud. Speak it so it becomes real.
2. Surround yourself with positive people.
3. Write the date of your departure on your calendar in bold pen.

Yes, it's oversimplified, and yet it's the core of what worked for me. In my next article, perhaps I can really help you to get on the road if that's what is your desire.

Riding the Trans America Trail wasn't my first big road trip and it certainly wasn't my last. Since then, I've ridden solo all over Central and South America, Europe, India and even Israel. Yet the TAT is the ride that solidified my love of exploring the roads less traveled and compelled me to explore more.

Whenever I get into a tough situation traveling, my thoughts always come back to the tuna. It reminds me that even the most ordinary of things can turn out to be extraordinary.

An awesome sunset at the end of a long, hard day, simple food that fulfills, and a story that will stick with me until the end of time.

And it reminds me that no matter what happens along the way, things usually do work out okay. 🍷

**One of my favorite meals ever: a packet of tuna and a warm beer.**



After the water subsided, the mud was very sticky.