

Why the Montana Mixed Epic? It all started with a plan.... The Joe Cosley Pancake Ride had a five year plan. It all started in the spring of 2014 after riding and finishing Guitar Ted's Trans Iowa. Years 1,2, and 3 were single day 150+ mile endurance rides. Year 4, ??... And year 5 was to be a west to east crossing of the State of Montana between the Hi Line and the Canadian Border. So here we are, 5 years later.

What is the MME? It's a fully self supported bike packing adventure ride/race across the state of Montana. On the Kelly Cordes fun scale I'll give it a "Type 2" rating, realistically it may have jumped into the "Type 3" category when you finish and have a moment to reflect. So, this a one and done event. If you're the kind of person that likes to see how things go for the first year, there will be no 2nd year event.

"I guess you never really know what sort of fun you're getting yourself into once you leave the couch, which is fine, because it doesn't always have to be "fun" to be fun.

Maybe the whole goal, the path of the enlightened, is to turn Type III situations into Type I fun. Right. Anybody had any luck with that?"

Kelly Cordes

Current link to the route info - [HERE](#). Two routes are listed "MME...." One with some cue information and the other is just the route.

The MME is a show up and ride type of thing. If you choose to participate, there will be a participant roster, you will be required to carry a SPOT Tracker or a Garmin InReach device and register with Track Leaders. Just a way of keeping track of folks and adding a measure of safety. I'll be riding also, so please don't think that I am offering any type of on course support.

Rules? Up to you. I would surmise that any one participating, that adheres to a strict definition and ethos of "self supported", will be pretty happy with their accomplishment upon reaching Williston ND. Just be transparent with your journey, both subjectively and objectively. If you are battling a 50 mph headwind and a farmer stops and ask if you want a ride, there is no right or wrong answer.

Details? "This is a Lewis and Clark style adventure". That's a hint that this will be a difficult ride on all levels. The first 250 miles is straight forward with a couple of resupply options and numerous water sources. The remaining 600 miles travels across the eastern plains of Montana with few amenities. You may pass a few farming "colonies", several small towns and come across an occasional rancher and or farmer. Water will be your biggest concern and you should be prepared to carry a sufficient amount to get you to the next spigot, and be willing to knock on a few doors if needed. Montana's a friendly state. Not lots of food options, so you'll either have to be willing to eat pepperoni sticks from the local Town Pump along the way or carry what you need.

I can't possibly "scout" the entire route, that being said I've done my best to create a reliable route file. I'm being totally upfront about this. After crossing over the Continental Divide via the Going To The Sun Road and passing through Saint Mary's, I have no first hand experience on what lies ahead. I have utilized several mapping programs, along with data provided by the Montana Department of Transportation. I cross referenced everything with the MDOT inventoried road system. These are all roads that are accessible by the general public (to the best of my knowledge). Road surfaces vary from paved, graded, gravel, and unmaintained.

I'll make route improvements and updates through the winter and will share for reference. I'll post a final route a couple weeks before the ride. There may be a few updates, on the route, but it's 99% set. There may be a couple reroute scenarios, mostly dependent on how much snow falls this winter and an instance or two on roads that are no longer county maintained and are impassable. The route is meant to be a guideline and deviations are ok as needed. If something isn't working or looks to be impassable, coming up with a work around is fine.

I'll also add POI's along the route and will label them with the appropriate information. Water, food, segment information if I'm unsure of that part of the route.

Start date, June 24. Should be late enough to see that the snow has melted and the Going to the Sun Road has at least a snowy corridor through Logan Pass. Also if the pass is closed during the weekday work schedule, this should put you in a good spot to arrive late Friday or on the weekend, when the road is open to the public.

The MME will start on the Idaho/Montana State line, heading east and taking you to the Montana/North Dakota State line (as the Crow flies, it's the greatest distance across the State of Montana). At the State Line, you will still have a 60 mile ride southwards to the town of Williston N.D. Finish will be at the Train Depot. Here you can catch the Amtrak Train/Empire Builder back to Whitefish, MT. I'll provide more details later on logistical issues to help make it easier for you.

Montana offers long days and the nights will give you just enough time to catch some sleep and recharge your system. Average usable daylight in June, will be around 17 hours. The actual Summer Solstice in Montana is on June 20, with a full moon on June 24. The moon rises from the se horizon at 10PM and sets over the nw horizon at 5AM on the 24th.

Whitefish is about 160 miles from the start (driving miles). There will be an arranged shuttle from Whitefish (limited spots) to the starting location. You can leave a vehicle in Whitefish if you are from out of town, details later.

Important points:

- This is a self supported ride. There is no aid or technical service provided. You are completely on your own.
- It's a mixed surface ride. Dirt, gravel, pavement, chip seal, unimproved surfaces will be encountered. 95% of the route surface at the minimum, consist of county, federal and state maintained roads.
- I'm sure there will be a few HAB instances.
- With a mid June start date, there's a chance of riding into a bit of snow. One stretch would be the Whitefish Divide on Trail Creek. The other in Glacier National Park, Logan Pass on the Going to the Sun Road, the "Big Drift" being the main hurdle. The historical average is on your side that there will be at least a single lane plowed through the Big Drift down to the pavement or still with a bit of snow. If the Big Drift is up passable, you'll have to detour around the south end of the park over Marias Pass and then back up the east

side on the Looking Glass Highway, over the Hudson Divide and meet back up with the intended route in Saint Mary's. I'll post a more detailed explanation down the road.

- Going To the Sun Road has its own set of rules. Park Crews are busy plowing the road in the spring and you need to be aware of what times the road is open to travel. Traditionally the road is closed during working hours, Monday through Friday, 9-5. I'll post updates as the start date approaches.
- Water. Storage will be key, always carry more than you may think you will need. Central and Eastern Montana is largely an agricultural area. With large agricultural production comes the use of pesticides. There are numerous water sources along the way, most of these sources could be affected by runoff and may have unwanted attributes. I would be cautious on what you choose for consumption. A normal water filter will not filter out pesticides. Sawyer Products makes an appropriate filter for this.
- I'm sure that 99.9% of the people you meet along the way will be more than happy to chat it up. For the Central and Eastern portion of the route, you will pass many rural farm houses and Hutterite Colonies. I'm betting that these people will be more than happy to fill your bottles up from a clean source if you ask.
- Beware of farm dogs. Don't stick your leg out and try and fend them off, that's an invitation for trouble.
- There are Rattle Snakes out in the plains, they like to sun themselves on the roads and soak up some rays. Just pay attention.
- There will be a few points along the way where you will be required to take a photo, and post to the MME Instagram account.
- Note your finish time at the Montana North Dakota border, also when you roll into the Amtrak Station.
- Williston North Dakota. It's a big town, with all the amenities. The Amtrak Empire Builder has scheduled departures on Sunday, Tuesday and Fridays at 11am, costs vary and start at about \$100.00. You can purchase tickets online, or at the station. There are options for your bike on the train also. The train rolls into Whitefish at 9pm, with the time change, for a trip time of 11 hours. Amtrak website has all the info.
- I will arrange a shuttle from Whitefish to the start, about a 2 hour trip. If you want to ride and leave a vehicle in Whitefish in a secure location, let me know and I'll help arrange something.
- The shuttle will most likely be organized utilizing the shuttle service of the Whitefish Bike Retreat. The first 200 miles of the route offers plenty of easy outs if you are not feeling good about the idea that you still have 750 miles to pedal. After you cross the Continental Divide and start heading east through the plains and coulees, your bailout points and sag wagon rescue, greatly diminish. Have a plan.

Disclaimer: I have never been bike packing. However, I have done many other activities throughout my life that give me the experience and ability to set out on such an adventure. In this day and age there's not really any guesswork on if anything particular "goes". With all of the current resources available, all that is about left is that you are strong enough mentally and physically to make it from point "A" to point "B". You may run into a few hurdles along the way, this is where "experience" comes in, so be fully aware of your own abilities and capabilities and you should be fine. It will also help if you are a detail oriented person, a problem solver and like to do some research.

If you have questions, please ask - joe@pancakeride.com I'm also open to feedback. My name is actually Brad, not Joe.

UPDATES - 05-11-2021

The Start date moved up a few days to the 24th, that's a Thursday. That will give you a day and half to get to West Glacier at mile 175. This should alleviate any issues with weekday work closures of the GTTSR, if the road is not open. Under the new GTTSR permit system, cyclist are not required to have a GTTSR permit to access the park, you do need a park pass though, and this can be purchased at the Polebridge entrance. Restriction on the GTTSR beginning at Apgar Village begin on June 14, essentially forward progress is restricted between 11am and 4pm on specific parts of the GTTSR. More info [HERE](#).

The route is updated, make sure you have the latest update "05-10-2021". Just a few reroutes. After more research, it turns out several of the state/county roads had "not been maintained for a decade or more", essentially abandoned. I'm sure there will be a few rough tracks that have minimal maintenance. For the most part though, it looks like most of the roads are maintained and in good shape.

I reached out to several Hutterite Colonies. Super friendly folks. I inquired about stopping for water if needed. They were more than welcoming. You'll pass several colonies along the way, and they may prove to be a valuable resource. It would be a good idea to do a little research on the history of the Hutterites. You may surprised on how they came to settle in the central northern plains and central southern plains of Canada.

AMTRAK - Buying a ticket in Williston ND to get back to Whitefish, shouldn't be a problem. But, you need to consider transportation for your bike. There are limited bike specific spaces on the train for travelers, and these are usually reserved well in advance. You can also put your bike in the cargo hold as your baggage. However this is space is in the undercarriage area of the train, and your bike will be on its side. It may be best to find some cardboard and a bunch of packing tape and make a rudimentary box. I'm sure your bike will thank you. Amtrak [LINK](#).

Resupply? I'll update the new route file in the next couple weeks. It's meant to be a guideline. You can send USPS parcels to Post offices along the route, addressed to yourself/general delivery. The parcel will be held for two weeks, at that point it will be returned to sender. Do some homework.

Water? Water won't be a problem for the first 250 miles or so and a regular filter should work fine (Sawyer Squeeze). For the remaining 600 miles it would be a great idea to carry an additional filter, such as a S3 Select Filters and Purifiers from Sawyer, [HERE](#). The Northern Plains of Montana is largely used as agricultural land. Unfortunately most of the agricultural community uses pesticides of some kind, that can end up in the naturally flowing water systems.

I'm in the process of setting up a Track Leaders account. Also if you have an InReach, we can exchange contact information, send out a pre ride message to the group. That way we will all have a common thread that we can use for communication if necessary. Such as if you are in the front and you run into a routing problem, you can send a message to those in the group letting the them know of the problem and a solution.

Trackleaders, Live Tracking - <http://trackleaders.com/mtmixedepic21>

I'll most likely create a separate RWGPS route for the 60 mile leg from Westby down to Williston. I'll just be looking for the straightest line.

Regardless of what time I roll into Williston, I'll need a day to get things in order, get cleaned up and ready to hop on the train. I'll pick a hotel in town, so if others want to possibly meet up

when they are done, there is a common meeting place. Hampton Inn and Suites, 1515 14th ST. West. It's about 2 miles from the train station.

That's it.