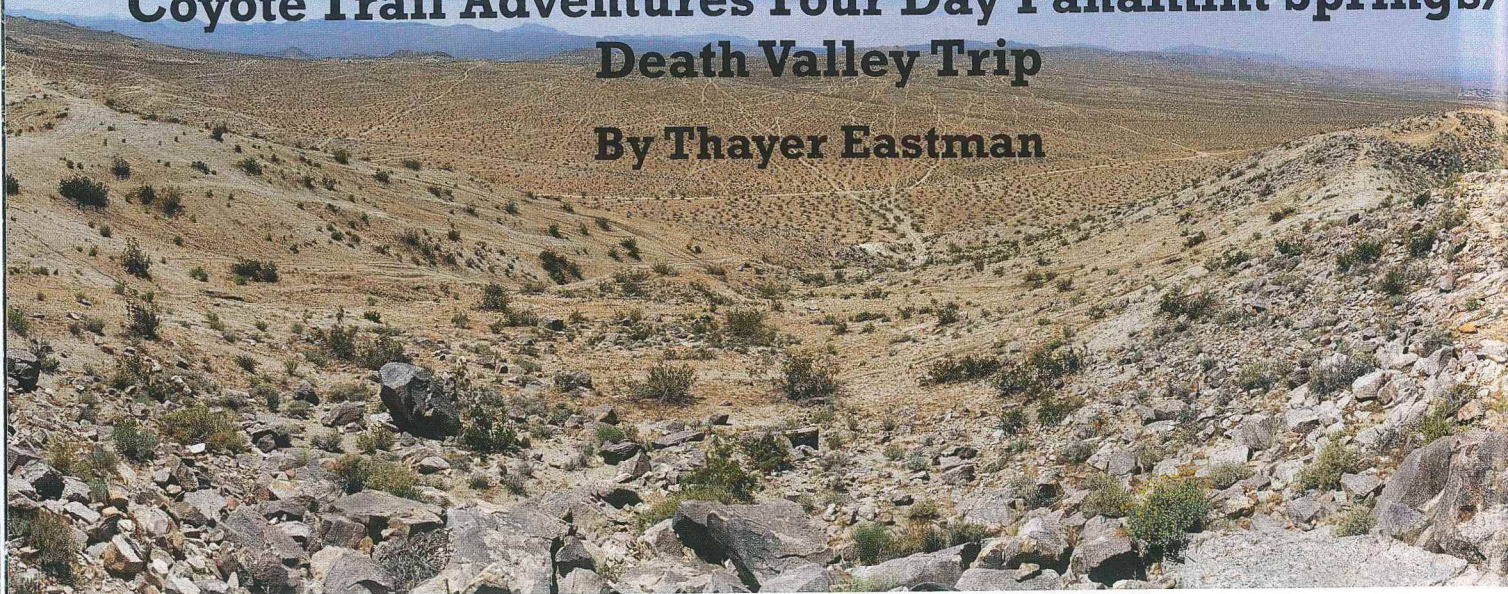


Ride Report!

Coyote Trail Adventures Four Day Panamint Springs/ Death Valley Trip

By Thayer Eastman



Trail rider, NETRA Member and sometimes Vintage Racer

The major influences for me in this trip were my previous RV and car rides through the high desert as a teen and an adult; reading *Dirt Rider* as a teen, which led me to Rick Siemens' book "Monkey Butt," and wanting to ride the Barstow to Vegas race before it was outlawed, as well as my two rotations through the Army Desert Warfare National Training Center, Ft. Irwin CA.

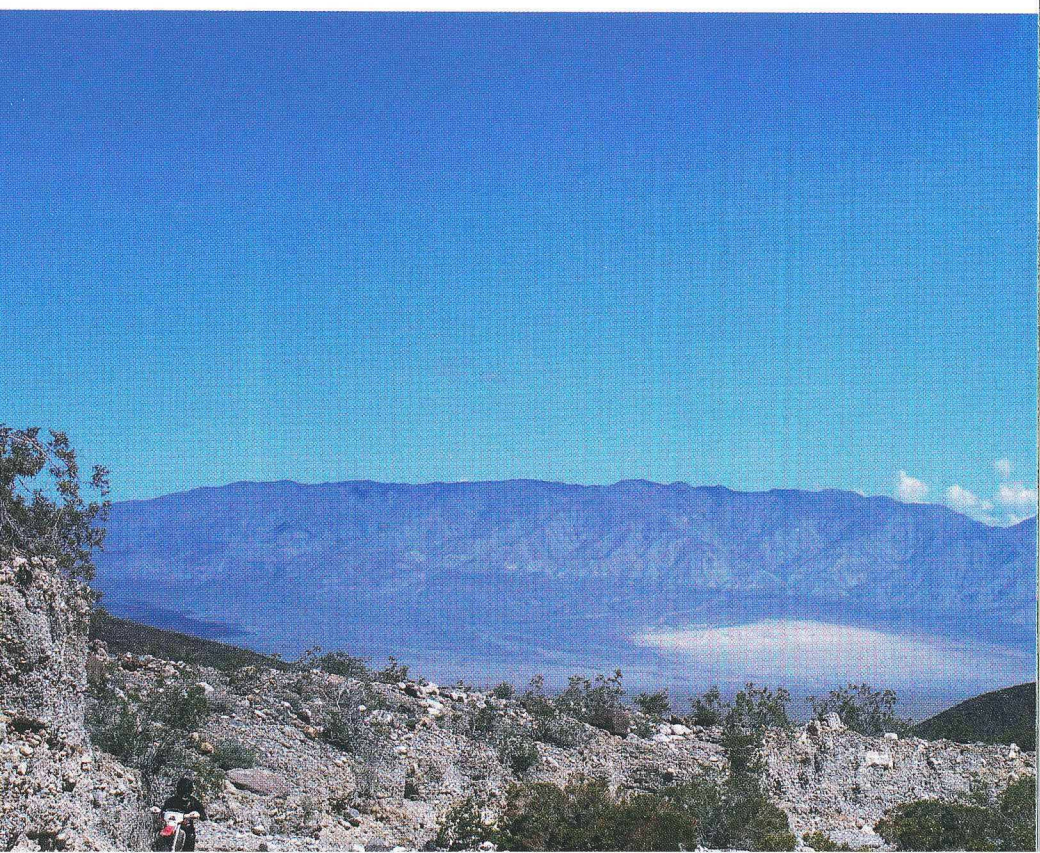
An internet search turned up trips in the outskirts of Las Vegas for one-day rides (lame), or Baja trips that seemed a little too far away and expensive (too hard for first-timers). Luckily, I found Coyote Trail adventures and looked at their stuff on Facebook. This seemed like the ticket.

My brother lives in Flintridge La Canada, CA, just over the Angeles crest from Lancaster where the Coyote Trail Adventures is located. He put me up and let me borrow his car, and as a super bonus, I got to hang with his family.

I ended up going for an all-inclusive four-day, four-night ride in the area of Panamint Springs and Death Valley. It was reasonably priced and included food, lodging, a guide (Steve the owner), sweep, and a chase truck. They asked for your food interests and even bought beer to your liking. I told them I was a vegan with a soy allergy just to mess around. They took it with stride when I said I needed a bowl of only brown M and Ms.

Day 1 (120 miles): We started with a wake-up at a nice Best Western, a hotel lobby breakfast and then a ride to Steve and Jen's house. After meeting everyone, Will, Ben, Bea and I signed a bunch of waivers and got our gear loaded. We got to talk to the sweep rider Carey and van driver Gil for a bit. That was when a mispronunciation of my name led to being dubbed "Thor" for the rest of the trip. We drove a little ways to the starting point and readied to head out. I got a CRF450X. It was nicely set up with a Trail Tech Vector and fresh MotoZ Tractionator tires. After a quick warm-up down some access dirt roads, we got into it.

It was sprinkling and overcast throughout the day, but it sure made for some nice riding and no dust. We rode along the foothills and popped in and out of some canyons. Eventually we stopped for lunch at a road crossing. The sweep rider, Carey, was on a KTM 500. He asked if I'd like to swap with him for a bit. I'm an old-school Honda guy, but, oh boy, that thing is awesome. I felt the orange itch and it might be spreading. We rode the rest of the day up to Darwin and followed a canyon to Darwin Falls natural spring that feeds both Darwin and Panamint springs. I'd been noticing a pipe along the base of the hill since we left Darwin. That was their one and only water source. After stopping at the spring, we headed down the other side of the canyon. Again another metal pipe.



We followed that pipe all the way to Panamint Springs Resort, where we had dinner and talked over a beer or two. I ended up bunking with Carey for the first night. He asked about swapping bikes back and I told him I would arm wrestle him for it.

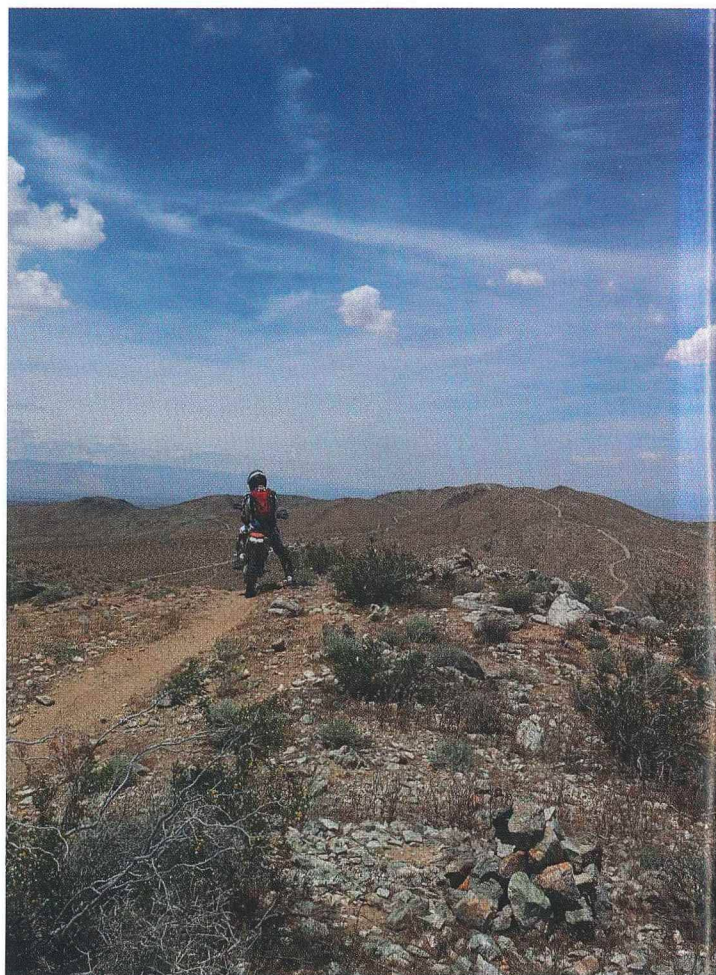
Day 2 (75 miles, more like 95 for me and Steve):

Next morning we left Panamint Spring Resort after a nice breakfast buffet. We headed a mile down the road and turned onto a trail. After about six miles, one of the other guys, Ben, hit a baby head and deflected off the trail with full whiskey throttle in effect. Ben ditched off the KTM350 and it went sailing into a ravine. It was totally tacos for the front wheel and twisted forks. Steve and Carey stripped off the wheel and I loosened up the fork clamps. Steve tied the wheel to his back and asked me to ride with him to the van. Never go anywhere in the desert alone; always use the buddy system. We left the other guys in the capable hands of Carey. Ripped up the trail and got onto a graded dirt road that led to the van. We swapped out for a spare rim and headed back at a good clip. I opened up the KTM 500 a bit and was mightily impressed.

We reassembled the bike with the new wheel and straightened out the forks as best as we could.

We rode the rest of the day, visiting a wilderness cabin and seeing donkeys. Wilderness cabins are kind of like warming huts. First-come, first-serve. And make sure you leave it better than you found it. Always sign into the guest book. We ended the day pulling into the private cabin that Steve had arranged. Jen showed up and we had a nice relaxing evening. Steaks and the fixings were delicious. We met a new guy, Justin, who was up for the night and tomorrow's riding. The one-man cabins are about 8 by 12 and have their own AC. There is a separate building with a very nice bathroom and shower facilities. And the large common area has a big picnic table and fireplace to hang out at.

Day 3 (105 miles): Justin, a fellow Army vet, tagged along for today's ride. We headed out in the morning and rode through some passes and canyons toward Death Valley. We entered the National Park area and even found the Barker Ranch, the site where Charles Manson was captured along with his followers.





We followed the pass the rest of the way into the Death Valley National Park and saw the “geologist cabin.” There was a cool rock formation nearby and it was starting to get hot. We came back down that same canyon and turned along the dry lake bed. Carey and I took off and agreed to meet at the next stop. After watching Carey go around the mud puddles on the left and then look over his left shoulder to check on me a few times, I surprised him. I went right around the mud and when he looked left, I blasted out in front of him and tried to roost him a little. After a brief chase, he waved for me to stop. We had a laugh, and then he said to lead and he would catch up. I started blasting this road along the dry lake and actually saw 91 mph at one point. There were big power slides out of the open corners for a good five miles straight. That checked off my bucket list right then and there. We had lunch at Ballarat and had a look around at the locals. Desert people are kind of weird, just saying. Read a whole article about “seldom-seen Slim” and a few other things that were big doings in these parts. After lunch we crossed the valley again and explored an old mine. We rode in and out in some nice smooth washes that emptied out at the base of the foothills. We ended back at the cabins for another dinner, but not before Steve took me out to his private stash of single-tracks for some fun. What a blast! Thanks, Steve.

Day 4 (80 miles): We took the scenic route back to where we started. Ended up close enough to the China Lake Naval Air Station to watch a few jets buzzing around. We visited the area of a race from a couple of days before and just basically goofed around, even chased a few jack rabbits. We climbed some impressive hills, dodged the super dangerous Cholo “jumping cacti,” and even did a little gnarly single-track follow the leader. The last few miles were on a huge graded dirt road and I could feel it coming to an end. I wanted to ride more. I have to do this again — soon!

I also tried out a new ap on my phone called RAMBLR. It’s a tracking ap that allows you to drop pins and take pictures, notes and videos along your trip. If you go to their website, search for user: gt_pedaler and see the track laid over a topo map and all the pics I took along the way.

