

Keith Bontrager Comes to KC, Reveals the Future

Michael Gier

A longtime pillar of the two-wheeled community — and arguably one of the men who has shaped cycling as we know it — came to Kansas City May 17th to sell his product line, to support the local cycling community, and to give us a glimpse into the future of cycling components.

The Trek Store of Kansas City (see information on back page) hosted the evening, free to the public, giving Mr. Bontrager a chance to describe his remarkable story — starting in his Santa Cruz, CA garage making components for the then-new sport of mountain biking, through his company's rise and sale to Trek Corporation, and to the current stage of his life, where he designs top-end parts for the world's elite racers, and gets to ride his bicycle for a living in some of the world's most exotic places.

Bontrager started by telling the crowd that he had just recently returned from a trip to South Africa, and bragging that his job was basically what the rest of us would call a vacation. He quickly dropped a juicy morsel of news, however, by claiming that his company was working on designs that would 'end' flat tires. As you might expect, his description of the concept did not give away many secrets, but it did give a glimpse into the innovations that Bontrager and Trek hope to release in the near future.

By the way, for those of you in the big wheel set, Bontrager promised that the new tire system he was describing would be available in 29er configuration "soon." There seemed to be much joy from the congregation at this news.

During his hourlong talk, Bontrager displayed the mindset of an engineer. What little emotion he displayed seemed reserved for talking about the physics and mechanics of product design. It was soon obvious that this is a man who likes to tinker, and who takes

great pride in figuring out a new way to solve an old

problem, with no great love for the business end of product design. He made that concept rather clear when he said, "Salesmen live in this special world where the laws of physics are suspended — occasionally."



After his presentation, Keith Bontrager spoke with guests for another hour.

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Next EarthRiders Meetings

AUGUST

Kill Creek Park

6:00 pm, Weds. Aug. 17th
Shelter 1

SEPTEMBER

Landahl Park

6:00 pm, Weds. Sept. 21st
Argo Rd. Trailhead

OCTOBER

Blue River

Noon, Sat. Oct. 22nd
Sandtrap, 130th & Holmes

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The Extraordinary Properties of Fleece

Two Days of Riding Bliss in Arkansas' Syllamo Trails

Mike Rago

The first weekend in February, Dave Smith, Aaron Browning and I headed down for a few days of riding on the Syllamo Trails in north central Arkansas. Dave had been there the previous October, and could not say enough good things about them. Dave's testimonial left me with high expectations, and Syllamo would not disappoint.

Day One: The "Easy" Trail and the Cramps that Brought Me to My Knees

We headed out bright and early Friday morning to get some riding in that afternoon. I was excited about the trip but a little apprehensive as well: I hadn't been on a bike in 5 weeks or more. None of us were in great shape though, except for maybe Aaron, and we all agreed that the pace would be mild.

Despite a little detour (beware the Subway) and a stop for some queasiness (there isn't a straight line of road between Harrison and the campground), we still made the trip in under 6 hours. We pulled into the beautiful Blanchard Springs campground around 1:00. The place is absolutely beautiful — the prettiest campground I've ever stayed at. It sits on a branch of the Syllamo creek, surrounded by hills and bluffs. Beautiful, and hot showers to boot!

Being February, we pretty much had the place to ourselves. After picking the perfect camp spot, we unloaded the bikes and got geared up and ready to ride. We had brought our lights just in case for the first day's ride, but we were ready to ride around 2:00 and it was "only" 16 miles so we figured we didn't need them. We also figured we didn't need things like extra water or food because, after all it was "only" 16 miles and besides, it was the "easy" trail. The fact that I hadn't been riding in weeks crossed my mind briefly, but again — it's "only" 16 miles on the "easy" trail.

The trail du jour was the yellow trail

(don't know its real name) and it could be accessed from the campground so off we went. Remember, we were camping right near the stream, so the only way to go was up. And up we went. The initial climb was brutal, covering every aspect of the word "steep". It seemed like it went on forever, and when we finally made it to the top, I was already hurting. It was an omen for things to come.

The yellow trail is one of the newer trails, and is an "easy" trail because it has a nice wide bench and doesn't have a lot in the way of technical features. It's a very nice example of mechanized trail building. The tread was gravel-like, and being a new trail it wasn't really burned in well. This combined with the rain they got a day or two earlier making the trail very soft; pretty much like pedaling through molasses. We rode the trail counter-clockwise and all agreed that it seemed more up hill than down. All this would combine for my undoing.

We stopped and took a well-deserved break on a pristine spot that overlooked the White River. The view was beautiful and we would have liked to hang out a little while longer, but daylight was burning and we had quite a ways left to go. I was already feeling pretty whipped, but man, it felt good to be on the bike again. As I said before, the trail didn't have much in the way of technical features, but it did have some, and they were pretty fun and very well done. On we rode, and the climbing, soft tread, and lack of fitness were starting to take their toll on me.

I couldn't tell you exactly when or where the cramps started happening, but



Aaron Browning and Mike Rago take in the view on the Syllamo trails

it was way too early in the ride, and they were getting intense way too fast for me. Those of you who have heard me tell ride stories before are probably used to me talking about leg cramps; they seem to come along with me on every epic ride I take including every trip I've made to the Berryman. But these cramps were special. Little to no physical fitness, relentless climbing, and pedaling on crushed velvet combined for a magical mix of cramps that seemed to go straight through to the bone. When I could no longer pedal and was forced to get off and push, the cramps would re-group and attack my legs at different muscles from different angles. Twice the cramping literally brought me to my knees where I sat, unable to move, making deals with God, promising to sell my bike if I could just see my wife and family again....

Onward we pressed, moving slow as the day was getting away from us. At one point, Aaron, who was faring the best, decided to go ahead, get our



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EarthRiders Membership Application

Support local mountain biking, trail maintenance, and land access efforts. Return this application with a check in the amount of **\$25.00** individual or **\$30.00** family, made payable to **EarthRiders**, for annual dues to: *EarthRiders* Membership, P.O. Box 14414, Lenexa, KS 66285.

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EarthRiders membership information is not sold to third parties. For more information about membership, see www.earthriders.com or E-mail membership@earthriders.org.

Until mountain biking came along, the bike scene was ruled by a small elite cadre of people who seemed allergic to enthusiasm.

Jacquie Phelan

<http://www.quotegarden.com/bicycling.html>

Ride Schedule

Mondays: Friz on the Plaza. Meet at Mill Creek Park (the horsey fountain), 6 p.m.

Tuesdays: Taco Tuesday at the Blue River Parkway Trails. Meet at Good Time Charlie's parking lot (formerly Pat Murphy's), 130th and Holmes. Rides start at irregular times after work, generally several groups of varying abilities.

Wednesdays: Hump Day at Kill Creek. Leaves from the Shelter 1 parking lot 6-6:30 pm.

Wednesdays: Explore the Core Urban Tour. Varying pace urban ride. Leaves from Acme Bicycle at 412 E. 18th Street approx. 6:15 pm.

Rides are subject to weather and leader availability, and are "show and go." Check the appropriate forum thread for the latest updates (sign up at www.earthriders.com).



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It's a busy week/month/summer

Don't forget the **MS150**, coming up September 10-11. Many EarthRiders will be participating, although some won't admit to riding road. www.nmsskc.org

The **Lake of the Ozarks State Park** project continues to go forward, and we thought you might like to see a few stats about the progress. So far, over 1,300 hours of work have gone into the construction of the LOSP trails. Trail workers have traveled almost 15,000 miles to accomplish that work. And incredibly, counting time, mileage, and expenses, trail workers are recorded as having donated \$17,093 "in-kind" to the effort. This on-paper-only money is our "payment" against the grant that funded the mechanized trail equipment being used to build the trails. Todd Posson reports that the 4-mile connector trail will likely be completed in October. Until that section is completed, the trail unfortunately remains officially unopen.

The annual **Rapture in Misery 6/12-Hour Race** (RIM) is scheduled for September 24th. The Department of Riding for a Really Long Time suggests you buddy up and start training now. www.heartlandrace.com.

Keith Bontrager Reveals the Future, continued

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Bontrager offered up a glimpse of the design philosophy that his company uses while designing components, describing in some detail the concept of a bike as a series of "stacked springs" — consisting of the tire, the wheel (up to the axle), the fork and/or rear suspension, the frame, and the seatpost — and using this illustration to explain that suspension design is about concentrating on those areas that already provide substantial suspension, rather than trying to wring a small amount from parts that don't. He revealed a mantra that's often repeated in the engineering world and adjusted for different applications: "You can have it light, strong, or cheap. Pick any two."

Bontrager started his business designing and building bike parts in 1980. He soon started manufacturing his own frames, which are now prized collectors' items. He described his early company's planned business model as pretty simple: "Make things, sell them, and get the

money." Fast growth created challenging times, though, and when Trek Bicycle Corporation offered to buy his then-\$4-million company in 1995, he completed the transaction in a month. He said he felt freed from the need to spend 80-hours a week working at growing his business, and from the constraints of attempting success in the competitive bicycle manufacturing world. "If you're going to be a custom frame builder," he said, "you're going to have to take a vow of poverty." Now, free of the business concerns of running a small company, Bontrager says that he is able to focus on his true love of design.

Today, Bontrager components are considered some of the best in the world, as demonstrated by their elite position on the bicycles of some of the top racers. Bontrager's components and wheel systems have earned a reputation as lightweight, extremely durable components for serious cyclists worldwide.

Before the presentation, the Trek Store had set up a generous table full

of prizes to be raffled off, with a portion of the proceeds going to ERTA. After Bontrager finished speaking, the raffle began, with most of the assembled guests ultimately taking home some prize. One lucky guest left with a new wheelset.

Bontrager toured the Midwest throughout May, giving a series of presentations on cycling's history and future, and his involvement with the world's premiere cyclists. Rest assured that as you read this article, Keith Bontrager is likely planning his next bike trip, and working out the details of what could be the next innovation in bicycle components.

For more information about Bontrager's line of wheel systems and components, check out www.bontrager.com. The EarthRiders would like to thank the Trek Store of Kansas City for hosting this event. You can find their contact information at the back of this newsletter, and more information on their website at www.trekcc.com.

A New Rider's Account of Her First Time on Dirt

A friend of your editor named Mary Solis took her first mountain bike ride just this month, and wrote a description of the experience. It seemed to this old editor to be a pretty honest account of one's "first time," which I really don't think you ever forget:

I wanted to tell you a little about my very first mountain biking experience. We rented bikes from Sunflower Bike Shop in Lawrence and everyone there was so friendly. Friends of my companion met us at the shop and showed us how to get to the mountain biking trails. They told us that the paved levee was boring. Of course they are

major outdoor enthusiasts and frequently ride trails. But we were all up for some fun and adventure and said, "Ok, let's do it!" We weren't aware that it was 9 miles. And frankly, in the heat and being our first time, I could have done about 4 miles and been fine with it.

Anyhow, they gave us the basics and we were on our way. Those first few hills were very intimidating! I was rather proud of myself on how I handled them though, and one of the experienced riders even commented that for a first timer, I was doing great. I kept up with them the whole time,

even though I was gasping for air and my heart rate was racing like crazy. And I didn't get off my bike once to walk the hills. Ok, what is with all the sand?! I lost my balance at the top of one hill going through some and wiped out. Not too bad but produced a pretty purple and yellow bruise and a nice scrape. So when we reached the half point my friends and I were stunned we still had half to go. Somehow, we pushed on with the incentive that we could go eat afterwards. It was the most mentally, physically challenging thing I have done in a long, long time. I couldn't believe the

Continued on next page.

Family Day at the Lawrence River Trails

Kevin Liu

LMBC Secretary

On June 25th, EarthRiders and the Lawrence Mountain Bike Club paired up to host the first ER/LMBC Family

Day at the River Trail in Lawrence. The afternoon consisted of social rides on the trail, a

kid's drag race, slow-speed races for kids and adults, and a singletrack race. The goal of the day was to host an event for the public to meet the mountain biking community from Kansas City and Lawrence. It was also a great opportunity for club members from both organizations to get together and spend time together.

Overall, there were around 45 different riders throughout the afternoon. While there weren't as many kids as there could have been, the



Three finalists, Adam, Franklin, and Jackie, near the finish line for the Kid's Slow-Speed race.

track race later in the afternoon, as he was involved in a spectacular crash on the course (on a borrowed bike, since his bike didn't have a chain anymore).

The afternoon was a success. Volunteers from LMBC prepared the venue during their monthly trail maintenance with mowing and trimming. Patrollers from the River Trail Patrol and Midwest Mountain Bike Patrol guided rides on the trail. Roadside Tacos provided free tacos

ones who came had a good time. The drag race was a close race, with the 1st place rider coasting over the finish line after the chain on his bike broke. The same rider had a difficult time in the single-

and chips/salsa for the hungry riders, and BikeSource of Overland Park donated excellent swag for race prizes. The two clubs enjoyed hosting the event and plan to have Family Day again next year. Keep an eye out for this event next June!



Two racers, Adam and Jackie, round the bend during the Kid's Singletrack race at Family Day.

Continued from previous page.

amount of concentration and focus it takes to stay on that little narrow trail! One slip and you are all over the place. I almost hit a tree about 20 times, almost slid off the trail and fell another 20 times, and almost wet my pants going down that one hill where there was a cement small landing or bridge of some sort — if you slip one half an inch off to the left, you are toast! How exhilarating though! The hardest part was the last couple of miles, just mentally trying to make it through. And then the mile or so back to the bike shop in what was the hottest part of the day. By now I was out of water and dying. Literally, I was getting dizzy and nauseated. One

more block without water and some air conditioning and I think I would have collapsed or gotten sick. One of my friends commented on how we should have taken pictures right after the ride — all strung out, sweaty/grimy, and sick, and compared them to the happy three chicks on their bikes with smiles before we took off. Next time, I am going in the Fall and buying a camelback!

That night we were all beat up like a train just railed right over us — sore butts, aching backs and shoulders, knees aching... man, I was tore up! And the next two days I felt almost worse and more sore. We were all laughing because after showering and eating a large pasta meal and a little shopping, we were all in bed by

10:30!! So much for going out on the town. None of us minded. We did get to shop around the next day and went to the Freestate Brewery. I enjoyed the quirky shops and the relaxed feeling that Lawrence has. People playing chess on the street, everyone just doing their own thing hanging out, lots of artsy people. Most people were so friendly too and that was nice.

Well, now I can say I did it. I got my husband excited about trying it out too, so that will be another adventure to come. Thanks for all your tips. I may be calling on you in the future for more advice on trails in the KC area. So the ones I did were just beginner??? Yikes....

Wah-cah-ROO-sah

In June, the Lawrence Mountain Bike Club operated a beer tent at the Wakarusa Festival at Clinton Lake as a fundraiser, and invited the EarthRiders to participate. The final amount raised is still being tallied, but our hats are off to the following ER volunteers for helping earn a little extra money to keep our little club operating. We'll probably do it again next year, and it's a great way to get into the festival for free! Thanks to:

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Mike Rago | Garrett Wood |
| Pam Rago | Michael Gier |
| Rickey Houk | Jayne Gier |
| Jaclyn Hall | Rusty Nail |
| Pam Rayborn | Jen Nail |



Walk-ing Ta-cos

The EarthRiders May meeting was held at the Smithville Lake Trails. The threat of rain kept quite a few people away, which was really unfortunate — because it didn't rain at all on the fearless souls who showed up for a great ride on well-buffed trails, and those who didn't make it missed out on the famous "Walking Tacos." For those that are wondering what Walking Tacos might be, well, you'll just have to show up to next year's Smithville meeting!



The Extraordinary Properties of Fleece, continued

(Continued from page 2)

lights, and bring them back to us because it was starting to look like we weren't going to make it back before dark. Dave hung back with me to make sure I didn't become armadillo fodder. The trail finally crested and became mostly downhill to camp; the last section was rocky, technical, and would have been one fun downhill if I had anything left. But I was way past bonking and took it nice and easy. We finally rolled back into camp, managing to get there before Aaron had to set out on a search and rescue mission.

That night we headed into Mountain View and chowed down on some excellent steaks at a place called Dogwood Hollow Steakhouse. I ate everything in sight and sucked down mass quantities of water in an attempt to refuel myself for the next day's riding on the "technical" trails. Back at camp we took hot showers before turning in for an early evening.

Day Two: Killer Trail, Gentle Climbs, One Bad Apple and the "Sweetest Mile"

I slept really well that night, and woke up feeling much better than I thought I would. I really think the hot shower helped, and I'm sure the big steak dinner and all of the other food and water I snarfed down didn't hurt either. We took

our time with breakfast and had a casual pace to our morning. We were pretty tired from the day before, but we only had 16 miles to ride today, and even though they were more technical miles, we had all day to do it. On this day however, there would be plenty of water and food brought along for the journey.

We loaded up and drove to the trailhead, arriving around noon. Today's ride would be clockwise around the perimeter of the Scrapy Mountain Loop (blue trail) and the Bald Scrapy Loop (orange trail). The trailhead was at the top of a hill, so this day's ride was already off to a better start.

It didn't take long to realize that this was going to be a much different, much better ride. The trails were more mature, and rolled much better. Although it was still somewhat damp out, it was never muddy and didn't slow you down. The soil type is similar to the Berryman, it drains well and is ready to ride shortly after rain. Gotta love that Karst topography.

The condition of the trail tread was the least of the reasons why this day was going to be better. The terrain, the layout of the trail, the technical features, the beautiful surroundings — everything about these trails is top-notch. You cannot be a mountain biker and not like these trails.



The author enjoying the rocks on the Syllamo Trail.

They should be on everyone's must-ride list. The downhills are fast and fun, with the right amount of rocks and 'features' thrown in. The climbs are good to you; as Dave says, they take you up "two clicks" and then down one, so you have time to catch your breath and get some momentum. And the climbs are interesting too — they're not just grinds like on the Berryman or even on the yellow trail from the day before. They take you up some technical sections, around some tricky turns, up roots, over rocks, around rocks, through rocks.

Ah the rocks; the wonderful, wonderful rocks. Big rocks. Medium rocks. Small rocks. Rock shelves. Rock drops. Rocks on top of rocks. Rocks in what seemed like all the right places to make both the climbs and descents that much more fun.

Fleece, etc.

These trails went on and on like this, all day long. When we'd stop to catch our breaths and take a break, the conversation never went far from how kick-ass the trails are. It didn't matter that we were as tired as we were from the day before, these trails begged to be ridden and made you want to keep going. They were just too fun!

The first part of our ride went on and on like this. Riding, smiling, stopping for breaks, and marveling at the trails and how much fun they were, then back on the bikes to take in some more. Still, the previous day's slog was catching up with me and I was starting to feel a little beat. We had made it through the first part of the blue trail and much of the orange when we stopped for lunch. We thought we were about at the half-way point, but after looking at the map we figured out that we were only about seven miles into our 16-mile journey. Damn. I'm this tired and we're not even half way? As fun as these trails were, it was starting to look like it could be a long afternoon.

But then, not long after lunch, we hit it. Syllamo, you have the sweetest mile: the last mile of the orange trail. This section of trail has to be the sweetest mile of trail I have ever ridden. I have never been on a faster, flowy-er, rock-strewn section of trail ever. It's an undulating section of trail that takes you up and over big, flat, slab rocks. As tired as I was, I put it in the middle ring, dropped her down a few gears and started cranking. I couldn't help it; it was just too much fun to go bombing through this section cranking it out in a higher gear. We were flying over the rocks, up and down through the hills, on a roller coaster ride like no amusement park could offer. I gave it everything I had left and it gave me back some of the most exhilarating riding I have ever experienced. I'm getting goose-bumps just writing about it.

That section of trail made the entire trip for me. Not that the trip needed it. The trails were so great that even without this section they would still be on my short list of best trails.

After hooking back up with the blue trail, we still had nearly six miles of kick-ass trails to go, and after coming down off

of the high from the sweetest mile, things slowed down a little for me. It was frustrating at some points: I couldn't hang it out on the downhills like I wanted to and I know I could have made it up most all of the fun-filled technical climbs if I had just been in better shape and wasn't so worn out. Still, I was feeling a lot better than I thought I would after the previous day's debacle, and I hadn't cramped all day. Then, we took a break and I pulled an apple out of my pack. Man it sounded good — and it was. It wasn't long after we started up again that the cramps hit. They came on hard and fast. It was the apple. Cursed apple! I think the sudden rush of sugar into my bloodstream triggered the cramps. I started sucking down water and, not long after they started, they were gone, as quickly as they came on. I don't believe I'll be bringing any more apples with me on epic rides....

The rest of the ride was more of the same: kick-ass trail and worn out riders. Aaron once again seemed to be faring well; the man from team Waldo representin'. We finished the ride in what again was longer than we anticipated, although we had plenty of time before dark this time and bigger smiles at the end of the day.

That night at camp the beer flowed freely around a roaring fire, and again the conversation didn't stray far from the kick-ass-ness of the trails and the ride that day.

Day Three: The rains come, the campground is prettier than we thought

Aaron had spent some time the night before lobbying for another ride on Sunday; Dave and I were pretty sure we'd had enough. It didn't matter though, because we woke up to sprinkles, so we packed up camp pretty quickly.

We didn't need to be in any hurry to get on the road, so we took the opportunity to check out the Blanchard Springs Recreation Area that the campground was located in. It turns out that the pleasant surprises weren't over. We found our way to the path to Blanchard Spring and took a little hike. It's an easy hike up a beautiful Ozark stream to the spring. After that we drove to Mirror Lake, a place downstream from the spring where a dam had been built to run a mill in the early

1900's. Again, beautiful. There were even remnants of the mill. It just kept getting better.

The final icing on the cake was breakfast at a little place called Cody's Restaurant in a town called Fifty Six, Arkansas. The breakfast was great and plentiful, and along with the biscuits they brought out homemade preserves. Mmm.

My friends, if you haven't figured it out by now, I cannot say enough good things about these trails, the campground — everything. The trails are so well laid out and built — they're nearly textbook. Those of you who design and build trails need to check them out; they might have you questioning what you think you know about flow. Plus, it's cool to see a good example of mechanized trail building over a large area. It was nice to go there on a mild weekend in February because we had the whole place to ourselves and it was nice to actually ride trail since it had been such a rotten winter for mountain biking here at home.

Bonktoberfest will be held at these trails this year and I'm excited to share



The author demonstrates improper downhill technique.

them with my fellow EarthRiders and all the mountain bikers that attend our annual gathering. The variety of these trails and the stacked loop design should allow for customized rides for all riding styles — including shuttled downhill runs. However, don't wait for Fall; get down there as soon as you can.

For more info about the Syllamo trails, camping, and the surrounding area, start at this link: http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/ozark/recreation/syllamo_bike.html



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For address changes, send a note to the address
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