



Wired

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The Desert

Featuring: Synchro 20

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WHAT I PACKED

Yeti 575 mountain bike \$3,000

Osprey Synchro 20 hydration pack \$130

DeLorme inReach SE Extreme communication kit \$400

Panasonic Lumix TS5 rugged camera \$250

Specialized Andorra clothing \$60-\$135

Sea to Summit Spark Spl sleeping bag \$300

Giro Xara helmet \$130

Smith Optics Pivlock glasses \$200

Light & Motion Stella 500 lamp \$200



Dawn was bright and cool. I rode 15 miles up and down washboard roads, past leafless trees and giant boulders that looked karate-chopped by Zeus. As I rode, I groped for the Osprey hydro-pack's bladder nozzle magnetically secured to my chest strap and steadily sipped from it as if on an oral-drip IV.



two loves—riding and camping—into my first bike-packing epic.

Then reality intruded. A week before my departure, a Mojave park ranger told me that my proposed route was nuts. "A very physically fit rider could do it, but I'm concerned about the trailer you'll be pulling," she wrote in an email. "The rough route may cause the trailer to destabilize your bike, and there will be no water or facilities of any kind—nor will cell phones work."

I soon found that it didn't matter which route I took. Thanks to broken pipes and a broke government, there were only three guaranteed water stops in the entire 2,398-square-mile preserve, and two of those were within 10 miles of each other.

I took a break from panicking and strategizing to pick up a few smaller items—including a key-chain vial of pepper spray. I figured I might need it for a rogue coyote. The Outdoorsman, the only shop in my hometown that seems to sell it, has bars on the door and shiny handguns lined up

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under a glass counter like glazed doughnuts. "Are you trying to ward off four-legged or two-legged predators?" asked Blain, the clerk with a ZZ Top beard. "If it's two-legged, you might consider a .44 Magnum. Then again," he laughed, "if you've never shot a gun, you'd probably have better luck with the pepper spray."

As I walked out with my powder-pink cylinder of oleoresin capicum, Blain called cheerily after me, "May you never have to use it!"

His words freaked me out. I hadn't considered the potential for dangerous humans. In lieu of guns, I would have state-of-the-art gear to protect me. I'd be carrying a DeLorme inReach satellite communicator

with a big red SOS button and generous battery power, and I had already programmed it so a few key friends could follow my ride online. I didn't set it up for all of my Twitter friends to see. What if one of my followers is a Charles Manson copycat who lives on a ranch in the Mojave?

Other essentials I was bringing: 30 spare bike parts and tools recommended by an expert bike-packer friend, a minimalist tarp shelter, a superlight sleeping bag, a 5.5-gallon water container, high-powered lights, a camera, and food. All of this had to fit on a Bob Ixex Plus trailer or in a 20-liter Osprey hydration pack with a pocket for everything. When I loaded the trailer for a test ride, I looked like something out of *The Beverly Hillbillies*. And that was before I bungled on the water jug.

At least my bike, the Yeti 575, was hard to beat. With 575 inches of spring play on the front shock, the aluminum bike has been around for about 10 years and is a cult classic, renowned for its cushy downhill ride. For 2014, Yeti increased the wheel size from 26 to 27.5 inches and returned the rear shock to create more support as the spring in the front fork compresses.

It was giving me grief, however: Without refitting the 575 with a special rear axle, you can't properly attach a trailer. I'd ordered the custom axle but had forgotten that this new and improved 575 also had larger wheels and thus required a trailer with a larger fork. OK, no trailer. Which meant no way to carry extra water. Now I was wiggling out.

I WAS IN A SAGEBRUSH AND JOSHUA TREE HEAVEN, WRAPPED IN SILENCE AND LIT BY STARS.

