

Sheep Mountain, August 2011

It's fair to say that the Sheep Mountain loop is considered Missoula's test piece mountain bike ride. It is tough and long, with (from my door) about 5900 feet of elevation gain in 37 miles, and it is remote. This makes doing the ride committing on a number of levels, and hence, easy to push off till next week or next season. In fact, just last Sunday I had backed out from doing Sheep yet again, this time with my friend Greg Hood, because it was going to be a hot day, and I had wanted to get an earlier start than we were going to be able to manage. In other words, I wimped out.

But Sheep wouldn't let go, so I decided mid-week to duck out of a morning's work and bang out the ride. It took me just under five hours to do it, with only a few minutes of stopping and 15 minutes of being lost along the way. In hindsight, Greg and I would have been fine to do the ride on Sunday.

From the Rattlesnake Trailhead, the route goes up to the top of Woods Gulch and then continues climbing along the ridge to a highpoint at Blue Point. It then follows the connecting ridge to Sheep Mountain (7650 ft), descending from Blue Point before climbing again to Sheep Mountain. From the top of Sheep, it's almost entirely downhill the remainder of the ride. It's a classic long loop, and with 99% of the climbing packed into the first half of the ride, is very strenuous. No other ride I've done in Missoula gives the same sense of backcountry adventure and remoteness. I highly recommend it, but be sure to bring plenty of water.



Here are some pictures I grabbed off of the web because I forgot my camera. Left: Missoula local Ben Horan with Sheep in the background. Right: A picture from the summit of Sheep Mountain, looking toward Missoula.