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THE MOUNTAIN BIKE FORUM

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PHOTO BY JAMES E. RICKMAN

THE MADNESS HAD BECOME JUST A BIT TOO MADDENING



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HIGH TIMES FOR FRAZER

WORDS BY JAMES E. RICKMAN

The nation's highest mountain bike hill climb has fended off extinction and will get by with a little help from its friends.

The Frazer Mountain Madness—a pair of races held at Taos Ski Valley, New Mexico—has been a punishing stop on the New Mexico mountain bike racing circuit for the past six summers. The madness features an insanely steep hill climb event that starts at 9,300 feet above sea level and ends five and a half miles later at a dizzying altitude of 12,163 feet. An accompanying cross-country race features a start at the same elevation with some seriously sadistic bouts of climbing that are balanced by a fast descent on picturesque singletrack that can't help but induce maniacal laughter in even the most staid participants. The combined events have more ups and downs than a bi-polar emo teenager who has run out of lithium.

This year, however, the Madness had become just a bit too maddening for race organizers Roger and Kerrie Pattison. The New Mexico Off-Road Series had dropped the Frazer hill climb from its roster this year to make room for a couple of new race venues in the summer series.

"Roger and I thought it might be time for a different direction," Kerrie Pattison said. "We've got to make the races bigger because we're farther away from a big population here."

Though Taos Ski Valley is world-renowned for its winter recreation,

the area suffers a dearth of visitors during summer months due to its isolated location and distance from downtown Taos, a southwestern mecca for tourists. However, the 200 annual participants in the Frazer Mountain Madness had given the area a needed summer boost for the past several years. Faced with the possibility that the event was going to disappear, the Taos Ski Valley Chamber of Commerce stepped in to help the Pattisons with marketing and sponsorship.

As a result, the Frazer Mountain Madness (www.frazermountain-madness.com) will continue again this year, but the hill climb will not be part of the NMORS points series, and it will be held the day after the cross-country race, not the day before as in previous years. Racers who had done both events previously will probably be thankful for the fresher legs they'll have on race day. Both events are scheduled for July 23 and 24.

Because the views from the top of Frazer Mountain are stunning—the mountain is next door to Wheeler Peak, highest point in the Land of Enchantment—many racers may opt to stay the extra day for the Hill Climb as well. There's nothing else like it in the nation, and the oxygen-lean descent afterward is, well, madness plain and simple.

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