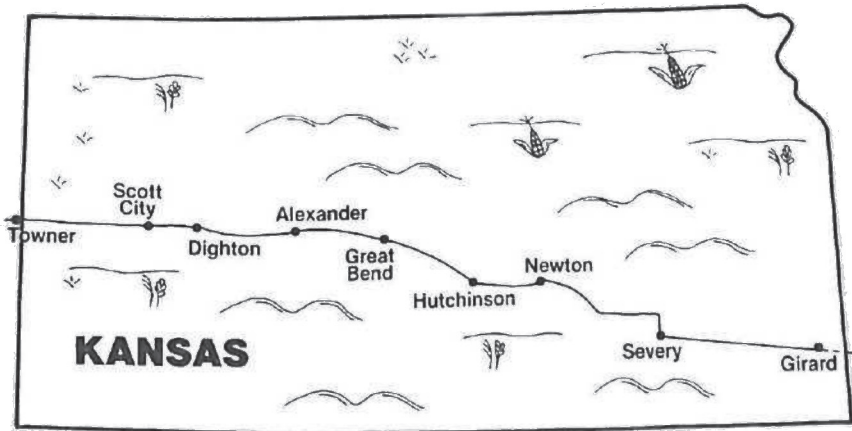




The Plains

I do not know where Kansas is, for I have never heard that country mentioned before. But tell me, is it civilized country?



DAY 30: Carol and I set off early, too. We climbed that sparking morning for several miles east of Westcliffe, then rolled onto the most gorgeous downhill of the whole trip. An 8% grade—we didn't have to ride our brakes all the time—easy racing curves, slightly banked but not too steep, a satin-smooth road surface with ample room for bikes, no traffic and magnificent scenery. We arrived in Pueblo fifty-two miles and five hours later, having said our final farewells to the Rockies.

Pueblo was a sprawling, sand city filled with shopping centers and 7-11 stores. We spent part of the afternoon changing tires in front of the Laundromat. Tony had brought me a new tire from the bike shop back home to replace my worn rear tire. Carol switched hers from front to back, expecting to complete the journey on one set



of tires. That was one expectation that was met. We gathered some groceries and left for the Plains, another big unknown and formidable part of our journey.

By seven that evening we were in another world. It was a shock to have moved into another landscape in just twenty-three miles. We arrived in Boone, Colorado, and set up our camp in the “city park” next to the local tavern. Strains of the Beatles and Bobby Darin coming from the open bar door caught us up in memories of the 50’s as we settled in for the night.



I was sound asleep when my blind partner roused me. “Is that a man sitting in front of that tree looking at us?” Carol was looking straight ahead, out the open tent flap, completely rigid and intent on the night beyond our tent. I lay there, stunned. (Goodbye Mother, Dad, Tony. It’s been a nice trip. I’ve enjoyed my short stay here on earth. Hope to see you again . . .) If there *was* a man staring at us in our tent, what was he thinking about? What was he going to do? Why would someone sit looking at two sleeping girls in the middle of the night? Was he some pervert concocting the most ghastly, vile crime ever yet committed against women? As long as he sits there, I thought gloomily, there was nothing we could do, and we sure couldn’t go to sleep. We were cows in a feedlot, getting fat and flush with fear-flowing blood, moist with adrenalin-pumped sweat. How juicy that would make us! How desirable! Okay, Fear, that’s enough. It’s time for Courage and Action to take over. I opened my eyes, said a last prayer and sat up to look out the tent.

It was totally black outside. I strained to see the tree six feet in front of our tent, hoping to God that I wouldn’t see anything but the trunk. I squinted, changed eyes, opening and closing to get different perspectives, but I couldn’t make out any misplaced form or grotesque creature sitting in front of the tree. Carol wanted to go pee. I withheld my final verdict for several more seconds, because I hated the thought of sending my helpless friend out to pee on top of the local maniac. Finally, I pronounced, “It looks all right to me. I can’t see anything.” I held my breath as she crawled out of the tent and disappeared behind the tree. Why did she always have to go to the bathroom after we had gone to bed? I fumed, anxiously awaiting her return. When she reappeared and had snuggled back into bed, I relaxed a little, but the specter continued to haunt me into the early morning hours.

DAY 31: I woke up determined to identify and fix the clicking noises I’d been hearing in my rear wheel ever since I’d changed my tires in Pueblo I’d tried unsuccessfully to ignore it. After breakfast, I flipped Little Silver on its seat and reset the rear wheel. It seemed to me that the free wheel was wiggling too much around the axle, and that the rear wheel was out of true. The last thing I was going to attempt to do was true my own wheel. Once, with Gerry’s help, I had tried to straighten out a crooked wheel by myself and ended up turning a perfectly good wheel into a “Spaghetti-O” from a can of “Alpha-bit” soup. Our guide book showed us that we would come to a bike store in Kansas within a couple of days. I resolved to try to live with the persistent noises until then, and we pushed on.

