

WE'LL TAKE YOU THERE

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**MAGNUM OPUS**  
ADVENTURE AT A HIGH-MOUNTAIN HUT

**BRING ON THE BRODIES**  
CAN YOU SHRED A KLUNKER?

**FROM PROTOTYPE TO PRODUCTION**  
THE MAKING OF A PIVOT

**RIDING WITH THE RAZORBACKS**  
EXPLORING ARKANSAS' BEST TRAILS



OPUS

adventure riding from the opus hut

DAYS

Words Sarah Rawley  
Images Allen Krughoff





Life above 11,000 feet in the Rocky Mountains is more stunning than in the valleys below. Colors are more vivid, and it is like seeing the world in HD. The skyline, with jagged edges and pinnacles rising into the clouds, is taken out of a Dr. Seuss book. The rusty-colored hillsides are a stark contrast to the high-alpine fields and scarred terrain that tell us we are in avalanche country.

Every avalanche chute and every bend in the road up Ophir Pass north of Silverton, Colo., reminds us of the same journey we took six months prior on skis to slay the remnants of a storm in mid-February. We are literally on the same road, but with an entirely different purpose; instead of skis strapped to our feet, we are spinning our way to the OPUS Hut, a well-loved wintertime destination.

The premise of this journey in late August? To explore trails far off the beaten path and discover a new perspective on the terrain; to travel light, yet enjoy the comforts of home; to relish good food and wine with others who view the world through a venturesome lens; to be captivated by stories around the dinner table without a cell phone in sight; to relax, unplug and detoxify in a European sauna with a view; to ride trails where the only tracks are from your friend in front of you.

I look at Elena, who hammers up the last switchback with grace and power resembling her big mountain style on skis. “It’s just around the corner,” I sputter. This time, I think I’m convincing enough, and even I believe we are almost there.

Of the handful of people I trust in the backcountry, Elena is the one whom I can call spontaneously to join in adventures that are loosely planned (and we may not have a definite idea of what we’re getting into). We have a reciprocal relationship—she coerces me to huck off cliffs on skis, and I tow her off of jumps on bikes.

The road levels out after climbing for about 1,500 feet over three miles, and the OPUS comes into view, nestled upon a ridge just below treeline. Allen, our friend and photographer for the trip, is waiting for us and captures the smiles of satisfaction that emerge when we know we are close.

Although riding to the OPUS Hut is the preferred method for a true bikepacking experience, the beauty of this off-the-beaten-path destination lies in its accessibility. If you choose to bring more than can fit in a Camelbak or are traveling with a group of mixed fitness and ability, the Silverton side of Ophir Pass is gentler in grade and passable by most 4-wheel/AWD vehicles. The western approach from the town of Ophir is much more difficult and requires either a high-clearance vehicle or, for bikers, a humble demeanor that accepts walking a few pitches of the climb, including the aptly named Cardiac Hill. Both sides of the pass have the stunning scenery characteristic of the montane ecosystem that progresses from lush creek beds at lower altitudes to the cushioned moss and marsh marigold of the alpine tundra. There are plenty of riding options on



either side of the pass, and in the coming days, we will get to experience both orientations.

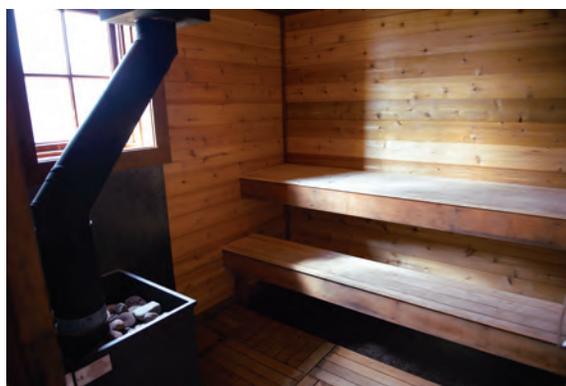
That familiar feeling of anticipation and relief kick in as we turn off Ophir Pass Road for the final half-mile climb to the hut. The last grunt is inspiring singletrack with tricky rocks and roots to navigate and a mini scree field to scamper across. It reminds me of so many other rides that have been fun to punch out, but I am simultaneously happy to be done. As we crest the rise and see the hut behind the top of the hill, our pace naturally quickens for the final push.

We know we have arrived at our destination when Runya's assertive voice greets us. This canine communication might send the meek back down from where they came. But once she says her hellos, she welcomes us into her pack and leads us to the front door of the OPUS Hut, where Bob Kingsley—hut master, builder, guide, gourmet chef and mastermind behind all that is the OPUS—awaits us with a warm bowl of soup and cup of tea.

The OPUS Hut, with four private rooms and a dorm-style space that sleeps 16, has a reputation for being the Taj Mahal of the vast systems of huts in Colorado. The name, in fact, stands for Ophir Pass Ultimate Ski Hut. But "ultimate" is more than having a bed already made, a full kitchen, wood-burning stoves, indoor composting toilets, solar-powered electricity, hot water and plumbing. It's the passion behind the walls. Bob spent years searching for the perfect patch of land, acquiring it and knitting together the pieces to fulfill his vision: to have a gathering place high in the breathtaking Rockies, where people from all walks of life can come and discover what has kept Bob and others here not only for the winters, but also for the summers.

Bob started guiding at 18 years old, and his hut-touring experiences in Europe shaped his vision for the OPUS Hut, a full-service lodge in a remote location with all of the amenities you could imagine. It took more than a decade to find this perfectly situated, 10 1/3 acre plot in the San Juan Mountains, and then another year and a half to acquire the land from two parties—a boisterous Australian who purchased his half for \$1 from a roommate at Colorado School of Mines in the 1970s, and a mining tycoon out of Nevada, who was in a hurry to unload mining claims. It took another five and a half years to build the OPUS Hut, which involved helicopters and snowcats to devise a sustainable, off-the-grid model to last for many years to come. The solid craftsmanship—with stonework and reclaimed timber—is part of what makes his OPUS an architectural work of art.

Upon entering the hut, we know the routine all too



**Top:** The OPUS Hut's unmatched 360-degree views look down into Paradise Basin, over to South Lookout Peak, and to the avalanche-scarred terrain. Situated on more than 10 acres, the OPUS Hut feels remote but is only one-half mile from Ophir Pass Road, making it accessible for groups of mixed abilities.

**Middle:** The OPUS comes equipped with a full kitchen to cook if you choose to pack in your food. To experience the full-service hut experience, we recommend going with the delicious meals provided by Bob Kingsley, the hut master.

**Bottom:** A European sauna sits 85 feet downhill from the main hut. Heated by an external wood stove, it is not uncommon for the sauna to reach 180 degrees.



Barry Kennedy, who fills in as the sub hut master, dishes up a satisfying meal of fresh veggies and pesto pasta. OPUS Hut is the only full-service hut in the Rocky Mountains, where meals made with locally sourced, natural ingredients can be included with your stay.

well: kick off shoes, hang packs and jackets to dry, and head straight to the warm stove, where our bubbling lentil and quinoa soup awaits us.

Laughter emerges from the main kitchen and living area. Bob had mentioned there was going to be another group here, but we are surprised at the sight. Wine glasses and two bottles of red wine are strewn about the kitchen table. Cards are flying and bets are going down. This was not the serious group of climbers, riders or hikers I envisioned; six beautiful, perfectly aged blondes seem a bit too made up for hanging out at a hut above treeline. I look over to Elena and without speaking, we share the thought, “Allen is cougar bait. ...”

This group of women hails from the Front Range of Colorado and gathered at the OPUS Hut for a ladies’ getaway to go hiking, soak in the Orvis Hot Springs and catch up. Our contrasting mission as dirtbag mountain bikers brings to light the allure of this hut—it is a destination for people of varying backgrounds to go rogue for a few days and appreciate the outdoors in their own ways. They welcome us into their game, make sure we have full glasses of wine, and ask what we’re doing and where we’ll go. I point to Bob and say, “Only he

knows the answer to that.”

As the sun goes down, we are served piping hot dishes of pesto and grilled vegetable pasta, green salads and, of course, more wine. This feature cannot be found elsewhere in the States: a high-altitude hut serving up home-cooked meals prepared with quality natural and locally sourced ingredients. After hauling in an entire week’s worth of food for our four-day ski trip, and then watching Bob whip up gourmet meals (gluten-free, no less) with ease, Elena and I vowed that any trip thereafter would not include canned tuna; we would go in for the full service, which includes après ski/ride soup and dinner and breakfast.

Dinner nourishes our bellies, but before a food coma kicks in, I hint that we should take a visit to the sauna. It always feels like a commitment to get suited up and walk the 85 feet from the contentment of the hut, but once we are blanketed in the sauna’s 140 degrees of humid heat and the cedar plank benches become a platform to unwind and detox, it is always worth the effort.

I find my corner on the lowest bench in the sauna,



Technology ceases to exist in the cozy atmosphere of the main dining area, where long dinner conversations transpire and travelers from all walks of life gather to share life in the mountains.



Enough of eating, drinking and sitting in the sauna like we were at a meditation retreat; we came to ride bikes.



Elena Forchielli navigates singletrack that weaves through a trials rider's playground to find the next cairn.

furthest from the coals that are heated by an external small wood-burning stove, to strategically ease into a deep sweat. It is easy to overheat in here because this is a European-style sauna, where 180 degrees is not uncommon. Occasional visits to the front stoop outside the sauna to cool down lead to stargazing. The minutes pass quickly and soon enough, it is time to jump back in the sauna for a warm-up.

As difficult as it was to muster motivation to go down to the sauna, it is twice as difficult to leave. Thinking about what tomorrow may have in store for us and the need to drink at least a liter of water to replenish fluids from the hourlong session in the sauna force us back to the hut. Our cozy beds await, and it is easy to fall fast asleep.

Morning comes quickly, and the smell of bacon trickles to our room, summoning us upstairs for pancakes, fresh melon from the local farmers market, bacon and coffee. Topo maps cover the table—a sign that it is finally time to get down to business. Enough of eating, drinking and sitting in the sauna like we were at a meditation retreat; we came to ride bikes.

Bob lays out several options that depart from the hut in every direction. Due to an ominous forecast, we opt to take a short route to maximize the views and experience a trail that Bob deems as “unique.” We head down the singletrack that led us to the hut, but before reaching Ophir Pass Road, we stay high on a game trail, barely cut into the hillside, that heads toward a thick grove of trees. Once we fight our way through the shrubbery, the trail becomes more obvious, marked by cairns, first through a section of scree, then up and around a hillside and completely out of sight.

As we continue to spiral upward, it is clear we are simply paralleling Ophir Pass Road. The pass below sits at 11,789 feet and is framed by Lookout Peak and South Lookout Peak. On a clear day, the view west from the summit is filled with massive peaks that are all unique in shape, including the distinctive volcanic peak of Lizard Head, and three fourteeners in the distance: Mount Wilson, Wilson Peak and El Diente.

The trail twists and turns through techy rock features as it climbs higher. Sections of the ascent are a trials rider's playground with large boulders and natural bridges scattered everywhere. Within a few miles of the hut, we are in a vastly different world. The grass is neon green, and the bookshelf cliffs that tower above contrast with the alpine bowls that sweep down to the hut. We stop for a moment to take in the scene. The misty undertone of the morning takes over, and it feels like we have surpassed time and space barriers and been transported to Narnia.

We are drawn back to the hut to enjoy hot soup and sketch out our plans for an afternoon excursion. The weather lightens up, and we plan to head the opposite direction, east toward Columbine Lake. This route is similar in nature to the morning, bouncing between established trail and seeking out the next cairn, but instead of nimbly crossing over talus and chunky rocks, we are on much smoother singletrack that runs along



the bottom of the alpine bowls and jumps into the protective canopy of trees.

Mushrooms catch our attention, and Bob gives us a quick lesson on how to identify the common hawk's wing and boletes that we could pick and safely eat for dinner. We carry on down a slippery descent, to an intersection where we can either begin a hike-a-bike up to Columbine Lake or proceed down an established trail to Ophir Pass Road.

I'm partial to trails that are 10 feet wide and present 12 different line options, but all I can see is a descent fit for an enduro race. The votes are in; suddenly we forget about photo ops, and Allen, Bob, Elena and I race down the trail, passing on the inside of corners while navigating 12 tricky switchbacks, rocks, roots and unpredictable turns. This is the same feeling that prompts the hootin' and hollerin' of "first tracks" on a powder day. But instead of effortless bounding through the snow, I am holding on for dear life, and adrenaline pumps through my veins.

The trail ends with a final roller coaster g-out onto a doubletrack road, then we have a fast jaunt to Ophir Pass Road. We are nearly back to where our journey began yesterday. It is a relatively quick spin back up to the hut this second time around. As we near the singletrack to the hut, four Coors Lights catch our eyes, a gift from our friends who have returned from their trip to the hot springs.

Back at the hut, Barry Kennedy, who fills in as a substitute hut master, joins us for the evening, and will be our guide on tomorrow's adventures. His booming laugh fills the walls as he shares stories about his stint as a helicopter pilot in Angola, living on the beaches in Costa Rica, the incredible skiing that awaits him on his next assignment in Kazakhstan, and local wisdom about the surrounding trails. Barry naturally uses the term "crizzeler," which perplexes us but sends Elena and I falling off the wooden benches laughing out loud.

"A crizzeler is that guy you always see, but you never know what he is up to," Barry explains. To crizzel or crizzelin', coined by Barry's friend Dave Gruss, is the act of cruising around in the backcountry. More aptly put as a noun, it is the person you see pop out of the woods when you think you are all alone in the mountains. He does nothing more than make eye contact and keeps moving about his business, though you have no idea what that is.

When we stop laughing, Barry describes a route on the west side of the pass that he will take us on tomorrow. It sounds magical. First, we will descend the steep climb we had avoided by accessing the hut from the eastern side. Then we will veer off into Swamp Canyon and ride beneath the magnificent Magnum Couloir and continue along the Opus Rim, where real loam exists in the fertile hideaways tucked above the town of Ophir—home to approximately 170 people—where we will finish. Barry has traveled the world, but something keeps him coming back to Ophir and it's home when he isn't flying around the world. After experiencing



**Left:** OPUS Hut is an acronym for “Ophir Pass Ultimate Ski” Hut. Although the hut was originally built to welcome backcountry skiers, it has quickly become a summer destination for those looking to ride off the beaten path.



**Above:** Elena pushes up the loamy singletrack that skirts above the town of Ophir near Swamp Canyon.



what feel like undiscovered trails, we are beginning to see why.

With a plan in place, we begin to pass a bottle of mescal, a pure form of mixed agaves, around the table, and the evening of Mexican-inspired cuisine is followed by another sauna session. The night melds into one full of laughter, stories and dehydration.

The next morning the clouds break open, and the dramatic scenery comes into full view. We quickly pack up, enjoy a full breakfast of Bob's specialty (quiche, strawberries and bacon), say our goodbyes to Bob and Runya, and head up and over the pass to meet Barry, who awaits us in the middle of Cardiac Hill.

We can only guess how long he has been crizzelin' as we take our time gazing at the scenery on the way down Ophir Pass Road. We jump onto a discreet trail that weaves in and out of a dense aspen forest and up into a box canyon filled with waterfalls. As promised, this ride delivers a lot of reward for very little commitment and effort. We continue along interesting singletrack that climbs steadily through the woods, crosses rushing creeks, and through pine-needled cushioned berms. Allen, Elena and I are beaming from this ride, and we are only halfway through.

Partway down an open fire road, I jump onto the singletrack and skid to a stop to look at a large mushroom spanning nearly 10 inches in diameter. Now that my eyes have become accustomed to seeking out these gems, I see three times as many mushrooms as I did two days ago.

Barry promises the next few descents will be steep and "sporty" and advises to get off the back brake. Diving down, the trail diverts from the fall line, but traction seeps out of the soil and my tires hook up just in time. My bike rides quietly

on this dark dirt, which is strangely different from the very dry, rocky chalkboards I have grown accustomed to riding in Colorado. It is reminiscent of riding in the Northwest.

The route skirts past an old mining building, which we explore for a few minutes. A single wooden beam holds up the structure, and an old cable that looks like a zip line extends to the town below. Tarnished nails, buckets and scraps of metal litter the floor. The rich history of mining days fills the dilapidated building with unknown stories and questions about life when the town of Ophir was triple its current population. We continue our descent to town, where chic rustic homes line the streets.

We have the entire climb back up to Ophir Pass ahead of us, but Barry cheerfully offers us a shuttle back up to the top. We graciously accept his offer, file into his rusty red truck and bounce all the way up the pass. After our second farewell of the day, we have made another new friend with whom we hope to adventure in the future. After waving goodbye to Barry at the top of the pass, Elena and I hop on our bikes to descend back to where we started and conclude our trip. Allen is our sag and lightens the load for the final leg.

Riding away into the bronzy afternoon sunlight, I know I will be back. Mountain dwellers—with their serendipitous lifestyles—know all too well that the world is truly a small place, even in remote, off-the-grid locations. Winter, spring, summer or fall, the OPUS Hut is one of those special places where you can set out alone, yet feel completely at home surrounded by new friends with whom you'll share lifelong experiences and memories.

As the Colorado mountain town adage goes, it was the winter that brought us to the OPUS to seek out fresh lines in deep powder, but the summers and exploring its hidden gems via two wheels will keep us coming back. 🏔️

**Above:** Old-growth forests and the fertile valley on the west side of Ophir Pass contrast the rock fields and cliffs that bookend the top of the pass.

**Right:** A discreet singletrack off of Ophir Pass leads to an open meadow beneath the majestic Magnum Couloir. Ophir Pass connects Silverton to Telluride, and harbors an oasis of hidden, lush trails. A day of riding with a local guide will help you find the goods.







Bring a spirit of adventure and taste for something new when you come to ride the trails surrounding the OPUS Hut. Keep your eyes on the trail; the views can be distracting.

# MAGNUM

hut trip 101

# OPUS

Organizing your own trip to the OPUS Hut is easy and requires very little preparation because all of the amenities are already at the hut.

Check availability on the calendar at [www.OPUSHut.com](http://www.OPUSHut.com), and contact OPUS Hut by email to reserve your stay. In the winter, all weekends are booked months in advance, so make your plan before snow hits the ground. In summer, plan on booking your trip at least a few weeks in advance for a small group and several weeks for a large group.

## LODGING RATES

Dormitory spot — \$35/person/night; 16 spaces available  
Private room — sleeps three; \$105/room; two rooms available  
Private room — sleeps five; \$175/room; two rooms available

## MEAL RATES — \$35/PERSON/NIGHT

Meals are prepared with quality natural and locally grown products and include après ski/bike soup, dinner and breakfast the following morning. Be sure to notify the OPUS Hut in advance if you are purchasing meals, and specify food allergies or preferences at time of reservation.

## WHAT TO BRING

You can get away with merely a small backpack if you go with the prepared meals. Bring an extra set of riding clothes, sauna attire and a set of clothes to lounge around in. Pack additional riding food and

anything you would normally stash in your pack for an epic day on the bike.

Save the weight and leave the sleeping bag at home. Fresh bedding and linens are available for \$10 for the duration of your stay, or you can purchase a bag liner for \$25 or rent for \$3.

## SUMMER GUIDING RATES

If you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with exploring on your own, you can hire a guide with local knowledge to make sure your bases are covered for a fun and safe experience.

## FULL DAY, PER PERSON

Single — \$325 / 2-3 people — \$225 / 4 people — \$150

## HALF DAY, PER PERSON

Single — \$225 / 2-3 people — \$150 / 4 people — \$100  
for five or more, inquire about prices

## EXTRAS

Guided Morning Yoga — \$35/person  
Afternoon Herb Walk and Medicinal Preparation — \$50/person

## CONTACT INFO

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