

Doc Holliday's Colorado

Tom Matthews

As a kid, I remember watching TV westerns; Roy Rogers, The Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy, The Cisco Kid and The Rifleman. My brothers and I had our 6-shooters, our cowboy boots and hats and we would play cowboy for hours. One of my favorite shows was Wyatt Earp, starring Hugh O'Brien. At my tender years, I don't think I had any idea that Wyatt Earp was a real person, maybe more of a bad guy than good one or that the show failed to present one of the most important people in Wyatt's life.

I was thinking about that on a ride that took us through Tombstone, Arizona. This is the location of the west's most famous gunfight, The Shootout at the O.K. Corral, where the Earp's and Doc Holliday, sometime dentist, gambler and gunslinger, took part.

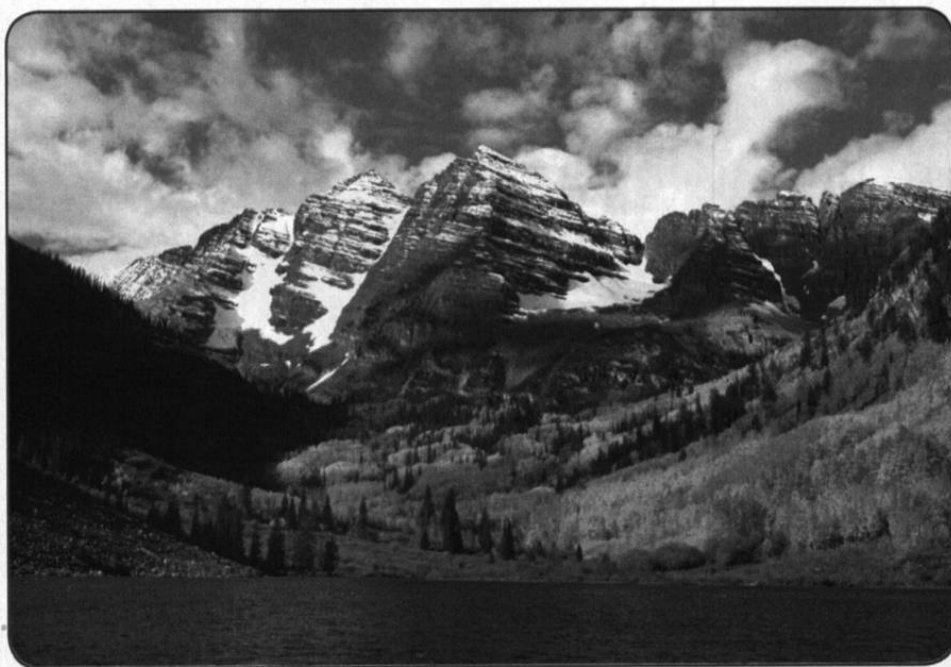
So what happened to Doc after that bit of unpleasantness in Tombstone? Like many of the characters of the old west, he ended up in Colorado.

Mining towns such as Leadville, "The Cloud City" America's highest incorporated city, Telluride, and Creede were the haunts of some of the most infamous characters of the Old West. Word is Doc shot a man in Trinidad, Colorado before moving on to Denver and then later to Leadville.

It's time to gas up the bikes and see some of Colorado and in be-

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tween all the natural beauty and soak up or soak in some of Colorado's Wild West and Mining history.

Doc's trail in Colorado starts in Denver. If you take I-70, head west through Mount Vernon Canyon and up to the Eisenhower Tunnel. Crossing the Continental Divide at 11,158 feet, it is the highest vehicular tunnel in the world (it can also be the site of the world's highest traffic jam.)

Ride down through Summit County, home of some of Colorado's greatest skiing, then over Vail Pass. It's the interstate but still a scenic ride. Now head south to Minturn on Highway 24 and head up towards Tennessee Pass to cross the Divide back to the Atlantic side. This is a

motorcycle road, with lots of turns and altitude gain. Stop at the site of Camp Hale, home of the famed 10th Mountain Division, America's World War Two Ski Troops. Several of the troopers came back to the state after the war and built Colorado's ski industry. Not much is left of the camp; visit the historical monument and take a moment to say thanks before heading over the pass and on to Leadville.

From Denver you might also decide to take US Highway 285 (Hampden Avenue) If you know your U.S. highway designations, odd numbers are north and south but 285 runs east west through Denver. This provides a constant source of confusion and amusement.

Once through the Dakota Hogback - the first rise of the foothills west of town, you'll enter Turkey Creek Canyon. It's four lanes but it's no stroll in the park. The turns are tight, the road banks the wrong way and the incline is steep. Add the fact that the town of Morrison tries to keep one patrol car on station in the canyon part of each day and that this is a major commuter route into the foothill communities and it can be a trick.

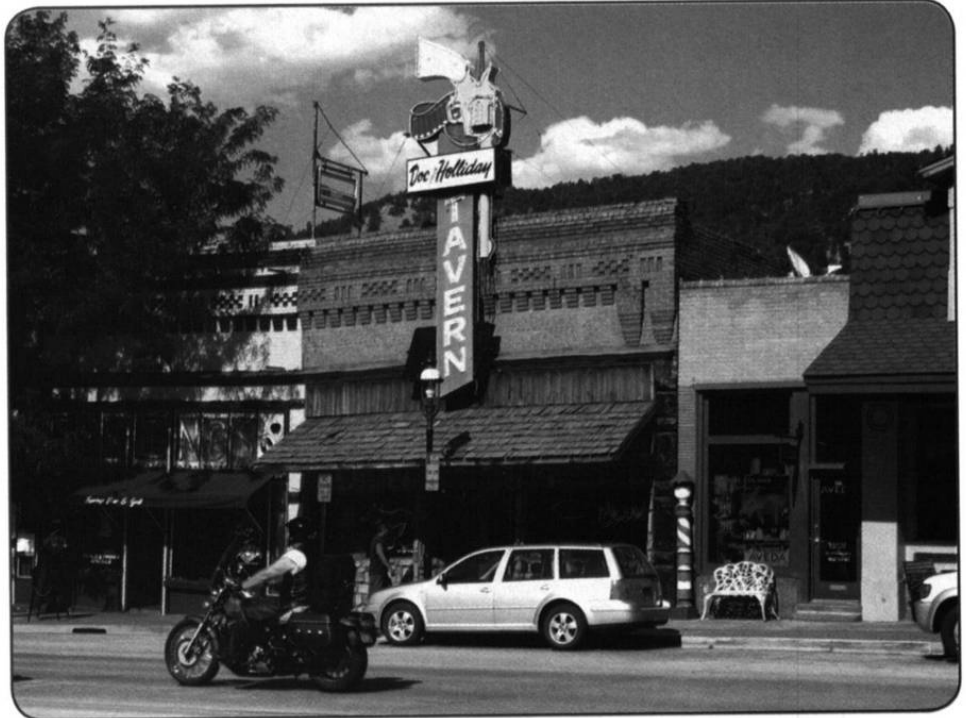
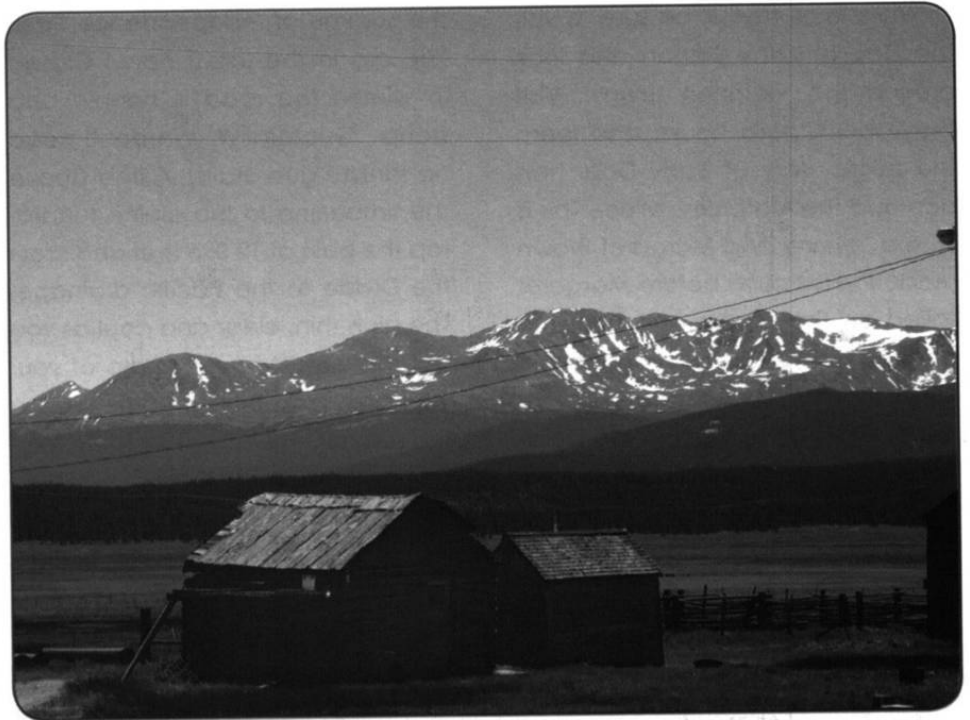
The lower Canyon is steeper and tighter but things get downright sedate by the time you reach Aspen Park at 8,200 feet 12 miles away. Don't worry the 4-lane ends soon.

Through Conifer and the endless clot of highway construction and you're rolling down Crow Hill Bailey and the Platte River Canyon. Here the roads narrows and then winds its way southwest through the canyon.

Climb to the top of Kenosha pass at 10,001 feet and see the vast expanse of South Park before you.

This is a high plain ringed by even higher peaks. The road is flat and straight until you reach Red Hill Pass, drop into Fairplay and then climb again over Trout Creek Pass. From here, the turns tighten at the headwaters of the Arkansas River. A brief but challenging ride through the canyon and river appears.

Across the river valley are the 14,000 foot peaks of the Collegiate Range; Mounts Princeton, Columbia and Harvard. It is truly awe-inspiring. Gas up at Johnson's Corner and turn



north on Highway 24 through Buena Vista. Ride on past Twin Lakes and on to Leadville.

After a stint in Denver, Doc spent time dealing faro in Leadville. On August 19, 1884 he managed to

shoot his old enemy Billy Allen in Hyman's Saloon over a \$5 debt.

Doc was not terribly deadly that day, hitting Allen in the arm, Doc Holliday was later acquitted in the shooting.



While in Leadville, be sure to visit the Doc Holliday Saloon and look around the Victorian town. Visit the Tabor Opera house and learn the tragic story of Baby Doe, Horace and the Matchless Mine. This is where Johnny and Margaret Brown made their fortune before Margaret sailed on the Titanic and became better known as the "Unsinkable Molly Brown". Tour the Mining Museum. Spend the night in the Delaware Hotel and watch for strange goings on, such as the ghost of a young girl bouncing a ball.

Now it's on to Glenwood Springs. This is where the ride gets really interesting. Ride south from Leadville on Highway 24 down to Twin Lakes and Highway 82. Turn west towards the lake and stop in the shadow of Mt Elbert, Colorado's highest mountain at 14,433 feet. The road meanders through the sub alpine forest and the first switchback will get your attention as you start the ascent to

the summit of Independence Pass. You are in the forest now. Closed in winter, the road is narrow and steep. Guardrails? We don't need no stinkin' guardrails. Climb above the timberline to the alpine tundra, top the pass at 12,095 feet and cross the Divide to the Pacific drainage. The air is thin, clear and cool as you get that "must have" photo of you, your bike, and the sign proclaiming the summit.

It is time to ride down towards the fabled town of Aspen. More switchbacks and hairpins as you get into the forest again. The road is narrow as the Roaring Fork Valley opens up and then you are surprised as the road turns into a city street and you're in resort town traffic. Try to find a place to park and look for the rich and famous. Aspen is gorgeous; Victorian buildings abound as do the cars clogging the streets. Best bet is to head on to the north side of town and get on the shuttle

to the Maroon Bells Wilderness area. Private vehicles are banned unless you have a camping permit (book early!) The bus will take you up Maroon Creek to Maroon Lake.

If the weather is right, you'll be treated to one of the most beautiful sights in North America, the three snowcapped peaks of the Bells reflected in the calm waters of the lake. Hike the trail, take pictures, lots of pictures - this is one of the most iconic photographs in the U.S.

Back on the bike; make your way down the Highway 82 along the Roaring Fork River. Aspen is behind but if it's quitting time, not the traffic. Most of the people who work in the high priced resort towns can't afford to live there so it's a commute down the valley to Glenwood. Time it right and avoid the traffic. Once in Glenwood Springs, you are in the Colorado River Canyon at I-70. Interstate 70 through Glenwood Canyon on the Colorado River is a marvel of highway engineering; replacing U.S. highway 6 with an interstate in a narrow scenic canyon without shutting it down was no mean feat. Even if you're the type who shuns the super slab, don't miss riding this portion of the highway.

Back on Doc's trail - Holliday left Leadville in the winter of 1885 fearing he would contract pneumonia and headed back down to Denver where he managed to spend some time with his friend Wyatt Earp. As his health continued to deteriorate, he decided to take the train to Glenwood to try the fabled hot springs and the vapor caves to ease his tu-

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berculosis. The world famous springs and the caves are still there and ready to soak away the kinks from your day's ride.

Doc checked into the Hotel Glenwood in May of 1887 and died there on November 8th. He had ordered a glass of whiskey and as he sat in bed drinking it he said, "Now this is funny." It's believed that he was commenting on the fact that he was dying in bed instead of at the wrong end of a gun. Doc is buried somewhere in Linwood Cemetery but his grave was never properly marked. There is a marker in his honor in the graveyard.

You've followed Doc's trail to the end but there are many more trails to follow. Ride on and search out Butch Cassidy in Telluride, Bat Masterson or Calamity Jane in Creede.

The riding season in the high country is short; make the most of it. Wherever you decide, you'll take memories of a great ride and a bit of Colorado's Wild West history with you.

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