Gila Hike and Bike - More than a Bike Shop
By Cathleen Norman

Gila Hike and Bike has been in business nearly forty years selling and servicing bicycles and offering an array of biking, hiking and backpacking gear and supplies. Original owner Jack Brennan spearheaded the annual Tour the Gila premier cycling stage race in 1987. Still located at the top of Bullard Street at 103 East College, the store continues as the race hub during the end-of-April event - handing out race packets, posting race results, repairing bicycles and providing other critical support.

Doug Horner and Eric Payne are the most recent in a series of hyper-dedicated owners with a passion for riding and hiking. The store sells the top tier of both road bikes and mountain bikes, and everything in between. And they help bikers keep rolling. "We offer absolute full-on bike maintenance - analogue, e-bike," says Eric says. "We do literally everything you could want done to a bike."

The business supports and serves long-distance travelers who come through Silver City on the north-south and east-west cross country biking and hiking routes that intersect Silver City. "Yesterday a woman's tour came through, riding across the country," Eric said in mid-March. "There were 24 people."

"Big adventures have increased a lot, especially in the past five years since COVID," he observes. "It's on people's bucket lists. North-bound bikers and hikers come through in spring and south-bound hikers in late summer and early fall." The store serves as a mail pick-up point for through hikers on the 3,100-mile Continental Divide Trail (CDT). Silver City is also a stop on the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route (GDMBR) that runs 2,667.5 miles from Banff, Canada, to Antelope Wells at the New Mexico-Mexico border.

"About fifty percent of our bike sales are eBikes," Eric explains. "It's big in Colorado and Europe and catching on here. Thirty year olds, fit people, are riding eBikes too." "It's important to stay on top of evolving bike technology, which requires more precision, very delicate work. Even with analog bikes, the gearing is electric more and more."

The store owners stay abreast of national and international outdoor recreation trends. Gravel riding is growing. Eric points out, "It's a new thing, nationwide and worldwide, riding bikes on dirt roads not trails or pavement."

"I like to help people to get on their bike and ride," says co-owner Doug. "That's what motivates me. We've sold some of the nicest bikes I've seen in my life to some fortunate customers." His favorite? MONe, built by Cjell Monē, a custom bicycle fabrication shop based in Silver City specializing in handmade steel dirt-drop, gravel, and bikepacking bikes. Trek is the store's best selling bike brand, followed up by Salsa, Velotric and others. "We also sell a lot of used bikes too," he adds. "And rents eBikes for $40-80 a day."

The shop expanded into hiking gear, meeting the needs of backpackers on the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) that developed through our region in the early 2000s. Today it carries a wealth of gear and gadgets for day hikers, backpackers, mountain bikes, race bikes and touring bikes.

Eric and Doug have raced in the local Tommyknocker, Tour the Gila, and the Signal Peak mountain bike race when that was a thing. Eric says he's been riding for 25 years, "I commuted in college, from my apartment to school." He's bike toured in Colorado, Utah, Mexico and Guatemala. Doug remembers getting serious about bike riding as a teen-ager, but admits hiking is his sweet spot too. He says his favorites are the Gomez trail network, "because it's close and has great views."

The store's mission includes outfitting and encouraging local residents to get out on the trail too - on two wheels or in boots. "People come in asking where to go. Helping people find cool hikes is the funnest part of the job," smiles Doug. "The Visitor Center sends people to us too. We are a default source for people who come to town."

The store carries every map and book available for the Greater Gila Region. They self publish the large, durable Gila Hike and Bike map - designed by Desiree V. Liska McGee and on its third update. It goes into in my backpack when I hike weekly with a local group!

Former owners include Mike Sauber who helped launch the Tour the Gila, Chris Schlabach, Martyn Pearson and Alex Olsen. The present staff consists of the two owners and workers Zack and Ben Horner. The store will have its familiar presence at Continental Trail Days in Gough Park on April 25. And things are gearing up for the 39th Tour the Gila, April 29 through May 3.