



Tempting goodies at Fred and Mary's

You've been riding through it all day - why eat dirt when you can have great food?

Dear Mountain Shredder:

You've been blasting your mountain bike around California's Snow Summit resort, getting big air and maybe doing a little soil-sampling on the rugged vertical. Now you'd like a great dinner without waiting hours for a table - you're hungry! And fast food really won't cut it – yecch! *So where do you go?*

I faced this dilemma after I'd spent the day photographing professional bike racers sliding, skidding and cranking down Snow Summit's dual slalom, downhill and cross-country courses. I was as tired and dusty as the racers, and wanted great food somewhere close to my hotel in Big Bear Lake.

I found it – got pleasantly stuffed – and it was healthy too!

When you walk in the door at **Fred and Mary's California Cuisine**, you may get a personal greeting from owner Mary Behziz. Sights and smells from the open kitchen entice you: a mild tang you can almost taste from a huge piece of pepper cognac filet mignon, or creamy white frosting from a melt-in-your-mouth layer cake. When he's not busy, Scottish-born chef Colin Colville talks to you about cooking for an upscale Redondo Beach restaurant before he escaped to Fred and Mary's, while you wait twenty-five minutes – usually much less - for a table on a Saturday night.

Then you're just a short time away from one of Colin's very fresh salads, light appetizers, juicy main dishes and delicious bread puddings - a great four-course meal.

After you're seated at your table with the smooth linen tablecloth and your waitress brings your water in nice crystal, the evening's real challenge begins. There are so many mouth-watering things on the menu – baby spinach salad with truffled eggs and caramelized onions, pesto-crushed northern halibut, penne pasta with chicken breast in a creamy garlic sauce - and you know you can't eat them all. But anything you order will be tasty, and satisfy your craving for good food.

Even vegetarians have tasty choices - no bland pasta primavera here! Chef Colin loves making up vegetable plates

"The tender tenderloin barely needed to be cut with a knife. The potato cake resembled shoestring potatoes. Crunchy and with a nice chive taste, the potatoes blended well with the soft, mild cabbage."

- Vivian Franje / The Press-Enterprise, Riverside, California



with the freshest in-season produce that he oven-roasts, and his handmade carrot gnocchis are to die for – red pepper sauce lightly zaps your tongue as you enjoy this slightly sweet variation on the classic potato-filled pasta pillows. Either one's a great choice if you don't want to feel too heavy riding the singletack tomorrow, and you've got lots of other options.

Start with a baby green salad - it's huge, and very fresh in a light citrus dressing. With apologies where they're due, this isn't your mother's dinner salad! Pine nuts add crunchy texture to the carrot slivers, bean sprouts, spinach leaves and lettuce, and four large, juicy tomato slices stake out the boundaries of the plate.

Just as you finish the greens, the main course arrives. If you're an adventurous vegetarian, maybe you chose Colin's vegetable plate. You won't be disappointed as you happily munch tender broccoli, asparagus, zucchini, yellow and red pepper, and eggplant subtly spiced in a way reminiscent of northern Italian cooking. It feels like you've just snagged first place at the World Cup downhill in Livigno, and you're celebrating!

Colin specializes in bread puddings, and there are several flavors for desert. The apple-cinnamon presents a fluffy baked masterpiece topped off with fresh-baked apple slices and a sprig of mint. The chocolate cheese cake is tempting, but your favorite bread pudding will leave you feeling lighter on the trail.

"Halfway through our meal, we had the place to ourselves. Fred told us not to rush; the restaurant would stay open another 90 minutes. With dessert, he offered a bit more wine at no charge."

- Vivian Franje / The Press-Enterprise, Riverside,

If you're not riding in the morning, you can have a good Chardonnay, Cabernet, Riesling or Merlot by the bottle (and I hope your bike buds help you drink it!). If you're by yourself, the house wine is very good by the glass.

Mary comes to every table to be sure you're enjoying your food. Ask, and she might tell you about her former life as a songwriter in L.A.

So you're served a healthy, three- or four-course dinner by smiling waitresses in a quiet room that feels very luxurious – how's that for a dirt dog's dream meal! – and the bill won't cost your next paycheck. A baby green salad and handmade carrot gnocchi or chicken breast stuffed with spinach and goat cheese will set you back less than 25 bucks. Add a glass of wine and desert, and it's still just 35 bucks. Mary likes cyclists - ask nicely and she'll refill your wineglass at no charge while you enjoy your bread pudding.

Don't go away hungry after a boring, overpriced meal somewhere else. Fred and Mary's is at 607 Pine Knot, in the middle of Big Bear Lake village, an easy walk from your hotel. You can call them at 909-866-2434 to ask about the latest menu. If I'm there photographing the NORBA National Championship race you just rode, I'll go with you!

Sincerely,

Mark

Mark Bohrer

NORBA race photographer

P.S. It's easy to find Fred and Mary's, in the center of town. Scan the menu and take a look at the hot, fresh-cooked plates. If you aren't salivating uncontrollably, there are other places you can go, but none this good for the price. So let's eat!