The Rockman

If you've been to Baja or if you're a 'single track' junky, you may haveÂ heard of Bill Nichols, AKA: The Rockman.Â This short biography (with a twist) will bring you up to speed on his incredible contribution to off-road, Baja, and single track.Â I challenge you to breathe his energy and read his evolution before youÂ rally one of his awesome trails.Â It will all come together following one of his routes in the guidebooks!

The Rockman â€“ Doinâ€™ Baja The Hard WayBy Kacey SmithÂ

Some people are legends for what they have accomplished, some for what they have said or inspired in the world, and others for their acts (whatever it may be).Â And, then thereâ€™s Bill Nichols (aka: The Rockman) who encompasses it all.Â

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This blue eyeâ€™d constant smiler is a serious man packed with navigational talent beyond Magellan.Â Iâ€™d love to boast tha he learned GPS from me, but even so, he doesnâ€™t use one much.Â Interested, he showed up at one of my Baja GPS Events in Santa Veronica, and with very few words, he became one of my favorite people on the planet.Â You know, the kind that just fits your friendship groove no matter the subject.Â Once we added the element of Baja, trail systems, and navigation to our roots, an inseparable link was made.Â Who, in their right mind, would set out on a dirt bike for weeks at a time and hand-pick single tracks through the hot desolate Baja desert and seriously think itâ€™s fun?Â I donâ€™t think Iâ€™ forget asking Bill what his first real job was and he replied â€œwhat counts as a real job?â€•Â Yeah, my kind of friend.

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The first time I rode with Bill, I expected nothing but serious riding from this pro, leaving me slightly nervous at the start.Â By the second day, we were rallying side up through treacherous rocks laughing like two school kids in a food fight.Â I did my typical â€œloose cannonâ€• style riding to tempt him in the back seat, but he had his own tactics to throw back adding to the competitive ear-to-ear grinning match we played.Â Hook, line, and sinker, heâ€™s now teaching me navigational senses (without a GPS) beyond anything I ever had.

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History makes up who we are and the â€œRockmanâ€• is certainly no different.Â He was born, raised, still resides and works in Arizona.Â His days as a kid growing up in the desert were as typical as mine in the city.Â He rode around the desert like a mad man on his bicycle collecting rocks, while I rode mine to the park and collected worms.Â His mechanical mind started young, as he constantly pestered his father to rig-up a motor for his two-wheeled pedaler, but no chance.Â Just as soon as he had some moolah, he bought a rocket-fast, fat-tired, 2-speed, centrifugal clutched Cushman Scooter with every penny he owned.Â And that, my two-wheeled friends, gifted us single track junkies with eons of Baja pleasure.

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Once he was hooked, he played around with a series of different types of races; from hare scrambles to enduros (his favorite), the Best of the Desert races, and even the Baja 1000â€™s. â€œIâ€™m not known for racing and I was never a big 1st winnerâ€•, Bill humbly explains.Â Yet, while he dabbled in racing for fun (with a full sized family of four and a budget of a gypsy), he took home 2 wins in the RMEC (Rocky Mountain Enduro Circuit) and another few wins with the Baja 1000 in the 50â€™s class!Â Sounds like natural talent to me.

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Now, back to childhood, Bill grew up from â€œrock collectorâ€• to â€œcotton pickerâ€•. He hated the job, for sure, but really enj accomplishment of making money, even though he didnâ€™t get to keep it.Â The money went into the family fund, just like the Mexicans do.Â This was just the start to his lifeâ€™s trail map now denoting his true being.

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Life isnâ€™t always easy, but Bill Nichols is a passionate working man with a hard-driving focus.Â With no plans for a college education, he got into driving heavy equipment building todayâ€™s Arizona Highways 40, 69 and other roadways.Â At around 25, he went through an apprenticeship becoming a journeyman mechanic and with experience he eventually became a diesel mechanic.Â It all comes together when he began his own trucking business, carefully purchasing a tractor and then a granite hauler, moving earth for pay as a small contractor.Â His own business was formed when his thinker was over stimulated while dirt biking with his son through a canyon filled with vibrant green rock.Â A crusher was bought and the little cotton picking rock collector was in business.

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Chapter 11 was filed, then chapter 7, and the rock crusher was bankrupt at rock bottom. Â Did that stop SeÃ±or Determined from getting back to the rock pile?Â The man was born to make the inevitable happen, and he did.Â Unwavering, with one-hundred percent unselfish support and strong work ethic from his wife, Marcilline, they started over again.Â Another bankruptcy didnâ€™t stand in their way as he barreled down his rocky road to finally succeed. Bill is now the CEO of a large rock crushing corporation for landscaping homes with that vibrant green mineral, with Marcie as CFO still at his supporting side.

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Now, although Marcieâ€™s not one bit interested in dirt biking, she has gained incredible respect in the industry as a spouse who genuinely supports the insanity Bill has formed creating trails in Baja.Â As Bill was having dinner with the Dempsey Brothers and Jim Oâ€™Neal in Ensenada one night, they agreed that middle Baja didnâ€™t offer much for crossing the Peninsula, but sure wished there was an avenue.Â â€œWell, what if we built one?â€• Bill said as they boasted derogatorily: â€œc canâ€™t be done!â€• Â And so The Rockman claimed his name after riding, chiseling with a pick axe, and hand carving his sing track from the Sea of Cortez to the Pacific Ocean making a trail that couldnâ€™t be done.Â He spent 3 years, 5 low flying flights, numerous rides, and insurmountable days of scouting and picking his way through the desert.Â Weâ€™re not in Arizona anymore Toto!Â Every inch was tiresome with dead ends and un-passable terrain blockers like vicious sky scraping rock mountains, boulder filled washes, and canyon after canyon that seemed so trivial from the plane above.Â Bill navigated with a GPS in regular archaic rookie fashion.Â With topo maps in hand, heâ€™d stop at each hurdle in the landscape and mark a waypoint to see his way through the mess, backtracking countless times in the hot sun.Â Each day heâ€™d returned from where he left off, until finally etching â€œThe Rockman Trailâ€• (PUCT).Â And, let me tell you, long hard siestas are not uncommon after this ride!

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Not near as hard to build, but now known as one of the best trails in Baja is â€œThe Bill Nichols Trailâ€• (RSCT), built in just 3 days.Â He said he â€œjust got luckyâ€• with this one.Â His mission was to make a single track connection between primitive 2-tracks from San Carlos Mesa to Catavina.Â He chose a canyon by reviewing a topo map (no planes used for this trail) and it proved worthy.Â Â Sounds easy, but after making the trail with Randy Gilmore, I got the opportunity to be the judge of the new single track.Â It wasnâ€™t what it is today, thatâ€™s for sure.Â It was thick with cactus of every possible puncturing possibility.Â I had to laugh when Bill started out by saying â€œwatch out for those cactus right there, theyâ€™ll flatten your tire!â The following 2 hours was like being on the log-jammer at Knottâ€™s Berry Farm.Â There was nothing but faint tread to see while hopping up and over a plethora of stacked rocks and dense cactus. As I was riding over bushels of that very cactus heâ€™d warned me about, I kept thinkingâ€¦. How the heck do you miss them?Â Where the heck is he going?Â But, this trail proved more than worthy.Â It was one of the best days of riding Iâ€™d ever had and now â€œThe Bill Nichols Trailâ€• will be on the most memorable experiences of your lifetime!

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Billâ€™s off-road accomplishments thus far are The Rockman Trail (Puertecitos to Catavina â€“ PUCT), The Pot Plant Trail (weâ keep that unpublished), The Bill Nichols Trail (El Rosario to Catavinaâ€“ RSCT) and The Window Rock Trail (finished and coming soon).Â He finished working on another coast to coast route that starts in Catavina heading to the west coast, where youâ€™ll pick up the single track for a 70 mile excursion and drop into L.A. Bay for the night.Â Oh, and there is more to come.Â Bill loves to share his accomplishments, once heâ€™s done with them.Â He gives them to friends, tour guides, and the Baja GPS Guidebook so everyone can enjoy each trailâ€™s challenge. He likes to build routes that cut off 2-track and pavement connections to get us from point A to point B with a bigger smile than the boulders he moves, and he does both well.Â

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Just as there is some kind of magical spell we fall under, riding Baja, it seems more like Bill was abducted by the Baja Buddha.Â Rather than just riding Baja, heâ€™s following his own passionate path, creating new rides in Baja that are effecting everyone around him in an ever so positive way.Â Bill says life is full of hard knocks and heâ€™s definitely learned his vitality the hard way.Â Personally, I think he practiced a humble road of fortitude. We all have a historical trail map of sorts, making up our beings; although Iâ€™m not sure any of us really grow up.Â We all just seem to be little kids in aging skin.Â Â Bi Nicholsâ€™ trail map is plain and simple to see:Â Heâ€™s a determined smiler, gifting smiles.Â May we all be so gifted as to serendipitously find this true meaning of life.

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