



Official Newsletter
August 2005
Come Ride with Us

Free Wheelin'



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Death Ride on Dirt

By Alfie Estrada

Lisa and I travelled up to the Markleeville area and stayed with friends at a bed-and-breakfast inn in Genoa, NV. She and the bunch were signed up to do the Death Ride (aka Tour of the California Alps) again. Early this year, I had already decided I would not ride this event again, but that I'd travel to enjoy the area more quietly while everybody else was out riding. In February, I was probably thinking if just lounging about in the B&B all day. By June, that boring concept was replaced by the idea of a mountain bike ride. I had no idea where; I'd just take the bike and decide when I got there.

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**Next Membership Meeting
7 pm, August 11, 2005
Rockridge Branch Library
5366 College Ave (at Manila)**

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When I dropped Lisa off at Turtle Rock Park at 5AM on ride day, I still had no real idea of where I was going to ride. All I knew was that I wanted to include the famous Tahoe Flume Trail in it somehow. I've done very little mountain biking in this region before, so most any place I went to would be new territory (including the flume trail). I had a bunch of trail maps, photocopied pages from trail books, lots of food, gels, drink mix, Camelbak, rain jacket, vest, a digital camera, a sense of boyish adventure, a dose of nonchalance, and many hours to use up.

And that was all good, too, because at the end of the day, I finished an eleven-hour solo odyssey on about 50 miles of trail (43 of which were singletrack). Did I have any idea beforehand that this ride would be so challenging? Of course not.

FIVE PASSES ON THE DEATH RIDE WOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER

Yes, this is a relative opinion, but one easily applicable to those who possesses the humble sort of off-road bike skills I have (read: I kind'a suck). To put things in perspective, I started my ride a little after 6AM. By the time I got back to the car, Lisa and all my friends had already finished the Death Ride. But, really, I should have known I was in for something like this when I calculated a loosely planned route to a distance of 50 miles. 50 dirt miles just don't come as easy as 75 or even 100 road miles, especially if you encounter technical challenges along the way. My long day was a harsh reminder of that simple reality.

I took half a dozen tumbles (no blood or broken bones), pushed up hopelessly technical sections at least a half dozen more times, unclipped and dabbed on rocks and boulders what seemed hundreds of times, bonked mentally and physically more than once, battled

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high altitude, bla bla bla.

It was exhausting. But what an awesome adventure it was, and one I should never do again on my own.

THE ROUTE IN A NUTSHELL

I began and ended my ride above Daggett Pass, at the Kingsbury Grade section of the Tahoe Rim Trail. I rode North to Spooner Lake in the morning, then entered Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park, where I did a loop around Marlette Lake by way of the main Flume Trail and the Red House Flume trail, then reconnected to the Rim Trail from Twin Lakes and rode back to Spooner Lake. Across, Hwy 28, I picked up the Tahoe Rim Trail again and rode South over the Kingsbury Grade again, back to the start.

Ya, I knew 50 miles was a lot. But it probably didn't hit me how MUCH that lot was until I encountered rider after fellow rider whose jaws dropped upon learning where I was coming and going that day.

KINGSBURY GRADE, PART 1

The beauty of starting good and early on a ride like this was the sense of having the entire world to yourself as I did for the first 12 miles of my ride. Relying on a mediocre map and guide for this section, I found myself off-course very early and having to rely on my inner compass and instincts to at least head in the general direction of Spooner Lake or Summit. (Note to self: when on stupid solo adventures, bring real compass.) I got there, somehow, but through a really tangled network of trails that was anything but what my map described.

On the way out to Spooner Lake, I saw the sunrise shining above the mountain range on the waters of Lake Tahoe. It turned out to be one of the rare moments all day when the sun actually shone. For the rest of the day, skies

were drearily overcast and the wind gusts were fierce at just about every summit clearing.

This stretch started at just below 7,500 feet above sea level, rose to a high point of about 8,700', then dropped back down 7,100' outside Spooner Lake. Dense forestry composed of many varieties of evergreens dominate the landscape.

TAHOE STATE PARK

My next destination was the famous Flume Trail. Upon reaching Spooner Lake Campground, I paid my \$2 to enter the park (a fee that didn't previously exist for bikers riding in, I'm told), and chatted with the rangers a bit about trail loop options and difficulties, areas to avoid due to impassable snow, and trails off limits to bikes. In the end, they gave me a back-country map which revealed lots and lots of trails one could ride on within the 12,000 acre park alone.

I opted to climb up to Marlette Lake and ride the flume on the North bound trip. It was here where I'd encounter the first of so few cyclists I'd see throughout the day. I rode with a couple of fellows from the Sacramento area along the Marlette Lake shore to the mouth of the flume trail. We reached what appeared to be a dead end and the two pointed to a shore about 50 feet across the lake. Because of heavy winter precip, the Lake was so full that the mouth to the flume was totally under water! So I went ahead and rode the foot-deep water all the way to the other shore, but was surprised to hit a ditch along the way which had me and the bike drop so much that my whole crankset was under water. Wonderful. Somehow I managed to pedal out of it. And I wouldn't doubt that desert air would have me (and shoes/socks) dry again in less than an hour.

The Marlette Flume Trail itself is probably one of the most hyped and written-about

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trails in the whole Western USA (if not the whole country). And now I know why. The trail itself is the actual location of a flume built in the late 1800's that carried as much as 10-million gallons of water a day from the mountaintops to the Comstock mining colonies as far away as Virginia City (what remains of this pipeline, in fact, still works). The flume hugs a steep edge of the mountain high above the Eastern shore of Lake Tahoe. At nearly every point of the flume trail, you're treated to panoramic views of the deep blue lake, the Desolation Wilderness area and the snow capped Sierra range beyond. A truly outstanding view around every turn of the skinny trail worthy of all the praise I've heard and read.

Most of the flume trail is flat and easy riding, with the exception of two notably hairy technical landslide sections. But folks with even a modest fear of heights should probably think twice about riding a bike here.

The north end of the flume trail is characterized by a 3-mile descent to Ponderosa Beach in Incline Village. Many end their ride here and hop on a shuttle which takes them back to Spooner Lake Campground. I opted to turn East before the descent and begin my return trip. First, I rode a clockwise loop to the Red House (what used to be one of the maintenance stations for the flumes), which included another flume section, though nothing nearly as long or spectacular as the Marlette Flume. The small loop ended at the Twin Lakes intersection of the Tahoe Rim Trail, which would turn out to be the real start of my ride.

Every foot of the TRT that I traveled was skinny singletrack trail. Beautiful, to understate, but challenging. On the inclines, it meant tight switchbacks with sand, rocks and boulders to battle with. The stretch from Twin Lakes to the meadows below Marlette Peak (8,800') was a long granny-ring affair, all right. And this part of the trail was on

a north-facing contour, there was still lots of snow on the ground -- covering trail even -- in at least 10 different sections. Some I rode through, others had to be hiked. Damn, feet wet again.

If the snow wasn't enough of a sign, the explosion of late wildflower blooms all over the side of Marlette Peak was another that snowmelt took a long time this year. What an incredible sight it was, and how interesting to see how durable a life form is that most of us think as delicate. Wind gusts that had me walking up the meadow at a steep angle had no destructive effect on them -- just the stuff that made them dance all day long.

The descent back to Marlette Lake was a twisty and manageable ride with yet more snow crossings along the way. I was happy to know that almost the entire ride back to the park entrance would be a downhill run. I was feeling pretty tired by now and was beginning to think about just hopping on a shuttle to take me back to Daggett Pass.

KINGSBURY GRADE, PART 2: IT'LL END IN TEARS

I was so dismayed to find out that the shuttle service to Daggett Pass no longer runs. The kid behind the counter of the Flume Trail bike shop spilled that bit of bad news. In doing so, I could tell he had slight, cruel grin on his pimple face. Punk. Fine, give me a better map than what I have then. I'm not about to explore that territory again with the PoS map I've got now.

I was left with a 12-mile technical ride on the Tahoe Rim Trail over the Kingsbury Grade as my only way to get back to the car. This is not what I wanted to discover. Well, OK. It wasn't the only option. I could have hopped on the shuttle to get back up to Incline Village, then paid a cab to haul my bike and carcass back to Daggett. Or I could have even just ridden the jeep trail back over the Grade.

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But nooooooo, I didn't want that monotony and subjected myself to the most punishing part of my ride yet.

The IMBA map I just purchased had a black diamond (you know, in the same standard as ski slope ratings) next to the TRT trail lines. Even that I ignored and stubbornly persisted with the urge to explore. Man, if I thought anything on the Tahoe State Park section of the TRT was technical, soooo many sections on the Kingsbury Grade made all the others seem like a sissy ride.

The climb alone up to the summit of the grade on the TRT -- if on smooth trail -- is a beastly grind. But of course, it had to be spicier than that. Here's a summary: tight switchbacks around trees, off camber turns, rocks, stair steps, more rocks, switch back, shale, rocks -- loose ones, boulder, more stairs, rocksrocksrocksrocks, boulder, switchback, steep mofo pitch, #@%*!! ya call THAT a trail???

I have never bashed my pedal against so many rocks in one ride. And my less than ideal line through the endless mine field of rocks just made my saddle like a mallet to my ass. It took me an eternity to get to the summit of the grade, which presents itself with such a breathtaking view of the Lake again, with a log bench built by a trail worker, no less. I was silenced so effectively by the beauty and the blasts of wind before me, that I almost forgot about all the moaning, bitching and complaining I did in my head on the way up. The bench was a great chill-out spot, and later I learned a typical turn-around spot for a lot of people who ride the Grade.

A look at my new map told me I wasn't even halfway back to the car at this point. It did appear that most of the way back might be downhill, but trails like this always have their share of nasty rollers, even going down hill. This suspicion was confirmed by a pair of riders I encountered, riding up from where I

was headed. Nice bunch of guys from Carson City -- one of them had a helmet cam, so if some MTB video surfaces on the Web somewhere that shows one pathetic looking rider asking a lot of paranoid questions about the trail features, let me know.

We parted ways, and as I rode on, one guy shouted back, "The real fun begins here!". I'm not so sure what he meant, but I was surely worried now.

Within minutes, I came upon the boulder city. Predominantly descending for the next 7 miles or so, the trail was littered with boulder stairs everywhere. Big ones. 1 to 2 foot-high steps again and again, followed by tight turns between even bigger boulders. Loose sand. Trail edges like the flume trail. Steps to ride UP, steps to hop off. They were right: these things could be loads of fun, but in as tired a state as I was in, I would have much preferred to be blasting down Monitor Pass at 50+ MPH. Way easier lines to pick there.

Unfamiliar with this descent, I had to stop dozens of times to evaluate a descending line. A glance at my watch told me that my return trip was already twice as long as my out-bound trip. Just as I was beginning to really tire of having to stop every several hundred feet, I encountered some hikers on the trail and exchanged a few good words with them (honestly, I don't know how I managed to stay cheerful). It took a while to hit me, but realizing that they were the first hikers I'd seen in hours also meant a good probability that I was close to a trail head. And when I realized that, I was oh so hopeful again. Sure enough, within 15 minutes, the trailhead appeared so differently than before because I departed an entirely different way. I never felt so relieved to be finished with a ride. Ever.

I racked the bike and drove back out to Markleeville to pick up Lisa. By the time I got there, she had been waiting around for nearly an hour, probably visualizing some horrific

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scenes of me in a pool of blood on the edge of a trail, or playing *Who's Edible?* with a bear. I knew I decided to set off on my own today to avoid the crowds of the Death Ride. All of a sudden, the same crowds in the finish area seemed strangely comforting. So, too, was retreating to a wonderful inn with Lisa and the rest of the travel gang for the night.

[See tales and photos about this and other cycling adventures at sonofabike.com]

We now have a record number of members, approaching 250. A hardy welcome to our newest converts and thanks to the older members who have demonstrated to them that our club is a great place to beeee.....



From the Office of the President

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

Safety is our number one priority...Please continue to ride with respect to your fellow cyclist and the cars with whom we share the road..

Our joint venture with the Breast Cancer Fund is quickly coming upon us. As I have pleaded in other newsletters we need the support of every member in this fight. Sign up today, attempt to raise funds. If raising funds is not your bag, support other riders with a donation or come have a good time, spending your money at the auction...There are many ways we can make it all happen..

CONGRATULATIONS:



Meeting Schedule

Membership meetings are on the second Thursday (unless otherwise noted in the newsletter) of every riding season month. Meetings are held at the Rockridge Branch of the Oakland Public Library, located at 5366 College Ave. (at Manila). Meetings start at 7:00 p.m.

August 11, 2005
September 8, 2005

Ride Schedule

August 13 – AWAY

Petaluma

40/77/88 miles

START: Walnut Park, 4th/E Streets, Petaluma

Departs: Lake @ 7:15 AM // Ride Start @ 8:15 AM

RIDE-AND-DECIDE OPTION: Those who prefer to ride locally may meet at Children's Fairyland and depart on a decided route at 8:00 AM.

Explore the beauty of the wine country and

the southern side of Sonoma County. Advanced riders traverse Coleman Valley to the coast, then visit Jenner, Cazadero, Occidental and Bloomfield. Intermediates do a clockwise loop, traveling northwest to Valley Ford, then up to the Guernville in the Russian River valley, then return via Sebastopol. Light riders enjoy a scenic ramble to Tomales, then a return via Chileno Valley.

August 20 – LAKE

Calaveras

69 miles (shorter options for Light and Humane Intermediate groups)

START: Children's Fairyland, Oakland.

Departs: 8:00 AM

The complete route travels to Castro Valley via BBR (Burdeck-Butters-Robinson) and Redwood Rd, then traverses the Dublin Grade and Foothill Rd to Sunol before the "main event" -- southbound on Calaveras Rd. The ride ends at Fremont BART. Shorter, less difficult ride options for Humane Intermediate and Light riders to be determined by ride coordinators.

Light Group: Oakland Zoo Ride (19 miles)

August 27 – AWAY

Mt. George

59 miles (shorter options for Light and Humane Intermediate groups) START: Benicia State Recreation Area

Departs: 8:00 AM

[ride to be determined]

September 3 – LAKE

Newark

32/54 miles

START: Children's Fairyland, Oakland

Departs: 8:00 AM

Nearly flatter than a pancake. This ride is designed to be a pre-Monterey ride taper-off

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workout: an out-and-back trip to Newark via Doolittle, Hesperian and Marsh Roads.

September 5 – LAKE

Labor Day Decide-and-Ride

START: Children's Fairyland, Oakland

Departs: 9:00 AM

Meet at the Children's Fairyland parking lot and depart on a decided route at 9:00 AM.

September 10/11 – AWAY

19th Annual Monterey Ride

120/85 miles | maps supplied at ride start

PACIFICA START (120 MILE): Pacific Manor Shopping Plaza

PESCADERO START (85 MILE, no overnight parking): Pescadero State Beach

Our famous season highlight: a one-way ride to Pacific Grove in the Monterey Peninsula with dinner banquet and overnight accommodations at the Asilomar Conference Center, then a bus trip back to the start the next day. Registration and advanced room reservations required.

September 17 – BART

Fog City / Grand Prix Option

35/38 miles

START: Embarcadero at Bryant St, San Francisco

Nearest BART station: Embarcadero

Departs: Lake @ 7:15 AM // Ride Start @ 8:00 AM

Take a scenic tour around San Francisco and get a taste of the T-Mobile International pro race course (an optional climb up Fillmore Street) if you dare! Light riders travel to the beach along the Great Highway and have the option to end at BART. Others enjoy stretches of the San Francisco scenic drive, including Twin Peaks.

September 24 – AWAY

Lucas Valley

25/42/63 miles

START: Smith Ranch Rd Park-and-Ride

LIGHT RIDERS START: Nicasio General Store

Departs: Lake @ 7:15 AM // Ride Start @ 8:00 AM

RIDE-AND-DECIDE OPTION: Those who prefer to ride locally may meet at Children's Fairyland and depart on a decided route at 9:00 AM.

Light riders start in Nicasio, and enjoy a scenic trip to the Bovine Bakery in Point Reyes Station and back. All others start off with a trip through Lucas Valley along Miller Creek before joining the same route to Point Reyes Station. Intermediate and Advanced riders take a turn for Marshall, up the 'wall' from the coast, then visit the Nicasio Cheese Factory before returning to the start via Lucas Valley.

October 9 – LAKE

Bike Against the Odds

12, 20, 30, 47 and 66 mile options | event registration required

START: Children's Fairyland, Lake Merritt, Oakland

For event registration and information, please visit **The Breast Cancer Fund** event site.

The Yellowjackets have a no drop policy and will leave no light or humane intermediate rider behind!

REQUIRED: Helmet, waiver, ID with emergency Info.

RECOMMENDED: Two bottles of water minimum, high energy food, pump, spare tubes, tools, patch kit, padded gloves, padded cycling shorts, protective eye wear, sun block.

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