

Pescadero Bike Ride

My arm is covered with black spots, ranging in size from dotted 'i's to baby peas, as if my bicycle had sneezed on me. I step back from putting my bike up on the carrier rack on top of the car. It's nearly 90 degrees out, I'm hot, sweaty, and I've been sneezed upon with bike lubricant. And we haven't even started out yet. There are four slots in the bike carrier. My wife Kathy's white Toponga model is in the inside on the driver's side, and my blue Ponderosa is on the outside. We need to load all of "Mike and Kathy's standard bike trip supplies" in the back of the Toyota Tercel wagon before we pick up our other rider.

Let's see. Two large water bottles each. Power Bars for snacking—the hardtack of the 90s, without the worms. Yum, won't they taste great later, if we can keep them down? Various tool kits, spare inner tubes and a pump for each type of inner tube, panoramic camera, SLR camera, helmets, gloves, rear view mirror that clips onto my glasses, bike bags to hold everything, extra outer clothing in case it turns out to be unusually cold by the sea, and 40 pounds of other stuff that we never know why we carry.

Then it's off to pick up Kathy's nephew, Bari Gonzalez. Kathy and Bari are the antithesis of me in physical attributes. Kathy is about 5' 4-1/2", a slender, athletic looking brunette with a look that constantly suggests that she sees some hidden humor in everything about her. Bari is about 5' 10" and has the thin muscular build of a high school football player, as he is. He is the 16 year old version of tall, dark, and handsome. His face, however, virtually twinkles with anticipated mischief and adventure. Me, I'm more like short, light, and dumpy, at 5' 8" and 200

pounds of former-weightlifter-fat, with a face hardened from years of fleecing playing others at poker.

In 1991, about a year after Bari moved out here to California from Illinois, he bought a nice hybrid bike. Kathy and I have mountain bikes. Hybrid bikes have a more open frame, making them perhaps a little more stable on open roads, and have a lighter weight construction. But, unlike road bikes, a hybrid bike is built to withstand a lot more punishment, like a mountain bike. They also come with tires that are somewhere between the smooth and narrow hard tires of a road bike and the fat, knobby, soft tires of a mountain bike.

The night Bari first picked up his bike, five of us: Kathy, Bari, Bari's sister Patti, Kathy's mother Geraldine, and me, went over to Shoreline Park for a ride. It's a beautiful little park, with nature trails, a golf course, a small lake, large lawns; and it's just a few miles from here. We jumped out of the car, hopped on our bikes, and started out down one of the paved sidewalks, until we came to the first opening in the trees. Off to our right and down was a mostly dry pond. Bari, off like a rocket and way up ahead of us, steered off the paved path and flew over the bank leading down to the muddy pond bed. We caught up to him moments later. Well, we caught up to his bike first and him slightly later. He had put on his front brakes as he went down the slope and he "took a header", flying over his handle bars. I have no doubt that it gave quite a giggle to the burrowing owls, avocets, egrets, and ground squirrels which saw the spectacle. "He'll never fly far with skinny little wings like that," I bet one of them said. "And I'll bet he doesn't burrow very far into the mud with such a little nose and teeth," I'm sure another said. That was how Bari came to christen his

bike with blood. That's also how he first came to hear one the biker's favorite adjectives, "road pizza"—a visual metaphor for someone with scraped, muddied, and bloody arms and legs, usually from having slid along something solid and rough, like the road.

You'd think that such adventures would discourage people. But, I haven't seen it do so yet. Take Kathy's introduction to mountain bikes. A year before Bari's incident, Kathy and I decided to buy each other some bicycles for our birthdays. As our birthdays are only a month apart, we bought the bikes in between, about the first of May. There was a great bike sale going on at one of the better outfitter shops in the area. This was the kind of place that sold serious first aid kits for people who might scale one the larger Tibetan mountains. The kind of place that knew the difference between a daddy long-legs spider and a poisonous brown recluse. Where the bicycle salesmen had knotted calf muscles and "biker's tans"—those distinctive tan lines caused by biker shorts and shirts. That's when I got my blue Ponderosa. Kathy originally wanted a lady's hybrid bike, but I explained to her that we could only afford to buy bikes once, so she had better buy the best bike she was ever going to want the first time. So, she bought a closed frame Ponderosa, like me. Mountain bikes seldom come with open women's frames, they usually come in the stronger and less flexing men's frame with the bar across the top.

The more practical among you have probably already wondered why the men's bike has that bar across and the women's doesn't. You'd think it would be just the opposite. Especially if you happen to sit your male anatomy down suddenly on that cross bar.

We brought our new bikes home and took

them for a quick spin that night. It was just out a couple of blocks and then back. On the way back, Kathy tried to get off the main road up onto the sidewalk. Her front tire slid along the slight lip of the driveway she was trying to go up, and she started to fall over sideways. Because she was not used to riding a closed frame bike, she couldn't get off the bike in time. She held out her arm to break the fall and broke her elbow. Now if I had broken my elbow riding a bike just on flat paved streets, I'd have given up the sport and thanked providence that I had learned my lesson for the relatively small cost of a broken elbow rather than waiting until I had been chased by a large bear over a tall cliff in the remote mountains nearby. Instead, the worst that befell me that night was that I got bike lubricant all over my arm.

But Kathy, after just a few days, when she had gotten over the pain well enough to talk in understandable tones again, merely brought the Ponderosa back and went to a different bike store, the Schwinn dealer. There she found a mountain bike that did indeed have a women's open frame—her beautiful, white Toponga model. Women also have that amazing ability to endure having a second child after the frightening and painful experience of having the first. It demonstrates their great moral character and fortitude, or perhaps it points to a genetic tendency to forget major unpleasant events of the recent past. Given that the most pathetic fool of a male, with foulest breath and a most garish fashion sense, can always find some otherwise perfectly sane women to love him, there is probably some greater pattern of holes in the genetic makeup of women, but I won't dwell on that here.

So, as I was saying, before you interrupted me by listening to my digressions, we were off to pick up Bari. Bari now owned

his second bicycle since coming to California, but more of that later. We put his red and white Ponderosa on the outside passenger side of the carrier, and we were off to Pescadero for one of our more fun rides.

It's funny how "fun" is such a relative term, isn't it? I mean, take me. I recall when we went to Henry Coe State Park to ride our bikes. The bike guide clearly said that the trails there were for "advanced riders only," with exclamation marks besides. Not just one, mind you, but at least two to my distinct memory. And, almost as a footnote, the bike guide mentioned that one trail was for beginners.

Now, I don't know if you've ever looked at bike trail guide books. They usually begin with a glowing description of the country side you will surely find during your ride. Mountain biking trails always are full of trees, pastoral settings, acres of wild flowers, and more fauna than you are likely to see on display in, say, any two consecutive issues of National Geographic. In fact it's pretty clear that you'd be a great cloth head if you didn't quit your job immediately and devote your remaining years to touring each of the trails, sniffing the wild flowers, inspecting the bird droppings of some about-to-be-extinct bird species, and tracking the footprints of some large cat-like animal that you hope you'll never meet in the open anyway.

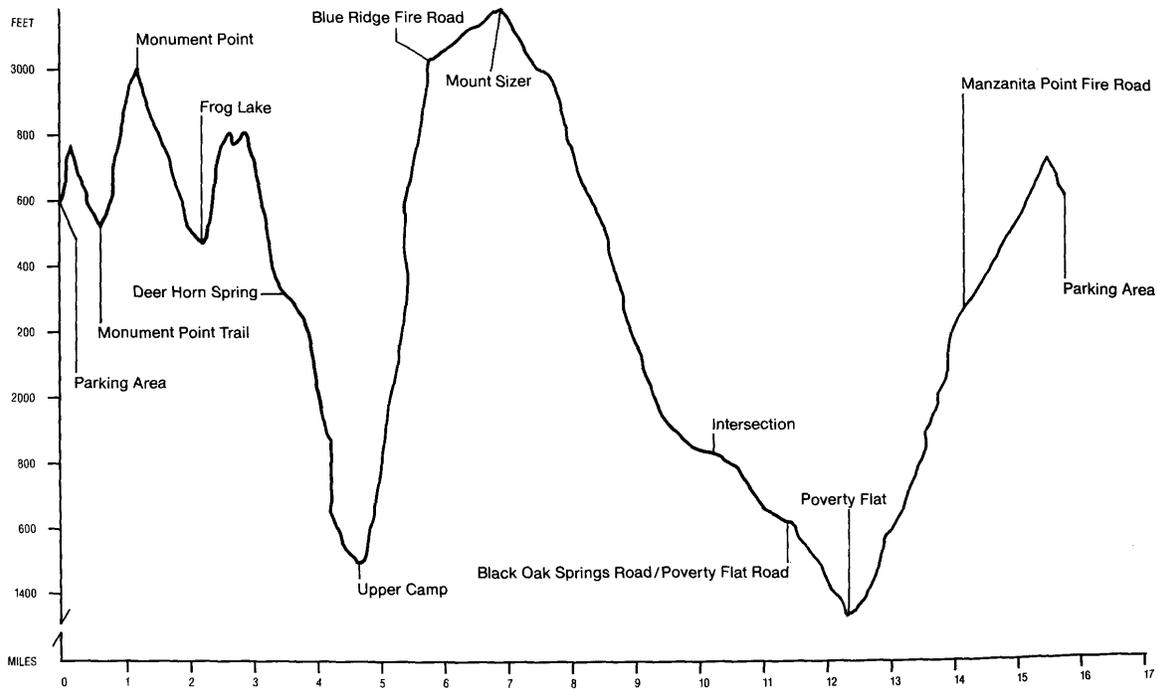
Besides the advertisement for the local acreage, no doubt plagiarized by the local Chamber of Commerce and real estate agents in the area, the author of the bike guide adds his opinion of the difficulty of the trail, using words like beginner, advance beginner, and advanced. Of course, the author is always of Hellenic descent, and can trace his ancestry directly to either Hercules or Zeus, so his judgments are usually tainted. But, when he

says a trail is for beginners, then you can jolly well assume that a five mile trek can be reasonably accomplished in a single day by any stalwart son of American soil who has both legs in good working condition.

To minimize any misunderstanding, and to avoid later law suits, the better guide books include a topographical side view of the trip, showing how the trail climbs and falls over the distance. So, for instance, the regular trails at Henry Coe pretty much all consist of an 1100 foot drop over the edge of one cliff closely followed by an 1100 scaling up a sibling cliff. The trail to Frog Lake, however, was described as a beginner's trail.

When we got to Henry Coe, I immediately sought out the park ranger and asked for directions to the beginner's trail. "Beginner's trail?" he chuckled. A man who had a lesser opinion of his manliness might have thought he actually sneered, but one of my self confidence recognized it for the chuckle that it was. "What we have here," he said, "are 1100 foot cliffs to fall over or climb up."

"But what about Frog Lake," I said. I had him there. He didn't expect that a pasty faced city boy like me would actually read manly books like mountain bike trail guides. As he glared at me for a moment, I could see that he had four long parallel scars on his face. These, no doubt, were the result of some foolish bear attempting to argue with this muscular greenwood policeman about the proper use of a plumb tourist. Those scars glared out at the cat scratches on my arm, even though there were partially obscured by spots of bike lubricant. I can see now in retrospect that his chuckle was actually a sneer. He thought that a casual sneer, would send us home so that he wouldn't have to be scanning the skies all day for buzzards and



HENRY COE STATE PARK RIDE #3

An example of one trail's topology at Henry Coe State Park

making contingency plans for flying in helicopters to take the city people to hospitals. Helicopters always disturbed the natural calm of his sanctuary.

"Yea, I guess you could ride your bike up there. It's pretty easy."

And with that he sold me a map of the area and even pointed out where North was in case I thought it might be in a different direction in this part of the country. Even with the benefit of his well pointed finger, I was a little confused about where the trail began. We ended up on a hiking-only trail to start. No bike riding allowed. Now why we allow government agencies, like the National Park Service, to spend our tax dollars on erecting "No bike riding" signs along trails that have 550 foot sheer climbs, starting 6 inches off your left shoulder, and 550 foot sheer falls, starting 6 inches off your right shoulder, is beyond me. It's like having a "No peeing on the electric fence" sign in a pasture, or a "No passing gas" sign at a dinner party.

The wise man does not consider the possibility. The sign is not needed.

We did not ride the bike along that portion of the trail. We pushed, or pulled, or carried the bike. Eventually, however, I fathomed how to get back onto the trail that did allow bike riding. All we had to do was to get our bikes up this foot wide, fifty foot long gash in the cliffs. The gash was filled, of course, with loose gravel, making it difficult to climb. On either side were only a few blades of dried grass for you to hold. You either succeeded or you contributed to what was in all probability a sizable collection of bones at the bottom of the cliff. In two and a half million years from now, future archeologists will be arguing amongst themselves. "See this chip in the bone, it indicates that these men were eaten by bears," one would say. "But how about the speckling of bike grease on this arm bone," another would offer, "it indicates that this was a bike rider that slid down a foot wide, fifty foot

long gash in the mountains and cracked open his skull.” “Ha ha, hoot hoot,” they would all laugh. “Pretty funny,” the first would say. “If men were stupid enough to try that even that long ago, they never would have survived.” “You’re right,” the second archeologist would say. With that, the two archeologist, each an eight foot tall cockroach, packed up the bones and went back to the zoo. There they could compare the fossil bones to those of the men kept in cages at the zoo.

Well, once on the bike trail, we could actually ride a good one-fourth of a mile or so of the 5 miles to Frog Lake. Oh, we made a valiant attempt to ride most of a mile. But after that quarter of a mile of relatively flat and wide trail, we ascended what must have been the site of an ancient volcano that had been shattering and crumbling until as recently as last Tuesday. It was difficult to even stand on the trail, much less rein in a bike. If you tried pedaling up hill, the shattered rocks flew from beneath your tires and you merely slid in place. If you tried to ride down the trail, you found that when your nose is at a lower elevation than either the bike or the rest of your body, brakes had less effect than you might have thought. It was a short trip that day, but I had fun.

I was saying how “fun” is such a relative term. Fun to Kathy and Bari seemed to mean going on bike rides when I couldn’t get time off from work. Then they would loose themselves in the middle of the forest primeval for several hours. Or they would end up in steep and narrow gorges that had recently hosted well-nourished horses that had befouled what was probably otherwise a non slippery and non odorous trail. It was to their credit that they thought to buy a compass as they headed out among the redwoods. Redwoods are trees so high that the sun could

be seen for only 10 seconds of the three days surrounding the summer solstice. Only then is the sun high enough vertically to shine down through the towering tannic timbers to the ground below. I would have been more impressed if they had thought to figure out which end of the compass pointed North before they got lost for hours on end.

So, as I was saying, we were off for Pescadero. Pescadero is a good hour’s drive over the twisty windy roads that cross over the Santa Cruz mountains to the sea. As the crow flies, it’s probably only 20 or 30 miles to Pescadero from either our house in Sunnyvale or Bari’s apartment in Mountain View.

Isn’t it strange how towns are always named? Sunnyvale, you can guess, is not in a vale and doesn’t get more sun than the neighboring towns. Mountain View is not on a mountain and doesn’t command much of a view. It’s like if you were to rent an apartment in a place called Oak Grove—you can be sure that there are no oak trees growing there any more. There are probably even no groves at all.

As with all of California that we’ve managed to see so far, the scenery ranges from merely beautiful to stunning as we headed over the mountains. This wasn’t our first trip there, so by now the three of us had all sorts of interesting diversions to distract us on our trip. For instance, we recounted the tale we made up of the hermits that lived in these forests. “See that huge tank by the barn over there? That’s the hermit’s condo. He lives there with lots of other hermits. The hermits drop rocks off the cliffs hereabouts to cause cars to careen over the cliffs.” You see, for some strange reason out here, there are no guard rails. Well, there are a few. If you see a guard rail out here, you know it’s to protect something really important down below.

It certainly isn't there to protect you. I've probably seen a good 20 or 30 feet of guard rail in the several thousand miles of California roads I've traveled. And every road that isn't in the valley has an 1100 foot sheer drop or climb on one side or the other of you.

So, the hermits cause you to fall over the cliffs. Then they sell the parts from your smashed car. That's how they can afford the hermit condo payments and the vineyards that they tend. This part of California is full of vineyards in the mountains, hidden away in the tall timbers like lice in a cheap wig.

We reached the town of Pescadero without further incident. Downtown Pescadero looks like a town of, say, eighteen buildings, gathered on a dozen acres, nestled in a wide valley. A few dozen homes are spread over the valley with decreasing density as you moved away from downtown. We stopped on the roadside near what is probably the only stop sign in the town, broke out the gear, and got more bike grease on my arm. A few minutes later, we turned on our bike computers and we were off down the main road.

This part of the trip is deceptive. It's probably slightly down hill, and our computers tell us that we are easily averaging a good 14 miles per hour or more. We always start out thinking that this trail is easier than we remember. A mile and a half or two miles down the road, we take a left onto Bean Hollow Road. Now roads, unlike towns and apartment buildings, must have names that are approved by a larger consensus of people. So, Bean Hollow Road must have something to do with beans or with a hollow. Of course, a mere road mustn't have both parts of the name make sense.

You can tell something of the character of

people in a region by how perverse their names for things are. For instance, in Vermont, if you find two neighboring towns, let's call them "Braintree" and "East Braintree" (remember, the town then mustn't have anything to do with brains or trees), you can be sure that East Braintree is anything but East of Braintree. Out here, people aren't so obviously perverse. I figure that what happened was the state map maker stopped by the town one day and said, "Have you ever driven on that road down there a piece?" To which the local replied, "Yep, I've been on the Hollow road." "Ah," says the map maker, "Bean Hollow Road."

By which you can guess that the road has something to do with a hollow and nothing at all to do with beans. It's a 250 foot climb or so, over a distance of a mile or so. That makes it a 5 percent grade overall. Of course, that's a lot like saying, "The Earth is pretty flat, overall." Say that to someone about to embark up the side of the Himalayan mountains and you're likely to get a Sherpa in the face.

This little hill separates Pescadero from the sea. That's great, because just before you go over the top, you get a nice view of the valley that holds Pescadero. Just after the top, you get a nice ocean view. I have to admit that I'm just telling you what others have told me. Being over 40 now, by the time that I reach the top of the hill, my heart rate is well beyond the original designer's recommended maximum. My tongue is hanging out the corner of my mouth like a greyhound in a race, and my vision zooms from near sighted blurry to far sighted blurry with each heartbeat.

I dimly recall, at this point, drinking some water from one of my two water bottles. Well, perhaps I collapsed and someone poured the water down my throat to revive me. In either case, I must not have



Kathy and Barry, looking from the top of Bean Hollow towards Pescadero

fully recovered my normally sharp mental faculties, including my strong sense of survival. I was so happy to be done climbing that hill, that I took off down the other side of the hill like my mother going to a garage sale. Fifteen miles an hour, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-one and then a car came around a sharp corner heading for me on this narrow, slippery road. Well, I can tell you that I very nearly made the seat on my bicycle a whole lot softer to sit on.

It's amazing how a bit of adrenaline can arouse you from a stupor. With the dexterity and concentration of a pick pocket at a nude beach, but with none of his hesitation, I slowed the bike enough to avoid a demonstration of ballistic science, missing the car by such a narrow margin that I was thankful that I hadn't taped any important documents to the ends of my handle bars. Then, three blind corners later, I was at the lake at the bottom of the hill and trying to squeeze myself into a teensy, tiny, little form so that I could coast up as much as possible of the steep climb right after crossing over the bridge.

Well, we're about 5 miles into the trip by now and I'm waiting at the top of that steep hill just after the lake. The hill is only 40 or 50 feet high, though. Bari just caught up with me and Kathy is just now catching up with us. We're at the junction of Bean Hollow Road and Highway 1, which is a beautiful drive along the ocean front.

We cross over Highway 1, take a left, and head south. This is a mostly flat or slightly downhill part of the ride. The traffic is a little heavier than usual today, but Highway 1 has wide shoulders with bike lanes at this point. Left and right of us are more truck farms that began for us at the top of Bean Hollow Road. They were mostly growing artichokes the last

time we were here. Today, something stinks. About 3 miles down the road, I finally figure out that many of the fields now have large onion plants in them. It may be cool over here by the ocean, but that continuous stiff ocean breeze still kicks up much of the onion plant odor. This isn't the stronger odor you get when you slice an onion, but it's still not pleasant.

About this point, we turn right off Highway 1 onto a little side road that takes us to the Pigeon Point Lighthouse. Past the lighthouse a few yards are a few large flat boulders which are away from the tall steep cliffs leading down to the ocean. Six foot waves crash over two or three huge rock pillars which stick up 20 or 30 feet above the ocean surface. A stiff northerly breeze is blowing here, as usual. This is the spot where we rest and eat. Unfortunately, I get to eat a "Power Bar."

Imagine, if you will, something about 8 inches long, 2 and a half inches wide, about 3/16 inches thick, and the look of carpet backing and the feel of carpet tape. I have one of the good tasting bars today, a wild berry flavored bar. Some months back, when we first tried Power Bars, Kathy got me a chocolate flavored bar. Mmmm. Tasted like road kill mouse, including the fur. As you chewed on it, you kept coming up with what seemed like little mouse claw bits mixed in with the pressed mouse guts. But, like I say, this flavor is much better. After all that huffing and puffing, you'd be thankful for some road kill raccoon right now. Still, I'm not sure that "thankful" is quite the word I'd use for my feelings about the Power Bar right now.

You've got to drink at least 8 ounces of water to eat one of these things, and you need your original teeth too—dentures would crumble before a Power Bar. We

usually rest a few minutes after exhausting our jaw muscles on eating this. This also lets what is now a brick in your stomach soften up a bit and redistribute itself. But, eventually we pull ourselves up. No one is going to drive us back to our car, we've got to peddle there, and the trip is only just about half done.

Riding a little further on along the side road brings us back out to Highway 1. And, turning right, we continue heading south. About a mile along the highway is a fruit and veg stand set out in front of one of the truck gardens. Unlike most of the other stands along Highway 1, this one is permanent. The stand itself is a dark green, one room affair, about 30 feet long and 10 wide. Behind it is a mobile home. Besides the fruits of their truck garden,

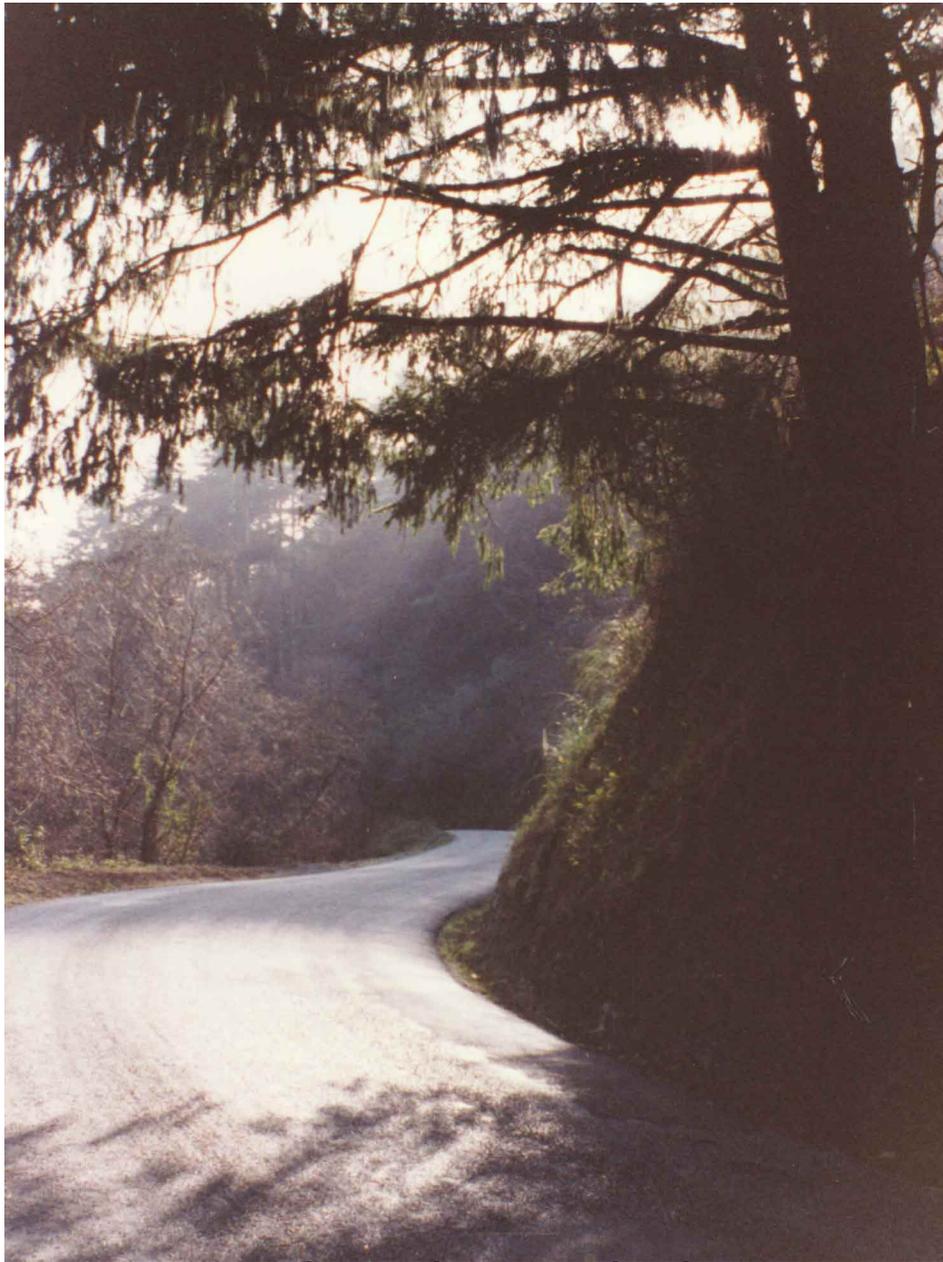


Michael in front of the Pigeon Point Lighthouse

they sell cold drinks and, of all things, Power Bars. Today, the promise of fresh strawberries is too much for me. So, we all pull in and I buy a pint of berries. This particular variety of strawberry is at its peak today. They are just past being very firm, deep red, and about twice the thickness of my thumb. As you would guess, the moisture and sweetness are just right—not too dry, and neither too sweet nor too tart. It only takes about 2 minutes

for us to go through them, but I know from long experience that the sugar will come in very handy in just a little bit.

A little further on, at the bottom of a hill where we have been gathering some much needed speed, Kathy decides that we should throw all that speed away and pull into one of the state beach areas so that she can, uhhhm, ahem, lighten her load. While she walks to the other side of the



Looking West along Gazos Creek Road

parking lot, I take a picture with my disposable panoramic camera. The beach itself is not outstanding in any respect, other than in its proximity to the lighthouse. Nonetheless, being over a mile away, the lighthouse is lost in the picture beyond the broad expanse of white sand and scrub plants. Kathy returns a couple of minutes later and we're off again. Just a few feet down from where the beach entrance meets Highway 1 is Gazos Creek Road, which we need to take to start back. I probably forgot to mention that roads which tightly follow a water way, or even a former waterway, are required to be named after that waterway. In our present case, the road follows an active stream. We zip across a gap in the traffic and head east on the narrow road.

This is the best part of the trip, apart from where you realize that you're almost back to the car. The road gently climbs and is bordered by moss covered, overhanging trees. A slight breeze from behind guides you through this sylvan glade. Ah, nature! So sweet, so ever young! Up we go on the gentle curve to the left. A little more up on the gentle curve to the right. How that blue car, down at the bottom of the 25 foot fall to the stream, managed to crash down there is a mystery to me. Of course, there being nothing of value down there, there are no guard rails.

Where was I? Ah, yes. A little more up the gentle curve to the right and...

My God! What's that mountain doing there? Sure, I've been here before. But, every time I come, I can't believe I would be so stupid as to come back here if I remembered how tall and steep this part of the ride is. Yes, it's only another 250 foot climb—the same height we climbed at the beginning. But back then, the mountain dished out its punishment in little spoons of syrup, disguising the awful

medicine contained within. There is no such subtlety here. "You've got gross capitiomiasis," says mother nature, naming some dread affliction not known to modern science, "and you must drink this 5 gallon jug of bike lubricant if you ever want to go home again." No, nothing subtle here. Two hundred fifty feet up over a distance of what seems like a few yards.

I'm sure you could take a grade reading here and find that the hill seemed to climb only at a 7 percent grade, or so. But we know better. We're only a few miles from the famous Mystery Spot, near Santa Cruz, where gravity doesn't work right. There, parallel lines meet; gravity pulls you to the side of buildings instead of to the floor, your height changes as you walk around, and your biking shorts never ride up your crack. Lot's of impossible things happen at the Mystery Spot, and it's likely that this 25 percent climb appears to be only a 7 percent climb to the naïve or to the Hellenic bikers who smugly ride this trail just once so they can add another 5 pages of Chamber of Commerce text to their bike guides.

Urnggh. My right foot pedals down. Arffn. My left foot pedals down. Oomph. Harr. Enggg. Grnnng. Pedal by pedal I work up the Tibetan mountain side. Up past the tree line. Up where the air is thin. Up through the layer of cirrus clouds. Hawks look up in fear that I will fall on them. The Olympic Gods ask that I kindly avoid biking through their flower beds.

At one hundred feet I stop to catch my breath, which has fallen out of my mouth and begun to roll back down the mountain. Kathy is just a little behind me. She has her bike in some sort of super low gear which I have never seen. Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh she pedals. One hundred pedals and she climbs ten feet. But, her breath is happily nesting in

her mouth. It has no pressing need, like my breath, to seek out its cousin the atmosphere, which we left behind some time ago.

And where is Bari? Well, he's gone up over this mountain, down the other side, up the next mountain, and then turned around and came back to where I am. Just to irritate me, he's not even out of breath. He looks as if he has just got up out of the easy chair as he says, "There's a real fun bit just up ahead." Right, I think. This from a boy who has already broken one bike since he came to California. He originally owned a Corsa bike. It was a nice green and white bike. When people felt the wind rush by just after seeing a greenish-white blur, people would say, "Oh, Bari just rode by." But, being the hybrid bike that it was, it wasn't constructed for the terror of Einsteinian mechanics to which he subjected that poor bike. If there was a ridge near our trail that was free of trees, he would ride over the ridge. Mind you, the reason no trees grew there was that it was too steep for trees to hang on. Is there a river up ahead of indeterminate depth and current? What better way, he thinks, to determine the character of the torrent than to ride up to it at relativistic speeds, jump into it as far as you can, and then see if you can peddle to the far shore before, say, the quicksand sucks you down.

The odd collision with underwater objects, with his sister Patti who rides much too slowly for his taste, and with imprudently stationary obstacles, like cars, eventually stressed even the best metal that man could create. Eventually, Bari's bike frame cracked apart. But he has a much tougher bike now. It should stay in one piece well beyond the one year warranty period, assuming that it gets stolen first.

I look over the top of our current mountain and see the "fun bit" that Bari has discovered. After all the effort I took in climbing the last one hundred feet, I see that the path now drops over a crevice in the mountain. Down about 75 feet and back up another hundred feet, all in the horizontal distance of a few yards. My breath, having visited its relatives and promising to come again, has returned. I put my bike in the highest of the 21 possible gear combinations. And, I'm off!



Kathy climbs out of the crevice

I can't say how fast I went down cliff face, the skin on my face was stretched back by the G forces, nearly closing my eyes, so I couldn't see my bike computer. Just as I reached the bottom, I began gearing down for the imminent scaling of the looming mountain. From 21st gear I immediately went to 14th. I was up 30 feet now. Then to 7th gear. I'm up 60 feet now. The 6th gear and 70 feet; 5th gear and 75 feet; 4th gear and 77 feet, 3rd gear and 78 feet; 2nd gear and 78 feet, six inches; then first gear. Oomph. Arrngh. Uhhng. I steadily climb. Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, and Kathy passes me.

There is no need to detail the remainder of the climb. True, it was next to a cow pasture, but I'm sure you've all heard the sound of cows giggling. My wheels turned fast enough to prevent any spider webs from forming between my wheels and the cow fence as I zoomed my way to the top.



Keith and Susan near the top of the last big hill

But to the top I made it. Then comes the last fun bit. For the next couple of miles, we descend from the ionosphere with the deep blue sky above, through the stratosphere with its wispy clouds of ice crystals, and back to the troposphere and familiar, sea level Earth. But, just as you eventually get fed up with eating on Thanksgiving, so too does the fun of this trip end. Not too bad though—a nice 14 mile trip. Unfortunately, just as there are leftovers from Thanksgiving that you must endure for another month, there are still several miles left before this trip ends.

At this point I'm reminded of another bike trip we took. The book said it was about 18 miles with a climb of about 800 feet. We measured it. As our broken bodies collapsed next to the car at the end of the trip, our bike computers tolled the 27 miles and 1150 feet of climb. I'll just bet that the writer of the bike guide was some sadist. Or, some bike club put him up to it. "Let's tell them that it's only 18 miles and 800 feet. At that distance, he'll be at the bottom of a deep valley, miles from anywhere, and he'll have to go the remaining 9 miles and 350 feet of climb just to find civilization again, more to find a lawyer who will sue us. Oh by the way, let's publish the book under some fictitious name, also, just to be safe." More likely, they wanted to get rid of crowds of out of shape bike riders by putting them through an unexpectedly horrific ride the first time.

Well, as the sun gets ready to take an evening dip in the ocean, our trip ends. The gear gets stowed, the bikes are strapped back up on the carrier, more bike lubricant finds its way onto my arm, and we all take a nap as I drive home again. Whoa, wake up Mike! I almost drove over the cliff there. Why don't they put up some guard rails here?