

# Sierra's Century of Pain

By: Brian Spriggs

This story is not about a grueling sequence of perfectly executed climbs through the blistering heat which concluded with a "Long" stretch of pristine pavement and an ecstatic biker "Hammering" home to a well deserved bottle of beer and some pasta.....no, that was the dream I had the night before.

But before I go any further, let me just pause to complement the Wheelmen on a well-supported, beautiful route through some breathtaking country. Literally *breath-taking*! Though I heard considerable whining about the rough roads, this was an awesome ride and physical challenge and I would encourage all who love just "riding a bike" to get out there next year. I know I'll be there!

95 miles, 11,700 feet. Get the picture?

I don't ride fast. I don't possess the cyclist build or the willpower to attain it. I'm just a guy who rides a bike and loves it. I eat too much wrong stuff, drink too much good stuff that ain't good stuff, and though I love to climb, I obviously don't do that well enough because I felt it on this ride! But I made it and have the T-shirt to prove it. Ok, yeah, they gave those out beforehand but I truly did finish, honest!!

## Chapter 1: Sheep Ranch Road

My buddy and I started off at 6am on the nose, due to the efficient way these masters of pain can check you in and send you packing before you know of the doom that awaits you, and down the road to glory? we went. A brief up, a brief down to town (Murphy's), and then welcome to Sheep Ranch Road's first ascent. Not the toughest climb but definitely gets the legs spoutin' some foul language early in the morning. And if the climb isn't tough enough, how 'bout the nightmare descent where all the potholes in Calaveras County gathered together on one strip of asphalt to stop the invading horde of "downhillers in tights"! They didn't stop us but they sure slowed us down. Lots of brake rubber was worn away on Sheep, let me tell ya. I just wonder how we'd have fared if they had left the Fullen Road climb in. This turn off Sheep Ranch was to be a 6-mile loop with some nasty grades, which was excluded due to time constraints, which became evident when the route designers tried the ride themselves and failed to finish by dusk! And a big amen to that because that hill may have prevented a large number of would be Sierra champs from consuming their well-deserved finish line pasta!!

## Chapter 2: Everything prior to Hell

Parts of Sheep, parts of this, parts of that, nothing too totally painful and memorable, just lots of up and very little down lead us through this beautiful but painful mountainous, tree lined wonderland. Thanks to nature's beauty for distracting us sufficiently to make it to

the “calm before the desert”.....Jesus Maria.....I really have nothing more to add on this section. Very pleasurable part of the ride that though difficult, was so green and cool one could almost forget of the warnings whispered at preceding rest stops.

### Chapter 3: Hell (or the reason I didn't finish before pasta)

Ok, so you've never heard of Jesus Maria Road. Well, I hope you never have to ride it unprepared, because I wouldn't wish that even on the A group. (A subtle challenge perhaps?) I've climbed Iowa hill, I've climbed prospector hill, and everything else close but after many miles of mostly up hill, Jesus will kick your ass, trust me!! Hot, desert scrub surroundings, lots of sun, and lots of miles with no rest stop left us all hurting. Felt so badly for one guy, I gave up a GU packet. And I'm a selfish bastard!! I actually took two of my own breaks during this tough section and am not ashamed to say, I needed them!! But I must share one humbling moment with all of you out there who think your level of endurance has reached it's peak. While sitting beneath the canopy of a Majestic Oak tree, up the hill pedals a bandana wearing god of cycling! This dude was conquering the Sierra Century on a single speed bike, believe it or not! And he finished way ahead of me and my triple! So, as you shift to your third ring and spin up the hills of hell, just remember that there are really no limits to your own success other than those you place on yourself!! Moving on,.....This was definitely the signature climb of this ride and I can only hope that it remains a part of this masterpiece. I hope to have many battles with Jesus Maria and perhaps some day I'll complete this challenging section sans break.....Wishful thinking indeed!!

### Chapter 4: Summary

After Jesus Maria, there is a truly nasty, long climb but it didn't really matter for some reason. How can any climb compare to Jesus anyway. I sensed that the tough stuff was behind me and now it's just a matter of pushing myself to the finish. And isn't that what these rides are all about? So maybe there is a Long Hammer in this story after all. It's the Hammer that you use every day to make yourself be a better person in your own eyes. Ride that extra 10 miles.....Lift that extra set of 200 pounds.....or maybe just spend that extra 15 minutes with friends at a rest stop, when you know their about done in, even if you're not, even if you know you could finish lots faster.

Why are we always in such a hurry anyway? Just hop on your bike and spin off a few and enjoy one of the more pleasurable, simple things in life, “just ride a bike”!!