

One Wright Sly Silver Mormon by Curtis Taylor

Many of the rides that attract me most have gruesome labels, to instill fear from their mere utterance. They include “The Devil Mountain Double,” “The Terrible Two,” or “The Monster.” To train for these rides a few similarly minded local cyclists and I decided to start planning local routes. The first ride has been referred to as “The Godzilla” or “The Great Divide Double” and turned out to be 176 miles 19,000 feet of climbing. It went from Folsom, to Colfax, to Foresthill via +15% Iowa Hill, then to Georgetown via 15% Corkscrew grade, before going back to Folsom. It was remote, epic, definitely, leg-melting, and by all accounts actually harder than the Terrible Two. The second had no 15% grades but also turned out to be 176 miles and included more than 17,000 feet of climbing. Since it has only about 2,500 feet of climbing in the last 60 miles, I don't find it necessary to associate it with any mystical creatures. Instead, I'm calling the second ride, “One Wright Sly Silver Mormon”

Being late in the year for training, half of the likely participants for this ride bowed out due to repetitive pains or lack of goals necessitating mammoth training rides. So at 6am on a Saturday morning in late July, Graham Pollock and I left Folsom, to do this great route we have dreamed about.

From Folsom, there are two common routes for days planned to go above 6000 feet in elevation. (Unless you are driving a car, and that's definitely not what we were doing!) One way would include anything up the north side of the Great Divide into Auburn and Colfax. The other goes to the south side of the Great Divide through Georgetown or Placerville. On One Wright Sly Silver Mormon, the route pointed up Salmon Falls and Prospector to Georgetown for the first few climbs.

Salmon Falls and Prospector are locally well known 20'ish minute climbs because they are some of the longest climbs within 2 hours of Sacramento. Normally my ride companions and I time trial up Salmon Falls and race up Prospector, but we generally head home or round out a 90-100 mile day with a moderate amount more climbing. On this day though, conservation was the name of the game for me. Especially since my riding companion won the Race Across Oregon the year I started riding and beat me by 20 minutes on the Terrible Two in June. (Did I mention, he's done the Furnace Creek 508 three times and is considering doing it again in 2008?)

After our very conservative ramble up the local big climbs, we rolled through a great old growth pine forest on Marshal Road as we headed for Georgetown. Our first water and food came at a little store on Main Street. Oddly enough the same store exists in Foresthill, but the name has one less letter. Perhaps it was once a chain, but is no longer?

Out of Georgetown, our route took us up Wentworth Springs Road past Stumpy Meadows, a quiet little lake where I once saw a bald eagle. From Georgetown to the summit above Crystal Basin could probably be considered a 35 mile climb, though it includes a few respites of rolling downhill. After cresting the summit it's a rolling climb to the turn towards Wrights Lake at NF-32, but another ½ mile to

Ice House Resort. By the time we reached our second food and water stop at Ice House Resort, we had logged more than 9000 feet of climbing and barely completed 80 miles. We still had to climb up to Wrights Lake Road at almost 7000 feet before descending to Kyburz near 4,000 feet and back up to 7,000 feet again.

We picked Saturday to execute this ride because we would be on Highway 50 for almost 5 miles and Saturday morning seemed like the least likely time for hordes of traffic descending to Placerville from South Lake Tahoe. The unplanned consequence was hordes of fishermen, campers and Hells Angels packing the roads around Ice House. Thankfully, after Ice House Reservoir there was only a handful of vehicles until we reached Highway 50.

The views in the high Sierra became more magnificent on our way to Wrights Lake Road. To our left were views of every peak on the east side of Echo Summit. One of them was Pyramid Peak for sure. On our right, nearer to us, were giant meadows and old horse camps. This area seemed very likely to have been prime high summer grazing camp for cattle 50 or 100 years ago.

It was about here where the first images of Redhook Long Hammer Ale started surfacing in my mind. In the commercial playing out ahead of me on the road, a domestique went back to the team car and filled his pockets and jersey with Long Hammers while a gnarly horseman wrestling cattle watched from the meadow. Without flinching the horsemen took off for the team car and received a few Long Hammers for his impressive effort.

Speaking of impressive, the scenery became even more impressive as we descended Wrights Lake Road. The view of the gorge containing Highway 50, was so grand both of us picked places to stop and take it in, rather than risk our lives stealing glances during a very technical descent. Had this road been on a grand tour, there would have been more Versus coverage of the surrounding landscape than of the riders themselves. I'm quite certain a "natural break" truce would have been reached at a few of the best vantage points.

We seemed to hit Highway 50 at the right time. The 5 miles down to Kyburz were perfectly positioned at one of the steepest downhill on the highway. Our speed for most of this section was upwards of 40 mph. Consequently, I don't believe we were on the highway for even 10 minutes. Not only did the shoulder feel larger than I expected, but the speed of the cars was never more than 5 mph faster than us. As unbelievable as it may seem, not one of the cars even honked at us. Our safe entry to Kyburz was as happy event for us as it was for the store clerk who sold us sandwiches, Gatorade, Snickers, and just about everything else she had in the cooler.

After loading our bottles and stomachs we left Kyburz and headed up Silver Fork Road for a 16 mile 3000' climb. It may have been our full bellies, but the first 2 miles of this climb seemed to have breached 12%. Fortunately, the last 14 miles were very gradual.

It's on sections of road like the top 14 miles of Silver Fork Road that make me really appreciate climbing. Don't get me wrong, I love downhill too, but everything goes by so fast. When I'm on a high Sierra road, ascending at 10 mph allows a lot more to be absorbed than descending at 45 mph. On this road there was a wonderful rolling river next to the road. (A tempting splash for sure when the temperature was 90+ degrees.)

The downhill finally came. At 115 miles and more than 15,000 feet of climbing completed we finally pointed our wheels downhill for good. Our turn onto Mormon Emigrant Trail directed us to Sly Park for a stop at the store. From there it was less than 2 hours to Folsom via Pleasant Valley Road and home through Rescue with the clock stopping at 12 hours 13 minutes and a ride time of 11 hours 8 minutes.