

Dog Bar Ride Recap (Solo-Hammer!)

By: Steve Ward

Even the double yellow line was difficult to make out as I rode down the center of the road; it had rained the prior evening and the relatively warm low 50's temperature created a dense early morning fog. Although it wasn't raining, or expected to rain, the dew point was responsible for the beads of water forming on the lenses of my glasses.

It took a few minutes longer than usual to pedal the three miles from my home to the ride start at Karen's Bakery. I was outfitted in winter riding gear which included wooly-booly socks, booties, leg warmers, a base layer under my jersey, a windbreaker, arm warmers, and a skull cap. I elected to wear short-fingered riding gloves because my hands do fine in temperatures that remain at 50 degrees or above.

At ride time, the day did not present itself as a banner cycling day; still foggy, although not as dense as when I began my ride. Chris Parod arrived at exactly at 7:30am, the designated start time, and would be the only other rider to show up.

We turned our first pedals together at 7:45am and began what for me would be a 97 mile loop out to Grass Valley and back along a route I had never ridden before. The weatherman was predicting a fair day with lots of sunshine and highs in the mid-to-upper sixties.

Chris and I rolled up Auburn Folsom road as far as Power House Road where I stopped to remove my windbreaker, arm warmers and leg warmers. I rolled them up neatly in my windbreaker and stashed them behind the guard rail along side the road. Since I was planning to return along this same road I would be able to pick them up at the end of the day.

Chris' training schedule called for a ride of somewhere around 50 miles, so he would be riding with me until somewhere in the area of Meadow Vista. We rolled into, and through Auburn, and then on toward Meadow Vista via Bowman Road, Christian Valley Road and Bancroft Road to where it junctions with Placer Hills Road. The junction represented 25 miles almost exactly.

With that, Chris elected to return by way of Placer Hills Rd and Lake Arthur Road which loops back to Bowman Road where he could then retrace the route we rode out on. I made a left on Placer Hills Road and began the short climb to the crest of the hill where I then descended into Meadow Vista for a quick stop at the Elementary School to fill my water bottles.

By now the day had become spectacular in spite of the early coolness; perfect for the roughly five thousand feet of climbing I would have to do on route to Grass Valley. The sun was bright and without a cloud in the sky and the onset of fall was evident in all of its glorious splendor. School aged children played organized soccer, the red team pushing the ball up the field as the blue team pursued; the action was plodding and it seemed both teams moved about together in the fashion of a school of fish, except for the goalies; the one watching intently as the girls worked their way closer and closer to her goal - the other, with her back to the action, paying attention only to some unknown attraction in the trees behind the field of play.

The recent rain released the fresh scents of the wooded hills, the flora and the fauna. Leaves of amber, red and yellow were strewn about haphazardly as if upon a loom in preparation for the making of quilt to comfort the land. My legs felt fresh and my heart beat slowly as I climbed northward toward Dog Bar Road.

The southern terminus of Dog Bar Road is at its junction with Placer Hills Road. I made the turn there which was followed by a short climb and then a steep, twisty drop down to the river along a strip of nicely paved road. I crossed the bridge and the road leveled out for a bit; a veritable

heard of deer, perhaps 20-30 were getting a drink from the river along the spit of sand a gravel that stretched the length of the river bend and out beyond my line of sight. Their keen sense of hearing picked up my pedal strokes and they began to run as one in the sand along the river until they also passed beyond my line of sight.

I was in awe of the day, thinking things probably couldn't much better than this when the road surface turned from good to superior. It was as unexpected as the day itself. The area was off the beaten track, there was very little traffic in this sparsely populated region; I couldn't have imagined that the road would be so pristinely smooth. This added to the euphoria of my day and clearly enhanced the sense of freshness in my legs as I rode the fifteen miles of Dog Bar Road that represented miles thirty to forty five for the day. This in spite of the plethora of long, four and five percent climbs that present themselves as I made my way toward Grass Valley.

I rolled into Grass Valley on an unintended route, having made a wrong turn on LaBarr Meadow road. I should have stayed right, but for some reason felt I needed to go left. I followed my intuition and arrived on Hwy 49 a few miles south of town. The stretch of Hwy 49 leading up to the McKnight exit was a bit harrowing with unavoidable islands of thick, soft gravel and sand appearing in particularly unnerving places such as on the descents. I would not choose to ride this stretch again. I arrived in Grass Valley at about mile 49 and stopped at the Chevron station of get a Gatorade and some smoked almonds.

I rolled out of Grass Valley on McCourtney Road, passed the fair grounds and county dump which accounted for the rash of rubbish filled trailer traffic along the first three miles of the road. However, this segment the road was once again well paved and blessed with a nice, wide, well marked shoulder. There's a quick climb just after the disposal site which is followed by miles and miles of descending on nicely paved, sweeping roadways with a grades of three to seven percent. Those approximately seven or so miles were a nice opportunity to catch up on nutrition and rest up my legs.

Although I was descending, I kept my legs turning over slowly in a big gear to keep the lactic acid from building up. The roads remained great throughout this section of the ride with the exception that the shoulder had given up most of its width. This wasn't a problem since there was little traffic to speak of.

McCourtney became Lime Kiln and eventually the elevation chart began to look like a jagged rip saw. The spikes becoming steeper and higher as the road turned from south to east. The climbs became increasingly more difficult but never reaching the level a Category classification.

It began to warm into the mid sixties and the sun was reaching its zenith as the route returned to Hwy 49 (at Wolf road). The three miles of riding on Hwy 49 went quickly before I made a right turn onto Lone Star road. The steepest climbs of the day were on Lone Star, but at something short of a ¼ mile, there was no cause for alarm. More descending followed as I rolled down Lone Star to the Auburn Country Club.

The golf hole that fronts the road appears like an oasis of Irish green; the long, lush, manicured fairway following the lines and flow of the land as it stretches over the rolling terrain and out of sight. Four men stood motionless upon the green, one holding the flag stick, one a putter, and the others pausing in consideration of the stroke to be played.

I turned left onto Bell Road and began another series of long descents that included two or three deceptively difficult, 15 mph turns. Caution is advised when approaching and negotiating these turns which are well marked with 15 mph signs.

Bell road continues on to Hwy 49 where at the corner I made my final stop for water at the spigot in front of the convenience store. Less than ninety seconds later I was back in the saddle and rolling down Hwy 49. The highway was alive and congested with weekend traffic. There were

several miles of lane closure due to construction which was well marked by cones and/or barriers. The closed lane was paved and appeared to be the safest place to be so I rode there and found that I was moving quickly. The buzz of the city, the distractions, the congestion and the energy of people washed over me like a salve that enlivened me after so many miles of solitude. It was strangely energizing. I had planned to make the turn onto Nevada Street and take the Maple Street bridge into Old Auburn which would avoid the traffic. But I was feeling very alive rolling down Hwy 49 and choose to continue on my current path.

I was making turns of the pedals for 30+ mph as I sped past the Cambria Bike Emporium; a few cyclists were gathered out front and shouted out encouragement – in return I encouraged them to: Defy Ordinary, Drink Redhook! They answered with whoops and hollers.

The final leg began at Power House Road and Auburn Folsom Road after I stopped there to collect the cold weather apparel I had stashed behind the guard rail on the outbound leg earlier in the morning; there was brisk wind blowing up from Granite Bay so I knew it would take a few extra calories to get back to Folsom. I was right.

It was a lot of work; I disregarded my speed and chose to ride a heart rate of 165bpm. That was hugely responsible for my feeling better after trying to maintain a pace that was putting me into the red zone. I was hoping for a pace line to roll by so I could jump on the magic carpet ride and enjoy a little relief for the final miles, but that never happened. Instead, I found myself passing a series of other riders and offering them a wheel, of which none of them were inclined to accept.

I ended the ride at Karen's Bakery some 5 hours and 55 minutes after setting out earlier that morning with Chris. Actual ride time was 5 hours and 34 minutes with an average heart rate of 151 bpm. What an exceptional day!