

2011 TUC Weekend Recap

Gentlemen, (Because as Tom explained, there are no current lady Grippers). For those of you in attendance, the weekend's events were a good time had by All. As for the rest - who had legitimate reasons for sitting this one out - we missed you, *and* want to remind those who have yet to jump in: We won't stop inviting you, because even if you are not interested in pedaling, you owe it to yourselves to share the unrivaled camaraderie of the Grippers. Don't look back some day in regret - these are priceless times that can't be duplicated.

As always, the pre-ride festivities were great. I had to opt out of the Cinco de Mayo ceremony as it was both my travel day and a chance to take my parents out for dinner at Roy's Club. Nina Fanucchi where are you?

Friday at the Law Office was a great prelude to the annual Ingomar Club banquet. No press coverage this year - or group photo, but security by Seal Team Six was tight, so we understand... Butch and Barry did the usual stellar job of mc'ing the event. Billy stepped up big-time by springing for new Gripper/TUC cycling jerseys. That yellow is both safe on the road, and lends a healthy-looking glow to everyone.

Tom talked his way through Melissa's inquest as to why there are no female Grippers with aplomb. Better him than us, though no apologies were proffered or necessary. Up until now, it seemed self-evident that a group evolving from the legendary Fugarwe Tribe contains no estrogen.

Ride day dawned with a cool overcast that, mercifully persisted throughout the ride. Someone pointed out that it was 46 degrees at the start and the finish. It's beyond me how some of you (Rob, Barry & ?) consume the bacon, hash browns and eggs served at the Fairgrounds prior to riding, but I guess any fuel is good fuel.

As noted in recent e-mails, Tom took part in the TUC for the first time. This was commendable, because lesser men would have been dissuaded by the tales of suffering by the (lying) riders of years past. I can assure you, it only hurts between 7:00 am and the time when the first beers are poured in Trinity Village.

In any case, we rolled out as a group - and lamented the absence of Bo, Mitch, Dan, Walt and the others who joined us over the years. Larry K and his riding buddy Bob (who actually came in first one year) were long gone in short order, despite Larry having done an insane 400-miler in Austin just a few days before. Kinda puts what we do in perspective...

I damn near crashed for the second year in a row on the first fast downhill. As with last time, I got the dreaded amplified steering-head shake at about 35 MPH. Don't know why, as this was different bike, but I knew what to do: Counter-intuitively, one must avoid braking, sit back, and pick up a little speed until things calm down. This was a time when a heart-rate monitor would have been a bad thing. It may have blown up and killed me instantly. Butch was not around to see it this time. Last year, he told me the back of my bike was swinging back and forth like a belly dancer on Red Bull. I did not pee my pants.

The rest stop outside of Rio Dell was no more. Not that we miss stopping in that burg, but it seemed a bit of a stretch to have to go all the way to the turn-around point on the Avenue of the Giants. Not to worry: I had to stop with a pinch flat right after we hit that famed stretch. Tom had just addressed some quirky thing that was causing his brakes to self-apply when the same nasty ridge that double-flatted Jim last year bit me. Trust me, it's difficult to see. Jim generously assisted with the repair, and his brother Tom (Otis) arrived just in time to deploy a floor pump for full inflation. This was the first of Tom's many commendable actions during the day. It wasn't quite the same as when Hank and Clancy rode herd on us, but no shots were fired this time - and no blood was spilled (Mark).

We caught up to everyone just as they were ready to forge on to the Gap. Jim and I enjoyed a great ride through Rockefeller Forrest - which had amazingly been repaved in several sections. I swear: If every mile of our rides were like those, we would *never* get off our bikes. Soon enough, we convened at the rest stop at the foot of Panther Gap. (See attached photos). Butch went out with the lead group as he had to truncate his ride to go to the Royal Honeymoon - or some lame thing.

At this point in the ride, I had a revelation: The old bikes I had been riding sucked. My new Trek (same model as Bo rides) made all the difference. The comparison I would make is trying to run a marathon in hiking boots. Great for hiking, lousy for running. New bike = better rider. (I had the same bike on the Gripper Fall Ride, but was unable to realize the extent of the difference as I was delirious much of the time with a fever that hit during the drive down from Oregon).

Anyway, Jim and I made it to the top at a pace that didn't slow him down too badly. Unlike past years, the sun did not beat down on us during the steepest sections. Otis picked up Butch to return him to Ferndale in time to get back home for his mani-pedi.

We lived through another death-defying descent to the west. I swear, we routinely haul ass over the worst stretches of crap that any sane person avoids like an STD during a normal ride. Bumps, gravel, sand, splits, chunks, Volkswagen-eating potholes and all manner of shit just waiting to flat your tires or spit you out into the woods or over a cliff are why the organizers call this ride *California's Toughest Century*. They ain't lying or exaggerating... Personally, I try to keep it under 30 MPH, but it's awesome to watch someone like Jim strafe the canyons - until he disappears out of sight.

We caught up to the gang just past the wheel-eating plank bridge where Seal Team Six fears to pedal. Seriously: There are still remnants of riders/bikes dangling from the underside of that span from past rides. Honeydont'...

Everyone took on nourishment at the lunch stop, and we pressed on soon because Jim bullwhipped us away from the massage station. Several steep hills were inconsiderately placed in our way shortly thereafter. Nothing like a big climb after a sandwich laced with industrial-strength pickles and paint-peeling mustard.

I made the strategic error of stopping to get some photos of the group as they bombed down yet another hill. Some pendejo with the biggest diesel-powered Ford FIWhatever pulled in and blocked my view - and everyone blew by. It was a long, lonely ride until I caught Jim and Rob by the beach - and they only stopped because Rob had a flat. Jim took another one for the team by helping with the repair, but technical difficulties thwarted his efforts. Rob had to join Barry and Mark with sagmaster Tom Otto.

In a first for me, I felt good enough along that section to pull a couple of guys who were losing energy. The wind was minimal for a change, which helped enormously, and one of the guys shared a recipe for abalone in a Crock Pot. (I'm telling ya: The random conversations that spring up among total strangers during this event happen nowhere else).

I met Tom, Kirk and Billy at the base of the wall. One of the volunteers told us about a guy who crashed and dislocated his shoulder. The EMT's helpfully popped it back in, and the guys rode on. (My cousin Jack verified this the next day: He knows the animal who would not yield).

Taking the advice of the rest stop guy, I gobbled a couple electrolyte replacement capsules before attacking the Wall. This stuff really works (for me). He also counseled us to take two more at Capetown so as to be fortified for the Endless Hills. For the first time, I was able to ride the entirety of the Wall without stopping. (Thank you, Trek). To complicate matters, several sections of the climb were this year comprised of sand and gravel. Uh, you can't get any traction if you stand up, and not everyone has the legs past the 80-mile mark to just sit back and cruise on up. I zig-zagged like James Skillman on a broken play, and just got by.

Billy and Kirk soon passed, Jim caught Tommy and me, and we plunged toward the base of the Endless Hills. Again, the weather was in our favor as we did not suffer the wind, but the bottom two miles provided an opportunity for some of us to walk our tired bikes for a bit. No sense in running a good steed into the grave (see *True Grit*) unless the stakes are higher. Otis kindly dropped by to hand off previously shed cold-weather gear, and falsely advised us that there were no more climbs past the cattle chute and two barns just beyond. Jim knew better, and disabused us of any false hopes.

The last big downhill toward Ferndale is particularly risky. By this time, most are fatigued, the road still is gnarly, and it feels cold in the shade of the woods. My hands felt like Ted Williams' noggin as it resides cryogenically awaiting reanimation.

Dropping into town is the sweetest of relief. A place with what must be one of the highest church-to-resident ratios on the planet looks particularly inviting when one has not met his maker on the Lost Coast. Jim and I finished together, (believe me, he waited) while Tom slipped in just behind after a self-induced stop. (Probably contemplating nature, though I wouldn't rule out a pee break). Finisher patches were awarded, photos were taken, and congratulations were shared.

Billy and Kirk packed up and left for the joys of home cooking, while some of us delved into the pulled-pork meal that is awarded to the survivors. Good fuel for the drive to Trinity Village. After showering and packing up at my parent's place, I picked up Greg Graham and we made for the Gripper Estate. Neither of us had seen it before, and everything we were led to believe - and more - was true. Clancy and his dog were there to greet us, and while Gunnar is no substitute for Hank, Clancy says he is warmer to sleep next to.

Being there verifies the entire premise of our joint venture. The setting is spectacular, the property amazing, and the house itself is getting more beautiful and functional every day. A hearty thanks is due to all who have pitched in on the improvements - and Butch is to be praised mightily for orchestrating the logistics.

Good use of the fantastic outdoor kitchen was made, beers were consumed, lies were repeated, and sleeping spots were claimed. A tour of everything gave rise to ideas for further improvements, and a discussion of what might be a better (more dignified) name for the property ensued.

It was mentioned that the word "Cabin" evokes a mental image of something rustic - which this house is assuredly not. I propose we have a confab to come up with a designation that better reflects the classiness of our enterprise (Compound, Estate and others were suggested) and will be of better use in our VRBO advertising. Now that utilizing our property as a training center for aspiring swimsuit models has been rejected without fair hearing, we need a consensus on Plan B. We don't want to sell this thing short among the Better Halves or renting public...

Also, a few household items (primarily kitchen stuff) were added to the mix. The sacred blender now has a companion Crock Pot, and some coffee/whiskey cups are in stock (Jim noted the lack of shot glasses - which makes one wonder how in the hell the inaugural Cinco de Mayo event had any semblance of order). People: Dig deep into your stash, and remedy this oversight. The next time Bill hosts Seal Team Six, we must be able to hold our heads high when serving drinks.

A good breakfast and orderly cleanup were accomplished the following morning. Clancy jumped into plumbing the outdoor kitchen while Tom, Barry and Mark pressed on for home. Jim, Otis, Greg and I took a tour via Moose's River Trail. It was verified that Butch has claimed some of one of America's most scenic places (Look it up: The Trinity River was featured recently in Parade magazine - along with those amazing arches in Utah and other wonders).

We split up around mid-morning, and Otis told us the very noticeable segments of the property improvements will take shape in the next few weeks. Those of you who are going for Memorial Day weekend are in for a treat.

These thoughts and more were bubbling on the drive back to Eureka...

I had the great pleasure of spending Mother's Day in Arcata with my mom, sister and aunt/uncle/cousins and kids thereof who still reside locally. These folks seem quite content to have remained in Humboldt County, and while those of us who have moved on have flourished in other locales, it should be considered that who we are now is a direct result of how, when and with whom we came of age.

Having a place to gather not far from our roots is SWEET!
I'm looking forward to seeing everyone there as often as possible.

E Pluribus Grippem, Dave