

Horse Mountain Grippers  
4<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Ride (2012)  
Recap

**Ride Roster:**

Rob Dunaway  
Jim Fisher  
Konrad Fisher  
Walter Hallanan  
Jimi Hill  
Steve Karp  
Larry Kluck  
Peter Livengood  
Butch (Matt, Francis, Baby Boy) Mathews  
Brendan McKenny  
Reed Minuth  
Dave Murray  
Jim Otto  
Tom Quigley  
Bo Reiwerts  
Mitch Shandley  
Tom Shields

**Support Staff:**

Bill Anderson  
"Tall Richard" Kuehner  
Hank Lawrence  
"Cowboy Bob" Stafford  
Clancy Walsh  
Johnny Walsh

"In the days of my youth, I was told what it means to be a man". Page/Jones/Bonham

Now that we've reached that age, we try to do those things the best we can. Doing our best means maintaining and expanding the friendships of Gripper Nation through events such as our annual Fall Ride. See the following for some insight as to how this happens.

The recap presented herein is written from my own perspective (with the exceptions of those activities taking place before my Thursday night arrival) as I can only report from a first-person viewpoint. Any additional anecdotes, stories or lies are welcome, and this document is open to editing by all concerned. Feel free to correct, amplify and/or revise as you see fit.

Hiуска!  
Dave

## Day One (Wednesday, September 26, 2012) Trinity Village

The first wave of Grippers convenes at Hawkins Bar. Members get settled in for the coming weekend; beverages were consumed, sleeping spots were found and/or assigned, recent improvements to the property were explained, etc.

## Day Two (Thursday, September 27, 2012)

The group on hand was expanding. Eggs and beer comprised breakfast at the Gripper Estate. A river excursion was (dis)organized, and the put-in spot was by the TV entry bridge. Four two-person inflatable kayaks and the infamous "Barney Boat" were launched. Otto films for posterity with his "Go-Pro" camera. The lads survive a multitude of rapids, and celebrate with youthful plunges into the river via the rope (cable, actually) swing downstream from Reed's place. It is reported that Walter Hallanan proceeds with caution until he masters the technique, and ultimately takes the plunge from a point higher than anyone else.

Not being present at the time, I can only tell you that, from later hearsay, it would be a good idea to plan your schedule to allow for attendance on the first day of our future dealings. While the ride is the hub of our gathering, the spokes that make it all worthwhile are the times enjoyed with each other catching up and just goofing off. "Be there, or be normal", as we used to say...

After "working" until mid-day, I escaped Beaverton, and was on I-5 South in the trusty Passat wagon by 1:30 pm. There is no getting around the fact that this is an 8-hour (400+ miles) drive from home, so I settled in with an audio book (by Harlan Coben) and cruised a steady 72 MPH. A stop for fuel and a surprisingly good burger was made in Grants Pass. The weather (light tailwind, clear skies) cooperated throughout, and I was on HWY 96 near Yreka before dark.

Having been over this road by car and motorcycle several times already in 2012, I knew it to be a great drive, and the moon-roof was wide open to enhance the experience. Traffic was light (except for the inevitable road-hog in a "Little Dick" 4X4 who could not abide being passed by a driver in a foreign car, which I surely did) and Carlos Santana rode shotgun on the stereo.

In some ways, driving fast (55-65 MPH) after sundown on a two-lane road is like being in a movie. There is action, you are part of it, but it is mostly darkness except for what is happening in front of you. One of the scenes that played out: A bat came swooping in from my right. Just when a tasty bug was about to splatter my windshield, the bat opened wide to swallow it – and proceeded to bounce off the moon-roof wind deflector. I'm pretty sure both parties perished, but sometimes you are not the windshield, nor the bug or the bat, for that matter.

Due to the nighttime, I didn't get much of a preview for the intended ride route on 96, but did get a sense that we would benefit from the recent paving conducted along the way. It's a lightly

travelled section anyway, but getting out on a Friday would mean even less traffic. (That was good planning on the part of the event organizers).

Reaching the G-Pound just before 9:00 pm meant jumping in on the usual: Lot's of levity, tequila shots and a warm welcome. Not long before then, Johnny Walsh had (finally!) achieved official recognition as a Gripper when he experienced the induction rites. Having just missed that memorable moment, I arrived at our marvelous outdoor kitchen, right in time for Johnny to pop out from the crowd and embrace me with a hug that said more than words ever do. The notion that Bo, Clancy and Johnny have been in my circle of friends since *first grade* (at Sacred Heart Elementary School) is just amazing.



What a cool testimony to growing up in a small town during the time we did. The same goes for our experiences in Junior High, (when Winship was truly the coolest place to be) and at EHS. Think about it: We didn't evolve into this distinguished group of Grippers in a vacuum, and we wouldn't have gained all of the current members from other locales had we not shared the inclusive mindset developed under those circumstances. The current Gripper roster may be spread all over the western US, (not to mention our ambassador in Germany) but the sense of community feels much tighter than that. Even better, we are still continuing or expansion, as the Saturday night initiation ceremony would later show.

Things came to a relatively early conclusion as we expected to get an timely start the next morning. With mild fall weather present, I elected to sleep outside on the Mathews patio where the sound of the river provided first-class "white noise". Other Grippers crashed inside, but windows remained open through the night.

Friday morning dawned with perfect conditions for riding: Clear, cool, and not at all windy. Bikes and gear were loaded into trucks, and we gathered at the G-Pound for breakfast. Cowboy Bob, Richard and others put together another of the fine meals we have come to expect at these events. Eggs, sausage, bacon and much, much more comprised the first of the thousands (eventually, it seemed like millions) of calories we would need to power our efforts.

Somehow, the premises were cleaned up while the ongoing process of locating everything, and getting stuff loaded into the appropriate spots was underway. The logistics team (that would be everybody) had good input and a mostly-sober vision as to what was needed. This is an example of how our cooperativetemperament leads to a viable result. The cool thing was, nobody seemed at all stressed, and it all got handled in time to just miss our scheduled 8:30 departure. As a bonus, Otto even found a riding jacket that had gone missing since our TUC foray this past May.

Bill Anderson had volunteered to break away from his duties at the TV water plant long enough to take part in the morning shuttle. He also was tasked with taking the traditional group photos (with a handful of cameras) in front of the Main House. (See below). Thanks, Bill!



As sometimes happens, Life got in the way of the plans for some who had every intention of making the scene. Barry and Mark got stuck at the last minute on a project due to an untimely break in a pipe. Bob Beede honored his commitment to crew for a friend who was competing in a triathlon. Walter Smith was off assisting his daughter with her relocation to college. Kirk had a prior engagement with a Scout troop – and others simply could not schedule the time for that particular week. Each were missed, but remain on the permanent invitation list for all future rides and events involving the brotherhood.

Soon enough, the show was on the road. Hank and Clancy led out with a truck and trailer hauling food, bikes, Grippers, beer and probably as least a little contraband. (We are pretty sure whatever firearms were on hand were legal and properly stored). Our first stop was at Ray's Market in Willow Creek. I'm guessing this particular store is the community equivalent (and combination of) the old General Store and contemporary suburban mall. The mix of people going in and hanging out speaks volumes about the local scene: Loggers, growers, Natives, tourists, white people with gnarly dreadlocks, skaters and more. If those into demographics ever want to see real diversity, they would do well to stop by.

Waiting there, I was reminded of the insanity that was the Willow Creek "Bigfoot Days" street dance/brawl back when we were pups. A true felony-a-minute happening, it is no wonder that what would be the modern-day Risk Manager's worst nightmare was laid to rest long ago. Someone noted that they do have a current version that is very much G-Rated, (quilt show, Bingo, etc.) but that doesn't seem like it would keep the County Mounties and medical personnel interested or engaged like it used to. Things change...

Our goal was to purchase some ice, and this seemed to trigger a life-long urge in Dr. Bo. He is famous for his love of ice cream and related products, so he jumped on the opportunity to get a milkshake next door. Any momentary envy amongst us would later be forgotten as he had plans to provide a similar treat for everyone after the evening meal.

Back on the road, we passed through the town of Hoopa and Indian Reservation land. It was mentioned that this area is one of the most beautiful and verdant valleys in Northern California – but suffers from a blight of controversial origin. The contrast of run-down trailer housing (with requisite rusty vehicles and a jumble of “yard art”) versus thoroughly modern community-use buildings is striking. A comparison to Appalachia was made, and it is easy to envision why. We agreed that the situation is unfortunate, but, as outsiders, our opinions are irrelevant.

The Arkley family property was also pointed out as we continued. When one thinks of a classic “spread” where ranching and farming take place in conjunction with modern luxury living, this place has to rank pretty high. Whatever that clan currently has going on, I’m betting they can “get away from it all” up there.

Inevitably, we encountered a bit of road repair along our route, but the delay was made pleasant by a friendly “flagger”. Her smile said “Go”, but the sign read “Stop”. What to believe? You decide:



Jim Fisher has also secured a spot for retreating from city life, and he was happy to share it as the launching point for our ride. His son Konrad had been holding the fort next to the Klamath River while working for a non-profit, and we were eager to visit the secluded property. Any time you are near a place named “Happy Camp” you have to be cynical to think the term is ironic. How could you not be a happy camper in proximity to the Siskiyou Mountains and the Klamath National Forest? OK, maybe those scratching out a living “back when” felt differently. In any case, we piled out, stretched our legs, watered the plants and made our way down to the cabin(s). Larry was the one guy who decided riding his bike was the best option. Still recovering from back surgery, he said walking was uncomfortable, but there was some suspicion that he is so highly evolved as a cyclist that being upright on two wheels has become the new normal for him. Could be fresh fodder for the old cartoon of the fish making its way onto land and morphing into a man – just extend that to the man on a bike...

To say that the Fisher property is scenic and secluded understates matters. There is a classically beautiful creek running nearby, and the proximity to the Klamath is truly sweet. This caused me to remember a bit in David Niven’s memoirs where he recounted how he and Errol Flynn would hire a car and driver, pick up W.C. Fields (and a load of whiskey) and escape to the wilds

of Nor Cal for fishing on this same river. Clancy and Hank are the spiritual heirs to that crew, but there is no hard evidence that either group put the scare into many fish.

Konrad was mostly ready for our invasion, and you have to admire a guy who so calmly went from peace and solo quiet to suddenly hosting 20 brightly-clad rowdies. The main portion of the lodge most accurately resembled a dance hall, which Konrad allowed is sometimes just that. He also explained the “artwork” (a bat-like scrawl) on the front door of one of the adjacent red mini-cabins. It seems to have actually become a residence for thousands of bats. No guano, man, he thinks that is great. There was also a leather scroll listing the history of the property hanging on the wall. Dubbed the “Old Man River Lodge”, the original “Sandy Bar Claim” dates to 1894. Various owners were listed, along with other notes of past activity in the area. The fact that anyone found their way out West so long ago, and settled in for the long haul, makes one wonder about how that all went down.

Once again, we conducted the ceremonial consumption of Mimosas (much as we did last year at Merriman’s Beach House) on the front porch. The range of a popped Champagne cork is not to be underestimated, as Butch and Chairman Tommyso ably demonstrated. The ratio of bubbly to orange juice skewed toward preserving citrus, so everyone was properly lubricated, even if our chains weren’t. We left Konrad for the moment, but he would join us that evening, and for the second day of riding.

Back up on the road, bikes were unloaded and riding mode was unfolding. It was at this moment that Peter discovered Bill had left with his gear bag. No helmet, no shoes: No problem! Being out of cell phone range, there was no way to call Bill back. Not to be denied, Peter elected to “Man Up” and ride in his athletic shoes. That could not have been comfortable, but he was game for giving it a go.

Otto also got off to a rough start. Putting his responsibility as videographer ahead of his own personal safety, Jim proceeded (in the first few feet of travel) to throw himself onto the pavement while attempting to recover his dropped camera. Unable to unclip in time to get a foot down, he drew the first (and only!) blood of the weekend. Unlike a couple of years ago when Walt Smith was viciously attacked in broad daylight by a curb-side storm drain cunningly disguised as level ground, Otto’s problem was pretty minor. (Just like Rocky Raccoon: “Doc, it’s only a scratch...”). Rolling south with Johnny, Richard, Bob, Clancy and Hank as our shepherds and support, we had the confidence of many and the clue of few. It didn’t matter. We were all on a sunny day off from whatever the “Normal People” were doing. Still no wind, a warm(ish) morning and not many cars on the road – it was a fine time to ride.

As we spread out, a few groups formed. I ended up riding with Peter while we talked about our respective backgrounds and interests. It turned out we both have a long attraction to sports as spectators and participants, and a common admiration for some of the modern icons of their chosen games. John Wooden was mentioned as a man we both really appreciated. A few other guys most of us know about also came up: Joe Gibbs, Don Coryell and John Madden. Quite remarkably, during his time as a quarterback for San Diego State, Peter had them all together on his coaching staff. He was present during the formation of concepts that influenced the development of football to the current state. If you ever get a chance, be sure to ask Peter about those times.

A side trip along the Lower Salmon River was taken by most. We rode upstream for several miles, and another (pre-Gripper) gathering was recalled. Bill Wing and the Electric Rafting Company hosted an extreme river-rafting excursion up near Forks of Salmon many years ago. I remembered seeing signs along the road stating something to the effect of “If you are not a very skilled motorist, you have no business driving on these roads. Turn around now, or you may die”. That is just how rugged and remote this country is, so keep that in mind when visiting. Naturally, we all had a great time with Bill guiding, which is why it came to mind.

That day was warming up, so it was quite helpful to have Johnny restocking our water bottles. Those guys on the big race tours need someone to supply liquid and calories, just like we do. The difference is our guys do it gratis, will also give us beer, but won't hang out of a car to adjust our derailleur or rub “butt butter” in places a hooker would be reluctant to touch – because that would cause them to lose their amateur standing – and those tasks would reduce the pool of volunteers to unacceptable levels. We have our standards, people.

Soon enough, we made our way back down to 96, and were outside of Orleans. A planned sortie to a nearby winery meant following the river along the east side. What we didn't know: Whether the winery was really there; that unidentified devious bastards had diabolically placed a huge climb between us and our destination; and that our path would take us past Skunk Hollow Road. For some reason, the area did smell like a skunk. One of the property owners across from that Hollow of Skunks evidently was doing his best to keep the skunks out (in?) because he had a really long stretch of privacy fence topped with concertina wire. None of the other locals, however skunky their places may have been, adopted such tactics, so that guy must be extra special in some way.

Thankfully, the climb took place along a well-shaded road, and the few unpaved stretches were negotiated without drama. We soon found ourselves at the Coates Vineyards, where whoever runs the place was absent. That didn't stop us from making ourselves at home on their front lawn, where we gathered for snacks, beers and photos. Surprisingly, the climb back out to 96 was much easier in reverse. Same distance and total elevation, just more gradual going back – which wasn't obvious the first time through. Richard and Johnny stopped to pick up pieces of the broken “HumCo” barricade spotted on the hill, which will make a nice addition to the G-Pound signage collection. BTW: This was a tri-county tour as we rode in the Trinity, Siskiyou and Humboldt districts.

After crossing the Klamath via that beautiful bridge just north of Orleans, we stopped at the Orleans Market for lunch. There was some kind of kinky three-way seduction going on in the gravel turnout just across the way, which involved a greasy biker from Central Casting, a skinny guy who laughed a lot and a large, “mature” woman who ultimately sped off to the north, sans helmet, with the biker on his Harley. Mere seconds later, the happy couple came blasting back in the opposite direction. I guess it doesn't matter where you are going as long as you are “Making Good Time”.

The proprietors of the market eyed us with suspicion, but Bo put them at ease by purchasing an ice cream bar. We tucked into a delayed lunch of sandwiches and (spoiler alert!) beer. This proved to be a bit much, too late, for me as I was uncomfortable riding for the rest of the day. By then, the heat had increased, the wind was stirring a bit, and we were running on the sunny side of the road after heading out. At times, the heat reflecting off the rock walls to our right doubled the effect. In retrospect, it was clear that I was too full of food, and getting dehydrated to boot.

We agreed to gather at the bridge near Weitchpec, which turned out to be Sacred Ground for locals who cannot buy alcohol on the reservation. Conveniently, there is market just across the bridge, where no such restrictions apply. Much evidence of ceremonial consumption was sighted near the holy shrine of Turnout Rock Pile, and we were grateful to have not intruded during normal assembly hours. By then, Peter had been reunited with his helmet and shoes, which gave relief to his feet, and put in perspective his determination. Cycling shoes have stiff soles for a reason, and doing without them leads to pain you don't want to experience. Good on ya, Peter, for hanging tough.

From there, Johnny gave us clear directions and distance estimates for the run in to his family's cabin. Many in the group had never been there, while others had not been in the area for a long time. The optimistic projections for a relatively mellow ride were probably skewed by the perspective of folks who normally go this way by car. It turned out that there was quite a bit of elevation change, so whatever remaining energy we had was soon tested. Of course, the route was every bit as beautiful as might be expected. The views from high above the river, and the tree-lined road made for great riding. Again, traffic was light, but the folks who drive around there seemed to be in a big hurry and exhibited a low tolerance for visitors on bicycles. They might have shown more respect if they had known we had Richard, Clancy, Hank, Johnny and Bob backing our play.

We passed Speygee Point Lane, which somehow was reported by Hank and Clancy as being "Spooogie Street". Johnny remarked that the misnomer sounded like some disgusting fluid, which was best avoided by all. The group I fell in with included Robbie, Butch, Walter, Peter, Tom S. and Brendan. We separated in places, but came back together in time to knock back a few Bud Lights (in special edition Oakland Raider cans) when Richard and Johnny helpfully stopped to make sure we all were on track to finish. As promised, at the "8" marker, (see below) we found Ryerson Lane (who puts up street signs out in BFE?) and turned off for the Walsh cabin.

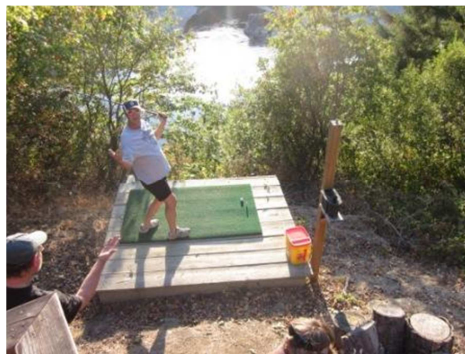




For some reason, (OK, they were lost) Jim Otto and Jim Fisher felt compelled to ride all the way to the “End of Road”, which was some miles past our destination. (Around these parts, when you see a sign indicating that the road will eventually end, that truly means you have no more room to continue, and you ought to believe it). How could it be that a direct descendant of Captain William Clark missed his location? (Otto’s mom: Doris Clark). Could just be a genetic propensity to explore, but it may have been a case of “Keeping up with the Grippers”, since we have had a few instances of riders making unplanned side trips over the years.

As might be expected, there was organized chaos as gear was offloaded, riding clothes were shed and sleeping spots were claimed. Helpfully, the cabin was equipped with plenty of bedding platforms that were comprised of sheathing placed on top of 5-gallon buckets. I opted to set up my lightweight cot on the far side of the cabin as the possibility that someone would take to snoring during the night occurred to me. Turns out I wasn’t wrong, but having foam earplugs made all the difference. (Don’t leave home without them).

Bob, Richard and several helpful others set about preparing that night’s dinner, while the rest of us began the rehydrating process. The Walsh Driving Range was open that evening, and the ensuing Gripper Golf demonstration was awe-inspiring. Hank, being by far the most avid links man, stepped up with a driver sporting a head only slightly smaller than that of Alfred E. Neuman. Despite the heckling from a raucous gallery, his mightiest swing produced a prodigious drive estimated to have traveled (at least) – four inches. Not to be deterred, Hank had another stab at it, and proceeded to propel the ball the staggering distance of (again, estimated) *five* inches! To say his “fans” were delighted does not accurately reflect the roar from the crowd. Being a man of good humor and secure ego, none of this had any ill effect on Mr. Lawrence, but it did ensure that those who followed had no performance anxiety.



As evening approached, most of us headed for the beach and a much-needed bath. The hike down to the river provided a great view of those enormous rocks lying below. More memories surfaced: A stay (forty years ago?!!) in the same location that consisted of days in the sun (naked, or mostly so, most of the time) playing Frisbee and amusing the jet-boat tourists with our heroic leaping catches of flying discs, concluding with a splash in the water. By the end of our stay, the boat captains were touting us as “local attractions” (and bad examples of youth) to their customers. No joke, we could hear them from the shore. Anyway, we had a hell of a good time, subsisted mainly on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and moved on to bigger and more responsible (if not always as satisfying) pursuits in life.

Proving Jimmy Buffet correct by “growing older, but not up”, our troop enjoyed a good, clean swim (punctuated by leaps off the rocks) with the enthusiasm and grace of those boys still residing within our current bodies. This was all the more bold, as we were still inside the landing zone of golf balls being launched from above. Anyway, what are the odds that anyone up there would be so accurate?



A couple of visitors (who know the Walsh clan) arrived in a Wing Inflatable propelled by a sharp-looking 65 hp Honda outboard. Not much chance of the salmon outrunning those guys. Johnny chatted with them for a bit, and learned they had recently seen a video chronicling much of the history of his family and their activities in the area. Johnny was unaware of this particular movie, but resolved to find out more.

As twilight arrived, Johnny and I resumed our ingrained habit of skipping rocks. The conditions were ideal, and the selection of perfectly formed stones was endless. We caught up on the events of those many years since we were last in this same location, enjoying the very same activity – and it was like no time had passed at all. True story: During that previously mentioned stay back in the 70's, both of us managed to skip rocks that went all the way across the mighty Klamath. We still have the technique, which produced some impressive results, but came to realize much more practice will be necessary to get back to the same form. When time allows, I'll be up for it...

Back at the cabin, Happy Hour was under way. The kitchen was hopping, steaks were being prepped and Dr. Riewerts fired up the ice cream maker in creative fashion. Let it never be said that we have to live life without ice cream due to locale - it simply isn't true.



Back on the deck, a domino game broke out, conversations punctuated by laughter took place everywhere, and our *raison d'être* was unmistakable. Cowboy Bob and crew soon laid out the type of communal meal for which he and they are famous and forever appreciated. Grilled steaks, salads, beans and much, much more were consumed with gusto (and beer) as we strove to refill our depleted calorie banks. (Those with even a modicum of restraint saved room for ice cream and my wife Kathy's variety of cookies). Everyone had plenty to eat under a brilliant Harvest Moon. (Which, we finally remembered, is the full moon occurring closest to the Autumnal Equinox). The skies were clear, even if our thinking wasn't.

Again, cleanup was a group effort, with the "Support Staff" doing most of the heavy lifting. Anyone who has been on these trips understands the value of these guys selflessly chipping in with their time and energy. We all eat like kings and ride relaxed because of their commitment to the Grippers. Each of them deserve a toast – with special thanks extended to the Walsh family and Jim Olson for allowing us to stay over during the height of fall fishing season.

One by one, the Grippers claimed their sleeping spots as it came time to turn in. Jim and Konrad sacked out under the canopy of a pickup, I retreated to my cot and Butch sought level ground on the Driving Range tee box. Johnny, as promised, played his jazz guitar and performed a few songs for his appreciative brethren. It was a great way to cap a memorable day.

The following morning, we rallied for an expansive breakfast. First, though, were the ritual cups of coffee – and a special performance by Hank. Somebody implored him to share his recent experience as a man-hunter, and we were very lucky indeed that he did.

It seems that some felonious jackass had, one morning, not long ago, opportunistically swiped Hank's pickup from his driveway when Mr. L stepped back inside for a moment. OK, the keys were in it and the truck was running, but c'mon, man! Some fools just have no impulse control. Hank's neighbor helpfully reported the direction taken by the suspect, and the chase was on when Hank jumped into this Better Half's car.

At some point, Hank determined the person he was seeking was best described as someone who feels compelled to perform oral sex on other males. He repeatedly made reference to this proclivity in an emphatic and convincing (if slightly more concise) manner. We, the audience, soon knew when the sobriquet C\*%@S+@#=#! would be applied for emphasis, and laughed all the harder when it was. Many of the elements of great storytelling were in play, (gestures, segues, veiled references, expressions, embellishments) so you pretty much had to be there for full effect. Veracity aside, it made for a great 30 minutes (or so), and fine way to start the morning.

There is no way to do justice to this escapade in print, so let's just say that it had a Happy Ending (no, not that kind) when the Victim, through dogged determination (and incredible luck) actually found Mr. Knob Job – and called in the Vancouver PD to make the arrest. Later discussion focused on how cool it was that El Loser Grande (he had, shockingly, many "priors") got nabbed, though we lamented how much it sucked that swiping a car has so little consequence these days. Now, I admit I am not the sharpest knife in the chandelier, but it remains a mystery to me how the theft of an asset worth thousands does not result in a charge of "Grand Theft, Auto" anymore. How about some jail time for these A-Holes? Attorneys Dunaway and Fisher, please explain. (I'm guessing it's because the jails are full of hapless tweekers, scammers and the like, but eagerly await the opinion of these Officers of the Court).

Next up was a hearty breakfast that is typical of the type consumed by outdoorsmen of all stripes. (Bacon, sausage, eggs, potatoes and a bit of fruit to round things out). Not the conventional fare of endurance athletes, but nourishment galore and in keeping with our ethic of “Eat before you are hungry, sleep before you are tired, have sex before you are horny, and drink before you are sober.” As always, the Support Staff did a fantastic job during preparation and cleanup.

Returning the cabin to its former state was done with military precision. That is to say, with the usual chaos that accompanies the stress of battle. There was quite a bit of running around and a fair amount of standing idle, but no Gripper was left behind. Ultimately, everyone gathered up their stuff and loaded the rigs under brisk conditions. Konrad was issued an exotic (pinkish in color) Italian bike that was sourced in Europe by his dad. Jim remarked that the companion floor pump of a similar hue was often eyed with suspicion until a rider needs to inflate his tires. Who says you can't have fashion and function in the same package?

Herding this many cats into a peloton takes a concerted effort – so we didn't bother. Back up on the road, Grippers departed when and as they were ready. Despite Larry's counsel, I elected to wear a jacket and gloves with fingers to start my ride. It was cool enough that this proved to be a good choice, and I was soon enough able to hand those items off to Clancy.

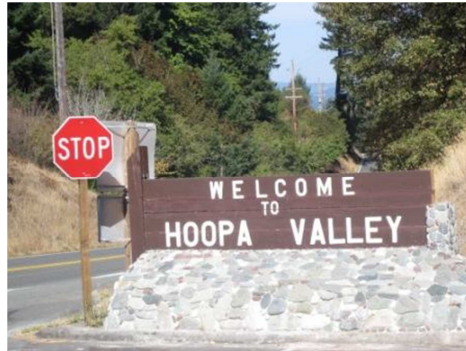
The ride back out to 96 was really nice, as the traffic was sparse and the air still. We passed the bridge leading to Bridgeville (coincidence, or clever planning?) and Butch noted that it was, as always, under construction. This hill just past that junction had overnight changed from a gentle slope when headed west to a climb requiring real effort. No matter. Fortified with camaraderie and sausage, we flew to the top and soon enough caught up with the sag crew.

As we circled up in front the grocery store to form a plan for the run into Willow Creek, a hostile local who made a point of driving his “dually” pickup perilously close to any and all cyclists was heard to say: “Goddamn cyclists! First they take up the whole road, now they take up the whole parking lot”. Understanding that getting into a battle of wits with a half-armed opponent will lead nowhere productive, we let that slide. Besides, we were embarking on another great day, while that fool had succeeded only in pissing himself off.

At that point, we were only about a dozen miles from Hoopa and the best part of riding on Highway 96 was just ahead. Smooth pavement, awesome views of the river (often 400 feet below) and the kind of “twisties” that meant we could frequently blast through at speeds posted for motorists. I got a real kick out of diving into tight corners at a pace that kept me ahead of the few cars approaching from the rear. Folks who don't ride often assume (I know, because they have told me many times) that high speeds on skinny tires mean a hazardous lack of traction. We know it's really a matter of physics, where the amount of grip on a lightweight conveyance shod with high-tech tires and two built-in gyroscopes (wheels) is more than adequate. All you have to do is watch the pro riders making those 100 KM/HR descents on the Grand Tours for proof positive. That stated, I have resolved to keep my downhill runs at 30-35 MPH, maximum.

Riding along, I found myself blissfully alone in spots. I took this opportunity to sit up and pedal with my arms out in “airplane” fashion. Minimal tilts to either side affected smooth arcs in my path, and rekindled the sense of joy in cycling we found as young kids. Try it sometime, you'll remember.

Our reverse journey through Hoopa was sort of like the day before, but made even more clear the best and worst of the area. This is one of the aspects of bicycling that riders “get”. You have more time to observe, (not just see) smell (that’s a two-edged deal, for sure) and *experience* your surroundings in ways missed when driving. By then, the day was heating up, though there wasn’t much evidence the community was stirring.



A stop at the rest area south of town brought the group back together. Great pains were made to emphasize the routing for the rest of the day. We were to ride over to Willow Creek and meet at the golf course. The idea was to stay off Highway 299, and get some lunch in a quiet setting. All of this was good planning, as the location of the Golf & Country Club is somewhat obscure – especially for those who aren’t into Pasture Pool. (Hank, of course, has played the track before, and recalled a day out there with Jackie Walsh when golfing took a backseat to having a good time).

Given that this was the “Fall Ride”, and it was taking place in the usual area, we were still blessed with warm, sunny weather. In fact, it was getting a tad hot, but nothing out of the ordinary. By the time we got to our mid-day stop, a bit of hydration was in order. A couple of Gripper Nation Emissaries were dispatched to the bar in an effort to explain our intentions to the staff. That is to say, we were about to overrun the back patio and order pitchers of microbrew and appetizers to augment our own lunchrations.

By then, it was known that we would be facing the largest climbs of our weekend in the next few hours. Larry observed that we were mostly in good spirits due to our ignorance of the true difficulty of the ascent. He further stated that he knew how he was likely to feel, (“not good”, which was rather ominous coming from a big-time cyclist) and that we would be well advised to pace ourselves. Knowing how crappy I felt after lunch the day before, and that throwing in the towel was always an option, I decided to relax and have a few beers.

Brendan took the opportunity to check his phone as we were by then back in cell range. His buddy in Eureka sent a message of inspiration (and a photo that would likely be rated “For Mature Audiences Only”) which would soon serve as my pedaling mantra: “Don’t be a pussy”! I also took a moment to check in with my wife and let her know we were having a great time – and that the big bag of cookies she had sent with me was enjoyed and appreciated by all. A dive into our coolers produced plenty of food for lunch, and the hostess laid out platters of onion rings and deep-fried mushrooms along with draft beers. I had my doubts as to how well all of that would stay down once we started humping up the hills, but indulged anyway. A few glasses of water went down between beers, so some balance was achieved. (My story, anyway).

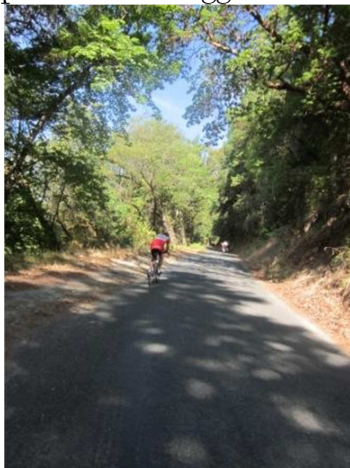


After we settled up with the bar, Cowboy Bob headed back to the G-Pound to offload the remaining provisions and prepare for dinner. As the riders assembled, the final stage of our latest “Gran Fondo” (roughly translated from Italian as *The Big Ride*) was again outlined by Reed and Larry, who had both done it previously – and lived to tell about it. We were advised in the strongest terms to stay hydrated and keep a grip on our heart rate. It was quite clear by then that the “Bait and Switch” was in full effect, as the run-up to this year’s event clearly stated that our route would most definitely be easier than those past. We were soon to see that the road over Waterman Ridge makes Fickle Hill look like “a bit of an incline”.

Somehow, a gap formed immediately, and Tom Shields was left turning left out of the golf course as the rest of us went right. Before long, he was corralled and returned to the field of non-competitors. Conditions as we started were quite comfortable, and the road was nicely shaded. No cars were present, so we hogged the whole road. (Take *that*, Mr. Grumpy Dually Pickup Driver)! The sag vehicles were strategically spread out to account for the varying levels of climbing energy remaining amongst us.

Soon enough, (too soon?) we hit the start of the climb. I’ll state this right now: There was no way in Hell I thought I was going to make the whole enchilada given the way I felt the first day and what I had just eaten for lunch. Being a Gripper, however, means never having to say you won’t try. The idea here is that if everyone else is giving it a go, you have little to lose by jumping in. No matter. There is no judging on these outings, and everyone has good, OK and better days.

As the best of luck would have it, the road, though steep and narrow, was in full shade. I fell in with Rob and Tommy as Mitch and Jim O. bolted far ahead. Again, a yo-yo effect was taking place as we struggled to find our respective spin rates.



Not long after, I saw something I never expected to see: Larry, Reed and Butch within sight. These guys typically leave me behind, so it was heartening to realize that I was keeping a decent pace. In fact, I was feeling pretty good. Unexpected, but welcome. You learn to take what the cycling gods bestow on a given day, and enjoy the moment. Before long, that trio paused at the junction to Horse Linto camp ground, as Peter, Quigley and I joined them. It appeared there were only 16 miles remaining, but this was anything but the mid-point of our effort. It was along about this time I began to wonder: What possible purpose could there have been for constructing a road up there? It's pretty much between Nowhere and Not Much, so what was the motivation? And who was Waterman, anyway? You ponder the most inane things when you are trying to catch your breath and get the heart rate back down into double digits...



Taking a cue from Butch, we handed off our helmets to Johnny with the notion that he would meet us with them at the summit. There is not much chance of damaging one's noggin when tipping over at 1-5 MPH – which is a pretty good pace on that hill – while there is a high likelihood that the discomfort caused by baking your brain through wearing a shell (no matter how well ventilated) would lead to a lack of concentration for the task at hand. We were in full sun now, and would remain so for the most of the remaining miles.

Over the next hour we climbed and had a few brief conversations. The strongest forged ahead, while we others proceeded within our capabilities. Butch noted that it was difficult to perform an effective “weave” across the steepest sections of the road as it was so narrow. This tactic has served me well in the past even though it means I cover more distance (OK, probably not much) as a result. I like to think there is some benefit, so please don't tell me if there isn't.

Keeping in mind that these were the only climbing miles I had experienced (other than the previous day) since the TUC, (my daily commute is quite flat, and after riding a newly increased distance to work nearly every day this year, I didn't seem to find any time for recreational hill climbing on the weekends) I was really surprised at how well it was going. Discretion being the better part of working one's ass off, I also elected to walk my tired bike in a few places while my breathing and heart rate settled down. Some folks were ready to sag by then, and it made sense in context. You don't want to be the guy who is so burnt out that he is unable to participate in the post-ride “Awards Ceremony” or our “Gripper Indoctrination” process, which is not to be missed. Besides, we aren't likely to be handing out the polka dot jersey for the Top Climber any time soon. In any case, Johnny was Johnny-on-the-spot when it was time help out. It also helped that he kept us optimistically misinformed as to the distance to the summit. I guess “summit” is the equivalent of a carrot on the end of the proverbial stick when it comes to cycling.

Eventually reaching (Not!)the aforementioned summit, we convened a group of nine riders. Hank and Clancy were helpfully waiting with beer, while Richard and Johnny provided water and returned our helmets. By this time Otto and Mitch were probably showered and relaxing out on the deck of the Gripper Estate. (Jim later provided a helmet-cam video of their descent into TV, and the velocity of those two heading down was as impressive as it was alarming).



Fisher the Younger had impressed all by keeping pace despite no recent saddle time on a bike. He claimed his level of fitness stemmed from vigorous hiking, but we all know there are different muscles involved, and that his youth and mental toughness had as much to do with it as anything. A true Gripper in the making, and, if I am not mistaken, the first second-generation member to be added. There is hope in that thar gene pool, fellas!

It soon was all too clear that we still had more elevation ahead. To be fair, it wasn't more than a few hundred feet aggregate, but it was a bit of shock to ride around a corner only to see that the arc of the road was clearly uphill. Oh well, it was nice and cool at that elevation, and the views to the east provided a pleasant distraction. The true turning point for our final descent was at the junction to Groves Prairie, which would only be nine miles in the wrong direction, so odds are that one of us will eventually end up there and be able to report back on what is to be seen in the area.

Reed helpfully pointed out that there are a number of “whoop-de-do” sections well hidden in the shadows of the road down to the bridge just above Trinity Village. I was glad he did, as the potential for being thrown off line in a corner is real, which could mean an unplanned flight over the bank and into the woods. Nobody wants to be responsible for the need to marshal a search party as evening falls, so keeping on the pavement is important when one is tired and riding through shadows on unfamiliar ground. Thanks for the “Head's Up”, Reed.

Figuring my usual pace under these types of circumstances, I settled in for a 20 -25 minute cruise over the final eight downhill miles. Some went faster, some were behind, but I'm pretty certain nobody enjoyed this bit more than I did. As much as I love riding with everyone, there is still a special quality to being solo for a bit and this was the perfect time and place for that. It was also nice to get a sense of what lies uphill from the point where we normally turn around when doing that traditional short morning ride to the outer edge of the village. Stopping at the bridge has been our habit due to time constraints, (and maybe because Danny Walsh just doesn't feel like doing any more than that) but scheduling for a run up to that first junction will be something to keep in mind when we come back for another visit. C'mon, Uncle Dan, how bad could it hurt?



Other than the fast guys, who were long since finished, the remaining survivors stopped for a group photo at the entry to Trinity Village. It had been another great day on the latest epic Gripper Fall Ride. A scene like this ought to inspire those who couldn't make it to do everything possible to participate the next time around.



As congratulations for a ride well ridden were shared at the Gripper Estate, a recounting of miles covered and incidents avoided was shared. There was only one flat tire reported (though not confirmed) and the only "crash" that took place happened on Day One, Minute One. Nobody got lost (uh, unless they are still out there and we forgot about them) and nobody suffered anything worse than the typical slight headache and predictable mild saddle-soreness.

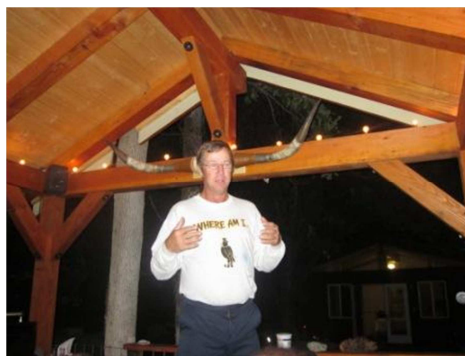
Much use was made of the outdoor shower that was installed adjacent to this summer's newly constructed "Maple Creek Suite". Freshly scrubbed Grippers were soon relaxing and enjoying some well-deserved adult beverages. As daylight waned, dinner was being prepared and we settled in for one final night of enjoyment. The food, as it had been throughout, was gratefully and thoroughly consumed in an all-out effort to finish off the remainingsupplies. Again, our sincerest thanks were extended to Bob and all of the Support Staff for their efforts.

Before long, the Chairman made a few announcement/pronouncements wherein we all were commended for participating and encouraged to keep up our unwavering support for our common causes. Tom has done a great job of keeping everyone on track, so another "State of the Grip" speech was essential to enumerating our recent successes and pending challenges.

Next up was the induction of the Gripper Class of 2012. Good sports all, honorees P. Livengood, T. Shields, K. Fisher, B. McKenny and W. Hallanan were cloaked in the sacred/silly beach shirt and anointed by Mr. Mathews, Chairman Quigley and Big Jim Otto into the fold. Swearing on the Eureka High School 1973 yearbook to uphold as many of the Gripper traditions as are humanly possible for as long as they all shall live, and capping that with a shot of tequila, each was then presented with the official Gripper Badge of Membership. Somehow, we were unable to leverage that poignant moment into hard cash from the newly joined, but that doesn't mean they are exempt from further future solicitations. In any event, our roster was significantly enhanced by the newest members, and they will long be glad to have been invited to join. (I'm not sure the penalties for arriving at future Gripper functions without their badges were fully explained to each, but based on how that went for at least one of the Senior Members, the new guys would be well advised to avoid a similar faux pas). Besides, you can't get those cool attendance stamps provided by Big Jim for your badge to commemorate our events if you don't show up - and show up prepared.

Coinciding with the weekend festivities was the birthday of Larry Kluck. We serenaded him heartily before he made a wish (that we would stop?) and blew out the single candle on top. Larry graciously shared his cake, and even more generously revealed that he had a present for each of us: As a gesture to permanently ensure our fealty to the brotherhood, he had arranged with the owners of the new, nearby tattoo parlor to ink us up with our logo. There was some suspicion that Larry was just needling us, but you do not want to get into a debate with such a keen legal mind after shots of tequila and several rounds of beer.

After that, we were granted another live episode of the “Hank Show”. As with that morning, Hank was in fine form. This time we got the inside scoop on how Hank, having done “nothing wrong” was nonetheless escorted off an airplane in New Jersey. His nemesis this time was an overdramatic male flight attendant, who, in common with the adversary from the stolen truck story, is believed by Mr. Lawrence to have a fondness for oral sexual encounters with other men.



Needless to say, you can't make this shit up, so there is no doubt Hank told nothing but the truth, so help him God. Standing on a chair and enacting to a large extent the gestures and inflections of the actions and words that were exchanged in the heat of battle, Hank had our undivided attention. This was the kind of theater that should end up on the storytelling stage of “The Moth Radio Hour”. (If you don't know about it, look it up on Public Radio). We were assured that there was “no profiling” going on with respect to the Steward, but it was clear that some negative assumptions were made. Keep in mind: Not all assumptions prove to be false.

On the other hand, those making negativesuppositions about Hank didn't need to have proof or logic on their side. Once he was deemed a nuisance, there was no winning. I didn't matter that Hank was standing up for What is Right, (in this case, an unfair policy decision that really concerned another passenger) he was going to be ejected from the game. Eventually, four large black police officers (with, evidently, not much else to do) were summoned to make the point that the ultimate arbiters of airport security are those who wear some kind of uniform.

The good news (besides all the laughs we had) was that Hank (as far as he and we know) was not assigned to the mysteriously administered “No Fly” list. That would mean that the terrorists have won another round, as we all would have one less chance for someone to stand up and bitch-slap their swarthy mugs the next time they try to take their bullshit to the skies. Think about it: Do you believe for one minute that a guy with Hank's credentials would sit idly by while some jihadist tries to foist off some twisted shit in the name of Allah? Not fuckin' likely, man. Now if he could just get over on those fairy flight attendants...

Things wound down from there as there was no way to go up from that level. The fortunate many had made it through another Gripper weekend in good health and great spirits. The majority turned in at the compound while some went to their own homes. (Steve had to leave before the evening festivities, but expressed his appreciation, and vowed to join us again as he had thoroughly enjoyed the last two Fall Ride events).

Butch led the way down Moose's Trail (mostly by instinct, but there was quite a bit of moonlight) as the Fishers, Johnny, Mitch and I followed. We were persuasive enough that Johnny reluctantly agreed to play some guitar for us. His claim that performing in the dark after consuming several drinks was somehow not ideal had merit, but how is that any different than the shows we saw in the field house at Humboldt State before it was updated? Besides, under the night sky down by the Trinity river is better than 99.9% of the usual venues.

Anyway, Johnny didn't just play. He also gave us some of the history behind his skills, described the various styles he practiced, demonstrated a few licks from the likes of Chet Atkins and Doc Watson and generally kicked ass in his own low-key way. One highlight was a rendition of "Reach Across the Sky", which he learned from one of his Yale buddies. Johnny related how he had played this song for the author after seeing him many years after it was first composed and performed. It seems his friend had mostly forgotten ever writing the song, and was very pleased to hear it brought back to life by Mr. Walsh. Asked if he had any original material, we were then treated to a collaborative tune called "Jabberwocky". No explanation as to the title, but some really great stuff it was.



These are exactly the types of moments that epitomize all that is cool about Gripperdom. Everyone has something to contribute and happy to share with our circle. Johnny is much too modest to take his full share of credit, but he certainly made the weekend better for us all. As you might imagine, that night's sleep was as good as it gets when you are on the road.

The next day we got rolling at a mellow pace. That is, until Mitch broke out his homemade shootin' iron. Much as Walter Smith is into the black powder rifle scene, Mitch constructed his own weapon and occasionally puts it to use. Several guys took turns slinging lead balls across the river, which caused a few from the G-Pound to come down to see what all the explosions were about. The mergansers were spared (this time) but the far bank took a bit of a beating. This all meant that I can once again report that "shots were fired and blood was spilled" over the course of the weekend. How much of each is irrelevant, it simply reflects the manly truth of our most recent escapades. Somewhere, Hunter S. Thompson is smiling...

I soon hit the road after the inevitable goodbyes. Butch was left to tidy up his place as another great season at Trinity Village came to a close. Summer was in the rear-view mirror and Grippers from near and far were headed back to their everyday lives. (Otto had cleverly built in a one day buffer before starting his new job. Good thinking, Jim). For those who made it, more great memories were added to the bank. The rest of y'all can use this recap as incentive to join in next time. Remember: Every ride is the best because they all are new and different.

**The following is where all in attendance are requested to add at least a few personal observations for posterity. Please do, when you reply to the author.**

**Finally, do us all the favor of correcting the inevitable mistakes found herein.**

BTW: It is no negative reflection on you that you have read down this far into the document. The beauty of the written word is that, unlike most speech, it can be filtered, ignored entirely or skipped over as the reader sees fit. Besides, I managed to keep the whole thing under 10K words.

**Ride notes:** We had three riders named Jim participate. (Otto, Fisher & Hill).  
There were also three masons in attendance. (Richard, Brendan & Mitch).  
A trio of Mill Valley residents attended: (Butch, Peter & Reed).  
No late night runs to Simon Legree's were reported. (Are we slipping)?  
Unbelievably, there were significant quantities of tequila left untouched. (WTF)  
Total distance covered: 120 miles (Estimated).  
Elevation conquered: More than anticipated.  
The climb up to Waterman Ridge was estimated (by Larry) to be "a category 4"!!??