

GRIPPER FALL RIDE -- September 26 – 28, 2014

RIDE RECAP - EPIC!!

-- Wow! Again. It has taken me two days to catch up with the reality that happens back home when we are in the lands and hands of the Gripper. The term "Epic" was used so many times this past weekend that we should call this ride "The Epic Ride" as compared with the Moonstone Ride, or Shasta Ride. Those of you reading this email will vividly remember what I describe, and those of who were not able to join - I hope I can accurately paint the scene. Speaking of scene, the Gripper director of media productions has gathered over 10 GB of pictures and video, so prepare yourselves for plenty of color and sound of the 2014 GFR.

The gathering started normally (for us anyway) - the afternoon cocktail river cruise on Thursday, followed by the first magic of the Walter Smith kitchen. (Specific kudos will be at the bottom of the email because they are so numerous.) Grippers kept arriving throughout the evening: Danny Braud showing up with a handle of homemade libation, actually 2 bottles. This was needed later in the weekend festivities as a demonstration of one's strength and determination. Brenden McKinney came to the GFR gathering EVENTHOUGH he almost died last winter. So he drives up late and sleeps in his truck, with all his scars and steel pins. (I slept on a bed.)

Friday morning always seems to be total chaos, and it pretty much is. But we made it out of the compound only a little late headed to Weaverville and the headwaters of the 2014 GFR. When we finally rolled into town the Gripper Convoy numbered 14, our parole officer, Scotty was waiting for us at the city limits on his bike and gave us an escort to the Joss House. The Grippers took complete control of the parking lot, intersection, and of course the bathroom. We were met there by other members who were joining from all directions; Steve and Jeff from the west, Johnny and Matt from the north, and Eric Ohde from the east. We were also met by "Sally" from the Trinity County newspaper syndicate. We duly impressed Sally with our history, organization, and of course virility and studliness. Pictures, interviews, and several blasts from the Chairman's whistle finally concluded and we were off. - Only about 15 minutes late!

The only crash of the weekend was actually a fall. Scott needed to stop after about 3 blocks down the road and couldn't get un-clipped: no damage or blood. The ride along highway 3 heading north was spectacular; traffic was extremely light, temperatures were mild, and we were in and out of the shade all the way. There was more climbing than advertised and the peloton's average speed was about 13 mph. We finally arrived at Alpen Cellars which turned out to be an oasis of green lawns, free wine, and a very welcoming host, it was 45 miles so far, and 4500 of climbing through all of the rollers. Bob B, Jeff Cohn, and Larry arrived there about an hour ahead of everyone else - no surprise. We were running late, so the COB suggested that we SAG back to our accommodations for the next two days, Josephine Creek Lodge. Dinner needed to get started, late in the day etc. Of course, only 10 riders listened to our august leader and the rest took off on the bikes after having several tastes of wine. They had 22 miles to get to the "end of the pavement." Of course once again, several riders (Larry, Bob, Jeff) insisted on riding another 20 miles over gravel and rocks to the lodge while most everyone else finally climbed in the SAG trucks. Our perseverance and determination to reach JCL was richly rewarded with spectacular views of the Trinity Alps, the majesty of Saw-tooth ridge, and the complete private serenity of the JCL. Even the pictures we had seen did not really prepare us for this beauty and special setting.

DAY TWO - why leave this place? This was the question that was tearing through the minds of several Grippers; stay and hike or ride up Scott Mountain and on to the Etna Brewery. Hmmmm, what to do? Well, several members did stay and had no regrets. Those that did ride were faced with 17 miles of constant uphill grade. But wait, it got better; as we approached the bottom of Scott Mt, the sign advised that for the next 6 miles there would be steep switch-backs and vehicles with trailers were not advised. This stretch was a combination of Panther Gap, Waterman Ridge, and Fickle Hill. Oh yeah man, it was tough. However, the views were incredible and the sense of accomplishment at the top was a reminder of why we ride. Wonderful. The Grippers all gathered there; some eating, some drinking (Hank had arrived as planned at 9 am at Coffee Creek AND had brought a large bottle of Pendleton Whiskey) and some trying to get warm. Larry was fighting a bad case of hypothermia - probably because he had been waiting so long for the rest of us. Well, what goes up must come down, and it was time for the 7 mile very steep down grade toward Callahan. After blowing through Callahan, we proceeded on toward our destination. It was like a horse heading to the barn; multiple pace lines and some big speeds through the meadow lands. Even though the mileage for this day was only about 45, everyone was spent because of the climb, high speed pace lines, and the strong headwind which was trying to prevent the Grippers from our assigned destiny. The weather was fantastic as we rolled into Etna and eased our bodies into the welcoming atmosphere of the Etna Brewery and Pub. Several Grippers who couldn't make this Epic Ride acknowledged the accomplishments of their fellow Grippers and had called ahead and put \$200 on our bar tab. A very strong statement for all of us to remember and emulate in the future. An hour and a half later the Grippers headed back to JCL. However, as expected a couple of the trucks, including Hank's had to stop at the Callahan Emporium for a beer. Alas, no shots, beer and wine only. One strange thing that happened on the way back, which I cannot figure out: Hank's truck with Hank, Jim O, and Perry Yorks was following the MDC properties truck (in which I was located), but after passing an outdoor wedding in Coffee Creek, the truck disappeared from the rearview mirror and was about 45 minutes later getting into the JCL lodge. Suspicions had something to do with wedding crashing, but nothing was confirmed.

Champagne toasts led to handing out Gripper badges for the new faces and GFR T-shirts. Another outstanding meal was served from the kitchen magicians followed by port and cigars for some and the melodious tones of the Walsh guitar. (Danny, this is where the Kumbaya started)

Kudos: Absolutely first, Kudos go out to Cathy (Lazio) for allowing the Grippers to use the JCL facilities. As everyone would admit - Epic! Thank you so much! Also to Johnny for suggesting that the GFR include JCL, somehow. Well, we really pulled it off. A huge success. Thank you Johnny and Cathy. Second, A huge thank you to Walter and Oscar, and everyone else who helped out in the kitchen (under Walter's direction): Joe R, George Y and many others. As you know, this is a very tough assignment (but Walter volunteered.) Walter showed huge creativity yet simplicity; a Caesar salad but with homemade dressing; New York steaks sliced from side of beef, dry rubbed BBQ chicken cooked in his wood pellet BBQ stove; full pork loins that he stuffed with apples and rolled; fresh peach cobbler with ice cream; and an omelet bar with egg "pancakes." Lots and lots hard work by the Smith brothers. Thank you.

Free Beer for the Grippers?? What? Yes, that's right, Peter Livengood, Reed Minuth, and Tom Shields pre-paid the Gripper Bar tab at the Etna Brewery, up to \$200. Wow! That was great. Thank you all.

The Sargent at Arms, Mister Otto to you, has consistently come through with our badges and participation stickers. The Grippers need those badges of honor. Thank you Jim.

Rob Dunaway lead the effort to bring something different this year, a participation T-shirt. This concept started weeks ago and all his planning was executed perfectly. Thank you Rob, I'm sure these will be coveted by others. So Grippers don't lose track of yours.

A big Thank-you goes out to Eric Ohde and his father for allowing the Gripper vehicles to leak oil on his property while we rode the wilds of Trinity County. He also provided an important SAG vehicle which was absolutely required to navigate the road to JCL He also stayed at the lodge and shut it down while the rest of us headed back to Weaverville to grab the cars and head home. Thank you Eric for coming through so strong.

SAG Drivers - I know you may have heard this before, BUT the Grippers cannot have a Fall Ride without you. Your help is incalculable, in every facet; hauling all the crap, handing out water / energy bars, helping in the kitchen, and so on. Thank you -(will you do it again?)

As I sign off, I am already thinking about our next gathering. The Snow Fest in February? I hope it's before that. Love you all, thanks for being there,
COB, Tom