

Adventure Rides in the

Santa Cruz Mountains, Mt. Hamilton, Sierra



Ray Hosler

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**Santa Cruz Mountains,
Mt. Hamilton, Sierra**

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There is some overlap of content between this publication and *Once Upon a Ride...* This is a compilation of three magazines I published in 2010. This publication contains more articles on local history and ride routes.

Cover: Jobst Brandt leads Peter Johnson over a slide that occurred on Alpine Road in March 1988, repaired by Jobst and friends. Back: Glorious August day on Tunitas Creek Road, 2008.

CONTENTS

6 Gazos Creek Road

Heavy winter rains turn ride into hike

10 Sea to Skyline

Vain attempt to find a way from ocean to
Big Basin

12 Corn Roast

We cool our heels in East Waddell Creek

16 Romancing the Moon

A moonlight ride up Old La Honda Road

18 Alpine Road

Life and death of the bike road to Skyline

22 Loma Prieta

Riding the wildlands of southern Santa
Clara County

28 Haul Road

A former train route deep in the redwoods

34 From the Publisher

Memories never age



Skyline Boulevard, near high point at 3,100 feet, looking toward the Pacific Ocean.



Gazos Creek Washout

APRIL 18, 1982

RIDERS: Jobst Brandt, Jim Westby, Ray Hosler, Ted Mock, Tom Ritchey, Dave Faust, Marc Brandt (Jobst's nephew), Tim Louis, Frank ?, Tom Sullivan, Jan Causey, Unknown rider.

Route: Palo Alto, California: Up Alpine Road; south on Skyline Boulevard to Highway 9, down

9 to Highway 236; up China Grade; down Johansen Road; down Gazos Creek Road; Cloverdale Road north; up Pescadero Road to Highway 84 and return home; 75 miles.

WEATHER: Clear, warm.

TIRE/MECHANICAL FAILURE: Ted—flat; Jobst—flat; Dave—broken rear derailleur; Marc—bent rear wheel.



Riders assemble as they come off Johansen Road onto Gazos Creek Road.

A raindrop isn't a potent force, but when it marshals its diminutive form into a downpour, it can be deadly. Man's creations become Tinker Toys in a deluge. Tall redwoods uproot and crash downstream with boulders.

This winter the Santa Cruz Mountains felt the fury of the raindrop army, and riders suffered the results of a wet season on their sacred ground.

Riders gathered at Jobst's house for a fair-weather ride. Jan arrived without Peter, her boyfriend [and later husband], who was home in bed. Tom Ritchey waited for us on Skyline, hoping his pregnant wife, Katie, wouldn't deliver while he was away.

STUNG BY A BEE

A rider on his first Jobst Ride stood next to his bike, with its distinctive fat aluminum tubes, as Jobst and others burst outside onto the front

lawn. Jobst looked at the rider's shiny fat-tube bike and bellowed, "It looks like your bike was stung by a bee!"

Jobst took our photo standing on the front porch, and then we were off. Right after crossing the railroad tracks on Alma, a police cruiser behind us blared, "Stay to the right of the road!" But everyone was intent on crossing El Camino Real. We blasted across to Stanford Shopping Center.

The ride went without incident until the upper reaches of Alpine Road, where we saw the first evidence of winter's heavy rains. A large section of road had collapsed, as though from an earthquake. We dismounted and walked our bikes across the sinkhole.

After assembling at the intersection of Page Mill Road and Skyline Boulevard, where Tom joined us, we headed south on Skyline. We stopped at the fire station to tank up on water. At Highway 9, Tom Sullivan, the mystery rider, and Frank turned left back to the valley.

Jobst began his usual furious descent, with everyone else going for the draft on a 40 mph joy ride. We had the good



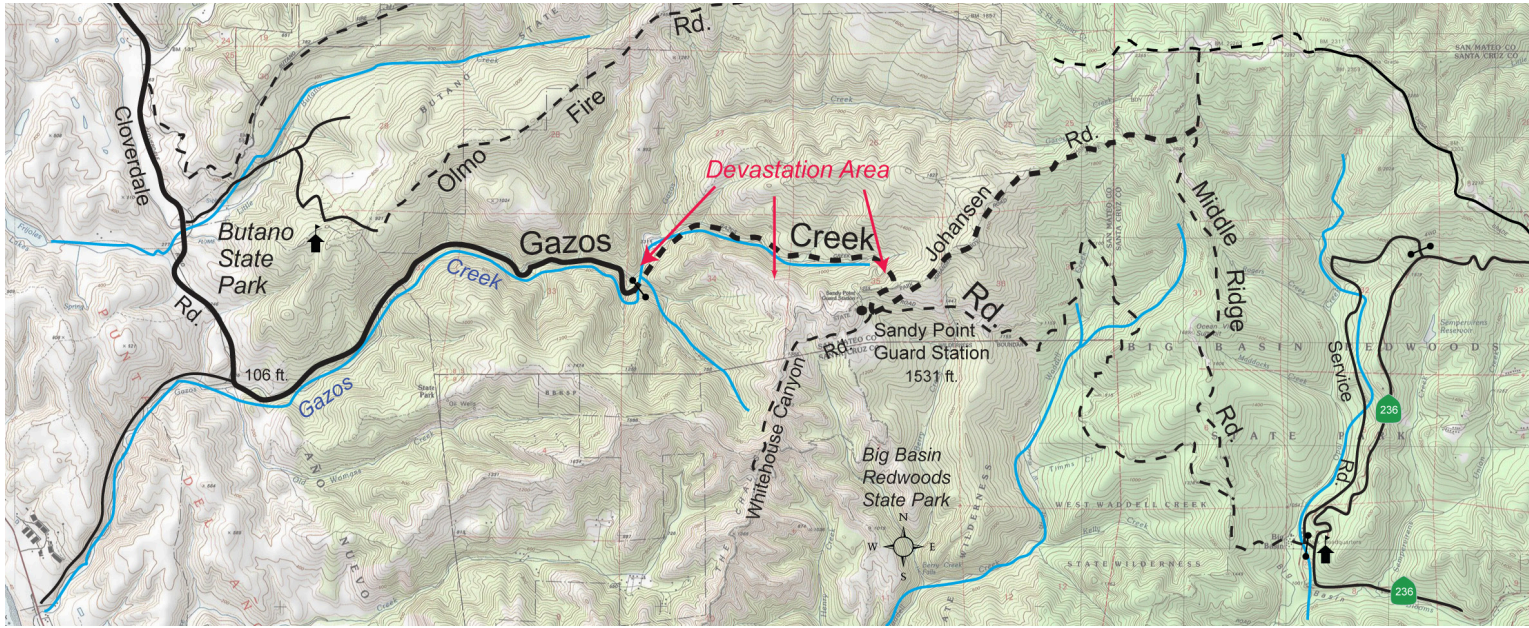
Ted Mock makes his way down Gazos Creek Road.

fortune of riding on Hwy 236 free of traffic. The road was closed to repair a landslide, but passable on bikes. Just before China Grade, Jobst amazed everyone by dismounting and carrying his bike up the side of a hill. We thought we could beat Jobst, so we picked up the pace and raced around the curve. Jobst won handily, much to our chagrin.

JOHANSEN ROAD

As we climbed China Grade, the Pacific Ocean and a vast redwood forest came into view. The greens and blues painted an unforgettable tapestry on this warm, sunny Spring day.

We rode to nearly the end of China Grade before heading left down Johansen's, an old logging road



[now part of Big Basin State Park]. Considering the heavy rains, it was in good shape. Ted flatted. I stayed to help while the other riders went ahead. We met the group at Gazos Creek Road, where Jobst was busily straightening Marc's bent wheel, and Jim was nursing a sore knee from a fall.

[Gazos Creek Road is a steep dirt road linking Big Basin park with Cloverdale Road. It's a favorite route for today's mountain bike rider, but in 1982 the only riders who took it were Jobst and friends.]

WHERE'S THE ROAD?

What followed can only be described as a nightmare vision of nature's fury unleashed. The road vanished, replaced by a raging creek and downed



Watch out for newts crossing the road in winter.

redwoods. If not for the creek, we would never have known where to go. In the brief rideable section, Dave bent his rear derailleur roller wheels when a stick jammed them. It didn't matter at this point that he couldn't ride, because we walked the next mile, picking our way through fallen trees. We scrambled over logs and boulders,



Ted, Jim, and Dave follow the creek.

wondering if we would ever reach a rideable road.

After a while we came to a clearing and took a break. Jobst and Tom noticed Dave's difficulties. When Dave said his bike was broken, Tom looked concerned, having built Dave's bike. He became visibly relieved when he found out it was just the derailleur.

Jobst and Tom set to fixing Dave's derailleur. Tom grabbed a couple of large rocks and pounded on the roller cages. Using the tools of cave men, they operated on a highly refined piece of steel manufactured halfway around the world. They fixed it well enough that Dave could grind out a turn or two on his cranks.

NEWTs FROLIC

Jobst walked to an inviting pool of water and looked down. "I see a couple of newts," he said. Marc went over to investigate, coaxing the newts into activity. "Don't worry," Jobst said, "they have to come up for air."

[Speaking of newts, on one ride Jobst put a newt into the water bottle of Nikola Farac-Ban or "Bike Barb," a well-known San Francisco rider. He was not amused.]

More scrambling followed, Ted dropping his bike down a steep cliff when he made a bad choice in the tangle of trees. We used our bikes as crutches, clambering log to log. Along the way, we saw a beautiful waterfall. I spotted a tiny red snake.



Dave works on his bike as Ted and Jim look on.

BLEATING SHEEP

At the final gate, the road finally became a road, but we still had to cross the raging Gazos Creek where a bridge had washed out. We walked across the creek and then encountered a herd of bleating sheep. On the flat section before Cloverdale Road we tried to avoid huge mud holes, but to no avail.

Soon we were covered in mud. Dave struggled along as riders pushed him. At Cloverdale Road, Dave found a ride to Loma Mar, where we'd meet again and Jobst would make more permanent repairs. After chowing down in Loma Mar, we headed up Pescadero Road and home.

From Sea to

MAY 21, 1983

RIDERS: Jobst Brandt, Ray Hosler, Tom Holmes, Tom Ritchey, Parker McComas, Bill Robertson, Paul Mittelstadt

ROUTE: From Palo Alto, California: up Old LaHonda Road, down Old LaHonda Road to Hwy 84; Pescadero Road, Cloverdale Road, Hwy 1, south to Waddell Creek; Skyline to the Sea Trail; to Big Basin Redwoods State Park; Hwy 236, Hwy 9, Skyline Boulevard, Page Mill Road. 90 miles.

WEATHER: Cool and foggy, then clear and warm; then cool and foggy on the coast, then clear and warm in Big Basin.

TIRE/MECHANICAL FAILURE: Paul—flat.



Paul Mittelstadt walks across one of many landslides next to Waddell Creek.

I knew this was going to be a crazy ride when Jobst said before leaving that he had no idea where he was going. By the time we reached Loma Mar store, our numbers had dwindled and we still didn't know where we were headed. Finally, I suggested Santa Cruz and then we were off.

On Cloverdale, Jobst spotted a turkey vulture dining on a disemboweled cow (still alive). Otherwise the ride went without incident. Even Cloverdale was in great shape [it wasn't paved then]. It was foggy on the coast so Jobst started having other ideas. When we reached Waddell Creek, he suggested we search out a trail to Big Basin State Park.

Everything went smoothly at first. The trail—
an old logging road—climbed gently through the

redwoods, Monterey pine, and marshlands. We saw the occasional hiker, too. After several miles we came to a sign that said the trail was closed from recent flooding. That was Jobst's cue for another "adventure ride."

LANDSLIDE BLOCKS WAY

In less than a mile we came to a landslide blocking the trail. There was no way through except to go around and up a hill, which we did for about a mile. When we arrived at the creek there was no way across but to

walk our bikes through. The road

Skyline Boulevard

steepened gradually, but we still hadn't reached the steep climb we knew was coming. At the junction with Skyline to the Sea Trail, Jobst chose a road that went to the right.



Tom carefully walks his bike over the bridge.

It was a good dirt road, but it didn't last for long. The road became more and more overgrown. At one point we walked our bikes over a wooden plank with a 15-foot drop into Waddell Creek. We left the creek behind as the climb continued. Finally the road ended in a grassy area. A dead deer lay nearby under a cloud of flies. Jobst climbed into a thicket of young redwoods, searching for the road. We had encountered a massive landslide.

Soon Jobst was yelling to Tom as they probed for a way through. Would this modern-day Davy Crockett find his way? Not this time. Jobst concluded that the landslide was impenetrable. We had to go back.

There was only one way into the park, and that was on the narrow Skyline to the Sea Trail. [The trail is closed to bicycles, but in 1983 mountain bikes were scarce.] The trail was hardly rideable, so we walked along with the hikers, towing our bikes.

BERRY CREEK FALLS

In the early going we came across Berry Creek Falls; waterfalls are rare in the Santa Cruz Mountains. A man sat on a bench admiring the view. "Don't you wish you could take that home with you," he said. I did the next best thing and took a picture. After several miles of climbing, the trail crested and we began a swift descent.

At park headquarters we had a bite to eat before the climb on Hwy 236 and 9 in the shimmering heat, a fitting end to another ride in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

JUNE 7, 1981

RIDERS: Jobst Brandt, Jim Westby, Rick Humphreys, Ray Hosler, Parker McComas, Roger Leff, Tom Ritchey, Tom Holmes, Dan Green

ROUTE: From Palo Alto, California: up Alpine Road to Page Mill Road; south on Skyline Boulevard, down Hwy 9, Hwy 236 to Big Basin State Park; Last Chance Road to Swanton Road and town of Swanton, returning same route. 88 miles.

WEATHER: Warm and clear

TIRE/MECHANICAL FAILURE: Rick—flat; Ray—broken rear spoke

Anually in early June, Jobst and friends ride to the “town” of Swanton on the Pacific Coast to enjoy bluegrass music

at the Corn Roast. It’s a modest affair in the redwoods on a hay-covered hillside. Hundreds of people show up to hear the music, buy locally produced arts and crafts, and chow down on beer, burritos, corn, and other good food. [The Corn Roast ended at this location in 1988.]

Leave it to Jobst to find an interesting way to get



there. Last Chance Road is one of his favorite wheeling grounds. The ride takes us through the East Waddell Creek drainage following a narrow canyon with waterfalls and cliffs. This Sunday morning a gaggle of riders arrived at Jobst’s doorstep at the appointed 8 a.m. start. Rick decided to pump his tire, but discovered it was flat. We were already losing precious time and behind schedule.

Corn Roast



Tom Ritchey joined us on Skyline and we continued south to the fire station, where Jobst stopped for water and then sped off to meet Roger Leff at the Hwy 9 junction.

Hwy 9 snakes downhill through the redwoods to Santa Cruz, offering cyclists a whirlwind descent. It's not too twisty or too steep to slow you down. You can just blast, and blast Jobst did.

A SWARM OF ANGRY HORNETS

Our black shorts, colorful jerseys, and the whirring sound of freewheels reminded me of a swarm of angry hornets flying along at more than 40 mph. We jockeyed for position behind the head hornet, Jobst. He's not only a great descender, but



Our favorite place to stop at the Big Basin Redwoods State Park headquarters, 1981.

his 6'5" frame creates the best wind break.

Swooshing off Hwy 9 at the Hwy 236 junction, we immediately began climbing on the narrow, twisty road. The climb took the sting out of our group and we proceeded at a slower pace, but not for long.

Tom, Rick, Dan, and I blasted off, not wanting to miss out on the burritos. We didn't let up until



Crossing Waddell Creek on Last Chance Road, 1982.

China Grade, where the road descends into the forest and park headquarters.

We took the narrow Service Road and continued downhill into the cool, dank redwood forest headed for the Big Basin Redwoods State Park store. While refueling, conversation turned to the cool beers waiting for us over the hill.

Our group headed off, turning right at the Blooms Creek campground, also the paved access road to the water treatment plant, before climbing a dirt road for a few hundred yards and then taking the crucial left turn onto unsigned Last Chance Road.

From here we found ourselves riding on washboards, trails, and rocky roads until the coast. The first part of the road is rocky, with sandpits and short, steep uphill that make going tough. The final approach to Waddell Creek is so steep and loose that only a few road bike riders can make it without walking [not so bad now, but overgrown].

CROSSING WADDELL CREEK

We dismounted and crossed Waddell Creek. Leaping from rock to rock and using our bikes as crutches, most of us made it without getting our feet wet. On the other side, we continued on a single track following the cascading creek in the rocky canyon. Depending on the past winter's rains, it can be rideable or covered with boulders and debris.

On this occasion we could ride, but even then it was a challenge on a road bike. This went on for about a mile before we came to a steep climb on a "road" over sandstone bedrock. It's hardly a road now, hidden by Scotch broom and pampas grass.

The climb tested our legs in places, but we all made it without dismounting. The end of the climb brought us to a respectable dirt road, only now we

faced six miles of bone-jarring washboard. We passed numerous modest wood-frame houses, occupied by burned out hippies, survivalists, and people who enjoy solitude.

Parker had trouble with his seat, so we told him we'd meet him at the gate where the pavement begins, which was a "mile down the road," according to Jim. But it was more like four miles.

He blasted down the bumpy paved road with a car right behind him. The landowner obligingly opened the gate for himself and for us to pass. We took a group photo next to the Pacific Ocean.

All that remained was a quick descent to Swanton, hidden away in the redwoods several miles from the coast. We walked our bikes up a hill and dumped them in some blackberry bushes. While enjoying the music, we had our fill of beer and burritos.

After a while, Rick and Dan decided to head to Santa Cruz. Tom, Jim, Parker, and I started back the way we came. In the baking afternoon sun we walked our bikes up the steep section of trail next



Jobst and friends kick back and listen to country music.

to Waddell Creek. Tom looked to his left and saw a waterhole. "Let's check it out," he said.

So we put down our bikes and dashed into the creek to cool off. Pretty soon we were splashing around and enjoying ourselves, dropping down into deep body-size pools. We found a small waterfall and enjoyed the refreshingly cool water.

Reality eventually set in and we knew it was time to leave. We dressed, got back on our bikes and struggled over the hills and steep dirt road back to park headquarters. We still had to climb Hwy 236 and Hwy 9, but it was well worth the effort. [In 2014, that waterhole was still there.]



Tom, Parker, and Jim take a refreshing dip in East Waddell Creek right off Last Chance Road.

Just when I thought I had lost it, there it was. My love affair with the bike found a new romance. We met on a warm summer night under the light of a full moon.

We rendezvoused on Skyline Boulevard, a ribbon of pavement perched on the crest of the Coast Range running from San Francisco to San Jose. From atop this ridge you can see the Pacific Ocean and to the east there's Santa Clara Valley. In the distance on a clear day you'll see the Sierra Nevada.

I've ridden on Skyline at sunrise and at sunset, in the fog and clouds, on clear and on smoggy days, but never at night.

We started from Palo Alto, riding past high-powered venture capital firms on Sand Hill Road and then into the rural setting of Portola Valley. One of the darkest roads to Skyline is Old LaHonda, a 1,200-foot climb.

The moon shone fitfully through breaks in a canopy of redwoods and tan oak. Under the white light of the moon, with our colorful cycling garb, we looked like ghosts drifting through the trees.

In this Stygian darkness I saw monsters—behind a tree, ahead in the middle of the road. But they let us pass with nary a boo to be heard. The headless rider must be right around the bend.

Alone in the night, we enthused about the ride. "Hey, I wonder if our eyes glow in the dark like deer when we see car lights," said Dave. "This reminds me of a dream I had," another rider chimed. "Or is this a dream?" "Watch out for bug lamps," Sterling yelled. "Don't be drawn in by the light!"

The one-liners continued as we made our way up





the mountain, bike lights showing the way. “On your left. Watch out for the hole. Which one? The one I just rode through.” Bump! “You found it!” The climb had never gone so fast, or so it seemed. Night riding creates a sensation of speed.

As we climbed, someone asked the inevitable, “Has anyone ever fixed a flat in the dark?”

From the bald top of Windy Hill we looked down on the valley bathed in the glow of incandescent light. To the north, the skyscrapers of San Francisco glowed like inverted chandeliers. Mt. Diablo loomed in the east, an ink-black spot. The still, warm air cast a surreal quality over the scene and I couldn’t help but think life is still a mystery.



With the flash of my camera, I captured another memorable event on film, evidence photos for the grandchildren I suppose. Six people on top of a mountain under a full moon smiled for the tiny black box.

The fun wasn’t over, not with a ride down Windy Hill. We found our way, some riding, some walking, some falling down.

Where the trail goes is anyone’s guess tonight. “Head for that grove of trees. Watch out. There’s a barbed wire fence. Nancy, where are you?” Crash! Josh is down.

At the bottom of the hill on Portola Road we’re all accounted for. Once underway, we’re Flying Dutchmen speeding through the night, headed for home under the light of a romancing moon.

1986 moonlight riders from left in upper photo: Sterling McBride, Dave McLaughlin, Ray Hosler, Clay Riley, and Josh Klein. Nancy Laurents in lower photo.



Alpine Road—

It doesn't take a civil engineer to see what's happening with Alpine Road. This would happen to any road left unattended.

It's sad because the road has been a part of the area's history since 1894, according to the hiking book *Peninsula Trails*. The road is shown on my 1937 auto map.

Who's responsible for the road (the 2.6-mile dirt section)? Technically, it's the county of San Mateo. In reality, it's the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD). However, the county has not officially turned over the road to MROSD, so it remains in limbo.

I contacted the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District in 2008 to try to get someone to maintain the road and return it to its former glory, without success.

While cyclists still use Alpine Road, it's mostly mountain bikers. We used to ride our road bikes up it nearly every weekend during the spring, summer, and fall. It turns into a quagmire in spots after a heavy rain.

So what happened to Alpine Road? Well, it's right on the

San Andreas Fault, which does not help matters. Still, the biggest problem with the road is lack of maintenance.

The county failed to clean culverts and that is a death sentence for a dirt road built on a canyon wall. This was around the early to mid-1980s, at a time when San Mateo County was paving every dirt road in sight. The last time the road was graded was 1989. It was a lousy job at that, and the culverts were not cleared.

No doubt the county would have paved Alpine Road, but it had been closed to public access for a couple of decades when it went on its paving campaign. There would have been public opposition to paving and opening the road, mostly because the lower paved Alpine Road is extremely narrow. The county had no compelling reason to reopen the road, so they left it as is.

In the meantime, the road started experiencing frequent washouts. Jobst and friends spent weekends working on the road, even installing a culvert, but it was a lost cause. Heavy equipment was needed.

Finally, in 1995 a huge landslide wiped out several hundred



Best of times. Spring 1990 on Alpine Road, as riders stop to fix a flat.

We Miss You

yards of road, a direct result of plugged culverts. MROSD built a steep side trail that's impossible for most road riders to pedal up without dismounting.

Other parts of the road are eroding and more washouts are on the way. The road has also become much narrower as vegetation encroaches and the road crumbles.

ROAD STILL VALUABLE

Alpine Road should be maintained, but not just for cyclists. It's a potential fire escape route for local residents, and an access route for fire trucks. A grader could make short work of the road and restore it to its original grade.

For cyclists, Alpine Road is far and away the best route to Skyline Boulevard. It maintained a grade of between 5 and 8 percent before falling into disrepair. The alternatives are the nar-



Jobst inspects a huge slide in 1987.



Bullet-riddled San Mateo County road sign on Alpine Road.

row Old La Honda Road, the steep Page Mill Road, and the busy Highway 84. Most motorists would favor seeing Alpine Road as a bike route to help relieve the heavy use on Old La Honda Road, and the same goes for Page Mill Road.

I feel privileged to have spent many Sunday mornings riding up Alpine Road. On a warm spring day the sound of birds singing under a canopy of oak, bay, and tan oak rejuvenated the soul. The burden of the daily grind gave way to friendly conversations riding uphill on a fine dirt road with splendid views of Santa Clara Valley below.

Other than maintenance on a culvert washout at the upper section of road in 2014, not much has happened with Alpine Road. MROSD talks about making improvements and it's in their vision plan, but will require San Mateo County approval.

Alpine Road Chronology

1894 - Road built, maintained by San Mateo County.

1975 - County closes road to public vehicles, installing gates at both ends (Alpine Road where pavement ends and Page Mill Road).

1982 - Heavy winter rains create landslides. Repaired.

1986 - Washout just beyond lower gate in creek bed. Washouts higher up.

1987 - Jobst and riders build a trail through landslide for easy riding. San Mateo County paving spree - Cloverdale, Old La Honda, Wurr, Lobitos Creek, Gazos Creek. Star Hill later.

1988 - Culvert installed by Jobst and Peter.

1989 - Road graded by San Mateo County in December. Lower bridge uncovered.

1995 - Huge landslide. MROSD designates steep side trail.

2008 - MROSD adds gravel to Mud Turn.

2014 - MROSD fixes washout half mile from Page Mill Road at open section where bridge was located until washed out in 1965. Washed out again in 2017.

Il Buono...



Alpine Road after grading, January 1990

e il Bruto...



Washout on Alpine Road in 2008 keeps growing.

Il Cattivo...



Hoofing it through Corte Madera Creek in 1987.



Plugged culvert in 2008.

Loma Prieta Puts Riders,



MAY 31, 1981

RIDERS: Jobst Brandt, Jim Westby, Tom Ritchey, Tom Holmes, Ray Hosler, Dan Green, Parker McComas

ROUTE: From Palo Alto, California: up Alpine Road, south on Skyline Boulevard to Summit Store; up Loma Prieta, down Mt. Umunhum, down Hicks Road through Los Gatos and home via Hwy 9. 80 miles.

WEATHER: Clear, hot

TIRE/MECHANICAL FAILURES: Ray-2 flats; Parker-2 flats and loose seat; Tom Holmes-2 flats; Jobst-jammed freewheel.

Besides the fact that Jobst hadn't traveled up Loma Prieta in more than a year, this trip was to be the test—or trial by fire—of the new Avocet freewheel being developed by Jobst. He decided to combine the two plans, which proved to be an ideal test for the new freewheel, because Loma Prieta is a tough ride with some hard climbing. Would the pawls hold up under the strain?

Jobst's freewheel is somewhat like the Shimano freewheel with a cassette body. It had a pawl design he saw in a Sturmey Archer hub that is no longer manufactured. Rather than using the traditional spring-activated pawl, Jobst's pawls are gravity-activated. They fall in and out of place as the hub turns on its axis. The test freewheel has 10 pawls, compared to a standard freewheel with four.

The intrepid engineer had no difficulty climbing Alpine Road. At the iron gate, Jobst stopped to search for a Hutton's Vireo he had observed on the previous week's ride. The bird had built a nest right above the gate in a large oak tree; however, there was no sign of the bird or nest.

At Page Mill and Skyline, Tom Ritchey, who had ridden from his home on Skyline a couple miles away, joined us. The ride along Skyline went without incident, as the riders discussed various topics this clear, warm morning. Tom said he wanted to head to the coast. Dan Green was going that way too, to visit friends in Santa Cruz. [They peeled off at Hwy 9.]

Jobst talked about next week's Corn Roast in Swanton and the impending ride on Last Chance Road. Jim showed how badly his recent cold had affected him by being dropped on one of the climbs. Several motorcycles buzzed by at high speed, one

Freewheels to the Test



of the riders leaning into a curve with his leg extended to one side. Jobst said that his technique serves no useful purpose; that became a subject of heated debate between Parker and Jobst. The rest of us had heard it all before.

At the fire station near Highway 9, we stopped for water at a fountain. Soon after stopping, two other cyclists came swooping in. The young riders were both known by Jobst, who had seen them racing tandems down Highway 9.

Jobst struck up a conversation with one of the riders, who said that recently he had raced down Bonny Doon—a steep, straight road leading to the coast—and noted that his tandem reached 75 mph. The

two young riders soon headed off on Skyline in search of dirt roads. Their conversation ended, we saddled up and headed off to the Skyline Boulevard summit and ensuing descent to Summit Road.

SHODDY SHOE WORK

On the climb up from Saratoga Gap, Jim was once again



Summit Road after the Loma Prieta earthquake, 1989.



Jim drinks from the Loma Prieta spring.

dropped. I had sore muscles from a previous day’s run, so I slowed for Jim where the road leveled off. I coasted along peacefully, hands off the bars while eating a fig bar. Jobst and Parker were up ahead. I looked down at the road and noticed a white piece of plastic dead ahead. A thousand thoughts raced through my mind: “avoid the plastic, hands on the bars, stop eating, slow down, determine origin of plastic.” With so many wheels in motion, I couldn’t coordinate every motion fully. In a split second my tire ran over the plastic, followed by a loud hissing sound as my rear wheel swerved crazily. Flat!

.....

“With so many wheels in motion, I couldn’t coordinate every movement properly. In a split second my tire ran over the plastic, followed by a loud hissing sound as my rear wheel swerved crazily. Flat!”

.....

I had one hand on the brakes by this point, and the fig bar fell to the pavement. I got the bike under control, but was going too slow to remove my foot from the toe clips before keeling over. I banged my elbow, and suffered a small cut.

In a few moments Jim was at my side asking me what happened. I fumed and cursed up a storm when I saw that I ran over a cleat. It didn’t take long to see that it was an Adidas cleat, and I guessed that it had come off of Parker’s shoe because he had been complaining about loose cleats! Jim found the cleat and tossed it off the road.

When Jobst and Parker realized what had happened, they returned to the scene of the accident and heard my story. Parker looked down at his shoe. “Yeah! That’s my cleat! I thought I heard something hit the road back here but I couldn’t figure out what it was.” I cursed at Parker and Jobst joined in, telling him that the Adidas cleats were poorly designed. Parker yelled back that he was just buying what the people at Wheelsmith



Here’s where the Loma Prieta spring water is stored, 2008.

recommended. “This was supposed to be the hot setup,” he said defensively.

I replaced my tube, and we were off again. We descended the long stretch to Hwy 17 at great speed, winding and twisting along Summit Road, which is barely wide enough for two cars. We passed apple orchards and Christmas tree farms, hilltop homes, and blackberry patches.

Once past Hwy 17, Summit Road traffic picks up. We rolled along to a lunch break at Summit Store, the traditional rest stop for all rides east and south of Hwy 17.

PEANUT GALLERY

After purchasing food and settling down outside, Jobst made his usual people observations. He went on about how the residents are not really country people, but Silicon Valley engineers who like to commute long distances to enjoy the countryside and keep their high-paying jobs. As usual, Jobst offered astute observations about the cars they drive and the clothes they wear. In between sage and pointed criticisms,

Parker quizzed Jobst about what lay ahead.

Our group headed off, intent on reaching the summit by noon. The Summit Road climb past San Jose-Soquel Road left us gasping for air, as Tom and Jobst rode off the front. Just beyond the swamp, we stopped at the fire station and got water for our bottles, except for Jobst who never carries a water bottle.

The real climbing began on Mt. Bache Road, which rises steadily past mountaintop homes. We faced the biggest challenge on “One Mile Hill,” with a steady grade of 14-17 percent. At the summit the road turns to dirt, revealing the southern end of the Santa Clara Valley—mostly ranches.

THE DIRTY BUMP

More climbing ensued on the dirt road, as we passed the junction of Summit Road and kept



Jobst grabs a Pepsi on Loma Prieta Road, 2006.

left on Loma Prieta. The next hill is known as “The Dirty Bump,” a section of about 18 percent [paved now]. During the approach to the Dirty Bump disaster struck; Jobst’s freewheel made a sharp pop—the sound of metal snapping. While riding by his side, at first I thought it was a broken spoke, but Jobst quickly ascertained that it was the freewheel.

“Maybe one of the pawls broke,” I said. We struggled up the Dirty Bump and at the top passed a car with two youths who were firing a small-caliber rifle. From this plateau we saw a rugged set of hills and to our right and a radar tower once used by the Air Force.

At the iron gate, Jobst told me, “I’ve got a fixed gear now.” Whenever his rear wheel moved, so did his drive-train. Jobst would have to ride the rest of the way in fixed gear, down the steep and dangerous Mt. Umunhum Road and through the busy traffic of Santa Clara Valley. This did not worry him a bit, as he pedaled to the traditional watering hole a few hundred yards beyond the gate.

WATERING HOLE

Here Jobst, Tom, and I stopped for some badly needed water. At the road-



Tom, Jobst, and John McDonnell take in the view looking east on Mt. Umunhum summit, 1982.

side there's a concrete block where water issues from a copper pipe about an inch wide. We rested and took our fill of the sweet, cold water.

During a 20-minute rest stop, we made insightful observations about our surroundings. I pointed out a flycatcher. Jobst identified a wren-tit by its peculiar loud sound. I then found two ants—one quite large and the other one tiny. Watching



Fixing a flat on Mt. Umunhum Road, 2006, below the concrete blockhouse.

their antics, I described a scenario for their doing battle. By this time Jim and Parker arrived and tanked up on spring water.

While waiting, I snapped several pictures with my Olympus XA. As I sat there, I found another interesting bug, this time a kind of wasp, regal in appearance. Jim looked at it and thought it was a drone ant, but that was quickly ruled out on closer observation. It was too big and it had a long neck with large, clear wings. It might have been an ichneumon fly. Its larvae are parasitic on the larvae of other insects. The riders also tossed around the idea that it was a space invader, in the guise of a bug. One never knows these days.

As Jim took in the sweeping vista of the mountains and Pacific Ocean in the distance, we spotted an Allen's hummingbird. "It's attacking me!" Jim exclaimed. Jobst speculated that it was attracted to Jim's bright orange jersey. "It wants you, Jim," Jobst said. After realizing Jim was not another hummingbird, the little guy buzzed off.

Rested, we headed to Mt. Umunhum. Immediately, Tom flatted. Despite Jobst having a fixed gear, he kept up with the group on the dirt. Then Tom flatted again. I had to go ahead and get one of Jobst's tubes because Tom was out. On my way back up the hill, I noticed a large junk yard full of wrecked cars, miles from civilization. After fixing Tom's flat, we quickly caught up with Parker, who had once again flatted in the front tire. This time, his seat had also come loose and he was cursing the Campy old-style double bolt. Tom waited while I rode ahead to find Jim and Jobst.

Back on pavement, we began the long, winding descent of



Mt. Umunhum has seen its share of fires. Here's how it looked in Spring 1986.

Mt. Umunhum, which usually has no traffic since it dead-ends at the top. [The road was also closed.] We came upon Jim and Jobst quickly enough; they were resting on the roadside, next to what looked like a mine entrance. Jobst crawled around inside and when he emerged declared, "There's a cold water spring in here."

We resumed the plunge down the mountain, Jobst managing to stay with our group most of the way despite the fixed gear. This predicament forced him to keep his rear brake on the entire way. When he got to the Hicks Road intersection, he asked me for my water bottle. Jobst poured water on the front rim and said, "That rim is hot! I don't want to have a patch unglue on me."

We still had more steep road to negotiate, as Jobst told the others to meet him at the creek at the bottom. After a harrowing descent, we arrived at the creek and waited for Jobst. "Maybe he crashed back there," someone ventured. But no, Jobst was seen emerging from the bushes about 100 yards up the road, where there was apparently another creek. He rolled up and said with a gleam in his eyes, "When I put that tire in the water it didn't go 'hissss' but it was just about hot enough to do that."

We continued to Los Gatos. Leaving a store, I yelled, "Oh no! I've got a flat tire!" I had to use Jim's spare tube. Once that was taken care of, we headed off through Los Gatos onto Saratoga-Los Gatos and home.

AFTERWORD: Jobst determined that a jammed pawl caused the freewheel failure. "Appalling," Jobst said. The freewheel never made it to market.

The paved road to the Mt. Umunhum summit opens in September 2017, but Loma Prieta Road remains closed indefinitely.



Over the years, public access to Mt. Umunhum has improved.





Haul

Road

***Deep in the redwoods,
following Pescadero Creek,
there's a smooth dirt road
with gently rolling hills —
perfect for cycling.***

MAY 13, 1984

RIDERS: Jobst Brandt, Olaf Brandt, Jim Westby, Peter Johnson, Ray Hosler, Jan Causey, Paul Mittelstadt, Bob Walmsley.

ROUTE: From Palo Alto, California: up Kings Mountain Road, down Purisima Creek Road, Hwy 1 to Stage Road to Pescadero, to Loma Mar, Wurr Road, through Memorial Park and Haul Road to Portola State Park; up Alpine Road, down Page Mill Road. 75 miles.

WEATHER: Warm, sunny and clear; some fog on the coast.

TIRE/MECHANICAL FAILURE: Jobst—front flat; Bob—flat

Word had gotten out that Jobst was still feeling the effects of a sore back, so a horde of riders showed up at his house. Little did they realize, even with a sore back, Jobst can maintain a withering pace up hills along the coast.



was there, as was Paul, who was suffering from a cold. He graduates from Stanford in June. Olaf, Jobst's number two son, a sophomore in high school, came along. He has been riding more frequently and is getting stronger every ride.

Our group separated on Sand Hill Road when Walmsley flattened.

Jan and Olaf rode ahead. On Kings Mountain, Jim and I followed Bob and Paul. Jobst rode at a leisurely pace with Peter. Taking after his father, Olaf pushed a giant gear while climbing the steepest part of Kings Mountain near Skyline. I advised Olaf to shift into an easier gear

Purisima Creek Road in 1988 where the real climbing begins.

Peter is finally riding again after being absent since the Europe ride with Jobst last summer. Jim made a rare appearance. He had just finished working on the 1984-85 Palo Alto Bicycles catalog. Bob, who has also not been seen for many months,

gear "or you'll ruin your knees."

At Skyline, Paul turned south. The rest of the group headed north to Purisima Road, an old logging road. Now it's a favorite place for mountain bikers, hikers, and equestrians.



Stage Road looking north from the first summit after leaving Pescadero.

Soon the land around the road will belong to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. Bob headed north when we reached Purisima, having ridden it last week.

The road was in much better condition than last year when it was dusty. We quickly made our way down the thickly forested canyon following the narrow, bumpy dirt road. At the culvert crossing on Purisima Creek, we stopped for water. I commented how different the place looked since I took a photo of Jobst getting a drink here two years ago. Several large trees grew where before there had been open space. Of course, the flooding from recent severe winter storms had changed much of the terrain.

Soon we encountered large mud holes. There was no way around so we rode through and got our bikes and our clothes muddy. At the bottom of Purisima Creek, we put our bikes over the yellow roadblock and washed the mud off in the creek. Jan removed her shoes and went wading.

Refreshed, we headed west on Purisima Road through a quiet glen marked by the occasional farm house and secluded estates. With the wind at our backs, maintaining a speed of 17 mph required little effort. I asked Olaf how fast we were riding. Olaf was using a new cyclometer made by Avocet, the mechanical components which had been designed by his father.

SAN GREGORIO

In San Gregorio, we stopped for food and drink at the town's only store. A half-dozen riders were already there. When we entered the store, we felt a blast of cool air from an overhead fan.

Jim and Jan headed up Hwy 84, leaving Jobst, Peter, Olaf, and me to continue on Stage Road to Pescadero. While climbing Stage Road, we were passed by a truck carrying a prize bull. Jobst commented, "How would you like to take your cow for a Sunday ride?"

On the final descent to Pescadero, Jobst said mockingly, "I'm confused about my direction. It happens every time I pass this place." He was referring to a strange building in the middle of a hay field, which is used for magnetic studies by the U.S. Geological Survey. [Apple and Tandy actually]

We continued past Willowside Farm, a former dairy, where peacocks and horses reside. Giant eucalyptus line the road and form an impressive canopy. Today we enjoyed a view of purple-flowered wild radish.



Tarwater tree is a short ride from the Haul Road.



Butano Ridge Trail in 1984. From left: Bill Robertson, Dave Porter, Dave Prion, Sterling McBride, Bob Walmsley, Rod Kendrick, Tom Ritchey, Brian Brause, John Woodfill, Karl Krumme; seated: Dave McLaughlin, Jim Westby, Jobst Brandt.

In Pescadero, our group turned left on North Street and headed east to Pescadero Road, bypassing the “downtown.” Rather than stopping in Pescadero, we continued on for seven miles and took a break in Loma Mar, which has one tiny country store right off the road. It’s also the town Post Office.

While taking a break, Jobst got into a discussion about Corvairs with a man polishing his Datsun 280Z. He said his father owned Corvairs in the 1960s when

they were made by Chevrolet. Jobst, although he spoke fondly of the car, said they were indeed death traps as consumer advocate Ralph Nader claimed. Jobst said the car’s suspension made it unsafe to drive.

Done eating, we headed onto the secluded Wurr Road in the redwoods for 1.5 miles to the Haul Road entrance. The smooth dirt road with gentle climbs parallels Pescadero Creek to Portola State Park and Hwy 9.

HAUL ROAD

At a tributary creek, Jobst stopped for water. A flood had obliterated the area two winters ago. We could still see signs of a natural disaster. It hardly seemed possible this trickle of a stream could have grown in size to uproot redwoods. After the floods, we rode here and had to portage our bikes over every creek crossing. It was easily the most miserable ride I ever had on



Iverson Cabin in 1988, shortly before it collapsed. Just off the Haul Road.

the Haul Road. The scene was one of devastation, with logs everywhere and the road a muddy mess. This was no doubt the low point of the Haul Road. Things have improved greatly since then. The Honor Camp “prisoners” used to work on the road, but the camp was closed in 2003.

We followed the freshly packed Haul Road in isolation. People rarely venture onto the remote road. In the 1940s-50s, a steam engine hauled logs to a sawmill at Waterman Gap near Highway 9. Jobst said the constant logging and truck traffic turned the road

into a smooth highway, so fast that he could ride effortlessly in an 85-inch gear at more than 25

mph. After logging stopped, the road fell into disrepair until the state finally took over maintenance.

At the back of Portola State Park, we turned left at an open gate and headed down a steep hill and passed the ranger house. The historic Iverson Cabin stood next to the ranger house. We turned left and rode over a wood bridge spanning Pescadero Creek, next to the park maintenance yard. [The bridge was finally replaced in 2010.] Jobst looked for trout in the creek, but saw only fingerlings. “There were big trout here 20 years ago,” he complained. “They got fished out.”

Olaf said he was tired, not a good thing when you’re in Portola State Park! The climb is brutal, with long sections of 16-18 percent to Alpine Road. From there it’s another three miles of climbing to Skyline Boulevard.

Olaf made it home. We enjoyed a cooling breeze, puffy white clouds, and views of the Pacific Ocean and Mindego Hill on the way to Palo Alto.

(Pescadero Creek below the Bailey bridge on Bridge Trail in 1987, a short distance from the Haul Road. Ted Mock photo)



Old Pescadero Creek bridge in the 1980s. Portola State Park.



New Pescadero Creek bridge, 2010. Haul Road access.

Memories Never Age



Ray Hosler in his youth.

The headline says it all. While I've aged and these rides are but a memory, they will not be forgotten. I produced this magazine to share the memories with fellow riders.

What I have forgotten—thankfully—is the pain: The pain of chasing riders who were much stronger. Fortunately, they waited.

As I look back on the rides, I'm reminded that we rode in some remote places. We

were just out for a bike ride though. All we left behind were tracks.

The outdoors should be shared as much as possible. Public support for open space confirms that notion is universal. Yes, we need rules, but let's do our best to let people play and get healthy exercise. We face an epidemic of poor health from sedentary living.

I hope by sharing these memories, others will follow and take up cycling!

Ray Hosler, January 2017

*This magazine is dedicated to Jobst Brandt,
Jan. 14, 1935 - May 5, 2015.*



Climbing Tunitas Creek Road on a beautiful August day.

Mount Hamilton By Bike

Road History

Century Loop Map

Wildflowers galore

Racing, Memorable Rides

CONTENTS

38 Mt. Hamilton Then and Now

44 Memorable Rides

50 Racing

57 The Wild Life

58 Enjoy the View

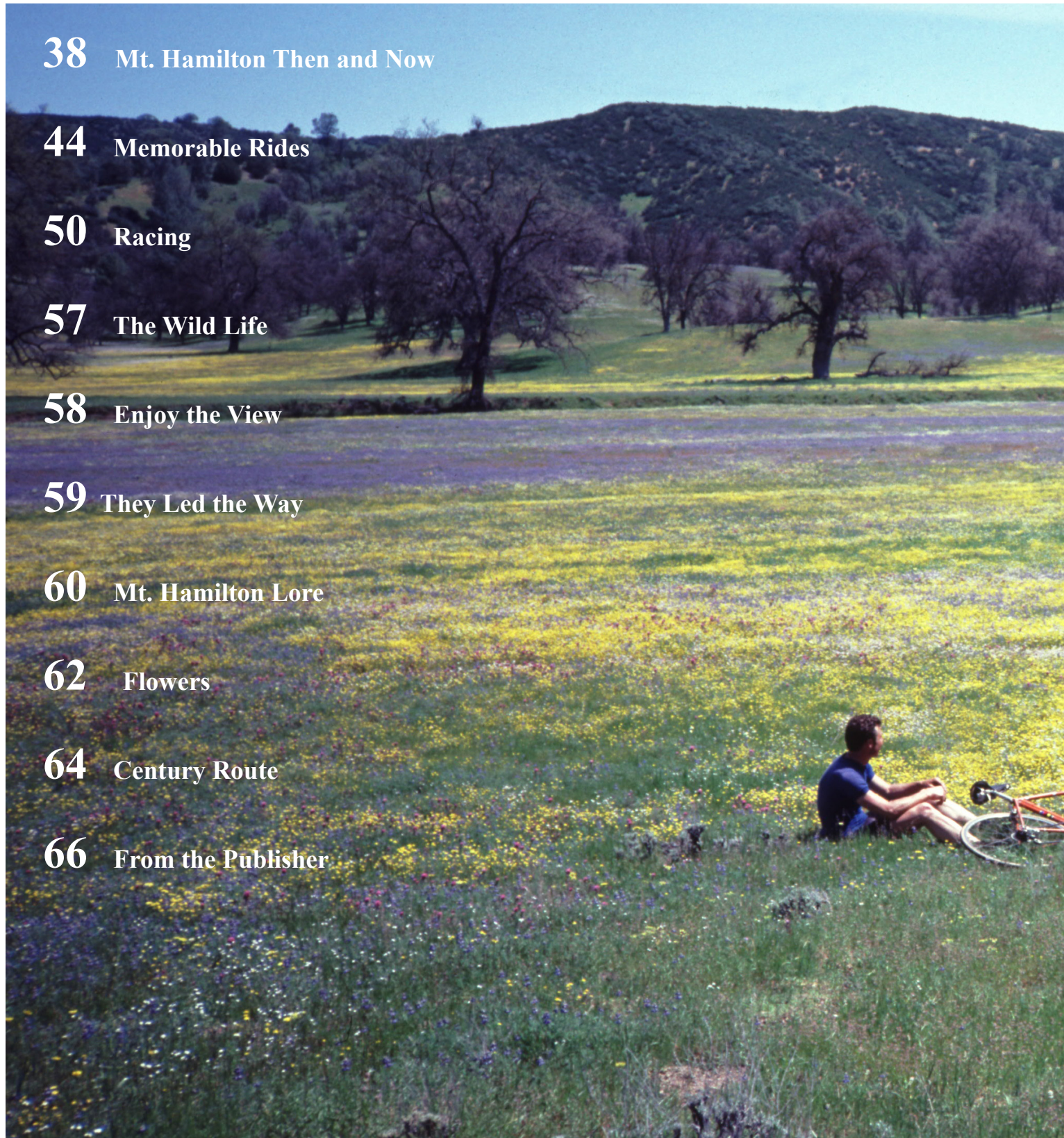
59 They Led the Way

60 Mt. Hamilton Lore

62 Flowers

64 Century Route

66 From the Publisher



Spring 1982 in San Antonio Valley.

(Cover: Joanne Klebe, Jim Westby, and Jeff Justice ride into an inferno on a 100-mile ride, October 1987.)



Ray Hosler © 2011

MT. HAMILTON —

Mt. Hamilton beckons. This lofty peak overlooking the South Bay invites us to see Santa Clara Valley from a long and winding road. Lick Observatory's mushroom-shaped domes perched on the summit, searching for worlds like ours light years away, add to the allure. It never ceases to amaze that in just a couple of hours you can ride there on a bike.

Since 1979, I've ridden to the summit well over 85 times, and beyond to Livermore on a 100-mile loop about 50 times. The ride never loses its appeal, so magnificent the views and so sparse the traffic. On this road carved into a mountain, cyclists can live an adventure.

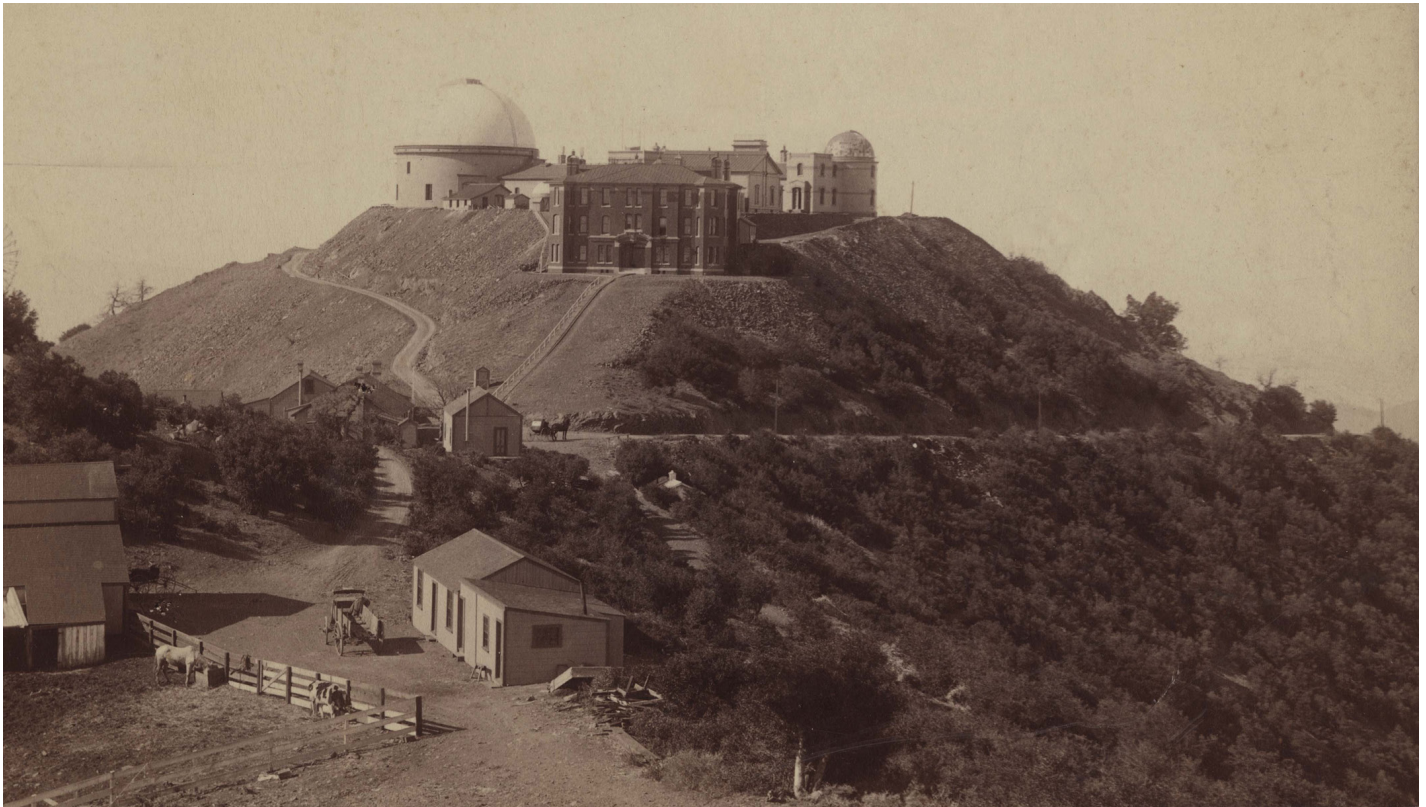
If not for Lick Observatory, the road to the 4,200-foot summit may never have been built. Today, thousands of cyclists ride to the summit annually for a better look at San Francisco Bay and its ring of mountains.

JAMES LICK'S LEGACY

As luck would have it, James Lick arrived at San Francisco in January 1848 within days of the Gold Rush, but the piano builder struck it rich in real estate (he bought Santa Catalina island). Late in life he wanted to leave a lasting legacy. After giving it a lot of thought and receiving many recommendations from influential friends, he settled on building — at the time — the world's largest telescope.

It wasn't until shortly before he died at the age of 80 that he finally chose to build the observatory on Mt. Hamilton. After all, he could see the summit from his palatial estate in Santa Clara. He had already looked long and hard at other locations, including Mt. Diablo and Mount Saint Helena. In his late 70s, he even traveled to Mount Saint Helena. An uncomfortable ride to the summit, during which he was unceremoniously dumped from his wagon, soured him on the

THEN...



Mt. Hamilton summit looking west circa 1890. Photo courtesy of California Room, San Jose Public Library.

THEN AND NOW

location.

Lick never got to see Lick Observatory completed, and did not even make the trip to the summit. He died two months before the road was completed. At his request, he was entombed in the observatory foundation so he could “rot like a gentleman.”

A ROAD FOR THE AGES

It didn't take long to convince Santa Clara County officials to build a road to the observatory when Lick's newly formed board of trustees asked for it. The county saw the observatory as a tourist destination, complete with a hotel, so they agreed to build the road. Cost: \$70,000 (equivalent to about \$1.4 million today). Construction started in April 1876 and finished in December that year. Because the county was strapped for cash, Lick fronted the money and agreed to be paid back through a bond.

Horses and mules did most of the heavy work, dynamite being used in rocky areas. Keeping in mind the mode of transportation — horse and buggy — and the need to haul heavy equipment, the engineers built the road with a steady grade of 5-6 percent most of the way. That meant the road needed a lot of switchbacks; many citations mention 365 turns, but I've never bothered counting. For the first three and the final three miles, the road climbs exactly 300 feet per mile (5.7% grade). There are two descents — to Halls Valley and to Smith Creek.

When completed, the final road inspection gave the county a worthy excuse to declare a holiday, so on January 13, 1877, about 5,000 visitors traveled to the summit! The road looked more like a trail, but over the years it was gradually widened and improved. By the early 1900s, although still dirt, it looked like the road we know today. It got dusty in the summer, certainly no fun for anyone riding a bike. A team of

AND NOW...



Mt. Hamilton summit, January 2011. The stairway to the old dormitory building on the hill is still there.



Mt. Hamilton Road around 1905. Note the dust. Photo courtesy of California Room, San Jose Public Library.

horses took about five hours to complete the climb, and about four hours going down. A strong rider can reach the summit in two and a half hours.

THEN...



Mt. Hamilton Road at the Smith Creek descent circa 1925.

ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

Sometime in the 1930s (it's shown as paved on a 1942 USGS topo map), the road was paved, and before that "oiled and graveled." That's literally what they did — drop gravel and then spray oil. It helped keep the dust down.

In 1972, the road was widened to 14 feet where needed over the last five miles to the summit, at a cost of \$50,000, so it must have been a modest change.

The state took over road maintenance in 1964 when Mt. Hamilton Road (also called Lick Avenue) was named Highway 130.

What you might not realize is that the highway extends to Patterson, another 30 miles beyond the summit. However, Santa Clara County still maintains the road on the Mt. Hamilton backside.

You may notice the yellow reflectors sunken into grooves in the middle of the road past Smith Creek. They're recessed so snow plows won't scrape them up. No doubt these grooves have caused more than one cyclist to crash while descending.

As anyone who lives in San Jose knows, Mt. Hamilton gets snow annually. Around 1980, after a heavy snow, the sheriff's office started closing the road at Grant Ranch Park to all but local traffic. Even today, cyclists may be dissuaded by law enforcement from riding to the summit when the road is dry, but there's snow on the ground.

WAGON RIDES

One of the early settlers to Santa Clara Valley, Frank H. McKee, took a wagon ride to the summit in his youth, in 1915. He describes the road as being dusty, as a team of four horses pulled their wagon up the mountain. They changed horses at the Smith Creek stage stop, where there was also a saloon. Today we see a California Department of Forestry building and a couple of houses at this location.

Jobst Brandt, who rode the 100-mile Mt. Hamilton loop

AND NOW...

more than anyone, remembers riding to the summit in 1955, about the time the 120-inch reflector was being built. On this particularly cold day, Jobst and friends gladly accepted an offer to warm themselves by a smelter operating at the construction site.

Today the summit is home to a small cadre of scientists and maintenance workers, but the one-room school closed decades ago, and most observatory scientists are based at UC Santa Cruz or UC Berkeley.

County Sheriff Glen Dolfin used to patrol the road regularly and lived at the summit, but in recent years that position was eliminated and now security is handled by UC Berkeley. In August 1993, Dolfin was shot and wounded by a man who had just killed his girlfriend on Mt. Hamilton Road overlooking Halls Valley. Dolfin recovered and retired shortly thereafter.

OBSERVATORY

Ironically, most cyclists never take the time to see the magnificent 36-inch refractor at the summit. It is a view well worth the trip. The observatory is normally open on weekends



Mt. Hamilton Road at the same location, January 2011. Trees obscure the observatory.

from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

If you're looking for water, there's a faucet at the small white house off to the left (dining hall) before the final short climb to the observatory. There is also a fountain inside the main observatory. Please remove sticky shoes before entering so as not to scuff the floor.

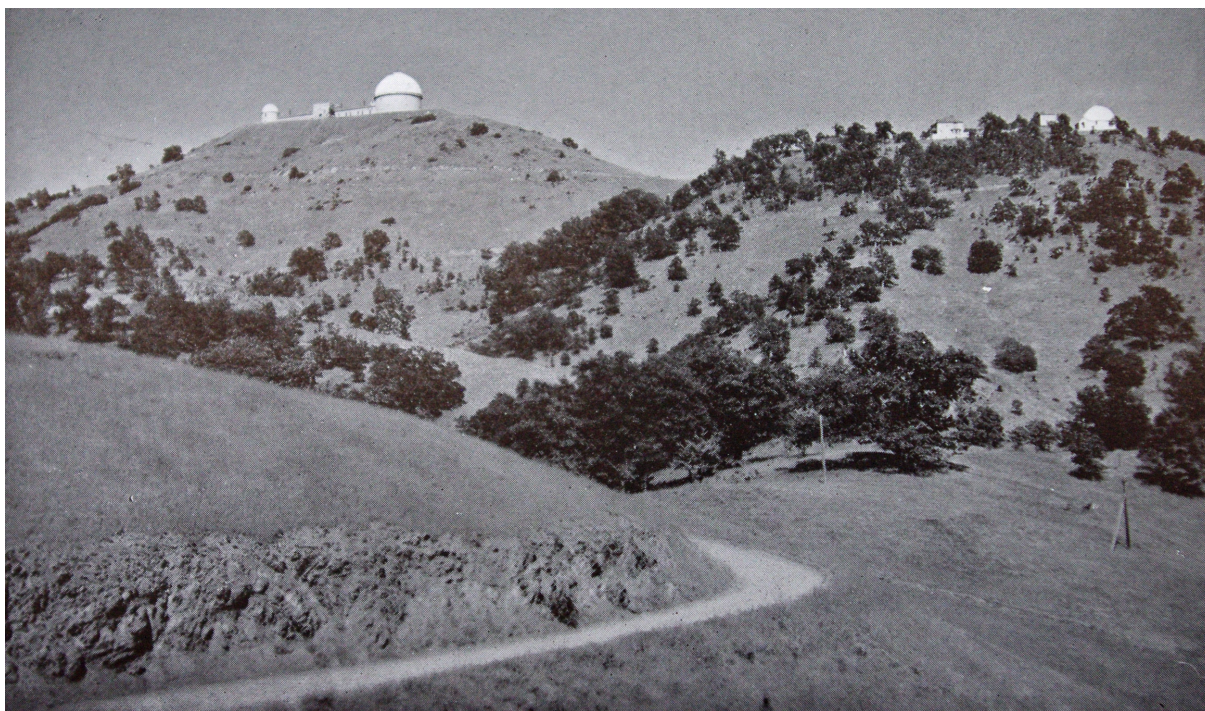
Mt. HAMILTON'S DARKER SIDE

While the Mt. Hamilton climb from San Jose follows a steady grade, the backside is another story. The last four miles to the summit average 10 to 13 percent on a bike inclinometer, the last mile being the steepest.

It wasn't long after completion of Mt. Hamilton Road that a trail was established down the backside by the handful of settlers who lived there in the late 1800s. J.B. Cory was the only resident in 1876 when the land was surveyed. Homesteads occupied 160 acres.

The east slope was paved, perhaps, in the 1940s but could be as late as the mid-1950s. An old road bed is still visible along Arroyo Bayo. No doubt the higher road was built to avoid flooding, probably at the time of paving.

THEN...



Mt. Hamilton Road about three miles from the summit, circa 1925.

Life on the other side of Mt. Hamilton appeals to the rancher. Attempts to "civilize" the area have been less than successful. A dairy farm established in San Antonio Valley in 1897 ended miserably. The land will only support one range cow per 100 acres. Another effort to settle the area had a more favorable outcome. In 1900, Swami Turiyananda established an ashram in San Antonio Valley. Santi Ashrama burned down in 1952, but there's a modest shack there today for the resolute who want to commune with nature. It's not far off San Antonio Valley Road.

San Antonio Valley's riches lay more in the rugged hills than in cattle, specifically Red Mountain, just northeast of San Antonio Junction. It was there that John Merchant discovered a rich vein of magnesite and staked claim to it in 1900. Dirty white mine tailings cover the mountainside. Magnesite (same as dolomite), used as a slag former in steel-making furnaces, came into demand in World War I.

The first mines, scattered ranches, hunting clubs, and vacation resorts prompted Alameda County to build a crude road from Livermore to Red Mountain in the 1890s, what is now called Mines Road. By 1912, the first cars were driving to San Antonio Valley, as well as huge, lumbering steam engines hauling heavy loads of magnesite ore.

Mines Road may have been paved about the same

time as Mt. Hamilton Road, in the 1930s, but possibly later, in the 1940s. It's one of the most remote roads cyclists can ride on in the Bay Area.

The Tour of California went over Mt. Hamilton (Modesto to San Jose) in 2008, heading up Del Puerto Canyon Road and the backside of Hamilton. Levi Leipheimer and Robert Gesink of Rabobank, emerged and worked together to stay away on the long run into San Jose. Gesink won the 102-mile route, which included Sierra Road.

STORES

There's one store — located at the Del Puerto Canyon Road intersection since 1965. The Junction Café has a bathroom, a bar, a library with hundreds of old *National Geographic* magazines, and serves burgers, sodas, Gatorade®, candy bars, and now Clif Bars®. It was remodeled in 2016.

Just up the road from the Junction there's a California Department of Forestry fire station. Ironically, it nearly burned down in a fire that engulfed the area in the early 2000s. The huge Lick Fire that consumed 48,000 acres in

Henry Coe State Park in 2007 did not reach Mt. Hamilton Road.

Other food stops have come and gone. In the 1960s, Arnold Ranch, marked by a well maintained wall of daffodils that blossom March-April, served snacks and soda from a small shack. Give a “peacock cry” as you ride by the ranch. They usually respond!

More stores were located just past the Junction Cafe. After climbing a short hill and descending, there was a small store in a trailer off to the right at the dirt road (Mines Road) to Red Mountain. It closed in the early 1980s. Farther along, there was a store on the left called Jot Em Down; it burned down in the late 1950s. Nearby there was Ruthy's and Country Corners, where you'll see a few houses and antique stores. Finally, there was the Branding Iron bar on Mines Road just before the long descent. It closed in the late 1970s and is now a residence.

I've included a Mt. Hamilton ride that makes a big loop through Livermore and Sunol, 102 miles and 8,100 feet of climbing. A slightly different route avoiding Livermore involves taking Con-cannon Blvd., Arroyo Rd., Wetmore Rd. to Vallecitos Rd. and then E. Vineyard Ave. to Pleasanton. Give these routes a try. It's a ride you will never forget and one you may want to do.

AND NOW...



More trees today. I had to climb up the hillside to get this shot. The original was not taken from the road.

Pity the Goldfish on

APRIL 12, 1981

RIDERS: Jobst Brandt, Bill Robertson, Sterling McBride, Dave Zanotti, Berkeley Wheelmen rider, John McDonnell, Jim Westby, Ray Hosler, Tom Holmes, Rick Humphreys, Dave Yamamoto, Dave Faust, Hal Tozer, Smitty Harwood, Mark Sisson, Dave Mulkey, Steve Cady, Kent Bostick, Keith Vierra, Unknown rider.

ROUTE: From Milpitas at Calaveras Boulevard, Piedmont Road, Penitencia Creek Road, Toyon Avenue, McKee Road, Alum Rock Avenue, up Hwy 130/Mt. Hamilton Road, Mines Road to Livermore, 84 to Calaveras Road and back to Milpitas.

WEATHER: Warm, clear, refreshing breeze

CRASHES: Dave Zanotti and Smitty Harwood descending the backside of Mt. Hamilton.

TIRE/MECHANICAL FAILURE: Ray - flat; Steve - 2 flats

The whole purpose of this ride—to put four goldfish in a concrete spring-fed trough on the backside of Mt. Hamilton—was lost to the unofficial “Mt. Hamilton Race” tune-up.

With so many racers joining Jobst, the pace had a lot of us red-lining on the ride up. Racers had to wait for what seemed an eternity for the slower riders, so the group immediately fractured into an incoherent rabble.

The day got off to a strange start, foreshadowing what would be a series of unusual events throughout the day, but par for the course when riding with Jobst and friends. Dave Mulkey lit up, forcing me to roll down the window as we drove from Palo Alto to the ride start in Milpitas.

We boiled out of our cars and mounted up for the ride to Mt. Hamilton. It would be a hard ride from the start. We hustled



A large ride in spring 1974. From left: Bud Hoffacker (1974 state road champ), Bill Henner, Mike Jacobowsky (Chain Reaction Bicycles owner), Dave Perry (U.S. National Team), John McDonnell, Jim Westby, Marc Brandt (U.S. National Team), ??, and Bill Robertson (1975 state road champ). Jobst Brandt photo

this Mt. Hamilton Ride



Beginning their descent on the east slope of Mt. Hamilton, the April 12, 1981, ride. Jobst Brandt photo.



Jobst checks for goldfish in the spring trough on the backside of Mt. Hamilton, spring 1981.

to the 4,200-foot summit, and in our haste we didn't have a chance to hear Jobst call out birds. Over the years we've seen everything from Golden Eagles to Western Bluebirds,

Phainopepla, Lewis' Woodpeckers, and Roadrunners.

At the observatory parking lot, Jobst gathered everyone for a photo. That was quite a feat with 20 riders anxious to get back on the road. Dave Mulkey, however, rested in the shade of the observatory, in a haze.

We swiftly descended the steep, tricky backside, stopping a couple miles down so Jobst could plant the hapless goldfish in a trough. It's a ritual to stop here and drink from the pipe that taps into the spring higher up. The cold water tastes delicious. Back in the early days of the automobile, motorists used the spring's water to cool overheated radiators.

Over the years, the spring has been maintained by Don Axtell, who annually comes here to fix the pipe and clean out the trough.

After depositing the goldfish [two were alive and well a couple weeks later when we checked], we continued down the steepest part of the descent. There's one straightaway followed by a sharp left turn and a cattle guard where riders can blow by 40 mph with ease.

On this occasion, with so many riders going so fast, disaster struck, as Smitty and Dave tangled and went down at the cattle guard. Blood was spilled, but it was not life-threatening.

“On this occasion, with so many riders going so fast, disaster struck.”

[Jobst crashed badly near the same place in 2009, hitting his head and suffering other injuries. He blew a tire. Brian Cox also crashed hard near here in 2004 while riding with Jobst; He got a helicopter ride to a hospital. Note that most health insurance does not cover the ride, which costs at least \$5,000.]



Water stop at spring, two miles down from summit, in 1996. From

We continued to the next—and only—stop on the backside of Mt. Hamilton, the San Antonio Junction store. This modest cinder-block building looks every bit the Wild West stage stop, with a hog's head mounted above the bar and a library comprising *National Geographic* magazines from the 1950s. Outside we were greeted by “Car Man,” a stick-man made from cast-off car parts.

We shared the picnic tables with motorcyclists, who hang out here and talk shop. We were entertained by hummingbirds helping themselves to the feeders. Higher up, acorn woodpeckers yakked away in the oak trees.

Not the place for gourmet dining, the Junction Cafe serves up the usual burger and fries, as well as an assortment of candy bars and soda [they have Clif Bars now]. Mulkey, living off the fumes of his racing days, slumped down for a bowl of chili and three beers. He hoped this would see him through the ride—another 55 miles or so. Making matters worse, Jobst left without us.

Mulkey and I caught up, as the ride became more fractured



Car Man resides just outside the door at the Junction Cafe.



left: Brian Cox, Jobst Brandt, Ben Kavanagh, Joachim Laubsch, Richard Mlynarik



On this ride in 1984 we were joined by Olympian Eric Heiden and bike frame builder Steve Potts. This is the traditional Safeway stop in Livermore. Jobst Brandt photo

on the long gradual descent of Mines Road, where the really fast racers blasted off the front. Jobst kept a steady pace into Livermore, where we stopped at a Safeway for food and drink. By this time Dave Yamamoto had disappeared (lost) and the fast racers were gone, never to be seen again.

Taking stock of his situation, Mulkey decided he had enough and crashed on a homeowner's lawn near the Safeway. Curious children circled his body, and asked if he was dying.

The childrens' parents kept shooing the kids away, fearing that Dave might be diseased, or rabid. Since Dave rode in my car, he was my responsibility. He said to go ahead and drive back to pick him up.

I continued on with Jobst and the slower riders to Milpitas and then returned by car to retrieve Dave. On the way back in my beat up Datsun B210, we stopped at Dave's request and picked up two hitchhikers rolling a tire down the freeway.

The North Carolina natives, in the finest Southern drawl, said they were headed to Hawaii, as soon as they raised enough cash. They were promptly offered some of Dave's finest hospitality, which they gladly accepted. "Don't worry about them," Dave reassured behind a veil of smoke. "They live their own kind of life." It is a life not unlike the Jobst Ride.

(Dave Mulkey died in 2002.)



MARCH 21, 1982

RIDERS: Jobst Brandt, Jim Westby, Ray Hosler, Marc Brandt, Ted Mock, Gary Holmgren, Peter Johnson, Tim Louis, Tom Holmes

ROUTE: Start in Milpitas, over Mt. Hamilton Road, Mines Road to Livermore; Hwy 84 to Calaveras Road back to Milpitas.

WEATHER: Cool and partly cloudy; tailwinds

TIRE/MECHANICAL FAILURE: Peter – flat; Jobst – chain clunk



Snow. You can find it in colder climates, at higher elevations in California. You would not think that snow could be found in the Bay Area, but Mt. Hamilton is the exception. It snows here every year, sometimes as much as two feet, as it did in 2001!

Despite cool temperatures and some clouds hanging over Mt. Hamilton, Jobst decided on doing the 100-mile ride on the first day of spring, which is sure to leave most riders exhausted this early in the year.

We didn't get away until 8:50 a.m. and the bank thermometer across the street from where we parked read 57 degrees, although it felt much colder. It seemed to get colder as we reached the base of the mountain on Alum Rock

Avenue following a circuitous route.

Jobst forged ahead while Peter lagged behind. He kept complaining, "I haven't ridden all week. The weather has been miserable." As Jobst and the others rode out of sight, Jim and I were left to plan our survival strategy. "This is the worst condition I've been in for this ride," I said. "I keep expecting the road to level out." Jim agreed.

Halfway up the mountain Jobst turned back to escort Peter, who lagged behind. Jim and I stopped for a cold drink of mountain water from a stream coming off the mountain. It runs only during wet years.

SUMMIT SNOW

At 3,000 feet, we saw our first snow on the ground. As we



Peter Johnson and Marc Brandt at Mt. Hamilton summit on a cool spring day, March 21, 1982. Jobst Brandt photo



Marc Brandt does a handstand at Junction Cafe on March 21, 1982. From left: Ray Hosler, Jim Westby, Peter Johnson, Gary Holmgren (seated), Tim Louis, and Ted Mock. Jobst Brandt photo

approached the summit, Jobst yelled to me, “Did you see the Golden Eagle?” I yelled back, “No, but I saw an Acorn Woodpecker.” I stopped to take Jobst’s picture with the observatory in the background.

Jobst took a group photo as we grabbed a bite to eat. Then we were off to descend the steep eastern slope. A short distance down, Peter crashed but was unhurt, despite his high speed. “You just have to learn how to tuck and roll,” he said. This was not Peter’s lucky day. Shortly after the crash, he flatted.

We left Jobst and Peter behind, knowing they would catch up on the long descent. We enjoyed a nice tailwind on the flat stretches along Arroyo Bayo leading to San Antonio Valley. Wind can make or break this ride. Usually there’s a favorable wind riding up the mountain, but more often than not, a headwind greets you on Mines Road.

Gary wanted us to turn back for Jobst, but nobody else was anxious to do that. We had all been dropped too many times. As expected, Jobst and Peter caught up at San Antonio Valley and we continued as a group to the Junction Café. Unfortunately, it was too early to see the valley’s spectacular spring flower display.

We rattled off our requests for food to the lady behind the counter. The bar isn’t much, with a pool table [removed], a few tables, and jukebox. I glanced out the window, keeping one eye on Jobst’s bike. He has a way of disappearing. One strategy we tried and found effective was to stack our bikes in front of his bike. Last year Dave Mulkey and I were left to our own devices when Jobst and the gang rode away without us.

After a quick meal, we headed north on Mines Road up a long hill that kept us grouped most of the way. It still looked like it might rain, with low clouds hanging over Red Mountain. After a while, Peter and Jobst fell back, while Jim and I rode together and the rest rode ahead.

SAFEWAY FOOD STOP

In Livermore we stopped at the Safeway where Jobst always stops [during the 1980s], for more food. The rest of the ride would be comparatively easy, although we had to ride on Hwy 84, with its long hill, narrow lanes, and traffic. [Fortunately, we abandoned that route about 1987.]

We enjoyed the ride up Calaveras Road and rolled safely into Milpitas under warm, sunny skies 100 miles later.

Racing

Cyclists have been riding up Mt. Hamilton since the first safety bikes were built, in the late 1800s, only 10 years after the road's completion. Two of those early rides are documented on page 25. The challenge to cyclists, no matter what the era, is too compelling to be ignored.

While there may have been a bike race up Mt. Hamilton in the misty past, we know for certain the modern Mt. Hamilton race has been taking place since 1958, first won by Rick Bronson. We also know it was the effort of the Pedali Alpini bike club at the suggestion of Jobst Brandt, who started riding up Mt. Hamilton in 1955. Jobst, who had done some racing in the late 1950s, believed the race would be

the ultimate test of rider and bike. He designed the winner's plaque — a chainwheel embedded in polished wood. He also liked to spray-paint the 10 - 5 - 3 km. marks on the road before the summit, which was never well received by the sheriff.

Today's race is managed by the San Jose Bicycle Club (teamsanjose.org), which has been around since 1939.

PEDALI ALPINI

Pedali Alpini was started in about 1956, and based in Menlo Park, according to Eric Peterson. It was one of the oldest racing clubs in Northern California. There have been many

1960s



Walter "Wally" Gimber gives race instructions for the 1963 race. Note that the riders could not wear company logos. Tom Yocom photo.

champions who raced for Pedali Alpini, including Jim Van Boven, 1968 national road champion and Olympian. Other top racers included Bill Robertson, 1975 state road champion; Keith Vierra, Coors Classic competitor; Tim Nicholson, Category 1 racer and Stanford cycling coach; Lars Zebroski, 1960 Olympic road rider, and others.

In the 1960s, they held races like the Tour del Mar along the Pacific Coast, and an American Bicycle League sanctioned time trial between San Gregorio and La Honda.

RACE ROUTE

The 2010 Mt. Hamilton race started at a middle school in San Jose, but it has started at various locations over the years, always a couple of miles from Mt. Hamilton Road.

The finish line has also varied over the years, with the longest route finishing at Wentle Vineyards on Tesla Road. The shortest finish was on Mines Road at the Double S hill, in 1987. The 2010 race finished at the intersection of Mines Road and Del Valle Road, a distance of 63 miles.

Over the decades, this race—as with all the local amateur races —relies on local law enforcement for permission to hold the event. The acquiescence of law enforcement varies considerably, depending on a multitude of factors.

Mt. HAMILTON CHALLENGE

While it is not a race, the Mt. Hamilton Challenge deserves mention. Held annually since 1969, the Pedalera Bicycle Club event takes place in late April and includes three rest stops and a sag wagon for riders. The 125-mile loop starts in Santa Clara, goes over Mt. Hamilton, back through Livermore and Calaveras Road. Proceeds benefit the Lance Armstrong Foundation. Hundreds of riders participate time and again, a great way to go if it's your first time doing the backside of Mt. Hamilton.

DEVIL MOUNTAIN DOUBLE

One other event warrants discussion and that's the Devil Mountain Double. For the truly inspired who want to ride 200 miles in a day, the late-April event climbs the steep



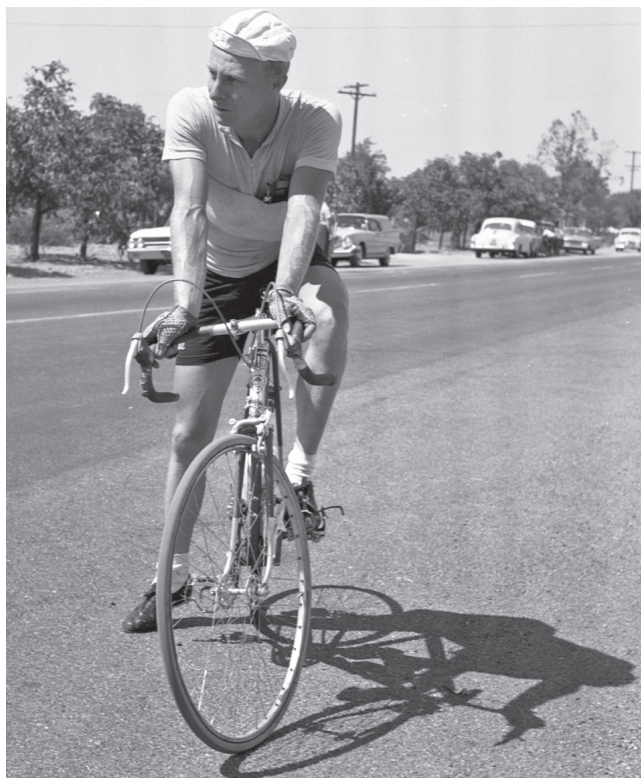
Lead group in the 1963 race, from left: David Baruch, Fritz Leidl, winner Tim Kelly in the U.S. national team jersey, Lars Zebroski, Ray Andrews, and Bob Tetzlaff. Tom Yocom photo.

backside of Mt. Hamilton. Starting in San Ramon, the ride goes to the Mt. Diablo summit, along Morgan Territory Road, through Livermore, Patterson Pass Road, Tesla Road, Mines

Road, over Mt. Hamilton, up Sierra Road, Calaveras Road, Niles Canyon, and back to San Ramon via Crow Canyon and Norris Canyon Road. Bring your lights!



Bob Solomon, left, and Sean Brennan speed over the Mt. Hamilton summit in the 1963 race. Tom Yocom photo



Bob Tetzlaff (1936-2012) won many races in the 1960s. The Los Gatos resident went on to establish the Cat's Hill Criterium in 1974. Tom Yocom photo.

1970s



John Porcella reaches the summit in 1979. Jobst Brandt photo.



Top: Gary Fisher presents winning trophy to Kent Bostick in 1979.



Left: San Antonio Valley in 1979. Below: Race finish c. 1982;



Dave Perry wins King of the Mountain, 1977. Jobst Brandt photos.



Tom Ritchey sits up in the peleton during the climb up Mt. Hamilton in the 1974 race. The national team rider went on to establish a successful frame and bicycle component business, and is a 1988 inductee to the Mountain Bike Hall of Fame for pioneering the modern mountain bike. This photo was used in the Palo Alto Bicycles mail order catalog. Jobst Brandt photo.

1980s



Gavin Chilcott won the 1981 race, finishing at Wente Vineyards. The winner's plaque was designed by Jobst Brandt. Jobst Brandt photo.



Lead riders stay together about three miles from the summit in 1987.



Kevin Metcalfe raises his arm in victory at the 1987 Mt. Hamilton road race.



This pack stayed together for most of the race in 1987.



Mark Caldwell puts the hammer down. Matt Newberry (Avocet) follows, with Matt Sarna behind him.



"I could use a Clif Bar." Gary Erickson finishes the 1987 race, several years prior to starting the successful Clif Bar company. It was during a 1990 Mt. Hamilton ride that Gary got the inspiration to develop a nutritional energy bar. He, as do so many others, owes thanks to the visionary James Lick.



The pack rides through San Antonio Valley, 1987.

1990s



Categories start at different times during the race. Riders head up the mountain in 1997.

2000s



Riders in the 2009 race, from left (numbers visible): Bo Hebenstreit, Jim Wingert, Peter Taylor, and Peter Cazalet.

The Wild Life



Jobst Brandt has some fun with a tarantula on a Mt. Hamilton ride. These docile creatures are more commonly seen in October.



Brian Cox and Jobst Brandt check out the elk in San Antonio Valley.



Wild pigs were a common sight in the early 2000s. Jobst Brandt photo



Wild turkeys often hang out near Grant Ranch Park. Watch out as you round corners. They do wander onto the road.

Enjoy the View

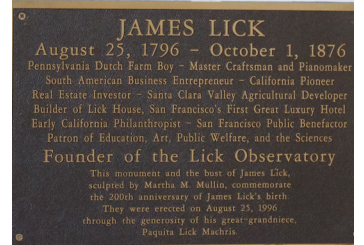
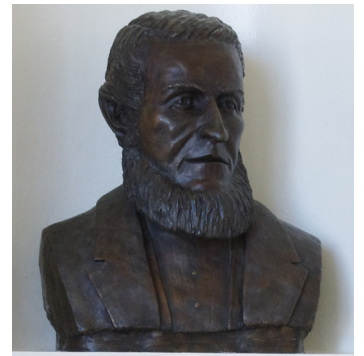


Halls Valley in the spring never fails to impress.



Riders look down on Grant Ranch where the road used to run. The ranch is now park headquarters.

James Lick's bust is located inside the main observatory.



A view from Lick Observatory summit at the blind-corner mirror.

They Led the Way

When I published *Mt. Hamilton by Bike* in 2011, I said it was only a matter of time before I found information on early rides to the summit. They're here.

The first known report of cyclists riding to the summit was on January 1, 1888, by Ralph Coxhead and Al Bouton. In addition, the *San Jose Evening News*, reported on October 2, 1888, Al A. Bouton rode from Oakland City Hall to Mt. Hamilton summit and back in under 20 hours! Considering road conditions and the bikes of the day, that's fast. At least he didn't have stop lights.

Bouton left Oakland at 3 a.m., reaching Lick Observatory at 1:50 p.m. That's about 62 miles one way in just under 11 hours, 6 mph. He made it back in nine hours. He rode a safety bike, and made four food stops.

COWBOY BOOTS AND CAMPING GEAR

In 1914 Sunnyvale's Charles Fuller rode to the summit and back in cowboy boots. He documented his trip with photos and a written account; the author's documents and photos were donated to the Online Archive of California.

Riding a single-speed, wearing cowboy boots and lugging a frying pan up Mt. Hamilton had to be difficult. Fuller said he walked a lot on that hot spring day – Friday, March 5, 1914.

Fuller must have been an interesting character. At various times he was a realtor, a Baptist preacher and then Sunnyvale postmaster, 1915-32.

I can't say with certainty that Charles Fuller the cyclist and postmaster are one in the same. Charles R. Fuller lived at 693 W. McKinley Ave. in Sunnyvale in 1940 with his wife Anita, according to the census. He was 56 years old, which sounds about right. He would have been 30 in 1914.

Stopping at a bike shop to buy a new tire, Fuller didn't start until 5 p.m.; instead of taking the train to San Jose, he rode. In my research I've noticed night riding was popular in the late 1800s. (I rode down Mt. Hamilton on a moonlit night in the late 1990s, but I can't say it was really fun. I had rudimentary lights.)

HIS LOAD WAS HEAVY

His bike was loaded down by a broiler, frying pan, kettle, a salt and pepper shaker. He almonds. Even Fuller admitted

Fuller started climbing walking. He soldiered on until pitching his tent. He was nine miles from the summit, above the southern end of Halls Valley. Only a wagon and a car

He encountered some teenagers walking up the road early in the morning and had a friendly conversation before breaking camp around 9:45. He reached the hotel at Smith Creek an hour later.

LUNCH AT SMITH CREEK

After lunch at the hostelry, Fuller began the long climb, but instead of following the road he headed straight up, following the telephone poles!

He reached the summit at 3:30 p.m. and toured Lick Observatory well into the evening before taking his bike back down the way he came, avoiding the road once again. He camped at Smith Creek.

Fuller rode most of the way back home, but fell twice during the descent. Remember, the road wasn't paved and his bike must have been hell to steer.

Thanks to Don Axtell for doing the research and finding Fuller's photos preserved at DeAnza College.



a tent and clothing. A leather bag on his handlebars had "granite" (enameled) pan, knife, fork, spoon, cup, and also carried food: potatoes, crackers, chocolate, and it "proved to be more than a sufficiency."

Fuller started climbing around 6 p.m., but in just 15 minutes he found himself around midnight before stopping at a creek next to the road and miles from the summit, above the southern end of Halls Valley. Only a wagon and a car

He encountered some teenagers walking up the road early in the morning and had a friendly conversation before breaking camp around 9:45. He reached the hotel at Smith Creek an hour later.

MT. HAMILTON

Over the years, I've accumulated historical trivia concerning Mt. Hamilton Road. I'll start at the base on Alum Rock Avenue.

- ◆ Crothers Road, two miles up, has been closed since early 1998 when heavy rains caused landslides. There are no plans to reopen the road, although it is open for bikes. It's a steep climb out of Alum Rock Park.
- ◆ The Grandview Restaurant, on the right at the end of the flat section four miles up, was originally named Grandview House; it was opened in 1884 as a hotel and tavern by Alanson Story. It served the Mt. Hamilton Stage Company. The stage line was motorized in 1911, causing Grandview House to close. The house reopened in 1934. Fire destroyed the house twice. The restaurant was moved across the road to its present location in 1954, remodeled in 2015.
- ◆ Power lines crossing the road mark the high point before descending to Halls Valley and Smith Creek.
- ◆ Mt. Hamilton Road was moved in 1933 a half mile north-



Grant Ranch inside the park.

east of the present-day Joseph D. Grant house in Grant Ranch Park to give more privacy to Mr. Grant, who built the house in 1882. The county park was dedicated in 1975 and at nearly 10,000 acres is Santa Clara County's largest park.

- ◆ The park is in Halls Valley, named for Frederic Hall, attorney for Jose Bernal, an early land owner here. The valley land was Hall's payment for settling a land deed.
- ◆ European wild pigs seen in the valley were much more frequent in the early 2000s when you could see where they "tilled the land." The county hired trappers to thin the herd.
- ◆ The park is the site of mountain bike races held in the spring.
- ◆ Kincaid Road dead-ends at a gate in a few miles, beyond which the unpaved road crosses private property and continues to Mines Road.



Cattle guard at San Antonio Valley.

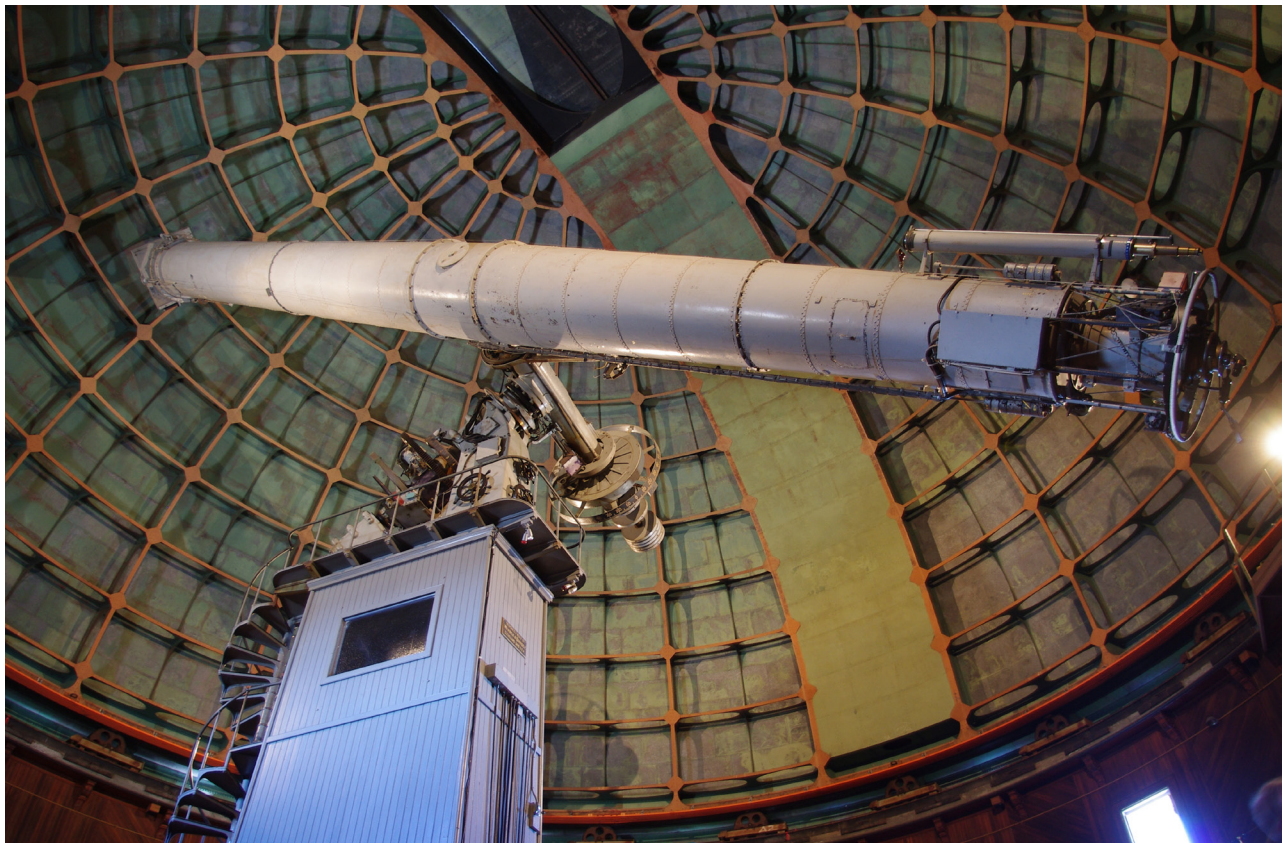
◆ About three miles from the summit at a sweeping turn, a brick kiln fired 2.6 million bricks for Lick Observatory.

◆ Many different domes and telescopes have come and gone at Lick Observatory. More than 2,000 acres of land around the mountaintop was deeded by James Lick to the University of California, Berkeley.

- ◆ The highest point here is Mt. Copernicus at 4,360 feet, where there's a fire outlook that closed in 1990.

L O R I

- ◆ On May 21, 1939, a Northrop A-17 lost its bearing in heavy clouds and crashed into Lick Observatory. The two pilots were killed. Nobody was injured inside the building.
- ◆ About two miles down the backside of Mt. Hamilton Road there's a spring and concrete trough. The water is delicious.
- ◆ Just beyond a straightaway three miles down is the first of eight cattle guards on Mt. Hamilton Road, at a sharp left bend.
- ◆ Next to Arroyo Bayo Creek is the old Mt. Hamilton Road.
- ◆ During a spring ride in the early 2000s, near a small reservoir beyond Arnold Ranch, Jobst Brandt saw three mountain lions walking along.
- ◆ Your best chance for seeing tarantulas crossing the road is in October and November.
- ◆ The Junction store at Del Puerto Canyon Road is closed on Wednesday and holidays, opens around 11 a.m. thejunctionbarandgrill.com
- ◆ Del Puerto Canyon Road was paved around 1979.
- ◆ Expect to see water running across Mines Road in two locations during wet years in the spring.
- ◆ Cork oak trees line Calaveras Road just beyond the 680 freeway overpass.
- ◆ Dead man's foot fungus can be found on Calaveras Road in the gravel on the right side of the road next to the Cork oak.
- ◆ About a mile from the high point of Calaveras Road a bald eagle nest was found at the top of a high-voltage tower next to the reservoir.
- ◆ There is no cell phone coverage on Mines Road, and it becomes spotty to nonexistent on Mt. Hamilton Road.



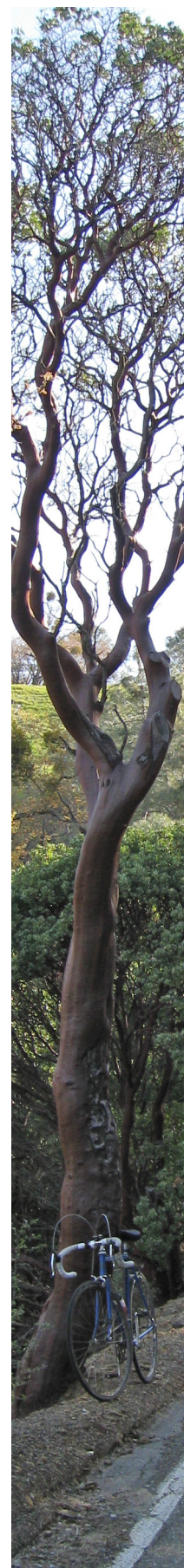
Lick Observatory's 36-inch refractor was the largest in the world when built and the first observatory on a mountaintop. Tours are given starting at noon most weekends.



Wildflower displays in San Antonio Valley, about 32 miles from San Jose, will energize you to ride here in the spring.



Jobst Brandt checks out San Antonio Valley in 1982, one of the best in memory for wildflowers after heavy winter rains.



Giant manzanita



Yellow poppies proliferate at the right edge of the road before the descent to San Antonio Valley.



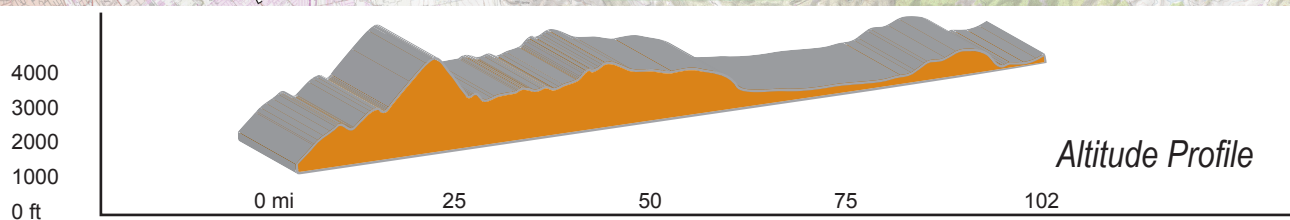
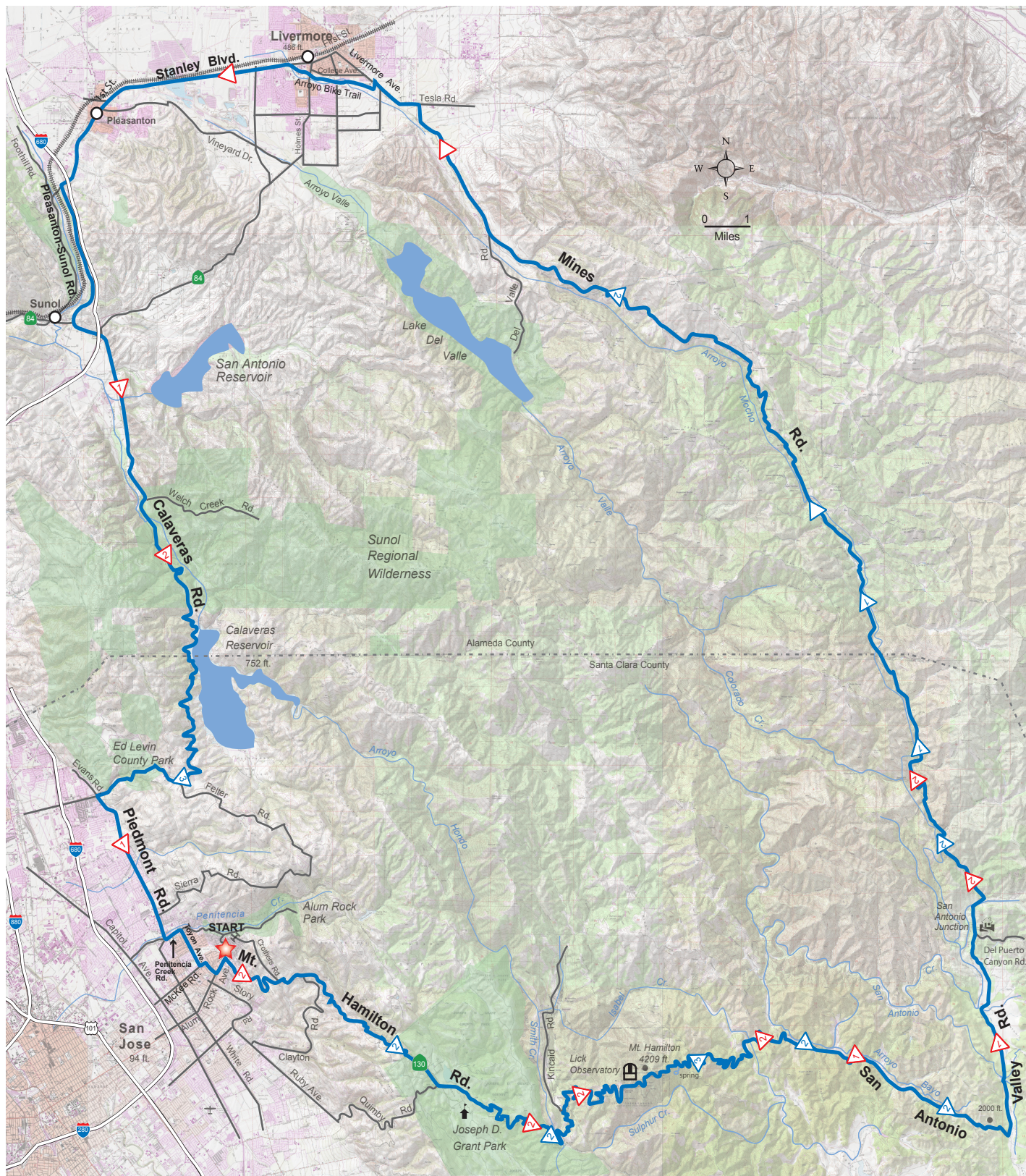
One of my favorite flowers is Serpentine spring beauty. Jobst Brandt photo.



Lindley's Blazingstar (*Mentzelia lindleyi*) says "yellow."



Serpentine spring beauty (*claytonia exigua*) close up.



Mt. Hamilton Mileage Log

Start mileage at the intersection of Alum Rock Avenue and Mt. Hamilton Road in San Jose, altitude 400 feet. Parking available on Alum Rock.

1.8 Crothers Road on left. 2.4 Clayton Road on right.

4.1 Grandview Restaurant on right.

6.4 Begin descent to Halls Valley. 7.5 Quimby Road on right. Steep. 7.6 Grant Ranch Park entrance. Water, restrooms, museum. 7.8 Grant Lake trailhead. Portable restroom.

11.0 Smith Creek descent. Portable restroom on left. 11.9 Smith Creek bridge.

13.3 Kincaid Road. 14.25 Giant manzanita. 16.8 Brick kiln area on left.

18.3 Right to Mt. Hamilton Observatory. 18.5 Summit. Observatory open most days 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Tours available. Water fountain, bathrooms inside. Continue back down same road.

18.7 Right on Mt. Hamilton Road at stop sign. Water faucet at house on right.

19.4 Begin 4.3-mile descent. 21.6 Emergency water from spring on right, when running. 22.3 Cattle guard. 23.7 Cross Isabel Creek and begin 0.6-mile climb. 24.4 Cattle guard. 24.5 Begin 1-mile descent. 26.3 Cattle guard. 27.0 Begin 0.3-mile climb. 27.2 Cattle guard. 28.2 Arnold Ranch and daffodil display in spring. 30.4 Begin 0.7-mile climb. 30.5 Cattle guard. 31.1 Cattle guard. Begin 1-mile descent. 31.8 Cattle guard. 32.0 San Antonio Valley. 34.6 Old road at gate on right.

37.1 Junction Cafe. Restroom, food, drink. 37.4 Cattle guard. 37.9 Mines Road on right. Begin 2-mile climb. 41.0 Begin 1.1-mile climb of Double S, followed by descent. 45.1 Alameda County line. 51.5 Branding Iron bar (now a residence). Begin long descent mixed with a few short uphills.

61.3 Right at stop sign on Mines Road.

64.8 Left at traffic light. Sign says Tesla Road.

66.1 Left onto Arroyo Bike Trail just past church. Look for white barrier poles at trailhead. 66.6 Cross bridge on left. Water fountain. 67.1 Ride under Arroyo Road. 67.6 Ride under Holmes Street.

68.2 Keep left where bike path splits. Food and drink available at gas station on right. 68.4 Ride under bridge and take immediate right on path, returning to Stanley Boulevard. 68.5 Right on Stanley at traffic light.

72.8 Keep straight at traffic light. Becomes First Street, unsigned. Stanley Boulevard goes right. 73.4 Meadow Lark Dairy drive-through on right at Neal Street. 75.7 Cross under 680 freeway.

75.8 Keep left on Pleasanton-Sunol Road at Castlewood Drive junction.

78.8 Left at stop sign onto Paloma Road (Hwy 84). 78.1 Cross under 680 freeway. Becomes Calaveras Road. 83.4 Cross Alameda Creek and begin climb. 86.4 Begin 0.8-mile descent, followed by ups and downs.

93.2 Begin final descent to Milpitas. Steep.

93.6 Right on Calaveras Road at stop sign. 94.5 Ed Levin County Park. Restrooms, water.

96.0 Left on Piedmont Road at stop sign.

99.8 Left at traffic light on Penitencia Creek Road.

100.2 Right on Toyon Avenue at stop sign.

101.1 Left on McKee Avenue at traffic light.

101.7 Left on Alum Rock Avenue at stop sign.

102.0 End ride.



Apperson Ridge from Calaveras Road.



MOUNTAIN MEMORIES

The more I ride over Mt. Hamilton, the more I want to do it again. When you think about it, the 102-mile loop is a huge undertaking, but break it down and take it a mile at a time, and it becomes a day-long celebration. Highs and lows. Ups and downs. There's so much to see in this wilderness overlooking Silicon Valley. The juxtaposition between the modern world below building our future and the wild, untamed Mt. Hamilton backside reminds us that life is still an adventure.

James Lick wanted to leave his mark on his passing, so he had the Lick Observatory built. I'd say he accomplished his goal. Wouldn't you? *Ray Hosler, May 2012*

*This magazine is dedicated to Jobst Brandt,
Jan. 14, 1935 - May 5, 2015.*



Ray Hosler on Mt. Hamilton backside, 1994.

Adventure Rides in the

High Sierra

**Memories of the
“Endless Ride”**

**Map and profile:
Carson, Ebbetts,
Monitor, Sonora,
Tioga passes**

CONTENTS

- 70** Death Rides Live in the High Sierra
- 72** Sierra Nevada Road Map
- 74** Sierra Passes' Role Through History
- 76** Sparks Fly on One Memorable Ride
- 82** The Endless Ride
- 85** Advil to the Rescue
- 90** Ups and Downs Through the High Sierra
- 92** Carson Pass map and profile
- 94** Ebbetts Pass map and profile
- 96** Monitor Pass map and profile
- 98** Sonora Pass map and profile
- 100** Tioga Pass map and profile
- 102** From the Publisher

Pass profiles and maps enabled by National Geographic
Topo!



Jobst Brandt, 73, rides through snowshowers at Mosquito Lake on a spring ride, May 28, 2008. (John Woodfill photo)



Cover: Jobst takes on the Sonora Pass "Window," 1987.

Ray Hosler © 2012

Death Rides Live

Any cyclist who rides the Sierra knows about the annual Tour of the California Alps, otherwise called the Death Ride.

The name sends shivers down your seat tube. This hard-ass annual event takes in the high passes surrounding the tiny town of Markleeville near the Nevada border.

Passes Sonora, Ebbetts, Pacific Grade, and Tioga are the steepest high-altitude paved public roads in the U.S. going somewhere. Steeper roads are dead ends, dirt, private, or have some other qualifier.

Sonora Pass has short sections as steep as 25 percent, and longer stretches of 18-20 percent. It is easily the most difficult pass I've ridden, and that includes rides through the Alps and the Dolomites.

Sonora Pass is unforgiving. In 2003, after a long absence from the Sierra, I found out. Severe leg cramps shortly after "The Window" left me in agony. I stopped and decided I would turn back, but my friend Jobst Brandt, who had ridden through the Sierra since 1958, had other ideas.

In one of those confrontational character-shaping events, Jobst yelled, "Ray! You can do this! Walk if you have to!" So I swallowed my pride and walked up the steep parts of Sonora Pass, at the Golden Stairs. (It's not much slower walking than riding.) At the summit I finally found relief by taking Advil offered by a fellow rider. After that wake-up call I always carried Advil to stave off the inevitable leg cramps.

Weather or not

If the steep grades weren't enough, there's weather to deal with. Granted, Sierra weather is nowhere near as unpredictable as the Alps or the Rockies, but that makes it all the more dangerous.

In 1989 on a nice June day we headed up Sonora

Pass. I brought the bare minimum, not expecting bad weather: a windbreaker was the only extra clothing.

By noon on the final climb to Sonora Pass summit the skies darkened and hail came in buckets! Within a minute the road turned from black pavement to a slurry of white pellets and icy slush. My hands froze. I had to stop and borrow a friend's socks to use as gloves. It was a more than frightening descent.

“Within a minute the road turned from black pavement to a slurry of white pellets and icy slush.”

The ride stayed gloomy and cold until Bear Valley the next day. Lesson learned.

In 2008, Jobst Brandt and friends rode through snow flurries on most of the high passes, a ride that proved too much for Jobst as he abandoned at Bear Valley and got a ride home.

Let's not forget the heat. On more than one occasion it has been insufferably hot on the two-day Sierra ride. Jobst had to cut short the ride in Strawberry one year, done in by heat and dehydration. The real killer is climbing out of New Melones Reservoir to Sonora at the end of a long day—temperature over a hundred.

Make a reservation

Lest I forget, the Sierra is unlike the Alps in more ways than one, including hotels. In the Alps there's a hotel every quarter mile, and I'm not exaggerating, much.

in the High Sierra

In the Sierra I can count the hotels on two hands. If you're doing a multi-day Sierra ride, plan ahead. Hotels are listed in this magazine. Sonora has a fair number, but they often fill up in the spring and early summer.

On one occasion, Jobst and friends wound up sleeping in a Lee Vining hotel broom closet.

Over five decades riding through the Sierra, one Jobst Ride stands out: It was 1974 on a fine weekend in late May.

Jobst recruited racers in the Bay Area for a ride that would be long remembered. As was his habit,



On the 1974 Sierra Ride, Jobst Brandt photographed riders as they neared Ebbetts Pass summit following a long walk through snow. From left: Bill Robertson, Tim Nicholson, Bud Hoffacker, Tom Ritchey, Jim Westby, in back.

Jobst liked to ride through the Sierra as soon as the passes opened. All but Carson Pass is closed during the winter due to snow.

On more than one occasion, Jobst went around barricades when the state's snow removal crews were not quite finished. This year, they discovered there had been *no* snow removal.

As the riders approached Kinney Reservoir one mile from the Ebbetts Pass summit, they found the road buried in snow.

"You couldn't tell where the road fell off," Jobst recalled. "We used our bikes to probe ahead and we looked at the trees to tell where the road went.

After a mile walking, the intrepid riders made it to the summit, where the road had been cleared of snow from the west.

Jobst often told the story and insisted that this ride, which became known as the "death ride" by those who did it, was the inspiration for the Tour of the California Alps death ride.

Death Ride origins

Not so. According to Wayne Martin, who started the Tour of the California Alps in 1984:

"It is a bit of a spinoff of the 1976 Super Tour when we rode into Markleeville from Jackson, over Carson Pass, into Gardnerville, then Topaz Lake and over Monitor Pass. We called that day the Markleeville Death March.

"After moving to Markleeville, I started the ride with the name 'Markleeville Alpine Challenge.' Got absolutely no interest, so I changed the advertising to 'The Markleeville Death Ride.'

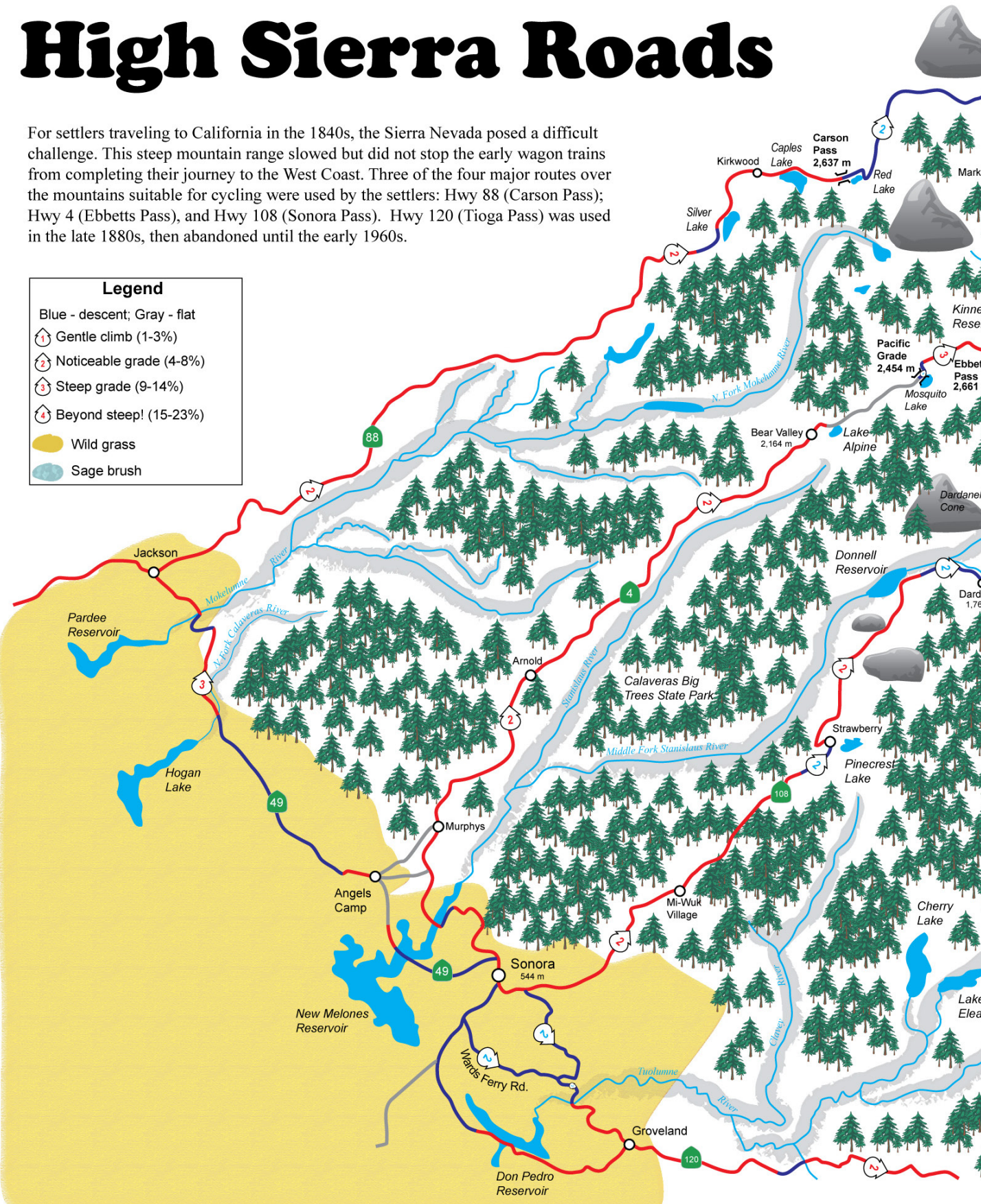
"Nothing original in the name as there are thousands of references to 'Death' this or that. The original Death Ride had 15 riders and we did five separate passes that day: Kingsbury Grade, Luther Pass, Carson Pass, Monitor Pass, and Ebbetts Pass."

High Sierra Roads

For settlers traveling to California in the 1840s, the Sierra Nevada posed a difficult challenge. This steep mountain range slowed but did not stop the early wagon trains from completing their journey to the West Coast. Three of the four major routes over the mountains suitable for cycling were used by the settlers: Hwy 88 (Carson Pass); Hwy 4 (Ebbetts Pass), and Hwy 108 (Sonora Pass). Hwy 120 (Tioga Pass) was used in the late 1880s, then abandoned until the early 1960s.

Legend

- Blue - descent; Gray - flat
- ① Gentle climb (1-3%)
- ② Noticeable grade (4-8%)
- ③ Steep grade (9-14%)
- ④ Beyond steep! (15-23%)
- Wild grass
- Sage brush





SIERRA PASSES' ROLE

In 1833 early settlers started crossing the Sierra Nevada to reach California. By the late 1840s, the gold rush turned a trickle into a river of pioneers crossing in covered wagons. In Northern California most settlers chose Donner Pass, but not just because it was the easier route.

Gold mining towns sprang up along what is now Interstate 80 and their residents invested money in road improvements to lure wagon trains their way. That strategy came into play for the other big passes. State government became active in April 1855 when the California state legislature passed a bill to invest in roads over the Sierra.

On April 22, 1884, when Thomas Stevens started his amazing around-the-world bicycle ride from San Francisco, he had a fairly good route to take following today's I-80 over Donner Pass. He followed the railroad right of way for some distance.

I have found no accounts of bike rides over the Sierra Nevada until the modern era of the 1950s. That doesn't mean it was never done, I just haven't found anything.

Modern Era

The 1950s brought tremendous wealth to the U.S. and along with it, free time. Hiking, cycling, and skiing in the Sierra took off as transportation improved. Fast, reliable cars sped across the Central Valley on paved roads. By 1964, with the I-80 freeway complete, it was only a 3-4 hour drive to the Sierra from the San Francisco Bay Area.

The freeway craze became so widespread that Caltrans had plans for a freeway all the way to Sonora Pass, and a tunnel through it! Local residents said enough already, and the freeway building spree sputtered to a stop.

Also in the 1950s, the modern bike became popular in the U.S. with the import of Cinelli, Raleigh, and others. Cyclists turned their attention to California's high passes. The Tour de France no doubt planted the seeds as its mountain stages gained notoriety.



Cyclists on Super Tour 1980 take a rest near Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite National Park. (John Finley Scott collection)

Jobst Brandt began cycling through the Sierra in 1958 with Rick Bronson, taking snowed-in Luther Pass and parts of I-80 yet to be opened. They started in Palo Alto. He quickly shifted his attention to Ebbetts, Monitor, Sonora, and Tioga, institutionalizing two-day loop rides starting in Sonora.

He may not have been the first person to ride a bike over the Sierra, but he was certainly one of the first. His 50-inch wheel equals a 34-18, a fairly difficult gear for steep mountains.

Jobst had company. Super Tours—12-day rides in the Sierra and other mountainous areas out West—started in 1976. They were inspired by long multi-day rides held by Carter Squires and the Diablo Wheelmen in the early 1970s.

THROUGH HISTORY

Super Tours, still held annually, have a unique style. About 50 riders sign up by word of mouth for the loosely organized tour of about 1000 miles; daily rides end with a big camp-out (sites. google.com/site/supertoursite/).

These tours appeal to a somewhat larger audience than Jobst's Sierra rides, which were mostly his friends and former bike racers. Super Tours draw an equally dedicated group of hardcore cyclists. John Finley Scott, known for inventing the modern mountain bike, provided Super Tour ride support with his 1965 British-built passenger bus in 1979-80.

The Super Tour in turn inspired the Tour of the California Alps Death Ride. All of these



John Finley Scott ca. 1959 on his Sierra tour. He was about 25 years old. The summit was not paved, as shown by photo inset on left. (Photo courtesy Vance Sprock)

historical events have helped inspire cyclists to ride through the Sierra. The Death Ride routinely has more entrants than ride openings. Here's a brief look at the passes:

Carson Pass

Carson Pass came into use in 1848 when a Mormon contingent headed east returning to their homes in Salt Lake City. No doubt Carson pass was named for famed explorer Kit Carson, who was the first person to carry mail using the Overland Mail route, in April 1848. It would be another three years before the mail

service became a real business.

Ebbetts Pass

"Major" John Ebbetts explored Ebbetts Pass in 1853 while looking for a suitable railroad route. A road over Ebbetts Pass was built in 1863 to link up with silver mines on the eastern slope, following Hwy 4. The early route became a toll road and stayed private until 1911.

Monitor Pass

Monitor Pass was built in 1950, and dedicated in 1954, replacing a dirt road with steep grades. One hint to its modern origin is that it keeps a steady grade.

Sonora Pass

Sonora Pass was used in 1852-53, but then abandoned. It came into use in 1859 with silver strikes in Bodie, Aurora, and the Walker River area. The route followed the Clark Fork until being rerouted to the current Deadman Creek alignment in 1863. It was run as a toll road until 1901 when the state took over.

Sonora Pass didn't become suitable for auto traffic until 1932 after the state made substantial improvements.

Tioga Pass

Tioga Pass came into being in 1882 as a wagon road to transport mining equipment to the Mono Lake area. The silver strike lasted only two years, so the road fell into disrepair. It

became little more than a cattle trail.

Thanks to Stephan T. Mather, a borax magnate, his land purchase of the route was donated to Yosemite National Park. The state built a connecting road in 1915 and paved it in 1937. World War II saw the road closed and it once again turned into a cattle trail. In 1961 the road was rebuilt by the National Park Service to its present alignment.

Sparks Fly on One

June 3, 1986

Riders: Jobst Brandt, Ray Hosler, Bill Robertson, Gary Erickson

Route: Day 1) From Sonora over Sonora Pass on Hwy 108, south on Hwy 395, up Monitor Pass to Markleeville. Day 2) Up Ebbetts Pass and Pacific Grade, down Hwy 4. Left on Parrotts Ferry Road to Columbia. Hwy 49 into Sonora. (217 miles)

Weather: Saturday hot and clear, then cloudy and windy on Monitor Pass. Sunday clear and warm.

Tire/mechanical failure: None

Driving to Sonora from the Bay Area, I am reminded why I do this trip every year, as hard as it is. The setting sun turned the sky a brilliant orange, the dry grass a golden brown. Giant oaks cloaked the hillsides, sentinels in the growing darkness.

On this Friday night we secured a room at the Sonora Gold Lodge on W. Stockton Street in Sonora, across the street from the Mother Lode Fairgrounds. After the usual fitful sleep, we started the day at 5:20 a.m. with breakfast. We purchased food the previous day for a quick get-away at 6 a.m.

.....

“Suddenly, a pickup blasted by, its right-rear wheel minus a tire throwing out sparks.”

.....

Under clear skies we rode through Sonora and headed north on Hwy 108 [Mono Way, predating the bypass] a two-lane road with a decent shoulder. Traffic can be heavy most any day of the week, even early morning.

Sparks fly

Several miles outside Sonora (1,785 ft, 544 m) we heard a strange sound behind us, growing louder by the second. It reminded me of a truck racing its engine. Nobody looked back.



Riders head to Strawberry on Hwy 120,

Suddenly, a pickup blasted by, its right-rear wheel, minus a tire throwing out sparks. The truck spun around in the oncoming lane, taking out three mailboxes. Two teenage girls tumbled out,

Memorable Ride

drunk. They laughed and looked terrified. That was one heck of a graduation party.

On reflection we should have stopped and grabbed the keys, but we continued, pulling over to let them pass as they drove up the road, sparks flying. A few minutes later a sheriff's car passed by but didn't follow the girls, who turned right onto a side road.

As we climbed the two-mile bump before Mi-Wuk Village (4,687 ft, 1,428 m), starting at Soulsbyville Road, Jobst found a nice pair of needle-nose pliers. Jobst has a house full of road booty – tools and work gloves mostly.

Nearing Mi-Wuk Village the terrain becomes decidedly mountain forest and you know you're in the High Sierra. The grade never goes much above five percent — long climbs broken by occasional descents.

One of my favorite stretches comes about two miles before Cold Springs where the Sierra peaks come into view and you pass an old ski resort on your right. In the distance you see your destination and wonder, "Can I do this?"

Temperatures continued climbing as the altitude passed 5,000 feet. Jobst had to stop for something to drink. It was a hot day, not to Jobst's liking.

We finally reached Pinecrest Lake Road and began a one-mile descent to Strawberry (5,738 ft, 1,749 m), our first traditional stop. We crossed the South Fork of the American River and

dismounted for some food in the barn-red Strawberry Store.

The well-groomed lawn and fully stocked country store offers a place to relax after 30 miles of riding and plenty of climbing. We lounged on the long bench in the shade and listened to the roar of the creek filled with snowmelt.

We continued up the road, passing 200-foot-tall Sugar Pines. Their cones can grow up to two feet in length. We saw quite few on the roadside. I imagine if one of those fell and conked you on the head you'd feel it.

There's a fairly stiff climb leaving Strawberry but in a couple miles the road levels out and it's fairly easy going, with not so much traffic by this point. To the left we could see a massive valley cut by the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River, dammed at Donnell and Beardsley reservoirs.

This stretch is a beautiful alpine setting with outcroppings of shiny white granite and tall pines. It led to our second stop at Donnell Overlook, which can't be missed. We rode our



Gary Erickson, Bill Robertson, Ray Hosler, and Jobst Brandt stop for food at Strawberry Store.



Ray, Gary, Bill, and Jobst enjoy the moment at the Sonora Pass summit.

bikes down the twisty, bumpy paved trail to a level view area with steel rail separating us from a 1,300-foot drop to Donnell Reservoir. Floating debris looked like Lincoln Logs. With the snow-covered High Sierra in the distance we watched white-throated swifts dart back and forth along the cliffs below.

Ready to ride after a 10-minute break, we began a swift descent to Dardanelle (5,774 ft, 1,760 m), a wood-frame store mingled with cabins nestled in a rock-walled valley among majestic pines. We stopped for some food and drink, sitting on the front porch and enjoying the shade.

Jobst lagged the group as we followed the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River up the gently sloping valley to Sonora Pass. We passed a huge yellow sign that warned against trucks and campers using the road. It said 26 percent grade.

Sonora Pass

At Kennedy Meadows the road suddenly jerks up, granite walls on the left, and a more distant river below on the right. Up ahead we saw “The Window,” a place where engineers blasted a path through the granite. It’s 20 percent most of the way to The Window, where it lets up to 14 percent.

I concentrated and pushed the pedals with all my strength. Past The Window the road twists upward and it’s easier, but still darn steep. In another mile, just when you think this can’t be that bad, Sonora Pass gets serious.

Deadman Creek on the right roars non-stop. This year we saw something completely different. The road cut through a 20-foot snow wall just before the Golden Stairs, the long, steep part of Sonora Pass with stretches of 18 percent.



Gary turns around for a photo on the steep eastern side of Sonora Pass.

I stopped to take a photo of Bill and Gary. An avalanche created the snow wall. Refreshed, I made it up the Golden Stairs without having to stand out of the saddle. Usually it’s a struggle at 3 mph in this section and it requires intense concentration to keep moving.

Beyond 9,000 feet the road eases up to the summit (9,620 ft, 2,932 m). I followed Gary and Jobst, and Bill came along five minutes later.



Gary and Bill take on the Golden Stairs, riding through a snow wall caused by an avalanche.

At the summit we met a guy who had been in a bicycle accident. He was waiting in a truck for a friend who was skiing down the mountain. The snow nearly covered the road sign.

We headed down the eastern slope, which starts with a steep 20 percent incline followed by a sharp but short climb. Your momentum easily carries you over the hill, but even then braking is required for the ensuing sharp left turn.

The rest of the descent through scattered aspen and granite goes in a flash, with another steep 20 percent section just before Pickel Meadows. A store off the right side of the road had just closed permanently. We used to stop and buy food here. Across the road U.S. Marines often practiced rappelling on a cliff. Their Mountain Warfare Training Center is several miles farther on.

As we broke out into the wide open expanses of the eastern Sierra I was reminded of growing up in Wyoming and Colorado. We rolled along through the flat scrub brush following the West Walker River to Highway 395. On this occasion we saw yellowheaded blackbirds in a marsh just before the intersection.

We turned north on 395, a busy highway with a wide

shoulder in most sections. With the Walker River on our right we sped downhill toward our next stop in Walker. Just the day before, a bus carrying gamblers had crashed here, killing 19. All that was visible was a long skid mark leading into the river, where many passengers drowned.

In Walker we stopped for lunch at the Basque Restaurant [closed now]. In the backyard they raised ducks and chickens for the next meal. I felt great, as did Gary and Bill, but Jobst was miserable.

Monitor Pass

After lunch we continued north toward Monitor Pass, turning left for the start of a long climb. It was hot here and the tailwind made it more so. What I like about Monitor is the sweeping vistas. There's nary a tree along the road. We inched our way up the pass at about 5 mph. Jobst suffered terribly. It was not his day.

We stopped for water at the creek in the sweeping right turn nestled in a woodsy enclave. Jobst seemed to recover somewhat after rest and water. As we climbed beyond the halfway point, the weather changed dramatically. The wind

picked up and it cooled off as a thunderstorm blew through.

Jobst recovered, but Bill wasn't feeling great as we neared Monitor summit (8,314 ft, 2,534 m), so I waited. At the summit a refreshing breeze cooled us off, but it wasn't cold and the rain passed.

We flew down the west slope with its long straight-aways and gentle curves. Speeds can top 45 mph here. At the bottom we turned right onto Hwy 89 and followed the Walker River into Markleeville, another five miles. Although the road was wet, it had stopped raining and we had a nice tailwind, arriving around 6 p.m.

Markleeville isn't much to see, just a dozen or so buildings. We found a room at Toll House, one of several hotels. Dining at the Wolf Creek Restaurant, Jobst regaled us with stories of rides gone by. By 8:30 we sacked out. Riding 125 miles with more than 12,000 feet of climbing will do that to a person.

Next day we had a hearty breakfast at the J Marklee Toll Station and headed back the way we came on Hwy 89 about 8:30.

As we rode into a headwind past the Monitor Pass turnoff a car

came up along us and its driver yelled, "Get off the road!" Jobst rode alongside the driver, who happened to be a deputy sheriff. After a few words with Jobst, he backed off and just told us to ride single file.

...a car came up alongside us and its driver yelled, "Get off the road!"

Ebbetts Pass

Fortunately Ebbetts Pass takes a while to start climbing, giving us a chance to stretch our muscles for the 14 percent grades ahead. It's a glorious ride to Ebbetts, with steep rock walls on both sides and lush green meadows. Only the occasional car passes by in the morning.

Jobst pointed out "Cadillac bend" as the climb took on a more serious grade midway up the pass. He told us how the road got its name. Many years ago a Cadillac crashed off the road and its carcass could be seen for years before it was removed. One of the key landmarks on the way up is Silver Falls and Kinney Lake.

We enjoyed a dry road and warm weather to the summit of Ebbetts Pass (8,730 ft, 2,661 m), where there's a cattle guard and a sign where cyclists take their photo. The pass was named after Major John Ebbett in 1853. Although it showed promise as a route for the transcontinental railroad, it did not come to pass. A stage route did go through here starting in 1864. This is easily the least impressive summit, with no views to speak of.

We headed down swiftly on the twisty road, which is fairly narrow in sections, so caution is advised. At the bottom we entered as remote a valley as you could ask for in the Sierra. Mokelumne River flows through verdant, marshy meadows.

Immediately after leaving the valley there's some steep climbing leading to Pacific Grade. You'll confront some super-steep sections of well over 20 percent, but they're short. Nevertheless, it's a challenge. Often there's a fair amount of snowmelt crossing this section of road that will most assuredly lead to road grime.



Riders share a casual moment in Bear Valley after climbing Ebbetts Pass and Pacific Grade.



We take a break at Donnell Overlook near Dardanelle on the 1986 ride. This is a must stop.

Once at the Pacific Grade summit (8,050 ft, 2454 m), an anti-climactic event, we headed down, passing Alpine Lake on our left. It was not frozen this year.

There's a brief climb before descending on the wide Hwy 4 to Bear Valley, our traditional lunch stop. Jobst had recovered by this point and it was a good thing as we drafted him down the mountains at speeds up to 48 mph.

Before we knew it we were riding through the baking hot Sierra foothills. We stopped briefly in Murphys for a drink and then headed out, turning left onto Parrotts Ferry Road. The new road was a nice change from the bumpy old road.

We crossed the sagging Parrotts Ferry Bridge over New Melones Reservoir, which is formed by the Stanislaus River. Completed in 1979, the 640-foot span (195 m) is one of the longest pre-stressed concrete beam bridges in the U.S. One of the earliest bridges to use a special lightweight concrete, the central span has sagged nearly two feet in the middle. A brace was added and the sagging stopped.

I blasted up the last 1000-foot climb in the shimmering heat. The others stopped at a Foster's Freeze in Columbia. Jobst, Bill and Gary arrived at the hotel a half-hour later, stopping a deputy sheriff to report the previous day's hair-raising incident.

Sierra Hotels

Sonora

Inns of California - 350 S. Washington St.
 Sonora Gold Lodge - 480 Stockton St.
 Best Western Sonora Oaks - 19551 Hess Ave.

Sonora bike shops

Sonora Cyclery - 13867 Mono Way
 Gold Country Adventure Cycles - 8 S. Washington St.

Markleeville

Creekside Lodge - 14820 State Route 89
 J Marklee Toll Station Hotel - 14856 Hwy 89
 Woodfords Inn - 20960 State Route 89
 Grover Hot Springs State Park - 3415 Hot Springs Road

Walker

West Walker Motel - 106833 Hwy 395
 Andruss Motel - 106964 Hwy 395
 Toiyabe Motel - 107045 Hwy 395

Bridgeport

Bridgeport Inn - 205 Main St., Hwy 395
 Silver Maple Inn - 310 Main St., Hwy 395

Lee Vining

El Mono Motel - 51 Hwy 395
 Lake View Lodge - 51285 Hwy 395
 Yosemite Gateway Hotel - 51340 Hwy 395
 Lee Vining Motel - 51439 Hwy 395

Caltrans Information

Road conditions

www.dot.ca.gov

Tour of the California Alps Death Ride

www.deathride.com

THE ENDLESS

This account was documented by Jobst Brandt following his "Big Loop" through the Sierra in spring 1993.

For me the spring tour over the Sierra has been a way to start the summer since 1958 when I rode with a friend [Rick Bronson] to Sacramento along the river and up Donner Pass (7,239 ft, 2,206 m). We rode partly on the newly completed Interstate 80 while traffic was still using US 40. It was early, so there was plenty of snow as we rode around the west shore of Lake Tahoe to find that Luther Pass (7,749 ft, 2,262 m) was still snowed in. Not to be deterred, we hiked over the snow to Picketts Junction at Hwy 88 and rode into Markleeville. We undertook several more such adventures on that trip, and many since. This was a good beginning to a great tradition that others have taken up,

although under the unfortunate title of Markleeville death rides.

There are three routes across the Sierra that can be connected into two-day tours with the start and finish at Sonora. These are Tioga pass to the south, Sonora Pass in the middle, and Ebbetts pass to the north. Once, more than 10 years ago, I and three other riders (Bill Henner, Tom Ritchey, Jim Westby) did the "Big Loop," riding over Tioga Pass in Yosemite Park and returning over Ebbetts Pass on a two-day weekend ride. This entails riding over Tioga (9,943 ft, 3,031 m), Conway (8,143 ft, 2,481 m), and Devil's Gate (7,519 ft, 2,291 m) passes, 168 miles to Walker on the first day. The second day is no slouch either, crossing Monitor, Ebbetts, and Pacific Grade for 114 miles. This is in contrast to making the trip over two adjacent passes. To make up for any other advantages, both Tioga and Ebbetts require crossing the 1,000+



Bruce Hildenbrand, right, joined Jobst and Jeff Vance for a Sierra Ride in 1991.

RIDE

foot deep canyons of the Tuolumne or Stanislaus rivers near Sonora.

This weekend, June 12-13, I set out to try something I had thought about over the years. I would attempt the “Big Loop” clockwise. As I started alone from Sonora just before 6 a.m., I ran into Bruce Hildenbrand, who was driving to the start of his ride counterclockwise over Tioga. Whether he or I had any plans on a big loop was not mentioned and, for my part, I felt it could have been self-defeating and presumptuous. We talked a bit of the Giro d’Italia and our slipping U.S. heroes, wished each other well and got going.

My route from Sonora (1,785 ft, 544 m) rose to Columbia (2,139 ft, 652 m) only to descend to Parrotts Ferry bridge (800 ft, 243 m) across the Stanislaus River and back up to Valecito and Murphys (2,175 ft, 663 m). The river gorge was still in the purple shadows of morning with the first rays striking the north shore. There was practically no traffic until I got farther up Hwy 4 to Arnold (4,000 ft, 1,219 m) where the pickup truck traffic began to get heavier. There were more “mountain men” than you could count, driving their jacked-up pickups on large knobby tires. I even saw one Power Wagon that had been converted to tandem rear wheels with matching long fenders.

At Calaveras Big Trees (4,728 ft, 1,441 m), the dogwood was in bloom and water was rushing in every stream and brook. It was a pleasant surprise to meet Dave Prion of Ritchey Bicycles, who was on a fishing trip, as he pulled over to say hello and offer me some breakfast.



Bruce, Ray, Marc Brandt, and Jeff prepare for the climb up Sonora Pass in 1991.

In the cool morning air the gradual climb went easily and, as I got higher, the vegetation and trees changed. Now at Dorrington (4,767 ft, 1,452 m) there were ponderosa pine as well as red and white fir with wild iris along the road. Red-and-white-breasted nuthatches were making their usual mini duck calls in the forest. Steller’s jays and Clark’s nutcrackers yacked away and I could see snow on the ridge to the south. At Bear Valley (7,100 ft, 2,164 m), Velo Promo was putting on the annual criterium with good organization but hardly any participants.

I got a pastrami sandwich in the deli and rode on past the Mount Reba ski area to Alpine Lake, where the road becomes narrow, forsakes its center stripe, and reverts to a more primitive asphalt. At the esses a disappointed racer joined me up to Pacific Grade Summit (8,050 ft, 2,454 m) with its grand panorama. Mosquito Lake, which sits right on the summit, was still frozen but had a few openings with window-pane clear ice from the night. The air was pristine and clear because the campsites were still snowed in, so there was no one burning Oscar Mayer products (the essence



Jobst remounts after taking a break on the east slope of Tioga Pass in 2003.

of camping).

Beyond Pacific Grade, the road makes a steep winding descent into Hermit Valley crossing the roaring cascade of Pacific Creek to level off at the Mokelumne River. With practically no traffic, the road was more like a private bike path. The grand landscape with wildflowers and crystal clear water was inspiring as I rode up to Ebbetts Pass (8,730 ft, 2,661 m) and down past Kinney Reservoir that was also still frozen. Clark's nutcrackers gave their raucous call as they watched the fishermen along Silver Creek for handouts. Some cyclists with a follow van were making their way up the east slope as I rolled down toward Markleeville. I stopped at a sparkling cold stream and ate a couple of bananas, tanking up for the climb from the east fork of the Carson River (5,700 ft, 1,737 m) up Monitor Pass (8,314 ft, 2,534 m) over to the Walker River valley (5,000 ft, 1,524 m).

The view on the descent to Topaz (5,033 ft, 1,534 m) stretches to Nevada with snow-capped mountains and the desert beyond, while below the rich green meadows are wet with Sierra water.

Although many rivers flow into Nevada, no rivers flow out of the state. As I rode south to Walker (5,403 ft, 1,647 m) I felt a favorable breeze that I had noticed along the Carson River. I got a snack at the grocery store and thought about the wind and the climb to Devil's Gate.

It was still early in the afternoon, so I headed into the canyon of the West Walker River where the wind was disappointingly mild... but it got better. As I approached Sonora Pass junction (6,950 ft, 2,118 m), I was cruising uphill easily. After the junction, however, the road curves around a mountain and, for the next mile or so, I faced a headwind before once again heading south to Devil's Gate (7,519 ft, 2,291 m) with its reddish volcanic sentinels. The wind was brisk now and, on the gentle 5 percent descent toward Bridgeport, I reached unusually high speeds for such a mild slope.

***“As I approached
Sonora Pass junction,
I was cruising uphill
easily.”***

Three miles before Bridgeport (6,463 ft, 1,970 m) the road turns left and straight into town exposing me to a brisk side wind that came from about 5 to 10 degrees from ahead. I didn't hurry because that only wastes energy. The strength of this wind gave me other ideas for the day's goal as I saw yellow headed blackbirds

and western gulls among the cows in the marshy fields that typify Bridgeport. Once in town I downed a chocolate milkshake and a large Coke just as Bruce Hildenbrand rolled in looking not too happy. He had just fought stiff headwinds for the last 30 miles, partly while climbing Conway Summit. We discussed the state of affairs and he encouraged me to take advantage of the wind and go to Lee Vining where he had seen four friends who were heading in the same direction, after crossing Sonora Pass. [Bruce did not do the big loop]

As I left Bridgeport, I rolled along with little effort at near 30 mph as a group of about 20 Harley-Davidsons rolled by headed toward town. The wind carried the rumble and rhythmically throbbing beat of the huge engines, long after they had passed. By the time I reached the base of the climb, the wind had dwindled to a light breeze. It was getting late as I crossed the summit at 6 p.m. As I tucked in for the smooth descent, a mountain bike rider in a Jeep Cherokee motored me down the sweeping four lanes of Conway Summit (8,143 ft, 2,482 m) to the bottom of the hill at the highest speed I had seen in a long time. From there it was a casual ride down to Mono Lake before the final 300 foot grunt up to Lee Vining (6,781 ft, 2067 m).

I rode right to Nicely's Cafe (it was 7 p.m.) where I found my bike friends ordering dinner. I joined them just in time to place my order. Fortunately I could share their cabin, because there were no vacancies anywhere in town. I had ridden 171 miles [averaging 13 mph, stops included] and climbed 18,150 ft, 5,532 m); with the great dinner, I slept well in the cool high mountain air.

We got a 6 a.m. breakfast at Nicely's and, because Bruce had told me that the Tuolumne Meadows store was not yet open, I ate two breakfasts so that I could make it the 92 miles to Groveland for the next food. The climb to Tioga Pass (9,943 ft, 3,031 m) went briskly with cool breezes and brilliantly clear air. On the way up I saw a western tanager and a mountain bluebird at close range; both of these brilliant birds are uncommon in my area. At Ellery Lake (9,489 ft, 2,892 m) the road flattened out and a mile later before entering Yosemite Park we stopped at the Mono Inn for a snack.

We took a group picture at Tioga Pass and cruised down the long gradual descent to Tuolumne Meadows (8,900 ft, 2,712 m). A couple of sharp bumps got us over to the Merced River watershed and Tenaya Lake. Although the climb from breakfast to the summit was only 3,180 feet, the descent to Sonora involved at least 6,000 feet more climbing that became evident as the road reached the heat of the San Joaquin Valley.

From Crane Flat, the old Big Oak Flat Road (one way) descends steeply through the Tuolumne Big Trees to the Big Oak Flat entrance station. This road was still closed for repairs, so there

was no one beyond the Big Trees campgrounds, a mile down the road. The giant redwoods are always larger than I remember them and the forest, with blooming dogwood and rushing water, is good for the psyche. At the entrance station I got a couple of sodas and rolled on down toward Groveland. My friends, who had stopped at the Crane Flat Store, caught up to me after the third crossing of the south fork Tuolumne River.

It was hot in Groveland (3,136 ft, 956 m) and I wasn't much for solid food, so I put away a milkshake and some Pepsi and buried an ice cold Pepsi in the clothing in my touring bag for the 642 foot climb out of Wards Ferry on the Tuolumne River. After that, the road continues to climb gradually to Tuolumne City Road (2,450 ft, 746 m) and a cold drink would come in handy.

The narrow twisting road climbs steeply up the canyon wall to the cliffs directly above the bridge. Here, I discovered years ago, there was a watering trough under a tree on the outside of the curve where the road levels off. I dunked my head and wet down my jersey. The faucet also has good drinking water. I dug into my bag for the secret weapon. The Pepsi was still crisp and cold and, as I drank, the fast guys went by looking good as they rode to the top of the last major rise where we all regrouped for the ride into Sonora. This, the second day, was 110 miles and 9,280 ft (2,828 m) of climbing for a total of 282 miles (450 km) and 27,430 feet (8,360 m).

It was a big trip and I was glad to have caught the opportunity to make the "Big Loop," of which I had wondered whether it was possible. It is, and it's a great ride.



A bite of snow for the thirsty on Ebbetts Pass in 2005.

Advil to

May 19-20, 2007

This past weekend Jobst and I rode over the Sierra—no big deal if you don't mind climbing 20,000 feet. As I discovered, you can complete this 210-mile ride on only three 100-mile rides, but bring the Advil®. After reading Jobst's deposition, I decided to tell what else happened.

The Sierra Ride odyssey really begins on a Friday around 3 p.m., no later. That's because the drive to Sonora, our starting point, requires joining the migrating weekenders and hordes of Central Valley residents who drive 50 million miles a year to and from San Francisco just so they can own an affordable house.

That drive is taking longer and longer and costing a heck of a lot more with gas at \$3.40 a gallon. I arrived a few minutes early and waited for Jobst to get his act in gear. We chose his 1991 white Volvo wagon over my dilapidated 1989 Mazda 323 with no leg room.

As it turned out, his car has a bent right front wheel that vibrates around 80 miles per hour, which is his average driving speed on the 580 autobahn. But I didn't notice anything, except that his electric windows are wired backwards. Down is up and up is down. Is that Swedish engineering or what?

Just beyond the Dumbarton Bridge we hit traffic. Choosing 880/580 over 84/Niles Canyon, Jobst immediately regretted his decision as we crept along studying truck license plates. Did you know that today's giant trucks have dual-exhaust pipes when they really only need one? Someone came up the bright idea that two looks a lot sexier than one. That and the latest "gangster cars" from Chrysler occupied our thoughts.

We had plenty of time to contemplate these worldly concerns. Eventually traffic started moving and we sped over Altamont Pass as Jobst pointed out the transcontinental railroad and about 50 other railroad lines. I can't tell you all their names, but rest assured it probably has the word Pacific in it, or a direction -- Western, Eastern, Northern, or Southern.

Central Valley withers

Driving through the Central Valley it's not hard to understand

why it's only a matter of time before this country imports all its food. You can't grow food on housing tracts. We digested that grim reality over a giant sandwich at Quiznos in Oakdale.

We arrived at Inns of California in downtown Sonora on Washington Street where we gladly paid \$114 for our room. Glad because this weekend every motorcycle rider in Northern California drove to Sonora and surrounding towns for Motorcycle Appreciation Month. No doubt this "hog" bill motored through Congress on the political wheels of the honorable Senator from Wisconsin. We heard plenty of hogs and half of them stayed at the Inns of California right outside our door.

After a fitful night for me and the usual deep sleep by Jobst, dawn came about 20 minutes early with the rumble of a Harley taking off. We proceeded to pack our bags, wolfing down food before rolling away at a few minutes to six under clear skies and a temperature of 50 degrees. I immediately found 10 cents and the coin collecting competition got into gear. More on that later.

Although the roads were empty, a bakery truck or some such vehicle had to buzz us as we headed to Columbia on Hwy 49. Jobst showed me where he met up with Bruce Hildenbrand on their independent 1993 "endless rides." Bruce had spent the night in Columbia and headed over Tioga Pass, while Jobst spent the night in Sonora and rode up Hwy 4 to get to 395. Later that day



Jobst checks out the New Melones Bridge.

the Rescue

Jobst, after enjoying tailwinds the entire way, met a tired Bruce, who spent the day battling headwinds, before Bridgeport on Hwy 395.

We rode through Columbia where, sadly, the Foster's Freeze had been replaced by a restaurant. Jobst and friends enjoyed many a cold drink here after a long, hot day riding down Hwy 4. Parrotts Ferry Bridge over New Melones Reservoir had its share of swallows and, as a bonus, an Osprey nested at the top of a tall, dead tree near the shore.

We climbed up a steep piece of road across the bridge, passing the old highway to our right. I remember taking that bumpy, narrow road years ago. I can't say I like the new treeless way any better. Fortunately traffic was light.

Rush-hour traffic to nowhere

On Hwy 4 traffic picked up as we continued uphill. Where were all these people going? At one point it felt like a freeway as waves of trucks and cars headed up the hill. To work? Fishing? Beats me.

I took the quiet Utica Powerhouse Road while Jobst stayed on 4. It's more of a climb on Powerhouse, with one section of 13 percent, but some nice houses line the road and the small hydroelectric plant offers an interesting sight. Jobst trailed me by only a few hundred yards as I merged onto 4.

We continued past Avery and Arnold on the way to Calaveras Big Trees State Park, where we saw no skulls, but plenty of smoke from campfires. Beyond the park we stopped at Camp Connell store so Jobst could buy a dozen 20 oz. Pepsi and guzzle a bottle, or two. He carried a shoulder bag even though he had a Carradice seat bag, all for that precious Pepsi. Jobst bleeds Pepsi.

The owners enjoyed hearing Jobst talk about the "Death Ride" and its origins. I told them to Google "Jobst" and they would find plenty more. I took photos of the store's ancient wooden skis, which shared space with logging saws on the ceiling.

Back on the road, we continued the long grind up to Bear Valley. We stopped once to photograph a brilliant red snowflower. We would see some more on the descent from



Snowflower on Hwy 4.

Donnell Overlook. The grade holds steady at 5 percent forever, or until reaching the Patchen road maintenance station a few miles before Bear Valley. In the modest ski resort we stopped and enjoyed a bite to eat. Jobst ate a burrito and downed another gallon of Pepsi while I drank root beer.

We contemplated the recent announcement of grandiose plans to build a huge ski resort here. Lots of luck. One thing for sure, skiers have a nice, wide road to drive up, including Hwy 207 to Mt. Rebla, up Hwy 4 a couple miles.

The road narrowed as we headed down to Alpine Lake. Snow lined the lake, but it was ice-free. Beyond the lake the road tilts up to 14 percent at the iron gate that lets you know the climb to Pacific Grade Summit is underway. Fortunately, the climbs are short.

Advil stops leg cramps

It was somewhere around Mosquito Lake and the Pacific Grade Summit that the leg cramps started. I immediately took two Advil®. No more leg cramps. I felt better and on the climb up Ebbetts Pass I had no problems, even on the steepest final climb. Jobst stopped to drink more rocket fuel to get him to the top. We had a bite to eat at the summit, with the annoying cattle guard. Are there really any cattle up there?

Kinney Reservoir, about one mile and 400 feet downhill from the summit, had a layer of ice, more than I would have imagined for such a dry winter. Jobst stopped to take my photo as I rode by. We proceeded at high speed down the narrow, twisty road with granite cliffs on one side and Silver Creek Canyon on the other. We stopped again to take a photo and enjoy the view down the canyon. At our final stop on a tight turn, Jobst looked over the edge and showed me the ancient Cadillac that crashed decades

On Hwy 395 we had a wonderful tailwind for a mile or so, but the wind died down and even went against us at times. We soldiered on and around 5:45 (114 miles) arrived in Walker, my legs just starting to cramp. Toiyabe Motel offered comfortable beds and lots of crosswinds from windows on both sides of the room. We paid the \$67 bill and got ready for dinner at the swank Walker Burger across the street. We wolfed down our delicious food in the tree-lined courtyard with an abundance of chirping birds frolicking among bird feeders and bird houses. Jobst drank another gallon of Pepsi and I finished off a \$5 “Big Gulp” shake.

A night in Walker

That evening we had no trouble sleeping, except for the next-door occupants who stayed up all hours watching TV. A couple of swift bangs on the wall and “Turn off the damn TV!” by Jobst put a stop to their nonsense.

In the morning we faced the grim reality of not having a hearty breakfast to greet the day. The restaurant next door proved too much work for the owners and

now it’s for sale. We backtracked a mile to the Walker Trading Post. It wasn’t much, but at least we had some food, and gallons of Pepsi. Jobst found a driver’s license on the ground and turned it over to the store owner.

Walker River gave no indication that it was low on water after a dry winter. The roaring river rushed past us as we headed up the canyon into the usual morning headwind. At least it wasn’t as bad as 2005.

Jobst pointed out Burcham Flat Road high up on the hill where Brian Cox and John Woodfill rode a few years back. Hwy 395 was closed so they had no other choice. The hilly gravel road connects to Hwy 395 two miles beyond Sonora Junction. Brian and John were surely snakebit on their ride, but we had our own snake to contend with. A dead rattlesnake on the edge of the road prompted Jobst to stop and harvest the rattle.

Our destination was Sonora Pass, so we turned right at the junction, looking for the yellow-headed blackbirds that call this home in the marshes lining the road. We saw a couple of birds speed by as I stopped to take some more Advil just in case. On past the Marine Corps base we rode, noting that this was anything



A cattle guard greets riders at the Ebbetts Pass summit in 2007.

ago. Of course this place is called Cadillac Bend.

Only one more climb. Monitor Pass on the west side offers long sections of 13 percent, a hot canyon, and plenty of headwind. I fell into survival mode at about 4 mph, Jobst just ahead. We passed a group of riders on mountain bikes who were going even slower. How can that be? We inched our way up the mountain following Monitor Creek, its usual orange color from ancient mine tailings. Work crews above us on Loope Canyon Road were busy grading away.

I took a break and enjoyed an apple along with the view of Sagehen Flat and Heenan Lake below. Not a bad place to watch the world go by. Rested, I continued up the hill and joined Jobst at Monitor Pass summit where a white tombstone backed by aspen said 8,314 feet.

55 mph without a helmet

We blasted down the eastern side, buffeted by the usual head- and side-winds. That didn’t stop Jobst from reaching 55 mph. We stopped at a creek in the trees so I could fill my water bottle. Nearby Slinkard Valley used to be such a lovely place until the big forest fire in 2002 that threatened Walker.

but rugged living for the troops. Looks more like luxury condos. We enjoyed the view of Pickel Meadow and Walker River, a ribbon of blue rushing down the snowcapped eastern Sierra. "How are we going to get over those mountains?" I asked. We would soon find out.

Sonora Pass at 3 mph

The real climbing begins around Wolf Creek as this steep section prepares you for what's to come. We rode past the former Leavitt Station store, now just a flat stretch of ground across from the Marines' climbing area. Of course, anyone who has ridden up Sonora Pass knows where the fun begins. At the base of the big turn we stopped for some more rocket fuel. Jobst drank a gallon of Pepsi and I ate a candy bar. Waiting for the rider is 708 feet of climbing in 1.1 miles. I saw 22 percent flash by on my inclinometer as I managed a walking speed of 3 mph.

Fortunately we had spectacular weather with refreshing mountain air and filtered sunshine, perfect for climbing. We continued up the pass, which isn't exactly easy in the middle section. It has several steep turns that can be tricky when wet during a descent. They led up to the final half-mile before the summit, which includes an amazingly deceptive left turn for



Enjoy the 20 percent grade on the east slope of Sonora.

someone going down. From the summit you can easily reach 50 mph on the 20 percent grade. At the bottom you'll see a short uphill. Great, something to slow you down. Only it's not enough to slow you down sufficiently without riding the brakes hard for the upcoming tight left turn.

Riding uphill is a different story. Jobst took my photo as I rode ahead. While it's steep, it's half as long as the lower section and before we knew it we were at the summit sharing the road with motorcyclists. We took the obligatory photos and then sped down the pass, negotiating the tricky Golden Stairs 18 percent grade, followed by another steep grade of more than 20 percent to Kennedy Meadows.

In Dardanelle, where we usually grab a bite to eat and Jobst buys another gallon of Pepsi, we found a shuttered store. I stopped to eat the last of my food and drink some water. Jobst rode ahead looking for Pepsi. We joined up on the long climb to Donnell Lake Vista Point where the Stanislaus River backs up thanks to public works.

The ride to Strawberry may seem like a big downhill, but it's not. It has a lot of climbing and long flat stretches. Only in the last mile does the descent begin. We stopped for food at Strawberry Store and once again Jobst downed a burrito and two gallons of Pepsi.

After the break and insightful observations about VW vans, we headed uphill to Cold Springs and then started the long downhill to Sonora. On the way we saw gawkers looking over the edge of a canyon next to the long-abandoned Sugar Pine Ski area where Hwy 108 splits into a divided road. A vehicle had gone over the edge and tow trucks were on the scene.

With continuing cool mountain air, we turned off to Twain Harte and took old Hwy 108. It brought us back to new 108 and more fast descending next to some disagreeable rumble strips.

We rumbled down the road and turned right at the stop light at Peaceful Oak Road to pick up the 108 bypass. It felt like we were on the 405 heading through LA as we looked down on Sonora. That took us back to Washington Street and a short ride to the hotel, 97 miles later, 3:30 p.m.

Jobst pulled out a fistful of gnarled coins that looked like they had been through a belt sander and declared victory. I rang in with 36 cents, but at least my coins were legal tender. And so ended another Sierra Ride. Time for a Pepsi.

Ups and Downs in



Yosemite National Park, 2003. Ray, Brian Cox, Jobst, John Woodfill, Jeanie Barnett.



Sonora Pass in 1981 after being blown to the summit.



Jim Westby rides up the Golden Stairs on Sonora Pass in 1989.



Worth the effort. Mono Lake in 1987 from Conway Summit.

the High Sierra



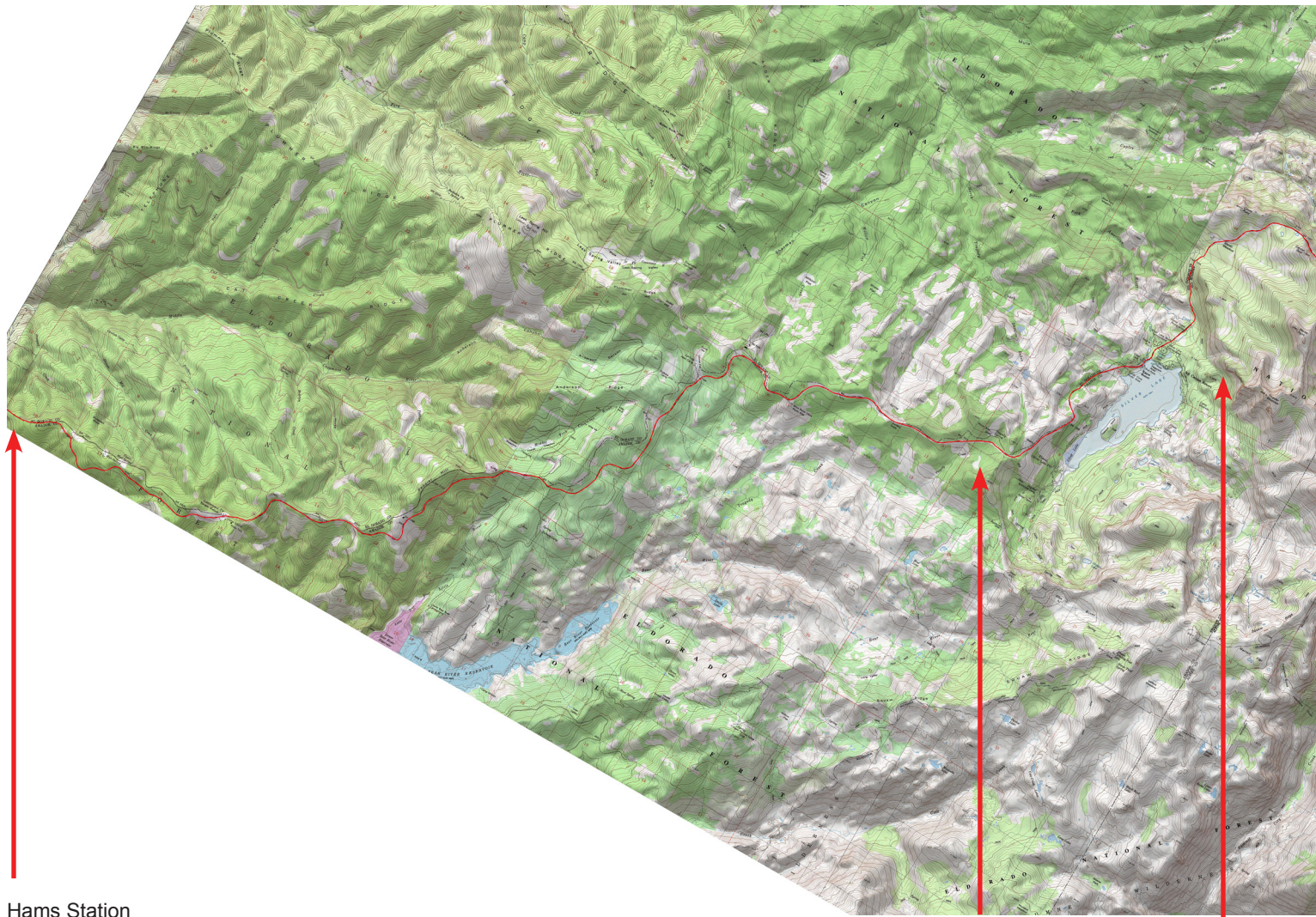
From left: Jim Westby, Ted Mock, Tom Ritchey, Jobst, Parker McComas.



Monitor Pass 1974. Bud Hoffacker, Jim Westby, Bill Robertson, Tim Nicholson. (Jobst Brandt photo)



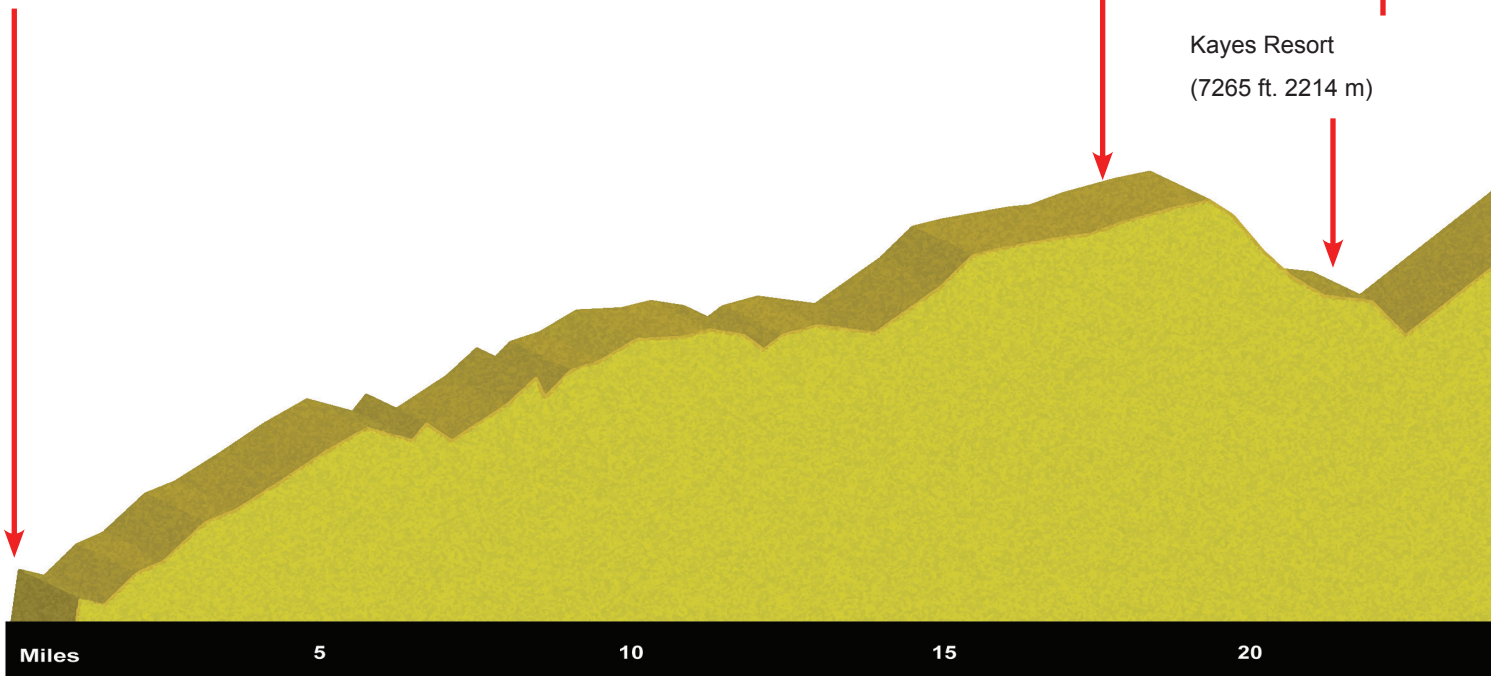
Jim Westby rides through the Yosemite tree on old Big Oak Flat Road.



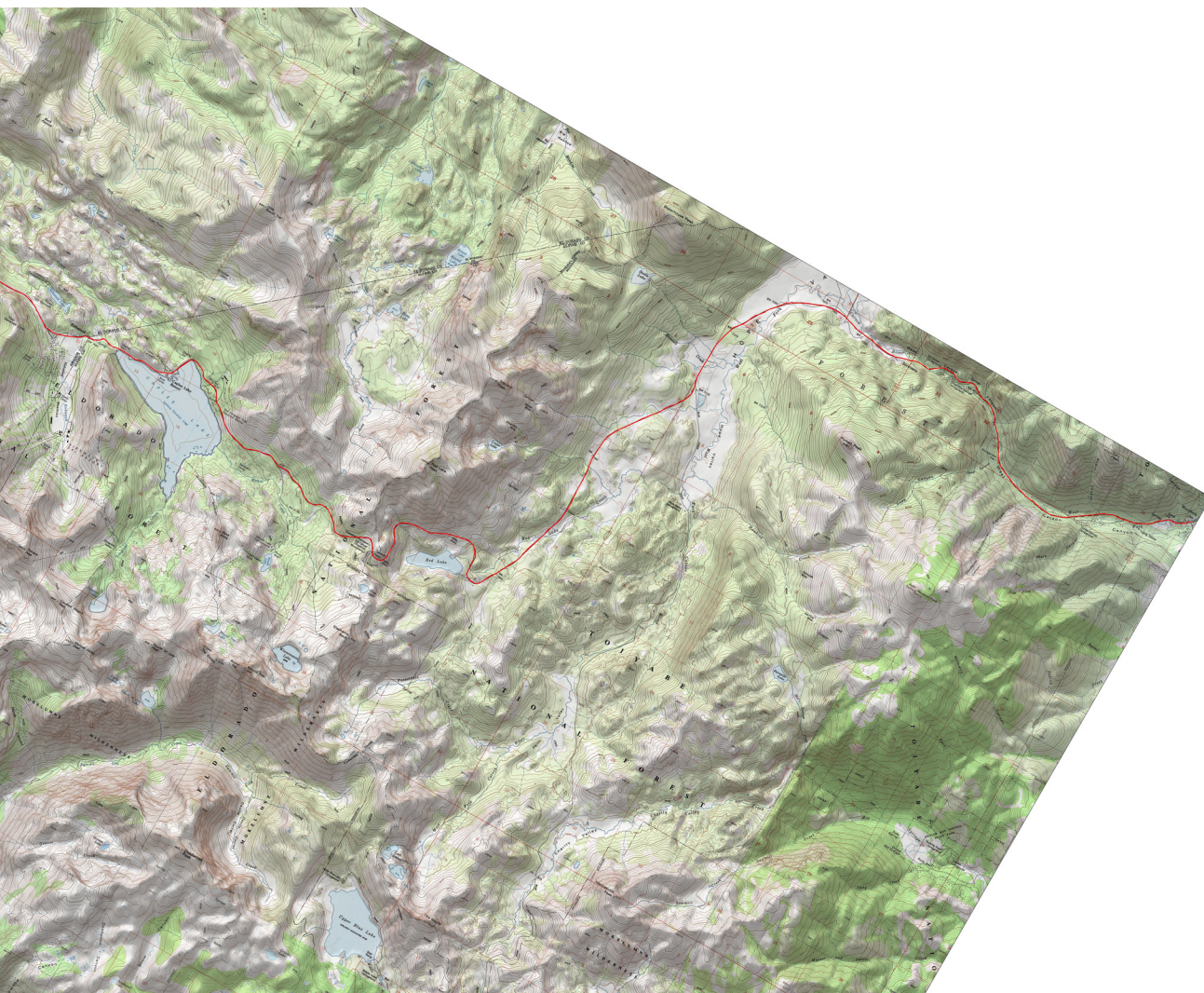
Hams Station
(5400 ft. 1646 m)

7673 ft. 2339 m

Kayes Resort
(7265 ft. 2214 m)



Carson Pass

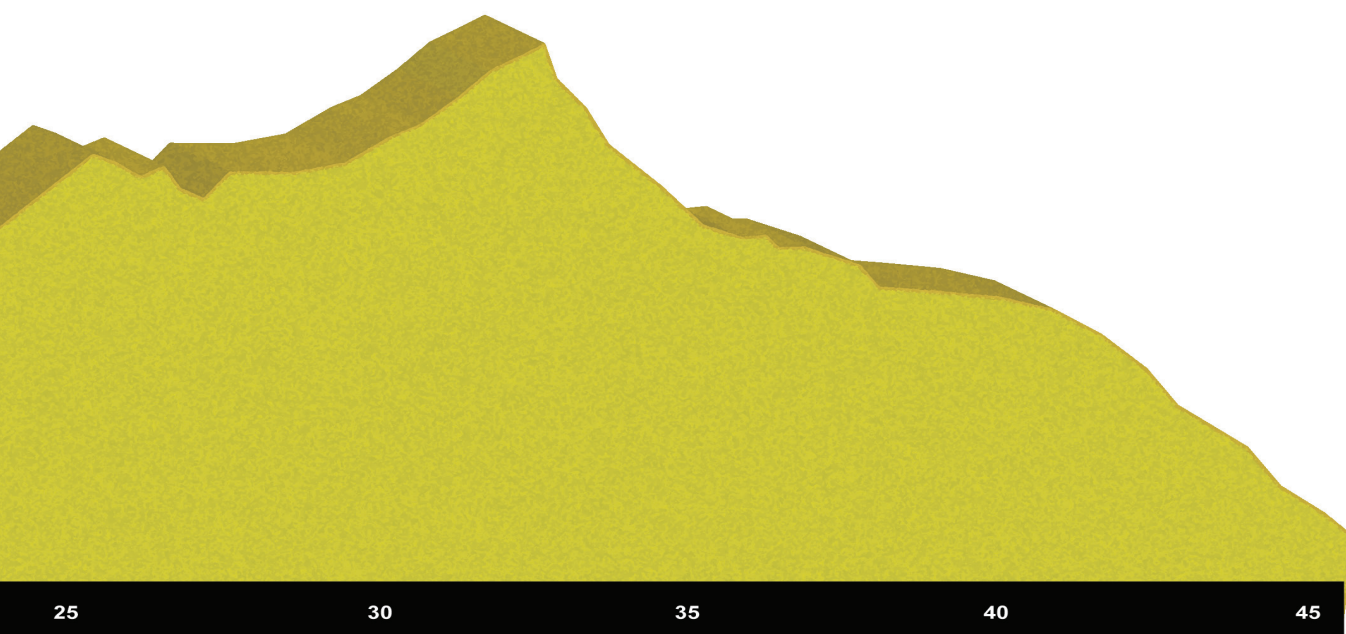


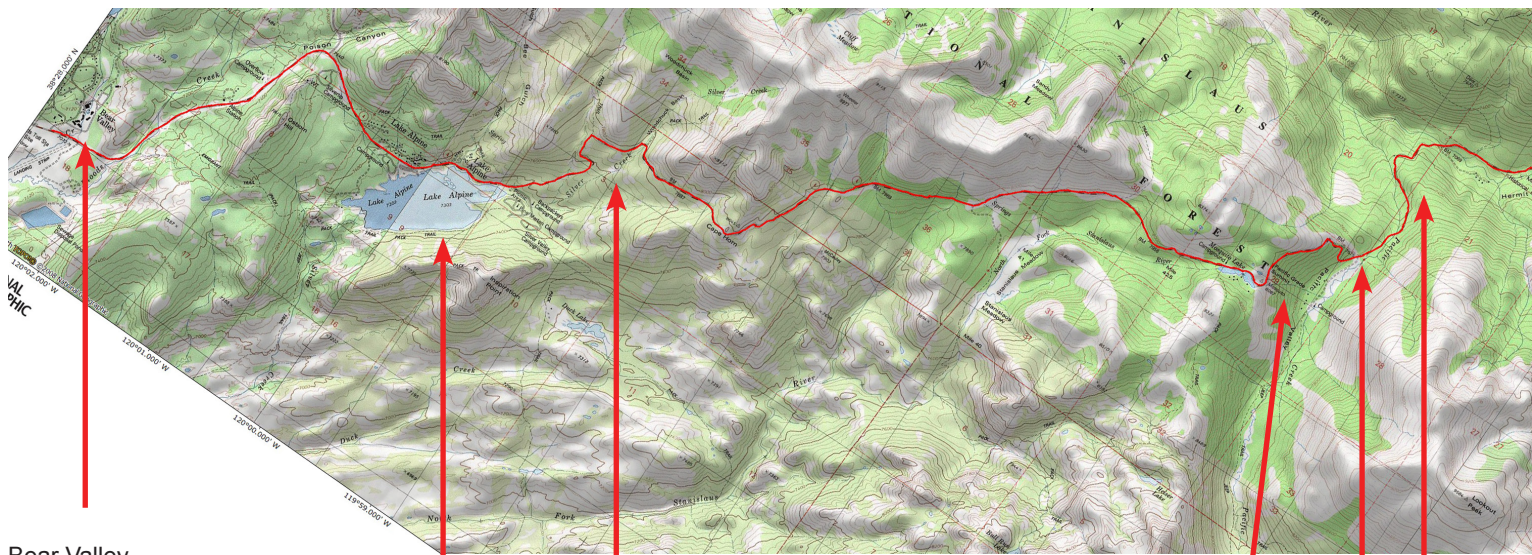
Kirkwood

Carson Pass
(9050 ft - 9227 ft)

Woodfords

m)





Bear Valley
(7100 ft. 2164 m)

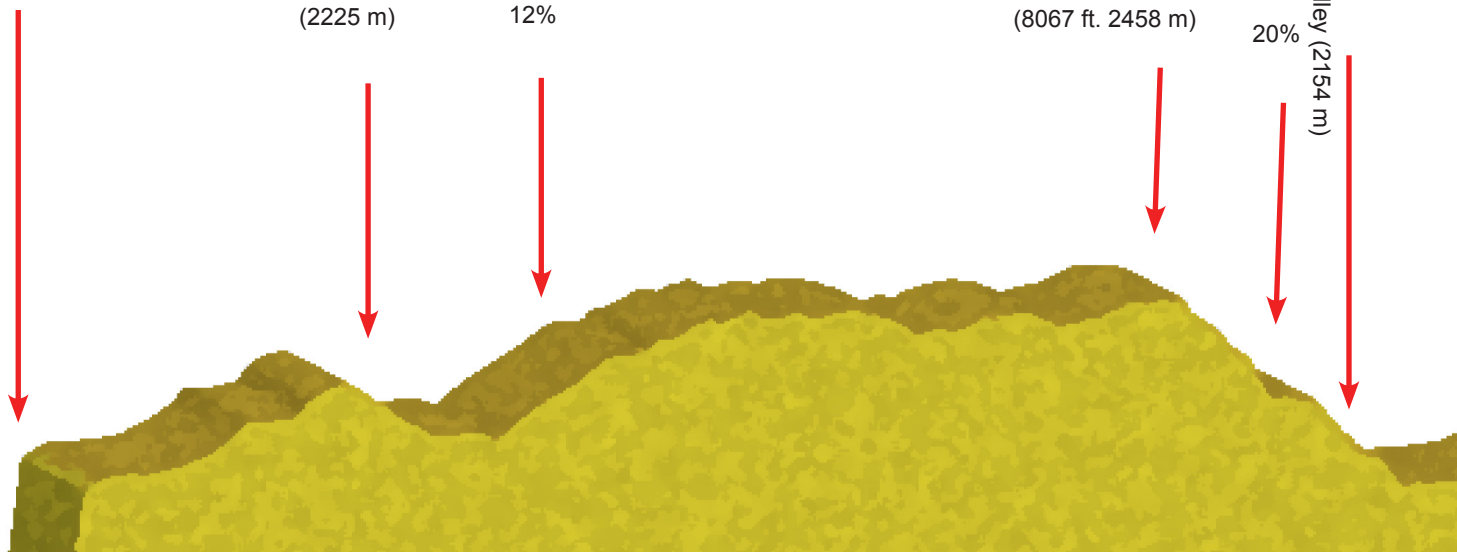
Alpine Lake
(2225 m)

12%

Pacific Grade Summit
(8067 ft. 2458 m)

20%

Hermit Valley (2154 m)

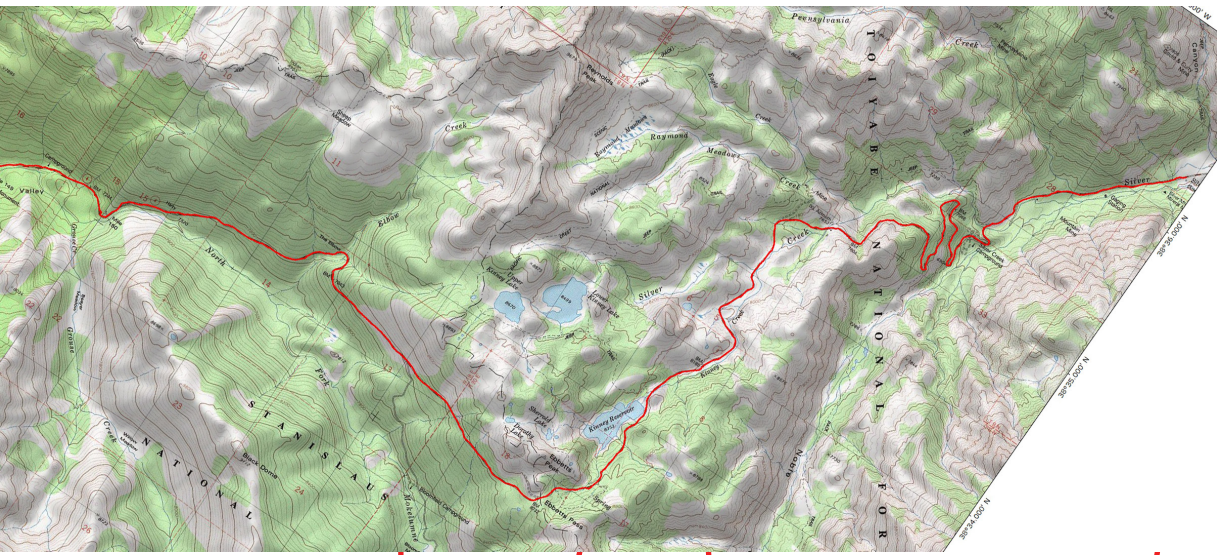


Dave Faust completes the Pacific Grade Summit climb in 1994.



Ebbetts Pass in 1989, the year it hailed on left: Brian Fessenden, Ray "Longjohn" Joe Terhar.

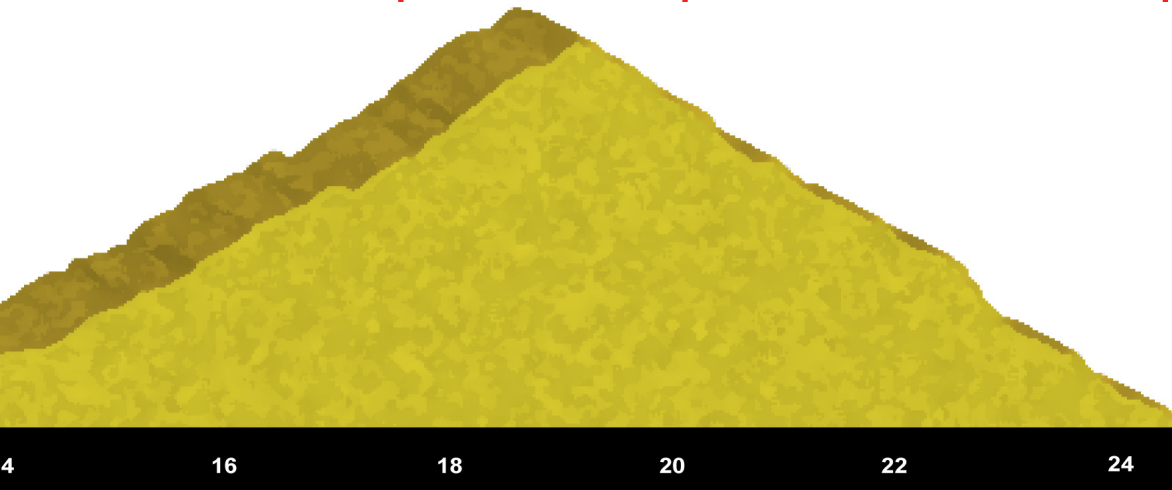
Ebbetts Pass



14%
Ebbetts Pass
(8732 ft. 2662 m)
14%



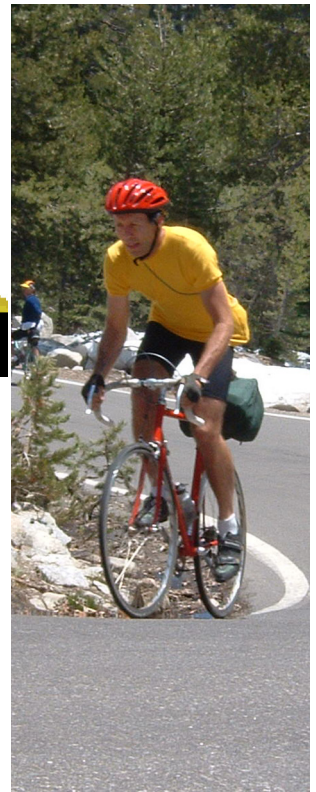
Silver Mtn. Mine
(6400 ft. 1950 m)



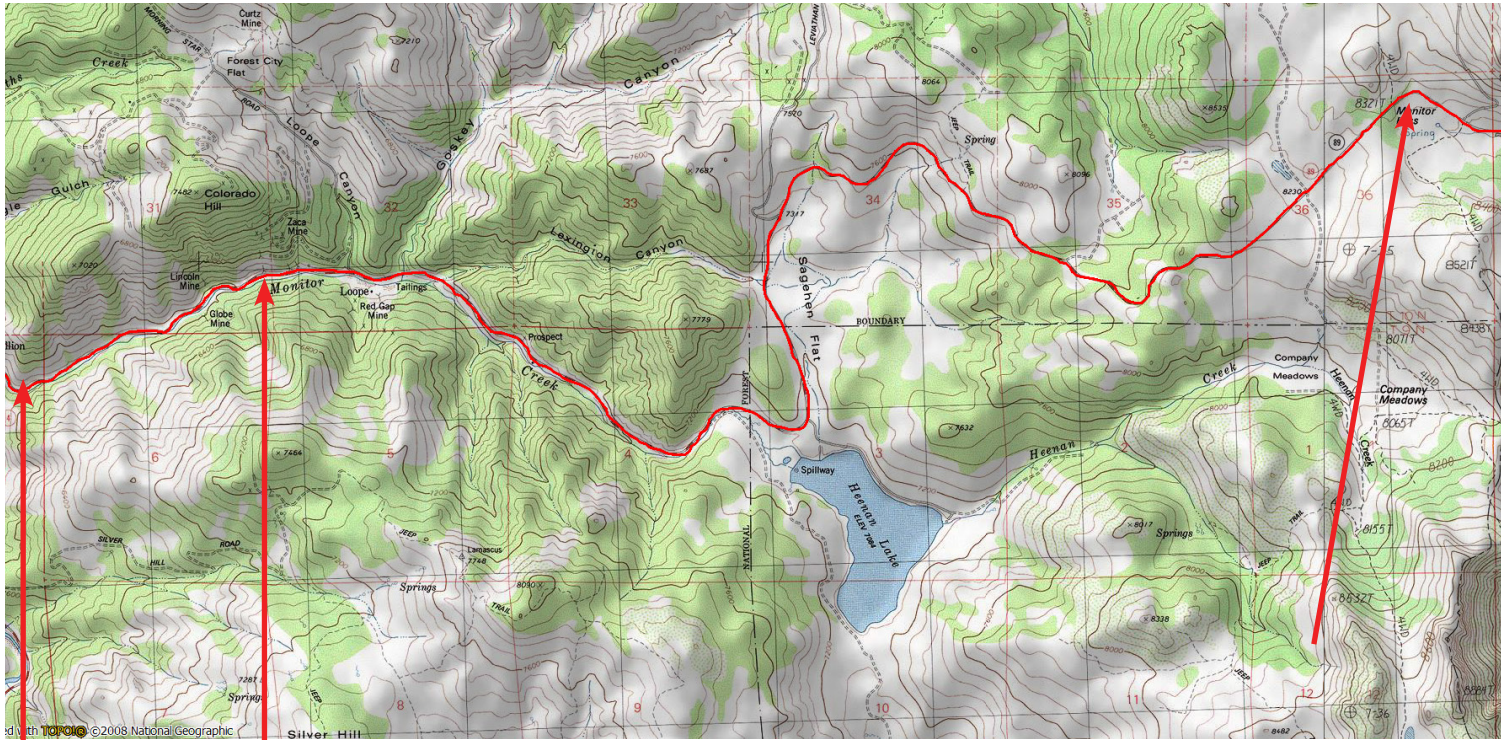
Sonora Pass. From Hosler, Gary Holmgren,



1977? Sierra Ride. From left: Marc Brandt, Rick Baldwin, Tom Ritchey, Gary Fisher, Don "Smokey" Wallace, Jim Westby. (Jobst Brandt photo)



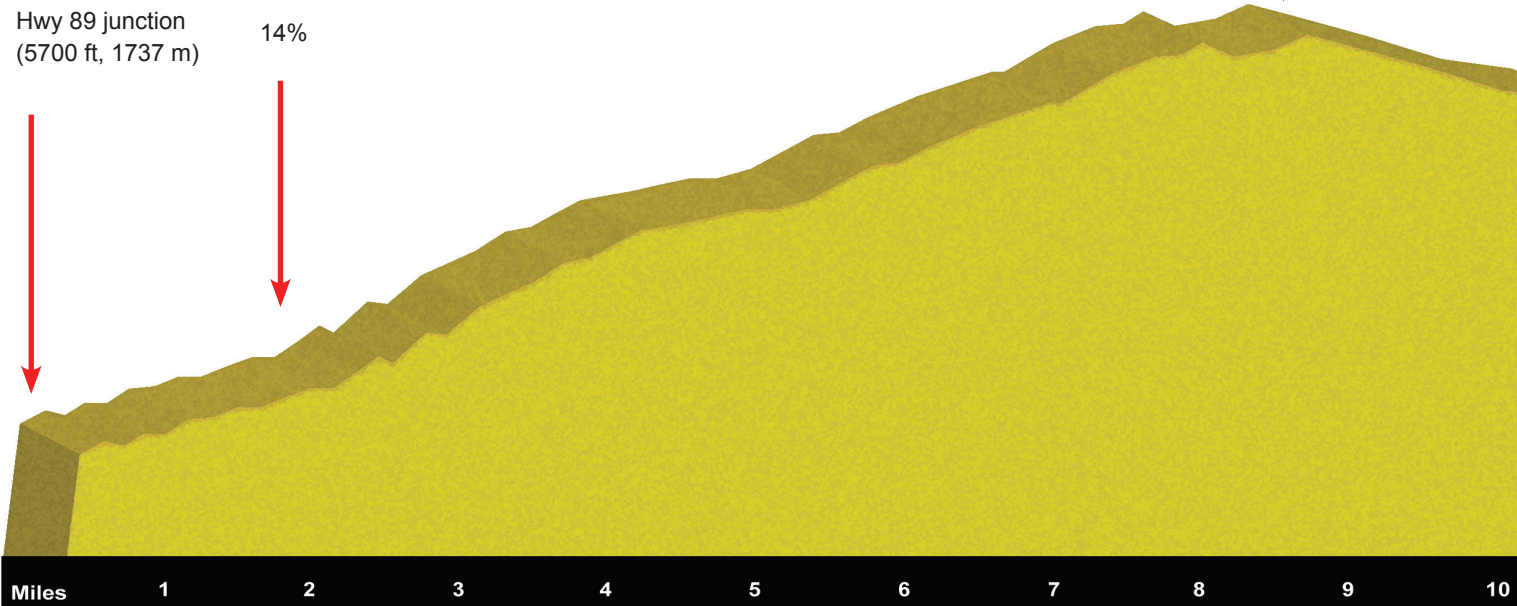
John Woodfill on Pacific Grade in 2005.



Monitor Pass (8314 ft. 2534 m)

Hwy 89 junction
(5700 ft, 1737 m)

14%



Miles

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

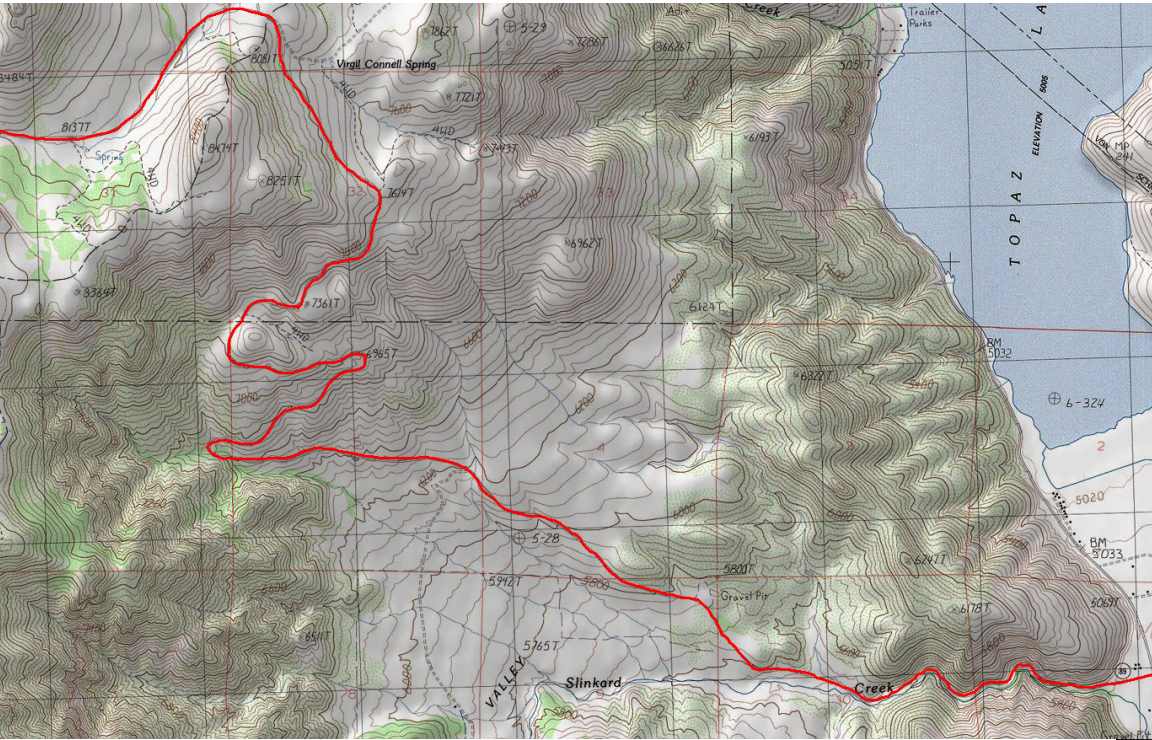
9

10

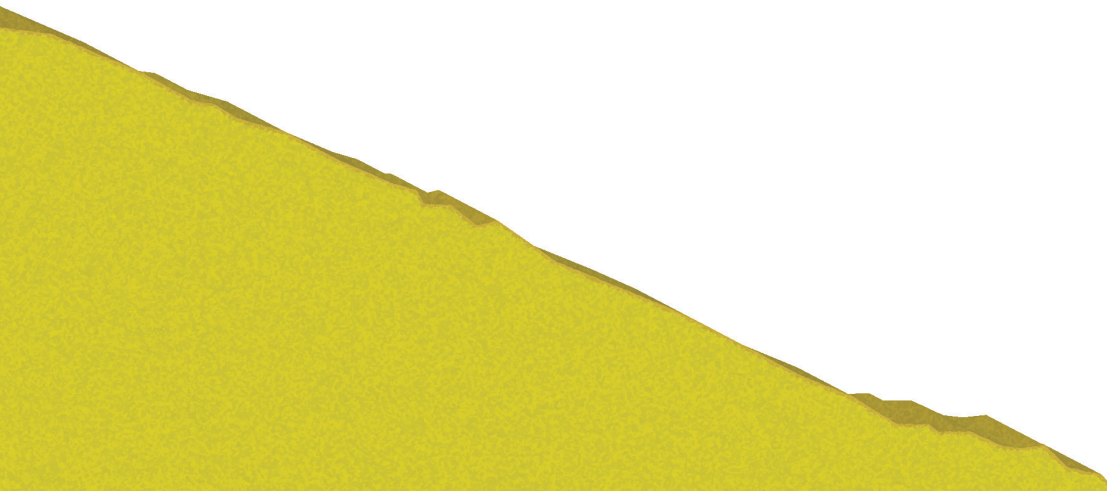


Riders descend the eastern slope of Monitor Pass in 2005.

Monitor Pass



95
ft. 1534 m)



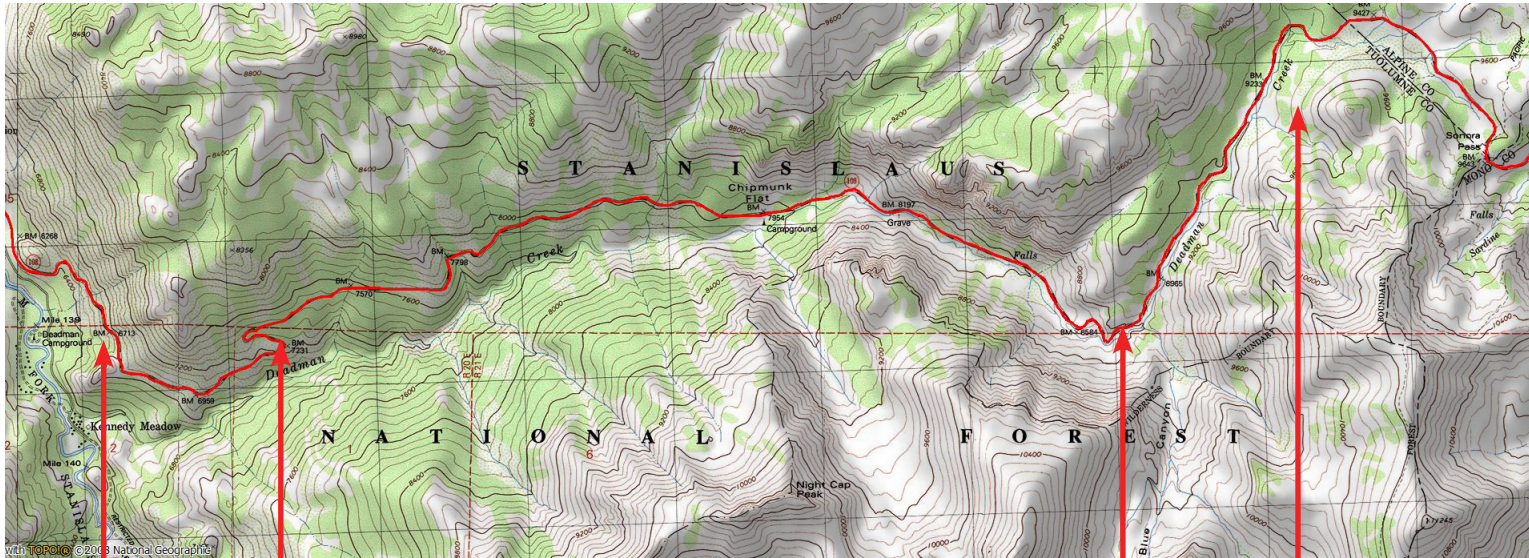
11 12 13 14 15 16 17



Monitor Pass summit looking west in 2005.



Jobst on Monitor summit, 2004.

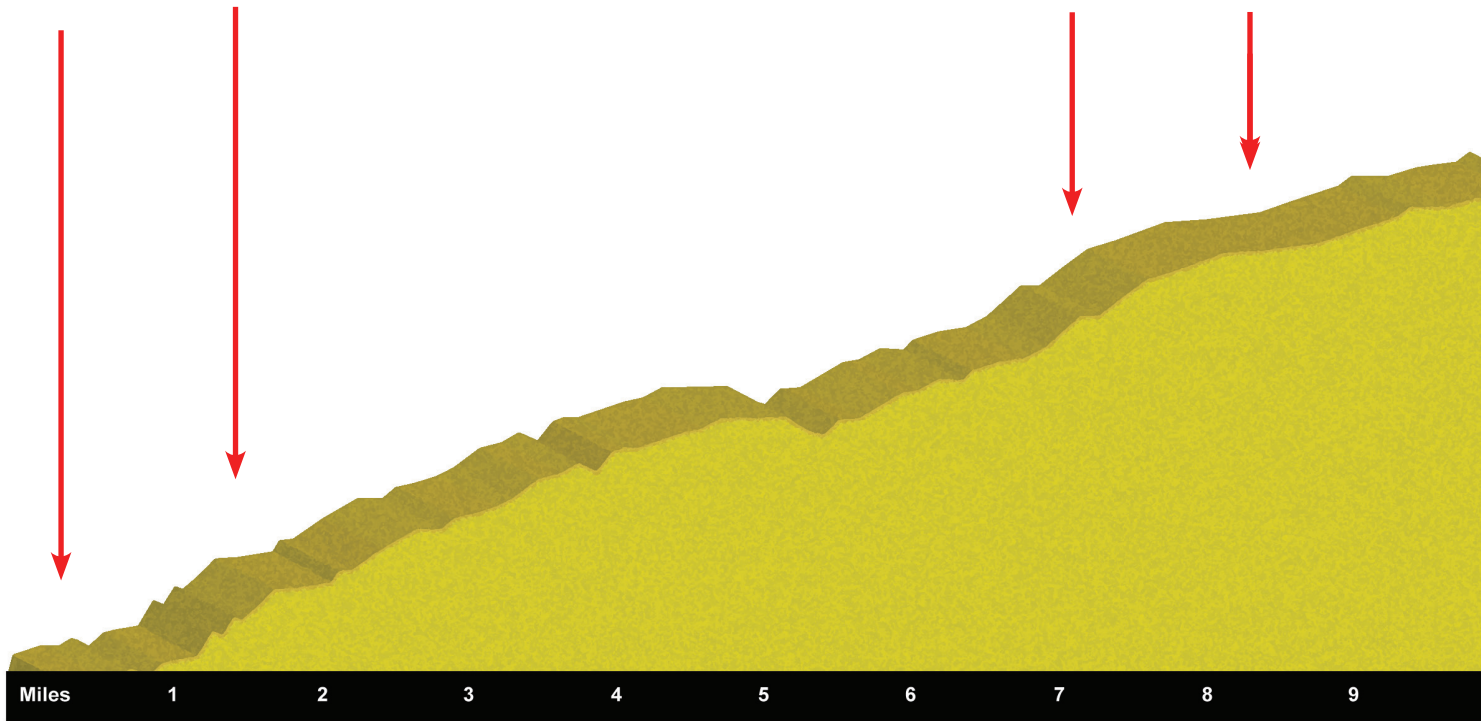


The Window
25%

14%

Golden Stairs
18%

Road levels
10% to 5%

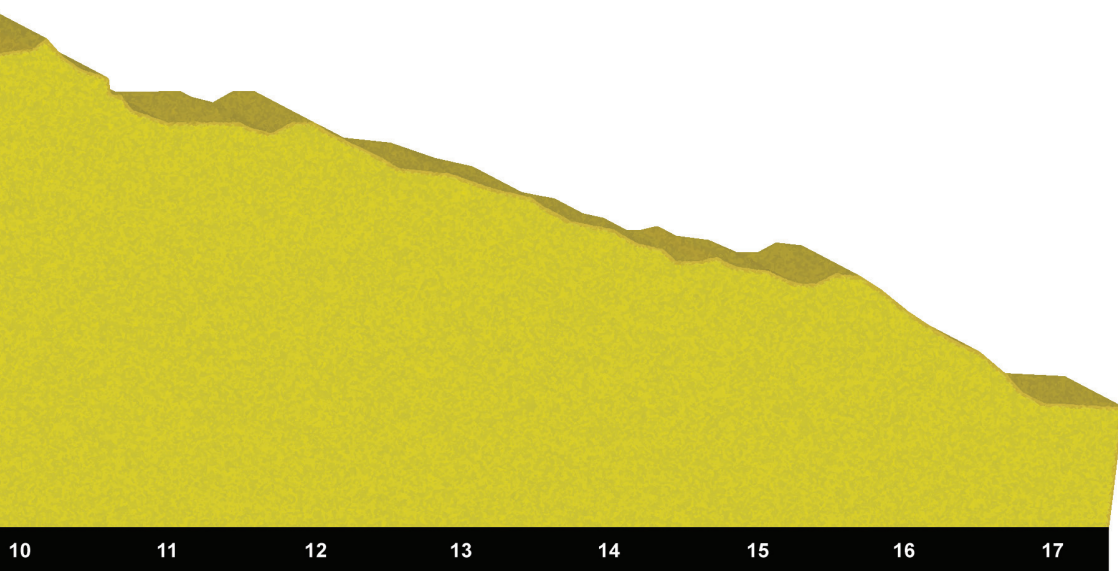
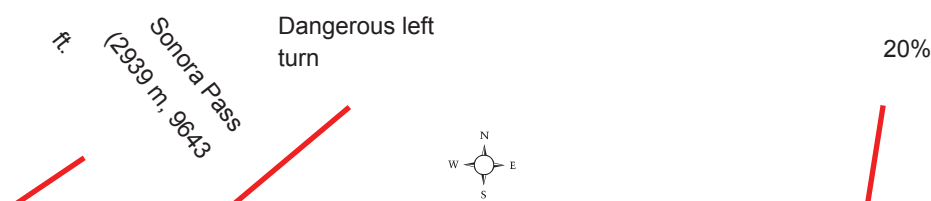
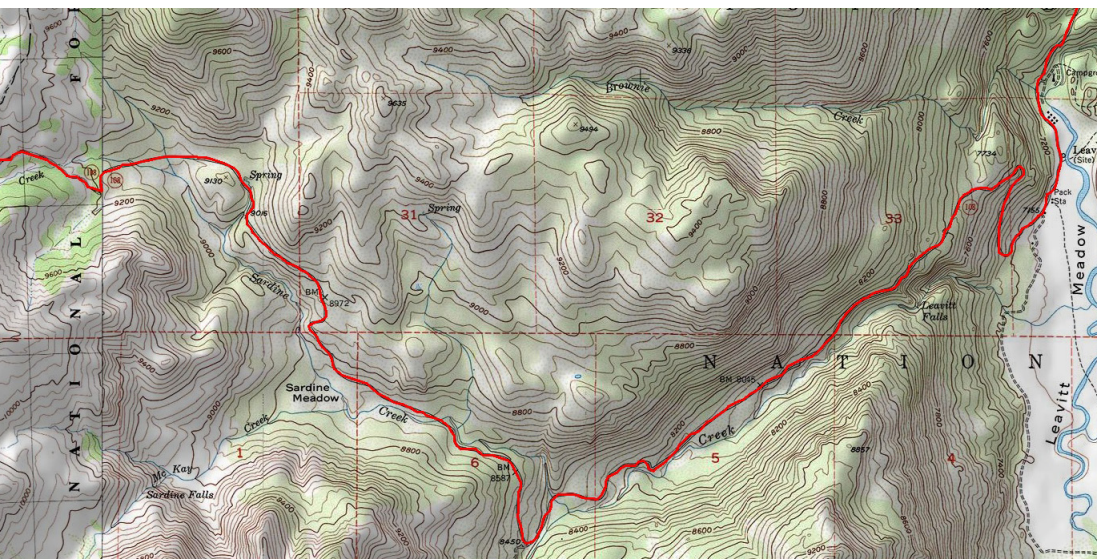


Super Tour 1980 at Sonora Pass summit. (John Finley Scott collection)



Brian Cox, John Woodfill, Jeanie Barnett, and Jobst on Sonora Pass in 2003.

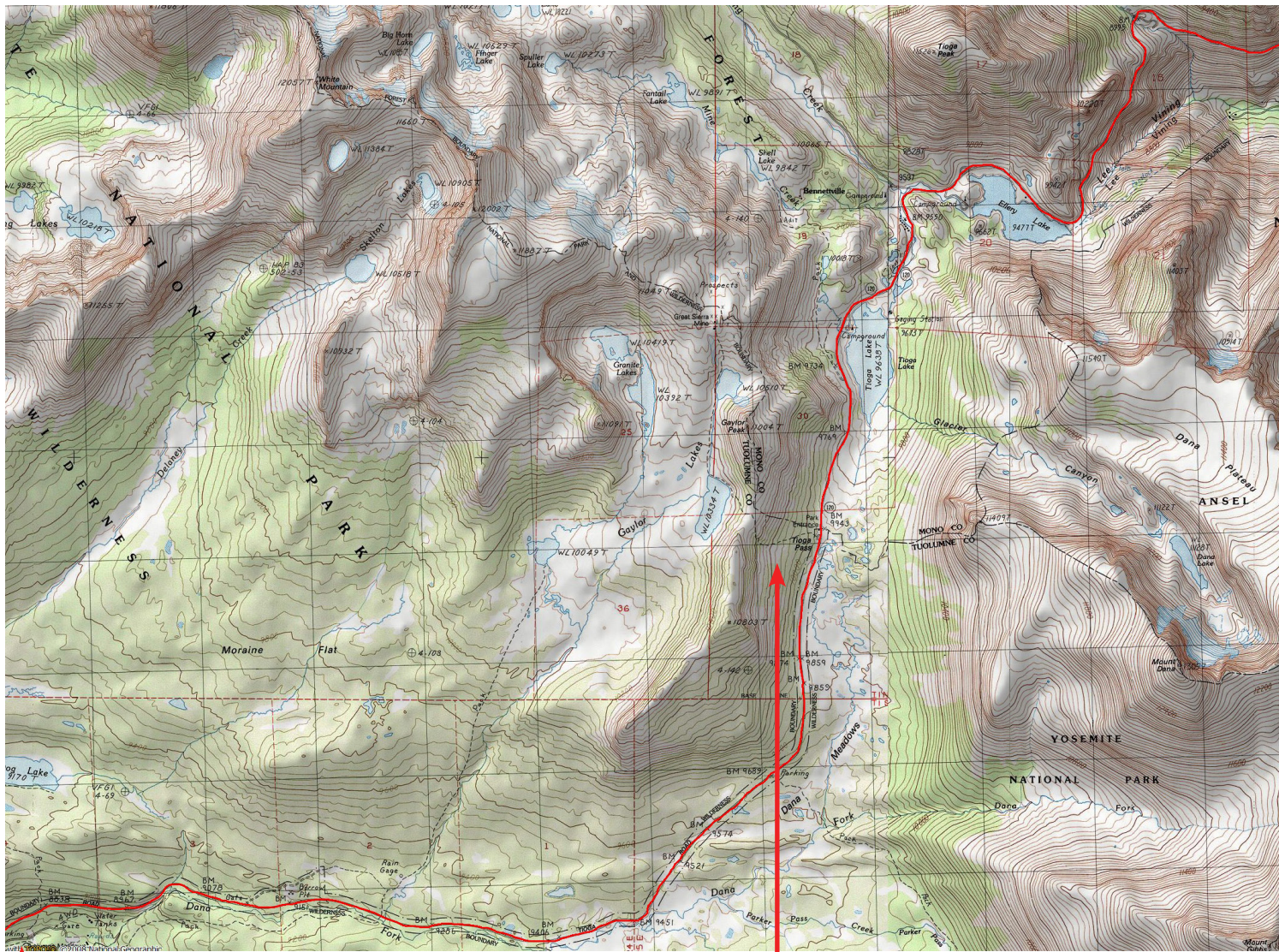
Sonora Pass



Dave and Reena climb Sonora Pass east slope in 1983.

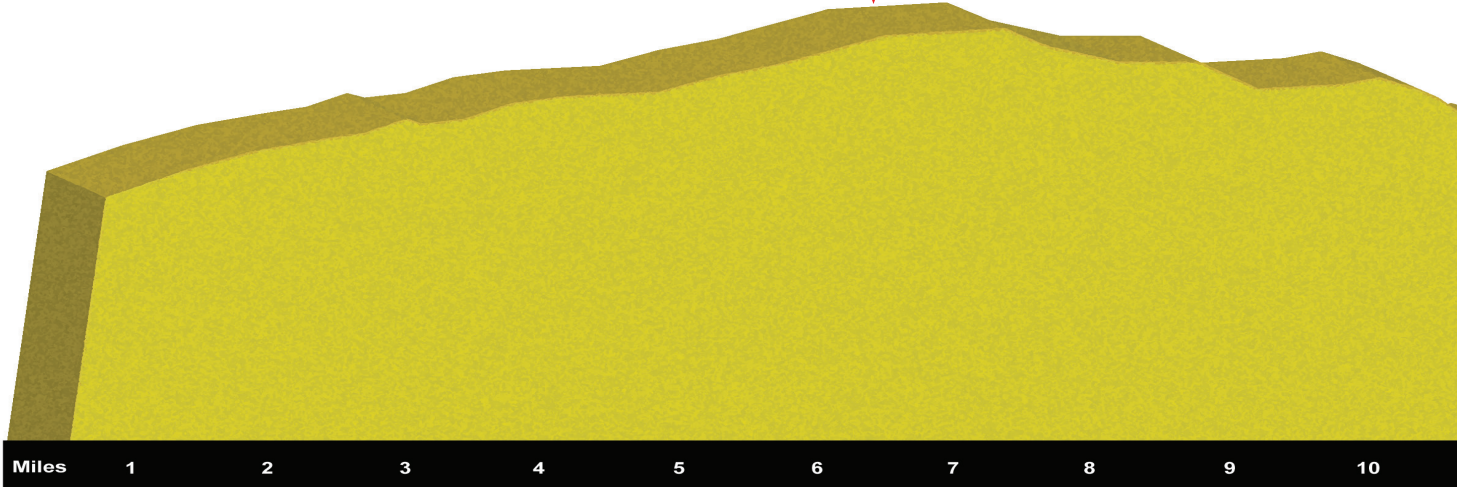


Completing the east slope climb on Sonora Pass in 2007.

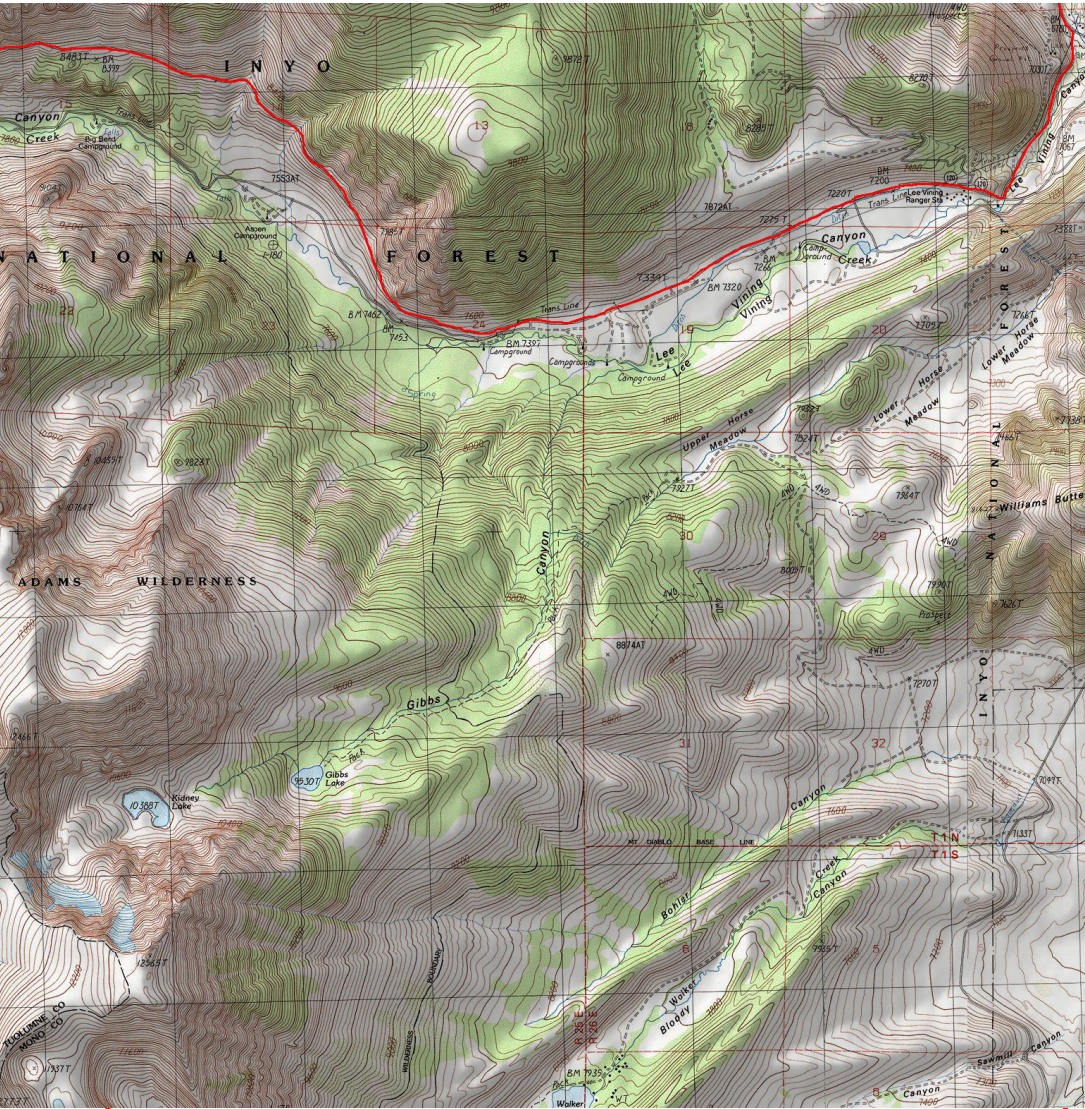


Tuolumne Meadows Lodge
(8700 ft. 2652 m)

Tioga Pass
(9943 ft. 3031 m)



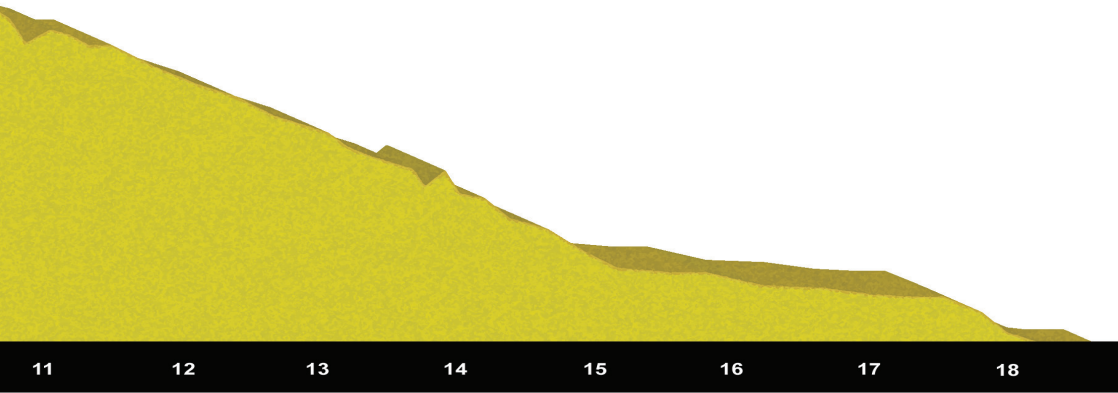
Tioga Pass



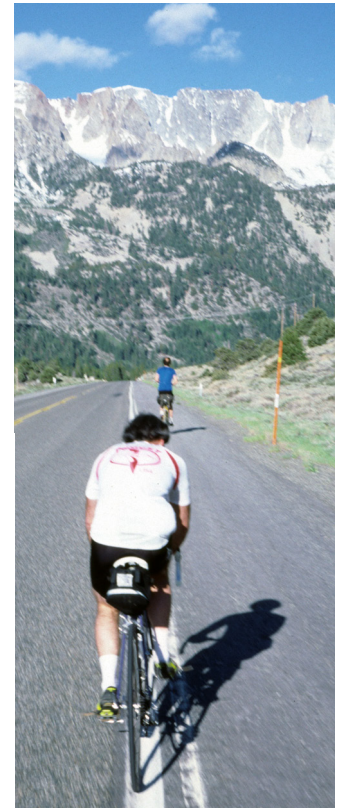
8-10%



Lee Vining
(6781 ft 2067 m)



11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18



Jim Westby starts the Tioga Pass climb, 1987.

Tall Tales in the Mountains



As I sit here writing about bygone Sierra rides I'm reminded how much fun we had even though the days were long and the hills ever so steep.

We were young! Even after 12 hours riding and well over 15,000 feet climbing, we could kick back and enjoy a beer and a fine meal before a good night's sleep.

And there was adventure with Jobst Brandt leading the way. One year after finishing the ride in Sonora an uptight elderly hotel owner got into an epic shouting match with Jobst for leaving our cars parked overnight. Priceless. We rode off—Jobst carrying a 10-pound watermelon—to beat the heat.

There was the time we rode several miles on a

former railroad right-of-way-turned-hiking-trail to reach Strawberry. Unforgettable. It wasn't enough that we rode 125 miles that day!

This story is not finished. I am still searching for old photos of Sierra cycling before the 1950s. I know it's out there somewhere. Let me know if you have any leads.

Thanks to Vance Sprock for loaning photos from John Finley Scott's collection, to John Woodfill for the amazing snow-ride photo, and to Perry Stout for filling me in on the history of the Super Tour.

Ray Hosler, May 2012

*This magazine is dedicated to Jobst Brandt,
Jan. 14, 1935 - May 5, 2015*



Riders put the hammer down on a Sierra ride in 1984.

Jobst Brandt led a cadre of elite cyclists through the Santa Cruz Mountains, around Mount Hamilton, and over the High Sierra, epic rides that will be long remembered by those who joined him. Inventor, naturalist, historian... There was never a dull moment on Jobst Rides, which lasted all day and included hidden trails and dirt roads known only by locals. The author joined Jobst for many rides, documented here along with photos and the history of roads often taken.

