

A West Coast Tandem Trilogy by Bob Smith

It is not often that a unique cycling opportunity and adventure avails itself in threes. What could be better than three enthusiastic tandem teams and three great rides? The Gates' (Tom & Margaret), Villhards' (Vic and Diane) and Smiths' (Bob & Anne) were all planning to attend the Northwest Tandem Rally (NWTR) in Eugene, OR over the 4th of July weekend and our 2nd Annual Tandem Trans American Reunion (TAR'03) in Sonoma County and the San Francisco Bay Area July 14-20. The Smiths' and Villhards' were planning to travel west twice. Tom suggested using the seven intervening days to ride the Pacific Coast Highway from Florence, OR to Sebastopol, CA (official reunion start).

The Gates' who live in southern CA would pick us up at the Portland Airport on July 3rd and drive us to Eugene for NWTR. After tandem rally (420 tandems) we would use the Gates' Suburban to transport six people, three tandems, luggage and bike cases to the coast at Florence, OR to begin our scenic trek to Sebastopol (520 miles). One team would drive Sag each day while the other teams cycled.

The Gates' provided the vehicle and the Smiths' & Villhards' provided the seven day itinerary for the trek down the coast. I used "Cycling USA West Coast" published by Lonely Planet and "Bicycling the Pacific Coast" 3rd edition by Tom Kirkendall & Vicki Spring and the online AAA TripTik to determine overnight locations. Both books were excellent sources of information with maps, route profiles, lodging/camping recommendations and restaurants. The one flaw I found with the books was the authors assumed self-contained riding and the route segments were generally 40-50 miles and Florence was not a segment start or destination. We needed to average 75 miles per day to reach Sebastopol in seven days. The AAA TripTik planner made it easy to adjust locations and re-calculate point to point distances. Averaging 75 miles per day eliminated most of the larger towns and cities along the coast. Diane and Anne made all lodging reservations. Diane is a travel agent with access to hotel guides and Anne used the cycling books and Internet for B&BS, etc. They had to change a couple locations which resulted in one near century segment. Considering it was high tourist season they still managed to arrange very good accommodations averaging just over \$100 per night per couple.



On July 3rd the Villhards' and Smiths' boarded a flight from Colorado Springs to Portland to begin our Tandem Trilogy. The NWTR was three great days of loop rides of varying distances from Eugene on great roads with very little traffic, excellent scenery and wineries. Tandem rallies tend to have interesting bikes from home brews to triplet trailers to quints and plenty of time to share the tandem experience with hundreds of teams. The weather was perfect for riding and we did about 175 miles of riding/training for the second leg of our trilogy. The NWTR was a well organized event with supporting sponsors Burley, CoMotion and Bike Friday. Several Colorado Tandem Club Teams from Denver and Steamboat attended the rally including our good friends and Trans Am buddies Gary and Karen Johnson. We had really hoped Gary and Karen could have joined our trilogy ride but Karen could not get an additional week off. Finally, NWTR provided me an opportunity to learn the basic functions of my new Magellan SporTrak Pro GPS receiver.



On Monday morning we loaded the suburban with luggage inside, three tandems on the back, Bike Pro tandem bag with the two S&S cases inside tied to the roof rack and six passengers for the drive to Florence. My allergies were acting up so Anne and I elected to drive the first day. The Gates' and Villhards' drew straws to determine the remainder of the driving rotation. Driving turned out to be sort of fun, it gave us time to checkout the route ahead, locate restaurants for lunch, stop for photo opts and pretend that we were actually providing support. The first day we crossed paths with several self-contained tourists, a young couple riding tandem and parents/in laws riding singles and a couple from Germany. We rode through Reedsport and crossed the Coos Bay Bridge. It was a very scenic day with ocean and bay views to our right and occasional lake views to the left with some inland riding as well. The ride to Bandon was 72 miles with a modest 1500 feet of climbing. We stayed at the Best Western near the Face Rock Ocean overlook.



With 75 miles per day segments we were able to sleep in a bit have a leisurely breakfast, load the suburban and be on the road between 8:30 and 9:00AM. It really felt like we were on vacation not like our 2001 Trans Am Ride, where we were on the road at or before daybreak everyday.



The Day 2 ride was from Bandon to Brookings mostly on US101. Initially, the route took us inland for 20 miles with the remaining 60 miles mostly along coastline. The morning was cool with a heavy marine layer that cleared shortly after leaving the coast south of Bandon. The inland riding seemed less undulating than the coast with higher temperatures. We accumulative 4300 feet of vertical in 82 miles with one climb from sea level to nearly 900 feet. Our lodging was at the Best Western on the north end of Brookings. The suburban afforded us so many more restaurant options. It was good to know that once you reach your destination you didn't have to get on the bike again until the next day.



Early on Day 3 we departed Oregon and entered California on our way to Orick (65 miles with 4100 feet of climbing). The route took us inland east of Lake Earl before returning to the coast again at Crescent City and then inland again several miles north of Klamath. About 5 miles south of Klamath we exited 101 onto Newton & Drury Parkway which took us through Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. The park was quite a treat with little traffic and a preview of the Avenue of Giants. Shortly after exiting the park we arrived at Rolf's Restaurant and Motel (3 miles north of Orick). Rolf's is a funky 40-50s era motel with 7 or 8 rooms and German Restaurant. Rolf is an Austrian Chef and the restaurant is infamous. Rolf's was recommended in both cycling books and now we know why. The rooms have all been recently updated, modest, very clean, much nicer than their outward appearance and very inexpensive. So if you are passing through Orick do give Rolf's a go especially for the food. Orick on the other hand was the ugliest town, we passed through.



An additional bonus was the adjacent Elk Preserve, where we viewed a herd from our rooms. Rolf's was a pleasant surprise and definitely one of the numerous high points of the trip.

Around midnight I was awakened to a single high powered rifle shot. I awoke Anne. I was surprised she didn't hear it. Suddenly, there was a more rifle fire and some small arms fire. I was afraid to move and expected bullets to come through the room at any time. This continued for several minutes then stopped. I thought it may have been poachers. In the morning the Forest Service came by and said they were trying to shoot a bear that had been vandalizing the restaurant and homes in the area. The restaurant offered us a free breakfast but they didn't open until after 8 AM and we needed to get an early start for Myers Flat (nearly 100 miles). We proceeded into Orick to a diner style restaurant that opened earlier. What a shame I would have really enjoyed another meal at Rolf's.

From Orick we headed towards the coast again to Trinidad and inland to Arcata and around the east side of Humboldt Bay to Eureka and south towards the Eel River and back onto 101 and finally to the Avenue of the Giants. Our initial plans called for an overnight in Redcrest at the Redcrest Inn. The inn was full, hence our near century ride to Myers Flat. Anne and I were driving, so what if the ride was 96 miles and 5900 feet of vertical.

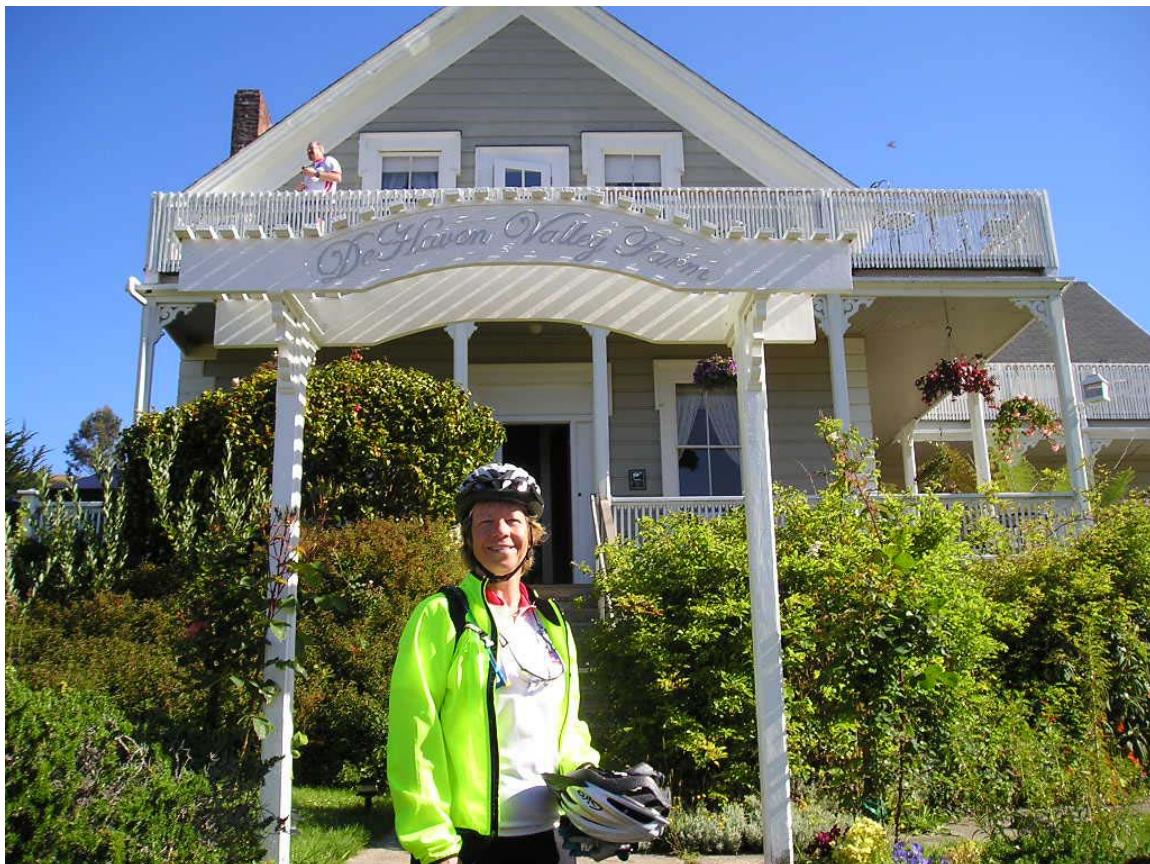


Over the years California has widened and relocated sections of US 101 leaving behind an alternate route CA1 or Pacific Coast Highway or bike route. A good percentage of the route was on CA1 and other roads such as the Eel River Road and the Avenue of Giants. Once everyone exited 101 onto the Avenue of the Giants, we immediately drove onto Myers Flat. We jumped on our bike and rode back towards everyone so we could also enjoy the ride through the coastal redwoods. It was another spectacular day with every possible view the Pacific Coast has to offer.

We stayed at the Myers Flat Country Inn which was once the Myers Flat Hotel that had fallen into disrepair. It's has been totally renovated and restored as a B&B. Myers Flat's only restaurant was closed and for sale. The next the closest restaurant was in Garberville. The suburban came to our rescue again. So if you are riding self-contained and want lodging and food reserve early in Redcrest or plan to ride on to Garberville.

After a wonderful breakfast at the Myers Flat Inn we enjoyed a very pleasant morning ride on the Avenue of the Giants to Garberville. At Garberville the Avenue rejoins 101 (Redwood Highway) to Leggett where we exited onto CA1, which returned us to the coast for the final time. This was one of our shorter mileage days (67) but the most difficult with respect climbing. We climbed up and down the coastal range several times including a steep climb into Garberville and the worst being Leggett Hill. I'm not sure of the actual elevation gain because of the way the GPS converts a track to a route. The stored route says we climbed 13,000 feet which I find very hard to believe. Temperatures

inland were much higher with clearer skies. As we made our final climb over the coastal range the marine layer rolled in and the temperature suddenly dropped 20 degrees or more. We lodged at the very cute DeHaven Valley Farm B&B several miles north of Westport. The B&B has a limited menu restaurant and requires a reservation with your entrée order at least a day in advance. The DeHaven was another great find by Anne and Diane. The dinner and morning breakfast were both superb.



In the morning the marine layer cleared giving way to great views of the ocean from the DeHaven Farmhouse for another great day of cycling to Gualala but not before a wonderful stop in Elk for lunch. The 77 mile ride to Gualala through Fort Bragg and Mendocino was a total coastal experience with lots of ups, downs and switchbacks to stream and river inlets. The Giant Redwoods of the previous three days gave way to Cypress trees, Eucalyptus trees, rugged coast line and blue seas.

The final day of our coastal segment was from Gualala to Sebastopol. Since this was the seventh day, we decided to share the driving. Anne and I drove the first leg to Jenner which was our lunch stop. It is also where our route turned inland along Russian River. We parked the suburban in Jenner and jumped on our bike and rode back towards the others. When we reached Tom and Margaret, we turned around and rode back to Jenner with them. Vic and Diane had a flat and were delayed. After lunch the Villhards' took over driving and the Gates' drove the final leg from Camp Meeker. Our son lives in Monte Rio and we visited with him briefly on the way to Occidental and finally to the

Holiday Inn Express in Sebastopol. Days 6 and 7 were very similar riding conditions and scenery. As we approached Jenner traffic increased probably weekenders from the Bay Area.



Prior to setting out on this trip we were told horror stories about traffic and logging trucks along this route. We saw very few logging trucks and the traffic was pretty much a non-issue. US 101 in Oregon from Florence south has good shoulder except for bridges like Coos Bay. US 101 in CA for the most has good shoulder. Both states have a lot of alternate low traffic routes that get you off 101 when possible. We had a great experience and we are glad we did it.

Monday, July 14th was our first off day in 10 days. The only thing we had to do was drive to San Francisco for our reunion kickoff luncheon at Dennis, Gerri, and Joanna's (Tsai & Donato) home in the Sunset District of SF (near Golden Gate Park). After a fabulous luncheon and reunion opening celebration everyone carpooled to Sebastopol. Gary and Karen Johnson flew in from Denver. This was our original plan as well. Thanks to Tom and Margaret for the support and suggestion that made our trilogy possible.

Tuesday was the first official ride day of the reunion. We rode north along the west side of US 101 to Healdsburg. Some of the group stayed in Healdsburg for lunch. The Villhards', Smiths' and MacKenzies' continued north to Dry Creek Road and stopped at the Pezzi King Winery. After tasting a couple wines the captains rode back to the Dry

Creek Grocery to pick up sandwiches for a picnic style lunch on the winery's patio prior to riding back to Sebastopol.

Wednesday's ride was out to the coast to Bodega Bay and north to Jenner and back in along the Russian River returning to Sebastopol. At Bodega Bay we stop and to visit Ron & Bev Armstrongs' new motor home. Every afternoon prior dinner was cocktail hour at the pool while in Sebastopol or in Frank & Lynn Breckenrides' room while in SF. These cocktail hours were where we renewed our friendships and shared stories. Eleven of the original 17 teams returned for our 2nd annual reunion. Mother and son team Sue and Josh Devondonis returned from England to attend. It was so good to see them after two years. Sue is a Chief Master Sergeant in the Air Force. Josh must have grown a foot since the last time we saw him. John and Lee Vermeulen drove all the way from Kitty Hawk, NC.

On Thursday we carpooled to Petaluma to ride to Tomales Bay and south along the bay to Point Reyes Station and back to Petaluma. The ride today was the hottest ride of the entire two weeks. After the ride everyone carpooled to San Francisco for the remaining the three nights at the Days Inn on the coast just south of the Old Cliff House. Using public transportation we went to North Beach for dinner at the Stinking Rose and then a show called Beach Blanket Babylon.



Friday was an optional ride day with Dennis and his friend Tom. They led us around SF on bikes. Tom is an experienced SF cyclist that has written a couple books on cycling the

City. We rode through Golden Gate Park, the Presidio, Sea Cliff (Robin Williams' home), Twin Peaks (SF high point), the Haight District and several other nice neighborhoods. The ride was a totally new way to see the City. Anne and I have visited SF numerous times but never on a bike. The others went shopping and/or sightseeing. I definitely think we made the best decision. Friday evening's dinner was a deluxe buffet at the California Culinary Academy.

Saturday we rode from the Days Inn across the Golden Gate Bridge to Sausalito and Tiburon to return to Fisherman's Warf by ferry. We were going to have lunch on the Warf but restaurants were packed. We decided to ride back to Ocean Drive and have lunch at the Old Beach House. Saturday evening we had a 12 course Chinese Banquet Dinner at a local Sunset District restaurant. We got to sample several very interesting traditional Chinese entrees. It was quite the ethnic and dining experience.



Sunday we loaded up the suburban the final time to carpool to San Mateo County to ride LaCanadia Road through Woodside to Stanford for lunch and back. Allan and Mabel MacKenzie hosted our farewell celebration and dinner in Foster City. Tom drove us to the SF Airport Marriott to unload the suburban and checked in. After showering we went to Allan and Mabel's for the farewell party. It was hard to believe that the trilogy was winding down. Sixteen days of cycling with wonderful friends through beautiful country. Life really doesn't get any better than this.

Plans are already in the works for next year's reunion in the Finger Lakes Area of NY. Tom is already prodding us to extend our stay in NY. We would love to but as of now I'm still working with no vacation to spare. God willing we will be there.

Heart felt thanks to the California Trans Am crew for pulling together a totally wonderful California Dreaming experience. A job well done to Dennis & Joanna Tsai, Gerri Donato, Charlie & Kathleen Payne, Allan & Mabel MacKenzie, Frank & Lynn Breckenridge and Tom & Margaret Gate. We hope to see you next year in New York.