

Spring Mtn Rd 2011

We had a total of five bikes with Larry Jackson Ed Buckner, Gary and Beth Helm, Charlie Myatt, and myself. Not too many riders, but given the short notice I gave for this extra ride and the expected high temps, not bad. The day's weather was projected to get into the mid to high 90s, but the morning was just a bit cool with a few puffy clouds up high. The mountains to the west showed the fog trying to push over.

We left the parking lot with Charlie as tail gunner (thank you). I was trying to make this a 'fast' day so I could get home in time to watch NASCAR at Bristol. I planned to cut the breaks just a bit shorter than the usual long stops. And given this, it was inevitable that traffic would fight us. Yup. Right off the bat. On Mankas Corner Rd we got behind a semi-tractor with a huge load of hay. He was going 15-20 mph. It wasn't until just before Wooden Valley Rd that we were able to pass him. Once passed, we got up to a mild pace and enjoyed a mostly traffic free run out to Monticello Rd.

We rode up the hill towards Napa...into the fog...and the temperature dropped. Most of us were dressed for the summer heat. I had to switch my heated handle grips on. But I 'knew' that once down into the valley floor the temps would come up. Nope. All the way up Silverado Trail, behind slow cars as expected, the fog was a low cloud above us. We turned on Pope Rd in St Helena and crawled through the town's main road. It is a tourist trap, but really, they need to solve that somehow. I pulled the group over at the start of Spring Mtn Rd to make sure everyone knew how to behave on this tight, twistied, and very technical road. It also gave us the chance to switch into warmer gear. Silly I know, but in the middle of summer with the predicted highs, we had to put on sweatshirts and thicker gloves.

Only Charlie had not been on this road. So after reminding everyone to stay well within their limits, I gave him the details of what to expect. After the talk, he asked why I chose this road. Well...cause it's a fun challenge with lovely tree encroached views. I told everyone I was going to stretch a bit and zoom-zoom it, but I would gather the group at various points.

Gary then told me that he and Beth had to bail as his temp gauge was peaking. He was low on coolant. They planned to go to one of the gas stations in St Helena and then roll home. They rolled back the way we came and they rest of us rolled on.

Oh, the first half of this road, in Napa County, is tight and marvelously twistied. This road is a joy to ride at spark...albeit with some reserve. And enjoy it I did. Oh I did and I did and... I very soon lost sight of any of the group in my mirrors. I did see bits of blue sky as I looked up through canopy. No more fog. After a good rollicking stretch I saw a large rock about the size of a cantaloupe smack in the middle of our lane. I thought fast, stopped my bike, got off, and kicked it to the side. I then got back on and rolled on. I only went a few corners and there was another rock, even bigger. I did the same game and felt real proud that I had made the road safer for us and any other vehicles to follow.

I pulled over to gather the group at one of the few intersections and was only stopped a short time before Ed made it. I guess my two rock kicking stops soaked up my lead. Larry and Charlie were not too far behind him. A quick thumbs up and I rolled off just as Charlie joined us. At Calistoga Rd, I pulled onto the wide spot and the rest of the group joined me for a rest. Peaceful...except for the barking sheep dogs and cars. OK...it wasn't peaceful-est. After I felt that everyone was ready, we continued on into Santa Rosa. The temp was now very comfortable so we swapped back to warm weather gear.

This stretch is just covering miles, not prime bike rolling. The signal lights were many, but we were locky and caught a lot of them green. Sweet! Santa Rosa and especially Fountain Grove Pkwy is well monitored by the local police, so a fairly strict adherence to the limits kept us from really enjoying this nicely paved and nicely wide hill road. But, it does give us poor folks a look at how the upper-upper middle class live. A final shot up

Old Redwood Hwy got us to Mark West Springs Rd. This used to be a road driven at sparky speeds – in yonder years, well back in time. Now the speed limits and volume of traffic kept us at a near painfully slow speed. We got near the slow posted limit just before we turned off onto Franz Valley Rd.

This road and Franz Valley School Rd are not the smoothest roads, nor the twistiest (I know, not a real word), but no traffic makes up for a lot. Besides, the twisties are nice on both sides of the county line and there are some nice views. And yes, Napa again has the better paved roads. This got us to Petrified Forest Rd and the one gas stop for the day. Food was just around the corner...and it beckoned...at least that is what my stomach said.

Busters BBQ, est 1965. A funky collection of buildings and patio dining make up this restaurant. It is a favorite of many bike groups, tourists, and the locals. Prices are modest, service is fast, and the food is tasty. We rolled in and parked next to some other bikes already there and made our way to the ordering window. I warned everyone that the little sign that says “Hot Means Hot” tells the truth. We all bravely (ahem) opted for the mild sauce. The sandwiches were delicious and, yes, messy. After cleaning up in their outdoor sink (great idea), I was going to use the restroom, but the line was long-ish. I saw another sign that said there was a port-a-potty in the back lawn. There was...with a padlock on it. Psych!

When we left, the parking lot was getting full of bikes and cars. I am sure the spots we freed up would be used. We crawled through Calistoga at a much higher pace than St Helena, but still slow. Here we actually touched the limit a time or two. Then we turned onto Silverado Trail and...traffic. They were close to the limit so it wasn't too bad.

The original route had us going all the way to Howell Mtn Rd. This is real narrow and rough road with glorious views. It has been closed to through traffic for a while. A chunk of the road has fallen and has not been repaired. Not sure when it will be fixed...if ever. No road is just a bit too narrow even for me. Deer Park Rd provides a nicely paved alternative to getting up the hill to Angwin, but without the grand views.

Once through the only stop sign in Angwin (nice), we were able to stretch our throttle hand a bit. OK...only I did. The rest of the group was wiser and safer. The run down the hill to Pope Canyon is chock full of very short straights joined by very tight turns. Wheeee! Oh I did a lot of boot touching here. Mostly light touches of the brakes and very limited use of the throttle is what it takes to do this road with a semblance of control.

At the bottom of the hill, we made our way to Pope Cyn Rd and Lake Berreyessa. Again, try as I may to be a mild mannered leader (and I was trying), the road made me speed up. It wasn't my fault. I tried to behave. Honest. I was able to slow down in the straights, but not the twisties. Every one finally caught up with me at the rest stop by the lake (we did not stop) and we rolled along the lake.

Jets boats, power boats, and skiers in the water provided sweet, quiet, idyllic views. Up close, the boats had to be noisy, but our bikes don't do well in the water. We got up the last hill to Turtle Rock and bypassed the famous, but greasy, egg rolls and rolled for the Corners instead.

The temp was finally getting warm. Not anywhere near the expected 90s. We had absolutely no complaints. There were a lot of bikes at the Corners. We stopped and rested. I bought my candy bar...\$1.61! I think that may be the last candy bar I buy there.

After we were rested, we all decided to opt for taking Hwy 128 to Pleasants Valley Rd. A little more road. A few more twisties. I again tried hard to be mellow. I held my speed at 55 max...well in the straighter sections. I didn't go too much faster in the tighter turns – often times slower. But my poor boots got a lot more pavement rubbing. Often I would get through a section of twisties and just pull in the clutch, waiting for the group to

show in my mirrors. So I didn't behave.

Ed pulled off for Vacaville before we got to Cherry Glen. At Cherry Glen Charlie and Larry head left to Vacaville and I headed right. It was now getting to be warm. Made it home in time for NASCAR. Dang, Jeff Gordon should have won it. He came in third. Close.