

## Sutter Creek

There were three total bikes at the parking lot for our last ride of the year. We had Larry Jackson, Kory and Abby Rivera, and me. Not as big a turn out as I expected.

The morning air was just a tetch cool, but no rain was expected, nor was snow expected up in them thar hills. We started our bit of boring freeway with Kory covering tail gunner (Thank you). I slowly got my bike up to 67-70 and held it steady. I wish I had worn my cold weather gloves as my hands were getting cool. Instead I turned on my heated handle grips. Better. I was double checking in my mirrors that I had both bikes back there on a regular basis. Then oops, I see Larry, but not Kory. Whaaa happened? I motioned Larry over to the right lane so I might have a different view in my mirrors...and if need be an easy way to pull over. It worked. There was Kory coming up the fast lane.

After that brief bit of excitement, I went back to quasi-sleep until we took Hwy 50 and I started looking for the Howe Ave exit. We made the right/left/right zigzag onto Hwy 16. Here traffic was going right at the speed limit. Good thing too as we spotted a SUV-cop giving a guy a ticket. Safe! Without the traffic keeping me honest, I would likely been a few bits over the posted limit.

We made our first stop in Rancho Murrieta for a butt break, snacks, drinks, smokes, and gas. I was expecting one of our northern riders to show up, but he wasn't there. I found out after I got home that he had things to attend to that prevented him from joining us.

Leaving the gas station, I stayed very awake as I was looking for a small sign pointing to the left for Old Sacramento Rd. This is a narrow, but mostly smooth back road that brings us into down town Plymouth. The turns are mostly gentle and with pleasant scenery. It makes a fantastic difference from Hwys 80, 50, and even 16. We crossed Hwy 49 and took E16 until it turned left. We kept straight on Fiddletown Rd...behind our first bit of slow traffic. But they were nice and pulled over and let us by at the first decent wide spot. I turned my heated handle grips off somewhere along here as the temps were nearing perfect.

We never got too fast. OK, make that I never got too fast. I was trying to be mellow. And I was mellow... mostly. I only touched my boots to the pavement a couple of times. Even so, Larry and Kory were being mellow than me. I often used the straights to slow up and wait for them. Why waste perfectly good turns to slow down in? Besides the straight sections allowed us to see each other with plenty of time for safe reactions. I stopped the group once up in the hills, with a marvelous view, to make sure everyone was doing fine. Yup, they were, so we rode on up higher. And of course we had the usual fauna to avoid with squirrels, one modestly size deer, and a few large birds.

This fun road of only 16 miles was used up too quickly. Sigh. At the top, I warned everyone to be a even mellow as the downhill turns were deceptively harder than they looked, and there was likely debris to watch out for. We then headed down the hill on Shake Ridge Rd. I was grinning.

This road is just a bit narrower than Fiddletown Rd, but still smooth. Now I was hitting my boots more often, but it was more the effect of gravity adding speed and me not braking quite early enough versus me trying to be a hooligan. And I wasn't a hooligan...well not often...well not all the time. Oh I still had plenty of safety margins. Down and down the road curved until we got to Volcano where it leveled out.

We made the left/right at the end of town, then the quick right onto Sutter Creek Rd. Now this road is narrow. Even on the bikes it feels narrow. And it is a bit rougher with the pavement being older. It runs alongside a creek. With the recent rains, the creek had a nice amount of water making tiny, scenic rapids and cascades.

Along with watching the very pleasant scenery, watching out for where I was riding, looking for hazards, making sure Larry and Kory were still with me, I had to look around each corner for the park where we were going to have lunch. I didn't have the exact mile marked. Aha! There it was. We pulled in and stopped next to one of the tables. The creek was just a short walk away as was the primitive outhouse. And I do mean primitive. The toilet paper was mounted on a twig. Kory left his bike's sound system going (at very gentle volumes) to give us tunes to dine by.

After our sandwiches, we headed into down town Sutter Creek to find they were having some kind of festival to do with organ grinding. I looked, but did not see any monkeys. The cacophonous noise changed tunes every other block with the different machines. Good thing I didn't make the deli the lunch stop as parking was non-existent. After creeping through the pedestrians and slow cars, we left out the north side of town and aimed for the gold mine.

Now on a wide road, we approached the entrance to the gold mine and made the turn...

The mine tour was closed. Oh, there was a nice sign saying the Black Chasm Cavern was open 20 miles away, but gave no directions. I now know it is back up the hill in Volcano. Next time. We then road up Hwy 49, to Hwy 16 (very briefly), then down Hwy 124 to Ione. Then it was the long bucolic ride on Hwy 104 for our last gas stop in Twin Cities. Then more riding on the valley floor to Walnut Grove.

I tried, as usual, to launch myself off the bridge near Walnut Grove, but I timed it wrong with the car in front of me. I think he slowed down just to ruin my air time, the little miscreant. Naw. It was me. I just took off too soon. We avoided a good chunk of traffic by using Isleton Rd versus Hwy 160. At least I think we did. Anyhow, at Hwy 12, I told Kory and Larry that I was going to ride out to Montezuma Rd to get a last bit of twisties in. Larry was going straight on Hwy 12 to Hwy 113. Kory and Abby were going to just head straight home too.

Oh boy, time to be a hooligan. I made the turn off Hwy 12 and then turned under the bridge... and into some kind of town fair blocking the road. Now I know there is a way to get to Montezuma other than Front St, but I nearly always get lost trying it. Sigh. Back onto Hwy 12 and home.

Without the gold mine tour, the day was fairly short. I rolled into the garage near 3:30. It was a nice last ride for our year. Not even too many bugs.