

Shame? Laziness? Life getting in the way? Lots to catch up on!



Who will be the least one standing, me, or the barn? Yesterday's ride was a big thing. Not a huge gnarly ride by any means, but the first time both Kevin and I have returned to Pescadero since June 2024. Actually, I did a solo run three weeks ago, just to prove to myself I still could, and then again last weekend, solo again, but instead of heading up Tunitas (the traditional route) I took advantage of a strong tailwind and returned on 84.

The first recent ride on this loop was on August 10th, trying to prove to myself that it would be possible to pull off our scheduled rides in Italy 10 days later. Ah yes, Italy, the trip that was supposed to take the place of our missing trip to the Tour de France, which we cancelled at the last minute because things were a bit nuts at the shop and my mom's health was beginning to look like she could go pretty quickly. So let's fill things in for Italy.

The reality is that things didn't change much at the shop, but my mom was looking pretty stable so off we went. The plan was to see the four stages of the Vuelta (Tour of Spain) that were taking place in... Italy! And afterward, head east and take advantage of Stelvio Bike Day, when they close the road down to everything but bikes, was going to take place.

OK this entry is changing direction- looks like it's going to be all about our Italy trip. Part 1 below.

We had a great time seeing those first four stages. Well, could have been better if we hadn't gotten seriously rained on returning from the second stage, but there had to be a real adventure on one of the days. Even though in Italy, a country I'd only seen the periphery of (stuff near the coast, accessible from a cruise ship, and a brief foray into Rome with my daughter Becky a while back), it wasn't tough figuring things out and getting around in general.

It does get a bit messy with Italian trains though. There are now four competing rail companies, and to get from A to B, you might have to transfer several times across different train lines. Not so bad unless one of the segments runs late; then it can become a house of cards with everything quickly falling apart. That did happen on our way out to the Stelvio... got a message that a connecting train was running 70 minutes late, and our connection to the next train was only 20 minutes. Fortunately there was another line running the same direction, on time, which we were able to get tickets for. A bit of drama but quickly fixed with solid internet connections and my iPhone.

It would be tough to pick the "best" of the four Vuelta intercept rides. Probably the last one, where we ventured a few hundred meters into France. Wicked climb through one super-long tunnel (about 2km) and lacking the big fans we find in tunnels in France, but beautiful mountains and the first time we felt like we were really up in the mountains.

The first day was a long flat run before a moderate climb on some interesting narrow roads; I don't think I could have chosen a much better route. Very pretty, not much traffic, and a weird little estate of some sort that you rode through the middle of. About a 2000 foot climb to the top of the first (and only) KOM (mountain top, which the first riders get points for getting to), fortunately with a nice place to get food about 2/3rds of the way up. It was really strange not competing with thousands for a decent spot; the Vuelta is

much more low-key than the Tour de France. Two train rides for this stage; first a short one to get about 10 miles out of town (Turin), avoiding icky roads and traffic. And then, on the way back, a longer ride from the base of the only climb.

Oh, right. Before I try to get too many points for the route I chose, the last mile or so to the train station was on really nasty cobblestone. Not fun! Trying to race to catch the hourly train, which we ended up missing, despite my efforts to drill it on the way back. The train station in Ivrea is tough to get to by bike! (So I just checked out the routing again and now see there's an alternative route that would have cut off all of the cobblestones as well as the heavily-used local road to the station. Darn!)

Next day was in the opposite direction, with a train to the base of the moderate climb. Got off to a bit of a rough start as, shortly after getting off the train, Kevin had a seizure and wasn't feeling so great. We waited around a bit, found a good place for lunch, and then Kevin decided what the heck, it was boring waiting around for a train to cut off most of the climbing for our ride and just went for it. We lost about an hour, with some concern we wouldn't make it to the finish line in time. Fortunately, Kevin found his legs and we had a pretty fun ride up to the finish line. Too crowded up there for photos so we backtracked down to a point about 700 meters from the finish, figuring also we'd be able to get out of Dodge more quickly after the race came by, so we could catch the train back.

It wasn't our intention to ride down the entire mountain and into Cuneo; we'd planned to catch the train just a couple miles down the hill. Didn't work out that way. A storm moved in, rain made it hard to see things, and we somehow passed up the town the station was in. At this point I go into heavy duty work mode, drilling it at the front, pulling Kevin along, trying to read my Garmin's map in the rain (which is NOT easy!) and eventually, when the road flattened out, got out our phones to try and figure out how to get to the train station in Cuneo. We actually got there ahead of the train we would have caught further up the mountain!

The train was PACKED with cyclists. Stuffed to the gills. So much so that they made an announcement (only in Italian, but translated by others) that they were going to offload all the bikes at the next stop and we'd be getting on a different train. Didn't sound like a good thing at first, but the other train was actually much longer, tons of space for bikes, and left just 10 minutes later. Yay!

More shortly!