

As a kid it seemed like Mt Everest. That kid was right.

This might have been the toughest 52 miles I've ridden. Any sane person would have bailed; my son's still not riding due to his tonsillectomy, Andrew begged out because he was sick, and me? I had a plan, and I execute the plan, pretty much no-matter-what, despite what feels like a bit of bronchitis coming on (which I sometimes get at the tail end of a cold).



Bits and pieces of a ride coming up OLH on their one-way trip to Pescadero

So I set out at 9am on my own, on a ride that would bring me to a road I'd often heard references to but never ridden (not too many local roads I haven't ridden!), and another that I first rode maybe 44 years ago and have been smart enough not to ride since. I did have an opportunity to choose an alternative; I could have done the Alto Velo ride (and tried to hang on for as long as I could), or maybe bum along with Zack, who I saw heading out for a ride as I rode over Jefferson. But I stuck to the plan. Over Old LaHonda & Haskins to Memorial Park, then across Old Haul Road to Portola State Park, after which I would ascend from the depths back up to Skyline.

It was nice not having to push myself on Old LaHonda, a benefit of the cold I'm getting over, so I cruised up at a 25 minute pace, talking to some of the many, many older guys from Woodside who were doing a one-way to Pescadero, where they had Bloody Mary's, cars and designated drivers to haul them back home. Even though I don't drink, there seemed to be a certain civility, almost sensibility to their ride. But, that's not how I roll, it wasn't the plan.



The gate for Old Haul Road off Wurr



A relatively-clean bike at the start of Old Haul Road

The climb over Haskins wasn't too bad; about 11:30 I think, so overall I was doing about an 80% effort. I arrived at Old Haul Road thinking this could work, especially after Zack mentioned it was one of his favorite roads (although he wondered why I was on my nice bike, not my rain bike). I admit it was a bit eerie out there, seeing absolutely nobody for 50 minutes, only very large droppings from very large animals and lots of signs to beware of mountain lions.



Old Haul goes straight, the Bridge trail to Pomponio Rd goes left



Creepy faces on a few trees on Old Haul Road

Old Haul Road can definitely be ridden with standard road bike equipment at the right time of the year, which I rationalized this was, because it had been a month since it had rained. Zack had recommended the short steep parts be done in the saddle to keep your rear wheel from slipping, but I had no problems with that. I can't do a decent track stand, but steep technical climbs don't bother me. Go figure. The main issue with Old Haul Road, at least the first time, is that you don't have a good sense of where you are (how far you've gone, how much further to go).



Bike's a bit dirtier after Old Haul Road!



Turnoff to Portola State Park from Old Haul

I made a point of checking out the various trail heads along the way, but the main choice appears to be taking a bridge across the creek to Pomponio Road (which connects to West Alpine just about the Buffalo ranch) or continuing on what quickly becomes a very slippery clay surface to the park headquarters, and then up the main road. I have no idea which route is tougher; I just know that the route out of Portola State Park from Park Headquarters is not fun!

Thankfully it's a "stepped" climb, so you get a chance to change gears now & then, but the climb out of Portola State Park is a whole lot steeper than anything on West Alpine... which means that, by the time you get to West Alpine, you've been, er, tenderized. There were parts of it that brought back vague memories from so many years ago, but overall it just seemed steep and nasty. I was so thankful seeing the "Trucks use low gears" in the other direction, as I neared West Alpine. Normally, the upper part of West Alpine is nothing to look forward to, but today, it was. Known territory. And just over an hour away from home!

This would be a tough ride even if you were feeling on top of your game. Old Haul Road certainly opens your eyes to the joys of getting a road bike off pavement, but a real CycloCross bike would make it a lot easier. More work getting to the dirt, for sure, but there are an awful lot of nice loops you can do off the beaten track. Here's a link to the official map for Portola State Park, but keep in mind it doesn't do a great job of showing the various legal options for exiting Old Haul Road. Could be there are only two, the one I took (shown in the Strava segment) and the one using the Bridge trail.