

Oops I did it again! Old Haul Road Part 2

On the face of it, it seems so stupid, yet so addictive. High-end carbon road bike with high-zoot carbon wheels and skinny road tires. What could possibly make a dirt road attractive?

Maybe it's the fun of the "Undiscovered Country." Having lived in this area since birth (almost 57 years), and having ridden extensively since 11 years old, it's not so easy finding new roads, new challenges. The obvious answer? Off-road. Trouble is, I have so little time to ride that I can't rationalize putting a mountain bike into a car and driving somewhere to ride it. But y'know, there was a time when we didn't have things called mountain bikes, but this crazy local cyclist, Jobst Brandt, thought the bicycle, the bicycle you had at hand, was limited in capabilities only by the user... so it wasn't unusual that we'd have a 10 mile stretch of dirt trail (not even fire road) in the middle of an epic Sunday 115 miler. We'd do this on fragile sew-ups (usually called "tubulars" these days), threading our way through rocks and sand patches and somehow rarely had flat tires. That experience was a huge thrill for a 16 or 17-year-old kid... it was probably what convinced me that cycling really was the solution for everything.

But for years, decades even, my road bike has pretty much stayed off the dirt, at least if it could be avoided. That is, until last week, my first run over Old Haul Road, from the Loma Mar (Pescadero) side and heading into Portola State Park and the infamous hellish climb back up to Skyline. Today, I figured I'd reverse it, dropping down into the park off a different road, one that Keith (one of our semi-regular Tuesday/Thursday-am riders) took a couple weeks ago. Riding with me was Jeff K, one of our reps who's come with me on a number of rides, although most have covered familiar territory.



Beautiful views from W Alpine

The ride started out like many, ascending Old LaHonda, but instead of heading down the other side, we went south on Skyline before descending West Alpine and admiring the spectacular views of the coast. And then, shortly after the normal turn-off for Portola State Park, it started to get silly. I've put together a video of the 10 minute descent into hell, on a twisty single-lane "paved" road that actually leaves you wanting more.



Honor Camp left, Medium Security right

Once at the bottom, we over-shot the normal choice for getting across to Old Haul Road, riding down into a deserted correctional facility, looking, essentially, for a way out. It was there; I even started down the "jeep trail" a bit before deciding it wasn't it and back-tracking to a gated dirt road that was signed as leading to Portola State Park.

A very long .8 mile later and I was back in familiar territory- Old Haul Road. It wasn't much different heading north than it had been the preceding week heading south, and once again my high-



My bike on Old Haul Road

performance "road" bike proved its worth in dirt & mud. We had one more opportunity to back track when we came to Towne Fire Road, which signage indicated would end up on the eastern slope of Haskins Grade (Old Haul dumps you off on the west end). That sounded interesting! Unfortunately, after a few hundred meters you plunge down to the creek, which, at that point, is very wide and very cold with no way to cross other than walking through it. So back up we go, soon exiting Old Haul Road at Loma Mar where we rejoined civilization.

The rest of the ride was the basic "coastal classic" heading out to Pescadero (lunch at the bakery, of course!), Stage Road north, then return on Tunitas. At San Gregorio we were flagged by Perry, a



Climbing Tunitas with Perry & Jeff

cyclist who'd had a flat but no way to inflate the spare tube he carries (he had his CO2 cartridge but forgot the head). We got him going and he sped on up ahead... but we caught back up with him again at the Bike Hut on Tunitas, where he'd gotten another flat. This time I assisted him, finding the tiny piece of glass in his tire that would have caused yet another flat, and the three of us rode together up Tunitas, over the top and home.

This was not an easy ride, but it was a lot of fun exploring new territory... and exploring is certainly the appropriate word!