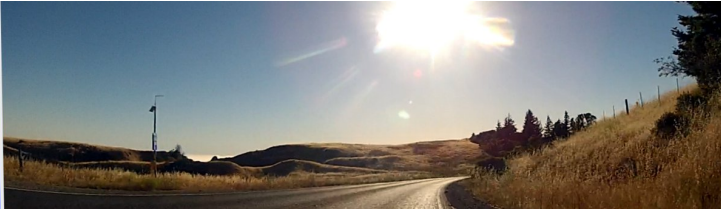


Learning what I already knew about pain (riding back from Becky's graduation)



My favorite spot on Skyline, between Page Mill and Sky Londa

It's hard to talk about pain when seeing something as beautiful as the picture above. I was going to say photo, but somehow "photo" doesn't do it justice. It's a picture, something that is so beautiful it isn't even tangible, but rather something that forms in your mind as you imagine scenes from a wonderful dream. But the title says I've got to talk about pain, so we'll get around to that. Eventually.

The plan for Sunday's ride (and remember, there's always a plan) was to head to Santa Cruz with my daughter for her graduation from UC Santa Cruz, with my bike packed in the car, and then ride back after. Becky's plan was a bit different; after graduation, she and her brother would drive up to Oregon to see their cousin Ed graduate in Eugene. My plan executed flawlessly; Becky and Kevin never made it further north than home (Redwood City). I understand why Becky called off her ambitious plan; after spending 2.5 hours sitting in the hot sun, no shade, you knew how a sun-dried tomato must feel. That plus, by the time I set out for the ride home a bit past 3:30, I was starved, not having eaten for 6 hours or so. Not the best way to start a fairly-long ride home! But that was rectified by a stop at the Jamba Juice at the entrance to Downtown Santa Cruz, where a large Orange Berry Blitz and soft pretzel provided the fuel for the ride home. It took a bit longer to consume than I would have liked, thanks to repeated "lung freeze" when I'd drink a bit too much too fast.

The section of Highway 9 from Santa Cruz to Boulder Creek is never something I look forward to, alone or with others. You just can't seem to get a rhythm on the many small climbs, and the cars would rather you were elsewhere. That combined with just having started out meant that I felt a bit sluggish for a while, although Strava tells a slightly-different story (even with a headwind, my times were pretty decent). I bought some water at the mandatory Boulder Creek stop and then headed anxiously for the main climb, about 10 minutes further on.



In honor of my daughter's graduation, and recognition that I, too, am proud to be a Slug!

Strange how good things can feel once you start climbing. Once you have something you can push against and challenge you. This time, with a slight difference though; about 5 minutes into the climb I began to get quite a side cramp, probably from the drink & food gulped down immediately before riding. It was interesting, that pain, knowing that it had nothing to do with muscles or lungs or anything I could actually control. I thought about the old wive's tales about not swimming right after eating because you'll get

cramps and drown. Umm... not too likely here! Nor, did I think, there would be any references found to someone who died because they had cramps for exercising too soon after eating. So what to do? Embrace the pain. Seriously! It wasn't going to cause me any harm, and it was an opportunity to push past it, prove to myself that it was just one more thing to conquer, and that I did. It was fun, really, working out whether to tune the pain out or celebrate it. I ended up entertaining it as an intellectual curiosity, wondering how much I could use it to distract myself from the usual pains that limit efforts on long climbs, but after a while I lost track of it, either because it gradually went away or simply became irrelevant.

My time for the segment from Waterman Gap to Saratoga Gap ended up just a minute off my fastest time these past 5 years, and since this was into a slight headwind vs a definite tail wind on my fastest ride, I was pleased with the results. Arriving at Saratoga Gap Mr. Mustard was already packing up, but I hadn't been planning to stop anyway; my "lunch" in Santa Cruz plus some Cytomax along the way was more than adequate for the ride. Besides, there was that "racing the sun" thing going on too! Leaving from Santa Cruz just past 4pm doesn't allow for too much sight-seeing, although I'll admit I was ahead of schedule arriving at the top just past 6pm. From there it was a quick run across Skyline, down 84 and home. Nice weather the entire way, about 80 in Santa Cruz and never dropping below 62 if I recall correctly. The fog stayed near the coast, and the wind made for striking views along Skyline, as you can see in the photo at the top. A very nice Father's Day ride, not a bad way to end a day that began with my daughter's graduation from UC Santa Cruz.