

King's is easier through the park? I don't think so.



Rule #1. Do not pass another cyclist unless you are absolutely positively certain you can say in front of him or her! The Tuesday version of the regular Tues/Thurs ride heads straight up Kings Mtn, from bottom to top (timing starts at Tripp Road). The Thursday version detours through Huddart Park via Greer Road, giving you a few hundred meters of flat road prior to turning up through the back entrance to the park. Of course, you end up paying for that flat stretch, as the park routing is considerably-steeper in sections than when you ride up Kings the entire distance.

Back in the day, we rarely diverted through the park. Not sure when it started becoming a more-regular thing, but believe it was either Eric or Karl who started it. Now, it's a given. I used to fight it; I used to sometimes say no, we're not heading up through the park, that's not the normal route for this ride. But eventually I broke down, because if riding through the park was harder for me, if it was something I didn't look forward to doing, then obviously it was something I should be doing.

In general, it adds about 90 seconds to the ride up the hill, depending how hard people push it on the flatter sections. If I'm really feeling good, I can manage just under 28 minutes. Today, just over 29 (and I was actually feeling not-so-bad). What can make-or-break the ride, in terms of your overall time, is how well you recover from the nasty stretch just prior to leaving the park and turning onto Kings. Somehow, you have to not tempt yourself to circle around a bit at the top, choosing instead to make a hard right and charge on up Kings. It's not an easy choice to make, because it takes quite a while to recover from the steep section if you don't take it easy for a while.

On the other hand, if you just head right up Kings, no detour through the park, there's little strategy involved, just an evenly-paced climb. Maybe the easier, more-even grade when you ride all the way up Kings is what makes it harder for some? Maybe they prefer the "distraction" of a changing grade, perhaps even an excuse for slowing down to a crawl on the really-steep stuff. But that doesn't work for me; I've ridden both ways far too many times to not have strategy at the back of my mind, for either route.

OK, the photo at the top, what's that all about? As we turned onto Greer we saw, way up ahead, climbing up Kings, a couple of cyclists. We intercepted them shortly after we rejoined Kings, which meant we were going up just a bit faster than they were. Of course, as we approached, their speed picked up! Actually, just one really picked up, the other dropping off his pace just a bit, giving us a chance to pass. What makes this significant? The fact that, had we not come across him, I might have eased off the pace a bit, content to let others in my group ride on ahead. But once you pass someone, you have to stay ahead of them, and so despite any temptation I may have had to let the other guys ride on ahead, it was a choice I didn't have. All because I passed someone.

I was actually glad that I'd been forced to keep my pace up, keep my heart rate at a decent level and arrive home after the ride feeling pretty well spent. If it takes riding through the park and passing someone to accomplish that, I'm game.

An awful lot of thinking for a simple bike ride!