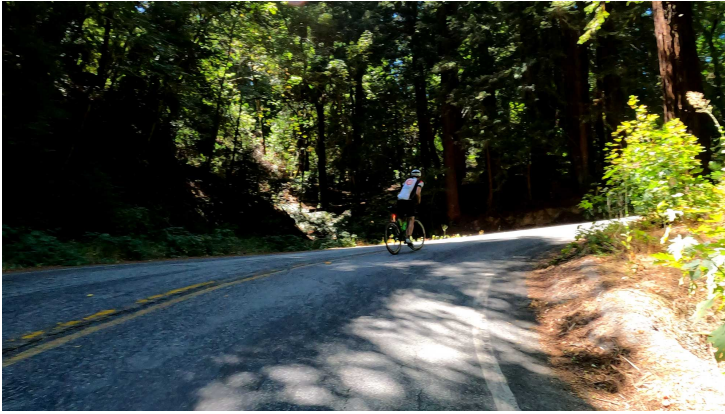


Not sure this ride makes sense anymore until I get lower gears



Kevin powering away from me at the start of Redwood Gulch's steep part. It would have been so much easier to just ride out to Pescadero, and return via Tunitas. It would have been easier to ride up Page Mill, descend West Alpine, and return on Tunitas. On paper, that shouldn't be the case. On paper, heading south through the foothills and then up Redwood Gulch, Highway 9, north on Skyline and home, should be easier. Less climbing. The relatively-easy cruise north on Skyline.

Maybe it's just because Mr Mustard hasn't been up on Skyline in... years.

But I think it's more simple than that. Redwood Gulch is just too steep for my gearing. For the longest time, I had the usual 53/39 with an 11/28. I think I even did Sonora Pass a time or two with that. Compact gearing came along just in time, with a 50/34 up front that allowed me to keep the size of my rear cassette to what it used to be. I've had this gearing for quite some time; maybe 15+ years, and until this year, it has served my needs very well. But Redwood Gulch is killing me. I'm quickly into my lowest gear and thinking the only way I'm going to keep going forward is by zig-zagging! My Bike Friday travel bikes, with its smaller wheels, is geared about 8% lower and, so far, I haven't found anything in France that's killing me quite like Redwood Gulch here at home.

It's probably all leading to New Bike Day sometime in my future. I can avoid Redwood Gulch and probably have another 4 years on climbs like Tunitas with my present gearing, but the truth is, I've become inefficient climbing the really nasty stuff, with the gears I've got.

How much lower can I go? Quite a bit. Whether I choose Shimano or SRAM for my next bike, the default gearing is lower, and the optional gearing even lower yet. Shimano has the same 34 small up front, with choices of either a 30 in the rear (two teeth lower than what I have now) or 34 (a relatively-massive 6 teeth larger and honestly, I can't imagine even trying a climb that would require a lower gear than that!). SRAM defaults to a 33 front chainring with a 30, 33 or even 36t rear; I'd probably go with the 33.

But today, for some reason, I just had to prove it was still possible to climb Redwood Gulch. Kevin wasn't happy about that; this is, he says, his least-favorite ride of all. Even with the stop at Foothill Plaza, adjacent to our former store location, for coffee (Peets) and food. Maybe that stop is actually the problem; you get into a relaxed mood and there's nothing at all relaxed about what's to come.

Once on Redwood Gulch, Kevin quickly faded into the climb ahead, while I simply faded. I've lost a full minute since this past February! Kevin is more into training your strengths; I have this idea I should challenge my weaknesses. Kevin did pay for his strong effort up RWG though, with a seizure while waiting for me at the top. He recovered and rode fairly strongly up 9, a road he dislikes even more than RWG.

Guess it's time to start seriously thinking about retiring my current Trek Emonda. Its closing in on 50,000 miles and is absolutely positively the best bike I've ever had. Anything I ask of it, it does. Except RWG. This also means I'll finally be on disc brakes, something my hands will appreciate on long technical descents (like Kings Mtn; descending 84 requires very little braking).