

PCH Randonneurs 300k – Feb 7th 2009

Before I start this review, I would like to take this opportunity to thank RUSA member Eric Anderson who's selfless generosity enabled me to ride the 200k brevet.

The PCH randonneurs 300k started at the Best Western in Ventura, CA and began with a 200k loop north to Goletta followed by a 100k loop south to Moorpark. I like rides that start at motels, you just roll out of bed and off you go. It's even better at the end when you can practically ride your bike right into the shower.

The rain the night before the ride was so hard it woke me at 4am and again at 5am. The weather forecast was for highs of 57 and lows of 50. It was expected to rain all day. My daughter, Amber, and I had brought many layers of clothing and our best rain gear. Being as we live and ride in Southern California our rain and cold weather gear wasn't that great. On top of that, I found I had forgotten my cycling shoes.

In the best randonneuring tradition I started the ride in light rain wearing sneakers. They were soaked in ten minutes. Trying to ride with wet, slippery sneakers on SPD pedals is challenging, let me tell you. We started by climbing towards Ojai as the rain became heavier until at times it was torrential (I'm English so I know what heavy rain is!) Then we turned back towards the coast and endured 30mph descents in the rain. At this time Amber started looking very cold so we stopped at a Von's and bought some more cold-weather gear (trash bags and latex gloves.) We got a lot of sympathy from 'normal' people as we stood shivering while tearing holes in trash bags and putting them on. This helped a lot except for the feet. Ambers' were cold and mine were still in sneakers.

After 45 miles we were in Santa Barbara and with Foster's help and my GPS system we found an open bike store where I bought new shoes and some booties for Amber. Thirty minutes and \$140 later we were back on the road again in better shape. We were finally warm and dry and clipped in. We got to the next control at El Capitan with about 30 minutes to spare and left a little after it closed. We were last – time to get going.

The rain had eased up by now and the roads were even starting to dry a little. We made good time on the way back, partly because we were better geared and partly because the route was flatter. It seemed the return back to Ventura went by very quickly, it was certainly much more enjoyable without the rain. We joined up with a nice group of riders who were skilled randonneurs and I felt comfortable we would be able to finish if we stayed with them. Thank you, Earl, for the introductions.

Although the route didn't take us past the Best Western it was only a half mile detour so we went back to the rooms to grab some more layers. With the clouds gone it was obvious the temperature was going to drop below 50F. The good news was that the moon was almost full and it was high. The bad news was that our main lights had been soaked and the battery was dead without ever being used. Fortunately we had backups and plenty of batteries. We left the Best Western and planned on rejoining the route via Sanjon road

but had to turn back because it was flooded. I don't know if the route was deliberately designed to allow us to make an equipment change before the night part of the ride, but it was very convenient.

The last 100k started down the route of the Grand Tour to Port Hueneme and Moorpark then climbed Grimes Canyon towards Fillmore. The climb was great under the full moon and very quiet. The descent down the other side by the light of the full moon and a 1 Watt LED light was a bit of a butt-clencher especially as there were quiet a few rocks in the road from the rain that morning. In addition the temperature was down to about 40F or lower and even with five layers I was on the cool side of comfortable on the descent.

Other than Grimes Canyon the dark part of the ride went through areas with a lot more facilities than the daylight part. Most of the controls in this section were un-manned and relied on receipts from a Wendy's and two gas stations rather than signatures. I have always preferred to ride in areas with more facilities at night, relying on my reflective gear to keep me safe from the inevitable traffic.

Ten miles from the end Amber took off like we were doing a Sunday morning bagel ride. All I could do was hang on as she flew home at 21 mph. We hit almost all the lights green. I could really have used a few red ones! We got to the end 19 hours after we started but our ride time was 13:30 for a total of 196 miles (with detours) and we weren't last! This was the third hardest 300k I have done (yeah it's scary – I've done worse!)

Thank you Greg for a great route and a ride to remember. I liked all those controls - it really helped to know there was a friendly face not too far up the road, especially when the rain and cold was getting me down. See you next month on the 400k.

Thank you Foster for a great route, awesome support, directions to the bike shop, and sagging my soaked sneakers home. You were right – they were still wet the next day. See you next month.

Terry Hutt

P.S. Love having routesheets and interactive maps on www.bikely.com