

### 3 DAYS OF SOLVANG!

Just back from having too much fun cycling on the annual VeloRaptor trip to Solvang.

FYI, Solvang is a small town, a bit north of Santa Barbara, and in March the cycling there is fantastic, as the rolling landscape is green and temperatures are in the 70's. Solvang itself is a 'Danish' village, a bit touristy <http://www.solvangusa.com/>, but it is a small walkable town in wine country (think the movie *Sideways*), and it has a very nice brewery. I liked the Vahalla IPA, but all the brews were well reviewed by our group <http://www.solvangbrewing.com/>. Solvang is also very welcoming to cyclists. In fact, a few amateur teams train there. The surrounding country side has a fair number of high end stables, as well as wide valleys filled with nut trees, and truck crops. In particular, we saw a lot of broccoli on this trip.

**Day 1:** The biking wasn't totally in Solvang as 5 of us rode around the San Antonio reservoir near Ft Hunter-Liggett on the way down to Solvang. This is a nice ride with a couple of climbs, but it seemed really exhausting. It was 44 mi, with 2300 ft of elevation that felt much longer and harder. I think it may be because we started at 12:30 pm and only took one stop at the Lockwood store. The gal behind the counter was very friendly and pointed us to the frozen Twix bars – excellent choice – but in reality, we needed more food and a few longer breaks on that ride.



One of the other Steves (there were 3 of us) and I got a nice diesel exhaust experience on the climb to the reservoir overlook, as a guy in a pickup couldn't resist stepping on it, just as he passed us. This was no accident, as Steve was a bit ahead of me and the guy let us have it with two distinct bursts.



The ride did have some magical moments, like when we spooked a Great Blue Heron as we crossed the grated bridge on Nacimiento Drive where it crossed the San Antonio River. We were able to pace the huge bird as he glided along the stream for a few hundred yards.

**Day 2:** The route on this day was the Foxen Canyon/Cat Canyon 60 mi loop, starting and ending in Solvang. Wheels were rolling at 8:15 in the cold fog and fortunately, we only had to go a few miles to get into the sunshine and some beautiful views.



While in the fog and mist Tom did spot a buffalo. I missed it as my glasses were totally fogged, and when I pulled over to wipe them, I rode directly into some sand and nearly went down. So much for riding 'blind'.

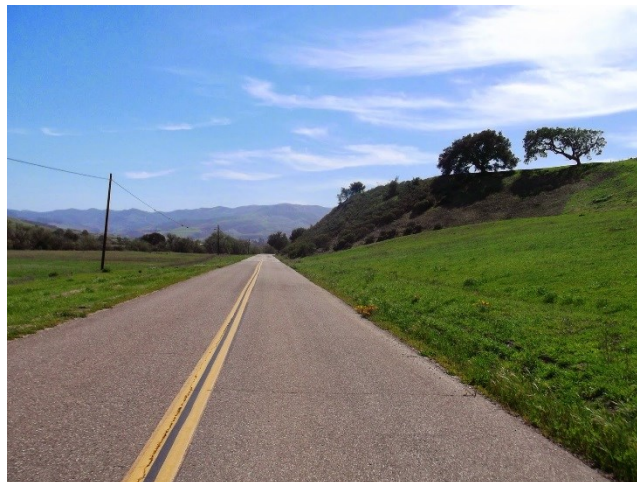
*Chocolate thievery:* After the steep Cat Canyon climb, the very bumpy road descends to Los Alamos and at mile 40 we lunched at the Quackenbush Café, <http://www.generalstoreca.com/html/chef.html/> . This is a comfortable little place with great soups and sandwiches, friendly staff, and a nice outdoor patio along the main

street. Their baked goods are also over the top. In particular, the day we were there they had a chocolate-banana cake/bread/brownie thing that was calling my name. I agreed to split a sandwich and a piece of the chocolate bomb with David (my sandwich buddy), and after carefully cutting the chocolate delight in half, proceeded to dig into my sandwich. Others at the table were commenting on how good the desserts looked, and the lovely lady sitting next to me commented that I had made a good choice with the chocolate/banana bread. I was astonished that she could know this, as her food was yet to arrive, and innocently asked 'How do you know?' But, just as I uttered this question, the answer became obvious. A corner of my piece was missing! The look on my face (shock) said it all, as the others at the table burst out laughing. Now I know who not to trust around my chocolate!

*Relativistic Cycling:* I have ridden with many groups of cyclists and find that the bulk of the conversation in most groups revolves around bike gear and rides. Not in this group!

After lunch the route climbs out of Los Alamos on Drum Canyon Rd. This is a bit of a climb, and to distract ourselves from the suffering, three of us were explaining Einstein's theory of relativity to a couple of others. You know, going through the standard train problem: "I'm on a train traveling 100 mph and throw a ball toward the front of the train. You are standing still, watching the train go by. How fast does the ball appear to be traveling to each observer, etc". Given my background as a nerd geophysicist the topic is not surprising, but then there was the philosopher (PhD), and the chemist-business man doing much of the explaining. Beyond that, the guy we were explaining it to is a retired judge that writes award winning poetry! Just your usual California biking group. On a later long climb we discussed the fractal dimension of the landscape. Since returning home, the discovery of gravity waves at the edge of the universe has been announced. That should get us up a couple more long climbs.

I'm not sure if it was cosmic energy or what but after the descent, there was no mistaking the Red-Tail Hawk that Larry and I watched as it circled up and away with a snake dangling from its' talons.



**Day 3:** Solvang to Jalama Beach and back (75 mi). The first section of this out-and-back route follows Santa Rosa Rd west from Buellton through fields and orchards for about 20 miles, out to California Hwy 1. The route then continues south on Hwy 1 for about 3 miles



to Jalama Rd. From there it is 14 miles west to the ocean and Jalama Beach. The weather was clear and not too hot, and the biking was outstanding. One important point to note is don't plan on spending much time at the corner of Route 1 and Jalama road, as the stench there is intense. Some one thing or many fleshy things are rotting in the brush. There was also a big pile of brussel sprouts (like a truck load) with cows wading right into it to munch. I would have taken a picture, but every cell in my body was telling me to move on.

Jalama Road has one big climb that comes at mile 29 from Solvang. After that climb there are a few more bumps, but the beach beckons, and it is easy to push on. Coming down the hill to Jalama Beach is one beautiful ride, whether on a bike or in a car on a motorcycle, it matters not, but after 35 miles on a bike, it looks especially good.



There is a state campground at Jalama Beach , and a small store/grill (Jalama Beach Store and Grill. <http://www.jalamabeach.com/>). That is where a second chocolate incident occurred. To many of us recreational riders, the food on the ride is an integral part of the experience, most folks that ride or hike long distances eventually find the foods that best suit their systems during their adventures. For me it is a butter croissant and a café mocha (no whip, extra hot). It turns out that the Jalama Beach Grill was a bit short on espresso drinks and French pastry, so I settled for half a Jalama Patty melt with fries (again splitting with my sandwich buddy). I was just tucking into the patty melt when Tom shows up with a humungous chili-burger and fries combo filling one of the carryout boxes that usually holds 4 drinks, burger and fries. Several of us sat in stunned admiration as Tom devoured a

substantial fraction of that burger, noted that we would endeavor to stay ahead of Tom on the return trip.

Then came dessert time and the Dove Bars in the store freezer were very popular (no frozen Twix). Rob decided that a whole Dove bar was too much, so he ate half of his and tossed the remainder into the box, on top of the mangled remnants of the chiliburger. Well, several of us gasped that someone would throw away such a valuable item as half a Dove bar, especially on top of a mangled chilli burger (you must realize that we had ridden 35 mi, and had 35 to go on our return). That is when Sally sprang into action, grabbed the half Dove bar from atop the chilli montage and gulped it down in one bite. Seriously, it was gone! And Sally is a small woman who thrives on classical music!



Somehow, I felt great on the return to Solvang and the miles just rolled by. I ordered a Mocha Frappuccino (actually called a Mocha Blender) at the Coffee Cabin <http://www.yelp.com/biz/coffee-cabin-buellton/> on the way into Solvang, and waited until my afternoon coffee buddies rolled in.

**Note:** Special thanks to Robin and Jeff for organizing this trip, and to Cindy, Christina and Lynn for their SAG efforts on the Jalama Beach ride.