

Bob'n Along the Pacific Coast

by Bob Smith

Last fall Anne and I decided that after a tour across the US in 2001 that we needed a tour that was a little more laid back. We met Tom and Margaret Gate from Corona, CA in Solvang to drive together to Monterey to begin our 5-day tour down the Pacific Coast Highway to Santa Barbara. We had met Tom and Margaret a year earlier on our US tandem tour.

We departed Monterey Bay on Oct 15th at 9 AM. It was a cool overcast fall morning for our ride to Big Sur (45 miles). Our route was through Pacific Grove and Pebble Beach via 17 Mile Drive to Carmel. The route starts on beautiful coastline bikeways and meanders through Pebble Beach with wonderful seaside views through cypress trees.



There are golf courses and beautiful multi-million homes along the narrow eucalyptus tree lined 17 Mile Drive, which easily creates a distraction from the climbing. By the time we reached Carmel our continental breakfast had been expended so we stopped for a second breakfast at the Tuck Box a quaint English style restaurant.



After a short ride through Carmel we proceeded down the Pacific Coast Highway towards our destination for the evening at the Big Sur Lodge in Pfeiffer State Park. The cool overcast conditions made for a very comfortable ride. The coast in Monterey County is anything but flat. Dinner at the Lodge was an interesting experience. They were having a party to recognize a local teacher for 50 years of service. As a result the dinner was a fixed menu and the kitchen was officially closed. We managed to convince the cook to let us order from the lunch menu.



Day 2 began with a great breakfast at the Big Sur Lodge. Tom informed us that there was a big climb out of Big Sur. The hilly coast continued to San Luis Obispo County.



After a fabulous lunch at the Lucia Lodge, we continued our 73-mile journey towards Cambria. The Lucia Lodge (a gas station in a previous life) is a restaurant that has a couple cabins and a few campsites. The coast highway through Monterey County is minimally developed, which makes it a jewel of a bike ride.



Just before the San Luis Obispo County line the front derailleur on our bike began to act up. The hinge on the clamp had cracked causing the derailleur to turn. I managed to readjust and tighten it enough so it would hold as long as we didn't use the big chain ring. The only bike shop in Cambria was closed by the time we arrived at the Bluebird Lodge.



On the morning of Day 3 we had breakfast at the Redwood Café, which was within walking distance of the motel. The route was 47 miles through Morro Bay to Pismo Beach. Due to our derailleur problem we detoured into the city of San Luis Obispo (SLO) to find a bike shop. If you need any bike stuff while in SLO, make sure you stop at Art's Bike Shop. They installed a new derailleur clamp for no charge above the price of the part. Whoa, we were now able to use the big chain ring again. Tom did a great job getting us into and out of SLO and back onto Route 1. Riding was much easier and faster today with big gears. We arrived at the Shore Cliff Best Western around 1 PM. The hotel was right on the cliffs of the Pacific Ocean just north of the beach.



On the 4th day we continued south along the coast to Oceano. From there we headed inland through coastal farmland to Guadalupe, Vandenberg Air Force Base and Solvang. On the outskirts of Guadalupe the front saddle mounting bolt broke causing my saddle to tilt backwards towards Anne. I just happened to have a shorter similar bolt but it was a bit too short. Tom and Margaret rode back to see what had happened to us. We walked the bike into town and found a Napa Auto Parts Store. The auto parts store was an amazing find. It was like stepping back in time.



We did manage to find a bolt that would work, which meant that I wouldn't have had to stand for the remainder of the 68 miles to Frank and Lynn's in Solvang. Frank and Lynn were another couple we had met on the 2001 US tandem tour. They rode out on their motorcycle to meet us and escorted us to their home. The six of us went out for dinner together after which Tom and Margaret drove home to Corona. Anne and I spent the night at Lynn and Franks. Lynn made us a great breakfast in the morning prior to us leaving for Santa Barbara's Goleta Airport where we would pick up a rental car to drive back to Monterey.



The final day's ride to Goleta Airport was 40 miles. About half the ride was on US 101, which has a wide shoulder. It was Saturday morning and the traffic wasn't very heavy.

This was a spectacular five day ride of 265 miles. We averaged about 13 miles an hour for the trip. The scenery was superb and the opportunity to ride with Tom and Margaret again was a wonderful experience. This was another one of those great bicycling adventures, that we wouldn't mind doing again. If you decide to take this trip sometime, consider the month of October because the Pacific Coast Highway has very narrow shoulders and can have heavy car traffic during summer months. October will be cooler so expect to ride in tights and light jacket for at least part of the ride. Also consider riding from north to south due to coastal winds from the north. The Monterey County segment is quite hilly.