



Going Solo

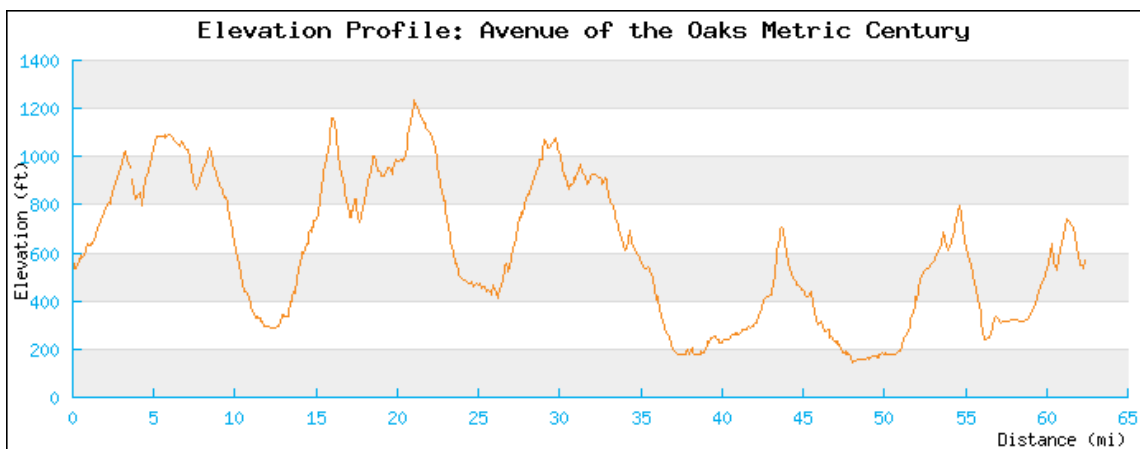
Avenue of the Oaks

100 km Ride

April 4, 2009

By Rob Verfurth

It was listed on the Descenders web site in the ride schedule. The group discussed the beauty of the route during past training rides. It had plenty of hills, a perfect course for the Descenders to excel. We should have had a huge turnout for this 100 km ride. Unfortunately the facts of life get in the way of doing all the riding you want. Many on the team declined, were out of town or just could not make it. After hearing all the great stories about the Guacamole Race is years past, I thought this would be a well attended event with hundreds of great riders. I was wrong on both assumptions. As it turned I was the only Descender signed up for the ride. I was determined to represent the team with the best of my (limited) ability and ride hard, proudly wearing my Descenders jersey.



The above elevation profile shows all the hills covering the course in North County. We rode in Rice Canyon, Couser Canyon, along Lilac and even Gopher Canyon. It was a beautiful course. The day was cool but clear as we milled around waiting for the start. There was a nice singing group from the local high school that sang the National Anthem before the gun went off. We started in the parking lot at Live Oak Park in Fallbrook. I was patiently positioned in the middle of a few hundred total riders when the ride gun exploded and the group set off. The parking lot is on a slight up hill so there were a few that had difficulty getting going. I should have suspected something was up when the guy in front of me, blocking my move to the front, was carrying a dog in a pouch on his back. Obviously not everyone was here to race.

I took a spirited pace when we hit Reche Rd trying to close the expanding gap from a group of 8-10 real riders. Less than .75 miles into the ride, the route took a slight turn to the right off of Reche and onto tree-lined Live Oak Park Rd (see photo below). The lead group missed the turn and headed up Reche. I found myself near the front of the ride with only two riders ahead. I do not know if they ever figured out the route.



A small group of us followed onto Mission Rd and across the I-15, eventually heading down Rice Canyon Rd, after the first SAG stop at only mile 7. Another data point that should have helped me understand that this more of a fun ride. I did not stop and found myself near the front again as we crossed Highway 76 and climbed Couser Canyon to another SAG stop. The last few leaders stopped and I was alone at the front of the ride. Scary thought at mile 16. I lead and pulled one guy for 9 miles along Lilac Rd and Old Castle Rd until we hit the climb along Circle R. At this point he decided to pass me along with one other guy that had been closing a gap from behind. I am now riding 3rd and enjoying the rise back up to W. Lilac. Cruising along Lilac I see the Ranchos out for their Saturday ride coming from the west. "So that is where all the good riders are today", I thought to myself as they flew by me.

We hit the 3rd SAG stop and the two "leaders" were having a snack so I headed alone down W. Lilac all the way to Camino Del Rey. I was caught halfway down the 5 mile descent and then got passed by two more guys as we headed back toward Old 395. I hung onto the wheel of one of the two young tri-guys that passed me, faded a few times but managed to close the gap to stay in his draft for about 4 miles. As we turned south

onto Old Highway 395 and then east onto Gopher Canyon, I spotted the two “leaders” from earlier heading in the wrong direction north on Old 395. I waved for them to follow me but they must have had better things to do. Back in 3rd place and being pulled by a guy. Things were looking good.

My lead guy was getting tired and his buddy was way ahead on Gopher Canyon. I needed to take a quick pit stop under the I-15 overpass so I let my fading friend carry on. Bladder all better and I was back on my bike. He struggled up the Gopher Canyon rise and I caught him in short order. I was feeling better so I picked up the pace and headed for the turn to go back up W. Lilac Rd.



I was still in good shape as I headed back up the 5 mile stretch to Old 395 and spotted many riders on their way down the loop I have taken 20 miles earlier. This was the third clue about the pace of the riders that should have told me about the level of competition.

We headed north on Old 395 back towards Fallbrook for the final 7 miles with no 100km rider in my view. I headed back into Live Oak Park in well under 4 hours and saw the guy who passed me along Camino Del Rey 25 miles earlier standing near the finish area waiting for his buddy that I passed going up Gopher Canyon. There were a few other riders that were in the lunch area that had completed the 30 or 15 mile rides but I could not find any others that did the 100 km event. It looks like I did not get lost on the course, found my way back to the start and finished in 2nd place. It appears that I was the “tallest pygmy in the tribe” for the day, or at least 2nd tallest!

This is a beautiful ride and one I recommend to the Descenders for next year.