

Kitchen Creek-Julian Loop

By: David Voris

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Distance: 75 miles

Participants: Jim Broder, Mike Hodges, Dave Voris

Start/finish: Park at Corner of highway 79 and Old Highway 80.

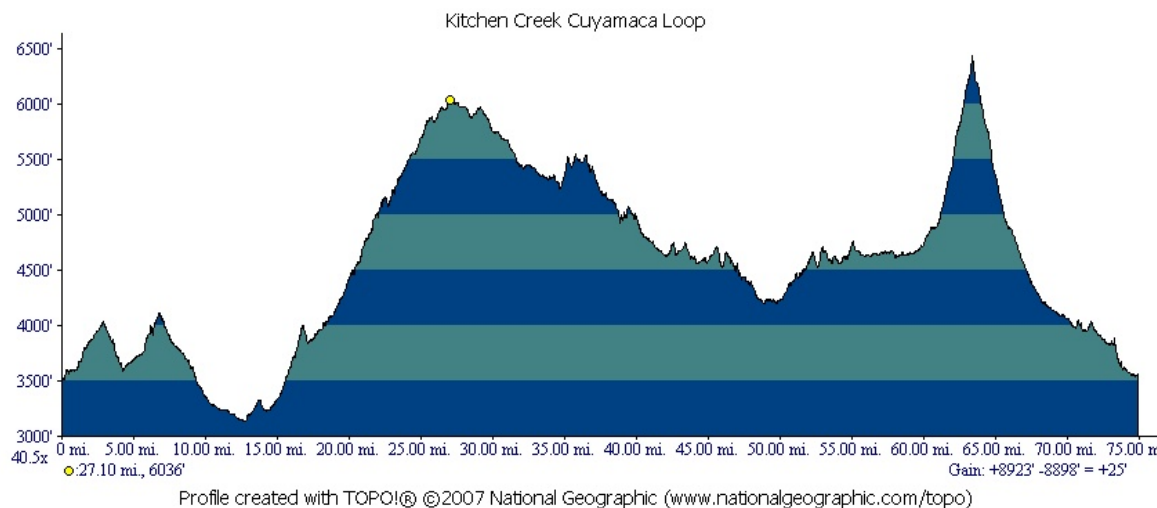
Weather: high 93 in Descanso, 86 in Julian

Total Climbing: 7,200' (including optional 2.5 mile 12% Cuyamaca Summit Road – 1,500')



Route:

Old Highway 80 Southeast 14 miles to Kitchen Creek Road – turn left. Take Kitchen Creek road up to Sunrise Highway. This is a 12 mile 2,800' steady climb. Right on Sunrise Highway. After three miles water is available at fire station on the right or a shop on the left. Take Sunrise Highway to the 79, turn right and continue into Julian. Refill in Julian. Take the 79 south 10 miles to Paso Picacho campground. Consider climbing the 2.5 mile paved “road” to top of Cuyamaca (starts at the fire station next to the campground). Proceed south on the 79 back to starting point.



Comments:

This trip is suited for days with no time limits. We took time to enjoy the less travelled roads and amazing views of the desert floor. We embraced the monsoon cloud formations overhead – clouds that we had longed for in city as we look to the east in our daily urban grind. We all agreed that there no town signs to sprint to, no personal bests, etc. We met the locals, had great conversations, viewed the camp sites, and unwisely stuffed ourselves with pie in Julian.

The blow-by-blow: After a pre-climb fill up at the SDGE station on Old Highway 80 at mile 11, we started up the 12 mile Kitchen Creek climb. Not one car the entire climb either direction. This desolation is due to the gates at the 4 and 9 mile marks that prevent through-traffic. The middle section of the climb is a single lane road. A perfect remote climb. NOT GOOD FOR DESCENDING – too gravelly, too narrow, and it was paved over some elusive protruding rocks. No real pitchy stuff. Just a quiet, steady scenic climb.

The pines welcomed us at the top just before the turn off to Laguna, and the firemen generously shared their drinking fountain. The trip from Laguna to Julian is great for testing a clubs' paceline teamwork skills. Mostly

downhill, but just enough upward pitches and cross winds to keep you thinking strategically. The cars were very light on this weekday summer afternoon, and the piney woods had a sweet smell.

The pie in Julian was better than ever, but left me with a stomach ache that lasted the rest of the ride. More team work on the 10 mile trip out of Julian to Cuyamaca, where the afternoon winds put up quite a fight. Had it not been for the 2003 Cedar fire, the Pasa Picacho campground would be paradise. Even with the burned pines, it is still very nice. We prepared for the stout climb to the top of Cuyamaca.

Jim skipped the Cuyamaca climb to manage his cramps. The road to the top of the mountain is the hardest 2.5 mile stretch of road I know of in the county (and is the highest paved public road that I know of – climbing over 1,500' up to 6,440). Harder than North Solidad and the tough sections of Highland Valley Road. The road is like a small golf cart path with potholes. There are 15%+ sections that continue forever, and the tough sections get longer and steeper as you get further up. Some sections may exceed 20%. No gears are low enough. We would slow down to rest on the few flat sections (i.e. sections that were only 7- 8%) just so we could turn the peddles over on the 15% sections. Mike hit the top a few moments before me - I was just happy to finish. The view on the top was epic but the descent was ominous. The road was so steep and narrow that there were only a few spots where I could fully release my brakes. And when I did release, the bike accelerated so quickly that I was immediately back on the brakes with my butt over my back wheel. I regretted not having enough water to cool my rims. Let's call it a "once in a life time experience".

From there the trip was 10 miles to the car nearly all downhill or flat through the quaint mountain communities. Some sections were twisty and fun. Jim did nearly all the work blocking the wind to the finish. He is a bulldozer on roads like this and a great bike handler. A great finish to an epic day.

Top of Page: Dave and Jim at mile 11 of Kitchen Creek **Top left:** Mike Hodges flirting with SDGE employee in exchange for water. **Top right:** early part of Kitchen Creek climb. **Bottom left:** Kitchen Creek mile 5 **Bottom middle:** near top of Kitchen Creek **Bottom right:** top of Cuyamaca – storm clouds

