

# ShadowTour Stagecoach Century

15 January 2011

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Great events require great planning. Mike Hodges coordinated and coerced the Descenders to present a strong showing at the Stagecoach Century for 2011. The "A" team from 2010 was the defending 4-man time trail champion and they owned the record time of 4:49. We had a record 22 Descenders participate in the event. The following teams started the 4-man time trial:

Team A: Oleg, Dave V, Eric and Rick

Team B: Guido, Bob R, Pete and John B

Team B1: Bernie, Len L, Chad and Nick

Team C1: Mike, Bob P, Rob and Bryan

Team C: John M, Steve F, Len and Werner

Solo riders: Dave Ernst and Bill Wood



Bob P, Pete and Mike before start

Most of the group met in the dark at Springmeadow at 4:45 am. Guido set an even earlier time for his team as they rolled at 4:30 am towards Ocotillo. The drive in the dark took less than 1.5 hours as we arrived at the Ocotillo Community Center just as the sun rose in the east. It was cool but a beautiful morning as the teams got their gear ready and checked in for the team time trial.



Bob R, Pete, Dave V, John B, Bob P, Rob, Bryan, Rick and Oleg at start

Team C1 happened to be the first Descenders team ready to start. There were 2-3 teams that started ahead of us as we rolled at 7:05 am. The other teams were still trying to get last minute equipment and teams organized. Had anyone seen Werner?

Our team kept up a nice 18 mph pace with Bob P and Mike doing 5 minute pulls, while Bryan and I took point for 3 minutes at a time. Bryan informed us he was just recovering from a nasty infection during the drive out and was not sure how he would fare during the ride. He was dropping behind in the first ten miles and we had to leave him to ride his own pace.

We were passed by a hard charging Guido and Team B before we got to the first rest stop just before the Sweeney Pass descent. They were moving well and looked in great form. Our first hour of riding had us at an 18 mph pace; it was going to be a long day.



Bob P and Mike Hodges after Sweeney Pass

The next Descenders team, B1, with Bernie and the boys cruised by us with all four guys in tact. They looked like they had Guido and team in their sights at the pace they were maintaining. We kept wondering, where was Team A?

Bob, Mike and I kept up a good pace as a number of riders stayed right behind us while the three of us kept taking pulls. A solo rider passed us and then slowed down. We passed him. About 5-6 riders were just drafting behind our team as we kept climbing towards Campbell Grade. Finally about mile 25 the powerful threesome of Oleg, Rick and Dave V flew by us. Where was Eric? What happened to their fourth man? They went by so fast we did not have a chance to get an update on where they had been and why there we only 3 guys left. They were on their way to closing the gap of the leaders. We were just a blip as they sped by at 25 mph.



Team A: three men on a mission.

As we climbed Campbell Grade, the guys who had been getting a free ride for a number of miles passed us. Bob, Mike and I rode on towards Box Canyon. Our second hour we only averaged just over 16 mph; it was going to be an even longer day. At the top of Box Canyon we spotted a Descender in distress; it was John Bittenger. He had a similar illness to Bryan and the Guido team beat him up in the early portion of the ride. John was spent. We pulled him along through Shelter Valley towards Scissors Crossing. Our pace was very fast as we sped along at more than 25 mph in the flat section, feeling good. We would learn the reason for our quick pace on the return.

*Oleg and Dave V contributed the below excerpt to summarize the ride and day of their team: Descenders A team started last. We did just a few quick pulls and were settling into a nice pace when around mile 5 Eric suddenly stopped pedaling - his chain was stuck in gears.*

*Rick turned around to go back and help Eric put the chain back on, while Voris and I kept soft-pedaling easy and enjoying the scenery, thinking it was simply a matter of dropped chain - Rick and Eric will be joining us in no time at all. In fact we could soon see two riders following us in the distance, so it must be them - perhaps we can go over the next climb at an easy pace before they catch us. But a few minutes later we realized the two riders weren't Rick and Eric and in fact they weren't anywhere to be seen, for miles! Eric had a rather major mechanical issue of twisted chain that required a chain tool and luckily Rick had the right tools to help him out. Voris and I kept soft-pedaling, letting more riders pass us, getting increasingly worried and frustrated as we soon found ourselves at the top Sweeney Pass descent and still no sign of Rick or Eric. What do we do now?! We reluctantly descended. Last year we passed all but one team in the first 5 or 6 miles, and here we were at mile 12 and we are so far behind ALL teams we can't even see them.*

*Finally, Rick caught us around mile 15, by which time we must have lost at least 5 minutes to top teams, and are also a man down. Unfortunately Eric's chain needed a lot of repair so he told Rick to continue. Eric could eventually somewhat repair the chain and started his own solo chase for 95 miles with only a few gears working. We hit the gas and "turned our pedals in anger", as Paul Sherwen would say, to make up for lost time. Rick recovered quickly after his heroic solo chase and we were soon trading turns at the front and catching riders and teams at a good rate. Eric was doing the same chasing us all-out in what must have been a solitary agonizing hell for at least 20 miles and actually got within just six minutes of the three of us before the first climb, but had to eventually abandon the chase and slow down a bit. After the climbs were behind us,*

*Rick did a monster long pull towards Shelter Valley at what must have been a solid 35 mph - my heart rate monitor was red-lining and my lactate-filled muscles screaming at me in pain even as I was tucked in safely in Rick's draft! We passed two strong Descender B teams as we went through Shelter Valley. Seeing so many Descenders on the course was fantastic! At some point I miscounted the number of Descender teams we passed and was really shocked to see yet another beautiful paceline of blue jerseys in the distance. Soon we got a glimpse of Ernst and the two remaining teams still ahead of us and already going back as we were approaching the turn-around point. As we would learn later from the time-stamps in the photos, we were catching them the whole time, - in fact from mile 33 climb to the finish we gained on every team (except for superhuman Dan McGehee), including making up 1:41 on Broadcom who finished with all 4 riders, but it wasn't enough to erase the huge time deficit completely. On the positive side, it was really a blast of a ride - the three of us were going all-out throughout the whole ride and we just kept swapping turns at the front, clicking off the miles at a rapid pace. At times it felt as if I am sitting in the back of the bullet train - tall lanky guys like Voris and Rick sure provide a lot of draft! In the final 25 miles I started doing some complicated mental arithmetic to figure out if we can finish in under 5 hours: "at 23 mph average.... minus the 6-minute Sweeney Pass Climb... Carry the 2..." Soon it was quite obvious we would, and my calculation of our ETA kept going down as we were powering along the final 10 miles: 4:57... 4:56... 4:55.. We ended up with 4:52:38 judging by the photo time stamps, only 3 minutes slower than last year - absolutely fantastic, considering the circumstances. Eric will have better luck next year (with the rest of the A Team) and we will get another shot at breaking the record.*

Just after the turn onto Route 78, Eric shows up pushing the pace in a vain attempt to keep close to his Team A threesome out ahead. Eric had some gearing and chain issues early in the ride and he could not use his lower gears. He continued to push forward up the San Felipe climb. John B fell back; there were 5 Descenders within 100 yards of each other from 3 different teams.

The first Descender we spotted on the return south was Dave Ernst who was riding solo for the day. He looked good, smiling and having a good ride.

The race leading four man TTT group rode by as did the solo leader. About 3 minutes behind came the roaring Team A trying to close the gap.

A minute or so later both Team B groups were negotiating the passing of the Boy Scout Troop 658 from Escondido who were out riding for the day. Bernie's team still had four guys at that point and looked in good position having closed the start gap on Guido's now 3-man team.





Oleg, Rick and Dave riding up San Felipe toward the halfway mark.

*Bernie sent in the following comments to summarize the ride for team B1. After a little excitement getting to the start line because of a long toilet line, we were off and finding a rhythm. Chad was strong out of the gate, taking long pulls with a fast pace. We eventually came in sight of the other B team already down to 3 riders but they seemed to see us and quickened the pace. After descending the second climb led by Len (the younger) in the 30+ mph range we were surprised as a blur of Rick leading the A team blew by us. At the turnaround we made up a little time leaving along with the other B team but were held up by kids/riders wheel sucking Guido's team until we passed them before highway 78. We then lost Len to cramps. The other B team passed back but we were able to keep them in sight, staying fairly close on the last climb where Nick fought through cramps. We upped the pace after the climb thinking we started only 30 seconds behind them instead of the minute plus it really was. We voted Chad MVP and appreciated that he was on our team instead of the A team.*

Eric rolled to the halfway point and just flipped a U-turn to head south. Bob, Mike and I needed a bit more rest than that. Our third hour pace was 18 mph as we got to the checkpoint right at 3 hours of riding. We hoped to make up some time on the descent.

We stopped for about 4-5 minutes getting food, drink and taking a potty break before climbing back on our bikes. We went south and quickly realized the winds were in our face and blowing briskly at times. It was going to be a painful return.

Still climbing to the turnaround point were John B and Bryan. They met up at the checkpoint, commiserated about their ill health and rode back together; never leave a Descender out on the field of battle. Team C2, John M, Len, Steve F and Werner were together heading towards the 50 mile mark as well. Since Werner was missing at the starting line it was good to see the team still intact.



Bob, Mike and I trudged on at a slower than desired pace with legs that were starting to feel the effects of the ride. The return down Box Canyon and Campbell Grade were beautiful, swift and much needed respites for the thighs. Bob felt strong and Mike was riding well. I was definitely hurting and wondering why Bryan left me to suffer all day with only 3 riders. Our pace during the 4<sup>th</sup> hour of riding was also 18 mph, not that impressive given the descent of the course but the wind and fatigue were taking its toll.

Bob and Mike prepare to descend the Campbell Grade.

At about mile 80 we caught up with Eric again. He stayed behind us as we got to Sweeney Pass. Amazingly Eric climbed in his high gearing all the way to the top and stayed right along with us. We finally crested the unending climb and spotted Len the younger at the final rest stop and saw Bill Wood on his return leg toward the finish. We now knew that at least 4 of the teams were down a man. Hour 5 was a bit better pace at 19 mph; the end was almost in sight. Bob was now spent and Mike did the hard work of pulling us toward the finish. I rotated to the front to give Mike a few breaks. Len came roaring by at some point while Eric hung back just behind us. At mile 97 Eric took off for the finish and Len faded a bit. We pushed to get under 5:30 of riding time. The road on that stretch is a bit bumpy so we straddled the middle line and cruised at a pretty good clip. The last 11 miles were at 21 mph and we finished in 5:35 total time.

*Guido sent in his summary of the ride from the perspective of Team B:*

*The day started early for Team B2 as we decided to meet at 4:30, 15 minutes earlier than the other teams. This proved to be beneficial as we arrived in Ocotillo before the porta potties developed lines that were 12 or more riders deep. We did encounter one challenge though: porta potties don't have lights! During a quick warm up, which helped to get rid of shivers due to the early morning chill, it was realized we would be facing a head wind on the out leg. It was immediately evident we would be in for a long first 50 miles. Ultimately, this proved true as our out leg was approximately 20 minutes slower than times from the previous year's event. After the warm up we headed to the start chute, and we were right around the 6<sup>th</sup> team off the line. We immediately slotted into*

our order (Bob, Pete, John, Guido). Between the head wind and the slight 1-2% gradient the effort level was comfortably high with speeds only reaching between 16 – 18 MPH. About a mile before Sweeny pass, we caught and passed on of the Descenders C teams. As we approached Sweeny Pass, the short pitch of 8%, we keep a steady pace to avoid any one on the team going into the red zone, a strategy we used throughout the ride. Our pace quickened significantly dropping off Sweeny Pass. As we progressed across the flats near the Palm Spring dirt road, we were passed by a solo rider. This turned out to be Daniel McGehee, who set a new solo course record of 4:47:20. At the point he passed, Pete's rotated to the front and he definitely had visions of sticking to his wheel. Pete was on great form and I think if he was riding solo he could have held the pace. Unfortunately, the pace was going to be too high for the rest of the team and it was not long before we lost sight of Daniel's wheel. About half way across the flats, we caught up to another team. The lead went back and forth about 4 times as their stronger rider rotated to the front. We were the stronger team when the gradients increased. As we climb the pitches before Vallecito Park we managed to create a gap. Pete put the final dagger into them as he surged passed the Park and headed towards Campbell Pass. We later found out their team completely blew apart. The increased pace, however took a toll on our team too, as John started to stuffer. As we climbed Campbell Pass the pace slowed significantly and it became evident that John was not on his normally amazing strong form. This did not come as a complete surprise as John was just coming off an illness and did not have an opportunity to train for the event. As we regrouped and set off toward Box Canyon the pace continued to slow, with both John and now Bob having some difficulty. To give Bob and John an opportunity to recover, they hung at the back, while Pete and I took longer pulls. Eventually, we had to make a decision to leave John behind, which was hard to do but we all knew it was the best thing for the Team. John contributed more than he knows!!! I'm sure I speak for the whole team... We greatly appreciate John joining the squad on short notice and are very thankful for his team spirit and camaraderie. Pete and I continued to take long pulls until we reached the top of Box Canyon. Just after we passed the ride's highest point (2,657 Ft) Bob started coming to life again (he must like the higher altitudes and slightly thinner air) and start taking pulls again. We flew toward Shelter Valley and on past Saddle Sore Ln., which was sadly to say becoming a reality. That was right about that time when the Descenders A team passed us. We were very surprised they had not passed us much earlier in the ride. We tried to stay close, but they slowly inched away as we sensed urgency within their team to make up time. After learning of their unfortunate mechanical issues early in the race, this all makes sense now! Progressing past Scissors Crossing and toward the 50 mile turnaround we were greeted by our own Descenders fan club cheering us on with a very loud blow horn, noise makers and cheers! This was none other than the Raibert family who got up very early in the morning to drive to San Felipe to cheer us and the other Descender teams on! They also cheered us on in Shelter Valley. This was very uplifting and helped raised the spirits of the team after fighting headwinds for the last 50 miles! Thank you Raibert family, you are great!!! By the time we refilled our bottles at the turnaround point and watered the grass a wee bit (if you know what I mean) we headed out for the return leg, with the other Descenders B team hot on our heels. We seemed to be fighting a head wind, which was surprising since we had fought a head wind most of the first leg. As many times as I've ridden the Stage Coach event, I don't think I'll ever figure out the winds, they are truly baffling. I also began struggling at this point; finally paying a price for the longer pulls earlier in the day, and went through a difficult time that lasted for about 15 miles. We traded the lead with the B1 team a few times until they put a pretty sizable gap into us climbing the pass just south of Shelter Valley. We were able to

recover, pulling them back and passing them again after descending Box Canyon. We descended Campbell Pass and began to push harder trying to make up time we lost on the out leg. At this point we were all riding strong and the team was working like a fine tuned machine with each rider taking between 1 to 1 ½ minute pulls. Speeds were in the mid 20's and miles began to click off more quickly. We had set a goal of finishing at 5 hours or less and even though we were now flying, the general thought was we had lost too much time already to achieve our goal. We were truly living one of Lance's famous quotes... "PAIN IS TEMPORARY. QUITTING LASTS FOREVER". Living up to these words, we kept our heads down and kept on pushing hard! As we started up the short climb before wash and the start of the Sweeney grade, Bob announced he needed to take a nature break. We pull over at the top of the hill, which was strategically done to ensure we were rolling down hill when we restarted. In the end Bob suffered from a little stage fright as it turned out to be a false alarm. No water for that cactus! As we remounted, we took off in haste as Team B1 was climbing the hill and back on our heels. Damn! We managed to stay in front of B1 up Sweeney Pass, and began to hammer for home. Bob was very strong at this point and was picking up the pace. Pete was still riding strong too and he had not faltered all day long! I only had enough power to take shorter pulls and to hang on at the back as Pete and Bob accelerated toward the finish line. The most difficult part of the last stretch was the road surface. When we hit this section the team, without direction, automatically moved to the center of the road as was rehearsed during our Oggi's pre-race strategy dinner. It was a little strange having motorcycles and a Border Patrol truck pass us on the right. As we crested the final rise, Bob raised the pace to around 30 mph. We all knew the pain would only last another minute or so! When we checked in with the timing marshal, we trigger the clock at 5Hrs and 15Mins and 15 sec. John continued on after being dropped and teamed up with Bryan (who ironically had the same type of illness as John) and finished the full century. Great job! Even though we did not achieve our 5 hour team goal, all in all, it was a respectable time and a successful event considering the headwinds. Congratulations to team B2 and to the other Descender teams on their finish times. It truly was a great day!

Three of the teams were done and relaxing at the tables behind the community center. Team A gave a huge effort to finish in 4:52 but lost the event record by only a few minutes. Bernie's team bested Guido's team by about 30 seconds; both finishing at 5:15 of riding.

The food was unremarkable but the guys sat around swapping stories from the ride. The final Descenders team arrived with only 3 guys in less than 6 hours. Every team faced adversity with their 4-man team and all finished with the minimum of 3 guys to clock the time.

Werner arrived and so did Bryan and John, coughing and hacking their way to the finish. All 22 Descenders completed the 100 mile event. Great team effort and representation from the club.



Len (the Elder) enjoying a meal after the ride.



22 riders, 5 teams for the team time trial,  
100 miles with more than 4,700 feet of  
climbing.



Team Descenders

\*contributions by Guido, Bernie, Oleg and Dave V