

Wildcat Canyon Adventure

By Rob Verfurth



September 20, 2009

Participant: Rob Verfurth

Start/Finish: Via Colmenar in PQ

Weather: high 90's/low 70's; foggy start but bright, clear blue skies by the top of Scripps Poway Parkway

Distance and Elevation: 63 mile loop from PQ with about 4,900 feet of elevation.

Route: 56 bike path to Black Mountain Rd to Mercy and up Scripps Poway Parkway. Highway 67 south to Willow and then up Wildcat Canyon to San Vicente Rd and onto Dye Road. Down Highland Valley Road to Pomerado and then over I-15 to West Bernardo Dr toward 4S Ranch and then behind Black Mountain along Carmel Valley Road and then return to PQ.

Comments: The Descenders planned route for the weekend fell apart with many guys traveling. I had a sick little girl yesterday so I needed to get in a ride on Sunday. A solo adventure up Wildcat Canyon was the perfect choice in my mind. I left a bit after 8 am with some low cloud cover and fog, heading east along the bike path. The route to the top of SPP is 12.5 miles and a nice warm-up of 1,500 feet of elevation from my house. The cloud cover was gone by the time I started the ascent up SPP and the temperatures were rising. I saw a huge crew of riders heading back down SPP and I almost decided to join them for a group ride but I had to complete my planned adventure.

I cruised down Highway 67 which has a nice wide, smooth shoulder. The only issue was a couple of large trucks and one RV that blew by me so fast, I felt the bike lurch to the left from the wind flow. The lower part of 67 is not that smooth but I made the turn onto Willow and headed toward Wildcat Canyon. The first 5 miles and about 1,000 feet of climbing are a bit narrow but not too bad. I cruised by the Louis A. Stelzer County Park early during the ascent and then saw open space preserves a few more miles up the canyon. The Oak Oasis and Silverwood Wildlife Sanctuary, along with the Stelzer Park appear to have lots of MTB single track trails crisscrossing the mountains. We need to do some MTB trail rides in this area someday.

I make it to the Barona Casino and Resort just before the 5 mile mark and continued to head north; but it seemed like a totally different road. All the traffic is gone and the road has gentle rollers until you come to a Barona dirt race track where there is a short but steep descent and then it finishes with more rollers until Wildcat Canyon ends at San Vicente Road. The full road length is right at 12 miles and 1,600 feet of elevation. It might not become a Descenders favorite but it certainly is worth the ride.

I headed west on San Vicente to Dye Road, doing all the lead pulls past the paintball sign and back toward the fire station. I am down to one bottle of water so a stop to rest and rehydrate is a must. The fire station was deserted with all the doors open and two trucks parked in it. I got water and rested a bit, listening to the music playing in the station. Between the trucks there are all kinds of work out equipment, a heavy bag and speed bag are out back and there was even a dryer running along the far wall. One section of the station was full of Gatorade bottles in a pallet and more water bottles too. I started to ponder life as a fireman. This seemed like a pretty good deal except having to respond to fires with a potential of dying on any given day. I just sat on the front wall, drank my bottle, ate a Clif bar and decided my fireman career was not a good idea.

The heat had really picked up as I headed across Highway 67 to Highland Valley Road. The wind in my face slowed me down as well, or maybe that was just a sign of my lack of conditioning. The descent down HVR was thrilling as always. My only mistake was to let a truck pass me after Bandy Canyon and right before the final descent. The truck had brake lights on the whole way down and I was reading the numbers on his license plate decal, very frustrating. When I came to Pomerado, I headed west over I-15 and cut through the RB park. There were a number of soccer games going and a big party at the pavilion. I stopped in the shade to relax for a few minutes and watch the soccer.

The climb toward 4S Ranch is always a bit tough by mile 50, but especially longer with the breeze and heat. I cut across Camino Del Notre and then went up Carmel Valley Road, around the backside of Black Mountain. I made it home with just over four hours of riding and 4,200 calories burned, according to my Garmin toy. If I knew how to download the route and elevation chart. I would add it to this trip report. I will volunteer to lead a ride up Wildcat Canyon with the Descenders any day; it was quite an adventure.