



Over the Golden Gate Bridge and back again, again and again...

A Riders Tale, by Pete Staylor.

Take the ride of a lifetime the brochure read, sleep out under the stars, ride your bike from San Francisco down to Los Angeles on California Highway One. ...Not me, no way, not in a million years. I'm too fat, too old and my knees are bad. I haven't ridden a bike more than a couple of miles in over 10 years. Nice thought though... I was making a car payment at the local bank and was waiting for my receipt. I laughed at the thought of actually riding down the coast of California on a bicycle. The brochure I had picked up somehow managed its way into my pocket.

When I arrived home and was pulling out the receipt for my files, there was that brochure staring up at me. The California Coast line sure is beautiful I thought. I took it into the kitchen and showed it to my wife Merry Lou. "If that's what you really want to do," she stated. It was more of a "yeah, right" as far as I was concerned. I had heard that before. I knew I was out of shape and I knew it would not be easy. I had recently undergone some new to me treatments of Synvisc for my knees. It is sort of motor oil that gets injected into the knee joints to help cushion any movement. Years of playing basketball had taken its toll and Osteoarthritis in both knees had been keeping me side lined from physical activity. One knee had been recently operated on and the Synvisc was doing its job. My knees felt better than they had felt in years. After two whole weeks of pondering this thought of riding 520 miles in 8 days I came to the conclusion that it should be done. This one was for me. Heck, I could get into shape once and for all and change my life in a positive way. Oh, and not to mention, maybe change the lives of others. This was after all a fund raising event for the Arthritis Foundation.

It was June 12th 2002 when I called the Arthritis Foundation in Los Angeles and talked with Amy Rousch (now Robertson). Amy told me all about the ride and was extremely energetic and positive addressing my concerns and level of ability or lack thereof. I came away from the conversation with her that this really was something I could accomplish. I was excited, I was scared, I was thinking to myself, "what the hell am I doing?" I signed up the next day.

That afternoon I rode my 30 pound mountain bike around the block. I'll get used to it I thought as I returned sweaty and breathing hard after only riding less than a quarter mile.

My wife asked me if I had taken into consideration the fact that my daughter Rachael was getting married just prior to me leaving on my great adventure and couldn't I have picked a better time to take this sort of commitment on? "Yes, I did," I answered. I told her that if I did not do it now, it would never get done. I told her that something will always come up and that this was something I had to do.

The events that started taking place after that were a little overwhelming that is to say the support I received was incredible. When I told a co-worker Michele Byers about the ride and the fact that I only had the mountain bike that I had purchased from her husband several years ago, she showed up back at the office several days later with a Trek 2300 Carbon Frame loaded with Dura_Ace components. Her husband Greg Byers had donated a complete road bike for me to ride. Because the bike was too small for me I decided to take it to a local bike shop to see if they could help make the bike fit. (I was not too knowledgeable regarding bikes at the time.)

The first shop that I took it to was not very helpful in fact they laughed at me when I told them what I wanted. I left quite dejected but was soon back on track when I took my 2 sizes too small bike to Anthony's Bike shop in Riverside. Not only did Anthony's get me a bigger framed bicycle, they decided to sponsor me in a big way and have done so for several years now. I want to put in a huge plug here for Anthony and his crew. Had it not been for all of their support and help I would have never been able to participate in this ride the first time. I owe them a big debt of gratitude as a lot of my success has been because of them and their wonderful attitude towards me, riders in general and this ride.



It just keeps getting better... I went to the 24hr Fitness center in Corona and told them what I was doing and that I had less than 3 months to train and it just so happened that the regional manager was there that day and she offered me a free 3 month membership. This worked out perfectly as I could train late night or early morning and not cause conflicts at home with the wedding plans. I was able to go to a number of spin classes offered there and man oh man were they ever tough. (I highly recommend taking a spin class if you are trying to get into serious bike shape.)

Within just 4 weeks of training I was riding up to 20 miles at a time and had lost over 15 pounds. I have to back up just for a second and share what it was like getting on a road bike for the very first time. After training on a mountain bike for 4 weeks and never feeling what it was like to actually glide down a road. What an incredible feeling of power and freedom. It is almost too difficult to explain but I can tell you this, I was inspired by the feeling and almost doubled my efforts to get into shape. My Neighbor Mike Ainsworth gets a lot of credit for helping me get into shape. We rode 4 to 5 times a week. Mike always let me set the pace and ride up front. (or so I thought) You see if you ride behind someone as big as me you get to spend about 30% less energy. And I thought he was just being nice... Well, at any rate it worked and as ride time approached I felt ready.

Fund raising... These words scare a lot of folks away from these types of rides and I admit that a lot of the time I wondered just how I was going to get 280 people to donate \$10 each. I called the local paper and asked them if they would help me raise the money and I was told that sort of thing just won't happen. They did however want to learn more about the ride and were interested in my story. They sent a reporter out to my house and a photographer met me on Mt. Rubidoux in Riverside and took several shots the ended up on the Press Enterprise section called "Out There." It was a nice article and it gave some good publicity for the Arthritis Foundation. What no one ever knew is that the photographer asked me to race down a section of the trail and go around a corner really fast. I did so and he got the shot, however, a few seconds after the shot I fell over into some rocks and narrowly escaped causing major damage to myself. I looked up at him with my hand and leg bleeding slightly and asked if he got that as well. He did not...



Determined to raise the funds I wrote letters to all of my family and friends and all of the local businesses in Riverside that I had done business with in the past. And they came through for me. It was real close and I had some extra help the last week of deadline to get over the top. I am amazed at all of the generosity I was shown. Just saying “Thank You” just isn’t enough as far as I am concerned. I hope that everyone that has helped me understands just how grateful I really am. The other part of the fund raising is that as monies actually start coming in you feel very responsible to everyone to succeed. Several times when I felt like giving up or not wanting to train because I was sore or tired I realized that I could not let my supporters down by stopping now. I think the organizers of rides realize this piece...

Training is extremely important and not to be taken lightly, especially when it involves riding for 8 days in a row and traveling up and down some major hills like in the Big Sur area. I read somewhere that if I could ride 20 miles in 20 minutes at least 4 times a week with an occasional 50 mile ride, that would be enough. So I did just that. I rode on several training rides including a monster of a ride up the hills in Palos Verdes. I rode in Apple Valley, in the wind. I rode in and around Temecula in the heat. I rode down the Santa Ana Trail to the beach and back at least 10 times. I learned that water and fuel are much needed when riding long distances. On one of my training rides I collapsed from heat exhaustion and dehydration. That was the last time I allowed myself to run out of fluids on a ride. Fortunately for me Anthony Zahn at the bike shop recommended that I invest in a good pair of bike shorts. However, as I was to learn, time in the saddle makes even more of a difference.

My sister Jody offered to drive me to San Francisco and to see me take off. Several people from the Arthritis Foundation had told me not to be nervous and I would probably feel a big adrenaline rush as we departed San Francisco amidst the crowd of riders and well wishers. I was nervous at the pre-ride dinner and even more nervous the following morning at breakfast. But there I was straddling my Trek 2300 carbon fiber bike wearing my new Castelli bike shorts and my bright green Arthritis Foundation jersey and jacket. My heart was pounding as the photographer hollered down for all 85 of us to smile for the camera. There was a

police escort waiting to take us out of the city. As we climbed our first little hill heading up to the Golden Gate Bridge I honestly was thinking; “this is nuts, what the heck am I doing here?” The group of riders that I had trained with several times during the summer were already way ahead of me and where was the adrenaline rush I was promised... I stopped part way up as we approached the bridge, it was foggy, cold and I was already tired. Several of my fellow Inland Empire riders were there waiting and looked as I did... tired. I found out we all had a lot in common. We were not going to give up any time soon and we would be helping each other out over the course of the next 8 days. John, Steve, Tammy, Vickie, Art, David and Michael are all my heroes. They helped me throughout the ride in different ways but just the same I would not have been able to complete the ride without them.



Day one started at Fisherman’s Wharf and was to end some 85 miles later in Santa Cruz. Having never ridden over 60 miles prior to this it was no wonder that I was a little more than tired by the end of the day. I was not able to keep up with my friends and had told them to go ahead. The daily route guide was amazingly accurate as far as mileage goes, but I think it was inaccurate with regards to the elevation gain. It stated 3,000 feet of climbing, however, a friend told me later that his altimeter clocked over 5,000 feet of climbing. I tend to believe the latter. I am not going to lie and say it was easy that first day in fact I kept day dreaming of hitchhiking ahead and cutting out half of the distance or catching a bus. Day one was the longest day of biking in my entire life and I learned a lot of lessons that day about what I should have done before attempting a ride of this magnitude. I rode in as it was getting dark. Did I mention yet that my rear end was beyond sore even with those expensive shorts I had on.

The saving grace for me is that I would not be setting up my tent that night because my wife’s brother Charlie Brown lived in Watsonville and they were picking me up and taking me over to their house for dinner and a real bed for the night. Prior to dinner Donna Brown took me over to a local spa where I was treated to a 1 and 1/2 hour sports massage and hot tub soak. A massage after a long days ride is something else I highly recommend and I have said this before and I mean it when I say that I do not think I would have been able to continue the ride without having that massage after my first 85 mile day. I woke up the next day and felt like I had not even been riding the day before, until that is, I sat down on the bike seat...

Day two started with me howling ouch as I sat down on my bike seat as we were peddling out of the high school parking lot. That was the one place a massage could not help. We were headed for Monterey and would be traveling only 53 miles. This was a very beautiful section of the ride and was not as tough as the day before.

Fortunately for me I meet this guy from Big Bear who seemed like he knew what was doing. Having a good time riding at his own pace John Justice would scowl like a pirate. “Arghhh Matey” and “Shiver Me Timbers” as he rode along side. I told John about my experience the day before trying to keep up with my friends and as I was about to find out, John had a great deal of experience with long rides. John taught me to slow down and ride at my own pace, not at someone else’s.

John Justice showed me the most invaluable “save the butt” technique that just meant riding out of the saddle occasionally to relieve pressure and use different muscles to peddle. I kid John often and tell him that he saved my life. What he did do was to teach me how to ride to have fun and importantly how to finish the ride without a sense of desperation. John also taught me humility, for without making the ride fun it was not going to be something I would ever want to do again. Thanks John...



That night we all ate at Buba Gumps in Monterey, yes I had shrimp, what else? Day 2 ended on a good note with a full belly and a warm sleeping bag in my tent that was set up in the infield of a baseball diamond. Or so I thought... At around 11:00 PM the sprinklers came on and started spraying everyone’s tents and gear. It took quite a while before they were turned off. I have some pictures of my gangs faces the next morning and they are not those of a well rested happy camper, although everyone did find it funny and we talked about it the rest of the trip.



Day three was another beautiful ride. Actually every day was incredible with regards to the scenery so I will quit saying that over and over again. I remember the valley as we headed into the Big Sur area probably because of the awesome tail wind as we rode kept pushing us. I hoisted my bike up over my shoulder for a picture in front of the Big Sur Inn. It has become a tradition for me and I don't know why other than to say "I rode Big Sur!"

At the Inn we took off our shoes and put our feet in the creek that ran next to the dining area. I think that is going to be a tradition as well because it feels great. That night we did sleep under a canopy of stars just like the brochure stated. In fact the Big Sur campground is probably the most beautiful campground I have ever stayed in. You do have to watch for poison oak as it is all over the area there.



Day four started with a very filling breakfast at the Big Sur Lodge and then an challenging 2 mile hill just as we left camp. They call this day "2 turn "Tuesday" because we turn left out of camp and the next turn is when finish that days ride and we turn right into San Simeon campground. We had awesome vistas this entire day as we were riding right along the jagged coastline. Picture taking was a must for several reasons, one of them being there were a lot of uphill climbs and I needed a lot of breaks. The good news is that for every hill I climbed, there was a downhill and not being the consummate pro rider I only allowed my bike to hit 40 miles per hour on one decent. After tackling what several riders named the "twin sister" hills

(we had another name for them...) we had about 14 miles of gentle rollers with an welcome tail wind as we sailed into San Simeon just below majestic looking Hearst Castle. I was so glad that this day finished on an easier stretch and felt that this day had been just as tough as the first day leaving SF. Our outdoor barbeque was a welcome feast and well earned from all the hill climbing earlier in the day.



Day five was a little cooler starting out after a great night of camping next to the ocean and having the sounds of the waves lull us to sleep. Slightly damp and little foggy soon gave way to sunny skies and more incredible views. We stopped into a little town of Cayucos and had coffee and fresh pastries. More sightseeing and beautiful landscapes were all along the highway as we headed towards Oceano. A few miles from our destination we stopped at Avilla Hot Springs where we swam in their heated Olympic sized pool complete with water slide and soaked in the sulphur spring water, which I have to say was very soothing on my tired muscles even if it smelled like rotten eggs... That night I pitched my tent under a tree and then wished I hadn't because of the raccoons living above me were quite curious about there new neighbor and tried to keep me awake. Five days of riding made it easier to sleep.



Day six I woke up and had to dry off my bike as the moist ocean air had soaked everything left outside. Our breakfast burritos were the least favorite meal

of the trip and several of us stopped at the first dinner we found for eggs and bacon. We rode along some beautiful farm land as we headed inland just a bit. It warmed up quickly as we rode through Foxen Canyon and rode past the back entrance to Michael Jackson's ranch. Our rest stop was at an old church and was much welcomed with the additional heat we now were experiencing. We climbed the infamous "wall" as it was called. (really not that bad, steep, but short) down through some wine country and on into Solvang. We set up our tents in the old missions back yard and enjoyed a fabulous meal as we realized there were only 2 more days of riding.

Day seven had all of us heading back out to the coast on our way to Ventura. It was scenic as we left the Santa Inez Valley and headed over San Marcos Pass down into Santa Barbara. It was a challenge climbing, however it was much easier as our group stayed together and encouraged each other along the way. And yes, the downhill was exhilarating. We had lunch at the Longboard Café on the Santa Barbara Pier and then raced down on the side of the Freeway (literally) into Ventura for our last night out on the road.

I'll never forget one of our group Steve Erlanger from Lake Arrowhead as he jumped up on one of camp ground tables as everyone was eating dinner and hollered, "TOMORROW WE TAKE LA!" Everyone responded with a loud yell of some sort. Several of my group decide we wanted to stay in a hotel that night so we could get an early start.(we wanted to make sure we made it to the finish line on time with the main group) Five of us checked into Motel 6 across the street from the campground and got our gear in order and struggled with the cramped quarters.

Day eight was a relief as we got up at 4am and went over to the Denny's for breakfast skipping what we heard about later as a really great breakfast. We got on the road before light (not advisable by the way...) and headed towards Los Angeles. Over Santa Susanna Pass was our route towards Universal Studios and the finish line. It was another uphill and we were glad as we reached the summit and began our decent. John Justice rode up alongside me at about 35 miles per hour and surprised me as he flew by. It startled me and I almost lost control of my bike. At the bottom of the hill I scolded him and he apologized. Riding city streets we waved at folks pretending to be celebrities in our bright green bike jerseys. About a block from the finish line waiting at a stop light I almost fell again and barely missed getting run over by a motorist as my foot slipped off my pedal just as the light turned green. I was never so relieved when I finally saw the arrows that direct riders into the finish line.



Now, the words I have written previously are not nearly as complete as they could be, nor do they express in detail the consistently incredible views or epic experiences that I had over these past eight days. But I can tell you this much... The cheers of well over two hundred people, some of them calling you by name was one of the most incredible experiences of my entire life. I thought, as I heard the loud cheers...I really did this, I just rode my bike from San Francisco all the way to Los Angeles, and everyone here is recognizing this incredible feat. My emotions were close to the surface as a group of my family members and close friends surrounded me. My emotions were of relief, of joy, of accomplishment. I was glad it was finally over and yet sad because it went by so fast.

I am so proud of everyone out there that did this because I know first hand just how tough this was both physically and mentally. I got to meet a lot of really nice people and I got to see the incredibly beautiful coastline of California in such a manner that very few people get to. I challenged myself in ways I never thought possible and succeeded. I am extremely thankful to all of my supporters, my friends and especially my family and my wife Merry Lou.

THANKS TO ALL OF YOU! I really did this!

...10 years later... in 2002 when I originally wrote all of the previous descriptions and tales from the road I neglected to tell one small detail. That detail was when I was heading back home the evening of the last day I told my family that I was never going to do that ride again. I felt that I had put them out and it had taken too much of my time and energy, not only that, I was turning fifty the next year.

The Arthritis Foundations 2013 California Coast Classic take place next Sept 28th thru Oct 5th. It will be the 10th time I will have participated in this event having ridden it 6 times previous and been an 8 day volunteer 3 times. I will be leading a team of riders down the coast a few weeks after my 60th birthday. It has been an incredible experience over and over again. Not too many people will get the chance

to do this and fewer still will do it repeatedly. It is an amazing experience that I highly recommend you try at least 5 or 6 times...I'll see you out on the road. Pete

The ride of a life time continues...

To learn more about the ride go to www.afcabikeclassic.org

