

BIKE TRIPPERS:

THE COAST RIDE

SUMMER 2012





Bike Trippers: Rhy Kelly, Tywen Kelly, and Kevin Kelly
The Coast Ride: 1,300 miles from Vancouver, Canada to San Francisco
26 Days in July/August 2012



THE START: VANCOUVER









Why did you ride your bike 1,300 miles?

I think the main reason I decided to do this trip was to test myself. I was curious if I could even do it. I also did it because it sounded interesting and unique. I haven't heard of anyone from my school in Astoria trying such an ambitious adventure. When I told people my summer plans they were amazed that I was even trying it. I'm glad I completed it too, because now I can brag to my friends and tell them I'm better than them. -- Rhy



I asked myself that question a lot during the trip. I never really got a concluding answer that I was satisfied with. The closest thing I could say is because I didn't not want to do it. Would I do it again? Certainly. -- Tywen



I knew from my last ride across the country that bicycling was the best way to see this country. Walking is perfect for a small country like England; while cars are efficient for a continent they are too fast. A bike is the right speed to observe while moving. So I told myself that if I had the chance I'd like to lead my kids on a bike tour of some part of the US. This was that chance. So we set out from the US/Canada border at Vancouver and headed south. First stop was the workshop of my friend George Dyson. It was filled with kayak parts, books and tools. The boys slept behind the bar. I could tell from the first day, it was going to be an epic ride. -- Kevin









What surprised you the most? What did you not expect?

I was surprised by how much I had to bike. Sounds stupid, but it's true. I've mostly traveled to places sitting in the luxury of a car and I never realized how magical cars are. On a bike I felt every inch of every mile, I felt every bump and I felt every gust of wind. In a car I never experienced distance as I did on a bike. I never expected there to be a difference between car miles and bike miles. -- Tywen



I was surprised by how many farms there are. Farmers are a small population, but farms are big, take up a lot of room. We passed by a lot of agricultural land. And it looks like most farms are really struggling.

-- Kevin



What I did not expect was the amount of time I would have on my hands when we had reached camp. It wasn't really a safe idea to ride your bike on Highway 101 at night so we would roll into a campsite around 4 or 5 o'clock and set up camp and then eat some snacks. For the first couple weeks we were mainly camping by ourselves and if my phone died I would have nothing to do to keep me entertained. When I had reached Astoria I decided to grab a book to read so the boredom would stop. I guess before the trip had started I never really took time to think what I would do when I wasn't biking. I sort of assumed all I would do was bike, but in reality I had so much free time. -- Rhy



This was an honest-to-goodness bike path. No cars! We had the joy of riding it near Port Townsend, WA. This is the image that comes to mind when one says "riding a bike cross country." But peaceful roads like this are relatively rare. Almost all longer bike paths, like this one, are abandoned railway paths. They are perfect for bikes because the few percent grade needed for locomotives is exactly what human engines want. Graceful turns, near level, just wide enough. Imagine riding across America on old rail lines coast to coast. It is certainly possible. -- Kevin



What place do you NOT want to go back to?

The scariest place was this tunnel. Bikers were suppose to hit the button and ride inside. It would set off lights to warn drivers in the tunnel, which ran uphill, and had no shoulders. Worst of all was the incredible sound, which made it seem as if the logging trucks and cars were pushing against your fenders. -- Kevin

I do not want to go back to anywhere between Crescent City and Fort Bragg. I found this to be the most painful and frustrating area of the trip. The pain came from all the steep and long hills that would seem to never end. The frustration came from the lack of spots to eat and the ignorance of drivers towards bikers. It seemed that as we went south there was less to eat and more of the people were rude and pompous. -- Rhy

I do not want to go back to northern California. The people simply did not seem as friendly there, the hills were steep, and there was not ideal weather for biking. Many restaurants were closed which forced us to sometimes bike 20 miles for breakfast. One time I thought we were coming up to a big mall where I could get snacks for the road. But not the case. It was just a very large prison. Probably could not buy a Twix bar from there. -- Tywen





What was your typical day like?

My typical day on the trip would start with me waking up, then going to bathroom and brushing my teeth, washing my face, etc. And then Ty and I would take down the tent and then I would pack my bags. Then I would ride until we stopped for breakfast, and then keep riding and take occasional stops for food or just to rest. And then lastly we would pull up to our hiker/biker camp and set up our tent and go to sleep and replay it all again the next day. -- Rhy

First thing I do when I wake up is lie still for a few minutes to realize that the sleep is over and I have to get up. Then I pack my bags, brush my teeth and load my bike. The next challenge is finding breakfast. Sometimes breakfast was across the street or down the highway 20 miles. We would ride all day after breakfast, stopping frequently to rest and drink water. We would also stop at gas stations for candy that we would eat outside as we sat in the shade. Eventually we would reach our destination. Depending on the closest place to eat, we would eat before we got to the campsite or after. Occasionally we would not even eat dinner at all. Once at the campsite we would set up camp and get in our sleeping bags and slept. I would fall asleep before it was even dark out. -- Tywen

Can anybody do this?

I think anybody can do this because I met so many bikers who looked incapable of doing it, but they seemed to be doing it better than I was. I met an old man who had been doing bike trips since before I was born. I also met these three guys we called the 3 dudes who seemed to be struggling but would always make it to the next campsite. As long as someone has a lot of time and some money on their hands, anyone can experience the bike trip. -- Rhy

Anyone can definitely do this if they want to. Physically, it is hard, but not arduous. Strong bikers are faster, but weaker people, like myself, just go slower. Lock in the granny gear and grind away. Eventually you make it to the top. Mile by mile you make it across the country. Much harder to conquer is the mental challenge of maintaining motivation. Your motivation will fail you before your body does. -- Kevin

What did you eat the most of?

I ate a lot of diner food; lots of burgers, pancakes, and steak. Also I drank a lot of soda. It was not the most healthy diet, but since we were biking so much every day I could eat whatever I wanted and not get a heart attack. -- Tywen

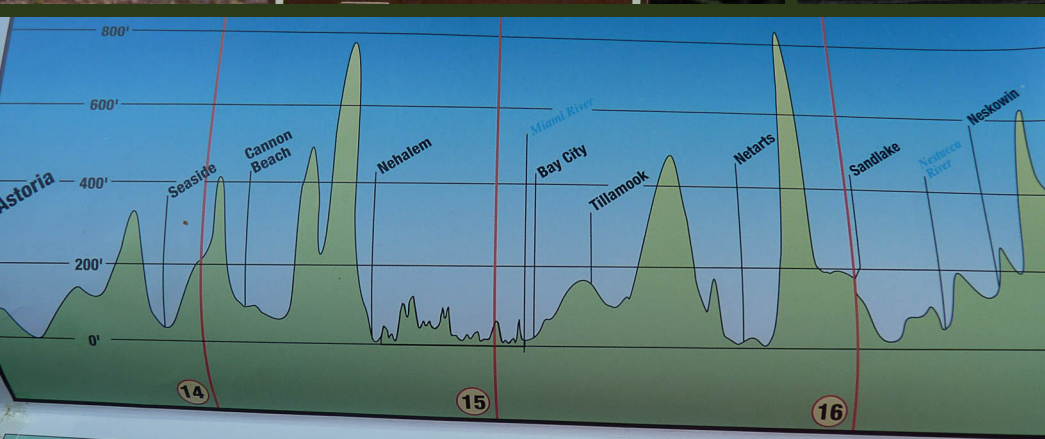
French toast. There is something about it that makes it more appetizing than pancakes or waffles. I think I had French toast for breakfast for everyday for the first 2 weeks. -- Rhy

Normally we don't eat at typical American diners and truck stops, but on this long trip on bikes we ate when and where we can. You burn a lot of calories, and you never know when you will pass food again. We had not been prepared for the scale of servings at every meal. They are huge. All I can say is that most of the other customers, who seem to be regulars, are not biking all day long. -- Kevin







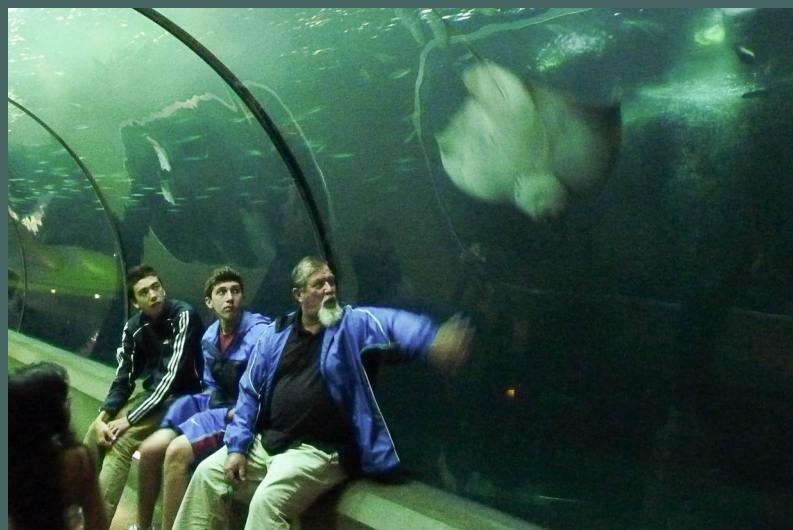


FIELD NOTES

and the foothills of the low Coast Range.

The coast supports a large variety of plant and animal life. The intertidal zone, which is always covered by water, is a rich and diverse environment. The rocky shore is home to a variety of plants and animals, including seaweed, barnacles, and crabs. The beach is a popular spot for sunbathers and surfers. The dunes are home to a variety of plants and animals, including grasses, shrubs, and birds. The forest is a lush and green environment, home to a variety of trees and plants. The mountains are a rugged and beautiful landscape, home to a variety of plants and animals. The coastline is a stunning sight, with its mix of mountains, forests, and beaches.











This was my second trip riding a bike along the Pacific coast. On my first trip 33 years ago, I rode north -- a big mistake because of the fierce headwinds going south. A lot has changed in the decades since then. Almost no one rode bicycles long distance in the 1970s. There were no bike lanes, no bikers in colorful spandex doing day trips. Most roads' shoulders were narrow to non-existent. No one, including me, wore helmets or had mirrors. Bicyclists on back roads were rare and exotic. Now there is a steady stream of them headed south along the coast, with great bikes, excellent camping gear, maps, marked routes and occasional signs. Many inns, restaurants, and parks cater to the bicyclists passing through. In this respect, it's a great time to tour on a bike.

But there is not just more bike traffic, there is more car and truck traffic. The northwest coast was a very lonely place 33 years ago. It was pioneer territory, a refuge for back-to-the-land hippies, hoedads, fishermen, and leave-me-alone libertarians. There were some tourists then, but not in the numbers of today. So riding on the microscopic shoulders of Highway 101 today as a parade of giant RVs speed by for hours on end can be nerve-wracking and discouraging.

Yet while there is increased traffic, there has been a noticeable downshift in the prosperity of the coast since I first rode there. Plenty of lumber trucks still ply the roads, but most of the towns seem hard hit economically. Many of the only cafe and restaurants in the smaller towns were closed. Lots of boarded up stores. Empty parking lots. Houses with peeling paint. Crumbling roads. The only new things in a lot of these places were new trucks and new cars. Everything else was derelict. As we neared Sonoma and Marin and San Francisco, the polish brightened, the towns were filled with shoppers, and prices for meals increased. It was good to see the America outside of our bubble of prosperity.

The other thing different this time is that I was riding an electric assist bicycle. Mine had a small 100-watt motor built into the crankshaft that I could turn on by pushing a red button on my handlebar. A battery I needed to charge each night would power the motor to give me a little extra push uphill. It was like summoning a tailwind. I still had to work hard to pedal uphill -- and anywhere flat I did not use the motor -- but with the assist I could keep up with the teenagers. The assist made my legs 40 years younger. It sort of flattened the hills so I would not fall too far behind. Even with that help I was spent after a day of pedalling 50- 60 miles.

We should have taken more days off, but time pressed us on. When we reached Astoria, OR, we decamped at my brother Brian's -- and Rhy's -- house (previous pages) and left our tents packed. That bed felt good. Brian joined us camping for a few days further south on the Oregon coast. So did Gia-Miin and Kaileen. On their way heading back from Vancouver, they intersected us and Brian so we had one night together camping near the sand dunes of Oregon (next few pages).

I find riding a bike all day a lot of work, but since it is a way to move while sitting, it's a lot better than walking. It puts us close to some amazing scenery. I had honestly forgotten how magnificent the views were. One can feel the power of geologic forces shaping the planet. It was a fantastic ride well worth the small price of mild discomfort. -- Kevin













What a difference a tail wind makes. We had a terrific tail wind all day on the day we landed here. It blew us uphill and then blew us speeding downhill. The moving air propelled us a gratifying 62 miles. Air is 50% of the battle on a bicycle, so when it is with you, riding is literally a "breeze." The peak of our day was this long downhill race which ended with this view near Brookings, OR. -- Kevin





Describe one person you met.

The first biker we met had a big beard. His name was Joe, but I called him Joey Buckets. He had outfitted his bike with four plastic tubs all of which matched the shape and size of a garbage bin. I shared a campground with him for one night, where I exchanged some of my stories. Later down the road I caught glimpses of him as I passed him or he passed me. Once I passed him while he was fixing his bike. I asked what was wrong and he said he had broken his third spoke. Turns out he was carrying too much weight on his bike and it was practically falling apart. That was the last time I saw Joey Buckets. After a few days my dad, cousin, and I began to suspect he was dead (as a joke of course). I would ask other bicyclist if they had seen Joey Buckets and eventually one cyclist said that he in fact had seen him the night before. The reason we hadn't seen Joey Buckets in a long time was because he had taken a "break day". He had also had a little too much to drink the night before at the pub and decided to sleep in a little bit. After hearing that, I felt some closure to the legend of Joey Buckets. -- Tywen









Much of the Northwest US is a rain forest. Thick with wet life. Dense in biomass. Thick and dark, like this grove we passed while walking our bikes on a dirt mountain road far from cars. If you look very carefully deep into the spaces between the trees in the far distance you can see ghosts. Something flicker. A formless movement in the corner of your eye. What is it? When it gets dark the spirits seem to approach nearer.

It is not hard to see why all tribal people and most mountain folks are superstitious and believe in forest spirits. In ancient times and remote places today, forest spirits rule the lives of humans. The spirits are the cause of illness and misfortune. And without artificial lights at night, these forest ghosts are all too present.

When you leave the comforts of technology behind you, you can still see them. -- Kevin

Started at Canadian border, Vancouver, BC
Day 1, Bellingham, WA, (33) 33 miles
Day 2, Desperation Pass, WA, (70) 37 miles
Day 3, Port Hadlock, WA, (125) 55 miles
Day 4, Belfair, WA, (185) 60 miles
Day 5, Elma, WA, (247) 62 miles
Day 6, Toledo, WA, (309) 62 miles
Day 7, Castle Rock, WA, (333) 24 miles
Day 8, Knappa Junction, WA, (388) 53 miles
Day 9, Astoria, OR, (406) 18 miles
Day 10, Nehalem, OR, (459) 53 miles
Day 11, Pacific City, OR, (516) 57 miles
Day 12, Newport, OR, (570) 54 miles
Day 13, Washburne, OR, (606) 36 miles
Day 14, Winchester Bay, OR, (655) 49 miles
Day 15, Bandon, OR, (707) 52 miles
Day 16, Gold Beach, OR, (770) 63 miles
Day 17, Smith River, OR (813) 43 miles
Day 18, Orick, CA, (869) 56 miles
Day 19, Eureka, CA, (925) 56 miles
Day 20, Weott, CA, (983) 58 miles
Day 21, Piercy, CA, (1034) 51 miles
Day 22, Mendocino, CA, (1099) 65 miles
Day 23, Salt Point, CA, (1168) 69 miles
Day 24, Bodega, CA, (1202) 32 miles
Day 25, Point Reyes, CA, (1247) 45 miles
Day 26, Pacifica, CA, (1294) 47 miles

There is another 650 bicycle-miles to the Mexico border in San Diego. We finished 2/3 of the cross national coast. Maybe we'll go the final 1/3 next summer.





What was the best camping spot?

I don't really have a preference as pretty much every state park we stayed at was identical, some with free showers and some with paid showers. -- Tywen

The quality of a great camping spot is primarily based on how good a night of sleep I got and then how much fun I had. When my dad came to camp with us that night he brought actual pillows, which was infinitely more comfortable than a sack of clothes. I also had a wonderful night in Bodega because a group of interesting travelers entertained me all night. -- Rhy



Did this trip change your idea of America?

Yes. I learned that I should not bike in the north direction along California along the coast. The wind blows south. And that there are a gazillion white people in the northwest. No minorities. -- Tywen

I think this trip changed my idea of some things in America, but I wouldn't say it changed a whole lot. I definitely have a new respect for any cyclist riding anywhere, and I now have a slight prejudice towards people who hog the road in giant trucks and basically drive on the shoulder of the road. -- Rhy





What did you think about while pedaling?

I thought about everything while I was pedaling. The only two things it seems you do while riding a bike is: ride the bike and think. I thought about what it be like to be a superhero, I thought about movies and TV shows, I thought about what I might do with my friends when I got home. I would also play out little scenarios and fantasies in my head; I would sometimes get so distracted I wouldn't realize we had gone like 15 miles since I had last checked. -- Rhy

Everything and anything. Much of the time I was thinking about funny or awesome scenarios in my head. And about good food. And ice cold water. And a soft bed. And everything I could be doing if I weren't on this crazy bike trip. -- Tywen

Nothing. When I walk my mind fills up with all kinds of loose ideas. I may may have my best ideas when walking. But when I am riding a bike, my mind empties. I can not think of anything for very long. Sometimes songs get stuck, but not much else sticks. It may have to do with the fact that bicycling requires a lot more attention to the road. You can fall in a blink. All I can think of is what is before me. -- Kevin

There is something magical about standing near a living thing as big as a building. The redwoods in Redwood National Park near Eureka, CA, are the tallest trees (and organisms) in the world. The tallest is 380 feet. They can be as old as 2,000 years. Not as ancient as the 5,000 years of the Bristlecone Pine, but old enough to stand since the days of Caesar and Jesus. Even more remarkable is the way such a huge structure is made. It is accreted, atom by atom, whereas a skyscraper is assembled in hunks. The dream of nano-technology is to grow skyscrapers and other large things in the way trees grow, atom by atom. This might make buildings and others radiate attraction the ways trees do too. -- Kevin





Animal life was abundant. We spotted a herd of female elk in the sand dunes in northern Oregon (starting upper left, clockwise), and later in California, we talked to two abalone divers who showed us their catch that day. (You have to free dive --no scuba -- to find these giant molluscs under rocks.) I never realized how ugly a live abalone is. I had thought of them as flat, but this one was about as big and round as a basketball. It had wrinkly black lips, and it was hard to imagine the first person who dared to eat it.

At Prairie Creek we saw male elk grazing, and ordinary deer everywhere. A few times they ran across the road ahead of us. We won't mention the dead deer along the road.

At one camp there were wild turkeys, with chicks, pecking through the brush.

Among the many, many specimens of roadkill we passed was a recently deceased porcupine. I had never been close to a porcupine so we had a chance to inspect its quills and general design. It's a marvelous animal.

Finally, we spotted this wild tyrannosaurus rex at the end of a long downhill. He was right across the road from a huge blue ox that belonged to Paul Bunyan.







Once when we came around the corner on highway 101 there was this guy with a huge huge globe walking in the road. His inflatable world was 8 feet in diameter and he was rolling it uphill. Kind of crazy. Makes folks on bicycles seem tame. The whole purpose of this kind of performance is that you are supposed to stop and ask him why he is doing it. I did not stop. But I did note his url painted on the ball. It was worldguy.org. He is walking for diabetes awareness. Now you are aware. -- Kevin



We stopped a moment and celebrated when my odometer crossed 1,000 miles. This happened along an empty road in northern California. That meant we had successfully pedaled 1,000 miles from Vancouver, Canada. We felt each one of those miles. These were bike miles. If you drove your car, you would probably drive a more direct shorter route on freeways. I figure that it takes one day to cover what a car does in one hour. By the end my odometer said 1,294 miles! -- Kevin



We thought our load was heavy. Most of us bicyclists do. But when we passed this guy hauling a sailboat on his bike trailer, our loads seemed very light. He was dragging a wooden boat, with canvas sails, oars and a six pack of beer, uphill for hours. He started in Arcata, OR and had many miles before he reached the lagoon he was after. But he seemed very happy about it. -- Kevin



What did you learn from doing this?

I learned to appreciate biking more. I learned to enjoy long bike rides. I also learned many factual things about bikes too, like you need flat-proof tires. -- Tywen

I learned that people take traveling for granted. It takes like 12 to 15 hours to drive in a car from Astoria, Oregon to San Francisco. It took 17 days of all day riding for us to get there on a bicycle. I remember whenever I was on a big hill telling myself "I would kill to be in a car right now." -- Rhy



What stuff did you carry? Was it enough?

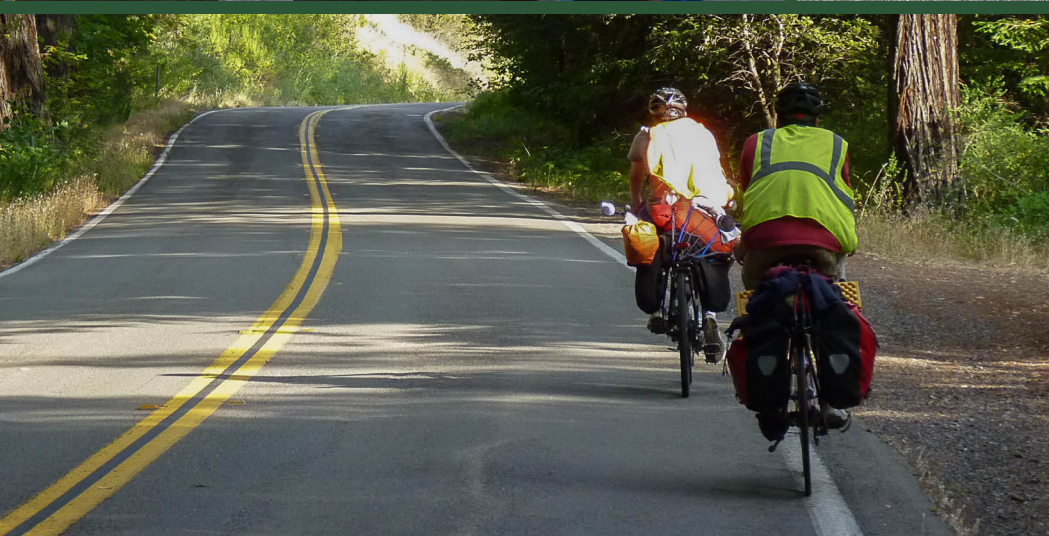
Most of my weight was clothes. I carried a huge lemon the first few days of the trip before eventually throwing it out. -- Tywen

We were definitely traveling lighter than most of the other touring bicyclists we met. One guy traveling with his wife had 80 pounds of gear; he was carrying both his own and his wife's gear. I think we had 30. -- Kevin









Describe one person you met.

Jay Klemp was an eccentric old man who owned a hostel that was also a disc golf course. Almost everything he said was hilarious because he would always say it so sincerely and you weren't sure if he was serious or not. All the stories he told made us laugh hardily and it was one of the most enjoyable nights of the trip. Jay and his wife were so nice and hospitable to bikers and travelers because it felt like a real home.

-- Rhy



The favorite group of fellow travelers we met we nicknamed "the 3 dudes." They were just starting out and two of them seemed clueless, but they didn't care, which made them a lot of fun to watch. Another pair of bicyclists had all kinds of stuff tied onto their bikes, including this hand made Big Foot doll (below) one of them got from a chainsaw artist along the way. He called the chainsaw doll Robert and zip-tied him to his handlebars. The great thing about bicycle camps is that they attract fascinating people. -- Kevin



One of the bikers we camped with for a few nights worked at a laminate factory and made small stickers of the highways he had pedalled on tours, which he stuck to his fenders (left). He had spent his vacations riding his bike long-distance. We meet a number of other older guys who also took their vacations on the road, going long and camping the whole way. They had their routine down pat. We loved hearing their stories of misadventures on the bike. -- Kevin





The human body on a bicycle produces about 1/3 of a horse power. Compare that to the 300 horsepower pickup behind us. We rode from the waters of Canada to the grasslands of California on 1/3 horsepower, and a few hundred watts, entirely fueled by pancakes and snicker bars. -- Kevin



We had only one day of rain, in Washington. The rest were sunny, although almost all of them started out foggy in the morning, and we had several days of overcast. It was decidedly cool along the coast despite it being July and August. We wore jackets going downhill because the moving air was actually cold. A few days near the end, in Sonoma, CA, it got hot enough in the afternoon to ride in shortsleeves. In short, it was ideal bicycling weather. -- Kevin



What advice would you give a friend who wanted to do it?

Pack light, have fun, be safe, and enjoy the down hills. -- Rhy

Make sure to pack appropriately. By packing only what you need, you will have more fun on the trip. -- Tywen

Go slow. It is actually hard to stop when you are on a bike, both physically and mentally. The most common mistake touring bicyclists make is not stopping often enough. Yes, there is a temptation to dawdle and never go, but most of the best part of a long bike trip happens when you are not on the bike. It's the side trips, the characters in the cafe, the wrong turns that force you off your bike that make a trip juicy. Don't pass an opportunity to eat. That is one way to slow down. -- Kevin



What was the most scenic part?

Going down the coast in Mendocino County. It was a cloudless sunny day and the Pacific was very blue. Highway 1 went right along the cliff and I could see nothing but open water. It was almost like I was flying right over the ocean. -- Tywen

The most scenic part was Southern Oregon. There was an awesome tailwind. My favorite part was when we had climbed to the top and flew down this one hill and got the view of the Pacific and the cliffs. The road and traffic was nice enough that you didn't have to brake to much and when you had reached the bottom there was a prehistoric dinosaur garden parking lot with a giant tyrannosaurus-rex statue. -- Rhy

What were 3 memorable times?

When Rhy frightened himself with surprising flatulence. When my dad surprised himself with an uncontrollable belch. And the day we got 6 flat tires. -- Tywen

The three most memorable times of the trip have to be the time a guy with a head injury asked us for help, all the flat tires on day 5, and the night I camped with the British guys, the hiker, and other interesting people. -- Rhy

Gliding down the Redwoods highway between the tallest trees in the world, coming round the corner in Sausalito to see San Francisco, and the 30-minute downhill ride in Leggett. -- Kevin





THE FINISH LINE: PACIFICA, CA.



26 DAYS, 1,300 MILES LATER



