

# Plumas County News

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*For such a hard bike ride,  
it was great being with dad*



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**FUN & GAMES**

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Sports Editor

When I started covering the Summer Solstice Century a few years ago, I was totally intrigued by the 137-mile bicycle ride. and I began to wonder if

I was capable of such a challenge. The course is a giant loop that begins and ends in Quincy with over 13,400 vertical feet of climbing, and it often takes cyclists over 12 hours to complete. I had to try it.

Thankfully I didn't have to try it alone, since my father agreed to do the ride with me. As he trained where he lives in Paso Robles and I trained around Quincy, we commiserated with each other on the phone and compared notes as

the date grew closer.

Neither of us had ever ridden a century, so there was some concern that we were biting off more than we could chew. By the time dad arrived in Quincy a couple days before the ride we were both pretty nervous, and neither of us slept much the night before the event.

The morning of the ride, we were underway at 6 a.m. and soon hit the Hogsback on La Porte Road. It took us an hour to climb that steep, four-mile

grade, and it was great to see the friendly face of Leanne Schramel assisting cyclists at the top.

Eventually dad and I rolled into La Porte, where a nice rest stop provided us with food and water. It felt good to be off our bikes, but we knew we couldn't linger because we had a long way to go. The next 15 miles were relatively easy and we arrived at the third rest stop in good spirits. At this point the weather had gotten quite warm and we were soaked with sweat, but we knew things were only going to get hotter as the day wore on.

From the Soper-Wheeler office to Challenge was mostly downhill, and I eventually got separated from dad because my bike descends faster. At the turnoff to Lake Oroville there was a decent climb into Forbestown, where more food and water was available at Stop No. 4. After parking my bike and finding some shade, I grew concerned that dad hadn't arrived yet. I knew something was wrong, so I started asking other cyclists coming in if they'd seen him.

Finally he came in, and I was relieved to learn it was only a flat tire that held him up. Wanting to make up for lost time, dad was ready to leave again just a minute after arriving, so I went around the back of the building to use the bathroom and grab my bike. When I came back dad was gone, so I hurriedly threw on my helmet and gloves to try to catch him.

After pedaling hard for almost 10 minutes, I finally caught up to dad, who was pedaling just as hard trying to catch up with me. He thought I had left before him. The mix up happened when we both said we were going to use the bathroom, but didn't realize there were two different bathrooms in separate locations. We had a good laugh about our little race, even though it tired us out.

As we dropped toward Lake Oroville the road straightened out and the temperature grew increasingly warm. With no real trees, the topography was foreign to the mountains I call home.

Just before reaching Stop No. 5, I was startled by a loud hissing as my rear tire quickly went flat. I must have hit a sharp rock just right, because I found a little gash in my tube and tire. There was no shade and my eyes stung with sweat, but I managed to get my spare tube on as dad helped me with equipment.

The temperature was 102 degrees at Stop No. 5, and I used napkins and water to try to get some of the grease off me from fixing the flat. A group of three cyclists came in while I was cleaning off, and they said they were the last riders on the course. This news somewhat concerned me, especially considering the hard part of the ride was about to begin.

From Lake Oroville it's a 40-mile climb up the Oro-Quincy Highway to Bucks Lake. We had already been riding for eight hours and were plenty tired, but it felt good to finally face the real crux of our endeavor.

Shortly after leaving the rest stop my rear tire blew again. Upon inspection, I found a tear in the same spot where my last tube went flat, and I started to panic that I might not be able to finish the ride. Thankfully dad was there to calmly figure out the problem. The tube had come through the tear in my tire, so we glued a patch to the inside of my tire and then patched the tube. While on the side of the road with my bike upside down, a SAG wagon stopped and let us borrow a better tire pump. We were also able to refill our water bottles, and we were grateful for the support.

Finally we were underway again, and we slowly fought the bikes uphill. Eventually we overtook two other cyclists shortly before finding Stop No. 5a. I was hurting pretty bad at this point and knew I needed to take in more calories, but my stomach revolted at the thought of an energy bar. Fortunately the rest stop had a bunch of watermelon, and I gobbled down seven or eight slices. I was also able to get down a few chocolate chip cookies. As dad and I left the rest stop, we looked back and saw one of the cyclists we passed earlier. She was walking her bike up the road, totally out of gas.

The next part of the course forced us to pedal up the entire length of Bald Rock Road. About that time, a system of thunder cells blew in and provided much-needed relief from the sun. As lightning flashed in the sky and thunder crashed off the mountains, it felt like our surroundings were mirroring the physical turmoil within us.

Soon, huge drops of rain began darkening the road and a small amount of hail bounced off our helmets. The storm invigorated us and we passed two more cyclists. A while later, I suddenly realized we were riding among conifer trees. I didn't notice the transition, but I was glad to be back in the forest.

The set of climbs up Bald Rock Road was torturously long, so by the time the road finally ended back at the highway, I'd never been so happy to see a stop sign. This was also where Stop No. 6 was located, and I was needing it badly.

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As I rolled to a stop, I recognized one of the bikes leaning against the cedar split-rail fence at the Brush Creek fire station. The bike belonged to Ty, a friend of mine who was also doing the ride. I found him sitting in a lawn chair by the food table, and I grew concerned when I noticed he had taken off his socks and cleats. He told me he was spent and was considering taking the SAG wagon back to Quincy. I could feel what Ty was going through. We had trained on this climb three weeks earlier with Pete Hochrein, and it was disheartening to know what still lay ahead.

Dad and I spent 15 minutes recovering at the rest stop. During this time, Ty dug deep and decided to keep going. The three of us left together but quickly spread out on the course. As I passed other participants, I kept a mental tally of how many were behind me. This wasn't a matter of pride; I simply wanted to relay to the organizers how many riders were left on the course.

My counting turned out to be in vain, as most of the cyclists blew by me in a SAG wagon about an hour later. Seeing them getting driven up the mountain with their bikes in the back of a truck redoubled my determination to finish.

After two brutally steep grades and several very slow miles, I finally pulled into where Stop No. 7 was located at Four Trees. We were behind schedule, so everything was packed up. Two SAG wagons were leaving with riders who couldn't make it. One of the volunteer drivers encouraged me to also take the shuttle back to town, or I would miss the end-of-ride barbecue. I politely declined, but in my mind I couldn't help scoffing at the suggestion.

Dad and Ty arrived at the rest stop a short time later. The stretch from Brush Creek to Four Trees had forced a few more cyclists to quit, but there were still five of us left, and a SAG wagon stayed behind for us with food and water. As we watched the sky fill with smoke, we talked about the thunderstorm and the fires it had started.

There was still plenty of climbing from Four Trees to Bucks Lake. I was exhausted, but the desire to finish pushed me forward. My legs were destroyed, my back ached, my feet were numb and my butt was killing me. Nevertheless, I felt deeply satisfied when I crested the last big climb up to Grizzly Summit. The worst part of the course was behind me, and I was back in the Shire.

The final rest stop at Bucks Lake was totally deserted, so we didn't even bother stopping. When the last SAG wagon passed us carrying the other two cyclists who had been behind us, one of them tried to convince us to take a ride back into town because it was going to get dark. I looked at him like he was completely crazy. At this point, the thought of not finishing was inconceivable to me.

Dad, Ty and I were the last three riders on the course as the sun set. We were slow, but we were stubborn. The descent from Bucks Lake was nice and fast, but I cramped up after being in the tuck position too long. Once I hit Meadow Valley, I was like a horse who could smell the barn, and I made good time on those last eight miles into town.

While waiting at the stop sign in front of the Dame Shirley Plaza, I had a good buzz going from all the endorphins coursing through my head. Dad pulled up a couple minutes later, and we rode through town together and into the fairgrounds as the last light faded from the sky. It took us 15 hours, but we had finished the ride.