

Getting into Gear

By Linda U. Foley



Al and Linda Foley take a quick break during Cycling tour

Photos Linda Foley



Summit sign offers a great way to stretch the calves

Whatever was it that caused me to say, "Let's do it!" when my husband said, "Hey, Adventure Cycling has a new tour on their agenda called Sierra Sampler in September?"

I had not been on my bike in about eight years for various reasons (including battling breast cancer), but a month before the ride I'd purchased a new Canondale, I'd been weight and circuit training for a year (with Fit Chix), and considered myself in shape. Mostly, I needed a new challenge.

The Ride started in Truckee. From the previous night's orientation meeting and dinner, we knew we were 64 riders, mid-20s to early 70s, from all over the United States. Professions included a doctor, pilot, entrepreneurs. One couple trained in the Cascades for this event but everyone had clearly done a number of serious rides all over the U.S. and Europe.

Ahead of us, lay 300 miles, about 60 miles a day. Ouch. And we considered our 50-mile roundtrip to Dublin part of our training. Time to get into gear!

Serious climbs were offset by serious scenery. Glittering Lake Tahoe, and Emerald Bay, Markleeville – part of the aptly named Death Ride – Topaz Lake, Antelope Valley, Lee Vining, Bridgeport, Mammoth Lakes, stunning Mono Lake, Bishop, and Lone Tree. Climbs were 9-10 miles long followed by huge, fast descents. You'd better have reliable breaks, strong arms and watch out for anything – like sand, unexpected turns or critters – that might cause you to crash. I've always liked the down hills but tried to stay at 34 mph, feathering my brakes to keep them from smoking.

We climbed a total of 20,000 feet. Thank goodness for granny gears (lowest gear). Some of the climbs were 8 to 12 percent grade. One recumbent rider quit the tour because the steep inclines prevented blood flow to his feet.

One morning – on our five mile ride to the camp at 6:30 a.m. – it was 34 degrees; my fingers were completely numb and I couldn't shift. Still, the new morning was invigorating, the rising day playing with light and shadows. Awesome!

But the adventure was not to be without mishap. Final day, one of the younger strong riders was out for one last fix, and ended up being chased by three pit bulls which she tried to outrun. She was found by a police officer with a broken clavicle, several broken ribs and a concussion. She is now recovering and looking forward to the next ride.

I only fell once when I couldn't disengage one of my cleats from the sticking binding and had only one flat. (Smart to bring my personal mechanic along, as in husband.) Though I know how to change tires, it's hard to do for a female; icky and tough on the nails.

We returned to Truckee by bus. Seeing where we had been from the bus window, we kept congratulating ourselves. Would we have done this had we known how difficult it would be? You betcha! Ride on!

*Adventure Cycling is a 45,000 member organization that criss-crosses the country year round in a variety of organized rides.