

About six months ago I got a bug in my head to think about training for rides that would get me ready for longer rides that would lead up to more training to get me ready to think about the nutrition needs of riding in extremely hot weather, riding at night, climbing extremely long hills and staying awake for a couple days straight all the while sitting on a 135 gm piece of carbon fiber covered by leather also known as a bicycle seat. This ride is known as the Furnace Creek 508.

www.the508.com

While thinking of nothing else for a couple months I decided to consider possibly doing the ride as a relay rather than solo. I really want to do this ride solo and thought as dumb as it sounds to do it solo the first year there are benefits to doing just that. By riding it solo rather than on a relay team I may suffer thru it but if I ride it as a relay I may come to my senses and never attempt it solo. Maybe suffering thru it solo would be dumb but if I finished I would never have to try it again and I could mark it off my ToDo list.

Well I decided, or was talked into, trying it as a relay since I am a 508 rookie. So now comes the challenge of finding another idiot to join me. I put the word out to 3-4 various bicycle related e-mail listing including a tandem, brevet, triathlon and my bike racing team. Not to mention anyone I knew who might be able to ride about half of the 508 miles. I only got one reply off the tri club list and I immediately talked that sucker into a local ride.

Jim and I met up for a 60-70 mile Marin County ride and my on-bike interview reveled that Jim is a long distance swimmer who has been riding for a couple three years. Well, being that he is my only potential partner I guess I have no choice but to sign him up.

We make plans to ride together the next bunch of weekends to get to know each other and plan for the race.

Jim

From what I know about Jim he is a competitive swimmer who just so happens to like to swim a long ways. If you think swimming from Alcatraz is a long way well Jim is the kind of swimmer who would rather swim out to Alcatraz before doing the swim back. Or if you need to get across Lake Tahoe why not just swim it so you can get your daily swim in at the same time. He told me a story of how he wanted to swim at the national championships but did not register in time. He showed up anyways and when someone was a no-show he decided to claim to be that person and swim in his place. Well somewhere out there is a US National Champion who never swam a stroke. Notice I did not mention Jim's last name to protect him.

The 508

For those who have never heard of the FC 508 it is a 508 mile time trial (must ride alone) thru some of the hottest places in the world. You may recognize town

names such as Mojave, Badwater, Death Valley, Furnace Creek, Stovepipe Wells, and who can forget Baker the home of the world's tallest thermometer.

If you race this solo you must cover each and every mile and go up every inch of the 36,000 feet of climbing. By riding it as a two person relay you have to do either a bit more or less than half the ride. The rules for a two person relay are as follows.

Each rider must ride four of the eight specific stages. You either ride the odds or the evens. If one rider cannot complete his stage the other rider may take over but only if that rider goes back to the previous stage start. Each team must have at least two additional crew members to help drive, navigate and feed the riders. Each team must have a support vehicle to follow the riders.



The Support Vehicle

For our support vehicle we used my 2002 Chrysler Town & Country Limited AWD van. I have to tell you it is the perfect vehicle. We had it rigged up as follows.

Up top we had a Yakima Mega Load Warrior basket. Mounted to the Load Warrior were three Yakima bike racks, five Yakima wheel holders, rear facing

amber flashing lights, eight 2.5 gallon containers of water, one beach chair, two pumps, and a dozen bungee cords holding things down. I spent the last couple of months scouring the roadsides gathering most of my bungee cords.

On the back and sides of our van were magnetic signs with our team name "Tortuga" as well as a reflective "Caution Bicycle Ahead" on the back and a reflective triangle to signify a slow moving vehicle.

Inside the van was where I had the most fun. The best part of designing the interior was that I partnered up with my daughters six year old Gabi and Jaci who is nine. We took out all but the front two seats and one middle row captains chair. We then put down plywood to cover all of the remaining floor space. Then we built a rear shelf to elevate the 5 gallon water cooler so we can get water bottles under it. This made room for a couple of big clothes bins for Jim and I and to top it off came the all important pull out cutting board designed by Gabi. Everything was designed so anything could be accessed from inside or outside of the van. At night the rider cannot move forward without the vans lights so it is important to be able to get to things without having to stop the van.

After a 250 mile shake out relay ride from Pacifica to SLO the van was tweaked a bit and was certified race ready.

The Crew

I tried like crazy to find a couple of crew members to help with this race. I talked to family, friends, even enemies and only got a few Maybe's. Any crew member would need to be available from Friday to Monday around the Saturday and Sunday race. This was a lot tougher than I thought it would be. But from out of nowhere a guy on the tandem list who lives near the start offered to help and had a buddy as well. Both Ed and Rod had thought about doing the race as a relay and thought this would be the perfect chance to check it out. I cannot tell you what a relief it was to get everything squared away and how great these two performed.

The Strategy

The race for relay teams is broken up into eight specific stages. It was decided I would go first and do all the odd stages. The odd (me) racer will actually ride 270ish miles while the even racer will do about 240. The decision for me to go first came down to my ability to go downhills. Jim is not comfortable on high speed descents and the biggy is Townes Pass on stage three at 17 miles long and down 5,000 feet. How do you ride from 4,900 feet down over 5,000 feet? You hit Badwater at the bottom which is about 300 feet below sea level. Of course this means I have to get up Townes Pass which is 10 miles up and 4,000 feet with zero flat sections.

We both decided we would take it easy on the first two stages each. The first four consist of pulls of 82, 70, 99 and 74 miles. If we get through these four

stages we feel we will be home free since the final four stages are only 56, 35, 34 & 58. If we have anything left after stage four (two for each) we can ramp it up a bit.

The Race

The solo riders started at 7am and the teams start two hours later at 9 am. This is to allow the solo support vehicles to get out of town before the teams take off.

Stage 1, Start to California City, 82 miles, 6,200' (Willy)



The race starts with a five mile neutral start through Santa Clarita. I make a point to get up front so I can claim that we were in first at one time in the race :). Just before the official start I dropped back to dead last. I figure I do not want anything to do with the four person screaming teams or the faster two person teams. This is a TT after all so there is no sense getting caught up in racing against them. Also, by staying in the rear I will have riders to pick off during this stage. It worked like a charm and I was able to pick off rider after rider who **were** slower than me. Plus I get to pick off all the riders who got too carried away and started to feel it. All the team vans will be waiting after the canyon run at about mile 24. I see my van for the first time and I am feeling great. From here I get a big high speed downhill which leads out to the longest road you have ever seen.

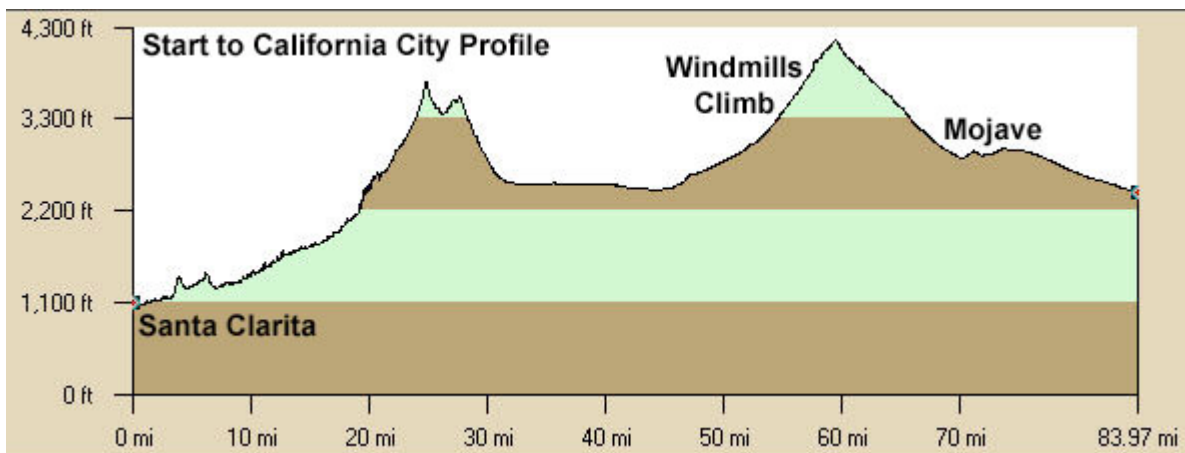
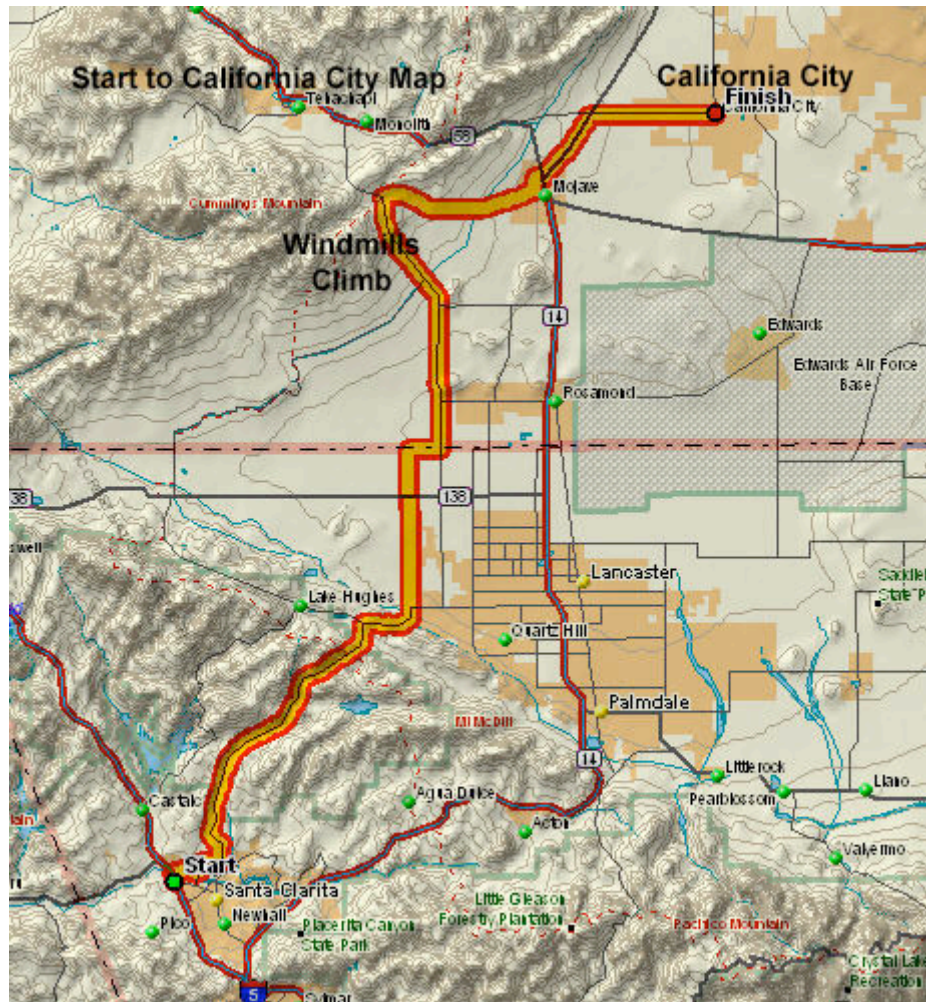


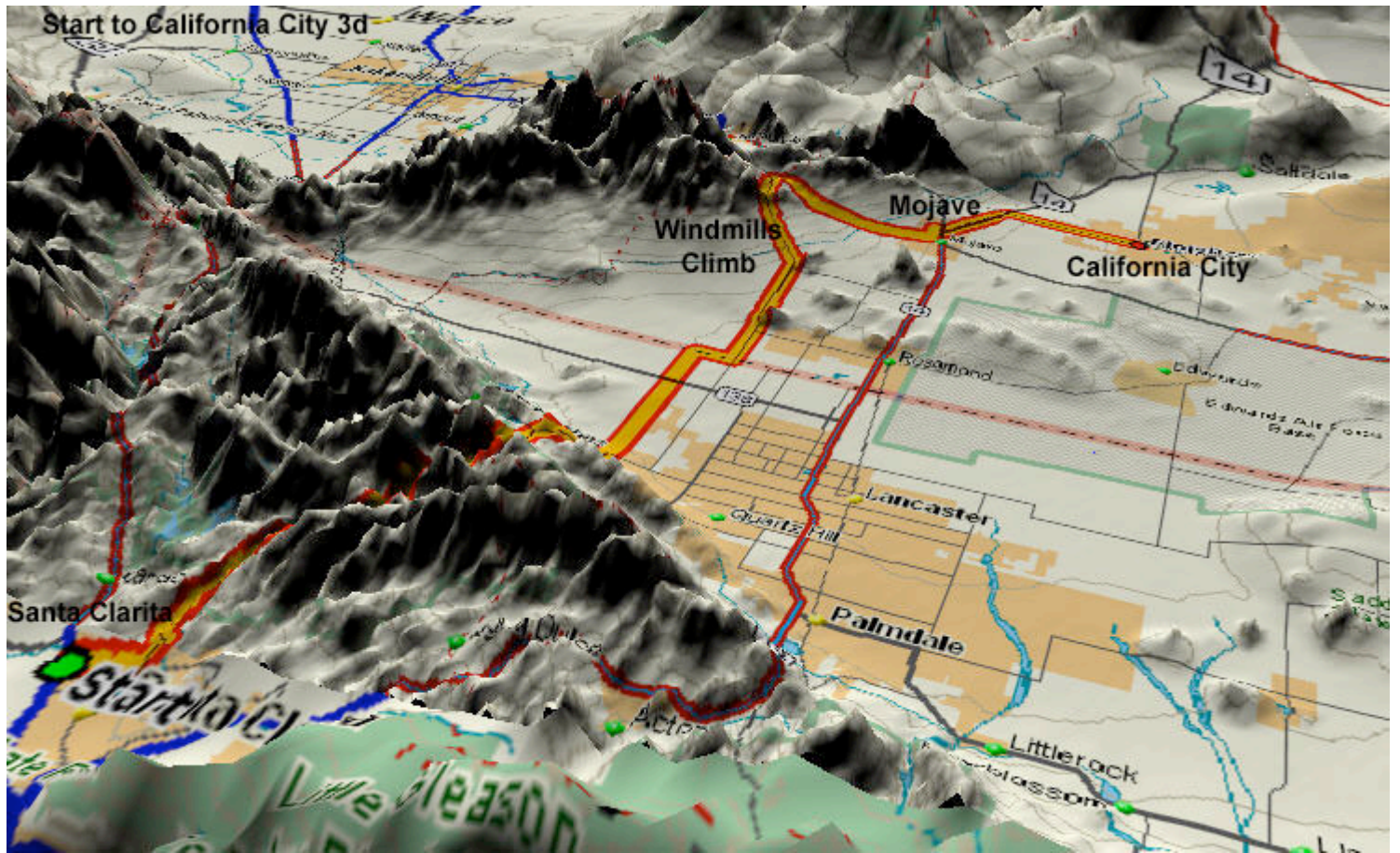
It just goes on for miles with no end in sight. I just put my head down and tuck into my aerobars for a long ride. Again I start picking off rider after rider and I notice that they either do not have aerobars or are not using them. I set my bike up at the beginning of this year to practice for the Davis 24 hr TT and have just gotten used to being in them for a decent amount of time. But some of these riders obviously have not ridden on them long enough to stay in the position for extended periods. I feel this was a huge benefit for me as I flew through this section. Before the end of this long flat section I manage to reel in and blow by Tiger Sharks #1 rider Dr Dwayne. He and I have ridden before and I knew our team would match up well with theirs. After a bunch of miles there will only be a few teams in our neighborhood and I figured they would be one. So I keep an eye on them which is not hard considering they each look like Tony the Tiger in their kits and their SUV has a big ass fin on top



After the long flat section you get a long, long, long gradual uphill [called the Windmills Climb](#). On the profile of each stage these look like long tall climbs but if you really paid attention you would have seen that you climb about 2,000 feet but in 10-15 miles. Just steep enough to be considered a hill but not so steep that you have to stand or even get out of your aerobars. There is nothing to explain to a Bay Area rider what these look like. But imagine riding Skyline Blvd (Hwy 35) from the SF Zoo toward Pacifica for an hour or more. Now these hills can get old after awhile but you just have to remind yourself that what goes up must come down. I cannot tell you how much fun it is to have a 10-15 mile downhill. At times you can get tired of going downhill for so long but then remind

yourself it is much better than going uphill. I scream down the hill thru the Mojave desert heading toward time station one in California City.



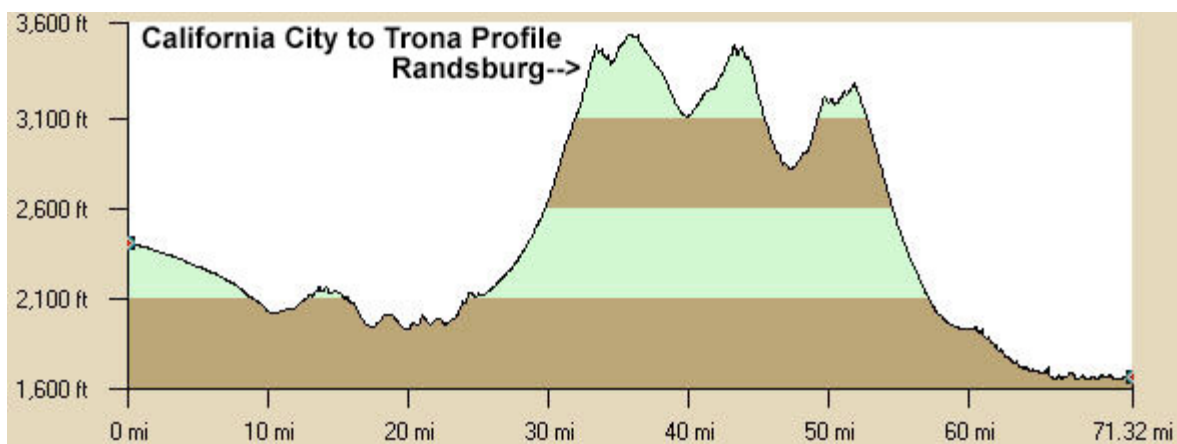
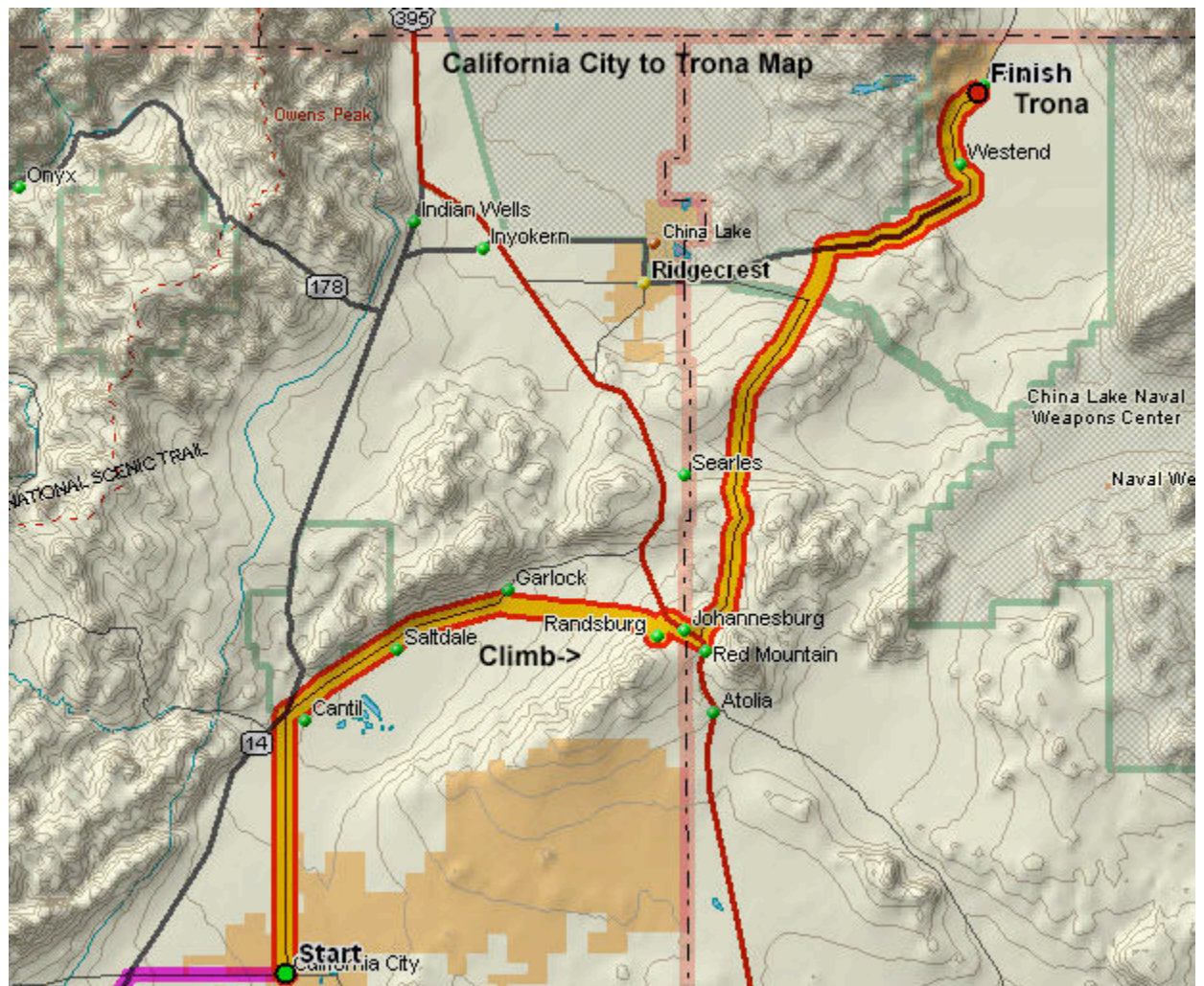


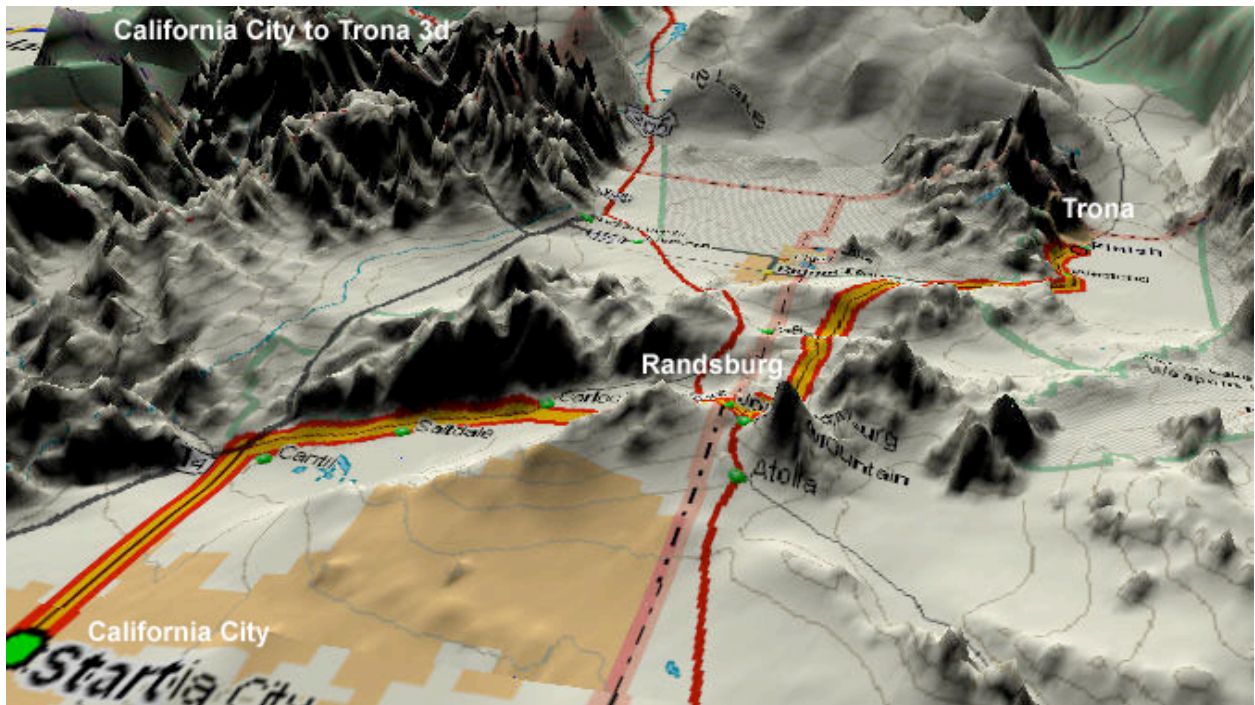


Stage 2, California City to Trona, 70 miles, 4,200' (Jim)

Jim takes off like a bat out of hell and I have to remind him to take it easy. He does not have as many riders to track down now that we are spread out a bit. Not to mention I tracked them all down last stage :) Jim is kind of an unknown to me and the crew. I believe he has the ability to go fast but does he have the stamina to go long and go again and again. [Jim is recently single so there were no girlfriends to ask.](#) Up to now his longest ride was a 200k with me the week before the race. He did fine and I believe he is slightly faster than me on the flats.

On this stage Jim has a long flatish section. He is hammering and everyone is excited at his speed. Whenever he needs water or chemical water he lets us know on the two way radio. We then get everything ready, we pull over and one of the crew runs like hell and Jim grabs the bottle. This worked great and we never had a bad handoff. The crew was great at this and Rod never dropped one of my empties I threw at him. Now Jim has a 7 mile 1,500 foot climb which he hammers up and is picking off team after team. It is very weird to actually call these things hills coming from the Bay Area. He then climbs a few little rollers and then has a long decent to time station #2 in Trona. Before he got to the downhills the van would leapfrog me to the next exchange to get me all ready for Jim's arrival.





Stage Three: Trona to Furnace Creek, 99.2 miles. Elevation Gain: 7538 **(Willy)**

I take off on stage three which is the stage that worries me the most. But I am also excited to get into and out of this stage as it will get me thru 180 of my 270 miles. Just before Jim finished stage 2 we passed the magic time 6 PM. 6 PM signifies night riding which requires the van to turn on its flashers, add a slow moving vehicle triangle to the rear and the rider must equip his bike with lights, etc. Also, the van is now required to drive directly behind the rider for both safety and so the rider can use the vans lights to see the road. I was not sure if I would like the idea of having a vehicle that close. I felt that maybe I would ride a bit harder than I should trying to impress my crew with my blazing speed. But it actually felt fine as did I as I tore out of Trona. Tiger Shark got out of Trona just a minute before us. I could see them and another team just ahead and I put the pedal to thewell the pedal. It was officially night time but the sun had not gone down so I wanted to get by them before it actually got dark. I blew by Dr Dwayne and I figured by his Doppler effected voice that that would be the last we saw of Tiger Shark ;) This flat section lead to another long gradual climb that I continued to hammer up. Once up the hill it was completely dark except for the beautiful moon and of course the headlights behind me. This lead to what would be one of the greatest downhills I have been on. Long and semi steep. Just as I started down the hill a rider passed me which worked out perfect. Not only did I have my van behind me but I had his van in front of me so I can see how it takes the upcoming turns. I cannot tell you how much fun it is to go this far at around 40MPH in the dark. I only had to use my brakes a bit and only to let the van

catch up so I could see the road ahead. I had a 4 AA LED light which was not great for this decent but the road was fantastic and both vans helped. Once at the bottom of this hill you ride into Panamint Valley. It is flat but the road is terrible. I have read every story about the 508 and they all talk about this section being so bad they wished they had a Mt Bike just for this 10 mile'ish section. Well, as bad as it was I guess I was expecting worse so I was presently surprised at how not so bad it was. While riding thru this section we started to pass some of the singles who started out a couple hours before us. So now we have a whole new group of riders to chase after. I felt sorry for the solos who by now were almost 200 miles into it. One in particular was a guy I met in San Diego know as Red-Eye Vireo.



He does some long distance riding and his philosophy is, "Ride till you drop and you're further down the road". I am dying to get this on a T-shirt even though it is completely opposite of my philosophy. Apparently about 190 miles is where he dropped.

From the nesting place of the Red-Eye Vireo I have another 10 miles to the base of Townes Pass. This is the hill I have been dreading. It is 4,000 feet in 11 miles, or so they say. There is a elevation sign at 2,000, 3,000, and at the top but no 4,000 sign. At the bottom I switch off of my Vanilla and onto my 16 pound Dura Ace triple grouped Merlin.



Just before I get going Tiger Shark starts up the hill with Dr Dwayne. I think this is great so I have someone to track down. In no time I have tracked down the shark and go for the gills. To pass at night, and especially at slower speeds, there is particular method we are to use to make a safe and clean pass. Once I get close to their follow vehicle (The Mother Shark) I ride around the left side of the SUV, then ride with Dwayne for a bit but only long enough to rub in that I have caught him. Then as I prance up the hill a bit my van will pass the Mother Shark and get between Dwayne and me. We then proceed up the hill with full intention of picking off the leader.

By now I am wondering where the hell the 2,000 foot marker was only to be greeted by the 3,000 foot sign. Man and I excited to see it, but it is short lived as my back started to act up. Occasionally my back will bother me just enough that I lose power in my legs. If I am almost up a hill I just keep going, but if it is a long hill like this it is better to stop for a couple minutes to stretch it out. Not only do I feel better afterwards but I pick up my pace so I think I break even. Of course I have to face the wrath of Dr Dwayne as he goes by but I let out a couple of Ohhs and Oweys for good measure.

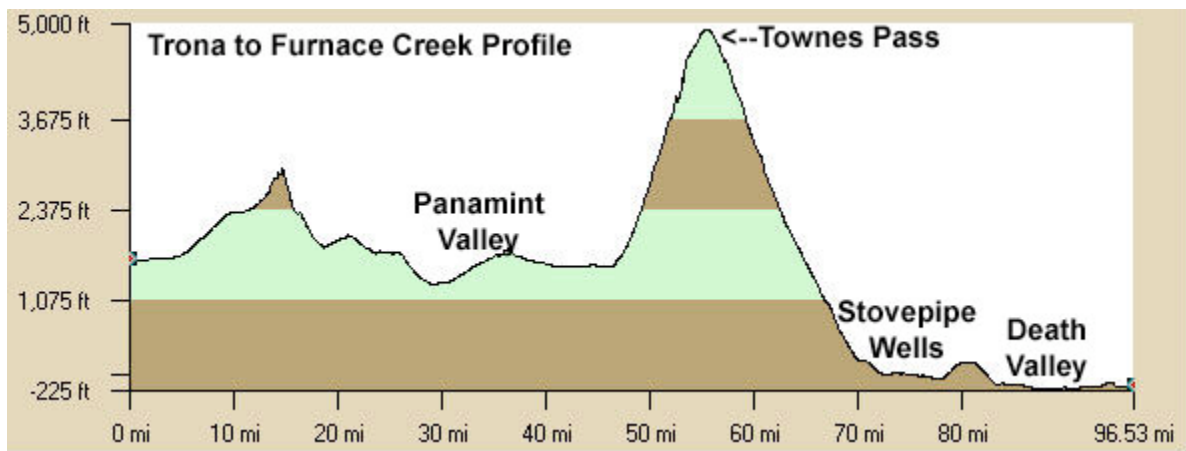
Back on the bike and I again catch the Mother Shark. but can't get around it before my back acts up for the second and final time. I back off a bit then put in the final push to the top at about 4,900 feet. Just as we get there Tiger Shark is

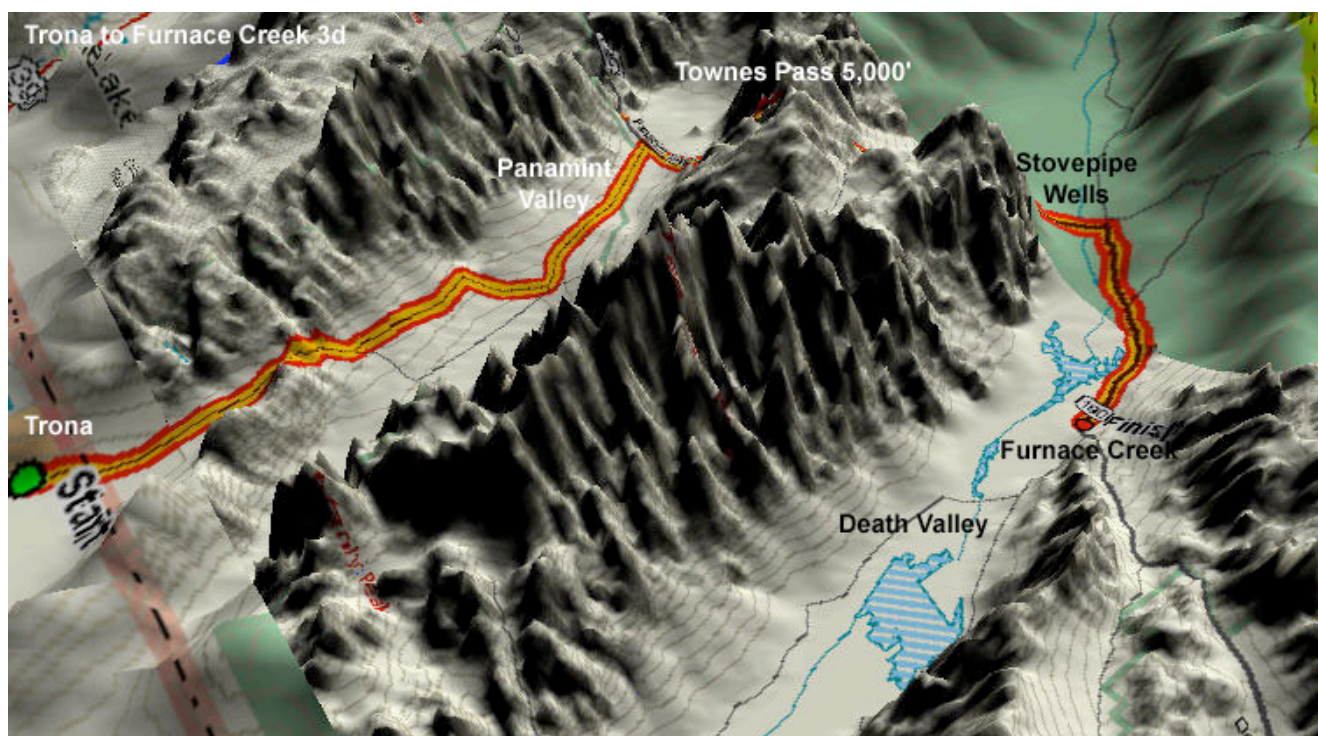
heading down. I have to put on extra clothes as well as a mega brutal HID NiteRider light for the 17 mile, 5,000 foot decent.

Now this decent is kind of like a Death Ride hill. It is long, and steep, but has only a few sweeping turns. It is the perfect hill if it wasn't midnight. But being an avid night rider I am up for it and take off down the hill. I am soon up to full speed which for a lightweight like me is about 45ish. But being at night it seems faster. I have the brutal light because at times I will outrun my van and there are many long, deep dips in the road where you lose the lights from your van. After about 20 minutes of ZERO braking the road starts to level off. At the top of the hill it was cold but now down at sea level I am burning up. I make a quick stop right in front of Dwayne and my crew literally pull my tights and LS jersey off me. Back on the bike I am on the Sharks like stink on chum. At some point in this ride you will go thru some mentally tough times and some of the greatest times. Well it just so happens that I am about to get my 2nd, 3rd, and 4th wind all at the same time.

I am on fire, (oh yea, I forgot to remind you that we are having a blast and nowhere near the leaders) For the next 35 miles I cannot go fast enough. Perhaps I had a slight tailwind but I kept pushing it till my legs tell me to slow it down a notch. But it never happened!!!! I was flying at 20-30 MPH on some of the best roads so far. I flew past a couple of pace vehicles and my van was able to just follow right behind me rather than the more complicated passing method. I wanted the ride to continue but only had about half a mile to go when someone through the "Hot Foot" switch on me. Usually, you can ride these out for a bit but I had to stop immediately and I could see the next exchange _ a mile away. My crew couldn't figure out what happened and I told them I had to unclip for a minute. Ed and Rod had never heard of Hot Foot and Jim hasn't ridden long enough to get it I guess as they all thought I was making it up. On the occasions when I get this it is usually in uncommonly hot weather in the Bay Area. We are all so used to 50-70 degrees in the Bay Area that when it gets hotter I believe my feet swell up just a bit which causes a nerve in the part of my foot right over my cleat to get pinched. Anyways, that's my story and I am sticking to it. And being none of them are Doctors I guess I can make anything up. But my feet did hurt like hell for one minute.

Now we are into time station three and I am stoked that I finished my second leg. Remember from here on out I figured I only have a 55 and 33 mile stage.





Stage Four: Furnace Creek to Shoshone, 73.6 miles. Elevation Gain: 6744'. (Jim)

Now that it is dark at the transitions Jim has to wait until I get all settled into the van and my bike up before he can take off since he cannot ride without the van and the van cannot leave without me. Or at least that is what I tell my crew. Again, Jim takes off strong and we leave just after Tiger Shark not having caught them after seeing them at both the top and bottoms of Townes Pass. Jim has a long section of flats followed by a 4 mile climb, a quick mile decent and then a grueling 9+ mile climb to the top of Salsberry Pass. Again, these climbs are not steep but just steep enough to make it a real grind.

Jim is again flying along the flats and picking off teams here and there. After the flats he hits the 4 mile climb to Jubilee Pass and tells us his plan is to reel in all five support vehicles he sees ahead. I figure fine with me.

What we, the crew, didn't know was that Jim did not know he had a 9.5 mile hill right after the 4 mile Jubilee hill. Jim continued to ride hard only to get hit hard with the Big Bonk stick. All the riders he flew by are now picking him off one by one. It is still dark so we are following right behind him and it is agonizing to watch. But he grunts it out to the top and now has a bunch of downhill to the end of stage 4. It is also getting light out and we pass the magic 7 AM time which allows the van to leave the rider if necessary. We decide to stay with Jim to the transition in case something happens.

We pull into Shoshone now about 325 miles into the race.

Jims Version

FWIW "After 50 miles of this, I stupidly wasn't paying attention to how far I'd come. (I felt great and passed a lot of riders).

Finally, - I got to the mountain. It started off as a long slow, steep, curve to the left. It is amazing in this race as you can see for miles and miles up either straight grades, or slightly curved grades in the dark. And, I saw a huge, long line, of small, and blinking amber lights, - (the vans must have amber flashing lights on at night in the rear of their vehicle, -as well as "warning" Cyclist ahead triangle reflective signage). I could see about 15 amber lights before they began to disappear around a corner/curve way up on the mountain. So, I said to myself, - "I'm a climber, - I'll knock out 10 or 12 of these people right now." (How stupid and arrogant that thought was). So, - I took off up the mountain and pounded up there, hammering away. When I passed about 10 people I was starting to feel it, and saw that just head was the elevation sign for Jubilee pass. What a long hill I thought, as I finished the five mile climb through Jubilee pass. After passing between two big rocks, - I saw a nice descent and thought that I was on top of the mountain and had a 20 mile descent down into Shoshone. When in fact I was only 1/3 the way up of a 15 mile steep climb heading toward Salsberry summit. Not long after the rest on the descent from Jubilee, - the road turned upwards again and immediately a huge gust of hot wind came out of the north and pushed me from the middle of the road right over into the sand of side of the road. I couldn't believe it, - I was dead tired, - it was night, - the wind was stopping my progress, - I was exhausted. I pushed on, suffering. I kept pedaling, - I can do it, I said to myself. Not too long after that, - some of the people that I took down earlier on Jubilee started passing me, ouch! Every time an amber light ahead of me would disappear, - I would think that it was the summit, - only to find out that it was just another curve, and afterwards, I would see more amber lights at an angle, - slowly progressing up the hill.

My heart rate monitor alarm at my threshold was ringing constantly. I wanted to turn the damn thing off, - but couldn't take even one hand off the bars because of the wind pushing me back down the hill. I seriously thought that I was going to have a heart attack. My mouth was burning from the dry wind pushing me backwards.

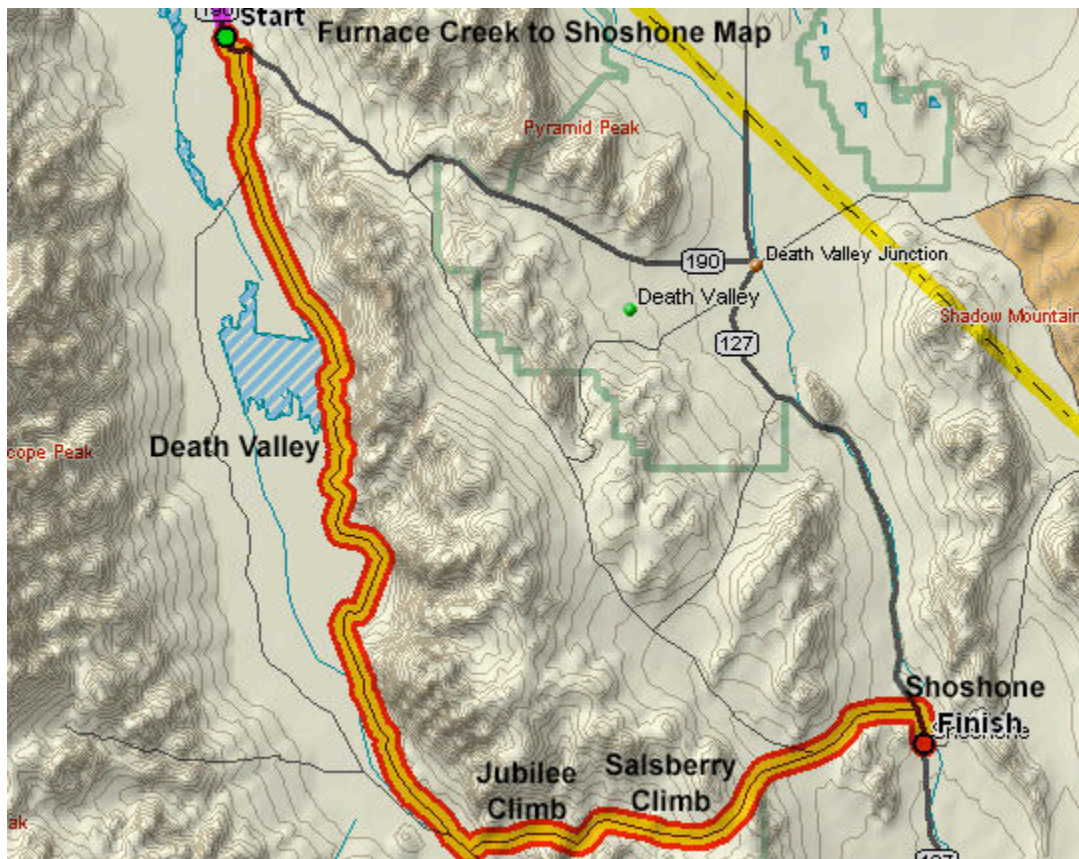
Then, - I saw that it was starting to get light, - I could see my watch, still beeping, it said 6:30 AM.

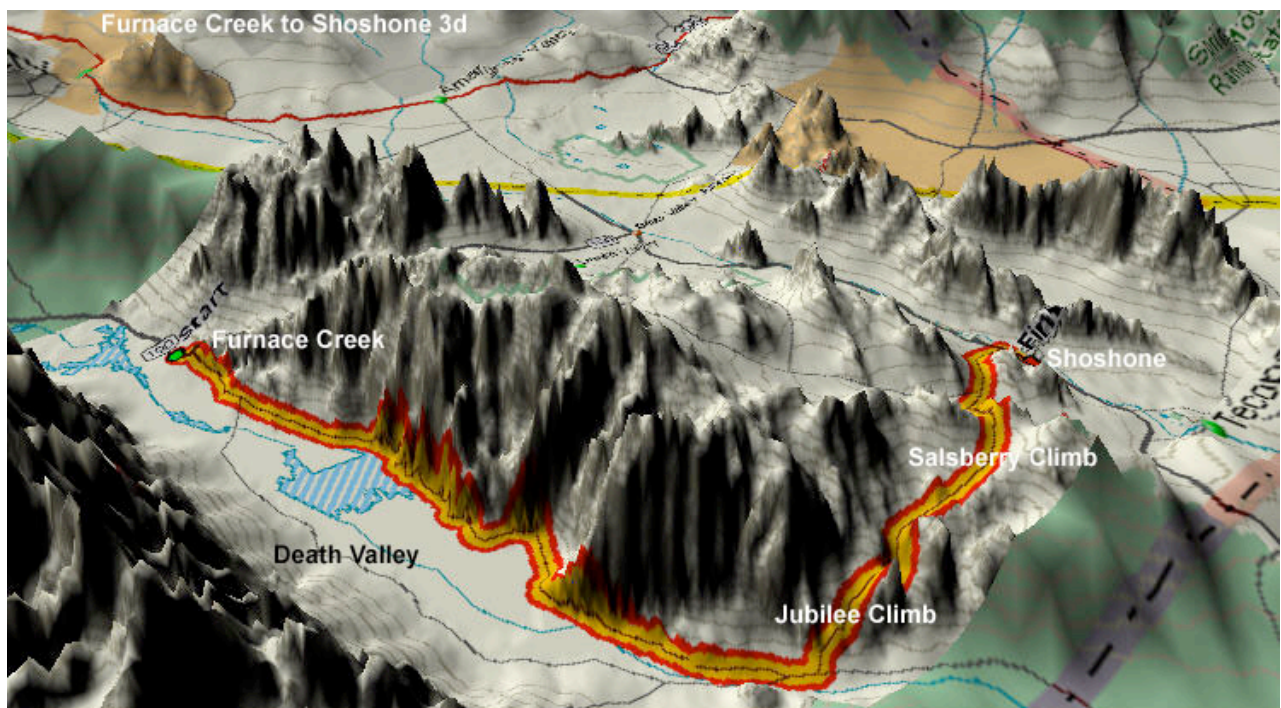
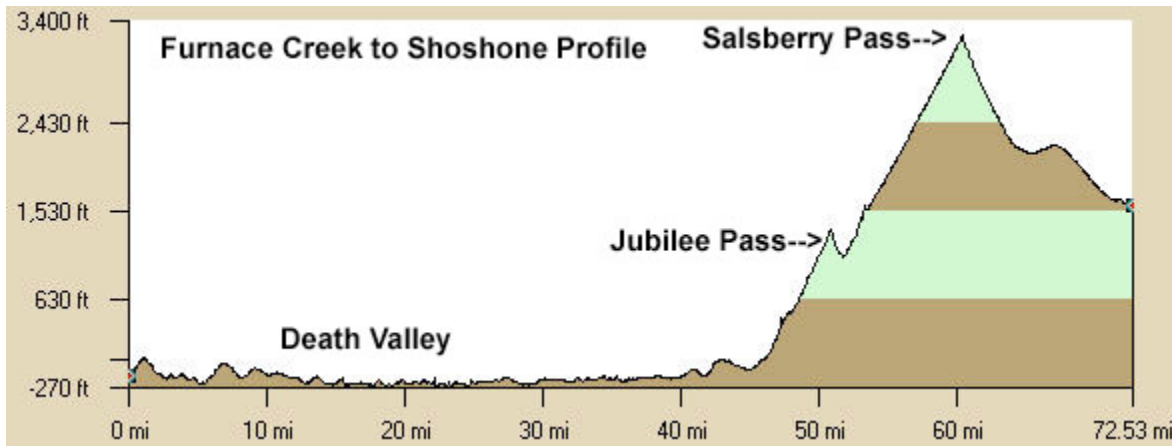
As it grew lighter, I saw the gorgeous big rock formations, but they brought me no amazement, such was my pain. Finally, - up ahead, - I saw the sign that said elevation 5940 feet. I immediately flipped off that sign, - knowing that I finally hit Salsberry summit: much to the amusement of W and the crew behind me.

My stomach was burning with intense acidic pain, my HRM was screaming at me, my eyes were sunk back in my head, I was delirious, and felt sure that I suffered

a mild heart attack. My heart rate finally dropped far enough below threshold that the alarm stopped. (I realized that I was riding above my 166 BPM threshold for way too many miles).

The descent down wasn't fun either. The road turned to crap with tons of potholes, with this rough cement-like loose stone material everywhere. I had to stand, because my butt was killing me, and I also was too tired to pedal, - but I also had to keep on BOTH brakes and dodge deep potholes. One slip-up and I was going down. I also had to ride on the painted white lines on the side of the road as there were less rocks on that, - but that paint had cracked, chipped, and created holes as well: bumpy. So even riding on that thin white line was a pain. Finally, I coasted into Shoshone with the wind at my back, at 7:30 AM, - ""



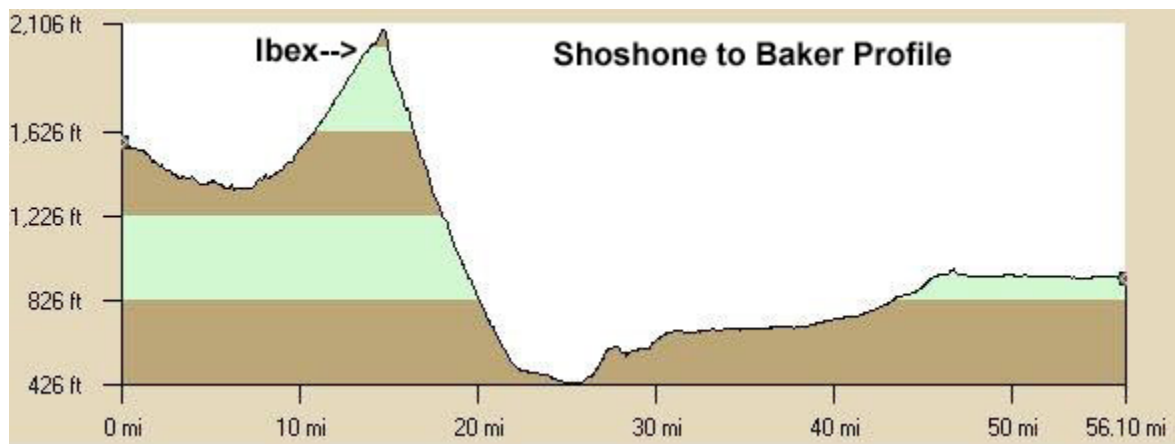
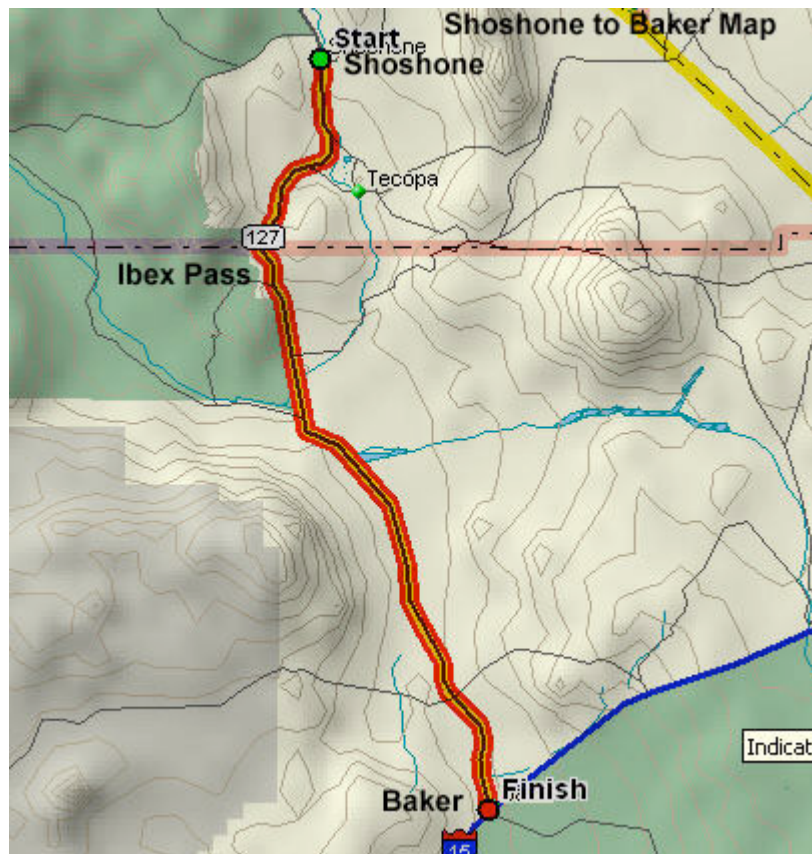


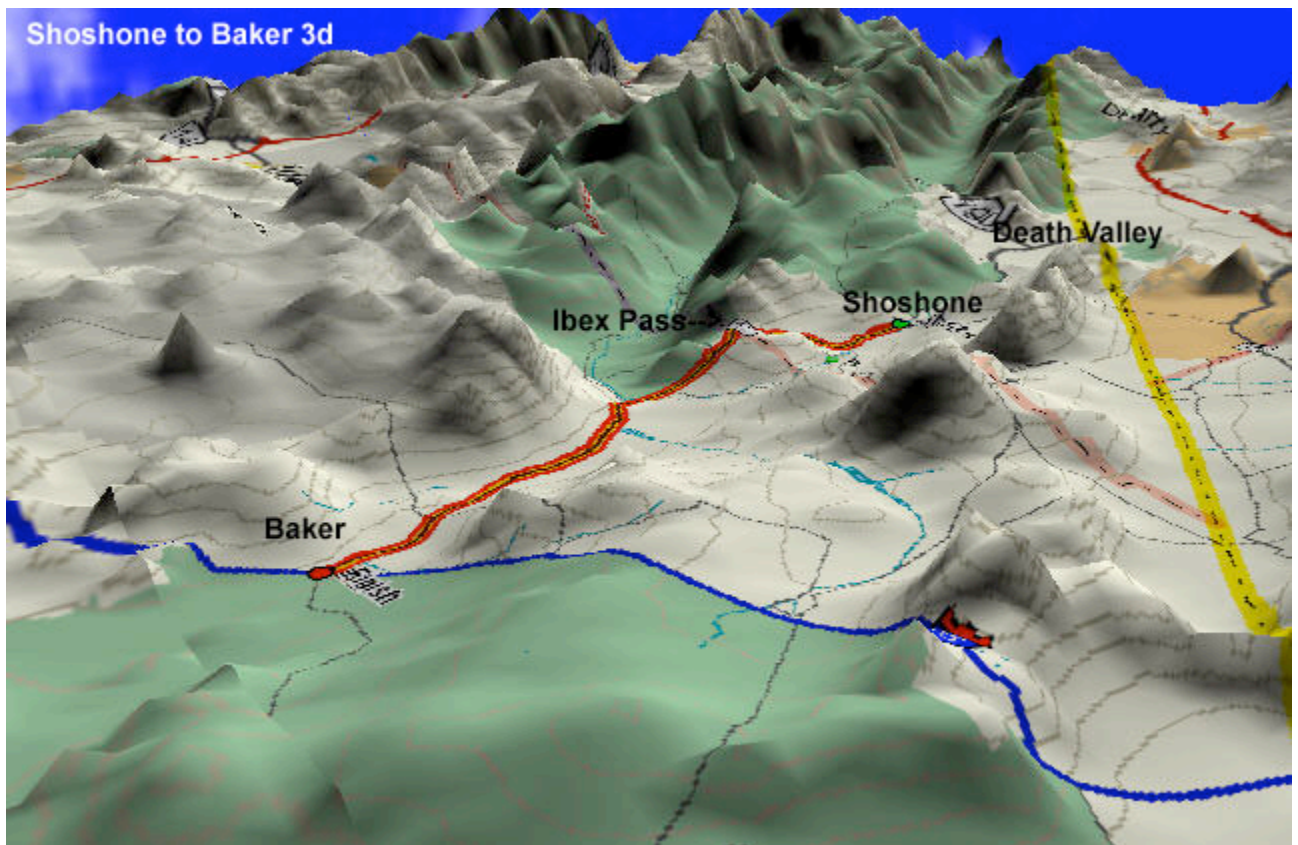
Stage Five: Shoshone to Baker, 56.3 miles. Elevation Gain: 2186'. (Willy)

Just before I take off for my 56 mile stage to Baker Tiger Shark pulled into the transition area. I don't know why I thought they were ahead of us but now I am fired up to get on the road. This race can have brutal headwinds at times but not today. I take off on a very smooth road and leave the van behind to gather up what is left of Jim and pour him in the van. I figure they will be on the road in 20 minutes or so which is fine since it is daylight out and I have plenty of fluids. As I take off I have a huge tailwind and am riding along this flat section of Hwy at 30 MPH!!!!. Man if I keep this up I figure I will beat the van to Baker. Luckily there are no turns on this stage. If there were turns surely the van would think I made a wrong turn rather than the fact that I am screaming along at the highways

speed limit. But as I should have known the road takes a long bend and I lose some of my head wind coming down to a mere mortal speed in the low twenties. Still this is fantastic and I have but a 750 foot long climb before a long downhill then the final 25 miles or so of upturned hwy to Baker.

When we left Shoeshone Tiger Shark was a few minutes behind us. I asked the van to stop and give me a time to when Dwayne goes by. They report back that we are 8.5 minutes ahead and with the long slow grind in my aerobars I figure we will add a bit to that by the time we get to Baker. Yesterday I put some time into Dwayne on similar roads I believe because he was not using aerobars. With 10 miles to go to Baker I tell my crew to jump ahead and get Jim ready. I want to be in and out of Baker before the Tiger Sharks get in so they do not even see us. I am really racing this section and feel great. I averaged 19 MPH for the whole 56 miles and that included a good 20+ mile section of grinding uphill. With about 3 miles to go I see a pace vehicle a ways behind me. It starts to gain on me but I figure it can't be the Sharks because I can see the rider does not look like Tony the Tiger. But with about a mile to go Dr Dwayne fly's by me and gets into Baker about a minute in front of us, I mean me. Man is the crew going to be pissed. But as I pull into Baker I do not see any of my crew nor Jim ready to go. I turn the corner and see Rod and the van, but still no Jim. Apparently the last leg really cooked Jim. After a few minutes Jim is on the road for his 30+ mile stage but he is not moving his usual speedy self. Baker is probably the biggest town we hit so we fuel up and I eat Ed's leftover Giro and a couple cups of Rootbeer.





Stage Six: Baker to Kelso, 34.90 miles. Elevation Gain: 2920'. (Jim)

We finally catch up to Jim who is not moving well. But it could have something to do with the 20 mile, 2,500 foot relentless gradual climb he is on. Plus it is a bit hot outside so all in all I am glad he is moving at all. Eventually Jim has to stop and is complaining about his knee. He does a bit of walking and this seems to help. I am a bit worried that I will have to go back to Baker and take over but Jim is adamant that he will finish this leg. After pulling into Baker all I had to do was my final 35 mile leg and man was I excited. Now it may come down to not only my final 35 miler but perhaps Jims final 58 miler. If I have to do it it should not be a problem and we have plenty of time, but over the past months I have been dreaming about getting my 35'er done. Jim toughs it up to the top of the hill and gives his BIGGEST finger to the 3,700 foot elevation sign as the rest of us laugh. Ok, Jim is going to be alright and somewhere along this section Jim gives himself a new nickname. "Big Ring 508 Beee'ach"

Over the past couple of months that Jim and I have been training together he has been fairly mild mannered, but on this ride I have seen quite a bit of his personality come out. He's new to long distance riding I got to see the big Sh*t eating grins come over his face as he has been powering thru the first couple of

legs and after each of his legs. Plus I have seen lots of determination in this last leg and have little worries I will have to ride his final leg. Would we be faster if I ride it? Absolutely. But there is no way Jim is going to let me and there is no other way I would want to even if it takes us to the 46 hour.....OK maybe the 45 hour mark. I want that jersey and I will push Jim off his bike if I have to to get it. In this race all official finishers get a jersey and that means if you finish in 46:01 no dice. And I have yet to see one on Ebay and believe me I have looked.

So now Jim begins his decent to Kelso. I have not followed Jim on any of the steeper decents on his previous stages and am surprised at how slow he is riding downhill. Jim is a bit more timid than I thought since these are full speed ahead, no turn, see as far as the eye can see type roads. I want to get out and cut both his brake cables as going faster would actually be more stable and safer than what he is doing. But I just want him to finish and I am fairly comfy sitting in the air conditioned van. Actually his butt is bothering him so he has been standing more than usual even on some of the downhills. One thing about Jim is that he has so many places to improve to go along with his natural ability that he will only get better. Much better.

Jim pulls into Kelso which is really only a train station. Apparently a while back a train when thru and it took 1.5 hours!!!!. Man would that suck to be on the wrong side of the tracks when that came thru. Our transitions are getting slower as we have no hope of catching back up to Tiger Shark which is just fine with me.

Jim's Version

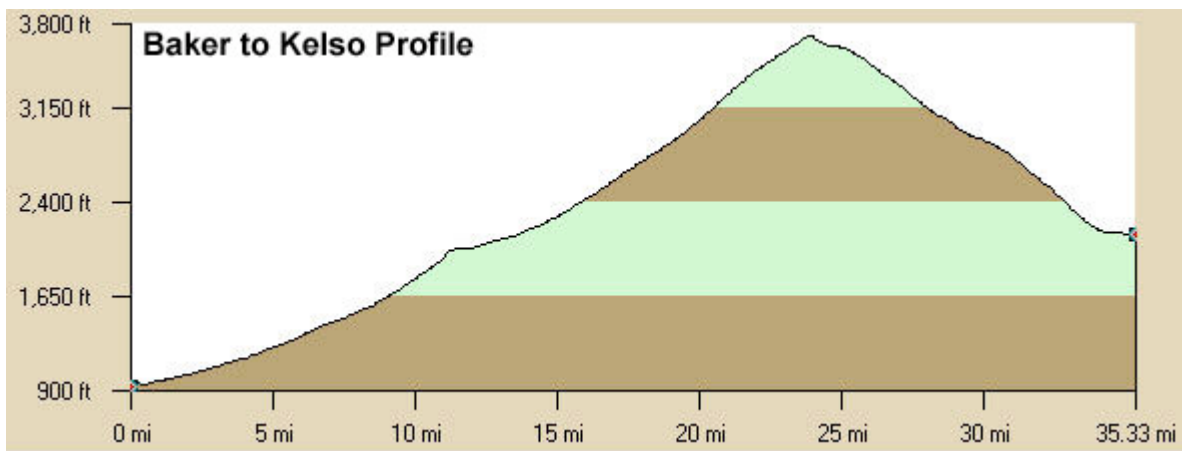
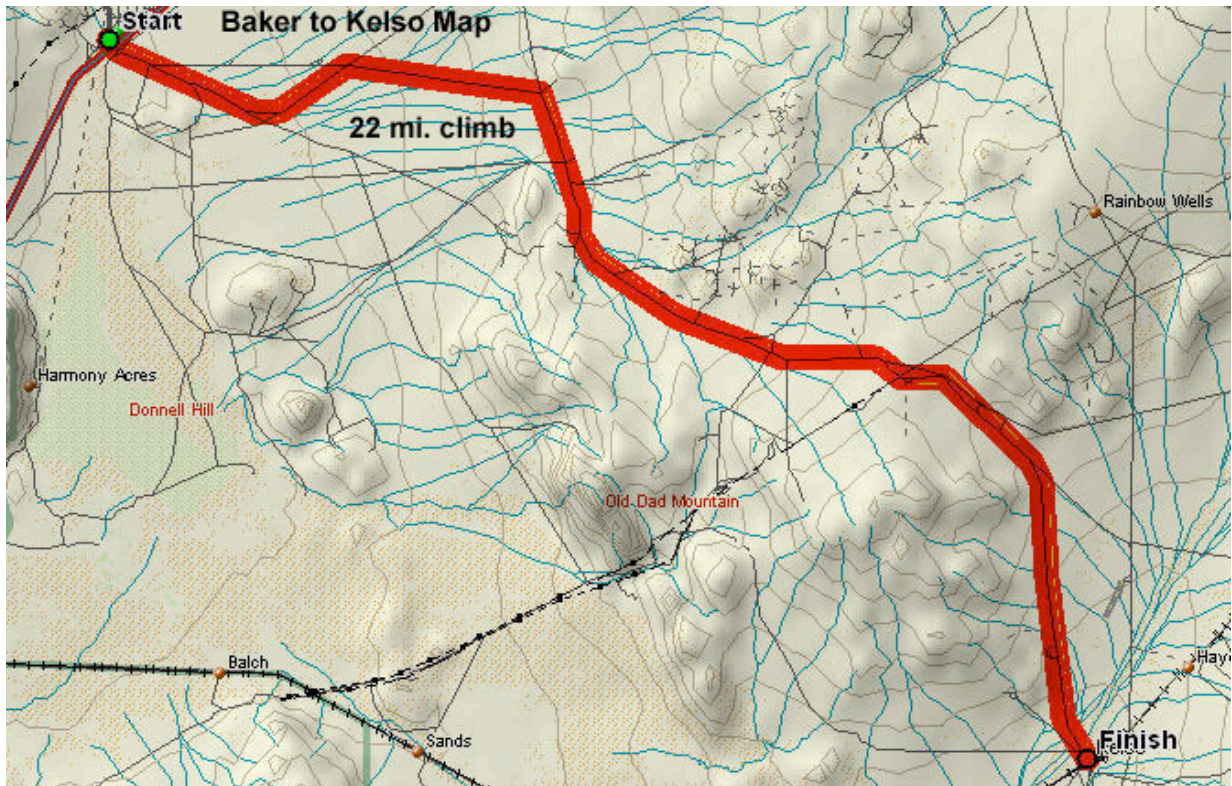
When the van got back, I only rode a few miles before I had to get off the bike. I sat in the van and told W and the crew about my knee. I put on a knee brace. W said that he could finish the race. And, as the tears welled up in my eyes, - I said, a la the movie, "Officer and a Gentleman," "I'm NOT QUITTING!!"

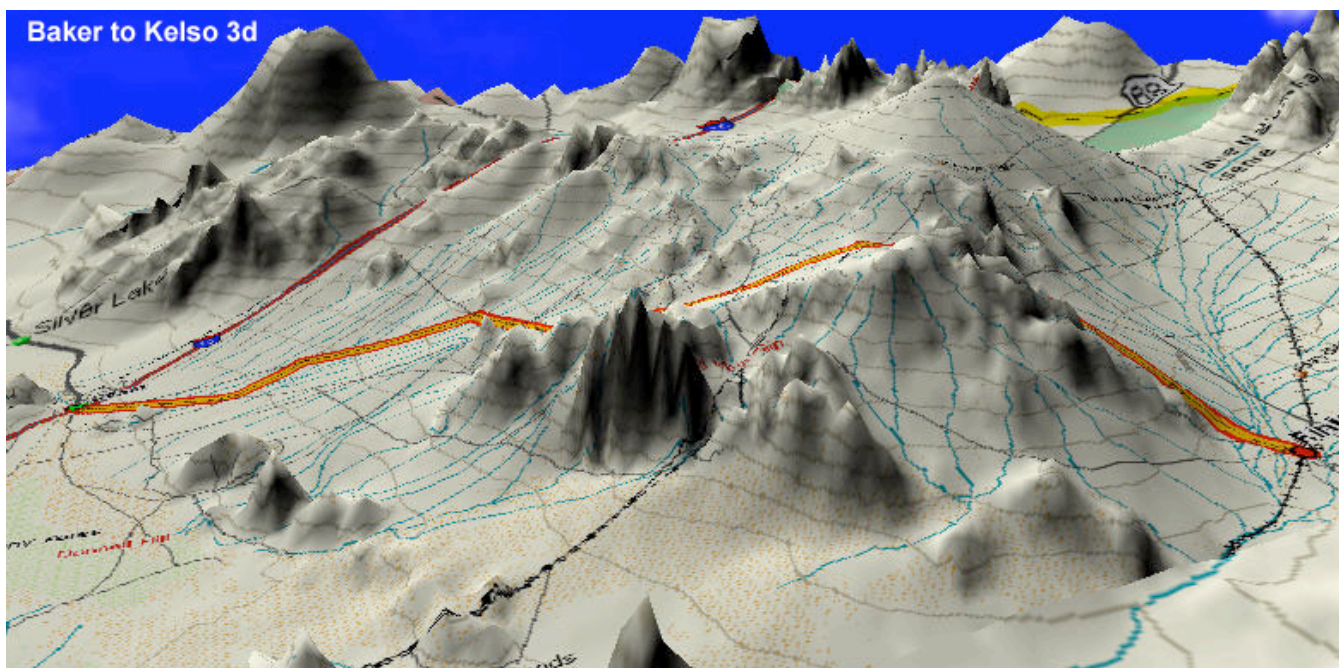
I got back up on the bike, more shooting pain in the knee, - the brace wasn't working. I took it off, sat in the van, - ate 6 electrolyte tablets. I looked at my helmet straps and they had white, salty, film on the black straps from my sweat. I put on a new headband, - took out some arch supports of the left shoe, and got back on the bike, - pain shot through the knee, my ass was hurting so badly that I couldn't sit down, - I started pedaling emphasizing my right leg only with my left doing nothing. "I'm not quitting"

Wait, - let me walk for a sec... I got off the bike and started walking around the van while they held my bike. The pain went away!! Unbelievable! "Guys, I feel a lot better"

Maybe something in my knee was swollen and pinching a nerve when I pedaled. So, - I walked the bike for about 100 yards, - up over a cattle crossing, and saw that the summit was right there. So, - I jumped back on the bike and coasted down the 10 mile descent into Kelso.

Of course, these shenanigans took us right out of the race. But, W was awesome and reiterated that the important thing is for us to finish and have fun; and, we have plenty of time before the Monday cut off... So, at the Time Station in Kelso, - W took off for his short ride and his last of 4 stages, (number 7), to Amboy. I walked around the Kelso train station, - again dead tired, - but convinced that if I walked, - my knee would hurt less. I was still wondering how a totally spent person was going to get back on the bike for that last 58 mile stage from Amboy to the finish line. ""





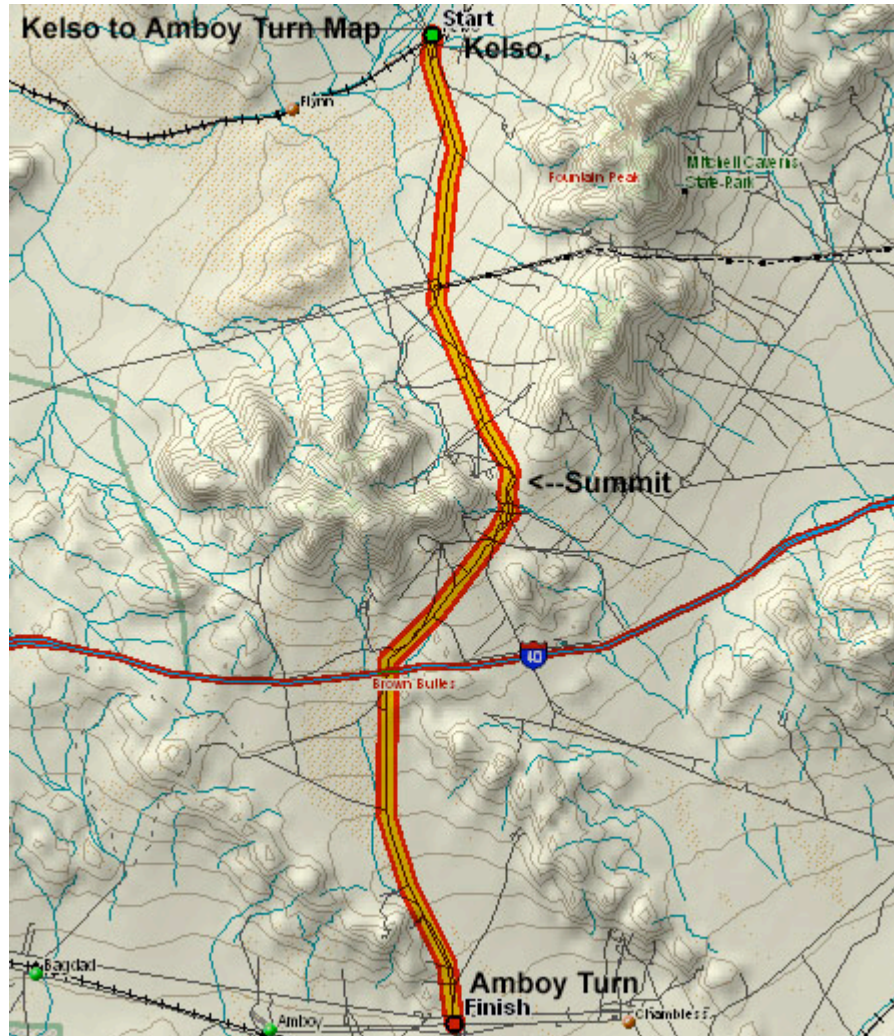
Stage Seven: Kelso to Almost Amboy, 33.8 miles. Elevation Gain: 2280'. (Willy)

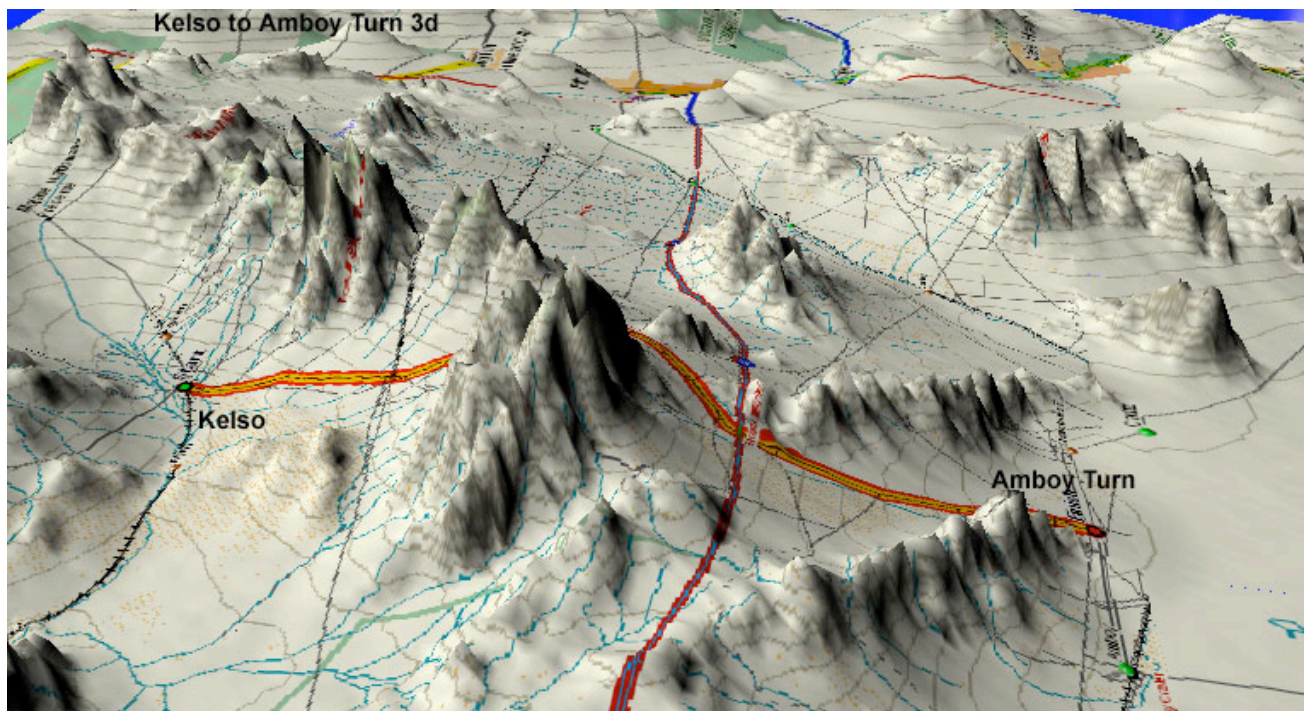
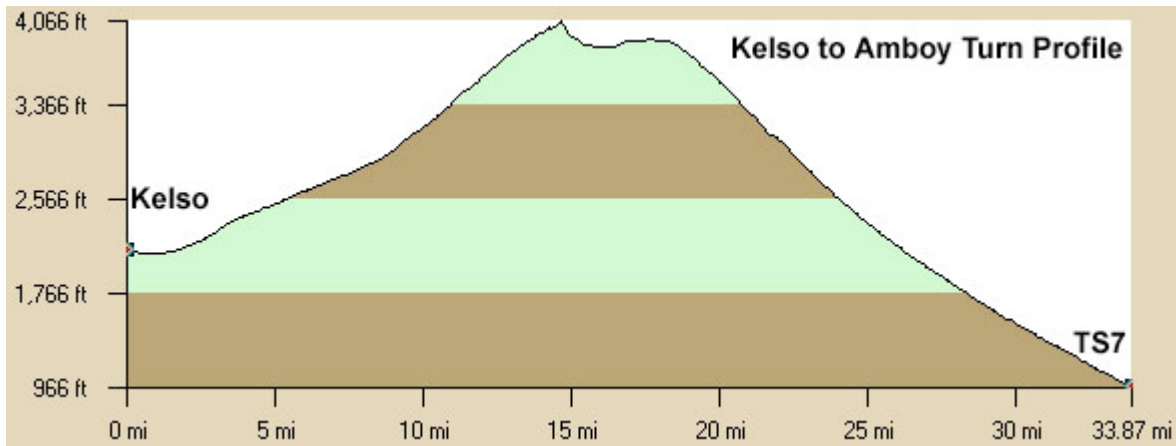
I now take off for what is hoped to be my final stage. We are still catching solo's here and there and I cannot tell you how tough these gays and gals are. As I pass them I say a few encouraging word careful not to sound to discouraging. I used to hate it in college when I ran cross country when you were bringing up the rear and someone would say "Hang in there" or "You're looking good". It made me feel like I must look like crap or must really be slowing down. I rode with Griffin probably longer than I should have, being this is a time trial, but we were going slow and up a pisser long gradual climb and it was nice to have a bit of conversation for a change. Come to find out I ride by this guys house quite often. He lives up off of Skyline (Hwy 35) near the top of Tunitus Creek. He explains where he lives and invites me to stop by next time through, which I will.

If you haven't noticed by now each rider or team has a Totem instead of a number or their name. You have to pick an animal and once someone has picked it it is taken for life. If I haven't mentioned our yet it is Tortuga which is Spanish for Turtle.

I leave Griffin and am flying up this 12, 2,000 foot climb. This is actually the hottest it has been for me but compared to prior years I believe we are having a mild race weather wise. By the time I get to the top I am ready for the climbing to be done. I have a few roller up top before another magnificent downhill. All the ups came with offsetting downs and were actually well worth going up for. My final downhill is gigantic and the roads are perfect. I am flying down at 40+ and again think that I can't wait for the downhill to be over it is so long. About halfway

down I again feel some Hot Foot coming on. It effects how hard I can pedal so I decide before I get to the bottom I will take a minute break so I can enjoy the rest of the hill. Once to the finish we have but 58 miles to go and Jim is fired up to get this thing done with. The transition at Amboy is set up Hawaiian style so both Jim and I get lei'd. I finally change out of biking clothes and into a t-shirt and shorts. Man does that feel great.





Stage Eight: Almost Amboy to Twenty Nine Palms, 58.2 miles. Elevation Gain: 4170'. (Jim)

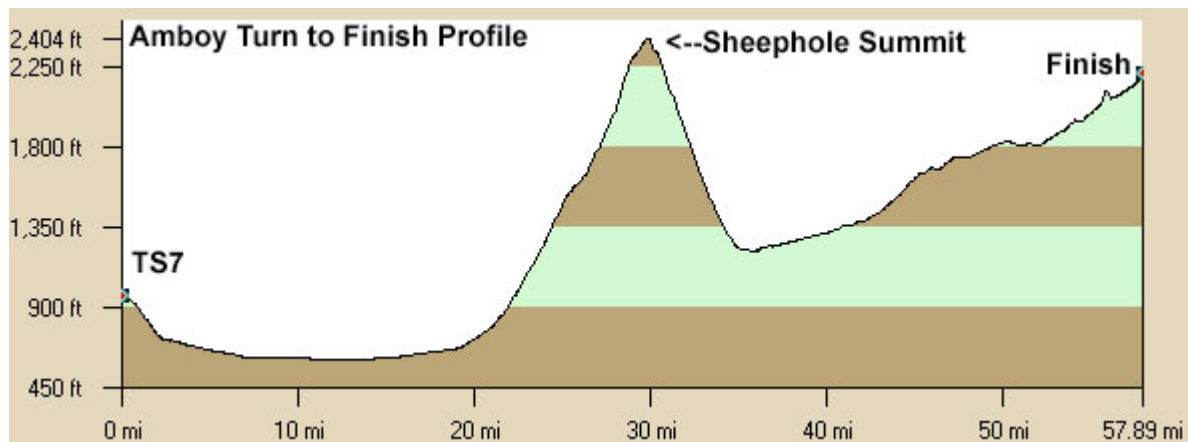
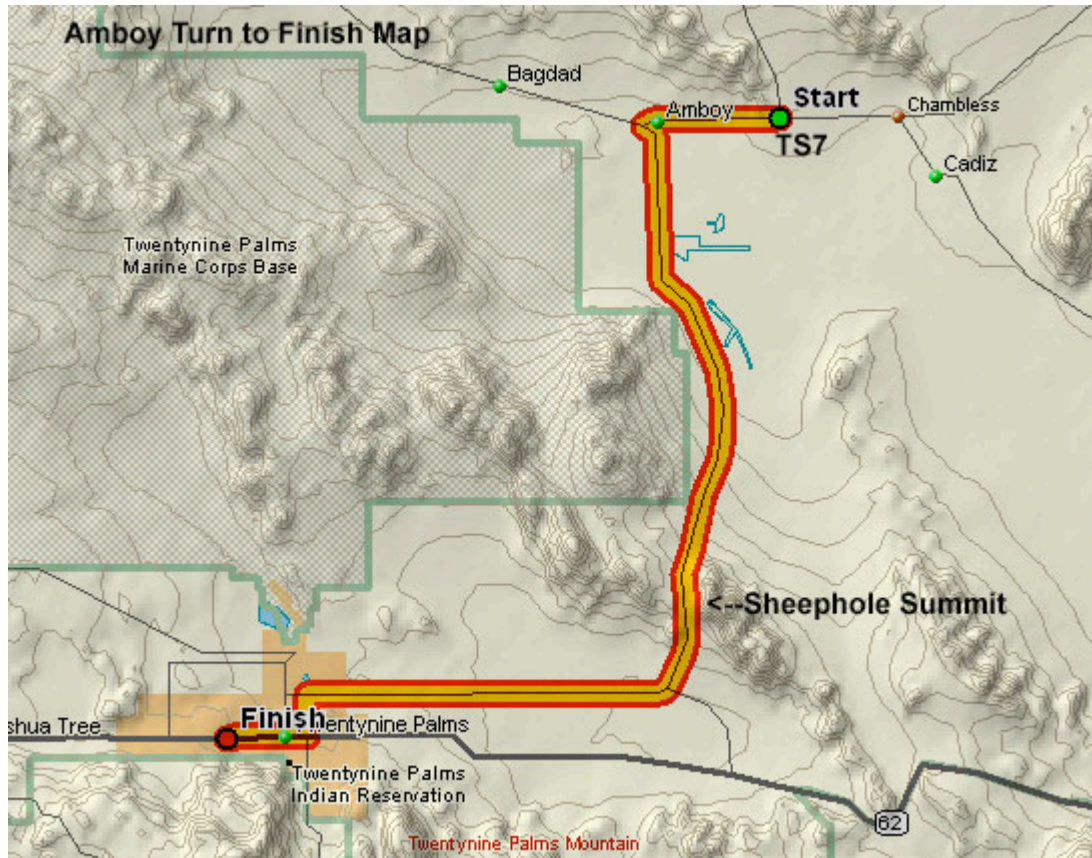
Jim seems to be feeling better but not as good as he would like. I think Jim is upset with himself for not paying attention to the profile of his second leg. Not because it will increase our time but more because he will not be able to enjoy his last stage as much as he wanted to. This stage has a gradual climb followed by and even more gradual climb. But we are getting back into civilization and the traffic is a big issue. There must be some recreational area nearby because lots of Huge trucks pulling ATV and boats fly by us doing ungodly speeds. We pass the 6 PM time and we must officially follow Jim which we have been doing anyways. The first day you must play leapfrog with your rider but the second day you have the option of leapfrog or driving directly behind him.

This section of road has very little in the way of a shoulder and the traffic makes it a no brainer to stay behind Jim. At one point a small car came up behind us and tried to pass at speed at the last minute. Remember we are only going 10-15 MPH but we are semi to the right and we have lights flashing and signs everywhere signifying we are a Slow Moving Vehicle. Well just as this car decides to pull around us a huge F-250ish Crew cab pulling a trailer decided to pull around not only us but the small car as well. All I hear is the worst screeching tires I have ever heard and I am just waiting for inevitable impact to the back of my van. All I could think of was at least the van is blocking Jim and I hope he has a clean pair of shorts to change into. Apparently the car slammed on its brakes and was gaining on us full on sideways with tire smoke everywhere. And then just as fast as it happened the drivers merrily sped down the road as if nothing happened. Man we cannot get off this road fast enough for me.

With but a few miles to go Jim is really hurting and would balk at having to ride up a curb if there were any. But he has not gotten off his bike and his knee seems to be hanging in there after we tweaked his seat a bit. With about a mile to go I get to get on my bike so we can finish together.



We pull into the hotel parking lot and break the toilet paper finish line in about 35.5 hours. This is about where we thought we would finish so we are both happy. Mostly because we do not have to ride anymore.





Final Thoughts

All in all I loved every inch of this ride and did not have one tough spot. I wish I did not have to stop on the climb but it was not due to fatigue I just needed a bit of a stretch. Actually the ride was a bit easier than I expected due to the milder weather, the easier climbs and the great team we had. I expected the climbs to be more Bay Area like and other than Townes Pass they were all just long grinds. Much tougher on your mind then on your body.



I cannot thank Ed and Rod enough for giving up an entire weekend to follow us through the desert. These are two guys neither Jim nor I had ever met before. They only made one wrong turn and only for about 100 yards. All their hand offs were perfect and they had anything we needed when we needed it. This was a rookie crew that performed like a veteran crew. We had many compliments as how well our hand off went on day one. We could not have done it without them and the sure sign of a great crew is one that allows you to feel great at the end.

We did not have so much as a flat the entire ride. No problem with any of the bikes nor the van. We had plenty of ice, food and chemicals (Hammer products) to get us through with plenty to spare.

I could not have asked for a better partner. Maybe a smarter partner but not a better one :) There are teams out there who are super competitive and stressed out the whole way. One partner upset, silently, that his partner isn't fast enough to keep them in contention for the lead. I would not have traded a minute with them. Our goal was to go as fast as we can while keeping the meter in the fun zone and for me we did just that. I do not think I could have ridden any faster on my stages without losing some of the fun and I was not willing to do that. At least not on a first try. I know that was Jim's intentions as well and only inexperience kept him from achieving it. But he was one tough rider out there riding his final two legs bonked. When we crossed the finish line he was not riding on fumes but COMPLETELY out of gas.

Willy in Pacifica