

Why this photo is important



The metal Triceratops on the road to Pescadero. Not so easy to see if the Mastadon that fell into the field a few years ago.

Oral history. We assume we can find everything about anything on the 'net, and heck, since I'm writing this right now and putting it out there, it's at least partly true. But not entirely. There's something missing when you experience the virtual instead of passing on the knowledge, the story, person-to-person.

Take the photo here. As a single point in time, and that's really what the 'net distills everything down to, it's not very significant. There's a large metal Triceratop at the edge of a field. OK, people have strange things in their yards. But the San Francisco peninsula is my yard. And that Triceratop goes back many, many years. OK, still, so what? Do I know the backstory, who put it there? No. But what I do know is that, for quite a few years, that Triceratop stared out across the field to a tall metal Mastadon. For years they faced off against each other in some sort of imaginary battle-to-be. Very few cyclists ever noticed; probably even fewer motorists. But I did. And every time I rode with a group past them, I pointed them out.

A few years ago, the Mastadon fell over and lay on its side for a couple months, until it was, literally, put back on its feet. It remained upright for another year or so before falling again, after a heavy rain, and it's remained on the ground ever since. During the drought, the weeds grew slowly so the fallen Mastadon remained visible, if you were looking for it. Today? You have to look really hard to see evidence of it.

Without an oral tradition, telling the story as people ride past, this imaginary battlefield... well, frankly, I'm struggling a bit to make my point. But what if I'd never pointed out the Machine Gun Man sculptures to my son on Stage Road? It's gone now, but he'll remember always, and some day he'll be taking someone past that house and tell someone about it. Something that ties us to the

roads we ride, something that, told by someone rather than researched on-line, creates a sort of bond.

Truthfully, Kevin, my son, gets a bit tired of me wanting to stop and check things out on a ride. Lack of permanence, and the need to remember what's gone, doesn't seem as important to his generation. I think his initial interest was easier to encourage because it gave him a distraction at a time when riding wasn't very easy for him and a 100k ride was more about survival than doing it really fast. And of course when your main focus is on the number of watts you're producing and your speed, there's less time to spot and talk about the things you ride past.

I wonder if the reason I'm bringing this up now is because I'm slowing down a bit as I get older, giving me more time to see things, or I'm looking for distractions to take my mind off the difficulty of keeping up with people.