

An epiphany about the nature of a mountain



The photo has nothing to do with the title of this piece but shows one of my very rare rides that include Canada Road north of Jefferson. Not the usual Sunday ride; Kevin (my son, not the pilot) was off doing paint-ball with some friends he went to school with, so I checked with the other Kevin (the pilot) to see if he was going to be around. Yes, and best of all, he was going to be dead tired from a tough ride on Saturday!

Due to the fogged-in coast, we skipped my usual Sunday ride (OLH/Pescadero/Tunitas), choosing OLH/West Alpine instead. I'm still dealing with a bronchitis sort of thing so no great speed of Old LaHonda (24 something) but it was nice riding at a pace I could almost talk. And it was fun taking someone past the duck pond who'd never seen the turtles before.

West Alpine? Well yeah, it would have been nice to be breathing a bit more evenly; a couple times Kevin was pretty concerned about my hacking cough, but overall, it actually seemed pretty easy. I was expecting something more in the mid-50s than a 47-something. It was reflecting upon the West Alpine climb a few minutes later that I came to the epiphany mentioned in the title.

What makes a great climb? What makes an epic mountain? Is it elevation, grade, distance? Easy to say it's a combination of all three, but that's not quite right. It's what you do with that mountain. It's how you (and others) personally relate to it. By itself, it's just a road up a mountain. If that road never sees a bicycle, then it might as well not exist. If that road is used in racing and has been known to separate the wheat from the chaff, it becomes legend. Better yet, if it's a road up a mountain that you regularly challenge yourself on, it becomes personal.

Not everything defined epic by being used in famous bike races becomes personal though. To tell you the truth, when I climbed the Izoard a few weeks ago, it didn't reach out and challenge me. A beautiful climb, yes. But compared to Ventoux, the Tourmalet, Port de Bales or Sonora Pass, it's just not that big a deal. But here's the puzzle piece that I think pulls it all together. I wasn't pushing myself on the Izoard (the guy I rode up it with kicks serious butt on the flats but doesn't climb well). My perception of the Izoard is that it's not as tough as Tunitas!

OK, getting back to the ride. After climbing West Alpine I rode north on Skyline, all the way to 92, then dropped down to Canada Road and back to Redwood City. Got blown around a lot on the descent on Skyline to 92; anybody who thinks their bike is unstable when riding that section, let me tell you, it's not the bike!