

## It's been a while. Still alive.



I should know better than to climb Joaquim. I don't even want to think about how long it's been since my last update. What's changed since then? Main thing is confirmation that the new, higher dose of Hydroxyurea (the chemo-type med for the mild bone marrow cancer I have) did a real number on my hematocrit. If Lance Armstrong were at the performance end of the hematocrit scale, I'm that far on the wrong side. 39 is not a good place for me; my normal hematocrit has run between 42.5-45, and my body had, up until now, adapted to increasing levels of this drug by increasing what's called MCV (mean corpuscle volume) to compensate for declining RBC count (how many red blood cells in a given volume).

Why the increase in dosage? Trying to shut down a bleeding issue that sometimes happens when your body manufactures way too many platelets. It's called acquired Von Willebrand, which is related to regular old Von Willebrand aka hemophilia. Fortunately, in my case, the bleeding issues (razor cuts that wouldn't stop bleeding) went away as soon as I stopped taking daily aspirin. The doctor wanted to keep chasing the rabbit though, thinking that, if I get my platelet count low enough, the acquired Von Willebrand will go away. But you know what? Who cares. Unless it causes an issue, acquired Von Willebrand is just a thing, a bark without a bite. And the research I did showed that it's not nearly as rare as previously thought; more than half the people with my particular mild bone marrow cancer thingee actually have it. Sending the link to that (peer-reviewed) paper probably helped convince my doc I could go back to my prior dosage.

All of that to explain why I'm kind of sucking on the bike these days. It's probably just an excuse; it could be that the gradual decline in fitness as you get older isn't a straight line but might have little up and down bumps along the way, and right now I happen to be in a down bump.

I'm also beginning to think about my next bike. Don't get me wrong, I absolutely LOVE my current machine, a Trek Emonda that now has nearly 50,000 miles on it. But it's got as low a gear as its drivetrain can handle (50/34 front, 11/28 rear) and I need at least a 30 for stuff like Redwood Gulch, and it won't be long, within the lifetime of my next bike, that it will have to be a 32 or 34.

And disc brakes. I don't need them for stopping power; I need them to reduce hand fatigue on long descents. My hands aren't as strong as they used to be, and eventually I'll be dealing with arthritis, like most do as they get older.

The new gearing options come without a downside. Disc brakes? A lot more maintenance (pad wear and bleeding the hydraulic system) and a lot more noise. Plus a pound of weight. But making descents more enjoyable offsets all of that. I hope!