

Anything to avoid the fog!!! But this? Umunhum?



Just 4 times ever to the top of this beast, Mt. Umunhum opposite Mt. Hamilton Kevin wasn't happy about this. I'd told him Saturday that we'd be going to the coast, we just couldn't keep waiting until the fog cleared. Then he arrives at the house and I'm telling him no, we gotta stay out of the fog zone, and I come up with Umunhum.

Last time we visited Umunhum was in 2017, with one ride earlier, sometime around 2011, which for some reason isn't showing up on Strava. There was also my first ride up it back in the mid-70s.

We aren't in shape to do a complete loop and return home, opting instead for riding to it and returning to the San Jose Train station for the trip home. Instead of 124 miles (and this wouldn't be a 124 miles we'd want to do even if we were both in great shape!) it came to about 67.5 plus another three miles back from the train station.

Sure, we were wearing leg warmers and base layers when we left, since the forecast showed temps staying pretty cool, even without the fog. We could have done without; it was pretty nice after the first 30 minutes or so.



It's actually quite a distance from Redwood City to food in Los Gatos, but I figured if we ate earlier (Peet's in Los Altos) we'd probably be running on fumes 3/4 of the way up Umunhum. Worked out well and we came across a very nice French Patisserie, Le Fluer de Cocoa! The person helping us was very definitely French too. Kevin, however, chose to engage in English. Why?

Maybe because he was feeling a bit off? I was outside, watching the bikes, but could see inside as Kevin was being taken care of. And as he was about to pay, he just froze in place. I know that one. I came in before he started involuntarily moving all over the place, got him on the floor, assured the woman that, for Kevin, this was normal and he'd be fine in a couple of minutes. Which of course he was.



There's actually a pair of SPD-SL road shoes hanging from those wires. Up to now, the ride had been pretty nice. And it continued pretty nice for maybe another 3 or 4 miles before it started getting a bit not so nice (climbing) and then really not so nice as Hicks wound its way up to the base of Umunhum. Each time I've climbed Hicks, I've thought it won't be as bad as I remember. And it always is. You do finally get where you need to go, but in the process there's at least one place where you might have gone into your very lowest gear, and as bad as Hicks is, it's nothing like Umunhum.

You remember that the first part isn't so bad, but oh geez, it's terrible. But a lot less terrible than what comes after it. Umunhum is like Page Mill between Gates 3 & 4, only worse. So much longer. So much straighter in a few of the really steep pitches.

I was going into crazy-sweating mode, as usual, primarily, almost only, on the right side of my head. Guessing this has nothing to do with where I sweat, but more likely how I hold my head when climbing. Would keep pushing the helmet against my head, to try and squeeze out the pads and headband, but that never seemed to work well. I did remove my sunglasses about half-way up.

Gearing. Yeah, I was out of gears. Somehow I managed to keep turning the pedals, spurred on by my Garmin's countdown (remaining feet to climb), which made it feel like I was getting somewhere. Kevin had finally gotten tired of riding so slowly so he rode on a corner or two ahead, but not so far I wasn't there to take care of him when he had another seizure, about 2/3rds of the way up the climb. Like the earlier one, not a huge production, just two minutes or so.

He gets back up and moving, once again putting some distance between us until it finally levels out as you head around the back side of the mountain for the first time, just before the final nasty assault, a very short but steep pitch to the location of the old radar building. That last steep part might not be so bad if you don't have anyone in your group who is going to go charging up it, claiming they're not showing off, like Kevin.

We spent a few minutes admiring the view, which, from the main visitor center, is primarily to the east (Mt Hamilton) and north (San Francisco), and stopped again on the flat section behind, to get a picture of Monterey Bay. And then... down.

Umunhum is a terrible descent. Too steep, corners banked badly, dramatic drop-offs. And one of those descents where the guy (almost always a guy) who thinks there's no need for disc brakes... that guy has a chance of becoming a believer on Umunhum.

And me? I was a bit concerned about my carbon rim brake wheels with 54,000+ miles on them but things seemed to be working well. Until, at the intersection with Hicks, we stopped to check things out. Good thing, that. My front rim was delaminating and exploding outward, just barely holding the tire in place. It was so close to blowing off the deformed rim. I was looking at it and wondering if I actually had enough time to let the air out before it would blow up while I'm desperately trying to deflate it.



Rim fails after just 54,000 miles? That's actually amazing, almost unheard of life for a wheel. This wheel's retirement is well-deserved. Fortunately it seemed intact enough at 50psi (normally I run 100psi) to try and nurse it back to the train station. Not much fun doing the remainder of the descents using the rear brake only, and it slowed down our speed just a bit (I wasn't going to risk riding really fast with a front tire that could blow at any time). Of course, we had nothing but our Garmins to get us to the train station and no intuitive feel for the remaining time it was going to take to get there. But it was going to be close, really close. I'd thought at first the train left at 4:02pm but fortunately it's actually 4:12pm. Fortunate because I'm not sure the Garmin was doing its best getting us there, losing some time and also because Kevin decided to have yet another seizure (and again, important to remember he can feel them coming on ahead of time, get to the side of the road, lie his bike down and get on the ground).

And we did make it! Meeting that same train after Mt Ham a couple weeks ago, we made it by about 30 seconds. This time, a whole two minutes.

In the end I'm happy I got to have another ride on par with the ride up Mt Ham two weeks ago. Reasonably warm temps and a long climb. Mt Hamilton is long because it's.... long. 18 miles. Umunhum is long because it's STEEP. Much steeper than Mt Hamilton.