

2013

Bike Notes 2013

In the evening in the dining car on Amtrak, they let you pick your own table. They ask you to sit your party of two on one side of the table, but your party can sit by itself if there is an empty table. The situation is different at breakfast. We were the first diners in the dining car this morning. The next guy, Louie, sat down in front of us. Berta thought he was just lonely, but when Bill also was told to sit at our table, it was clear they didn't want four people spilling ketchup on the paper table coverings at three different tables. It's impossible not to make a mess when the condiments come in those little rippy plastic packets. And we are Condiment People. Ketchup on scrambled eggs, sugar on grits, butter on cinnamon raisin toast, four squares per slice. The only reason there wasn't a salsa smudge on the table when we left is because they wouldn't give us any salsa.

Last year, when we took this same train to Eugene, we were delayed by six hours in San Luis Obispo because they forgot to bring a satisfactory complement of locomotives. This year we are on schedule as far as we can determine considering we don't know where we are and all announcements have to do with whether the café car is currently open. The café operator has a particularly somnolent voice. Just hearing his announcements induces yawns and droopy eyelids. Last year, our delay put us at Mount Shasta at midday, when we could appreciate the snow on it (even in August) and its grandeur. We thought that was very cool. It turns out that Mount Shasta can get even prettier. Today, we rolled past her at that perfect magical pink-orange moment of sunrise. There was some snow again on the grey northern slope.

The conversation at breakfast was wide-ranging. Topics included The Singularity, wastewater treatment, The Grateful Dead, violin playing, bass guitar playing, how Bill was told he was acting suspiciously last night by an Amtrak worker when he was doing absolutely nothing to merit the comment, how Facebook wants to add 5 billion new users, and how it is easier to make a living as a bass player in Colorado than in Boston or San Francisco. For the second time on this trip, we had a person refer to "AI" like everyone is on acronym familiarity with Artificial Intelligence. Last night's comment was a lament that AI is going to replace all of our jobs. This morning's comment was excitement that AI is going to save us from all work. But the person this morning also thinks that in five to ten years, computers will program themselves. Berta wants to know what useless geegaw a computer is going to dream up when it has enough processing power to make decisions for itself. Maybe they will autonomously follow the cat around and get a video of it that millions of other computers will autonomously watch for us, saving countless wasted hours.

A woman who heard we are detouring in Eugene asked if we are going to the donut shop. "What?" we asked, thinking she couldn't have possibly said "donut shop" and we must have misunderstood her accent. After way too much effort, we learned that Voodoo Doughnut (yes, they put the ugh in donut) in Eugene has a massive world-wide following of at least two people: this woman, and the person who said she had (HAD!) to go there. She told us we had (HAD!) to go there too. Out of all the things to do in Eugene? It wasn't even clear that she had gone to Voodoo Doughnuts. Stop telling us what to do!

After leaving Santa Barbara, our train window started out pretty clear but then became progressively dirtier. So we have a challenge for the smarty pants at UCSB: Self-cleaning train windows. We have decided that part of the problem is the electrostatic charge that builds up on a moving train. Part of it might also be that we have traveled 700 miles. Our window has gone from serviceable to bad to worse. It started raining a while ago and John the Optimist was excited that the rain would clean off the window. He just proclaimed that it is much worse now. We have decided we would pay \$10 more for our ticket to have someone clean our window. We just have to find an Amtrak employee who is willing to ride in the little harness we have rigged up outside our window.

We want clean windows because we have a new high definition video camera with us and are amassing endless hours of footage of landscape and other trains passing us. We will post some video as a test of your allegiance. We will save you from hearing our distracted mumbling ("Is this on?"), but don't know where we will get some New Age soundtrack to replace the mumbling. With some luck and some hours of editing, we might have something worth watching.

Day One, Eugene to Florence, Oregon

Today's mileage: 10

Total bike mileage so far: 10 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$3.52

Weather: Windy, humid, and cool

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0

Animals for the day: A pigeon who was building a nest in the support of the historic Siuslaw Bridge in Florence. He was way more interesting than the flying rats who live near our house.

There are bike tour days when nothing goes right. This was not one of those days. We knew the route from Eugene to Florence in Oregon was more than 70 miles with a decent climb about halfway. There are a few campgrounds shown on the map, but nothing with a bed and a hot shower. Now, we have done enough bike touring to know that a lot of mileage on the first day is dumb. It takes a few days for the legs to understand that we are serious, so starting out with more than 70 miles is D-U-M-B dumb. Hmm. Options... We thought of a one-way car rental, or the possibility that John would drive a rental car back to Eugene and take the bus back to Berta. Before that could happen, we thought about U-Haul. For about a Benjamin, we drove a van with no rear-view mirror and a laughable "Green Meter" that never decided we were conservative enough with the accelerator. There were people bearing down on us, so John bore down on the throttle and we chugged over to the coast. The 10-foot U-Haul had just the two bikes in the back. We had a choice between laying the bikes on their sides with the bags on or standing them up and tying them to the railings. We decided on tying them up. John, who if you don't know is a knot enthusiast, used some mooched twine to tie up the horses for the trip. The knots were only to keep them from tipping over, not to keep them perfectly still, so any kind of deceleration caused a big bonk in the back. Berta imagined the bikes crashing into the walls, smashing our stuff. This never materialized. It was probably the big sliding door rattling around. We arrived in Florence and drove to the Bi-Mart to return the U-Haul. The guy accepting the truck walked out of The Consignment Store, which kind of makes a person think of prom dresses, but he really stretched his Harley T-shirt and his store included many dollies and moving supplies. He walked over to another building and returned five minutes later with information about the Seal Caves up the coast from here. We decided against going to the Seal Caves, but we did end up at his recommended Bay Street Grille for dinner. They have

three shiny lacquered wooden stingray sculptures on the ceiling and two squids in raw dry driftwood near the entrance. The driftwood squids were about four feet long with large glass eyes applied. They offer twists on the Martini called the Bikinitini and the Flirtini (we did not sample). They have a nice lineup of beers on draught that included a mild amber called Dead Guy by the Rogue Brewery. Strange name, good beer. They deep-fry their calamari at the Bay Street Grille, which makes a person feel a little greasy and cheap.

After releasing the truck and before we saw the squid sculptures, we had about three hours to occupy before we could check into lodging in Old Town Florence. In Old Town, there are about ten restaurant choices and thirty places to buy something that cannot be used to do anything. If you can dust it, you can find it here. Interspersed are shops to buy some morsels to tide you over until the next restaurant and plenty of pretty things in a multitude of art galleries. We got to the Siuslaw Pioneer Museum right about when it opened at noon. We talked with the nice white-haired lady at the door for a while, not aware that she has a bad cold that her buddies recognized right away when they heard her voice. We thought she always sounded like Elvis. The museum was a nice one. Highlights in our minds include the testing equipment from the milk factory (lots of fine laboratory glassware), some Japanese buoys made of glass that floated over here once in a long while, maybe 20 old typewriters, hundreds of old cameras, and a C-clamp that had a three-foot jaw with a C that was fashioned from a well-twisted four-inch diameter branch of a tree. While looking at the glass buoys, one of which was had two globes stuck together like diplococci, Berta started to wonder aloud how they made those so long ago. Oops, she thought, glassblowing isn't exactly newfangled.

This part of the Oregon coast is particularly exposed to the dangers of Pacific tsunami waves. There are signs everywhere about tsunami evacuation routes. The terrain here is pretty hilly, so if a person had enough warning and an ATV, it would be no problem. They probably do have an ATV, because it seems that there are about four dune vehicles for every person here. We are just within a mile of the ocean, and there are huge sand dunes between here and there. You would need to travel only a short distance to find something to rent that would speed you up or down these dunes. The two most popular items seem to be sandboards and ATV. We are guessing about sandboards, but we guess you have to reapply wax every day. Every place that rents these things also has a playground, pool, and miniature golf presumably so that while Dad is out shredding the sand the kids can drain his wallet playing games.

We watched a video about the drawbridge action of the Siuslaw Bridge twice so that we could hear somebody authoritative pronounce the word. It is Sigh-oos-slaw according to this narrator. Umpqua seems a little more straightforward, even if it does seem like a trick for the old lips. Berta doesn't care how they want her to say Willamette, she is going to force a big "lamb" right in the middle.

Trivia angers Berta. John thinks that trivia is some sort of indicator of intelligence, but Berta thinks it doesn't really take smarts to know that Catherine the Great was the longest-ruling female leader of Russia. Maybe Berta is just bitter at the eighth-grader on Teen Jeopardy tonight.

Day Two, Florence to North Bend, Oregon

Today's mileage: 52 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 62 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$3.67

Weather: 80 degrees with stronger wind as the day went

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0

Animals for the day: Two white goats, ten sheep, a seal in the Siuslaw River, and lots of water fowl.

We pedaled for about a hundred yards before we had to walk our bikes on the sidewalk of the historic Siuslaw Bridge. The bridge was built in 1936 by WPA workers and it has architectural features that would look right at home in Gotham City. While we were crossing the bridge, a whitish-gray seal floated on his back toward the ocean. We watched him for about ten seconds, both silently worrying because he was so still that he might be kind of, you know, not alive, but we both let out a little “Oh, good!” when he finally rolled over and dove under water. Those possum seals are such kidders!

It rained overnight. We have rain gear, but we didn't need it today. We did make use of our fenders for some scattered puddles. It started out about 65 degrees and climbed up to 80. All day there have been luscious white clouds on plenty of blue sky. We are really seeing the sand dunes now as they are about fifty feet tall and right at the edge of the road. In spots, they have spilled into the roadway and take up half of the generous bike lane. There are large pine trees with their feet buried in the sand at the periphery of the dunes. That is on the right side of the road as we travel south. On the left side of the road is wild, tall, pine forest.

It really seems like most of North America is flat unpopulated land, right? Well, the unpopulated part is pretty accurate. A person can ride for miles and miles on nice pavement without seeing a house nor a stop sign. Flat? No. We are spending much of this ride within just a few miles of the coast. The max elevation is about five hundred feet. Flat? No. We go down fifty feet, up fifty feet. This is America! Can't we fill in these dips? And the bridges! Berta has a bit of an issue with heights, especially when the height is over a body of water. What ever happened to ferries? And what about those flat bridges like they have in Seattle over Lake Washington? That would be good. But no, in Oregon, they have to do behemoth iron structures a hundred feet over the water with knee-high railing and howling cross winds. Yesterday we crossed a bridge that had a button we could press that alerted drivers that there were bicyclists on the bridge. It probably was on for twenty seconds and then the lights flashed “75 points for the one with the bright yellow jersey!” We are thinking of starting a doping program so we can get over these bridges faster.

A while ago we decided that it is worth it to investigate when we see a sign pointing to some view point or natural landmark or historical marker. We still hesitate a little bit when the sign points toward a big hill. If the turnoff goes uphill, we pay now and play later. If the attraction is at the bottom of a big hill, now that's a quandary. We can get ourselves way downhill in no time at all, only to find out something is closed or worse, lame. Even so, it seems like we have decided that the worst thing to do would be to never find out what was over there. Today a sign asked us to fly down a 11% hill for about a half a mile to see the Umpqua River Lighthouse. The lighthouse was nice even though it wasn't bathed in the spectacular light of sunset like all the glossy photographs in the galleries here promised us (probably because it was before noon). The real view at this spot was when we turned around and looked at the ocean. We were rewarded with a spectacular vista of ocean, harbor, sand dunes, conifers, and aquaculture happening in “The Triangle” where they created a quiet spot in the ocean surrounded by rock jetties. We tried to see the whale freeway that is supposed to be out between the buoys. We had no quarter for the telescope to see the whales, so we squinted until we thought we saw whales. More than likely they were imaginary whales since late November is the time when they pass here going south. We did look at real line drawings of whales on the educational sign.

We came upon a road construction site today. It started halfway up a good hill where the "Right Lane Closed Ahead" sign was followed by cones giving us exclusive access to the slow lane. The magic lasted for about five hundred yards before we got to the actual construction. They had the slow lane gouged out about four inches deep and four feet wide to replace the asphalt. It seemed like our only choice was to be in the roadway with cars trying to get up this grade. It was the proverbial hairout. We stopped to let a clot of vehicles pass and looked ahead to see one of the construction workers doing an exaggerated charade that said "COME... OVER... HERE... AND... RIDE... ON THE... PROTECTED... SIDE... OF THE... TRUCKS..." We could have hugged him. We hopped off the bikes, lumbered across the trench in the road over to the shoulder, gave that worker a big grateful thumbs up, and pedaled the rest of the hill without expending any more adrenaline. At the top of the hill, we pulled into a wayside viewpoint and saw the lighthouse we visited earlier well in the distance and hundreds of feet below us.

Day Three, North Bend to Bandon, Oregon

Today's mileage: 36 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 98 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$3.45 along the way today

Weather: 60 degrees to start, up to 78 with stronger wind as the day went

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0

Animals for the day: a whole lotta crab

We stayed right on the route last night at a Quality Inn. The lobby had nice quality, but we walked out of the decent lobby past the okay first building and to the section eight housing in building three. We wonder if we hadn't asked for the AARP discount (and gotten it) if we would have had a better room.

We had dinner at La Herradura. After Berta used the Google Translate app on her totally awesome phone, we realized that there wasn't a surface in the restaurant that did not have a horseshoe on it. Now we know what a herradura is. John ordered a carne asada burrito that occupied most of the beautiful blue serving plate it arrived on. The burrito, served mojado, was ten inches long and delicious. Berta almost never wanders from ordering the chili relleno and today was no exception. Hers was good too. She made a vow to find a good recipe for hot pickled cabbage relish like they served there.

Our route today started out right on the coast, away from Highway 101. We stopped at one of those tiny coffee sheds and bought a couple of large muffins for insurance against a long stretch on the road. After some miles of shoreline with twisted pines on the side of the road, we crossed a working harbor (Fresh Tuna at the dock!) and turned up Seven Devils Road. We looked and looked for any devils, and never counted one. It was a beautiful quiet road up that gave us a vantage for miles around. Most of this area is well covered with large pine trees, with just a few real sore-thumb areas that look like somebody did some clear-cutting.

We entered Bandon on a back road and stumbled on the Bandon Wastewater plant. We stopped so John could talk to his people. The Bandon plant is an activated sludge plant that has a flow of 250,000 gallons per day. Recently, the city manager wanted to give the city council a tour of the plant and only two of the five council members showed up. They used to dispose of their grit at the city dump until a child of one of the council members said it made the dump stink. Now somebody wants them to pay \$900 per load of grit to have it trucked away. The operators do all the lab work, unlike larger cities where there are lab workers who do all of the lab work and there are operators who control the plant. In the lab in Bandon they measure TSS, Volatiles, BOD, CBOD and DO and all sorts of things John knows about. The water treatment plant just added a small UV disinfectant that is made in

Germany. If they need parts, the parts come from Germany and not in a timely manner. It was entertaining to talk to the dedicated operators at Bandon and to realize that we all have similar problems.

Lodging wasn't available for a few hours, so we lolled around the boardwalk and downtown. Bandon has some excellent large wood carvings of sea animals on the boardwalk. There was a long complex of docks that allowed many people to be fishing about fifty feet from shore. We watched as a guy hauled back and hurled something into the water. Splash! Then it seemed like only a few minutes later, he would pull the rope hand over hand to retrieve what turned out to be a crab basket. He measured the crabs and threw some of them back. A woman standing next to us hollered over to the dock. A woman on the dock replied with an enthusiastic wave. "We have food!" she said. The whole time we observed this, there were two small boats in the harbor turning slow circles under clouds of interested sea gulls.

The Bandon Inn sits on a bluff overlooking the downtown area, the busy harbor, and miles of spectacular coastline. Their rooms are very nice. They have a booklet that admonishes guests who would dream of cooking crabs in the room ("We have an arrangement with Tony's Seafood to clean and cook your crabs"). We enjoyed sitting in our room and watching the weather change in the evening. We also turned on Ironman and fell asleep before he breaks free from his captors in Afghanistan.

Day Four, Bandon to Port Orford, Oregon

Today's mileage: 30 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 128 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$3.75

Weather: Rain and wind in our faces

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0.5

Animals for the day: No animals were dumb enough to be out in the rain

Today we accomplished thirty hard-fought miles. It started to rain about five miles along the road. The wind started immediately and was very noticeable since we rode along unprotected bluffs for a while. It rained steadily for at least an hour. We stood on a patio at a gas station convenience store and had some food while we dried off a little. Berta thought she would be okay leaving the stop without getting out her rain pants, but she left without them and then quickly decided the rain pants were important. We backtracked half a block to the Langlois Public Library, where the kind librarian let us get out of the rain for a minute. Berta used a spacious bathroom to put on her rain pants. She tried not to leave all of the water drops she deposited on the floor.

The librarian asked where we were going for the day and for the whole trip. He recommended a motel and a restaurant at today's destination, then carefully drew a detailed map for us. We pedaled for another thirteen miles and went to the motel he suggested. We wouldn't in a million years have gone to this motel based on its dilapidated sign that clung to two large poles sticking out of the weeds along a steep road with OCEAN VIEW and a huge arrow ten feet tall painted on the asphalt. But the librarian proved right as we checked into the Castaway Motel and entered our humble room to discover a spectacular view of the bay and a dock a hundred feet below. Saint John took all of our soggy clothes to a laundromat at the edge of town while Berta took a shower and warmed up. It started to rain again.

The guy at the motel desk told John that the place to have lunch was three blocks away at The Crazy Norwegian. [Insert your own Norwegian comment here]. We walked over in our newly cleaned and still slightly warm clothing and discovered that fifteen carloads of

people had gotten the same message and occupied every table in the crowded restaurant. We turned on our heels to look for option number two. We saw a couple outside heading for the door. They asked if there was a line. We told them there wasn't an empty seat in the place. Sensing they were locals, we asked where else to go. "Griff's on the Dock," they answered. We walked back up the hill, then down the extreme hill to the beach and across the wind-whipped dock to Griff's.

We selected one of about six tables, looked at the specials on the board, and talked to our fresh-faced server. Somewhere in there, she said, "if you have never tried cioppino, you need to try ours." Now, we have discussed cioppino a little (Berta: "I just don't think tomatoes and seafood go together") and fish a lot more (John: "I know I should eat more fish... okay, I will have the sirloin steak with mashed potatoes"). But we try to be good visitors, and something just clicked. We went for sharing the cioppino, a ham and cheese sandwich, and a cup of clam chowder. You can't go too far wrong with a ham and cheese, and the clam chowder was super good; but the big winner was the cioppino. It was thick, with peppers and spices like a great pasta sauce, packed with fish and seafood they had fresh right there, and served with bread that was roasted with real garlic butter. This was a major revelation for us. We may never have cioppino again, but on this day we did, and it was good. John later would say "\$14.95 for that little bowl of soup!" but at the time he said "YUM!"

We returned to the motel, feeling like our horizon was just a little wider than when we left. We watched from our room as boats returned to the dock. We again tried to watch Ironman, this time from late in the movie. Again, John fell asleep, and now he thinks Berta is conspiring to keep him from watching Ironman. She saw the ending and told him all about it, but it wasn't the same, even when she waved her hands.

We woke up early and knew that breakfast was within the city limits but really had no concept of how far it was. We are used to people telling us that things are within walking distance, but they have no idea. At the Crazy Norwegian yesterday, the server insisted that the Paradise Café is close enough to walk to. After about a half a mile, Berta began to whine. After about three quarters of a mile, the café finally materialized. It was very quiet, so we picked up menus on our way in. The cook arrived and when saw our menus he asked, "What, do you want my job?" It was a good-natured josh by someone who seemed to be on some kind of stimulant. He tried to get us to cook our own meals. The breakfast was huge, tasted possibly a little of last night's fish dinner, and was more expensive than we expected. Our inflated bill did not reflect what the marquee had promised. We paid up with a \$0.75 tip that we hoped was insulting and began the long walk home, feeling ripped off.

Returning to the motel, we noticed a sour smell in the room and determined that someone in our complex was cooking fish for breakfast. It probably was the couple in the room next to us who rode a pair of Harley Davidson motorcycles. He had the bigger bike and carried a Yorkshire terrier in a mesh carrier behind him in the passenger seat. They were talkers. We rolled away from them as they continued talking to the motel proprietor. They passed us several miles down the road and waved with a cute little beep beep. Within minutes, they were miles ahead of us.

Day Five, Port Orford to Gold Beach, Oregon

Today's mileage: 37 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 165 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$3 something

Weather: Fog and sun and fog again

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0.2 because we got a little hungry

Animals for the day: Llamas, donkeys, and a chicken in one yard; goats and a hairy pig in another

Cedar Valley Road is a beautiful, mostly flat, twisty country road that practically nobody drives except right at the north end of it to get to the golf course. The slender valley is framed by pine-covered mountains of some height but we didn't have to climb them, so who cares. By the time we got to Cedar Valley Road today, the fog had cleared and the sun shone on us, the golfers, and the llamas we saw. The llamas, recently shorn and looking a little pathetic because of it, live with their friend the chicken. Further down the road, some other llamas live with their friend a black hairy pig.

We pedaled down this lovely road for miles, seeing only a few cars. There were many small farms along the way, some with tomatoes in tunnels and one with lots of lettuce, green and purple. At the end of the road, we met up with the Rogue River and followed it down to the harbor and resort town of Gold Beach. We hit the lunch jackpot when Berta spied Double D's in the back of a little parking lot. We had a jalapeno burger and a regular burger with salads on the side. The place was filled with locals and the two women servers were fun. The one woman had volume issues and stood at one end of the dining area hollering to the other woman, explaining that Berta wanted a Diet Pepsi. The man at the next table offered the loud woman his cell phone so that she could call down there without yelling. She laughed and said she liked yelling. At another point, she told one table that she would be over to take their order "just as soon as the guy here makes a decision about what he wants". We chuckled through our yummy lunch. As we left the restaurant wearing our fluorescent jerseys the cook told us, "I never saw you come in."

Gold Beach looks just like Pismo Beach with a long stretch of flat beach facing some really active surf. The ocean side of the main street of town is lined with lodging options ranging from ragged to rich. We asked the server at lunch where we should stay. She recommended a few places and then told us not to go to other places. The number one place in town had No Vacancy, which exhausted the suggestions she had made that we actually remembered. We specifically remembered that she said "don't go to the Gold Beach _____" but then realized there was a Gold Beach Inn, a Gold Beach Resort, and five other variations on Gold Beach. We actually selected one of them and it turned out just fine. As the sun set, we found out why they call it Gold Beach.

We heard the owner of the Mexican restaurant where we had dinner talking about the local high school football team. She makes all of the Oregon Ducks fanatics we have seen everywhere in Southern Oregon look like amateurs. We asked her about the game and she said it would start at seven right across the street from her restaurant and she would be there as soon as she closed up. She said the Panthers were matched up on this opening night with a team from a much bigger school, but that the Panthers had a good team and they had beaten this opponent before. Game time was too late for us, but we read the next day that the Panthers were victorious 46-18.

Day Six, Gold Beach to Brookings, Oregon

Today's mileage: 30 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 195 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$3.64

Weather: Fog and light fog

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0

Animals for the day: Fiberglass Bears

The little town of Smith River is the Easter Lily Capital of the World. Even in early September, we saw two fields of eight-inch tall Easter Lily plants. In town, there was a diner with a really nice old convertible parked out front, a shack where a woman sold tamales and other Mexican food, and a drive-up espresso shed out by the highway where we purchased juice. There was a closed-up Ray's Place, which is a chain of grocery stores in this region. It must have closed just recently because the paper on the windows was new and there were lights on inside the store. Considering most of the town was boarded up, the closed market was probably the last straw for many people nearby. It had the scent of a dying town.

The Samuel H. Boardman State Scenic Corridor in Oregon celebrates a man who dedicated his life to protecting this beautiful coastline. We were riding on highway 101 and seeing signs for one stop after another on the scenic corridor. Eventually, we decided the threshold for viewing was pavement. If the turnoff was paved, we would do it. Gravel, no. At one stop, they promised a view of Arch Rock. We rode (on pavement) to the ample parking lot where four cars were parked. There were large rocks jutting out of the ocean near and far, but none had an arch as far as we could tell. We had seen a mini arch a few days back that wasn't even acknowledged with a sign, so we knew we would recognize Arch Rock when we saw it. It wasn't until we walked our bikes about a quarter mile down a Lord of the Rings trail when we stood on a bluff that we experienced the most excellent perspective on Arch Rock. We photographed the moment with all of the cameras we carry, and started back up the hill, admiring six-inch wide mushroom caps in the moist dark undergrowth along the way. John collected so many pine needles on the return that his rear wheel froze. He carried his bike like a wheelbarrow until the parking lot where a moment's inspection revealed the bollux and a backwards spin of the wheel solved the problem.

There are bears in downtown Brookings. The first one we saw was wearing a pirate hat, an eye patch and a peg leg. He was carrying a monkey. Yes, Brookings signed on to this craze of planting creatively decorated public art pieces all along the main drag. The twist here is that many of the bears are in different poses, so it looks like the artists had their choice. Also, instead of just painting the bears, these people put permanent clothing on the bears. The Pirate Bear just described wins our prize for Most Random Bear. We thought the Viking Bear was great until we realized it is a Samurai Bear which was a disappointment by comparison. The Most Handsome Bear goes to Pharaoh Bear, painted in gold leaf with colorful hieroglyphics. Honorable Mention for the bear that looked steel-plated.

We walked down the main street because a room wasn't ready at 12:30 when we rolled into town. The housekeepers at the motel let us put our bikes in our room before it had been cleaned. That's a big deal for us because we can't leave our belongings unattended, even when we have the bikes locked up. The girl at the desk said the cinema was "two lights down", which turned out to be about half a mile. We walked most of that distance right behind a couple who had a pair of Bernese Mountain Dogs, one old and one young. We stood waiting for the two lights while the older dog twisted around to see if we were looking at him (we were). The theater has two screens, showing *The Butler* and that documentary about the boy band One Direction. No car chases? No explosions? Berta would have to watch it alone.

We stopped and looked in a few knick-knack shops on the way back to the motel, knowing full well that nothing in either place was practical AND lightweight. It was time to eat again, so we stopped in at the new Thai restaurant because we like spicy unfried food. That was a very good decision.

Every bike trip brings with it new technology for our convenience. Berta is using Evernote software so when she takes a photo or makes a note with her totally awesome phone it is on the computer when we open the computer in the motel room. John sat at the

computer on Sunday morning and watched British TV to see World Superbike live at the Nurburgring in Germany and then MotoGP at Silverstone (both races were “barnburners”). But the big tech thrill this year is the little Sony HD video camera on John's handlebars. It has a 32 gigabyte microSD card that we pop into the computer in the afternoon. The camera has a waterproof case that we learned early on we need to clear of moisture when we ride in fog. John presses the “ON” button and we get HD video. Next year, when we haven't had a vacation in too long, we will fire up these videos and smile.

Day Seven, Brookings, Oregon to Crescent City, California

Today's mileage: 36 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 231miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.05 Welcome to California.

Weather: Beautiful day. Sun!

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0

Animals for the day: Big Slugs and sea lions

We have seen many more bicyclists on this tour than we have ever seen. This morning, as we rolled up to the “Welcome to California” sign, Jason was taking pictures of it and talking to a couple who had pulled over in their car. He held his iPhone up with one hand and held a thumbs up in his photo of the welcome sign. Jason started in Seattle and has a goal of San Diego. He is camping, as are most bicycle tourists we see. We just aren't that tough. He has a pretty compact setup, especially for a camper, with waterproof Ortleib packs. They are heavy, rubberized panniers that probably came in handy in Oregon where he had hard rain a few times. Jason took our picture at the welcome sign and rode off without us. We made a left at a side road while he stayed on highway 101.

That side road we took kept us off the highway for many miles. That's the big advantage of Adventure Cycling maps. They have looked at routes like this and identified quiet roads that parallel the highway. We end up going farther, and usually have a hillier route than a main highway, but we ride in peace and quiet. So we started along a country road and immediately Berta announced a photo op. John, thinking she was interested in the vista, suggested up ahead was a good spot. But Berta wasn't looking up, she was looking on the road at the largest slug she had ever seen. She placed her larger-than-average shoe next to this impressive STGM (shell-less terrestrial gastropod mollusc) and captured its likeness forever. It turned out that Mr. Slug has many cousins, some of whom are not adept at dodging moving vehicles.

Part of our route today took us through Fort Dick where the speed limit is low and the smooth roads have wide shoulders and double yellow lines down the middle. The ride was very pleasant. We saw a sign indicating there was a lake nearby, and since the road was paved, we turned. We got a glimpse of the lake as we approached, but the shoreline was a marsh about fifty yards wide that completely obscured the water from the end of the road. There was a man sitting in a beach chair by his parked truck, reading a book on a Kindle.

As we rejoined the route, we saw three cyclists going our way. The man in front had a box on his rear rack that was carpeted, padded with water-weenie foam, and had a little sun-shade awning on it. The assembly barely contained a fair-haired terrier who was standing with his forepaws on the front edge of the box, trying to look around his captain. We caught up with the trio and rode behind them for about three miles, the whole time apparently invisible to them. They did not look up and exclaim “Where are you going, you awesome bicycle tourists?” like we wanted them to; they just continued pedaling. Even the dog stared straight ahead. They motioned and pulled off at a gas station as we turned right to head to the beach.

We knew from our maps that we were headed straight for the coast. We heard the barking before we saw the sand. Pulling into a parking lot at the beach, we looked at a huge rock in the ocean that was surrounded by seals making as much noise as they could. The wind shifted and we heard nothing but the crashing of the waves. Then it shifted again and the barking returned. Nearby there were two Army guys looking at the big rock with binoculars. This was Sunset Beach at the north end of Crescent City.

We stopped at a bluff overlooking the lighthouse and rejoined our recent bike acquaintance Jason. His buddy Daniel was also there. Daniel has lived in Santa Maria, where Berta grew up, and is aiming for San Luis Obispo. They both look like the pedaling part of bicycle touring is no problem whatsoever. John talked to the young men while Berta went over to talk to those three cyclists who had ignored us earlier in the day. The dog couldn't stand a minute more on the bike. He wagged and wiggled and soon had his paws on solid ground. It turned out that his humans were most interested in discussion now that they knew we existed. The talkative one was the middle-aged woman, who talked consistently while the other two offered only punctuation. She was a farmer of tomatoes ("oh, I didn't know that you are a farmer" the younger woman said) who recently paid \$87 for enough canned tuna to last for two years. Berta, wanting to appear interested, asked if she could use it like canned tuna you can get in the market. The woman was immediately offended, saying her canned tuna is much better than a person can get in the store. Really, Berta insisted, she just wanted to know if it was cooked before canning so you could make tuna salad with it. Sheez!

We zig-zagged through Crescent City and arrived at a Best Western Plus to find out that today, the day before Labor Day, the price of a room is twice what it will be the day after tomorrow. Great, here's seventy dollars you can just throw out in the street for people to run over! We love being tourists! We saw a fellow bike tourist at the front desk. We told her we were going to Safeway and asked if she wanted anything. She was confused, not realizing we are fellow travelers because we had just finished doing laundry. No, we insisted, we also are riding bicycles a long distance. We would gladly look for your favorite beverage at the local market. She couldn't think of anything, so we headed out to forage for ourselves.

The highlight of our walk was a Tetrapod. This is a fifteen-foot tall four-legged concrete structure they use in breakwaters and jetties [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetrapod_\(structure\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetrapod_(structure)). Crescent City decided to place one of these items on the boulevard for us to appreciate.

Day Eight, Crescent City to Orick, California

Today's mileage: 40 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 271 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.05

Weather: Thick Fog then sun

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0

Animals for the day: Does Paul Bunyan's ox Babe count?

After a few miles on Highway 101, we exited at the Newton B. Drury Parkway. As we climbed a long straight wide hill, a line of old cars came toward us. They were Fords, around 1930 model year, and they looked perfect. John turned on the video camera and one of them gave us an ah-oooooooo-ga honk.

The Drury Parkway was our first good look at the Redwood forest. The road was twisty, with many nice descents that cost us only two reasonably difficult hills. We coasted down miles of shaded road, amazed at the height and girth of these beautiful trees. We were passed and re-passed by some of the same tourists as they would drive ahead, stop to take

photos, and then see us again. At one time, we saw an official sign for the Big Tree. We both kept riding. As we pulled into the visitor center up the road, we commented that we both passed it up. "How big does a tree have to be around here to get a Big Tree sign?" (Back in Port Orford, on the stormy day, we struggled into town against a stiff headwind and looked with confusion at a highway sign that said something like "High winds when lights flashing". The lights were off. Does the sign have to tip over before the lights come on?)

Along the ride today, we came upon Paul Bunyan and his ox Babe standing more than 100 feet tall at the Mystery Trees attraction. The statue talked in a suitably booming amplified Bunyanesque voice from someone hidden nearby. Berta, posing at Paul's foot, heard him ask "Where are you riding from?" "We started near Eugene, Oregon," Berta replied, ignoring the sentence ending with a preposition and not knowing where to throw her voice. Paul did not hear her, and repeated his question a little like he was talking to a simple person who also didn't know English. Berta repeated her answer, a little louder this time. At the same time, a woman standing nearby (see photo) who appeared not to have ridden a bicycle in the last twenty-five years, answered that they had come from Medford. "Great," Paul said, "have a great ride!" She answered, "Thanks, we will."

We are staying in the Palm Motel and Restaurant. It's about ten miles further down the road than an historic inn that Berta had her eye on for tonight. We looked for the inn or any signs pointing to it, but missed it. Before we knew it, we were out of town (you can't go back) and hoping the next little town would have acceptable lodging. The sign here at the Palm Motel has a stylized rising sun over palm tree islands surrounded by water. Below the sun is a bikini attired woman lounging next to a pool. But the real attraction is the smaller sign below that indicates each room has direct dial phones, color TV (each letter of "color" in a different color) and a pool. We looked for an asterisk that explained the pool only had eighteen inches of water in it. Our room actually is an apartment, with three bedrooms and a bathroom. It is older but clean enough. The lithograph over the bed shows a glamorous woman and top-hatted man standing at the bottom of some steep steps. Parked at the top of the steps is a 1930s limousine and in the sky is a dirigible and a speeding passenger plane. It was the future eighty years ago.

John needed a new book to read, so we walked over to the market where the world's most helpful cashier works. At the end of the aisle with the extensive selection of fishing gear, there was a small shelf of second-hand books that had one decent book that John already read and fifteen romance novels that he doesn't want to read. The average age of the books appeared to be about thirty years judging from the dust. Mister Helpful grabbed four plastic grocery bags full of paperbacks from behind the counter and plunked them on the top of the frozen novelties case for us to see. More from the same reader we suppose. John did find a western novel written in the 1920s: *Burnt Creek* by Ernest Haycox. We don't think the cashier charged us for it because he knew John selected it out of desperation. He asked us if we had a corkscrew for Berta's bottle of wine and suggested we talk to the lady at the motel who normally had books for trade. Back at the motel, John tried to trade in his just-finished Clive Cussler book or the unstarted western novel and was given a vapid look indicating we don't do that and why would you ask.

Our server at breakfast used the times around helping us to go in the back and fix her hair. When we walked in, she was a mess. After we ordered, she reappeared with three large curling iron rolls at the back of her head. Even John noticed the change. By the time we paid up, she had brushed out the curls and presumably looked as good as she was going to look. Did she wash her hands after primping? Note to self: wait a while before going to the café for breakfast.

Day Nine, Orick to Eureka, California

Today's mileage: 45 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 316 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.05

Weather: Sunny all day

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0

Animals for the day: Elk and seals

Today we met Paul Mandala, who started riding his bicycle in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska in early July. He is pedaling to Argentina. We met him when we rolled up to the visitor center at Humboldt Bay, where we were all attracted by the mirror surface of the still water. It was one of those meetings where you might have pulled away without saying much more than "Hey," but you are lucky that you didn't stop there. We chatted for a while about our destinations. A guy who had parked his car nearby walked over and asked about our destination. We told him where Paul is going because it's awesome. We agreed with the guy who looked 65ish that there are only a few times in life when you can take a year and a half to ride your bike along a couple of continents. Most people don't do it, and some regret not doing it.

We continued riding, now with Paul. Our first stop was five hundred yards down the road, where there was a crowd of elk resting in shady grass next to an old red schoolhouse. One of the elk had a good sized rack of antlers. They were all lying in the grass, so we don't know how tall they were. We watched as a house cat walked from the nearby RV park and started towards the elk. Nope, he thought better of it and turned away. Now that would have been exciting!

Our route removed us from the highway again and put us on a Scenic Drive. They should have called it Rustic Drive. We saw only two cars in about six miles, and one of them was the mail carrier who had to be on this road. Several large stretches of the road were unpaved and scarred by multiple large divots. John started laughing. It turned out he had impacted a hole hard enough that the video camera spun backward on his handlebars and was pointing straight up. Nostril Cam!

We pedaled through McKinleyville. The big sign announcing the town said "Where horses have the right of way". We don't know about horses, but we do know that bicycles are treated well there. We rode for many miles on a bike path that started at the beach and took us all the way through town. For a while, the bike path was unpaved on a steep uphill and we all tested our off-road skills. Berta, not wanting to be the lame girl, did just fine. The bike path skirted town. It's a common problem with rail-trails and bike paths. They are not the best place to ride if you are looking for food or lodging because they take you along the outskirts of town. It was okay today and we headed for Arcata, which turns out to be the site of Humboldt State. We passed a farm that grew pumpkins in a field of sunflowers. The happy sunflowers were taller than us.

John volunteered to ask a policeman who was sitting in his car at a bend in the road where to eat in town. As John approached the car, Cujo the police dog woke up in the back seat and had to be restrained by the policeman pounding on the cage divider in the car. Copper had really bad suggestions that included 1. Going back from where we just were (No), and 2. A BBQ place (No). It ended up that we stopped at a sandwich place called

Blondies. Besides the three different yummy sandwiches we had, and good classic music playing (some by Blondie), they had a most impressive selection of beer in bottles. Let's do the math. Six doors in the cooler, fifty different tall bottles in each door at least; that's 300 different beers in big bottles. Then they had another wall of coolers full of six-pack bottles. Not like it would be smart to have a beer on this day, we were famished! We wolfed down our sandwiches and rolled through the college. Evidently, the college has had an influx of capital that provided for rows of gleaming new student housing. We witnessed a young man making an illegal left turn on a skateboard into oncoming traffic, possibly headed for his classes in Rocket Science.

The downtown area is just a few blocks away and looks like a charming place to hangout. There was a grassy commons with places to eat all around. We took a bike-friendly one-way street through town and pointed the wheels towards Eureka. We accumulated two other bike tourists and went a few miles five in a row.

Paul headed off to stay at a friend's house and we selected the first lodging we found. It was a Clarion Hotel. The room was nice, the price was reasonable, and they had a soup and salad bar at five included in the price of the room. The lettuce was fresh when we got there at 5:01. There were garbanzo beans, julienned carrots, croutons, and sesame seeds to put on top. The two dressing choices were Thousand Island and Italian. We both like a certain kind of Thousand Island (tangy, not too sweet), and this was that kind. The soups were split pea and a spicier tortilla soup. We figured they were purchased in a big box, but they were both pretty tasty. It was exactly what we wanted for dinner. What an unexpected treat.

Day Ten, Eureka to Scotia, California

Today's mileage: 39 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 355 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.09

Weather: Sunny all day with a tailwind

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0

Animals for the day: Red tail hawks, little white goats with caramel brown heads, Holsteins

We left Eureka by way of the waterfront and passed a huge lumber processing plant. We stopped and gawked at the large machinery that was stacking recently debarked logs. We wound through town and made it back onto the highway. In these parts, highway 101 is a divided highway with two lanes in each direction and a consistently ample shoulder that includes an impressive rumble strip to shake the teeth of anyone who swerves towards us. Highways like this have gentle grades, too, so they are actually a good way to make some time. Even so, we were glad when we were able to leave the noise of the highway and hit some back roads.

The College of the Redwoods looks like a serene place to study. It is in the middle of nowhere right between Small Town and Farmville. Actually, it is between Loleta and Fernville. We almost flew past Loleta, but John caught a glimpse of the sign that pointed towards the Business District. We pedaled up the hill towards what looked like a partly deserted town. Over the unused railroad tracks and up another block is the Loleta Cheese Factory, where they make at least 5500 pounds of cheese per day. On big days, they do a batch that produces 7200 pounds. They had pepper jack available with Jalapeno, Chipotle, and Habanero seasoning. We wanted the Habanero, but the Jalapeno came in a more

reasonable chunk considering we don't have refrigerated panniers. They had cheese in process behind the glass windows in two long stainless steel troughs in different stages of cheesiness. The woman who gave us a two-minute description of the process was unable to tell John what enzymes they use, but motioned to a guy who could have been Berta's uncle and said that Bob here is the guy who would know that. At first, we worried that we might be distracting Bob from his important cheese duties, but it immediately became clear that Bob was Chatterer in Chief, only needing the slightest nod or uh-huh to keep him going. We heard about the hope that the railway would become a bike path, about caramel coloring upsetting the vegetarian-ness of cheese sometimes, and about the Australian who might have fed Bob a line about needing money on a bike trip; however, we left knowing almost nothing about what enzymes Bob uses to convert milk into cheese.

After leaving the cheese factory, we made a random turn through town. John spotted a bakery and suggested we stop in. Uh, yes. We immediately saw the lemon tart and decided on it without discussion. It was a much too small rectangle of lemon curd on a thin shortbread crust. We tried not to sprain our eyeballs whilst we ate. Berta tried to be ladylike and not hog the rest of the tart. Looking around, we saw four parties having brunch in the sunny dining room. It was Wednesday or Thursday morning and the place was full. There were large ciabatta rolls and loaves of all kinds of bread lining the shelves. How does a tiny town like this support a cheese factory and a busy bakery like this? How can we get another lemon tart right now?

Some miles later, we rolled into Ferndale, where they can lay claim to having a really beautiful main street. All of the storefronts in town are in the Victorian style. We rolled through town and spied the sign pointing to a city park. We headed there for lunch. Out came the Jalapeno cheese and Berta's lukewarm diet Sunkist orange soda. John wouldn't touch it because he likes his soda ice cold. There was a nice playground and baseball field that we just looked at during lunch. There were two ladies visiting on the other side of the field over by the nursery school. They were too far away to hear anything except an occasional outburst of laughter.

As we left town, we saw a church with a nice steeple and pretty stained glass. The name of the road changed from Ocean Drive to Grizzly Bluff and we came upon a cemetery carved into a steep hill. Berta hoped it didn't offend anyone, but she took a photo of it because it seemed like a peaceful place to rest.

We passed several farms. A truck passed us with an Australian shepherd in the back. We had heard this dog for at least a mile, barking at cows behind us. We anticipated that he would wait until just the right moment before he barked and startled the beeebees out of us. When the truck did pass, Mick was looking out the port side, completely unaware of the bicyclists off the starboard bow. He might have been looking for the white goats with caramel colored heads that we saw a little ways down the roads.

We stopped to video a farmer who was wrapping his hay bales. There are rectangular hay bales and there are cylindrical hay bales. These were cylindrical. We were stopped, with John pointing his the camera on his handlebars towards the contraption that makes these big white plastic marshmallow hay bales, when a pickup stopped in the opposite lane. The man in the pickup hollered out that "those are the largest marshmallows I have ever seen". He said he has lived here for years and hadn't really seen how they get wrapped up like that.

The town of Scotia is a lumber company-owned town. The Historic Scotia in, first built in 1920, and then rebuilt after a fire has creaky old wood floors in the lobby. We tried to tiptoe, but really just clomped over to our room on the first floor. Our room had one of the nicest bathrooms we have ever seen in any hotel. It looked like everything was installed just last

Thursday. The room was large and spacious, even if we had to sit on the floor to use the computer while it charged. That was just as well, because this hotel room had the least comfortable chairs that ever existed. They had wicker seats and straight backs. They were so bad we went for a walk. We saw the big lumber mill where there were bulldozers moving piles of smoking hot sawdust. We watched as a semi backed up to a contraption with massive hydraulic lifts that tipped the trailer and created another baby pile of sawdust that started up a conveyer belt to the mother pile.

On the way back to the hotel, Berta spotted a hair salon and announced that she wouldn't pedal a day more with split ends so bad. The hair stylist was busy, so we went over to the market and got some bowls of soup to tide us over to dinner. It was perfect timing when we returned. Berta got a haircut while listening to this woman quietly singing to easy Christian music and John read the last of his western novel. Dinner was pretty good, with the highlight being the quart sized tin of tiny beer bread muffins that came out before our meals. They were chewy and yeasty and delicious. The server claimed that she didn't know the recipe.

Day Eleven, Scotia to Garberville, California

Today's mileage: 48 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 403 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.07

Weather: It got up to 91 degrees. Cool in the shade of the redwoods

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0.5

Animals for the day: A really loud something in the bushes during lunch

We rode the Avenue of the Giants today. Leaving the four-lane divided highway, we jogged to the left and into a dark, damp different world. The road here has good pavement. Most of the cars traveled very slowly, with their lights on so they saw us well, and gave us a lot of room. The road had very gentle curves to it where everyone could see well into the distance. The redwoods (these are [*Sequoia sempervirens*](#)) are remarkably tall and straight. No doubt why they have been used for lumber. We passed many state park signs with yellow block printing on heavy brown wood showing named groves. For some reason, John stopped at one of the ones that also had a memorial plaque nearby. It told of Charles and Eloise Shields, who lived their retirement life in 1977 in Carpinteria, California, just down the road from where we live. Her obituary from 1999 says in part that "the years were filled with friends, clubs, committees, classes, and traveling nationally and internationally. After 16 trips across America, they earned recognition in the Guinness Book of Records (1994 - 96) for visiting 370 U S National Parks". We didn't know then, as we stood there, that they had lived near us; John just told Berta about them travelling into the record books. Pretty cool.

We stop at about twenty miles to have lunch. On past trips, we waited until we came to a town with a cafe and sat down to an eggs and hashbrowns type of a late breakfast. For some reason, we have been getting later starts on this trip. Sometimes we have to wait for an 8 a.m. continental breakfast, or we just sleep in. A few days it was just too foggy to start out. Anyhow, we have been getting on the road more like nine o'clock on this trip. So it takes a couple of hours to go twenty miles, especially if there are some hills. And it seems more convenient to have lunch with us so we can control the content. We stop at the side of the road, sometimes finding a picnic bench, but sometimes it is more urgent than that and we just lean the bikes up where we can. Seating isn't really important, because we don't really want to sit during lunch when we've been sitting so much anyhow.

During lunch, an animal rummaged around in the undergrowth, sounding like Sasquatch. Berta looked over, wondering if a bear would emerge from the bushes, but it didn't. We sat

at a picnic table under the pink string from a long-deflated birthday balloon that was once attached to a nearby tree branch. The pasta salad passed from Berta to John, the remaining Loleta Jalapeno cheese apportioned, and the orange juice not cool at all sipped from a repurposed diet soda plastic bottle.

We expected there to be a Best Western in Redway. Not so. Before we knew it, we zoomed through the little town and flew down a major hill. Then we really couldn't go back to check it out. We needed to ride another few miles and up a hot hill with no shoulder to Garberville. When we arrived, our room was not ready. We pedaled around the three-block town and returned to the motel lobby in an effort to pressure the staff into readying a room. We read the USA Today while we listened to the travelers checking in at the lobby desk. At first, there was a rock band who arrived on this Thursday for some weekend concert. A performer wearing fashionably dark glasses and contemporary facial hair talked way too much. He became even more animated when the guy from the sound company arrived, wanting to know all the details about "the venue". The trumpet player came in and added some flair to the conversation. He ended up giving a pair of complimentary tickets to the cute reception clerk at the motel.

The next hopeful travelers were a couple from Denmark. The man was very motivated to get a better rate for their room. He mentioned that the price at another Best Western north of here was much better. Next, he had some sort of coupon that the clerk said couldn't be applied for their stay tonight. Finally, Hans pulled the power of the press card and claimed to author a travel website. The implication was obvious. The young woman, who was good at her job, pleasantly recited the company line that she did not have the capacity to change their established rates. It turns out that Hans got hosed just like the rest of us. When our room was ready shortly thereafter, John told the clerk that it was educational sitting in the lobby. She said, "Welcome to an hour of my world."

We recouped a little of our money by getting some free Merlot at the wine and cheese hour at the motel. The Danes were doing the same with the Chardonnay. A sign proclaimed that no alcohol was to be taken from the wine tasting area. We deceived the octogenarian sommelier by pouring our glasses into a paper cup and dashing off to our room while her back was turned. Finally, John proclaimed that the volumizing shampoo they had at this Best Western was a failure.

Day Twelve, Garberville to Westport, California

Today's mileage: 57 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 460 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.07

Weather: Hot inland, cool in the shady parts, and 78 once we got back to the ocean

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 1.5

Animals for the day: Scrub Jays, Pelicans

On this trip, we made the discovery that pasta salad from a supermarket deli is a good lunch for a bike tour. It tastes good and seems to be good fuel for the ride. We stopped yesterday afternoon at a Ray's Place market in Garberville, and made a few trips to the deli counter. We first got a pound of pasta salad (the kind with olives, artichoke hearts, and a vinaigrette dressing) before perusing the salami and cheese aisle then returning to the deli counter for a quarter pound of sliced genoa salami. Debi at the deli counter, after Berta told her it didn't matter how thin she sliced it, sliced it right to the thin setting that John wanted. Debi said the thin slices would make it go farther.

Before we left town in the morning, John went into Ray's Place another time to plan ahead for his vices. So at eight in the morning he bought a bottle of tequila. A fellow customer, a man who looked about sixty, turned when John grabbed the divider thing and set the bottle on the conveyor belt. "That's the last thing I would expect you to be buying," the man said. John explained that we might be camping tonight and he wanted to be prepared. "That would ensure a good night's sleep and a tough ride the next day," he advised. John came out of the market and told Berta about the exchange. A few miles down the road, we saw the same man in a big red American-made pickup. He passed us as we exited the highway, stopped at the stop sign and waved for us to come around the driver's side. He rolled down his window and told Berta what he had told John earlier. We laughed and wished each other a good day. He passed us one more time coming the other direction a few miles later and gave us one last wave.

John's concern about provisions was well-founded. We hoped to find lodging and food at Leggett. We called the Stonegate Villas to see about their availability. The lady said they had no rooms because the whole place was booked by a group of Buddhists. Berta thought that maybe it would be Buddhist for them to give up one room, but there would be none of that. We called ahead and secured a room at a bed and breakfast in Westport. We sat down and had our pasta salad and salami while we contemplated pushing on. The elephant in the little shady spot under a tree was the profile of the route we both knew well. Right after Leggett would be the biggest climb of the trip, four miles at seven percent. That is what it would take to get over the coastal mountain range on Highway 1. Oh well, we decided, and looked for water before resuming the ride. There was a Cal-Trans yard right across the street and we entered it to ask for water. Nobody was around and we found a hose bib. John had his hand on the hose to remove it, but then he said, "No, maybe not," and we rode back to the gas station to get water. The attendant advised against using the faucet there because the town's well was contaminated. We bought a quart of water and Berta was proud to be traveling with a water lab analyst.

The hill was long, but not too hot, and in less than an hour we were over it. The descent was excellent. We got mixed in with a group of Wild Hogs (Harley motorcycles) and raced them down the hill. The three in front were not pulling away and the two in back didn't seem anxious to pass us. That lasted for a few miles and they gave a wave as the road flattened out and they motored away. The additional toll from Leggett to Westport was 28 miles and about three hours.

The Westport Hotel has a nice menu online that we couldn't enjoy because their pub manager just quit and took the chef with her. We walked to the convenience store a block away and ordered a pizza with everything on it. We couldn't even see an oven behind the counter, but somehow the clerk put together an excellent pizza for us. Dorine back at the bed and breakfast had offered to make a salad to go with the pizza, so Berta headed back to accept her offer. She brought out an excellent salad of mixed dark green lettuces, walnuts, and cranberries, with a nice Italian dressing. She brought out water and place settings and we enjoyed a delicious dinner where we hadn't expected it.

We struggled with burning legs up one flight of stairs to our room. It was a small room, so Berta sat on the bed and opened up the computer while John assumed the position in a chair near the window. And so began the running commentary on what was happening outside our window. John, with elbows on the windowsill, proceeded to describe everything he saw. Just when it seemed there was nothing more to say, Crash! We heard the sound of a minor car accident outside. Now it would get really interesting. The car was a small sedan, maybe a Honda Civic, and probably from the late nineties. The driver had misjudged a little

parking area on the shoulder of the road and smashed their front end into a rustic log wall. Fluid immediately began to pour out of the car. The car's inhabitants emerged to assess the situation. The male driver, who might be described as Caucasian-Rastafarian, was wearing pants made of burlap or hemp, badly cinched at the waist with a rope. From the passenger side there materialized a young woman wearing an iridescent diaphanous butterfly wrap that needed constant adjustment. There were two dogs in the back seat. We cannot comment on what they were wearing because they never left the vehicle.

There ensued much pacing, head scratching, clothes adjusting, and car inspecting. The young man would lay in the dirt, look up at the leaking radiator, get up, pace around, and then get under there again in case anything had changed. He started the car and backed up without hitting anything before pulling forward a few yards. This maneuver left two swooshes and puddles of fluid from the car that apparently had a little more fluid to give. John talked more in this stretch of time than he normally does in a span of two days. The pair left the car and walked over to the convenience store. When they returned ten minutes later, he pulled up and recinched his pants, she retwined the wrap around her shoulders, and they tucked into the car to wait. They alternated sitting in the driver's seat. It was still light then. We went to sleep before eight (bike trip schedule). At 0030, Berta awakened to the realization that there was activity outside. A late model convertible car with a throaty engine (maybe a Camaro?) was sitting with its engine running and its headlamps pointed at the Mishap Mobile. A man wearing normal clothing was working on it. A short while later, the new car pulled away, and then the old car pulled away.

At 0420, the fire alarm went off for the first time. There were three very loud squeal-beeps just long enough to wake us but not long enough to give the brain information to work with. We heard voices down the hall. A few minutes later, the alarm went off again. All of the men decided it was time to investigate. John met two other guys in the hall and they collectively determined that there was no fire in the building. Over the next hour, the fire alarm went off a few times just downstairs and another time upstairs where all of the visitors were not sleeping. Lee, the owner of the building, arrived and offered to take the fire alarms off the ceilings. Everyone declined that and went back to bed. We already had slept eight hours so we were pretty good. We went downstairs around 0730, hoping to get our breakfast earlier than they planned for us. It worked and we had yummy citrus scones, yogurt parfaits, coffee and tea.

They apologized many times and did not charge us for the room. John's parsimonious heart leap with joy.

Day Thirteen, Westport to Van Damme State Park, California

Today's mileage: 35 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 495 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.25

Weather: 78 degrees with a nice tailwind

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 1.0

Animals for the day: Real Blue Jays, Seals swimming in the ocean, deer

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Mendocino made us want to check our bank balance. Whew! Pricey. Before we went there, we talked to Katie at the Westport Hotel for a while during breakfast. She described Mendocino as “cute”. We translated this to mean “Spendy!” We had no idea. We approached the small community of Mendocino after a handful of bruising little hills, including one that measured 19% grade on Berta’s cycle computer. She was walking through a corner that turned up that steep when a man going downhill hollered from his truck “That’s what I’d be doing!” We took a road along the bluffs that deposited us directly in the center of town. John walked his lycra covered self into a boutique clothing store to get some lodging suggestions from the young women who worked there. He walked out and announced this would be an expensive night. We returned to the north end of town, climbed a steep driveway, and discovered that we could get a \$100 room at the Blackberry Inn. The only requirement would be that we go away and come back another day. Evidently, the nice guy at the desk thought we rode up on touring bicycles to reserve a room for next weekend.

Berta pulled out the smartphone and the GPS. The next possibility was a place we had seen on the way into town. They did have a room, actually a suite, for \$365. The clerk accentuated that the price included breakfast, which would save us, what, eighteen dollars at the most? Let it be known that John did look at Berta with a face that wondered if we should do it. Berta replied with her “Oh, HECK No!” face. Berta can’t believe John even asked. Next, we zig-zagged through town looking for anyplace with a room. We telephoned an inn only six miles down the road that had a room for \$275, but the woman first asked for all the information on our credit card including the 3-digit code on the back. Then she said her computer was down and that she needed to have us repeat the same information so she could write it down. We said we would take our chances without guaranteeing the room. Leaving town, we came upon another inn and stopped. The sign said they had lodging and dinner. A man and a woman who was clearly the proprietor were having a conversation in the gravel parking lot, ignoring the electric neon colors we were wearing. After listening to their non-essential conversation for several minutes, we decided to leave. As we turned, she asked us if she could help us. Berta said No.

Somewhere in here we learned that this was the weekend of Winesong, an annual charity wine auction and tasting event benefitting the Mendocino Coast Hospital Foundation. The demand for rooms was at least one biking couple larger than the supply. We stopped at three more inns until a few miles down the road we approached the town of Little River. We had called ahead and they said they had no room, but the sign still said “Vacancy”, so John went in. No luck. That is when the confluence of factors led to a good decision. We looked down the road at the Van Damme State Campground and decided we would camp for the first time in our bicycle touring lives. For five dollars apiece, four dollars for two ten-minute hot water showers, and an extra seven dollars for a bundle of firewood, we secured a semi-private spot in the Hike and Bike campground. Berta calculates that John owes her a gift worth at least \$254 (not including occupancy tax) representing the money saved by camping over the less expensive of the two other options we had.

The extra lightweight tent and sleeping pads were unfurled. John set about assembling the tent. He was struggling with putting the poles in the appropriate holes when Berta noticed that one pole was longer than the others. Reorienting the poles, the tent was quickly erected. We took adequate showers and arranged the campsite before locking up the bikes and then packing up the valuables and carrying them with us to the market. We walked about five hundred yards on a Sneaky Pete trail the ranger described that plopped us out right across the highway from the market. We paid exorbitant fees for two tasty Reuben sandwiches, bottles of water, ice, soda, and some breakfast sandwiches for the morning.

It turns out that John takes his caveman duties very seriously. When we returned to the campsite, he set upon building a good campfire for us. The firewood needed whittling and chopping so that we had some kindling and smaller pieces. The little pile of sticks Berta collected needed arranging. Hmm... do we sacrifice a portion of the paper bag from the market to get the fire going? All concerns evaporated with the first flames catching on the wood. Berta sat in the warmth of the fire and typed a few notes for the day's blog that would not be transmitted tonight for lack of an Internet connection. We donned most of the clothing we had with us and crammed into the tent in our bivy sacks. Our tent is made by a company called Big Agnes which implies roomy. Well, not so much. And bivy sacks are just tubes of Mylar with Velcro closures. By the morning, John had ripped a three foot long tear in his sack. He needs to work on his ten RPH (revolutions per hour) sleeping habit. Despite this, we had a decent night's sleep and awoke knowing that camping is a real option on our bike trips. Truth be told, John's feet were cold and he didn't put enough air in his mattress. Berta had dirt on her that she didn't like. We were on a learning curve.

Day Fourteen, Van Damme State Park to Point Arena, California

Today's mileage: 34 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 529 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.25

Weather: 78 degrees but cold ocean air

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 1.0

Animals for the day: Coastal cows

It takes a long time to pack up camp. We started the day by choking down some cold breakfast sandwiches in the chilly air out by the beach. We hung the tent fly on a low-hanging branch thinking it might dry out, but it didn't. John stuffed it in the cargo net on his rack and resolved to move it around a few times during the day. Berta did the same with the little towel we had that was very moist. We were pleasantly shocked that all of the lightweight packable items that had exploded from their stuff sacks last night actually went back into their sacks. We were sure we would have trouble repacking these things. No worries.

As we stopped in Elk (aka Elk Creek) at a gourmet market, there were four touring bikes parked at the café down the street from the market. We went inside and John ordered the roast beef sandwich with everything. John talked to the man behind the counter while the woman behind the counter made our sandwich. We learned that the building has always been a market and the wood floor was original except for that area over by the register. We commented at all the cars parked outside, which he said were the tourists who paid the bills for most of the year. He was glad for the locals, too, who kept the market afloat during the winter. Berta said one sandwich was enough for the both of us (she was right, she likes being right), and John selected a Double Chocolate Brownie for dessert.

Along the road, we spied a View Point when we needed lunch. The sign that announced the viewpoint in one-quarter mile did not explain that there was a downhill followed by an uphill in order to get there. Those signs never do. As we climbed the hill, a line of motorcycles with sidecars passed us. In the last sidecar, there was a medium-sized shorthair dog wearing aviator goggles. He twisted around to get a good look at John, his blond body and his dark goggles frozen in time, creating an image in Berta's mind that she will not soon forget.

John unfurled the tent fly and draped it over the rustic fencing at the viewpoint in the full sun to get a little drier. We split the sandwich. It had generous tangy mustard dressing and

lots of red onions. We leaned over so the sandwich would not drip on our bike shoes. Cars came into the viewpoint parking lot, sometimes in caravan, and enjoyed the view before driving away. We released the chocolate dessert to disappointment. It smelled great. It was one of those subtle sweets that probably had a healthy percentage of cacao but was seriously lacking in sugar. Oh, for Granma's sweets.

As we approached Point Arena, John asked a guy doing some landscaping about lodging options. He told us to look for the lodging sign in town after the gas station. As we pedaled through Point Arena, we noted that the motel that our maps had mentioned under "Lodging" was fenced off and boarded up. With trepidation, we turned right at the sign. We descended a hill that tomorrow in retrospect would be minor, but on this afternoon it seemed significant. We were thinking about the price we would pay if there was no room at the bottom of the hill. The road had a nice bike lane, complete with bike logos and arrows. We rolled for a mile and approached a working port. It took a two loops in the parking area to realize where the driveway to the hotel was.

The driveway was steep enough to make Berta wonder if this was the only game in town. John was already in the lobby when Berta pushed open the nicely carved wooden door. She saw a display of wine bottles, a mounted brass wine pull, and several framed art pieces on the wall. There were two drawings by Pablo Picasso that were remarkable only by their signatures, and several colored line drawings by "the only living artist displayed in the Louvre". The woman at the counter was super in her support of bike tourists. She has no idea how valuable it was for her to do our laundry for us. And the red blend in the wine rack was lots of fun, especially as there were some real wine glasses in the room to drink it from.

At the restaurant down the hill, they offered a customizable beer sampler from more than 30 beers on draught, and spicy pasta that John dispatched with nary a thought. Berta enjoyed her beer sampler three times more than she enjoyed her spinach salad and clam chowder. The clam chowder had more bacon than clams (not bad, but they should have called it Bacon Chowder. Now that's an idea!) The restaurant and the balcony of our hotel both had great views of the rocky harbor and the cliffs beyond as the setting sun gilded the ocean. We slept really well because, let's face it, any bed is better than sleeping in a tent.

Day Fifteen, Point Arena to Jenner, California

Today's mileage: 55 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 584 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.20

Weather: Chilly ocean air

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 1.0

Animals for the day: Coastal goats, red tail hawks, vultures

The continental breakfast at the hotel started at seven. We surveyed the options, plotted our eating attack, and then stalled, noting that there was no milk for the cereal. John spotted a refrigerator in the corner. No milk there. It was not plugged in so it was used as storage

for breakfast items. We chatted with a couple and with a single guy in the room, trying to extract milk information. Berta traipsed over to the hotel lobby and made the helpful lady at the desk smack her forehead, "Oh, the MILK!" She trotted over to the breakfast room to get the milk. Looking at our three groups, she exclaimed, "All the bike people at once!" The blond man was by himself. We talked more with the couple. They were from Germany. Their English was very good, which is a good thing because our German would have gotten us only to "halt" and "guten tag". They left a little earlier than we did, but we went out to the driveway to look at their bike setups and chat with them before they left. They gave us a pen with their website printed on it that would expand on our introduction to Falko and Marion.

On the road, we saw a guy riding north and flagged him down. We like to talk to other touring cyclists. This man is riding to Vancouver and noted that his riding friend just coming up the road would like to talk to us. That is because Javier from Mexico City really wants to talk to any cyclist he sees. He not only is from Mexico City, he *pedaled* from Mexico City. He has a low-tech setup that includes a Coleman tent in the original plastic zipped packaging. It was a small tent but most certainly not lightweight. His enthusiasm was glowing. He has a goal of having photos of every cyclist he sees, and he seems to have artistic flair. So while we were trying to learn about him and his travels, he was moving his camera around to get an artsy photo of us. He bent and stretched out low while still straddling his bike to get a hero shot of us. We do not know if that worked.

There was a race happening today between John and a male cyclist who passed us under less than honorable circumstances. Passing must not be flaunted when 1) the passer is on a much lighter machine, 2) the pass occurs on a downhill, or 3) the passee is hampered by a slow wife. Also, it is bad form to be riding at a measly pace and then to gas it when another cyclist approaches. You either ride hard or you don't. John perceived one of these slights and sped off with Berta trying to keep up. Berta did just fine for a while because she does not pretend that she isn't competitive too. But after a while, Berta noted that we had pedaled twenty miles and it was nearly time to have lunch. The miles ticked on. Finally, Berta blurted with vigor that we needed to stop and eat. John, oblivious to his own lagging blood sugar, said, "oh, okay". We stopped at a highway call box, not caring that it had no shade much less no amenities. We stood on the metal lid of a hollow-sounding utility vault and started in on the pasta salad and some nicely salty string cheese.

While we were stopped, a van travelling northbound parked on the southbound shoulder and three people emerged. One man immediately lit a cigarette, the woman talked to him while he focused his telephoto lens on a nice view of the coast, and a second man walked over to us. He was very easy to talk with. If we described him, it would match a description of Berta's dad. Very similar features, we both commented afterwards. They were on a comprehensive tour of the Western United States that included everything from Washington State over to the Grand Canyon. They drove on the Hoover Dam even though they assumed they wouldn't be allowed to do that. They saw the new bridge that went up near Hoover Dam. We had an easy conversation with this man. We looked out over a coastal plain that was five hundred yards wide. His friend with the telephoto lens confirmed that the cows on the ridge were actually goats. We all packed up, wished each other a good journey, and rolled away.

We knew we would be at Fort Ross today. A quick Internet search indicated that Californian budget cuts would keep us from an official visit to the fort as it is not open during the week. Too bad, John said, as he has been to Fort Ross and he knew Berta would like it. Fort Ross “is a California State Historic Park showcasing a historic Russian-era fort compound that has been designated National Historic Landmark status” (<http://www.fortross.org>). Not much is visible from Highway 1. On the closed gate was a sign that indicated the grounds were open even if the visitor center wasn’t. We rolled our bikes around the end of the gate and down the quarter-mile driveway to a parking lot that had six cars in it. There were two porta-potties for each of the cars. Most of the park was obscured by a thick stand of pines. We did some circus bicycle moves and got on a concrete walkway that looked promising. We coasted past a newly-poured concrete staircase leading out of the dark visitor center and deduced that the budget cuts did not impact capital improvements.

The fort comprises six or eight buildings connected by tall wooden fortification. We circumnavigated the walls and identified two open gates. Spilling out of one of the openings were several middle-school Cossacks wearing blue poofy pants, billowy white shirts, and pointy Russian hats. John asked a boy what was happening. This kid was about to explode he was so excited about their field trip. Right now, they were learning what tasks were necessary to maintain the fort. But later! Later, they would stay the night IN THE FORT!!! He explained to John that the fort was built in 1819. He was beside himself that he was going to stay overnight. We saw middle school teachers and students boiling water and setting up camp for the night.

It wasn’t much further to our destination in Jenner. This small coastal town is situated where the Russian River flows into the Pacific Ocean. We saw several people using binoculars and followed their gaze over to the significant sandspit opposite the mainland where birds flocked. We found the office for the motel, leaned the bikes against the building, and walked in. The woman at the desk popped up and offered to show us the room we might have. It was fine and had a small sunporch where the bikes would be secure. While we were getting registered, the woman—upon hearing our hometown—said she used to work at the San Ysidro Ranch in Montecito. A man appeared behind the counter and announced he had stolen her away from them. We chatted for a little bit and he offered to make dinner for us.

We decided against accepting the dinner offer because we needed to eat soon and it was only 4 p.m. That seemed too demanding to tell him to start cooking right away. They said there was a good Indian food place a mile down the road, which was too far to walk and we didn’t want to pedal. The last two choices were Café Aquatica or something from the deli counter at the gas station. Off to the café! We ordered a sandwich and a salad to split both. Berta heard the guy tell John that they didn’t have enough avocado to put on the salad. He offered to return the extra dollar John paid for it, even though there was a small pile of avocado already on the salad. John told him not to worry about it. This created a fuss because, evidently, nobody has ever turned down a refund. We ended up getting extra salad dressing and a free three-dollar vegan oatmeal raisin cookie because John was so reasonable. That’s Mr. Reasonable to you.

Day Sixteen, Jenner to Point Reyes Station, California

Today's mileage: 47 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 631 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$4.15

Weather: Misting with a bruising wind in our faces

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 1.5

Animals for the day: One farm had pigs, geese, goats, turkeys, sheep, and chickens

In the morning, we passed the Indian restaurant a mile and a half down the road. Good thing we hadn't decided to walk there for dinner yesterday. At eight in the morning, the buffet was not open. We crossed the Russian River and headed for the seaside community of Bodega Bay. The coast there is lined with docks and harbors. Highway One has multiple shops that sell kites and saltwater taffy. We stopped at a market and rolled away with lunch in John's pannier.

The wind, which had been our friend or at least a pleasant acquaintance for several days, decided to unfriend us today. It blew straight in our faces. It was an inconvenience for sure, but it really caused us consternation when it carried an awful smell. Following a short time during which we exchanged pinched disapproving looks at each other, we saw a farmer who was driving a manure-spreading truck in his field right at the fence line next to the road. The silver-haired man bounced along, atop a vehicle that in our opinions was gag-worthy.

The next stretch contained the best menagerie of farm animals of the whole trip. There was a wide layer of sheep surrounding a thin stand of eucalyptus. There was a crowd of turkey hens in one pen separated from the toms in the next pen. We saw goats, young ones and old ones, roaming the grounds with a sow trailing a line of piglets. Who knows what other species were there. It was around this time that Berta had a Blood Sugar Emergency. She knew she was hungry at the bottom of the big hill, but it's a bad idea to eat before a big hill. You get back on the bike and develop a major burn going uphill. So Berta waited until she was near the top of the long hill to demand lunch. John recognized the urgency, threw his bike down, and quickly extracted pasta salad from his pack. While we were stopped, two guys we had been seeing for three days approached. Most pairs of cyclists have a stronger partner and a weaker partner. The stronger guy stopped next to us and waited for his friend while Berta was inhaling her food. She really didn't care what she sounded like. John discussed bike setups and camping versus staying in motels. They are campers and they don't waste their time making a campfire like we did. Finally, Berta regained her composure. The two men rolled away and John reached in his pack for dessert.

Dessert was a dual flavor item with a triangular slice of chocolate cheesecake facing right and a triangular slice of plain cheesecake facing left. The plastic shell was sealed at the flat base with a sticker that made claims about the deliciousness of the contents. Berta, just having returned from Low Blood Sugar Zombieland, thought she should be careful not to launch the sweets in the air with a careless job of opening such a poorly-designed package. Not like that time in high school when she went to open a pack of Fritos and lost all of that corny goodness in one tragic rip. The top successfully separated from the rest of the packaging, Berta took a forkful of the plain cheesecake. It slipped off the fork and landed in the dirty old grass at the side of the road. Talk about tragedy! An ant family rejoiced in their good fortune.

The balance of the cycling day was spent battling a troublesome headwind while trying to enjoy the majesty of the Tomales Bay. The little town of Tomales has a beautiful downtown and a nice Historical Museum that we didn't visit because it isn't open during the week. The largest employer in Tomales is the high school. We rolled through the stop sign in the middle of town and continued to the coast. Look at the long and skinny bay that is Tomales in the map below:

Half of the coastline of Tomales is mud up to a heron's knee. The other half is choppy wind-whipped whitecaps around the outlines of oyster beds. On the shore, there are stands of eucalyptus with bright orange trunks probably from a lichen.

We rolled downhill into Point Reyes Station and turned left to cruise the three charming blocks of their main street. Halfway along, we saw Falko and Marion snacking outside a bakery. We stopped and chatted and wished they lived next door. They were headed to a campground six miles out of town and we were headed to a bed no matter what the cost. \$180 later and after some searching we got our wish. The GPS said there were three bed and breakfast spots in town but it was lying on all counts. We rode in circles following the liar and passed the two guys we talked to earlier on the road. Then we passed them going the other direction. They evidently had their plans made and thought our predicament was funny. Berta was beyond thinking it was funny. We made a phone call and returned to the first place we passed on the North side of town. We had a choice of two rooms. The cheaper one was perfectly adequate, so Berta didn't even look at the other one. John was proud. The innkeeper told us that the best place to eat in town is the Italian place. Berta looked at the menu online and identified two appetizers that were in our price range. Good thing they weren't open for an hour and waiting to eat was not an option.

We made a few more loops around the town center before deciding our only choice was a deli. We had already ordered a BLT and a meatball sandwich when John saw the nachos another patron ordered. "What is that?" he blurted. We got the nachos too and they were excellent. Lots of veggies, good heat, and queso fresco. Yet another meal that was much better than we expected.

Upon returning to our room, we heard bleating. Berta hurried to the balcony and looked for the bleater. He was forty feet away in a yard separate from the inn's patio. This goat was small and completely black so that when he talked we saw his pink mouth appear from the darkness. John bleated. The goat bleated. It happened again. Berta had no idea John spoke Goat. As for John, he is easily entertained and dreamed of goats.

Day Seventeen, Point Reyes Station to San Rafael, California

Today's mileage: 30 miles

Total bike mileage so far: 661 miles

Local Gas Prices: \$3.89

Weather: Cool and sunny

Saddle Sore-o-meter reading: 0.0
Animals for the day:

This trip has been an adventure in breakfast. Before this trip, we had only once stayed in a Bed and Breakfast. Many of our nights on the Northern coast of California have been in such places. Not our first choice, but we haven't seen a chain motel in many days. John talked to the proprietor here and learned the difference between a farmer and a rancher. This guy says he is a rancher because he raises animals like Billy Goat outside. The hard-boiled eggs at breakfast came from the chickens outside. Everything else looked purchased: muesli, bread, cereal, and orange juice. We piled up a good sampling and dug in. A man emerged from behind a closed door and announced that he could finally come out and have a pre-breakfast snack. He was on a weekend trip with his wife. They live in Southern California where he is a contractor. They had a cute dog. He suggested he couldn't do a trip like we are doing; actually, when we said he could do it, he elaborated that he didn't *want* to do a trip like we are doing. Something about preferring to sit on a couch...

A large portion of the ride today was on a bike path. We used our Adventure Cycling maps to find where to get on the path that went for miles and miles hidden from the highway where there was heavy machinery working. The return to civilization began as the bike path entered a campground in Marin. Berta talked to a woman who had started cycling on a tandem with her husband five months ago in New Orleans. They managed to survive the aggressive raccoons who are terrorizing campers in the area.

People joke about it being all downhill when you ride South. Today it was actually true. It seemed like we coasted for miles and miles and miles. At one point, as we were screaming down a long gradual hill, a rowdy pack of road cyclists flew past us. They appeared to own the road, or at least they thought so. We didn't want to be involved, and with just a touch of the brakes, they were gone in the distance, rolling through stop signs and otherwise causing cycling mayhem.

Marin County has good bike infrastructure that we appreciated since we were now officially "off route". We just needed to get to a place where we could rent a van to drive home. We followed street markings to get through some really cute little towns until it was once more time to feed the bellies. Sitting outside a shop, eating our pasta salad, we saw Marion and Falko roll up once more. It was a bonus meeting as we were sure we had seen the last of them. We talked a little bit longer and they rolled away. They were headed for the Golden Gate Bridge and we weren't. Berta managed to navigate us to a rental spot with barely a missed turn. We rented a van to drive one way to home. And in just minutes we left the slow-paced bicycle tour behind and sped off down the freeway in air-conditioned comfort.