

GOLD LAKES TOUR RECAP- Sept. 09

by Karen L. Baker

When I had to drop out of the *Tour de Bakery* due to a scheduling conflict, the *Gold Lakes tour*, organized by Dave Joshel, seemed like a perfect substitution. I prefer hub tours (unpack once!), love to climb and ride new roads, see new vistas. Even though I've lived in California for four years I've never visited the Eastern Sierras, so this was the perfect opportunity to explore.

We arrived in Blairsden on Friday, and after check in at the Feather River Resort (a funky log-cabin-in-the-pines kind of place with a great swimming pool) and a quick lunch in Dave's cabin, Dave suggested a warm-up ride to the old mining town of Johnsville. Just a nice 10 mile out and back to get us acclimated to the altitude and stretch our legs. What he didn't tell us was that at least 4 1/2 miles of that loop was straight up! Note to self: always ask Dave what he considers to be a "warm-up" ride. Our reward was the interesting Plumas Eureka State Park featuring remnants of a sizable gold mining operation and some lovely views of Eureka Peak.

Dave had cooked up a fabulous roast chicken dinner for Friday night, stoking us for the Saturday ride which would take us on a 63 mile loop (with 3,340 ft of climbing) to Lake Davis and Calpine.

Saturday's ride was named "Tour of the Sierra Valley and Lake Davis." After a short (1,000 ft.) but steep climb up to the lake, we had a long pull down a huge valley right out of "Bonanza" with a Yolo-style headwind until we headed up Yuba Pass toward our cabins and another relaxing swim in the pool.

The roads in the Eastern Sierras are a dream. Smooth, low traffic and fast descents: It's a pleasure to really let go without worrying too much about hitting a big hole; although Dave can testify to other hazards in the mountains (keep reading ...). Our SAG driver, Diane Richter, kept us fueled and hydrated with a van load of wonderful goodies (the watermelon was a special treat) all day and found a great picnic spot to boot.

Saturday night we gathered to eat yet another delicious dinner orchestrated by Dave with many sous chefs helping prep and clean up. After enjoying homemade cookies and brownies, a fierce Scrabble game ensued with Bill Dunn emerging as the Scrabble King of Blairsden. No surprise there: he travels with a custom bag for his letter tiles!

Sunday's ride started out under slightly overcast skies which quickly cleared to bright blue and perfect riding weather. This was our biggest climbing day with 5,200 ft. of climbing (according to Bikely) and over 51 miles. No big valleys today, just mountain passes and gorgeous Tahoe National Forest with hidden lakes and dramatic rock formations. Our first big climb of the day was six miles on Yuba Pass (going the other direction from Saturday's ride) which took us to 6,700 ft at the summit. After a 7-mile descent, we turned onto Gold Lakes Highway and started another 5-mile climb; after about 2,000 ft you think you're at the top, but it's a false summit. I stayed with Dave for the first part of the climb, and then he dropped me. The road there is twisty with lots of blind curves. A few minutes later Dave reappeared on the other side to warn me about a big rockslide that barely missed him. And he wasn't kidding. Huge boulders were in the bike lane and all over the road. Great riding on Dave's part to avoid being hit! He said it sounded like a thunderstorm just before the rocks tumbled down. At our next snack stop (a beautiful little mountain lake was tucked away there), Diane arrived and admitted to clearing the road so that no one would get hurt. Who needs Schwarzenegger when you've got Diane?

The 2009 Gold Lakes tour exceeded all my expectations. My only disappointment was the lack of donut shops in Graeagle, but Dave had such a great spread for breakfast every morning, I got over it.

We had excellent route sheets, the SAG stayed with the group, and if you aren't into climbing, you could still enjoy this tour by sagging up the longer stretches. I'd like to thank Paul, Alan, Bill, Russell, Roger, Dr. B, Diane, Don and especially Dave, for making this tour so enjoyable.