

# Take it easy on the Highway

With two recumbents from San Francisco to Los Angeles

## Getting ready

Everything is ready for our bicycle trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles. I'm using a Bacchetta Giro 20 and Ueli a Bacchetta Bella. Due to Ueli's foresight we checked in the bikes the evening before departure at Zürich airport. We had to disassemble the bikes quite a bit in order to fit them in the cardboard boxes the airline provided. Now California is waiting for us. But shouldn't we alert a few of our friends in California. After all you don't go to California every weekend.

There is Mary in Berkeley to pay a visit. To alert her, I needed her mail address. Well, just Google "Mary" and "Berkeley". It's amazing what wealth of information you can get without questions asked. Mary is now 61. I knew that much before. She was 3 years younger than me already 30 years ago. She owns a property, it says, that is valued to 400 000 \$. Why do they distribute all this information to anybody who happens to ask? For 12 dollars I could even have had her criminal record. It's really amazing how far we have come in our information age. But I still don't have her email address and probably won't be able to pay her a visit. Never the less we will start tomorrow in San Francisco. Exactly 35 years after my year in Berkeley at UCB in 1979. I wonder what has changed in the meantime.

## Zürich to San Francisco

A flight of 12 hours is quite a challenge. But now we have made it and with the BART train we have reached Embarcadero station and from there - riding our bikes in a gentle evening breeze - we reached our Hotel near pier 45. Every time I come to California I'm surprised about the friendly welcome you get everywhere. The lady at the BART station helped us getting the tickets and even showed us the trick to avoid the extra bank charge. The receptionist at the hotel Argonaut gave us the impression that she has been waiting for us the whole day and the porter took our two recumbent bikes and gave them a special room. He would love to do more bicycling, he said, but his bike has a flat tire and he could not spare the 15 dollars for a repair. My promise, to repair his bike next morning, resulted in two wine vouchers at the hotel bar. I love this country.



Starting with a Bacchetta Giro and a Bacchetta Bella at the Golden Gate

## **San Francisco**

The day started with a light drizzle. We took the ferry to Sausalito to do some shopping in the numerous fashionable boutiques. But it was somehow not the right thing. For a real shopping tour you must be with a female person. A shopping tour with a colleague is a bit farfetched. Quite soon we modified our tour and took an extended walk to the Golden Gate Bridge, where we were rewarded with a beautiful view of the bridge in the afternoon light.

On the way back to San Francisco we passed Angel Island. An excursion to Angel Island was for me - 35 years ago - the first step in getting familiar with UCB. The professors of UCB organized this trip to make life a bit easier for the new students. Later on, all we have learned in this year in Berkeley has been incorporated in our professional life and this professional life is now almost over. Isn't it terrible how time flies?

As the day drew to its end and as it hasn't been especially eventful, I took Ueli to the Dungeon of San Francisco, to Madame Thussaud and to an evening meal in the Rain Forest. I hope he appreciated my resourcefulness and slept well in spite of the dreadful events in the Dungeon. Tomorrow we will start southwards.

## **San Francisco to Half Moon Bay**

It's more symbolic but we couldn't possibly miss this: The ride over the Golden Gate Bridge. It was fantastic but a bit too windy. We much more enjoyed the clam chowder at the Cliff House. An elderly couple on their racing bicycles showed us the way to this lovely spot. The sun shone bright and the wind pushed us forward. Some steep hills and the corresponding descents brought us to the Half Moon Bay area. But we still didn't have a hotel. A lighthouse and a signpost brought us to a collection of huts, where we just could secure the last two beds in the dormitory of the Youth Hostel. I hope nobody is snoring.

The evening meal with fried salmon and two glasses of Chardonnay rounded up the day in a descent way. But even more interesting was the life story of Russell and Susie at the neighbouring table. And this is what makes a journey in California so exiting. You are never alone. There is always someone to talk to - or more frequently - to listen to. Russell, originally from England, has sold cars in Hawaii and Taiwan before he settled to fishing in the Half Moon Bay. Susie from New York has two daughters. And so on. Chatting away for hours the evening gets late before we realize it. But tomorrow we really should reach Santa Cruz.



Highway One  
near Half Moon  
Bay

## **Half Moon Bay to Santa Cruz**

After a good sleep in the dormitory of Montara Lighthouse we headed southwards with an empty stomach. No breakfast at the lighthouse hostel. But the Three-Zero-Cafe (a suggestion of Russell and Susie from yesterday) at Half Moon Bay airport made up for this. No airplanes but a huge breakfast for half of Half Moon Bay's population. It seems to be an In-place. We had to wait for more than half an hour to get a table. We were probably the only guests who really deserved such a treat, because we had 100 km biking ahead of us.

These 100 km were absolutely fantastic: Steep cliffs, big waves and the Californian blue sky. What else do you need? As we were rolling along, suddenly a pick-up truck stopped. Out jumped the driver and handed us out two reflecting jackets. "They are here to save your lives" he said and ran back to his car and dashed off. Now we are underway as "Tarmac Electricity" and can be seen from more than two miles distance.

In Davenport we had a short break with hot chocolate, to give us the missing energy to reach Santa Cruz the same day. On leaving the coffee shop the waitress said with a sad face "Oh, you guys are leaving already?" I know it's just a phrase but it makes you feel so good. We reached Santa Cruz the same day at sun set and we found a very pleasant hotel at the sea front. No advanced booking. Just give Fortuna a chance and the best things will happen. One day it's a dormitory in a light house, another day it's a spacious suite where even our bikes have a decent place. But honestly the light house was not exactly to my taste.



Sunset in Santa Cruz

### **Santa Cruz to Monterey**

Sitting in front of a nice open fire in a huge Hotel lobby in Monterey is sort of reassuring. In spite of big fears about sleeping "à la belle étoile" we are in a safe place and well taken care of. Our third day led us first to Capitola, an Italian style village at the sea front not far from Santa Cruz. Banana pancakes and a hot chocolate laid the foundation to the 100 km to come. We drove first through charming suburbs with cosy villas built of wood, each one with a well-tended garden. Then we reached the area of Watsonville. This is Strawberry County. Strawberries as far as your eyes can see. Watsonville owns also a historic town centre. But we had to inquire several times for it, in spite of being in the middle of it. It just didn't look old enough for our European eyes.

Then we somehow lost track and found an alternate route through marshland and over some very steep hills. Suddenly an oncoming car stopped and the driver explained us that we should watch out for his girlfriend. We should tell her, that he will be waiting for her at Kimberly Park. I suggested that he hasn't been friendly enough with her, so she deserted him. He couldn't deny. So the next two hours we looked out for a lonesome lady trudging along Kimberly Park Drive, but in vain. I guess she had better things to do than to follow a useless knight.

The sun was already low when we reached Monterey, where we found a wonderful room in Monterey Plaza Hotel. It's not far from Cannery Road with its many shops and restaurants. And after 100 km on our bikes we really deserved it.

### **Monterey to Big Sur**

The most beautiful days are most difficult to describe. Or is it the bottle of Chardonnay we are enjoying at an open fire in a cosy restaurant between huge Sequoia trees. Anyhow, we started this day with the spectacular 17 mile drive. Every mile was a treat. The wild coast line and the exciting villas some people have built here were a real delight. We passed the most often photographed tree of the world, the "Lone Cypress", and slowly drove into Carmel where we stumbled unexpectedly into the mission of Carmel



Of course we couldn't skip that. It is strange, but we were really deeply touched. What you see here is part of Spain. A friendly lady explained us in all details the history of the Spanish missions and how it came that the USA ended up owning this wonderful strip of land. She was a history professor, but never got a long term contract. So she changed to human resources for a big company in order to have a secure income. She returned to history as a hobby after her retirement. After her lengthy but very interesting explanation of Spanish and Mexican history she ended with the remark, that we are now certainly sorry to have asked her anything in the first place. We had a hard time to convince her that we truly enjoyed her lecture.

The journey continued along the fantastic coast with point Lobos as the first turn out. The lady at the entrance assured us that there aren't any dangerous animals and that we should easily manage deers and squirrels. Point Lobos is a fantastic peninsula with many trails leading to the most exciting coves. "Take it easy on the highway" lady park ranger shouted when we left Point Lobos.

We drove on, alternating between steep ascends and hilarious descends, the blue Pacific always at our right side. We passed the most beautiful bridge of the world (Bixby Bridge) and with the golden sun sinking into the Pacific we approached Big Sur. And before panic could spread, we found a lovely cabin between huge Sequoia trees.



Pacific coast with  
Bixby Bridge

### **Big Sur to Lucia**

A bicycle tour is like having Christmas every day. Every day is like a wrapped present. You don't know what is inside in the morning, but you guess that it will be something fantastic.

This day started with us finding out where the heating switch of our cabin is located. After this discovery, temperature started to rise from 10 degrees to 20 degrees and we started to really enjoy our cabin. We spent the morning hiking between huge Sequoia trees and visiting the cabin of John Pfeiffer, the founder of the national park with his name. Well, I guess his cabin had no heating switch neither. We found the camping place, where we stayed 35 years earlier, with Daniela (my daughter) crawling between the giant trees. The trees have grown quite a bit since then, I would say.

Back on the road we followed the advice of lady park ranger from Point Lobos: "Take it easy on the highway ". Every mile or so, we could have stopped to take photographs of the steep cliffs and the big waves. The road climbed and descended in regular intervals. On the downhill part I was much faster than Ueli due to the better aerodynamics of the Bacchetta Giro (my bike). On the uphill part Ueli was much faster on his Bacchetta Bella than me due to God knows what. Maybe it's his training.

The sun was already low when we reached Lucia. And they even had an empty cabin for us. The last one, by the way. Sometimes you must be on good terms with Fortuna. And this was not the last of the unexpected surprises of this evening. Here we met Paul and Sharon. Sharon invited us to come with her along the trail that leads to the top of the hill. There her husband Paul was playing the "Nyckleharpa", a Swedish instrument that is actually a violin played with a keyboard. He played the most beautiful tunes while the sun was slowly melting with the sea. We stood there and we knew that there are moments in live that will never come again. We stood there and listened until the sun had disappeared and the whole sky was aflame with yellow and red over a deep blue sea.



Sunset at Lucia

### **Lucia to Ragged Point**

The evening at Lucia Lodge was very pleasant. Upon my remark, that I have lived in this area in 1980 and that I have studied earthquake engineering at UCB, the lady of the Lodge explained us, that she had been in a very severe earthquake and that she was convinced that she was going to die and her last thoughts were "O, I haven't wrapped the birthday present for my sun".

We shared the table with Sharon and Ralph. He has spent half a year in Switzerland and spoke real good Bernese dialect. In Grindelwald he started his long trip with the bicycle, which led over the Alps and over the Pyrenees down to Gibraltar. There he took the ship to Ceuta and continued to Casablanca and further on to Agadir. In this light our trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles was not more than a Sunday afternoon trip.

The next day's ride continued along the steep cliffs with lots of uphill and downhill. I got really fond of this roller coaster ride. You just have to take it real easy on the uphill leg and then you let it zip at full speed on the downhill part. After 40 km we reached Rugged Point and decided that we shouldn't overdo it today. They have here the most beautiful rooms just over the cliffs with the most beautiful sunset. What else do you want?



Highway One near  
Ragged Point

## **Ragged Point to Morro Bay**

This day brought a real change. The morning still had us among cliffs and breaking waves but the afternoon lead us into flat terrain where the highway was stretching as a long thin line towards the horizon. And still it was a great feeling to glide through this vastness of land, the golden hills on either side, occasionally some cattle grazing in the distance. The temperature rose to over 30 degrees and a gentle wind pushed us forward.

Piedras Blancas was the first stop of the day. It's a charming sandy beach, but not for us. The beach was full of seal elephants and they gave a real performance. And they can be really fast, a warning sign announced. We stood there and watched for more than an hour.

In Cayucos we made another stop. The main reason was the big sign "Antiques". What do they sell here as antiquity? The land is still so young. They had lovely porcelain. Some of it resembled the porcelain Ueli got for his wedding some 40 years ago. And then I found the most beautiful vintage Barbie dolls. I almost took one with me but then I remembered that not only me, but my daughters too have accumulated a few years.

After a refreshing Coke (I know it's not healthy but it's really good at these temperatures) we drove on towards Moro Rock, the sentinel of Moro Bay. And there we found the most charming hotel right at the sea front: the "Anderson Inn". The lady at the reception (she is actually the proprietor) made us a special price, but we had to promise her, that we won't tell anybody. We are residing now in a luxury room, where even our bicycles have sufficient room to relax.



On Highway One near San Simeon

## **Morro Bay to Lompoc**

This day started leisurely along the coast line of Morro Bay through old Eucalyptus forests and marshland. Then we climbed a little bit to reach the Osos Valley, a perfectly flat and well cultivated piece of land. I'm sure the bears (osos = bear in Spanish) were so bored, that they have left long ago and have found more spectacular scenery in Yosemite Valley.

We past Guadalupe and later Orcutt but there was nothing really exciting for the cyclist's eye. The land is mostly flat and obviously ideal for strawberries. In Orcutt we inquired for a hotel: No hotels in Orcutt. But we should find plenty of them in Lompoc, an old man suggested. "Oh that is much too far" his neighbour warned. "Oh no" the first said, "These two gentlemen are really good at bicycling". For sure, bicycling was much easier after this compliment.

We reached Lompoc after two hours and obviously a bit too late. No rooms available in the romantic hotel built in the style of an old castle. So we had to content us with the "Comfort Inn" together with 200 French and 500 German tourists. The evening meal was another tricky problem. After crossing the 8-lane main street seven times in our quest for a cosy restaurant, we settled for the Panda Express. Food was certainly excellent. But good food doesn't make an evening meal if served in plastic containers and eaten with plastic forks. Not to mention the lemon juice out of the plastic bottle. I guess we're just a bit too fussy. Tomorrow there will be another day.





Morro Rock,  
sentinel of Morro  
Bay

### **Lompoc to Santa Barbara**

Today was a Golden Day. We took the detour through the Santa Ynez Valley and it was well worth it. The first highlight was the Mission La Purissima outside Lompoc. They have restored the mission to its original state. You can well imagine how the Franciscan brothers tried to cultivate a land in conditions that were far from ideal. They had a few soldiers, who despised manual work, and a few Indians, who didn't see any point in manual work. And then this shortage of tools, iron and other useful things. And all this in the year 1812. Sounds like yesterday for us Europeans, doesn't it.



Mission "La  
Purissima" outside  
Lompoc

Before we left the mission another visitor, concerned about our survival on this hot day, gave us two bottles of water. And we badly needed them. We drove on through Santa Ynez Valley and reached Solvang, a lovely Danish village. Every building bears a Danish name and it really looks pretty. Maybe we should have checked in in one of the many Danish hotels. But the day was still so young and the sun was high.



Live Style at Lake Cachuma, Santa Ynez Valley

Santa Inez Valley grew wilder and the road steeper. And I guess my friend and bicycle companion Ueli did not at all share my views about the fantastic scenery and even less about the excitement of a real steep mountain pass. But it was just overwhelming. The mountains glowed in the evening sun and the road was winding steadily higher and higher. We reached the summit exactly at sunset. Below us the lights of Santa Barbara under a veil of silver mist and over the mountains the last purple rays of the fading sun.

Who could worry about the hotel we haven't yet booked, when you can witness such a fantastic display of colours and shades. With this fantastic scenery below us we raced down towards Santa Barbara. The street carves down in wide bends and as long as you keep on your bike the speed of the cars, there are no major difficulties. But if you are too slow, the cars will start to honk and nasty words are shouted.

In no time we reached Santa Barbara and we were also completely lost in some suburban quarters with lots of dead ends but no hotels. And it was pitch dark. Don't expect help in such a situation. The few cars that passed made a big detour to avoid those dangerous beings on bikes and nobody ventured to open the window a fingers width. When the sun has set, the so communicative Californians have "guichet fermé". But we needed a hotel and didn't know in which forlorn suburb of Santa Barbara we actually were and how we could reach Down Town.

With the help of a courageous young lady in a pick-up truck we finally found our way out of the maze and landed safely in a Best Western Hotel. How truly original!

### **Santa Barbara to Ventura**

Santa Barbara is a real treasure. It has a Down Town with lots of shops and restaurants, almost in Italian style, just a bit more spacious. We started the day with a visit to the Mission. We walked through the old gardens, visited the beautiful church, as you are supposed to do. But far more time we spent chatting with another visitor, whose parents are from Locarno in the Italian speaking part of Switzerland. He was so excited to meet someone from his parent's country, that he hardly let us go.

Next stop was the pier of Santa Barbara with lots of nice old shops and restaurants. But why do they allow cars on this pier? A lot of valuable space is used for parking. With a clam chowder and an Irish coffee we had sufficient fuel to tackle the next 60 km to Ventura.

The bicycle route follows the coast, no hills and therefore easy riding. Out in the ocean you could see the oil rigs. But also on land we passed lots of oil pumping machines. It seems they find here oil in every backyard. The road along the coast was extra wide to provide parking space for these huge motorhomes so abundant in California. That's where the oil goes to.





The almost too perfect bicycle road between Santa Barbara and Ventura

We reached Down Town Ventura and found a hotel at the seafront just in time to enjoy the most beautiful sunset from our balcony on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor. Not really romantic. Our subsequent search for a nice restaurant proved to be more successful. We decided to dine at the Indian restaurant. And we really got a great meal. At the neighbouring table they were celebrating a 21 birthday. And as we helped them singing "Happy Birthday" we got a large piece of their birthday cake.

## The End

Its seven o'clock in the morning and I'm watching the surfers riding their waves from the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of the Crown Plaza Hotel at Ventura beach. This evening we will reach Los Angeles and take the plane back to Switzerland. What a terrible thought! I knew from several books I've read, that the trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles on Highway One is one of the best bicycle tours. But I didn't expect it to be such a gorgeous journey. Spectacular scenery every day, perfect temperature, no rain and all these friendly people. It's just unbelievable.

Even our two Bacchetta bicycles behaved flawlessly. They are not mentioned adequately in this report. Probably because they made the 800 km trip without the slightest problem. My Bacchetta Giro 20 is a fantastic bicycle. It is the result of a 25 year quest for the "ideal" bicycle. And this quest began with a Fateba Long Bike. It was a real revelation: Bicycling without pain. The Fateba was joined by a RANS-Tandem, a Street Machine from HP-Velotechnik and a Scorpion also from HP-Velotechnik. Each of these bicycles has its own character and they brought me to the nicest spots on this world like Iceland, Cyprus and the Pacific Coast. But I haven't yet found the "ideal" bicycle.

They showed me however in which direction to go. The "ideal" bicycle has to fulfil three main criteria: Comfort, Aerodynamics and Weight. It has to be so comfortable that you feel well even after 15 hours of riding. Wind resistance must be so small that you don't have to pedal on flat terrain and its weight must be so low that you don't feel the bike at all. The Bacchetta Aero II (which I bought before getting the Giro 20) with its reclined carbon seat and the narrow 8 bar tyres was for me the first bicycle to fulfil all three requirements. As on a flying carpet you glide over the road with more than 40 km/h, if the road surface is smooth. But what if the road is not smooth, what if there is no pavement at all? Finally I landed on the Bacchetta Giro 20. The first two criteria - Comfort and Aerodynamics - it fulfils perfectly. With the third criterion, the weight, you have to compromise, if you want to use rough or even unpaved roads. For Highway One it certainly was the ideal bicycle.