

My First Chico Wildflower!

While attending UCD and living in Davis in the early 80s I was fully immersed in the cycling world there; riding 100s of bucolic miles per month, as an officer in the DBC and helping organize the Davis Double and Foxy Fall centuries and their summer tours. Cycling for me was, and still is, a wonderful elixir for the soul, creating time to both connect and be set free. Having a bike club offer a "Century" was a fairly new concept back then and when I heard the Chico club was organizing their first one, I eagerly mailed in my registration. I drove up the day before with Mike, my housemate/cycling buddy, we envisioned this as a training ride for the upcoming Davis Double. We stayed with two of my best friends, Geno and Karl, who were conveniently attending Chico State. I rode a black Trek with Reynolds 531 tubing, a Brooks saddle and Campy hardware and Mike had a nicely appointed Peugeot. The start finish was in Bidwell Park, if memory serves. The check-in was at a picnic table in a secluded forested area from which we eagerly set off with a small group other riders under heavy gray skies. Riding 100 miles was a bigger deal back then, as both equipment and the mindset were still transforming. I don't remember the exact route, but we did climb Honey Run early in the day and it started raining less than half way up. It was a cold rain. While descending from Paradise, I stopped and took off my wool socks and wore them as gloves so I could continue to use my brakes. My face hurt. The rest of the route was a wet blur, mostly traversing flat exposed farm roads down south of Chico, as the waves of rain intensified. At the rest stops, the volunteers were scrambling but mostly powerless to help the dwindling groups of suffering cyclists. I asked for and received a couple of black plastic trash bags, using them for sleeveless rain coats, booties inside our shoes and helmet covers. But there weren't enough for riders to follow and it was too little, too late. The grail for me in those early days was "The Patch", colorful evidence worn on your jersey or windbreaker or displayed on your family room wall as proof that you were a true cyclist. Our small peloton soldiered on, wet and cold to the bone, our chains now devoid of any

lubrication. Luckily, we had a local Chico rider who knew the way back into town as all our maps had morphed into useless mush. We found the Picnic table in the park, dismounted, waddled over (remember real chamois?) and were handed the most amazing bowls of piping hot chili. I could have swum in it. Our spirits began to warm and strengthen so I moved over to the reg table and inquired about my eagerly anticipated and hard-earned patch; that little bit of thread and fabric that had motivated me those last, long, wet, cold, miserable miles. "Oh, I'm sorry....we don't have patches," said the club's volunteer. I don't think I burst into tears, but given the weather, no one would have noticed if I did.

Randall Braun

RouteArrows.com