

Tour of California Trip 2014

Stage 6, Santa Clarita-Mountain High, May 16, 2014 (Friday)

By Oleg Shpyrko

Imagine you lived in France and were just a short drive away from the queen mountain stage of Tour de France, would you bother to travel to watch the peloton? What if you lived in Italy and it was the Giro (which also starts next week!) coming close to your hometown? Would you drive to Koppenberg to watch Tour of Flanders if you lived in Belgium?

In case you are wondering, yes, this is quiz and the correct answers are (in order), Yes, Yes and Yes!



Young Peter Sagan wins his second ever stage, at Palmdale-Big Bear Stage 6 of 2010 ToC.

Well, we are Californians and the most patriotic thing any Californian can do is to go watch Tour of California on Friday, May 16, 2014. May is also bike-to-work month, and what is more fitting to the spirit of bike-to-work idea than ditching work altogether and biking all day instead of going to work? I like to think of it as “work-to-bike” week, where you work super-hard Mon-Thur (while also biking to work), so you can afford to bike all day on Friday instead of working.

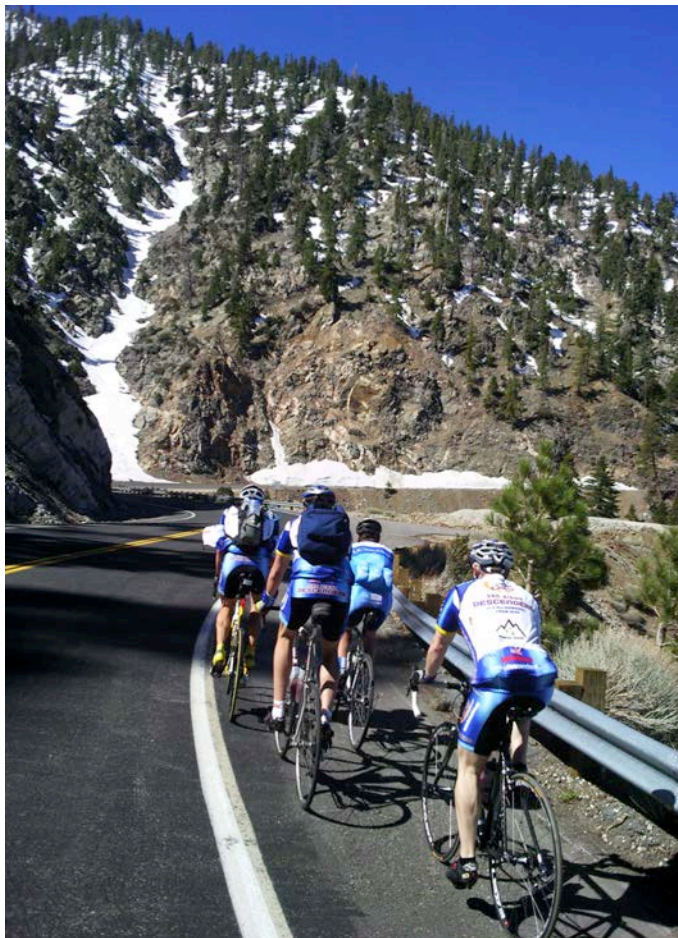
The Queen Mountain Stage in this year’s edition of Tour of Cali is likely to be Stage 6, starting from Santa Clarita and finishing in Mountain High Ski Resort, in a town of

Wrightwood. It's a 94-mile stage with 11,700ft of elevation gain – climbing more than any other stage in this year's ToC.

If the town name, "Wrightwood", sounds familiar to you it's because it should – this was the site of our 2010 Tour of California San Diego Descenders outing – incidentally, also stage 6 (in 2010 edition the stage was from Palmdale to Big Bear). That day a very young and mostly unknown rider by the name of Peter Sagan won the stage. This was his second stage win at ToC (in his first appearance too, he would go on to win a total 10 stages in Tour of California in the last few years and will be back this year, for more), and while he may have turned a few heads taking two sprinter stages at the earlier Paris-Nice that year, I believe it was really that Stage 6 of the Tour of California that made many cycling fans notice his talent – he was a part of the select group of 14 or so containing mostly GC contenders, all very good climbers, that made it to the finish together, and Sagan easily cruised to the sprint win, moving himself up to 3rd place overall in GC (just 9 seconds off the leader's time), as well as taking the sprints and the young rider jersey that he would easily defend throughout the rest of the Tour.

In 2014 the Tour of California will have many top names, including former TdF winner and Olympic gold medalist, Sir Bradley Wiggins (who promised to win it – after a long dry spell!), Peter Sagan, Mark Cavendish, Tom Boonen, Thor Hushovd, John Degenkolb, Jens Voigt, Laurens ten Dam, Lars Boom, Niki Terpstra, Greg Van Avermaet, as well as top US riders, such as Fast Freddy Rodriguez (he is still racing!), Ted King, Ben King, Philip Gaimon, Taylor Phinney, Peter Stetina, Matt Busche, Lawson Craddock, Joe Dombrowski etc.

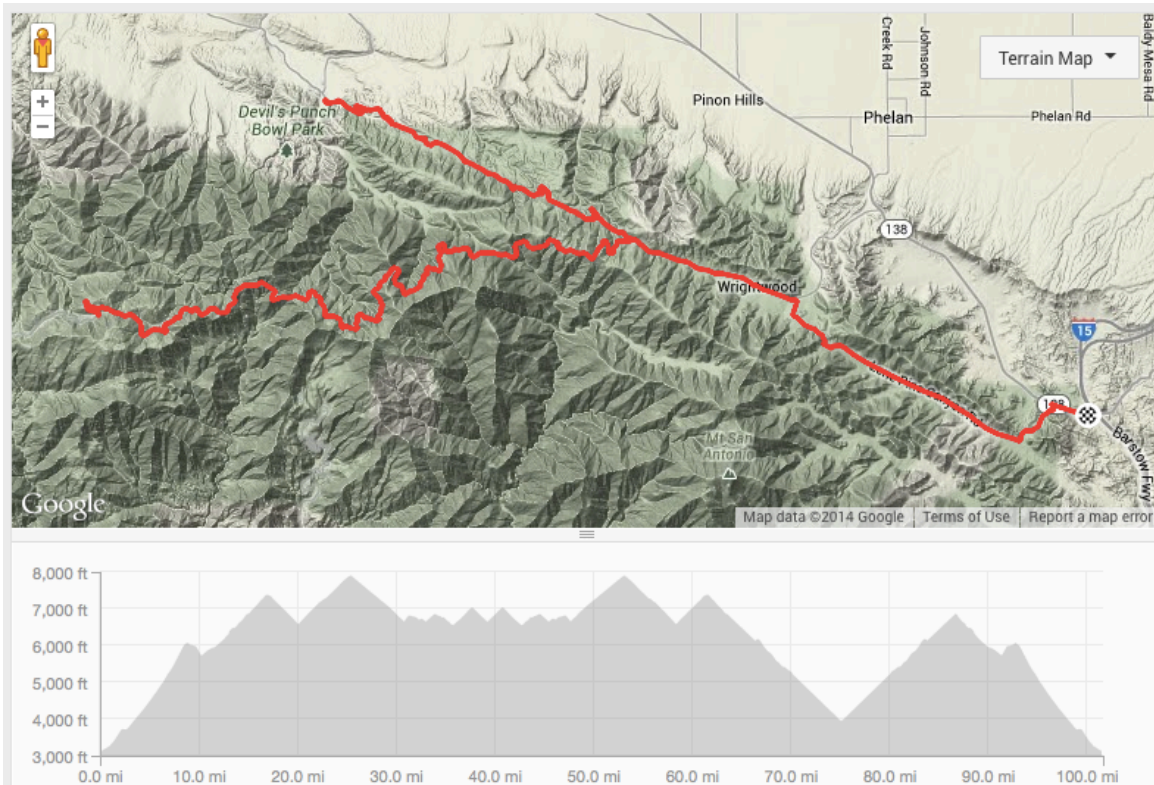
Our 2014 route and itinerary will be similar to the 2010 version. We will leave San Diego Thursday Night (*meet at 7PM, on the road by 7:30PM), will stay overnight at the luxurious Best Western in Cajon Pass (rooms only \$63 per night which includes terrible, horrible breakfast – but hey, they have a pool!).



There was still snow during our 2010 trip up to Dawson Saddle – in May!

In the morning we will check out and leave the hotel around 8AM and will ride along the scenic Lone Canyon (with rock formations right out of the Hollywood Westerns) and continuing to Alluvian ^#@\$ Fan (aka AFF) up to Woodward. We are going to have a volunteer drive a car earlier in the morning, loaded with water, food and clothes to Big Pines (will be left it at the Angeles Crest/Big Pines Rd. fork, by Mount High Ski area, if possible), then descend down Lone Canyon to meet the group.

We will climb 3,000ft in just 9 miles, arriving at Wrightwood, with a short downhill section and left turn onto Angeles Crest Hwy to follow. It's another 5 miles of climbing up to Big Pines. We will pass Mountain High Ski Resort in Big Pines, the Stage 6 finish line around mile 15 into the ride. This is a major regrouping area, and support vehicle will be located there. I expect no water sources past that point on our route.



Route map: <http://www.strava.com/routes/179746>

Full route as shown here is 100 miles, 13K of climbing (many sections are optional!)

In theory, you could just stop here and wait about 6 hours for the race to come to you, then just roll down to the hotel/cars once it's done. However, we came here to ride our bikes and will have three options:

(1) We can take a left on Angeles Crest (very scenic, winding road) and ride up to Dawson Saddle (one of the highest paved roads in Southern California at nearly 8,000 ft), and then descend to the tunnels (about another 15 miles) and back to Mount High, just like we did when we were all 4 years younger. One doesn't need to go all the way down to the tunnels, and could turn around and start climbing earlier.

Or even not go past Dawson Saddle at all, just come back to Big Pines, chill at the support car and start option 2.

(2) We could also descend Big Pines Road to Shoemaker Canyon, riding against the direction the race will go up, about 11.5 mile descent, and then turn around and climb back up to Mount High.

(3) Finally, we could (and I think most of us should) do both (1) and (2) – in that order. After all, we have all day, so why not?

The ideal spot for watching the stage is near the top of the Mount High climb, where the final 2 miles to the ski lifts will average about 8%, surely breaking up whatever small group survives to that point.

Note that once we reach the Wrightwood fork of Angeles Crest and Big Pines Road, the two route sections are simple out and back. The entire planned route is about 100 miles (and 13,000 ft of climbing – yikes – it's all going up or down!), but individual riders should be able to plan to turn around at any point of the attempted out-and-back segments to shorten the ride accordingly. The important thing is to get back to Big Pines/Mount High Ski area by 3PM or so – the peloton arrival time is expected to be from 3:15PM to 4PM or so.

The final 15 mile ride from the finish line of Stage 6 to the cars is according to the San Diego Descenders motto, “It’s all downhill from here” – no pedaling is required*. (*almost – except for a short uphill segment coming out of Wrightwood). We may hit Friday evening LA traffic, so arrival in San Diego is difficult to forecast, but assuming we don’t get stuck too badly, I would expect 7:30-8:00PM arrival.

You Should Come!
Oleg.



Peloton charges up to Dawson Saddle in 2010 Tour of California

The Important stuff - Trip Itinerary (tentative):

Time	Distance	Location	Notes
Thursday, May 15:			
7PM load 7:30PM leave, arrive ~9:30PM	N/A (Drive)	San Diego - Best Western Cajon Pass.	Destination: Best Western, 8317 California 138, Phelan, CA 92371, (760) 249-6777. Right off Exit 131 to CA 138. 108 miles from Poway, ~1hr 45min drive
Friday, May 16:			
7AM-8AM	N/A (Food)	Best Western Hotel	Crappy Breakfast, Check Out
8AM- 9:30AM	0-15mi	Cajon Pass- Wrightwood (Mount High fork in Big Pines)	The Support Vehicle will be parked at the Mount High, (Angeles Crest/Big Pines fork).
9:30AM- 12:30PM	15mi- 63.5mi	Angeles Crest up to Dawson Saddle, down to tunnels and back	Earlier turn-around (don't go all the way down to the tunnels, or even just up to Dawson Saddle and back down) - optional, reduce as needed
12:30PM- 1PM	63.5 mi (lunch)	Lunch, regrouping	At support vehicle
1PM-3PM	63.5- 86mi	11-mile Descent down Big Pines Rd, then climb back up to Mount High	Can be made shortened, but certainly don't go past Shoemaker Cyn (road fork) - optional, reduce as needed
3:15-4PM	86mi (spectate, cheer)	Mount High/Big Pines, Somewhere in final 2 miles @ 8% gradient	Expected range of arrival of peloton in Big Pines is 3:15 (fast) to 4PM (slow).
4PM-5PM	86mi- 100mi	14-mile descent down to cars in Cajon Pass	1 mile uphill once we make right turn in Wrightwood, but the rest is super-fast downhill at 30+mph
5:30PM- 8:00PM	N/A (Driving, but mostly stuck in traffic)	Drive back to San Diego	Expected arrival is ~8:00PM, depending on traffic.



Rick was carrying extra water – climbing out of rocky Cajon Pass.



At the end of the ride, at Best Western Hotel in Cajon Pass.



Alluvial F'ing Fan on the way up to Wrightwood. Farkas (who else?) in breakaway



Waiting for peloton at Dawson Saddle



Team San Diego Descenders climbing up to Dawson Saddle



Light at the end of the Tunnels on Angeles Crest



Gorgeous views from Angeles Crest Hwy

Top-10 memories of our 2010 Tour of California trip:

1. Beer the night before, at the Best Western. Rick introduced me to Raddler (50/50 mix of beer and lemonade), a German drink that also means “cyclist” in German.
2. Riding past these huge boulders at the start in Cajon Pass.
3. Brief stop at Wrightwood Café for a coffee and pastries. The waitress was so impressed by Rick’s muscular legs, she ran to the kitchen and brought all her girlfriends out to show them Rick’s legs. There was a lot of “ooh” and “ahhh”. I think they really wanted to touch his legs too, but didn’t dare ask Rick.
4. Seeing snow as we rode up to Dawson Saddle. Spectators were having snowball fights and building snowmen – in May!
5. Rick catching and dropping two super-fit cyclists flying up the climb to Dawson Saddle... While carrying about a gallon of water in his backpack.
6. Descending down to the tunnels was fun. Climbing back up was hard work.
7. A female rider who joined us on the climb back to the Dawson saddle – she was very fit and had no problems staying with us, and we were working. She chatted me up, she just did triple-pass ride in Colorado. I could barely talk.
8. Watching breakaway group containing Andy Schleck (remember him?) and Hincapie – they would be caught by peloton later. Cavendish was dropped on the climb but was leading a small gruppetto across the Dawson Saddle.
9. Descending faster than cars into the Wrightwood, where locals mistook us for a (very slow) pro team that fell behind the main peloton and cheered.
10. Super-fast descent to Cajon Pass. We may have had tailwind. It was fun!