

THE BIGFOOT TOUR

**Yreka to the Unknown Coast
and the Avenue of the Giants**

We named this journey across the northwestern corner of the state in honor of the famous resident of these forests primeval, the legendary sasquatch. But we could just as well have called it the Tall Trees Tour for all the quiet giants we'll see while riding through four different national forests—Klamath, Six Rivers, Shasta, and Trinity—not to mention riding around or through the Marble Mountain Wilderness, the Trinity Alps Wilderness, and Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

Or we could have called it the Wild Rivers Tour, because at one time or another, the route parallels or crosses the Shasta, Klamath, Scott, Salmon, Trinity, Van Duzen, Eel, Bear, and Mattole Rivers, all of them pristine, untamed streams. In fact, about 70% of the entire route runs next to a river, a creek, a lake, or the ocean.

We'll visit little towns like Happy Camp, Forks of Salmon, Hayfork, and Ferndale (as pretty as Mendocino, but with far fewer tourists). Beyond Ferndale—on the far side of the steep, coastal hills—we'll explore the Unknown Coast, the only stretch of California coastline without a major highway next to it. We'll end up (after the long climb and descent over Panther Gap), rolling down the Avenue of the Giants, among the tallest trees on earth.

This tour only offers one stage with longer/shorter options. For most of the tour, there aren't any extra roads with which to create alternate loops of any length, whether we wanted to or not. Much of the route passes through areas so remote and unpopulated they have no need of more than the one paved road we use.

Stages range from 55 to 78 miles. Some portions of the tour are quite easy, but most of it is quite challenging, with climbs that are long or steep or both. In light of that, we would not recommend this tour for anyone but reasonably fit, experienced riders. That doesn't mean you have to be fast...just steady and determined and fairly self-sufficient. If that describes you, and if you're ready for this adventure, it promises to be one of the best tours we offer.

This tour could be ridden any time from late spring to early fall. There is always the possibility of rain in this northern portion of the state...whether you're in the mountains or along the coast...and at the same time, you may hit a hot spell, and some of the interior valleys on this route can become very hot indeed during the summer.

It's about a six hour drive on Interstate-5 from the Bay Area to the start near Yreka, while the return trip to San Francisco from the tour's end near Garberville should take about four hours on Highway 101.

Day 0: Arrive in Yreka.

Yreka is about six hours north of the Bay Area on Interstate-5. There is only one campground near Yreka that will work as a starting point for the tour. That's Waiiaka Trailer Haven, just on the eastern outskirts of town. As the name implies, their primary patrons are RV and trailer folks. Most of the camp is just rows of gravel parking slots. However, they do have a small, shaded lawn set aside for tent camping. It's not exactly a pristine wilderness experience, but it is clean and tidy and quiet, and it has the all-important virtue of being where we need it to be to launch the tour. You may not need it after a non-riding day, but they do have showers. When we camped here, we were able to put about 30 tents on the lawn without crowding.

Their camping fee is \$10 per tent for the first two folks in the tent. If you're a single in your own tent, \$10 seems a bit steep for what is frankly a very ordinary, no-frills campsite. If you feel this way, I happen to have an alternative to suggest. We don't normally do motels on these tours, but I'm going to offer one as an optional solution in Yreka.

My choice is the Wayside Inn. It's an older motel, but is clean and well-maintained, with the usual motel amenities: cable TV, a postage-stamp-sized swimming pool, etc. Their rates are reasonable. What's more, there's a decent little cafe on the corner of the motel that—when I stayed there on another tour—was offering two breakfasts for the price of one for all motel guests, which means you can lard up on all the eggs, bacon, hash-browns, and toast one human can hold for very little money. (This may not work too well for the veggies in the crowd. The joint does sort of lean toward the lumberjack end of the culinary spectrum, although there are probably some vaguely healthful items on the menu.) You'd have to come up with dinner on the town as well...somewhat more expensive than eating in camp...unless you could talk the motel management into letting you set up your camp kitchen on their lawn...doubtful.

Although I have not done it, several of the participants in our club tour spent the afternoon of our arrival day loosening up their legs on short rides near Yreka. After briefly scoping out the local Triple-A map, they were able to find their way around various 20-mile loops and out-&-backs that they described as pleasant and worthwhile.

One other disclaimer about the campsite: if you begin your tour on a Saturday night in the summer, there's a chance there will be auto races going on at the fairgrounds, just south of the camp. It's far enough away that the noise of the races is sort of like distant thunder, and not immensely annoying. In fact, I found it rather interesting. A few of us walked over to the race track and watched the races for awhile...the most bare-bones, grass-roots, dirt track racing you can imagine...a real slice of country Americana.

Day 1: Yreka to Happy Camp

74 miles, 1700' up, 3000' down

78 miles, 3300' up, 4600' down

This is the only stage on this tour with a longer, hillier alternative to the basic route. The two routes split up just outside camp at the start. Let's follow the basic route first and then come back and examine the longer option.

From the camp, you'll have to negotiate a couple of miles of city streets on your way north on Hwy 263. Once out of town, the road slopes gradually downhill off a high, dry, almost chaparral-like plateau and then picks up speed as it drops into the rugged canyon of the Shasta River. It looks more like Eastern Oregon here than anything else you'll see on the trip, and by the time you get to the ferns and fogs near the coast in a few days, this arid landscape will seem like another world.



There is one brief, rolling climb on this stretch, but the rest is all downhill. Near the bottom of the canyon, you cross a stately old twin-arch bridge that has the elegant, deco look of the WPA about it—quite impressive—and then you zoom down to a junction with Hwy 96. Turn left here and you won't make another turn for the next 60 miles, all the way downstream alongside the Klamath River to the town of Happy Camp.

This has to be one of the easiest stages on any tour we offer. Mile after mile, you glide along next to the wild and scenic Klamath River...sometimes on one bank, sometimes on the other, but almost always going downhill, if ever-so-gently (above). There are a few small rollers, and just before Happy Camp, one rather large climb, but the overall theme for the day is descending, with the pretty river as your constant companion.

Technically, the Klamath isn't a wild river, as its waters are



It's a fairly daunting looking climb, all out in the open on the mountainside, but it isn't really all that bad, and getting it out of the way first thing in the morning—while you're fresh and it's still cool—makes it quite manageable.

Once over the top, hang on and let it rip for 3.4 miles on a super-fast, silky-smooth, not-too-technical descent toward the village of Fort Jones. Just at the bottom of the hill, as the grade levels off, I've thrown in a little detour off Hwy 3 on a side road called Moffett Creek. It loops down the other side of the valley for three miles and then re-connects to Hwy 3. If you miss it, you'll still end up at the same place. But I like it better than the main highway, not only because it's a smaller road—always a plus in my book—but also because it humps up and down over the rolling terrain more naturally than the main highway...little bumps and drops instead of one steady downgrade of about 1% on the highway. And the views are better from a slightly higher elevation on the side road, looking

impounded ten miles upstream at Iron Gate Reservoir near the Oregon border. You wouldn't know it to look at it here, dancing merrily down its rocky canyon. And for what it's worth, the water released from the lake is all top-water and thus marginally warmer than otherwise, should you care to stop for a swim. This is a popular stretch for white-water kayaking and rafting. It's also a great fishing river, as are all the streams we'll visit on this journey.

Before I explored this road, I imagined the surrounding countryside would be all tall trees...a dense, dark forest of fir and pine. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the forest is actually a mix of conifers and deciduous trees, and the woods nearest the river and the road are predominantly of the latter sort: oak, maple, cottonwood, poplar, ailanthus, madrone, alder, yew, and many more. It makes for a much more interesting and pleasing spectacle than just an unrelieved wall of pines...or so it seems to me. (You'll get your dose of endless pines later in the trip and then you can make your own comparison.)

At mile 43, Scott River Road tees into Hwy 96. That's where the alternate route rejoins the basic route. So take a break here while we go back to Yreka and follow the other route to this point.

This route is only four miles longer than the basic one, but it's the elevation gain that really makes it different, and most of that comes almost immediately after you leave Yreka on Hwy 3. At first, after leaving town, you climb gently beside a long, rolling meadow. If it's a clear day, you'll see magnificent Mt Shasta looming on the south-eastern horizon, sunlight glinting off its snowfields. At mile three, you begin the long climb to 4097' Forest Mountain summit...1300' up in 3.7 miles.

out across the mountain meadow. The first Moffett Creek sign you'll see at the bottom of the hill is for a left turn. You don't want that one. Hang on for another hundred yards for a right turn.

On the far side of rather quaint Fort Jones at mile 16.2, turn right on Scott River Road. This is a jewel of a backroad, and getting to it was the primary reason we bothered with that long climb to start the day. It begins with a run across the open fields of grain and meadows sprawling across Scotts Valley (above). It looks much like many another country road: pleasant, but not anything out of the ordinary. But around mile 23, just after a junction with Quartz Valley Road, it narrows, loses its center stripe, and begins diving and weaving down the canyon of the Scott River (below). While it is rarely flat, it never climbs or descends in any extreme ways. It is always relatively easy going. And the beauty of the setting is superb. Sometimes you're skimming along right next to the rocky streambed





and sometimes riding high up on the canyon wall, with the stream a ragged silver ribbon far below. Everything about this road is perfect for cycle-touring, including better-than-average pavement (which is the case for most of the roads on this tour). If you can manage the big climb at the start of the stage, you will be amply rewarded with this run down the river. It makes for an epic day of biking.

You'll fly through the remote little hamlet of Scotts Bar at the end of a long, wild descent, and after a few more, mildly downhill miles, Scott River Road will hit Hwy 96 and the routes will be together for the balance of the stage.

There really isn't much to say about this run downriver. The pavement is good. The scenery is great. Traffic is light. There are three or four little towns spaced out along the way...wide spots in the road where you might pick up a snack at a little store. It's perfect for cycling...a great day for a smoothly rotating paceline (right). At about mile 68, you begin the one significant climb of the day (on the basic route), leaving the river and gaining 500' in a little less than two miles. Then it's downhill again all the way to Happy Camp, with the first two miles steep enough to get you excited and then more of the day's steady diet of mild roll-out.



Just on the south end of Happy Camp, you turn left on Elk Creek Road, cross the river (left), and follow the signs uphill to Elk Creek Campground. When you turn into the driveway for the camp, you encounter one of the most challenging parts of the ride: a wickedly steep downhill on dirt for about 4/10ths of a mile. I almost decided against recommending this camp based on the driveway alone, but the quality of the camp changed my mind...that and the fact that there isn't another camp anywhere close that will work as well. (Actually, there is a Forest Service camp—Curly Jack—just after the turn onto Elk Creek Road, but it's quite primitive. You're welcome to stay there, but I prefer the more developed camp.)

The owners of Elk Creek Campground take great pride in their facility. It's as spotlessly clean as a forest setting can be. There are excellent bathrooms and showers. There is also a sandy beach with a beautiful swimming hole. There is a large contingent of RVers here—folks who come for the entire season in many cases—but there's plenty of room set aside for tents, and cycle-tourists are frequent visitors.

Update: the copy above was written after a tour a few years ago. Recently we toured the region again and stayed in Curly Jack Forest Service Camp, which is located just after you cross the river on the big bridge. I was not in charge of choosing the camps on the recent tour, but the guy who was said that he visited Elk Creek Campground on his scouting survey for the tour, and he felt it had gone downhill since our last visit; that perhaps it had changed hands and was now being managed less well. So we stayed at the USFS camp, which actually worked out very well, except for the fact that they do not have showers. There is river access for swimming, although the Curly Jack "swimming hole" was not nearly as nice as the one up at Elk Creek. Because my own research and routes lead to Elk Creek, I am leaving things as they are—or were—for us on our first tour. But be assured that Curly Jack will work as well.



Day 2: Happy Camp to Matthews Creek

66 miles, 3500' up, 2300' down

Getting out of Elk Creek Camp is even more challenging than getting in. Good luck! You may take some consolation in the thought that this daunting dirt driveway is by far the steepest hill you'll climb all day.

You retrace yesterday's route to Hwy 96 in Happy Camp and then turn south, following the highway and the Klamath River for another 36 miles to the little town of Somes Bar. Everything that was said about the river and the road on Day 1 applies here as well. The river grows a little bigger as it flows toward the ocean, and there are a couple of medium-sized hills that break up the gradual descent. Sometimes you're rolling along on a gentle downgrade, and sometimes flying on smooth, fast descents in the canyon...always on perfect pavement, and always with the beautiful Klamath River in view...perfect for a smoothly roating paceline (photo, previous page).

After dropping about 750' in 36 miles, you finally say goodbye to Hwy 96 just south of the town of Somes Bar and turn upstream along the Salmon River on Salmon River Road.

The sign at the junction says you're going to the town of Forks of Salmon, but it's what lies along the way between here and there that ought to be emblazoned on the sign: "Totally cool, super-fantastic cycling road ahead!" The run down the Klamath has been wonderful...beautiful cycling. But all those mildly downhill miles may have grown just a little bit tame. You're getting jaded, restive...perhaps looking for a little more excitement.. If that's the case, the run up the Salmon should be

the perfect wake-up call. As soon as you turn the corner, you know you're dealing with a different sort of animal now. The turns are tighter. The elevation changes are more abrupt. The road is narrower, and before long, it's going to become narrower still.

For the first few miles, the road still pretends to be a main highway to somewhere substantial, with lines painted on its wide lanes...even as it starts tripping over itself on a series of sharp little hills and twisty bits. Eventually though, it loses all its stripes, gives up any pretense at dignity, and hangs onto the cliff anywhere it can find a foothold. As you cross Butler Creek, there is a large sign warning trucks and RVs against proceeding any further...always a sure sign of good cycling ahead. The gorge narrows, and great grey knuckles of rock grip the river in a stranglehold, forcing the stream over waterfalls and cascades between deep, green, glassy pools.

Sometimes the road is only a lane wide, with a nearly sheer cliff bulking up on the right and the world dropping away abruptly at the edge of the pavement on the left, straight down into the canyon. No guardrail, mind you, nor even a wee bit of shoulder in some spots... just the edge of the asphalt, and then...nothing. Sometimes that drop over the edge into the canyon is a long way down...as much as a couple of hundred feet. If you went over the edge here, it wouldn't be a case of a few bumps and a bent bike. It would be a case of notifying next of kin. It's wild and a bit scary, and it's also stunningly beautiful. This is a cycling dream road. One of the best (both photos).

This was certainly rated one of the highlights of our club tour here, with all riders in a state of exaltation at the end of the day, wearing silly grins and shaking their heads in wonderment.

You'll be so engrossed with the scenery and with keeping your bike away from the more alarming drop-offs that you may not notice whether you're going up or down. You're doing a little of both, with more up as the day wears on...none of it very tough. For being in such a tortured





canyon, the road is surprisingly unhilly. The village of Forks of Salmon is about 20 miles upstream from Somes Bar, and in that distance, you climb a little over 1000', most of it in small increments broken up with little descents and near-level sections. Forks of Salmon is a sleepy, shady little no-place: just a few houses and shops, a small pioneer cemetery, and a handsome new school.

Just beyond the town is a junction. Straight ahead is Sawyers Bar Road—another great road, but not going where we need to go—and to the right, across a little bridge, is Cecilville Road. That's your road. Cecilville is the next tiny town up the line. You still have another ten miles to go to get to Matthews Creek Forest Service Camp. You'll gain another three or four hundred feet along the way, through more empty, pretty country... sometimes near the river, and sometimes wandering off through the woods.

Matthews Creek's chief attraction as a campground is that it's in the right place at the right time. We're not on a popular tourist route here, so finding any sort of campsite is a victory. We'd probably be forced to take it, whatever its charms, but actually, it's a very nice camp, situated in a grove of trees on a rise above one of the river's many rocky gorges. Perhaps the best thing about this campground is its swimming hole: as spectacular as any of the deep canyon pools on the river so far (above). From the little beach below camp, the pool looks nice, but you need to dive in and swim upstream a bit to really appreciate this magical spot. Out of sight around the first rocky outcrop is a deep grotto, with an overhanging cliff rising up at least 50' above the river. At the base of the cliff is a smooth sand beach flecked with fool's gold, giving the sand a glittery shimmer. Depending on the level of the river when you're here, this sand bar may be underwater, but it's still nice, and the water is not so cold that you can't laze around in the shallows for as much time as it takes to get a good sunburn.

But wait! There's more: around a second rock

headland is yet another beautiful pool, with the towering cliff extending so far over the water that it creates a cave into which one can swim. The clear, bottle-green water is as much as 20' deep in this pool, so diving from the surrounding cliffs is probably fine. We did a lot of it when we were here.

It's fortunate that this marvelous swimming hole is here, because there are no showers and no plumbed bathrooms. Just piped water from hose bibs and lucky to have that (and very clean, modern chemical toilets). Hope that you're here on a hot day, so you'll

be motivated to jump in. There are no reservations here and only about ten sites, but the local rangers insist the place is never close to full, especially on a weekday. Also, they don't enforce a maximum occupancy number on the sites, so if the place is even partly full, you could all squeeze a little and still fit in. When we stayed here, the camp was deserted.

There is one alternative for those who find this too primitive. Eight miles beyond Matthews Creek is Cecilville, the home of Snipes Villa, a store/cafe and cluster of rustic cabins...with bathrooms. I haven't been in the cabins and can't vouch for their quality, but they are reasonably priced, and if you're considering this as a step up from the camp, how fancy do you need them to be? Prices range from \$21-38 per cabin for the first person, with each additional person another \$8. Frankly, I think the camp is very satisfactory, but if you really need that hot shower, you have an option. However, I know every single person in our group was more than happy to swap a shower for one night for the joys of that wonderful swimming hole.





Day 3: Matthews Creek to Coffee Creek

64 miles, 7000' up, 6200' down

The first four days of this tour are in the shape of a huge S-curve. As you descended west and south along the Klamath and then climbed east up the Salmon, you were carving a big arc around the perimeter of the Marble Mountain Wilderness...the top half of the S. Now you're at the middle of the S and are about to begin arcing back the other way around the Trinity Alps Wilderness. While the roads on the first two days stuck close to the rivers and avoided most major hills, the roads from here on, although following rivers off and on, spend more time clambering up and down over the surrounding ridges. Check out those elevation numbers...whoa! After two days of relatively flat terrain, all of a sudden, somebody ups the ante.

The climbing really began in the last few miles of yesterday's ride: Matthews Creek camp came in the middle of a fairly substantial uphill, which you now continue. For the first eight miles to Cecilville, the road is much the same as what you enjoyed over those wonderful miles yesterday: narrow and twisty (photo, previous page), as it tiptoes along the edge of the canyon, with monolithic ramparts of stone standing tall on the uphill side of the road and the clear blue creek snaking away through the rocky gorge (above). There are a few fast, snappy little descents bundled in with the general uphill trend here. It's a sweet stretch of road.

At Cecilville, all this changes. For one thing, the road levels and straightens—at least for awhile. For another, it regains its stripes, indicating that you're once again on a main road to somewhere. (The difference is only relative: the road is still virtually empty.) On the far side of Cecilville, there are a couple of ugly

mining operations that have chewed up several acres. I don't know what they dig for here, but like most mining, it's a messy business. Fortunately, they're rather modest as mining sites go, and you soon put them behind you. But as you say goodbye and good riddance to the mines, you say hello to almost 16 miles of steady climbing.

Just east of Cecilville, after the brief level stretch, you begin the first phase of the climb: six miles at about 4-5%. After a short flat spot, the grade ramps up to over 6% for the next two miles. This is serious work, but fortunately, it's followed by two miles that are virtually flat. And then you begin the final phase: eight miles of steady 4-5%. Steady is the watchword here. 3800' of climb in one bite is

more than the legendary Tioga Pass in Yosemite (although minus the high elevation). It may take you three hours or more to pedal from Cecilville (at 2270') to the 6109' Carter Meadows summit, but if you take it easy and keep it below your personal redline, you ought to be able to get it done with a minimum of abuse to your system.

The scenery along the way is pleasant, if not spectacular: mostly forests of pine and fir. As you near the summit, the trees thin out and you enjoy more open vistas to alpine meadows (below). Although the Trinity Alps resemble the High Sierra, they often seem to have a timberline that's about 2000' lower. I don't know why this is, but I've often noticed it throughout their range. It appears to be the case here, as the hills to the south of the summit are only sparsely forested or bare altogether, even though they're only in the 7-8000' range. The Pacific Crest Trail crosses the road at this summit, the highest point on this tour. This is just past mile 26 on the day, so you may want to meet your sag here.

Once over the top, you can rest your puffed-up quads and overheated knee joints on a smooth, fast descent to the town of Callahan...but keep spinning the pedals at least a





little so you don't stiffen up. It's 12 miles to the town, all of it down, with most of the 2900' of drop in the first 8 miles. It's a full-tilt flier—never too technical—where you just let it roll and hang on. Callahan is a quaint little town: everything looking very old-timey and western (above). It's not a tourist trap...just a collection of tired old buildings, dozing by the side of the road.

You turn right here and head south on Hwy 3. This road will be your home for the rest of today, most of tomorrow, and part of the following day. It starts out level for the first two miles. Enjoy the easy miles while you can, because you'll soon be climbing again, this time gaining 2300' in a little less than seven miles. As you climb, the road switches back and forth across the mountainside once or twice, affording you impressive, changing vistas. You're not looking at the Trinity to the south anymore, but out into the open, arid valley to the northeast... a great view. This climb will test you more than the longer one to Carter Meadows earlier, partly because it's a bit steeper, partly because it's later in the day (hotter), and partly because you'll be more tired by now. The 5401' Scott

Mountain summit marks the last of the climbing for the day and the beginning of one of the wilder descents you'll ever do. You drop 2200' in less than six miles, and every inch of it is twisting, switchbacking, corkscrewing excitement (below). As is the case with most of the roads in this area, the pavement is excellent, and you can descend as briskly as your skills and your nerves permit.

Once off the steepest part of the descent, you pick up the Trinity River and follow it south, downstream for the final 12 miles of the stage, almost always descending gently on the way to Coffee Creek Campground. Be prepared to buck a stiff headwind blowing up the river, which will just about negate any advantage the slight downgrade might have offered. One of our cyclists saw a black bear scamper across the road just ahead of him on this stretch.

Turn right on Coffee Creek Road and immediately left into the campground. The campground is a small, private park catering to both RVs and tents. The access roads are unpaved and most of the campsites are on mowed lawns, with broadleaf trees scattered about. There is one shower each for men and women (free), and although the bathrooms look old and rather rustic, they're generally clean and the hot water is abundant. Little Coffee Creek isn't visible from the campsites, but a short walk over a low levee brings you to its bank. There is a pleasant swimming hole here too. Although not as grand as the one on the Salmon, it is pretty and deep enough for careful diving. The creek is overlooked by a large osprey nest, and we enjoyed watching these impressive birds with our field glasses.

They take reservations at the camp, and I would suggest that you ask for either the sites in the center of camp—in the middle of the road loop—or the grassy sites along the south side of camp. That's if you have a larger group and want to gang your sites together. Almost any of the 40 or so sites would be okay for a single campsite.

In case you want an alternative to camping on this day, and are willing to shell out some serious dollars, there is a very nice inn just a few miles beyond our camp. Tomorrow's route goes right past the front door in its first few miles. It's the Victorian-era Carrville Inn (photo, next page).





Day 4: Coffee Creek to Hayfork

69 miles, 5300' up, 5500' down

In the Tour de France they have a term for a stage when you just haven't got your normal zip...when everything is a struggle, physically and mentally. It's called a *jour sans*...literally a "day without." I'd like to borrow the term and apply it to our recreational tours. There is sometimes a day in the middle of a tour when you begin to wonder if this riding day-after-day is all it's cracked up to be. The first few days have taken their toll...you're a little weary, and the prospect of getting back on the bike for another long haul seems like more work than fun. It doesn't always happen, and it doesn't hit everyone at the same point, but when and if it does catch up with you, you need to draw on some extra reserves of energy and especially good humor to see you through.

I mention this now because I think today's stage is the sort where that kind of malaise might overtake a lot of riders. It comes at just that dog-days point in the middle of the tour, and it's a pretty darn hard piece of work. In particular, the section from mile 5 to mile 37 is an endless string of pesky little climbs and descents in the 200' to 600' range. They're too big to hammer flat on sheer strength and momentum, so you're forced to drop down into climbing mode over and over again, making you feel a bit like Sisyphus after awhile. And this is where you encounter those unrelieved walls of pine trees I alluded to earlier. I like pine trees as well as the next guy, especially a few big ponderosas standing

proud on a hillside. But today's trees are mostly undersized and undistinguished... rank upon rank of second or third growth lumber trees. Oh yes: you do get to ride alongside a huge lake now and then. Well, actually it's a reservoir, called either Claire Engle Lake or Trinity Lake (both names apply). It looks quite pretty in the spring, when it's full of water, but by mid-summer or early fall, so much water has been drained off that there's a vast band of dead, denuded dirt between you and the actual lake. When it's in this state, it has all the scenic charms of a strip mine. Okay, okay: it's not that bad! The blue water does add a nice change in the scenery over all the pines, in spite of the ring-around-the-tub impression.

If there's a silver lining in all this gloomy grumbling, it's that each of those wearying climbs comes with a matching descent, and they're all great sport, with smooth paving and interesting turns and contours to keep you entertained (below). By the time you complete the run down to Weaverville at mile 38, you will have climbed 2900' and descended 3400'. (And for the record, while I still maintain this section can be tedious, everyone on our tour enjoyed this portion of the ride...happy campers, one and all.)

One other detail: back at the start, you get to do the little Carrville scenic loop off Hwy 3. It's only 1.3 miles long, but it's worth doing, passing the stately old Carrville Inn.

Weaverville (photos, next page) is a mixed bag of a town. It's large enough to have all the stores you'll need for replenishing your foodstuffs...which means it's also large enough to sprawl in the usual unsightly way for a couple of miles along the highway. On the other hand, it has a beautiful old downtown core of charming 19th-century storefronts, backed up by neighborhoods of handsome Victorian homes. The best of this is just to your right when you hit the center of town. Your route turns left from Hwy 3 onto Hwy 299/3, but if you want to see the old town, go





off-course at this intersection and explore the few blocks just to the right. Many of the riders in our gang took the opportunity to stop here in a nice cafe with pleasant seating on an arbor-shaded terrace overlooking the old town.

After you've seen the good side of Weaverville, you get to leave town through the not-so-good side: all the modern commercial sprawl that compares so unfavorably with the old-town version of what a city can be. At least it's all downhill and passes quickly, and then you're back in the country, heading south on 299/3 with pretty little Weaver Creek on your right. Hwy 299 is a fairly busy road, and this section where it doubles up with Hwy 3 is no exception. But it does have large shoulders and you're only on it for seven miles, turning off on Hwy 3 to Hayfork just after crossing the bridge where the Trinity River pours in from the left and picks up Weaver Creek. There is a freeway-style roadside rest stop on this section of 299, in case you didn't take care of business in Weaverville.

The turn from 299 to 3 is at the lowest point of the day—around 1650'—and after a brief level stretch, you begin a climb of around 500' in a mile and a half. A snappy two-mile descent follows, dropping you down to a shady valley along a little stream. I wish I could tell you the route stays here by the nice creek for several miles, but unfortunately, it almost immediately begins climbing again and keeps climbing for over seven miles, picking up 2000' along the way. Put this one in the same category as yesterday's two big ascents...a long, steady grinder. It's not overwhelming, but it can get tedious. The lower portion of the climb is over 5%, while the last two miles ease off a bit.

As usual, the descent from the summit is a gem, as you zoom downhill for most of eight miles. There's a nearly level mile in

the middle, but the rest is killer. By the time you run out of momentum, you're rolling through farm fields and meadows on the outskirts of Hayfork, a town that mostly seems to consist of outskirts. Markets and shops and cafes straggle along the highway for a couple of miles without ever achieving the civic density that clearly says "downtown." You head right through all of it and out the other side. Today's destination is the Trinity County Fairgrounds on the far side of town. It's the last vestige of civilization as Hayfork knows it before deep country begins again. You can't miss it.

There is a large, tree-shaded area for camping at the fairgrounds and there are bathrooms with free showers. There is so much room for camping that Jerry Fulton, the fairgrounds manager, says he can always carve out a private corner for a group. I believe him, but I'd still recommend timing your trip to be here at some other time than when the County fair is in session...unless you're a great fan of rural Americana. When you arrive, you need to check in with Jerry at his house. It's grey and sits right up by the road at the southwest corner of the fairgrounds.

Day 5: Hayfork to Grizzly Creek Redwoods SP 67 miles, 5000' up, 7000' down

This is a wonderful day. I love it. It offers the cyclist a little bit of everything, as it moves from the hot, high mountains to the cool, moist coastal zone. You begin by continuing south on Hwy 3 for a few more miles. Down here, the road is much more enjoyable than it was up in the pines around Trinity Lake. There are still pines here, but they're nicely mixed in with oaks and other leafy trees, and all of them are spaced out more openly over the hills and valleys. The traffic load appears to be lighter here as well.





The next hilltop has a name—South Fork summit—and it’s appropriate that it should, because it’s the highest point on today’s route (4090’), and on the rest of the trip, for that matter. There are some informative placards in a vista point on the south side of the road at the summit (below), looking south over the distant hills. They tell you about the impressive rock formations that you see off on the southern horizon—a group of peaks known as the Lassics—and also put names to many of the trees and other flora that you see in this region. Take a break here on South Fork summit and improve your local knowledge. At mile 28, it’s a good spot for a regroup.

After a short level stretch along the top of the ridge, the road topples off into another marvelous descent. My notes say this downhill drops 1650’ in seven miles, but I really thought it was a lot longer than that...an almost endless, high-speed glide on perfect pavement. I think maybe my brain just jumped into neutral half-way down the hill and I lost all track of time and space. It’s the kind of run that will do that to you. Bike heaven. Whatever its official length, this great downhill does eventually come to an end near a junction with a road along the Mad River, which puts in a brief, cameo appearance here before being absorbed into the Van Duzen River. One mile later, you come to a store and cafe in the village of Van Duzen at mile 35...the first commercial enterprises since Hayfork.

For the next eight miles, the road bumps up and down over rollers and at least one fairly husky hill. It passes through another little burg called Dinsmore, with another little store, and soon begins a long flirtation with the lovely Van Duzen River. At mile 43, the road crosses the Van Duzen and suddenly, in the space of a few yards, all signs of that mega-bucks paving and highway engineering job disappear. The road narrows to two dinky, twisty lanes as it curls up and down along a thickly forested hillside. Mostly it goes up, gaining about 700’ before the summit at mile 46.5.

I had often heard from other cyclists and also from friends who ride motorcycles that this is a great area to ride because the roads are so well-paved...paved much better than one would expect, given the extreme remoteness of the area. They’re right. Not every mile is perfect, but a great deal of today’s route is on satin-smooth blacktop that you would expect to find in a new tract neighborhood. It’s especially nice to find it here today: you’re going to put it to good use on some of the best downhills you’ve ever seen.

The route is mostly level for the first seven miles and then begins the first of several big ascents. You climb quite steeply for a mile, drop steeply for just a few tenths, and then resume climbing for most of the next four miles. Midway up this climb, Hwy 3 ends and you turn right (west) on Hwy 36, following the signs to Forest Glen. At the top of this climb, you’re 12 miles into the ride and you’ve already gained 1800’! Are you awake yet? I hope so, because you’ll need all your wits about you on the descent to Forest Glen, dropping 1600’ in nine miles. There are a few little saddles in there somewhere that force you to turn the pedals now and then, but the overall impression is of major downhill thrills...all on that silky pavement (above).

There are no services in Forest Glen, so keep right on hammering. Maybe all your momentum from the descent will help you get up the next big hill, which begins two miles beyond Forest Glen at mile 23. It’s a steady, five-mile, 1800’ climb through older fir forest. Once again, through this section, one is struck by how over-engineered the road is for the local needs. Not only is it paved beautifully, but there are wide shoulders, extensive guard rails, and all the other little touches that one associates with busy, arterial highways...and yet the road is virtually deserted. Kind of looks like the CalTrans district office up here had a huge chunk of change burning a hole in its pocket.





The hill eases off along a nice, tree-lined creek and then climbs briefly past the little settlement of Bridgeville, where, true to the town's name, it recrosses our old friend, the Van Duzen River. This is at about mile 60, so you're getting close to the end of the line, but there are still some quality miles left. The Van Duzen passes through a beautiful gorge right here—as impressive as anything you saw back on the Salmon—but the road doesn't cooperate as well here in getting you out, right on top of the view. You see it through the trees and off the bridge at Bridgeville, and if you want to badly enough, you can probably find a way to hike out on one of the many points and get a better look at it.

After dancing along the cliff above the gorge, the road begins its final little descent

Much as I like those smooth, fast roads that have taken the route on such a magic-carpet ride today, I think I almost prefer this little winding lane through the woods (above). The pavement isn't always as smooth as on the earlier sections, but it's not all that bad either. And the downhill off the western side of the hill is as distinct from those earlier, wide-open descents as it could be: tight, looping, snaking turns, piled on top of one another like a plate of spaghetti noodles. This Mister Toad's wild ride lasts for most of five miles, with a little level stretch thrown in to keep you sane.

to the riverbank and camp. After days of fairly hot, dry country, you move abruptly into a dark, cool redwood forest, with the state park as its centerpiece. Grizzly Creek comes in from the north here, but the Van Duzen is still the main attraction, with the campsites all arrayed along its bank. The river is no longer in a canyon, but ripples lazily along a wide, gravel bed, with a few larger boulders plunked here and there along its banks to keep it interesting (below). It's just deep enough in places for swimming. You may choose to do so, but you don't have to: there are hot showers. While there are many individual sites, available through the usual ticketing agency rigamarole, there is one large group site under the administration of the local rangers. The only bad thing about this park is that the campsites are all right up alongside the road, and the first trucks start rumbling through at around four in the morning. Earplugs are in order.

You spill out, dizzy and exhilarated, into a beautiful valley, and just as suddenly as you lost it, the fancy pavement returns. Cross the valley and begin one small, final climb of about a mile. There is a road sign at the summit that warns of a 9% downgrade for two miles. Normally, I take these steep grade signs with a grain of salt. They generally seem to err well on the high side of what's really there. I thought that was the case here as well when a rather mild downhill petered out after about two miles. It was a good descent, but maybe 6%, if that. I was sneering at the wussy highway engineers for overreacting once again, when I sailed off the edge of the *real* downhill...Holy Hairballs! After that first, easy downhill, the road drops almost 2000' in the next 3.5 miles...well in excess of 9%. In some spots, I would guess the grade is in the low to mid-teens. This is a wide-open hammer hill, with relatively smooth asphalt and long, straight chutes where a brave or crazy descender could crank it up to fearsome velocities. The only speed inhibitors are three or four 10-to-20-mph hairpins...serious brake tests! There are a couple of spots where—if you can tear your eyes away from the road right in front of you—you can see where it rolls out onto the valley floor far, far below...and it looks so tiny and so far down! This is not a descent for the faint of heart. In our group, the boldest, most skilled riders hit about 50-mph here, but even they had to feather the brakes most of the way because it was just too steep and technical to let it go.



Day 6: Grizzly Creek SP to A.W. Way Park

65 miles, 5000' up, 5200' down

One of the nicest things about multi-day tours is the variety of scenery that scrolls out before you over the course of your journey...the many changes in landscape and geology and vegetation that you witness. Remember the arid tablelands near Yreka at the start? That sagebrush and cottonwood country of the upper Klamath seems very distant from the ferns and redwoods of the lower Van Duzen...and the changes will become even more noticeable as you work your way through this day's ride.



The stage begins with more miles through the deep redwood forest. There are a few rollers, but for the most part, this stretch can be considered flat or even slightly downhill. For a time, the Van Duzen keeps company with the road, but eventually the river meanders off to the south. By now, the river valley has flattened out into a broad, fertile plain...the home of grazing dairy cows, and also the home of more people than you've seen in a few days. There are stores at mile 7 and mile 10, and then at mile 12, you hit the town of Carlotta. It's not much of a town, but it appears to serve a wide area of rural residential development, as the valley floor and the nearby low hills are liberally dotted with homes. This marks the beginning of a stretch of ragged-fringe suburbia, culminating in the small city of Fortuna.

(Trivia: both the towns of Bridgeville and Carlotta achieved brief moments of national notoriety in recent years when each was put up for sale on E-bay...that's right: the whole towns, such as they are. I don't think Carlotta ever attracted a buyer, but Bridgeville sold for something over a million dollars, although the sale was still in escrow the last I heard.)

There is one corner that might confuse you in this section. After the first real uphill of the day

leading into the town of Hydesville, Hwy 36 bends sharply to the left, while you continue straight ahead onto Rohnerville Road. This leads to a quick downhill, a short up, and then a long glide downhill through Rohnerville and Fortuna.

It takes about 11 miles to work your way through all this development. Some of it is pure tract neighborhoods and shopping centers and some of it is pretty little country lanes. With a population of a few thousand, Fortuna is the biggest, busiest community we see on this tour. You can grumble and groan about this intrusion of crass, commercial civilization on your pristine, backcountry odyssey, but really, it's not that bad. Fortuna's suburbs may be nothing special, but its main street has a certain hometown charm, and after all those days out in the boonies, the buzz of the city is almost fun...a nice change of pace. (How's that for spin-doctoring?)

We ride right down main street to Hwy 101 and get on the freeway heading north. This run up the freeway lasts almost a mile and a half, and although there are wide shoulders, I'm not thrilled to have to put you here, but there is no alternative. You pass one set of off- and on-ramps between the time you get on in Fortuna and the time you get off, and you can mitigate the freeway experience a little by riding down the off-ramp and back up the on-ramp. The ramps serve a little-used, dead-end street called Palmer Blvd., so there won't be much traffic on them, and they're so long, they eat up nearly half your time on the freeway. Your real exit from the freeway follows the signs to Ferndale and Fernbridge.

The road loops back under the highway and rolls north to a left turn at Fernbridge, on a handsome old bridge over the Eel River (left)

I always feel as if I've entered another world when I cross the Eel at Fernbridge. This is the gateway to the town of Ferndale (below), and Ferndale is the gateway to the Unknown Coast. Life moves at a slower pace out here. It's quiet and mellow, and above all, it's beautiful. Once over the bridge, you approach the town across three or four miles of flat dairyland...the fertile delta of the Eel River. You





world: it's the start/finish of the Tour of The Unknown Coast—a great century ride in May—and it's the finish of the Kinetic Sculpture Race, which is sort of difficult to describe. Kinetic sculptures are essentially what the name implies: outlandish, artistic constructions in the shapes of birds, insects, fish, and pretty much anything else, which are propelled by human pedal-power. The race starts up north in Arcata and wends its way—very slowly, over two days of the Memorial Day weekend—down to Ferndale, via roads, beaches, mudbogs, and water. To say it's the weirdest bike race in the world is a whopping understatement. The Kinetic Sculpture Race Museum is right on the main drag in Ferndale, and if you don't stop anywhere else in town, you ought to

can see the town from miles away, with the tall steeples on its Victorian churches standing out against the green hills that loom up at the edge of the valley. You roll through town on the main street, turn right near the top of the town, and then quickly left on Mattole Road, following the signs to Petrolia and Capetown. Hold on though: you have to stop for at least a few minutes and enjoy this pleasant little town before heading on...maybe circle around a few of the side streets and admire some of the fine old homes, or wander through a couple of the stores.

Ferndale has been the hub and heartbeat of the Eel River agricultural region for over a hundred years. Much of the town was built during the latter half of the 19th century, and the commercial buildings on the main street of town are almost all superb examples of the best Victorian architecture of the era. So too are many of the houses—both modest and grand (above)—that line the neighborhood streets. Perhaps because the town lies a couple of miles away from the main highway, it suffered few of the unfortunate commercial “improvements” that mar so many towns: burger joints, filling stations, bowling alleys, malls, etc. Somehow, it escaped all that, and then, in the 60's and 70's, the locals looked around at their beautiful village and realized they were living in a time-capsule treasure. Steps were taken to ensure that it would stay this pretty and unspoiled forever. And so far, it has.

Although most of the downtown businesses now make their living off tourist merchandise, and although every third house on the quiet side streets seems to be a B&B, Ferndale remains a pleasant, mellow, low-key village, with locals still outnumbering visitors. Their tourist trappings seem a little less in-your-face than those in Mendocino or Carmel or some other “quaint” villages.

Ferndale has two claims to fame in the bike

at least peek in here. It's free.

When you've finally had your fill of Ferndale, it's time to tackle the Unknown Coast. (Some people call it the Lost Coast, but I go with the name they use for the century.) Mattole (pronounced muh-TOLL) Road begins in Ferndale, climbs up and over the hills to the ocean, and then climbs back over the hills to the Eel River further south. It covers almost 70 miles along the way and serves as the only link with the outside world for this extremely remote section of California coast. Today, you'll do about half of it, and the balance tomorrow.

So far on this stage—in 28 miles—you've climbed less than 800'. You'll climb more than twice that total in the next seven miles. The ascent starts just at the edge of town, at the beginning of Mattole Road. This first big climb is known as Wildcat Grade (below), and it's the let-it-all-hang-out, downhill finale on the century ride. We're tackling it in the opposite direction from the century though, so all their descents are climbs for us. After 800' of up in the first two





miles, you add another 900' over the next five miles, interspersed with flats and even one small downhill. In spite of being quite steep, this is great riding, with the narrow road hemmed in by lush vegetation and overhung by a thick, leafy forest canopy. You'll know you're at the summit when you break out of the woods onto the open hilltop and see the ocean for the first time (top). This is what they had in mind when they put the word "panorama" in the dictionary...a wrap-around vista of sea and hills and sky that makes all the climbing worthwhile. Welcome to the Unknown Coast!

Now you get to descend the other side of the mountain on a wonderful, tangled downhill that slips and slides almost back to sea level over the next seven miles (with a mile or so of flat in the middle). It would rank as one of the great downhills of all time except for its patchy, potholed pavement. You really have to stay alert and leave a little margin for error when flying down any of the big descents out here.



Unfortunately, this great descent doesn't deliver you all the way to the ocean. It bottoms out in the valley of the Bear River, just inland from the sea. Maps place a dot here and label it Capetown, but all that's really here are a few farm houses. Getting out of this pretty valley is a real chore: the road climbs 1000' in just a mile and a half. That's an average of over 12%, but several pitches are a lot steeper than that. This is the steepest hill on the tour...a beast. Once over the top, you drift downhill, gently at first, for about a mile, and then more steeply (middle). A lot more steeply. You've arrived at the infamous Wall...the dreaded climb on the Tour of the Unknown Coast. For you however, it's a descent, dropping over 900' in a little over a mile, most of it in one long, straight plunge to the beach that approaches 20% (bottom). Some folks might consider letting it fly all the way down this wall, but, oh baby, you better have it all together if you do! (Great bike handling skills, nerves of steel, and your insurance premiums paid in full.) When we toured here, the pavement leading up to the steepest pitch was very bad, but the wall itself was newly paved and smooth as silk. When our boldest descenders saw that, they let it go and dropped like stones down a well shaft, easily reaching speeds in the high 50s.



If you survived the stiff climbs and the white-knuckle descents to this point (mile 47), you've now arrived at the beach...and not just any beach: this is Cape Mendocino, the westernmost point in the contiguous United States, and the place where the famous San Andreas Fault departs the North American continent and heads out to sea

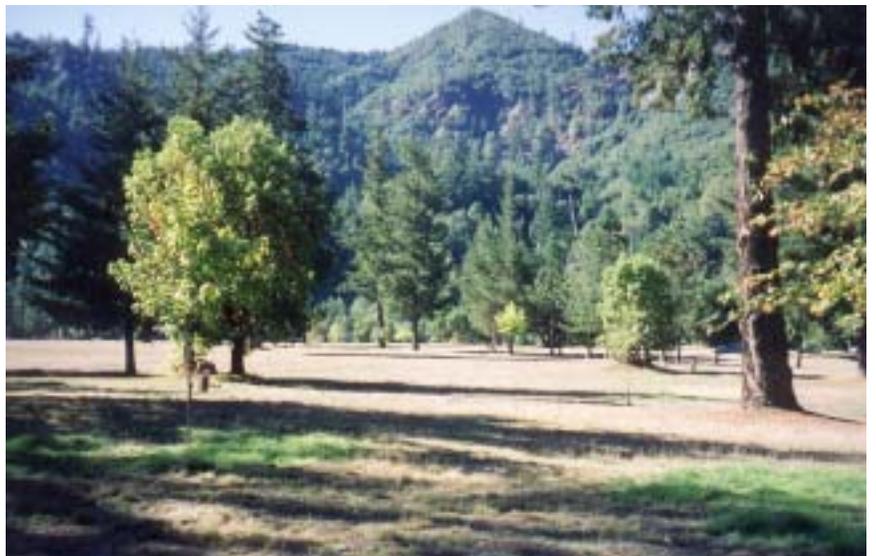


bend in the Mattole River, with most of the campsites perched just above the water. There is yet another beautiful swimming hole in the river, with a big rock for diving. About the only things I can think of to dislike about the place: the showers are unheated and they don't take reservations. Although there are only about 30 actual campsites, there is an enormous flat lawn in the center of the park for overflow camping, and I am assured by the Humboldt County Parks people that the local caretaker will find room for everyone. Watch out for little patches of poison oak scattered throughout the park. It even grows in the middle of the lawns where you camp.

for the last time. It's a wild, beautiful, empty place (above), and I encourage you to stash your bike, take off your shoes, and walk along the sandy shore for awhile. The beach is pristine and perfect. Aside from a barn or two, some fences, and the road itself, there are no marks of man anywhere along this stretch. And on almost any day of the week, you and your companions may be the only people on the entire strand. The sand-and-pebble shore is generously sprinkled with rocky tide pools and elaborately sculpted standing stones.

The road runs level for six miles right along the empty beach and then veers back inland on a series of little climbs and descents. Beyond the first climb, you descend into the valley of the Mattole River, and you'll play tag with this pretty stream for the rest of the day. After a few of these rolling ups and downs, you head downhill fairly decisively into a little valley (right) with the town of Petrolia at the bottom (mile 57). With a store, a post office, and a cluster of houses, this is as close to a metropolitan center as you'll find out here in the back of beyond. The road continues to bounce up and down over the hills in a series of small changes, until mile 60, when you're treated to one last, nasty uphill: 500' in a little over a mile. (Doesn't sound too bad on paper, but it sure looks—and feels—tough when you're crawling up it.) Over the top, there's a nice descent of a little over a mile and then two final, level miles to the campground. Did I mention that all of this Unknown Coast country is beautiful? I did? Can I mention it again? It's a very attractive blend of wild river, rolling meadows, and shady woods...and of course the ocean. And the best thing is, it's all yours: you may not see a passing car for hours on end...a peaceful cycling dreamscape.

A. W. Way County Park (right) is as beautiful as the surrounding countryside. It snuggles into a wide





coast without going inland to busy Hwy 101. Unfortunately, it's unpaved for most of 50 miles and is even more remote and rugged than the section you've just done.

It's possible to follow that route and end up in Garberville, near where our stage ends. Two people from our group elected to explore that way. They arrived at the finish at about the same time as the rest of us. They reported that the roads they used were all paved but were extremely steep in places. These riders are very experienced and fit, and if they say a road is extremely steep, you can believe it!

The bridge at Honeydew marks the beginning of today's big challenge: Panther Gap. This is where you climb back over the mountains. You ascend steadily for five miles, gaining more than 2000' in an endless series of switchbacks, most of

If you just have to have that hot shower, there is a beautiful, private resort six miles back toward Petrolia. It is expensive, but not only do you get the nice showers, you also get excellent kitchens and queen-sized beds. (You rent the two cabins on the property to get access to their showers and baths. Six of you can sleep in the two cabins and everyone else camps on the lawn.)

them in the leafy forest. From time to time, the sightlines open up and you can see back down over the whole Mattole River valley (below). It's one of the prettiest views on this or any other bike tour.

After five miles, the climbing eases off, although you still keep working your way uphill for at least another three miles. The exact location of the 2744' summit is a bit vague. As far as I know, there is no sign at the summit, but somewhere around mile 16, the gradual climb becomes an authentic flat, and in a few tenths, a serious downhill. By mile 17, you're flying down the mountain on a wild, technical descent, including numerous 180° hairpins and some less-than-great pavement that will keep you focused on the business at hand. You drop over 2000' in the first five miles and another 500' or 600' in the next five miles.

Day 7: A. W. Way Park to Dean Creek

55 miles, 3500' up, 3400' down

Because this is the last day of the tour, and because of some unique problems near the end of the stage, I'm allowing for several possible places to end this ride. Each has its good and bad points, and as we arrive at each of them, I'll discuss their pros and cons...and then you can decide what works best for you. I do indicate a preference for one, but feel free to choose any of the others if they're a better fit for you.

Just as you begin this descent, you enter Humboldt Redwoods State Park. At the bottom of the downhill you

The day begins with eight more miles rolling along the Mattole River, with the word "rolling" covering a multitude of moderate elevation changes, some of them plus or minus more than 100'. The scenery continues to be terrific (above): great views over the river and across meadows carpeted with wildflowers and waving grasses, and hedged about with sun-dappled forest. At mile 8, you come to the town of Honeydew...not much more than a store and post office. You bear left on Mattole Road, over the river on a wood-planked bridge. There is another road off to the right here, pointing to the King Range. That's the real Lost Coast out there. It's the only way to head south along the California





One thing to bear in mind with all of today's finishing sites is that they're all within four or five hours of the Bay Area. You may want to consider skipping an overnight here and just having a final picnic (and a shower?) and climbing in the car for the drive home at the end of the ride.

One mile past Williams Grove, you slip out of the park for a bit and hit the shabby little town of Meyers Flat. Another mile

plunge abruptly into the deep, dark forest of tall trees. The road, which was already quite narrow, pinches down to one lane as it squeezes between the trunks of the giant trees. This portion of the park is known as Bull Creek Basin, and is home to some of the largest, tallest redwoods anywhere (right). (*Sequoia dendron giganteum* of the Sierra Nevada is larger in girth—up to 40' in diameter—while *sequoia sempervirens* of the north coast is thinner—if you can call an 18' trunk thin—but at over 350' is much taller.) This is one of the better spots for taking a break and letting the power of these splendid beings smooth out the wrinkles in your soul. At mile 26, there is a turn-in to an especially nice grove of trees along Bull Creek, and this might be a good spot to regroup with your sag. One of our riders saw a bear shambling along the side of the road right here.

park— you'll find Hidden Springs Campground. This is a conventional state park campground with many individual sites and hot showers. At 41 miles, it too adds up to a rather short day, and there are still some really nice miles along the Eel River ahead. That's a mark against it, although after all the hilly miles you've done this week, you may be more than ready to call it quits at this point. The other minor knock on this campground is that the sites are generally rather cramped and are wedged into a hilly, thickly wooded setting which tends to make each site a tiny, contained

The beautiful, quiet run along Bull Creek continues to mile 31, at which point you encounter Hwy 101 again. You duck under the highway and turn right (south) on the Avenue of the Giants, which more or less parallels the main highway. The name sums up what this road is about: a splendid promenade through the redwood forest (photos, right and page 1). Almost all of it is contained within the state park and looks suitably park-like. The road is in great condition and is either flat or mildly rolling, and although it's a popular tourist road, the speed limit is low, and as in other great parks, the drivers seem a little more laid-back than they do out on the main highways. (If they were in a hurry, they'd be over on Hwy 101.) As an added scenic bonus, for the rest of the day, you'll be riding along the south fork of the Eel River.



At mile 33, you pass a little town called Weott where you can score some munchies at the store. And then, at mile 38, you arrive at the first of our possible destinations. I know 38 miles seems a little early for the ride to be over, and that's one of the marks against this site, but it has its charms as well. This is the Williams Grove group site in the state park. There are no individual campsites here...just two group sites, off by themselves, right along the river. Of the two sites, I recommend Site B because it's closer to the river and farther from the road. Also, it's cheaper. This is a beautiful spot, and it would make an ideal terminus for the trip, were it not for the shortness of the day's route and for the fact that there are no showers in the bathrooms here.



unit. This may be okay for folks needing just one site, but it doesn't lend itself well to ganging several sites together for a group...assuming you could even get connected sites on a Saturday in the summer.

The nice cycling road runs for another 11 miles along the Eel River (above) before ending three miles past the town of Phillipsville at about mile 52. All of those miles are nice, usually with the Eel meandering along next to the road. There's nothing to distinguish the spot where the backroad ends...just an on-ramp where the little road feeds up onto Hwy 101. From here, there is a three-mile stretch along the shoulder of the busy, four-lane highway that's unavoidable (below). Riding along a freeway may seem like a sorry way to end such a magnificent tour. However, it's a section that is ridden by cyclists every day—regardless of its merits—because, at this point, there simply aren't any other realistic alternatives for cycle-tourists riding the length of the state. (As noted earlier, the only alternate route is the rugged dirt road out of Honeydew.) You see fully-loaded touring bikes being pedaled down this stretch all the time, their long-suffering riders patiently counting the miles until they can bail off 101 onto Hwy 1...still quite a ways south of here. On the positive side, the scenery along the freeway is as nice as any of the rest of the miles around here—still with the Eel as your travelling companion—and the four-lane configuration is actually almost a blessing in disguise for cyclists, as it usually allows cars and trucks to give bikes a wide berth by shading into the inside lane. What's more, the highway is silk smooth, with wide shoulders. So it's not inconceivable that you could ride this stretch, and three freeway miles may be

worth it to you for the sake of the many good miles preceding them...and for the campground ahead.

Just after escaping the highway at the Redway exit, you come to our third option: Dean Creek Campground (mile 55). This is a private resort catering to RVs and tent campers. It's very clean and tidy, with many grassy campsites shaded by large trees. They have excellent showers and a nice swimming pool, as well as considerable frontage on the river. They have one, extra-large patch of lawn that serves as their group site, although they theoretically limit occupancy to 20. You might be able to con them into letting you squeeze in a few more, but at some point, if your group is much bigger, you'll probably have to spring for some individual sites as well. They also have a small motel. Another possibility is to just pay for the day-use of the pool (\$5 each). Cool off in the pool, have a final picnic lunch, and jump on the

bus. This is probably the option I would choose. (It's what we did on our tour.)

The fourth option—now that you're off the freeway—is to ride on to the town of Garberville, a little less than five miles to the south. Some of these miles are good cycling and some are not-so-hot. You'll do a bit more climbing and descending on this section...not included in today's elevation totals. You pass through the town of Redway, which is a sprawling mess with no apparent merits or scenic charms, but otherwise the road is generally quite pleasant. Garberville is a busy town that has prospered as an off-ramp service center for Hwy 101. There are several large, modern motels and numerous places to eat, from fast-food franchises to better restaurants. I've only included this as an option for folks who want a real mainstream motel with all the trimmings.





Nearby lodging (in Yreka):

Wayside Inn (see text)	800-795-7974
Best Western Miner's Inn	530-842-4355
Klamath Motor Lodge	530-842-2751
Motel Orleans	530-842-1612
Thunderbird Lodge	530-842-4404

Day 1 (Happy Camp):

Elk Creek Campground
 PO Box 318
 Elk Creek Road
 Happy Camp, CA 96039

Jim & Carol Jones, owners
 530-493-2208

Camp fees:

Individual site (one person)	\$10.00
Two to four people	\$7.00 each
Over four people	\$6.00 each

Camp facilities: showers, restrooms, water, volleyball, horseshoes, laundry, river access.

Speaking of which, I'm going to throw out one, final possibility...call it option 4.1: just three miles south of Garberville (back on busy 101) is the Benbow Inn (both photos, this page). This is a wonderful old resort in the tradition of the great national parks hotels, or perhaps more accurately, in the tradition of an English country hotel. The venerable tudor-style lodge is on the National Register of Historic Places and is clearly deserving of that distinction. It's quite expensive, and I don't recommend it for a group on our projected budget, but for a couple looking to end their trip in the lap of luxury, this is the place to do it. If you've only glanced at the Benbow while speeding past on the freeway, you have no idea how pleasant and special this place is. I have not stayed overnight at the Inn, but I have dined there, and I can tell you the experience is wonderful...not to be missed, if it can be justified in your budget.

So there you have it: a wonderful tour that ends with a quiet run along the Avenue of the Giants and a brief scuffle with freeway traffic. We found this last little freeway bit didn't bother us at all and did not in the least detract from our enjoyment of the last day. Nor did it mar our memories of a week's worth of dream miles on some of the most remote, scenic, and traffic-free roads we've ever ridden.

• Details •

Day 0 (Yreka):

Waiiaka Trailer Haven
 240 Sharps Road, Yreka, CA 96097

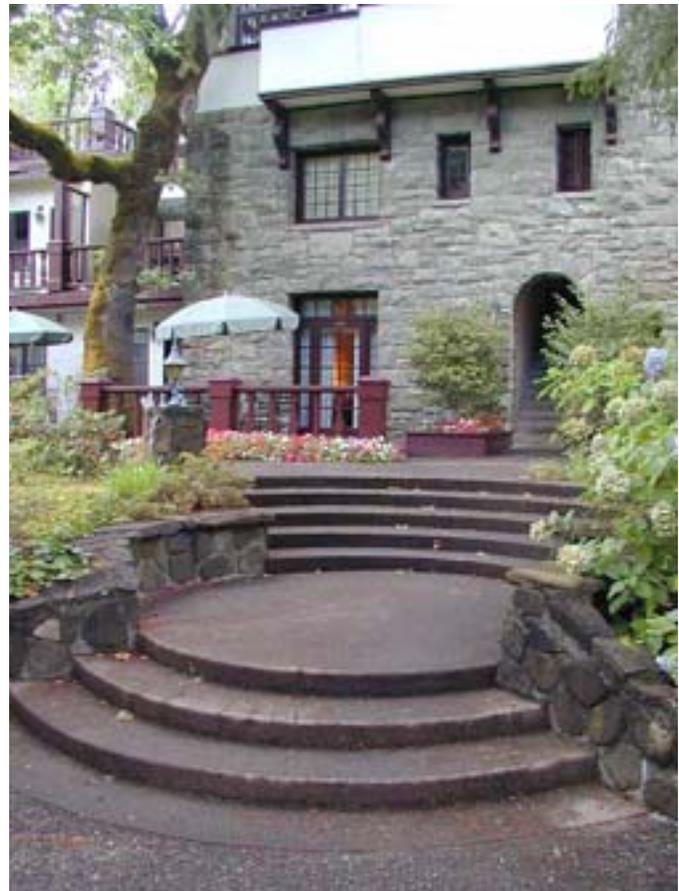
Ralph Worth, manager

Office closed 10-3 each day 530-842-4500

Camp fees:

Per tent (two people) \$10.00

Camp facilities: restrooms, showers, laundry.



Day 2 (Matthews Creek):

Matthews Creek U. S. Forest Service Camp
 Cecilville Road, 8 miles west of Cecilville

Open all year. Approximately 10 individual sites. No group sites. No reservations.

Camp fees:

Individual site (no maximum) \$6.00
 Camp facilities: latrines, piped water, river access.
 Nearby lodging: Snipes Villa, Cecilville 530-462-4685

Day 3 (Coffee Creek):

Coffee Creek Campground
 Route 2, Box 4600
 Coffee Creek Road
 Trinity Center, CA 96091
 Josephine & Willie Dunham, owners
 530-266-3534

Open all year. Approximately 40 sites. May be reserved. No group sites.

Camp fees:
 Individual site (8 people max) \$11.00

Camp facilities: showers (hot, free), creek access.

Carrville Inn B&B
 HCR 2, Box 3536
 Trinity Center, CA 96091
 530-266-3511

Day 4 (Hayfork):

Trinity County Fairgrounds
 Hwy 3, south edge of Hayfork
 Jerry Fulton, Manager 530-628-5223

Open May through September. Many sites. May be reserved. Groups accommodated.

Camp fees:
 Group rate (per person) \$3.00

Camp facilities: showers (hot, free), restrooms, water.

Day 5 (Grizzly Creek):

Grizzly Creek Redwoods State Park
 16949 Hwy 36
 Carlotta, CA 95528
 Rangers 707-777-3683

Open all year. Sites may be reserved May 27-Sept. 4. 30 individual sites and one group site. Group site reserved through local rangers. All others Park.Net. Reservations through Park.Net may be made up to seven months in advance. Check with rangers for reservation window on group site.

Park.Net 800-444-7275

Camp fees:
 Individual site (8 people max) \$16.00
 Off-season \$12.00
 Park.Net service charge (per site) \$7.50
 Group site \$66.00

Camp facilities: showers (hot, pay), restrooms, water, hiking trails, river access.

Day 6 (near Petrolia):

A. W. Way County Park
 Mattole Road, between Petrolia and Honeydew
 Approximately 30 sites, plus overflow area. No reservations.
 Humboldt County Parks 707-445-7651
 Fred Liu, park caretaker 707-629-3314

Camp fees:
 Vehicle \$10.00
 Bicycle \$3.00

Camp facilities: showers (cold, free), restrooms, water, river access.

Nearby lodging: Resort near Petrolia 707-629-3317

Day 7 (tour's end):

Williams Grove group camp (Humboldt Redwoods State Park)
 Avenue of the Giants, one mile north of Meyers Flat
 Box 100
 Weott, CA 95571
 Rangers 707-946-2409

Open late May to mid-October. Reserved through Park.Net, from 5/27-9/4. See Day 5 for Park.Net info.



Camp fees:
 Site A (up to 60 people) \$90.00
 Site B (up to 40 people) \$60.00
 Park.Net service charge \$7.50

Camp facilities: bathrooms (no showers), river access.

Hidden Springs Campground (Humboldt Redwoods SP)

Open late May to mid-October. Reserved through Park.Net, from 5/27-9/4. See Day 5 for Park.Net info.

Camp fees:
 Individual site (8 people max) \$14.00
 Off-season (5/1-25, 10/1-15) \$12.00
 Park.Net service charge (per site) \$7.50

Camp facilities: showers (hot, pay), restrooms, water.

Dean Creek Resort (camping & motel)
 PO Box 157
 4112 Redwood Drive
 Redway, CA 95560

707-923-2555

www.campground.com/deancreek
 e-mail: deancrk@humboldt.net

Open all year. Over 40 RV sites, 11 tent sites, and one group site. May be reserved.

Camp fees:
 RV (partial or full hook-ups) \$21-25.00
 Tent (six people or two tents max) \$21.00
 Group site (20 people max) \$5.00 each

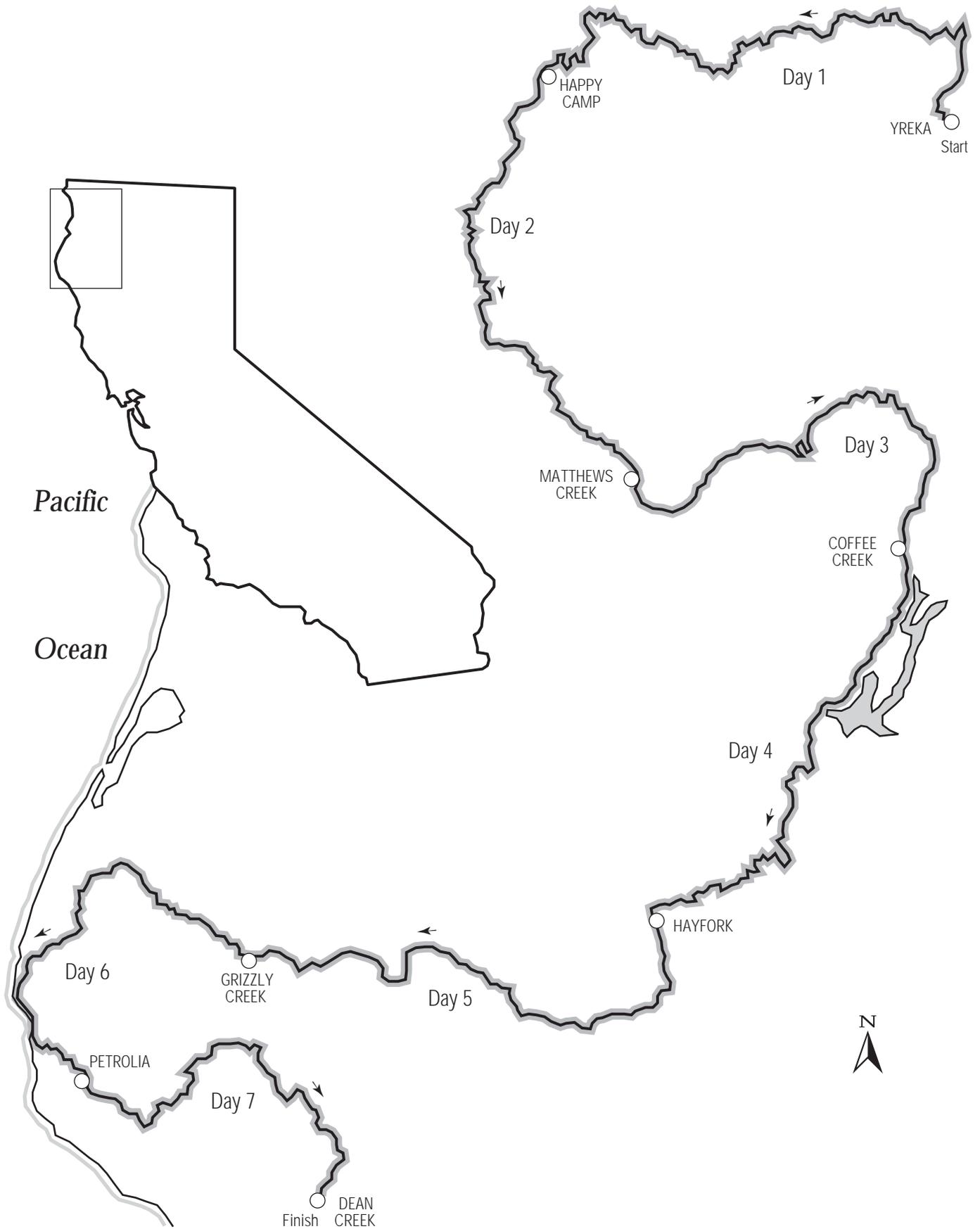
Camp facilities: showers (hot, free), laundry, barbecues, store, phone, swimming pool, spa, sauna, meeting room, river access, playground.

Nearby lodging (Garberville):

Benbow Inn (see text)	707-923-2124
Best Western Humboldt House Inn	707-923-2771
Humboldt Redwoods Inn	707-923-2451
Motel Garberville	707-923-2422
Sherwood Forest Motel	707-923-2721



The Bigfoot Tour



The Big Foot Tour

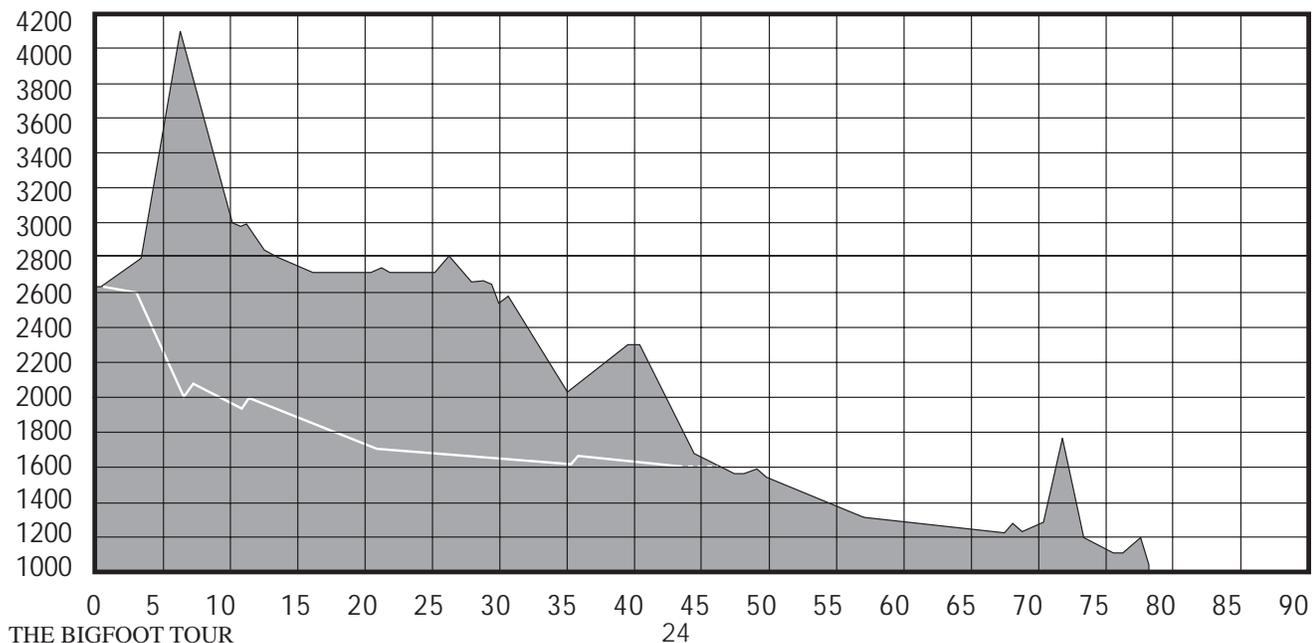
Day 1: Yreka to Happy Camp

74 miles, 1700' up, 3000' down, 78 miles, 3300' up, 4600' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	R	Sharps Road	Leave Waiiaka Trailer Haven.
0.1*	R	Fairlane Road	Long route turns left.
0.6	L	Oberlin Road	Under I-80, into Yreka.
0.7	R	South Main Street	Through Yreka (2625').
2.5	S	Hwy 263	Leave town.
10.6	L	Hwy 96	Ride along Klamath River.
43.0/46.9**	S		Scott River Road junction. Long route rejoins.
44.6/48.5	S		Town of Hamburg (1592'). Small store.
53.5/57.4	S		Town of Seiad Valley (1371'). Small store.
66.5/70.4	S		Begin climb.
68.1/72.0	S		Cade Hill summit (1750')
72.3/76.2	S		Town of Happy Camp (1087').
72.7/76.6	L	Elk Creek Road	
73.9/77.8	R	Elk Creek Camp driveway	Steeply downhill on dirt.
74.3/78.2		Finish	

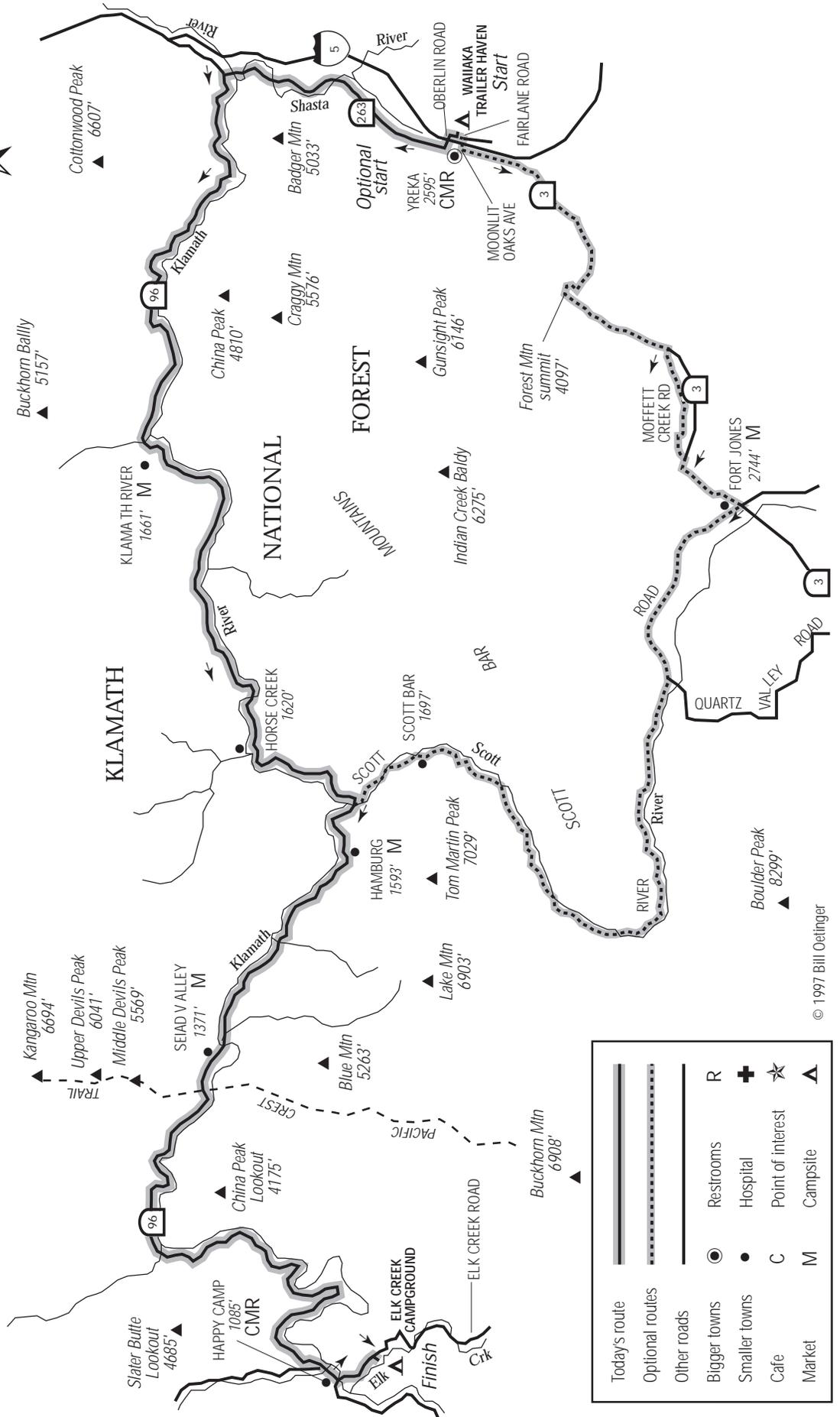
Long route

0.1	L	Fairlane Road	Short route turns right.
0.5	R	Moonlit Oaks Avenue	Under I-80.
0.7	L	Hwy 3	Leave Yreka (2625').
3.0	S		Begin big climb at approximately 2800'.
6.7	S		Forest Mtn summit (4097'). Big descent.
10.1	R	Moffett Creek Road	Backroad bypass of Hwy 3 at bottom of descent.
13.7	R	Hwy 3	Return to Hwy 3
15.8	S		Town of Fort Jones (2744').
16.2	R	Scott River Road	Flat for first few miles...
44.0	S		Town of Scotts Bar (1694').
46.9	L	Hwy 96	Rejoin short route.



The Bigfoot Tour

Day 1: Yreka to Happy Camp
 74 miles, 1700' up, 3000' down
 78 miles, 3300' up, 4600' down



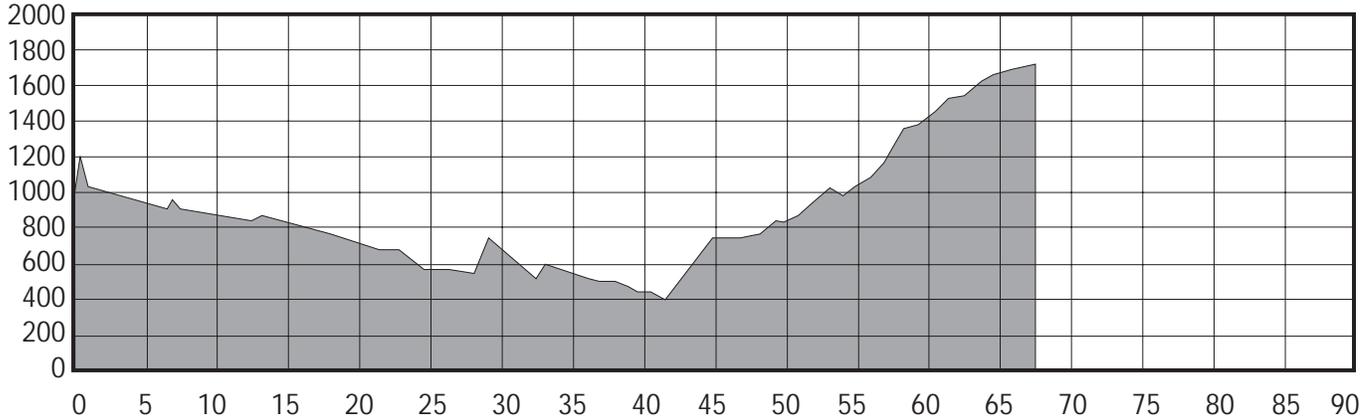
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The Big Foot Tour

Day 2: Happy Camp to Matthews Creek

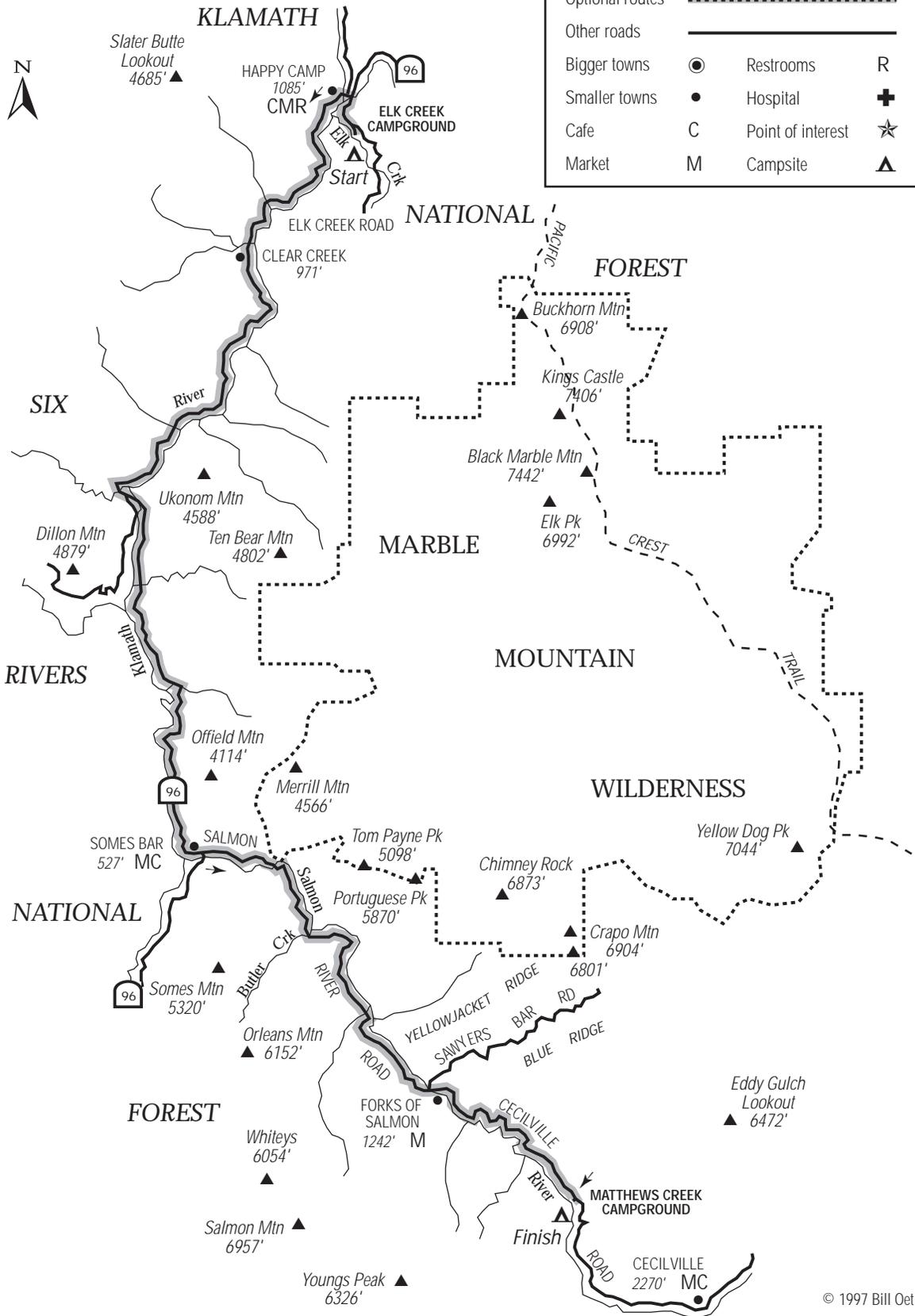
66 miles, 3500' up, 2300' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0		Elk Creek Camp driveway	Leave camp. Steep uphill on dirt.
0.4	L	Elk Creek Road	Downhill to Happy Camp.
1.6	L	Hwy 96	Ride along Klamath River.
38.5	S		Town of Somes Bar (527'). Small store.
38.8	L	Salmon River Road	★ Ride along Salmon River.
56.1	S		Town of Forks of Salmon (1242'). Water.
56.5	R	Cecilville Road	Sawyers Bar Road goes straight.
66.2	R	Into Matthews Creek campground	



The Bigfoot Tour

Day 2: Happy Camp to Matthews Creek
66 miles, 3500' up, 2300' down



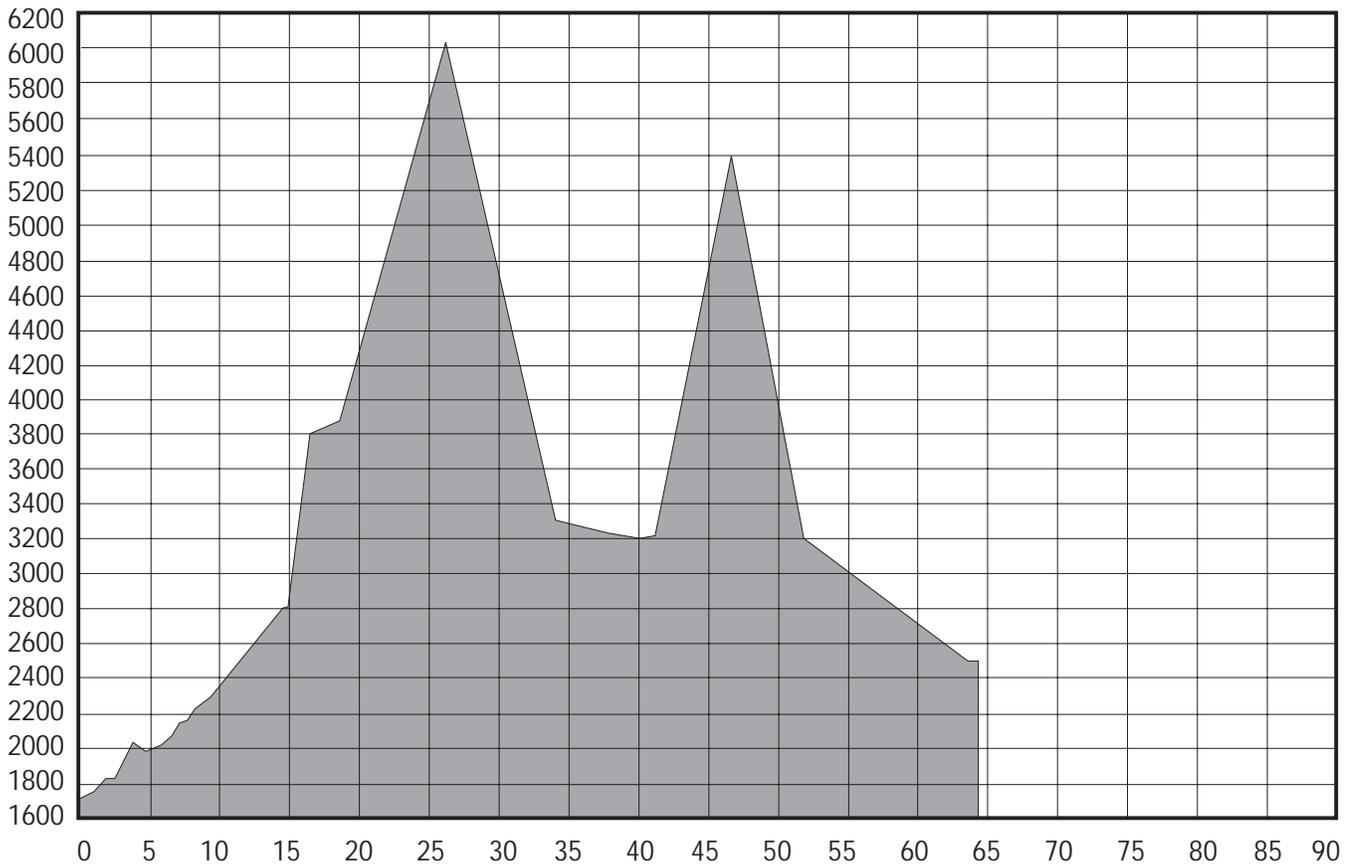
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The Big Foot Tour

Day 3: Matthews Creek to Coffee Creek

64 miles, 7000' up, 6200' down

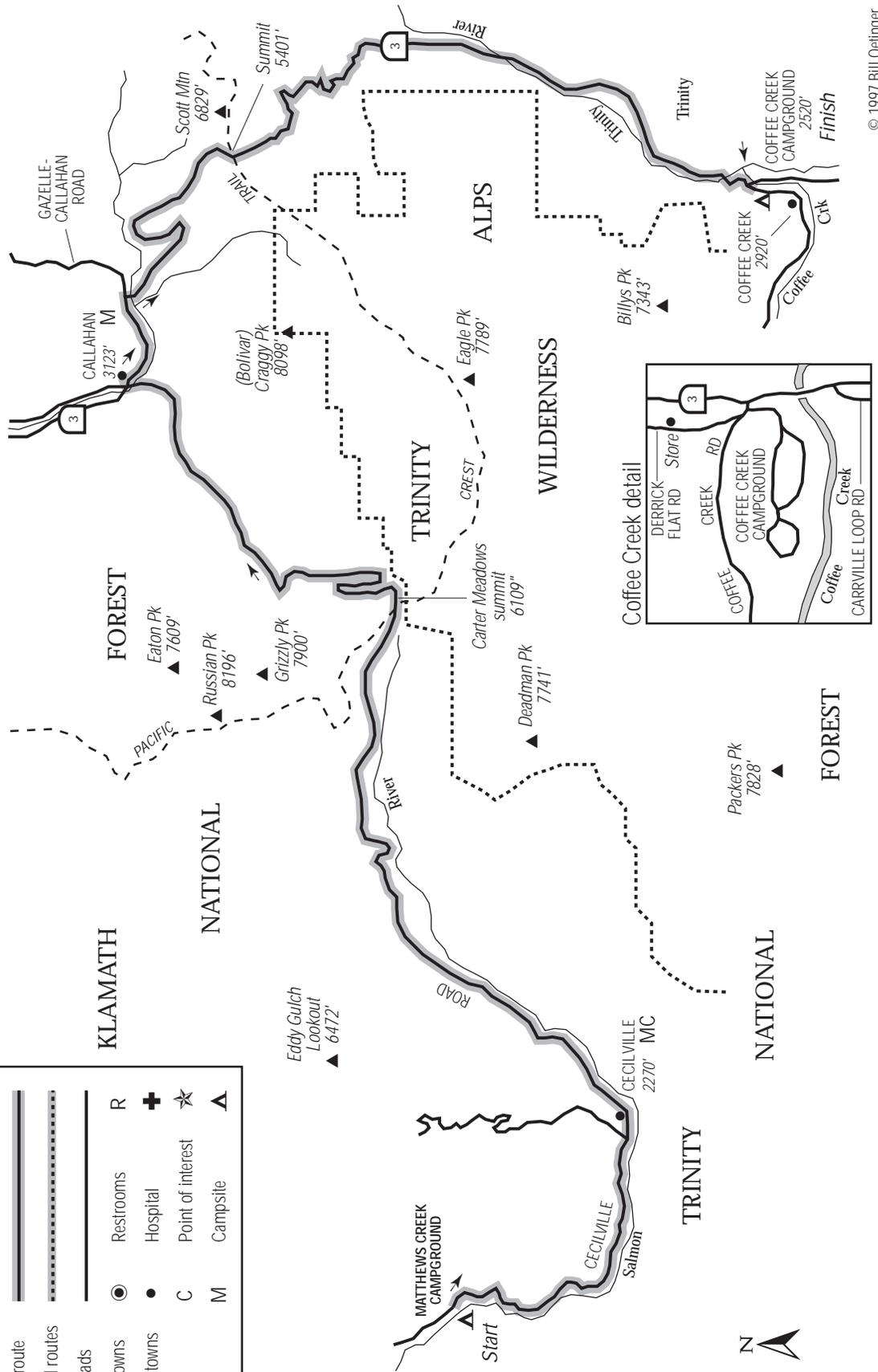
MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	R	Cecilville Road	Leave Matthews Creek camp.
8.0	S		Town of Cecilville (2270'). Small store.
8.8	S		Begin long, gradual climb...
26.4	S		Carter Meadows summit (6109'). Cross Pacific Crest Trail.
38.3	R	Hwy 3	Town of Callahan (3123'). Small store.
40.1	S		Bear right on Hwy 3 at Gazelle junction.
46.8	S		Scott Mountain summit (5401').
64.3	R	Coffee Creek Road	Immediately left into Coffee Creek camp.
64.5		Coffee Creek camp...finish	



The Bigfoot Tour

Day 3: Matthews Creek to Coffee Creek
64 miles, 7000' up, 6200' down

	Today's route
	Optional routes
	Other roads
	Restrooms
	Hospital
	Point of interest
	Cafe
	Market
	Campsite

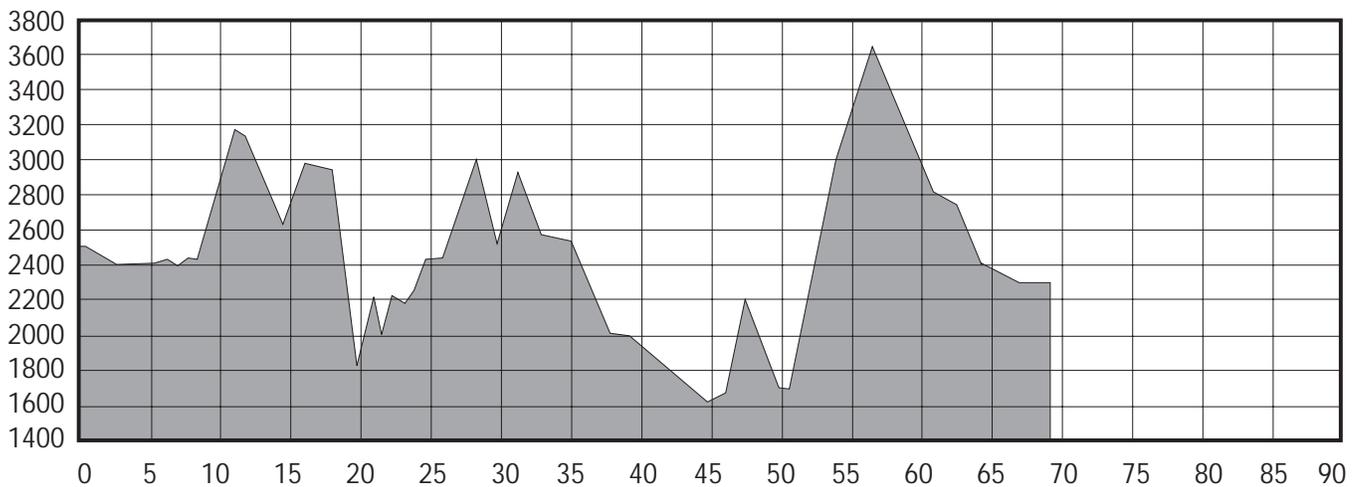


The Big Foot Tour

Day 4: Coffee Creek to Hayfork

69 miles, 5300' up, 5500' down

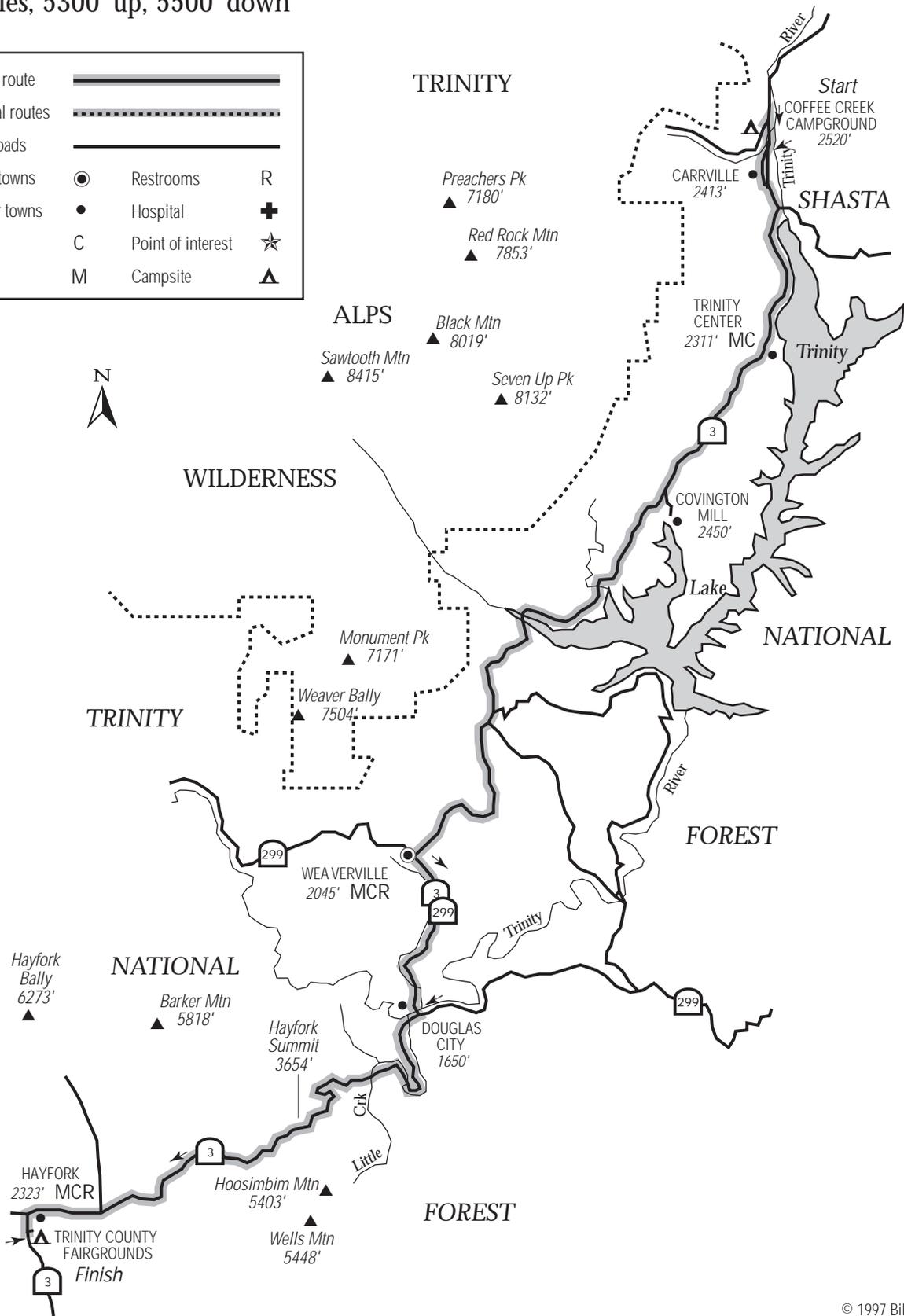
MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0			Leave Coffee Creek camp.
0.4	R	Hwy 3	
1.2	R	Carville Scenic Loop	Short scenic diversion...
2.5	R	Hwy 3	
37.6	L	Hwy 299/3	★ Town of Weaverville (2045').
43.7	S	Hwy 299/3	Roadside rest area.
44.4	R	Hwy 3	Turn just after crossing Trinity River.
56.6	S		Hayfork summit (3654').
67.0	S		Town of Hayfork (2323'). Stores.
69.0	L	Into Trinity County Fairgrounds	



The Bigfoot Tour

Day 4: Coffee Creek to Hayfork
69 miles, 5300' up, 5500' down

Today's route	—————		
Optional routes	- - - - -		
Other roads	—————		
Bigger towns	●	Restrooms	R
Smaller towns	•	Hospital	+
Cafe	C	Point of interest	☆
Market	M	Campsite	▲



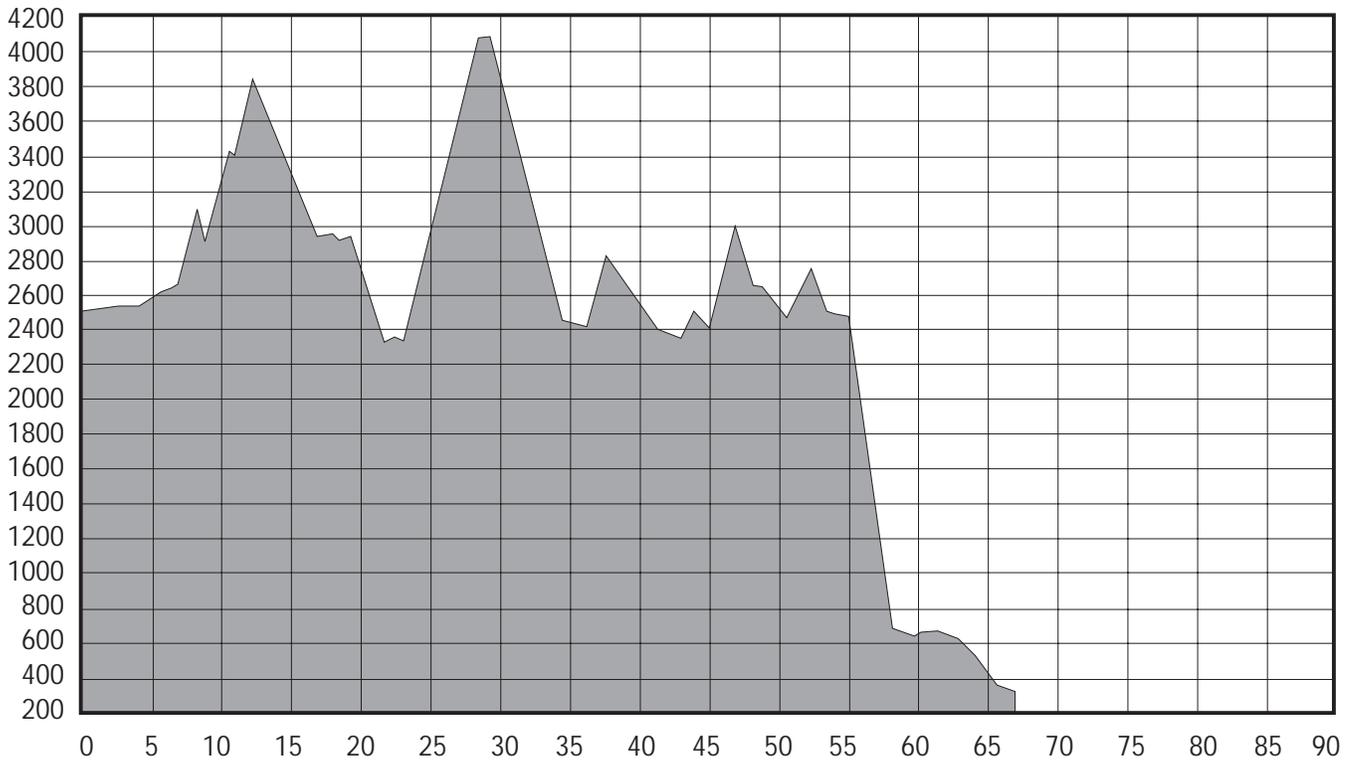
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The Big Foot Tour

Day 5: Hayfork to Grizzly Creek

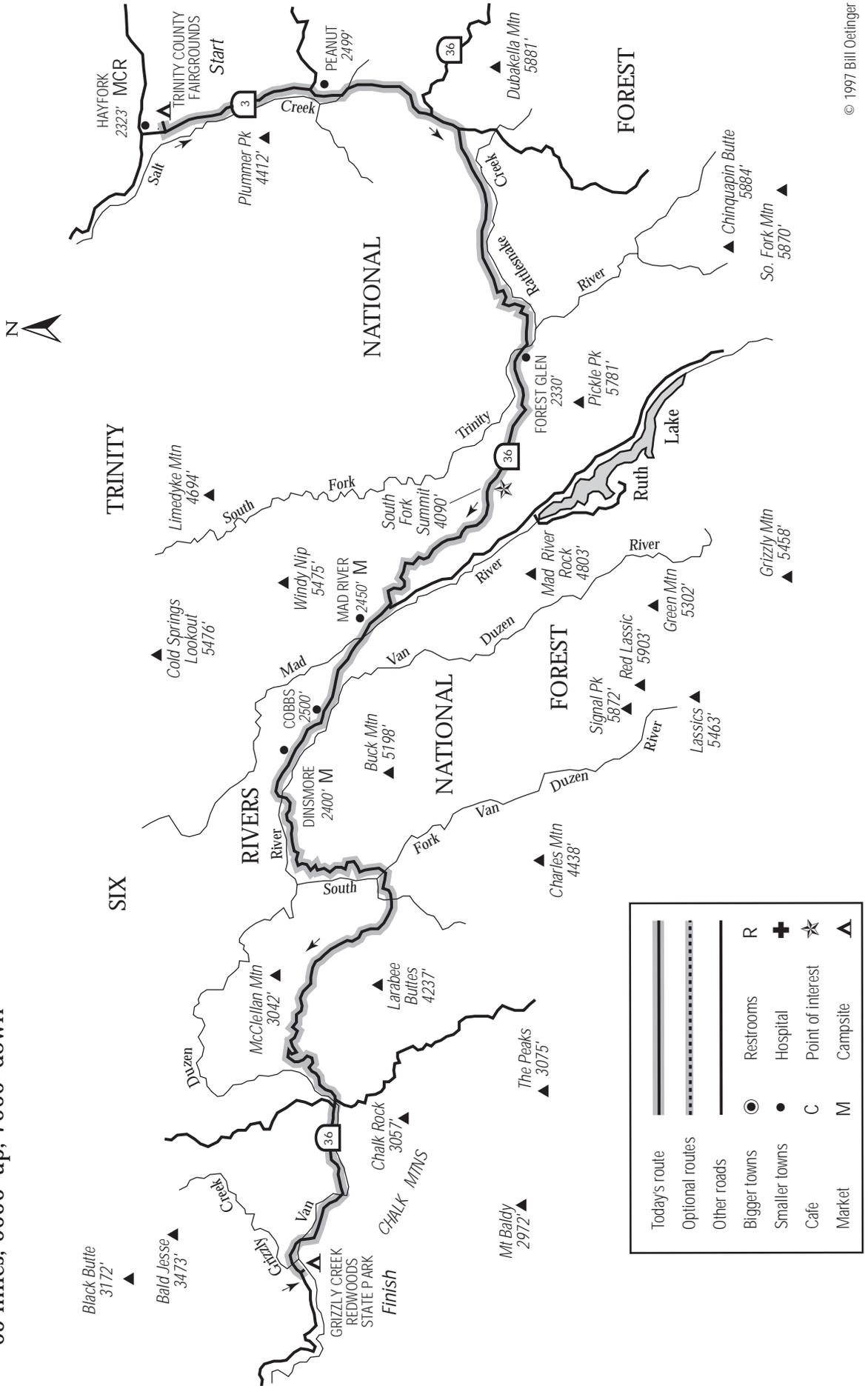
67 miles, 5000' up, 7000' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	L	Hwy 3	Leave fairgrounds.
10.9	R	Hwy 36	Follow signs to Forest Glen.
21.7	S		Town of Forest Glen (no services 2330').
28.2	S		★ South Fork summit (4090').
35.4	S		Town of Mad River (2480'). Store, cafe.
41.9	S		Town of Dinsmore (2400'). Store.
64.1	S		Store.
66.6	L	Into Grizzly Creek State Park	



The Bigfoot Tour

Day 5: Hayfork to Grizzly Creek Redwoods State Park
65 miles, 5000' up, 7000' down

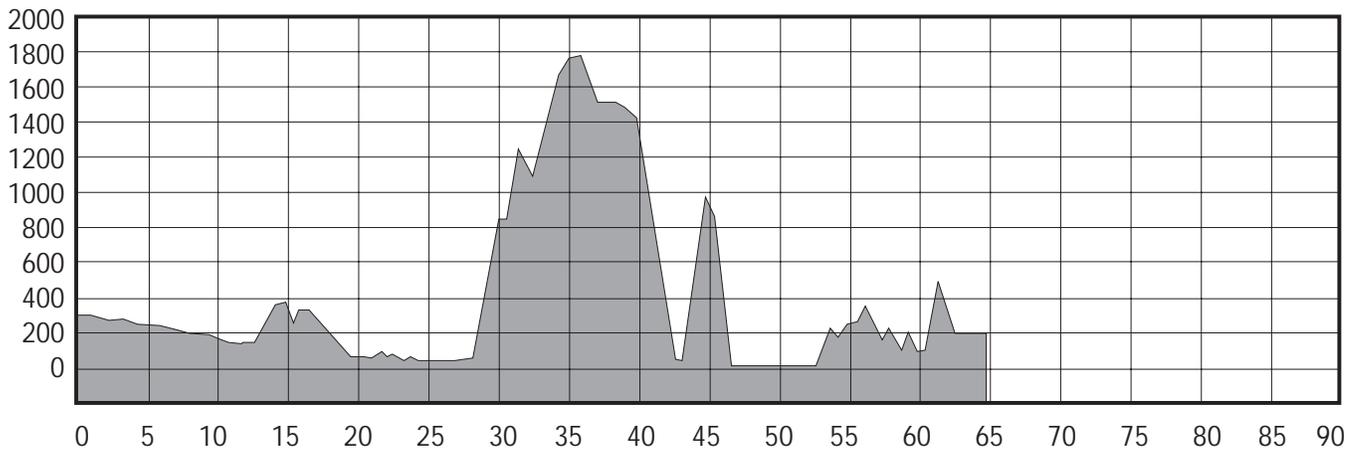


The Big Foot Tour

Day 6: Grizzly Creek to A. W. Way County Park

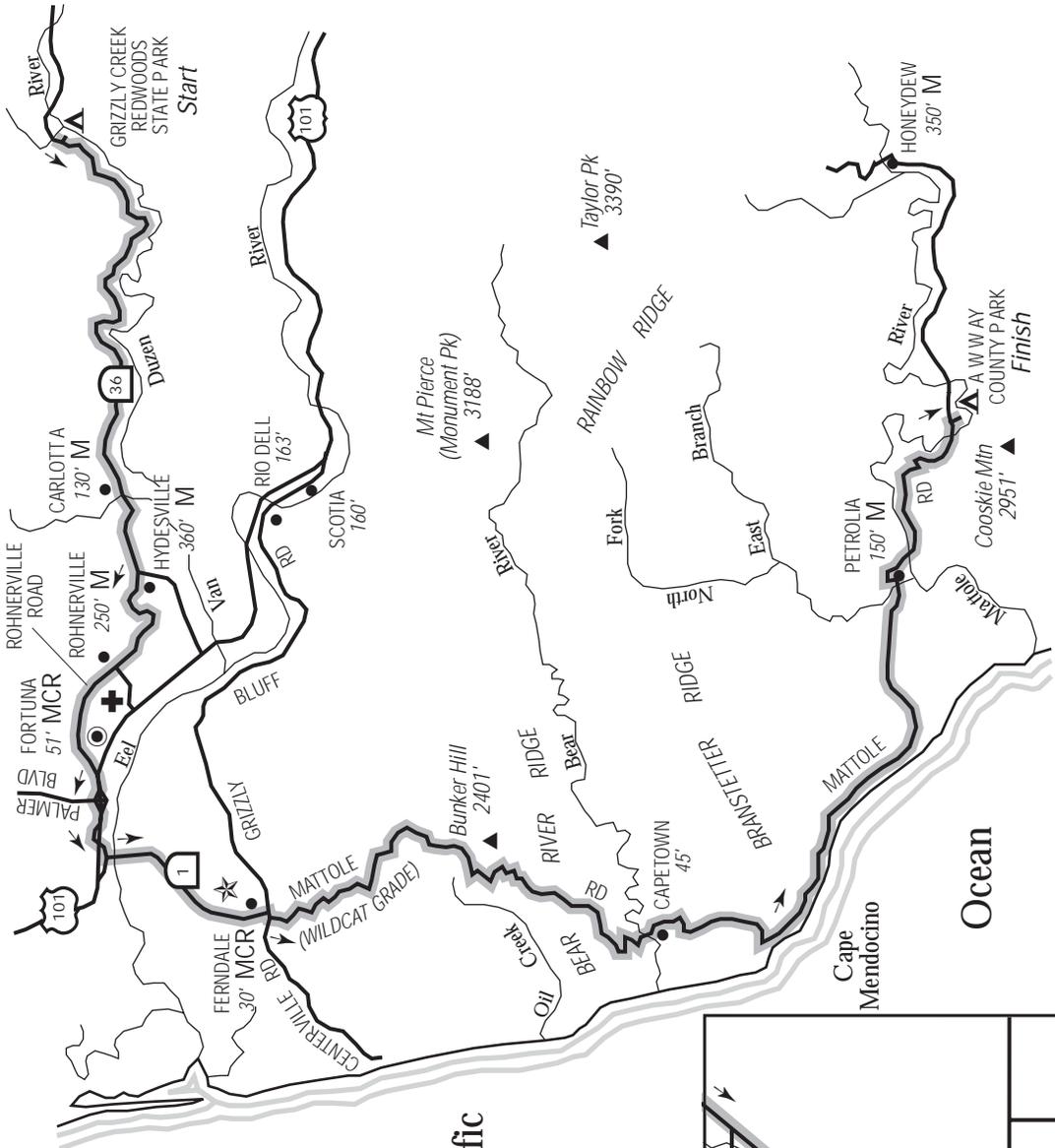
65 miles, 5000' up, 5200' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	L	Hwy 36	Leave Grizzly Creek camp.
12.1	S		Town of Carlotta (130'). Store.
14.1	S		Town of Hydesville (360'). Store.
14.4	R	Rohnerville Road	Hwy 36 bends left; you go straight.
20.0	R	Main Street, Fortuna (51')	More of a merge than a right turn.
21.0	R	Hwy 101	Use Palmer Blvd. off-ramps (see text).
22.4	R	Ferndale, Fernbridge exit from 101	Off-ramp curls under freeway.
23.3	L	Over Fernbridge on Hwy 1	Cross the Eel River to Ferndale.
27.0	S	Hwy 1	★ Town of Ferndale (30').
28.1	R	Ocean	
28.2	L	Mattole Road	Big climb on Wildcat Grade.
46.7	S		★ The beach at Cape Mendocino.
57.2	S		Town of Petrolia (150'). Store.
64.3	R	Into A. W. Way County Park	



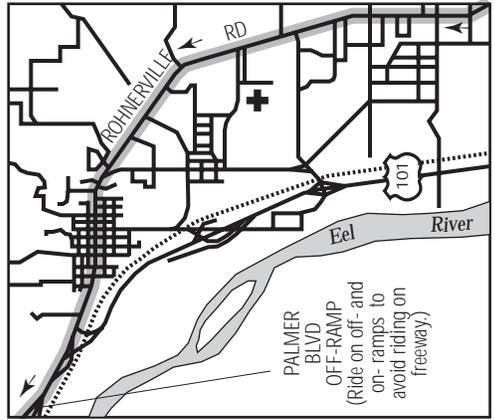
The Bigfoot Tour

Day 6: Grizzly Creek Redwoods SP to A.W. Way County Park
65 miles, 5000' up, 5200' down

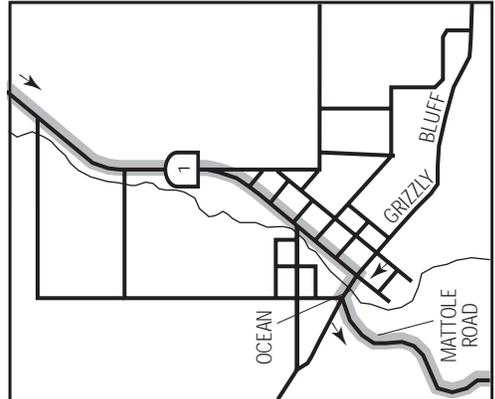


	Today's route		Optional routes		Other roads		Restrooms		Hospital		Point of interest		Campsite
	Cafe		Market		Bigger towns		Smaller towns						

Fortuna detail



Ferndale detail



Pacific

The Big Foot Tour

Day 7: A. W. Way County Park to Dean Creek Camp

55 miles, 3500' up, 3400' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	R	Mattole Road	Leave camp.
8.2	L		Left over bridge in town of Honeydew (350'). Begin long climb over Panther Gap.
16.0	S		Panther Gap summit (2744').
25.0	S		Enter redwoods...Bull Creek Basin.
26.3	S		☆ Rest area. Good spot to see big trees.
30.8	R	Avenue of the Giants	Turn just after passing under Hwy 101.
33.3	S		Town of Weott (338'). Store.
38.1	S		Williams Grove group site.
39.1	S		Town of Meyers Flat (196'). Store.
40.1	S		Hidden Springs campground.
49.1	S		Town of Phillipsville (280'). Cafe.
52.0	L	Onto Hwy 101	Three miles on freeway shoulder.
55.0	R	Redwood Drive (Redway exit off 101)	
55.2	R	Into Dean Creek Camp	

