

## 2005, The Summit—The View from Iron Mountain!

Submitted by Larry Peters, Metro Atlanta Cycling Club (Atlanta)

### *What's the Summit?*

For the past few years now, we've been meeting up with members of Columbus's Major Taylor Cycling Club, the "Ohio Players" and other like minded friends for a long weekend's worth of great springtime cycling action in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee. We'll typically get in a good solid 4 days of riding some of the most beautiful (and most challenging) roads in the States. There's no real race involved, most are quite satisfied with the satisfaction of simply getting to the tops of the mountain passes, but you'd be a fool to think a good number of the group are not trying to get to the top first (or least faster than they did last year)!

For two year's now we've stayed at the Bicycle Inn ([www.bicycleinn.com](http://www.bicycleinn.com)). Now defunct, the Inn was located in Bakersville, NC. Ambiance was somewhere between a Bed & Breakfast and a youth sports camp—all with a heavy dose of cycling. (Walls were decked with several decades' worth of cycling photo's, posters, parts, bikes & memorabilia. Meals were served family style and there were huge porches just outside the dining area to facilitate the "recovery drink" induced post ride conversation. The event then moved to Townsend, TN, and now Helen, GA. Overall, it's a great time—I'd encourage everyone to be there next year!

(I never got around to finishing my reports for the rest of the week, but I had a good start. Enjoy!)

### *Day one: Iron Mountain and the Roan Moan*

Fortunately, the previous day's torrential downpour had passed. Nice cool spring morning, but by the time we actually left the Bicycle Inn it had warmed up quite a bit. Indeed, within a few miles of leaving the lot, the mercury was up enough to drive vests, arm & leg warmers and over-gloves into our bulging jersey pockets. A perfect day for a ride. I recall a breeze—I think it was from the northwest--, but between the winding valley roads, trees and a nice size little peloton, it was pretty hard to tell what direction it was coming from.

We headed up the road, along a very scenic riverside road, toward Tennessee. The pace started out painfully slow, but, I'll admit, I was not complaining too much. The legs were taking a long time to warm up. With 60+ miles, and, based on comments from the veterans, two solid climbs and several nice hills to go, this could turn out to be a long day.

For some unknown reason a few riders at the front insisted on riding side by side—basically 3-4 across, taking up the entire lane. We accumulated a long "tail" composed of increasingly impatient automobiles. In spite of their horns, and shouts of "move over" from those of us at the back, no one would shift to the right.

Finally, Bo Gaines of MACC got the right idea and attacked the whole group. The "bait" was too much. A good number of riders simply could not help but chase. Our little group strung out nicely (and to the right)—letting the traffic through. Amazing what a real veteran can make happen with a little thinking.

Of course, this little “show of force” came with consequences! The “gloves were now off” and, until we got to the serious climbs, the ride turned into a series of frisky attacks, counters, cool downs, and sprints to various city/county/state lines.

A brief “nature break” allowed everyone to get together again. Out of the parking lot, I went to the front and started setting what I thought was a nice steady, but strong, pace. Along with Dave Southerland and Ken Ashton a few of us were working very nicely together, exchanging pulls along another beautiful streamside road. I started to get this strange feeling we’d started going uphill—at a bit more than 20 mph.

I was tucked behind Ken in the rotation—then he just slipped away. Soon he had a very nice gap. The grade was slowly increasing, indeed, soon all were in the small ring. This must be “Iron Mountain”—the first, and shorter, of the day’s two climbs.

There seemed to be a consensus: If Ken’s wintertime training trip to Tucson had been effective enough to let him confidently build this type of a lead going into a climb, there was no use trying to follow! Just see if he came back.

As I hit the 25, I noted a couple of things: Ken was a good switchback in the road ahead—but the gap was not going up. Greg Masterson was steadily catching him. Several others—including Don and Dave had also gapped me and seemed to be making up some ground. It felt like there were a few folks glued to my wheel—but I must admit, I was concentrating on how my body felt in relation to the road, and didn’t dare look over my shoulder to see how things were sorting out behind.

I stopped worrying about other folks and got into the mental “climbing zone.” It’s almost a type of meditation: Maintain a nice spin without, on one hand, sending the heart rate into the stratosphere, or on the other, “burning out” the thighs by pushing to big a gear. Every once in a while (exiting an inside curve “switchback” is a nice time) shift a gear or two harder and stand for 20 pedal strokes, then sit and get the spin going again.

Fifteen minutes in “the zone” and Ken’s wheel was only a couple bike lengths away. Unfortunately, we’d reached the top and my little pursuit was over. Greg “crested” a bit before and went back down to check on others. We all collapsed on the side of the road at the top of Iron Mountain (and the state line) and waited for the others to make it to the top.

On to Roan Mountain!

## **2010 Major Taylor Tennessee Summit**

*Ruminations from the Chicago Major Taylor attendees (MTC3)*

There were some incredible bikes there. These guys and gals bring some serious weapons. Campy components made a respectable showing with at least one 11 speed. Hmmm, no SRAM as I recall. Didn’t think about it ‘til now. I could have missed it. I would be surprised if no one had SRAM. Hmmm, no Di2 either! We discussed it. I guess nobody had a spare 5 grand for components laying around.

Biggest bike brand at the Summit? Orbea. I was mildly surprised. There were Orbea's all over the place. We discussed this at dinner Friday night. I have always appreciated Orbea's ability to couple great function with great form. They are some of the best looking bikes out there and they perform. They almost grab you on the show room floor with that Spanish styling. They design and build them right there in Spain.

I've said this before – it's funny how cyclists can remember your bike even if they can't remember your name. I was asked twice if I had a new bike. Nope, I redid the decals and tape. Just a whole new look on an incredible frame. Another Litespeed owner was real interested in how I did it.

Total ascending distance: almost 6000 ft – which is below my April trip norm. The weather and my missing Friday's big climb (Foothills Parkway, 11 miles at 4%) are the factors. For a point of reference, the ascending distance from LaRabida to Crown Point via the Erie-Lackawanna is around 300 ft. The Indiana Lake Shore Century is 1100 ft.

Rashaan Bahati, the pro racer, did a really good pitch for his foundation Thursday night. He spoke to us as a group. It was a really good discussion. I got autographed photos: one says To: MTC3! I gotta figure out how to post it. He will be in Chicago May 9th.

Four women attended this year. They were concerned in that they wanted to become better climbers but they wanted mentoring. Their point is that this is billed as a 'training summit', so where is the training? Hmmm, good point. One woman cornered me (and others) and wouldn't let up until it was agreed to address the issue at the presidents meeting. It was addressed at the presidents meeting.

Club presidents got together and agreed to change next year's Summit location. We will be going to Helen, Georgia in the northeast corner of that state. We also agreed to provide alternate 'B' rides to those who aspire to do the more challenging rides. Mentoring will be included. The reason for the move is just for a change up. The Townsend, Tennessee residents could not be better hosts. Good meeting.

I have been to Helen, Georgia on cycling trips multiple times. Really nice German themed town. Excellent climbing for all levels. Gorgeous landscape. Flatter stuff if you want it.

I can't get over the incredible SAG provided by Cycology Bike Shop. Not only was it well stocked but they even had spare jerseys in case you over dressed. I did borrow a red sleeveless and shucked my long sleeve. It turned way warmer than expected. And climbing brings some serious heat.

Since thunderstorms were a certainty in the forecast I left Townsend Saturday morning. There was no sense in being cooped up in the room all day. Missed Saturday's ride to Cade's Cove in the national park and the closing dinner, but it was good to get home.

## On Top of the World

*Townsend area climbs prove revelation, inspiration for visiting cyclists*

By [Stefan Cooper](#)

*Blount Today News*: April 29, 2009

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Just a little bit more.

Make this next corner, pour it on, and it's less than a tenth of a mile to the top of the climb.

That'll show 'em. That'll shut 'em up.

And then it happened.

Like a jet blast deflector rising from the deck of an aircraft carrier, the road rose in front of Baltimore cyclist Frankie Johnson as if pushed from the earth by hydraulics.

Major Taylor-affiliated cycling clubs from seven U.S. cities converged on Blount County last week. Organized by the Metro Detroit Cycling Club and Walland cyclist Eddie Sloan, they'd come to test themselves on some of the area's most feared climbs, including Butterfly Gap Road, Happy Valley Road ("the Wall") and Flats Road.

Baltimore Metro Wheelers Cycling Club cyclist Ashanti Barfield had done his best to warn Johnson about the latter. Flats Road, dubbed "Sweetie Pie" by area cyclists, is an awe-inspiring gradient from behind the wheel of an automobile. On a bicycle, the 28-percent, half-mile monster is all but impossible without the right gear.

A rear sprocket with at least a 27-tooth gear would be best, Barfield, who'd ridden the climb the year before, advised his friend.

"He said a 27 is a mountain bike gear," Barfield said.

A strong, experienced cyclist who'd ridden some of the world's toughest climbs — including the famed, 21-switchback Alpe d'Huez featured in the Tour de France — Johnson rolled to the start Saturday confident a 25 would be plenty.

"They said, 'You need to bring a 27,'" he said. "I ain't bringing no 27."

When Johnson hit the final, fierce 50 meters, Sweetie Pie stopped his bike dead in its tracks in mid pedal stroke. To keep from falling over, he was forced to dismount, with Barfield and two others waiting at the top.

“Bet he’ll bring that 27 next year,” Barfield said.

After nine attempts, Johnson successfully engaged his pedals and continued to the top. There, he received a fist bump from Barfield and Dayton, Ohio, cyclist Charles Love. After a brief rest, the trio set sail down Foothills Parkway for the 18-mile ride back to Valley View Lodge in Townsend for a shower.

The trash talk directed at Johnson for much of the 60-mile ride had been stinging and relentless, but it was never personal, Love said. A year ago, on the very same stretch of road, Sweetie Pie had kissed him square on the mouth, too. That, Love said, he blames on Sloan.

“Eddie tricked me last year,” Love said. “He said, ‘If you get to (Flats Road), and you don’t like it, there’s a shortcut to go home.’”

The challenge of Flats Road is due, in part, to where it comes in the ride, said Love, who made the trip south with Dayton’s Major Taylor Cycling Club. The climb to Butterfly Gap and the Top of the World is 6-mile lung-buster in its own right, coming some 16 miles over steep, rolling terrain from the group’s hotel. Many area cyclists rate it the toughest climb in the Smokies.

“It was rough,” Barfield said. “Once you got on it, it was a question of, ‘When is it going to end?’”

For Metro Detroit Cycling Club president Brian Cox, whose riding partner had dismounted, removed his shoes and began walking halfway up the climb, Butterfly Gap would signal the end of his day.

“He dropped me,” Cox said. “Walking, no shoes, and he dropped me.”

As the climb neared the parkway, Cox, who’d finished the ride a year ago, hiked across a berm to join other riders for an abbreviated trip back to the hotel.

“They said, ‘Just pick up the bike and come on over here. You know you want to,’” Cox said.

Riders continuing on plunged south down the parkway to US 129, crossing Happy Valley before a searing, 2-mile climb up Happy Valley Road. The turn onto Flats Road comes less than a mile from the summit.

Love said he struggled on the first two climbs a year ago.

“They were calling me, ‘Last place, dead meat,’” he said. “They said ‘Why don’t you pull over and let us call the sag wagon for you.’”

By the time he reached Flats Road, Love said, the tank was empty.

“I had to walk it last year,” he said.

Part of it was not enough miles in his legs prior to the trip to Tennessee, Love said. Part of it, he added, was a needed change in lifestyle.

"I was a party animal," Love said. "All I knew how to do was pick up a bottle, go to a club and chase girls. This stopped all that."

Intent on avenging last year's ride, Love said he put away his bike over the winter and hired a personal trainer. From December to February, he did nothing but lift weights.

Being humbled on Sweetie Pie last year made him "take a good look at myself in the mirror," Love said.

It helped make last Saturday's rematch all the more sweet.

Love was the first in his group to reach the turn onto Flats Road this time. The others would join him there, enjoying a brief respite before pushing on. Nearing the top, Love pulled clear of the others to reach the crest alone.

As it had with Johnson, the final few meters took all he had.

"I thought I was going to jump off," Love said. "I knew I'd never forgive myself if I did. I would have had to go back down and do it again."

There would be no need for a do-over, however. Upon reaching the summit and unclipping from his pedals, Love let out a loud whoop, pumping both fists in the air in celebration.

"This was sweet!" he said.

No. It was Sweetie Pie, and she's not such a bad girl after all, once you get to know her.

## **2009, The Tennessee Summit— Tail of the Dragon and "The Wall"**

Submitted by Tony Cranshaw, Metro Atlanta Cycling Club (Atlanta)

Day 1 of the Major Taylor Cycling 2009 Summit was a tough day in the saddle for 90 miles, and featured a few of the most scenic and memorable climbs ever, including the ridiculous "3 mile Wall", the legendary "11 mile Tail of the Dragon" and the infamous 18 mile Foothills Parkway. The Wall was a 3 mile climb at 9%, but with a few sections around 15%. I swear I heard circus music in the switchbacks!

At the 65 mile mark, I had wicked leg cramps from sodium depletion and lactic acid buildup, with perhaps a mild heat stroke while ascending the Tail. I had been riding fast and strong, but I was dropped by the lead chase group at the base of the Foothills Parkway, when my afflictions set in, making for a long hot, painful and lonely ride for next 18 miles, including 11 miles of climbing. After going over the parkway I was revived at a gas station by a couple of Detroit Cyclists, while I waited for the MACC Calvary to show up to take me back strong to the finish.

7,000 calories burned. 6+ hours of pedaling. 8,000 feet of vertical gain. Wow!

## **2009, The Tennessee Summit— A “Recovery” Ride....Yeah, right**

Submitted by Tony Cranshaw, Metro Atlanta Cycling Club (Atlanta)

Day 2 of the Major Taylor 2009 Summit featured a so called 35 mile "recovery" ride to the sponsor bike shop and back to the Valley View Hotel. What started out as a recovery ride, ended up being a battle between the Ohio and MACC cycling clubs. It was a brisk ride to the shop – about 15 miles, where the shop had discounts, food, and beverages waiting for us. We lazed around for about two hours before some of us got the impetus to roll back to the hotel.

Everyone was full of pizza and sodas after leaving the bike shop riding at a comfortable conversational pace. Then the guys from Ohio started attacking the punchy little climbs and bumped up the speed. No one in the group responded to this move, except for yours truly. I counter attacked, and then traded pulls and hill attacks with the lead breakaway guy for the next 8 miles.

Then right before the main highway 321, the MACC Calvary arrived after a relentless chase. The Ohio guy cut across the highway in front of high speed traffic trying to get the jump on the group. We caught him, then took turns attacking him on the river road, but couldn't shake him. He was eventually outnumbered 4 to 2, with about 3 miles to go on US 321 to the Hotel. After everyone traded a few strong pulls, it was up the Prez to take these guys down at the end. Which of course he did.

Minutes later, we were all sitting outside talking trash and drinking beers like family.

## **2009, The Tennessee Summit— Cherohala Skyway in NC!**

Submitted by Tony Cranshaw, Metro Atlanta Cycling Club (Atlanta)

Day 3 of the Major Taylor 2009 Summit featured a special MACC ride on the Cherohala Skyway in North Carolina. It featured a 12 mile climb to about a 5400 foot elevation. This was a very long and grinding climb, averaging about 6 %, with swooping switchbacks and scenic mountain vistas. This ride was listed as one of the top bicycling rides in the country in this book that Dave had brought along.

We started near Deals Gap in the shadow of Cheoah Dam – the one that Harrison Ford jumped from in *The Fugitive*. In a beautiful paceline we rolled up NC 129 along a rollicking whitewater river, then Dave took us on some backcountry roads that slowly climbed along the edge of Lake Santeetlah, past another dam, and then into the Joyce Kilmer Wilderness. After a brief stop, we left the Memorial Forest parking lot and hit a 2 mile 6% climb up to the Cherohala Skyway, then turned right for the climb proper. Cherohala is a beautiful climb, completely isolated, with breathtaking vistas, and an unrelenting 5-7% grade for the next 10 miles. We spread out all over the mountains, each finding our own pace up the climb.

We arrived at the summit of the climb with little or no water. However, our SAG Bo kept us alive with ice throughout the climb and greeted us with a gulp of water and a cold beer at the top. Thanks Bo!

IMHO the only reason for taking a 2 hour climb up a mountain is for the awesome descent back down. This epic descent did not disappoint. Reaching speeds of 50 mph with wide turns and no

traffic gave me goose pimples – most turns were cambered perfectly and I didn't even need to touch the brakes. That 12 mile climb took about 20 minutes to come down. The other real treat of this ride featured a romp thru the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. This was a beautiful nature preserve with waterfalls, creeks and wildlife next to Lake Santeetlah.

After the killer descent and site seeing, I decided to breakaway from the group and hammer back for the next 10 miles (probably a 1-2% downhill all the way back), before I was caught by that awesome MACC paceline on 129 within 2 miles of the finish. Not to give up, I took it up to 29-31 mph to drop the group only to be mano-a-mano again with the Prez (Greg) at the end of the ride.

55 miles, 5,500 feet of climbing, 4,500 calories burned, and some of the best views you will ever get from a bike. Incredible day!

## **2010 Major Taylor Tennessee Summit Townsend to Cade's Cove, Smoky Mountain National Park**

Submitted by David Southerland (Atlanta)

Wow, Eddie Sloan has really outdone himself this year with the routes. The 2008 and 2009 Summits utilized the same routes both years (The Wall, Foothills, Butterfly Gap) – but processing some feedback requesting new routes, Eddie had put together some beauties for 2010.

Thursday's route went up the Foothills Parkway the long way and down to Calderwood Lake, then back on some great country roads to Maryville and the Cycology bike shop. Having Rashaan Bahati to chase made it a blast, and really fun. The ride back to Townsend gave us 75 miles on the day. Friday provided no break as Eddie took about 20 of us to Tellico Plains for an assault on the Tennessee side of the Cherohala Skyway. For those who rode all the way to the state line, it was 25 miles up at an average 4% grade (and back down for another 25). But it had significant downhill sections, and the uphill segments often approached 10% for extended distances. This was a HARD ride! Waterfalls, cascades and endless vistas softened the hurt some, but not too much.

What would be our finale on the last day?

Weather reports for Saturday indicated a 100% chance of scattered showers...but what's a vacation without a little rationalization? *Scattered* showers....that means there is a pretty good chance we won't get wet at all, right? Not all Summit attendees were buying it, and quite a few left for home on Saturday morning, before it had even started raining. Turned out to be their loss in a big way.

The radar on Saturday morning showed that we might not get any significant rain till late morning. Eddie's official ride was scheduled to start at 10:30, so about 20 of us decided at breakfast to roll out early – 8:30 or so – but where to ride?

Townsend sits on the southwest corner of the National Park, near a famous section of the park called Cade's Cove. After May 1<sup>st</sup>, the Park closes the Cade's Cove Loop to cars every Saturday morning until 9 AM – but it wasn't yet May. I had always wanted to ride the Cove, but



the word is that the traffic is completely unmanageable for a bike ride. Nevertheless, I asked some of the local folks about the route Friday night, and one of them handed me a copy of the local paper – A miracle it seemed, right on the front page.

Cade's Cove had been closed to all traffic for the previous 6 months – for resurfacing and other various improvements, and the Saturday of the 2010 Summit was to be its Grand Re-opening. Better yet – the Loop and the road leading to it was closed to automobile traffic until 12 noon! Rain or no rain, I was going to ride it today.

The window of dry weather was enough to entice a crowd of MACC attendees and others to go with me, including Ken, Ivan, Charles, Frankie, a few Detroit guys, and a number of the Ohio Players. We rolled out at 8:30 AM and headed straight into the National Park. We all embraced a very lazy pace for the first 5 or 6 miles, trying to shake the miles and the vertical climbing of the previous two days out of our legs. No complaints from me!

Once we got into the park the road turned right, the cars disappeared, and ever so slowly the road began to tilt up. Not much, maybe a 2% grade to start with, along a twisting road with a cascading stream on one side and a depression-era CCC-built wall on the other. Damn, Larry Peters and Eddie from Atlanta moved to the front, and each took their turn ratcheting up the speed as we strung the group out. As first Larry, then Eddie pulled off after their turn – leaving me at the front for my turn – I noticed that our uphill grade had increased some – maybe 4%.

But I was feeling really good, so I decided to make the most of my effort, even if Frankie and Greg dropped me again. 5 or 6 minutes later I was still up front, with Greg's voice behind me urging me on. Maybe I had dropped a few folks and I could help Greg get to the top of this hill fresh and strong. Frankie was there too, giving me just as much encouragement. Finally exhausted, I pulled to the left letting them come through, giving me congratulations for my effort. I had expected to ease up and let 8-10 folks slide by, finding my place at the back. To my surprise, only Frankie and Greg were with me – the peloton was barely in sight, a ¼ mile back down the climb – which was now close to a 6% grade.

Reinvigorated, I settled in behind Frankie's wheel and let Greg pull us on, delighted I was hanging on. At one point I had to ask Frankie to back off a little, but it felt great. Again – no cars anywhere – just like the newspaper article promised. I crested the climb with the two strongest riders at the 2010 Summit, and sailed down the 1 mile descent with them into Cade's Cove. Park Rangers waved us through, where the trees opened up to huge meadows – filled with families on bikes and hikers.

The Cade's Cove Loop is a single-lane, one-way 13 mile loop through what used to be a small rural community before the National Park was formed. Many buildings are still standing, too. The road is twisting and turning, with little dips and punchy climbs. Greg, Frankie and I sat up after the road became one lane and took in the views and the scene. Ivan – crazy downhill Ivan – came flying by and 'attacked' us while we were soft-pedaling – and rode on all alone. We were in no mood to chase after the work we had just done and the views to be had, so why was he attacking now while everything was tranquilo? We weren't to see him again until we got back to the motel.

Ken joined us and we pulled over a mile or so later for a picture. Waited for the guys to catch up, took a picture of a couple from Kentucky that had just returned from a stint in the Peace Corps in Guatemala, and just enjoyed the day. 15 or so of us rolled easily around the Loop, at one point startling a deer that ran across the road just in front of a couple of the Detroit crew.

We exited the Loop and headed back up that one mile climb, all of us riding together – minus Ivan.

At the top, chaos hit the group. A local riding with us attacked on the downhill and we all gave chase. I learned quickly that the guys from Detroit and Chicago really know how to descend shallow grades (while pedaling) – I had thought they were really bereft of hills in their hometowns, but they were flying. I held on for the steep part of the descent (we were going down the climb I come up with Frankie and Greg), but when it got to a 2-3% grade the Midwest guys just rode me off of their wheels! Well done.

We regrouped at the exit of the park, then rolled back easily to Townsend and the motel. What a great ride, and likely to be an opportunity we would never get again. The Cove is beautiful, but apparently rarely without heavy traffic – and we had just had the entire thing to ourselves! 36 miles and probably only passed by a dozen cars the entire ride.

We got back at 10:45 or so, and it started raining just as we turned into the hotel. It then rained almost all day – but our timing had been perfect. Excellent!

## **Ride Report and 2011 Preview: Mountain Lakes Zig-Zag**

**Lake Burton, Georgia      November 2010**

By David Southerland (Atlanta)

The 2011 Major Taylor Summit tackles some of the least straight and most interesting roads anywhere in Georgia on this route in the northeast corner of the state. We'll hit this right on the last day. A few weeks ago I got the chance to ride a 35 mile section of this route with a good friend and his 16 year old son. It was every bit as good as I had hoped.

I was ramping back up on my fitness that October weekend, having had some minor surgery a few weeks before – and ordered off the bike by my doctor. So, why shouldn't my first ride back be in the mountains? Maybe not the brightest thing, but what better way to spend a Monday holiday?

We parked at the corner of Ga. 197 and Burton Dam Road, just north of Helen, and at the southwest corner of Lake Burton – the first of three mountain lakes we would skirt today. The weather couldn't have been better – mid-50s at 11 AM, no wind, stunningly bright autumn day. Sam, the teenager with us, had been buried in a book about NYC rats – of all things – for the drive up. After prying him away we all readied for the ride, even as Sam told us how he was getting over a cold and probably wouldn't be riding very fast today. Are kids learning that early? We've all heard that before – 'my legs hurt today,' my breaks are rubbing,' and I'm tapering down my training for this weekend's race.' I'm in trouble.

Wow, we had barely a mile of warm-up before hitting the first tough climb on Burton Dam Road, at least an 8 or 10% climb for a little over a ½ mile! True to his word, Sam sat on the back while his dad Tom pulled us to the top. Tom has had a great season and still had some good mojo this late in the year. Hitting the top of the climb, it went back down just as quickly, just as far, and just as steeply. Soon we found ourselves on a flatter section of road next to Seed Lake, absolutely flying on a 2% downhill grade, with Tom still pulling and Sam still sitting and complaining we were going too fast for him. His teenage setup plan was working me to perfection.

For the next 12 or 15 miles there wasn't a straight section of road as we passed first Seed Lake, then Rabun Lake, the latter which was littered with beautiful lakeside homes. A little bit of up and down, but mainly the road just twisted and turned, sometimes with narrow lines of sight, but always fun. I went to the front a few times but didn't have a whole lot in my legs; Sam was glued to my rear wheel like Lance to Jan in 2001. Problem was that I didn't have 'The Look' to pull out later in the day. When we got to the eastern edge of Rabun Lake we headed north on Old U.S. 441 towards Tiger. I knew that if we had continued around the other side of the lake it would have taken us to Shady Road, one of the steepest, hardest climbs in northeast Georgia – a 20% beast that would have to wait for another day.

I had been a little worried about traffic on Old 441 (having only seen it on a map), but it was a beautiful stretch – slightly uphill, but nearly bereft of any other vehicles but a few bikes going the other way. Tom pulled all the way up.

We took a store stop in Tiger six miles later. Again Sam telegraphed his intentions by reiterating how out of shape and tired he was, yet buying a large bag of spicy hot beef jerky. An attack was imminent and his teenage naiveté was giving him away!

From Tiger we rode west towards the major obstacle of the day – Glassy Mountain. On paper it looked very reasonable – maybe 5 miles at 4% or so, with a stretch a little steeper. At the store stop a local had warned us about the climb, but insisted that we were doing it the “easy direction.” Like many things in life, the climb didn't really ride like its profile. It rolled for 3-4 miles, a little more up than down, but nothing harder than we find in northwest Atlanta. Then it went up, but not too bad. The serious stuff was probably no more than 3 miles, between a 5 and 8% grade – but with beautiful country views in all directions. Probably similar in profile to the north side of Unicoi Gap (for Georgia locals). The downhill, though, was incredible: almost 10 straight miles of 30 mph speeds. Plainly, we had just gone up the “easy” side.

Did I mention that Sam did attack on Glassy Mountain? Didn't drop his dad, but sure dropped me and I had to climb on my own. It was nice pushing my legs again after the forced break, even if it hurt a bit. But I kept it under control and enjoyed it. Just keep rolling the pedals over and I would get to the top.

At the bottom of the downhill we made a sharp right back onto Burton Dam Road. Went right back up that same climb we started with on the other side, but a different direction. On an elevation profile it's a mirror image of the first 2 miles of the ride. Again, Sam and Tom slipped away on the 10% grade, but it was over soon enough and I just slid down the other side and back to the car, finding the two of them with big grins on their face, clearly having enjoyed the ride.

Can't wait to do this route on the Summit, and see what kinds of speeds we reach on Seed Lake Road and the downhill side of Glassy Mountain. 60 miles on that day, and the stretch I did today will be right in the middle. It's going to be an epic way to finish the Summit. See you there!