

Mammoth Fall Century Gran Fondo: Ride Directors Take John Armstrong.

The Mammoth Fall Century is a great ride that I enjoy and look forward to every summer. I have ridden this route many times, in both directions, and I have worked on the event in one way or another for about 10 years. Here are a few thoughts on the ride and how you might approach it. It's a big handful, yet it's immensely satisfying to complete.

The Fall Century is a tale of 6 summits, pacing, and being patient, saving energy for Climbs#4 and #6. Enjoy the five different landscapes along the way, each with its own character and beauty.

Above all, remember; you are riding at 6400' to 8,126' in the Eastern High Sierra. You will be working a lot harder than at sea-level. You need to understand this, and adjust with a higher pedal cadence and a slightly slower bike speed. The highest point in this year's Tour De France, the Col d'Izoard, was 7743'.

The start is a neutralized, controlled start and we move down the Main Street of Mammoth at 20 mph with a CHP and a Mammoth Lakes Police Department escort. There are 28 intersections and driveways we need to control on this start and it takes a lot of volunteers to make this happen. We lead riders onto Highway 395 where we find five of our CHP escort vehicles controlling traffic at the intersection until we are all on the highway north.

Climb #1, Smokey Bear Flats: The first climb is up to Smokey Bear Flats and it will be easy to unconsciously attack this climb, because you are all excited and we have restrained you for 4 miles to Highway 395, and you want to get going! Take it easy on this first climb. It's not too long, about 1.7 miles, or steep (about 4-6%), but it's a good idea to spin at a high cadence and get acclimated and let others take off and ruin themselves. After this climb you have about 5 miles of rolling terrain before the Deadman Summit Climb. There is a toilet at the base of this climb, just before the Cal Trans Maintenance station, in case you had too much coffee.

Climb #2, Deadman: Deadman is a good climb, about 2.5 miles at 4%-6.5%, 550 feet of climbing, and you will feel it; you are back at 8,040' which is the elevation of our start in Mammoth! The road is narrow at the bottom, so stay in the shoulder, and later on the shoulder is pretty wide and comfortable.

At about 18 miles you will find **Rest Stop# 1** staffed by Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra, a very experienced group of volunteers who run an amazing disabled ski and snowboard program. Glen Miyata has a tech service truck at this stop and he is a master mechanic. Ten miles of downhill and flats follow, so you can digest some food and enjoy the views of Mono Lake. You turn right onto highway 120 at mile 24 of the ride and enter the Mono Lake zone of the ride. There's burnt-out forest, views of the lake, and a feeling of riding away from civilization. Perfect.

Climb #3, Sage Hen Summit begins after a downhill right hand turn near Mono Lake and you'll have a deceptive 11 mile and 1500' climb to the top, which at 8,126 feet is the highest point in the whole ride. It's even higher than The Village at Mammoth. Don't over-cook this; it's the longest climb of the day. Find a good rhythm and enjoy it. You will need your energy later for Wild Rose and The Finish.

Rest Stop #2 at the top of Sage Hen Summit awaits and our cross-country skiing athletes from Eastern Sierra Nordic Ski Association will take care of you. They are aerobic, endurance athletes too and they understand your pain and suffering. You are helping them go racing next year, by the way. Footloose has a mechanic at this stop for your adjustments and needs. Amazing views of the Sierra and Mono Lake from this rest stop.

Your patience and perseverance climbing to Sage Hen Summit is rewarded with another long downhill, 1700' of descending over 20 miles, into landscape #3, the eastern high desert, heading towards your lunch stop at Black Lake. CalTrans fixed this road a couple of years ago and it rides a lot smoother now. Once in the flats of the high desert you will have fun on a series of rollers and woop-de-doo's. This is a part of the course where it's great to have friends in a pace line.

Rest Stop #3 at Black Lake is staffed by the Mono County' Sherriff's Search and Rescue team. They are our longest serving volunteer group and have worked this stop for almost 10 years now. You'll have fun meeting them for sure. This is our lowest elevation of the whole ride at 6,400'. Only 42 miles and about 3,000' of climbing to go!

Climb#4, Wild Rose Summit: Get a little more to eat and rest up, because Wild Rose Summit looms in your future and you've now ridden 61 miles, with perhaps your toughest climb right in front of you. You will be glad you did not attack Smokey Bear, Deadman and Sage Hen climbs and that you have some energy left for this one. It's 6 miles and 1200' of climbing, runs 4% to 6% mostly, and the sting is in the last quarter mile where the climb reaches 13%. We often feel like walking this piece, but it's not steep for long, so push on and feel good when you have made it. A fast time up this hill is 30 minutes, I do it in 45 minutes, and many will take an hour to get it done. Did I mention it's warm? You'll be here around mid-day.

Rest Stop #4 at Wild Rose Summit, staffed by Bishop Broncos Football Team, is a chance to recover briefly and get ready for another descent of about 5 miles and 650' before tackling **Climb # 5, Watterson Summit**, a two-stage climb of about 4 miles and only 500 feet of climbing. You are now into some rolling hill country that brings you to **Rest Stop #5 at Watterson Summit**, a wonderful view of Mammoth Mountain, and the last 30 miles of your ride. Yep, there is another exhilarating descent after Watterson (700' drop over 9 miles) and you'll ride around Crowley Lake heading for Whitmore Rest Stop near the intersection of Benton Crossing Road and 395 North.

Rest Stop #6: At **Whitmore Ball Field and Track** can fuel your final push to the Finish. Our Mammoth High School Baseball Team will take care of you and prepare you for the finale.

Final Climb #6: Your challenge now is to simply keep going, since you have a 1250 foot elevation gain to get home to The Village in Mammoth, that beer, and tasty after-ride meal. You get onto 395 North and you just simply have to grind away at it. Pass the Airport. Pass the Old Sherriff Sub Station. Pass the Geothermal Plant, get onto Highway 203 and keep grinding that small chain-ring. Now you are in town and back in civilization. Pass the Fire Station; 1 mile to go. Keep spinning. Finally The Village arrives, a gourmet meal, your finisher's medal, and a time for your 102 mile ride.

*Thanks for coming to Mammoth and supporting Mammoth Mountain Community Foundation in funding academic and athletic opportunities for kids in Mammoth. Let's do it again next year.
John Armstrong, Ride Director.*