

Skyline-to-the-Sea 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Hike, July 17, 2004,

Distance: 28 miles Saratoga Gap to Waddell Beach

Cumulative elevation gain: 2800 feet

Cumulative elevation loss: 5100 feet

Hikers: Amy, Ivis, Ken, Sparky, Trimaine, Ralph, and Terry

This year's hike was dedicated to Ralph Childs, who loved the redwoods and flying kites at the beaches of Santa Cruz. During the last weeks of his life Ralph made hundreds of paper cranes for peace. I decided to carry a paper crane I received at his memorial service and release it in the water at Waddell Beach in his memory.

Everyone arrived early at Saratoga Gap so we were on time for our 7am start. It was already warm so I knew we had a hot day ahead. If we were going to make our goal to be at the Beach by 5pm I needed to maintain a 3-mile-an-hour pace or more, including pit stops and a lunch break.

Folks swore I was running the first leg of the hike but we needed to make good time on the first 6.5 miles to Waterman's Gap because the next section up to China Grade was mostly uphill. With seven hikers instead of the three we had last year we needed to take more stops to adjust shoes and for bathroom breaks. We got to highway 235 at 9:05am, 15 minutes slower than last year. I warned the hikers that we would be hiking some gradual uphill and slowed the pace a bit. Ken was drafting me the whole way (actually I was just holding him back). Ivis was muttering something about the hike being all down hill and "gradual" climbing but she was right behind Ken and me the whole way to China Grade. We reached the China Grade Road at 10:45am.

The terrain changes here and you get some nice views to the ocean and some scrambling over rocky trail. Redwood trees are replaced by scrubby manzanitas and the tiny biting black flies move in. With our lunch destination in sight we push ahead and reach the Big Basin Store at 12:15pm. We were now 30 minutes ahead of last year's pace. Lorraine, on her horse, Dancer met us. She was doing the last leg of the trip with a friend on horseback. Unfortunately, they had to take a different trail, which was a bit, shorter but steeper.

After taking a group photo at the 12-miles-to-the-beach sign we were off again at about 1pm. With 12 miles to go I knew we would easily make our 5pm goal. Not far ahead we ran into Lorraine with the horse, Lacy refusing to cross a footbridge. We passed them only to run into them again going in the opposite direction a mile further on. They took the Sunset trail to Skyline-to-the-Sea and were planning to go down McCrary Ridge Trail and meet up with us 3.5 miles from the Beach.

We thought that the horses would be waiting for us at the designated intersection but there was no sign of them. We were hiking a blistering pace so we left a note on the trail sign in case they were behind us. 10 minutes later we hear them galloping up.

The last 3 miles is always the longest. With the end in sight, Ken kicked in his true pace and started leaving us in his dust. I had to send the horses galloping after him to get him to wait for us at the next intersection. We made it to the last decision point, the intersection where the horse and bike trail splits from the hiking trail. Here the hiking trail goes off to the right and climbs a bit while the horse trail is flat. I check the condition of the hikers and vote to take the horse trail again this year. At this point Trimaine is in quite a bit of pain and is hiking on mostly willpower. We all slow down so we can cross that highway to the beach together.

At 4:45 pm we cross the road to Waddell Beach with Joe and Sandy waiting for us with food and drinks. We beat last year's time by one hour.

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Trimaine received the leader's "most inspirational" award for walking through the pain the last two miles.

When we arrived at Waddell Beach I released a paper crane in Ralphie's memory. Using his favorite word, the hike was "awesome!"