

WILD RIVERS TOUR

July 22-28, 2012

Six stages • 350 miles • 25,000'

This tour is essentially a repeat of a popular tour we staged in 2006 and again in 2011, also called the Wild Rivers Tour. We revised a few things for the 2011 version, but it's mostly the same excellent tour. It also shares some genes with another fine tour we ran in 2000: The Bigfoot Tour. All of them explore the same region: the far northwest corner of the State of California (with just a tiny sliver of Oregon thrown in).

It's called the Wild Rivers Tour for a good reason. It travels alongside or crosses several beautiful and (mostly) wild rivers: the Trinity, the Klamath, the Salmon, the Scott, the Illinois, the Smith, and the Mad. In addition to slinking along all those beautiful river canyons, it scrambles up and over a number of high ridges, tiptoes out along rugged, rock-ribbed coastal cliffs, and meanders for many miles through immense forests, in the shade of some of the tallest trees on earth.

The tour runs through or near the Six Rivers, Rogue River, Klamath, and Siskiyou National Forests and the Trinity Alps and Marble Mountains Wilderness Areas. It visits numerous beautiful state parks and Redwood National Park.

As you look over the maps that follow, you may notice references to a place called the State of Jefferson. Understanding the State of Jefferson goes some way toward understanding the region where this tour will be rolling out its miles. This remote corner of California, along with the adjacent and equally remote counties of southern Oregon, has always been a place apart, both in practical terms and in the minds of the people who live here. Because it is so far removed from the urban interests of San Francisco and Portland, the citizens of the region have often felt as if they live in a different world. That feeling of apartness has sought expression time and time again in efforts to secede from both parent states and form their own, autonomous state. During the 19th Century, attempts were made to form the region into the State of Shasta, the State of Klamath, the State of Jackson, and finally, the State of Jefferson.

The last and most concerted effort to secede and form the State of Jefferson took wing in early December of 1941, but events across the sea at Pearl Harbor put those plans on hold, and that was the last gasp of the separatist movement. But the sense of being in a remote, self-sufficient, independent region lives on. You may feel as if you're in a different world here. But don't worry: the natives are friendly.



right on Hwy 96 and descend—briefly—to the village of Hoopa in the center of the Hoopa Valley Reservation. This first portion of the stage is almost level, as we cruise north along the valley of the Trinity (below) on its way to a junction with the Klamath.

Just past mile 15, our brief flirtation with the Trinity ends and we take up with the Klamath. We cross the Klamath (top photo, next page) and bear right, still on Hwy 96, but now heading upstream into a rockier river canyon. The easy valley miles end and we have to get to work on a series of small, lumpy ups and downs, scrambling over rugged shoulders above the water. It's never hard work and is usually very scenic.

We will travel to the start of the tour in a car pool fleet, storing the excess vehicles for the week in a secure location in Arcata. On the final day of the tour, we will retrieve the cars, load up our bikes and gear, and drive home that same day.

With only six stages and with that quick getaway at the end, that leaves a day of each weekend bookending the tour for either getting ready (at the start) or decompressing (at the end). It makes for a more relaxed tour overall, and that no-pressure feeling is enhanced by the relatively easy stages: not so many of them and not so many miles. There are some climbing challenges, but in general, this is not a brutal tour. It should be accessible to most moderate riders.

The tour follows our by now traditional club tour format in being what we call a cooperative tour. By that we mean that all participants cooperate in helping to keep the tour moving along by chipping in here or there with the assorted chores that need doing each day. If you're new to SRCC tours and unfamiliar with how we manage this, you should read our short—four pages—introduction to SRCC tours, which is available as a small pdf document. It can be found with a little digging at the club website, or simply ask one of the tour organizers and they will provide you with a copy.

Okay then, let's hit the road...

Stage 1: Tish-Tang to Nordheimer **51 miles, 4500' up, 3750' down**

Tish-Tang is a pleasant, quiet camp administered by the Hoopa Tribe. It has a nice frontage along a pretty stretch of the Trinity River (above). It's a good spot to start the tour.

After climbing the camp driveway, we turn

The biggest climbing challenge of the day begins around mile 30, where we leave Hwy 96 for the much quieter and much more entertaining Ishi Pishi Road. Barely more than a lane wide, this charming back road crosses to the west bank of the Klamath and climbs over a thousand feet in about four miles, offering lovely vistas back down to the river to distract the riders from whatever struggles the climb may be imposing on them. Once we hit the highest point, there is a nice reward in store: a dancing descent back to the river...a twisted, tangled wiggle down the canyon wall.

At the bottom, we roll out across a high bridge with a dramatic scene below the span. This is the confluence of the Salmon River with the Klamath, and it makes an impressive display just below the bridge. (Do not cross this bridge without stopping to check out the view.)

A brief climb after the bridge leads back to Hwy 96 near the





exaltation at the end of the day, wearing silly grins and shaking their heads in wonderment.

During this dramatic run up the gorge, you'll be so engrossed with the scenery and with keeping your bike away from the more alarming drop-offs into the rocky chasm, you may forget to 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 unhill.

You might notice the white haze over the distant ridges in the photo below and also the wisps of "cloud" on the mountains in the photo at left. Both of those offer evidence of the forest fires that were raging all around us when we toured

little town of Somes Bar. Turn right (south) on 96 for just a short run, then bear left onto Salmon River Road.

This road up the Salmon River Gorge is one of the best roads on this or any other tour. For the first few miles, it 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 (right). No guard-rail, 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.

This was certainly rated one of the highlights of both our previous club tours here, with all riders in a state of

here in 2006. We have run into forest fires on at least four of our past tours, including the 2006 tour and the Bigfoot Tour. In all cases, we have been fortunate in avoiding any really close encounters with the fires and also in managing to stay out of the way of the intensive fire-fighting efforts going on around us.

Nordheimer US Forest Service camp sits along the south bank of the Salmon River, deep in the gorge. The river is not only spectacular to look at. It is also a popular kayaking stream, with many challenging cascades to navigate, and it has numerous pretty swimming holes between the cascades and waterfalls. Nordheimer has plenty of river frontage nearby. It may take a little hike to get down to it, but it's there, with nice beaches and plenty of places to get wet. No one is ever going to convince you that the water in any of these mountain streams is warm, but it's not as wickedly cold as you might expect. If the day has been hot and you've worked hard enough, you will have no trouble at all diving in and splashing about for awhile.





Fork of the river for all of our early miles. The river is usually visible on our right as we doodle along on the gently rising road (left). This section of the river is not quite as spectacular as the rocky gorge below Forks of Salmon, but it's still nice scenery and pleasant for cycling.

At some point, the river veers off up a side canyon to the left and we continue along the banks of a little tributary called Russian Creek. It's at this point that things become seriously difficult. On the map, you can see a couple of hairpin switch-backs along this section. As you come around one of them, you can look up across the canyon and see the summit, waaaaay off in the distance. We had one of our sags parked there on our last tour, and the big van looked like a tiny white dot against the immensity of rock and sky...most discouraging!

But eventually we do get there, up to that lofty summit, and the payoff is panoramic views in pretty much all directions (below). We would say it's breathtakingly beautiful, had our breath not already been taken away coming up the hill.

The other big payoff is the descent off the north face of this giant ridge. It's not quite as enormous as the climb was, but it is very big, and if you're a bold and brassy descender, you will be livin' large for the next little while, curling and carving down the mountain.

Once this dizzy descent ends, we roll out across the fertile farm lands of the nearly flat Scott Valley, leading up to the town of Etna at mile 44. I seem to recall folks stopping for ice cream in this little town, but I can't recall exactly where we did that. If we found it before, and if it's still there, we can probably find it again. It's not that big a town.

Once out the other side of town, we pick up Hwy 3, the main artery through this valley, and a highway that connects

Stage 2: Nordheimer to Indian Scotty

67 miles, 6500' up, 5100' down

In the introduction, we stated that this is, in general, not a brutal tour...but that there will be "some climbing challenges." We arrive today at the most significant of all those climbing challenges: Etna summit. One look at the elevation profile and you know you're going to have your work cut out for you this morning.

Let's get the numbers crunching done right at the start: the stage begins at Nordheimer at around 1100'. Etna summit, 34 miles into the stage, is at a bit over 5900'. With a few ups and downs in the first few miles, that adds up to over 5000' of elevation gain before the summit. More precisely, it means 2000' of gain on an up-and-down run along the Salmon River for the first 26 miles—all pretty and not too difficult—and then 3000' of steep, unrelenting climb in the final eight miles. Riders on the prior tour who also have some experience of the big cols in France agreed that this monster would rate *HC* (out of category...off the chart) in any Tour de France stage. It is a huge beast of a climb, and it seems to get harder the higher you go.

On the other hand, everyone on the tour finished it, including many very moderate riders. And we know of a boy scout troop from Sebastopol that did this same stage, and all those kids, some on rather marginal bikes, managed to do it as well. It just takes chugging away at it, one turn of the pedals at a time.

The early miles on the stage are not nearly that daunting, as we roll along beside the Salmon River and through the village of Forks of Salmon, which, not surprisingly, is situated at the point where two forks of the river come together. Or, in our case, diverge. We will be bearing left here on Sawyers Bar Road and heading upstream along the North





be our home for the rest of today's stage and for a good chunk of tomorrow's stage as well, and you could hardly ask for a nicer place to ride a bike.

Some of the time, the road snuggles along right next to the river; other times, it climbs high up the flank of the forested canyon and overlooks the river from on high. At some point along this stretch we saw a pair of bald eagle nests...massive constructions in old, dead trees overhanging the river on the far bank. Most of us only saw the nests, but a few lucky riders happened by at just the right time to see the eagles as well, taking off from the nests and fishing in the river.

After goggling at the eagles or their nests, keep an eye out for the sign for Indian Scotty campground. Turn left off the main road, cross a bridge over the river, and bend downhill into the shady camp. This

is a very pleasant camp set in a big mixed grove of mature firs and broadleaf trees. Here again, there is easy access to the pretty river, and most of us spent most of the afternoon dabbling about in the shallows or paddling about in inner tubes. There are no showers at this primitive camp, and we can set up our portable unit, but the nearby river may suffice for washing the big chunks off for some people.

things as far afield as Yreka to the north and Weaverville to the south. As such, you might expect it to carry a lot of traffic, but it's not that bad, and anyway, there are decent shoulders.

At about mile 50, we leave Hwy 3, pass through the little village of Greenview and turn left onto Quartz Valley Road. This very pretty and very quiet road meanders around the valley, making more turns than you would think a road over such flat terrain would have to make. Okay, there are a few hills here and there, but the road stays approximately level, maybe by using all those little turns and wiggles to dodge between the hills. And the elevation profile reminds us that there is at least one short but steep bump in the road, so it doesn't succeed in dodging all the hills. The landscape immediately around Etna is open and pretty dang near flat...farm fields, with big irrigation rigs sprawled across them. But along Quartz Valley, amidst those little hills and ridges, the landscape becomes a bit more wooded and rumpled (above). Short, steep bumps notwithstanding, this is all very mellow riding.

While we think this route is quite easy to follow, we should point out that one of the riders on our last tour—off the front and feeling frisky—somehow managed to get off-course crossing this valley and ended up logging quite a few bonus miles. There are all sorts of side roads that might tempt one, but no one else got suckered into following any of them. However, just bear it in mind that it can be done: you can get lost out there if you work at it a little.

After nine miles, Quartz Valley tees into Scott River Road. We turn left and pick up the downstream path of the delightful Scott River (both photos, right). This will



Stage 3: Indian Scotty to West Branch

59 miles, 3100' up, 3500' down



Yesterday's stage ended with seven miles of Scott River Road, along the beautiful Scott River. Today's stage begins with 17 more miles of the same great cycling road, along the same pristine and wild river (both photos, above). This is such a nice road...

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. As noted yesterday: 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. (The high-up-the-canyon-wall part is especially true today.) Everything about this road is perfect for

cycle-touring, including better-than-average pavement.

We fly through the remote little hamlet of Scott Bar at mile 14, after a long, wild descent, and then, after a few more mildly downhill miles, Scott River Road will tee into Hwy 96, where we turn left and head downstream along the bigger river. This is our second visit with the Klamath, and it's every bit as pleasant as the first one (on Stage 1).

The run along Hwy 96 is not quite as magical as the miles along Scott River Road. It's more of a main highway, although still reasonably quiet (below). The pavement is good. The scenery is great. Traffic is light. There are a couple of little towns spaced out along the way...wide spots in the road where you might pick up a snack at a little store. Most of the time, this run along 96 is very gently downhill, with a few very modest rollers thrown in. But at about

mile 39, we encounter the one significant uphill along this section, leaving the river and gaining 500' in a little less than two miles. Then it's downhill again all the way to the town of Happy Camp, with the first two miles steep enough to get you excited and then more of the same steady diet of mild roll-out that preceded this little lump.

When we did both the Bigfoot Tour and the first Wild Rivers Tour, we stayed in campgrounds just to the south of Happy Camp. This time, in order to balance out the stage miles, we're skipping those camps and pushing on through the town and out the north side, headed for a camp a few miles to the north. The last miles of this stage are being stolen from the first miles of what was Stage 4 on the previous Wild Rivers Tour.





but most of the time, it is hidden behind a screen of trees and understory shrubbery.

For all of those easy, 2% miles, the road has stripes at center and sides. But at about the point where it gets a bit steeper, it loses all of its stripes and takes on a much more primitive, backwoods character (although retaining its generally decent pavement). When you see the stripes disappear, and when the creek crosses under the road, from being on the left to being on the right, that's a cue to wake up and start looking for the signs and forest road leading off to the right to West Branch campground. It will come up within a mile or two of the loss of the road stripes.

West Branch camp is a USFS camp built originally by the Conservation Corps during the Depression. It's a small camp, very quiet and tranquil. You can see from the photo below why Indian Creek is called a creek and not a river. It's smaller, and there may not be any swimming holes big enough for actual swimming or even full-immersion bathing. But it looks cool and pleasant, and will doubtless look even more so after a long bike ride.

When we hit Happy Camp, we have to turn right on a local street to cut across to the road that will take us out of town and onward to our camp. The way you will know when that street has arrived is when you see the big monument to Bigfoot on the corner (above). Yes, this is the supposed native habitat of Bigfoot...Sasquatch. If the giant primates do exist, they are supposed to be living in the woods right around here.

Stop at the statue to pay your respects to our erstwhile forest relatives, then turn right on Davis Road and, in one long block, right again on Indian Creek Road, which will be our home all the way to the turn-off into our camp, 12 miles further up the road.

The road out of town spikes up into a short climb of about 200' in half a mile or so, coupled with a drop off the other side of approximately the same size. After that, this quiet byway settles in for the long, mostly uphill run to camp. Most of that climb—from around mile 49 to around mile 56—is moderate and steady, gaining maybe 600' over that distance, which works out to around 2%. The last couple of miles after that kick up to something a bit steeper, but still nothing in the leg-breaker range.

Scenery along this run is the by now familiar mix of firs and broadleaf trees. You might expect all of this region to be nothing but endless carpets of redwoods and doug firs, but it is actually a much more varied mix of many types of trees, with quite a few natural meadows and man-made clearings dotted around amongst the woods. Indian Creek Road's namesake creek is never far from the road,





The only other way to know you've moved from one state to another is that, on the Oregon side of the line, the road widens a bit and picks up its full set of stripes again. (Recall that on the California side, it had been narrow and unstriped and rather primitive.) Our cycle-touring friends in the photo at left have just crested the summit and are heading downhill, into Oregon, on the bigger, nicely striped road.

This downhill off the summit/border is a big one, and as much fun as you want it to be. It's about 3200' down over 12 miles. The pavement is decent, the grade is never too steep to make it tricky, but plenty steep enough to be fast. There are loads of slinky corners to wiggle through, including a few hairpins. The scenery is pretty much a non-stop wall of firs and pines and other dense foliage. Nothing especially dramatic or attention-getting about it. Kind of: seen one

tree, you've seen 'em all. So don't worry about missing anything super spectacular while you're grooving the descent. Just go ahead and get into the downhill dance.

After those 12 miles of concentrated gravity candy, there are another five miles of rollers and roll-out that finally level out into a moderately boring run through the forest. At 25 miles, we turn left on O'Brien Road. This could be an easy turn to miss: just a simple left onto a small road in the middle of nowhere. The key to being alert for this turn is knowing that it comes up just after we cross the pretty Illinois River. Once over the bridge, start looking for the turn.

At the other end of the mile-long O'Brien Road is the tiny village of O'Brien (below), and also the junction with Hwy 199, which will be where we spend most of the rest of the stage, with one notable exception.

Stage 4: West Branch to Panther Flat

55 miles, 4300' up, 6100' down

We begin Stage 4 the way we ended Stage 3: climbing. From the start of the stage—at a little under 2200'—we have nine miles of continuous uphill to a 4750' summit. That works out to about a 5% average, and that probably is a fairly accurate reflection of what it will feel like in the real world: a steady grind. Not killer, but definitely work.

Yesterday, the road name was Indian Creek Road. Somewhere out there, probably right at our camp access road, the name changes to Grayback Road. In addition, over its entire distance—yesterday's section as well as today's—it is known as the State of Jefferson Scenic Byway. So there's your proof: you are in fact in a different state here, or at least a different state of mind.

When the climb ends, so does the state of California. The border with Oregon is at the summit. Or, if you prefer, you're simply crossing from the southern part of the State of Jefferson into the northern part. Perhaps this ambivalence about the official geography might explain why this is the most laid back, unassuming border crossing you will ever do between California and any adjacent state. At the summit, there is a thin white line painted on the road, with hand-scrawled spray paint letters indicating that it is in fact a border crossing. Nothing official. No visitor information center. No ag inspection station. If a terrorist wanted to smuggle contraband peaches and pears into California, this would be the place to do it.





and traffic-free. The only thing wrong with this tunnel bypass is that it isn't any longer: seven miles total. After the three-mile climb, there is a delightful descent of four miles, all slinky, kinky twists and turns down through the deep green forest. At this point, the unrelieved wall of pines and firs has given way to a more attractive wood of deciduous trees, often hung with moss in a decorative way. It really is a pretty little interlude, away from the main highway.

Not that the main highway is all that bad. It's more modern and less quaint and technical than the side road, but it's still good cycling, and it still mostly tilts in a downhill direction, which is always a nice state of affairs. Riders who enjoy hammering can put these mildly downhill miles to good use: with just a little effort, the bikes can be made to go very fast along this section.

As you can see from the photo of O'Brien, we parked the bikes and parked our butts on the front porch at the store. At 26 miles, it made a good spot for a rest stop.

In theory at least, Hwy 199 is going to be busy. It's a well-known connector highway between Grants Pass at Interstate-5 and Crescent City at Hwy 101. Before the previous Wild Rivers Tour, we worried about how bike-friendly this stretch would be. We had visions of being harried off the road by flotillas of RV's and log trucks. The reality was quite different. We felt as if we had the road pretty much to ourselves. Not one of our riders had a single scary moment with heavy traffic.

Five miles south of O'Brien, our brief sojourn in the state of Oregon comes to an end. (We were in the state for a total of 22 miles.) We pass back into California at mile 31.5, and then, a mile-and-a-half later, we come to our only detour off Hwy 199 for the balance of the stage.

At mile 33, we take a left on Oregon Mountain Road. Were we to stay on 199 at this point, we would soon find ourselves in Collier Tunnel, a long and rather unpleasant tunnel for bikes. Fortunately we don't have to go there, because Oregon Mountain Road climbs up and over the top of the ridge that the tunnel is boring through. Presumably, the winding, narrow, over-the-top road is the original highway here, and the tunnel is a more recent addition, a way to blast the traffic through here in a hurry.

But while our four-wheeled friends are zooming through the tunnel, we are meandering through the pretty forest, right on top of the tunnel. It's a winding, three-mile climb, gaining about 800' to get over the top at 2092' Hazel View summit. Every inch of this climb, and of the descent off the other side, is pretty and quiet

Just a couple of miles below the Oregon Mountain Road junction, we pick up the wild and scenic Smith River (left), and we will be following its downstream flow for the entire rest of the stage...a dozen miles or so. Some of the time it's as dramatically on display as in this photo, and some of the time it hides behind the trees. But it keeps popping up often enough that it provides pretty much constant entertainment value all the way to the finish.

Speaking of which—the finish—keep an eye peeled for the right turn into our camp: Panther Flat (below). If you get to the town of Gasquet, you've gone too far. This is one of the new camps for us this time around, so we don't know too much about it. We do know that it has the always popular feature of showers. But it also has river access, so you can get wet whichever way you want...or maybe both ways.





in the most spectacular fashion, as the river cuts a deep gorge through the rock, leaving tall, dramatic cliffs looming over the water... and over our road, which crowds down into the gorge, next to the river. Despite sifting through all the photos from our prior tours and from a couple of Google searches, we weren't able to find a decent photo of the most impressive section of gorge, with the dramatic, towering walls of dark rock. Well...you'll just have to take our word for it that it's there and that it's worth a look. This smooth, more-or-less level road might make a nice spot for a busy pace line, first thing in the morning, but don't be so locked in on the wheel in front of you that you forget to look around at the river and its deep, rock-ribbed canyon.

Stage 5: Panther Flat to Elk Prairie

72 miles, 4500' up, 4800' down

No travelogue about northwestern California would be complete without one of those shopworn clichés about it being “a land of contrasts.” This is indeed a tired old staple of the travel writer's lexicon, but the fact remains that clichés exist because they are essentially true...so true as to be obvious and therefore commonplace.

That will be very much the case with Stage 5 of this tour: the contrasts will be hard to ignore, as we ride from the deep, dense, shade of the redwood groves out onto the windswept, open, rocky headlands above the Pacific Ocean. It would take a very jaded or dull-witted person to fail to be impressed by the extravagance of the scenic smorgasbord on tap for today. We don't expect to have too many participants on this tour who will fit that description (neither jaded nor dull-witted), so we feel fairly certain that all of you will love today's stage.

We begin by continuing west along Hwy 199, through the little town of Gasquet and into the deep redwood forest. The mostly downhill run on 199 that predominated at the end of yesterday's stage has pretty much come to an end by now, and although our elevation profile for today's stage shows a modestly downhill tendency over the early miles, it is in fact mostly level riding with a few up-and-down rollers thrown in.

This whole run along Hwy 199 is known as the Smith River Scenic Byway, and with good reason: the Smith River keeps company with the road for many miles. It isn't on display for every one of our miles—neither late yesterday nor early today—but it is there more often than not (above), and every so often, it is on display

We commented on yesterday's stage about the variety of types of trees making up the woods and forests through which we had been riding in the interior valleys. To some extent, that changes today, as we ride into the true redwood forest (below). Yes, there are any number of leafy trees and shrubs that share this environment with *sequoia sempervirens*, but the big trees do tend to dominate the landscape, putting everything else in the shade, both literally and figuratively. Those of us who live in northern California and see big redwoods on a fairly regular basis may come to take the forest giants for granted, but you only need to visit a place like the Smith River with someone from elsewhere—southern California, say, or back east—and to see the awe that overcomes them when surrounded by this wondrous world to appreciate once again how special it is. Describing a quiet redwood grove as feeling like a cathedral is another tired old travel writer's cliché, but it too has the ring of truth.

The heart of this particular stand of old growth redwoods





houses on the inland side of the road and nothing but beach, standing stones, and sea stacks out in the shore break on the ocean side.

This pretty interlude lasts for just over two miles, with the Battery Point Lighthouse (left) as the picturesque exclamation point at the end of the run. The nice seashore frontage ends at about mile 33, so this is an obvious spot for a regroup with a sag. After that, we have to negotiate a few blocks of residential city streets, cutting across the south edge of the town, where it fronts on its little harbor. Then, at mile 35, we merge onto Hwy 101 south, heading for Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park, through which the highway runs for several miles.

After a short, level run along the beach south of town, the highway tilts up into the biggest climb of the day: a 1200' ascent between miles

falls within Jedediah Smith State Park. It's about as nice a state park as you'll ever see. On our first Wild Rivers Tour, the primary route through the park included a lengthy bypass off Hwy 199 and along a remote road through the forest. Sounds great, right? Get off the main drag and wander around in the hinterlands, and give the congestion of Crescent City a complete miss. The only problem was that a good chunk of this forest road was unpaved. Some of the folks in the group took a dim view of so many miles of gravel road and proposed an alternative route that would head into the town of Crescent City. Led by one tour participant who had grown up in that little city, we made a nice circuit around the town and rejoined the gravel-road gang south of town.

This time around, the Crescent City loop has become the primary route, and the unpaved bypass is offered as an option. However, we're not riding directly into town on 199. It gets a bit congested. Instead, we turn right off 199 onto North Bank Road (Hwy 197) at about mile 14 and head north for over seven miles to a junction with Hwy 101. We turn left on the highway and go south only long enough to cross a bridge, then turn right on County Route D3, also known as Lake Earl Drive. This mostly level road bends around to the south and continues all the way into Crescent City. This section is mostly straight and mostly lined with woods and meadows and a scattering of rural residential properties and farms. The route slip and the Crescent City detail on the map do a good job of describing the route.

In the latter half of this section, the rural flavor gives way to suburbia, although it never becomes unpleasant or overly congested. The last road in this batch—Washington—finally delivers us to the best part of the Crescent City scenic circuit: Pebble Beach Drive, which runs right along the rocky coastline, with beach

36 and 40 (approximately). You might think that riding along Hwy 101 would be even more of a traffic hassle than riding on Hwy 199, but it's not that bad. Okay, it's not ideal, but it's not terrible. For one thing, traffic isn't all that heavy. But more importantly, there is a passing lane almost all the way up this long hill. Any car or truck passing a cyclist will shade over into the left lane to pass, if at all possible. So in the end, the bikes end up with more elbow room, most of the time, than they would have on a smaller, two-lane road. Once over the top of this unnamed summit and launched off the other side, we are treated to some wonderful vistas over the massive headlands and ocean reaches (below), stretching far off to the west and south. Also, midway up that big climb, there is a nice vista point where you can break off the climb for a few minutes to look back north along the coast to a fine panorama of Crescent City and its surrounding rocky coast line.

Once you've taken in those expansive views over the ocean and cliffs, it's time to rock on down the south side of the hill: about six miles of mostly downhill fun. There are a





Redwood National Park. That state-federal overlap probably means something in administrative terms, but in practical terms for cycle-tourists, it simply translates as miles and miles of pristine, magnificent scenery. It does not translate as having to pass through a park entry kiosk or having to pay a fee to enter the park.

If you thought you had escaped any gravel roads by giving that primitive bypass in Jedediah Smith State Park a miss, guess again. In contrast to that silk-smooth pavement on Coastal (or is it Alder Camp?), the pavement, or lack of pavement, out on the coastal cliff road is a bit of a stunner. Some of it has deteriorated so badly that you will probably have to get off your bikes and walk for a few

couple of small uphill mixed in near the top...big rollers... but after that, it's a lot of high speed play, all the way down to almost sea level.

At the bottom of this descent, we roll out across the almost flat valley of the Klamath River. This is our third visit with the river, and at this point, we encounter it near its mouth, just upstream from where it flows into the ocean at Requa. We cross the river on a rather grand bridge, with golden bears standing as sentries at each end. Then, on the south bank, we exit 101 on a freeway-style off-ramp, then do a 180° button-hook turn back to the north to tee into Klamath Beach Road. This pleasant and quiet road parallels the river for a little over a mile before we find our next turn, away from the river and up into the coastal hills again. The whole run across the river valley and up to this next climb adds up to almost ten miles, most of it within the Yurok Indian Reservation.

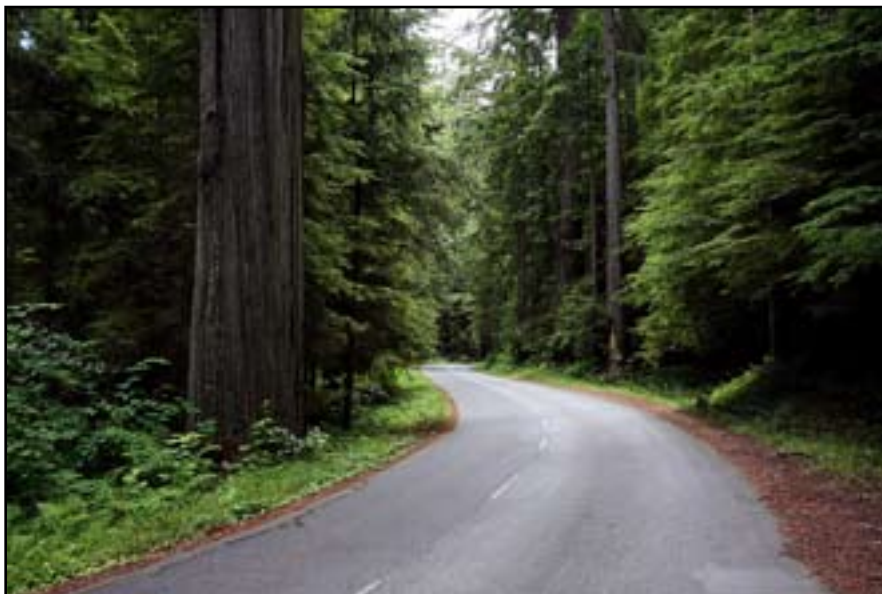
Our left turn is called either Coastal Drive or Alder Camp Road. We thought it was the latter when we toured here before, but some maps show it as the former. Whatever it's called, it climbs at a medium-hard pitch for a bit over two miles, usually amidst thick forest and on beautiful new pavement. Over the top, the road name confusion continues: we are going to bear off south along the coastal cliffs on Coastal Drive, but Alder Camp branches off and wanders along on a parallel track, just a ways higher up the hillside. It seems more confusing when you study the map than it does when you're actually there, looking at the road in front of you. At least we can say that no one got lost on this section on our last tour.

When we turned uphill, away from the Klamath River, we entered Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, and we will be in the park for the rest of the day. In fact, all three of the state parks we ride through today are contained within

yards now and then. It's quite an adventure...a real walk on the wild side.

We can't tell you exactly how long the gravel section is. Most of it is rideable, with just a few rough spots, and then eventually the pavement reappears (photo above). The views off the road and down to the ocean are spectacular, but the unpaved bits do require some care, so you might want to stop now and then to look at the view, rather than rubbernecking too much while skating over the gravel. That sort of multi-tasking could land you in the ditch.

Coastal Drive, with its assortment of unpaved sections and uppy-downy rollers, gives way after four miles to Newton B. Drewry Scenic Parkway (below), which will carry us smoothly and easily the final seven miles of the stage to our camp in the middle of the park. Elk Prairie campground is pretty much a standard-issue state or national park camp. There are showers at this camp, which is good, as there is no river to jump in, and with the cooler weather near the ocean, you might not want to, even if there were one.





ups and downs are all scaled to the speed of a cyclist. You don't have that sense of pedaling forever and never getting anywhere. It stays fresh and entertaining all the while.

As we have noted about good roads before, the only problem with these two roads is that they don't go on long enough. The whole run adds up to only six miles. Over too soon! At its south end, Stagecoach Road dumps out into the charming seaside village of Trinidad. Trinidad sits atop a bluff overlooking one of the prettiest little harbors you'll ever see (bottom photo). The village itself is pretty cute too. The town comes up just a bit over halfway through the stage,

Stage 6: Elk Prairie to Arcata **45 miles, 2600' up, 2700' down**

There is a reason why this camp is called Elk Prairie (above). It sits next to sprawling meadows where a large herd of Roosevelt Elk make their home. It's difficult to ride through these meadows without catching sight of the magnificent animals, off in the middle distance or, sometimes, right up by the road. Up close, they're *huge*.

Today is our getaway day: do the ride, load up, and drive home. Because of that, it is intentionally a short and relatively easy stage, leaving plenty of afternoon for logistics and travel. We begin with another run south along the Newton B. Drewry Scenic Parkway and then we turn south along Hwy 101, down through the old logging town of Orick. Just on the far side of town, we pick up the first of our scenic bypasses off the main highway. (There will be more.) This is a left onto Old State Highway, which is, presumably, exactly what its name implies: a remnant section of older road. It takes a somewhat hillier, more meandering route around a little seaside lake called Freshwater Lagoon. It's a tiny road, not in the best of repair, but that all acts as a recommendation for exploratory cycle-touring.

After this bypass of nearly four miles, we return to 101 for about ten miles, riding for much of that time alongside two more big, seaside lagoons, all within Humboldt Lagoons State Park. At mile 21.6, we turn off 101 and onto Patricks Point Drive (middle photo), which runs through Patricks Point State Park.

This begins one of the nicest sections of this stage. Not that the previous miles have been at all substandard, not at all. But this road and the one that follows it—Stagecoach Road—are both delightful for cycling. Not only is their scenery about as nice as it can be, and not only are they just about devoid of any traffic, one of the best things about them is something we might call scale: their bends and turns and





so it's the obvious spot for a rest stop, either working out of the back of a sag wagon parked overlooking the harbor, or perhaps visiting one of the nice cafes in town. Our route slip has us turning left on Main Street and shooting right through town, but it would be a crime not to go off-course here and explore a little. Even with the prospect of the drive home at the end of the ride, you still don't want to hurry through this. It's too nice.

There is another excellent and lightly traveled scenic bypass on the south side of Timidad: the aptly named Scenic Drive. It runs for five miles right out on the coast, with gorgeous vistas out across the beaches and rocks to the surf and sea beyond (above). When we did this tour before, this road had fallen off the cliff in big chunks. It was closed to cars, but the cyclists managed to get through. Only one rider—an expert mountain biker—was able to ride the whole thing, through all the jumbled pavement and upheaval. The rest of us walked our bikes here and there and rode when we could. The road is still closed to cars, although it's hard to see why it should be anymore. It has been repaired and is rideable throughout. But there is a barricade near the south end that keeps the cars out. Our sags will have to skip this section and use 101 instead.

The cyclists will have to use 101 again too, but only briefly. At the south end of Scenic Drive, the road merges back onto the main highway, but we are going to get right back off at the next exit, less than a mile later, on the road to Clam Beach. We take the overpass over 101, which is becoming a full-fledged freeway at this point, then turn south on the frontage road on the other side. Just around the corner, we turn south on Dows Prairie Road and get ready for a bit of work: there is a short but steep climb from down near sea level up to a mesa.

Once up on the mesa, the route continues south on Dows Prairie for about three miles, at which point it bends seamlessly around a sweeping right-hand corner and becomes Norton Road. Up to this point, we have been out in the

country, with Dows Prairie rolling gently up and down through meadows and woods and the same sort of rural residential properties we saw north of Crescent City yesterday.

Today they are the outliers of the town of McKinleyville, which is itself a suburb of Arcata. When we bend around that corner onto Norton, and then quickly take a left onto Eagle, we have arrived in town, sort of. On our left is the Beau Pre golf course, and on the right, the McMansions that seem to spring up next to every country club.

From here on, it's a moderately complicated journey through or around the suburbs of McKinleyville and Arcata. That may not sound too promising, but it's actually not too bad, and most of the time quite interesting and

fun (thanks to some diligent route planning on the part of your tour organizers). Okay, some of it is just suburban boulevards, but even these are quiet and decent for biking. It is a small town, after all. The big inset on the map does a good job of showing all the turns through this section and into Arcata, all the way to the end.

One of the key links in this suburban transit, and one of the best parts of the tail end of this stage, is Hammond Trail (below) a bike path/nature trail that connects McKinleyville and Arcata. Some of it passes alongside tract neighborhoods in the same way that the bike trails do around Santa Rosa.





Finally, just shy of mile 44, we hit the ragged fringe of Arcata's residential and commercial development. That means we've made it to within a mile-and-a-half of our finish before we really hit anything resembling city streets or congestion. And even this last bit isn't too bad. Arcata is a bike-friendly town and this is all easy and pleasant to do on bikes.

The ride finishes at the Arcata Recreation Center where showers are available. While most of the participants are finishing up the ride and getting showered up, a few will retrieve the car pool fleet, while others start loading bikes onto the roof racks. We may also do a spread of lunch munchies off the tailgate of the big food-and-luggage truck. That's what we did before.

So there you go! Not the longest nor the hardest or most epic tour ever, but an excellent adventure, with a nice combination of wonderful scenery, entertaining roads, pleasant camps, and a fair bit of challenge, but not so much for it to be killer. And, we hope, a good gang of participants to enjoy it

all and keep one another company. And maybe some good weather...and no forests fires this time!

Some of it is more "natural," as seen in the photo. All of it is pleasant and of course car-free.

To get to this nice trail, we have tacked west and south across the 'burbs of McKinleyville, past the high school and back over 101 on another overpass, until finally we're out near the coast again...not quite to the coast, but out into the region of wetlands and salt marshes and dairy farms. For awhile, the trail runs parallel to Fisher Road and even becomes Fisher Road—but then the road disappears and all we have left is the trail, heading south to a crossing of the last of our wild rivers: the Mad River (above). It looks neither mad nor wild at this point, as it flows lazily across the flat wetlands and out to sea. But the area around the river is quite wild and open and interesting...and a far cry from the high mountains of Etna summit or the deep canyons of the Salmon or Smith Rivers. It's that "land of contrasts" cliché again. We have seen a lot of different scenery on this one, short tour.

And talk about a road scaled just for bicycles... The bridge over the Mad River is exactly that: just the size for bikes and nothing else (right). We can guess that the bridge wasn't built just for bikes. It was probably built to support or service that big pipeline next to it, and at some point, some bright person figured out it could work for a bike trail as well...and thank you to whoever figured that out!

Off the south end of this neat little bridge, we have three more miles of country riding to do—on Mad River and Upper Bay Roads—bending left and right along section lines through flat dairy and hay fields, with the occasional trees and hedgerows dotting the otherwise open fields.

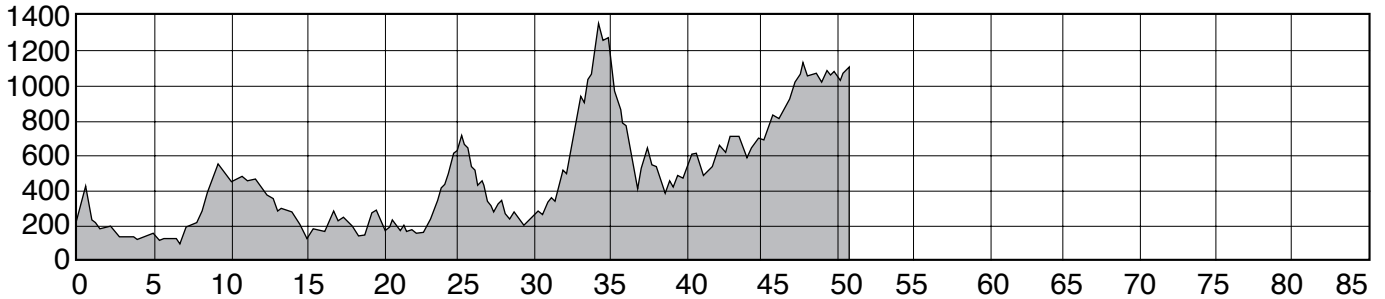


THE WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 1: Tish-Tang to Nordheimer

51 miles, 4500' up, 3750' down

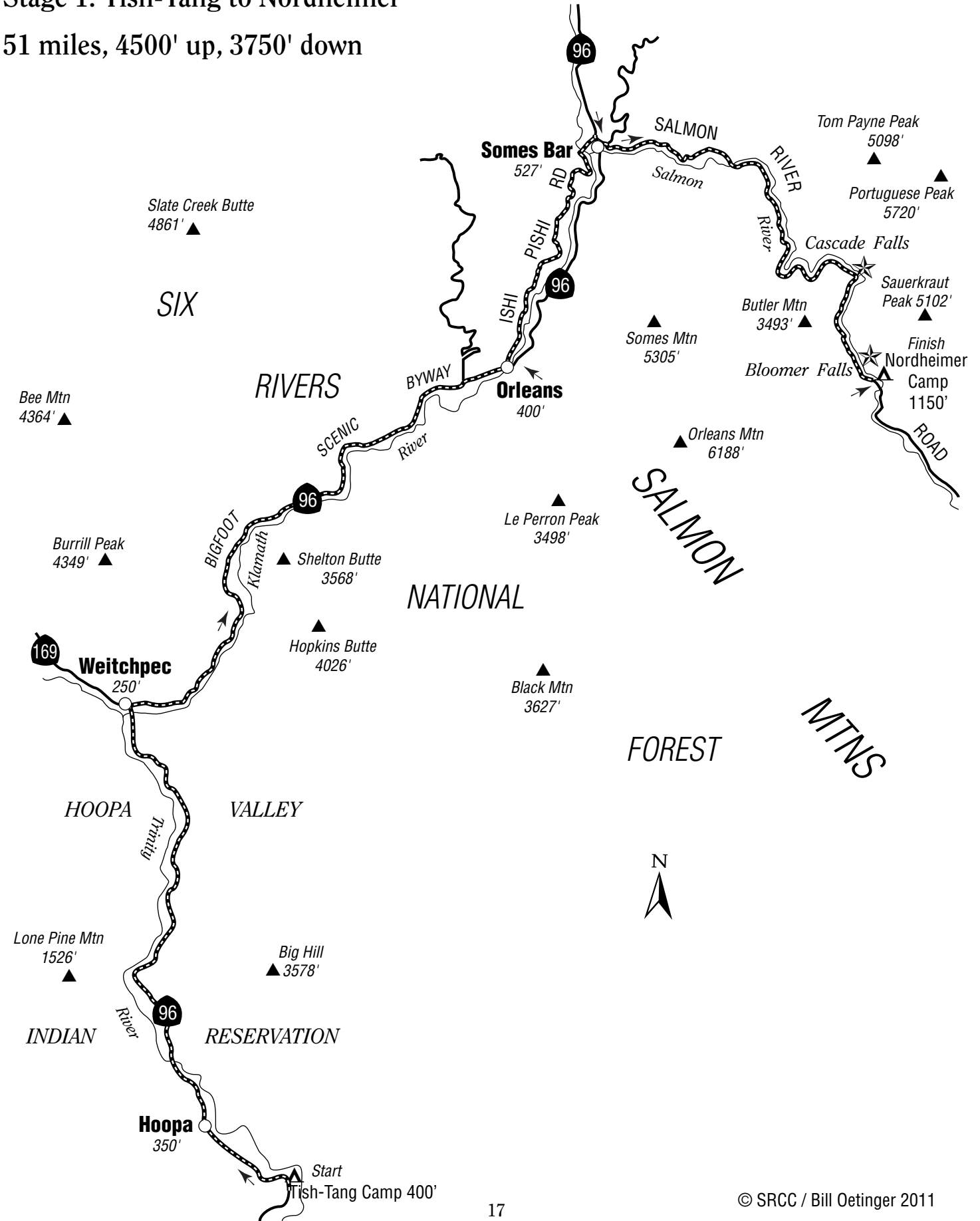
Leave Tish-Tang Camp	0.0
R (north) on Hwy 96	0.5
Enter Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation	
Follow Trinity River downstream	
Town of Hoopa (350')	3.0
Bear R to stay on Hwy 96.....	15.4
Cross Trinity River at Klamath River junction	
“Town” of Weitchpec (250')	
Follow Klamath River upstream	
L on Ishi Pishi Road.....	30.1
R on Hwy 96	37.9
Town of Somes Bar (527')	
L on Salmon River Road	38.2
Follow Salmon River upstream	
L into Nordheimer USFS camp (1155').....	51.4



WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 1: Tish-Tang to Nordheimer

51 miles, 4500' up, 3750' down



THE WILD RIVERS TOUR

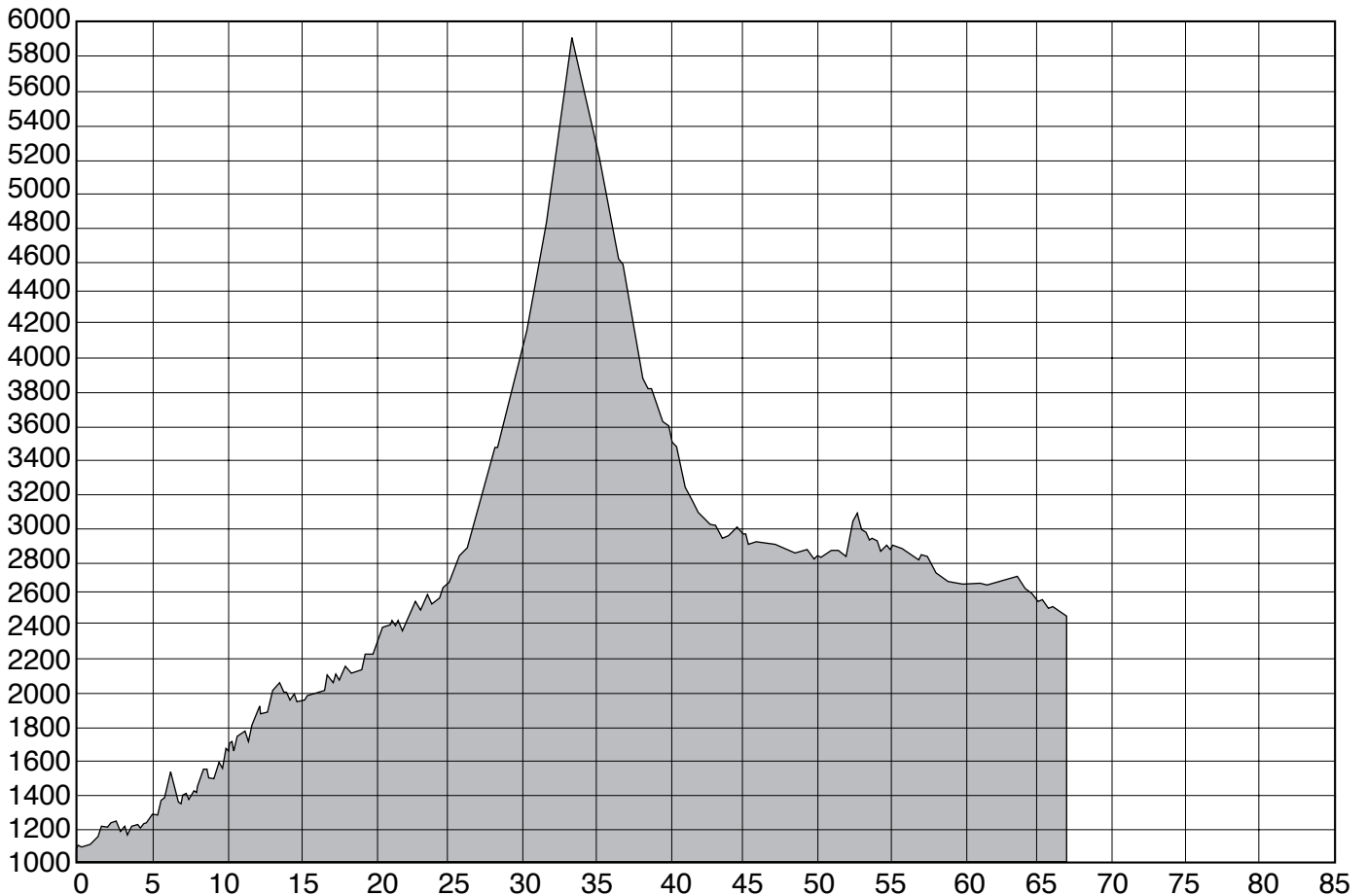
Stage 2: Nordheimer to Indian Scotty

67 miles, 6500' up, 5100' down

L on Salmon River Road	0.0
Leave Nordheimer Camp (1155')	
Follow Salmon River upstream	
L on Sawyers Bar Road.....	4.1
Town of Forks of Salmon (1242')	
Follow North Fork Salmon River upstream	
“Town” of Sawyers Bar (2160').....	19.1
Big climb ahead...	
Etna Summit (5958').....	33.4

Big descent ahead...

L on Collier Way.....	43.7
Town of Etna (2942')	
L (straight) on Hwy 3.....	44.2
L on Main Street	44.9
Town of Greenview (2811')	
L on Quartz Valley Road.....	50.5
Bear L to stay on Quartz Valley Road	54.8
L on Scott River Road.....	59.2
Follow Scott River downstream	
L on Indian Scotty Campground Road	66.2
Cross river and follow signs to Indian Scotty	
Finish at Indian Scotty Campground (2570')	66.8



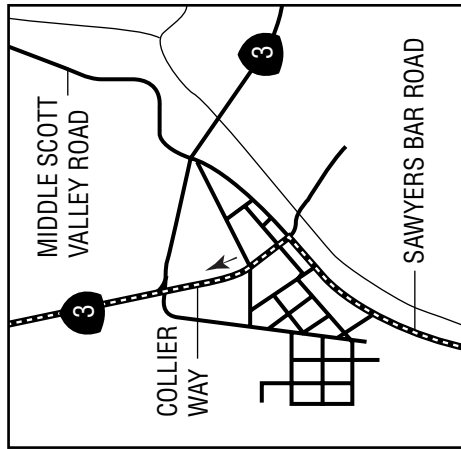
WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 2: Nordheimer to Indian Scotty

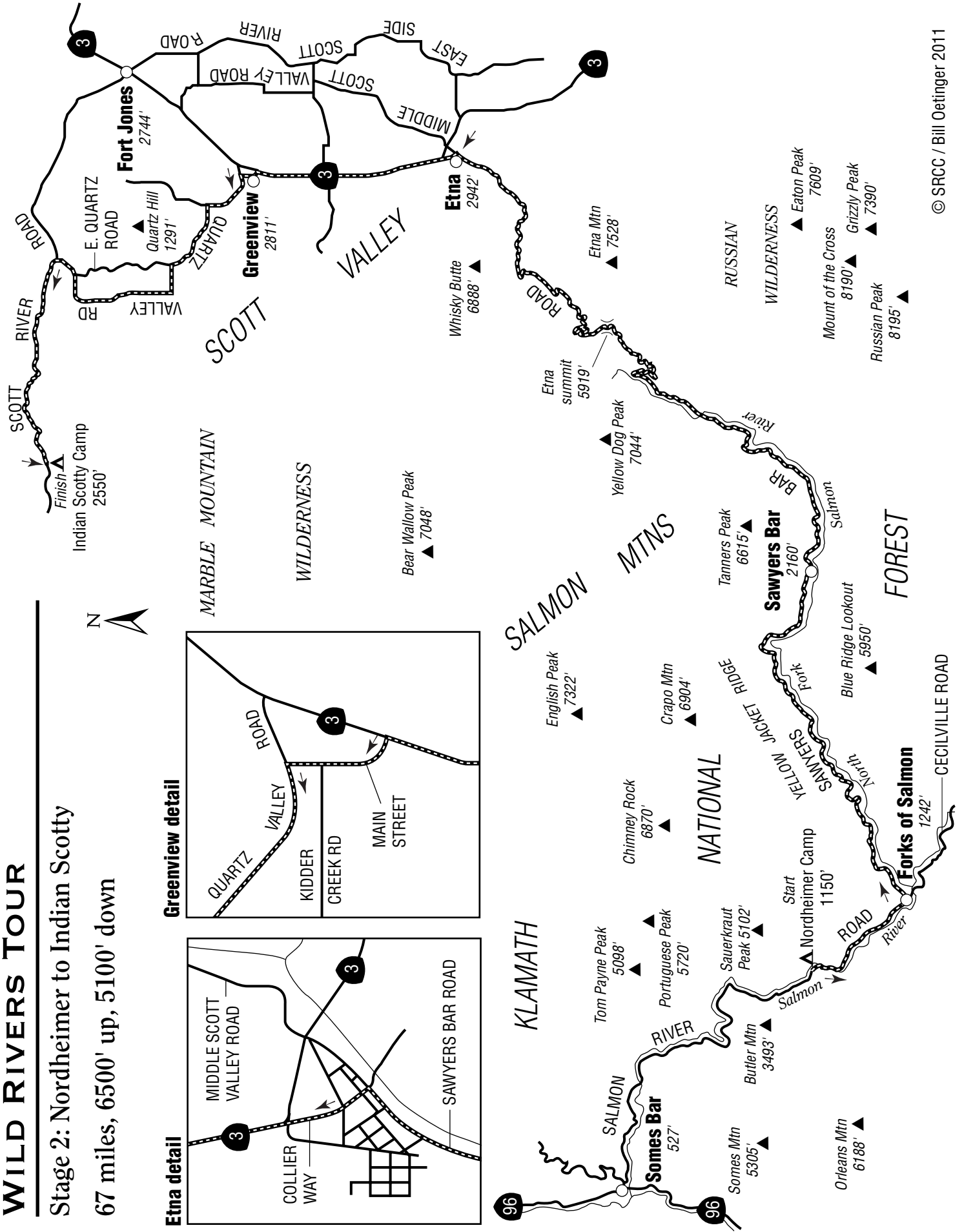
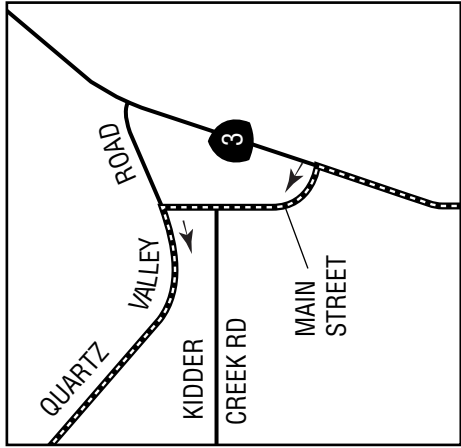
67 miles, 6500' up, 5100' down



Etna detail



Greenview detail

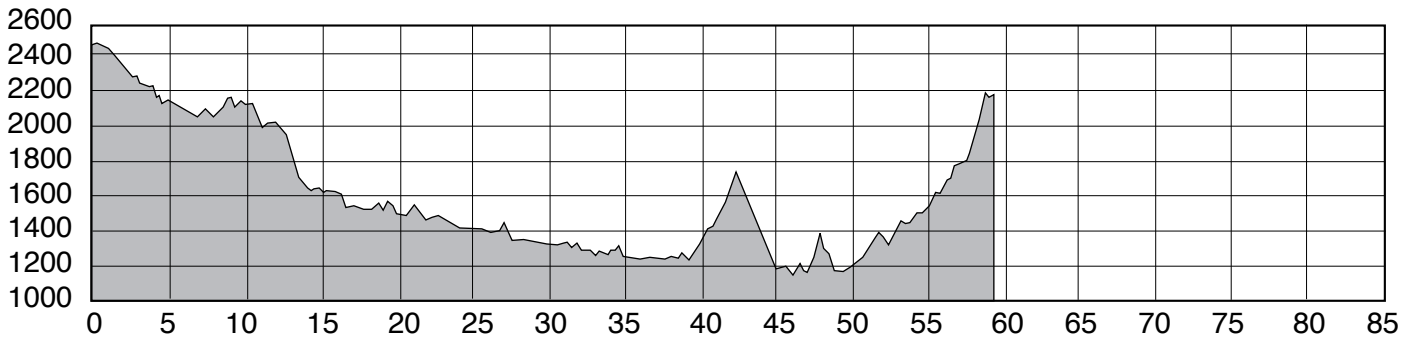


THE WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 3: Indian Scotty to West Branch

59 miles, 4500' up, 4900' down

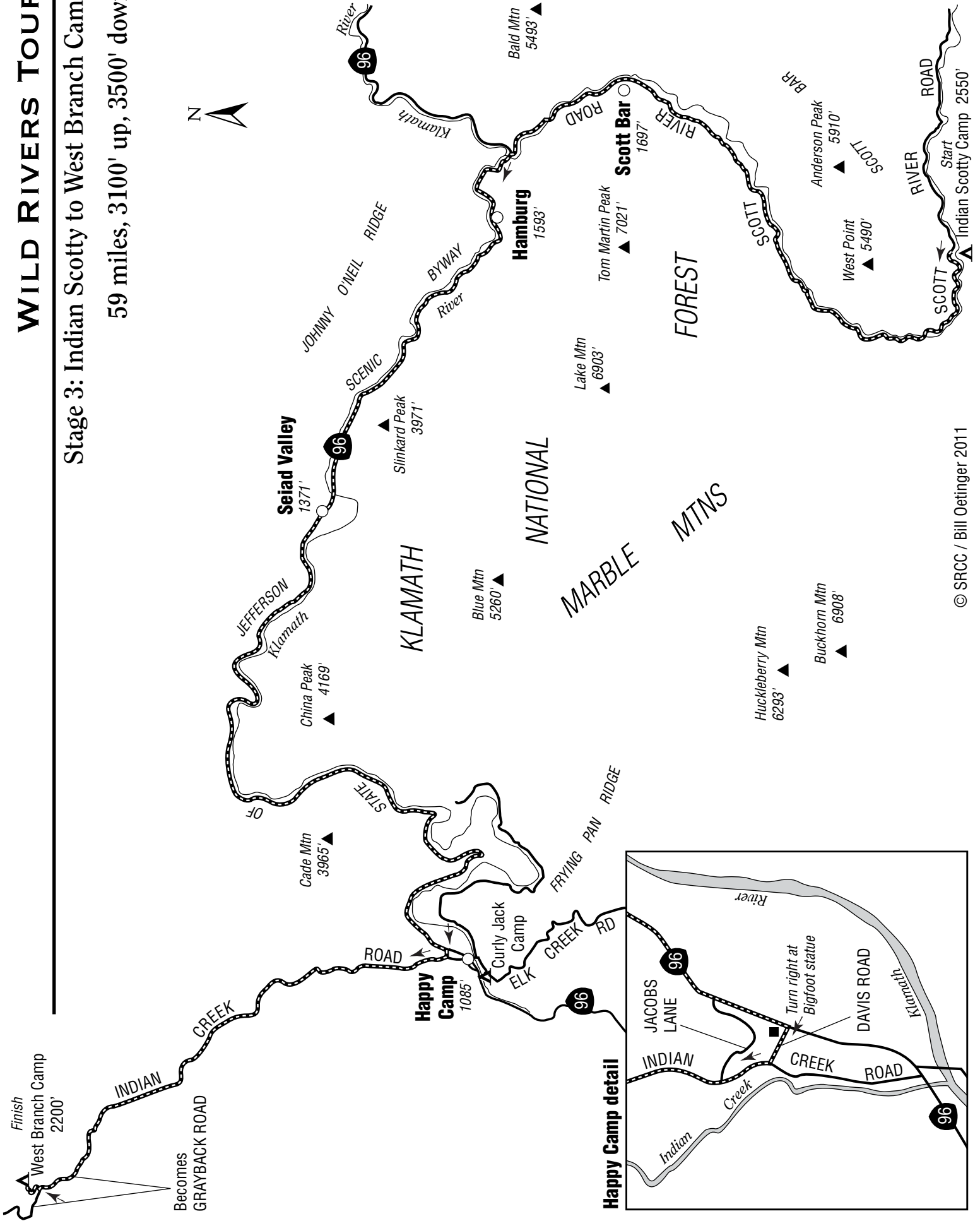
Leave Indian Scotty Campground (2570').....	0.0
L on Scott River Road	0.7
Follow Scott River downstream	
Town of Scott Bar (1697')	14.0
L on Hwy 96.....	17.2
Follow Klamath River downstream	
“Town” of Hamburg (1593').....	19.3
Town of Seiad Valley (1371')	28.2
R on Davis Road	46.9
Town of Happy Camp (1085')	
Monument to Bigfoot	
R on Indian Creek Road	47.1
Follow Indian Creek upstream	
Becomes Grayback Road and also	
State of Jefferson Scenic Byway	
R on forest road to West Branch Camp.....	58.7
Finish at West Branch Camp (2170').....	59.2



WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 3: Indian Scotty to West Branch Camp

59 miles, 3100' up, 3500' down



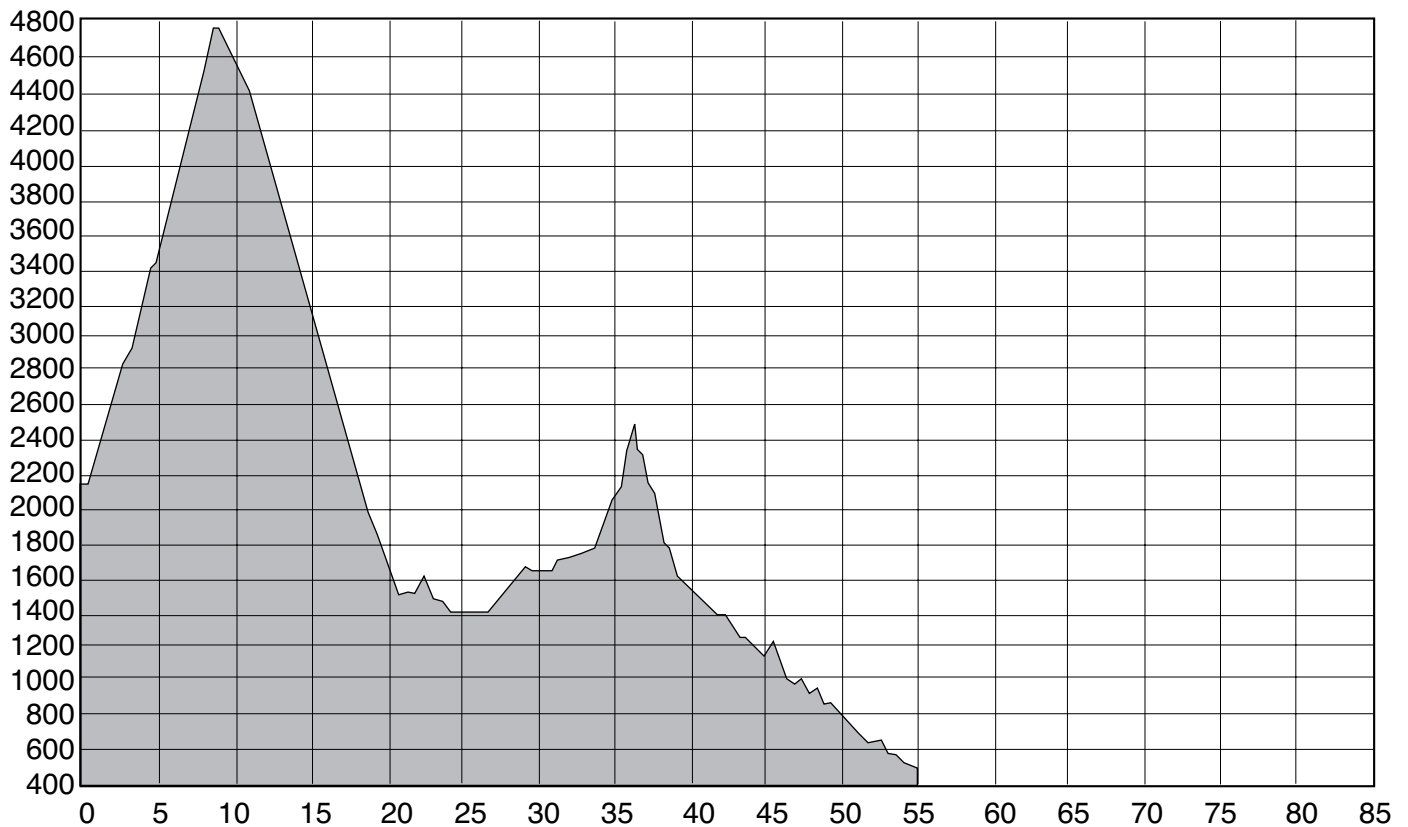
THE WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 4: West Branch to Panther Flat

55 miles, 4300' up, 6100' down

Leave West Branch Campground (2170')	0.0
R on Grayback Road	0.5
AKA State of Jefferson Scenic Byway	
Summit (4750')	9.3
Enter State of Oregon; big descent ahead...	
Becomes Happy Camp Road, then Waldo Road	
L on O'Brien Road.....	25.2
L on Hwy 199.....	26.1
Town of O'Brien (1412')	

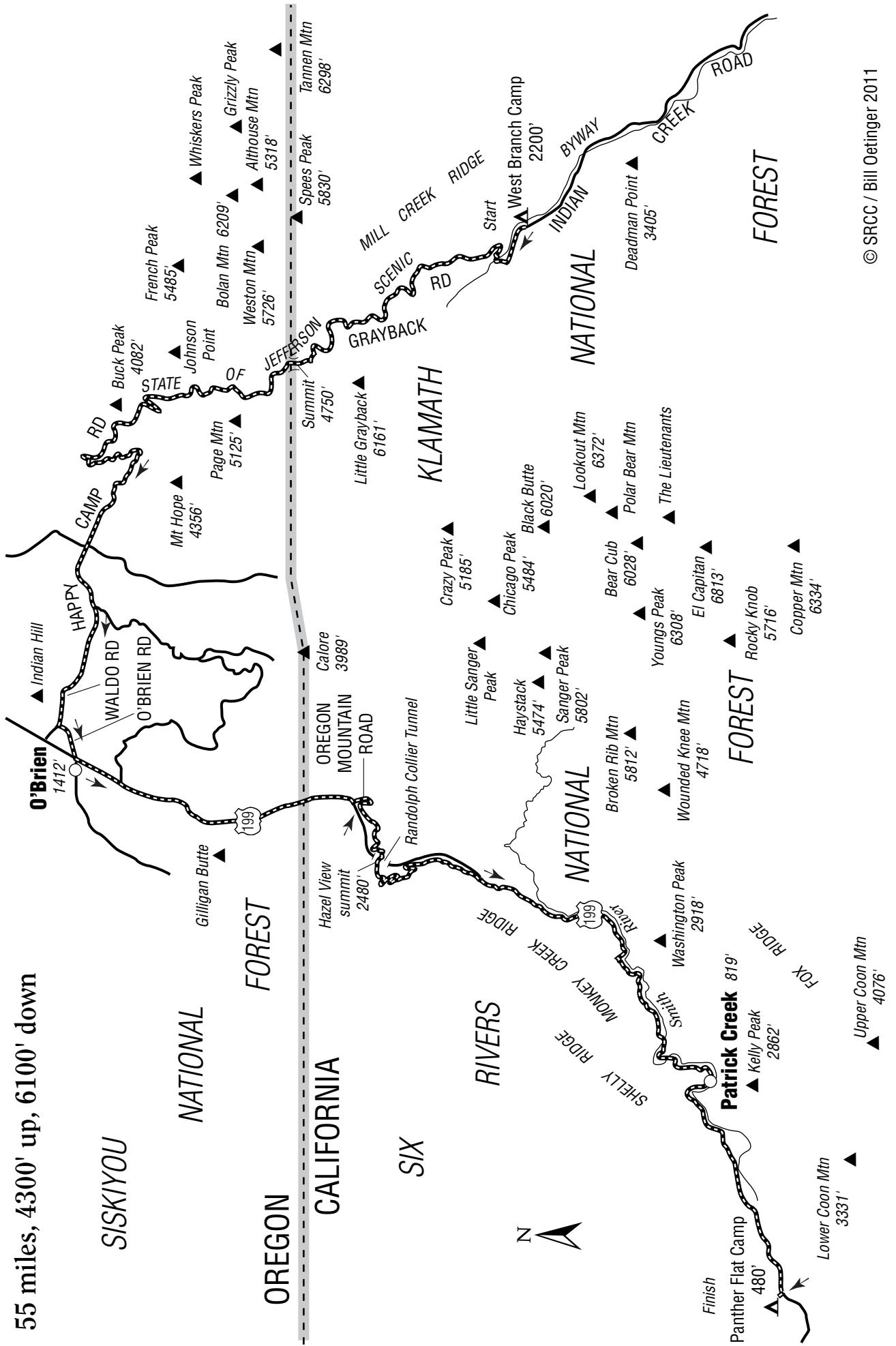
Return to California.....	31.5
L on Oregon Mountain Road.....	33.0
Hazel View Summit (2480')	36.0
Fun descent ahead...	
R on Hwy 199	40.1
Follow Smith River downstream	
"Town" of Patrick Creek (819').....	49.2
R into Panther Flat Campground.....	54.4
Finish in campground (478').....	54.7



WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 4: West Branch to Panther Flat

55 miles, 4300' up, 6100' down



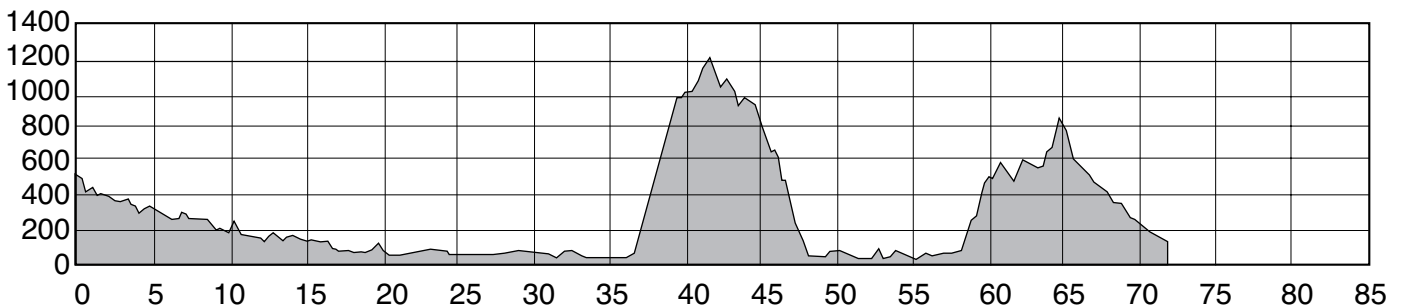
THE WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 5: Panther Flat to Elk Prairie

72 miles, 4500' up, 4800' down

Leave Panther Flat Campground (478').....	0.0
R on Hwy 199	0.3
Follow Smith River downstream	
Town of Gasquet (370')	4.0
Junction: Douglas Park Road.....	9.2
Turn-off for optional route	
Town of Hiouchi (178')	11.2
Enter Jedediah Smith State Park	
R on Hwy 197 (North Bank Road	14.1
L on Hwy 101 (only briefly).....	20.8
R on County Route D3 (Lake Earl Drive)	21.2
Becomes Northcrest Drive	28.6
R on E. Madison Avenue	29.4
Bear L on Arlington Drive.....	29.9
R on W. Washington Blvd	30.2

L on N. Pebble Beach Drive.....	31.7
R on Taylor St; becomes 5th St.....	34.0
Downtown Crescent City (29')	
R on D St	34.4
L on Front St.....	34.6
R on L St (Hwy 101)	35.0
Leave Crescent City	
Enter Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park.	35.4
Summit (ca 1220')	42.4
Exit Hwy 101 after crossing Klamath River ...	56.5
Follow Frontage Road 180° back to the north	
L on Klamath Beach Blvd	56.9
Enter Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park	
L on Coastal Drive (AKA Alder Camp Road) ..	58.2
L on Coastal Drive.....	60.3
Some sections of gravel	
R on Newton B. Drewry Scenic Parkway.....	64.7
Enter Redwood National Park	
R into Elk Prairie Campground.....	71.7
Finish in campground (131').....	72.0



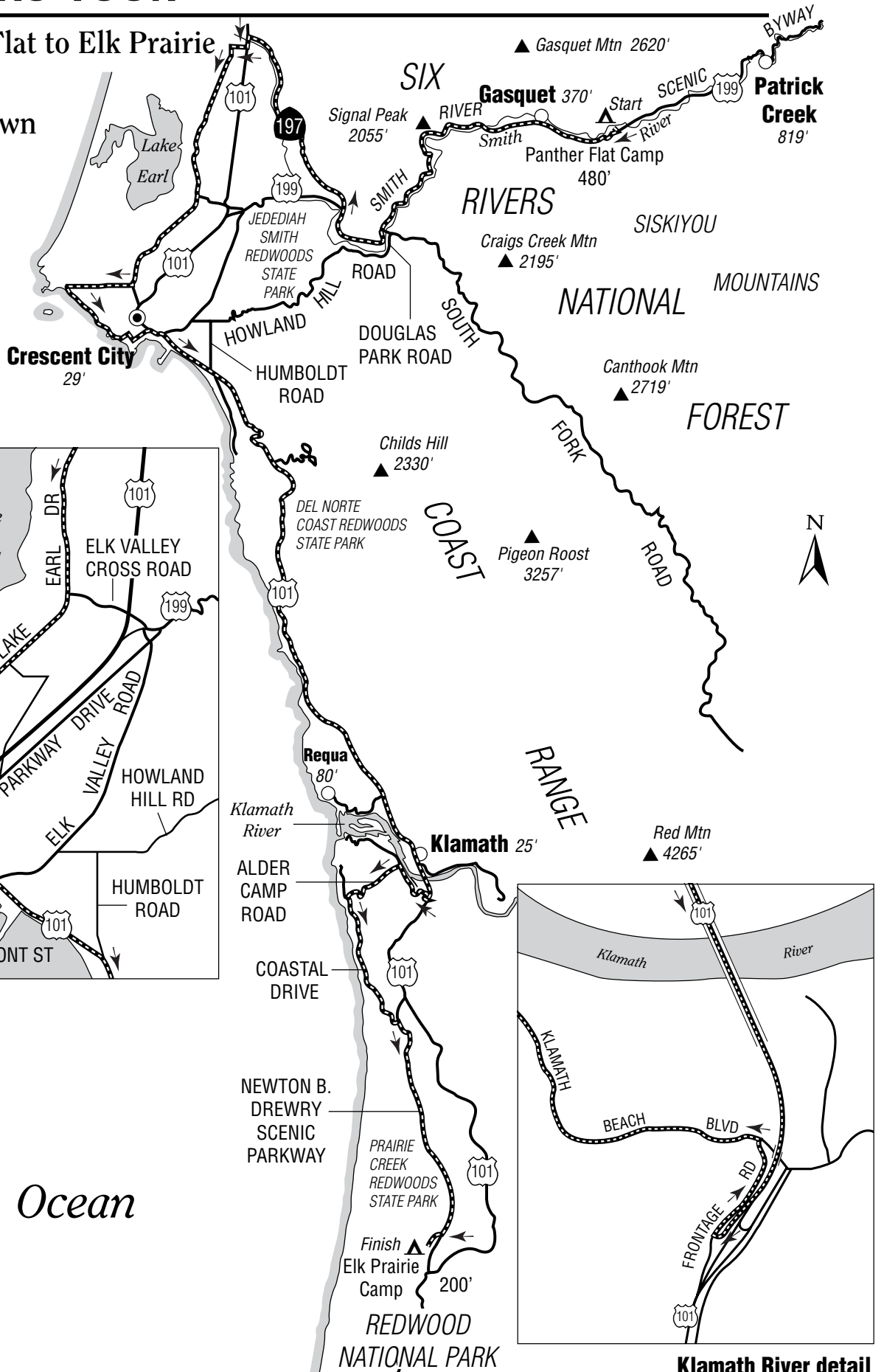
WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 5: Panther Flat to Elk Prairie

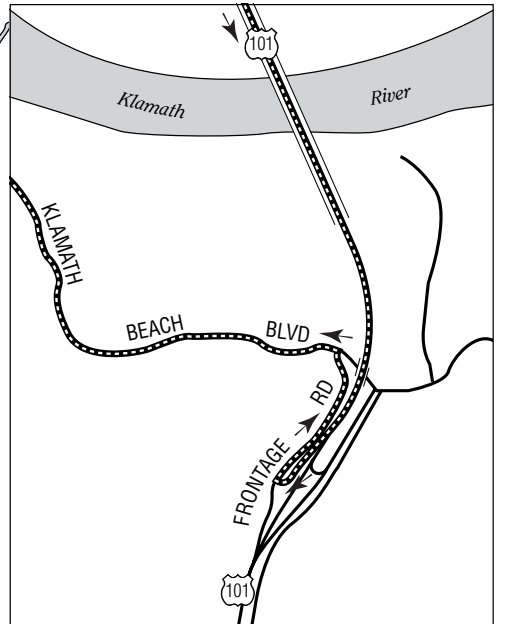
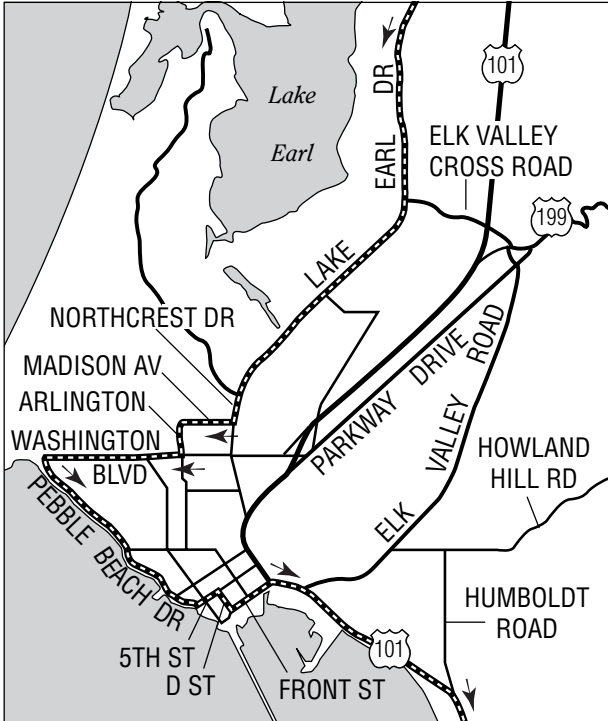
72 miles

4500' up, 4800' down

Pacific



Crescent City detail



Ocean

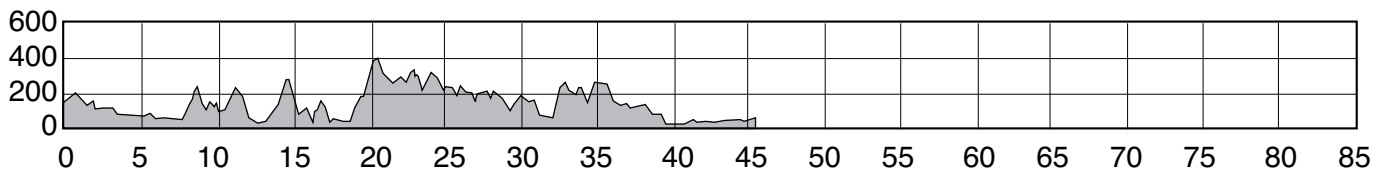
THE WILD RIVERS TOUR

Stage 6: Elk Prairie to Arcata

45 miles, 2600' up, 2700' down

Leave Elk Prairie Campground (131')	0.0
R on Newton B. Drewry Scenic Parkway	0.6
R on Hwy 101	1.7
Town of Orick (26')	6.4
L on Old State Highway	7.8
L on Hwy 101	11.4
Enter Humboldt Lagoons State Park	
Exit 101; R on Patricks Point Drive	21.6
Enter Patricks Point State Park	
R on Stagecoach Road	25.3
L on Main Street, town of Trinidad (175')	27.8
R on Scenic Drive	28.0
(Road closed to cars but okay for bikes; Sags detour via Hwy 101.)	
After Scenic Drive, bikes merge onto 101	31.2
Exit 101 at Clam Beach off-ramp	32.0
L on Clam Beach Drive over 101	32.3

R on Little River Drive	32.4
Bear L on Crannell Road	32.5
R on Dows Prairie Road	32.6
R on Norton Road	36.4
L on Eagle Lane	36.6
Town of McKinleyville (155')	
L on Central Avenue	37.0
R on Murray Road	37.1
L on McKinleyville Avenue	37.6
R on Hiller Road	38.6
L on Hammond Trail (bike path)	38.3
Cross Mad River on bike bridge	40.5
L on Mad River Road	40.7
L on Upper Bay Road	43.1
R on Janes Road > Spear Avenue	43.8
City of Arcata (34')	
R on Alliance Road	44.3
L on 15th Street	45.4
L on L Street	45.5
Finish at Arcata Rec. Center	



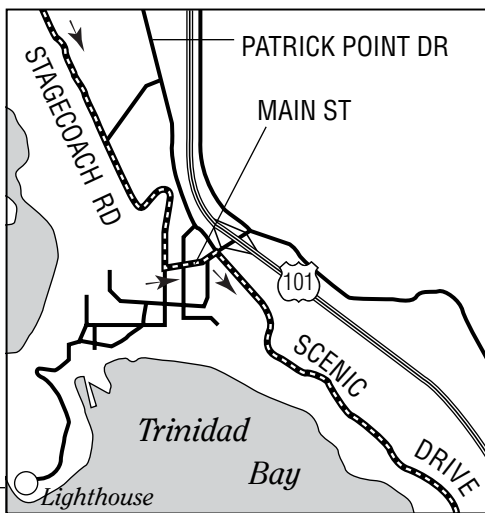
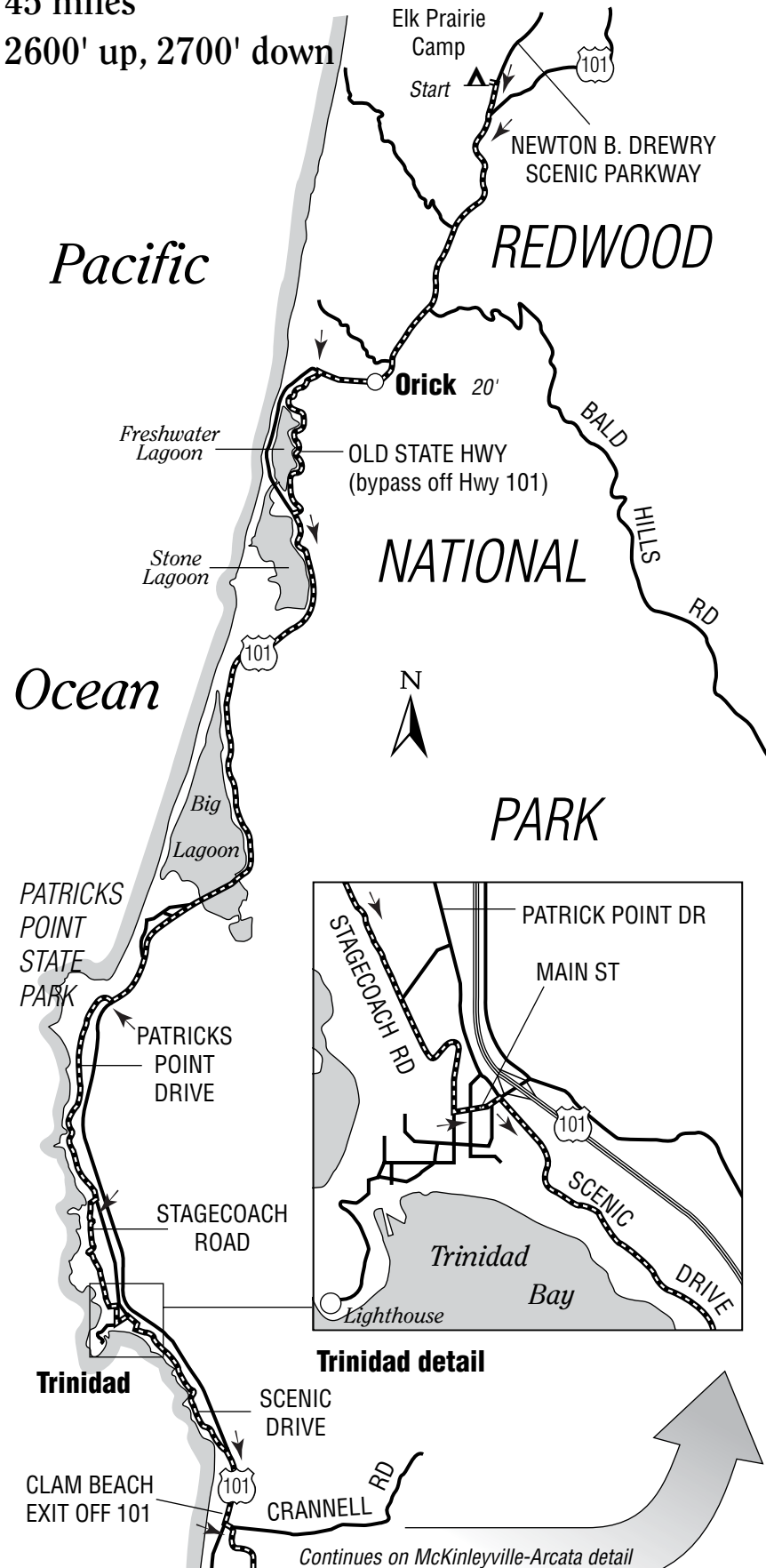
WILD RIVERS TOUR

McKinleyville-Arcata detail

Stage 6: Elk Prairie to Arcata

45 miles

2600' up, 2700' down



Trinidad detail

