

The Sierra to the Sea “adventure run” came to be, really, because Tennessee is so far from California. I have wanted, for years, to run Vol State – the run that goes across the state of Tennessee. It’s somewhat organized, in that you get maps, have a 10 day cut-off, everyone starts at the same time and stuff, but you can do it unaided or with support, run as far as you want each day, buy your food wherever, sleep in motels or your crew’s car, etc.

But two big problems – it’s always held the same time as Hardrock and, more importantly, it is very far from here and would cost a fortune to attend, what with three plane tickets, a rental car for 10+ days, and more.

So, in order to appease me, Wendell thought of running across a different state. Like, maybe one that’s REALLY close to here...like, here! Like California! What a great idea – I loved it right away! Before we even knew how far it was, I knew that I wanted to do it. That’s how ‘the California Crossing’ idea came to be. (The name Sierra to the Sea was coined by our friend, Jasper, a short time later – and it seemed just right.) Wendell did some rough estimating on a map and came up with a route that he thought was ~210 miles, which sounded perfectly doable to me. For whatever reason, it never crossed my mind that anything was ‘too far’ – I love running all day, sleeping, getting up, running all day, and repeating that over and over, so how bad could this be? (I didn’t realize ‘til later that I’d never run all day, slept, run all day, over and over on roads, though, only on trails.)

We only had one time period this year in which to do it – between our Headlands Hundred and Redwood Park events – and it was further limited by Aaron’s school – I needed to pick up his packet on the 14th and attend registration day on the 21st. So we decided that we’d leave on the 14th, start on the 15th, and do it in about 5 days. See, how easy is THAT?!

(As it turned out, we weren’t able to leave ‘til the 15th around lunchtime, so we started late in the day on that Wednesday.)

After Wendell packed the car with our big cooler, lots of Sprite and Diet Coke (which is usually my drink of choice even when I’m running, except for these multi-day things, when I prefer Sprite), chocolate milk, goldfish crackers, and other snacks that I’d bought (many of which are still buried in the Highlander since they never appealed), we were off. I drove the whole way, as is typical, so that Wendell could work. Aaron read the magazine I’d bought him and the books he’d taken – which turned out to only last about 2 of the 5+ days we were out there. Wendell had the great idea of following the course backward for much of our drive, so we had some idea of the terrain and shoulder width in each section we’d be covering. (We actually checked out an alternative to Hwy 12 between Jackson and Lodi, because 12 was SO busy, but 12 had a good shoulder, at least, and 104 had no shoulder and a 55 mph speed limit. Looked as if 12 was going to be it.) It was good to see the course a bit – but it really did feel like a long drive, and the signs giving the distance to Lake Tahoe sure had big numbers on them for awhile!

We arrived at the NV/CA border at about 4:00 on the 15th, parked in a casino parking lot so that I could put on socks and shoes, and stopped at Burger King so that I could wolf down a Whopper Jr. as Wendell drove me to the state border. I’m very fortunate that I really don’t need to ‘do’ much for a run like this – nothing on my feet except two pairs of thin Ultimex socks and my orange pair of Adidas Supernovas (to match my nails) every day.



It was weird to get out of the car right in downtown South Lake Tahoe because I’d actually forgotten about running this section when I thought of going from NV to the bridge. It was over 5 miles of ‘city’ running to start, something that I love to do. I always feel energized when weaving in and out of pedestrians and there’s always lots to look at when there are stores and restaurants around. As I passed by places that we usually visit on our trips to Tahoe, like Baja Fresh and Red Hut, it kind of made me feel sad that I was just passing by and wouldn’t be able to stop and enjoy. Little did I know at the time, but Wendell, Aaron, and I would have breakfast the next morning at Red Hut before hitting the road for the first full day!

I ran down the main drag, having to stop occasionally to wait for a ‘walk’ signal – time not running for which I was already grateful as I thought about the number of miles and hours ahead of me. Actually, even though it was fun to run through this busy section and I enjoyed looking around, I found my mind wandering to the ‘big picture’ – now that I was running, for the first time I thought about how far I had actually said that I would run! One reason that I hadn’t told a lot of people about this whole thing was in case it all fell apart...like right here, in the first few miles or even awhile later, like half way home after a hundred miles or so. Seriously, it now seemed like a daunting distance – and I was actually glad that Steve

had posted about my journey to the PCTR message board. As much as it embarrassed me to tell people about this run, as much as I felt spoiled for being able to take the time to try to do this, I appreciated the support and encouragement of Steve and the rest of the folks who'd posted nice messages on the board. I realized now that I HAD to keep going, not just today but 'til I was done, unless something broke – like a bone, not like a shoelace. Since people knew about this, I had to finish it. Yikes.

I looked up to see Wendell and Aaron, waiting at the corner of this street and the campground where we often stay. They'd honked and waved a few minutes earlier when they'd passed by me – the first of a bazillion honks to lift my spirits over the next few days. Yippee – it was already great to see them, and they were going to reserve a site for tonight and then meet me up the road a bit. I got to the corner – 5+ miles – in less than 55 minutes. Not bad considering that I'd stopped to cross streets and stuff. I turned away from the lake and headed up Hwy 50 toward Meyers – wow, now I was REALLY on my way!



Everything here was still flat – I was wearing one of our altimeter watches for the first few sections, since I would be doing some climbing before dropping down to the valley that would last the rest of the way home. I was able to run everything for the first 10 miles or so, stopping once again to see the guys and get my orange safety vest from Wendell which I would wear for almost the whole rest of the trip. A few sips of Sprite and I was on my way – up 50 past Lira's Market (a great little market that we usually visit when we're running the on the Rim Trail) and taking a left onto Hwy 89. The guys passed me again, honking and waving, and told me that meet me up ahead. After a flat section through Christmas Valley, with streets named Elf and Santa Claus (bringing thoughts of appreciation for living on a less-festively named street into my head), I finally had to walk...a lot. I was climbing up toward Big Meadow, where Wendell said they'd be, but I honestly couldn't see that I was getting close to it. I'd always approached the Big Meadow trailhead on the TRT from the south, and it always seemed very low and flat in that area. Now, however, I was climbing up higher and higher – my altimeter was getting close to 1,000 ft. – and it felt as if I was surrounded by mountains and hills. Hmm... Suddenly, there were the guys trotting down the other side of the road to hike up to the trailhead with me. They'd parked below it and run down, and now we all hiked up to and past the car, wondering where in the heck the trailhead was and when it feel meadowish. Finally, we saw the TRT signpost across the street and realized that we'd made it to Big Meadow. It was starting to get dark – not super late, but just dusk with mountains and trees – so I decided to hike up a bit more while the guys went to get the car and meet me not too far up ahead. I hiked on 'til I was near Luther Pass, where Wendell's found a great parking area and we called it a (third of a) day. 16 miles, 3:47 running time, 1,390 feet of gain.



We drove back to the campground, checking the Red Hut to see when they opened the next day, and arrived at our site where the guys had set up our tent and gotten our mats inflated and bags out – what a treat! We all fell asleep right away, after I set my alarm for 5:00 to shower and be at the Hut by 6:00.

Wendell and I were up and showered and dressed by 5:30, so we got Aaron dressed and the tent down, and were at the Red Hut about 5 minutes before they opened. After some great breakfast and good coffee in a wonderful environment, we drove up to where we'd left off the day before. I started at 6:58 a.m., first running down a short while and then up to the summit of Luther Pass – elevation 7,740. From there, it was mostly downhill to the junction of Hwy 88 and Hwy 89, where I took a right onto 88, knowing from our drive that I'd be on this A LONG time.

While 89 had been pretty, 88 was BEAUTIFUL. This is where Wendell took some of the prettiest pictures of the whole journey, I think – at least 'til the Sausalito shots near the very end, which are pretty in a different, 'city' way. I love areas

like this – flat, beautiful meadows with lakes and streams that feel as if they're down low because they're surrounded by mountains, but they're actually up high. I guess I can't explain what I mean, but there are areas like this around Silverton, CO, too – you drive *down* to them, they're lush and filled with plants and wildlife, and they're flat, so they feel like valleys, but you're still at elevation. So cool!



But again I was having thoughts of the daunting nature of this “adventure run”, as my friend, fellow runner, and artist extraordinaire, Karen Hanke, had put on the shirt logo she'd so generously designed for this journey. When I next saw Wendell and Aaron, and Wendell said, “You've run a marathon now!” as if it was a good thing, I almost cried. I mean, he'd *included the previous day's mileage*, and I'd *still* only run a marathon?! How could I do almost 8 more of those?! And the same thing the next time the guys had ‘good news’ – Aaron happily told me that I'd done a 50 Km at one of the next aid stops – and, crap, I felt as if I'd run at least 50 miles already! Seriously, I was down at this point, but I didn't want to let on too much to the guys – I knew that I'd let them and other people down if I just gave up at this point...but, honestly, it was crossing my mind. I know that I mentioned ‘big picture’ and ‘daunting’ and stuff to Wendell, who's done enough multi-day stuff to know that you can't think about that...but knows me well enough to know that I was focusing on it the whole time.

Just as I decided with each day, there were good and bad things about full day one. The wind was strong, seemingly a headwind no matter which direction I was going, and the cars and trucks went FAST out here. (Semi drivers seemed to give me a wide berth every time – it was the people driving or pulling RVs who were the most selfish about “their” lane.) Most of the truckers were very friendly, though, and waved back to me – and the UPS semi driver even waved to me first. And I realized that one of my favorite smells in the whole world, the smell of freshly mowed or baled hay, smells just as sweet when it's passing at 60 miles an hour on the back of a flatbed semi.

Wendell had warned me that the biggest pass of all that I'd go over, Kit Carson Pass, would be just on the other side of Kirkwood, the beautiful ski resort area. So as I started to climb up and up, long before Kirkwood, I thought how my afternoon was going to suck – here I was climbing some small pass, not even nearly to Kirkwood yet, and I still had Carson Pass to climb in the afternoon. Suddenly I was at the part of 88 that I remembered a lot from the drive – what had a been a steep and winding downhill with no shoulder, just a guardrail with a drop-off, in the car was now a steep and winding climb for me with nothing next to it. I am not good with heights to begin with, and add semis and RVs flying by on their way down the hill, driving on the white line and practically touching the guardrail, and I just couldn't do it. But I realized that if I crossed over to the other side where the vehicles had two lanes and there was a nice wide shoulder with a mountain wall next to it, it wasn't scary at all. Whew! As it turned out, I ended up doing this a lot over the next few days – especially on curves to the left, when oncoming traffic couldn't see me until it was too late for either of us to do anything about it. And I never did reach a spot where both sides of the road were shoulderless and narrow – every time I crossed over to have my back to traffic, it was usually for a very short time (this first climb being the longest section) and there was always a ton of room for me to walk well away from cars.

As I reached the top of this long climb, I got the greatest news from Wendell – THIS was Kit Carson Pass!! Even though it had been a long, slow grind and it was SUPER windy up on the top, what a relief to know that THIS had been the biggest climb of the trip! Woo hoo! It had been super windy all day but, just as I arrived at the top of the pass, the wind was SO strong that it lifted the big ‘Caution – Runners on Road’ sign that Wendell had brought, tossed it high into the air, and brought it crashing down just inches from Wendell and the car! It split into two pieces, one of which (the top) came flying toward me, blowing across the pavement. I picked it up and carried it to the car while Wendell picked up the sandwich part of the sign – looked as if we'd just be using cones as warning from this point forward. Wendell congratulated me on reaching the top, and I ran down the other side, so relieved that I'd finished Carson Pass and was on my way to Kirkwood, our first lunch stop of the trip!



Again, though, as I reached the Kirkwood Inn having run 18 miles today and 16 the day before, this whole thing just seemed impossible. Even though my legs and feet felt fine, it was windy and loud and hilly and hot and sunny – and I just didn't see how I'd ever finish. I guess that I'd voiced this in some fashion a couple of times already to Wendell as the morning had worn on, because then Wendell gave me the best advice, which he repeated several more times over this day and the next – just enjoy the time out there and enjoy what I was seeing. And, finally, after a delicious lunch that included salad dressing and fries (yes, it's true), I finally tried to do that.

Instead of thinking about finishing or how many miles were left, I tried to just enjoy what I was passing – the horses, the hawks, the farms, the open spaces, the lakes, and everything else. And this seemingly obvious and 'simple' change in focus made a world of difference for me.

On I went for almost 7 more hours, climbing up to Carson Spur – another long grind, nearly as high – and later that day I was finally up in the 40s for the day's mileage. Whew! Now, at least, I felt as if I was getting somewhere – over 50 for the two days combined, and I'd made pretty good time with a lot of downhill in the afternoon. Plus, it was EXTRA special when, late in the afternoon, Wendell showed Aaron and me that we could see Mt. Diablo!! Honestly, it looked like one of those religious posters – on the horizon were some small hills and shallow valleys, then a really thick layer of clouds, and the ONLY thing above the clouds was a seemingly suspended Diablo! It was a lovely sight, very comforting to me, and really made me feel as if home wasn't all that very far away.

Wendell and Aaron had found a great campsite up ahead a bit – a little campground with only three sites and our tent as the only 'resident', right near the highway – so I planned to just keep running 'til 8:00, stop wherever that was, and get a ride back to the tent. However, just as I was telling Wendell my plan, he told me of a questionable yet close restaurant, Ham's Station, which was at the 43 mile mark. I ran there (past the tent – man, it looked inviting!) and we stopped the clock again for dinner. The place was really run down and didn't seem very clean – but the guy who did everything at this one man show made a mean plate of fish and chips for me, a great hot dog for Aaron on an only-partly-stale bun, and a pretty good chicken breast sandwich for Wendell. We decided that, as Wendell paid the bill, I'd go out and run two more miles to end at 45 for the day. So it was 11:39 in time, 45 miles, and 2,890 feet of climbing for my first full day. Not bad – AND a great little campsite without the fly on the tent, so we could see all the stars over our heads as we fell asleep.



Friday at 5:15 a.m. came around, and we got up, got dressed, and packed up to move on. We drove back down to where we'd left off the day before, I hopped out at 6:11, and the guys drove off to check out a more...um...'desirable' restaurant that was shown on the map as being just down the road. I kept telling myself what Wendell had said – to just enjoy my time out there, and I was. Just a few miles later, Wendell came running up the road to tell me that the restaurant looked good and that we could have breakfast there, but that I'd have to run past it a bit and we'd drive back since they didn't open 'til 7:00. So I got in 4 miles and we stopped at 7:10 to drive back and have a delicious breakfast with Seattle's Best coffee – yum!

Next came what for me was one of my favorite and least favorite sections. From the restaurant, Cook's Station, I ran great for a long while. It was mostly downhill, and finally we arrived at some sections that were RESIDENTIAL!! Yippee!! Now, I love the Sierra and the solitude and the beauty of it all...but I also knew that, until I started hitting some homes and little shops and inns and things, I wasn't getting OUT of the Sierra. Plus, as at the beginning, I felt energized to see some people out 'doing' things – other than driving. Out walking on side roads, watering plants, feeding their animals – just some other activity gave me new things to observe and took my mind off my running. Also, it was in this section, as I descended with each step, that I realized how much better I was running now that I was down lower. It's a funny thing about altitude for me – I don't really realize how it affects me until I'm out of it, and that was certainly the case with this journey. I felt as if I ran for hours feeling good.

Late that morning, as I approached Pine Grove, I passed signs for some cool Native American things and other historical venues just a few miles off Highway 88. When I next met up with Wendell and Aaron, Aaron said that he had a question to ask. So I asked him, "Do you guys want to leave me for awhile?" I think Aaron was relieved that I'd sort of suggested it, so he and Wendell explained that they wanted to visit North America's largest grinding rock, just a few miles away near Volcano. No problem – in fact, I was relieved, because Aaron had read the whole 2008 Almanac and issue of Popular Mechanics (with a bunch of science/space articles in it) that we'd brought and was getting pretty darned bored in the car. So I put some money in my waist pack, grabbed some fruit bars, filled my bottle with ice water, and we parted ways. I told them that I wouldn't look for them 'til 1:00 or so – and I think it was about 11:15 when we all took off. It was a fun area for me now, too – I stopped and bought a soda and used a bathroom in town, and actually ran on sidewalk for awhile. (Sigh) It was SO nice to run OFF the road for mile or two.



But then came the worst part so far. First, I left town and headed toward Jackson. Immediately, the shoulder got very small, disappearing completely around some of the turns, and at the same time the traffic picked up. It was also very hot again today – completely sunny with relentless wind, once more. (Aaron later told me that it was at least 87 on Friday.) I went on feeling more alone, knowing that I wouldn't see the guys now for awhile. Up until this point, I'd never gone more than about 45 minutes without seeing them, and they'd often park, put out the cones/signage, and then Wendell would come back to find and walk or run with me. And now, not only were they gone, but I had to REALLY watch where I was going and where I was putting my feet and, more importantly, watch where the cars and trucks were going and whether they saw me. Little did I know that this off-and-on scary, always stressful feeling of being really close to vehicles would continue almost non-stop for the rest of the journey.

After the guys returned and found me (which Wendell said was easy, just knowing my relatively steady pace of ~15 minute miles and the mileage of the road) we made our hot, sunny way to Jackson – our next lunch stop. We passed the turnoff for the Jackson Rancheria, a casino-ish place I've seen advertised on TV but knew nothing about – and still wouldn't as we only passed the road that led to it, not the Rancheria itself. A few hot, slow miles later and we were in downtown Jackson, where we stopped at Mel's Diner for lunch. Once again, it was nice to be in air conditioning for a few minutes – but it wasn't long before we'd eaten, used the restroom, and were back at the car ready to start up again. It was 2:06 in the afternoon and I'd gone 28 miles so far – more than half way for the day, which felt good. But leaving Jackson sucked. Lots of traffic, stop lights, higher speed limits, narrow shoulders, climbing up, no shade, streets angling all directions – yuck. I was glad to get out of Jackson and head toward Lodi.

Things improved a bit as we got farther from town. The traffic was still heavy, but things opened up and we started passing some farms and stuff. We had decided to get a hotel room in Lodi for Friday night so after several more hours of running, Wendell and Aaron said that they were going to go on ahead and scout out a place to stay. I knew that they'd be gone awhile again, but I didn't realize how much I'd miss them. I think I got low on calories while they were gone – something I'd battled at least a little each day – so I started getting sad and down. Then the traffic picked up – duh, it was FRIDAY AFTERNOON! A steady stream of cars with a few RVs and trucks went by, heading home after the work week or, in most cases, heading up to Jackson or the Sierra or someplace else for a nice weekend. It was nearly unbearable as I had to constantly try to make eye contact with each driver or least make sure that they were aware of my presence and frequently had to hop off the paved shoulder and onto the slanted, weed-filled gravel. This was worse than I'd ever imagined it might be – but, little did I know, it wasn't the worst of the trip.

Awhile after the guys had left, I was crossing a narrow country bridge. I had crossed many of these in the course of the journey with no problem. But this time, as I was about a third of the way across, some kid in a big white pick-up truck saw me, looked me in the eye and, if anything, moved CLOSER to me! I couldn't believe it! I quickly put my left foot up on the high curb-thing, grabbed on to the railing with both hands, and leaned over as he passed by. I was shaking as I got down from my perch and continued across the bridge. As the shoulder opened up into a wide gravel open area, I looked up to see the Highlander with Wendell and Aaron in coming toward me, pulling over onto the gravel, and parking. Aaron got out and trotted toward me but, upon seeing my face, stopped and said, "Are you ok, Mom?"...at which point I promptly burst into tears.

I told them about the truck, but also knew that I was crying because this was SO hard, harder than anything I'd ever done. I was less than half way, hadn't even made it to the end of the second full day, and yet, while my legs and feet (the things I'd worried about) were perfectly fine, my head was just plain tired. Hour after hour of relentless hot, strong, loud wind and non-stop traffic made this SO stressful and exhausting. This was SO much harder than running across Death Valley, even, where at least you could focus on the physical side of things and let your mind wander, where you often went for miles and miles without a vehicle passing by. I had to be constantly alert out here for hours on end, and it was just draining me.

But hugs from the guys helped me regroup, and I drank some more chocolate milk and Sprite which also helped me get my head together by giving me some much-needed calories. They told me that they'd found a Comfort Inn with a pizza place right next door in Lodi, and that we'd drive there as soon as I was done for the day.

So on we went, me plugging away on the road, them driving up a few miles, stopping, putting out the cones, and waiting. Aaron now read the Hardy Boys books he'd bought in Jackson at the used bookstore, and Wendell worked on his laptop. I was glad that they'd had the chance to play a few games of cards in the morning while waiting for me in the shade, because now it was too hot and sunny to be outside the car.



This last section was tough, too, but it helped to know that I'd be over a hundred miles by the end of the day and that we were going to stay in a motel and have pizza for dinner! I kept on, past farms and animals and empty fields, and it was still too dang hot, but the traffic got a little more bearable as the day wound down. Wendell was just finishing writing an e-mail message when I passed the car at 43 miles, and he told me that they would move shortly, drive up to 45, and stop there so we could end the day. They finally went by, and Wendell yelled, "Only six tenths of a mile to go!" – and I realized that, if I really ran from where I was to where they were pulling off, I could finish in under 12 hours for the day. So I pushed a bit and finished 45 miles in 11:58 with only 950 feet of gain.

As soon as I got in the car, Wendell showed me the key card to get into the motel room – ah, I could almost feel the comfy bed from there! As we drove, it gave Wendell the chance to review the upcoming sections of the course – where we could have breakfast, what was in between where I'd start and Lodi, and where to go once I got to Lodi. We arrived at the motel, carried our stuff up, and Aaron set up his laptop and played while Wendell and I showered and got changed. They we all walked down the street to the pizza parlor (which was closing in 10 minutes!) and ordered a pizza, which they kindly offered to deliver to our motel room. Back in the room Wendell showed Aaron and me all the photos he'd taken so far and it didn't seem that we watched the slide show long before the pizza was there – hot and delicious. A hot strong shower, a good meal, a little TV watching, and I was ready for sleep.

The next morning, we were back where we'd left at 6:06 – my bright orange vest, a bottle of ice water, and I was ready to go. I knew that it wouldn't be long before we got to Clements, where there was nice looking little breakfast place – about the first thing in town. It turned out to be six miles away, so Wendell and Aaron stopped a few times in between and then, in 1:22, I was taking off my pack and vest and heading in to get something to eat. Over breakfast, Wendell raised something with Aaron that he'd talked over with me earlier on the road – he could bring Aaron home, drop him off, and come back out to crew for me, since we were getting close to home and would be sleeping in our own beds each night from now on. Aaron was interested in doing that – he'd spent a ton of time in the car these last days, and he was anxious to get home to talk to friends, play, watch some TV, and see how our cats were doing. So at 8:12, I put some more money in my pack, put my cell phone in there for the first time, filled my bottle with ice, and took off...as the guys did the same thing, only they were driving home.

I thoroughly enjoyed the section from Clements to Lodi. I talked to both Wendell and Aaron several times, telling them how it was going and finding out where they were and when they got home and stuff. And all along this route, the

highway was lined with vineyards and walnut tree groves with a few beautiful, old homes interspersed. I passed a very cool vintage car show at a vineyard, which was not only fun to look at but smelled great, too – smells of regular gas, wax, cleaner, and the coffee they were serving filled the air – and I ran through a few neat little towns where I bought a fruit smoothie, a Sprite and, as I entered Lodi, a frozen fruit bar. It was funny: the guy in the convenience store in Lodi was the first person who asked me what I was doing – he assumed, from my orange safety vest, that I was working nearby. I had been relieved that, up until now, no one seemed to have noticed that I was running to their restaurants or stores. But he seemed genuinely interested when I told him so I was running, so I told him where I'd started and where I was going, and we talked about it for a bit. He was probably in his 30s and he said that he liked to run, so it didn't seem weird to him that I'd started at the border and was now in Lodi, which was nice. He wished me luck and I moved on down the street. Here again I was on sidewalks, so was able to relax and enjoy the time away from the traffic – and, I realized, the traffic just hadn't been that bad since Clements.

Wendell and I talked a few times through here, as he was on his way back but was coming along the course backwards, so it wasn't going as quickly. But the time we met up, I was on Hwy 12 heading through the newer part of Lodi. Wendell said that he'd found a nice mall just up ahead where we could have lunch, so I ran 'til I got there – it was 12:10 p.m. and I'd gone 14 miles since breakfast. After a less-than-satisfying lunch at Quizno's and part of a good piece of zucchini bread from Starbucks, I hit the road at 12:42 heading out of Lodi toward Rio Vista.

And, goodness, what a long, flat, horrible section this turned out to be. The next 7 hours and 28 minutes were filled with tons of traffic and hot, dry, windy air. I thought that the traffic would ease after I went under the I-5 overpass – but, boy, was I wrong. My right leg was starting to hurt – from all the running on the slanted shoulder without the reprieve of walking uphill or running down, now that everything was flat, we guessed. The closer I got to Rio Vista, the more everything sucked, and by the time I crossed the first bridge, the one over the Potato Slough, the traffic was literally non-stop – moving too fast with a little too much space to be called “bumper to bumper” but that same quantity of vehicles. Wendell tried to keep my spirits up by telling me how pretty it was around the slough and stuff – but it wasn't really working. My leg hurt and the pavement was in lousy shape, so all I could do was walk. As we neared downtown Rio Vista and bigger bridges, though, Wendell would drive ahead 3 miles, park, and run back to walk with me. It helped immensely, and made me even more happy that Aaron was at home, playing with the girl who lives next door, rather than out here in the heat either sitting in the car or walking along the stupid roadside with his mom and dad. I really felt like quitting, but then Wendell encouraged me to keep going as far as Rio Vista itself, cross the big bridge, and finish at around 150 miles so far. So we did that, with him driving ahead, coming back to find me, then walking or jogging to the car so that I could eat and drink.

It was during this miserable time that I saw one of the highlights of the whole journey. I heard a dog barking off to my right but I hadn't passed a house or business or farm or ANYTHING for miles. I couldn't imagine why a dog would be out here...and then I looked and saw the dog, a big, mostly white one, running along just below a ridge. And what I thought at first glance had been dried grass blowing on the ridgetop was actually a big herd of sheep, being kept in order by the white dog, with a shepherd trailing behind the whole wide parade! I could hardly wait for Wendell to get back from moving the car up the road so that I could show him – it was just beautiful.

So we trudged along like this, making lousy time but finally reaching the bridge over the Sacramento River which led to Rio Vista itself, the car, and the end of the day – 8:10 p.m. for a total of 12:48, 25 miles since lunch, 45 total for the day. And up to 151 total – which should have felt good, but was still kind of scary because it seemed that I would need two more really good days to finish, since we weren't sure how far it was but were pretty sure that it was 225 or so.

It was great to talk to Aaron on the phone again as we drove home – we'd been chatting off and on all day, talking about the cats and how he got to go miniature golfing with our neighbors – and to drive into the driveway around 9:00 to relax at home before heading to bed just after 10:00.

Full day three was horrible from start to finish. I thought it would be a good section for me, at the start at least, because I found out as we drove home the night before that the stretch from RV to Suisun City was hillier than anything I'd covered in hours and hours, and we thought that it would be a nice relief from the miles and miles of flat stuff I'd covered on day two. Instead, though, it was awful. First, Rio Vista has got to be one of the windiest places on Earth. Seriously, no WONDER they have those turbines out there! I don't know in miles per hour how strong the winds were, but they were worse than anything I'd faced so far and were in my face for miles. When I'd crest one of the hills, I would literally be stopped in my tracks for a few seconds. Add to this the fact that the engineers who designed the highway between RV and SC determined, apparently, that it would be far too safe to have a wide shoulder on the hilly sections, that they

wanted more drama for the folks who drove out here, so each time I went up a climb and was out of sight of the oncoming traffic, the shoulder disappeared. And each time I went down a descent so that the cars might consider giving me some space, there was no shoulder for me and they couldn't see ahead to swing wide. So in both cases, I had to hop off the road into the weeds or gravel or whatever was there. My right calf just kept getting sorer and sorer – it seemed to start hurting because of the repetition and then hurt more from pushing into the wind. So I walked up the hills and walked the flats and tried to run the downhills – all the while favoring my right leg and cursing the wind.



Thank goodness Aaron stayed home this day, too, because it was no fun and neither was I. Again the relentless heat (over 90 degrees these last two days), unending wind, and sparser but still frequent traffic, plus I was just walking. My pace was slower today – I didn't get to Burger King in Suisun City (17 miles) for almost 5 hours. I hated my pace and hated myself for not being tough enough to run. But, again, sitting down in A/C with Wendell, having him be really positive about how far I'd come and how my pace was still good, and having a Whopper Jr., fries, and a big shake all helped me get my head back into the thing. After the half hour lunch break, I hit the road again, headed through Suisun City and out the other side toward Fairfield and Cordelia. Getting through SC was nice – there was even a criterium in progress right downtown, so the cyclists passed me a couple times as I meandered through the streets.



But as soon as we got to the other side of town, the first real glitch of the trip – the road we needed to take was closed to cars. Just then, though, we saw a woman on a bike head down it and not return, so we figured that at least I could get through and Wendell could take the posted detour and meet me...somewhere. As it turned out, it was only closed for ½ a mile or so, and it wasn't long before Wendell was heading toward me up the road. Now he drove ahead, scouted out the route, and phoned me, telling me to stay straight through the long industrial park (2 miles) and eventually climb up through the shade and he was at the top of the hill, about 3 ½ miles away.

This part wasn't good, either – I was just slow and sore and super hot and negative and felt ready to cry every time I rounded a turn or crested a hill and didn't see Wendell and the car and fluids and calories that I wanted. But, once again, Wendell was so happy when I finally did arrive – telling me what mile I was at and how his feet hurt from running and walking with me just bits and pieces of each day and how great I was doing and how steady I was still going (even though he meant SLOW and steady now) and just lifting my spirits incredibly. He told me that I was almost at 175 miles, which seemed semi-cool at the time, but then did seem cooler when I called Aaron to tell him. After listening to the two of them, I almost started to feel good about where I was and how things were going...almost. Then, right around the 175 mile mark, Wendell drove by and told me he was going to scout out the route. Next thing I knew, he was driving back toward me, telling me to take off my pack and get in the car, that this wasn't going to work out without us taking a look.

He'd shown me McGary Road, which we were within a mile of now, on the map as a weird, dotted line labeled as 'unimproved road' – which, to me, meant it would be like a fireroad or something. I NEVER dreamt that it would be a closed, fenced-off, posted 'No Trespassing' paved road with heavy construction equipment part way down and barbed wire running along one side!! Oh, I HATE stuff like this, I thought – and said, which was unnecessary, because Wendell was fully aware of that. But, as we drove on I-80 next to McGary Road so that we could scope out how far from the far side Wendell could drive in, he explained that, if I didn't do this, I'd have no way to get to the other side of I-80 onto a road that would take me the right way. So we went back to where he'd picked me up, both got out, took my "Look at me!" safety vest, put my pack on, grabbed a second water bottle (not because it was far, but because it somehow seemed comforting to at least have a lot of fluids if I was going to be breaking the law), and we started out together to get me to

the start of McGary Road. It was like a dream that went from bad to worse. First, we started out on a train track which made me nervous. Then we realized it was paralleling the wrong freeway, so we had to climb down through the brush in an area where there was no fence, which we found behind an industrial building. From there, we climbed up to the hilly, dusty open space, where kids on motorcycles were doing motocross stuff while we were crossing. Sheesh, I thought – maybe I'll just get nailed by a motorcycle in this part and not have to go on that fenced-off road, at least. But we made it safely across without getting hit, and now we were at the signs and locked gates of McGary Road. I took a deep breath and went under the gate – which, I realized later, wasn't even very securely closed off and which many others before me had skirted. I didn't look back as I went one way and Wendell went the other, for fear that I'd chicken out and beat him back to the car. I focused straight ahead and actually ran – yep, I ran the whole thing. I don't even know how far it was, but I didn't drink anything from either bottle I'd brought, just ran and tried to be invisible or at least not guilty-looking. For awhile, I was up at freeway level, just hoping that no Highway Patrol officer would see me. Then, though, I dropped down lower and actually felt pretty safe, especially when I realized that there were big gaps in the fences on both sides and that, really, the only reason that this road was closed was because of the construction they were doing. It wasn't long before I reached the construction equipment and, just beyond it, the other gates. Yippee! And there was a BIG space to the left side, where the gates didn't quite reach the bushes, so I just walked around to public part of McGary Road and felt as if I could finally breathe again. I called Wendell and told him that I was 'out' and he said that he was almost there, so within minutes, I was adding ice to my one full bottle and dropping off the other in the car, which he'd parked next to the 'Road Closed' sign.



Wendell drove up to the other side of I-80 and parked the car, running back down to hike up with me. When we got to the car, he told me that I would now head downhill into American Canyon, which I did. It was a nice section, with lots of horses and stuff, but my leg was still so sore that I ran very little. After running the steepest descents and walking everything else for while, I looked up to see Wendell coming back to run and walk with me to get to Vallejo. We started talking about whether he should go pick up Aaron, who'd been home all day, so that he could join us for the last few hours. It must have been after 5:30, but not much, so we figured that it would work out ok with traffic and all. At the car, I took more ice, drank some milk, and headed out as Wendell left to pick up Aaron. I'd only made it one long block to McDonald's, where I went in to use the restroom, when my phone rang. It was Wendell saying that he'd driven on the course to the Hwy 37 bridge from Vallejo to Sears Point – but that it was a freeway and closed to pedestrians. Oh, crap - here we go again! He drove back to pick me up – going to get Aaron was out of the question, at least for now – and we drove back toward the bridge. As he drove, I read the map and we saw that there was another small bridge that went to Mare Island, so we drove past the 'good' bridge to find it. It allowed pedestrians and was fine, except that it was out of the way on both sides...and only got as far as Mare Island, anyway. As we exited that bridge and drove back to where the Hwy 37 bridge becomes just 37 and went to Sears Point, we noticed that, in fact, Hwy 37 is only a "freeway" from Mare Island to Vallejo – if I took the little bridge and then got over here, I could take this big wide-shouldered road the rest of the way to Sears Point. Whew! What a relief! As we were driving on 37 toward Sears Point and talking about it, Wendell said something about driving back to McDonald's and starting up again. Oh, man... I had lost all momentum and really, really just wanted to stop for the day. When I suggested that, I started to cry – I felt like a loser for walking all day, only getting 32.5 miles, and stopping after just over 10 hours. But Wendell thought that it was a good idea, actually, given my sore leg and inability to run, and the fact that Aaron had been home all day, as well as having found out that we were going to have to add on several miles the next day to get down to the other bridge and wind our way back to the highway. So I called Aaron at 6-something and told him we were on the way home, that I'd stopped at 5:47 after only 32 miles, but that I would now probably take me two more days to finish – one full day with the added mileage to the bridge and one short day on Tuesday.

However, as we now drove in the other direction on the Hwy 37 bridge, I noticed a huge shoulder and NO "Freeway Entrance" sign, as well as NO "No Pedestrians" sign!! I said something to Wendell, and we agreed – the bridge was freeway one way, highway another. Another BIG whew!! Still with my sore right leg and 40-50 miles to go, some of it on uncertain route, it would probably be early Tuesday when I finished. So we headed home, hoping that we were doing the right thing by cutting it short rather than going back and adding a few miles onto today so that I could finish on Monday.

I must say, it was WONDERFUL to get home while it was light out! We had dinner and sat around and watched some TV together and got to bed before 10. It felt like I'd only been out half a day!

Monday started out with just Wendell and me leaving at 5:30 again – these days when we stayed home, we left at 5:30, stopped at Starbucks for a latte and muffin, and then didn't stop for a real breakfast at all. Just walking around our house and to the car and Starbucks, I could tell that my leg was MUCH better today. Back we went to McDonald's in Vallejo, where I used the restroom and hit the road. 6:20 a.m., and we were on our way. Wendell drove up a way and came back to meet me carrying the camera, prepared to walk with me all the way across the GOOD bridge and to the start of the flat highway that leads to Sears Point. However, I surprised him and myself, too, by running most everything! It seemed that the short, walking-filled day before had left me rested and my leg feeling nearly as good as it had two or three days ago and the day, FINALLY, was overcast and cool, so I ran, walking only the uphill until he and I got to the far side of the bridge.



There we parted ways – and I knew I wouldn't hear him honk at me for awhile, as the traffic was totally stopped going in his direction. The way I was running, though, there was quite a bit of traffic but the shoulder was super side and in great condition, so I ran almost all of it, walking only occasionally after I'd run so long that I needed a break. Even though it's a long stretch from the Vallejo end of Hwy 37 to the Sears Point end, there was only one stopping point for Wendell where I could replenish and say 'hi'. We met there, and realized that, even with short walking breaks, I was right back on 4 mph pace – so much better than the day before! So we both moved on to the far end of this section and met up again...where ALL of 37 becomes freeway! I was SO upset! At this point, we figured that I had no choice but to continue – doing anything else would mean backtracking more than a day's worth of running and traveling way north before trying to find another way down to San Francisco.

So I started up the hill on FREEWAY 37 – which really was one of the nicer highways I'd run on, with a nice, very wide shoulder and nothing "freewayish" about it except for the name and the speed limit. The cars were farther from me here than they had been for a long time – but I was SO nervous that I'd get stopped by someone for running here that it was very stressful and seemed to take forever, even though I was running well and making good time.

My phone rang as a bridge appeared in the distance – it was Wendell, saying a couple of things: first, that the bridge would be the worst, narrowest part and second, that once I got to Hwy 101 (a big, main thoroughfare) I should follow the railroad tracks and stay OFF 101 and third, that we'd meet after all this stuff on a road called Nave. Oh, great... I met him a half mile farther up the road, and as I restocked he said that he was going to drive home to get Aaron. This was good news because it meant that he thought I'd finish today...but it also meant that I'd have no moral support crossing the bridge, running the rest of the freeway, or navigating around the 37/101 interchange. At the time, I couldn't understand his timing – but, as I ran on alone, chatting with him periodically on the phone about how it was going, I realized he'd done the right thing. He couldn't crew for me out here, anyway – I had my safety vest on and was prepared to explain to any policeman that I was out here: because I'd run 200 miles and didn't have a whole lot left to go. But I didn't want to draw further attention to myself by having our car parked on the shoulder or be seen getting aid from the back of the car on the side of the free. Plus, once I got to the bridge that I'd seen and he'd mentioned (over the Petaluma River), if our car had been there, I'd have gotten in! Truly, that was mentally the hardest thing for me – not only was it considered a no-pedestrian freeway bridge, it was not intended for anything more than two lanes of vehicular traffic each direction and there was BARELY room for me. When I crested the rise in the center of the bridge and saw three 'Wide Load' trucks headed my way, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. But it all turned out fine – there was a railing and a curb, and everyone tried to make room for me. When I made it off the bridge, I knew that all I had to do now was to get to the train tracks at the 37/101 junction – and I could see that the tracks were abandoned next to me, so I figured that those would be, too. I zipped along 37 for those few miles, running every step – not fast, but afraid to walk and get caught – and I even had a police car drive by. I wanted to look at the car to see what jurisdiction it was from, but feared having them notice me because I was looking at them. As soon as they passed by, I realized that they must have seen me and not cared, which made me relax quite a bit.

I got to where I could see the signs for 101 and found the tracks that Wendell had mentioned – and I also found a nice bike path that paralleled them, so took that into a shaded, lovely, upscale industrial park. I asked to make sure that I knew how to get to Nave (and also learned that it didn't rhyme with 'wave' but was pronounced 'nah-vay'), and motored on down the street. Just as I got onto Nave, so did Wendell and Aaron! Just ahead was a McDonald's, so we stopped for lunch at 20.5 miles on the day and just over 5 hours. Not bad, especially considering the day before.

We were all pretty excited that I would finish on this day – but poor Wendell was still on his laptop trying to figure out how to get me over to places like San Raphael, Larkspur, Corte Madera, and Mill Valley. Once we got to Mill Valley, even I knew which way to go! As it turned out, I stayed on Nave 'til it ended and, right there, Wendell found a bike path that ran right along 101! I followed it 'til I saw them again, and then stayed on it 'til I reached San Raphael. Here Wendell told me what streets to turn on but to basically just follow the bike route marked in the street. I did this, and met the guys at regular intervals. At one point, near a big mall, Wendell sent me one way only to realize that it was wrong, so I hopped in the car to backtrack the ½ mile to where we'd left the correct route. Even though we weren't sure of the route through these areas, we were all starting to get really excited, as the end was definitely in sight and we were going to make it there today! This whole part of the journey is almost a blur – I enjoyed it all, whether up or down, city or residential, just because I knew that I was going to do this. Through a combination of bike route, bike path, and regular city streets I ended up in Mill Valley – which is just a jog down the bike path from Sausalito, the city at the near end of the Golden Gate Bridge. When I met the guys for the last time before entering the city of Sausalito, I finally felt that I could put on one of my Sierra to the Sea shirts that I'd heat-pressed with Karen's wonderful logo on it. I had initially planned to wear one each day, but figured I'd jinx myself for sure if I did that.



So I changed shirts and jogged toward downtown Sausalito. The guys parked and ran back a couple of times to meet and run with me. We were all in great spirits now, so amazed that we were almost done. Aaron was going to get dropped off by Wendell at Vista Point, where the bridge starts, and run across with me while Wendell drove to the far side and came at us from that end of the bridge.



As I climbed the LONG climb out of Sausalito (I'd forgotten from driving this section how much it climbs), another man started hiking with me. He asked me if this was the way to the Golden Gate Bridge. I told him it was, and that we had less than a mile to go and then just under two miles across. He was excited, as he'd feared he wouldn't make it before the sun set but, instead, it appeared that our timing would be perfect. Up and up we climbing, watching for the crazy, speeding cyclists who flew downhill toward us, one even with an open cell phone shoved between her cheek and her helmet straps, talking. As I passed the turnoff to the tunnel, which I wouldn't take today, I saw Wendell and Aaron waiting for me for the last time. We all hiked up toward Vista Point, and I had to whistle and gesture to the other hiker as he started to head the long way to the bridge. We rounded the turn, and THERE IT WAS! As we trotted down to the beginning of the bridge, Aaron said, "Mom, you're over 99% done!" which cracked us all up – especially when Wendell realized that, with almost 2 miles of bridge left, I really DID have about 1% more to do! Aaron, who loves to time things, started his watch as he and I crossed onto "the first red part" of the bridge. We ran and ran, weaving in and out of the people. It was a beautiful evening on the bridge, and it was wonderful for Aaron and me to cross it together. Neither one of us had even been across the bridge before, and I can't imagine a better time or way to do it. Aaron looked back and said, "Hey, Dad's following us!" which he was, taking more pictures.



Aaron and I discussed, as Wendell turned around, whether we'd even hear the honk of our car when he drove by this last time – it seemed noisy and bustling and windy. But I DID hear it! It was so neat – I looked over to see Wendell taking a picture as he drove by, just before he disappeared with the rest of the city-bound traffic.



Aaron, having not warmed up at all, wanted to walk and have a drink of water at the first upright, so we did that and then ran to the second upright, where we walked and he drank again. Not long after that, we could see Wendell running toward us, and we all ran down to the end of the bridge. Aaron stopped his watch at the end of the 'red part' (19:20), and I stopped mine at the end of the walkway by the giant cable cross-section. 12:28 and 44 miles for the day, 62:56 and 228 miles for the whole trip. We stayed only long enough for a photo – it was time to go home.



Even now, days later, I don't quite know what to think.

I am so fortunate that my feet are just not problems for me, that I don't blister or need to tape them or anything. As for my legs, other than the right calf thing, which now seems fine, and the fact that they have looked like they belong to the Michelin Man for the last three days (swollen, filled with fluid, and no definition), they are no worse for wear.

As for Wendell and Aaron, I couldn't and wouldn't have done it without them. I mean, really, I couldn't have even begun to think about this thing without Wendell's encouragement, support, and direction. I can't read maps well and have no sense of direction, so I'd never have navigated even the easiest sections. And, honestly, it don't think it ever crossed Aaron's mind that I wouldn't finish, that I couldn't just run across the state if I wanted to, which gave me a lot of strength. And when I was down (which was actually a lot more than this report makes out), they were what kept me going.

Also, the people who were writing to the PCTR message board – I have to thank you. Wendell read your comments to me as we drove up, and I read the new ones on his computer each night. It made a huge impact on me, more than you'll probably ever know, to think that you would care how it was going, that you would be interested in photos of the journey, that you would want me to finish. You and your comments and good wishes really helped motivate me to keep going out there.

Although it had nothing to do with why I wanted to go from Sierra to the Sea, we don't think anyone else has crossed California this way. Having made the journey, we know why it probably hasn't been done before. I would never do it again, but I already can't imagine not having done it.

This is where you qualify for the cash prize – seriously, I feel that I should give SOMETHING to anyone who actually reads this whole, long thing.

Sarah