

Riding Around the Sierra Nevada Roads



Ebbetts Pass – Death Ride Pass #3
May 28th, 2007

The Death Ride is just around the corner so it's time to climb some of the passes in preparation for the real deal. What is the Death Ride? It is a 129 mile ride that takes you over five climbs and 15000+ feet of climbing. The Death Ride is one of the premier cycling events in the area. One of the climbs takes you up to Ebbetts Pass. It is the third and fourth summit (you go over and down on the other side part way and then climb back). I consider the start of the passes to be the intersection of Highway 4 and Highway 89. There is a great parking area to the side and the famous 24% grade sign to mark the spot. Your ride will begin alongside the Carson River.



The climb starts out very gentle and you think it's going to be easy. At some point, the road changes from a clearly marked two way street to a wide single lane road. Be prepared. Half way up the climb the gradient will change dramatically. You'll look ahead at the road and think that there must be some mistake. No, it's really that steep. It will level off a bit but then the grade kicks up again around the switch backs. Factor in the elevation and the hot summer temperature and you have a really tough climb! I have seen this climb eat up a few riders during the actual Death Ride.



I have seen people crash into the sides of the carved out roads and I have seen people get dehydrated. Two scenes stick out in my mind during the '06 Death Ride. The first was that of a guy laying on the side of the road. His bike was trashed and he was cringing in pain. He had to be airlifted out by helicopter. The second was that of a young woman who was riding with her parents. She was hyperventilating and her face was red like a tomatoe. Her Death Ride ended on the second switchback. Don't underestimate this climb or this area.



At some point, you'll think to yourself, "Ok, this is enough. Where's the top?" Once you get to Kinney Reservoir you'll know that you're almost there. In fact, it's a gorgeous place to take a break – especially in the spring when there is still a little bit of snow kicking around. There's a sign at the top of the climb marking the elevation. Congratulations! You have completed the third Death Ride Pass! Had this been the real Death Ride then an abundance of riders, food, and water would have been waiting for you at the top. Today, I had one frog from a nearby pond croak at me.



My Garmin reported a starting elevation of 5713 feet and an elevation of 8676 feet at the top of the climb. It seems that I have lost some feet along the way but I'll accept these numbers for now for a total ascent of 2963 feet. Over a course of 13.09 miles, this gives me an average gradient of 4.3%. It sounds pansy but look at the profile. You can see where the road picks up at around the halfway mark. The spikes in grade ($>10\%$) are the switchbacks. You will see that the road gives one final kick near the summit.

