

Riding Around the Sierra Nevada Roads



Highways 341 and 342 to Geiger Summit
April 21st, 2007

The weather has been very foul lately with lots of wind, some rain, and a little bit of snow. Today the weather was good enough for a ride and the destination was Geiger Summit. I climbed from the south so I passed through the old mining towns of Silver City, Gold Hill, and, of course, Virginia City. These old towns are really quite unique and they stand as a symbol of Nevada's great past! I started the climb near the intersection of Highway 50 and Highway 341. There's a great little treat shop called the Chocolate Nugget. It was early in the morning so it was still closed. The shop is about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile in from the above mentioned intersection.



It doesn't take long for the old mining relics to appear and they are everywhere. Look around and you'll see lots of mines – both active and abandoned. Stay clear from the abandoned mines at all costs! They are not structurally stable and have been known to collapse. The motto here is, “Stay Out – Stay Alive”. There will lots of opportunities to pick up genuine mining souvenirs in Virginia City.



The climb is extremely steep and it is not recommended for large trucks or any vehicle pulling a heavy load. A more gradual (but longer) Truck Route is available. It is also a very beautiful climb and it's on the list to be explored too. Look carefully in the background and you'll see a road sign warning drivers of an upcoming section of 15% grade!



You'll see the steep portion of the climb when the road suddenly pitches up and looks like a wall. It levels off by some railroad tracks but then wastes no time to pitch up even steeper! My Garmin was showing an instantaneous grade of 20% to 27% during most of it. Honestly, the bike felt like it was slipping backwards in some places. It is one of the weirdest feelings I have had. The road levels off to 8% as you reach the Virginia City town limits. It's funny how easy 8% feels after the 20% to 27%.



I'm not even going to try to give a sales pitch for Virginia City. There is a ton of great resources online and offline that describe this once booming mining town. The town has lost very little of its original mining town architecture although the buildings are now filled with tourist oriented shops rather than mining supply stores. Be sure to spend some time strolling up and down the main strip. It's not very long. Don't be afraid to explore some of the very short streets off of the main strip. They can offer a nice quiet retreat from the hustle and bustle of the shops. The road takes a slight downward slope through the town. Continue through the town and climb slightly more to Geiger Summit.



So what is the final verdict here? In a nutshell, 'insane'. The steepest section of the climb from about 2.5 mi. at 4912 ft. in Gold Hill to about 5.9 mi. at 6322 ft. at the entrance to Virginia City has an average gradient of 7.9%. If you look at the graph then you will see it is a pretty steady pitch with only minor oscillations. The average grade of the section from 5.0 mi. at 5806 ft. to 5.9 mi. at 6322 ft. rockets up to 10.9%! If we count the entire length of the climb with a starting elevation of 4761 ft., a final elevation of 6802 ft., and a distance of 10.84 mi. then we have a very gentle 3.6%.

By the way, here is a close up of those railroad tracks. You'll see them on the way up. They look pretty brutal.



Here is the elevation chart. You can see the wild pitch near Virginia City.

