

# San Diego East Moto Sport Touring 2006

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I like telescopes, particularly the big ones. The first one I ever was able to get up close to was the observatory complex on the summit of Mauna Kea in Hawai'i and I was hooked. I just love the shape and size of the things for some reason. Since then I've had a chance to visit several others and it was my hope that on this trip, I would be able to visit Mt. Palomar Observatory. I was successful in that endeavor and found a lot of other parts of the state that I didn't know existed. The ride was decidedly not without challenges: technology, maps, weather and fatigue. It would also be the first ride I would abandon before the full weekend was complete. At this point though, the more challenging the ride, the more interesting it is for me. For now, I'll leave the journal in the form that my notes took to see if that is a usable format (it certainly is easier on me!)

I had originally wanted to head up into Sequoia and King's Canyon but the weather reports over Monday and Tuesday rained that plan out. I wanted to get a ride in, so I decided that I would try my hand at the desert, since it probably wouldn't rain there. Consequently, I was not as prepared, route-wise, as I like to be. I put together a game plan with fixed routes between my way points and figured I would just rely on my map and GPS to get me from place to place if there was a road closure.

## San Diego East Sport Touring Photo Album

### Day 1

I left work Wednesday afternoon and rode home to load the bike up. All I had to do this day was get from Playa del Rey to San Juan Capistrano. A quick short day to try and get me perfectly position on the Ortega Highway (a very popular ride in SoCal) for the next days ride. It rained a bit on the way down during the hour to hour and a half south. No real traffic to contend with which was a blessing. I got to SJC and checked into the hotel, laying my gear over the heater to dry it out. Popped downstairs and lubed the chain in the parking lot. I walked around then trying, without luck, to find some maps specific to the area I was heading into but only was able to find Thomas Guides. I ate at Bravo Burger (ok food, but not great) and turned in for the night.

### Day 2

I got up early as usual, around 6:30, to check the weather. It was very hazy and a little foggy so I decided to wait before heading out. I've ridden in clear sunshine, snow, sleet, rain, fog and hellacious heat and the worst of all is fog. It gets everything wet and never clears off of the face shield so you wind up squeegeeing your mask clear ever 2 seconds. Better to avoid it. I waited then and got on the road about 8:30 after picking up a ham and cheese sandwich at Ralph's from a guy named Juan who was VERY smily. The hotel I had picked was right on the Ortega Highway (CA74) so after getting the sandwich and checking out, all I had to do was turn right and go. Traffic was a little stacked up heading east so it took a little of the fun out of it but I got into it after a while and as the traffic lifted I started to enjoy it. Very clean pavement and nice and twisty; twists that are easy to look through and spot your entry into the next curve. I came over the ridge line and stopped at an overlook for Lake Elsinore.

The lake is very bizarre, looks like a gigantic puddle in the middle of a suburb. I was able to see the road head down into the valley pretty clearly so I waited a 60 count until the last car went down the grade and passed the halfway point before heading back out myself. The city of Lake Elsinore seems built like a grid and had a lot of construction that slowed me down in town. I finally opened it back up as 74 continued out of town on to Perris. The road from Perris to Hemet and then Valle Vista is a straight agricultural trucking road so not too interesting although the weather was turning out nice with big white clouds. Lots of orange trees blossoming... lots of bees. Immediately outside of Valle Vista the road makes an obvious hard left up the valley wall so I stopped to take a break by an orange grove and beehives. The peaks of the mountain range were hidden by clouds and when they parted I noticed that the mountains were covered in snow, which was unexpected.

[Click here for a Panoramic Photo of Lake Elsinore](#)

Nice tight twisties up to Idyllwild but I missed the split onto the Panoramic Highway (CA243) and stayed on 74 by accident. It was a nice road and I stayed on it a little to see where it went before turning around and making the correct turn onto 243 to head up into the mountains. Very pretty alpine look to the area with clean twisty roads and white crispy snow. Hardly any traffic up there too. Up and over the summit of Mt. San Jacinto and then down into Banning going through two huge hairpins. I got on I-10 in Banning and the temperature went up about 20 degrees from 65 to 85. Blast over to Indian Wells and get back on 74 except in the opposite direction and head southwest. Hands-down one of the best roads ever. Curve after curve upwards passing through HUGE boulders that look like someone just threw them all over the side of the valley. See a California Big Horn Sheep standing on one observing all the vehicles going by. I stopped trying to find places to take pictures and concentrated on enjoying the ride up through that rock-fest.

Once over the crest of the road I wound up in a long string of cars waiting to get through a construction area. I broke through the jam and started down into a huge basin-like valley. The road straightened out and I turned left onto 371 before stopping at a 76 station in Anza which felt entirely deserted. I filled up the tank and ate Juan's sandwich looking at a whole lot of nothing. Then back on 371 and onward to Temecula to finish the day's ride. 371 was a lot like the road to the Grand Canyon from the south except that it a) has hills and b) has no payoff.

I hit Temecula just before sunset, riding by the massive Pechanga indian casino and check into the Best Western. I walked around Temecula trying to find a bar before settling for a Hungry Hunter to grab a chicken sandwich and write my notes down.

### Day 3

I had to wait again for the haze to burn off, but by 8AM it didn't look like that was going to happen. The weather report said to expect rain too. I didn't think much of it since I was headed into the desert today and it is southern California after all. They always get worked up over the potential of rain, but never deliver.

I jumped on to I-15 due south. The traffic was very bad, it was a Friday morning after all, and was getting worse as I shifted over onto CA79. It all disappeared though on San Diego County Road 16 (S16). That was a beautiful ride with no cars and clean curves. It was a quick glide south to CA76 (what's with all the highways in the 70s around here????) where I picked up the highway towards Palomar. My GPS was telling me to take Nate Harrison road as an alternative to South Grade Road to get to Mt. Palomar so I made the left turn onto it. That road was awful: huge potholes, bad paving through miles of Orange Groves. Then, before I know it, I got to a sign that said "Pavement Ends - 3 Miles". From the road conditions, I wasn't entirely surprised but I was feeling a little frustrated. I pulled onto the dirt and had a look at my maps and GPS. It seemed that the main road up to Palomar was the only option so I turned around and followed the signs to S6 (South Grade Road).

It got remarkably cold as I head higher, but it was a clean ride up to Palomar Mountain General Store. This is a very popular area to go riding in between LA and San Diego and I've read stories where the residents on this road used to spread oil in the turns to discourage the flocks of sport bikes that would try and drag knees up to the general store and back. Strangely then, the area was deserted of most cars and with the exception of one lone Harley up there, I was the only motorcycle around. I imagine the weather had something to do with that and as I walked around the parking lot of the general store, rubbing my hands, a guy driving a honey truck asked if I want to swap rides so I could warm up. Nice try buddy :) I took the small road that goes to the observatory and parked my bike so I could explore a little.

I walked over to the 200' dome under cold grey skies and entered a gift shop that was akin to some sort of astronomical sanctuary. I went into the observatory proper and had a look around. Since it was early on a Friday morning, there

weren't many tourists around and there weren't any astronomers around to talk to so I headed back outside. Much to my shock, in the 10 minutes I had been wandering around inside it had started snowing! I jogged back to the bike and geared up. I turned on the GPS and followed the directions to Palomar Divide Road. Rather, I should say I followed the directions to where Palomar Divide Road SHOULD be... it doesn't exist despite the very vocal protestations of my GPS.

I traversed the four miles or so between Palomar Observatory and Palomar State Park four times trying to find this non-existent road. Each lap, the snowfall started to increase so after the fourth round trip, I decide to retreat down S7 towards Lake Henshaw. The missing pavement had now forced me into taking a wide arcing loop around and I would have to backtrack from 79 to 371 (through Aguanga) to Anza for gas again. In Anza, finally back on route, I was supposed to pick up Coyote Canyon Road south to get into Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (ABDSP) but, as fate would have it, the pavement died on Coyote Canyon Road just like Nate Harrison Road earlier in the day. I had come too far along 371 to turn around and head back a third time so I keep going back over the hills and through the boulders down into Palm Desert / Indian Wells. I spied a AAA office and head inside to grab some maps. Checking out the situation it seemed that I had three routes to get to my planned stopping point for the night, San Diego:

- Head over on I-10 to I-215 to I-15. That would have meant three major freeways on a Friday afternoon during rush hour. No thank you.
- Go back a third time along the 74-371-79 path. I detest backtracking so this was definitely the last possibility.
- Go immediately south on 86 along the western edge of the Salton Sea and then cut across the desert through Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on CA78 where I would finally be back on the original route. That looked like the best option.

I head down south along 86 right into the teeth of the wind; my Joe Rocket jacket acting like a sail and dragging back on my shoulders and neck painfully. The weather was warm as well on this side of the mountains so was starting to get about as uncomfortable as I could get. I ground my teeth and hunkered down until I finally arrive at the turn off onto 78. Then it was straight into the desert exchanging the wind for the glare of a setting sun. All in all though, after the wind subsided over the next few rises I headed through some magnificent dunes and a variety of desert landscapes in what turned out to be a very nice road. I passed Borrego Springs in the middle of the park and then bolted west along 78. All around were weird, tall, grassy, spiky plants with lurid red blossoms on them.

As it got darker I got closer and closer to my personal nemesis for this ride, CA79. I finally made for San Diego on 79 South, past a very desolate looking Lake Cayumaca, to get onto I-8 and head west into San Diego proper. I got to the Best Western and walked right into a tin-dictator hotel manager who was not pleased about me, my motorcycle and my lack of having a reservation. I have no idea what he was talking about. Finally, I convinced him to let me check in and I got settled, jaywalked across the street to the Casa Picante Cantina to have a bite to eat, get a drink and put my thoughts down. At the bar, I explained what I was doing to a couple of drunk frat boys who were curious about your disheveled author scribbling away with a pen in one hand and a tequila in the other. I think the only impression they had after I completed my story of how the day went, was that I must be certifiable to ride through stuff like that.

## Day 4

I don't have any notes from Day 4 because I wound up abandoning the ride around 2PM and headed all the way back home and never got my notes down. I did remember to retrace the final route I took on this last day in MS Streets and Trips and since I keep all my original maps for my planned trips, I know what I intended to do. So between that, my memory and the pictures I took, I should be able to give a fair accounting of how that day went and why I decided to abandon.

The original ride had me heading out of Santee east along I-8 to the south end of Anza Borrego State Park and heading into the park via Ocotillo. Then I would generally wend my way north to finally stop about 15 miles south of Temecula again in Pala. Well, I wound up riding a major chunk of that the day before as I criss-crossed the whole damn southwestern portion of California trying to recover from the lack of Palomar Divide Road, so I figured that I'd head east all the way out to the Arizona border and then try to find Glamis, which a co-worker had reminded me was out there somewhere. She and her husband regularly camp out there and ride ATVs and dirt-bikes so I figured that her recommendation would be pretty solid.

I took a quick jog south on I-15 to Chula Vista before finally breaking east on Otay Lakes Road/CA94. CA94 is the southern most major road in California and is only a few rough ridges away from the US-Mexican border. On many stretches you could see a dirty path running through and over the hills with the white SUVs of the Border Patrol out there moving slowly back and forth.

The road was fairly deserted, leaving me and another super bike to run fairly swiftly on the straights and carefully through some turns that were a bit sandy. I decided on a whim to head south on Tecate Road and go to the Mexican border. My insurance doesn't cover me in Mexico so I didn't actually go through, but I had a long look at it and talked to a couple of GS riders that were heading into Mexico to camp in Baja for a week. Then I headed back up to 94 and continued east across some really gorgeous and rustic landscape, passing (according my MS S&T within 350 yards of the border).

94 finally joins up with with I-8 just west of Anza-Borrego and I just kept going figuring I might as well see if I could get all the way to the Arizona border. Interstate 8 has some fascinating landscape on it. If the road above Indian Wells / Palm Desert looks like someone tossed a bunch of boulders around, then this looks like someone used a shotgun full of the the things. It's like they grow out there. I get within spitting distance of Araz Junction, about 10 miles from the AZ border before having to turn back to get gas. Close enough for me. I then headed north on S34 into the depths of the desert to Ogilby and ride through some of the most desolate places I've ever been on two wheels. I cut NW on the deadnuts straight Ted Kipf Road and then west on CA78, finally pulling into the dunes of Glamis and riding on the ribbon of pavement that runs through all the sand.

I pulled into the the viewing area parking lot and had a break while watching sand rails and ATVs with big scoopy tires hop the dunes and generally cut loose. The heat was increasing as the day went on and I could feel my strength waning, particularly because of the trip down 86 the previous day (in fact, sitting here over a year later writing this, I can feel that spot between my shoulders aching sympathetically!) I was already starting to doubt the wisdom of trying to ride for another full day at that point and figured I would just see how I felt when I got to Pala.

I went west out of Glamis on 78 through the endless expanses of dunes before cutting across some imaginary dividing line that separates the extreme of the desert from acres of cultivated agriculture. The temperature was hovering close to 90 now and I pulled into a Jack in the Box in Brawley to get out of the heat and look at the map. My shoulders were really hurting and I had entirely the wrong armor for this kind of heat. I didn't really fancy another full day of this, so I decided to pull the plug right there and figure out the route that would get me back home the fastest. Unfortunately, that route wound up being BACK along 86 (north this time) and then back through ABDSP from the east along 78.

The wind was just as bad again but now nearly 15 degrees warmer. My shoulder was barking badly at me and I thought about cutting the ride short right there but there was no where to stop short of the desert towns up by Palm Springs again. So I headed into ABDSP and out again this time cutting north on S22 to 76 instead of continuing west like the day before. I took 76 up to Temecula, heading north this time past Mt. Palomar and spending a great deal of that road stuck behind a deliberately slow Cadillac on a two lane highway with no passing areas. I finally dragged my butt to I-15 and headed home on the Los Angeles freeway system.

That last bit really hurt and i was so very happy to be home. Day four alone was a 481 mile day of primarily freeway miles at high speed and in high temperatures and it really wore me down fast. I particularly learned to make sure I have paper maps of the areas I go to in as great a detail as I can get because the missing roads and unpaved trails really played havoc with my plans and caused the ride to be far more strenuous than I planned. However, I am happy I got to see Glamis, because it really is impressive and I was shocked at the extent of the desert in the eastern portion of southern California. I knew the Mojave was out there, but man, it's extensive!