

## 2009 In Photos

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2009 boiled down to the list of challenges. Very few days went by that I wasn't at least thinking about the challenges, if not directly planning, executing or recovering from them. But while the challenges may have defined the year and shaped a lot of the efforts I took, it wasn't the only thing that happened. The 2009 challenges have their own entire section of this site, so with this article, I'll try to show some of the other things that went on, although in some months, the challenges just dominated the landscape entirely.

### January

I was working on getting my Advanced Open Water certification, part of which required some confined water work at the Hawthorne City Pool. While my fellow students and I were busy galavanting around under water, playing with Diver Propulsion Vehicles, practicing peak buoyancy control, and generally getting overchlorinated, some bastard crept under my truck, and the Tacoma next to me, and stole our catalytic converters.

I had just bought the truck from my father about 10 days earlier, and was revelling in not having the extra costs of regular motorcycle ownership anymore. And then this happened. The dealership quoted about \$1200 to get a replacement, but I found a forgiving wrecking yard that sold one to me from a salvage Tacoma for \$300. So I borrowed a friend's car, drove out to some place half way to Arizona, picked it up and installed it myself. Great way to celebrate ownership of your first car in five years.

This picture shows how I had to use my new found rock climbing knot tying skills to manufacture a pair of bowline knots to hold up the exhaust pipe, where it usually mounts to the catalytic converter. The replacement, which was nearly stolen as well, is now hard-welded on.

### February

While all the diving and hiking prep work was going on, I took some time off to meet some friends of mine from PodiumCafe. Chris, SuiJuris and I rented a vacation house in Solvang and had a cocktail party with some of the blog members that coincided with the time trial for the 2009 edition of the Tour of California.

The event was well attended, and I finally got to put some faces to people I'd only had the opportunity to get to know in the comment section of the live threads. A good time was had by all, particularly by Chris, Sui and myself. I have fond memories of that first evening: the Chinese Hot Pot, the bottle of sake the size of a human thigh, and the pear the size of a toddler's head.

### March

Another month, another cycling event. This time, I headed east to the Redland's Cycling Classic, the semi-official start for the United States "National Racing Calendar" (NRC). I had an ulterior motive to attending, since some friends of mine, Lyne and Steph, had promised to introduce me to the Swedish Women's National Time Trial Champion, Emilia Fahlin.

As luck would have it, the morning of the women's criterium, I woke up with a nasty flu. Not wanting to infect the entirety of the peloton, I had to keep my distance from the riders. I never got to meet Emilia.

Rumor has it, she was heartbroken when she was told I had to go home sick.

## April

At least once a month, I go up to Sacramento to visit my grandparents. My grandfather insisted that we were going to dye easter eggs this year, so he rounded up a flat of eggs, and grabbed an old collection of Paas brand egg colors and we dipped and dried eggs for an hour or so in the kitchen.

That's my grandfather, 94 years old and still going strong. He works in the garden in all seasons, helps to take care of my grandmother, practices with and sings in the church choir, and lives a life that should be seen as an example to all. He and my grandmother are great people and I'm happy I get to spend so much time with them.

## May

I signed up for the Joshua Tree Climbing School two day basics course in May of 2009 followed by a day of private guide service through them. This was to build a solid base of climbing fundamentals before my trip to Grand Teton in June.

What a fantastic experience this was. The two day class really provided a solid base, starting with bouldering and basic technique, and building up over the days to top roped ascents of pitches rated up to (realistically) 5.5 to 5.6. The private day, Don Reid, my instructor, went in depth on anchoring techniques and covered a lot of material related to what my experience would be like on The Grand. He tailored the teaching toward mountaineering rather than exclusively rock climbing and all that experience really paid off a little more than a month later. I also completed my first ever multipitch ascent, on a route called "Fotog". There's something to be said for being on a rock face more than a rope's length above the ground.

## June

Transformational is the only word I can think of to describe my experience in the Tetons. I set the goal to climb The Grand, then spent a solid year reshaping my body and learning new skills to be able to accomplish it. It's incredibly powerful. So powerful that to this day, six months past, I'm still trying to understand the shift in attitude that process has caused for me. So it was that one year to the day after setting the Triumph's side stand down at the camp site at Colter Bay, I loaded up my pack and set out on the hike to Corbett high camp.

I hiked over 40 miles on that trip. My guide and I made it to the upper saddle on the face of The Grand before having to turn around. I was physically tested to a greater extent than ever before. I experienced some incredible weather, and saw astonishing vistas. I swung an ice axe for it's intended purpose and strapped crampons to my shoes to gain purchase on ice. I did things that 366 days before that, I never would have considered.

## July

Coming back from The Grand, I immediately set about accomplishing some of the harder challenges that were on my list, but I also took a moment to go do something truly spectacular, and dove on the Eureka Oil Platform (commonly referred to as a "rig dive"). It's like diving on Neptune's Tinker Toy; massive support pillars as far as the eye can see, in waters nearly 600' deep.

One of the members of our group had the lanyard on a piece of equipment come loose and the knife fell from his wrist. I watched it go glittering down and come to a rest at 122' on a cross member of the super structure. I zipped down from 95' to go retrieve it and bring it back to Brother John. Two more inches to either the left or the right, and that little bit of plastic and metal was headed straight down the bottomless pit.

The rig dive was a fine example of how advanced training allows you to explore advanced locations. We had to use natural navigation, since compasses don't work in all the metal of the structure, we had to deal with 5' visibility on the Olympic wreck we dove on afterwards, we had to deal with a strong current on the south side of the superstructure. Training made all of that manageable.

AugustKUSC is hard set on nearly all the radios I own, and when I hear a piece I'm unfamiliar with that I like, I send a quick email to myself saying "TIMESTAMP". Then, at my leisure, I can go to their website and look up the composer and what the piece was. Over time, I've accumulated quite a list of music to examine, some of which I've been able to find and purchase, some of which I've now seen performed, some of which is still waiting to be moved from the post-it note to my collection.

I didn't do much in August. It was very warm, and I was exhausted from Grand Teton, Mount San Gorgonio and all the training. So I gave myself some down time: spent time with friends, listened to music from those lists, relaxed and ate good food.

SeptemberHaving spent a full month doing not much of anything, I became very re-acquainted with all the things I still haven't finished in my apartment, despite having lived there for almost 18 months. My office is, by far, the biggest eyesore of the lot. All I do is go up there, thread my way to the computer, do some work and then leave while trying to ignore that disaster area.

I have electronics components up there, A/V cables, paperwork, photography gear, motorcycle parts, tools, wood working equipment, a remote control boat, etc, etc. I look at it and realize I haven't touched 99% of it in 12 months time. Some of it because I have no need for it immediately, some of it because I can't get to it because of all the rest of the crap up there.

It's time is up though. By January 31st, Egg Shen will bring order out of chaos!

OctoberI woke up to go to the gym, one morning in October, and saw the fog laying thick and low in the valley between my apartment and Loyola Marymount University. I ran back into my apartment and tried to capture it as best as I could. Obviously, I wish the power line wasn't there. Or the Public Storage yard. Or the air conditioning units. Well, what can you do... you make the best shot you can with the tools at hand.

I have to say, I'm happy to be living above the fog belt now, instead of down in it, as I did when I had an apartment down in Playa Del Rey. It was miserable riding through that stuff on the way to work on the Triumph. I'd rather ride in a cloudburst downpour any day than through fog.

NovemberIn November, I had to attend Watchguard Firewall training up in Seattle. Fortunately, my buddy Chris lives up there and his birthday is less than a week before mine, so I got to be there when he opened his presents. His kids gave him a football and a Southwest Airlines play set! They were ever so excited to see Dad open up his gifts, although chances are, Dad still hasn't had a chance to play with them yet.

Funny thing... I spent nearly a week in Bellevue at training, in the shadow of large Microsoft office towers. The entire time I was there, Google Maps refused to work on my Blackberry. Now, I'm not a big fan of conspiracy theories, but...

December I wanted to put up a picture of my Christmas cookies, but I haven't had a chance to download any of them yet. So I'll have to back to the Challenge Well. After successfully summiting San Jacinto, I went to Catalina for the day with my dive buddy to work on our Divemaster mapping project. This also turned out to be the final task I needed to complete the 2009 challenge: a dive in December. We went out to the swim platform at Casino Point Dive Park, saw a ton of invertebrates and a harbor seal that was shocked to see two ugly neoprene clad idiots clumsily moving about its domain.

Much more diving to come in 2010. Much more of everything to come...