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## Day 2 - Bottega Gran Fondo... Where's George?

Wow, what a day! So, we've ridden probably close to 2k miles throughout CO over the course of our RTR days and I tell you what, today's grades might have matched some of our RTR climbs...minus about 10k in altitude obviously, which is of course a factor, but still! We rented bikes, so my Garmin was not working, but John's seemed to be faring a bit better than mine and he claims we saw 16+% at some point and my legs believe it! There's certainly some element of just not being quite in climbing shape yet due to a late start to our training season, but holy crap (and yes, I'm censoring so we can have a PG Post!!)

But back to the beginning...awoke this morning to some pretty cool news...@GranFondoDotCom highlighted us, Iorillo Cycling, as your source for daily BGF updates?! How cool is that?! As excited as Johnny was to meet all the pros, I was equally as excited to have the attention of BGF's social media entourage throughout the ride...so much pressure though!? We are proud to represent and hope we do not disappoint! I am going to blame the excessive energy outburst jumping around the hotel room this morning for my dismal performance on QOM though...who wouldn't? ;)

Started our day with Team Hincapie, but George quickly lost his

team (did he even know we were there?), riding with the likes of Christian VandeVelde, Dave Zabriskie, Lucas Eusier, and a last minute guest pro, Levi Leipheimer. What happened to "No Man Left Behind!" George? Seriously? We're still at Stop #1 waiting for our assist! Finding him, or any of the other pros along the way, was like a bad "Where's Waldo?" episode! I saw Christian and one of the others (not entirely sure which one as I think I blinked) literally FLYING downhill out of a stop (on gravel) while we were coming in...that may have been the last sighting of the day...no more "access". Although John had his sighting and story all ready to go... he found himself riding behind (a) VandeVelde and thought he would draft for a bit, pass, then tweet about passing "VandeVelde" on the route...failing to mention of course it was Leah (Christian's wife). Just when he had it all planned out, Lucas Eusier (and his massive 130lbs) came along and pushed Leah up the hill with the same ease with which you and I might lift a coffee cup...so much for passing, Johnny!

We were lucky enough to spend some pre and during ride time with Chris Carmichael, who is absolutely one of the nicest guys you want to meet (right next to Lucas Eusier). And we learned he's actually going to be at our camp in Tucson later this week, so cannot wait to spend some additional quality time with him (though I'm almost certain he is going to take Jason and Jay's place in pushing me beyond my limits throughout camp this week)!

Ride to Chef Stop #1 was as intended, a leisurely 8 miles. Grabbed some good grub, then we're off. Didn't fare too poorly on our first climb (though I can honestly say I still have not looked up QOM/KOM results, so have no idea where I may have fallen along the way, but I FELT ok, which was all I cared about).

Post QOM/KOM, ran into a few mechanical issues...I think my orange-clad guardian ride marshal ("GRM") must have thought I was nuts (and let's not forget my lovely husband has long since abandoned me at this point due to his OCD (obsessive cycling disorder) and quest for KOM...good luck with that! Levi? George, Lucas? Really?). At the top of QOM/KOM, somehow my brakes got completely out of whack...GRM fixed those...then like literally 500 feet into the succeeding climb, I could absolutely SWEAR I heard a loud "pop" followed by a "hiss"...both indicative of a flat, right? I immediately stopped, but low and behold, nothing. I had my (rental) bike turned upside down, checking every little thing, and nothing. What the heck did I hear? I don't know, but my GRM stopped, checked me out, and shortly thereafter gave me a quick pull through a windy stretch before riding off into the sunset...not before I popped a chain though...what the heck?! Seriously? Thankfully, the cycling gods must have moved on to someone else thereafter, as the remainder of the ride was mechanically uneventful...thank you GRM! That said, the bike rental situation was

not as bad as we feared it might be. While I'd certainly much rather have my Trek Madone 5.2, complete with power meter and functioning Garmin, having my seat and pedals on a Specialized Roubaix wasn't the end of my cycling world.

I sort of reached my stride around mile 35...oh wait, that's precisely when I both found my lovely husband and he stepped up and started leading...ahhh, for the love of drafting! The next stretch, which looked super easy on the profile, didn't feel quite as easy as it looked...maybe just tired, maybe a bit of wind, maybe just "who knows", but it seemed like it should have felt a lot easier than it was. Passed a small peloton of ride marshals fixing some sort of mechanical issue. In the spirit of "Got Milk?", their jerseys had "Need Help?" on the back...I refrained from pointing out the irony...and thank the cycling gods for karma, because later, when that same peloton passed us on the road and I read "Need Help?", I thought, "Why Yes, Yes I do!" and we quickly latched onto their 20+mph train. However, several miles later, someone from their group rotated in to the front...and well, he was clearly a veteran of the route and/or area, as well as overly ambitious, and it was all over. If I had kept that pace at mile 50, I may well have never made it to mile 75, so we alas gave up and kept our own pace.

The second climb of the day...well, it was pretty much never ending. So, Chef Chiarello, note for next year, please put the mileage to the TOP of the climb on the route profile...some of us require the mental component to get us to the top and not knowing how much more I had...was excruciating! As a result, Mt. Veder won today. I almost had it, but the combination of being behind schedule in training, being on a rental bike without my MTB gears (yes, you heard me right...I have MTB gears on my road bike, compliments of Landis Cyclery in Tempe, AZ!), and not knowing how much farther was left, I had to cave with probably 50 yards of the steepest part left, dismount, and hike. Total bummer! The remaining climbs were still extremely tiring at that point, but do-able. Next year!

The quick (side) story to the MTB gears...training for our first RTR in 2010...after successfully completing CTS Spring Training Camp on Trek Fx Hybrids (while everyone else was on their ridiculously light road bikes), we of course upgraded to road bikes, power meters, and all the other cycling paraphernalia "required". In doing so, my biggest fear was my ability (as a novice) to complete 500+ miles in CO with a LOT of planned climbing. Our bike shop guy said they had previously and successfully put MTB gears on a road bike and offered the same to me...SOLD! The other bike shop guy, upon picking up my brand new road bike, customized with MTB gears, made the "oh so funny" remark of "What, is she climbing Mt. Everest?". Well, upon our return to the bike shop for post-event tune-ups, I made sure to have them convey to Mr. Comedian that "No, I didn't climb Mt. Everest...that's only 29k...I climbed 32k!".

Yeah, baby! :)

Back to BGF...alas we finished all nearly 80 miles unscathed (and Kara's Cupcakes at the top of the last climb...awesome!). Straight to the bike shop to return our rental bikes, back to the room to shower, then a quick walk back into town and straight to...where else...

Bottega! A few appetizers on the patio before they reopened for dinner, then dinner there yet again. Never disappointed, plus we ran into Chef Patterson on our way out and let him know we had just booked reservations at his restaurant in Boulder in June since this year's RTR starts there. Also saw George starting his dinner with friends as we walked out, but refrained from giving him a hard time about the missing assist up the mountain. Contacted a friend in SC earlier in the day who has done Race Across America about someday meeting him and his wife at Hotel Domestique...we'll give George a hard time then!

Overall, a tremendous trip. Thanks to Chef Chiarello and his 150 staff and volunteers who pulled off this amazing event. He accomplished his goal of Flavor vs. Taste and Access. We did exactly as he'd hoped and enjoyed every minute of the access and amassed a significant amount of "flavor" on the trip, with many stories and enthusiasm for the event. We are totally looking forward to next year's BGF, but will plan our training accordingly in order to master Mt. Veder next time!

Off to Tucson, AZ to follow up our BGF with CTS Climbing Camp... take it easy on me Chris! :)

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*Created in Day One*