

WHEN THE 'BIG ONE' STRIKES...

—
BY CHARLES KELLY

In a bicycle column I write for my hometown newspaper, I pointed out that in the chaos that follows a disaster, the only people who may still be mobile are mountain bikers.

One example occurred locally, in what has been dubbed "The Flood of '82." In January of that year, 10 inches of rain fell in 12 hours. Mudslides and floodwaters cut off every major traffic artery in the area. My town was completely isolated. Even an off-road motorcycle can't cross three feet of rapidly moving water.

When the flooding was at its peak, Gary Fisher and I explored the extent of the damage on our mountain bikes, watching in amazement as cars floated down the main street. Where we couldn't ride, we waded across. And after the flood subsided, we compared notes with friends. It seemed that every area mountain biker had been doing likewise.

I was surprised and pleased when the local Red Cross contacted me about my article. It's interested in recruiting mountain

bikers for mobile disaster assessment, which must be done within the first 24 hours, when roads may still be impassable.

Here in northern California, everyone knows that the Big One is inevitable: the earthquake that will paralyze everything. Even if the roads are still usable, gasoline may be unavailable. It's this scenario that keeps the Red Cross alert. About 95% of Red Cross work is volunteer, and those taking part are required to attend several classes because it is important to coordinate help before it's needed.

Mobility is half of the disaster relief effort, and communications is the other. Local ham radio clubs have always been generous in helping the Red Cross. In most areas there are operators who know their duties and where to go to perform them.

If mountain bike clubs stepped forward to fill the other requirement, it would go a long way toward dispelling any negative images that off-road riders have acquired. ■