

# Stanford | Cycling Team

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## Our favorite cycling routes near Stanford

### Local Routes (Road)

#### Shorter Flat Options

- **The mini-loop:** This is the route you want to take on a day when your legs are screaming and your body is aching and anything more than half hour will kill you. Take Old Page Mill to Arastradero and right on Arastradero to Alpine and right on Alpine to Campus. Ideal addition to get your extra half hour in on your base training days when you miscalculated a longer ride. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **The Loop:** Ideal option for a flat route with no stop lights on a recovery day. The standard route normally starts off by heading up Alpine to Portola and taking Portola to Sand Hill. The reverse direction is popular with the tailwind speedsters dashing along the downward slant of Alpine Rd. The benchmark 15 mile route can be enhanced by further additions like Arastradero; going to the gate at the end of Alpine; adding the "maze" to it in Woodside. The "maze" is short for: taking Tripp on 84E to Kings, R on Kings, L on Manuella, L on Albion and R on Olive Hill to Canada (or the reverse direction). Time: 45 mins to 1 hr + (depending on additions) [\[Aerial Photo \(B/W\)\]](#)
- **Foothill:** Reserved for days when all you want to do is recover as frequent stop lights make any steady effort quite impossible. The turnaround points for 45 mins (Grant), 1 hr (Homestead), 1:15 (if the route parallel to foothill is taken on way back), 1:30 (Stevens Creek Blvd). For those who hate stop lights or want variety, the route that is parallel to Foothill is normally taken by turning right at Homestead/Vineyard. Take right at first intersection (Deodara). Keep following the closest parallel path to Foothill (Granger, Frontero and County Club Dr.) until you hit Magdalena. At this point, you take a left and a right on Summerhill. Summerhill gets you to Elena/El Monte. Take right on El Monte and left on University. Follow University till Burke. Take left on Burke and right on Fremont. Keep following Fremont and cross Arastradero to Hill Crest and finally it gets you back to Foothill opposite VA hospital.
- **Canada Road:** The TT practice area, It is a rolling road from Woodside to 92. Can be embellished by adding the Crystal Springs loop to it (extra 7 miles). It is roughly 30 miles and takes about an hour and a half at decent clip (without the Crystals Springs loop). Runnymede Rd which runs parallel to Canada starting with 280 underpass (before Jefferson) is used for echelon TTT practice because it has virtually no traffic. [\[Canada Rd on a gloomy day\]](#)
- **Alameda loop:** Another flat option for those tired of standards. The route starts off at the intersection of Alpine Rd and Sand Hill Rd where you now go straight onto Santa Cruz Ave. Shortly afterwards Santa Cruz Ave veers to the right and you are on Alameda de las Pulgas. The bike lane, while

sufficient, is nowhere as generous as on Foothill, and the traffic can be rather overbearing. Alameda could be taken all the way to San Mateo (12 flat miles) or one can turn around at any point. Some minor hills all over the place.

- **Saratoga loop:** Relatively unfrequented loop, this loop is done by going down foothill past Homestead, Stevens Creek. Soon past Stevens Creek take L on Santa Paula, R at T junction, bear left on McClellan, Right on Bubb, Left on Rainbow, R on Stelling, L on Prospect, R on Sunnyvale Saratoga Road, Right at Saratoga on hwy 9, Right on Pierce, L on Eden and back to Foothill. Time: 2.5 hrs (for people wanting to do shorter and completely flat option, Take left on Sunnyvale Saratoga road, left on Rainbow, right on Stelling, left on Homestead to Foothill: Time 1 hr 30 minutes.
- **Bayshore loop:** (dedicated to John Cahoy): Down Foothill, left on Grant, First right past El Camino, left at next T, on to Stevens Creek bike trail, Take bike path all the way through the Shoreline park and if you don't get lost, you can end up on Bayshore road near Oregon Expressway. Take bike bridge (hidden entry, of course) across 101. R on Santa Ana, Left on California, Underpass, Right on Park, Left on Stanford. It is a fun little route with wooden bridges, bicycle barriers to get around. If you are riding this in late fall or early winter, do not forget to check out the shadows when you have the creek by your right in the Shoreline park. Time 1.5 hrs
- **Dumbarton loop:** (dedicated to Ueyn Block): Down Palm Drive and University Avenue, through the hustle and bustle of downtown Palo Alto, across 101, through East Palo Alto and onto Dumbarton bridge (aka 84). Battle some wind and road debris (good for time trialling!). Take Marshlands Rd to Thornton Ave and turn around unless you are heading for Early Bird Crits or further into East Bay. Time 1.5 hrs

## Longer Flat Options

- **Around the Bay:** Down Palm Drive and University Avenue, through the same hustle and bustle of downtown Palo Alto, across 101, through East Palo Alto and onto Dumbarton bridge (aka 84). Battle some wind and road debris (good for time trialling!). Take Marshlands Rd to Thornton Ave which turns into Paseo Padre Pkwy. Left on Ardenwood Blvd, and then onto the bike path along levee. Follow Alameda Creek till Niles Junction (intersection with Mission Blvd). Take right on Mission into Milpitas. Right on Calaveras Blvd. Get on the bike path that parallels Hwy 237 (with one necessary detour onto the other side). Sunnyvale Baylands County Park. Moffett Park Dr., Moffett Blvd, W. Middlefield, Charleston, Foothill. ~60 miles.
- **Uvas loop:** Follow Saratoga loop route into Saratoga, take Hwy 9 into Los Gatos, turn left after going over Hwy 17 onto Los Gatos Blvd. Right onto Blossom Hill. Right on Camden. Right on Almaden, left on McKean which later turns into Uvas. Ride rolling hills around Uvas reservoir. Left on Watsonville. Left on Oak Glen Ave. Right on Llagas. Left on Hale which turns into Santa Teresa. Left on Coleman and back to Blossom Hill. There are many variations if one wants to avoid major roads in San Jose area. Smaller roads connect to bigger roads or run in parallel. Over 100 rolling miles for long-distance enthusiasts!

## Short Hills

- **Los Altos Hills:**
  - The most common route that the club takes is to take Arastradero, Purissima, right on Elena and reach El Monte. There are less less traveled options, even along this road that is worth a

look.

- At the top of the mild(?) climb on Elena off Purissima the 3-way stop indicates a road Natoma to the right. Take Natoma to Black Mountain (flat) and right on Black Mountain to Altamont (gentle upward grade) and you are near Page Mill.
- Another road that goes off Elena to the right is called Taffe that is about half a mile past Natoma, before the intersection of Elena and Robleda. It is a gentle grade all the way to Altamont. Look for the beautiful vineyards on you left in the valley.
- On Purissima from Arastradero, if you do not take a right on Elena, you hit Robleda. Right at the T gets you to Elena, left meanders and if you continue left on a fork, it will get you near Fremont and you can escape to Foothill expressway by taking a left on Fremont and right on Edith.
- In the fork above mentioned, take right and you are on Chaitin and follow Chaitin and it will take you all the way to Burke. take left on Burke to reach foothill.
- Take Fremont from Arastradero (reverse direction of suggested path parallel to Foothill). About a mile or so on Fremont, instead of following Fremont by taking left at stop sign, if you go straight you are on Concepcion and this connects to Robleda. The key point on this route is a road that comes to your right called Viscaino which is apparently ideal for 1-minute intervals on reasonably steep grade.
- **Palo Alto Hills:** As you head west on Page Mill Road and are about to start climbing, take a left on Paseo Del Roble, this is a quick hill and you loop back to Page Mill and take an immediate right onto Alexis Drive. You go by the Palo Alto Hills Gold and Country club and continue up till a dead end. Then head back down the hill same way you came. Also to continue, go south on Arastradero and take a right onto Stirrup Way and check out Saddle Court and Saddle Mountain Drive. There's a dirt trail at the end of Saddle Mountain Drive which leads into unknown. All dead ends, but fun.
- **Emerald Lake Hills:** Emerald Lake Hills is an amazing maze of roads on the hills overlooking Redwood City. Many ways exist to enter this maze. One, take Alameda to Harding Ave and turn left. Hillcrest Dr that you soon encounter to the right is your first short hill. If you take it, turn left on Oak Knoll. Else proceed to Canyon Rd directly. Take Canyon Rd to Cardilleras Rd to Lakeview/Ferndale Way to Summit Dr to Mountain View Way to Glendoch Way to Hillcrest Way to Eastview Way to Maple Way to Glencrag Way to Jefferson. Or in reverse or any other Ways and side streets.
- **Mt. Eden:** (0.65 miles, 240 ft, 6.6%) **Mt. Eden** is the first climbing test for Stanford's south expeditions. It starts at the fork with the Stevens Cyn. Rd and is a relatively easy, taking no more than 5 minutes to climb. Santa Clara Archery Range is hidden along the way.
- **Pierce Rd.** (0.7 miles, 280 ft, 7.9%) This climb starts at the intersection with Mt. Eden Rd and ends by the **Mountain Winery** gates, a good spot for nature break and refueling. The bottom of the climb is well paved but steep at around 10%. After a minute of climbing, one is welcomed by a respite of flatter section of 5-6% grade. Following the pair of sharp hairpins the road steepens to ~8% but the end is nigh!

## Steep Grades:

- **Summit Springs** (13.3%) On Tripp road between 84 and Kings Mountain, this 0.7 mile 500 ft 2 step climb gets any one on any day as it reaches 23% near its very top (26% on the inside of the hairpin).
- **Moody** (11.2%) Some people do intervals on **this 0.5 miles 320 ft climb** while others grimace at the thought of surviving it once. If you had the capacity to stop pondering the meaning of pain, you™d realize that the climb is quite pretty. For example, 90 seconds into it, you™d pass **Cactus Wall**. Gorgeous **views** of the canyon below are best seen while descending. **This** is a welcome sight too. Buena Vista Dr to the left of the stop sign is a good place to rest your aching bones. **[Aerial Photo]**
- **Joaquin** (14.6%) At the end of Alpine road deep in Los Trancos Woods, just about where it meets the gated end, it is brutally steep (max 19%) but not too long (0.3 mi, 270 ft). Did I say not long? Scratch that, it is long enough at that! At the end Joaquin connects to Old Spanish Trail which offers alternative ways to descend to Los Trancos. Old Spanish Trail itself is a very old road that existed way before Joaquin, Page Mill or Alpine. Public section dead ends at the private property but the road continues to its eventual junction with Page Mill even if unpaved. **[Aerial Photo]**
- **Los Trancos** Again off Alpine to the left if you are going up on Alpine, it connects to Joaquin. It is often used as a descent after climbing Joaquin. The overall grade is 3.8% but there are significant pitches up to 18%.
- **Golden Oak** Off Alpine and on to Alpine, one entry starts immediately to after Arastradero in the uphill direction of Alpine and rejoins Alpine some 0.3 miles later. However golden Oak is about 0.8 miles long with significant portions around 14-15%.
- **Westridge** (10.5%) The steeper version (> 12% in steepest points) of this 0.7 mi climb (380 ft elevation gain) is taken after the shopping complex as you head up Alpine and it connects you to Portola. **[Aerial Photo] [Photo]**
- **Crestview Drive** (8.3%) taken off Edgewood in Canada to Melendy in San Carlos, is a monster. Listed 8.3% is misleading because there are, thankfully, several flat spots. You gain 630 ft in 1.45 miles.
- **Valparaiso** (12.3%) One block long steep pitch really close to campus on Alameda reached by taking left near Fire station if you are heading from campus on Alameda. Only 0.2 miles long.
- **Quinnhill Rd** (16.4%) One block long really steep pitch that is straight and to the point - gain 130 ft or else. The climb is located in Los Altos and can be reached via Foothill and University Ave (the latter road runs parallel to Foothill between El Monte and Magdalena. Once at the top (La Cuesta), you can descend the other side to Summerhill for more fun riding.
- **Tollgate Rd** Tollgate Rd runs between Saratoga Heights Rd (off Pierce) and Congress Springs Rd (aka Hwy 9) or vice versa. Consider Saratoga Heights and Tollgate as one. Each direction starts with a climb, much more strenuous in the reverse direction, a wall really, 16-17% for about 200 meters. The pavement is smooth, surrounding mansions and vistas are enjoyable, a welcome diversion from standard routes overall.
- **Santa Maria Ave** (8.5%) Santa Maria Ave is a series of switchbacks on the hillsides west of Portola Rd near border of Portola Valley and Woodside. The turn (somewhere between OLH and Willowbrook) is marked and yet is easy to miss. Some of the pitches are rather steep but never too long. Few flat spots (e.g. at Le Roy junction) are merciful. Small network of parallel roads provides many

alternatives, all sloping (Tynan Way, LeRoy Way, Russel Ave). Descent could be precarious. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

- **Bunker Hill Drive** (9%) This hill starts at Polhemus Road along Crystal Springs appendix loop west of San Mateo. It starts out rather gently, with plenty of flatteners. Most of the serious climbing is in the last few hundred meters, where it steadily rises at a 14-16% grade. Since overall climbing distance is 0.55 mi, the average grade is not so bad. Beyond the crest, it has a short drop, crosses over 280, and meets with Skyline Blvd. In the reverse direction it could be used to shorten the Crystal Springs loop, but make sure your brakes are in good shape. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Ticonderoga Dr** This hill is also off Polhemus Rd but closer to Hwy 92. Also steep. It connects to Lexington Ave at the top which loops back if taken to the left, or connects to Bunker Hill Dr if taken to the right.
- **Club Drive** (8.8%) Club Drive starts at Alameda in San Carlos and climbs up to the monster of Crestview. It rises at "just" manageable 10% grade, then lets you draw a deep breath by flattening for a while, smashes you in the legs with 15-17% grades, and then flattens out again at the top. As you grunt up the steep section, you can admire the view of one of the undeveloped canyons in Belmont if you can tolerate the often-speeding traffic, as it is one of the main access roads up to Crestview.
- **Huddard Park Service Rd** (7.9%) Huddard Park Service Rd could be reached via bumpy Greer Rd. Almost at the end of Greer, take left at the gate (usually open). The first right turn leads you over wooden bridge to the picnics area. Keep to the left here. Once at the fork with big sequoia in the middle take any as the roads rejoin shortly afterwards. Past the barriers turn right. The measured climb starts here. The grade is fairly easy initially. Then you suffer couple of road climb fits, pass another gate and turn left towards the toll booth. Now suffer continuously past the toll booth and towards the junction with Kings Mtn Rd on ~10% grade. You are fit if you can make it under 5 minutes.
- **Patrol Rd** (10.2%) Patrol Rd connects supersteep Summit Springs Rd to Entrance Way (just above Kings Mountain) and continues to eventual dead-end. The section between Summit Springs and Entrance Way is a descent, Entrance Way to dead and is a 10.2% 2/3 mile long climb. Entrance Way itself is a short somewhat steep climb between Kings Mountain Rd and Patrol, ideal for 60 sec hill repeats. Patrol Rd west of Entrance Way has a nice section of 18% for hill enthusiast. For the connoisseur, there are several short climbs on the side roads off Patrol Road. One in particular, Patrol Court, starts with a left switchback that hits 23% on the outside, and 28% on the inside.
- **Cervantes Rd** (11.1%) Both ends of Cervantes Rd are on Westridge Rd in Portola Valley. The bottom is on Westridge near Portola Rd. The real climb starts at about Sioux Way where the road throws off the mask of benign rustic thoroughfare and turns to cruel hill slopes. Appropriately, the climb crests at Peak Ln. beyond the top, the road gradually descends towards Westridge.
- **Godetia Drive** (8%) Godetia Drive is a shortcut from Canada Rd to Jefferson. If you've never ridden it, it's the first street you come to after passing the back entrance to Canada College as you're heading north on Canada. About 0.5 miles on old pavement past some stables.

#### **How to get there:**

- **Woodside:** Take Sandhill over 280. There are various options to reach Woodside from Sand Hill: Whiskey Hill, Manzanita, Mountain Home/Portola. Additionally you could take Alameda all the way

past 84, left at fork onto Fernside, left at T, (McGarvey) right at top of short steep pitch, and left at Jefferson to Canada, and left towards Woodside.

- **Los Gatos:** Get to Saratoga via route in Saratoga loop above and continue straight on Hwy 9 rather than taking right to go to Mt. Eden. This is near various climbs posted below like Shannon, Hicks, Soda Springs, Loma Almaden, etc.

## Longer Hills:

### In the Vicinity

- **Old La Honda** (3.35 miles, 1290 ft, 7.3%) This is a beautiful classic benchmark climb of the region. It is neither terribly steep nor long, but its proximity to population centers and the beauty of its narrow switchbacks and generous shade make it extremely popular. Almost all local riders know their best times up this hill, from the bridge to the stop sign. Each Wednesday it is climbed by the infamous "Noon Ride", often including national-caliber riders. It was recently repaved over 75% of its length, making it a bit faster. Its narrow, blind corners make Old La Honda a terrible descent, and almost all rider opt instead to descend nearby Highway 84. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Kings Mountain Rd** (4.25 miles, 1540 ft, 6.8%) This is another popular climb that can be used to reach the Skyline Blvd on top of the mountain range separating the valley from the ocean. Generous shade, relatively moderate if inconsistent grade attracts many local riders. The climb is not too strenuous and the descent is quick. The lower portion is lush, with a couple of flatter spots, such as when the road crosses Squealer Gulch. The middle and upper portions are a tiny bit more exposed as the road meanders, hairpin after hairpin, up the slopes on Skyline Ridge. Unlike OLH there's no established timing protocol. Some measure this climb from the intersection with Tripp Rd, others from Patrol Rd fork, the difference between the two being on the order of 50 sec. Another alternative is to take Greer Road, from its intersection with Kings Mountain Road just below the start of the climb, to the Huddard Park service road. Take a right over the wooden bridge and you'll eventually arrive back at Kings Mountain Road, having bypassed its lower third. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Alpine Rd** (4.1 miles, 1250 ft, 5.8% including dirt) From Sand Hill Road to Portola Valley Road, Alpine Road has a significant amount of automobile traffic but is still quite rideable. In these 4.2 miles it gains approximately 400 feet. South of Portola Valley Rd, however, the road narrows, and enters the beautiful Corte Madera Open Space Preserve. After a relatively flat initial 1.3 miles, the grade steadily increases for another 1.6 miles. Here, just past the intersection with Joaquin Road, Alpine is gated and the pavement ends. It remains dirt for 2.5 miles, gaining approximately 950 feet, until joining the top of Page Mill Road. The dirt portion is popular with beginning mountain bikers but is also fun and quite doable on a road bike, climbing or descending, if it hasn't rained during the previous few days. Unfortunately, a landslide has taken out a significant section of Alpine Road, leaving it impassable by bike. A single-track detour bypasses this section. However, 50% grades and exposed roots and rocks make this path unrideable for road bikes -- a significant amount of walking must be done. Mountain bikes can handle most of it, however. If one isn't in the mood for dirt, a left turn onto Joaquin Road from Alpine Road 50 meters before the gate rewards one with a brutally steep, short-but-not-short-enough climb. From the top, turn right onto Old Spanish Trail, then left onto Vista Verde, then right onto Ramona. A right at the end, onto Los Trancos, will take you back to Alpine Road north of Portola Valley Road. [\[Aerial Photo: paved section south of Portola Valley Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: from Joaquin to Page Mill\]](#)

- **Hwy 9 East** (5.25 miles, 1790 ft, 6.5%) The East portion of the Hwy 9 (aka Congress Springs Rd) connect Saratoga to Saratoga Gap (intersection with Skyline). Since most frequently Hwy 9 is reached via Pierce Rd, the starting point for the climb is the bridge a little further uphill from intersection with Pierce. Another connector further uphill is Redwood Gulch Rd. The grade is quite even and moderate at 6.5% average. Only towards the top the road tilts up by 0.5%. Signs along the side of the road provide frequent reminders of the distance yet to ride. Car traffic can be quite heavy on this wide 2-lane road, and it is thus perhaps better for descending than climbing. As a descent it is really very good and provides plenty of practice for smooth gliding over the corners and a few tighter hairpin bend challenges. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Page Mill** (8.4 miles, 2000 ft, 7%) The quoted stats for the climb don't do it proper justice. The measured 8.4 miles start at the intersection with Arastradero and terminate at the intersection with Skyline. The proper climb starts at about 1.2 mile mark where the roads sustains 7-8% grades for may be 0.5 miles. Beyond that the grade is highly inconsistent with the steepest pitches in excess of 15%, two intermediates descents and a sequence of rolling hills. Along the way are some excellent views of the Silicon Valley and of Alpine Creek Basin. As a descent, Page Mill is quite challenging and very popular, especially among experienced descenders. The road is narrow and steep with poor visibility in the corners, however, so riders must watch carefully for motor traffic. Several sections have poor pavement, and the descenders better keep their posteriors out of the saddle. Other routes which cut into Page Mill are Altamont Road and Moody Road, both from Los Altos Hills. Moody is especially notable, as it averages 11.2% over 0.5 twisting miles. [\[Aerial Photo: Lower slopes\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Midsection\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Top part\]](#)
- **Jefferson Rd** (1.9 miles, 520 ft, 5.1%) Jefferson Rd is a steady and not very long climb in Redwood City off Farm Hill. The top is not well defined because it is so gradual. Good place for your interval workouts. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Hwy 92 East** (1.7 miles, 520 ft, 5.3%) The East side of the Hwy 92 (aka Half Moon Bay Rd) connects the end of Canada Rd with Skyline Blvd. Since the intersection with Skyline is a mathematical saddle point, this is one of the easiest ways to cross the mountain range. Indeed, it only takes about 10 minutes to gain the requisite 520 ft of elevation gain, starting right after the bridge separating Upper and Lower Crystal Springs Reservoir, since the grade is steady and is not difficult. The biggest annoyance is the amount of the traffic en route to Half Moon Bay, from weekend tourists to massive trailers moving goods. But isn't it an incentive to climb fast? Flower stand near the top caters to the visitors of Skylawn Memorial Gardens cemetery to the north of the saddlepoint, so no podium girls there. As a descent, Hwy 92 is effortless but for the care to be taken to avoid riding slower or faster than surrounding motor vehicles. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Redwood Gulch** (1.35 miles, 690 ft, 9.7%) Redwood Gulch Rd connects Stevens Canyon Rd and Hwy 9 and as the name implies runs in the gulch in the redwood forest. It starts with the normal 7-8% percent grades on good pavement and in generous shade. Two or three minutes later one makes a sharp right hairpin turn and is forced into lowest possible gears. The 0.3 mile long section of 15+% grade is brutal and severely tests the desire to ride the straight line. Fortunately, the next flatter section provides much welcome respite. After passing several semi-deserted trailers, the road is back to its tormenting steep grades on recently repaved surface. The last 100 meters near intersection with Hwy 9 is short descent. In reverse, Redwood Gulch will test your brakes. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Montebello Rd** (5.3 miles, 1940 ft, 6.9%) Montebello is a dead end for cars through open space preserves and past several vineyards. The climb starts with 7-8% grades and quickly steepens to 10%

as it meanders along the lower slopes. On these lower slopes you could sometimes encounter peacocks crossing the road. In about 1.5 miles the road levels off considerably and then enter the shaded grove. Here one can ride in a big ring without any trouble. As the false flat section ends, one enters the region of inconsistent grades with some steep corners and in the open view of the sun and the valley below. At the end of pavement, the road continues as a dirt road towards Page Mill for an unmatched panorama of Silicon Valley. Peacock Ct offshoot of the Montebello (at 0.72 mi mark, 330 ft up from Stevens Canyon) is claimed to be one of the steepest in the region, but the verification is difficult as the road goes over private territory. Aerial photograph shows Peacock Ct to reconnect back to Montebello in the middle of flat section. What else is known is that two gates guard the road but are not really at the two junctions with Montebello so getting off the bike to cross spoils the purity of climbing experience. Maximum grade is about 24% and there is 0.1 mi long section at over 21% - very difficult indeed. Montebello Rd also served as the scene of collegiate racing battles, as SJSU held HCTT on it. [\[Aerial Photo: Overview\]](#)

- **Sanborn Rd.** (1.9 miles, 540 ft, 5.3%) Sanborn Rd is a dead end offshoot off valley side Hwy 9, at about 2 mile mark from Saratoga. After the initial run in one faces with a series of steep but mercifully short wall. The second half is significantly flatter. The road passes the entrance to Sanborn-Skyline county park with multitude of dirt trails (illegal for bikes) leading to Skyline. Sanborn Rd turns into a unpaved private road which is purported to connect to Black Rd via Lake Ranch Rd and to mighty Bohlman via Allegheny Ct and McGill Rd! As a descent Sanborn Rd is fast and furious owing to the lack of turns and significant grades towards Hwy 9. Caution has to be exercised as one has to stop before reentering Hwy 9. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Hwy 84 East** (3.4 miles, 1020 ft, 5.7%) With its gentle, steady grade and modest elevation gain, Hwy 84 (aka La Honda Rd) is the easiest route from Woodside (intersection with Portola Rd) to Skyline Blvd and on to the coast. However, it carries a considerable amount of auto traffic, and is thus rarely used by experienced riders for climbing. As a descent, however, it is quite popular; the sweeping turns, good visibility, and well-maintained pavement make for a fast, relatively safe trip down. Watch out for wet spots after rains in the 3 hairpin turns. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Bear Gulch Rd East** (3.1 miles, 1670 ft, 10.2%) Bear Gulch is a beautiful, steep, narrow paved road from Highway 84 to Skyline Blvd above its intersection with Kings Mountain Road. It is similar in nature to Old La Honda but steeper. Unfortunately, it is private, and access is blocked at top and bottom by gates. The road was closed to public access in 1978 and biking and hiking is illegal (even for the residents!) along its length except for a tiny "easement" where Bay Area Ridge trail connecting Wunderlich and Huddard parks crosses the road. In 1978, the road was unpaved and described as having "adverse grades" and "unnecessary for present and prospective public use". Subsequently, the road was paved and gated at both the bottom and the top, presumably by the home owners. The lower slopes are adorned by mansion-type properties. The gate at the bottom is electric and tall, located about 1.2 miles from Hwy 84. The gate at the top is low. [\[Aerial Photo: lower slopes\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: middle slopes\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: upper slopes\]](#)

## Further South

- **Shannon** (1.3 mi, 340 ft, 4.9%) Shannon is the steady hill leading to so-called Top of the Hill. You'll encounter this hill if you venture South in search of Holy Grail of Umunhum or similar. The grade steepens as the climb progresses, and emerges from shadows into the open towards the top, past horse pastures, ranches and stables. At the top, you can see stupid turkeys cuckooing enviously at the horses. Rustic paradise, no less! [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

- **Bohlman - On Orbit - Bohlman** (4.1 miles, 1950 ft, 9%) Brutal, oppressive, brutal, painful, savage, arduous, killer, murderous, blood-and-guts, formidable, backbreaking, grinding, fatiguing, unsparing, harsh, merciless, intense, exhausting, austere and even slavish! This is a really crank-twisting climb and will put your uphill determination to a severe test. It is no coincidence that the climb starts at the Saratoga's Madrona cemetery where many an exhausted cycling souls may have found a rest! The listed stats show a considerable average grade of 9%, but it is much worse than that because there's considerable flat section and even mild descent at the top. On Orbit is an alternate route that bypasses a portion of Bohlman and is should be taken to realize full pain benefits of the climb, straight Bohlman is only 1780 ft in 4.2 miles (7.9% average). 0.5 mile long section on On Orbit averages out nearly 20% and you'll find it extremely hard to ride straight line. Once you give in to temptation to weave a lower grade lane across the road, the next difficulty becomes to make sharp turns at the edges of the road as one weaves across. Low gear of 39/28 or even a triple really helps on this climb! The maximum grade is 22% (24% inside the right turn) The last mile or so is nearly flat but features a treacherous off camber turn dusted with sand and gravel. Even so, **this** is a welcome sign, really. Steepest section compensates with best **views of the valley**. From the top of Bohlman, if you survive, there is a 0.9-mile dirt road with two gates to the right (bear right on the dirt) to the top of Montevina Road, which can be descended to Highway 17. McGill Rd (0.65 paved miles with views) near the top could lead you back to Hwy 9 via Allegheny Ct (see McGill/Allegheny intersection **here**) and Sanborn were it not for Allegheny being unpaved and private. A few interesting roads shoot off Bohlman. Norton Rd (privately maintained but accessible) loops back to Bohlman via **Kittridge Rd** (with short unpaved trashy stretch) or to On Orbit via Kittridge and **Quickert**. Private **Wildcat Ridge Rd** forks off Quickert and descends towards Villa Montalvio Arboretum crossing aptly named Wildcat Creek and offers unparallel views of the valley below. As a descent, Bohlman is not bad especially towards the top because the steepest pitches are also rather straight. **[Aerial Photo: View of lower slopes from Saratoga]** **[Aerial Photo: View of the top]** **[Photo: First 300m]** **[Photo: Brutal section number 2]** **[Photo: Bohlman - On Orbit first intersection]** **[Photo: Sweat trickles on the road ...]** **[Photo: Dangerous Descent]** **[Photo: This section is steeper than it seems - 20%]** **[Photo: Another view of Silicon Valley]** **[Photo: Bohlman between On Orbit intersections]** **[Photo: Bohlman - On Orbit second intersection]** **[Photo: Bohlman and McGill]** **[Photo: View of Skyline]** **[Photo: View of Skyline and Lake Ranch Reservoir]** **[Photo: Flat section]** **[Photo: View of Bohlman ridge from McGill]**
- **Hicks Rd South** (1.0 miles, 705 ft, 13.3%) This is one tough climb! Front-side Hicks road starts at the intersection with Shannon, and rolls easily for over 4 miles passing by Guadalupe Creek Reservoir. Inhospitable hicks, white albinos, and gun brandishing sorts of bumpkins live around there. One is brutally awoken once the road crosses the bridge while making left hand turn. No matter how high one raises the head, the eye keeps meeting the road, and the desperate feeling of drowning in the deep well envelops the body. The struggle captures the suddenly impotent legs. A cattle grate partway up the steep section is threatening, but can be survived if conditions aren't too wet. Doing this climb in a 39/27 is a struggle -- even with such gearing, fit riders will be wishing for more on the steepest slopes. At the top of the hill, Mt Umunhum (nee Loma Almaden) forks off in the "sugar cube" direction, as well as several dirt trails. **[Aerial Photo]**
- **Hicks Rd North** (1.6 miles, 740 ft, 8.4%) The backside of Hicks is not as brutal as the front-side. Starting from the cattle grate, the road gradually steepens until it reaches 10% grade for the last 0.8 miles finishing at Loma Almaden Rd and open space preserve. The pavement is good, but the end is not immediately in sight. **[Aerial Photo]**

- **Loma Almaden** (Mt. Umunhum) (1.8 miles, 860 ft, 9.3%) Loma Almaden following the difficult climb of Hicks, presents a considerable, but worthwhile, challenge. The grade is quite non-uniform, with a section from approximately 0.5 to 0.9 miles approaching a 20% average grade. The pavement on this formerly restricted federal road has not been maintained for nearly 20 years following the land grab disputes with local flesh eating militant albinos of a landowners. There is a cattle-guard part way up, although it is quite passable. Another cattle guard is right at the gate at the end of the car-accessible section. Bikes can continue beyond the gate for another 1.2 miles (see below). [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Mt. Umunhum** (1.2 miles, 520 ft, 8.4%) This section is continuation of the Loma Almaden Rd beyond the gate at the top of car-accessible section. Loma Almaden Rd is the access road towards the Loma Almaden airforce radar station on the top of Mt. Umunhum. The base of the radar which was dismantled in the early 1980s can be seen form far out as a 3 story high "sugar cube" aka "Monolith". There's also a white ball - National Weather Service Doppler Radar - on the nearby ridge. Live camera there provides constant views of Bay Area. The base is closed for public access because of the unsafe level of asbestos in the remaining structures and intervening private property. Mt. Umunhum means "hummingbird" in the language of Ohlone Indians who populated the area before Spanish colonization. The mountain is the second highest in the Santa Cruz range and was of ritual importance to the native tribes. The public road continues for 1.2 miles beyond the gate -- riders are encouraged to climb over the gate and make the extra effort, as the views from the end of the public road are spectacular. See for yourself [here](#). The end of the public section is quite clearly marked, with signs on the side of the road and large warnings painted across. It is unfortunate the remaining road is off limits, as the undulating, steep grades and awesome views make it quite tempting to continue. The trails which follow, on Umunhum, eventually connect with Soda Springs Road to the north or to Loma Prieta, Loma Chiquita, or Mt. Madonna to the south. This is earthquake country where San Andreas fault runs through the ridge, Los Gatos Creek and Austrain Dam (to the west). Much earth movement occurred here during the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. Arguably, the claims to the road are false but the Open Space Preserve takes wait-and-see attitude to squatters living in hovels. The rumor has it that the most vocal of them, Rick Estrada (umunhum@hotmail.com) no longer lives there. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Soda Springs.** (5.3 mi, 2250 ft, 8%) Soda Springs is a rarely visited climb because it is a dead end and is away from more frequented routes. It is nonetheless a worthy challenge. Situated to the south west of Los Gatos, Soda Springs is accessible from Alma Bridge Road, between Old Santa Cruz Highway and the Los Gatos Creek Trail. Alma Bridge Rd that leads to the base of Soda Springs meanders around Lexington Reservoir, 6.5 million gallons of water artificial lake created on Los Gatos Creek in 1952. The reservoir was named for the town of Lexington, now 130 ft below water along with another town called Alma. The Pacific Coast Railroad and Old Santa Cruz Hwy ran through what is now bottom of the lake, and could be seen during particularly severe droughts. Soda Springs Rd forks off inconspicuously at 2.9 mile mark from the top of Los Gatos Creek Trail. The gradient is quite consistent for the entire duration of the climb and averages 8% over the span of 5.3 miles. As a result, it climbs 2250 ft and is one of the few climbs longer than 5 miles in the area. It terminates at the gated private property at the top. Beyond the gate, the road continues towards the top of Mt. Thayer and eventually connects to Loma Almaden Rd and Mt. Umunhum. As a descent Soda Springs can be quite hazardous due to its steep pitch, sharp turns, light coat of gravel and hidden driveways. Descending it is a good neck exercise - i.e. keeping your head up for 20 minutes or less that it takes to descend. There's no water on or near the climb, so good supplies need to be ascertained beforehand. Weaver Rd forks off 1.5 miles from the top of Soda Springs, where Soda Springs technically becomes Love Harris Rd. It provides a welcome diversion and gives awesome views of the other side of the ridge overlooking Lexington reservoir and the valley through which Hwy 17 runs. Child's skull was

found near the intersection in 2001. Weaver Rd could be visited during the descent. In 1961 and in 1985 the area eastside of Lexington reservoir (including much of Soda Springs Canyon) was on fire when arsonists torched the area. The mostly chaparral-covered hills were more forested before the fire and offered more shelter from sun to the suffering cyclist. [\[Aerial Photo: view from Lexington Reservoir\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: lower part\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: middle part\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: top part\]](#) [\[Soda Springs and Alma Bridge intersection\]](#) [\[One of many hairpins\]](#) [\[The end will make you dizzy\]](#) [\[View from the Top\]](#) [\[Descending\]](#) [\[Weaver Rd\]](#) [\[Weaver Rd: ascending view\]](#) [\[Weaver Rd: descending view\]](#) [\[View from Weaver Rd towards Monte Sereno\]](#) [\[View from Weaver Rd toward Santa Cruz\]](#)

- **Montevina.** (3.5 mi, 1760 ft, 9.5%) Montevina Road climbs the slope of Mt. El Sereno from Highway 17 to a dirt road which connects to the top of Bohlman Road. It is very twisting and narrow, making for a fun climb but a slow descent. It climbs 1760 ft in 3.5 miles, averaging 9.5%. As one reaches the top, the roads straightens and steepens, making the finish run towards the gate quite challenging especially on the hot sunny afternoon. Since the bottom of the climb is somewhat far from the usual Stanford rides, it is usually reached at the end of long ride which makes it more difficult. It is also frequently used as a descent for Bolhman Rd rides. [\[Aerial Photo: View from Lexington Reservoir\]](#)
- **Black Rd** (5.3 miles, 1780 feet, 6.3%) Black Road climbs away from Highway 17 (near Lexington Dam) at a steady 8% grade through dense oak and laurel forest. It levels out at its intersection with Gist Road, passes a school (a good water stop), then continues steeply (10%+) on to Skyline Blvd. The light traffic is primarily residential. As a descent it is very curvy at the top, but the pavement is in decent shape. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Gist Rd** (1.4 miles, 680 ft, 8.6%) Gist provides an alternative to the top of Black, and provides a shortcut from Black's midpoint to Skyline if one is heading south. It is relatively steep with tight turns and very light auto traffic, either local or off course. A sign at the bottom warn that Gist is for local traffic only, but since it is a public road this can be disregarded. As a descent Gist Rd is fairly parlous with abrasive surface and several very sharp and steep pothole-riddled turns. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Bear Creek East** (3.2 miles, 1260 ft, 7.5%) The east side of Bear Creek Road is a steep, busy road between Highway 17 and Skyline Blvd. Summit Road begins approximately 0.7 miles and 170 feet of climbing from the intersection with Skyline, continuing south. The east side of Bear Creek Road sustains grades of near 10% (10.7% average between Summit and Hwy 17). However, its relatively high traffic volume make nearby Black Road (possibly with Gist Road as a shortcut) more attractive. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Summit Rd** (11.2 miles, 1850 ft, 3.2% between Mt. Madonna and Loma Prieta Rd) This road rolls along the upper part of the ridge separating Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties, providing a connection between Mt. Madonna to the south with Loma Prieta and Loma Chiquita peaks to the north. It officially starts at the intersection with Mt. Madonna and Pole Line Roads. The lower 3.4 miles are haphazardly paved and travel over quiet, partially shaded sparsely populated residential hillsides. This section isn't really much of a climb at all, gaining meager 400 ft in the process. The rest of the road is exposed and the surface is packed dirt, with one small stretch of privately installed asphalt. People who paved that little section did so to protect themselves against clouds of dust that are very common in the summer. Several steep dirt pitches may present a difficult challenge to skinny tires, but also reward with grandiose views of the Pacific, distant mountains and valleys. You will pass the intersection with dirt Croy Rd at 4.2 mi mark, Ormsby Cut-off at 7.8 mi mark, and Uvas Park cutoff at 9.1 mi mark. Riding bikes in the Park is illegal, so don't be tempted by this cutoff. The area around the cutoff is known as Maymens flat and the views are breath-taking. 2964 ft high Nibbs Knob ("knob" is

something between hill and a mountain) is also an interesting to observe. The land around the road is private (except Uvas Park), but residents are tolerant of bikers as long as they're quiet and respectful of the area (the residents maintain the road themselves). The average grade on this road is understated because of additional 540 ft of descending. In any case, it seems that more people use it as a easy descent in the opposite direction. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

- **Old Santa Cruz Hwy** (3.6 miles, 740 ft, 3.9%) Old Santa Cruz Highway consists of the two pieces that remain of the original road between San Jose and Santa Cruz. The piece described here is on the Bay side and is measured from Aldercroft Heights to Summit Rd. It therefore excludes common segment that Hwy 17 and Old Santa Cruz Hwy share closer to Los Gatos before they diverge again and Old Santa Cruz plunges under the waters of Lexington Reservoir. When Hwy 17 was opened, Old Santa Cruz Hwy lost its economic significance. Many mountain municipalities along the road have also declined and joined the ranks of "Santa Cruz Mountains' Ghost Towns", Holy City being the most spectacular example. You can pay homage to Holy City's crackhead of a founder, father Riker, at 1.35 mile mark. As a climb the road is measured from its intersection with Aldercroft Heights Rd to Summit Rd. The grade is fairly easy, and frequently flattens out, allowing additional rest. Last mile is nearly flat and features a couple of small downhill. The pavement is very recent, very smooth and the level of traffic is low (since the road is public, you can safely ignore "Local Traffic only" sign at the top). These advantages make it an even better descent. It is the easiest, most fun descent known! Gentle curves, generous shade, smooth surface and the lack of competing traffic will make you truly fly! Aldercroft Heights Rd in south east direction take you to the funky small mountain neighborhood of Aldercroft Heights. There's a nudist colony there (Lupin Naturist Club), small artists cabins lush redwood regrowth after ancient logging, and remnants of Pacific Coast Railroad. After a few miles (2.6), climbing 300 ft and descending 300 ft into Hooker Gulch, the road is gated and turns into dirt. The gated part belongs to San Jose Water Company and is belligerently patrolled. There's a trail between Aldercroft Heights Rd and Wright Station Rd that leads to Wrights Tunnel. Wrights Tunnel is historic railroad tunnel built through the San Andreas Fault Zone. The tunnel took 3 years to build, killing 31 Chinese laborer in natural gas explosion in the process, was 6,000 ft long, connected two historic mountain communities (Wright's Station and Laurel) passing beneath Summit Rd east of Hwy 17. The tunnel was dynamited shut in 1942 by the Army out of fear that it might be used by a Japanese invasion force. The fault rupture in 1906 offset the tunnel about 400 ft. The tunnel is closed, parking and trail access is limited, poison ivy is abundant everywhere, and permission for access is required from San Jose Water Company. Finally, it is worth mentioning that there's an offroad shortcut from Aldercroft Hgts to Old Santa Cruz. From Alma Bridge intersection go up and over the hill until Aldercroft returns to the creek, continue for a few turns until you see a clearing and trailhead to the right. Ride up rather steep but short unpaved canyon wall on Call of the Wild Road where Jack London is said to have had a cabin. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

- **Redwood Estates Rd** (2.2 miles, 905 ft, 7.8%) Redwood Estates Rd is in fact a small network of roads running through small mountain community of Redwood Estates and connects Old Santa Cruz Hwy near Holy City. The roads are very narrow, steep, but paved. You'll cross under Hwy 17, pass a fire station where there's water, and a small grocery store. The roads to take are Madrone Dr, Oak Dr, Broadway Rd, Ester Ct, La Verne Dr and Bayview Dr which finally connects to Summit Rd. It so very shaded and quiet, that you won't see you shade and all that you'd hear descending is the rubber squealing against the rim. And of course your own moans! [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

#### Further North

- **Hillcrest Blvd** (1.4 miles, 550 ft, 8.7%) Hillcrest Blvd in Millbrae connects El Camino Real to northern section of Skyline. The road is wide, smooth and purely residential. Within the first mile you'll face a

twisted 10.2% wall starting at about Minorca Way (0.65 mi mark). Brief rest at the anonymous street between two intersection with Vista Grande, another short (0.3 mi) convex portion and you're done. Descending requires good brakes, or else you risk to plow into intense motor cross-traffic. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

- **Guadalupe Canyon Pkwy/Radio Rd** (3.9 miles, 1120 ft, 5.4%) West side of Guadalupe Canyon Parkway starts from Hillside Blvd in Daly City. The road is wide, and well-trafficked. It gains about 500 ft in 2 miles (average grade 4.7%). Narrow and rough Radio Rd forks off at this point. East side of Guadalupe Canyon Pkwy starts off Bayshore Blvd in Brisbane and is a bit more inconsistent - it features some steeper section and a small descent. Radio Rd intersects it at about the top. After passing through a eucalyptus grove, Radio Rd climbs at sustained 6.8% to the top of San Bruno Mountain and the radio towers at the summit, although it includes narrow switchbacks and grades up to 10%. It levels off as it enters San Bruno Mountain State Park, but then picks up again. The infamous radar dish signals the final grueling stretch. The summit provides a good view of the Bay and San Francisco International Airport unless it's too foggy. If it is, you may be above the clouds, a view few we'll ever experience. Every New Year's Day (with occasional exceptions) there's a race to the top. Nasty, crappy, windy, rainy, foggy weather is typical for this mass start scramble to the top - but that makes it a New Year Epic! The race starts a bit above Bayshore Blvd, so the stats for the race distance are 3.5 miles and 1070 ft of elevation gain at 5.8%. [\[Aerial Photo: Overview\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Guadalupe Canyon Parkway East\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Radio Rd\]](#)

## On the Other Side

- **Hwy 84 West** (14.3 miles from San Gregorio, 6.8 miles from La Honda; 1460 or 1120 ft; 1.9% or 3%) This climb is long only on paper, the most of the lower slopes (surrounded by hilly farmland) is rather flat. It is thus a good ride to take at the end of tiring coastal ride. You'll face may be two or three stretches at 7%, but the rest is much easier. Funky towns of Sky Londa and La Honda are occupied by motocyclists mostly. Redwood Terrace community is mostly farms and ranches. This side of Hwy 84 also tends to get less automotive traffic, although the motorbikes are definitely crazier. As a descent, it's a nice opportunity to practice team time trialling at high speed. You may have to stop at the two traffic lights though. [\[Aerial Photo: Vicinity of San Gregorio\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Coyote Creek and Bear Gulch Rd junctions\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Redwood Terrace\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: La Honda and Pescadero Junction\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Steepest Part\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: From West Old La Honda to Sky Londa\]](#)
- **West Old La Honda** (2.5 miles, 580 ft, 4%) The west side of Old La Honda connects Hwy 84 to the Skyline Blvd and is a convenient shortcut. It is neither steep, nor long and offers dramatic views of the valley below and of the ocean. Near the top it flattens out and enter redwoods for more excellent riding. The traffic is very light, and the grade is quite moderate, and could be used for easy climbing repeats. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Pescadero (Haskins)** (1.6 miles, 560 ft, 6.8%) From the east, this is a moderately steep (peak 8% or so) grade with considerable tree cover. The sweeping turns and smooth surface make this a fast and fun descent. The west side is more exposed to the sun and has tighter turns and steeper grades (sections at approximately 10%). Near the top are a series of straight-aways which offer false promise of being the end of the climb. In the summer, it can be quite hot, and nearing the end of a long ride, Haskins isn't always a welcome encounter. The descent of the west side is slower than that of the east because of the rougher road and blind, tight corners. This road is at the heart of the annual Pescadero Coastal Classic road race, organized by Alto Velo. It is also main part of "The Course". [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

- **Tunitas Creek Rd** (5.7 miles, 1540 ft, 5.1%) Tunitas Creek Road is a great climb. Tunitas Creek Road connects coastal Hwy 1 and Skyline Blvd that runs on the top of the Santa Cruz Mountain Range. Although the entire profile of Tunitas runs over more than 7 miles, the interesting part starts with intersection with Lobitos Creek Road as the road gains lush redwood cover. This intersection is also the starting point for semi-regular but fully famous mud-ball ride. The mud-ball course starts off with brutal 8-9% grade averaging 8% for approximately 1.8 miles, but the environment is so pretty one hardly notices the effort. For most of its length, this patchwork of broken asphalt, tar bumps and some unkempt gravel parallels tiny, log-jammed Tunitas Creek, hence the name. The last few miles flatten considerably, and could be pretty annoying to a lightweight rider. One can take Tunitas Creek Road all the way to Skyline across from the intersection with Kings Mountain Road, or one can turn right at Star Hill Road and then left on ultra-narrow Swett Road for a more interesting route to arrive at Skyline further south. The latter route is recommended if you are heading south. Lobitos Creek Road is a shortcut to Tunitas Creek Road from the north, from Verde Road. It is also quite pretty, and although it is steep in places it isn't too painful. Lobitos Creek Cut-Off is another connection between Verde and Tunitas Creek Rd, but is less notable. Descending Tunitas Creek Road is also an interesting experience. However, bring padded gloves and keep your weight off the saddle, because with the rough pavement it's a bone-shaking ride. Speaking of bones, bring warm clothes if you descend it in the late fall or early spring, or else you get chilled right to the bone. Bring glasses with wipers or defoggers too. [\[Aerial Photo: Overview\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Hwy 1 to Lobitos Creek Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Lobitos Creek Rd to Skyline\]](#)
- **China Grade** (1.5 mi, 760ft, 9.7%) China Grade is a very narrow shortcut road in bypassing a portion of CA-236 as it meanders through Big Basin Redwood Forest. One of the oldest roads in the area, it derives its name from its steepness. Early logging operators called it China grade for it seemed so steep that it could get one to China! Compared with CA-236, one bypasses the intermediate descent and the water stop at Park Headquarters. After the road forks off CA-236, it gains 270 ft in 1.9 miles as it rises gently past the golf range with the soda machine and deeper into the Redwoods. Upon crossing the bridge over Little Boulder Creek, the road turns to its shortcut business with the brutal efficiency - gaining 760 ft in 1.5 miles for the average gradient of 9.7%. Relentless grade, abrasive surface and many large potholes are excused by fantastic scenery of the deep redwood forest, and time passes quickly before one reaches the welcome relief of CA-236. Fit riders will only spend less than 15 minutes on the steep parts. China Grade continues on to climb several hundred feet at a reduced grade, but it terminates into dirt roads and thus isn't commonly ridden above Highway 236. Impressive views abound! Above intersection with CA-236 redwood forest gives way to thirsty conifers strewn over drier shrubbery-covered hillside. Dirt roads are signified by a big boulder and a log. The road straight ahead is Butano Fire Trail, leading eventually to Cloverdale, the road to the right is Gate 12 Rd which eventually connects to Old Haul Rd and West Alpine. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **West Alpine** (7.6 miles, 1930 ft, 7%) This road starts at its intersection with Pescadero Rd near the bottom of the Haskins hill. From the start the road enters ample shade of wonderful redwood forest, gently rolling up past dramatic redwood trees and a music waterfall of a small creek. In a couple of miles the road gains only 250 feet or so. This monotony is interrupted by a series of relatively steep switchbacks reaching 10% grades. At this point the road gradually comes into the open as it gradually winds up past Camp Pomponio Road and then the Portola State Park access road, where it has a false flat. It seems like one is almost there, but there's still plenty of climbing left and the last junction is only a little past the midpoint. After several false summits, it is quite a surprise when the summit is finally reached. If too many hopes were expended in trying to reach the true summit, the frustration can become quite serious. A short, twisting descent brings one to the intersection with Skyline. The climb actually isn't difficult, but the gentle lead-in and frequent false summits give it a reputation for

being seemingly interminable. As a descent, the frequent turns and rough road surface (although the top portion has been recently repaved) make for slow going and numb hands by the bottom. Portola State Park Road and Camp Pomponio Road (and Tar Truck Trail) are both quite steep and lead to the interesting network of road-bikeable (in dry weather) dirt roads in the park. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

- **Hwy 9 West** (27.2 or 7.4 or 6.0 miles, 2850 or 1900 or 1300 ft, 2% or 4.9% or 4.1%) Highway 9 follows a very gentle net uphill from Santa Cruz to Boulder Creek. The road is so pretty, accompanying traffic notwithstanding, that you will no doubt mistake this for downhill. Listed stats vary depending on the starting point. The entire profile from Santa Cruz (intersection of River and Water Streets) to Saratoga Gap (intersection with Skyline) averages only 2% grade over 27.2 mile run. Boulder Creek is the mid-point and will restore glycogen depletion with supply of cookies and coffee at Blue Sun Cafe. Next 6.1 miles are about as gentle as preceding 13.5. More serious climbing starts at Saratoga Toll Rd (7.4 miles to the top mark), but the grade is still under 7%. Next point of interest is the intersection with CA-236. Only 6.0 miles left to go! The views of the surrounding mountain ranges, of Castle Rock State Park, San Lorenzo River valley, Butano, Diamond, Fat Buck and Beatty ridges is truly breathtaking! After the final, fairly flat, mile the road intersects Skyline Blvd. The heavy auto traffic makes West Highway 9 unpleasant despite some nice views of the redwoods below, and to the tired cyclist it seems to go on forever. As a descent, it's a super-blast! Its smooth, wide surface and gentle turns yield a fast and safe trip into Boulder Creek. [\[Aerial Photo: Overview\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Santa Cruz - Felton\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Felton - Ben Lomond\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Ben Lomond - Boulder Creek\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Boulder Creek - CA-236\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: CA-236 - Saratoga Gap\]](#)
- **Hwy 92 West** (1.7 miles, 620 ft, 7%) Highway 92 (aka Half Moon Bay Rd) cuts across the mountain range from Half Moon Bay to Peninsula and East Bay. The west side follows a very gentle net uphill from Half Moon Bay for almost 3.5 miles before finally tilting up. The measured climb starts at that point. Incidentally, it is also where the road widens and the quality of pavement is much improved. The climb is only 1.7 miles and is very uniform. The view of the Pilarcitos Creek gorge is great, but the amount of automotive traffic that accompanies it is overbearing. For that reason the climb is not popular for the return from Half Moon Bay, and much steeper Tunitas Creek Rd is often preferred. As a descent, it's a super-blast! Tuck as aerodynamically as you can and flow in the curve! [\[Aerial Photo: Vicinity of Half Moon Bay\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Towards Mountain Crest\]](#)
- **Bear Gulch Rd West** (3.2 miles, 1020 ft, 6.0%) Bear Gulch Rd West is a dead end descent off Skyline between Sky Honda and Kings Mtn Rd. It heads down, naturally enough, west of Skyline, at about the point where Skyline starts to descend south towards Sky Londa (or it levels off if you are coming from another direction). If you want to climb this road, you'll have to descend it first (although first 0.3 mi off Skyline is a climb). In theory, the road goes all the way to Hwy 84, but in practice there's significant difference between theory and practice because significant section is private. The private portion goes through famous Neil Young's ranch "Broken Arrow" and is off limits for public access. Within private territory the road connects to Native Son Rd. and reveals the album cover shot from CSNY's "American Dream". As a descent, the road is easy and rolling for couple of miles at about 3% grade, but then plunges steeply towards the gate. Accordingly, the start of the climb is difficult - the first mile averages about 12%, more than Moody and twice as long! Take into account damp and leaves-covered pavement before the road goes into the open, and you have one monster of a climb! Unbroken if abrasive pavement. Views towards the south on the open section are unparalleled! Highly recommended. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Star Hill and Swett Roads** (Starr Hill (to Tunitas): 3.9 miles, 800 ft, 3.9%; Star Hill/Swett (to Skyline): 4.2 miles, 1000 ft, 2.7%) Star Hill Rd is a dead end descent off Tunitas a little below Skyline, while

Swett Rd is an alternative connector between Starr Hill and Skyline. Star Hill road is not steep (it averages 4.6% between the gate at the bottom and intersection with Swett, and is flat between Swett and Tunitas), just very pretty narrow one lane road winding through the mountains. Its surface is similar to that of Tunitas but much less beat up due to lower volume of traffic. The road is so quiet, it's spooky. Native Son Rd forks off to the left as you're climbing to the intersection with Swett, and is itself an interesting descent (and climb). Both Star Hill and Native Son Rd are gated at a private land owned by Neil Young. Star Hill continues all the way to Hwy 1. Swett Rd starts off incredibly steeply (doozily) as it forks off in the direction of Skyline. It could be very slippery when wet or even damp from morning fog, beware. Once beyond initial wall, it's fairly easy with a few rolling hills. [\[Aerial Photo: Swett Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Starr Hill Near Swett\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Starr Hill and Native Sons Rds\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Native Sons Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Bottom of Starr Hill\]](#)

- **Mt. Bache/Loma Prieta Rd** (3.3 miles, 1520 ft, 8.7%) Mt. Bache/Loma Prieta Rd connects Highland Way to "summit" on the ridgeline. It has several 15% pitches, but overall isn't too bad. It almost terminates at the junction with unpaved section of Summit Rd which connects Loma Prieta mountain with Mt. Madonna state park. Beyond this junction the road continues upwards on gravel, dirt and rock and lets you get very close to radio installations on top of Loma Prieta. For better or worse, the final push to the top is rough and steep and is barely passable. From the top, unpaved roads connect to Loma Almaden, Casa Loma (via Loma Chiquita), Mt. Chual, Crystal Peak etc. Unfortunately, these trails are private. Dirt section of Loma Prieta Rd (beyond green gate) is in parts privately owned as well, but bicyclists and hikers are not denied access to the summit area despite menacing "No Trespassing" signs. Overall, Mt. Bache/Loma Prieta Rd can offer some spectacular view of the Monterey Bay and the ridgecrest. As a descent it is fairly straightforward to navigate. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Alba** (3.9 miles, 2035 ft, 10%) This climb is also known as A Long Brutal Ascent. It is the middle of the 3 roads that connect coastal side Hwy 9 with Empire Grade Rd. This one starts in Hubbard Gulch (in Ben Lomond) and goes up. If you arrive to the base descending Hwy 9, then orthodox temple signals you to pray and pay attention not to miss the turn straight to heavens. Interestingly, small network of roads (probably private) permits alternative access to Alba from Hwy 9, including the road called Stanford Way! The 10% average grade is rather steep for the road that climbs over 2,000 ft. The grade is highly inconsistent with sections near 5% intermixed with significant portions at 15% to 20%. With road gears (a low of 39/28 or bigger), surviving this climb is an exercise in pain. The steep sections aren't so long that a fit rider can't power through them, however. As a descent, it isn't bad given its steepness. Lower slopes of the climb are well paved, but the top section may force one to navigate the potholes. Old "Little Red Schoolhouse" is an unwelcome view as it signifies significant steep section. Sequoia Seminar, on the other hand, is on a slightly flatter section. Alba Rd originated in 19th century as road providing the farmers at the north end of Empire Grade with a route to Ben Lomond, their nearest place of trade. It was known as Alba Grade, Ben Lomond Grade. Originally built from Empire Grade in 1886 through what is now Summit Drive and the "Old Alba Road" trail in Fall Creek State Park. The upper part was so steep (10% grade) that there were reports of horses pulling driverless wagons into town. The driver had fallen forward off the wagon seat in one case, and was either injured or killed! Vista point where the park begins offers awesome views like [this](#). [\[Aerial Photo\]](#) [\[Approaching Sequoia Seminar\]](#) [\[Upper Slopes\]](#)
- **Bear Creek West** (9.5 miles, 1750 ft, 3.5%) Bear Creek Road connects Boulder Creek on Highway 9 to the southern extreme of Skyline Blvd. The listed stats are for the full climb, of which the bottom 4.5 miles is mostly flat. The grade is variable but mostly gentle. The road is wide 2-lanes and well paved. These features make it an excellent descent, never ending and very smooth. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

- **East Zayante** (11.7 miles from Felton, 9.3 miles from Quail Hollow Rd, 1880 or 1800 ft, 3.0 or 3.7%) East Zayante Rd is another beautiful road in Santa Cruz Mountains. The name refers to the name of the local group of Ohlone indians who inhabited the valley in which the road now runs. The road starts in Felton, but could also be reached via Quail Hollow. Initially, the road rises and falls along Zayante Creek; some sections are nearly flat. The traffic around the community of Zayante (indicated primarily by precariously perched houses and Zayante store) could be a little crowded, and the road lacks wide shoulder, so watch out. East Zayante is quite misleading, however. From Fern Ridge Rd, the road becomes Upper East Zayante and it gains 1430 ft in 5.1 miles in two distinct parts. The second part is more like 9% with some very steep hairpins over pretty bad pavement. Near the top you're sure to be barked at. But this is much better than being sacrificed by devil worshipers who were said to infest the area before Loma Prieta earthquake. As descent, the upper part of Zayante is quite technical. Make sure you have brake shoes with lots of rubber before you embark on this one. Many invisible potholes will also nail you hard. Finally, Zayante should be taken enroute to see the beautiful Loch Lomond lake, artificial drinking water reservoir (since late 1950s) after the Scottish Loch of the same name. [\[Aerial Photo: From Felton to Quail Hollow Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Quail Hollow and Lompico\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Lompico to Lower Ellen Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Upper East Zayante Rd\]](#) [\[Photo: Intimidating Wall on Upper Zayante\]](#) [\[Photo: Hairpin\]](#)
- **Jamison Creek** (3.0 miles, 1470ft, 9.7 %) Jamison Creek, the northernmost paved route from Hwy 9 (via Hwy 236) to Empire Grade, starts out steep, then gets steeper. Near the top it sustains grades over 11%, making the summit a long-overdue sight. It isn't as difficult as Alba, however. Descending Jamison Creek isn't too bad, since traffic is quite light, and the road is mostly two lane with a clear center stripe. For people wanting to climb over 1,100 feet in 1.8 miles (read: masochists), this is the ride for you. Jamison Creek will make you glad that there's a 27 cog on your bike--you do have a 27, right? [\[Aerial Photo\]](#) [\[Hairpin\]](#) [\[Final Push\]](#)
- **Bonny Doon** (4.9 miles, 1620ft, 6.3% to the school on Pine Flat (UCSC HCTT finish), 7.4 miles, 2110 ft, 5.4% to Empire Grade) Bonny Doon starts out hard. It gains about 1000 ft in 2.0 miles (9.5% average grade). It then gains another 600 ft over the next 3.6 miles before the short descent and merges with poorly-named Pine Flat Rd. A relatively flat area with many ponderosa pine trees is east of this road. To say that "Pine Flat" is named after them may not be correct as the early settlers tended to call all conifers "pines". While not as steep as its lead in, Pine Flat continues on seemingly endlessly (3.7 miles) at a reduced 4% grade. It eventually connects to Empire Grade Rd. Overall, it is an easier ascent to Empire Grade than either Alba or Jamison Creek. On the other hand, unlike most climbs around there, it is exposed to the sun (except for steepest grades, thankfully). Combining this with the loss of the sea breeze as one travels inland from the coast yields rough going on a hot summer day. Approximately 1.5 miles up Pine Flat Road is its intersection with Ice Cream Grade, which first provides relief from the climbing via a 200 foot narrow, shaded descent, but then demands full payment plus interest with a 380 foot climb to Empire Grade, which it intersects across from Felton Empire Road. While not quite living up to its name, Ice Cream Grade does provide important refreshment -- Bonny Doon Elementary School is located at the intersection of Ice Cream Grade and Pine Flat Roads and has a water faucet. Ice Cream Grade's construction (\$1735 in 1893) was financed by selling ice cream, hence the name. The school near the intersection also marks a finish line of Bonny Doon HCTT, a tough collegiate event hosted by UCSC. As for the descent, make sure you don't carry too much speed into intersection with Hwy 1, and don't miss a few tricky corners. Historically, Bonny Doon Road originated as Coast Grade built in 1851 by civil engineer George Liddell. At various times it was known as Liddell Creek Road, Lydell Creek Road, or Lime Kiln Road, and currently includes former Ocean View Avenue uphill of intersection at Pine Flat Road. The name "Bonnie Doon" is said to have originated around 1880. [\[Aerial Photo: Roads of Bonny Doon\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Bonny](#)

**Doon Beach to Smith Grade** **[Aerial Photo: Bonny Doon and Pine Flat Roads]** **[Aerial Photo: Towards Empire Grade Rd]**

- **Empire Grade Rd** (18.1 mi, 2800 ft, 3%) The descent of Empire Grade into Santa Cruz is fast and fun. Empire Grade has its beginnings as a traffic infested two-lane residential road called High Street in Santa Cruz. Most of the traffic is either going to or leaving the UC Santa Cruz campus. As you pass the Bay Street intersection, you just have to endure about one mile of cars until you pass the UCSC west entrance. You can divide Empire Grade into two sections that have their own distinct characteristics. Just pass the UCSC west entrance is seven miles of smooth curves moving up a steep 8 to 10 percent grade on some parts. This section is a sort of rolling-uphill, with short steep sections separated by shallower grades and intermediate descents. The second part of this ride begins at the Ice Cream Grade-Felton Empire Grade intersection. This section starts out with mostly straights and you'll notice more residential dwellings for the first mile or so along with a school and Christmas tree farm. Most of the houses are deep in the woods so all that you'll see are driveways. As the road pass the top of Ben Lomond (near intersection with famed Alba Rd) Mountain, it descends gradually towards Jamison Creek Rd which will let you connect to other destinations or return to Santa Cruz without turning around. Beyond the intersection the road continues for about 1 mile until it dead-ends at Lockheed-Martin ballistic missile plant. Couple of fun diversions can be found near the dead end. One is the short road to the top of **Eagle Lookout** point (unpaved), and the other is a rugged dirt trail descending to Little Basin Rd. Named after the Empire Mining Company, which operated during the 1850s, this road was constructed, in 1872, up Ben Lomond Mountain on the ridgeline between the Coast Road and the San Lorenzo valley. Unlike the present road, which ends at Eagle Rock and the Lockheed facility at the summit, the original road went 35 miles north and served the Big Basin area. The descent of Empire Grade into Santa Cruz is fast and fun. **[Aerial Photo: Santa Cruz to Felton-Empire]** **[Aerial Photo: Midsection]** **[Aerial Photo: Alba to Eagle Lookout]** **[Photo: Eagle Lookout]**
- **Mountain Charlie Rd** (5.2 mi, 1130 ft, 4.1%) Just west of Highway 17, off Summit Road, Mountain Charlie Road was once part of the McKiernan Toll Road from Scotts Valley to the summit. What remains of that original road, built in 1868, is now officially called Mountain Charlie Road. Its west side connects Bean Creek and Glenwood Hwy intersection to Summit Rd. East side connects Summit Rd on the east of Hwy 17 to Old Santa Cruz Hwy. To get to the bottom of west side, you need to get to Scotts Valley via either Hwy 9 or Zayante Rd. This makes for one long ride and explains why Stanford riders are seen so rarely on this road. Yet the road is stunningly gorgeous, generously rewarding the traveler with luscious redwood cover and spectacular views on the both sides, tuning you to the "Once upon a time in the West" melody. It is definitely worth the visit. The road begins climbing innocently, and absorbs you entirely in its beauty before picking up the grade. In general the road goes up in a stair-step fashion and is not too difficult. Towards the top, some very sharp pitches will cut through your quads with surgical seriousness, but not for too long. At the top you'll want more! As dessert after climbing Mtn. Charlie you can try a "wall" on the Riva Ridge Rd. Riva Ridge Rd. climbs gradually and then drops steeply before climbing up a very steep wall. The grade must be close to 20%. To get to Riva Ridge Rd, keep your eyes open for it on the left as you approach the summit. Riva Ridge will connect to Hutchinson, which leads to Summit Rd. As a descent Mtn. Charlie Rd is nasty, too narrow, covered with leaves, and sometimes steep. Now some history. The road is named after Charles Henry 'Mountain Charlie' McKiernan, native of Ireland, the second white man to live in the Summit area (settling in 1851), gold digger (without luck), pioneer, hunter, rancher, teamster, road builder. McKiernan is most famous for his losing fight with a grizzly bear. In 1854 while hunting with a friend, he was surprised by a 1,000 pound mother bear with two cubs. Mountain Charlie was seized by the bear, which crushed the front of his skull. The other hunter eventually managed to distract the bear. McKiernan recovered but had a metal plate, made from two silver Mexican dollar coins,

temporarily fitted into his skull (removed as the wound wouldn't heal, much to the protests of Mountain Charlie). You don't have to worry about bears in the Santa Cruz Mountains anymore because by the late 1800s most of the bears had been killed. In the 1870s McKiernan started a stage coach business and later became one of the most successful businessmen in the area. McKiernan's cabin near the summit (near Riva Ridge Rd) was often a stopping spot and became known as Halfway House or Station Ranch. Life in the Santa Cruz Mountains in the late 1800s was very wild. Small time bandits used the area as hideouts - picking on travelers as well as making forays into the 'big' towns. Local historian James Addicott records: "McIntyre, who raised cattle on the Zayante Creek Flats, was murdered by two men frenzied by drink who went after McIntyre's hidden treasure [money]. He was mercilessly butchered and his body burned in his pioneer mountain cabin.... but they were chased and caught on Mt. Charley road by a San Francisco posse who hung them on the little old Los Gatos wooden bridge on Main Street. [Sentinel, December 17, 1950]" n 1858 the Santa Cruz Turnpike Company issued a contract in the amount of \$6,000 to Charles Henry 'Mountain Charlie' McKiernan and Hiram Scott for the construction of a road. The road from the Scott House, located in what is now Scotts Valley, to the Summit was later known as the McKiernan Toll Road. The place of fight with bear is on Mtn. Charlie Rd 2.1 miles south of Summit Rd, just east of Pierce Rd. Unfortunately, the plaque indicating it was heavily damaged in Loma Prieta Earthquake of 1989 and is said to be awaiting restoration elsewhere, so the place is hard to find. The redwood forest surrounding Mtn Charlie road is home to some of the biggest redwoods. Somewhere in that forest stands Mtn. Charlie Big Tree, aka "King", a specimen of sequoia sempervirens, 250 ft high (300 ft until the storm of 1950), 18 ft in diameter, 60 ft in circumference. Nearby is the massive stomp of "Queen" that Charlie sawed down, but the difficulties that he encountered in doing so lead him to abandon taking down the "King". [\[Aerial Photo: Glenwood Dr to Cock Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Cock Rd to Pierce Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Pierce Rd to Summit Rd\]](#)

- **Felton-Empire Rd** (3.7 mi, 1520 ft, 7.8%) Of the 3 main routes from Hwy 9 to Empire Grade, this is the easiest. It starts very gently in the residential area, then delves into the forested redwood are and steepens. The grade is highly inconsistent, and wide selection of gears may be required. Towards the top the road has been recently repaved and is very pleasant and in shade on the hot afternoon. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Mt. Madonna** (from Casserly Rd: 4.1 miles, 1590 ft, 7.4%; from Hazel Dell 2.7 mi, 1290 ft, 9.0%) West side Mt. Madonna Rd connects Casserly Rd in Corralitos to Mt. Madonna County park, and is located in the coastal hills west of Gilroy. One story that the name comes from ruins of the 19th century cattle baron Henry Miller's summer house built by Italian woodcutters. Another is that travelling poet gave it a name. It is so far south from Stanford that car-less roundtrip of more than 120 miles would only be manageable in June when the days are the longest. It will test how much you have left, so be prepared with water and food. While the park itself is one of the most majestic in Santa Clara county dominated by redwood forest, the road that leads into it is quite tormenting. From Casserly to Hazel Dell the road ascends gradually, gaining only 300 ft in 1.4 miles (4% grade), but after Hazel Dell the road begins a relentless, often shadeless, 9.0% grade **climb**. In the summer, it is often hot and windless, exposed though flanked by some eucalyptus trees. 1.1 miles after Hazel Dell the grade is gradually increasing up to 10%, followed by short 12.3% section. After that the grade becomes non-uniform with some steep pitches. This rural road through farm lands does offer breathtaking (not that you need it!) views of Monterey Bay. The road crests at the intersection of Mt. Madonna, Summit and Pole Line roads, where you'd be welcomed by a big old redwood tree standing stubbornly at the intersection. The other side of Mt. Madonna Rd will lead you to Watsonville Rd and is all gravel so be sure to take your mtb skills with you if you elect to continue that way. As a descent, the paved side of Mt. Madonna is not exciting. It's narrow, with almost no straight lines, and is very much like

descending Moody except far longer. [[Aerial Photo: Mt. Madonna Rd from Casserly to Hazel Dell](#)]  
[[Aerial Photo: Mt. Madonna Rd from Hazel Dell To Summit Rd](#)]

- **Eureka Canyon Rd** (8.9 miles, 1690 ft, 3.6%) **Eureka Canyon Rd** is one of the most beautiful if pothole-riddled in Santa Cruz mountains. The traffic is very light because it doesn't connect to any populous section of Santa Cruz county. The road is twisty and ascends gradually through a dark cool forest before cresting near Buzzard Lagoon Rd and Highland Way. The views of Monterey Bay in the occasional openings are spellbinding and forest canopy is such refreshing shady haven on a hot summer afternoon! The road starts at the Corralitos Market and Sausage Co (finest purveyors of Kobasica outside of Poland), and is hard to miss. The grade is gentle along Corralitos Creek right on up to where Shingle Mill Gulch meets Rattlesnake Gulch at the hairpin at Grizzly Flat. Now you have the stairway to the Ormsby/Buzzard Lagoon junction. The road tucks into left hairpins where you have the refreshing sight and sound of water gushing down the last ridge of Sierra Azul, greedy for the sea. Now you gaze down upon a seascape. The foreground is a rugged green redwood canopy. The San Andreas Rift Zone zigzags along this flank of Loma Prieta. The canyon road traverses the naked face of the big Eureka slide. As A descent it is not too bad due to its rather shallow grade, but will test your cornering abilities. [[Aerial Photo: Overview](#)] [[Aerial Photo: Corralitos to Mormon Gulch](#)] [[Aerial Photo: Eureka Gulch](#)] [[Aerial Photo: Grizzly Flat](#)] [[Aerial Photo: Eureka Slide](#)] [[Photo: View from Highland Way](#)] [[Photo: another View from Highland Way](#)]
- **Pole Line Rd** (2.3 miles, 520 ft, 4.3%) Pole Line Rd is another pretty an interesting road leading into Mt. Madonna County park, from CA Hwy 152 (Hecker Pass). Gorgeous redwoods adorn the steady climb, except one 20% wall and a flat section near the intersection with Blackhawk Canyon Rd. Pole Line Rd is more frequently used as a descent if used at all. [[Aerial Photo](#)]

### Across the Bay

- **Mt. Hamilton** , (18.3 miles, 4380 ft, 4.0% (misleading due to descends) more like 6-7% on the climbs) Mount Hamilton Road climbs from San Jose on Alum Rock Avenue to Lick Observatory at the Mount Hamilton summit. It is actually three climbs, with three climbing sections separated by moderate descents of 2 miles and 1 mile. As is clear from the distance, the grade is shallow, but the climb seems to go on forever. When one gets sight of the summit, and the end seems near, there is still five miles of climbing to go. Each year there is a famous USCF race over the top, down twisting San Antonio Valley Road, and on to Livermore. There is also the popular "Mount Hamilton Challenge" recreational ride every year, which also passes over the summit. Mt Hamilton Road offers some wide views of the San Jose area below, which is impressive if one likes unfettered urban sprawl. All the climbing pays off, however, when from the summit, on a clear day, one can see all the way to the Sierra. You can also see the sinuous path the road took you to the summit. The descent of Mount Hamilton Road is neither especially bad nor good. The shallow grade limits speeds, and one must keep a constant watch for auto traffic, but it isn't nearly as challenging as the descent of San Antonio Mountain Road to the east. The lower portion of Mt Hamilton is riddled with slick patchwork on the pavement, and thus care must be exercised here, especially in wet conditions. [[Aerial Photo: Overview](#)] [[Evening View of San Jose](#)]
- **Mt. Diablo from South Gate** (10.8 miles, 3,500 ft, 6.2%) Mt. Diablo towers over the East Bay area with the summit altitude of 3,849 ft. On a clear day, views from its 3849 foot summit stretch more than 200 miles. Mount Diablo has the largest viewshields in the United States and second in the world (the first one is Mt. Kilimanjaro). Mount Diablo is a geologic anomaly located approximately 30 miles east of San Francisco. The upper portion of the mountain consists of volcanic and sedimentary deposits of

what once was one or more island arcs of the Pacific Plate dating back to the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, between 190 and 90 million years ago. During this time, the Pacific Plate was subducting beneath the North American continent and these deposits were scraped off the top and accreted onto the North American Plate. The faulting action is ongoing and will continue to change the shape of Mount Diablo, along with the rest of the Coast Ranges. Mount Diablo is steeped in lore -- much of it involving the mountain's name. The reference to "diablo" or devil can be traced back to 1805, when Spanish military troops searched for runaway mission Indians. At a willow thicket near present-day Buchanan Field in Concord, the soldiers encountered a camp of Chupcan people and surrounded it. During that night, the Indians escaped unseen and unheard. Angry and confused, the Spanish called the site, "Monte del Diablo", or "Thicket of the Devil". Later, English-speaking newcomers mistakenly assumed the word "monte" meant "mountain" and applied the title to the prominent nearby peak. A linguistic accident thus gave California its Devil Mountain. Mount Diablo had profound significance for many Native California groups within its expansive view. The Julpun of the area now known as Brentwood and Byron recognized the mountain as the birthplace of the world. Hundreds of miles away in the Sierra Nevada, some Northern Miwok saw it as the place from which a supranatural being lit a previously dark landscape. Further south, the Central Miwok featured this mountain as part of their most sacred ceremonies. Wintun elder Frances McDaniel said that Wintun spiritual leaders prayed to the creator from the mountain's heights. Chochenko speakers from the Mission San Jose area called the mountain Tuyshtak, meaning "at the day". The Nisenan of the Sacramento Valley called it Sukkaan, or as Nisenan elder Dalbert Castro once explained, "the place where dogs came from in trade". Mount Diablo is eclipsed only by Mount Hamilton in total height, but, unlike Mount Hamilton, there are no downhill sections as you head towards the top. Also, the average grade is steeper than Mount Hamilton, and that killer section at the very end is a religious experience! The South Gate Rd climb officially starts at the altitude 800 ft in Danville at Athenian School. Very pretty road with little traffic, initially narrow, with some pothole and a few tight turns and small descents. In 2 miles, you reach intersection with North Gate, South Gate Roads and Mount Diablo Scenic Blvd ends at the ranger's station. The grade increases from there on but the view is spectacular and more than compensates. You can even see Santa Cruz mountains on the other side of the bay. The grade levels off in a few places to provide some relief. The very finish is quite steep - way over 10% and will demand some prayers! As a descent the road has its twists but it is not too bad because it's not particularly steep. This route is also the site of annual Mt. Diablo Challenge, a ride to benefit American Lung Association, first Sunday of October each year. See if you can beat 1 hour! On the summit is a small museum and a rather impressively built lookout dating back to the 1930's and the era of the Civilian Conservation Corps. On a clear day one can see Mt. Lassen, Mt. Shasta (with binoculars), and even Yosemite's Half Dome in Sierras! [\[Aerial Photo: Overview of South Approach\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: From Athenian School to Artist Point\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Artist Point and Intermediate Descent\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Junction of North Gate, South Gate and Summit Roads\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Mount Diablo Summit\]](#)

- **Mt. Diablo from North Gate** (12.3 miles, 3670 ft, 5.7%) Escape to the curves or simply ride up for the intense view. North Gate Road to the summit is only a mere 11 miles. It seems much longer. It starts in Walnut Creek at the intersection with Oak Grove Ave. The ride is very curvy but not too steep. Headed up the hill is an amazing experience. The unobstructed views are to die for as North Gate Road climbs up the west side of the mountain, and every single corner will have you pulling to the side to stare in amazement. This level of openness is probably unparalleled in the entire Bay Area. The lower elevation flows up a draw and then it's a series of switchbacks weaving a tapestry of pavement up the mountainside. Pavement quality is average, not spectacular, not horrible. There will be some crumbly sections along the edges and much of the ride has no center line. And the climb is steady

and not excessively steep. As a descent North Gate Rd is very nice. [\[Aerial Photo: Overview of North Approach\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Mount Diablo Summit\]](#)

- **Calaveras** (8.0 miles, 1380 ft, 4.9%) Calaveras (inflected form of the Spanish word "calavera", meaning "skull") starts as a climb after the intersection with Welch Creek. It is not very steep at all. Initially, it gains elevation at probably 5%, but almost levels off once great views of Calaveras reservoir and Sunol backcountry are revealed. Calaveras Dam, which creates the reservoir, used to be the largest earth fill dam in the world. It is 210 feet tall and was completed in 1925 after the earlier dam collapsed due to engineering flaws. The city and county of San Francisco owns the dam and reservoir. Calaveras Reservoir is fed mainly by Arroyo Hondo and Calaveras Creek. Lying in the Calaveras Valley, the region is a geologically active area with the Calaveras Fault running below it. Climbing Calaveras Rd from the other side is much shorter. Either way, beware of the sleek damp corners! The main profile ends at the intersection with Felter Rd. At this point Calaveras Rd descends into Milpitas and becomes busy residential thoroughfare. Honorable mention goes to Old Calaveras Rd which predates "new" Calaveras. It runs between Evans Rd (named after the early farmer; just off Calaveras in Milpitas) and Downing Rd (connecting back to Calaveras Rd). Old Calaveras is quite steep even it averages only 8% over its 1.1 mile course (460 ft of climbing). At the bottom it probably hits 15%! [\[Aerial Photo: Calaveras Rd - Main Climb\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Old Calaveras Rd\]](#) [\[Photo: Calaveras Reservoir\]](#) [\[Photo: View North\]](#) [\[Photo: View of Sunol Valley\]](#)
- **Palomares** (from Niles to the top: 4.1 miles, 1060 ft, 4.9%; from Palo Verde to the top: 5.6 miles, 910 ft, 3.1%) Palomares (meaning pigeon houses in Spanish) is a very nice wooded rugged road with little traffic and low civilization level. It forks off Niles Canyon Rd east of Fremont and leads to Palo Verde road and Eden Canyon Rd that parallels I-580 between Castro Valley and Dublin. From the south, it climbs, with some steep sections for over 4 miles, is somewhat flat at the crest. From the north, it is more shallow and less intimidated. It's a fun descent in both directions. Couple of wineries along the way, and cool streamside shade. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#) [\[Photo: Palomares Valley\]](#) [\[Photo: Near Niles Canyon\]](#) [\[Photo: Steep Section\]](#) [\[Photo: Top view\]](#) [\[Photo: Descent to Palo Verde\]](#) [\[Photo: Dublin Canyon Rd at the northern end of Palomares\]](#)
- **Morgan Territory Rd North** (5.4 miles, 1430 ft, 5.0%) The north side of Morgan Territory Rd climb starts from Marsh Creek Rd in Concord on the back side of Mount Diablo. Uplifting shaded single lane climb with tight corners amidst golden domes of East Bay to the park at the top. Not very difficult for either climbing or descending. [\[Aerial Photo: Marsh Creek Rd to Curry Canyon\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Curry Canyon to Finley Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Finley Rd to Hilltop\]](#)
- **Morgan Territory Rd South** (5.0 miles, 1510 ft, 5.8%) The south side of Morgan Territory Rd climb starts from Manning Rd in Livermore on the back side of Mount Diablo. Merciless shadeless single lane curvy climb. A bit steeper than the northern approach. More for hard-core types. Or for descenders who like tight corners. [\[Aerial Photo: Morgan Territory Rd and Manning Rd\]](#) [\[Aerial Photo: Morgan Territory Rd South Near the Top\]](#)
- **Quimby Rd** (5.1 miles, 2100 ft, 7.7%) Quimby Rd is a short cut which bypasses the section of Mount Hamilton Road to the first intermediate descent, eliminating 8 miles and 1500 feet of climbing. It starts off innocently in a residential neighborhood deep in San Jose, but the grade increases steadily, until with 1 mile to go one is assaulted with a series of vertical switchbacks and an extremely steep, truly daunting final straight which, with the help of the pitiless sun, will sap any remaining strength from the legs. Final 3.1 miles gain 1650 ft, more than 10%, while the last 1.2 miles average even more - 11.5%. Two farm gates on the top. Following the climb is a 1-mile descent to Mount Hamilton Road,

losing 600 feet. After surviving this, climbing the remaining 2800 feet of Mount Hamilton Road seems trivial. Wild turkeys may observe suffering from sidelines, so try to put on a good show. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#) [\[View of the start\]](#) [\[Nearing the top\]](#) [\[Looking back from the top\]](#) [\[Buckeye Farm at the top\]](#) [\[Intersection of Quimby Rd and Mt. Hamilton Rd\]](#)

- **Kincaid Rd** (6 miles, 850 ft climb, 1070 ft descent, 7.1% or 11%) Kincaid Rd is a dead end sinuously winding **off-shoot** connecting Mt. Hamilton Rd and Olondo Creek. After couple of rolling miles on good pavement it heads down densely forested canyon at almost 11%, crosses the **bridge**, and then climbs on the other side for another 2 miles at 7.1% grade, and then briefly descends to a dead end at the gate. Traffic is almost non-existent, pastoral views abound and the surface is a bit abrasive, especially after the bridge. As pavement continues beyond the gate it is tempting to know what's hidden there ... Roundtrip is 12 miles and is a nice add-on to Mt. Hamilton expeditions. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#) [\[Pastoral View\]](#) [\[The Gate\]](#) [\[Mt Hamilton View\]](#)
- **Welch Creek Rd** (4.1 miles, 1910 ft, 8.8%) Welch Creek Road is not known to many cyclists, particularly on the Peninsula. The reason is twofold. First, the climb is away from civilization, in the Sunol Regional Wilderness in the East Bay. It's off of Calaveras a few miles past the 680 underpass, **right before Calaveras itself starts climbing, at the place known as Haynes Gulch**, flanked to the left by Apperson Ridge with its mighty Maguire Peaks (trail to the top is at 0.72 mi mark, but no bikes are allowed on that trail). Second, many bruised souls conceal their traumatic experiences with this long climb. It's a monster that will grind you to the bone, will turn your quads to jelly, will bake you in the cruel sun or envelope in wintry fog. The difficulty of its narrow one lane with abrasive pavement, and inconsistent gradient is tempered by the views and sounds of the creek (in the winter), and open skies and pastures at the top but accentuated by frequent (four or five total) cattleguards. Sunol Regional Park stretches from 0.3 to 2.8 mile markers. Within the park, a stretch of road between 2.0 and 2.5 mile markers is **bloody steep**, in excess of 15%. Above 2.8 mark, the road **emerges from the canyon and becomes steeper again, bloody steeper**. By the finish the gradient is **truly bloody relentless**. Views towards the bay could be **tremendous**. See also [here](#). Net climbing is only about 1900 ft but will all the ups and downs you'll end up climbing 2265 ft, which would produce 10.7% average grade. Vultures are ready to pick on your exhausted meat, I mean muscles. You can also see acorn woodpecker, black phoebe, titmouse, yellow-billed magpie and turkey vulture. Did I mention it is long (and that's only to the end of paved section, dirt segment continues far beyond, as a bike legal dirt fire road for another 3.4 miles towards Rose Peak (which itself is only 36 ft lower than Mt. Diablo) but much less steeply, and "No Motor Vehicles" signs could obviously be ignored) and illegal beyond the border of Ohlone Wilderness? Since there are multiple cattleguards on steep stretches, caution and good brake pads are advised when descending. For the daring ... Update: Sometime in 2007 the road was repaved and asphalt is pristine - Enjoy! [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)
- **Weller Rd** (3.4 miles, 1170 ft, 6.4%) Weller Rd is an interesting side road off Calaveras which takes one up behind the east side of Mt. Allison, the highest of the three peaks (Mission, Allison, and Monument) immediately east of Milpitas. Not too steep, but not too shady either. The road traverses mostly farm land which in ancient times belonged to Tamyen Ohlone tribe. The name is that of one of the pioneers buried at the Laguna cemetery in Ed R. Levin Regional Park (below Weller Rd on Calaveras Rd). Beyond the gate the road continues for a few more miles as paved private road, and eventually turns to dirt. As you ride up the hill you may notice stone walls around the ridges. Some of these were built by Amish family that lived here, others are very ancient and their origin is hidden in the dark ages. [\[Aerial View\]](#)

- **Felter Rd** (4.2 miles, 1070 ft, 4.8%) Felter Rd (named after another early pioneer) connects Calaveras Rd in Milpitas to Sierra Rd and runs through sun-drenched and exposed Los Buellis Hills. It is a quiet road with a steady gradient, frequented by cyclists, so drivers who use them are expecting to see cyclists. It is used more frequently as a descent for those brave souls who climbed Sierra Rd on the other side (see below). Frequent switchbacks make good braking technique essential. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#) [\[Photo: Bottom of Felter Rd\]](#) [\[Photo: Los Buellis hills\]](#) [\[View of Calaveras Reservoir\]](#)
- **Marsh Rd** (1.9 miles, 310 ft, 3.1%) Marsh Rd is quiet and scenic dead end road with hardly any traffic that is an offshoot from Felter Rd. The road descends into a valley that holds Calaveras Reservoir, bottoms at Calaveras Creek and climbs gently towards the gate shortly thereafter. The surface is decent and the gradient is reasonable, although steeper than the average grade indicated because 310 ft is net climbing between the start and the finish, not the total amount. The road gained notoriety after 1981 when the local 16 year old high school student raped and killed his 14 year old girlfriend and dumped her body in a ravine on Marsh Rd. The story received significant public attention and was made into a movie "River's Edge". The ghost of the girl is said to haunt the bridge across Calaveras Creek. The legend is that if you drive at night across the creek back to Felter Rd, you'd see girl's reflection in the rearview mirror but if you look back, ghostly image disappears. The ghost legend made the road a notorious party hangout for the local teenagers and ghost hunters, so county authorities declared the road closed to the public and erected a gate. Old man living by the bridge has been known to shoot at trespassers who go up to reservoir in search of the urban legend. He is often mistaken for albino. Mountain men, separatists and homeless living in the area could be, however, as dangerous. [\[Photo: Marsh Rd is Closed Sign\]](#)
- **Sierra Rd** (5.7 miles, 1910 ft, 6.6%) Sierra Road climbs from busy Piedmont Road into the residentially-populated hills over Milpitas. The grade is steady near 10%. This selective hill was used in the Tour of California and inflicted pain even on jaded professional cyclists. The views are fabulous, whether looking towards [the Bay](#) or towards [Black Mountain, Mt. Day, Rattlesnake Butte, or Mt. Hamilton](#). At the top, Sierra Rd continues as a rolling, twisting, narrow road to Felter Road, rewarding riders with some excellent views (which accounts for much lower overall grade). Unlike climbs on the coastal range, Sierra Road has significant sun exposure, and thus can be extra challenging during hot summer days. [\[Aerial Photo\]](#)

## Beyond

- **Mt. Tamalpais** (12.5 miles, 2200 ft, 3.3% (5.5% excluding Hwy 1) to race finish; 15.5 miles, 2850 ft, 3.5% (5.2% excluding Hwy 1) to East Peak) Just north of San Francisco's Golden Gate is Mount Tamalpais, 6,300 acres of redwood groves and oak woodlands with a stunning view from the 2,571-foot peak. On a clear day, visitors can see the Farallon Islands 25 miles out to sea, the Marin County hills, San Francisco and the bay, hills and cities of the East Bay, and Mount Diablo. On rare occasions, the Sierra Nevada's snow-covered mountains can be seen 150 miles away. Coastal Miwok Indians lived in the area for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. In 1770, two explorers named the mountain La Sierra de Nuestro Padre de San Francisco, which was later changed to the Miwok word Tamalpais. There are several routes up the mountain. One would be to follow the course of the annual Mt. Tamalpais Hillclimb road race, which starts off at Stinson beach, continues for about 5 flat miles along coastal Hwy 1, then turn to Bolinas-Fairfax Rd and climb the next 5 miles. After the cattle guard keep left on W. Ridgecrest Blvd. In approximately 2.5 rolling miles you'll see the big parking lot at the intersection with Pan Toll Rd. This is the finish area for the race. By this point you will have climbed 2200 ft in total of 12.5 miles. You can continue to climb E. Ridgecrest Blvd to the East Peak of Mt. Tamalpais. In another 3.0 miles you'll climb another 660 ft. Alternative route to the race finish

area is to take Panoramic Hwy and Pan Toll for 1880 ft of climbing in 5.3 miles (6.7% average grade), a very pretty climb as well. [[Aerial Photo: Panoramic Hwy and Pan Toll Rd to Ridgecrest Blvd](#)]

## Far Beyond

- **Old Priest Grade** (2.0 miles, 1500 ft, 14%) Notoriously hard climb going to Big Oak Flat in Sierras. With a few sections at ~20% it is a groaner. Also known as "Road from Hell" with traditional canister of water midway. The road, which was originally built during the Gold Rush is a shortcut for the more modern SR120 (New Priest Grade), starting in [Moccasin, CA](#). The altitude at the top is about 4,000 ft, yet the road's westward exposure tends to absorb as much heat as possible and produces ambient temperature of 100F on a sunny summer afternoon, making altitude not a relief. At all. [[Aerial Photo: Overview](#)] [[Photo: View from New Priest to Old Priest](#)]
- **Mix Canyon Rd** (3.95 miles, 2270 ft, 10.9%) Absolute hardest hill in Vacaville area. The quoted stats are for the paved section of the climb. The stats exceed those of Alba, but the climb is in fact disproportionately more difficult. The reason is that there are at least 2 short descents and 2 short flat sections (about 0.1 mi each) in the lower portion of the climb. Initial portion is in [Weldon canyon](#), about 1.5 miles at average grade of 5%, ending at the Twin Fawn Trail trailhead. From then on, the average grade is 14.5%! Hard, hard, harder! There are markers every 0.1 miles to quantify the pain. For the most part, the road parallels a [creek](#), is mostly in the shade and could be quite pretty in the spring. At 3.2 mi mark the road emerges from the canyon to the spine-tingling beauty of surrounding views and stunning pain of extreme switchbacks. Several switchbacks here exceed 20%. Rails with graffiti are reminiscent of the famed Alpine ascents. The paved [road ends with a fork](#). Gated private paved road to the left leads to communication installations on top of [Mt. Vaca](#), the highest point in Solano county. Dirt road to the right continues uphill and reaches the ridgeline (Blue Ridge, north-south running ridgeline north of I-80, also known as Rocky Ridge) very soon. Majestic [views on all sides](#) follow the road as it peregrinates the ridge for another 3.5 miles, finally terminating at the private gate. The viewshield is very large, especially on the clear day. From the ridge you can see [lake Berryessa](#) tucked peacefully amongst the mountains. The ridge follows the fault line and contains an epicenter of Vacaville-Dixon earthquake of 1892, 6.5 magnitude. It is more likely, though, that the shaking you'll feel once at the top is your trembling legs, nothing more. Speaking of shaking, the climb was used in 2003 to shake up the general classification of Solano Bicycle Classic, a pro stage race. Many professionals reported much pain! [[Aerial Photo: Overview](#)] [[Photo: In the beginning](#)] [[Photo: Hairpin](#)] [[Photo: Steeeeeeep!](#)]
- **Gates Canyon Rd** (3.6 miles, 1100 ft, 5.8%) Second hardest hill in Vacaville area and climbs the same Blue Ridge as the first hardest. Similarly, the listed stats make the climb appear easier than it actually is. The reason is the highly inconsistent gradient, and relatively [long prelude](#) to the steep part. Initially, the road passes some farmland, [orchards](#) and beehives, while offering view of Mt. Vaca. Serious climbing only starts at 1.95 miles mark. Most of the time the road follows [Alamo creek](#). Between 2.7 and 3.4 mile marks the road [is unpaved](#). Pavement gradually improves and the best pavement is beyond [the gate at 3.6 mile mark](#). The private road that continues beyond the gate leads to the top of Rocky Ridge. [[Aerial Photo: Overview](#)]

## Mountain Bike Routes

\* [Mountain Bike Routes](#)

Sources:

- Sergei Morozov: compilation, climb statistics, descriptions
- Chandra Nair: inspiration, flat roads descriptions
- John Cahoy: spirit of explorer, short hills descriptions
- **Klimb** €“ climb statistics
- Keyhole/Google Earth: aerial maps
- Dan Connelly: climb statistics, descriptions, some wisdom
- Guy Neenan: climb descriptions, ride descriptions
- Bill Bushnell: climb descriptions, ride descriptions
- Jobst Brandt: climb descriptions, ride annotations
- Brian Percival - climbs intelligence reports
- "Roads to Ride South. A bicyclist's topographic guide to San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties" by Grant Petersen and John Kluge
- "Roads to Ride. A bicyclist's topographic guide to Alameda, Contra Costa and Marin Counties" by Grant Petersen with Mary Anderson
- **Bay Area Climbs by Western Wheelers**



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