

# THE NAPA VALLEY TOUR



## **Four days, 200-300 miles**

Napa Valley is probably the most famous wine-producing region in America. Other regions may make wines of equal, or in some cases, better quality. Other regions may boast thousands of acres of pampered vines and dozens of prestigious wineries. But no other region comes close to Napa for the intensive development of its local viticulture...from the percentage of available land turned to vines to the sheer number of wineries along its roads, to the careful grooming of its reputation as the holy grail of grapes.

But Napa Valley is more than just the wine in its bottles. Its prestige and natural beauty have proved to be powerful magnets for visitors, and it ranks right up there with Disneyland and Yosemite and the Monterey Peninsula as one of California's most popular tourist destinations. There are many things to see and do besides visiting wineries, from riding the Napa Valley Wine Train to taking a hot air balloon flight to being pampered at a spa. From the point of view of a cycle-tourist, this is something of a good-news-bad-news deal. There are literally hundreds of inns and B-&-B's scattered up and down the valley, so you can find overnight accommodations with just the right combination of luxury and economy to suit your taste and wallet. But the bad news is that there is also a great deal of traffic, at least on certain roads and at certain times.

Our Napa Valley Mini-Tour does a thorough job of exploring the best of the region's backroads. Given the particular geography of the area, it's impossible to avoid the busy roads entirely, but we've tried hard to keep them to a minimum, and to steer our cyclists onto as many miles of scenic, cycle-friendly byways as possible.

## **Where to stay**

After considering each of the valley's small towns as the base of operations for this tour, we settled on Yountville for several reasons: it works best for our routes; it's conveniently located for driving in, being the town closest to the Bay Area; and it has—in our opinion—the nicest selection of places to stay. Lodgings here tend to be quite luxurious and are priced accordingly. The tariffs may not be outrageous by big city standards, but it's a far cry from the economy motels of this world. For such establishments, one would have to stay in nearby Napa, half a dozen miles to the south. That's another reason for choosing Yountville: St. Helena and Calistoga—Napa



in the opposite direction, and hooking onto them from the camp would be really difficult. It would be better in those cases to drive to Yountville and ride from there. The regional park, to the south of Napa, works fairly well for the two southern routes, but is off the map for the two northern ones. In short, neither is very convenient. Frankly, if you want to camp, this is probably not the best tour to choose.

Yountville is a charming little town. Its main street (Washington, both photos) is set a long block off busy Hwy 29, so the buzz and fuss of traffic is minimal. (In contrast, 29 slices right through the centers of both Calistoga and St. Helena, and on almost any day, traffic through the hearts of those towns is at near gridlock.) There are many interesting shops in Yountville and a wide variety of restaurants, bistros, cafes, and diners for stoking up your boilers before or after the rides. And of course, there are dozens of fine wineries nearby—some within walking distance—for tasting and buying.

Valley's other two resort towns—are quite a bit further from the less expensive motels in Napa.

At the end of this section, we will list all the lodgings in Yountville that we discovered while investigating the town. We have noted their location on the Yountville detail map. (This detail is located on the Up Valley map, for no other reason than that it provided the only open spot for the inset.) We will also list all of the motels in Napa that are located nearest to Yountville...within a few miles. It is not within the scope of this tour packet to assign relative values to the local accommodations. We just list them... you have to figure out which one works for you.

We suggest you consult the California Automobile Association's Tour Book for prices and ratings, or else check out their websites. We will only say that all of the lodgings in Yountville are very nice. Some are smaller—almost like Bed-&-Breakfast inns—and some are larger. Bordeaux House, Maison Fleurie, and Petit Logis fall into the former category. The Railway Inn is unique: nine rooms built inside renovated railroad cars and cabooses. The other four inns are all larger, with many extra services and frills.

We include contact info for a state park campground in Napa Valley and a regional campground in the city of Napa, in case you want to turn this into a camping vacation. However, both parks are quite a way from Yountville, and the routes will have to be altered in one way or another to make it work. The Up Valley route goes right past the state park, and the Pope Valley route could be bent around that way fairly easily, but the other two routes head off



### **A word about the wineries**

We tend to discourage cycling and wine tasting at the same time, at least not to excess. For one thing, it's no more correct to drink and ride a bike than it is to drink and drive a car. We understand you won't get plastered on a few sips here and there, but remember that when you're riding, your metabolism will force-feed whatever alcohol you do consume directly into your system, so a little of it can go a long way. Furthermore, many of the wineries take a dim view of having cyclists drop in for tastings. They know you're not going to buy a case of wine and strap it to your bike. They (and we) would suggest that you finish your ride and then come back in the afternoon in your car for a taste...and a purchase.

Many wineries will ship wine home for you of course. So a few stops for tastings, coupled with the occasional purchase (for shipment home) is a plausible option.

## About the region

Napa Valley is a simple piece of geography to understand: three miles wide and about 30 miles long, surrounded by steep hills but virtually flat on the valley floor, and nearly every inch turned to vineyards, except for the land covered by four communities spaced at ten-mile intervals along its length, from north to south: Calistoga, Saint Helena, Yountville, and Napa. The valley is actually oriented along a northwest-to-southeast diagonal, but one tends to think of it simply as running north-south, with Calistoga at the upstream, northern end ("up valley," as the locals call it), and the "big city" of Napa at the bottom, where the little Napa River flows into San Francisco Bay. Two main highways run parallel up the entire length of the valley: Hwy 29 on the west side of the valley and Silverado Trail on the east side. Between them are about 16 cross-valley connector roads that tie the two highways together like rungs on a ladder.

Both of the main highways are two-lane, except for Hwy 29 south of Yountville, where it becomes a four-lane, divided highway and eventually a freeway. (There are many more miles of freeways in the southern end of the county, down around the bigger city of Napa, but those don't figure into our planning here.) Both highways carry a fairly heavy traffic load, but both are okay for riding most of the time, thanks to wide shoulders and good sightlines. We will be very clear in telling you where they are not okay, and will route the rides accordingly.

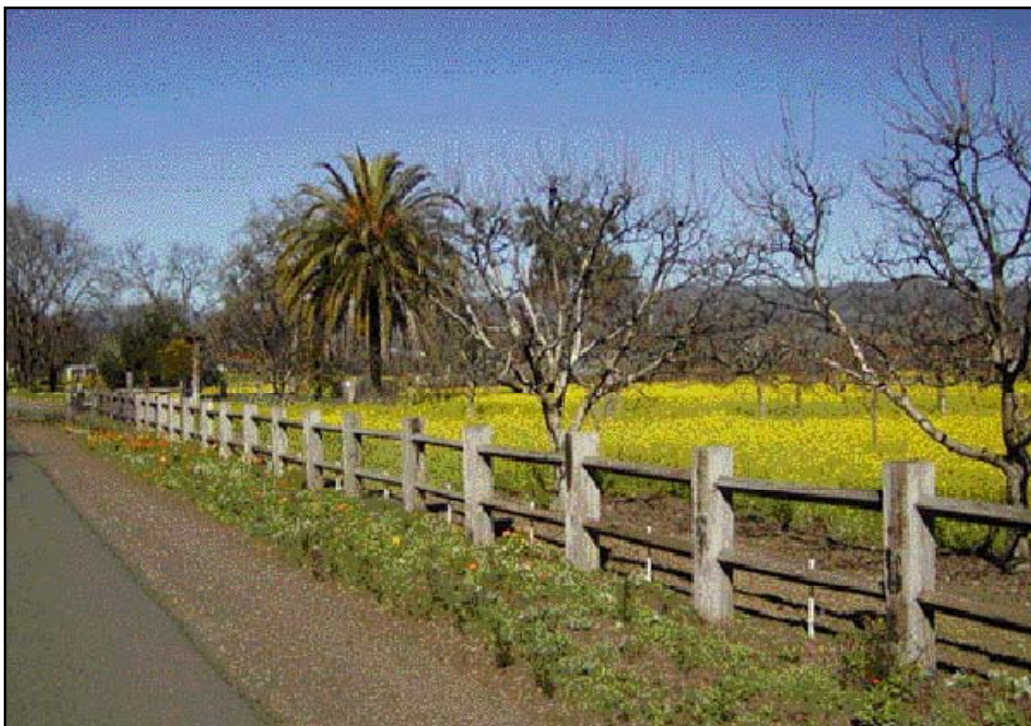
Napa County really has two personalities: the nearly flat valley floor and everything else... meaning, for the most part, the hills that surround the valley. Each of our four basic rides spends part of its time among the vineyards and wineries of the valley and part of its time climbing into and dropping back out of the wooded hills on either side. Each ride can be shortened to the point of remaining almost entirely on the flat valley floor, which is what many riders of limited experience and/or fitness may choose to do. Cyclists with at

least a moderate amount of training and ambition will probably want to climb out of the valley and explore the quieter roads in the hills. We will also point out ways to extend the basic rides, usually with somewhat hilly miles. The four rides are listed below in the order in which we would choose to do them. However, you can do them in whichever order you like, and can modify them to your heart's content.

Try as we might, we haven't been able to completely eliminate all redundancies on these rides. That is, there are places where the same section of road has to be used more than once, usually in getting in and out of Yountville. However, we have contrived to minimize any sense of *deja vu* by traveling the roads one way along a road on one day and in the opposite direction the next we use it.

All four rides begin and end at the corner of Washington Street and Yount Street...our notion of the center of town. Yount Street becomes Yount Mill Road as it leaves town, and we always refer to it as Yount Mill Road in the directions, even when it's in town.

Given the possibility of shortening the rides to the point of remaining almost entirely on the nearly-flat valley floor, we rank this as probably the easiest tour we offer. Even the full-length routes each day are quite manageable for moderate riders, with the possible exception of the Sonoma Loop, with its one big climb.



## The Rides

### Pope Valley Loop

51 miles, 2500' of climb



This is one of the most delightful, enjoyable rides we've ever had the pleasure of doing. We can comfortably, wholeheartedly recommend every mile of it, without any reservations or disclaimers. This is what cycling is supposed to be! The scenery is superb. The climbs are easy, even pleasant. And the downhill are terrific fun, especially the main one on Howell Mountain Road... one of our all-time favorite descents.

The ride begins—as all on this tour do—with a few miles of flat and mildly rolling terrain on the floor of the valley, almost always through the vineyards and past one winery after another. Some of these establishments are huge and carry well-known and highly revered names, while others are tiny and will be unknown to anyone but a dedicated wine bibber.

You'll spend most of these valley miles on Silverado Trail, the eastern half of the parallel highways that run all the way up the valley. It carries a fair amount of traffic—is rarely deserted—but there are almost always large, smooth shoulders. Indeed, when we ride here, we often reel off these flat, easy miles in a rotating double-pace line, without ever having the two-abreast file of riders encroach on the roadway. As you head north, the nearly-level valley floor will sprawl away on your left, while on your right, steep, rugged hills will rear up, often with chunky cliffs of basalt knuckling up out of the oak cover. This eastern flank of Napa Valley contains and displays

more exposed rock than any other region in the entire North Bay, and one of the most charming aspects of the local landscape is all the handsome old stone walls that line the roads...built with stones culled from the rocky fields.

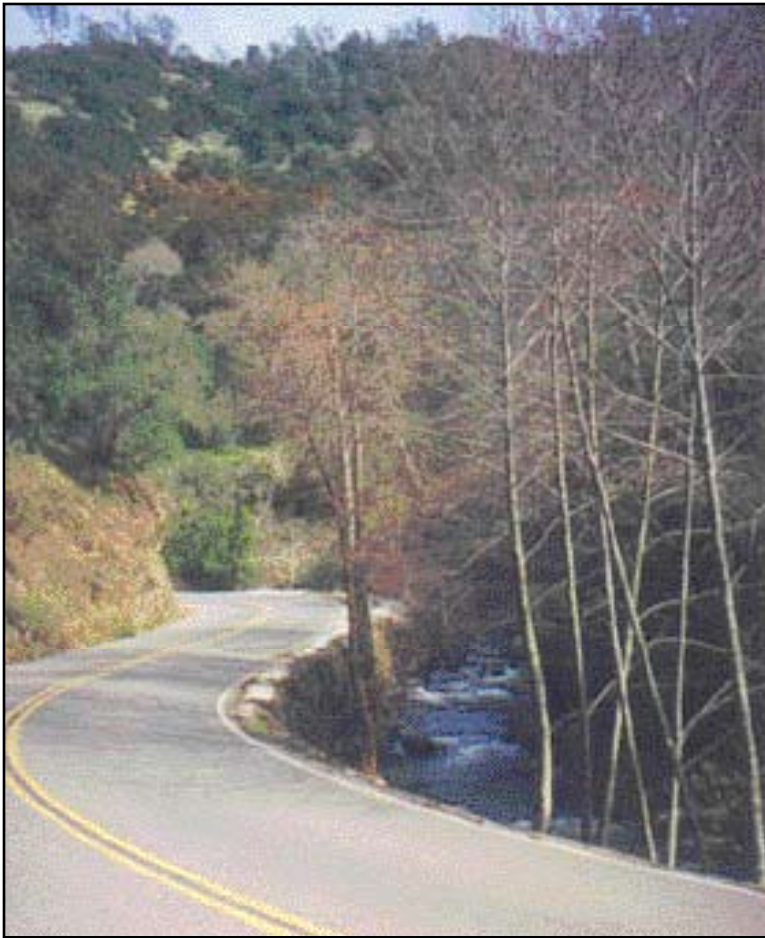
Just past eight miles, you leave Silverado Trail for a right on Sage Canyon, now also bearing the state route number 128. This is one of the main connector roads to Lake Berryessa—a popular recreation area—and so should theoretically carry a lot of traffic. And yet cyclists ride here all the time and rarely feel pestered by the passing parade. A brief, level run through the trees leads to a short, gradual climb, at the top of which, you roll out onto the shore of Lake Hennessey (below), the reservoir holding all of Napa's drinking water. As reservoirs go, this one is quite nice, doing a passable imitation of a natural lake. The road follows the pretty contours of the lakeshore for a couple of miles until a junction with

Chiles & Pope Valley Road. Hwy 128 bears to the right and heads for Lake Berryessa and on east toward the central valley of California.

We will be suggesting an optional loop out to Lake Berryessa for those who feel that 51 miles just isn't enough of a challenge. The quickest way to the lake is to follow Hwy 128 from this junction. The road is level for a bit and then tilts up into a fairly steep climb of a couple of miles. It's decent riding...nothing really wrong with it, really. But we recommend passing it by, even if you do plan to tackle the longer route. That's because you can get to the same place by sticking with the basic route for another six miles and then doubling back to 128 on a small connector road. It's longer—seven miles as opposed to 4.5—but the whole idea was to bulk your miles, right? The real reason for doing it this way isn't to simply pad the miles: the real reason is because the roads we're doing instead are so much nicer.

So...bear left from 128 onto Chiles & Pope Valley Road. For a mile or so the road is level, but then it encounters





further you go, the wilder it becomes, only it's a little harder to see up here because of the lay of the land and dense foliage. If you have a special fondness for cataracts and cascades, you might want to stop now and then and peer through the bushes down into the gorge. It's lovely.

Just before mile 18, you pop up out of the gorge and come to a junction. Lower Chiles Valley Road tees in from the right. Now that you've enjoyed the pretty climb up the gorge, this is the road you take back to 128 if you're doing the longer option. I'll discuss that route later.

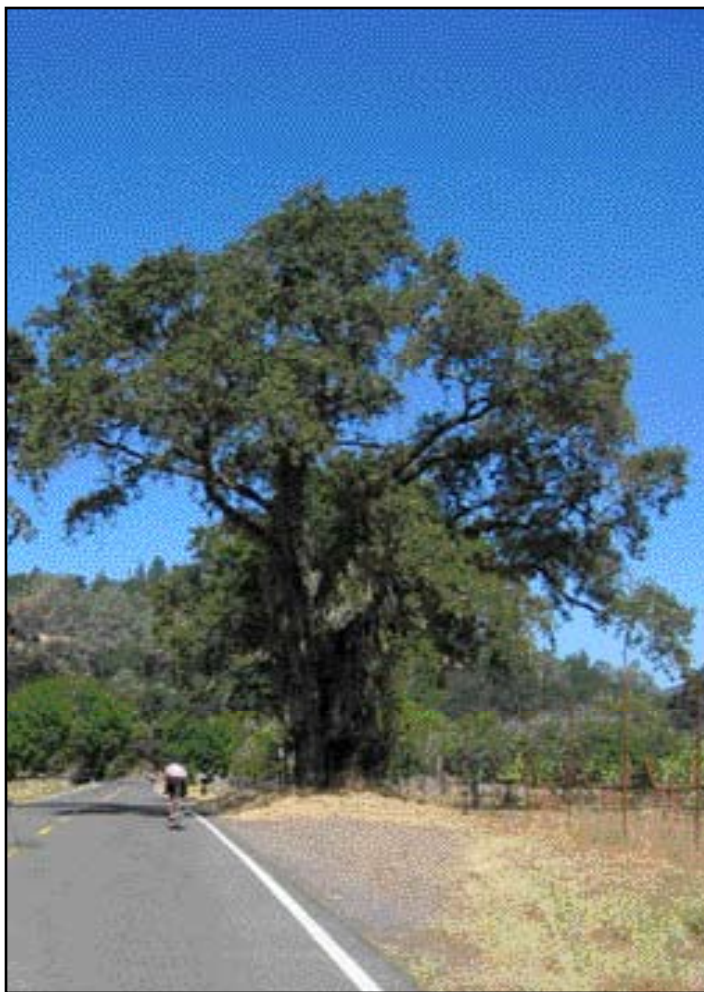
The basic route stays on Chiles & Pope Valley Road and continues to climb for another mile or so...very gently. It's one of those climbs that's so slight you'll be frustrated at not going faster. It appears almost flat, but isn't. Somewhere along here—perhaps at the top of this last, lazy climb—you leave Chiles Valley and enter Pope Valley. It's not entirely clear where the dividing line is. Most of the time, we hear the entire region referred to as Pope Valley. Whatever it's called, it's a great place to ride a bike (above). After those easy climbs, the road rolls gently up and down through long meadows and scattered woodlands. In the spring, the meadows are splashed with great, gaudy displays of wildflowers...many varieties in great profusion. It's quite a show. There is very little in the way of development in Pope Valley: the occasional ranch home or barn, and gravel drives leading off to more distant homes in the hills. Otherwise, it's quiet and empty.

At around 22 miles, you'll climb the only hill of any size

Chiles Creek and begins a gentle climb up the creek's rocky canyon. Several years ago, in an article about this area, we referred to this section of road as an "11 on a scale of 10." Nothing in all the years since has caused us to change that assessment. It is an ideal cycling road, even if it is an uphill. Our favorite part is a stretch of a couple of miles where the busy little creek is dancing along right next to the road (both photos). So close is the creek in some spots, that a moment's inattention could have you riding right off the edge of the pavement and dropping six feet into the drink. There isn't a hint of a guardrail. It sounds dangerous, but is really only picturesque and exciting, unless you somehow completely go to sleep on your bike.

Eventually the creek slips under the road and comes up on the left side, and the





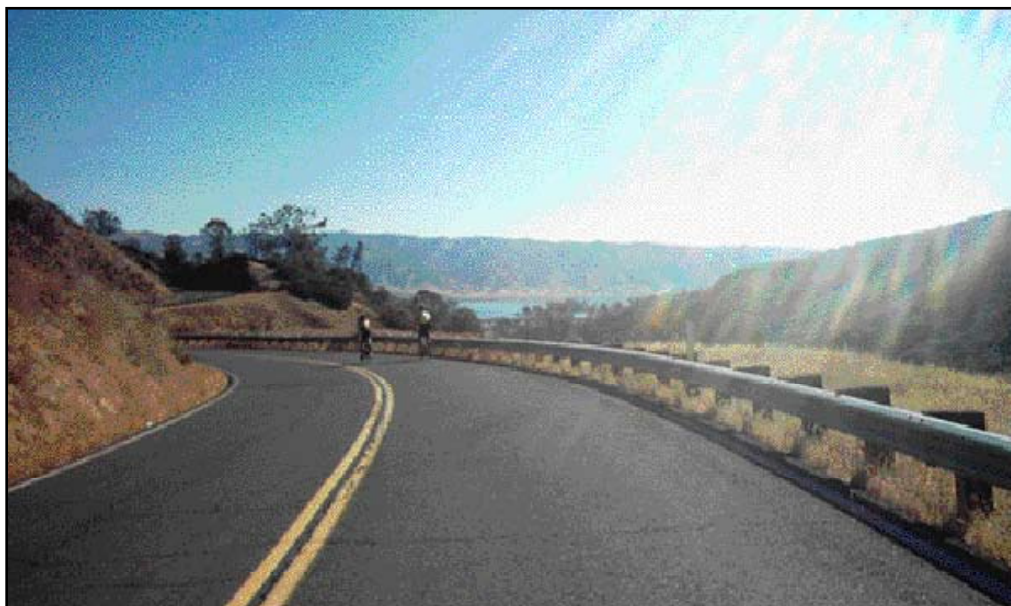
on this road (since the gorge)...probably the only one that will make you reach for your small chainring. Once down the far side of this little hill, you'll pass Pope Canyon Road and then Pope Valley Cross Road. This is where the longer route rejoins, and shortly thereafter, the reunited routes roll into the tiny village of Pope Valley. Let's leave folks resting at the Pope Valley store and go back to take a look at the long route...

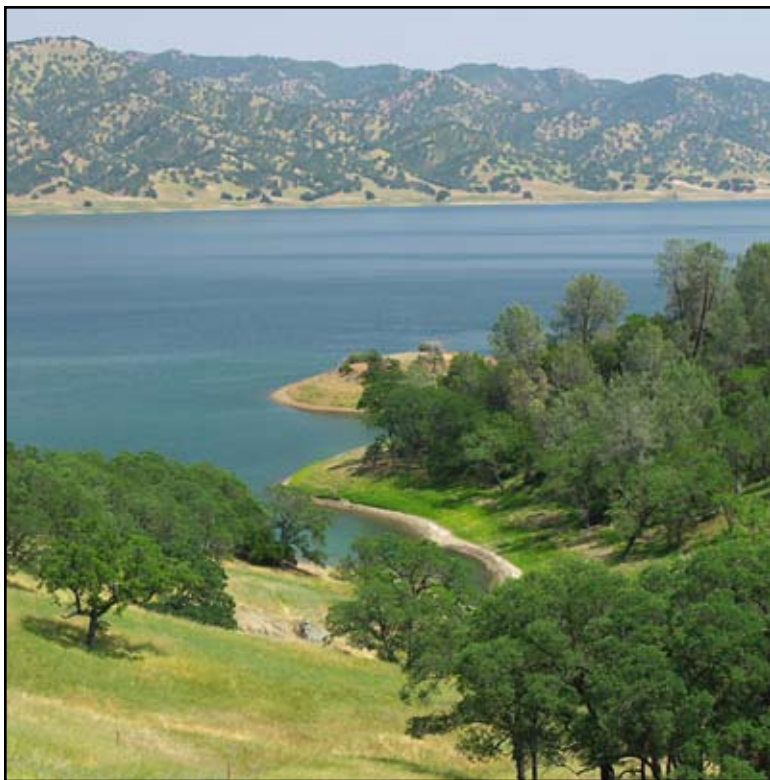
When Lower Chiles Valley Road departs from the basic route, it does so over a couple of steep ridges. You'll do some fairly ambitious climbing in the first couple of miles, followed by rollers and then flats through meadows and woods back to Hwy 128. The main highway climbs very gradually for a couple of miles and then drops for another couple of fast miles to a junction with Berryessa-Knoxville Road, which is well marked as the way to Lake Berryessa. There is a

store at the junction, the first one you will have seen on the ride. After the turn, the descent continues for another few miles toward the lake.

Usually, we're all for doing the longer routes, but we're only lukewarm about this loop. For one thing, You'll miss riding up the length of pretty Pope Valley. In our opinion, the road along Lake Berryessa (below) is not nearly as pleasant. Berryessa is a huge reservoir, and it looks it, with the telltale ring-around-the-tub shoreline common to all reservoirs where the water level fluctuates over the seasons. Although there are loads of oak trees dotting the hills, somehow this landscape contrives to look rather hot and barren. The lake is almost always visible off to the east, but you rarely get close to it, and never ride right along the shore. Then there's the road itself. It's one of those modern highways the Army Corps of Engineers builds around its reservoirs: wide and smooth, but with nothing charming or beguiling about it. It's also quite tiring, consisting almost entirely of one jumbo-sized roller after another. And finally, it's fairly busy with pickups pulling ski boats. Lake Berryessa is ski boat central, and on summer weekends, the place is buzzing with red-blooded American boys and girls revving up their toys...on the water and on the road.

After running up almost the entire length of the lake—13 miles since Hwy 128—you turn left on Pope Canyon Road and begin a long, rather steep climb up a bald, open hillside away from the lake. Over the top, there is a nice drop into a series of remote canyons. Small climbs and descents bring you back to Pope Valley. Once out on the flat valley floor (photo, bottom, next page), hang a right on Pope Valley Cross and cruise back to the basic route. Altogether, the add-on will fatten your day's logbook by about 21 miles over the standard route. In spite of my reserva-





*Lake Berryessa*

tions, this is still a good ride. We wouldn't recommend it at all if it weren't. We just prefer the shorter route.

Back to the basic route... The store in Pope Valley is the only place on the basic loop where you can buy food (outside of Napa Valley). The only hitch here is that the store is closed on Saturdays. The owners are Seventh Day Adventists. This entire area was heavily settled by members of that church, and you'll find the same closures in the town of Angwin, just off the route in a few miles. It might make sense to schedule this stage for any day other than Saturday. (This Saturday closure may have changed in recent years...it may now be open.)

There are three roads out of Pope Valley: the one you came in on, Pope Valley to the north, and Howell Mountain to the west. Even though you eventually want to head west, and even though you may see Howell Mountain on the route slip, you most definitely do not want to take it here. It climbs very steeply for over two miles—a really brutal pitch—and besides, it carries most of the traffic. No, we have a better option. Head north on Pope Valley for a couple of miles and turn left on Ink Grade.

But before you tackle Ink Grade, consider another possibility. If our reservations about the long loop to Lake Berryessa turned you off to that option, but you still want more

than 51 miles, you might take a run further north up Pope Valley Road to a couple of interesting roadside attractions. They're indicated on the map. One is Litto's Hubcap Ranch, which is just about what the name implies. For years, the local rancher—Litto—collected hubcaps and hung them on his roadside fence. Over time, the collection grew to astonishing size, and the whole assemblage took on the trappings of folk art. The site is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It's an oddball bit of rural Americana.

The other attraction is also on the historic register. Off on a short side road is Aetna Springs, or what's left of it. This entire region (Napa, Sonoma, Lake, and Mendocino Counties) has a long history of hot spring spas where people come to take the supposedly therapeutic waters that bubble up from geothermally heated springs. The heyday of the spas was the turn of the century, when wealthy city folk might come and stay for an entire season. A few hot springs resorts still exist, but most have disappeared. Aetna Springs—once one of the grandest of them all—still survives in a way, although no longer open for

guests. Currently owned by the Unification Church (the Moonies), it's in a state of moderate disrepair, but on-again-off-again plans are afoot for new owners to renovate the remaining buildings. Given Napa County's stringent zoning codes and these dire financial times, it could take years to untangle all the red tape on this one. In the meantime, you can see the grand old lodge and several interesting outbuildings. The designs for some of the original buildings were executed by Bernard Maybeck, the noted turn-of-the-century architect, and are worth seeing, if that sort of thing interests you. There is also a modest golf course attached to the resort. It was opened in 1890,





and that makes it the oldest golf course in California. Doing this out-&-back would add something like eight miles to your day and 500' of climb, most of it at the top end of Aetna Springs road, beyond the resort, so if you only go as far as the old resort, your climbing will be minimal.

Back on track... Ink Grade (both photos) is a wonderful road. It carries almost no traffic and although it climbs the same hill as Howell Mountain, it manages to do it in a much more civilized manner, rationing the elevation gain out over a couple of extra miles so that it's never too steep. Best of all, it's very attractive, meandering back and forth across the hillside through broadleaf forest, sometimes with a lively brook splashing along near the road. Toward the top, the leafy forest gives way to fir and pine, and there are occasional mossy rock walls soaring up impressively next to the one-lane road. It's so pleasant, you may be inclined to overlook the fact that it's the longest climb of the day: 1100' in five miles.

The ascent isn't quite over when you turn right on White Cottage Road at mile 30. You have to

climb for a small fraction of a mile and then—from the high point on the ride—you begin the first of several miles of fun descents. White Cottage runs for four, mostly downhill miles to a junction with Howell Mountain.

This is a hard intersection to explain, but it's easy to understand when you get there on your bike: just cross the main highway and keep going. Here's the deal: when you hit the stop sign at the end of White Cottage, you're at a junction with a busy highway. To the left, it's called Howell Mountain Road—the same busy road that begins in Pope Valley—but to the right, the road's name becomes Deer Park Road. Howell Mountain turns left and gives its name to the very different road that is across the highway from White Cottage... where you're going.

This is the section of Howell Mountain we've been looking forward to. This is one very entertaining downhill. It stops being a wide, busy highway and is reduced at times to hardly more than a lane wide. Pavement is good, but not great: generally, smooth enough to allow you to go fast, but with enough cracks and bumps to keep you really focused. The grade isn't steep enough to make this a white-knuckle descent, nor to require massive doses of brakes. If you're a skilled descender, you can almost—*almost*—do the whole thing without braking at all. For four exhilarating miles, the road slips downhill through the forest, slithering back and forth through a seemingly endless string of shallow S-bends. If you can spare a moment from the wild ride—and you should—you can look out over a panoramic vista down the pristine side canyon of Conn Valley to Lake Hennessey (photo, top, next page). Remember Lake Hennessey? You're looping back toward it as you drop back into Napa Valley.

The end—too soon!—of the Howell Mountain descent means the return to Napa Valley and another installment of Silverado Trail...a different section and this time going south. Here's one last shot at padding your miles: if you're





curious about the town of St. Helena, this is a good opportunity to visit, because Pope Street, right across from Howell Mountain at Silverado Trail, leads to the center of town in one mile. Personally, I don't see any compelling reason to visit St. Helena, although the local merchants will likely hate me for saying so. It's the town most central to the Napa Valley wine experience, both geographically and spiritually. There are many nice shops, beautiful homes, great places to eat, and famous wineries. However, I don't see visiting them adding up to an especially memorable cycling experience. Most of the town is strung out along Hwy 29, and as I noted before, this main drag is often at near gridlock. However, if you want to see it, here's your chance. I'll suggest a way to cruise the town on the Up Valley stage as well.

You'll roll south along Silverado Trail for three and a half miles and then turn right on Rutherford Cross Road. This is one of the nicest of the cross-valley connector roads...

the rungs on the ladder. It's one of the only ones that doesn't zip straight across from Silverado to 29. It wanders around a bit, and is always pleasant riding. After three miles, you arrive in the little wide spot in the road of Rutherford and now have to hop onto busy Hwy 29. It is busy, but south of Rutherford, there are immense, smooth shoulders, so the steady stream of passing cars should only be a minor aesthetic intrusion and not a safety concern. After four miles on the highway, you get

to escape onto tranquil Yount Mill Road (below), which meanders through the vineyards all the way back into Yountville...two and a half very quiet, scenic miles. Another half-mile along the village streets and you're back at the start.

With a couple of very minor exceptions, all the miles after the summit on White Cottage—just past mile 30—are downhill or flat, so once you've conquered Ink Grade, you can put it on cruise control and just enjoy the ride for the final 20+ miles.

I discussed various ways to add miles to the stage, but not how to shorten it. On this day, there is only one viable shortcut: when you get to Sage Canyon at mile 8, stay on Silverado Trail and almost immediately turn left onto Rutherford Cross and follow the route back to Yountville. That will yield an almost flat 18-mile ride around the vineyards on the valley floor.





cases, these promontories are topped by lavish mansions...one per knob...no crowding! Every so often, the otherwise level roads have to clamber up and over the shoulders of one or another of these hillocks, and such is the case with Oakville Cross.

The route cruises south along Silverado Trail for seven miles through the now-familiar vineyards (bottom)—but with a new crop of wineries on display—until you turn right on Oak Knoll Road and recross the almost flat valley. There used to be a real challenge on this section: crossing the near-freeway of Hwy 29 on Oak Knoll. You used to have to dash across between the speeding cars. But now that challenge is happily a thing of the past, as a signal has been installed at Oak Knoll, and you can bring the freeway to a halt to ride across at your leisure.

Once across the highway, turn left on Solano Avenue. If you want to make a short, easy day of it, turn right here and head back to Yountville. This will give you a very moderate ride of about 21 miles, all in the valley and all

## **Mt. Veeder Loop** **45 miles, 1800'**

This is the stage that stays closest to Yountville. It consists of two loops: one on the valley floor that is nearly flat and one in the hills to the west that is rarely flat. In fact, in spite of the relatively low total of elevation gain on this ride, it has at least one climb that is harder than anything on the Pope Valley loop. We also offer some options for those who want to bulk up the 45-mile basic ride.

The nearly flat loop in the valley comes first. You begin by retracing the tail end of yesterday's ride: north out of Yountville on Yount Mill Road and then further north on Hwy 29. This time, you'll only be on 29 for a little over a mile, just to Oakville Cross Road, another of the cross-valley connectors (home of the original Oakville Grocery, the first of what has become a chain of trendy gourmet shops). This road manages to find a little hill to bump over on its way to Silverado Trail, gaining less than 100' on a short rise. Although most of the valley floor is flat, there are these occasional wooded knolls poking up out of the surrounding vineyards, and they're scattered pretty much all up and down the valley like bumps on a pickle. Each is a couple of hundred feet high and most appear to be entirely self-contained islands... just an individual, rather conical hill, with no connecting ridges. I don't know enough about the local geology to explain them. In many





the level section ends, you have another couple of hundred feet to climb to the summit. This section is a little less daunting, but it's still a relief to arrive at the top, especially when you consider the great downhill ahead...

This downhill is every bit as much fun as the one on Howell Mountain, and to make it even better, it's about twice as long: almost eight miles! (In the relatively small hills of the North Bay, it's rare to find a descent this long.) The last couple of miles are almost flat, but you can carry a lot of momentum through that section, so it still seems as if you're zipping along effortlessly. It starts out steep enough to be really fast, and there are loads of tricky corners to test your handling

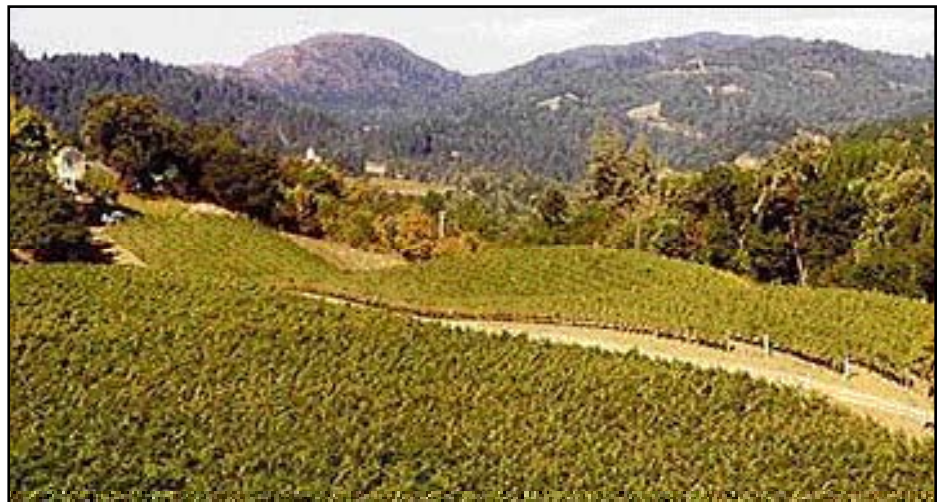
nearly level. If you're doing the whole stage, go left and then quickly hang a right on Orchard Avenue. Orchard begins to climb, very gently. After a little over a mile, turn right again on Dry Creek Road. Orchard has a look of encroaching suburbs about it, but once you head north up Dry Creek, you're moving into the country. You're also climbing quite a bit, in a series of small pitches, with even smaller downhill sections in between. This is a fine cycling road, and in spite of the fact that you're mostly climbing, I think I can promise that you'll be having fun. The surrounding scene is usually wooded, with the creek that gives the road its name often in evidence alongside the road.

At 23.4 miles, you come to a stop sign at a junction with Oakville Grade. Turn left. This is still Dry Creek Road, in spite of the fact that it looks as if you've turned onto an entirely new road. A mile and a half later—all mildly uphill—turn left again onto Mt. Veeder Road. Drop to a crossing of a little creek and gear down for the big climb of the day.

You'll climb about 800' in the next three miles. That may not seem too severe, but almost a mile in the middle is level or even a bit downhill, so the climbing is packed into shorter, more concentrated doses. The first one is the hardest: perhaps as much as 600' in a mile and change. After that you can catch your breath on a pleasant glide through the trees as you traverse the hillside. Most of the time, you're surrounded by shady woods of redwood and bay, but every so often, a break in the forest will allow you to look out over the neighboring hills, across the hilly vineyards and all the way down to the valley, far below (both photos). When

skills and your courage. Pavement is generally quite smooth, but there are enough potholes and cracks to keep you from getting too cocky about just letting it rip. After three or four really exciting miles, the grade eases off a bit, and in some ways, this actually makes the descent more fun. You can stop worrying so much about killing yourself and start being aggressive in the corners. We've done this section in a pack of riders during the annual Tour of Napa Valley Century, and it was a total free-for-all, with riders pushing the envelope at every corner...having a ball living out their Tour de France fantasy lives.

Midway through the descent, you come to a junction with Redwood Road. Although it seems as if you're continuing straight ahead on the same road, Mt. Veeder Road ends here and you continue on Redwood. There is another leg of Redwood that goes right, up into the hills to a dead-end. One way for padding your miles today is to turn right at this junction and do an out-&-back on Redwood. This is a seven-mile round trip, all up on the way in (690' of gain in 3.4 miles) and of course, all wild-and-wooly downhill on the way back. Scenery is more of the same woodsy stuff



you've been doing on Mt. Veeder. You ride alongside Redwood Creek, and at times, the creek drops through some very pretty cascades and boulder-strewn pools. (Many of the creeks in this part of California dry up by midsummer. There is no snow melt here to keep them replenished during the dry season. Redwood is a big enough creek that it will still have some water in it most of the summer, as long as it's not an extremely dry year.)

Whether you do the add-on or not, you will eventually continue downhill on Redwood. You still have some miles to go of enjoyable descending, although the grade at times begins to almost level out. Quite often in this section, the pools and cascades of Redwood Creek are attractively deployed alongside the winding road. This is a great section of road.

But even long descents must come to an end, and in the case of Mt. Veeder/Redwood, it does so smack into the suburban fringe of the city of Napa. Welcome back to reality! Actually, this isn't too awful as suburbs go. Redwood twiddles downhill for one last mile through rural-residential neighborhoods, more as a boulevard than a back road—we didn't even count this mile in the downhill total—before you turn left onto Dry Creek. Unlike the earlier, rural section of Dry Creek, this portion is a straight, flat city street, lined with large, cookie-cutter homes. But it's only suburban for about a mile before the houses start to thin and you break out into open fields again. Altogether, that adds up to two fairly painless miles in the built-up burbs...not too bad!

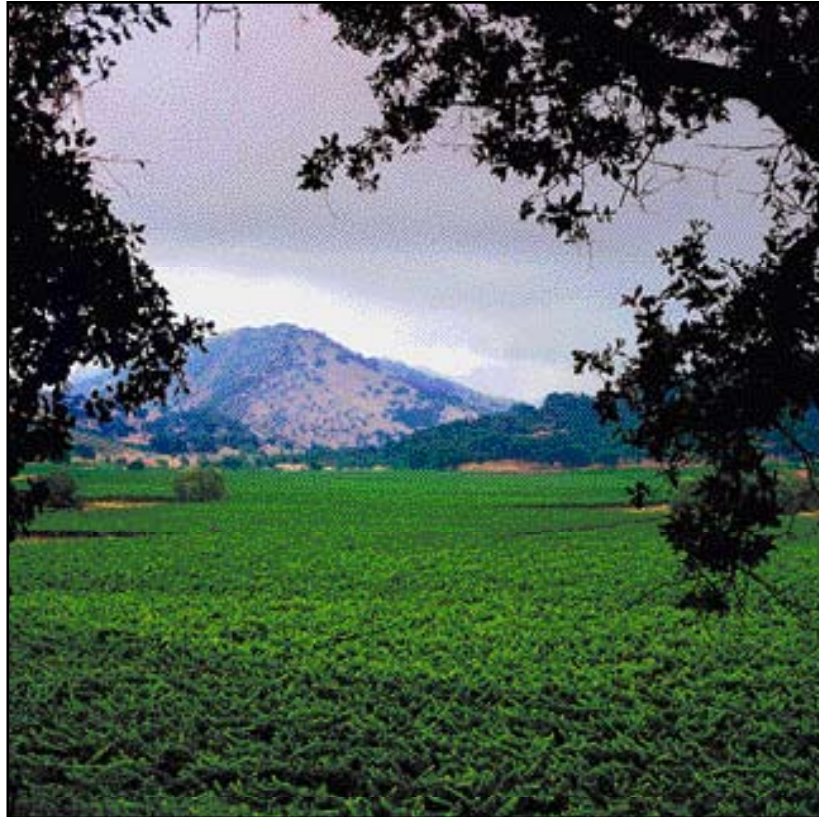
One mile further along Dry Creek and it's back onto Orchard to retrace the route to Solano Avenue. Then you just run out the string, cruising in along flat (or very gently downhill) Solano to Yountville. Solano is essentially a frontage road along Hwy 29. However, it's just far enough back from the freeway to not feel as if you're riding on the shoulder of the main road.

But wait: there's more! In case you feel 45 miles (or 52 with the Redwood out-&-back) isn't enough, we have THE NAPA VALLEY TOUR

another proposal for you. (Even though this option comes early in the ride, we saved the discussion of it for last because we consider it so thoroughly above and beyond the call of duty for the day. However, if you've just gotta have it, here it is.)

Go back to Silverado Trail at around mile 14: if you were to continue south on ST rather than turning right on Oak Knoll, in two miles you would come to Hardman Avenue. Take a left on Hardman. Ride up and over a small hill and turn left on Atlas Peak Road. The goal is to climb this beautiful road to its end and then return. If done in its entirety, this is a fairly ambitious undertaking, adding up to over

ten miles each way and over 2000' of climbing, most of it on the outward-bound leg. The total round trip from Oak Knoll is 25 miles. However, being an up-&-back, it can be shortened by turning around at whatever point along Atlas Peak Road you feel you've had enough. In fact, there isn't any great payoff for making it all the way to the end, except to say that you did it, and to maximize your downhill on the way back. There are no scenic viewpoints at the top...just a turnaround in front of a locked gate in the woods. The best panoramas are about halfway up the hill. After



that there are many pretty little views of meadows and woods, waterfalls and quiet farms, but nothing spectacular.

Once on Atlas Peak, you pass first through an area of expensive homes built around the Silverado Country Club. As you climb past the golf course, the homes become more thinly scattered on the rocky hillside. This area was ravaged by a forest fire a few years back that destroyed virtually everything in its path, so almost all the houses look rather contemporary. I wouldn't characterize this as suburban though. The homes are too scattered and upscale, and the hillside setting too natural to qualify as a tract neighborhood. There is a great deal of exposed rock here, more than you will see on any other part of this tour. The higher up the hill you go, the fewer houses you see and the more open space, filled with rocks, wildflowers, oak and manzanita.

Except for a couple of steep switchbacks near the top, the main climb is never brutal...nothing that will test a reasonably fit rider: probably in the 4-6% range. There is a substantial section that's flat and even mildly downhill breaking up the middle of the ascent. The lower, more recently improved section of the road is wide and smooth, while the upper section narrows to one lane and is rather bumpy. All of the climb is lovely, and the return descent is an absolute blast. This is a popular ride with local cyclists.

If you want even more sweet torment for the day, there is another dead-end midway between Oak Knoll and Hardman called Soda Canyon. This is a 13.5-mile out-&-back (round trip) with 1400' of climb. The critical fact to note about Soda Canyon is that 800' of that climb is packed into just over one wickedly steep mile. Now we're talking serious punishment.

Let's review all these options. Start with the relatively easy basic route: 45 miles and 1800' of climbing. Add in just the Redwood Road spur: now it's 52 miles and 2500'. With just the Atlas Peak out-&-back (no Redwood): 70 miles and about 4000'. Now, if you were to do all the bonus out-&-backs—Atlas Peak, Soda Canyon, and Redwood—you would end up with a very buffed out stage of 90+ miles and 6000' of climbing... some of it very steep. Ouch! Of course, if you care more about big climbs than you do about noodling around in the vineyards, you could lop off the Oakville Cross loop at the start and just scoot over to Silverado Trail on Yountville Cross, saving about 11 flat miles and still leaving in almost all of the climbing.

## Exploring Up Valley

### 64 miles, 1400' of climb

Although this is the longest of the four stages, it is also probably the easiest, having the least amount of climbing. That's primarily because it spends more time prowling around in the flatter parts of the valley than the other stages. It only contains a couple of very moderate climbs at the north end of the valley, where it briefly hops over into Sonoma County. For those with a wish for more hills, we will point out a loop near Calistoga that offers a challenging climb and a snappy descent back to the valley.

This time, you leave Yountville by way of Washington Street. It's not as nice as Yount Mill Road, but it makes a change. Head north on Hwy 29 to Rutherford Cross Road and take this pleasant byway across the valley to Silverado Trail. If you study the map for this stage, you'll see that I avoid Hwy 29 for a few miles on each side of St. Helena. Anything north of Rutherford on 29 is not worth doing on a bike. It's too busy, and unlike the southern section, has very little shoulder to get away from the traffic. Also, it's not very scenic, with a good deal of commercial clutter

strung out along the road. To some extent, this is true on the north side of town as well. More about that later.

That means you'll go both north and south on Silverado Trail for a few miles. I've kept the backtracking to a minimum by throwing in a detour onto Crystal Springs Road (below). When you get to Deer Park Road, north of St. Helena, go right and climb up the short hill to a left onto Sanitarium Road. Drift downhill for half a mile on Sanitarium and turn left on Crystal Springs. This is a very nice, usually quiet backroad that parallels the main highway for a couple of miles. There are a few very modest climbs and descents, as evidenced by the small blips on the elevation profile just after 15 miles.

After Crystal Springs, you continue north along flat and rolling Silverado Trail for a little over six miles, all the way to the outskirts of Calistoga, the town at the north end of the valley. All of the miles along Silverado Trail are pleasant. The scenery stays much the same all the way up or down the valley: vineyards and wineries and a smattering of rural homes in the foreground, and rugged, forested hills rising up steeply in the distance. The valley begins to pinch in a bit as you head north, with taller hills and higher rock cliffs looming a bit more than in the more open, southern end of the valley. As you approach





Calistoga, the cliffs really become impressive, culminating in a grand congress of rocky ramparts and buttresses known as The Palisades (above). These hulking buttes adorn the flanks of Mt. St. Helena, at 4344', the highest mountain in several North Bay counties. In fact, it's in three counties all by itself: Lake, Napa, and Sonoma Counties all meet on the summit.

The route leaves Silverado Trail just before Calistoga for a series of small streets that wander through the town. We could have bypassed the town entirely on the highway, but we wanted to give you the opportunity to mosey around a bit and see the place. Also, this route passes the Monhoff Recreation Center, a city-run facility where there are restrooms and water. To see more of the town, you will have to go off-course and cruise down the main street of town for a few blocks. It may be a subtle shading of style, but Calistoga feels slightly less trendy and stylish than St. Helena. The main street almost gives the impression of being an old west, frontier town (right). It isn't old west and frontier, really. There are probably just as many chic shops and nouvelle bistros here as there are down valley. It feels more rustic and crusty. Probably the locals think of themselves as a little more laid-back and homespun, and a little less swank and snooty than their downstream neighbors.

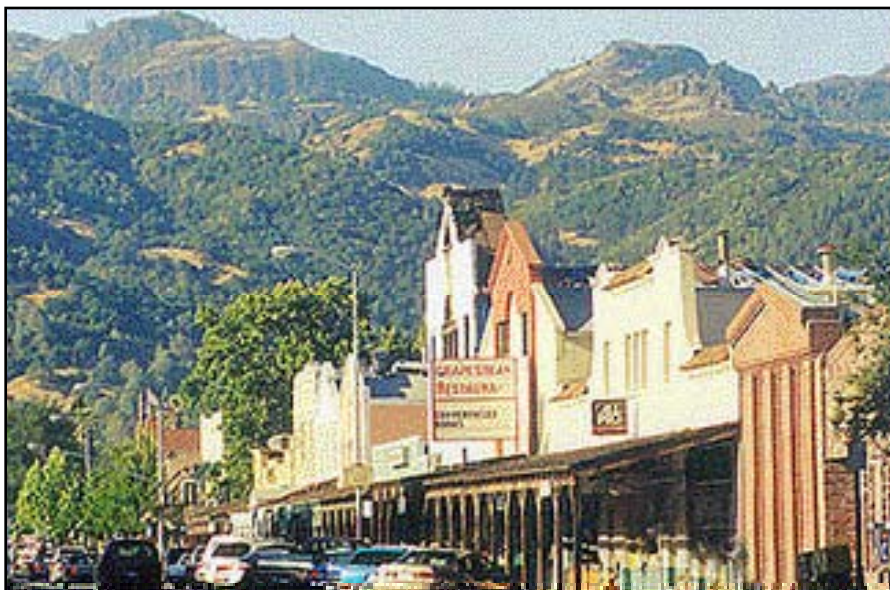
The town is famous for its spring-fed waters... both the bottled sort one drinks and the hot, curative sort one bathes in. There are spas doing a flourishing business right along the main street of town. You can see steam rising from vents in the ground in many spots around town. We like to point out to other cy-

clists the steaming water in roadside ditches on our route: don't go off the road into that! There is even an Old Faithful Geyser, which spews on a fairly regular basis, and whose owner claims to be able to predict impending earthquakes by subtle changes in the geyser's steam cycles.

An obvious shortcut today would be to ride down the main street of Calistoga to Hwy 29/128—where the basic route returns from its run further up the valley—and rejoin the route there. That would give you a stage of about 46 miles, all nearly level.

Once you've had your fill of window shopping or lunching in Calistoga, you continue north (on the basic route) along quiet neighborhood streets and head out of town, past the steaming ditchwater and the telltale geyser.

This is where we've thrown in a little bonus loop for those who want more climbing and adventure in their day. Take a right on Greenwood (see the Calistoga inset), jog over to Hwy 29 and then up to Lawley Road, also known as the Old Toll Road. This is a wonderful road, often only a lane wide, that scrambles up the hillside beneath Mt. St. Helena for four miles. The first mile is nearly level, and then the next three miles are up, to the tune of 1000' of gain. In places, the grades are quite steep...perhaps in the 8-9% range for a few tenths of a mile. Most of the climb is much easier, and at all times, the scenery is superb. You'll be riding through oak and manzanita and madrone woods, and off in the distance the soaring crags of The Palisades rear up out of the trees. This is as close as paved roads go to the great cliffs, and it's a view few visitors to the area ever see. On nearby Hwy 29, the view is almost always obscured by trees, and there are no vista points where one





might pull over to admire the sight, even if it were visible. Only on this very lightly travelled back road can you take it all in.

Speaking of nearby Hwy 29...that is how we propose to get you back down to the valley. This section of Hwy 29 is probably as busy and as uncongenial for cycling as any of the other portions we're avoiding down in the valley. It serves as one of the only arteries to carry traffic from Napa and Sonoma Counties over to Lake County and beyond, including many people heading for Interstate 5 and points north, like Oregon. It's always jumping, is quite narrow, and has no shoulders whatsoever.

So why are we throwing you to the lions like this? First of all, if you're not comfortable with traffic, please don't do this loop. We don't want you complaining later that you weren't warned. On the other hand, this is a circuit we often add to our Napa Valley club rides, and so far, we've all survived it in good humor and health. That's because the entire run is downhill. It's quite twisty too, which slows the cars down more than the bikes, so a good descender on a bike can keep up with or even go faster than the traffic on the road. If you can keep it over 30-mph here—and that's easy—you're as likely to be held up by traffic as to be holding it up. Our strategy is to take a short break at the top of the climb on Lawley, watch the traffic going downhill on

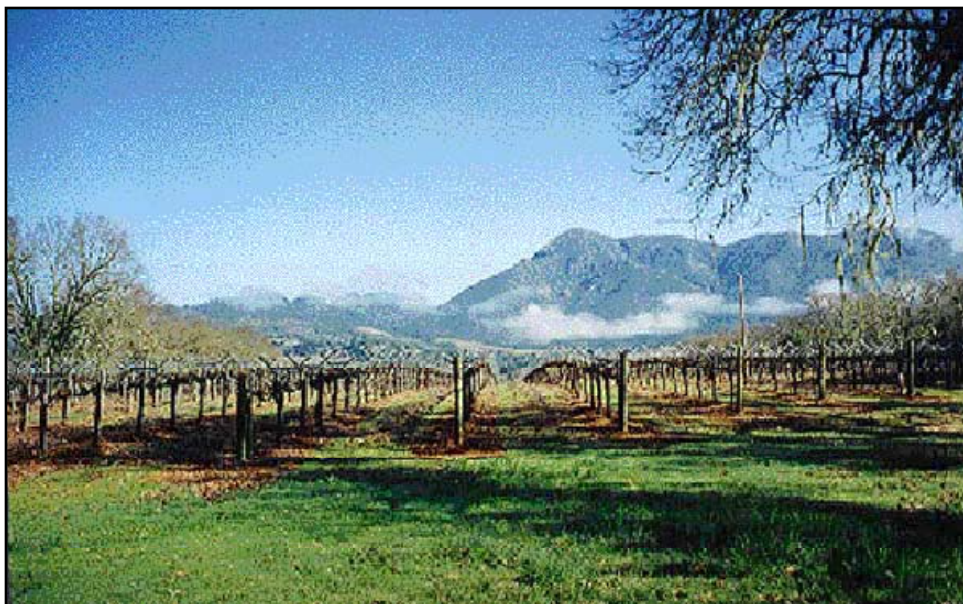
29, and wait for a good break, of which there are many. Then hop into the gap and go like hell. The downhill on 29 is 3.5 miles (and at 35-mph is over very quickly). If you do manage to steer clear of traffic, it's a really great downhill...lots of fun. Altogether, with the uphill, the downhill, and the assorted connector roads, it adds exactly nine miles to the 63-mile stage.

The reunited routes meander around on tiny, quiet lanes north of Calistoga for two miles and then hop onto Hwy 128. This is the west side of the valley, where Hwy 29 is supposed to be, but as you probably figured out by now, it crossed the valley at Calistoga and climbed up Mt. St. Helena. Now Hwy 128 takes its place and runs for many miles north into Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. Although not absolutely deserted, it carries much less traffic than 29, and we have always found it to be an enjoyable road to ride. Shortly

after turning onto the highway, you begin a gradual climb of about a mile, at the top of which, you cross over into Sonoma County. If you're feeling frisky and competitive, you can challenge your buddies to a county line sprint that is also a hill prime.

Over the top and into Sonoma County, you get to enjoy a smooth, mildly exciting descent into Knights Valley (above), another quiet, unpopulated valley similar to Pope Valley...very little out here but a few vineyards, empty grasslands, and tall trees. It's a beautiful, tranquil landscape. About two miles into the valley, you hang a left on tiny Spencer Lane, which connects to Franz Valley Road (below). Franz Valley is an even better place to ride than Hwy 128. If 128 was quiet, this is quieter. Sometimes





you're riding in leafy woods and sometimes across rolling meadows, with views up to Mt. St. Helena and the other peaks of the Mayacamas Mountains (*above*).

Franz Valley Road leads to a left onto Franz Valley School Road, which is, if possible, even quieter and more out of the way. You've now swung around the top end of the loop in Sonoma County and are heading south, back into Napa County. The road climbs in little fits and starts to another hilltop summit right on the county line. If your pals nipped you for the prime on 128, here's your chance for revenge. Just at the high point on the road, you topple over into Napa. This is an excellent little downhill: the pavement is smooth; the corners are just right; and the grade is perfect for a comfortable level of medium-speed mayhem...two miles long.

At the bottom, you roll out onto Petrified Forest Road, a busier highway—the main arterial from Sonoma County—that funnels you back down to Hwy 128 and a return visit to Calistoga, this time at the other end of the main street. The route turns right on 128 and heads south, just skirting the edge of town. If you want to prowl Calistoga some more, you can go off course again. Here's a little piece of local knowledge: almost directly across from Petrified Forest Road—where it tees into Hwy 128—is a driveway leading into a mobile home park. If you ride down this drive, it will connect you to a short bike path that links to Cedar Street, a quiet, tree-lined neighborhood lane in residential Calistoga, running parallel to the highway. Take this quiet bypass and you can see more of the town and avoid riding on the highway.

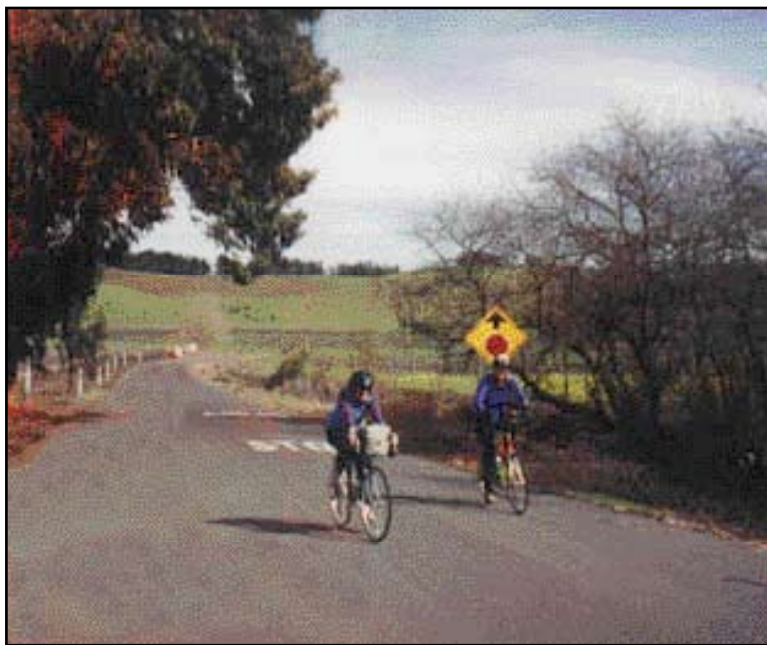
THE NAPA VALLEY TOUR

When Hwy 128 hits the main street of Calistoga (at the stop sign), it merges with Hwy 29. As it heads south out of town, the highway will carry the dual 29/128 designation. This northern section of highway is okay to ride... even better than okay. The scenery is excellent (*below*), and although there is usually a heavier volume of traffic, there are immense shoulders, so everyone has enough elbow room. South of Calistoga, the route sticks with 29/128 for five miles, and then takes a left on pretty little Bale Lane and recrosses the valley to our old pal Silverado Trail. South of Bale, 29/128 becomes increasingly cluttered and busy, and also, the shoulders disappear almost entirely.

Once you turn south on Silverado, it will be your home for nearly 14 miles, as you roll down the valley, all the way to Yountville Cross Road. The only exception to this seamless run would come if you elected to visit the town of St. Helena. As I noted earlier, I don't see any really compelling reason to do so, but if you have a burning desire to see this trendy town, today might be your best opportunity. Here's what you do...

As you head south on ST, you will encounter only one stop sign. That's at Deer Park Road, where you turned off for the Crystal Springs bypass on the way north. Now, if you choose to, you can turn right on Deer Park again, this time back over the valley to 29/128. This will put you on the busy road for about a mile and a half, leading into and through the town. Along the way, you will pass some of the biggest and most famous of the Napa Valley wineries. This really does feel like the epicenter of California wine-making. Once you're into the heart of St. Helena, keep an eye peeled for Pope Street...just at the bottom of the mild downhill that makes up the most built-up part of down-





town. This will be your escape hatch back to Silverado. If you think all this back and forth across the valley sounds silly, all we can say is: no, you probably won't get killed on the section of 29/128 between Bale and Rutherford Cross, but we can assure you that you will not have any fun.

By now, we've said pretty much all there is to say about Silverado Trail: the scenery is good; pavement is smooth; shoulders are wide; and the terrain is flats and mellow rollers. You can settle into a nice rhythm and just let the miles flow by. Yountville Cross Road is gently downhill in this direction, and then you glide back into the center of Yountville, having completed a grand tour of almost the entire valley.

If you don't think you can manage a stage of as much as 64 miles, here's what we suggest for a shorter ride: do the route to the north end of Crystal Springs (15.3 miles), and then turn left (instead of right) on Silverado Trail and follow the return leg of the stage to home. This will yield a very moderate route of about 32 miles. If you want to, you can add in the side trip through St. Helena described above, which will add another couple of miles.

## **Sonoma Loop** **52 miles, 3100' of climb**

This is the hardest of the four stages, made that way by one big climb. It is otherwise no harder than any of the other routes. It also contains the largest ration of what we would characterize as unpleasant urban riding: busy streets with trashy commercial development. In spite of those disclaimers, we think of it as a very nice ride, visiting regions so far unexplored on this tour.

The beginning of the ride will be familiar enough: south out of Yountville on Solano, Orchard, Dry Creek, and Redwood, all used on the Mt. Veeder loop. This time, you head in the opposite direction, into Napa. Less than half a mile after turning right on Redwood, you turn left on Westview Drive and leave the Veeder route behind. Westview is a wide boulevard through a typical California tract neighborhood. It's followed by more of the same on Browns Valley and Buhman. Altogether, you'll ride through suburban tracts for about three miles. None of it is remotely unpleasant. It's just not terribly scenic or exciting.

As you leave the suburbs on Buhman Avenue, you climb the first of the day's hills: a brief hump of perhaps 100' in half a mile. Once over the top, you're in the country. Zoom down the other side, but stay awake for a turn at the bottom of the hill. You'll be staying on Buhman, but that requires a hard bend to the right at a junction with Congress Valley Road. One mile later, you turn right off Buhman for another brief climb on Henry Road (left). After that climb and a matching descent, turn left on Dealy Road and then right on Old Sonoma Road, which, in just a few tenths of a mile, tees into Hwy 12/121.

This is the main highway through the region, connecting Sonoma County with Napa County and points east, in particular Interstate-80. It's a very busy road unsuitable for cycling. However, we do have to ride on it for just a few hundred yards here, nipping across to the south side. It's not much fun, but it can be done, and there are good turn lanes where we're going, which gives you a little safe haven from the traffic. Cross the highway and turn left on Duhig Road, right in front of the imposing (but entirely ersatz) Domaine Carneros Winery (below). Climb for about half a mile on Duhig, crest the rise, and descend into the peaceful world of the Carneros District.





The rolling hills of the Carneros flow gently down to the northern reaches of San Francisco Bay, which you can see shimmering in the distance, off to the south. On a clear day, you may even be able to see the glittering towers of the big city, 25 miles away across the water. Supposedly, part of what makes this region so nice for grapes is the fog rolling in off the bay, so be prepared for it to be cool. The softly rounded hills are given over almost entirely to wine production, with only a few isolated stands of trees and the occasional small pond breaking up the endless rows of vines. Along the fringes of the bay, there are vast tracts of salt marsh and tidal wetlands, mostly fairly wild, but in some cases supporting dairy herds. There are also one or two marinas where the Napa River meets the bay, and a few clusters of vacation homes strung out along the levees, above the flood line.

There aren't many roads through this empty, remote region, but there are enough to get us where we want to go. After the brief climb on Duhig, you zip swiftly downhill to a junction with Ramal Road, which meanders all the way across the district as a sleepy road to nowhere. There is a third road at the Duhig-Ramal junction: Las Amigas Road. We will come back to this spot later and show how you can avoid the dreaded big climb and the trashy urban riding by doubling back on Las Amigas. For now though, let's stay on the assigned route.

Ramal loops south and west along the bay and then, at about mile 20 (right), curls north toward the old town of Sonoma. Midway along

Ramal, you will pass over into Sonoma County...another great spot for a county line sprint! Although you are now technically in another county, it won't feel as if much has changed. In fact, the case is often made that the climate, scenery, and overall ambience of this area have more in common with Napa County than with the bulk of Sonoma County, further to the north. Humorists suggest that many locals would be neither surprised nor upset to wake up one morning and find the county line had been moved and that they were now residents of Napa County.

As you approach the town of Sonoma along a rather confusing tangle of little roads, the scenery slowly changes from agricultural to rural-residential to city streets. What with the big climb you have ahead of you in a few miles, we don't really think this ride needs any optional add-ons.





Mexican) empire and the home of General Mariano Vallejo, a fine man and able colonial administrator who had the misfortune of being on the wrong side when Yankee settlers staged what was to become known as the Bear Flag Revolt in 1846, raising their grizzly-embazoned flag over the Sonoma Plaza and proclaiming California an independent republic. The republic only lasted a few weeks, until word arrived that the United States had declared war on Mexico, and the insurgents threw in with the US. Within a few years of course, gold had been discovered, California had become a state, and the rest, as they say, is history. Anyway...unless you're completely indifferent to our local heritage, you'll want to poke around the Plaza a bit (below).

However, if you think it does, we offer one suggestion here. When you come up 7th Street East and hit the corner of Lovall Valley Road, the route turns left into Sonoma. If you turn right on Lovall Valley, you can enjoy a nice little up-&-back into the hills above the town. The climb is not too steep and turns into a nifty descent on the way back, and the scenery is great...similar to the dry, rocky landscape on the Atlas Peak option, with a pretty creek piddling along beside the road in a rocky channel. As you're climbing, keep an eye out for a left turn onto Lovall Valley Loop Road. Taking this little road will allow you to circle around the top of the valley and connect back to Lovall Valley, now heading downhill, back to town. Having a loop at the end makes it a little more fun than just coming to a dead-end and turning around. The round trip will add about ten miles to the stage.

Once in town (on Lovall Valley Road, in front of Sebastiani Winery), you have two options: you can shoot right through town on a nice bike path that avoids a good deal of traffic, or you can detour one block south (off-course) to the Plaza and spend some time being a tourist. If you've never been to Sonoma, we recommend at least a cursory tour.

Sonoma is one of the cornerstones of California history: the northernmost outpost of Spanish (and later,

There are numerous, well-preserved buildings from that pivotal time and earlier, including Vallejo's adobe compound and the mission. There are also plenty of places to find food and water.

While the center of town has charm to spare, the outlying fringes to the west and north of town are more eyesore than anything else, and unfortunately, our route has to navigate a few miles of this mess before reaching pleasant country again. You can either ride west from the Plaza until you come to 5th Street West or you can return to the bike path and ride to the same spot. From the bike path, there isn't any sign to tell you which of the cross streets is 5th Street. If you can figure it out, turn right on 5th. If not, it really doesn't matter. The bike path will lead to Hwy 12 in a few more blocks. Turn right there and you'll soon be back on course. This is the two-mile section of trashy commercial crud that is unavoidable. The area was built out during an unfortunate period: not long enough ago to have the charm of antiquity, but too long ago to have been subject to any enlightened zoning





ordinances. It's just a hodgepodge of stores and gas stations and down-at-the-heels neighborhoods. Oddly, the ultra chic, super luxurious Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa sits in regal splendor right in the middle of all this tacky sprawl.

Anyway, it's not great riding, but is tolerable, and not really dangerous, because the traffic is moving at slower, city-street speeds. When you finally leave the congestion behind, you have about a half-mile of open country on Hwy 12 before escaping the busy highway with a right turn onto blessedly quiet Cavedale Road. You have now arrived at the Big Climb. It's more than just a big climb though: it's a great biking road...one of the best of the region's many dinky mountain roads. It is typically almost devoid of auto traffic, is often just one lane wide, and once you've hauled yourself up out of the canyon, the views are fabulous. It does, however, sport some of the worst pavement around, as these two photos attest. It's not much of a problem on the long climbs, but it can be a bit of an issue on the few downhill sections of the road.

THE NAPA VALLEY TOUR

Before attacking the big ascent, take a minute to look at a curious little monument beside the road just at the base of the climb. It commemorates the construction of the road in 1915. The work was financed entirely by private subscription and the donors are all listed on a handsome plaque, with the amounts they chipped in, from \$165 from E. E. Hicken down to \$5 from W. E. Henderson. There is an anecdote about this that we repeat here with the caveat that we have no idea whether it's true or not: according to the tale, there was a high-quality brothel secluded up in this canyon, and the men who put up the money to build the road did so to facilitate access to this establishment. Whatever their motivation, we're glad they did it, because they bequeathed to us a fine road through a piece of majestic backcountry.

This remote road is a favorite training venue for Levi Leipheimer and other local racers. It's a big climb and it contains a few sections that are quite steep...well up into double digits. The racers will do repeats on these steep walls: up, down, up, down. Cruel work, but great training. Those steep pitches are interspersed with more moderate sections where more moderate riders can recover.

Overall, you gain about 2000' in five miles from Hwy 12 to the first summit. Most of the time, you're riding through forest of oak, fir, and madrone or out across stony hillsides that have more of a look of dry chaparral, with manzanita bushes and other low shrubs and wildflowers predominating. When the forest cover opens up, there are occasionally panoramic vistas over the Valley of the Moon or even all the way down to San Francisco Bay (photo, next page).

There is a cave on Cavedale as well. It's small and doesn't go much of anywhere, but it's there, right alongside the road. During the Christmas season, small stockings appear outside this cave, and little presents are left for the cave's residents.

Off the far side of the first summit at 2300' you get to negoti-





ate a series of steep, highly technical descents and small climbs in deep fir forest. The technical aspect comes from a combination of tricky corners and that bad pavement, all patches and potholes. The paving on the descents used to be terrible, but has recently been given a rather mediocre repaving which has improved it a little. It's still a descent to handle with care. After a bit more than two miles of this bumpy up and down, you come to your next junction at Trinity Grade. There is a firehouse on the corner here where you can get water. It's the only resupply point out here, and it's a rare rider who will pass it by without a refill.

Trinity Grade turns into Dry Creek Road...another section of the same Dry Creek you've been on once or twice already down in Napa Valley. It isn't precisely clear where Trinity ends and Dry Creek begins. Perhaps at the county line where you return to Napa County. It's all one, continuous road, with no apparent changes. When you turn from Cavedale onto Trinity, you climb very gently and very briefly to a pretty, level run along the hillside, with some great views out through the trees to the valley below. Then the forest closes in, the road tilts downhill, and things get very exciting very quickly.

The main chunk of this descent is only a bit over two miles, but it ranks as one of the best, most memorable downhills on this tour. It's also potentially one of the most perilous, if you don't exercise good sense. The pavement is usually very smooth, so that's not a problem. In fact, it encourages you to want to really let it fly. But the hill is just too steep and the corners are too tight to support that sort of full-tilt flier. This descent comes at about mile 30 in the Terrible

Two double century. As organizers of that event, we always warn the riders ahead of time to take it easy on this, the first big downhill of the day. We always put a course marshal at the top of the hill to remind people to slow down. And yet, year after year, riders—crazed by adrenalin and testosterone—attack this thing as if the finish line were at the bottom of the hill and not 170 miles away. And year after year, they go flying off into the bushes or over the cliff...bikes bent, bodies broken... and these are supposedly skilled, experienced riders. Nobody has been killed yet, but we've had some very hairy close calls. We hope you will pay more attention to our warning than some of our TT participants have done.

If you can manage to control your wildest death-wish urges and soft-pedal the first steep, corkscrew section of this drop (below), you'll end up having a really great, E-ticket ride down the mountain, with one slinky curve after





another, most of the time on excellent pavement (above). When the fast, twisty part of the descent ends—at a small bridge over the creek—you get another couple of miles of mild downhill along the creek to decompress. You'll briefly revisit the section of road you did before on the way to Mt. Veeder, now going in the opposite direction, and then you're off on a new road: Oakville Grade. This road climbs quite gradually for a couple of miles across an open hillside before hurtling itself off the cliff face in one last, fast descent into Napa Valley.

This is a different kind of downhill from Dry Creek. It's also a couple of miles long but is wide open, with only a few, fairly easy turns. It's very steep, and putting that together with the relatively nontechnical nature of the curves means that bold or foolish riders can crank it up to some really spooky speeds...mid-50s and up, if you have the brass for it. Once again though, we want to urge you to be smart. If you have the skills for it and are comfortable at those speeds, go for it. But don't try to be a superstar if you're not. Just because we say riders hit 50+ on this baby doesn't mean you have to. Things have a way of spinning out of control very suddenly at those speeds...one little pebble...one little Botts dot...or one little nervous clutch at the front brake lever, and all hell breaks loose.

Besides, there is a terrific, panoramic vista over all of Napa Valley that's begging to be admired on the way down the hill (right). We suggest you back it off a notch, enjoy the view,

and live to tell about it. At the bottom of the hill, you abruptly level out onto the flat valley floor and roll down to Hwy 29. Then it's a right turn, south down the highway to Yount Mill Road (again). I think Yount Mill is the nicest way in and out of our home town, but if you're sick of it, you can continue another mile on 29 and go left on Washington. We haven't gone into town that way yet.

In case all this radical climbing and descending is too much for you, we will now go back to the Carneros region and show you a way to turn this hilly ride into a moderate cruise around the south end of the valley. When you come down Duhig, instead of going straight on Ramal, turn left on Las Amigas. This road is very

similar to Ramal: quietly rolling up and down over the mellow contours of the vineyard-covered hills, with here and there a grove of trees or a country farm house to add a little color and texture to the corduroy rows of vines.

Las Amigas turns into Cuttings Wharf Road at some point out here. From Cuttings Wharf, you turn onto South Avenue and then Carneros Avenue, which leads to Hwy 12/121. Once again we have to cross the busy highway and jog along it for a brief stretch before escaping on Old Sonoma Hwy. This tiny road leads to Old Sonoma Road, which you were on very briefly on the outward bound leg, a few miles ago. This time, stay on Old Sonoma Road for a little over two miles and then turn left onto Congress Valley Road. Almost immediately, turn right onto Thompson Avenue. Up to this point, the scenery has all been open



meadows, vineyards, and scattered rural-residential properties. Now you begin to move back into Napa's neighborhoods. Thompson is still a very nice road to ride, climbing gently for about a mile and then dropping quickly to Browns Valley Road. Turn left and ride for a little over a half-mile on this suburban boulevard and then turn right on Westview Drive. Now retrace the outward-bound route back to Yountville. Altogether, this will add up to a ride of about 35 miles, with only moderate hills and descents.

And that's it! If you've done the rides in the order in which we have described them, you're done. Once you've actually knocked off all the rides—instead of just reading about them—you will be very well acquainted with this pretty region.

Please let us know how your tour went. We appreciate all comments and suggestions.

## **Adventure Velo**

707-823-9807

[adventurevelo.com](http://adventurevelo.com)

[srccride@sonic.net](mailto:srccride@sonic.net)

[backroad@sonic.net](mailto:backroad@sonic.net)

## **Details**

### **Accommodations in Yountville:**

#### **Napa Valley Lodge**

2230 Madison Street

Yountville, CA 94599

707-944-2468 • 800-368-2468

[www.woodsidehotels.com](http://www.woodsidehotels.com)

#### **Bordeaux House**

6600 Washington Street

Yountville, CA 94599

707-944-2855 • 800-677-6370

[www.bordeauxhouse.com](http://www.bordeauxhouse.com)

#### **Maison Fleurie**

6529 Yount Street

Yountville, CA 94599

707-944-2056 • 800-788-0369

[www.foursisters.com](http://www.foursisters.com)

#### **Petit Logis**

6527 Yount Street

Yountville, CA 94599

707-944-2332

[www.petitlogis.com](http://www.petitlogis.com)

#### **Vintage Inn**

6541 Washington Street

Yountville, CA 94599

707-944-1112

800-9-VALLEY (in US)

800-351-1133 (in California)

[www.vintageinn.com](http://www.vintageinn.com)

#### **Napa Valley Railway Inn**

6503 Washington Street

Yountville, CA 94599

707-944-2000

[www.napavalleyrailwayinn.com](http://www.napavalleyrailwayinn.com)

#### **Villagio Inn & Spa**

6481 Washington Street

Yountville, CA 94599

707-944-8877 • 800-351-1133

[www.villagio.com](http://www.villagio.com)

#### **Yountville Inn**

6462 Washington Street

Yountville, CA 94559

707-944-5600 • 800-972-2293

[www.yountvilleinn.com](http://www.yountvilleinn.com)

### **Accommodations in Napa (nearest to Yountville):**

#### **Budget Inn of Napa Valley**

3380 Solano Avenue

Napa, CA 94558

707-257-6111

#### **The Chablis Inn**

3360 Solano Avenue

Napa, CA 94558

707-257-1944

[www.chablisinn.com](http://www.chablisinn.com)

#### **The Chateau Hotel**

4195 Solano Avenue

Napa, CA 94558

707-253-9300

[www.thechateauhotel.com](http://www.thechateauhotel.com)

#### **The John Muir Inn**

1998 Trower Avenue

Napa, CA 94558

707-257-7220

800-522-8999

[www.johnmuirnapa.com](http://www.johnmuirnapa.com)

**Napa Valley Marriott**

3425 Solano Avenue  
Napa, CA 94558

707-253-7433

[www.napavalleymarriott.com](http://www.napavalleymarriott.com)

**Camping:****Napa Valley Skyline Wilderness Park**

2201 E. Imola Avenue  
Napa, CA 94559-0793

707-252-0481

On the SE side of Napa, approximately 15 miles from Yountville. No reservations, except for RVs.

**Bothe-Napa State Park**

3801 St. Helena Hwy (Hwy 29/128)  
Calistoga, CA 95542

707-942-4575

Approximately 15 miles north of Yountville on Hwy 29/128. Reservations through Park.Net: 800-444-7275

**Airport shuttle service:**

Evans Airport Service 707-255-1559

Regular service, but stops in Yountville only by special request at the Vintage Inn, Napa Valley Lodge, Villagio Inn, and Yountville Inn. Bikes must be boxed and will be charged a full fare.

**Bicycle service and rentals:**

Napa Valley Bike Tours (Yountville)

707-944-9080

[www.napavalleybiketours.com](http://www.napavalleybiketours.com)

St. Helena Cyclery

707-963-7736

[sthelenacyclery.com](http://sthelenacyclery.com)

Napa River Velo (Napa)

707-258-8729

[naparivervelo.com](http://naparivervelo.com)

Bicycle Madness (Napa)

707-253-2453

Sonoma Valley Cyclery (Sonoma)

707-935-3377

[www.sonomacyclery.com](http://www.sonomacyclery.com)

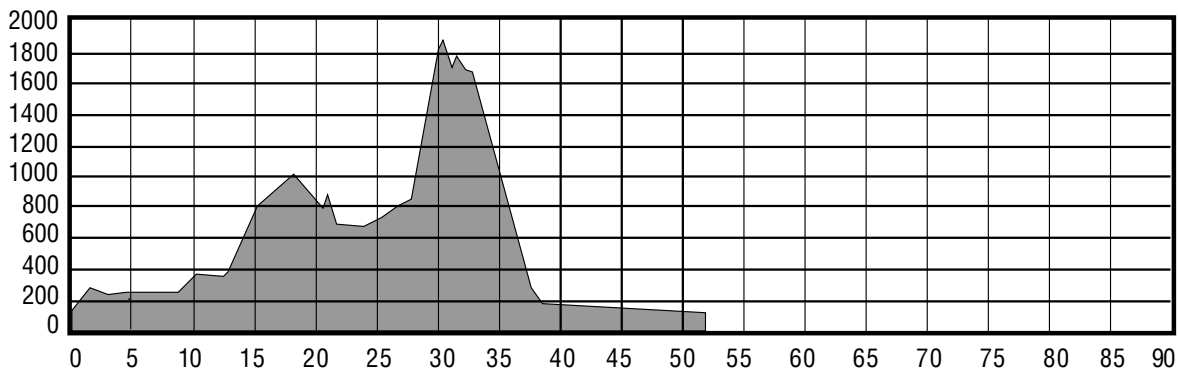


# The Napa Valley Tour

Pope Valley Loop

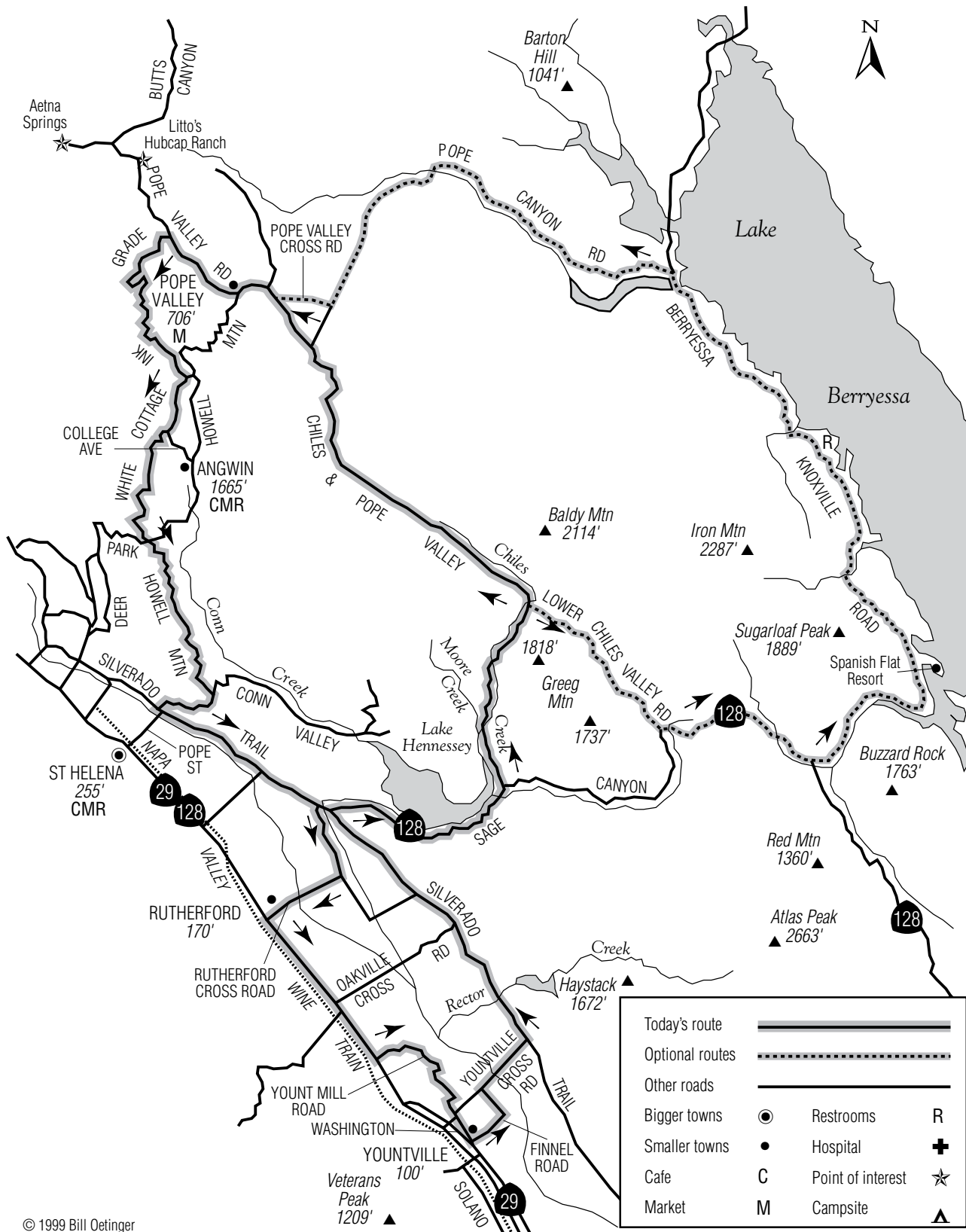
51 miles, 2100'

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	North	Yount Mill Road	From Washington Street junction.
0.2	R	Finnel Road	
1.3	R	Yountville Cross Road	
2.6	L	Silverado Trail	
8.2	R	Sage Canyon Road (Hwy 128)	Past Lake Hennessey.
11.5	L	Chiles & Pope Valley Road	Pleasant climbing...
17.8	L	Bear left on Chiles & Pope Valley at Lower Chiles Valley junction.	Long option goes right on Lower Chiles Valley.
23.1	S	Pope Valley Road	Town of Pope Valley (706').
25.8	L	Ink Grade	Believe it or not: more pleasant climbing!
30.0	R	White Cottage Road	
33.8	S	Howell Mountain Road	Cross the intersection to a great downhill.
38.2	L	Silverado Trail	Or cross to Pope street and explore St. Helena.
41.7	R	Rutherford Cross Road	
44.6	L	Hwy 29	Busy road, but big shoulders.
48.4	L	Yount Mill Road	
50.9	S		Pass Yountville Cross Road, continue into town.
51.4		Washington Street	Finish.



# The Napa Valley Tour

Pope Valley Loop  
51 miles, 2100'



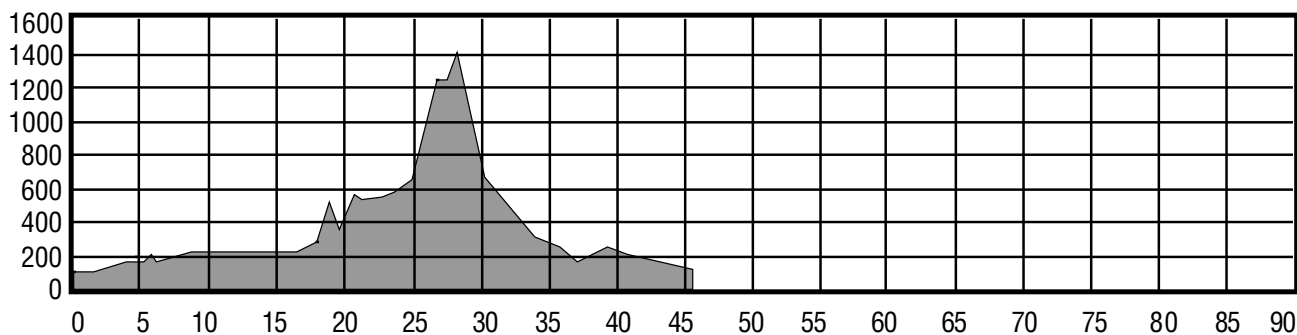
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# The Napa Valley Tour

Mt Veeder Loop

45 miles, 1800'

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	North	Yount Mill Road	From Washington Street junction.
3.0	R	Hwy 29	
4.2	R	Oakville Cross Road	
6.6	R	Silverado Trail	
13.7	R	Oak Knoll Road	
14.7	S		Jog L/R on Oak Knoll at Big Ranch Rd junction.
15.9	L	Solano Avenue	Cross busy Hwy 29 first...good luck!
16.1	R	Orchard Avenue	
17.4	R	Dry Creek Road	Climbing ahead...mostly easy.
23.4	L	Dry Creek Road	Bear left on Dry Creek at Oakville Grd junction.
24.9	L	Mt Veeder Road	Serious climbing, but with several level stretches.
28.3	S		Summit. Great downhill ahead!
33.6	S	Redwood Road	Mt Veeder turns into Redwood.
			Optional: out-&-back on Redwood...add 7 miles.
36.2	S		A brief visit to the suburbs.
37.2	L	Dry Creek Road	
39.4	R	Orchard Avenue	
40.7	L	Solando Avenue	
44.9	R	California Street	Under freeway, into Yountville.
45.0	L	Washington Street	
45.3		Yount Mill Road	Finish.



Mount Veeder Loop  
45 miles, 1800'

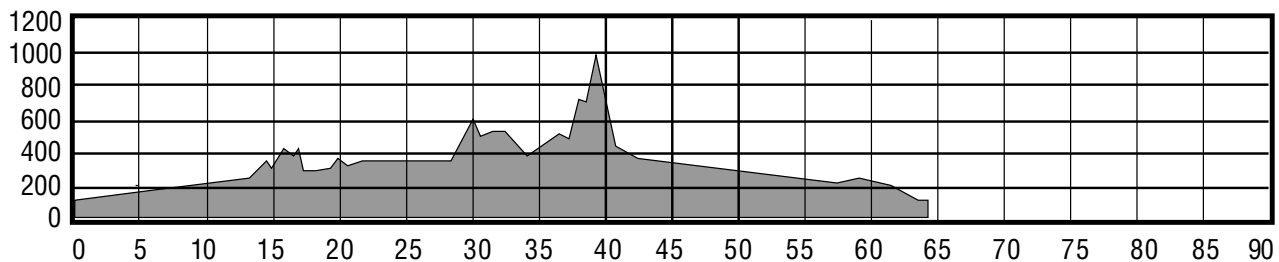


# The Napa Valley Tour

Exploring Up Valley

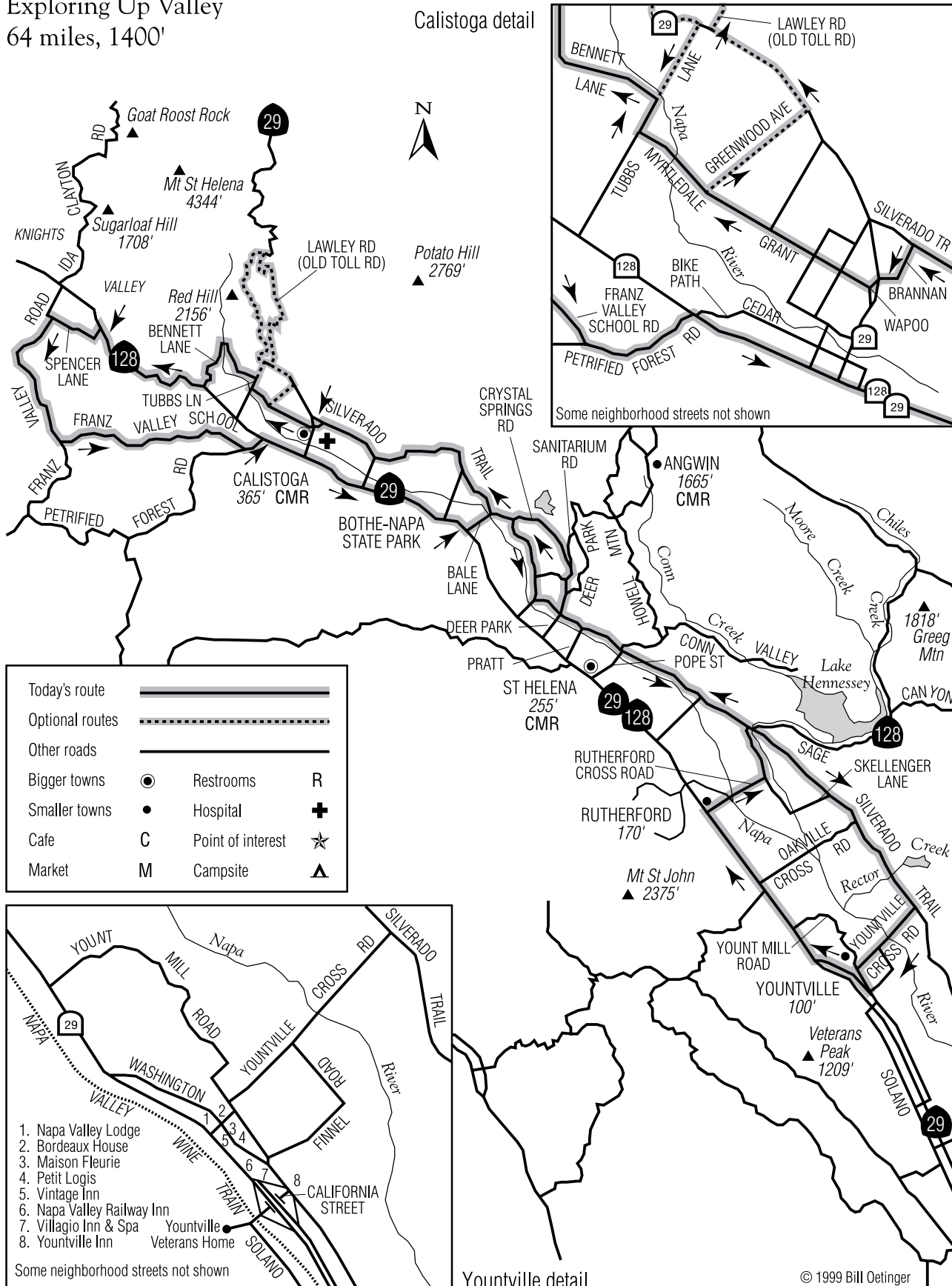
64 miles, 1400'

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	North	Washington Street	From Yount Mill Road junction.
1.4	R	Hwy 29	
6.1	R	Rutherford Cross Road	
9.0	L	Silverado Trail	
13.9	R	Deer Park Road	Small climb.
14.7	L	Sanitarium Road	
15.3	L	Crystal Springs Road	A nice detour off Silverado Trail.
17.5	R	Silverado Trail	
24.0	L	Brannan Street	Just on the edge of town of Calistoga.
24.3	S	Wapoo Street	Cross Hwy 29, or go left and explore town.
24.4	R	Grant Street/ Myrtledale Road	Restrooms and water at Monhoff Rec. Center.
25.5	S		Greenwood Road...optional hilly loop diverges.
26.6	R	Tubbs Lane	
26.2	L	Bennett Lane	
28.2	R	Hwy 128	Moderate climb coming up.
29.9	S		Summit. Sonoma County line.
31.5	L	Spencer Lane	
32.9	L	Franz Valley Road	
36.5	L	Franz Valley School Road	Series of small climbs ahead.
39.1	S		Summit. Descend back into Napa County.
41.0	L	Petrified Forest Road	
41.6	R	Hwy 128	Rolling along the edge of Calistoga.
42.6	S	Hwy 29/128	Center of Calistoga. Go straight or stop to explore.
47.7	L	Bale Lane	Bail onto Bale before Hwy 29/128 gets too busy.
48.4	R	Silverado Trail	
62.0	R	Yountville Cross Road	
63.9	L	Yount Mill Road	Into Yountville.
64.4		Washington Street	Finish.



# The Napa Valley Tour

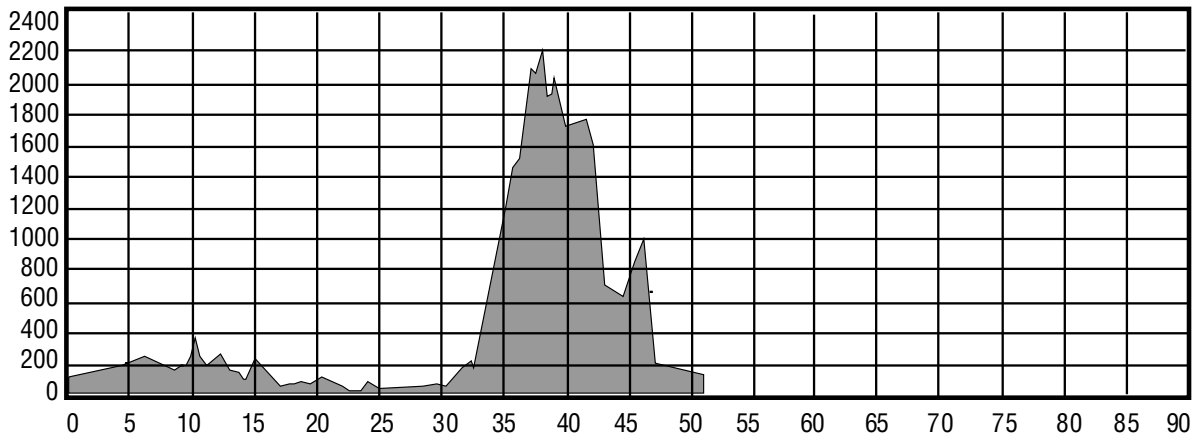
Exploring Up Valley  
64 miles, 1400'



# The Napa Valley Tour

Sonoma Loop  
52 miles, 3100'

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	South	Washington Street	From Yount Mill Road junction.
0.3	R	California Street	Under freeway.
0.4	L	Solano Avenue	
4.5	R	Orchard Avenue	
5.8	L	Dry Creek Road	Into Napa's suburbs.
8.0	R	Redwood Road	
8.4	L	Westview Drive	
9.1	R	Browns Valley Road	Immediately jog left on Browns Valley.
9.4	L	Buhman Avenue	Climb out of the burbs...country ahead.
10.9	R	Buhman Avenue	Bear right on Buhman at Congress Valley junction.
11.9	R	Henry Road	Small climb and descent.
12.8	L	Dealy Lane	Rollers.
13.9	R	Old Sonoma Road	
14.2	R	Hwy 12/121	Busy road, but only on it for a minute...
14.4	L	Duhig Road	Brief climb, then descend into Carneros region.
15.6	S	Ramal Road	Straight on Ramal at Las Amigas junction.
21.6	L	Dale Road	
22.1	R	Burndale Road	
22.5	S		Cross Hwy 12/121 on Burndale.
24.8	L	Old Burndale Road	Tiny, obscure road...don't miss it.
24.9	S	Denmark Street	Cross Napa Hwy to Denmark.
26.2	R	7th Street East	Into the residential neighborhoods of Sonoma.
27.2	L	Lovall Valley Road	
27.8	S	Sonoma Bike Trail	★ Or go off-course (left) into downtown Sonoma.
28.9	R	5th Street West	Or stay on bike path to right on Hwy 12.
29.2	L	El Verano Road	
29.7	R	Hwy 12	Two miles of busy, trashy highway.
32.3	R	Cavedale Road	Big climb ahead, but beautiful scenery too.
37.6	S		Summit.
39.9	R	Trinity Grade/Dry Creek Road	Great descent ahead...but tricky!
44.4	L	Oakville Grade	Bear left on Oakville at Dry Creek Road junction.
47.7	R	Hwy 29	
48.7	L	Yount Mill Road	
51.2	S		Straight into Yountville at Yountville Cross jctn.
51.7		Washington Street	Finish.



# The Napa Valley Tour

Sonoma Loop  
52 miles, 3100'

