

ROAD BIKE RIDES AROUND MURPHYS

Courtesy of David Ritchie

French Gulch Loop – 9 miles

Start in the parking lot by Murphys Park. Go out to Main Street, turn left and continue straight ahead up French Gulch Road. There is a one mile climb of 400' to the crest of French Gulch Road. Descend to the western intersection of French Gulch and Murphys Grade, turn left up Murphys Grade Road and climb 550' in four miles back to Murphys. If this is done clockwise there will be a steep climb at the west end of French Gulch Road.

Greenhorn Creek Loop – 20 miles

Start in the parking lot by Murphys Park. Go out to Main Street, turn left and follow Murphys Grade Road down to Highway 49 in Angels Camp. Go right on 49 and take the first left onto old Highway 49. Go ½ mile and take the first left to go to Greenhorn Creek. Enter Greenhorn Creek subdivision at the bottom of the hill and take a right in front of the timeshare units. Take an immediate right again and turn right at each of the next several intersections. At the south end of the subdivision go through the foot traffic gate at the end of the paved road onto a very short section of private gravel road. Turn left and follow the creek to the intersection of Highway 49 and Highway 4. Cross Highway 49 and go up Highway 4 through Vallecito and return to Murphys.

Parrots Ferry out and back – 18 miles

Start in the parking lot by Murphys Park. Go out to Main Street and turn right to Highway 4. Go down Highway 4 to Vallecito and take Parrots Ferry Road toward Columbia and Sonora. It's five miles from Vallecito to the Parrots Ferry Bridge. Turn around and return, with a one mile 7% climb out of the river canyon. Parrots Ferry Road beyond the bridge has a nice climb to Columbia, about 2 or 3 miles further, but the shoulder narrows down with tighter curves and can be a bit dicey when quarry trucks and log trucks are rolling.

Dogtown-Calaveritas out and back – 28 miles

Start at the high school parking lot in Angels Camp at the west end of Murphys Grade Road. Up Murphys Grade Road ¼ mile to Gardner Lane, turn left. Go ½ mile to Dogtown Road, right on Dogtown Road. 7 or 8 miles out one gets to the Fricot (Cave City) Road intersection, turn right 50 yards to Calaveritas Road, turn left on Calaveritas Road to San Andreas. Turn around at the Government Center in San Andreas and return. This is a pretty ride; rolling hills, mediocre pavement, little traffic. There are a couple of short steep climbs. If you start in Murphys and go down Murphys Grade to the high school this becomes a 50 mile ride.

San Domingo Creek Loop – 20 miles

Start in the parking lot by Murphys Park. Ride down Murphys Grade Road to Gardner Lane at the high school, turn right to Dogtown Road, ride out Dogtown Road about 3 miles to San Domingo Creek Road, which goes right, up the creek. This becomes packed dirt for a couple of miles but is rideable except in wet weather. Ride past Stevenot Winery and turn right up Sheep Ranch Road. Climb a 10% grade for a mile, then drop into Murphys.

Fullen Road out and back – 17 miles

Start at Murphys Park. Cross Main Street and go out Sheep Ranch Road past Mercer Caverns and Stevenot Winery. 5 miles out, Fullen Road goes up to your right, ½ mile steep climb. Fullen Road has numerous short steep climbs that will get you if you don't anticipate and appreciate their pitches. Go to your lowest gear as you approach them. Fullen Road tees into Avery-Sheep Ranch Road. Turn left onto Avery-Sheep Ranch Road, go a couple of miles to the triangular intersection of Murphys-Sheep Ranch Road and Avery-Sheep Ranch Road, turn left on Murphys-Sheep Ranch Road, make a very short climb past Mineral Mountain subdivision and return to Murphys, passing the Fullen Road

intersection about 2 miles from Mineral Mountain. This has about 2500' of climbing, much of it challenging. Pavement is mediocre.

Mountain Ranch out and back – adds 10 miles to the Fullen Road out and back

At the Murphys-Sheep Ranch, Avery-Sheep Ranch triangular intersection, go to Sheep Ranch and then on to Mountain Ranch. Do not take Mountain Ranch Road into San Andreas, it's got heavy traffic and poor shoulders. From the triangular intersection, Sheep Ranch Road drops steeply into a canyon and then climbs up the other side to Sheep Ranch. Sheep Ranch to Mountain Ranch rolls up and down. The pavement is mediocre with little traffic.

Up Highway 4 to above Arnold out and back – 26 miles

From Murphys, climb Highway 4 on a 2 mile 6% grade with a decent shoulder and heavy traffic. Past Hathaway Pines take Moran Road to your right as you enter Avery. Turn around at the upper end of Moran Road where it meets Highway 4. Don't ride Highway 4 between Arnold and Dorrington.

Big Trees out and back – 18 miles

Start in the parking lot at the state park entrance. Ride past the South Grove to the end of the road and return. Excellent pavement, little traffic, pretty. Good climbs, about 2000' total. Well worth the \$5 or \$6 entry fee.

Up Highway 4 above Dorrington

Park in Dorrington. Highway 4 from here to the Bear Valley Mountain Resort has good pavement and wide shoulder. It's a long steady 6% climb for 11 miles, then flattens out to Bear Valley Village with a few short climbs. Bear Valley Village is 20 miles out.

Spicer Reservoir Road out and back – 18 miles

Spicer Road exits Highway 4 about 5 miles below Bear Valley. Excellent pavement, little traffic, pretty. Some good climbs. There is good parking ¼ mile down Spicer Road. Or park in Bear Valley and come down Highway 4 to the turnoff, making a 28 mile out and back. Or start in Dorrington and make it a 50 mile ride.

Bear Valley to Mosquito Lake out and back – 20 miles

Park in Bear Valley Village. Go up Highway 4. The 6%-7% climb starts immediately, then drops into Lake Alpine, then climbs steeply out of the far end of Lake Alpine for a mile, then rolls to Mosquito Lake on a narrow mountain road with beautiful vistas to the south.

Beyond Mosquito Lake

Hermit Valley is 2 miles beyond and 1000' lower than Mosquito Lake. This is where one finds Pacific Grade at 24%. Ebbetts Pass is 5 miles beyond Hermit Valley and 1700' higher, 7% grade.

Bear Valley to Markleeville out and back – 72 miles

This is a beautiful and challenging ride. If you consider doing it look at www.deathride.com

Glory Hole (Melones) Road out and back – 15 miles

Start at the turnoff to Glory Hole, about 2 miles south of Angels Camp on Highway 49. Ride to the marina and turn around. Take some of the campground and boat launch loops to add a couple of miles. Good pavement and little traffic. Nice lake views. One short steep climb coming out.

Salt Springs Loop – 30 miles

Drive down Highway 4 to the Copperopolis turnoff, but turn right onto Rock Creek Road. Park just after you turn off. Do a counterclockwise ride through Salt Springs Valley, climbing out the north end of the valley and dropping into Milton and then taking Rock Creek Road from Milton up Rock Creek Road and back to the start. Every time I do this ride I swear that the next time I'll do it on my mountain

bike. The pavement on the western part of Rock Creek Road is lousy. We once did this ride clockwise and it is the only time I've ever had my average speed decrease on a downhill. This is where Mike got a flat from a square nail during a race, so we can only guess when the paving was done. There is a sanctioned multi-lap race on this loop every spring. This gets hot in the summer.

Knights Ferry Loop – 34 miles

Knights Ferry is over on Highway 108, about an hour away from Murphys. Start at Knights Ferry, take Sonora Road, then south to the east side of Woodward Reservoir, then take Twenty Eight Mile Road to Rodden Road, to Orange Blossom Road, back to Knights Ferry. Flat to moderate rolling, decent pavement, little traffic on Sonora Road, more elsewhere. This can be hot and windy in the summer.

Willem Road out and back – 30 miles

Park in Knights Ferry. Go back out to and cross Highway 108. Go south on Willms Road on excellent pavement with no traffic. This is pretty in the spring, hot in the summer.

Places not to go.

Highway 49 between Angels Camp and San Andreas has no shoulder and heavy traffic.

Highway 4 west of Angels Camp has no shoulder and heavy traffic.

Highway 4 between Arnold and Dorrington is narrow, twisting, and has no shoulder. Logging trucks are common.

Highway 4 on the downhill side just above Murphys (Utica Grade) has little shoulder. It's a five minute ride down, but can be dicey in heavy traffic.

Stevenot Bridge, on Highway 49 south of Angels Camp, has nasty expansion joints that eat tires. The slots are wide and in the direction of travel. Walk them. There isn't much reason to go there, because the highway south of the bridge narrows down with no shoulder and heavy traffic.