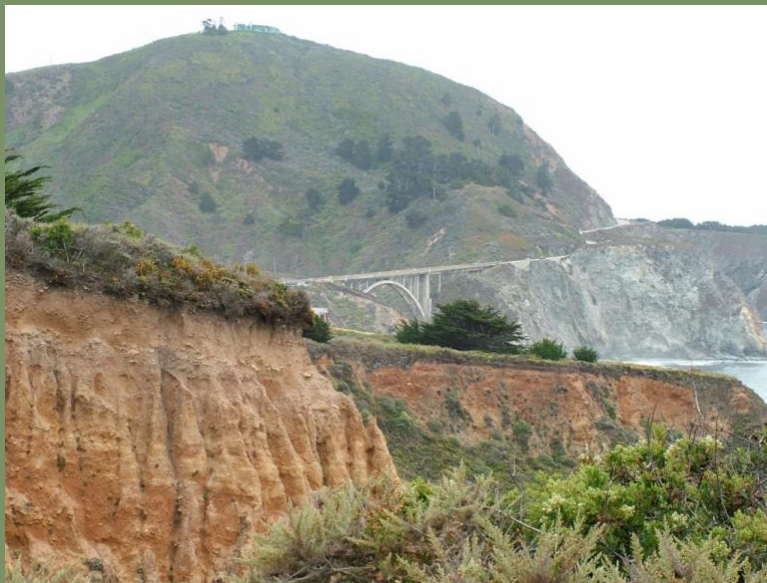


CALIFORNIA CENTRAL COAST CYCLING

ATASCADARO, SANTA MARGARITA, CARMEL BY THE SEA, PEBBLE BEACH, MONTEREY

Biking along the Central California Coast offered a distinct experience compared to Southern California. Rather than cruising through beach towns, I pedaled through the rolling hills of the Santa Lucia mountains and oak groves around Atascadero. In the Monterey Bay area, the route hugged the coastline, wound through hills, and passed iconic Monterey Cypress, Monterey Pines, and Coast Live Oaks.



Bridge to Big Sur

CENTRAL COAST – ATASCADERO AND SURROUNDING AREA MAP

This region is steeped in ranching, agriculture, and a vibrant cowboy heritage. The Santa Maria rub, a favorite among tri-tip aficionados,

was born here. In recent years, ranches have increasingly made way



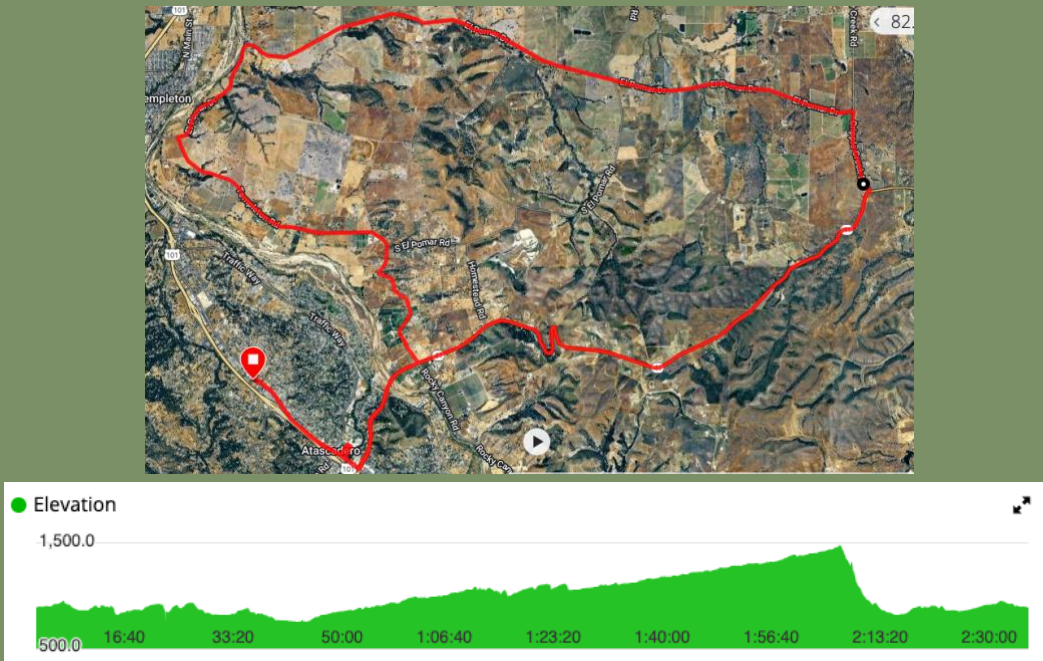
for wineries, with Paso Robles emerging as a renowned destination for wine lovers.

Atascadero, Spanish for “bog,” was founded in 1913 as a utopian planned City when Edward Gardner Lewis bought Atascadero Ranch. He also founded University City, a suburb of St. Louis, as a utopian community. In 1907, Lewis created the American Woman’s League to prepare women for voting rights. Atascadero is the midpoint between Los Angeles, 210 miles to the south and San Francisco (“The City”) 215 miles to the north. It is surrounded by vineyards, oak

trees, ranches, and rolling hills.

Here are a couple of rides I enjoyed around Atascadero.

ATASCADERO TO TEMPLETON LOOP AND SUNKEN GARDENS



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
28.51 miles out and back, Total ascent 1,353 feet

I kicked off my ride just outside Atascadero on El Camino Real, pedaling south along the west side of U.S. 101 into downtown Atascadero. With light traffic, I turned left onto California State Route 41, then left again onto Templeton Road, leading to a scenic loop through El Pomar Drive and Cripple Creek before circling back to CA Route 41. The route map shows this 10-mile loop, and the elevation chart reveals a steady climb—peaking around 1,100 feet—followed by a thrilling downhill back to town. Rolling through Templeton, I was surrounded by sprawling ranches, golden fields, and rows of picturesque vineyards. Back in Atascadero, I couldn't resist a quick spin around the Sunken Gardens, a lush, historic gem inspired by the Grand Basin at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. This ride was a blast, with oak-dotted hills and open skies that make you want to keep pedaling forever!

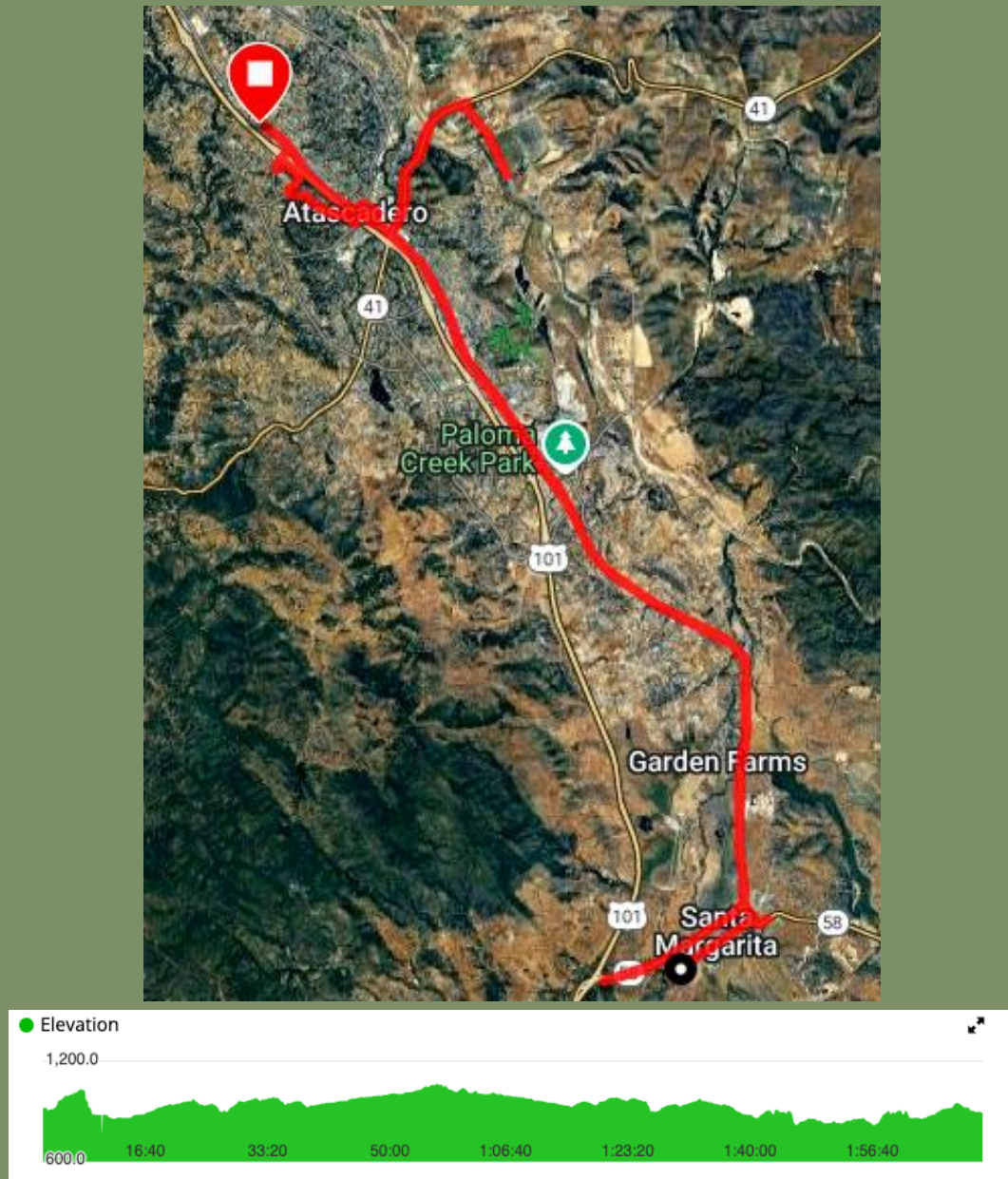


Famous Sunken Garden – Atascadero

Cycling Tips:

- **Road Conditions:** CA Route 41 and Templeton Road have decent shoulders but watch for occasional gravel on El Pomar Drive. A road or hybrid bike works best.
- **Timing:** Early mornings are ideal to beat the heat and enjoy quieter roads, especially in summer.
- **Fuel Up:** Grab a coffee or snack in downtown Atascadero before starting—local spots like Bru Coffeehouse are perfect for a pre-ride boost.
- **Safety:** Wear bright gear on CA Route 41, as traffic can pick up near town. Carry water for the climb, as there's little shade on the loop.

ATASCADERO TO SANTA MARGARITA AND ROCKY CANYON



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
28.63 miles out and back, Total ascent 812 feet

I started this adventure on El Camino Real just outside Atascadero, cruising along the west side of U.S. 101 into downtown Atascadero. With light traffic, I headed south toward Santa Margarita, a hidden gem nestled in the Santa Lucia Mountains' foothills, where CA State Route 58 meets El Camino Real. The route map traces this out-and-

back journey, about 28 miles round-trip, with the elevation chart showing gentle climbs—nothing too steep, topping out around 1,000 feet. Santa Margarita’s downtown stole the show with its Old West vibe: think weathered wooden storefronts, cozy wine tasting rooms, and the hum of locals at The Range or J’s Country Kitchen. This historic town, founded in 1889 near Cuesta Ridge, boasts the ruins of 1787 Spanish sub-mission Santa Margarita de Cortona (Spanish for Saint Margaret of Cortona) Asistencia, tucked within the iconic Santa Margarita Ranch on the right as you roll in. Heading south to the U.S. 101 intersection, I turned back to avoid the highway’s bustle, pedaling back toward Atascadero. Nearing town, I veered right onto CA Route 41, then right again onto Rocky Canyon Road, riding a couple of miles before turning at Templeton Road. The ride wrapped up through downtown Atascadero, with oak-studded hills, ranches, and vineyards painting a postcard-worthy backdrop. This ride’s chill vibes and Santa Margarita’s rustic charm made it an absolute joy!

Cycling Tips:

- **Road Conditions:** El Camino Real (SR 58) to Santa Margarita is smooth but narrow in spots—stay alert for passing cars. Rocky Canyon Road is quieter but has some uneven patches; a road bike is fine but check tires for grip.
- **Timing:** Hit Santa Margarita early to catch the farmers market (Saturdays, spring through fall) for a post-ride treat. Avoid midday heat in summer.
- **Fuel Up:** Stop at The Range in Santa Margarita for farm-to-table grub or a quick wine tasting to soak in the local flavor.
- **Safety:** Carry a spare tube, as rural stretches like Rocky Canyon have few services.

- **Bonus:** If you've got time, detour to Santa Margarita Ranch for a quick peek at the Mission's ruins or try ziplining at Margarita Adventures for an adrenaline kick.

CENTRAL COAST – MONTEREY BAY AREA

Monterey Bay. Spanish explorer Sebastián Vizcaíno arrived at Monterey Bay on December 16, 1602, naming it Puerto de Monterrey after the Count of Monterrey, viceroy of New Spain, whose family was from Monterrei, a city in Galicia, Spain. Situated on California's central coast, the bay is famous for the scenic 17-Mile Drive, featuring Pebble Beach Golf Course, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Monterey, and Big Sur. Author John Steinbeck, known for *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Tortilla Flat*, was born in nearby Salinas, where visitors can explore the National Steinbeck Center in Oldtown Salinas and tour his birthplace home.

The region has a dynamic wine scene, featuring numerous vineyards

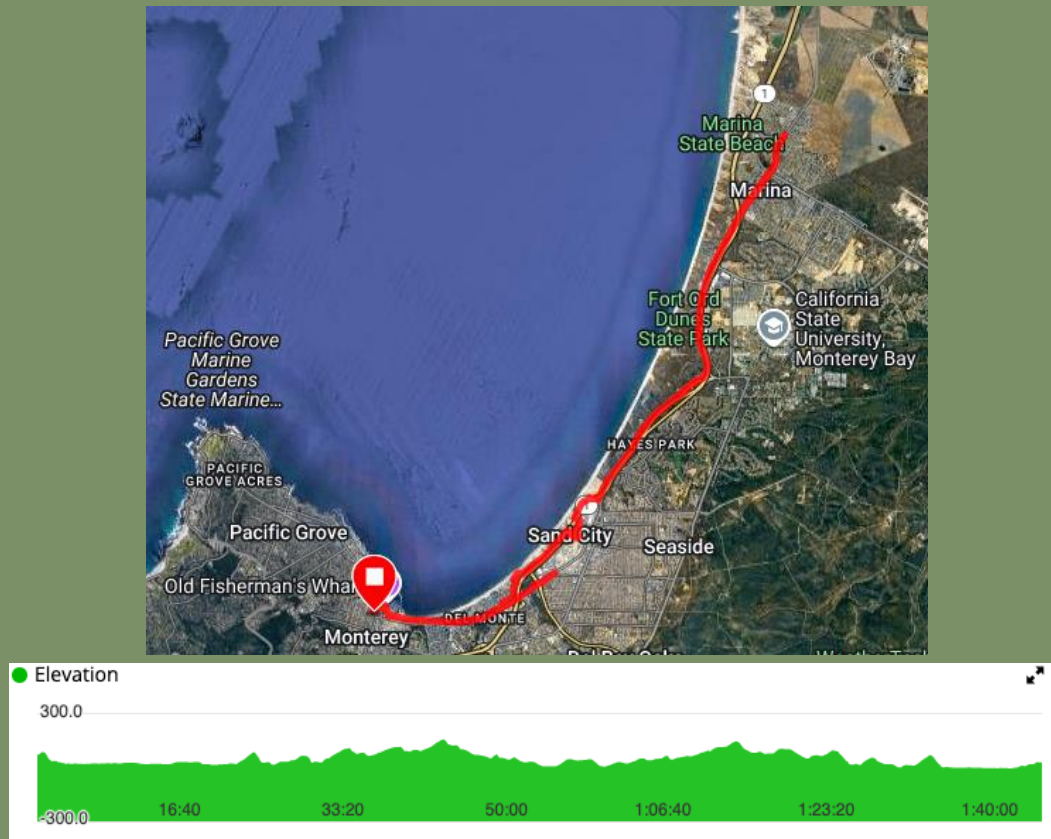


and tasting rooms. For car enthusiasts, it's home to the iconic Laguna Seca racetrack, hosting IndyCar events and historic races.

The Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, held annually on the third Sunday of August at Pebble Beach Golf Links' 18th fairway since 1950, is the world's premier celebration of automotive

excellence. It showcases elite collector cars judged for elegance, historical accuracy, technical merit, and style, attracting global enthusiasts to view rare prewar and postwar vehicles, concept cars, and new debuts. Highlights include the Tour d'Elegance along Highway One and the Classic Car Forum. The Best of Show award, selected from class winners, is the ultimate honor, with Bugatti and Mercedes-Benz each earning 10 wins as of 2024. The event is part of Monterey Car Week.

MONTEREY - SAND CITY – SEASIDE - MARINA



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
22.83 miles out and back, Total ascent 806 feet

Monterey – Monterey, founded by the Spanish in 1774, was the capital of the Californias and the only port for goods via its Custom House, California's oldest government building. On July 7, 1846, during the Mexican-American War, Commodore John Drake Sloat raised the U.S. flag here, claiming California. Monterey was the provisional capital of California until 1849. Key sites include the Presidio, Old Fisherman's Wharf and Cannery Row (featured in Steinbeck's works), the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and the Naval Postgraduate School.



I set out to explore the Monterey Bay Coastal Recreation Trail, a scenic 18-mile paved pathway hugging the coastline from Pacific Grove to Castroville. I chose to ride the Seaside/Sand City section, starting from downtown Monterey, with its lively cafes and shops. Accessing the trail was a breeze—no tricky navigation, just a smooth transition from city streets to the dedicated path by the Old Fisherman Wharf.

The trail itself is impeccably maintained, with a relatively flat, well-paved surface perfect for cyclists of all levels. I shared the path with only a few joggers and fellow cyclists, which allowed me to enjoy the surroundings. I rode by the U.S. Naval Post Graduate School. The Monterey Bay unfolded to my left, its deep blue waters sparkling under the sun, framed by rugged cliffs and sandy shores. The air carried a salty tang, mixed with the faint scent of kelp and eucalyptus.

The Monterey Bay Coastal Recreation Trail gets tricky near Tioga Avenue, where it crosses Highway 1 and requires a left turn onto Metz Avenue, behind a large retail store. From Metz, a left onto Playa Avenue crosses back over Highway 1, rejoining the trail with a right turn.

One of the highlights was spotting wildlife along the shore. Near the water's edge, sea lions basked on rocky outcrops, their barks echoing faintly, while playful sea otters floated on their backs. The views were breathtaking, especially where the trail curved closer to the bay, offering unobstructed panoramas of waves crashing against the coastline.

The elevation changes were minimal, with gentle inclines that posed minimal challenges. Sand City presented a brief stretch of mild

congestion, where the trail narrowed slightly, and I navigated around a few pedestrians near local shops. Pedaling northward, I passed the historic Fort Ord, a former U.S. Army base, its faded barracks and

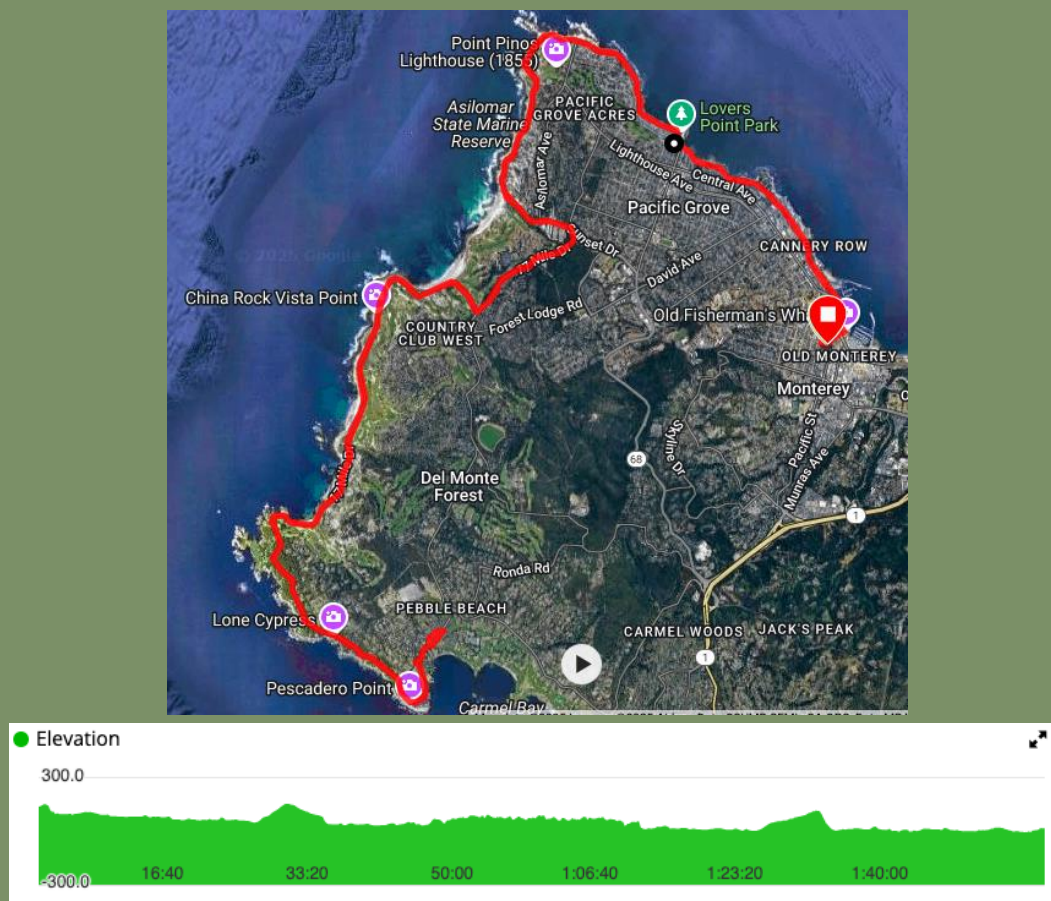


open fields a reminder of its military past. Nearby, the campus of California State University–Monterey Bay stood out against old military structures. As I rode north, I had a view of dunes dotted with ice plants and the distant

silhouette of the Santa Cruz Mountains across the bay. (Picture credit Courtesy of California State Parks, 2025.)

I reached Marina Beach and after a quick sip of water, I turned back, right after Beach Road, retracing my route. The return ride felt faster, perhaps because of a slight tailwind or the familiarity of the path. The scenery remained just as captivating. The entire ride, covering about 23 miles round-trip, was a perfect blend of exercise and immersion in Monterey's coastal beauty.

MONTEREY – PEBBLE BEACH



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
26.51miles out and back, Total ascent 731 feet

I cycled a scenic route combining the Monterey Bay Coastal



Recreation Trail with surface streets through Pacific Grove and Pebble Beach, heading toward Fisherman's Wharf before taking the trail north. Starting in downtown Monterey early in the morning, I encountered only a few walkers and cyclists on the well-paved

trail. The route passed Cannery Row, lined with shops, restaurants, and hotels, and offers an easy access to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. We highly recommend visiting the aquarium, especially for families with kids.



Here are a few pictures from one of our trips to aquarium.



The Monterey Bay, shimmering on the right side of the Coastal Recreation Trail, offers stunning views that made it hard to focus on the path ahead. The scenic stretch from the Monterey Bay Aquarium to Lovers Point is a beloved tourist hotspot, vibrant with activity throughout the day. About halfway along the path, the Pacific Grove viewpoint offers a stunning spot to pause and soak in breathtaking coastal vistas. The trail continues through Pacific Grove, hugging the bay with sweeping ocean views. Along the way, Kissing Point Viewpoint provides another cherished location for capturing the bay's beauty. The route then rounds the peninsula at the historic Point Pinos Lighthouse, operational since February 1, 1855, and proudly

holding the title of the oldest continuously operated lighthouse on the West Coast



Point Pinos Lighthouse

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Point_Pinos_Light_during_reconstruction_\(2013\).jpg#file](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Point_Pinos_Light_during_reconstruction_(2013).jpg#file)

Pacific Grove is fondly known as “Butterfly Town” for the monarch butterflies that migrate there from mid-October to mid-February. I headed south through the Pacific Grove gate into Pebble Beach and the iconic 17-Mile Drive. As I was riding early in the morning, I was greeted by spectacular views with minimal traffic, allowing me to enjoy the scenery. Riding with the Pebble Beach golf course on my left and the vast, shimmering ocean on my right created an unforgettable experience. The crisp ocean breeze and light mist brought a chill, but my rain gear kept me comfortable.

The route showcased some of the most breathtaking spots along the coast: Spanish Bay Vista Point, Seal Rock Creek Beach, Fanshell Beach, and the striking Cypress Point Rock. The iconic Lone Cypress Tree and the hauntingly beautiful Ghost Trees at Pescadero Point were highlights, culminating at the Lodge at Pebble Beach. The terrain was mostly flat with gentle inclines, making for a smooth ride. While I’ve driven through Pebble Beach before, cycling offered a more relaxed and intimate connection to the stunning landscape, allowing me to notice vivid details.

I chose the early morning for good reason—traffic can thicken later, and the narrow roads feel safer with fewer cars. After reaching the Lodge, I turned back, pedaling 13 miles to Monterey. The return ride was equally scenic, bathed in soft morning sunlight, with the flat terrain making for an effortless journey framed by coastal beauty.

Pebble Beach is a Monterey Bay treasure owned by the Pebble Beach Company (including Clint Eastwood and Peter Ueberroth, previously Arnold Palmer and Richard Ferris). It boasts the scenic 17-Mile Drive with mansions, views of the Ocean, the world-renowned Pebble Beach Golf Course, and historic lodges: The Lodge at Pebble Beach and The



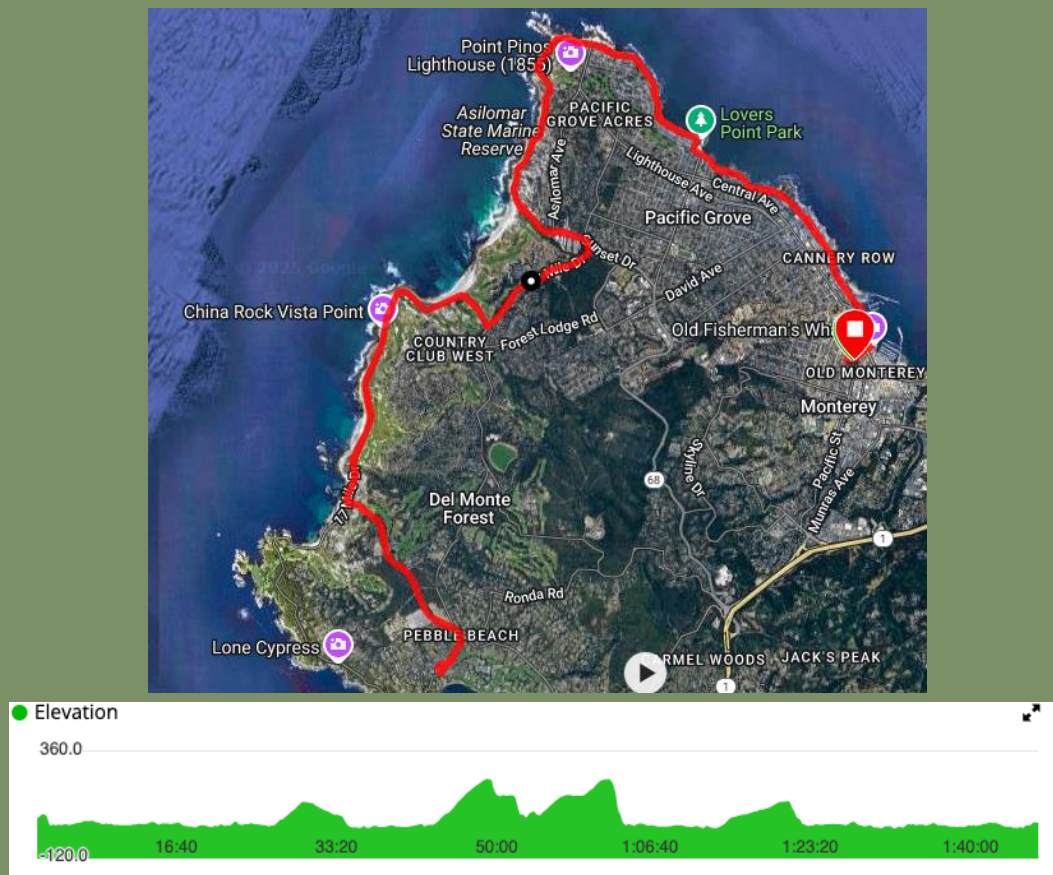
Inn at Spanish Bay. It once hosted the Pebble Beach Road Races (now at Laguna Seca Raceway) and equestrian events until 2012, evoking fond family memories.

Another memorable route I've cycled, starting from Monterey like the previous one, follows the coastal 17-Mile Drive through Pebble Beach. After passing Seal Rock Overlook, I turned left onto Spyglass Hill Road, diverging from the coastal path toward the Lodge. This



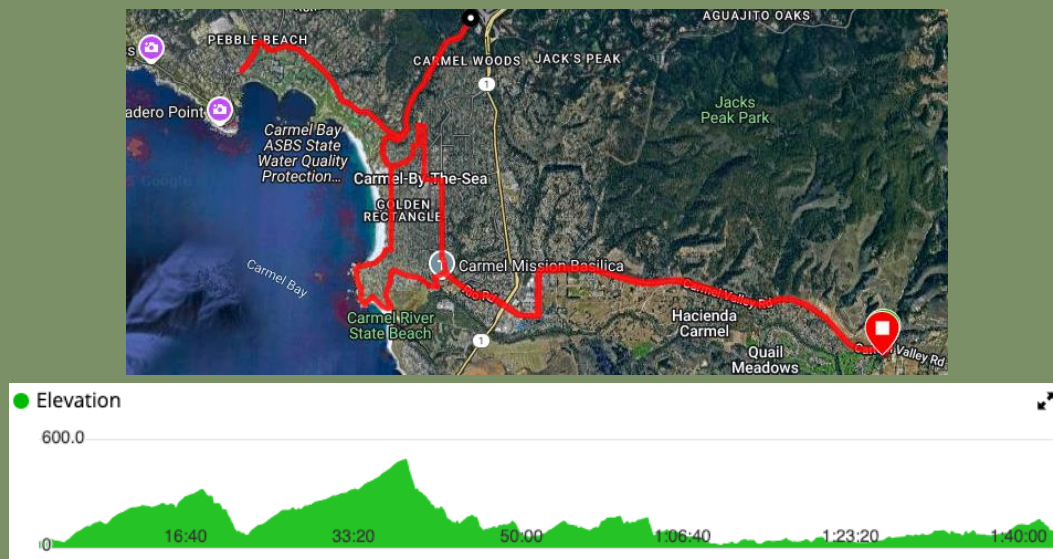
road merges into Stevenson Drive, named for the famed author Robert Louis Stevenson. Both the road and the prestigious Spyglass Hill Golf Course, located along this route, draw their names from Stevenson's classic novel,

Treasure Island. Unlike the relatively flat coastal route, this path is hillier and winds through the lush, heavily wooded terrain of the Spyglass Hill Golf Course, offering a more challenging yet serene ride. The route also took me past the Pebble Beach Equestrian Center before arriving at the Pebble Beach Visitor Center and the Lodge. Details of this ride are provided below.



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
22.91miles out and back, Total ascent 852 feet

CARMEL VALLEY ROAD – CARMEL BY THE SEA – PEBBLE BEACH



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
21.21miles out and back, Total ascent 1,186 feet

I cycled from the intersection of Valley Greens Drive and Carmel Valley Road, heading west toward Carmel-by-the-Sea and the lower part of Pebble Beach's 17-Mile Drive.



Starting early in the morning to avoid traffic, the initial stretch along Carmel Valley Road involved some climbs through residential areas and open spaces, leveling off as I approached Carmel-by-the-Sea.

From there, I took Carmel Rancho Boulevard around a shopping center to reach Rio Road. Crossing U.S. Highway 1 was tricky due to heavy traffic. Continuing past the historic Carmel Mission, I rode through residential streets and downtown Carmel, eventually reaching Ocean Avenue, which led me to the 17-Mile Drive via the Carmel Gate.

Once in Pebble Beach I rode to the Lodge. Starting at the Lodge in Pebble Beach, I retraced the 17-Mile Drive back to the Highway 1 Gate. With traffic building on U.S. 1, I opted to avoid it, instead returning through the Carmel Gate via Ocean Avenue. In Carmel-by-the-Sea, I rode south on San Antonio Avenue through a charming residential neighborhood, where rustic homes create a cozy village atmosphere. At the end of San Antonio Avenue, I turned right onto Scenic Road, passing Carmel River State Beach and continuing to the Carmel Mission and Rio Road. On one of my rides, I noticed a bridal photoshoot near the beach—don't worry, I steered clear and didn't photobomb her moment.



Established in 1902, **Carmel-by-the-Sea** traces its roots back to 1602, when Spanish explorer Sebastian Vizcaino named the area Rio Carmelo in honor of the three Carmelite friars who served as chaplains on his expedition. A charming coastal village just south of Pebble



Beach, Carmel captivates with its picturesque beaches and stunning oceanfront homes. Known for its fairy-tale-like ambiance, the village features winding streets lined with boutique shops and art galleries.



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Saint Serra's final resting place in the Mission

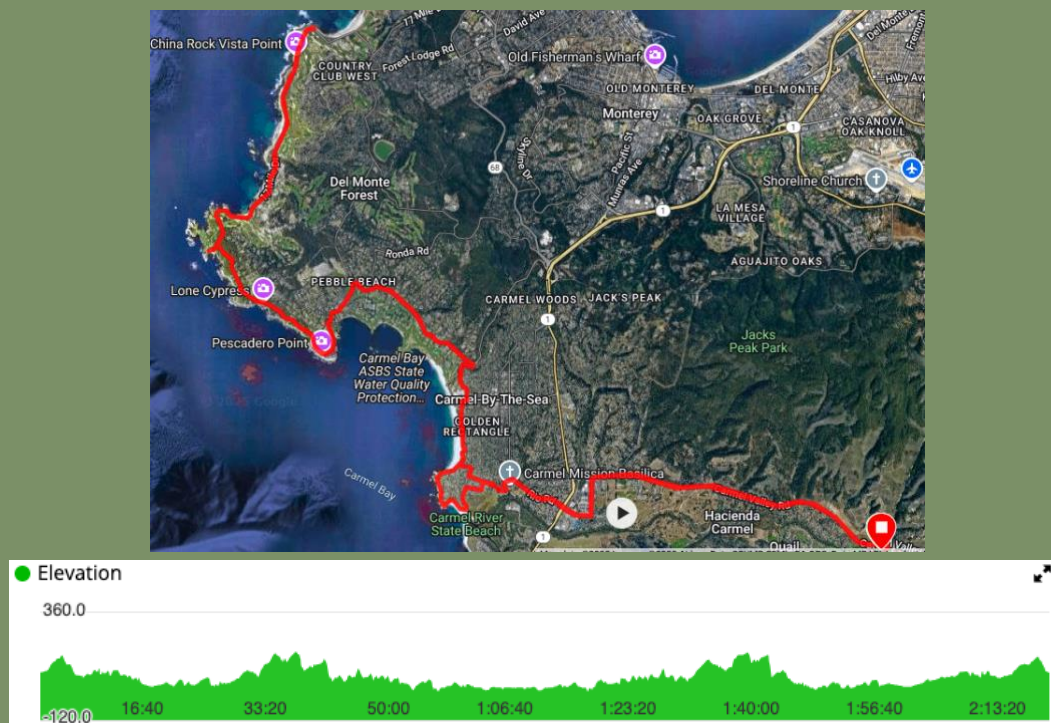
The return ride was breathtaking, not only from the pedaling but also from the stunning scenery, with the ocean sparkling on one side and charming village homes lining the other. I thoroughly enjoyed this scenic ride.

CARMEL VALLEY ROAD – CARMEL BY THE SEA - PEBBLE BEACH (SPANISH BAY VISTA POINT)



Another variation on the ride above is that, instead of turning around at the Lodge and heading to the U.S. 1 Gate, I continued along the 17-Mile Drive to Spanish Bay Vista Point. After pausing to savor the stunning morning views, I retraced my route back to

Carmel Valley Road. Below are details about this ride.



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
28.83 miles out and back, Total ascent 930 feet

One spot we loved to unwind, be it after a bike ride or a family outing, was Will's Fargo Dining House and Saloon, a lively 1920s roadhouse in Carmel Valley Village. Sadly, it closed in 2017, but we cherish countless fond memories of lively meals there.