

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

PENINSULA AND NORTH BAY

Cycling San Francisco Bay Area is an adventure. Picture biking around towering redwoods, bustling urban streets, sprawling farmlands, horse barns, and wide-open spaces. Each ride is a joy, and I can't help but feel like I'm pedaling in the footsteps of Saint Junipero Serra, tracing his historic path through California.

I've split this write-up into two sections: **the Peninsula**, encompassing the vibrant cities of Palo Alto, Atherton, Los Gatos, and Portola Valley; and the **North Bay**, including the rugged Marin Headlands and the picturesque cities of Sausalito, Tiburon, San Rafael, and Santa Rosa.

PENINSULA INFORMATION

Nestled in the heart of Silicon Valley, **Palo Alto** buzzes with innovation, hosting tech giants like Apple, Google, and Tesla. The city was founded in 1894 by Leland Stanford Jr., who also established the iconic Stanford University. Its name, Palo Alto—Spanish for “the tall stick”—comes from a towering redwood, dubbed El Palo Alto, spotted by Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portolá's expedition in 1769 along the banks of San Francisquito Creek. Picture of the tree on the right,



credit Carleton E. Watkins, Twin Redwoods, Palo Alto, 1870, NGA 92380. Just a few years later, in 1777, Saint Junipero Serra, forging his chain of California missions, founded Mission Santa Clara de Asís (Spanish for Clare of Assisi), its northern edge tracing San Francisquito Creek, just beyond Stanford's campus and Sand Hill Road.



Leland Stanford founded **Stanford University**, established in 1891, to honor his late son. Sprawling across the family's former farm, it's affectionately nicknamed "The Farm." In 1951, Stanford University sparked the Silicon Valley revolution by

launching Stanford Research Park, the first such park in the nation igniting a tech legacy that still burns bright.



Nearby **Portola Valley** carries the name of Gaspar de Portolá, the daring Spanish explorer and aristocrat who roamed these lands in the 1770s.



Memorial Church, Stanford University Chapel

PENINSULA RIDES

All my rides start on El Camino Real (CA 82), the historic Spanish road connecting the Missions in California. I then turn left onto Arastradero Road, passing a striking McLaren dealership that always catches my eye. I follow Arastradero until it meets Page Mill Road, just beyond the underpass of I-280, known as the Junipero Serra Freeway. Another notable landmark is Tesla's headquarters on Deer Creek Road along Arastradero.

From here, I've explored two routes. One option is to continue straight on Page Mill Road as Arastradero veers right, ascending into the mountains through Foothills Preserve. This route, labeled "***Foothills Alameda da Pulegas***," offers challenging switchbacks and breathtaking views. The ride's map and elevation profile provide full details for this scenic stretch.

For my second route, I swing right or left onto Arastradero Road, depending on which way I'm riding. This stretch is home to the Pearson Arastradero Preserve, a hidden gem where the region's natural history comes alive. It's definitely worth a quick stop to soak it in. The road itself is a narrow, winding two-lane with no shoulder or bike lane, keeping me on my toes as I dodge cars



and watch for people riding horses trying to cross the road to access the nearby trails.

Arastradero dead-ends at a T intersection with Alpine Road, setting the stage for the next leg.

I veer right onto Alpine Road, pedaling toward Roberts Market, a cozy local grocery with a sister store up in Woodside. (My personal nicknames are South Roberts and North Roberts.) From there, I hook right onto Portola Road, cruising through Portola Valley's charming mix of homes and horse barns, all shaded by majestic redwood trees.



As Portola Road curves left, I could go straight onto Sand Hill Road to loop back toward Palo Alto and Stanford University, which I have done. But often I choose the breathtaking path, cruising down Mountain Home Road, where grand mansions nestle among towering redwoods, before rolling into Woodside and pulling up to Roberts Market. This spot's a lifesaver, serving up mouthwatering sandwiches that hit the spot for a mid-ride refuel. Tip: Pack a small reusable bag at Roberts Market to stash their amazing sandwiches for the road ahead.

From Roberts Market, I usually head north on Cañada Road, a scenic stretch that's a cyclist's dream. The star of this route is the Filoli Historic House & World-Class Garden, a stunning estate that's well worth a detour. (Pro tip: check if reservations are needed for the day you're riding.) I've pedaled as far as the I-280/CA 92 intersection before doubling back, taking in the view of Upper Crystal Springs Reservoir framed by the rugged Santa Cruz Mountains. On Sundays, Cañada



Road between the I-280/CA 92 intersection and Filoli is closed to motorized vehicles from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., creating a car-free route. Be aware that it can still get congested with fellow riders and pedestrians. Picture Credit: <https://www.thesanfranciscopeninsula.com/listing/crystal-springs-regional-trail/4692/>

The distance I cover on Cañada Road varies depending on how long I feel like spinning. Heading back to Woodside and Roberts Market, I've got a couple of favorite return routes to share:

The first option is to stick with CA 84 and swing right onto Alameda de las Pulgas (Spanish for Avenue of Fleas) just past Woodside High School. From there, I merge onto Santa Cruz Avenue, then I turn left onto Junipero Serra Boulevard. This route skirts by Stanford University's main campus and leads me back to Arastradero Road. (I have tried the option to remain straight on CA 84 to make a right onto El Camino Real to return to my starting point. The relentless traffic and constant stoplights on El Camino Real turn the ride into a grind, so I don't recommend this route.)



The second route kicks off with a right turn onto Whiskey Hill Road from CA-84 in Woodside, leading to a T-intersection with Sand Hill Road. On the right, you'll spot the Woodside Horse Park, a family favorite. I cruise over I-280, hang a right onto Junipero Serra

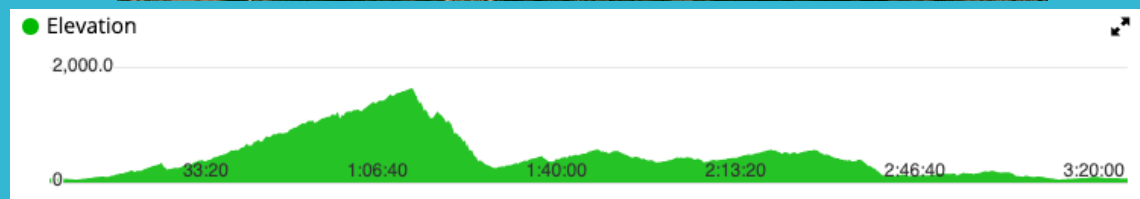
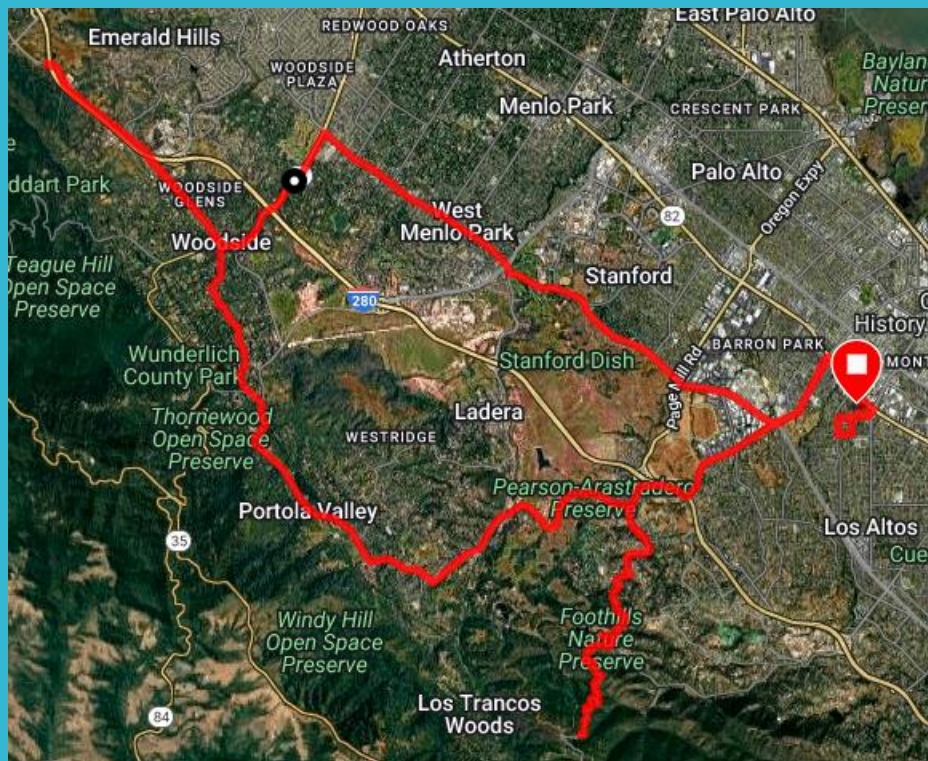
Boulevard, and glide past Stanford University back to Arastradero Road.

I've ventured through Stanford's campus to reach El Camino Real before, but the maze of campus roads can be a headache, so I usually steer clear.

Additional information on the routes is provided below.

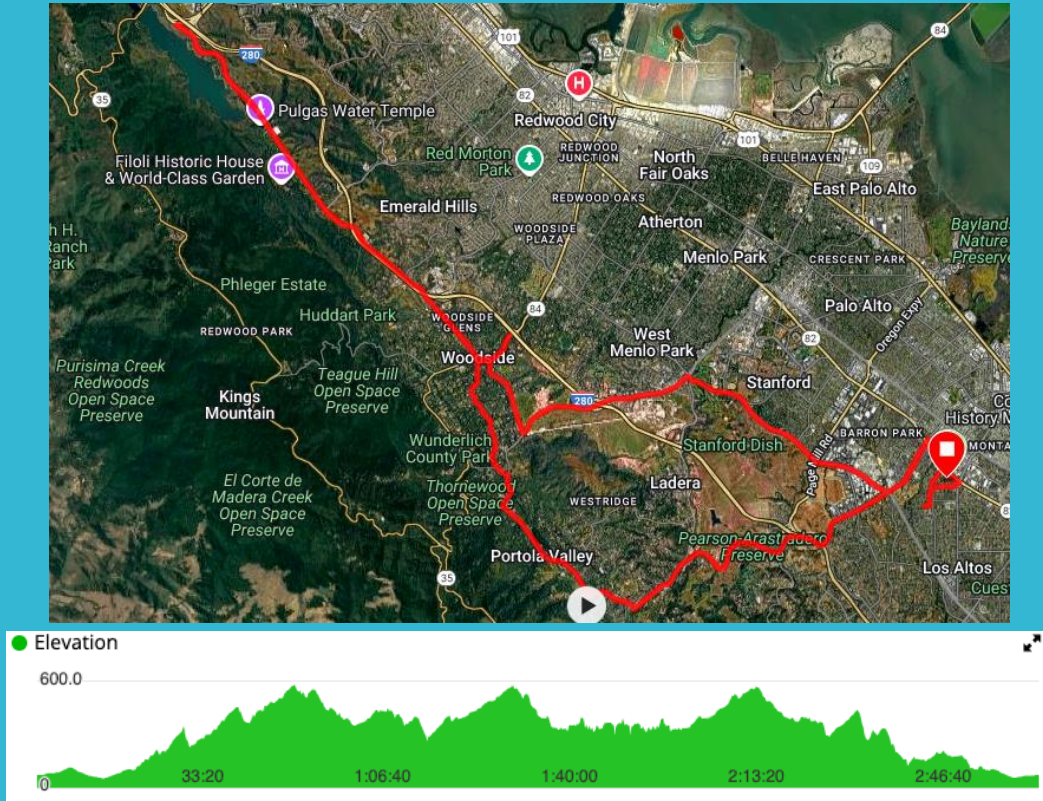


FOOT HILLS – ALAMEDA DE LAS PULGAS



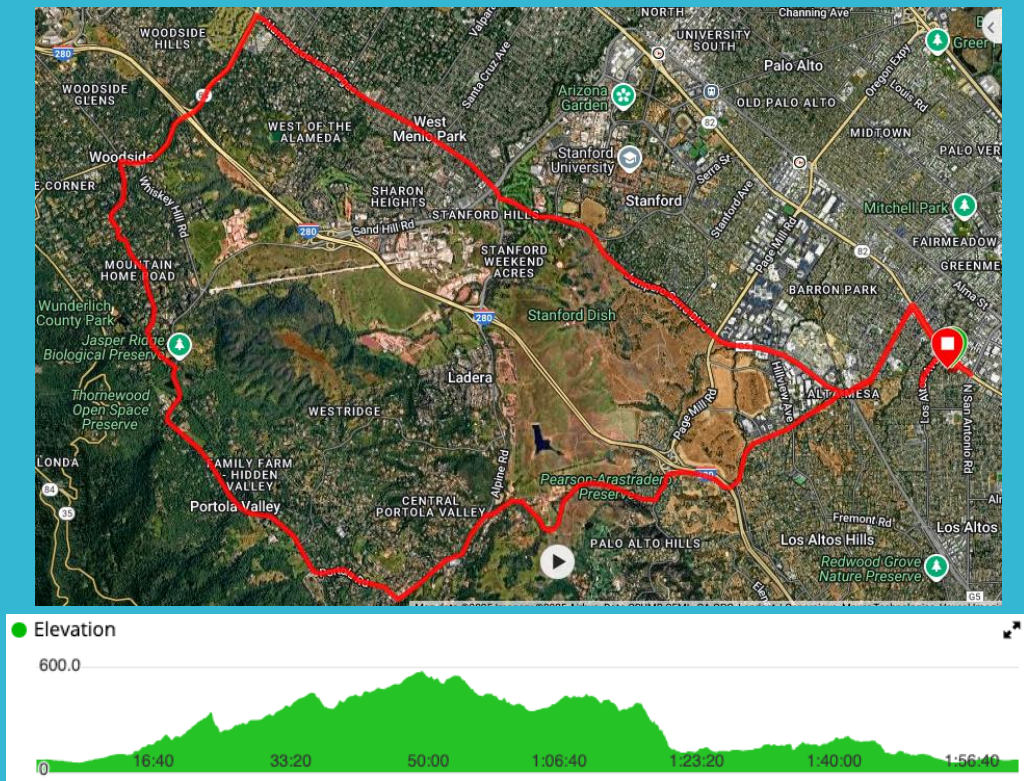
Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
40.09 miles out and back, Total ascent 2,503 feet

CA 84 ROUTE AND WHISKEY HILL ROAD (WOODSIDE HORSE PARK)



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
41.01 miles out and back, Total ascent 1,553 feet

PORTOLA VALLEY LOOP – ALAMEDA DE LA PULGAS



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
24.01 miles out and back, Total ascent 971 feet

NORTH BAY INFORMATION

The “North Bay” area is north of the Golden Gate Bridge, the iconic



entrance to the San Francisco Bay. The Golden Gate Bridge, an architectural marvel and symbol of San Francisco, opened on May

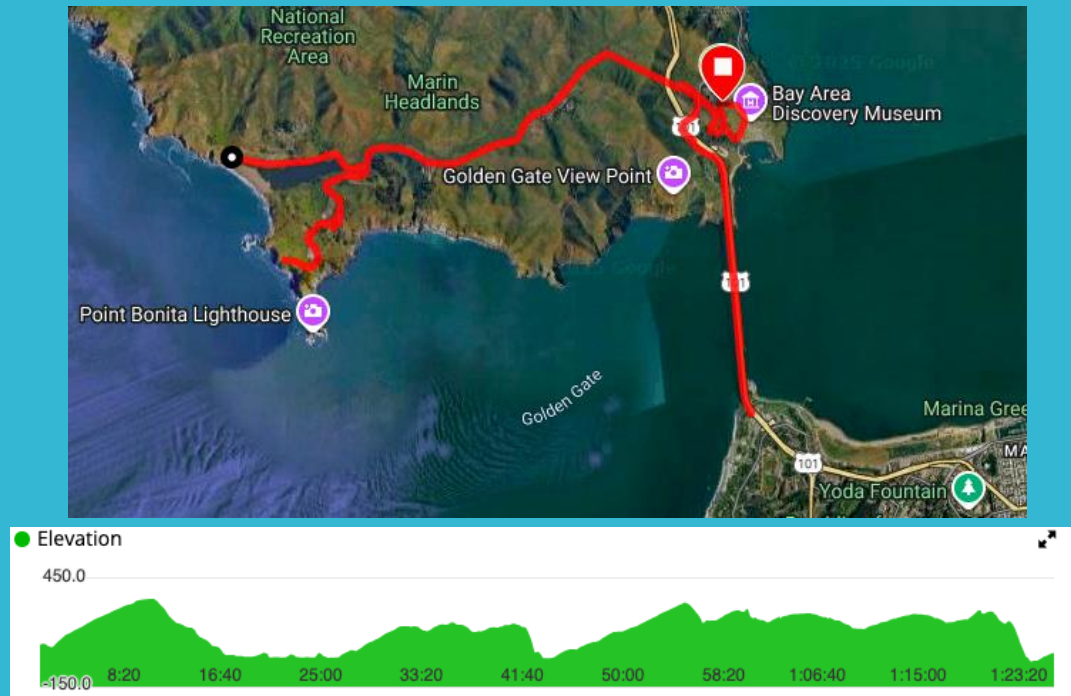
27, 1937, connecting the city to Marin County. Before the bridge was constructed, traveling north required a ferry to Sausalito or Tiburon, followed by a drive.

Historically, the U.S. military maintained a presence around the Golden Gate area due to its strategic importance. The Presidio in San Francisco, along with Fort Baker and Fort Cronkite located just north of the bridge, are remnants of this era.

The North Bay itself is a suburban region that gives way to wineries and agricultural landscapes as you travel farther north. Closer to the ocean, the terrain becomes rugged, offering striking coastal views.



MARIN HEADLANDS – GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
16.21 miles out and back, Total ascent 1,460 feet

I began my bike ride at Fort Baker, now part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. This scenic spot hosts a hotel, a Coast Guard station, and the Bay Area Discovery Museum. From Fort Baker, I pedaled toward the Marin Headlands via Bunker Road. One highlight of the ride was passing through the Baker-Barry Tunnel, a cool, dim passage beneath U.S. 101. Emerging from the tunnel, I was greeted by expansive open spaces and rugged, stunning scenery.

The Marin Headlands offered challenging climbs, but the effort was worth it. I cycled past historic bunkers and batteries, some dating back to the 1890s, steeped in military history. At old Fort Cronkhite, I paused to take in the views of the Pacific Ocean and Rodeo Beach. A unique attraction here is a blue whale skeleton display, making this spot especially fun for families. Then, I continued around Rodeo

Lagoon toward Mendell Road Point. Along the way, I passed the decommissioned Nike Missile Site SF-88L, now a museum, as well as Battery Alexander and Battery Wallace. At Mendell Road Point, I unclipped to enjoy panoramic ocean views and a higher vantage point of Fort Cronkhite below.



The return ride toward the Golden Gate Bridge included steady climbs. Emerging from the coolness of the Baker-Barry Tunnel, I pedaled onto Alexander Avenue. Crossing

over U.S. 101 to Conzelman Road, the Golden Gate Bridge loomed ahead. Riding along the western side of the bridge toward the Presidio, I was struck by the bridge's towering presence, its red-orange cables cutting through the sky. Each pedal stroke carried me closer to the heart of this icon.

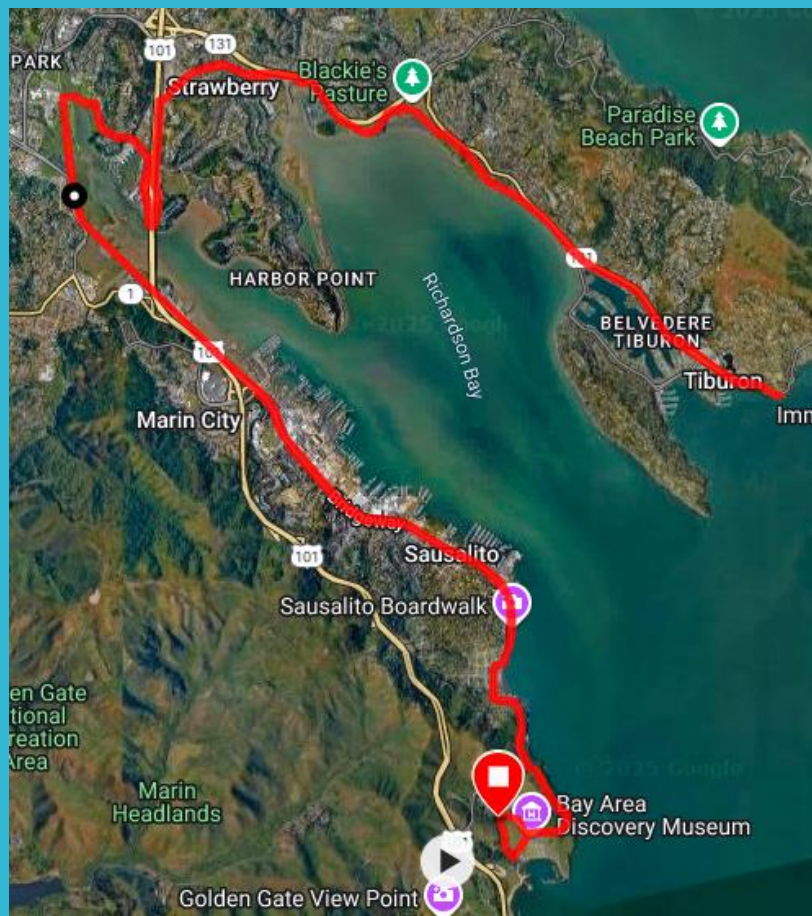
However, the bridge experience was less enjoyable. Despite the western side being designated for cyclists, I encountered pedestrians who weren't mindful of riders. I had to dodge a few and even unclip once to avoid a collision, making the crossing a bit nerve-wracking. At the Presidio Park, I turned around as pedestrian traffic increased.

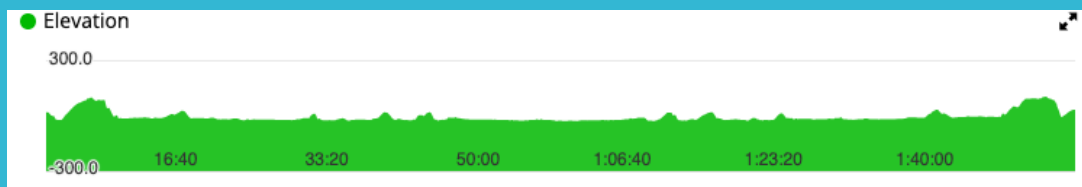
Finally, I pedaled back to Fort Baker, feeling very satisfied. The ride was memorable, blending challenging terrain, rich history, and stunning coastal views—an adventure I won't forget.



Looking westwards - View of Golden Gate Bridge and Marin Headlands

SAUSALITO - TIBURON





Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
25.08 miles out and back, Total ascent 597 feet

A beloved route for locals is the scenic ride from Sausalito to Tiburon, or vice versa, depending on where you choose to begin. Sausalito, named from the Spanish for “small willow grove,” carries a rich history. On August 5, 1775, Spanish explorer Don José de Cañizares landed here during his expedition, marking the area’s early European discovery. Once a quiet fishing village and a bustling ferry terminal for San Francisco-bound travelers, Sausalito transformed into a shipbuilding hub during World War II. As I pedaled through its charming streets, I passed weathered piers, the silent relics of the wartime ships crafted there. The town’s vibrant art scene, with its many galleries, added a creative pulse to the ride.

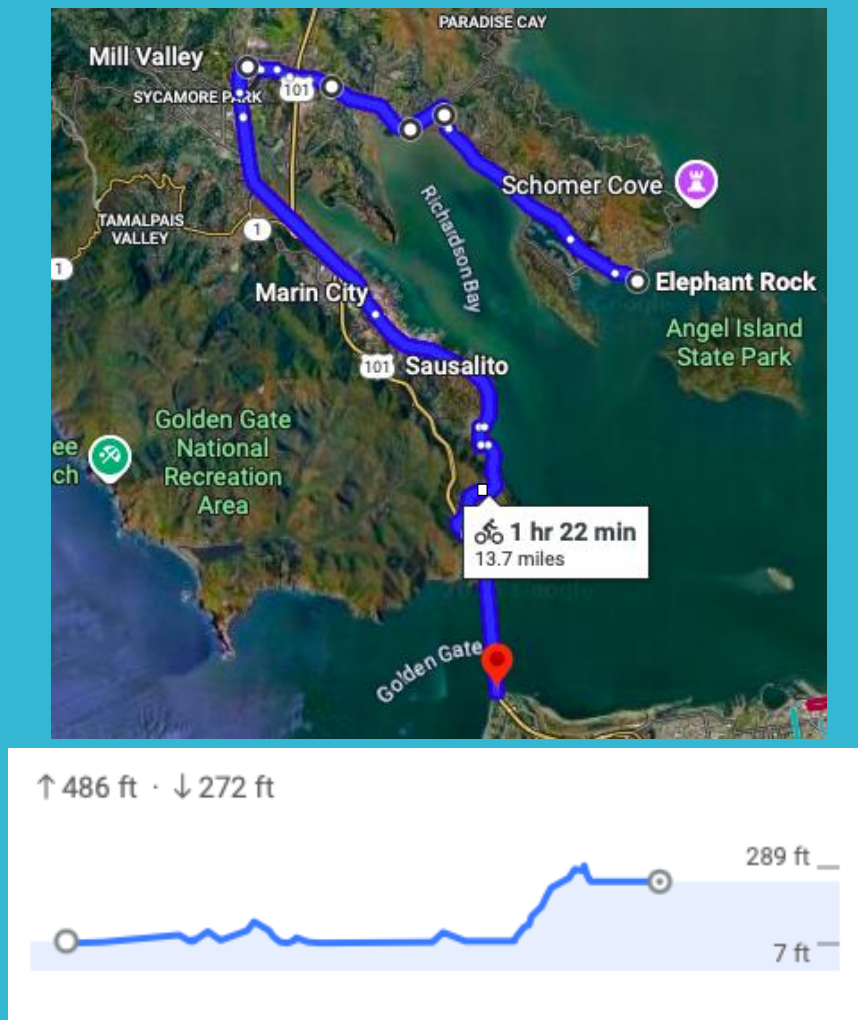
This ride, a favorite among locals, stretches from Fort Baker to Tiburon, blending scenic beauty with personal discovery. Starting at Fort Baker, a tranquil hub within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, I felt the pull of adventure. For cyclists following this route, take East Road out of Fort Baker—a steady climb that tests your legs but rewards with sweeping views. East Road merges into Alexander Avenue, guiding you toward downtown Sausalito. As I pedaled, the town’s charm unfolded: I could smell the savory aromas of the area restaurants just before arriving in the vibrant heart of downtown, where shops, boutique hotels, and the historic ferry terminal beckon. For those wanting a side trip, the ferry offers a scenic ride to San Francisco’s Financial District, a nod to Sausalito’s past as a bustling transit point.

From downtown, find the Mill Valley-Sausalito Pathway at the intersection of Bridgeway and Gate 6 Road. This well-maintained trail is a cyclist's dream but can be busy with pedestrians and fellow riders, so stay alert. The path leads south along Hamilton Road, a direction that might feel counterintuitive. A glance at a map reveals why: the route curves around Pickleweed Inlet to reach Tiburon. As I rode, the inlet's quiet waters mirrored the sky, evoking a sense of calm. Hamilton Road becomes Redwood Frontage Road, passing under U.S. 101. After a short stretch, turn right onto Belvedere Drive, skirting a shopping center. Belvedere parallels Tiburon Boulevard, eventually transitioning into Greenwood Beach Road, then Tiburon Linear Park Road. Pause here to appreciate the stunning views of Richardson Bay, its shimmering expanse a moment to enjoy both as a rider and a wanderer.

After crossing Lagoon Road, join Tiburon Boulevard and continue into Tiburon—Spanish for “shark.” My destination was Elephant Rock, where the San Francisco skyline rises across the bay, a breathtaking sight that feels like a reward for the journey. Tiburon's waterfront, lined with inviting shops and restaurants, offers more spectacular views of the City. As I stood there, the bay's breeze carried a quiet connection to this place and its timeless beauty.

The route is mostly flat after the initial climb out of Fort Baker, making it accessible for many riders. On the return, expect a climb after Sausalito as you approach Fort Baker, followed by a smooth descent back to your starting point.

TIBURON – GOLDEN GATE



Source: Google Maps

26.71 miles out and back, Total ascent 821 feet

Kicking off at Elephant Rock in Tiburon, I was instantly hooked by the dazzling San Francisco skyline shimmering across Richardson Bay. The beautiful view fueled my excitement as I hopped on my bike, ready to roll.

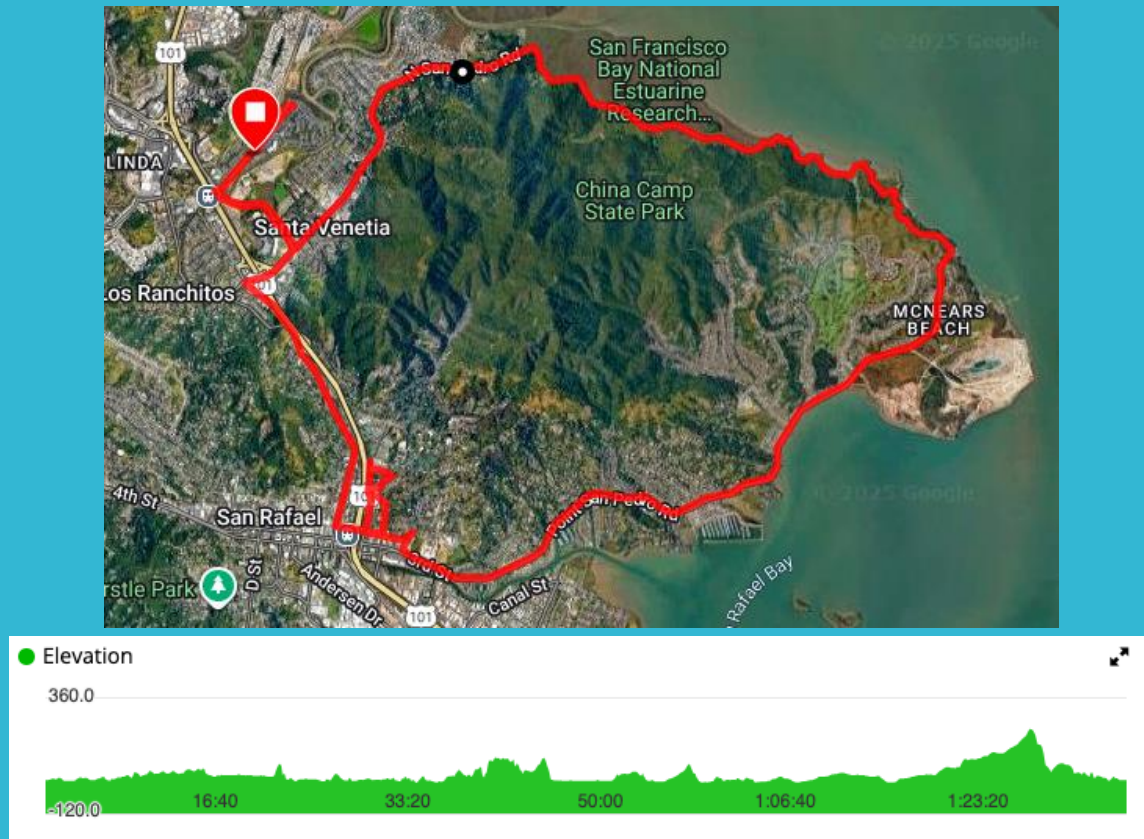
From Elephant Rock, I zipped straight down Tiburon Boulevard, bypassing the left turn at Lagoon Road where Tiburon Linear Park Road begins. I followed the road over U.S. 101, swinging onto East

Blithedale Avenue, then Ashford Avenue, to join the Mill Valley-Sausalito Pathway. The well paved trail draws a lively atmosphere of riders and walkers, so keep your eyes peeled for the bustle. Pedaling along with minimal elevation changes, I was able to enjoy the route's easygoing vibe, until the final stretch.

The road took me toward Fort Baker, where I stuck to Alexander Avenue, a seamless link to Conzelman Road and the star of the show: the Golden Gate Bridge. As I approached, its towering red-orange cables sparked a thrill that made my heart race just as it does every time I cross the bridge; this was no ordinary ride! A pro tip for crossing the bridge: visit goldengate.org to check the cyclist lane schedule, as lanes shift by time and day. Signs clearly mark the cyclist side (often the west) versus the pedestrian side, but here's the catch—some walkers ignore them, straying into your path. On this ride, I tackled the western side toward the Presidio, dodging carefree pedestrians with a mix of focus and frustration. The bridge's majesty was unbeatable, its cables slicing through the sky, but staying sharp kept the ride from becoming a nerve-wracking dance. I turned around at Presidio, and powered back to Tiburon, hitting a fun climb to Sausalito that got my blood pumping before coasting down to my starting point.

This ride was a blast—a high-energy mix of stunning views and the buzz of conquering an icon again. Every pedal stroke left me buzzing, eager to share this unforgettable adventure!

SAN RAFAEL LOOP



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
16.62 miles out and back, Total ascent 541 feet

Founded in 1817 by Spanish missionaries, San Rafael owes its name to Mission San Rafael Arcángel, honoring the Glorious Prince, Archangel Saint Raphael. Unlike the famed 21 missions along El Camino Real, this mission stood apart, later abandoned during Mexican rule. Beautifully restored, it's a must-visit for history buffs and cyclists exploring the area's cultural roots.

I've tackled some fantastic rides around San Rafael, and one standout route is a loop encircling China Camp State Park via North San Pedro Road and Point San Pedro Road. This 16.62-mile circuit, with moderate elevation gains of around 541 feet, offers a rolling terrain, perfect for road cyclists seeking a scenic yet manageable

challenge. China Camp, a historic Chinese fishing village now preserved within the state park system, is a gem. We have hiked its trails and can confirm it's as captivating on foot as it is on two wheels.

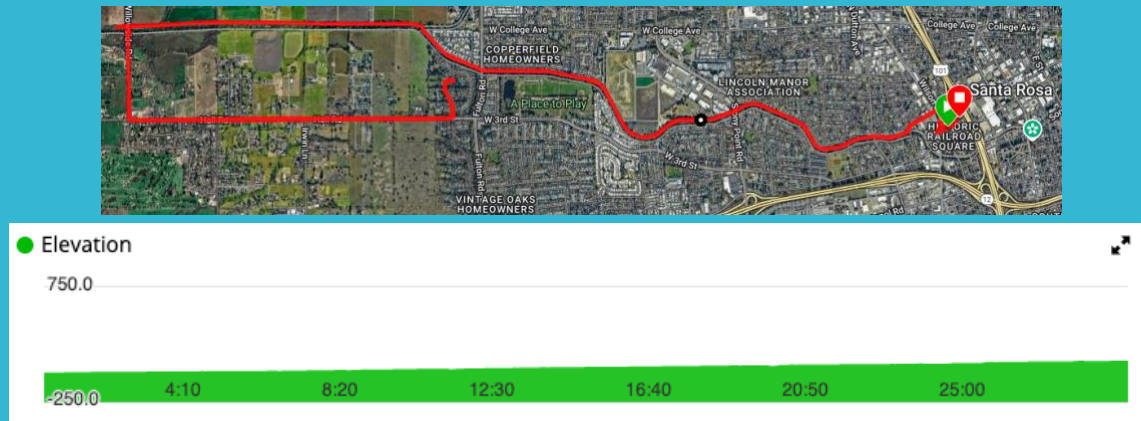
As you pedal along North San Pedro Road, the route hugs the shoreline, and San Francisco Bay sparkles into view, especially after McNears Beach, where the vista shifts to the tranquil San Rafael Bay. The road surface here is generally well-maintained, though watch for occasional gravel patches on Point San Pedro Road. After taking in the bay views, I crossed over U.S. 101 into downtown San Rafael, passing through residential streets that, while less picturesque, lead you straight to the restored Mission, a great spot for a quick refuel or photo op. The final leg takes you east back over U.S. 101 to the starting point, with a punchy climb to test your legs before the finish.

For post-ride refueling, don't miss Chalet Basque on North San Pedro Road. Their hearty Basque cuisine is a cyclist's dream—think rich, flavorful dishes to replenish those calories burned on the loop. We try to make it to this restaurant when we are in San Rafael. Pro tip: ride early to avoid midday traffic on Point San Pedro Road and pack a windbreaker for the bayside breeze. This route's mix of history, scenery, and just the right amount of challenge makes it a San Rafael classic!



View from San Rafael – Peacock Gap

SANTA ROSA



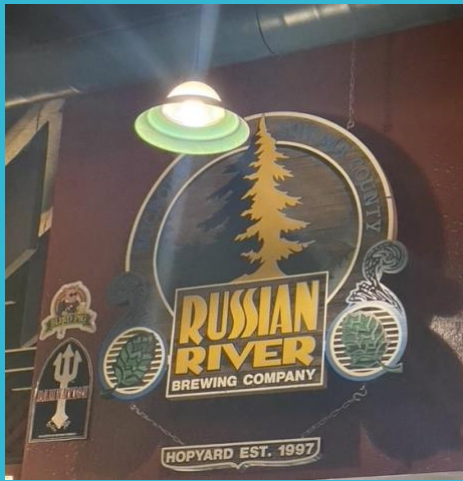
Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30
16.63 miles out and back, Total ascent 541 feet

Buckle up for an epic day in Santa Rosa, California, where the vibes are as bright as the *Peanuts* characters popping up all over downtown! This lively city is home to the Charles M. Schulz Museum, celebrating the genius behind Snoopy, Charlie Brown, and the whole *Peanuts* gang. Colorful statues of these beloved characters sprinkle the streets with pure joy. Plus, Santa Rosa sits in the heart of Sonoma County's wine country, where world-class wineries and rolling vineyards steal the show.



I kicked off my bike ride in downtown, zipping past the charming historic train station and giving a high-five (well, mentally) to the Charlie Brown statue. I jumped onto the Santa Rosa Creek Trail at Pearson Street/6th Street, and wow, this trail is a gem—smooth, well-kept, and perfect for cruising. I flew along the path until it turned to dirt past Willowside Road. No problem! I swung onto Willowside, whizzing by gorgeous wineries and lush farms. After zooming past Willowside Middle School, I hooked a left onto Hall Street, enjoying the scenery. Feeling adventurous, I detoured into a suburban neighborhood for a

quick peek, then raced back the way I came. This ride was a total blast—flat, fast, and no hills to slow me down!



To cap off the adventure, we rolled into Russian River Brewing Company in downtown Santa Rosa. Their jaw-dropping beer lineup (Pliny the Elder!) was the ultimate reward for an awesome ride.