

The Vineyard Drive Ride:

Cambria Pines to Vineyard Drive (20.6 miles, 33.1 km):

The Vineyard Drive Ride begins the same as the Rossi's Driveway and Parkfield rides, all of which branch off from the roundabout at the junction of Highway 46 and Vineyard Drive about 7 miles to the west of Paso Robles. To get there take Highway 1 south from Cambria and in about 4 miles take Highway 46 toward Paso Robles. Highway 46 from Highway 1 toward Paso Robles is a fine ride all by itself. The road surface is smooth and wide and well-marked. It goes up into rolling wooded hills for 10 miles (16 km) until it reaches a high point of 1762 feet (537 meters). Along the way up to the high point on Highway 46 are two wide turnouts (unfortunately not paved) that have outstanding views of the Pacific Ocean and Morro Rock to the southwest. A couple miles beyond the high point, the Santa Rosa Creek Road crosses Highway 46, and on the other side it becomes the Old Creek Road which winds down into the coastal town of Cayucos. Vineyards and farms become more prevalent as the road curves east through valleys and ridges. About 8 more miles after the Santa Rosa Creek / Old Creek intersection comes the roundabout at Vineyard Drive. Three rides pass through this intersection, the Parkfield Ride, the Rossi's Driveway Ride and the Vineyard Drive Ride. The riders for the Rossi's Driveway and Parkfield rides will peel off at the **first** exit of the roundabout (Vineyard Drive – east) and ride the 4 miles to the little town of Templeton where they will find a gasoline station. Those just going to Paso Robles for the day can circle to the **second** exit and continue on Highway 46. Those going on the Vineyard Drive Ride will circle around to the **third** exit, Vineyard Drive – north.

Running total, 20.6 miles, 33.1 km.

Vineyard Drive to the Adelaida Road (9 miles, 14.5 km):

Vineyard Drive is a well paved road that is narrow in places, but has a centerline. It tends to follow broad shallow valleys bordered by low rounded ridges and hills with small farms, pastures, and vineyards. Then the road will go through a tree-lined curvy corridor and over a low pass that you won't notice until it flows into another broad shallow valley with more farms, pastures and vineyards. This is California's version of bucolic. In September, when we will be navigating Vineyard Drive it will be harvesting time for the grapes which means look out for large farm implements going very slowly. The road will be alternately in bright sun or dappled shade which means that road irregularities and gravel may be hard to spot until they are just in front of you. Along the way there are many wine tasting rooms to tempt you. The ride organizers hope you resist the almost magnetic pull of them, and come back in a vehicle with 4 wheels and a designated driver.



Past vineyards and pastures in the sunshine:



Past vineyards and pastures in the shade:

In about 10 miles Vineyard Drive passes yet another vineyard and comes down a hill into a valley drained by Las Tablas Creek to a T-intersection where it ends at the Adelaida Road.

Running total, 29.6 miles, 47.6 km.

Adelaida Road to Klau Mine Road (1.3 miles, 2.1 km):

We make a tight left turn onto Adelaida Road and soon pass the entrance to Tablas Creek Vineyard, which is owned by the Perrin family in France who own the highly regarded Chateau de Beaucastel, of Chateauneuf du Pape, and the Haas family which owns the wine importing company Vineyard Brands. Tablas Creek Vineyard is worth a stop when returning to the area for wine tasting, as was Thacher Vineyards a couple miles back the way we came.

At Tablas Creek Vineyard the Adelaida Road leaves the Las Tablas Creek drainage and winds up over hill and dale out of the valley a couple miles into another shallow valley where we leave the Adelaida Road and turn onto the narrow rough Klau Mine Road.

Running total, 30.9 miles, 49.7 km.

Klau Mine Road to Cypress Mountain Road (2.2 miles, 3.54 km):

The narrow steep Klau Mine Road goes down a small fairly steep wooded drainage that joins up with Las Tablas Creek, which appears again after taking a trip around the large ridge to the east of us. The road then heads westerly following Tablas Creek towards the site of the Klau Mine which is off to the west about a quarter mile from the junction with the Cypress Mountain Road which we will be joining. Mercury was mined until around 1970 at the Klau Mine and the nearby Buena Vista Mine in the hills a quarter mile or so from the junction. The mines are now a Superfund Site and acidic mercury laden runoff is supposedly contained within the mine area instead of spilling into the Las Tablas Creek drainage as it had done for years. Las Tablas Creek runs into Nacimiento Reservoir which among other chores supplies drinking water to Paso Robles - hmmm.



Yippee! The Klau Mine road is a little scary:

Running total, 33.1 miles, 52.3 km.

Cypress Mountain Road to Chimney Rock Road (3.3 miles, 5.3 km):

The Cypress Mountain Road, for the most part, runs right along Las Tablas Creek towards the north and west through a broad valley. As were the rest of the roads on the ride up until now, much of it is tree lined and looks out over vineyards and pastures and up into rolling oak-dotted hills beyond.

Occasionally, ridges several miles to the west are visible. Just a few miles beyond those high ridges sits Cambria and the Pacific, which are not visible. After a while the trees along the road thin out a little and the road goes through more open vineyard and pasture land. We are getting a bit deeper into the interior of the Santa Lucia Mountains. The ridges to the west are getting higher, putting up more of a rain shadow. The climate is a bit drier. In a few miles we pass a rural fire station and come to the junction with the Chimney Rock Road that will take us back to the east ultimately to Paso Robles.



White house, red barn, expensive fence, nice curves, Cypress Mountain Road:

Running total, 36.4 miles, 58.6 km.

Chimney Rock Road to Nacimiento Lake Drive (8.8 miles, 14.2 km):

The Chimney Rock Road is the premier part of the ride. It goes through more rolling hills of oak, pasture, and vineyards. It has, for the most part, good pavement, is fairly wide, has a centerline, and most importantly is nice and curvy. The temptation is to let fly and “give it some stick.” You can do that, but keep in mind the possibility of becoming a hood ornament on an oncoming pickup truck, or entering into a fraught conversation with the local constabulary, or doing what I’ve done and blow it on a suddenly appearing sharp turn and end up doing a barrel roll on your nice expensive motorcycle, crack your ribs and spend the rest of the rally in a Vicodin haze – or worse.

Shortly after turning onto the Chimney Rock Road, we see the somewhat famous Justin Vineyards and Winery and the “Restaurant at Justin”, which has a Michelin Star. The restaurant is not large enough to seat 30 dusty, oil soaked, motorcyclists. Besides, no need to blow all your meal allowance in one place. Not long after that we come to the junction of the Adelaida Road, which is where we would have come out had we not taken the Klau Mine and Cypress Mountain Roads earlier. Adelaida was the name of the small mining camp town housing workers from the Klau Mine and other mines in the area. Only a restored schoolhouse and the cemetery remain. The cemetery is on the southeast corner of the Adelaida Road junction. It is interesting to visit. Further on we will pass the Adelaida School, and not realize it. It’s odd how a town that existed from the 1880’s to the 1970’s left no trace except a cemetery and a schoolhouse. I suppose the “House of Caterpillar” had something to do with that.

The Chimney Rock Road, it turns out, is a “Designated County Highway,” a part of California’s “State Scenic Highways System”, and we’ll see why for the next 6 miles. In fact, that 6 miles is not all that much better scenery-wise than what we’ve been riding through. It’s just a beautiful ride.



Some “esses” on Chimney Rock Road:

After those scenic 6 miles we will come to the junction with Nacimiento Lake Drive where the Chimney Rock Road ends. We’ve come 45 miles so far, and we will have a decision to make. On one hand (the left) the Nacimiento Lake Drive heads off 51 scenic miles to the north past Nacimiento Lake and Lake San Antonio into broad open valleys surrounded off in the distance, by higher ridges of the Santa Lucia Range. There is much more chaparral vegetation than the countryside we’ve ridden through. Chaparral is a sometimes/often an incendiary mix of various species of brushy, medium and low-growing – well, brush. Chaparral is the primary fuel for the major destructive conflagrations in Southern California. It’s a bit more scattered about amongst the grassy hillsides and the oak trees in this area, but further on to the north, 10 miles or so, thicker growing chapparral in the higher elevations fueled several of the larger fires in California’s modern history.

The main reason to take the left-hand turn on Nacimiento Lake Drive is that 51 miles to the north is the Mission San Antonio de Padua. It was the most isolated of the 21 late 18th century Franciscan missions of Alta California, Nueva España, and it was abandoned to be left to the elements in the mid-1800’s as were nearly all the 20 other missions. It was in somewhat complete but crumbling condition with the tile roofs caved in when restoration efforts were made in the early-1900’s. The only catch to seeing it is that

is located on the Fort Hunter Liggett U.S. Army Reserve Post. It used to be easy to get on the base, but now it's more difficult – bring your passports, photo ID, your firstborn child, and a signed and notarized loyalty oath.

Running total, 45.2 miles, 72.7km. or 147.2 miles, 236.9 km. (Mission San Antonio).

Nacimiento Lake Dr. to Paso Robles (13.3 miles, 21.4 km):

If we forego the trip to Mission San Antonio, and continue to the right onto Nacimiento Lake Drive the road leads 8 miles to Paso Robles. Looking off to the south a little past the junction you can spy Chimney Rock itself sticking up out of the hillside. You'll notice the countryside appearing to get drier with thick chaparral growing on the hills, especially on the north-facing slopes, and see fewer trees. The road is straighter and more travelled.

In two miles we will come to the San Marcos Road going off to the left (east). It goes 5 miles down to Highway 101 where you can turn left (north) and go a couple miles to the little town of San Miguel. San Miguel is the home of Mission San Miguel Arcángel another of the 21 late 18th century Franciscan missions of Alta California. It retained many of its original buildings in better condition than Mission San Antonio de Padua. The church, which was badly damaged by the 2003 San Simeon Earthquake, has been fixed up. It is the only one of the mission churches that retains its original interior plastered walls, murals, and woodwork. The original early 19th century artwork was designed by Catalan artist Esteban Munras and his Salinan Indian “neophytes”. Mission San Miguel also retained its original arched colonnade.



Chimney Rock protrudes from a mountain side covered with chaparral:

The remaining 6 miles of the Nacimiento Lake Drive into Paso Robles is a country road with more and more residences as we get nearer to Paso Robles. The town of El Paso de Robles (Pass of the Oaks), or as Americans say, out of ignorance of the Spanish spoken by the original Europeans to claim the area, “Paa-so Roe-bluzh,” was a town known for its mineral hot springs from the late 1800’s, and you can still rent a room at the Paso Robles Inn with a hot mineral water spa to soak in. We’ll only have come about 55 miles so far, but some of us may be tempted to rent a spa room. Today the wine craze has taken over from the hot springs, although you can participate in both. Mostly, we will be ready for lunch. There are restaurants and pubs that should be able to accommodate us.

Après déjeuner we’ll mount up and find that Highway 46 leaves Paso Robles for Cambria at the south end of town. We will take it past the Vineyard Drive roundabout and return to Cambria the way we came. If we are feeling particularly feisty we can choose to leave Paso Robles on the narrow curvy Peachy Canyon Road. This road roughly parallels Highway 46 about 3 miles to the north, but it is in much more hilly rugged country. It weaves in and out of limestone ridges, limestone being uncommon in California, and perfect soil for growing grapevines. The Peachy Canyon Road comes out on Vineyard Drive where we would cover a couple miles going in the opposite direction we came in from till we get to the Vineyard Drive – Highway 46 roundabout.

Running total, 58.5 miles, 94.1 km. or 66.5 miles, 107.0 km (Mission San Miguel)

Returning to Cambria from Paso Robles on Highway 46 (26.6 miles, 42.8 km):

Once on Highway 46 going west from the roundabout it’s just a repeat in the opposite direction of the way we came in the morning.



The total number of miles without the side trips to either of the missions is around 82 miles, 132 km. With a trip to Mission San Antonio it’s 184 miles, 296 km, and to Mission San Miguel it’s around 90 miles, 145 km.