

The Parkfield Ride:

This will be the longest, hottest ride of the rally, but it will go through some interesting countryside. The ride is a loop, a long loop from Cambria to Templeton for gas, then Templeton to Parkfield, back to Paso Robles and then back to Cambria. Paso Robles is about 6 miles to the north of Templeton along Highway 101. Templeton is a better jumping off point for the rides going out into the vineyard, farm and ranchland to the east of Highway 101.

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

The Parkfield Ride begins the same as the Rossi's Driveway ride, they both 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.

Vineyard Drive to Templeton (3.8 miles, 6.1 km):

Templeton is the last place to get gas until the ride passes through San Miguel in 115 miles or 185 km. From Highway 46, Vineyard Drive winds past vineyards containing 100-year-old Zinfandel vines, down a narrow wooded valley before coming out into a more settled area of houses and ranchettes. The road continues on to cross a bridge over Highway 101 and shortly beyond comes to traffic light at Main Street, Templeton, where you turn left. The gas station is at the Templeton Market and Deli, on your left on Main Street as you ease past the downtown area.

Running total, 24.4 miles, 39.3 km.

Templeton to Bitterwater Road (42.5 miles, 68.4 km) via El Pomar Drive, Cripple Creek Road, Highway 41, La Panza Road and Highway 58.

Leaving the Templeton Market and Deli we go back down Main Street to the light at Vineyard Drive and turn left. In about 10 feet Vineyard Drive becomes Templeton Road, and we cross the bridge over the Salinas River. We'll barely get acquainted with Templeton Road when it veers off to the south and the road that continues straight ahead becomes El Pomar Drive. The road parallels the Salinas River for a

couple miles then goes around a curve by the Finley Family Nursery and turns inland. The sign for the Finley Family Nursery is painted on the side of an old Jaguar sedan stuck in the dirt, perhaps after it missed the curve 30 years ago and has never been moved. Horse barns behind ranch houses, vineyards and wineries start appearing in the rolling hills and oak trees are scattered about as the land gradually rises. Bucolic, but also in September, hot and dry. There are a few gentle curves, but El Pomar Drive is mostly a leisurely country ride on a mostly straight well-paved road. In about 9 miles El Pomar Drive ends in a T-intersection with the Cripple Creek Road.



El Pomar Road and the stuck Jaguar XJ.

A right turn onto Cripple Creek Road will lead shortly to another T-intersection at Highway 41. A left turn to the east onto Highway 41 takes us in a couple miles to the turnoff for Highway 229 going south to the old small town of Creston. We do not turn on Highway 229, that is for the Rossi's Driveway Ride, but instead go straight for another couple hundred feet, where after crossing the bridge over dry Huer Huero Creek, the La Panza Road angles off to the southeast. La Panza Road is marked only by a street sign, and to make matters confusing, the road going off to the north at the intersection is marked by a street sign saying Creston Road.

We'll be on the La Panza Road for about 10 miles until it links to Highway 58. The vineyards thin out and the number of horse farms increases. People seem to spend a lot of money on fencing. Eventually 4-strand barbed wire for cattle shows up more often. It's rolling grassland, open country not quite treeless, and it's pretty dry in September, but the pavement is good and the traffic is light to non-existent.



La Panza Road. Horse ranch one side – cattle ranch on the other.



Highway 58 has a few nice sweepers.

At Highway 58 the turn is to the left, east towards the Carrizo Plain, but first the road leads through a bit higher country. It's still rolling hills and grassland with some trees thrown in. Some of the higher ground to the south of Highway 58 is the Los Padres National Forest. The National Forests are not all towering pines and Douglas firs. Pinion pines and junipers will do in many cases, even sagebrush and cactus sometimes. The expensive horse-farm fencing has given way to good old barbed wire to keep the cattle from wandering out into the roadway. As we near the Bitterwater Road the hills and valleys open out into the vast treeless Carrizo Plain. You may spy the Temblor Range, the ridgeline to the east, the home of the San Andreas Fault. Shortly we'll be looking for the Bitterwater Road. There will be a sign saying "Cholame" and "Highway 46" just before the turnoff, and then a simple street sign at the corner of Highway 58 and the Bitterwater Road which heads off to the north out of the Carrizo Plain.



The Carrizo Plain with the Temblor Range in the distance.

Running total, 66.9 miles or 107.7 km

Bitterwater Road (31 miles, 50 km)

The ride along the Bitterwater Road goes from Highway 58 at the south end and connects to Highway 46 at the north with a total length of 31 miles. Narrow but fairly good pavement, except for some places with asphalt patches, and has little traffic. It goes through rolling hills of ranching country, and for some of its length it runs in the San Andreas Rift Zone containing the San Andreas Fault, where every day the rocks down below on the west side move about .07mm towards San Francisco, or looking at it the other way, the rocks down below on the east side move about .07mm towards Los Angeles. In places there is no fencing along the road and cattle are free to roam. It's called "Open Range" – take care. There are long straightaways, probably not a lot of law enforcement. You can take your chances. There are also some nice sweepers, but watch for sand on the road at this time of year. East of the road are the higher hills of the aptly named Temblor Range, which holds the San Andreas Fault. The terrain rises gradually as

you go north and the road runs near the San Andreas. The vegetation, such as it is, goes from open grassland to oak woodland.



Bitterwater Road running in the San Andreas Rift Zone.

Running total, 97.9 miles, 157.5 km.

Highway 46 (2.2 miles, 3.5 km):

After turning right onto busy Highway 46 at the end of the Bitterwater Road the next stop will be the James Dean Memorial in Cholame. Near as I can tell, Cholame is a one-building town. The building is the Jack Ranch Café, and the James Dean Memorial is next to it. The Jack Ranch Café appeared to be closed in October of 2022. A mile or so to the east on Highway 46 is the junction with Highway 41. In 1955, a student at Cal Poly who was eastbound on Highway 46 ruined a perfectly good Porsche 550 Spyder, killed James Dean, and seriously injured Dean's mechanic, Rolf Wuetherich by attempting to make a left turn from Highway 46 to Highway 41 in front Dean who was westbound on Highway 46. The ride will avoid the same intersection by turning left about 300 feet before we get to it onto the Cholame Valley Road (after making doubly sure no westbound traffic is coming – being especially on the lookout for Porsche 550 Spyders). The ride will be heading towards Parkfield, known as the 'Earthquake Capital of the World', where you will probably not experience an earthquake although your chances of doing so are better than your chances of experiencing an earthquake anywhere else on the 700-mile San Andreas Fault.

Running total, 100.1 miles, 161 km.

Cholame Valley Road (15 miles, 24.1 km):

From the intersection with Highway 46 the Cholame Valley Road runs 15 miles to downtown Parkfield (population about 18 slightly unnerved people). The Bitterwater Road may parallel the San Andreas

Fault, but the Cholame Valley Road runs right on top of it for several miles. Mostly the road runs through a broad valley drained by Cholame Creek with the fault running along the east side of the valley. As the road nears Parkfield the valley narrows and the road goes between two small ridges. This is where the road follows on top of the fault. It's not as if one side of the road inches south and the other side of the road inches north, because the actual fault is deep down in the ground and its zone of movement is larger across the fault than the width of a road. However, if you stood on the hill to the west side of the road after about 10 years you might notice that a telephone pole or a tree on the hill to the east side of the road had moved south about a foot. Or, if you experienced one of the occasional magnitude 6 earthquakes centered below, as the folks in Parkfield very occasionally do, you could move that foot in about 10 seconds which is a whole lot of earth to move, and it will scare the bejeezus out of you.



The San Andreas is straight down from here - and goes several hundred miles in each direction.



The “slightly crooked bridge” across Little Cholame Creek.

Parkfield itself, all four or five houses and a couple businesses of it, is just to the right of the junction of the Cholame Valley Road and the Parkfield-Coalinga Road. Take a look at the bridge that spans Little Cholame Creek just beyond the sign that says, “San Andreas Fault” – “Now entering North American Plate” and notice the bridge is slightly bent. This is the new bridge. It supposedly has a sliding joint so that it doesn’t crack like the old bridge as the piers at each end move more and more out of line with each other. The Parkfield Café is the only place to eat around these parts. We may be able to arrange for burgers and BBQ. Even though it will be the driest, dustiest, brownest time of the year, imagine the green grass and wildflowers of May and enjoy the large oak trees and park-like setting of Parkfield.



Downtown Parkfield & Parkfield Café.

We leave downtown Parkfield, recross the slightly crooked bridge and then turn right on what has become the Vineyard Canyon Road, formerly known as the Cholame Valley Road.

Running total, 115.1 miles, 185.2 km.

Vineyard Canyon Road (24 miles, 37 km) to San Miguel:



Going up Vineyard Canyon Road.

The Vineyard Canyon Road (not to be confused with Vineyard Drive) continues up Cholame Creek for about 5 miles before branching off to the west across Cholame Creek and up out of the canyon into the hills. The oaks get thicker and some pines appear as the road crosses the pass at the high point of the ride (2600 ft, 793 meters). The road then descends into Vineyard Canyon itself, and follows it westerly toward the village of San Miguel on Highway 101 – home of the Mission San Miguel Arcángel. This is ranching country, and it looks like enough water can be pumped to irrigate hay fields. As the Vineyard Canyon Road enters the Salinas River Valley it merges into the Indian Valley Road. After a little more than a mile the Indian Valley Road meets the Cross Canyons Road. A right turn takes you in about 300 feet to the intersection with River Road where you have a choice of going left or right. Going straight puts you on a dirt road going nowhere.

A right turn on to River Road will take you across the Salinas River into San Miguel where you can turn left on Mission Street. If you are running on fumes there is a gas station on 10th Street three blocks to the west of Mission Street. Mission Street, of all things, runs by Mission San Miguel Arcángel, begun in 1797, and is worth a stop. The mission suffered greatly during the 2003 San Simeon earthquake (which did not happen on the San Andreas Fault), but now it has been repaired. Visitors are welcomed to the museum, gift shop and grounds. It is still a Catholic parish, but you can go inside the church and look at the original artwork still on the walls. Mission San Miguel has managed to survive mostly intact from colonial days - Spanish colonial days. Most other California Missions were reconstructed, some of them from piles of dirt that were the remains of their adobe walls when new. Just after Mission San Miguel there is the entrance to the Rios-Caledonia Adobe which was built in 1835 for the mayordomo of the mission lands. If one or both of these historic sites are open, they are worth a stop. Continuing south on Mission Street will put you on the on-ramp to Highway 101 south to Paso Robles and Highway 46 - west about 11 miles away.



Mission San Miguel Arcángel.

If you don't wish to go into San Miguel and see the Mission or don't need gas, a left turn onto River Road takes you southward along the east side of the Salinas River. It's best to take River Road about 10 miles to Highway 46 coming in from the east to Paso Robles, and then quickly get on Highway 101.

Highway 46 takes you across the Salinas River and under the bridge for Highway 101 where you can continue for a block and find gas stations, or make a left to the on-ramp for Highway 101 going south. In a few miles will be the exit for Highway 46 - west for Cambria. At the bottom of the off-ramp, you can decide whether you want to turn left and go under 101 and find your way to the Firestone Walker Brewery or turn right and head for the barn.

Running total: 150 miles, 241 km.

Returning to Cambria via Highway 46 and Highway 1 is 25 miles, 40 km

Total miles for the ride 175 miles, 281 km

