

## Big Sur Ride:

Everybody wants to go up Highway 1 (aka The Cabrillo Highway) from Cambria past San Simeon and Hearst's Castle to Big Sur, and sometimes beyond to Carmel by the Sea and Monterey. We'll go north up Highway 1 past San Simeon as far as Big Sur Lodge, 72 miles (116 km), or maybe a little further to the Bixby Bridge, 85 miles (137 km) or a little further yet to Rocky Creek Bridge – fewer cars, better turnaround, 86 miles (138 km). Double that mileage for the roundtrip.

From The Cambria Pines to the Monterey Bay Aquarium via Highway 1 is 105 miles, 169 km. It is a long days' worth of driving or riding. The same destination via Highway 46, Paso Robles, and Highway 101 is 145 miles, 233 km. – one way. The driving time is much less than Highway 1.

Instead of a write up about the myriad of sights on the Cabrillo Highway from my computer I'll direct the reader to the vastly better description from a website called Pashnit.com, <https://www.pashnit.com/ca-hwy-1-big-sur-coast>. This website is a superb and detailed compendium of motorcycle rides covering California. It has been written over the years by Tim Mayhew. It is freely available to anyone, although donations are welcomed. The Pashnit article describes the Highway 1 route going from north to south. This will be perfect for us, because it would be good for the riders to stick together on the way "up" from south to north so we show up at a lunch stop somewhat at the same time. On the way back south most of the sights and pullouts described in the Pashnit.com article are on the righthand side which is also the ocean side.

As of June, Highway 1 is still closed after slides and washouts due to the rainfall of last winter's storms that wiped it out in several places.

The Pashnit.com article describes what we can see and do, I'll just let you know why we might not be able to do it come this September.

The Cabrillo Highway was open for business all the way from Carmel to San Simeon a few miles north of Cambria in 1937. Before that there was a horse trail. The whole coast from Carmel to Cambria was so remote much of the building supplies and equipment came by sea. Electric powerlines didn't arrive in the Big Sur area till the 1950s'.

From the very beginning Highway 1 did not always cooperate with the wishes of travelers to traverse it. It has mood swings. The road slides off the mountainside into the sea, the mountainside slides down on the highway from above and then into the sea, the mountainside burns up and the road is closed, or a flood knocks out a bridge, or a debris flow from a fire knocks out the road. In May of 2017 the Mud Creek landslide covered a quarter mile of Highway 1 more than 65 feet deep in rocks and, appropriately enough, mud – 6-million cubic yards worth, or enough to fill 300,000 20-yard 18-wheel dump truck loads – not that they actually did that. They just made 2400 feet of new shoreline bulging out into the Pacific. The road wasn't uncovered and fixed and open for travelers for over a year at a cost of \$54-million. Makes one wonder how long this can go on.

The California Department of Transportation, known as Caltrans, has so many slides and washouts on Highway 1 it gives them names. Arleen's Slide a couple hundred feet south of the Mud Creek Slide is named after the Caltrans "flagger" Arleen Guzzie. She noticed cracks in the highway and an orange nasturtium growing next to the road that kept creeping down the hillside. She reported her observations, but what could the higher-ups do besides getting everybody the heck out of there. Soon

the hillside ended up on the beach. Arleen was not present when the road went down the hill, but the folks in the house directly up the hill from the slide must have been terrified and then relieved when their homestead didn't accompany the highway on its ride down to the ocean.



*Mud Creek slide – note the lucky homeowner in the lower right directly uphill from Arleen's Slide. Photo credit US Geological Survey.*

A bit further north, Paul's Slide is so persistent Caltrans built the huge concrete Rain Rocks Rock Shed across the highway so the rocks and debris from the rock face above would scoot across it and down the other side leaving the highway open. This March the area considered to be Paul's slide expanded a bit to the north. There the hillside became unglued and buried the highway with about 500,000 cubic yards of rock and mud about 500 hundred feet away from the rock shed leaving it unmolested and still ready for any boulders that might want to roll across it.





*The Pitkins Curve Bridge (rocks go under) and Rain Rocks Rock Shed (rocks go over) protect Highway 1 from rock slides – at least for about 900 feet of roadway.*

September weather is usually perfect for a ride up Highway 1, with clear blue skies, warm temperatures, no rain, and no fog. It's also the perfect weather for generating the highest fire danger.

If the stars align and roads are open, the ride up Highway 1 to Big Sur can be combined with the Nacimiento-Fergusson Road for a gigantic 200-mile trip along the wild coast and up into the interior of the Santa Lucia Mountains then looping back through Paso Robles. The Nacimiento-Fergusson Road leaves Highway 1 about half way to Big Sur from Cambria. It is the only paved road that crosses the Santa Lucia Range going towards the east between Cambria and Big Sur. Unfortunately, the Nacimiento-Fergusson Road has been wiped out in many places by rockslides, debris flows, and collapsed roadway in the aftermath of the arson-caused 128,050-acre Dolan Fire in August of 2020 and a large storm in January 2023.

Besides wrecking the road, the Dolan Fire also killed 10 endangered California Condors, seriously burned three US Forest Service firefighters, burned up their equipment, their fire engine, and their entire fire station, and burned many acres of Coastal Redwood trees from the southernmost population of them. The arsonist is serving a long time in prison. The U.S. Forest Service Nacimiento Station didn't seem to be practicing the Forest Service's own "Defensible Space" strategy by removing and cutting back surrounding vegetation, but in a "blow-up" such as what happened, there is no such thing as "Defensible Space".



Debris flows from winter rains falling on hillsides denuded by the Dolan Fire also wiped out several places on Highway 1. At Rat Creek the highway crossed the creek on an earth-filled bridge that had a very large culvert passing through it at the level of the creek bed. Water flowing down the creek went under the highway through the culvert and into the ocean. This method was used on many of the smaller watercourses that crossed the highway where there was not usually the need to build a big impressive concrete arch bridge as was built to cross Big Creek a couple miles to the south. Above Rat Creek the steep denuded hillsides got slammed with about 17 inches of rain in two days. The mud, rocks, tree trunks, and boulders flowed down the creek bed and stuffed the culvert full. The earth-filled bridge became an earth-filled dam. The water rose up till it was running across Highway 1. The fill on the downstream side of the “dam” started eroding away. Then the roadway started eroding away towards the middle from the downstream side, and there you have it. The debris in the streambed was now level with the roadway and the roadway was no longer there.



*Rat Creek – The Caltrans guys say, “Ok, what do we do next?” They know. They’re used to it.*

For those keeping track, the Dolan Fire surpassed the Mud Creek Slide in costs, \$63-million vs. \$54-million. The \$63-million does not count all the money spent on road repair, and the charges keep coming in.

Should Highway 1 be open by the time the rally is held, the ride directions are ridiculously simple. Turn right on to Burton Drive from Cambria Pines Lodge, go to the light at Highway 1 and turn right. Continue on Highway 1 for about 72 miles to Big Sur with lunch at the Big Sur River Inn, or 85 miles to the Bixby Creek Bridge. Turn around and come back. If we are lucky and the beginning couple miles of the Nacimiento-Fergusson Road are open, we can ride up it to take in a magnificent view of the coastline for miles in both directions.