



Family Down Time

by Fred Poulos

The North Bay offers many wonderful and affordable opportunities for families to get out and play together. We made a family decision a few years back to invest in some very basic bicycles and found that they have become our primary close-to-home recreation. As our daughter was very young when we first began our pursuit, we were obliged to find safe, flat and unambitious places to bike. As time passed and she became increasingly proficient and interested, we have ventured well beyond the confines of the local trails, once even doing a 2+ week road trip with bicycles securely racked on our car's rear. We drove up to the San Juan Islands and made serendipitous daily stops along the way, biking such diverse terrains as the Mendocino ocean bluffs on the old railroad bed that runs from MacKerricher State Park south into Fort Bragg (a flat and beautiful 7 miles each way) to the Quinault Rainforest's old dirt roads on the Olympic Peninsula as well as trails around downtown Portland's Willamette River, among many others.

Locally, I would like to recommend the following rides for all levels of young riders. The distances are my best guesses:

1. The trail that begins at the junction of 116 and Occidental Rd. runs south down 116 and heads away from the road immediately before O'Reilly's parking lot. It's a lovely roll past the backside of semi-rural homes that emerges at Analy High. Across the street and to the left it continues past Analy's playing fields coming out on Morris St. near the Community Center. (By following Morris St. to Hwy 12 you can cross the street and connect up to the trail to Santa Rosa.) To Morris St. and back is probably 3 or 4 miles.
2. WEST COUNTY TRAIL: Park at the public lot just past the Fire Station in Graton and head north past horse pastures, berry farms and vineyards. After a few miles you'll emerge in downtown Forestville. This is one of the easiest rides and convinced my daughter of her abilities at an early age. Nowadays she looks forward to a ride there after school, an early dinner at La Rosa Market and a full-bellied ride back to the car.

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Mark Your Calendar

Mon. Oct. 12

Parent Meeting, 6:30pm, BH Library

Mon., Oct. 19

RPF Board Meeting, 6:30pm, BH Library

Wed., Oct. 21

4/5 Field Trip: Four Winds performance at Spreckels Auditorium, 9:30am

Wed., Oct. 21

6/7/8 Field Trip: Complexions Contemporary Ballet performance at Wells Fargo Center for the Arts, 11:30am

Wed., Nov. 11

NO SCHOOL - Veteran's Day

Wed., Nov. 18

Culmination, 1:30pm

Thurs., Nov. 19

End Trimester I

Parent Meeting! Monday Night 6:30pm BH Library

This meeting will be a chance to explore more in depth what the Unity Retreat brought to our children and the school. Parent meetings are your chance to take part in the community and learn what is going on so don't miss out! Bring a little snack to share if you want!

3. **JOE RODOTA TRAIL:** Eight miles sounds far yet the ride from the trail that begins across the street from the Hopmonk and goes all the way to Santa Rosa Ave. via the Prince Memorial Greenway (connection behind the Vineyard Creek Hotel) is flat the entire way. Go on a Wednesday early evening in the summer when the Bicycle Coalition provides free valet bicycle parking at the Wednesday Night Market, where you can wander the stalls and enjoy the many treats and sights. Watching the sun set into the West County hills on the ride back can be sublime.
4. Another easy and safe ride can be had at the trailhead on Willowside Road across from Summerfield School. It follows Santa Rosa Creek and eventually arrives at the same place as the aforementioned trail along the Prince Memorial Greenway. This ride is about 7 miles each way.

Many of these trails connect and interconnect. As skill levels rise there are some quiet surface streets that may be ridden to tie different trails together. Check out this website: http://www.sonoma-county.org/parks/pk_westc.htm

Clearly there is more to bicycling Sonoma County than competitions and Gran Fondos. Let's not forget the family fun. Ride safely and enjoy!

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