

## **Atascadero Templeton loop – 60 miles**

*This route begins and ends in Morro Bay and gives you a good workout crossing the Santa Lucia range and investigating north county towns and country. It is rated moderately strenuous for climbing and requires the courage to share the road with motor vehicles in sections where there is no shoulder on Hwy 41.*

Some bike riders avoid Highway 41 between Morro Bay and Atascadero. I find it scenic and soothing. Here is a quality ride that starts on 41 with a variety of terrain and a good workout.

**Morro Bay to Atascadero:** 17 miles with a couple of good climbs, a fast descent and a quick transition from fog to forest.

Begin at Lila Keiser Park in Morro Bay near the intersection of Highways 1 and 41. The first five miles on 41 are a gentle ascent, then two miles of climbing alongside Morro Creek past the turnoff to Cerro Alto Campground. After a couple of miles of level riding, climb two miles to the summit. Shift up and tuck for a quick descent, then motor casually into Atascadero.

*The good:* Great views of the farms east of Morro Bay that extend into the foothills of the Santa Lucia Range. Most of this segment has good shoulder width.

*The bad:* Sometimes the shoulder narrows and forces bicyclists into the traveled way. Be aware of vehicles coming from behind.

**Atascadero to Templeton:** 7 rolling miles through horse and wine country.

Cross underneath Highway 101 and continue to Templeton Road. Turn left, relax and enjoy the scenery. After riding over a few undulations, stop at the intersection with El Pomar Drive and watch for cross traffic. Turn left and cross the freeway as El Pomar becomes Vineyard Drive.

*The good:* Open country, horse ranches, vineyards.

*The bad:* Narrow road with no bike lane.

Side trip: If you want more miles, turn right on Main Street in Templeton after crossing the Salinas River and ride through town. Just before the freeway, turn right on Ramada Drive and ride the frontage road to the intersection with Highway 46. Cross underneath the freeway, turn left on Theater and ride back to Templeton. As you enter Templeton, take Old County Road to the intersection with Vineyard. This will add about 7 flat miles to your ride.

**Templeton to Green Valley:** 22 miles through vineyards, back across the Santa Lucia mountains and down to the coast (almost).

Follow Vineyard and make a transition from dry farmland to forested hills and vineyards. At the intersection with Highway 46, turn left and ride Highway 46 to Highway 1 south of Cambria. You climb a little bit as you pass Jack Creek and York Mountain and a little more beyond Old Creek and Santa Rosa Creek Roads. Cross the summit and enjoy the view of Estero Bay and Morro Rock to your left. Tuck in for a six-mile descent to Green Valley.

*The good:* Riding your bicycle through the mountains – a splendid sense of isolation and self-sufficiency as you climb and descend from the Salinas River valley to the coast. New pavement overlay on Highway 46 makes for smooth,

fast riding.

*The bad:* Parts of Vineyard Drive are narrow and shoulderless.

Bail out: If you are running short of time or energy, take Old Creek Road to Cayucos and back to Morro Bay. This will reduce the route by 14 miles and give you a white-knuckle descent past Whale Rock Reservoir.

**Green Valley to Morro Bay:** 16 miles of open farmland and coastline.

Ride past Harmony and indulge yourself in the long descent to Estero Bay. Turn off Highway 1 onto Ocean Avenue and ride through Cayucos. Take a coffee break at Kelleys or have lunch at Martin's. Hop back onto Highway 1 and rejoin the rush of humanity as you ride through north Morro Bay to Lila Keiser.

*The good:* Wide, smooth shoulder on Highway 1. Count on a tail wind (most of the time).

*The bad:* Sometimes it's a head wind.

Be aware of temperature differences between the coast and north county. You may start in 60-degree weather in Morro Bay and find yourself sweating in triple digits in Atascadero. Or, in winter, you may start in 60-degree weather in Morro Bay and find yourself shivering in the low 40s on the other side of the hill.