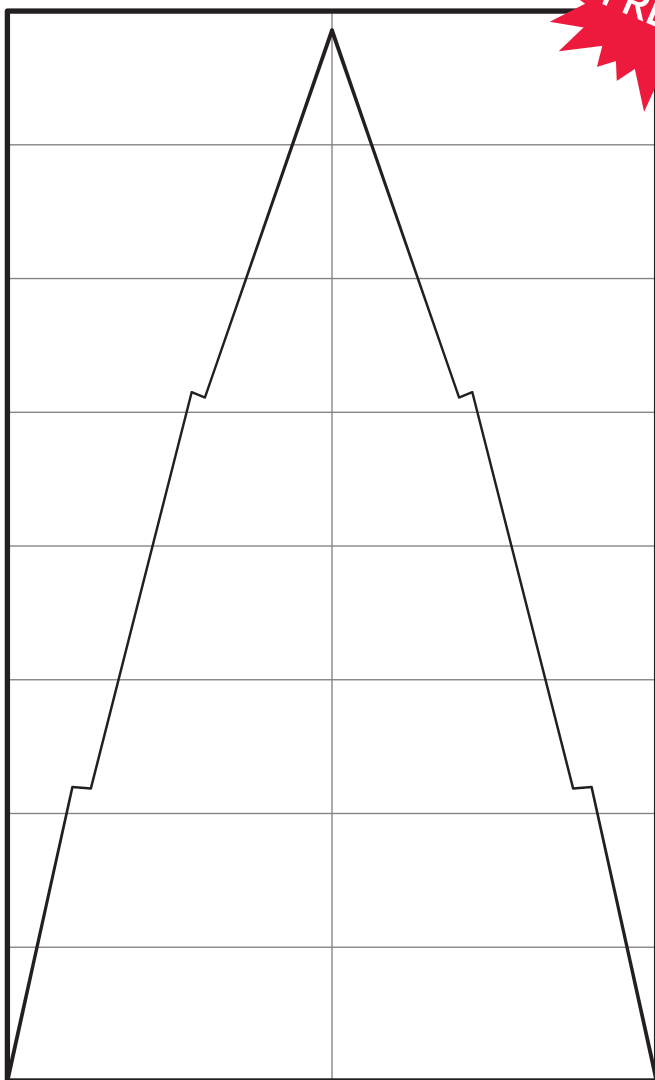


OCT 2022

FREE!



IF IT'S ALL FLAT IT'S NO FUN

**Some good hills and dirt roads for cycling in
and around Northeast Los Angeles**

Enjoy six rides near Pasadena, Glendale, Highland Park, Eagle Rock, Burbank, La Cañada Flintridge, Altadena, and up into the San Gabriel Mountains and Angeles National Forest

Printed by Thorin Klosowski in collaboration with Best Friends Forever Cycling Club and RNN Press, October 2022, Los Angeles, California

HEY

When I first moved to Los Angeles, I went to the coolest local bike shop I knew of and asked, “I’m new here, where are the best dirt rides?” The owner looked at me and shrugged, “I only go to Angeles National Forest these days,” he said, and left it at that.

It was not a particular helpful response. Maybe I was overeager. Maybe I wasn’t clear what sorts of rides I was looking for. Maybe it was just gatekeeper bullshit, I don’t know. But soon after that, I was fortunate enough to make some friends who knew the area and who showed me around. And now, I’d like to share some of my favorite routes for anyone else out there unsure of where to start.

I’ve structured these rides from easiest to hardest, both in how physically demanding the routes get, and how remote you are. There are some routes you’ll run into people every few minutes and have cell service. There are others where you likely won’t see a single person. I’ve tried to provide as much context around the road conditions and trail vibes as would be useful, so let your comfort levels take you as far as you’re interested. I’m not going to pretend to know what “intermediate” or “beginner” or “difficult” means to you, but hopefully you’ll get a feel for what each of these loops is like.

Every one of the routes in this little booklet is doable on a “gravel bike,” whatever definition of that you’re running with. Mountain bikes will certainly do the trick as well, though you’d likely find more fun in other places, as I’ve focused primarily on double-track fire roads and the occasional easy-ish single track. Fire roads being the term I’m settling on for “truck roads,” “motorways” “forest access roads,” and whatever other terms the city and public utility companies use for “roads that are the width of a car, closed to public traffic, and open to cyclists.”

But riding in Los Angeles often means riding uphill. Okay, it *usually* means riding uphill, unless you’re making your way toward the ocean. Because of that, even the easiest routes can kick your ass. Prepare to climb, to sweat, to spin out, to curse, and to question what you’ve gotten yourself into. Which is to say, prepare to have fun. As Tshering Tobgay, cyclist and former prime minister of Bhutan, told journalist Jody Rosen in a 2014 article for The New York Times Style Magazine when describing the cycling in the Bhutanese Himalayas, “If it’s all flat, it’s no fun.” That sentence has been stuck in my brain for nearly a decade, and as the title of this little zine makes clear, I tend to agree with the sentiment.

Of course, there are plenty of other dirt roads in this city. Plenty more wonderful routes not included here. This city has a diverse collection of hidden single track that take you between neighborhoods or into secret alcoves in parks. Los Angeles is a remarkable city to explore, even if the cars regularly make it a bit unbearable. But the ones included here are my favorite local climbs, and maybe that’ll be useful to you, too.

Speaking of cars, I will always take a destroyed rocky road over a midlife crisis in a Porsche who doesn’t seem to know the size of their car. This never felt more important than at the start of the pandemic, when lockdowns forced everyone temporarily inside, then quickly outside. Biking up the 2 was nearly impossible for stretches of 2020, as long lines of cars made their way up the highway too fast, too slow, or just too close. The section of road from Clear Creek to Red Box looked like the entrance to Disneyland at the peak of summer. Even today, over two years later, it feels different.

So, until the day we ban cars in parks, we have our fire roads. Where no cars are allowed (mostly). Where there’s plenty of room for hikers and bikers at once, and where you will find some of the best views in all of Los Angeles, along with accidental history lessons as you go.

-Thorin
thorink@proton.me

CHERRY CANYON

WHATEVER LENGTH AND ELEVATION YOU WANT

If Griffith Park is the popular older brother and likely the most popular park in Los Angeles, Cherry Canyon is the cool but awkward youngest sibling. Plopped between Glendale, La Cañada, and Pasadena, it's a triangle-shaped park filled with fire roads and single track.

One of the reasons I love Cherry Canyon—aside from it being nearly empty all the time—is the number of trails that are perfect for learning how to ride single track if you're not used to it. The fire roads are all great for getting in some climbing, and the single track can help boost comfort and raise your skill level without putting you in too much danger. If you're new to riding dirt, this is an excellent place to cut your teeth.

One reason it's a great place to start is that it's nearly impossible to get lost in Cherry Canyon. That's because the Cerro Negro lookout tower, which stands at the pinnacle of all the trails, providing the perfect way to orient yourself if you get turned around.

Originally built in 1934, the lookout houses a Chrysler Victory Air Raid Siren—a Cold War era wo000Ooooo-woooooOooWooooo machine built by Chrysler meant to alert people of a nuclear attack. There were originally six of these installed in Los Angeles, and they were tested at 10am on the last Friday of every month. The city decommissioned them when tech advancements (if one can call mass killing devices an advancement) made it possible to deploy a nuclear attack in about the time it takes to heat a Hot Pocket, making this sort of alarm system pointless. Sadly, the tower is closed to the public. I bet the view is killer up there.

If you tasked me to create my perfect Cherry Canyon route, it'd likely go something like this: enter on Hampstead Road, then start onto Cherry Canyon Motorway. Take a sharp right onto the Liz's Loop, a short, not-too-hard single track (which was named after local trail advocate Liz Blackwelder, who died in 2014).

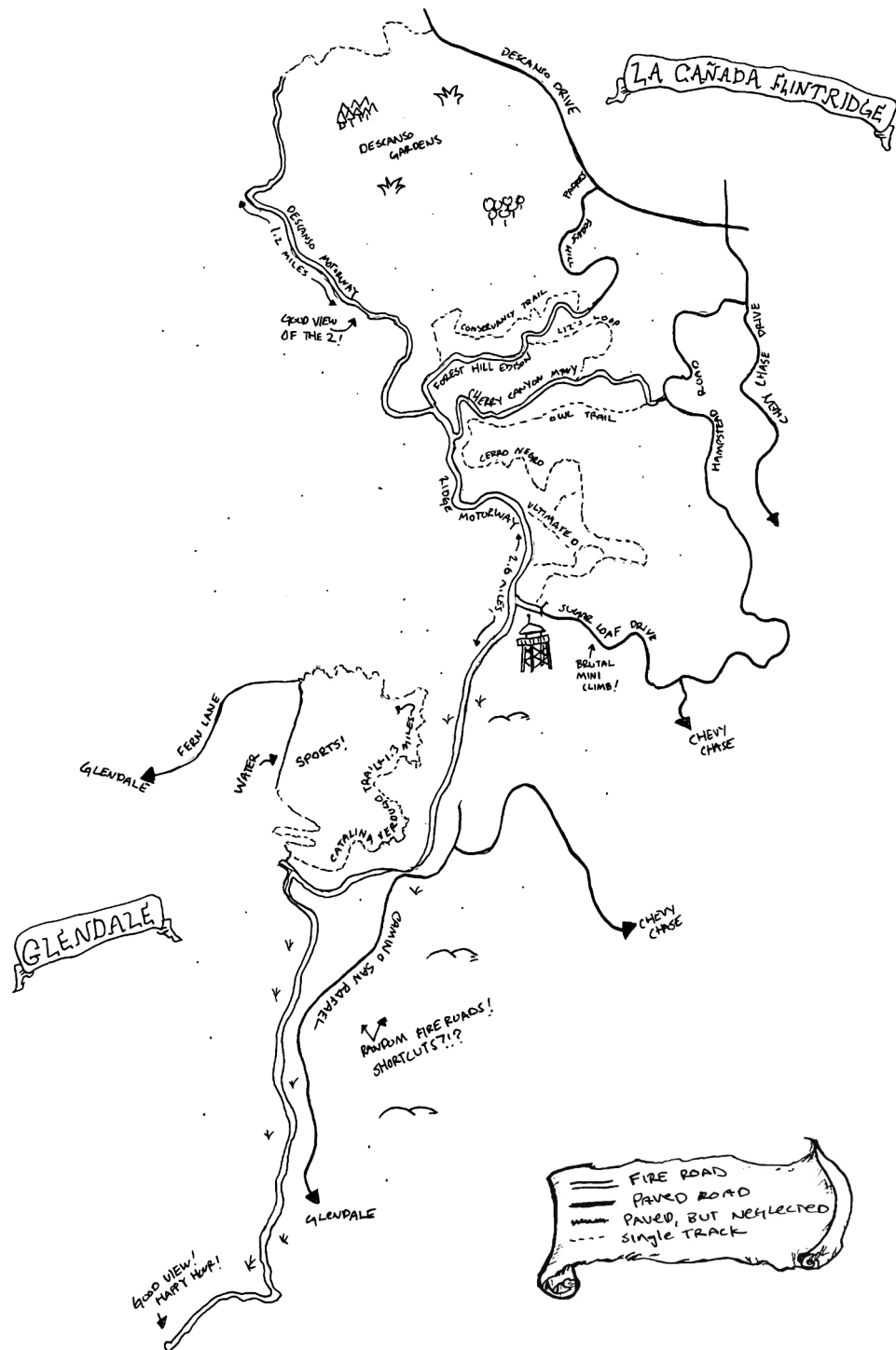
At the end Liz's Loop you'll hit Alpha Motorway, which turns into Descanso Motorway, which turns into Ridge Motorway (lol). Take this to the lookout tower, and drop toward Sugarloaf Drive, but take a hard left onto the Cerro Negro trail single track before you get to the gate. This circuit of single track has a mix of flat packed dirt, jumbled rocks, sketchy descents, and surprise dips that on some days are best walked down. There's a bench in here somewhere too, if you fancy yourself a sit. This trail eventually drops you back at the bottom, where you can either call it a day, or head back up onto Cherry Canyon.

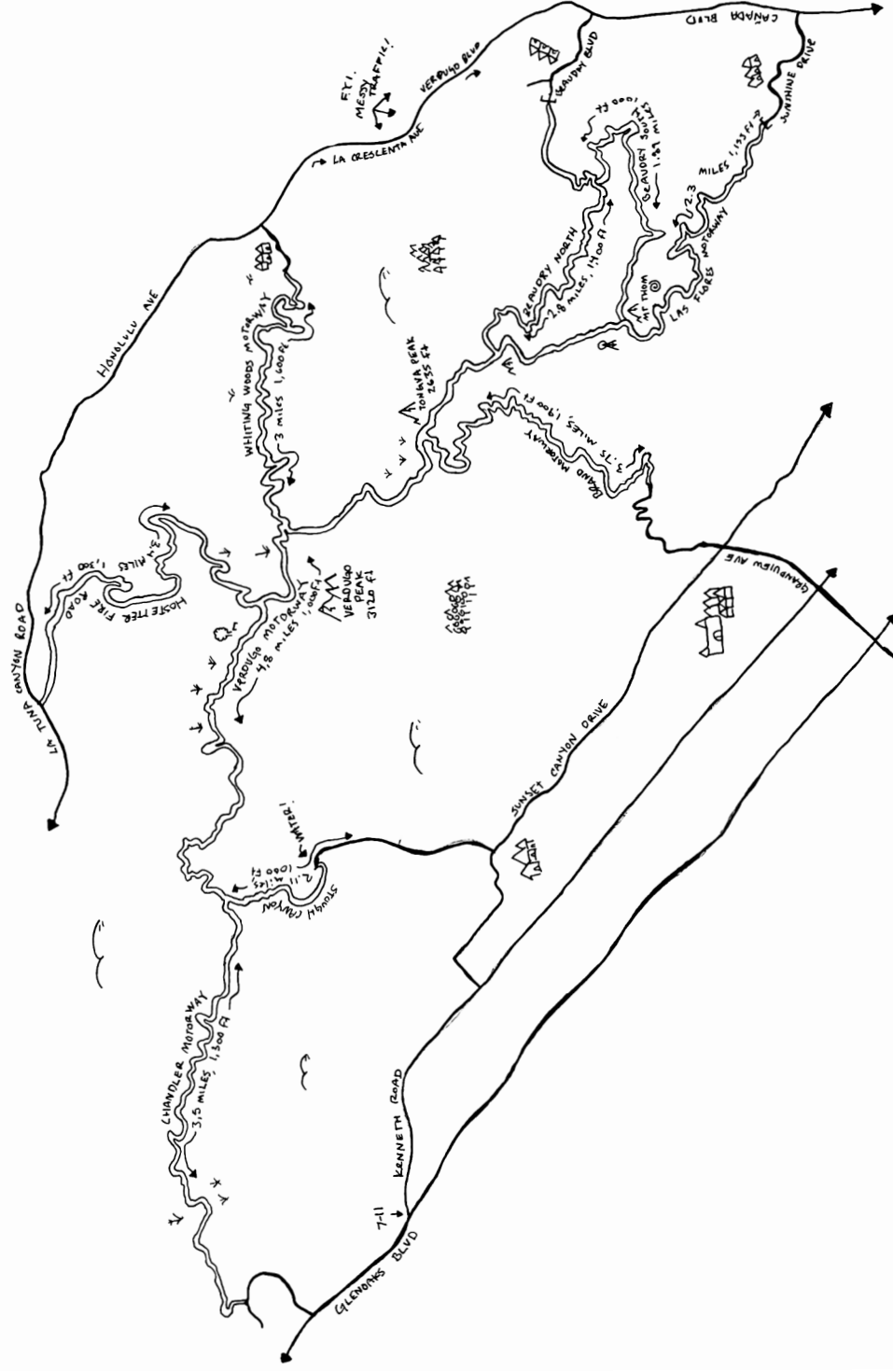
Take Cherry Canyon Motorway back up to the spine, then follow Ridge Motorway all the way until it dead ends with a view into Ranch San Rafael that reveals the gapping maw of suburbia, a sea of identical rooftops layered like sentiment in the desert. This is a good spot to sit and have a beer (or whatever).

From here you can turn around and head back to wherever you started, or if you're feeling spicy, you can descend the fun way: via the Catalina Verdugo Trail single track that leads down to the Glendale Sports Complex (take the longer winding path, not the switch backs). This can be a bit scary feeling as the trail is exposed, occasionally overgrown, and on the weekends often jammed full of people making their way up while you attempt to head down. If you're lucky enough to hit it at a time when it's not full of people, it's a flowy trail that has enough "oh shit" moments to keep you on your toes but doesn't require a PhD in mountain biking.

Tire rec: I'm happiest with at least 38mm, but I've cut through here on 32c slicks before.

Water: There's at least one water fountain on the Ultimate Destination trail, and there are public water fountains in the Glendale Sports Complex. There may be others tucked away I haven't seen.





VERDUGOS

WHATEVER LENGTH AND ELEVATION YOU WANT

The Verdugo Mountains are an excellent next step up from Cherry Canyon because the fire roads are well maintained, popular with both hikers and bicyclists, and you're seldom out of phone service.

When you look at the fire roads and trails inside the Verdugos on a map, it looks something like a centipede. The trails all combine near the imaginary spine, and every one of them will rip your legs off on the way up. If you're anything like me, these climbs wipe your mind clean, allowing your brain opportunity to then trick you into thinking what you just accomplished was "not that bad" and "fun, actually."

The beauty of the Verdugos lies in your options. You can enter from a variety of places, then chain together fire roads for hours. From my place, I like to start with a run through Cherry Canyon, so I tend to come into the Verdugos up Los Flores Motorway to Mount Thom. From here, it's a choose your own adventure across some 25 miles of well-maintained fire roads perfect for gravel and mountain bikes alike.

If I just want to chill out and explore a little, I'll continue down Verdugo Motorway, which forms a sort of backbone of the park, until I get to the best snack or lunch spot in all the Verdugos: the big ass tree with a swing (aka the Tree of Life, maps typically list this area as either the Warden's Grove or Fire Warden's Grove), then typically I'll turn and head back. If I'm just looking to bounce and head home, I'll descend Beaudry North. If I'm looking to punish myself, I'll descend Beaudry North *then* climb back up Beaudry South—the most painful climb in from what I can tell—then descend back the way I came up. Beaudry South has comical grades and loose rock. It is best suited for those days when you're feeling strong and need to be humbled. If you're *not* in the mood to hate yourself, Beaudry North is often considered the "easiest" (a relative term) route up into the mountains.

There are plenty of unmarked single tracks throughout these mountains, roads that seem to lead somewhere only to dead end in the spring, but which reveal the slight hint of a once-worn path in the summer. It is a place where you can dive in and spend the day. The Verdugos Mountains are made up of several parks, open spaces, and conservation areas. As a result, it generally feels mildly chaotic inside. Explore enough, and you'll find all sorts of random places, like the ruins of an abandoned youth camp, or the rusted out carcass of a truck. It's a park that displays a lot of the personality of Los Angeles, while still allowing you to feel like you've enjoyed some time in the wilderness.

I've often found myself wondering why there are so many fire roads buried here. The answer—perhaps obviously—is that the mountains are on fire pretty often. In just the last 20 years, there have been three major fires.

The most recent one, the La Tuna Fire shut down the 210 in 2017. It prompted a variety of apocalyptic photos that felt all the more chaotic given the rest of the 2017 news cycle. I rode through the park after this fire was contained. Nearing the remnants of the fire, the usually rocky roads turned to a graham cracker-like crust, a crispy layer that felt sacrilegious to break. Between the smell of burnt trees and strange red fire retardant still covering much of the landscape, it felt like riding into Mordor.

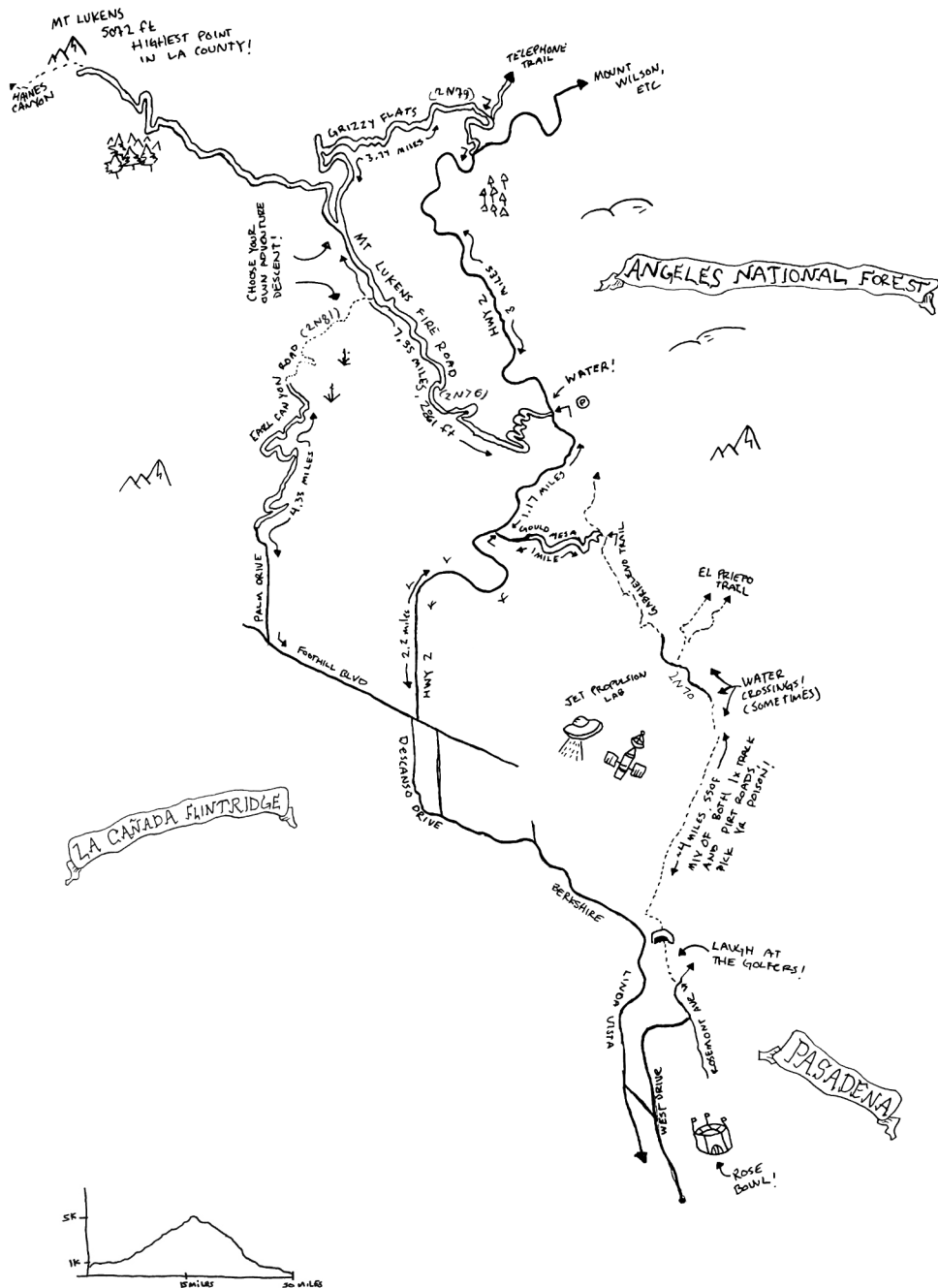
If you're the type to pay attention to signs, you'll want to keep an eye out for the oddball "no smoking" signs throughout the Verdugos. Glendale's Community Services and Parks director told me over email that these pun-filled signs were installed in 2013 by one person, a Senior Administrative Analyst (who no longer works for the city) because "He wanted verbage that would grab attention and (be) funny at the same time." I can only assume this dad-joke loving individual moved on to make millions writing for sitcoms in Hollywood.

Tire rec: I'm happiest with at least 38mm, but if you want to bomb the descents, the bigger the better.

Water: No water at any of the peaks, but plenty in the neighborhoods. There's a public fountain at Stough Canyon, and perhaps others I'm not aware of.

LUKENS

~30 MILES, 4,551 FT



Mount Lukens has the distinction of being the highest point in Los Angeles County (technically!) at an elevation of 5,075 feet. The peak has a weird naming history. The name comes from Theodore Parker Lukens, a Pasadena businessman and mayor who was big into reforestation and conservation. However, before Lukens came around, at least one survey noted the peak as “Saint Elsie Peak,” aka “Sister Elsie Peak,” which came from a Catholic nun who died from small pox while caring for the sick, but almost nothing else is known about her. At least one survey marker lists the name as Sister Elsie, but in any case, Lukens is the name that stuck.

For me, Lukens is the “let’s just order pizza,” of bike rides. It’s not necessarily my favorite, but it’s the ride I’ve done the most, and the one I always choose when I don’t know what else to do. Yet, having done this ride dozens of times, it always manages to feel different. Some days you’ll run into a landslide to hike-a-bike-over. Others, you’ll descend through a rutted mess that leaves you clinging onto your brakes for dear life. Often, right before fire season, the road is freshly cleared and feels as compact and smooth as asphalt. It’s wonderful.

There are a few ways to tackle Lukens. You can drive up the 2 and park at the foot of the fire road (2N76), eliminating the dangers of the sometimes-terrible traffic on the 2 and resulting in a 14 mile, 3,000 foot elevation gain ride that’s entirely on dirt. The most fun, but also most time-consuming, option starts somewhere around the Rose Bowl: first you meander through the dirt trails by JPL, where you’ll eventually hit the Lower Gabrieleno trail, a mixed use trail that often has a few creek crossings and which I almost always take a wrong turn on at least once. Eventually, you’ll hit Gould Mesa, a short fire road that ends with a gate, and your entry onto the 2 for a much shorter stint up the highway portion. You can also just head straight up the 2, which is what I tend to do when I’m short on time.

From Sunland-Tujunga, you can take the Haines Canyon single track trail up (or down), but the trail tends to be poorly maintained and often more technical. It’s *doable* on a gravel bike, but about as comfortable as hopping on a pogo stick on a trampoline. If you do go this way, keep an eye out for a spot of blue and you’ll find an old, half-buried VW Bug on the trail (abandoned VW Bugs in canyons seem to be a minor phenomenon in Los Angeles, as the 2007 Turnbull Canyon Fire uncovered nine(!) lost VWs).

In the spring and early summer, Lukens fire road tends to be demolished. There’s loose rock everywhere. Massive ruts that make climbing difficult and descending dangerous. Regardless of trail conditions, with Lukens, there’s one thing that’s always consistent: the fire road from the fire station to the peak is relentless. The seven-ish mile climb includes an elevation increase of nearly 3,000 feet. It’s a slog, and it’s wonderful. It starts with a series of switchbacks which calm down just in time for a pleasant-looking bench to appear before you, giving you a spot to rest if needed. After that, it’s just a long, brutal climb until, eventually, you see the peak... only to realize you’ve hit a false flat and will need to tackle one more large switch back before you’re at the top.

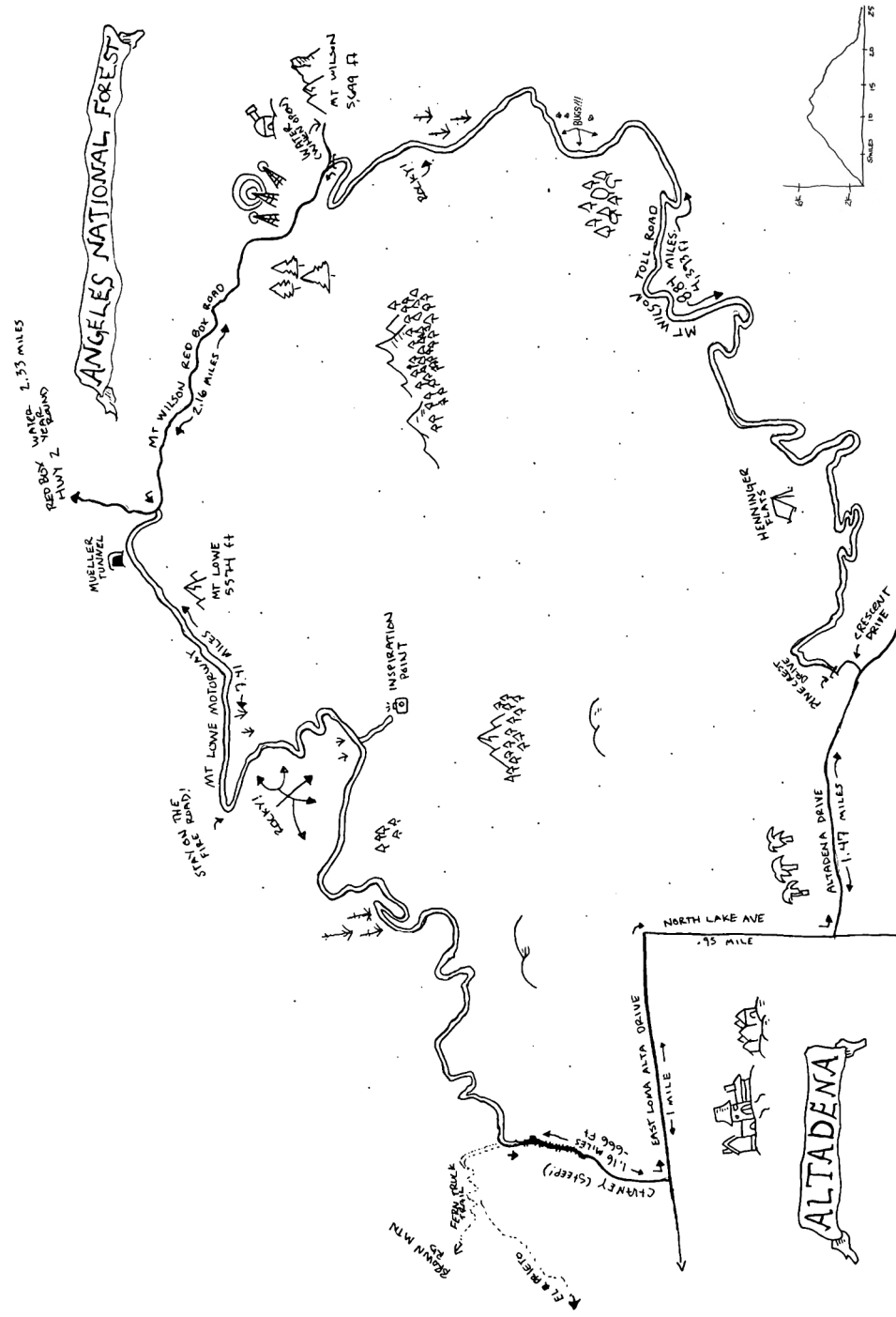
Even when the trail is busted up, the climb is rarely technical, though you will want to note any considerable gulches for the descent. When the road is really bad, with landslides and jumbles of rocks everywhere, I’ve seen folks go over their handlebars on the way down, perhaps too distracted by the views to note a surprise dip.

From the top of Lukens on a clear day, you can look down on the Verdugos, seeing in plain sight all the trails you’ve perhaps already done for yourself. Squint hard enough, and you’ll be able to see the ocean sometimes, too. There’s no water up top, just radio transmitters and the strange sound that emits from them.

To descend, head back down the way you came, and either continue on down Lukens to the 2, take a left onto Grizzly Flats Road (2N79/80)—a used-to-be single track and current doublewide that takes you down some moderately technical terrain without being *too* scary at any point—or head down Earl Canyon Road (2N81)—an alleged single track that tick-tocks throughout the year between being maintained and looking more like an overgrown deer track than a trail. This one tends to be far more difficult and might require walking or bushwhacking.

Tire rec: I’m happiest with at least 40mm, but the fire roads conditions vary so dramatically it really depends on the time of year. 45-50mm, knobby tires will give you the most fun time, especially if you want to descend Earl Canyon or Grizzly.

Water: Only at the fire station (usually). There’s a water spout near the fence though whether it’s working or not has been a gamble since the pandemic started. There’s no other water along the route.



WILSON TOLL ROAD AND MT LOWE

24 MILES, 4,800 FT

Starting up Mt Wilson Toll Road, one might think the hard packed dirt roads are easy to climb, but as you inch your way up, the trail gets more and more rocky before eventually hitting portions that, in certain times of the year, are often filled with little landslides. But it's never super technical, and one benefit of climbing is that you have ample time to choose your lines, or choose to hop off and walk. As a climb, Mt Wilson Toll Road also has the benefit—or the downside—of frequently giving you a view of the summit.

While you're climbing Toll Road, it's fun to think about the fact this road was once intended for cars. The trail was at first a normal trail, meant for hikers and horses—and cost 25 cents per use for hikers and 50 cents for horseback—thus the “toll.” With increased use came a widening of the trail, and the building of the observatory at the top of Wilson created the need for even wider roads to bring up parts. There was a hotel at the top, but it was destroyed by a fire. Eventually, the 2 was built, and the paved route up into Angeles National Forest was preferred over what was assuredly a vertigo-inducing car ride up Toll Road.

Nine miles and about 4,300 feet of elevation climb later, you get to the top of Toll Road, where you can take a right and head into the visitor's area. Here, you'll find the Mount Wilson Observatory, as well as the Cosmic Café if you require snacks. There's also a (free) water spout in the parking lot. This area is closed from around late-November through April, so don't count on it in winter, and the café is closed most holidays.

After you've refilled water, head down Mount Wilson Red Box Road and look out for a small parking lot and gate on your left to start the descent down Mt. Lowe Road (2N50).

Descending Lowe is another experience altogether, and one that I regret nearly every time I do so. The mountain's main goal is to jostle your bones right out of your body, leaving you as nothing more than a pile of guts clenching desperately to handlebars.

But among the steep gradients and blown out rock shards, it, like Mt Wilson, is so steeped in history that this will always be a loop near to my heart. If it feels unbelievable that Toll Road was meant for cars, then it's even harder to wrap one's mind around the idea that Lowe was originally intended for trains.

From the late 1890s through the late 1930s, there was a scenic railway along this route. Conceived up by Thaddeus Sobieski Lowe, the Lowe Scenic Railway consisted of multiple train systems leading to the top, including a vertical railway up to Echo Mountain and a trolley ride that ended at a tavern and hotel, which also sported a number of facilities, including mini golf, tennis, and a zoo. All this was eventually destroyed after a series of property disputes, insurance issues, fires, winds, and a flood. The rail itself was eventually scrapped during World War II, and the Forestry Service destroyed any remaining structures in the 50s and 60s. You can get much of this history from signs throughout the ride, which provide an excellent excuse to stop and shake your hands out during the gnarly descent. In any case, Lowe's name stuck because his buddy Andrew McNally put it on some maps, an ode to chimerical aspirations.

Wilson and Lowe were affected by the Station Fire, but more recently, in September 2020, the Bobcat Fire lit up the mountain. Sliding in during one of the worst months of the pandemic, the fire endangered a number of the foothills neighborhoods, the observatory, and brought dreadful air quality to most of Los Angeles. This side of the mountain has since reopened, but even in 2022 there's still work to be done of other trails.

Like most of the trails included here, it's pretty easy to link together all sorts of wild rides. One of my favorites is to go up Mt. Wilson Toll Road, down the 2 until Grizzly Flats, then take Grizzly up to Lukens fire road, then descent Lukens back to the 2.

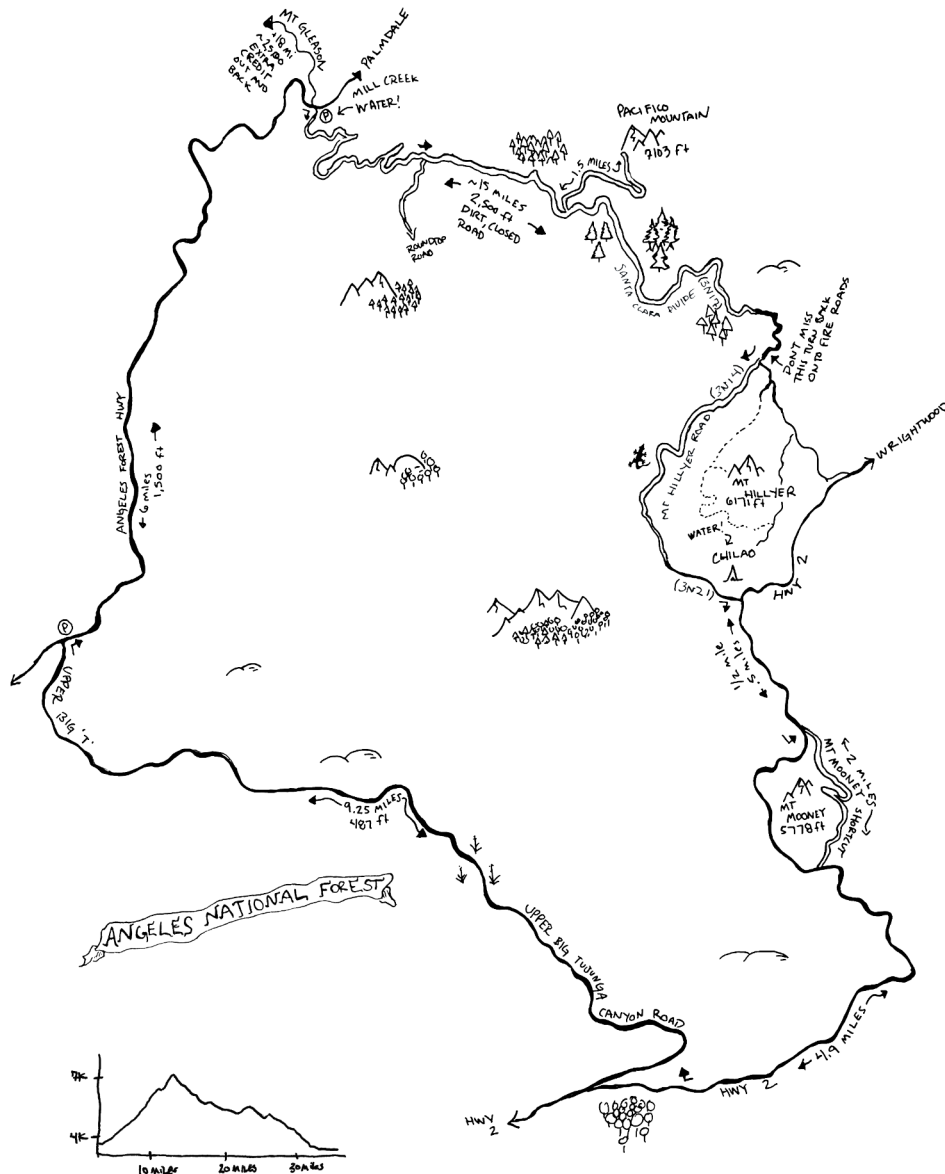
You can do this route in reverse, too. Both Toll Road and Lowe go through cycles where one feels worse to descend than the other, but one thing that never changes is how brutal the climb up Chaney to the start of Mt Lowe is. Chaney eats your heart rate and spits out your soul before you even start the fun part of the ride. I tend to prefer starting with Mt Wilson, which at least has the decency to put you on dirt while it demoralizes you and calls you names.

Tire rec: 45mm or bigger gives me the best time, but it's certainly doable on smaller tires.

Water: There's a public fountain at the top of Mt Wilson, but the gate is closed in the winter, usually from around late November through April. The Cosmic Café follows the same timeline, and has sandwiches and other snacks, but is typically closed on holidays.

PACIFICO

~39 MILES, 4,900 FT



Mount Pacifico is a wonderful, non-technical, but relatively remote ride that's a good way to test your comfort levels. You'll be deep into the forest, won't run into many people, and won't have cell service. This route's difficulty lies more in its remoteness than it does its climbs. But you're also never *too far* away from a campground and other signs of civilization.

There are a few ways to do this ride, but because of the pavement to dirt ratio, this is a rare ride I suggest driving up to do. You can park either in one of the pull offs at the Upper Big Tujunga and Angeles Forest Highway intersection, or start from Mill Creek Summit picnic area at the base of the dirt road leading up to Mount Pacifico. I prefer Mill Creek, despite the fact it means an obnoxious climb on pavement at the end of the loop, because it makes it much easier to add on Mount Gleason as extra credit if I'm feeling like a doofus.

Whichever starting area you choose, the dirt road (3N17) up to Pacifico is a dream. From Angeles Forest Highway, it's almost six miles with 2,000 feet of elevation climb, making for a never-gut-punching average grade and a (relatively) easy ascent. Since there's a campground at the top of Pacifico Mountain, the dirt road leading up to it is well maintained and not technical. The descent down to Chilao campground is mostly clear and easy, though it can get a bit rocky during certain times of year.

What you get for your effort is a fantastic ride in the backside of the forest. At 7,000 feet, Pacifico has a different feel than many of the other summits in the forest, feeling a little more mountainous than say, Lukens, which has more desert vibes throughout.

There's a campground at the top of Pacifico, though no water. Root around a little when you're up here, and you'll find an outcropping of boulders with metal pieces jutting out of them. It appears there was a fire lookout tower here at some point in the '30s. Unlike the other fire lookouts in the area, it didn't have a cabin area for anyone to sit comfortably. Strange. Since there is a campground here and the PCT nearby, you will sometimes see the occasional backpackers and off-landers.

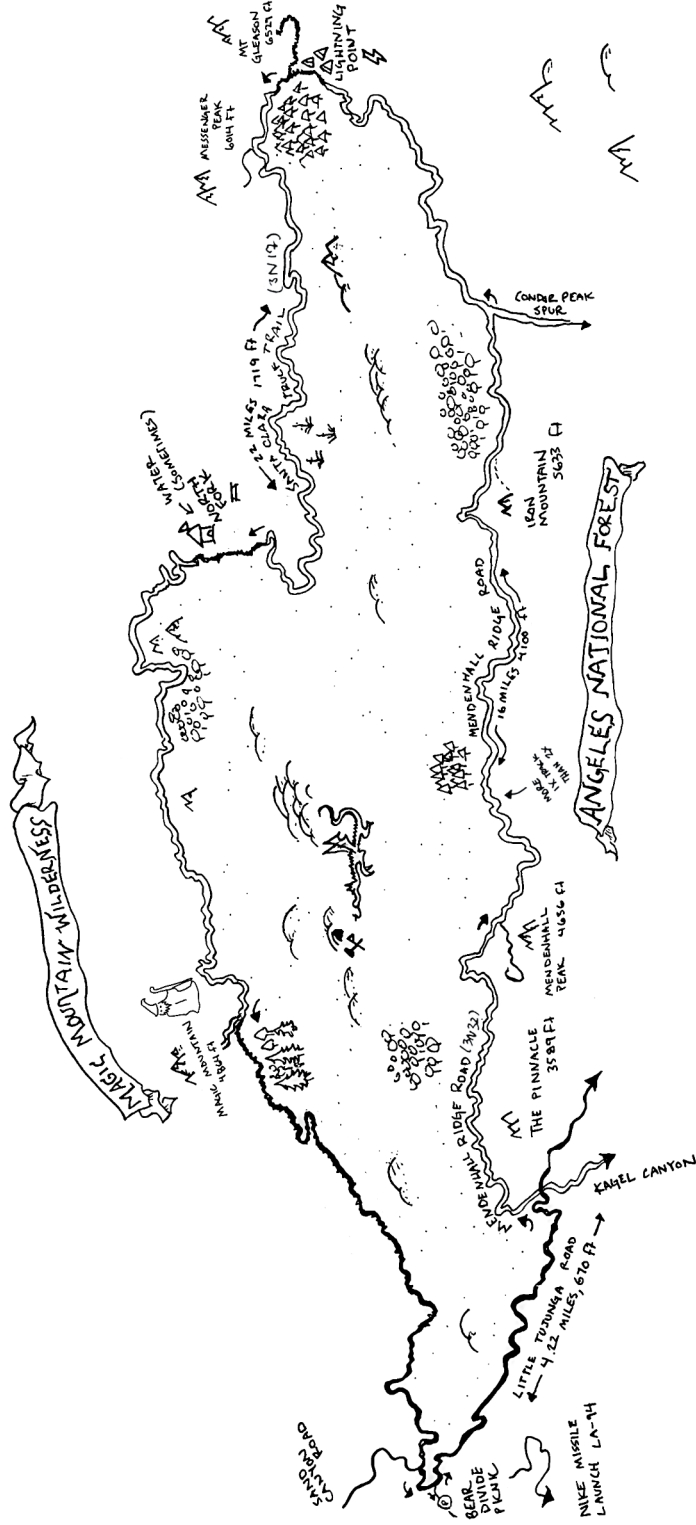
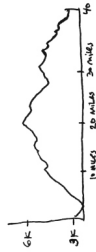
While you can certainly head up to Pacifico then back down the way you came, I prefer a loop, cutting down the battered dirt road into Chilao campground. You'll hit pavement here briefly, which is your cue to keep your eyes peeled for the turn back onto a dirt road. Otherwise, you'll just take a paved road back to the 2, or accidentally find yourself on the figure-eight mountain bike loop, a technical single track. In any case, you'll eventually hit Chilao campground, where you can snag water if you need to before hopping onto the 2.

You can take the 2 straight back to Upper Big Tujunga and to your car, but it's worth taking a small diversion and hopping onto the Mt. Mooney fire road for a two-mile dirt shortcut that wraps around Mt. Mooney and gets you off the highway for a short stint. This was closed off for the Bobcat Fire, and you'll likely spot the burnt trees along this route for years to come. Once you complete this shortcut, head back onto the 2, then Upper Big T for a mostly downhill chillfest back until you hit Angeles Forest Highway.

If, like me, you hate driving up to rides, this loop is doable through several other routes. Aside from simply riding up the 2, which would likely feel a little ridiculous to get to just 15 miles or so of dirt, you could ride up Wilson Toll Road, head to Chilao, then head up to Pacifico from there, descending the 2, or getting extra rowdy and throwing in the rest of Santa Clara Divide for a truly absurd day (see the next section). In any case, Pacifico is worth doing at least once.

Tire rec: 38mm or bigger gives me the best time on the descents, though the climb isn't particularly technical.

Water: There's a public fountain at the Chilao campground and at the Mill Creek picnic area. You can usually also get water at the Monte Cristo Fire Station.



SANTA CLARA DIVIDE

42 MILES, 6,200 FT

This is my favorite loop in the area. It's also the most remote route included here. There are long stretches where you will not see anyone, so being comfortable with that and prepared for any issues that may arise is key. Because of the location, this is another one of the rare rides I tend to drive to, typically parking at Bear Divide Picnic Area. You can also come up from Whitney Canyon Park in Santa Clarita, taking the Santa Clara Truck Trail all the way up for what amounts to closer to 70-ish miles and nearly 10,000 feet of climbing. Or go up the 2, take Angeles National Forest Highway to Gleason, and go from there.

In any case, as with every route included here, these are mostly just suggestions to help you get started, and my suggestion is to start at Bear Divide Picnic Area. From here, there's just a short four-ish miles of pavement before hitting the loop, which is mostly dirt and on roads closed to normal traffic.

Cross over the gate at Mendenhall Ridge Road (3N32) on the left side of Little Tujunga Canyon Road, to begin the 16 mile and 4,100 feet of elevation route to Mt. Gleason. You'll start climbing immediately (what a surprise!). At first it'll feel like an average double-track road. But that's an illusion. In my experience, during most parts of the year this is single track along a path that was, if you squint hard enough, once a road. During certain parts of the year, some minor bushwhacking may be involved, and you'll likely see a downed tree or five.

One of my favorite parts about doing this ride comes as you finally find your way out of the wilder parts of Mendenhall and get a view of the valley to the north. You can see communication towers from here, which are at the top of Magic Mountain. On a good day you'll be able to see most of the Santa Clara Truck Trail etched into the side of the mountain. Depending on how you're feeling, this is either remarkable, or a weighted sense of dread. After seven or eight miles, the trail starts to hourglass, flexing between a double-wide before condensing into single track again. Travel along for long enough, and you'll eventually get to Lightning Point campground (seems like not a fun place to stay, based on the name), and the road will turn into Santa Clara Truck Trail (3N17). You might be tempted to head up to Mt. Gleason from here, and doing so will get you 500 or so feet more of elevation, but there's not much in the way of, well, anything up at the top of Gleason, so set your expectations to a shrug and you won't be disappointed.

Santa Clara Truck Trail is much more of a traditional access road, and is typically in better shape than Mendenhall, which makes the nearly 22 miles of mostly descending much breezier than the climb up, though be sure to save some legs for the few short climbs. As you descend, you'll first come across Messenger Flats campground, then eventually find your way to North Fork camp, where there is typically drinkable water set outside for Pacific Crest Trail hikers. As it's the only water along this route, it's useful to know about, but being literally a jug that say "drinking water" on it, I tend not to rely on it. You might be tempted by a new dirt road—4N35—here, but the last time I went down it, I found nothing but a trail that fizzles away and disappears after a couple of miles.

Be sure to stick to 3N17 at any crossroads. You'll eventually reach the aforementioned communication towers alongside some water towers, which is Magic Mountain—no clue if it's related to the Six Flags ride or not—but while there's a mystical vibe to the name, it's "magic" was more fraught historically, operating as a Nike missile site before it was eventually used to test thrusters for NASA instead. These sites, scattered across the United States and Europe (there were a dozen or so of these around Southern California, including one at Mt. Gleason, another near the Bear Divide Picnic area, and closer to Los Angeles, one at Mt. Disappointment) housed anti-aircraft missiles. They were built throughout the '50s, but decommissioned starting in the '60s and '70s.

Anyway, while you're busy thinking about the Cold War, at this point, you may notice the dirt road technically turns into pavement. But it's more of an *idea* of a paved road. It's beaten to hell, often filled with potholes and occasionally disappearing altogether, leaving you to wonder if there was ever a road here to begin with. If you thought you'd be able to bomb the descent and head back to the car easily, I'd suggest you continue to keep an eye out for meteor-sized indentations in the road now and again. You'll hit the Santa Clara Divide gate in no time, and if you parked at Bear Divide Picnic area, just take a left, head around the corner, and you're right back where you started.

Tire rec: 40 to 45mm tires will be best, especially as it seems Mendenhall Ridge Road is getting maintained less often.

Water: There's no water on this route, at least... no guarantees of water. There is regularly a big jug of water at the North Fork picnic site.

A NOTE ON RINCON TRUCK TRAIL

I was only able to do Rincon (Forest roads 2N23 and 2N24) once before the Bobcat Fire in 2020, which has closed the trails as of this year (2022), with no details for the reopening yet (2023?). I don't trust my memory enough to detail too much of this ride, but I remember loving every second of it. Here what's to expect, based on my loose memory of the route.

To keep the ride on the shorter end and more focused on dirt, take the Metro to Azusa, which drops you off right by the San Gabriel River Bike Path. Head up an 8-mile climb up the 39. Right after the East Fork turn, you'll find the Rincon Red Box Truck Trail on the left. From here to Red Box Picnic Area is about 26.5 miles of fire roads, totaling about 3,400 feet in elevation climb. It gets perplexing in here, with a surprising number of crossroads with trails that lead to nowhere. If you've ever tackled a Lost Woods portion in a Zelda video game, you know what to expect. I highly recommend having a map downloaded to your phone or printed out before doing this ride, as it's easy to take a wrong turn. But if you stick to 2N23 and 2N24, you should, probably, theoretically, make it through.

Beyond that, my memories are a haze of over-exertion and exhaustion. It's one of the longest stretches of remoteness I've encountered here, and from what I've heard from the handful of other people who've done this ride, it's rare to see anyone at all. I imagine that solitude will only increase as it inches back to re-opening.

WHY MOST OF THESE ROADS HAVE WEIRD NUMBERS

Throughout this little guide, I've included the forest service road numbers whenever I had them. These numbers, in one variation or another, are used throughout just about every National Forest I've ever been in, and they're helpful for navigation. It's not like they put up street signs on desolate dirt fire roads in the middle of nowhere. In Angeles National Forest, it's a combination of four digits, like 4N27 or 3N17. In some cases where the road is longer, such 3N17, which stretches all the way from Santa Clarita to Chilao, there's also a number or letter at the end. For example, 3N17.2 seems to designate a segment. 3N17H seems to designate a short branch off the main path, such as the short section up to the Mt Pacifico campground off the main 3N17 road. Learning how these work can help you find trail turnoffs, or find your way if you get lost. But these aren't always labeled, and it's likely I missed a few (or got them wrong) in here.

COMBOS

Okay, so you've got some routes and some ideas. How about we make them... more ridiculous?

Cherry Canyon to Verdugos

One of my favorite little combos in LA, cruise into and play around in Cherry Canyon for as long as you like, then drop down the single track to the Glendale Sports Complex, re-up on water at the sports center, then head up Mt. Thom. From here, do whatever you'd like.

Mt Wilson Toll Road to Grizzly Flats

Pretty straight-forward here, but it makes for a great day. Head up Wilson Toll Road, then cruise down to Red Box to re-up on water, then head down the 2 until you hit the Grizzly Flats turnoff. Do the climb, head down Lukens (or up Lukens, if you're feeling spicy!), and you're home free from there. Depending on where you're starting from, it ends up being somewhere around 40-45 miles and 6,500 feet of climbing, or so.

Mt Wilson Toll Road to Chilao to Pacifico to Grizzly Flats

Hey, why are you walking away from, hear me out. Hello? Well, anyway, you head up Toll Road (or Lowe), cruise on the highway to Chilao to take on the climb up to Pacifico, then snag Grizzly Flats on your way back down. Ezpz, right? Ends up being somewhere around 70-80 miles, nearly 12,000 feet of elevation.

An idiotic route I've contemplated, but never tried...

We've already established the route above is goofy. But what about this: Toll Road to Chilao to Pacifico to Santa Clara Divide to the Verdugos? This is one of my little dream rides I'd like to try someday, though can't seem to find anyone dumb enough to try it with me as it ends up being somewhere around 115 miles, 16,000ft.

WHAT TO BRING

Everyone is going to have different comfort levels and different goals, and will thus bring different things on rides. Rung what you bring, but that's not an excuse to forget essentials. If you're new to riding, there are a few things everyone should have to tackle the more remote routes.

- Pump (or CO2)
- Patch kit/tubeless repair kit/tire levers
- Tube (even if you're running tubeless! Don't be a weight weenie when you're doing any of the more remote routes)
- Multi-tool
- Snax (the most important part, really)
- More water than you think (these routes are often remote, they're also exposed, and the water supplies haven't always been consistent since Covid)
- Maps (paper maps if you're old school, or downloaded maps on your phone from a free app like MTB Project are crucial if you intend to go off-road and far away from people). Uh, don't rely on the hand drawn maps included here for any sort of life-or-death accuracy
- Handlebar/frame/whatever bag (the longer the ride, the more extra crap you need, especially during weather changes)

It's also important to know how to use all these tools. You will need to repair flat tires, fix random things breaking, and who knows what else. Get good at all of that. Or at least competent.

GPS MAPS

You'll likely want to adapt these to wherever you're starting from, but consider them a starting point for all the routes in here:

https://ridewithgps.com/collections/50730?privacy_code=QzPBPVi0Qljh7o5g



GLHF(SH)

Good luck, have fun, say hi.

NOTES:

BEST FRIENDS FOREVER C.C.

X
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