

Dirt up, dirt down, our 'cross bikes are good for more than just rain!



Some views you earn on the road, this one you earn on the dirt. Today's ride had lots of dirt.

Time to do something different, something really different. Kevin and I both have 'cross bikes, which we bought primarily for rain use (disc brakes working one heck of a lot better in the wet than rim brakes), but it was time to try them out for their intended use. Dirt.

It's tough coming up with a dirt-worthy ride that doesn't require loading the bikes up into a car and driving someplace, and in fact it took me about 3 hours researching rides people have done on Strava, along with using google to try and figure out which trails were bike-legal and which weren't. I posted my [initial idea](#) late last night on Strava. The final ride is shown below. Please note that this ride, far as I know, is on 100% bike-legal trails. We had to modify things from the original because some parts, like Lost Trail at the top of Windy Hill, turned out to be off-limits to bikes (despite quite a few posted rides that at least implied otherwise).

We set out around 10:30, had breakfast and coffee at the Woodside Bakery, then continued on pavement up to Windy Hill in Portola Valley. About a mile or so of dirt road to the lower, paved section of Alpine Road, which, after a couple of miles, comes to an end. Not really; there's a path around a fence and from there begins about 4 miles of not-so-bad dirt fire road and single track. It was quite impressive watching Kevin handle it; he's never spent time on mountain or 'cross machines, but he just powered right up. In fact, he made some of the steepest sections look easy while I struggled, mostly, I'll claim, because he had considerably-lower gears on his bike.

At the top of dirt Alpine you end up on Page Mill, close to Skyline. Most would ride down Page Mill or head to Skyline and ride back that way. But we wanted as much dirt as possible, so we continued into the Montebello area across the street, dropping down and climbing back up through not-too-challenging single track before connecting up with Skyline and then heading across into Russian Ridge.

We'd been warned by Todd, a former employee and excellent mountain biker, that the route we'd chosen involved some pretty nasty steep stuff that we might wish to avoid, but y'know, we were sort of all-in on this ride so we stuck to the original route. We managed to get in 11 continuous miles of dirt before getting back to Skyline to connect with the next leg, Lost Trail at the southern end of Windy Hill. Well, that didn't work out, because it was posted off-limits to bikes. So we continued on to the next entrance to Windy Hill; same thing again. Finally, at the main entrance, you could hit the trails again! A short distance paralleling Skyline, then a steep and not-very-fun ride down to Portola Valley. According to Strava, the descent's been done in just over 6 minutes. We took 17. Not just because it was pretty crowded with people and dogs, but because it wouldn't have been safe going much faster. A dual-suspension mountain bike would have been much more appropriate, but that wouldn't have been much fun lugging up all the hills!

It was quite a different way to spend a Sunday. Instead of doing the usual 55-80 miles, sometimes 115 if we loop to Santa Cruz, this was just a bit over 35, at a far slower average speed. But in terms of fun per hour, it did very well. --Mike--