

Got the Bike and the Helmet . . . Now What?

By Christopher Kolm



Chris and friends last Sunday on the Lamorinda Loop, returning from an 80-mile ride
Left to right: Micky Bloom, German Serrano, Bart Borland, Christopher Kolm, Ted Brooks

So you want to ride your bike but don't know where to go? Allow me to introduce you to the Lamorinda Loop. It's safe and can take between one and two hours to ride depending on your speed and how often you stop at any of the great coffee shops along the way.

The key to cycling in suburban areas is to know the secrets that experienced cyclists know. There is an entire network of paths and special streets that link one community to the next and avoid congested roads that are un-friendly to cyclists.

The Lamorinda Loop is about 15 miles long. You can start anywhere along the route but I'll start you out at the corner of Moraga Road and Moraga Way. From this intersection, head out Moraga Way towards Orinda. You will begin to downshift at 1.5 miles from the start; pick a gear you are comfortable with and pace yourself up the 1-

mile hill. Watch for broken pavement, debris and overgrown oleander bushes as you crest the hill and roll down through the Glorietta Road intersection.

At about 4.5 miles, you'll approach the Orinda Crossroads; stay right at the light and head towards Theater Square. On the weekend a constant stream of cyclists stop by Starbucks for a quick break; there's lots of room for your bike outside.

Finished that latte? Okay, head across the traffic circle and turn right onto Davis Road. Go to the first stop sign and look left. This is the hidden entrance of the bicycle path that will connect you to Lafayette.

Follow the bike path, watching for walkers and joggers, kids and dog leashes. The path ends at St. Stephen's Drive. Ride straight across the intersection and down the little hill that looks like it is going to take you onto Highway 24 East. Turn right onto Happy Valley Road and enjoy the long hill down and the smooth pavement. Follow the road to the intersection with Acalanes Road Left on Acalanes Road and onto the marked bike lane. At the light, turn right onto Mt. Diablo Blvd. A short climb uphill earns you a nice coast down in the wide bike lane and past the entrance to Lafayette Reservoir.

At Mountain View Drive the bike lane ends abruptly so watch for traffic, car doors opening and vehicles entering the street. Make your way down the boulevard to Lafayette Circle, turn right and proceed to Fiesta Square.

You've traveled about 9.5 miles now and may need a refresher. Papillion's a great place to take that next break, and again there is plenty of room to store your bike and sit outside. If your bike needs attention or you want to upgrade your outfit, right across the parking lot is the back of Sharp's Cycles, one of only a handful of great bike shops in the East Bay.

From Lafayette, there are several options to get back to Moraga but only one route is recommended for the recreational cyclist. Don't go straight up Moraga Road as it is steep and has no shoulder. A less steep but also somewhat dangerous route is to go left on St. Mary's Road but this too has no shoulder at times and cars tend to go faster than the recommended speed limit.

A much better route is to go up Moraga Road to School Street. Left on School Street and about a half mile down past Stanley Middle School is an entrance to the Lafayette-Moraga Bicycle Path. Take a right turn onto the path and discover one of the

treasures of living in Lamorinda. It can get a little crowded on the weekends as it is well-used by the young, the old and a vast array of pets and strollers so take your time and enjoy yourself as you make your way slightly uphill on the well-kept trail.

After crossing many small roads, at about 12 miles, the path crosses St. Mary's Road. Motorists are usually friendly here and let you cross. After this intersection, the path cuts through a steep pasture up to your right where cows are often seen grazing. There is a steep bit farther on but it is thankfully short; at the top, the path crosses Rheem Blvd.

Continue slightly uphill past Saint Mary's College on your left and coast down into the Moraga Commons. There are restrooms and water here. You can relax in the park and end your ride now, sitting under a shade tree and appreciating your accomplishment, or take a left at the light onto Moraga Road and cruise back to your starting point at the corner of Moraga Road and Moraga Way.

Some prefer to ride the Loop in the opposite direction; try it both ways and see what suits you!

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