Epic Cycling Climbs

## Epic Cycling Climbs Route CA/NV: Ride through the heartland of the Sierra Nevada USA - 8 day ride



Spanning **767 km over 7–8 days, with a total elevation gain of 12,770 metres**, this spectacular cycling journey captures the very best of California's Sierra Nevada. From the

crystal-clear waters of Lake Tahoe to the dramatic granite peaks, alpine meadows and cascading waterfalls of Yosemite National Park, the route is an unforgettable exploration of some of the most breathtaking landscapes in the American West.

The adventure begins in **Incline Village**, at the northern tip of Lake Tahoe, following the shoreline south towards South Lake Tahoe. From there, the road climbs over Kingsbury Grade before descending into Nevada's Minden Valley. The landscape gradually transforms as the route heads south through the arid desert plains of Nevada, skirting the eastern foothills of the Sierra Nevada on its way to **Mono Lake**. This extraordinary salt lake, with its distinctive limestone formations, lies at the foot of Tioga Pass, the gateway to Yosemite National Park.

The challenge intensifies with the ascent of **Tioga Pass, reaching 3,031 metres**, before the road winds into the heart of Yosemite's magnificent high country. Here, alpine meadows, pristine lakes and sweeping mountain vistas create a constantly changing panorama. The journey culminates in the iconic Yosemite Valley, where towering granite cliffs frame the legendary El Capitan, spectacular waterfalls tumble down sheer rock faces, and the unmistakable silhouette of Half Dome dominates the horizon.

The return journey follows Yosemite's northern access route, descending for approximately 65 km through the rugged terrain of the Sierra Nevada. The route then turns back into the mountains for another memorable climb over **Sonora Pass at 2,933 metres**. From here, the journey continues towards South Lake Tahoe via Luther Pass, before tracing the western shoreline of the lake. Along the way, we pass the stunning turquoise waters of Emerald Bay, the lakeside communities of Tahoe City and Kings Beach, before completing the loop in Incline Village.

Combining demanding mountain climbs, sweeping descents, remote desert landscapes and some of America's most celebrated natural landmarks, this is far more than a cycling challenge. It is a journey through an extraordinary variety of scenery, from the shimmering shores of an alpine lake to the vast, rugged wilderness of the Sierra Nevada.

See the complete route here



The spacing of the stages is partly dependent on the available accommodation. Long stretches of road don't offer any services or accommodation and hence the stages vary in length and altitude gain. I have divided the route in 7 ½ days riding with a couple of shorter stages. One day can be dropped if you are willing to lengthen stage 4 by around 15-20km and combine a shorter stage 5 and 6 into one stage of around 145km length and 3,000m altitude gain. If you want to stick with 7 ½  days, these are the suggested stages:

**Stage 1: 100km, 1,260m elevation gain** - start in Incline Village - end in Topaz Lake. The route starts at the top of Lake Tahoe and rides down the eastern rim road past wonderful highlights including Sandy Harbour, Spooner Lake and Cave Rock. After Spooner summit, the route joins the I50 which is a dual carriageway but widely used by cyclists. Just before the state border between NV and CA, the road swings up the Kingsbury Grade and climbs about 300m towards Daggetts Summit before dropping down to the Nevada high desert plains. It continues through a wide open arid landscape to Topaz Lake. Topaz Lake is about 5km off the route but there is plenty of accommodation.

**Stage 2: 120km , 1,510m elevation gain - ride total 220km, 2,770m elevation gain -** start in Topaz Lake - end in Lee Vining: After 5km we return to the route and follow the NV-208 to Smith Valley before continuing on the NV338 to Bridgeport. This is a 67km stretch where the route climbs 800m through the high desert with no services available en route. Bridgeport is a good place to refuel before tackling the last 35km of the day climbing the Conway Summit which is about a 500m climb, before riding into Lee Vining which has a real stage post feeling. If you have the legs, you can explore the Mono lake from here.

**Stage 3: 125km , 1,886m elevation gain - ride total 345km, 4,656m elevation gain -** start in Lee Vining - end in Yosemite Village (Curry Village): Stage 3 is a fabulous day of riding through the Yosemite National Park's high country. It starts with a bang climbing the Tioga Pass, the highest pass on this route at 3,030m elevation. From there the route continues through Yosemite high country past Tuolumne meadows, Tenaya Lake and the fabulous views of Half Dome and the other peaks of Yosemite Park. The route follows the Tioga Road down to Crane Flats and onwards into the Yosemite Valley. The route ends for the day at Curry Village.

**Stage 4: 108km , 2,111m elevation gain - ride total 453km, 6,767m elevation gain -** start in Yosemite Village (Curry Village) - end in Tuolumne: Leaving the Yosemite Valley, the route passes by El Capitan and climbs back to Crane Flats and then continues on the Big Old Flat Road through and out of the Sierra Nevada to the west. This is a 54km stretch mainly downhill till the turnoff to the Wards Ferry Road after passing Groveland. The road turns very small with questionable surface and drops 500m down to the Ward Ferry Bridge over the Tuolumne river before climbing steeply back up gaining 530m elevation and ending in Tuolumne. The Ward Ferry Road is a fabulous ride of around 30km through open landscapes and through a tight gorge of the Tuolumne river. There are also no services on this stretch and very likely no traffic.

**Stage 5: 84km , 1,933m elevation gain - ride total 537km, 8,700m elevation gain -** start in Tuolumne - end CA-108 / Kennedy Meadows Resort & Packstation: Stage 5 brings us back, deep into the Sierra Nevada. From Tuolumne, the route climbs, mainly on the CA108 towards the Sonora Pass, using side roads wherever possible. This is a steady climb of nearly 2,000m with a couple of small downhills. The route is almost entirely in the forest and can feel a little endless, but as it climbs higher, nice vistas open up and the landscape becomes more dramatic. The day ends at Kennedy Meadows Resort & Packstation (the only accommodation on the CA108) which is about 2km off the main road on a partly unpaved road. It is a wonderful place to spend the night in the high mountains.

**Stage 6: 77km , 1,200m elevation gain - ride total 614km,  9,900m elevation gain -** start in CA-108 / Kennedy Meadows Resort & Packstation - end in Topaz Lake: This is a short stage with climbing the Sonora Pass as the highlight. The Sonora Pass is the second highest pass on this route at 2,930m altitude and is a wonderful road, typical of Sierra Nevada landscapes with the trees only receding at the pass height. Wonderful views and a great descent toward Sonora Junction and ultimately towards Topaz Lake where the day ends. As this is a short ride, the rest of the day could be used to explore Topaz Lake via the Topaz Park Road.

**Stage 7: 91km , 2,020m elevation gain - ride total 705km,  11,920m elevation gain -** start in Topaz Lake - end in Lake Tahoe / Camp Richardson: This is a great mountain stage with climbs of the Monitor and Luther Passes before descending to the shores of Lake Tahoe at the historical Camp Richardson. Monitor Pass offers great views over the arid Nevada mountainous desert whereas the Luther Pass returns to the heavily wooded landscapes of the Sierra Nevada mountains. The day is topped off by the return to the clear waters of Lake Tahoe and stay in the historical Camp Richardson. There should be time at the end of the ride to relax and dip into the lake.

**Stage 8: 63km , 850m elevation gain - ride total 768km,  12,770m elevation gain -** start in Lake Tahoe / Camp Richardson - end in Incline Village: Half day riding to return to Incline Village via the western shore of Lake Tahoe. The highlight of the last day riding is Emerald Bay on Lake Tahoe, the most iconic part of the lake. The road climbs high above the lake and over a narrow ridge road before wonderful views over the bay open up. This is not a section to hurry through. From there the route follows the western shore line through the villages en route, up and down, through forests and with open views over the lake. The ride ends in Incline Village after passing the lovely towns of Tahoe City and Kingsbeach.

Climbs en route: Kingsbury Grade / Daggett Summit at 2,235m, Conway Summit at 2,482m Tioga Pass at 3,031m, Crane Flats at 2,015m, Wells Ferry Road at 850m, Sonora Pass at 2,933m, Monitor Pass at 2,534m, Luther Pass at 2,360m, Emerald Bay Inspiration Point 2,164m

The start at Incline Village is easy to reach by car and by plane from Reno Tahoe International Airport. Incline Village is also a great base for further exploration of the North Lake Tahoe / Reno region.

**You can look at the route here on Komoot or scan the QR code below:**

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**Road ride from Lake Tahoe to Yosemite Nat...**

↔ **768 km** ↗ **12,770 m**



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