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## Gap Gear

It's a great ride to Stubbs Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap

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The sparsely distributed vineyards of the Petaluma Gap region are perhaps best explored on a bicycle. The sights, the smells and, of course, the wind inform a terroir experience that's rewarding even without opening a bottle—but we will open that bottle.

A ride to the all-but-hidden Stubbs Vineyard southwest of Petaluma, paired with wines sourced there by DeLoach Vineyards, starts this new series of great rides to great vines. My ride begins at free, four-hour parking in downtown Petaluma, which turns out to be just enough for this 42-mile loop. Passing the Petaluma Creamery, Western Avenue becomes Spring Hill Road, and the scent from eucalyptus windbreaks hangs in the air. A long-horned bull looks up, deep in dry grass, then

resumes his determined munching. There are a few vineyards along this road, but I spy more Angus than Pinot Noir.

On this side of the hill, patches of green still tint the yellowing hills at the end of June, and green blades stick up around hay bales drying in fields. Here comes the reason why: the sky clouds over and I'm fighting a chilly breeze as ocean air makes one last run inland in late morning. This must be the gappiest place in the Petaluma Gap. For a spell, it might as well be February.

It's a left at Bodega Avenue and the Coast Guard training center, but then, forgetting my own route map, I push on up Valley Ford Road instead of taking an immediate left on Tomales. But a left turn on little Carmody Road provides a nice add-on climb, steep

but brief, and makes me think about the fine cheese named after it by Bellwether Farms. The pavement, as if taunting Sonoma, turns abruptly smooth at the Marin County line.

Turn left on Fallon-Two Rock Road for a stretch, then right on Alexander, a quiet country lane for half the week until the shooting range fires up from Thursday to Sunday. At last, a left turn back to Petaluma-Tomales Road takes me to Chileno Valley Road on the right. A moderate climb through an oak forested ravine opens to a view of a swan-graced lake.

Right on Wilson Hill Road—now this is a climb. At the summit is the goal: a splendid view of Stubbs Vineyard, nestled in a little valley and sheltered from the harshest winds.

After enjoying a steep descent, I watch my speed on the left at Hicks Valley Road, which leads to Petaluma-Point Reyes Road. Marin-bound bikers can make a pit stop at Marin French Cheese Company to the right; otherwise turn left toward Petaluma. The road is busy but provides a wide, smooth shoulder after passing the vineyards and olive groves of McEvoy Ranch. The sudden shift from country back into town is made gracious by the grand old houses of Petaluma's D Street.

**DeLoach 2014 Stubbs Vineyard Chardonnay (\$50)** This wine's oak aroma is fresh, not toasty, from time spent in just 20 percent new barrels, and doesn't overwhelm its delicate scent of lemon tartlet and Golden Delicious apple. The creamy characteristics of malolactic fermentation, too, merely wrap and soften the tingly core of cool climate acidity, detailed with more lemon and spice in the aftertaste. A Chablis fan's Chardonnay?

**DeLoach 2014 Stubbs Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$55)** The Pinot, too, is light and spicy, its appearance like strawberry jam, perhaps, informing my palate impression, spiced up with crushed raspberry seeds, late summer Pennyroyal and cardamom, deepening in the glass with overtones of milk chocolate. An enticing wine, well worth the climb.