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NAPA VALLEY'S NEW ROAD TRIP

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NAVIGATE

ROAD TRIP, RECHARGED

*A drive to Napa in an electric vehicle
brought this San Francisco couple
to a place refreshingly differ-
ent. By Chris Colin*

*Charging up at
San Francisco's
Crissy Field*

Photograph by DREW KELLY

SUNSET ♦ APRIL 2016 25

EV LINGO

MPGE Miles per gallon "equivalent," an easier energy metric for our fossil-fueled brains to handle than kWh kilowatt-hours.

RANGE How many miles you can travel in your EV before its battery runs out of juice—and your car grinds to a halt. Newer compact EVs average nearly 100 miles under ideal conditions, while the Tesla Model S sedan offers more than 270 miles of range on average (depending on battery size).

RANGE ANXIETY A condition that besets new EV drivers who haven't yet figured out how fast they can zip up a steep hill with the AC blasting (behaviors that burn the main battery and decrease range). They eagerly watch MPGe drop without a charging station in sight.

HYPERMILING Not going more than 55 to 60 mph on highways to conserve range, and coasting (especially down hills) to regenerate battery power.

CHARGING STATION The EV's "gas station." A public or private place where you plug in for free or typically for a reasonable price.

Dan Brooks lives on a quiet cul-de-sac just outside downtown Napa, a soft-spoken, middle-aged guy in beach hat and sandals. He flies a medical helicopter for a living. Until one recent morning, when I pull up in his driveway, though, he is a complete stranger, a dot on a map that my wife, Amy, and I have built a strange vacation around.

We are 24 hours into our experiment.

Longtime San Franciscans of the bleary parental variety, we'd been itching to ditch town for a couple of days. Rather than the standard road trip, however, we got the idea of renting an electric vehicle. Like many, we'd come to occupy a funny spot regarding EVs: We had the sense that they are on the cusp of ubiquity, but also we professed some basic ignorance about how they work. What's their range? What kind of chargers can you use? What button do I push?

Operating the car turned out to be the easy part. It was the spirit of the trip that was different. Rather than following your bliss, your bliss reorients to your car's limited range and the limited supply of charging stations, which Amy and I accessed on a website called PlugShare. Before setting out, we pulled up a map of North America, sprayed with dots, each representing available chargers. When we zoomed in, we noticed an impressively heavy concentration in Napa Valley. Rather than charting a road trip according to spots we wanted to hit, we chose dots that we had enough range to reach (about 80 miles, according to EV-owning friends). The paralyzing options travelers are often confronted with get whittled down to a manageable handful. Amy and I found this process of planning refreshing. My poet friend Matthew sometimes has his students stir the pot by writing poems without the letter *e*. This would be our e-less trip: a little harder, considerably more memorable.

HOW MANY CHARGES WILL IT TAKE?

Thus, one chilly spring morning, an hour after leaving the city in our freakishly silent Nissan LEAF, we rolled into Napa. Much as I'd hoped for some barely-making-it drama, we arrived with power to spare. We used the surplus to drive to High Water Stand Up Paddle.

Like EV driving, stand-up paddleboarding takes six

seconds to learn. Amy and I pushed out onto a still stretch of water and glided about effortlessly, enjoying the backdoor approach to a town from the water—the weathered old mill, two dudes fishing from a rock. As we neared downtown Napa, the sites took on an added dimension, coalescing into a tour of our fossil-fueled civilization: a freight train, motorboats, a droning squadron of string trimmers, and finally cars cars cars. Then there was us, advancing up this winding ribbon by other means entirely.

After the paddle, we checked into the Napa River Inn, chosen not for the perfect views or sun-dappled balcony off our room, but the charging station in the parking lot. We walked around the city that night, our LEAF quietly readying itself for the next leg.

A STRANGER'S DRIVEWAY

While the PlugShare map mostly comprised businesses with charging stations (hotels, restaurants, and wineries), a handful of dots stand for individuals volunteering their own private chargers. We loved this excuse for

meeting a certified local on our trip, much like we enjoy the glimpse of people's homes we get when we rent a house from Airbnb. Which brings us to Dan Brooks.

"It's surprisingly fun to plan your trips with an EV," the helicopter pilot tells us, describing the video game-like thrill of trying to reach a destination on a single charge, and of driving in the most mileage-optimizing way possible (see "EV Lingo," left).

"Plus, you find yourself in this little community. You meet people at the charging station, or in chat rooms."

So far, though, the number of EV drivers who have taken Brooks up on his charger offer is zero. "The truth is, there's a pretty good supply of them in the valley," he concedes when we meet. "But I like to think it'll happen. Maybe we'd have coffee while their car charged or something."

Unfortunately, Amy and I aren't Brooks's first charge either. We don't need any juice. We had just felt like chatting with a human to hear another viewpoint on Napa.

MANDATORY SLOW TRAVEL

Morning finds Amy and me on a red dirt trail in the middle of nowhere, dry grass shushing around us. It was complex EV arithmetic that delivered us to

Top 3 EV apps



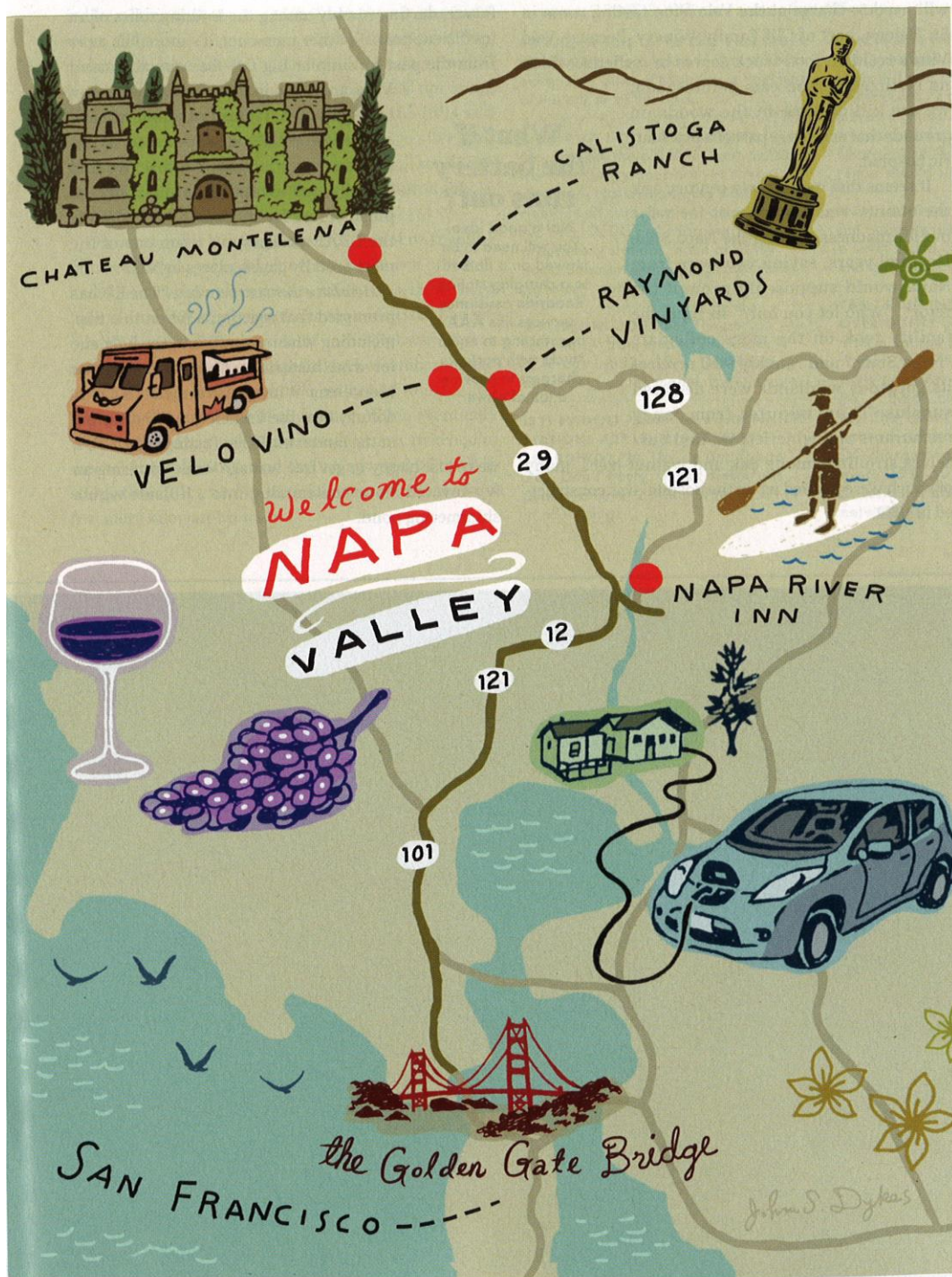
PLUGSHARE
Finds stations, including in private homes and 120-volt wall outlets. Uses Google Maps.



CHARGE-POINT
Operates stations nationwide. It finds its own stations as well as all others.



NEXT CHARGE
Plots road trips, pairing hotels and restaurants with charging stations. Uses GPS.



S.F. TO NAPA

STOP 1 Napa River Inn in Napa's downtown. From \$229; napariverinn.com.

STOP 2 Skyline Wilderness Park with hiking, biking, and equestrian trails. \$5/vehicle; skylinepark.org.

STOP 3 St. Helena's Velo Vino tasting room—with a food truck. Tasting \$20; cliffamilywinery.com.

STOP 4 Raymond Vineyards in St. Helena, with a Champagne lounge and dog winery. Tasting from \$25; raymondvineyards.com.

STOP 5 Chateau Montelena Winery in Calistoga. Tasting \$25; montelena.com.

STOP 6 Calistoga Ranch with an ale bath spa treatment. From \$795; calistogaranch.com.

DIGITAL BONUS

For two more wine country road trips—Portland to the Willamette, and L.A. to Santa Barbara—visit sunset.com/evroadtrips.

Illustration by JOHN S. DYKES

READY TO TRY AN EV?

Because the major car-rental places rent hybrids (and not solely electric), the best bet for trying an EV is a car-sharing app like Turo, which EV owners use to lease out their own vehicles. Turo operates in major cities such as L.A., San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle, and Honolulu, and daily rates for a Nissan LEAF start at \$28, while a Fiat 500e starts at \$29.

the Skyline Wilderness Park, a corner of Napa we'd never seen. To reach our next stop of Calistoga, we will need to charge at the Velo Vino tasting room in St. Helena, part of Clif Family Winery. Because Velo Vino's resident food truck serves bruschetta, which no civilized person eats before noon, we are killing time in the woods on grounds that once were part of a psychiatric hospital.

It seems that more than a century ago, the county was known not for wine but for madness. During the Napa State Hospital years, saying you were from Napa would supposedly prompt the retort, "Who let you out?" In time, the facility took on the more collegiate "Napa State," and roughly 900 acres of its gorgeous wildlands were declared surplus. Thus, minutes from fancy restaurants and wineries, we find ourselves strolling among oak and walnut trees, many of which were planted when the hospital was constructed in 1872.

FANCY CHARGES, FUN WINES

At times during our drive, it feels like we are from the future, darting nimbly among the hulking relics of an inefficient past. At other moments, it's more like *we're* from the past—a simpler Big Oil-free one. Raymond

Vineyards, also in St. Helena, would seem to be part of that future-past. But whatever you'd expect of a solar-powered, biodynamic vineyard, this is not that. We find scantily clad mannequins and rooms of plush velvet furniture and walls. While the LEAF charges, we roam one of the most proudly garish places in Napa.

How have we never been here? The EV has prompted that reaction a lot on this trip, including when we pull into the holy site for wine historians: Calistoga's Chateau Montelena Winery. Its famed '73 Chardonnay beat the French in a blind tasting in the landmark Paris Tasting of 1976. Us,

we're just happy to get free wattage while admiring an ivy-covered stone chateau dug into a hillside with a shimmering pond.

What if the battery runs out?

Not a good idea. You will need to be towed on a flatbed to a charging station. Roadside assistance services like AAA are starting to equip trucks with portable chargers to provide a jolt of power.

THE LAST CHARGE

To point out that Calistoga Ranch has a charging station is like noting that the Taj Mahal has soap in the bathroom. Of course they charge your EV here, and if they didn't, someone on staff would rub sticks together till it was ready to go. Our most luxurious EV dot is the 157-acre resort—tucked discreetly into the hills and creeksides of an oaky canyon—where you go after winning your third Oscar. Amy goes for a swim, I soak in an ale bath, and in general we recharge as thoroughly as our car.

On our way back to San Francisco, one of us smelling faintly of hops, we remark on the joy borne of minor hassle. Years ago, we owned a wildly unreliable Ford Falcon, and any trip beyond our zip code risked an extended interlude on the side of some highway. It was annoying—but it also brought a level of deliberateness to our comings and goings. We really had to plan, and that gave things a whiff of adventure. When eventually we bought a dependable grown-up car, we switched to mental cruise control, and the voyage part of the trip slipped away. It's nice to have it back now, if only for a few more kilowatt-hours.

Charging in public

When you rent a gas-fueled car, the biggest concern is figuring out which side to fill up on. With EVs, there are some other differences. A few questions answered:

SO WHICH SIDE IS THE CAR'S CHARGER DOOR ON? Like a gas car, it could be either side. Also, it might be in the front of the car or at the back.

CAN I PULL INTO ANY STATION? No. Just like the old VHS/Beta debate, the EV industry does not yet have a standard. Not all charging stations are right for all cars. Stations are either AC Level 2, DC fast-charging, or Tesla proprietary stations, each of which has a different-shape plug. Teslas can go to any station.

WHICH ONE DO I USE? The person you rent the EV from can let you know. A LEAF can use Level 2 or fast-charging depending on the model, for example.

IS IT EVIDENT FROM THE ROAD WHICH STATIONS ARE LEVEL 2 VS. FAST CHARGING? No. Use an app (page 26). Don't worry. Unlike diesel/gas pumps, a Level 2 AC charger won't fit in a DC plug.

WHOM DO I PAY FOR THE CHARGE?

Some charges are free, but more than likely it'll cost around \$4. Sorry, no credit cards or cash. You'll need a scan card issued from the company who runs the station. The majors are Chargepoint, Blink, and EVgo. Your renter should supply you with one.

HOW LONG TO RECHARGE? It depends. But typically around four hours at a Level 2 and 30 minutes at a fast-charging station.

CAN I PLUG INTO A PUBLIC STATION OVERNIGHT? Good EV citizens unplug after a charge (about 4 hours).

HOW FAR CAN I GO? From "B.C. to B.C.," Baja California to British Columbia. The West Coast Electric Highway network is installing retail-location DC chargers (and many Level 2s) every 25 to 50 miles along Interstate 5. Tesla has also built an extensive network. 