

THE TRAILS OF MARIN COUNTY

NEARLY COMPREHENSIVE MEMOIRS OF DEAN GUSTAFSON

"When you get to the top of the mountain, keep climbing." - Kerouac

Truly what I can classify as genuinely sacred territory. I spent years and years focused on accessing those fantastic hiking and biking trails, in what I consider a paradise — and I'm not exaggerating! I discovered such interesting, beautiful landscapes, from deep in moss covered shaded redwoods with streams and gullies, tall sequoia's towering overhead, to fallen as food for new growth. Primordial. To wide open vistas as far as the eyes can see. I want to revisit those places that were — and are — so important to me for decades of my adult life.

Starting in 1984 and ending around 2015. I really took advantage of the areas around **Mt Tamalpais**. Highly influential brother **Brian** first drove me to experience **Muir Woods** and then up to the top of Mt Tam, to find phenomenal views of the entire **San Francisco Bay**. I was curious about traversing this accessible mountain on foot, and attracted to hiking up above Muir Woods on the foot trails that branch up going beyond, beneath the towering Redwood trees that were very very old and very much taller than any other trees I'd seen. They give me a feeling of great comfort, uniquely so. Forward to 1986, when my curiosity got me on the mountain. I became hooked on exploring the hiking trails of **Northern California, Yosemite** especially!

NATURE AND CULTURE

I grew up in **South Minneapolis** for my first 20 years. A city with park systems running throughout, of forests connected by water in the forms of lakes, creek, and the **Mississippi River**. I had the luxury of exploring those park systems, with remarkable freedom as a boy. No fear, especially when with friends. It was a non-threatening youth I had. This helped form my relationship with being in nature. I also appreciated urban culture — the arts, music, humanities. I craved this and Minneapolis had a good balance going for it.

The **San Francisco Bay Area** has both powerful nature and culture. I thrived on this. Being in the pure solace of a Redwood forest, where it felt and sounded as if it were hundreds of miles away from civilization. To getting back to an art exhibition, concert or party in a buzzing urban environment within 10 - 20 miles away was staggering. I loved it like food for the mind, and body.

Setting out solo in the 80s, fueled by a sense of going to the heart of wonder with places of timeless integrity.

HIKING DOWN INTO MUIR WOODS

It must have been brother Brian (without whom) driving to Muir Woods, first dropping me off at the trailhead on **Panoramic hwy** near the **Mountain Inn**. (then bro-in-law Mitch might have been with). I researched, finding a trail map of the area, finding the right trail network leading down to Muir. From the small parking lot with a great view west! I ended up becoming very familiar with that zone.

They drop me off there, with the plan to meet them at the Muir Woods center somewhere. I gave it one hour.

The lot on Panoramic has a phone booth, drinking fountain and an outhouse. A row of rough wooden steps leading down to a wider trail, that turns into a narrow dusty foot trail that runs alongside the road for a few hundred yards until heading downward. There is a huge boulder that was great to climb up and have a snack with a view.

Continuing down into the shaded forested area, where less lizards are shuffling about, it becomes deep and quiet away from the road. The trails have crunchy redwood fronds. The scent of sequoia's are not strong but earthy and pleasant. I am surrounded by redwoods. Younger, not the massive, ancient sequoias found down ahead in the official Muir Woods National Park. By hiking in from above, I avoid paying at the front gate. I was poor then, so anything saved helped.

Glorious hike, taking under an hour. Perfect!

I find Brian easily out on a bench with coffee. We walked around the grove, awestruck by the tall, wide Redwoods, as with every visit there. It makes sense that tourists are attracted to this from all over, all year round. An international spot to hear languages from around the world. All of us impressed by these towering survivors of fires, logging mills, and centuries of time.

THE MOUNTAIN

I found a way to ride my bicycle all the way from the **BART** station, getting on a ferry to **Sausalito**, finding the road that winds it's way up to Panoramic from the south side of **Mill Valley**. A grueling bike ride, dangerous with cars too close, bicycling in their blind spot, around tight bends. Not recommended, and I only rode that once on a bike ride up. (a few times down, but more on that later)

Finally on Panoramic highway, familiar from driving with Brian. This was hard, but my 23 year old self managed.

The Mountain Inn nearby I locked my bike, finding **Railroad Grade** fire trail up to the top of the mountain. Filled water bottle from the drinking fountain, PBJ sandwiches in backpack, I was set! Railroad Grade is an easy ascent. Made for an actual train that once carried passengers to the top. Now it's a barren fire road, perfect for mountain bikes. A few early design mtn bikes passed by me, before nearly everyone had them by the nineties. I was envious, they were pricy!

The feeling of rising up above tree lines was exhilarating! I was discovering my favorite mountain, for the proximity, access, and setting. The trail is mostly out in the hot sun, so I absorbed the water supply rapidly. About two thirds up is the Mt Tam inn, a hostel of sorts, More people were there, possibly staying there overnight? I fill up the water bottle and the rest is a breeze. Emerging on the paved road up, I walk on it for about 800 yards to the top of the **East Peak**. Wow! This.Is.It.

But I still had to return soon, so I started back too soon for my liking. The sun is still high enough, but I don't want to ride on the highway down in dark traffic. As expected it was a harrowing bike ride back, and a few years before I knew any better to wear a helmet! (d'oh)

I managed, but it's risky. Zooming to the ferry. I am not riding a bike that way ever again! (or so I thought)

THE ZIGZAG TRAIL

Riding to Mill Valley, the perfect town at the foot of Mt Tam, and I found an old road map that included some obscure foot trails. One of those was the hidden back **Zigzag Trail**. Hard to find, and the map was right. After I grind my way there on my trusty old Raleigh Olympian 10-speed, gliding into downtown Mill Valley, scoring a good hot cocoa from the busy corner cafe, stopping in **Mill Valley Market** for snacks. Discovering they sell Dutch Stroopwafels! (before they were available elsewhere) Delighted to find, it had been since Amsterdam the previous year. I stocked up, riding deep into a neighborhood of rich houses in the redwoods. I fantasized living here.

Found the end of the road, with a mansion, but no sign of a trailhead. The street sign was a good pole to lock the bike. The driveway intimidated entering but I did a few short yards in, finding a small foot bridge over a tiny stream. There it was, the Zigzag Trail, with a worn wooden sign carved into the small foot bridge. Up and very steep, I could tell that not many knew it. I start my ascent, pulling myself up with exposed roots. Only a few feet up, I find a small piece of modeling

clay on the path. Odd to find, totally out of place. I started to mold it into a tiny skull. Enjoying the silence. Nobody is around. No activity. Just me sitting on a root, modeling a skull. I stuck it on top of an old rotting stump. I keep climbing. Above a smaller building, that didn't look like a home, more likely an old water reservoir? I huff it up up up. Boy this is steep! And it zigzags. Aptly named.

I'm in the thick of young sequoia trees. In the form of tall poles clustered and younger. Surreal! I loved this immersion. Eventually it becomes less steep, emerging past houses and the Mountain Inn. I'm up on Panoramic highway! A much better way up than biking the highway.

I get to the same trail down to Muir Woods. I ended up going further than just that, loving the climb up the foot trails through the big big big trees! Passing redwoods with old forest fire scars, with dark cave-like cavities at their base, I could stick my head in to experience sheer existential voids. Completely dark. Completely silent. I'd back away, stunned by the feeling of this. Magnificent. And I carried on, up alongside the road up the mountain, until cascading down to **Pantoll Ranger station** and campground. Where the Rangers had *American Beauty* on! A favorite **Grateful Dead** album. I was in love with all of this!

I checked out the map posted there, deciding to not go too far ahead. I still had to huff it back!

I took a snack break up the slope across the road, with a magnificent view of the ocean! A beautiful young lady passed by, we exchange sheepish "hi's". I was a shy young single solitary fellow. I thought I could have chatted more, but it wasn't in me. Too polite? I daydream of her instead. All the way back to my bike. It's darker down in the shaded forest, deceptively showing it to be later than it really is, I raced. Popping out to the Panoramic highway is a relief! Sun is still high. I still need to get down the steep Zigzag Trail in shade. Easier to hop down than climb up—at least for my younger knees. Saying hello goodbye to the tiny permoplast skull I crafted. Hopped on my bike still there. Riding fast as I can. To the ferry, catching the last one, around 7pm.

What a day! Exhausting and exhilarating simultaneously. I am definitely returning.

MORE OF THE SAME FOLLOWED FOR 1988 - 1989.

It became a good habit for those years, I was hooked on that particular region. The skull didn't budge! I usually went by bike solo, sometimes meeting Brian there. I remember in '87 I hiked up Mt Tam, meeting Bri on Panoramic, with sore

feet. We drove to the **Marin County** fair near **San Rafael**, but my feet were too sore from the hike up to the top of Tam. Brian went in to see Chris Isaak, while I soaked my swollen feet in the nearby pond, hearing the show for free. Brian had a great time! He met a fun woman also from Minnesota! Unfortunately she never returned his calls. Disappointment for my single bro.

DHARMA BUM

I enjoyed **Jack Kerouac** writings about nature and culture, of which he had a great sense. I read several, and *The Dharma Bums* struck chords with my younger self. The energy of urban nightlife with ecstatic nature hikes is so Bay area. I felt this in spades when getting to paint at the **Academy** downtown to the clanging sound of **cable cars** and the urban buzz of activities in all directions. Art openings, nightclubs, live music, etc., with all of the personalities surrounding. Contrast that with the spiritual depths found in the rawest natural setting. Ocean, mountain, forest, and that was my Bay area.

Also I was fond of *The Portable Emerson*, I found a used paperback with essential writings by **Ralph Waldo Emerson**. Inspirational literature, I would tote in my backpack easily enough to read and underline passages anywhere.

This page stands out in memories of that time:

"But in other hours, Nature satisfies by its loveliness, and without any mixture of corporeal benefit. I see the spectacle of morning from the hill-top over against my house, from day-break to sun-rise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations: the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind. How does Nature deify us with a few and cheap elements! Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. The dawn is my Assyria; the sun-set and moon-rise my Paphos, and unimaginable realms of faerie; broad noon shall be my England of the senses and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy and dreams."

EXPLORING

I kept a pattern, when I lived with family all the way in **Concord**. I spent my time away, exploring San Francisco, **Berkeley**, or on the same Marin trails I really got to know well. I got up early enough to make a full day of it. Riding to BART, ferry to Sausalito, passing the **Bay model** building, through the marsh path to **East**

Blithesdale rd to downtown Mill Valley, turn on **Throckmorton**, to the cafe for that rich hot cocoa, the market for stroopwafels. Down to the end of Cascade, to the Zigzag trail, pass the tiny skull and up what is considered one of the toughest trails of Marin! To either Mt Tam or through Muir Woods. I really loved all of it. To the top of the mountain was a special triumph, of sweeping views and a lot of sweat. Warm weather brought me in the shade of the redwoods. Sometimes I would keep going beyond Pantoll, but ran out of time.

Onetime In 1987 riding across the city up to the bridge, up from the **Presidio**, a military cop stopped me after riding up a one-way. I argued there was no sign from the bottom, and he let me go.

I showed a few friends, who drove. The zigzag up, and to Muir Woods without dealing with entry fees and the populated parking lot. A few times with Jim — good friend and roommate when I finally moved to the city. I went with sister Jill once, hiking above the Muir woods region. This was when I still lived in Concord in Early '88.

SENSES AND SIGHTS

Boots crunching on fallen Redwood foliage, up rocky natural steps, gravel, or soft dirt. Each step of syncopated rhythms, carrying me onwards, sometimes into unknown territory. Trusting in the park system to have it clear and safe. Not always the case. Sometimes the more obscure trails would have collapsed foot bridges, its erosion undocumented. More frequented trails usually have signs that warn the hiker, or alerts for any closures.

Rocky dusty trails exposed to the sun would usually have **Western Fence Lizards** inhabiting the open rocks in the sun. **Manzanita** bushes with their shiny red branches showing. Like larger **Madrone** trees.

It's always fun to find anthropomorphic tree branches. One in particular was down along the main Muir Woods walkway display, looking like a viking ship prow with an animal head. I saw that for years in the eighties, I finally sketched it in 1990. I believe it rotted away the following year.

The plant life is always interesting. **Poison Oak** was one to be aware of. I got it badly on a few of those hikes in '86-88. Keeping a supply of **TechNu**, the only solvent that seemed to extract the itching oils from my skin. I got more aware of the plant, avoiding more attacks in the nineties. It's possible that I developed an immunity.

Each step on those trails taught me the beauty of increments. I couldn't experience this from convenient leaps. I had to labor for it all. Driven by passion for the area. I was hot on the trail to be enraptured by the Marin redwoods, and with the heartiest workouts to get there and back. This drive to be there was substantial to my character development, mirroring my quest for visual artmaking. Each influential on the other was nature and culture again. As the years passed, I only got better and better accessing it all.

FROM SAN FRANCISCO

My expansion began with living in the city. Bicycling across town from the **Mission** to **Golden Gate Bridge** was a big deal in itself. **Joe** — great long-time friend and then roommate showed me a great bike ride across **Golden Gate Bridge** to the **Marin Headlands**! I had gone there with Brian driving for years, but never bicycling that way. It was fantastic! Crossing the bridge, when in Marin the road to the left/west climbs up in a dramatic open road with the ocean roaring below and far as eyes can see. It's a workout climbing the road up. At a crossing you can either go to the right, leading down to **Rodeo Valley**, or ride further getting to **Rodeo Beach** above the ocean. Passing open bunkers (I took advantage of these years later for a Cacophony Society event) and down around the bend to the beach facing west. We would ride both in a big loop. When getting a mountain bike (1992) I'd take the trail at the junction. As it was, I only had my road bike.

Bicycling to my favorite go-to trails near Mill Valley from the city, I took to riding across the bridge to Marin more than taking the ferry there. Often returning on water, but often I chose to ride back, up up up from Sausalito to the bridge. Stopping in the **Haight** for pizza or burrito. Perfectly exhausted.

HIKES WITH SMILIN' SURFER JOE

Joe knew where to hike in Marin, and how to do it right, having the inner radar for quality trails. Long hikes that when lingering after twilight meant being immersed in the most spectacular sunset colors. Why leave when it starts to get the most awesome?! Just have flashlights, and enjoy returning at dark. This is so Joe! We took some epic hikes.

One that stands out was along **Ridgecrest Blvd** on the western edge of Mt Tamalpais. This must have been 1991 when he was still a roommate at the Bryant pad. The trails along and above **Stinson Beach/Bolinas** is astonishing in its scope of views. Some of the trails are out in the open, while we took a

forested route. That was my first hike there with Joe , and very impressive. The sunset we experienced seemed to represent eternity of colorful rich bliss — with no psychedelics! We were high on the workout of the trails, views and colors that abound — and especially the essential good company. This was a time when Joe turned me on to the sublime album *If I Could Only Remember My Name* by David Crosby, with a cast of favorite musicians, including Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh, Graham Nash, Neil Young and a host of more California musicians we love. The song *Laughing* encapsulates what that sunset felt like. Every time I hear it culls that magic hike vibe, and the colorful 90s I experienced during that time and place...26 years old living in the Mission district, San Francisco, California, West coast, the edge of the North American continent on the Pacific Ocean, planet Earth.

OTHER HIKES DURING THAT TIME

With Joe on a couple of hikes we aim for Muir Beach, the next one over to the north from Rodeo Beach, taking our time to descend the long trail from the hills above. Parking in wide open space hills, at first with dramatic views, descending into brush and forest, which made returning with flashlight essential. Those were great late afternoons into evenings. We returned a few times more over the decades.

I MISSED OUT ON THE HOT SPRINGS

Heard raves when Joe showed Jim, about the hot springs that exist in a narrow cove in Marin that can only be accessed at the very lowest tide. I guess it's a precarious climb at night to the roughshod Steep Ravine beach before getting as far as Stinson Beach. They would usually have to go around 4am, not a good time for me, going to sleep by then, so I missed out. I understand it became popular after word got out, with a few only fit at a time. They went a few times in 1989-90 and that was it.

HIKES WITH FRIENDS

With Jim, who drove a few times. To Cascade Falls in Mill Valley once with our friend Karlin. A previous trip, going to Muir Woods, I showed my discovery of the steep, obscure Zigzag Trail out of Mill Valley. (when it still had a small permoplast skull I modeled, found on the trail in '88 . It sat on a redwood stump for a few years.) I'd been going there regularly since '87. I showed a few friends over those years.

One time, with my old 10-speed Raleigh locked to the same street sign near the

Zigzag trail, I returned to find my bike decorated in wildflowers! Turns out it was friend **Will Tuttle** from the Academy! Recognizing my bicycle, thought he'd leave a surprise! Told me what that week sometime.

One time I led **Amelia**, an Academy student and **Cacophony Society** member, and good friend of the esteemed **Ethyl Ketone**. I described the bike ride to her, she was up for it, but turned out to be too much for her. This was 1990. She made it but it was easy to see she suffered. Especially by the time we got to the Zigzag Trail on foot. Steep and technically difficult, I put her through the wringer. She didn't complain, however I should have known better. We could have turned around miles before. Later she would mention in half jesting, *"Dean led me on a bike ride all the way up to Oregon and back."*

MARCH 21ST, 1990,

An unusually early departure from the Mission on a Wednesday morning. One day I somehow got up around 4am, enthusiastic about leaving for the sunrise for a change. I rode the Raleigh to the east edge to maybe catch the ferry and experience the sunrise over the bay. It was tremendous. Before the sun rose over the east bay hills, the waters of San Francisco Bay appeared to be of dark blue ink. (affecting my next painting that month, using dark phthalo blues)

Not recalling why no ferry ride. Possibly the season started later until summer going to Marin, since it was a reverse commute?

This was a good opportunity to experience the sun rising from alongside the bay — which was beautiful that morning! By the time I was on the bridge, the sun was high. Yet this was the earliest I rode my bike across it.

Glorious entry into Marin! I rode to Mill Valley, as usual, but rang my friend from the Academy, **Mike DeMaeyer**, who lived nearby in **Tamalpais Valley**. He had an eccentric setup of unique collected antique machinery all about, a pet duck, and plenty of space.

After that visit for an hour, I zoom to hiking up Mt Tam!

I lock the bike, charge up the Zigzag to Panoramic hwy. Get on the hiking trails, now taking narrower hiking foot paths up to the top, savoring the earlier hours. I still had to get back before too long. It's the spring equinox and daylight still limited. I still had time to both savor the hike and do a sketch of the dramatic view up on top. Get back in time to the last ferry. One of the best days that year — and I had many!

A DAY WITH DAEDELUS

Early 1991, was a Cacophony event rappeling on the tall boulder cliffs around the east peak. Went with Brian and Jill, early, fabulous weather and a great new perspective on what the mountain offers. This was the only time I had rope descending on tall cliffs. The event was titled "A Day With Daedelus", hosted by **Harry Haller**. Others there was **Dan of Burning Man** and the **Haight Ashbury Free Band** (around when he invited me to join the band.)

MOUNTAIN BIKE!

Several years of bike riding and hiking Marin later, and I still didn't have a mountain bike. This changed when my trusty old Raleigh got stolen behind my back! (that should teach me not to go snogging with my sweetie, with the bike behind us) I heard the clicking of my unrepairs gears, jumped up to see the guy escape. Running after him was useless by then. I fell on the grass, humiliated. Really disturbed that day. But times for an upgrade were overdue. I worked extra to afford a good bike, marbling a bathroom for a client of Brians made just enough extra cash for a brand new **Specialized** emerald green mountain bike bought new at **Valencia Cyclery**.

Stoked and chuffed! I took it up the mountain soon after test riding it around the city. Great to plow my way up Railroad Grade to the top! I am hooked! I researched ways to go up from Mill Valley, taking **Summit Rd** to the wacky named **Hoo-Koo-Ee-Koo** trail that leads to Railroad Grade.

Ach! In just over a month, that new bike was stolen, in front of the library with crowds surrounding. I doubted anyone would try. I return to find no bike but a cracked lock. Apparently they use a small car jack to break it apart like tinsel.

Ugh. Argh!

I was freaking out badly.

Meanwhile, Brian found a solution that very next day. A client in **Lafayette** he was doing minor home repairs for, heard the unfortunate story. They had business with **Fila**, who had their mountain bikes in a warehouse. Discontinued from competition in the growing field of mountain bike production. (this was September 1992) They offered Brian two brand new Fila mountain bikes, all for having a few assembled for their use. Great deal! I got there with Brian, building the bikes in under two hours!

They are not as great as Specialized, but good for the time. A bit heavier, yet solid. The gears were all there. A standardized structure. Whew! Saved. Brian

now had a new mountain bike too!

DHAIVYD IN FAIRFAX

With a new mountain bike, (the Specialized at least at first and once) good friend from my **Minnesota** years **Dhaivyd** invites me to **Fairfax** where he moved to the previous year. I had no idea about that town, and I found a road map of Marin, plotting a good route I'd never taken. Passing **Mill Valley**, going around the mountains east side, up through **Larkspur**, through **Ross, San Anselmo**, and then **Fairfax**. Hot weather over this way. It was September and beautiful. Areas I would become very familiar with in the 21st century.

I found his house, visited for awhile, got ready for some real mountain bike trails! We first grabbed snacks and juice at the small natural foods store **The Good Earth**, when it was on **Fairfax-Bolinas Rd**. I liked this small town with its neat little redwood park in its center.

Zooming on our mtn bikes into **Deer Park**, practically in his backyard! I could see why that was a desirable region to reside.

Laughing and howling through the woods — this is the life! Splitting off at **Five Corners**, we were on a fairly level winding trail. **Concrete Pipe Rd?** to the start of what would become my most frequented bike trail up the mountain. **Eldridge Grade!** Not necessarily easy, and quite a ramble, that was an exhilarating ride up! Full of detailed switchbacks, through diverse terrain. Phenomenal views from the top!

Dhaivyd must have driven me back to the city, with plans there of his own. Placing my bike in his VW bus, he named The **Bubble**.

PINE MTN, REPACK TRAILS

Returning on my new Fila mtn bike, Dhaivyd decided to show me another new place, this time driving partway up to **Pine Mountain** trail, up a rocky incline in a fantastic zone, dramatic and wild! The problem is my Fila bike had wimpy spokes that kept breaking on that bumpy trail until the wheels wobbled too much I could barely make it. This ride would probably break tougher spokes. We went up Pine mtn trail— hot, rocky. Down **Rerepack** trail to Fairfax. Steep as fuck. Its name tells of need to repack bearings after racing down! It was a chore going down tha, with failing spokes!

Another place I would frequent by 2002, ten years later!.

My Fila wheels couldn't possibly make it back to San Francisco, and the time

wasn't a race before nightfall. So again I got another ride to SF in the Bubble Bus. [thanks Dhaiyvd!]

BICYCLE REPAIRMAN

I learned how to replace spokes, a few at a time, purchasing stronger ones. I acquired quite a few good DIY bicycle repair tools that year. I replaced some parts that needed upgrading. Fila was never about bicycles, and some of the parts showed this. Preferring **Diamond Bicycles** over **Valencia Cyclery** for parts. Valencia had some condescending snobs working there. Diamond up in Noe Valley were more respectful.

SUPERMOON RIDE UP MT TAM

Loading both of our Fila mtn bikes in Brians Jeep, coordinating with Jim and his sweetheart of the time, who drove separately. We set out for riding up Mt Tam, parking near the Inn, with the goal to ride up on Railroad Grade later than I'm used to, during sunset by the time we were up at the top. Watch the full "supermoon" rise, returning down in moonlight. Wonderful ride! My idea and everyone loved it! Except for Joe who was intending to join, but his old mtn bike was stolen from in his car, parked out front of their apartment on **Bartlett St.** Ugh. Can't be too careful about securing mtn bikes. Those thieves have radars. [fortunately, Joe bought a good upgrade. A fire engine red **Cannondale** who I believe still has it over 30 years on.]

Brian on his first ever mountain bike ride did great! No fatigue, just naturally breezing on up the switchbacks.

Jim put tougher tires on his 10-speed road bike and rode up that smooth fire trail easily. Good plan! I wish I would have thought of years ago.

The glow of ascending was perfect during sunset. As the news hyped, it's supposed to be the largest looking moon for the remainder of this century. It was huge, rising in the east, but not noticeably different when up high. Still it provided good illumination for the ride down. We were hootin' and hollering on the way down, having a great time! The only time I bicycled Mt Tam after dark. (hikes however, were several in the dark.)

HIKING AFTER SUNDOWN WITH JOE

Joe loves the lingering glow long after the sun has set. Equipped with our flashlights usually carrying bike lights in our backpacks) we might have hiked from his car parked above Muir Beach, we would ramble down the foot trail down through wide open hills, descending into lush brush, passing through

glades with that pungent aroma of foliage fed by wild springs, emerging at the intimate beach. Often climbing surrounding cliffs to really enjoy the view. After the sun sets, everyone immediately leaves, but not Joe. He got me into the late glow hikes back. No sense in leaving before the peak! We stick around, engulfed in blazing sunset colors — intense pinks, oranges, yellows, transmutating into subdued colors, magnificent in a different kind of depth. Stunning blues, mauves, dull pale yellows — not to be missed. The oceans perpetual roars and crashes as the best serenade.

Yeah! Worthwhile! The hike back requires flashlights, gotta watch the step, or potentially twist an ankle on the rough trail in darkness. Pointing lights off to the side would show red eyes of wild deer watching us from the woods. A haunting sight!

We did those hikes for years. Immensely satisfying! Joe has the Marin trail muse! A good influence.

BIKING TO RODEO BEACH

Joe got me into it first, but now on a mtn bike! Soon I made a habit of riding that way solo. Zooming across town to the bridge. Depending upon what day, the east side with pedestrians might be the only bicycling option. It's far better to be on the bikes-only West sidewalk with the ocean view. I would zip across the bridge, going around the bend and through the tunnel if coming from the eastern sidewalk. And through the gate, swooping down and up the bowl-like lot, up the steep hop upwards and up the dramatic climb up **Conzelman Rd**, to where it forks. There is the **Coastal Trail** head, the pavement is left behind. This is where the mountain bike comes in handy. I loved riding fire trails. The dusty chert feeling good and naturally bumpy. The trail is in the shade, nice and cool with the aroma of moist vegetation. I'm engulfed in a tunnel of foliage. The trail cascades alongside **Rodeo Valley**, descending gradually. The terrain gets "technical" in parts. It emerges in a field designed for archery practice, with targets on haybales off to one side. I might see a few archers doing their thing with bows and arrows.

Crossing the paved road, the trail gets harder to find, but I manage after Joe first showed me. It rambles near a creek, under canopies of forest, crossing a small wooden bridge over the creek. Meandering, opening up near an historic military building. Continuing towards the ocean, passed the marsh, and the paved road to Rodeo Beach. A fantastic destination!

I was first shown by Brian in the summer of 1984. We had a great Marin day,

Muir Woods and a drive around those headlands. Brian had a few bottles of Old Tadcaster Ale in a cooler in his van that we enjoyed on that beach of smooth gravel. A refreshing memory!

The intimate little perfect beach lies between two cliffs. The ocean in combination with the structure of the cove makes a natural tumbler — you can hear the sound of stones being rolled with the undercurrent of the waves. Unique! The perpetual undercurrent constantly rolling the pebbles for centuries into smooth roundized gravel. This particular section of the headlands happens to be rich in green serpentine stone. The beach is dominated by small green pebbles, irresistible to pick through and keep a handful! Also there is red carnelian among the serpentine. Not as much but can stand out.

[in 1996 Joe and Jane got married on that beach! It was the perfect day, I was a fortunate participant! The reception was nearby in historic military centers. A day for the ages.]

Sometimes I would keep riding up the trails and over to more beaches in **Tennessee Valley** and Muir Beach (I wrote about earlier) This means returning the same way, unless there was a ride waiting for me to meet at one of those destinations. (happened a few rare occasions) Exhausting ride yet exhilarating.

Powering back is always harder. You don't want to leave. One ride I did around 1994, I stopped up the hill over Rodeo Valley to watch the sunset (it must have been winter) to see one of the brightest richest *green flashes* I can remember! Magnificent! I've caught several over the decades at **Ocean Beach**, and good ones too. This one stands out for the setting, intensity, and very unexpected.

Another time in the same stretch, I saw a healthy bushy tailed fox up close, crossing the trail into the brushes. rare! I timed my return to not miss the gates closing on the west sidewalk over the bridge. Zipped across with spectacular lighting. Curve off the bridge and back in San Francisco. Always exhausted. Always satisfied.

BIRD- MAMMAL- INSECT- PANTHER

Really taking to mountain bicycling Marin, after that first rambling ride to visit Dhaiydv in Fairfax, I got into the habit of riding past my usual Mill Valley and continuing on around the mountain to **Ross**— a rich town of affluent manors in the redwoods. There according to my trail map was the start of the Eldridge Grade trail I took first with Dhaiydv from the other direction in Fairfax.

This goes around **Phoenix Lake**, meeting a crossroads then up up uphill, all the way to the top. Not as gradual as Railroad Grade at all. Not for the timid, yet not the steepest route. There are passages that will kick your ass. Some of my favorite patches. The start like a roller coaster, passes a drinking fountain at the T, the short steep section emerging out of the first stretch of woods into the sun with a good view of Bald Hill to the north east (more on that later) and up a short rocky patch. I couldn't make it up that until after a few times. I had to expect it in advance first, gears clicked into low gear, crank the pedals so as not to spin out, and barrel up without a pause. It was a good feeling I became addicted to! More climbing ahead, riding through densely shaded Redwood dominant switchbacks. Some of my favorite sections!

Wrapping around the mountain, some of it gradually, some slippery and flat steep passages. Eldridge Grade has it all.. Finally arriving at the final yards of the trail. A slippery steep slope that I rarely made up without dismantling the bike. It was always a personal triumph to make it up in one go. Probably only five times out of dozens.

On the final half-mile of paved road, approaching the prominent east peak that I knew for years of hiking from Mill Valley, I locked the bike to the rail near the kiosk. The walkway up to the pinnacle is of wooden slats to start, then a rocky hop around the north end and around to the top. Boulders are stepped on, the top features a rangers lookout hut. I rarely see anyone inside, but hear the radio transmitting reports. Odd.

The view is of the entire Bay area. Breathtaking and a fantastic payoff for the work required to get yourself up there. A celebration in itself!

Early 1993, on one of my marathon excursions from the Mission to the top of Mt Tam, on the Eldridge Grade halfway up I found myself approaching Dhaivyd and Diana! [now married!] We biked up together, enjoying the top for a good hang with good friends!

Speaking of friends, one time after riding down from the mountain to Panoramic, I saw a familiar face. It was **Jon** (aka **Mr Science**) who I knew through Cacophony Society events, including the Eclipse trip we took to **Mexico** in July of '91! He wasn't just visiting the area, but I saw him getting the mail — he moved there! In the sweetest little red house on Panoramic, near the trail down to Muir Woods. "*I'm a mountain man now!*" He showed me his pad. Impeccable. Immaculate. Compact, and tastefully arranged. It's an art form to do with such little real estate!

Going down Railroad Grade was easy, and I discovered a biking trail from Panoramic down to MV, otherwise to Summit by way of Hoo-koo-ee-kooh (the best trail name ever) to downtown Mill Valley - East Blithesdale, the trail through the marsh (fascinating birds) Sausalito, the ferry if there is time, and I feel like taking. Or I trudge uphill to the Golden Gate, zip across — naturally stop to look west at the sunset from the bridge ! Through the **Presidio, Arguello Gateway, Arguello Boulevard, Golden Gate Park, the upper Haight** (sometimes for a well needed bite. Pizza slice, or a Bobs Burrito at **Balazo**, or a falafel from **Blue Front**) Life was very very good. Then taking the wiggle to **Church, 18th, Valencia or Folsom**, home to **Bryant**. Satisfied.

I went up with Dhaiydv a number of times, who was an essential influence on my central Marin County bike rides. (as was Joe for coastal rides and hikes). We had a massive appreciation for the power of Mt Tamalpais to transform us. It's where the four corners of Earth meet, to the lucky few who get this.

I brought then visiting nephew **Kim** up there in 1994, thinking he'd woop my old ass going up. False. I should have known. The ride there alone was grueling, let alone going up. I really had to push him so we could return on time. Remember Panoramic highway? I generally avoided going down by bike, but expediency calling, I decided it would be faster. Harrowing and dangerous, but we made it just in time for the last ferry. *Whew!*

Poor guy. He claimed to be into mountain biking in the mountains of Massachusetts. This was brutal. I don't think he's ever quite forgiven me for my oversight. Crazy uncle Dean. (at least in robust health and strength, right?) He became a Bay area local! By 2000, we both returned to Mt Tam a few times, with good friend **Hitesh**, who's a real bicycle enthusiast!

FROM THE MISSION TO THE TOP IN 3 HOURS

Super inspired to test my timing, with a new **Swatch Chronograph** from brother **Craig**. It must have been 1993.

I took off with zeal unstoppable. Did the path of least distance across the city to the bridge, huffing into Marin, practically flying down to Sausalito, getting on the bike path, through the marshlands, up the road beyond Mill Valley, Larkspur, Corte Madera, Ross, Phoenix Lake, Eldridge Grade, up without stopping unless I had to. To the road making it to the top in only 3 hours total! - WHEW!! (I have the exact amount written somewhere) Quite the achievement. I did this race for time a couple times more. In 1996 also from The Mission, around the same timing. In 2008 riding from Ocean Beach the time that took me to get to the top of Mt Tam

on the same Marin route fared better under 3 hours. Each time I was driven as a berserker viking. Focused physically to win a race with myself. I won every time.

EXPANDING HORIZONS

More trails were explored as the years progressed. At first through Joe's good influence as previously covered. Eventually we got to the **Steep Ravine trail** hiking down from Pantoll ranger station. The most primordial zone on the mountain I reckon. A land of the lost, with moss covered fallen redwoods, gargantuan sized tree stumps, logs over cascading waterfalls. I half expected to see a dinosaur, chomping at the ferns so fecundly growing in this moist underworld. I loved this, becoming a favorite destination. Hiking beyond that rich dense active ravine — and steep it was — eventually opened up to an ocean view. Spectacular!

I returned with my (now ex-wife) **Alisa** years later. I couldn't wait to show her around!

A final time was in 2011 with friend **Bruce**. This was a great hike.

With Alisa, we made a tradition out of finding new Marin hikes. We loved it! Now that she had a car, that freedom to wander farther was wonderful. I didn't drive until my 30s, and I had been proud to be car free, however it opened up the timing — we would drive from the city to a different trail often every other Saturday. Especially happy about our instant access to the headlands.

Tennessee Valley was a good accessible one, and an easy walk. A flat trail from the parking lot to beach. We did that several times, mainly when living in the Inner **Richmond** neighborhood not far from the bridge made it a quick hop. This was after I scored a '**71 VW bus** in' 97. Yeah! Traveling in style! We loved driving to Marin in that. It's orange color stood out from a distance.

NOTABLE HIKES :

Easter hiking up Mt Tam from **Cascade Falls** parking lot. A perfect hike up narrow unknown foot trails. In fact we got lost going back, ending up on a dark road, I didn't know but it must have been in the vicinity of the *pumpkinbus*. The homes were upper class Mill Valley in redwoods, just higher elevation from where we parked. We pass a woman driving in, the only sign of life out there in the darkness. We asked her directions down to Cascade Falls lot, and she knew exactly where to point us. Through her backyard was a tiny foot trail leading directly to the VW. She was great! The trail was steep and narrow, but we were

young. It was a relief to see the orange of our bus below in extremely dim light. We asked the perfect resident. Eventually following the road we would have walked another mile over until finding the right road. The only time I was lost in the dark on Tam.

MUIR BEACH, THE PELICAN INN

One of the epic hikes I did previously with Joe driving, and now I wanted to enjoy with Alisa. Parking up high on the hills, descending on the narrow foot trail. The view is vast, big Earth — big sky, big hills, big ocean. Ending up in foliage until crossing the paved road to the intimate Muir Beach. Passing by the very British looking **Pelican Inn**, which happened to be open! After enjoying the beach, we end up in the most English style pub I've ever been in — aside from Britain itself. We adored this, and settled with cozy pints, among the timbers that looks as if made 400 years ago in a small village in **Europe**. Inspiring us to plan a trip there! I haven't been to Europe since 1994, and Alisa has never been. We outlined a good itinerary right then and there over pints. This gave us more energy (the plans, not the ale so much) for the hike back uphill in the dusk lighting. Beautiful! This must have been early 2000. We went to Europe for most of June. Fantastic and memorable!

THE CATARACT TRAIL AND DAM

I went with Joe first years before a couple times, and maybe with Dhaiyyd who loved it. Either from the top and back again, or parking at the bottom near the dam by the reservoir Lake. **The Cataract trail** : One of the best trails on the mountain, alongside a small creek, with waterfalls and dense, steep woods. Fantastic, another favorite like Steep Ravine but more traveled. **Rock Springs** parking lot is at the top, large and paved, drawing more visitors, for the nearby mountain theater, hiking, and astronomy events [more on this location later!] The bottom of the Cataract trail has less parking available. When starting from there, it's a steep and narrow climb upwards from the get-go. I thrived on uphill, versus downhill, tended to hurt my knees more. Either way, there's going to be steep down trail hiking.

A good workout, with some fabulous sections of small waterfalls trickling in small pools. Around the top feature several offshoot trails connected with other areas of the mountain, such as the **Simmons trail**, among other foot trails.

The Dam is like a temple of a lost civilization. Hiking with Joe around its bottom is where the temple wall effect occurs!

PINE MOUNTAIN, AZALEA HILL LITTLE CARSON FALLS

Friend **Will Tuttle** tipped us on to this glorious area just beyond Fairfax. This was 1999 in Spring time. An area that became very dear to us, and very familiarized.

Driving through Fairfax, where I haven't yet really ever explored or visited much since Dhaiydv lived there in the early 90s. Finding Bolinas Rd, driving up passing the golf course, find the small, dusty **Azalea Hill** parking lot.

Azalea Hill is directly south and quickly bounded up for spectacular views of Tam, and **Bon Tempe Lake** reservoir.

Across the road north is the long, technical Pine Mtn fire trail, (remember? 1992 with Dhaiydv) connecting with several destinations. In this instance in the Spring of '99, we're on the quest for the waterfall at Will's enthusiastic recommendation. This was **Little Carson Falls**.

He was right. A great area! The waterfall was flowing but not roaring and that was good. Being able to scramble up on dry boulders was nice.

This became a regular go-to for subsequent years. On foot in one direction, and just me on bicycle in the other. Remember that ride I took with Dhaiydv where my Fila spokes snapped? That was on Pine mtn fire trail. So I'd been here before, 8 years previously.

After a few hikes that way, we really took to hiking ahead of the falls, discovering that a trail keeps going down alongside the stream, leading to what I consider a sacred grove. A ring of tall redwoods, that was a perfect spot for a rest, and Tai Chi.

Not far ahead is **Kent Lake**, a long, sprawling body of water for miles. Before getting that far, we found the tiny trail up, back to **Oat Hill** fire trail. Emerging from the steep narrow foliage dense to the wide open was exhilarating. The lighting usually dramatic by now. Long shadows cast everywhere, we take romantic photos of our shadows kissing. Mt Tam, Pine Mtn, the colorful boulders like a natural geology exhibition on permanent display. Ready to head back, the ramble down the Pine Mtn Trail requires steady footing. The orange vw bus looking like an incandescent toy from the distance. A welcome sight!

FAIRFAX, THE GOOD EARTH

Hungry, stopping at the natural foods store in the center of town. Impressed.

Ordering Thai Wraps, enjoying them out front, envious of those who live there.

LET'S MOVE HERE!

In 2001 we came to that decision. After all, we went there most every other weekend! So why not? Alisa worked at the **Exploratorium**, then located at the **Palace Of Fine Arts**, not far from the Golden Gate. I worked mostly from home for **Midnight Design**. She researched bus schedules, set up in favor of that commute. Yeah!

We look at a few weird rentals , nice places but not for us. Soon, a day after Christmas, Alisa found an ad for a house in **San Anselmo**, just a skip away from Fairfax. Good friend **Pam** visiting from Minneapolis went with. She was our auspicious extra judgment.

We scored! More affordable price than our current Victorian flat in the city, that had some weird issues.

What a huge difference that move made. Some of my best years were experienced there. A charmed lifestyle as Marinites.

HIKING FROM OUR HOUSE

We walked all over San Francisco from whatever apartments we lived at, but Marin County meant driving to a trailhead (or bicycling)

Now we were in San Anselmo in what I consider peak years on several personal levels. With my sweetheart — we really were compatible then, in our idyllic cottage, with several trailheads within a few blocks walk.

DEER PARK NETWORK OF TRAILS

At first we set off for Deer Park, winding our way through Fairfax, passing through wooded neighborhoods with more charming houses that influenced choices to move there. Remember Dhaivyd first showing me those trails in '92? Now it's ten years later, and I live around there! Beautiful. Phenomenal. Dreams come true!

Doing loops around the area meant getting accustomed to more connected trail systems. After one of our first hikes of 2002, we stopped in Fairfax's bicycle shop near our place, finding hiking trail maps and a bicycle map too. I bought both! After that we had no shortage of new trails to explore. Every weekend we got out there.

A FEW FREQUENTED OVER THOSE YEARS.

I soon found an unmarked trail— not in maps — leading up from a nearby road, leading into the Deer Park trail system from above! Closer from our door. I don't

remember how I discovered this, possibly by traversing it in reverse? Regardless, I seem to have a keen extra sense for finding obscure trails! It's not easy to spot from the little traveled road. You need to pull yourself up with a rope that neighbors must have installed. Up a short incline, to the narrowest foot trail through the brush. It emerges up at the crossroads of the **Bald Hill** fire trail, and the trail that switchbacks to Deer Park most directly. Sometimes we'd opt for that to save time on a shorter jaunt — but also for its beauty. Vistas look over the valley and hills west, dramatically. Out in the open for a good zigzagging stretch, descending alongside small trickling waterways, lizards hop out of our way until in the forest, and to the Deer Park field and kids playground.

OR YONDER UP TO THE YOLANDA TRAIL

Leading to Five Corners, is a fairly level **Yolanda Trail**, it's a good little ramble through the trees. It is not redwoods territory, probably the fog not reaching that side of the mountain that prevent them thriving there. It gets hot! Oaks and madrones tend to dominate the San Anselmo /Fairfax region.

Around the middle of this relatively short trail is a large oak, with an open hole at its base. It's about a foot tall opening, inviting anyone passing by to look in. What do we find, it's a regularly rotating cast of trinkets, arranged deliberately. Most likely by a creative local who hikes that often, finding interesting tchotchkies along the way, placing them in this small enclave — like a miniature theater. You might see a cartoon squirrel at a tiny table with an earring on it. Or a circle of gems, to a toy soldier with flowers from it's rifle. I wish I had a photo from each hike! That would be interesting. I even contributed something. We had the weirdest tchotchkie of a small handcrafted baby seal — that Alisa's mom Diane gave us one Christmas. It was eerily lifelike, it's tiny eyes seem to look right at you. Really weird, but hard to live with. So into that shrine it went!

I wonder if that little hole got cleared out by the same people, or some feel free to take items home — probably kids. It was a fun little diorama type space.

Onwards! Passing a small clear hillside spot, a place Dhaivyd showed me in 2001. A sacred little space for him, with a grand view of Mt Tam from up there. Just a few yards to the Five Corners intersection.

MEMORABLE PASSAGES

At this trails end breaks off into great options. The quick way down to Fairfax was a sharp right, down the narrow declining foot path that goes through a section of very tall, very young Redwood trees. I consider this patch to be

somewhat of a sacred grove, the way you descend in a zigzag through the tall young sequoia's, like a processional, ceremonial pathway, reserved for the elves — it suddenly becomes **Rivendell**, Marin. Ending near a wizened old stump. It Always felt important going through there. Onwards it levels out, popping out on the main wide trail to Deer Park, only a few hundred yards away. No more redwoods, only that small section back up that narrow path. No wonder it seemed somehow 'sacred'.

The Oaks on that last section seem haunted, huge, gnarled witchy tree's. We loved it. And through the charming downtown Fairfax we walked gladly. Stopping at the Good Earth up on Drake. Good quality living, near our home. Another example of a dream come true.

DHAIVYD

We had quality times exploring Marin. He's always been one of the sunniest personalities I've known, since meeting in 1982 in Minneapolis (see my Nicollet Island memoir: https://dean-gustafson.com/autobiographical/Nicollet_Island.pdf)

Eventually moving to Fairfax in 1991, as described earlier in this essay. Becoming something of a central Marin sage, introducing me to the area I would move to ten years later, becoming very familiar with. (I wrote about our 1992 bike excursions). In the summer of 2001 he was back visiting from Minnesota (he moved back to the home state after traveling **Asia** in 1996). He stayed a few days at our San Francisco apartment near **Lake on 11th**. We loaded our bikes in my '71 Volkswagen bus, and chugged our way to the trailhead at Phoenix Lake. From there we plowed up **Fish Grade to Lake Lagunitas**. We passed by a bizarre looking pump system. There is a photo I took of Dhaivyd acting like it's hooked to the mouth, while appearing to crank with arms! Surreal fun! (I'll include if I find it.) Up the steep trail above the lake to almost **Laurel Dell**. Stopping for snacks in the shade of a large oak at the clearing.

Ever since whenever I pass that spot, I tend to imagine our memory ghosts are still there.

Heading back down to **Rocky Ridge** trail — living up to its name. Bumpy, rocky, and a ridge that makes me feel like it's hundreds of miles away from civilization. The most far-out trail in Marin for its outlying off the beaten track seclusion vibe. This was my first time there, returning several times alone as a favorite loop. It's hot, rocky and challenging to not spin out. I rarely saw another out there, lending to its far flung vibe. It rambles on the ridge out in the open, with vistas, boulders, brush that feels like high country, lizards scurry, and maybe rattlesnakes spotted

along the way. Deer, rabbits, and horseflies (the worst of the lot, in my experience)

It then dives down to **Bon Tempe Lake**, a steep drop, to a division/dam, along where **cormorants** gather on logs, sunning their wings. And further back to Phoenix Lake to the welcome sight of my orange vw bus. Two te-dyed Marin County hippies, in great shape for being hill riding freaks. This was a memorable mtn bike ride with a good friend! Thanks Dhaiyv!

RING MOUNTAIN

In 1995, I read a newspaper article in the **Chronicle** about **Miwok** petroglyphs in Marin, and I was determined to find them. I had a plan to go on the Larkspur ferry and ride the bike up into that park. I calculated well. Dhaiyv was interested too, so we met at **Embarcadero** ferry building. That year he moved to the upper Haight in the city, while attending school at **SF State**. On a sunny July day, perfect for the outing. Super nice ferry ride over, and a different ride than I'm used to, usually Sausalito.

Undocking in a real seaside town of restaurants with views of the bay, I navigate us to the hills. **Ring Mountain Preserve**, with wide open spaces, vistas all around, including San Quentin prison to the north (unfortunately, it's the only negative) . A magnificent space! Trails lead around the area, with enormous boulders spacing widely apart. One of these feature the petroglyphs. We found it! With little information or barricade. The article had information about someone defacing the old symbols. Sadly true, with fresh chisel marks cut into the rock. Only a few of the aged carvings were untouched. Rings, you could tell were handmade centuries ago. A map of a village? Primitive figures? Intriguing! I sketch a few in my sketchbook, enjoyed the boulder. The thing protecting them, was the thick growth of Poison Oak surrounding the boulder. I never thought I'd ever be grateful for that plant (it has struck me miserable before).

Satisfied to find them — mission accomplished! Still we enjoyed a shaded area with a massive boulder that Dhaiyv climbed up and sat atop. I sketched him from below. A fine lunch stop. We returned, happy to have discovered yet another amazing patch of Marin.

I returned only once several years later with Alisa, parking on the north side, walking up. The petroglyphs now has information on a placard and fences guarding the site better. Good! I was inspired to get my telescope up there, thinking about what good views of the sky, but never did. It's off the beaten track, plus light pollution is probably not helpful.

EXPLORING CENTRAL MARIN

Living in the heart of that county gave instant access to networks of the best trails — hiking and biking. Now that was my peak fitness. You have to be driven by a spirit of personal adventure regarding conquering the steepest trails, not only because they're there, but I'm there too.

THE BIKE TRAILS FROM HOME

Pams Blue Ridge, Cascade Canyon, Repack, Pine Mtn, Deer Park, Five Corners, Fish Grade Trail, Concrete Pipe Trail, Lake Lagunitas, Pilot Knob, Rocky Ridge, Laurel Dell, Yolanda, Pumpkin trail, Bald Hill, Eldridge Grade, China Basin, Big Rock Ridge, these are just a few remembered off the top of my memory. Just names of places with proximity to our new house. I'll focus on describing a few favorites discovered when I moved to central Marin. So many great rides and I certainly took great advantage of every time I could.

THE MOST IMMEDIATE RIDE

was out around the corner from Oak Knoll Avenue, past **Lansdale Station** an old train depot — and consequently, the birthplace of the first mountain bikes!] Crossing busy **Center Blvd** up **Forrest Avenue** through densely forested houses, gliding down to the Fairfax 'hoods. **Meerna**, (near where Dhaiyyd lived in the early 90s) Turn on the dirt trail into Deer Park! Alongside the pre-school building and playground, into the park system fire road trails, where bicycles are allowed. Up to Five Corners is a nice little workout to climb (nothing to my peak shape years). From the intersection I would usually opt to aim for the top of Mt Tam, by zooming down Concrete Pipe trail, flattening as it nears Eldridge Grade — the old reliable that I already wrote about in detail, so I will take a turn up Fish Grade, churning up to Bon Tempe Lake, the paved road leading over to Lake Lagunitas — that I covered with Dhaiyyd for the Rocky Ridge loop I became fond of revisiting. To return home, I'd ride from Bon Tempe either to the trail system through Five Corners returning the same way. Or taking the paved road out of the park system, down to Bolinas-Fairfax road, zooming down fast down through Fairfax, and home. Or — after Eldridge to the top (always exhilarating), returning in a loop by flying down the one paved road to the top of the mountain. It's views of the wide open Pacific Ocean (or dramatic fog as far as eyes can see), are awe inspiring. Sometimes I couldn't believe it was real. I flew down, wind power of accelerated speed whipping my long golden hair back. I felt like a bird soaring. Passing the elusive **West Peak** with its radar dishes and sphere, up for awhile

then down to the Laurel Dell trailhead near Rock Springs lot and the Mountain Theater (more about them later)

A steep climb on the dirt, then down to the Laurel Dell clearing I mentioned having a snack break with Dhaivyd in 2001. And down to Rocky Ridge and home. What a great loop!

CASCADE CANYON TO REPACK. PINE MTN.

A frequent go-to. Getting my bike gear on, riding out of San Anselmo into Fairfax, only a few blocks away. Ride through the tiny downtown, getting to **Cascade Drive**. The road there is lined with houses, and a stretch of sycamore trees. to the park trailhead where the road dead-ends. Crossing the creek is usually not a problem. It's bone dry over half the year, and low waters during the rainy season. I might ride through getting wet, but okay except when my shoes got soaked if my wheels stuck in the water. Oh well!

A few hundred yards ahead to the falls path intersection. Just at a nice wooden footbridge over the creek runoff from the waterfall. I would always spend moments gazing below at the water below. Usually still water reflecting the trees like a mirror. It became a place of pondering. The Beatles song "*There's A Place*" comes to mind. Where I'd meditate on the scene, and how it changes every time I'm there.

Behind is the **Cascade falls** footpath, I would hike with Alisa, and up in the network of foot trails. Beautiful small waterfall !

UP REPACK (NEVER DOWN)

Just a few yards ahead of the small bridge is the end (or beginning, in my case) of Repack Trail. Steep as fuck, and winding, I rarely crossed anyone going up it as well, once a younger bicyclist passed me around 2011! Otherwise a few going down. Not my thing, harder on the knees and hands to hold the brakes down the whole way downhill.

Near the bottom of the trail before it gets steep is a massive boulder I'd place a hand on its surface as a kind of meditative ritua, that became tradition, before the big hoofing up.

I'm of the type that preferred going uphill rather than down. Especially when dealing with loose dirt and rocks that makes it prone for wheels to spin out, harder on knees, and hands clenching worn brakes. (I certainly burned through them on those hills)

Rpack is named for the way after riding down, you'd need to *repack* your axle bearings with fresh grease. I rarely had to do that, so it must be referring to older

model bikes.

I reveled in the challenging workout of going up Repack, but never down.

Now I am ready to climb. Ratcheting to the lower gears, I try not to let my wheels spin on the dusty steep section. I rarely don't spin out. It's a rough trail. Still I push onwards, occasionally having to get off and walk the bike. Sweat dripping to my eyes, stinging. The pride of being able to do this is the drive.

I climb steep, concentrating on making it up more than looking at the forest surroundings. It starts to rise above the trees, and gets rocky and open. Not a good ride unless it's fairly cool weather.

Soon it intersects with Pine Mt trail, from the other side I'm used to. It's rocky, bumpy, and technical. I would often opt to go up on top of **Pine Mountain** by turning right at the fork, where it goes on a wide open section. Leveling out for a ramble, wrapping around Pine mountain and revolving up another rocky incline to where it starts to plateau. A narrow path to the very pinnacle goes a few yards through thick brush — including poison oak! I need to be careful. Leaving my bike at the edge. Nobody is around to take it, I'm confident of that. The top has a prominent boulder with a metal marker pole; it's the top of Pine Mountain. I climb up the rock, great views of **Tomales Bay** to the north west. The rolling hills between this and the bay are beige and green. The ocean! And the hills blocking Bolinas, and the South view of Tam, the trail to Azalea Hill, Bon Tempe Lake. The east is Fairfax, San Rafael and the east bay. A most rewarding ride! I snack, sketch and take it all in.

Returning, I take the very rocky Pine mtn trail down to Fairfax Bolinas road — rough terrain! I start to pass hikers, from the Azalea Hill lot. Phenomenal passages of dramatic open beauty! Big sky, big Earth.

Pavement, now I'm cruising down, wind whipping my hair back. The switchbacks to the golf course, then the residential section of upper Fairfax. I'm wary of driveways, passing several, and a trailhead for the western end of Concrete Pipe trail. Blasting, noisy windy friction, down, turning to the lower Fairfax level.

Imagining hitting the big tree where the road takes a sudden left into Fairfax. Blissed out, adrenaline intact, heart, lungs, legs, arms, senses heightened. A great life! I can't imagine ever stopping doing this regularly!

Often variations on a trail. Occasionally. I might ride up Pams Blue Ridge above Fairfax, hooking to Cascade and Repack from another direction, and get an even bigger workout.

RIDGECREST

A major favorite loop! Not for the weak, but it's mostly paved road. Fairfax-Bolinas road, up up to Azalea Hill, where road heads down to the dam at the West end of **Alpine Lake** (remember from a hike with Joe). I'd stop at the dam to take in the scenery, the trees, the water, the open space — thinking this is the luckiest life *ever*. In particular in that dramatic spot, before making the really big climb from the lake to the ridge.

Fortunately car traffic is light. It was quiet enough to hear their engines from a few minutes away. I would have road bikes pass by occasionally, with myself riding a slower mtn bike, the tires tread and overall weight make me considerably slower than road bikes built for speed not dirt and rocks. One time an elderly guy zoomed past on a recliner bicycle! I thought someday I will be riding up like that!

It's a huff to climb the switchbacks up through dense redwoods. It's a steep workout to where it comes to a T with Ridgecrest blvd. I take a left (a right going down to Bolinas, I did once for a round trip, totally wiping me out! and once meeting Alisa there with the VW)

In thick fog it's soaking wet, redwoods dripping with moisture like actual rainfall.

Plowing ahead after turning left at the T— it is now Ridgecrest — a favorite stretch of road. After a few hundred yards in thick coastal redwoods (*sequoia sempervirens*) it opens to vast views, of open hills rolling up, ocean or fog as far as the eyes can see. The road snaking uphill, like a ribbon cutting through the hillsides. Foot trails wander alongside the road, with some diving down (I hiked with Joe in the early 90s). Ahead is seen a curious circle of boulders, like an English stone circle — but in California. I bike up to the hill just above those rocks (learning from maps they were named "*Rolling Stones*", before the band took that name over, I suspect.) I get up on that hill, walking the bike up the narrow footpath, and absolutely revel in the dramatic views! Of Stinson Beach and Bolinas below. The mighty **Pacific** seeming infinite. The circle of boulders nearby, the hillsides rolling every direction but west. The mountain is too near to see a peak — in fact I'm on the mountains western shoulder. I do a sequence of Tai Chi movements, learned from friends Will and Anthony. I feel connected to sky from Earth. 100%, particularly after a snack, water, and I sketch the scenery. A magnificent, seemingly magical power place.

A hanglider may be seen, casting off from a hill nearby, coasting gracefully down to the beach. Wow.

Before too long I move on across the road is the trailhead down to Laurel Dell. If I

rode another quarter mile up Ridgecrest, it leads to Rock Springs lot, and the road up to the top of Mt Tam. I want to leave the road and do a loop back to Fairfax. Via the rough trails. I am on a mtn bike after all, and not a skinny wheeled road bike. (several might pass me by up there)

Bumpier dirt trail feels good to be back on. I surge down to the thick woods again, crossing a few streams getting wet riding through, but don't mind. It's refreshing, raw nature. I rarely saw anyone else there, a few times were horse riders. I slow down to not freak the horse.

Eventually it curves around the clearing near the dell. I passed the tree where Dhaivyd and I stopped for shade in 2001. I imagine our ghosts still there, smile internally, and proceed down the steep bumpy bike trail — careful not to wipe out! To where it meets Rocky Ridge. That far off trail that feels like it's hundreds of miles away, not dozens from a major city.

I see vultures close up, and soaring below. Sometimes seen sunning out their wings from a perch. What a realm! Rocky, dangerous, remote. I love it.

Cruising down to the lake, meet with the trails through Five Corners, Deer Park, Fairfax, back home. Shower, crank music, and painting for hours. Living the life.

VILLAGE MUSIC

Mill Valley had the most remarkable record store ever. I can't rave about it enough, and many others have over the decades of its existence (closed 2007) I can let the website tell the story :

<https://www.villagemusic.com/>

I was hooked — riding the bike there and back, especially during sale weeks, became ritual.

Directly I found through researching the way to ride through Ross and Kentfield to trails and roads not all on maps. Leading around the mountains eastern shoulder, up some crazy steep dirt trails, on to Mill Valley.

If I wanted less paved road for dirt trails, taking a bit longer, I'd connect with the systems south above Phoenix Lake at Ross. More satisfying of a loop— and a helluva good workout!

Mill Valley is pleasant to approach. More redwoods the further in you go. After the level Baltimore Canyon, at a turn right and up to Mill Valley. I cascade down into thick redwoods, starting to pass mansions, out of the park gate and on a narrow Redwood lined road through neighborhood of rich houses. On to Blithesdale road, where it emerges into the intimate downtown. There's a modern architectural church on the corner, Throckmorton crossing I see the movie theater (always liked the town layout) and there at the top of the road is

the destination.

Village Music was like a living museum of pop culture of the past 80 years. I won't expound much here, keeping the content to outdoor trails. I will say, as soon as I walked into that store, you're suddenly immersed in another world. I would fill my backpack with no more than a dozen albums. Bicycling back with the path of least resistance. Grinning the entire way back home in San Anselmo. Shower the dust and sweat away, , play the treasures I just found, and painting artworks in my lower studio, loving it! I did this at least once a month or when special sales happened. Some great deals were found there — never over charging. I discovered different genres, soul, r&b, rock n'roll, blues, jazz, folk, etc. found good mono **Beatles** records for around \$8, which others might tag over \$100! I would ride home always with a grin, a satisfied customer.

I walked all the way there once, with plans to meet Alisa there and drive back. That was a fine , hot summer day!

A few years previous I walked to Mill Valley on those trails on a rainy day. The plan was to meet there, she drove from work, to meet our fun holiday spirited friend **Peter Doty** at the **2AM Club**, for the **Christmas Jug Band**. I had raingear, but the slippery muddy trails really slowed me down. I arrived in the dark. It became a really Fun time though!

MORE MARIN TRAILS ELSEWHERE

Hundreds of outings ... So many that they tend to blend together from over those truly charmed years.

I would venture off in other directions. **China Basin** *of* **Western San Rafael** and the hills nearby. The north to **Big Rock Ridge** on **Lucas Valley Rd**. There is a massive boulder on the road at the trailhead. The view from the top of the ridge is stunning.

Bolinas Ridge! A fabulous ramble, from Ridgecrest. The ride would dive down to the edge of **Kent Lake**. Or I might want to avoid riding **Drake**. Traffic around those tight bends can be dangerous.

The ride out to **White Hill** was a great one. After approaching the area via the far northern section of Pine mtn trail, very rocky. I wind up riding the open hill from the western side. To this extremely steep patch of open trail, so steep I felt as if riding as vertically upwards as I've ever ridden, like a helicopter ride!

Somehow I rarely didn't make it up! At the top is like a bald hillside ridge with awesome views of everywhere. I could see that hill all the way from our rooftop through a clearing.

Going down was tough. I would sometimes opt to ride around the south side on the only designated legal single track trail for bicycles. The fire roads are usually all we should ride on. When hiking foot trails, it's really annoying when a bicyclist comes roaring through.

BACK TO HIKING

So many trails! Did I mention going up Mt Tam from Lake Lagunitas.

Phenomenal! A steep uphill that I went up with Alisa a few times.

Pilot Knob is a hill just above that lake, for hiking only. One warm day I walked there, hearing fallen Marrone bark crackling as the heat caused it to tighten (or unfold?) A fascinating phenomena, unique to that time and place.

The trails leading to White Hill by **Woodacre**, being a full day ramble but very worthwhile, via Pams Blue Ridge. Up, down and back up and so on..

The Pumpkin trail, above Bon Tempe Lake. One morning hike we took, by the time we got on the Pumpkin Trail, the late morning sun warmed the hillsides, causing a wonderful strong aroma of wild sage to waft over the lake. That was a specific olfactory memory!

The trail up **Bald Hill** from the back access from San Anselmo, from the top is a wonderful view of the town, the ministry is like a castle.

Some of the trails further up the roads, passing mansions in upper Ross with swimming pools. (never saw anyone enjoying it once) Driving there first helped expedite our time.

The zigzagging trail down from the end of the Yolanda trail, cascading near Eldridge grade and Fish trail. Off of Concrete Pipe trail, is an off shoot that leads to a great little known trail up a ravine (its name is something like the Logging trail?) making a fine loop!

More trails driving to include back up at the top of Muir Woods but hiking more to the north in a big loop, starting paved, turning into a nice ramble to the redwoods below. Alisa and I had such good fun on those days. Beautiful times. We'd leapfrog. I would hike ahead, stop to draw in my sketchbook, catching up with her later, feeling good!

The **Troop 80 trail** network leads us down into the thickness of Muir Woods but from the north— more rugged and less traveled. Down from the road is a remote campground, and walking on brings us to walking bridges over primordial fallen redwoods, naturally fallen. Through the official park, looping back up to the car

by sundown. Beautiful lighting by the time we're back above the deepest forest darkness. It's always surprising when up on a ridge just how early it still is.

From Muir Woods is the **Bootjack trail**. A long one going far west. [I hiked this back in 1987]

A few hikes were had from Mill Valley, the **Dipsea trail**, stairs going from Near downtown Mill Valley to the ridge. Passing the most unique houses , some like Hobbit holes, or crafty treehouses.

Bolinas, after parking as far west and North in that obscure little town, discovering the fantastic beach. Returning with easels to do some *plein aire* painting! That was in 1999.

Samuel P. Taylor state park. Across Drake, the trailhead starts at the **ink wells** , leading to a great hilltop, with excellent views north and west.

Other fun hiking memories, going up Pine Mtn trail once (out of dozens) we found a \$20 bill! Always a mood elevator to find such a sum. So the following times I'd hike ahead, leaving bills for her to soon find. I knew she did from the shriek of surprise and laugh heard! I did this repeatedly as a fun prank, feigning coyness so obvious. That was good fun.

On those hikes to the falls and looping back on Oat Hill trail, the long shadows cast were pronounced by the time heading back, we took photos of ourselves kissing up there in long shadow form. In fact it was on Azalea Hill that I proposed to her. We were in self-conscious laughing mode about it. Yet it was all about sheer overwhelming joy that we felt at the time. The fantastic beauty up there is a beautiful experience. Those were the most fortunate and loving charmed years. Wow. It didn't last after a few years, but *c'est le vie*. It lasts within me as peak domestic years.

North of Sir Francis Drake blvd. I discovered another hill nearby the house, we'd take as an alternative to the usual Fairfax trails. Up through more San Anselmo neighborhoods, a few blocks up, turning right then left, the richer houses up with views. The road ends in a trailhead through a grassy open hillside space of trails. Very nice places! I would ride the bike to San Rafael that way after awhile only taking the roads. I loved visiting my friend **RB's** vintage drum shop! **A Drummers Tradition**, always a great stop-in. Excellent friend and excellent store! it's a Drum shop, gallery and school. Essential!

One time a cop gave me a ticket up there for riding on a single track footpath on

that hill. I won because it was the only way to connect from one fire road to the next, with no signs that prohibit riding bicycles. The cop must have been bored to bother. At least he heard me out. I offered to call the park system to request a sign and a re-route.

TERRA LINDA FROM SAN ANSELMO

Just to the north, I found an obscure way between those towns . Over a secluded hill off of **Deer Avenue** in San Anselmo. I didn't use often, not having frequent reason to get that way.

One time in '02 bicycling to **Marin Civic Center**, with friend **Hitesh** to the **Ali Akbar Khan** (sarode) concert there, featuring **Zakir Hussein** (tabla). A fantastic performance! Among the best Indian music gigs I've experienced.

The route is a paved trail, up a sharp steep incline, through a secluded hilltop park, then the road down passing suburban apartments.

A year later I returned with my first handmade telescope. (once with Kim, and Hitesh, a few times with Alisa, and solo) It's a good dark patch up on that hill. It wasn't easy to shlep the scope up that trail from the car, but it was the closest dark sky spot for astronomy from the house. Occasionally I'd use the Azalea Hill lot with my bigger 'scope, but it's a teen night party zone. Ruining good astronomical viewing, yet the kids need those getaway places. I had mine as a high schooler!

PAMS BLUE RIDGE AND MORE

I mentioned before, and it was a good hiking destination, above Fairfax. The road climbing up through Fairfax neighborhoods in the trees. As you reach the trailhead, it goes up passing countryside style houses. The fire road, going along houses, then you're climbing up a short steep stretch to the top. In December the tree up there has a few decorations! Shaped like a small Christmas tree, a fun detail with great views. From there it networks to several directions. To the north in the downtown direction but up high, going past the scout camp. Down through more neighborhoods, emerging around behind the Fairfax Pavilion, and downtown.

There are several more trails taken in during those years, that I won't be able to recover all of their names! Including more around Alpine Lake, up and between there and BonTempe.

Alongside Ridgecrest, assorted trail, up with the spectacular views of Stinson, Bolinas, and the ocean.

Going up Pine Mountain, I decided to try and hike to the Little Carson Falls via the direction from the other side, with no trail. I was right about the geography. I went down a ravine, to a stream of reeds, feeding into the falls ahead. Nice trees were on this way. I thought this should be a trail. Perhaps it might get flooded in the rainy winter season.

IS THAT A GEIER?

Hans-Wilhelm from **Bremen Germany** visited in 2004. A good friend of my brother **Grant**. Staying at our place in San Anselmo for a night. In the daytime I decided to show him Muir Woods. I fired up the VW bus, a good Grateful Dead tape in the cassette deck, taking the winding and scenic Fairfax-Bolinas Rd. Up to Ridgecrest, all the way to Panoramic to the trail leading down to the big Sequoias. He was surprised to see "Is that a *geier?*" (German for *vulture*, swooping about) "*Whaaaa, I never saw a geier before!*" A common sight around Mt Tam.

Descending the trail to the huge redwoods that I can't help but feel awestruck by every time. Climbing back up, he did well. Exclaiming later how tough it was to keep up! Again, I pushed my guests, expecting more fitness experience.

It was a great day! He was impressed by my "*1970s style*", of my '71 bus, long-hair, tie-dyed Marin County hippie free form ways.

Livin' the dream.

ABOVE DEER PARK IN MID- 2001

we visited friends **Caroline** and **Tobias**. Living in San Anselmo in the tiniest shack. We could never do that scale, so we were impressed. They are shorter, but requires ingenuity with spatial optimization. We took a hike up around where the Yolanda trail starts. Also that spring we attended an open studio at the home of one of my old Academy painting teachers (from 1987) **Larry Robinson**, what would up around the corner from our home later on. It's on **Forrest Avenue** — impressive place! Secluded up above the road. I could see how Larry thrived on that environment. Inspiring us to move there. Hiking trails in the area afterwards. It was idyllic!

ASTRONOMY

Building telescopes influenced my frequency of the trails up around Rock Springs parking lot, where the monthly star parties are held by the park system in conjunction with the **SFAA**. - For more in depth coverage of my involvement, see this: <https://dean-gustafson.com/astronomy-book.html>

That lot is above the Cataract trail, networking with several other great hikes. Above the lot provides stunning views of the city the beaches of the peninsula, and the ocean! Often we are above the fog (the SFAA newsletter title) blocking light pollution and gives awesome dramatic beauty! I would take a burrito up there, fuel for astronomy. The spectacle of finding galaxies millions of light years away is something else. *Have telescope, will travel*, takes on cosmic significance. I would hike the area first, hours in advance. For years. My final hikes there were in 2015, when I still could, but using walking sticks.

AIRCRAFT MOTOR

My friend **Louis Brill** expressed interest in the remains of a crashed airplane, happening in the late 1940s-early 1950s. The engine block is still there. We took a hike looking for it in the fog one time in 2013. No luck. But not long afterwards by myself before a star party with the SFAA, hiking down from the lot, I spotted it in a dry creek bed to my left! I never got Louis there unfortunately but I sketched it and took a photo. He was pleased by that much.

POINT REYES

A distance requires driving there. I heard about a great swimming lake to hike to in **Point Reyes**. Research shows that as **Bass Lake**, after going north of Bolinas, the dusty parking lot at the end of the road leads you in the park system. A rambling foot trail going along the coast for a short jaunt, turns inland eventually leading to the lake. A medium sized spring fed lake, without a beach, the banks are slippery, with tree roots and stones. It's considered a nude swimming lake, Rangers are more interested in other violations, like no dogs, alcohol, etc. Taking clothes off, leaving them within sight. The water is clean and good cool temperature after the sweaty hike. There are not many swimming grounds in the bay and this is the best spot that I know of. Not populous because it's a chore to access. We might see only a few swimmers there keeping to themselves. I do some power laps across and back. Exhilarated and refreshed! A favorite summertime activity.

Hiking back is a breeze! If continuing beyond the lake, it leads to the ocean, and a series of trail systems.

The North point of Point Reyes to **Tomales Point**. We hiked this once. Passing elk herds along the way as the peninsula narrowed down to a point. Running alongside **Tomales Bay** and opening into **Bodega Bay** to the north. The **San Andreas Fault** is visually apparent by looking at the landscape. A bad place to

be when the big one shakes!

It was fascinating, but long and windy. The wind gave me a headache so I wasn't at my best. Still glad to have discovered it!

"BAD" TRAILS

Once we headed down the roughest narrow foot trail from along Ridgecrest down to Stinson Beach. Great destination, but it was better to take a wider trail back up! A rare occasion when we both were hit by Poison Oak! It had been years since I last suffered that itchiness. It was back to find a bottle of **Technu**. I think that was the only time Alisa caught it. The trail map needed editing, so I drew an alert named it "**bad trail**"!

Going down from Mt Tam was another bad trail on that map. Too steep with loose gravel to walk down, even slowly. We had to sit and slide down some sections. I doubt our pants lasted after that.

Not bad trails, just long and exhausting. One time hiking down from the top of Tam, I took more never traveled (by me) foot trails. Lots of switchbacks, it took hours to reach Phoenix Lake it was dark by the time I reached it. I took the town roads home, with sore feet.

RETURNING TO SAN FRANCISCO

I moved near Ocean Beach, for a triumphant return with style in September '08. The first thing I did after settling in, was bike to Mt Tam. Crossing the bridge, down through Sausalito, around the eastern side, Ross, Phoenix Lake, up Eldridge Grade to the top — in 2 hours and 11 minutes. A record time! (a faster , shorter distance than from the Mission) A memorable ride!

BROKEN TRIQUITUM

After moving out of Marin for a few years, I'd still frequent favorite trails. In 2008 I returned to Repack and Pine mtn, after most of the year away. Bouncing down the rocks I must have let my mind wander, hit a rock the wrong way, instantly losing control catapulting forward in an instant, wrist first. Ow! A staggering worst wipeout! I got up, and forged onwards. I went to the old Good Earth, with telescope in the car, determined to do my usual sidewalk astronomy. It had been since January. This was October. Pained wrist, I got back home to San Francisco to wake up in extreme pain. Emergency Room showing I broke my right **triquitum** — a wrist bone. I was in a cast for 3 weeks. It healed well!

I did return to the path a few times afterwards. I'm not going to be deferred by

one accident! Carefully going downhill, and very cautious!

HIKING TIL THE END

Otherwise returning to the favorite hikes until I couldn't anymore, even after not living in Marin for a few years. Ending in 2015. I've covered most of the trails in the area, give and take some that branch out from the main arteries.

My final experiences were in a power wheelchair, 2018-19, planning paratransit rides from San Rafael (where I lived then) to Mill Valley and Fairfax (separately) I couldn't go far, but a few yards into the redwoods. **Old Mill Park** in MV, and Deer Park at the entry was a good thing. Feeling the wheels crunching over the Redwood fronds.

CLOSING, BUT NOT COMPREHENSIVE.

I tried to include every trail recalled, however so many continue to emerge from the depths of my deep memory banks, that whenever I started aiming this memoir to finalit, more and more additions arise. I gotta stop somewhere.

Thriving on the feeling of being immersed in that world of deep natural Californian integrity. Hiking and biking in that environment of redwoods, their trunks covered in lichen and the soft surface as if touching the hide of a living bear. Fronds and cones are pleasantly crunchy under foot. Ferns, dank moisture abound amidst small trickling streams. Dusty stones, surprising vistas, boulders to clamber up, skittish lizards darting about, dramatic colors at sunset, vultures swooping above and below, deer, gnarled brush, rattlesnakes, rabbits, deer, the occasional bobcat and fox. I never encountered a mountain lion. Though I suspect they saw me, just lucky they were shy.

Hiking, I had slowed down experiences, of patiently taking it all in, of the natural environments details surrounding. Step-by-step, up and down, incrementally moving from levels in elevation. It takes perseverance .

Bicycling, I gained strength that is lasting my life. The feeling was almost like being transformed into a mythical being. Plowing up the steepest inclines, pushing pedals/gears/chain/wheels. I lived to be a hill monster! A real joy.

I can only access this from memory now, and in my dreams — sometimes fortunately vivid, other times dim and fading. I am fortunate to have had the pull to get myself out in the wilderness of Marin for all those years. It makes me who I am, still.

DEAN GUSTAFSON, DECEMBER 2025



for more sketchbook drawings from Marin,
<https://dean-gustafson.com/artwork-essays/Marin-drawings.pdf>