

Exploration/Offroad trip suggestions for GS Adventure Riders in the Yosemite/Sonora area.... (Map information provided at bottom)

My wife Gail and I spent a week in the area around Yosemite National Park, and we explored the surrounding area by dirt bike, jeep and on foot. Here are some suggestions for GS adventuring that you are not likely to find on the regular maps, or that may be on the maps but have discouragements like "Road Closed" signs to alarm you.

Our first full day of dirt riding was spent in the area around Cherry Lake, just northwest of Hetch Hetchy reservoir, on various graded dirt forestry service roads. The goal of our outing was Jawbone Falls, (courtesy of Bonnie Kellogg & Tim Cannard), a destination we last visited many years ago. Our route started at the cherry lake turn-off on 120, and continued up the paved road (#17) to the intersection of #17 and paved road #31.

The right hand turn across from #31 leads onto forestry service road # 1N96, which takes you to the top of a mountain with a big watertank and flume. This is a great spot for views of the distant Sierra and the foothills. It is an up-&-back road but not so long, so it is well worth the detour.

Continuing north on #17 we counted off the forestry service roads until we came to 1N06 on the left. This one is easy to spot because it is the only road with a locked gate! We asked the local forestry agent if there were another way onto the road, and he just told us to go around the gate, so we did (it was easy - plenty of room for a big bike). This road would take us up to Woods Meadow and a beautiful waterhole for cattle, with an old corral and ranch remnants. You need to watch the forestry service map carefully, as there are many opportunities to stray off the main road onto logging roads or roads leading out to Femmons Meadow. By paying attention to the landmarks like the corral and the old railroad grade it was pretty easy to stay on track and we emerged on #14, paved road, just about where we expected. This end also had a locked gate, but there was plenty of room on the south side to manoeuver the bike around it.

USFS 14 is a paved road which led us to the turn-off for Jawbone Falls, 2N22, a paved road which branches off to the right about two miles from the gate. From 2N22 you turn right on 2N78 which dead-ends at Jawbone Falls. Jawbone Falls has two big granite pools and a sheer granite face with just a few streams of water this late in the year. Earlier in the season the pools are full, and make for refreshing, iccold swimming for the hardier adventure bikers. Because of the remoteness, bathing suits are optional. Judging by the topography and the watermarks on the rock, April or May would be spectacular months to visit these falls. If you turn right on leaving the falls, you will hit USFS 31, which eventually leads back to #17 and Hwy 120. However, there are many small forestry roads

to sample, and if you have the map, you can return via Femmons Meadow and other small dirt roads. I don't advise this unless you have a USFS map and are comfortable with dualsport navigating, but it is a lot of fun to explore, and you can always retrace your trail to a known waypoint.

After lunch at Jawbone, we managed to get thoroughly lost on some logging roads, but after much backtracking and navigation by instinct we re-emerged on Forestry Service #31, which leads back to 17 and the road back to Cherry Lake.

You could make a big circular loop on these roads, starting at Hwy120 and emerging out of the forest on highway 108, via #31 east of Sonora at Long Barn. This is a plan for a future shop ride, and if anyone wants to try this sooner, I'll be happy to copy off the forestry service map section for you.

The second day of our vacation, we parked the bikes and piled clothes, lunch, a .22 rifle and binoculars into the Jeep, and headed off to the White Mountains and the famous ancient bristlecone pine groves at 10,000 feet. After crossing Tioga, (and studying Cathedral Peak for the next day,) we took Hwy 120 out past Mono Lake to Benton and Hwy 6. Hwy 6 goes south down the Chalfant Valley and intersects with Silver Canyon Road just east of Bishop. Silver Canyon Road is a challenging jeep road that climbs up the side of the White Mountains, (and I mean CLIMBS!). This road has several water crossings with steep entries and exits, and narrow, rocky gorges, topped with a very steep series of switchbacks up the side of the mountain. Even though the road signs read "Road Closed" we were skeptical as always, and found the road freshly graded and no trouble at all, other than the exposure out the side window. A high point of the climb was the herd of a dozen or so bighorn sheep than met us in a rocky defile and followed us for a few hundred feet before climbing up a vertical cliff and out of sight. 17 or 18 miles later the Silver Canyon road tops out on the ridge road that runs out to the summit of White Mountain. The last four miles are closed to traffic, hiking only, so after enjoying the views of the southern Sierras and the valley systems near Death Valley, we played rally driver and scampered back down to Westgard Pass and the Owens valley.

This Silver Canyon Road is very doable on a GS, the only caution would be that the road surface is very dusty and silty, which means that after a rain this road would be incredibly slippery and sloppy. I would only attempt it under reasonably dry conditions (two or three days after a rain, at least). Without a doubt this is one of the most spectacular routes I can imagine for a GS. Going up would be easier, but going down would be more thrilling, so I'll leave that up to you....

The third day, we were feeling a little lazy, so we did not arrive at Tuolumne Meadows until nearly noon. We intended to climb Cathedral Peak, not by the Cathedral Lakes trail, but by the no-longer-marked Budd Lake trail. We spent most of the first hours climbing by line-of-sight on the mountain, and didn't find the trail until we were about half-way to the top. We left it again shortly thereafter and diagonalled up the scree slope that leads to the saddle just below the main peak of Cathedral. A series of granite slabs make a great staircase climb up to this saddle. From the saddle it is an easy friction climb across to the knife-edge ridge that runs from the main peak to the needle on the west side. Gail was not totally convinced that this was a good idea, and I had to play all my cards to coax her up on the ridge. Then she surprised me by climbing up on a big granite block with several hundred feet of vertical exposure and posing for pictures. I tried for the summit, having done it in the past, but this time I could not seem to get on the right route, and turned back after a couple of big scares.... there's always another time. We descended on the Cathedral Lakes side, a steep friction climb down a series of granite shoulders, and only had to backtrack once (too much exposure, too steep a gully to climb down). We bottomed out on the Cathedral Lakes trail about 5:30 pm and were back at the Jeep by 7:00. This has nothing to do with motorcycling, but if you like to climb and adventure-hike, this is one of the neatest, rarely-done scrambles (at least from the Budd Lake side) in Yosemite, and one you'll never forget.

Thursday we explored more roads for future GS rides, but in the Jeep. The climb up Cathedral Peak took its toll on our 50-year old bodies and those comfortable heated seats were too attractive to pass up. All that follows is easily doable on a GS, and most of it I've ridden before.

We headed out to Sonora Pass, first to check out the Leavitt Lake area for possible camping sites, and then to explore the forest service road network on the north side of Highway 108 (Sonora Pass). As those of you who have done the two-pass ride with me know, the Leavitt Lake turn-off is not marked, but once you have seen it, it is easy to find again. It is a left turn, marked by a very large vertical rock, at a sharp right-hand hairpin turn (if you are going up the pass). I estimate it is about four miles past the Leavitt Meadows Pack Station. It is just a short distance east of Sardine Meadow/Falls, which is marked on most maps.

We consider this road relatively easy for GS's, with only one or two difficult sections and a couple of creek crossings. The hardest part is at the beginning, so if that looks OK to you, the rest won't be much of a problem. Usually we park our GS's by the lake after the 2.5 mile climb, and laze around a little, but this time we took the jeep up above the lake on the east side and explored the camping sites in the groves around the lake. There is lots of room to camp, and plenty of flat areas for tents, with windbreaks of trees for protection. Leavitt Lake itself is

the water supply, and if you bring a fishing pole it could even furnish breakfast! This road would be hard in the spring because of run-off and erosion, but should be pretty easy from late June until late in the fall.

After descending from Leavitt Lake, we continued up 108 towards the pass summit, watching carefully for Forestry Service Road 062, which heads north up the side of the mountains a little less than two miles before the summit. This road is well marked, and big signs caution hunters to watch out where they shoot, there are Marines training in the area.... If you look at the forestry service maps, you will see there are several short dead-end trails which lead off 062 up to the headwaters of Wolf Creek and Chango Lake, and these are for you to explore at your leisure. Some of them are easy, some look a little more challenging.... Let me know what you think! At the first "T" intersection, turn right and stay on 062 (left is 042), then bear right until the next "T" intersection, which is 059, and takes you back down to 108 through the Marine Mountain Warfare Center.

This well-graded road, 062, is perfect for GS's from start to finish. There is only one water ford with a very steep entrance and exit, and you definitely do not want to go too slowly on this or you might hang up. Just remember Forestry Service Road 062 "T" intersects with 059, which leads you south, down the hill to the Mountain Warfare Training Center. The guard came out with his M 16 to see what we were up to, but let us go through with no trouble.

Our last day of exploring was spent on the R 80 G/S and the Suzuki DRZ. I wanted to outline a nice route for Gs riders to try, so we stayed on reasonably well-marked roads with specific destinations. We started at camp (Cherry Lake Road) and headed east about 6 miles on Hwy 120, turning right on Harden Flat Road. (The sign says Harden Flat and Berkeley Camp.) This road passes a number of camps, and after the Berkeley Camp, watch for Forestry Service Road # 1S12 on the right. This well-graded dirt road winds through old lumbered areas above Big Creek Basin and eventually arrives at Five Corners (name describes it...). Here you can backtrack on 2S01 to the summit of Pilot Peak, or go straight across and continue on 1S12 in the direction of Eagle Peak and Little Nellie Falls. 1S12 follows the contours of the hillsides, through forest-fire cleared areas grown up with berry bushes (lots of bear scat) and a couple of tricky intersections... watch for 2S91, branching off to the right, for a short ride up and back to the top of Eagle Peak and a look right up the Yosemite Valley past El Cap and Half Dome! After the Eagle Peak turn-off, you continue about a mile on 1S12 and watch for a sharp downhill turn to the left. It is not marked, but it is brown clay dirt, quite different from the gravel of the main road. This short downhill leads to Little Nellie Falls, your shady glen for lunch. After a break to enjoy the falls, perhaps take a dip in the bathtub-sized basin at the foot of the falls, you are ready to take a little more challenging ride out. Follow the road directly across

the creek and head up the other side. This is Forestry Service Road 2S84, but it may not be marked. Watch out for washouts, and pick your path to stay out of the big bike-eating ruts! Partway up is a gate, which is unlocked, but closed by a rock. Be sure to shut this after you, to keep the cows where they are supposed to be. At the next intersection turn right on Old Coulterville Road (2S84), and follow this road down into Foresta, a collection of summer houses just inside the Park. Continue on this road, past the signs that say Road Closed/Bridge Out, and go another mile or so south to Foresta Falls. You can't miss it, it is just above an old concrete bridge, and is quite a beautiful spot. This is the recommended turn-around spot. If you continue down this road, you will have to go around a locked gate, and you will find the road gets progressively more and more difficult. I did not go all the way to the bottom, so there is no assurance that you can get out in El Portal as the map shows... it might be impassible and you might have to ride all the way back up. Whoever completes this section, please let me know! Otherwise the ride to the Foresta Falls is worthwhile in itself, and when you return to Foresta you can take the paved road back up to the main Yosemite Highway 140 that leads down into the Park or back to 120.

If you do not want to backtrack on pavement, you can ride back to Five Corners and take Forestry Service Road 20 back to Anderson Flat and Kinsley, then take 2S05 back to Briceburg and Hwy 140. This route even turns up on some AAA maps, and is easy enough for even a street bike. The road ends with a spectacular switchback descent into the Merced River valley, with great views in all directions. Briceburg is about 8 miles north of Mariposa, where you can get gas, food and lodging, and rest up for the ride home.

The maps I recommend for these routes are as follows:

National Forest Maps:

Stanislaus - covers Little Nellie Falls, Jawbone Falls and Leavitt Meadows & Sonora Pass, also Ebbetts Pass and Highland Lakes.

Toiyabe - covers Leavitt Meadows/Sonora Pass in much more detail, and the area around Lake Tahoe, including Ebbetts, Carson and Monitor Passes.

Inyo - covers the White Mountains and Bristlecone Pine area. Note Wyman Creek and Silver Canyon as the two GS-suitable routes.

USGS Quadrangles:

El Portal covers Little Nellie Falls and area west of Yosemite National Park.

Cherry Lake North and Cherry Lake South cover the area around Jawbone Falls

Sonora Pass and Pickel Meadow covers the area around Leavitt Lake and 062/059.

You can get these maps at R.E.I. or you can get them at any USFS office, where they are a little less expensive.