

Driving Tours

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Delta folks refer to the roads and highways here as “asphalt sloughs,” such is our water orientation.

You can cruise the asphalt sloughs in your Corvette, your Winnebago, your Harley-Davidson, or even on board your Schwinn and gain a wonderful feel for the place. Bicyclists particularly like the flat lands of the California Delta and almost never are pumping uphill.

All the resorts except (Lost Isle and Franks Tract) are accessible by car or bicycle. Because the Delta area is mostly comprised of flat land, some parts are ideal for bicycling. Here we highlight several drive tours that are particularly enticing.

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Rio Vista-Ryde Loop

This is the coolest wheeled trip in the Delta, which can be accomplished in an easy couple of hours, but could ideally occupy most of your day if you stop to tarry a bit. (Portions of it also are very popular with folks on bicycles.) Heading west on Hwy 12 over the Rio Vista Bridge, take the first right turn after crossing the bridge and follow the signs to the Ryer Island Ferry. This free-running, *Real McCoy* diesel-powered ferry will take you over Cache Slough to Ryer Island. The ride is free. You might see a freighter either heading to or returning from the Port of Sacramento.



Turn right after exiting the ferry and follow the winding levee road. It will lead you to the lower end of Ryer Island. It then makes an easy U-turn to take you up the waters of historic Steamboat Slough, where in the 1850s noted paddlewheel steamboats such as the *Yosemite* and the *New World* enjoyed the slough for the shortcut it provided over the longer route on the Sacramento, then referred to as “the old river.”

You’ll pass Snug Harbor on your right, a comfortable Marina and RV park, situated on a tree-shaded island accessed by a private bridge. It has a small store and snack bar, and overnight cabins called “Snuggle Inns”. If you continue along the levee road, you’ll come upon the *J-Mack*, a cable-guided ferry that will give you a free ride across Steamboat Slough. (RVs can safely cross on these ferries without difficulty.)

After exiting the ferry on the opposite shore, you can turn right and proceed for a mile or so to the county-operated Hogback Park, a beautiful tree-shaded park with launching and areas ideal for picnicking. Hog’s Back, as it was called in the old days, was a nefarious sandbar that in its time snagged many a steamboat. The early steamboats used to try to plan their schedules so they would pass Hog’s Back at high tide.

Backtrack now, passing the ferry landing heading upstream on Steamboat. You’ll pass the 58-room Grand Island Mansion, straight out of a movie about the antebellum south. These days, it is the site for many weddings. You can enjoy Sunday brunch there as well. It also has a boat dock.

Continuing up the slough, you will meet the Sacramento River at the mouth of the slough, crossing the slough over an aged double-leaf bascule-type drawbridge, and then proceed upriver, now on the west bank. Next, you will take a right turn over the Paintersville Bridge, named after Levi Painter, who it is said kept his riches in postholes underneath the fence posts. On the far side of the bridge, if you turn left and take a little aside, you'll find sleepy Courtland, the pear capital of the universe (or so Courtland folks like to say). They stage the Courtland Pear Fair here every year the last Sunday in July.

If you instead turned right after crossing the bridge, you would meander along the river on Hwy 160, bound for the Chinese hamlet of Locke. The town was built by the Chinese in 1915 when their Chinatown in neighboring Walnut Grove burned. There are art galleries in Locke, and one of the best known saloon-restaurants in the Delta, Al-The-Wop's. Here, you'll find a jar of peanut butter and a jar of marmalade on every table. Here too is the Dai Loy museum, a resurrected Chinese gambling hall.

Another mile down the "asphalt slough" brings you to Walnut Grove. There is a collection of interesting restaurants here, and places to shop. Cross the green bascule bridge to the other side of the river, and take a left. You are bound for the two-dog town of Ryde. You can't miss it. There's a big water tower by the 32-room Ryde Hotel, a good place to dine, or stay for a day or a week, to maybe play on its smallish 9-hole golf course.

Continue downriver, and at the next golden-colored bascule bridge, turn left onto the bridge, and once again cross the river. Then turn right to Isleton, home of the annual 3-day Isleton Crawdad Festival on Father's Day weekend in June. Isleton has an active Chinatown, with many renovated

shops. The Hotel Del Rio is the favored watering hole in Isleton. Continue down river some more, passing Vieira's Resort, established long ago by immigrants from the Azores and a fun resort to visit (they have rental cabins as well as an RV park). Continue down stream, until you see the towering Rio Vista Bridge. You have come full circle, crossing five drawbridges and two ferries in the process. Wasn't that a lotta fun?

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Where The Windsurfers Fly

It's just a short easy drive, but when the wind is blowing, the drive is like entering into another world. From the Rio Vista Bridge and Hwy 12, head toward Antioch on Hwy 160. You are on the east bank of the river. You will pass Brannan Island State park, and on the right just across from the park Windy Beach, a windsurfer's hangout.



You will cross over the lift bridge on Threemile Slough. A little aside to the left after crossing the bridge will take you to Outrigger Marina, home of the giant sturgeon (mounted on wall at the marina). Rest a spell and have a hamburger and a beverage on the Super Deck. Back on Hwy 160, continue south. Out on the river, you will see more windsurfers (aka boardsailors). When the roadway bears left, just ease right following the

river, in what is almost a straight. You have entered into “boardhead” territory.

Out on the water, they are everywhere, like flying fish. They have favorite launching sites, with names like “the powerlines”, like “refrigerator beach” etc. These are amiable places, where they can find a parking spot for the van or pickup and a beach friendly enough for launching. In an earlier time, they could have been flower children. No fat on these people. They are fit.

You continue along the road. More of the same. Toward the end there is a county park, which includes a launching ramp. Ease left a bit instead of going to the park and you find Sherman Lake Marina. Stop for a snack. Although you feel like you are on an alien planet, you find that here the spoken language is English. Of sorts. No loop here. You have to run back over the same territory to get to Hwy 160. Take a right onto the highway.

If you are still adventurous, you can drive by the vegetable stand with all the animals, then take a left turn and eventually end up at Eddo’s Boat Harbor. There hasn’t been anyone name Eddo here for years. This is the San Joaquin River now. If it is in the fall of the year, the stripers will be running and there will be anglers around. The resort has launching and a comfortable RV park. Back on Hwy 160, you are almost to the Antioch Bridge, which looks a lot like a giant dinosaur ambling across the flatlands, I think. This is a toll bridge. You are in the free direction. Off to the right, maybe you can catch a glimpse of the ferryboat *Sausalito*, built in 1885. For over 50 years, it has been the clubhouse for the Sportsmen Yacht Club. It does not float anymore. Well, we cannot say that for sure.

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To The Ghost Town Of Collinsville

Rio Vista is a nice place from which to start this cruise. The town is pretty, with the Montezuma Hills as a backdrop. Part of the movie *Howard The Duck* was filmed in Rio Vista. The movie flopped, but you can't blame Rio Vista for that. Down by the water, you can see a monument to Humphrey The Wayward Whale. And another commemorating Rio Vista as a stop for the paddlewheelers that carried the Pony Express mail on its last leg from Sacramento to San Francisco. Etched in the monument is a likeness of the paddlewheeler *New World*, which was brought from New York around the Horn by Captain Ned Wakeman. The Rio Vista Museum provides you with a nice look at the past. The Point is a good restaurant on the downstream edge of town. Out on Hwy 12, then proceed west, being sure to abide by the speed limits.

You are driving through rolling hills. This is sheep country, although plenty of natural gas has been found here also. Watch carefully for the road sign and turn left on Collinsville Road. You are heading for Birds Landing, which is the smallest town in the U.S.A. with its own post office. Clint Eastwood filmed part of the movie *Bird* (about saxophonist Charlie Parker) here. Blink and you will miss Birds Landing. There's a little saloon here, comfortable enough for the entire family to take on refreshment.

Turn left and in no time at all you will pass the cemetery up on the hill and arrive at Collinsville. Maybe there's a half-dozen homes there still occupied. Squint your eyes down a bit and imagine this town with maybe

600 people here, most all of them commercial fishermen; with 598 of them speaking Italian, everyone except Pat Simpson and his father. Think of it with a boardwalk serving as the main street and imagine the sounds of Model T Fords rumbling over the boardwalks. By the 1950s, commercial fishing in the Delta was pretty much over. The town withered and died. Well, a little marina named Collinsville Resort lived on a bit longer. The gang who hung out there called themselves the Collinsville River Rats. The place closed, maybe a dozen years ago.

On the way back out of town, hang a left and it will lead you to a nice newish little park down by Montezuma Slough (tiny guest dock). You will see the giant gates across the slough that work to keep fresh water in the nearby marshlands. There is a lock so boats can lock through when the gates are closed. Tarry a spell at the park. Backtrack to Hwy 12, and if you are in the mood to, turn left (west) and proceed a few miles to the Rio Vista Junction Railroad Museum, run by volunteers. They have some rolling stock there. You can take a ride on a trolley, and on special occasions, long railroad excursions.

That's the end of this cruise, although you could continue west on Hwy 12 to Suisun City, and maybe stop by the city's excellent new marina to sip a beverage or have a bite to eat at sidewalk tables in a restaurant, and soak up the scenery of the harbor.

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The Delta Loop

This is just a 10-mile run, but you could enter it and perhaps not get to the other end for days, even weeks. That has happened. Honest. We're on Hwy 12 again, about 10 miles west of I-5. You take a right immediately after crossing the Mokelumne River swing bridge. This will take you past B & W Resort (long ago, there was a cannery here) and you will pass under Hwy 12.

There are over 20 waterside resorts along this stretch of levee road, Brannan Island Road by name. They offer most anything you might require, from overnight accommodations to pizza, from overnight guest docking for you and your boat to full-hookup RV sites for your land yacht. You can dine sumptuously at a floating bistro (Moore's Riverboat), dine casually at The Lighthouse Restaurant, swim in the pool or play tennis on the tennis courts of your campground (Delta Bay Marina), cook up some chow at your housekeeping cabin (B & W Resort — say, was that Kevin Costner I just saw fueling his skiboat), boogie on the dance floors of one of the places with weekend music, or just sit on the river bank and fish for stripers or catfish and watch the Chris-Crafts go by.

This is Andrus Island you are on. The crops are a-growing, and you can see farmers tilling the fields. The sunsets are beautiful here, and if the timing is right, they can lend a warm glow to a passing rust-bucket freighter, heading upstream to the Port of Stockton. Korth's Pirates Lair was probably the first resort in the Delta, and it still is run by third-generation family (4th generation at ready too). Stop by for breakfast at the marina cafe and enjoy all the flowers around this beautifully landscaped marina. Something always is in bloom here.

The Delta Loop Association plans a gala celebration each spring with live music and other activities at many of the resorts. The celebration takes

place the first weekend of May.

Heading home, take a right on Jackson Slough Rd., which takes you back to Hwy 12. Left (west) on Hwy 12 takes you to Rio Vista, right takes you to I-5, past bustling Tower Park Marina, in what once was the ghost town of Terminous. You can't miss the place, for the old water tower there reminds you of its heyday as a produce shipping center. Take a left just past Tower Park onto Glasscock Road and in about a mile you will be at Westgate Landing, a county park.

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South Delta Hinterlands

The biggest of the reclaimed Delta islands is 32,500-acre Roberts Island. Nowhere in the entire Delta can you get the essence of the isolation that the early settlers of these reclaimed islands must have felt than by driving on Roberts Island south of Hwy 4, to the west of the San Joaquin River. Those pioneers were really isolated. And by driving here, you can begin to understand why they rejoiced and had such a big party when the Roberts Island Drawbridge was completed in 1898, providing a means for them to take the horse and buggy to town when the buggies weren't mired deep in mud from the winter rains. You'll understand too why the farm ladies in the Holt region enjoyed catching the train into Stockton from the Holt Station to do their weekly shopping. (It is said that ladies-of-the-evening also came out on these trains to brighten the lives of the farm workers around Holt.) You'll understand too why it was such a big deal when the Borden – Delta road was built in 1917 (much of it is on the

present Hwy 4 route) to make it possible to actually drive across the Delta from east to west (and, through Stockton and on to Yosemite) weather permitting. Oh, those were handsome new drawbridges installed across Old River and Middle River, and they still look handsome today, although the Middle River structure no longer operates as a drawbridge.

You can cruise Hwy 4, headed west out of Stockton. For a little aside loop cruise, take a right (north) on Inland Drive, and follow the roadway through a couple of name changes and a couple of turns. If it is spring time, you are apt to see cropduster airplanes landing and taking off from a little roadside landing field. If it is winter, you will see hawks, sitting on top of the utility poles, keeping an eye out for their next meal. If it is March or April, you surely will see asparagus cutters, out in the fields cutting 'gras. It is back breaking work.

Keep on the road and you will come to the unique sliding-span drawbridge across Turner Cut (you won't be crossing it). Ahead lies Tiki Lagun Marina. Good boat slips, nice campground. Shoulder to shoulder with it, is Turner Cut Resort, comfortable berths, fun restaurant, tree-shaded campground. Continue on the road and off to your left is 52-acre Lost Isle, home of the Bikini Contests and Wet T-Shirt Contests (you need a boat to get there). Now you are driving alongside the Stockton Deepwater Channel. Maybe you will see a freighter. Keep going along the Channel and you will snake your way into Windmill Cove Marina. Have a hamburger and enjoy it at a table on the elevated deck. You can see everything from there, even north Stockton in the distance. The Cove has a nice beachside campground. One year, a big crew of television's *A-Team* came to Windmill Cove. They transformed it into a cantina on the Amazon River. They were there for about two weeks filming a special 2-hour segment of the show.

Backtrack a mile, then take a left on Holt Road, which ultimately will take you under a narrow railroad underpass (a part of the old Borden – Delta Hwy route). At the stop sign, if you go right, you arrive at Whiskey Slough Harbor, a comfortable marina with a launching ramp. Take a left at the stop and if you blink, you will miss what is left of the town of Holt (it has a post office, in a mobilehome) and a saloon (oh, I could tell you stories about hours spent in that saloon). The intersection back at that stop sign is a little confusing, but one way or another you will end up back at Hwy 4, perhaps a couple miles west of where you turned onto Inland Drive.

Go left (east) on Hwy 4, take a right on Inland Drive and enter the hinterlands of the South Delta. You'll pass the abode of one farmer who has a pair of completely renovated and detailed Harvester tractors set up high on posts flanking the driveway to his home. At Kingston Road, a dead-end, you'll note the old one-room vintage-1904 Kingston Schoolhouse, that now serves as a residence. There is a lot of territory out here on Roberts Island, but no resorts. Just consult a map (AAA's road map is a good one) and take roads that look interesting to you. Imagine the early days of levee building when this island was being reclaimed and the huge work forces required. To the east is the San Joaquin River, to the south Middle River and then Old River, all three at one time busy with riverboat traffic. Middle River curls around and passes Hwy 4 next to Union Point Resort, where it's fun to dine on the outside deck in the summer.

There is a site on the San Joaquin River where 15 or 20 years ago the rickety Brandt Bridge crossed the river. Nearby is the Matthews Road fixed bridge that replaced it. In a dramatic scene in the movie *Cool Hand Luke*, Paul Newman was trying to escape prison over that old bridge. He holed up in a building on the west side of the river, a building that still stands,

barely. Your ramblings might take you near the old Holly Sugar plant, where sugar beets once were barged in by boat, taken up the dead-end Sugar Cut to a “beet dump.” Maybe you’ll pass in the area of the Grantline Canal, where just west of Tracy Blvd. Tracy Oasis Marina holds court there, and has a comfortable restaurant and saloon where locals gather. Maybe you’ll end up at the San Joaquin River where Interstate 5 crosses, at a point where there are five bridges over the river in the space of no more than a quarter-mile. Stop in for a respite and beverage at Mossdale Marina, home of the annual Mossdale Crawdad Races. Across the river, pause to examine a historical monument. Hey, when the railroad bridge here was completed in 1869, trains crossed the river and the Transcontinental Railroad was considered complete, although no golden spikes were pounded here. You could take a couple hours or four hours to prowl this territory, and it would be time well spent. You would have gained insight.

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The River Road

You can take I-5 from Stockton to Sacramento and it takes no more than 40 minutes to get there. However, it’s a lot more fun taking the more engaging route along the river. Cut over by taking the Thornton-Walnut Grove Road exit west off I-5, passing over the Mokelumne’s South Fork at Wimpy’s Marina, then over the North Fork at Giusti’s. Pick up the river at Walnut Grove, then drive along its east side, through Locke and then Courtland. There are some beautiful old restored homes along the river. Pass through the sleepy town of Hood, then Cliff’s Marina, where for

years the owner made a living trapping crawdads, and you can still buy them there.

Next up is the Freeport Bridge. Pass the bridge and go into Freeport to look around. It has a fine marina (Freeport Marina) bait shops, saloons and a nice restaurant. There's a nice golf course on the downstream side of town.

Backtrack to the bridge and cross over it. Turn right after crossing the bridge. If it is in late April or May, you are apt to see 100 or more anglers fishing for American Shad. The river bank is heavy with shade trees. You will pass by several marinas, and then the Sacramento Yacht Club. You might see an excursion train on the railroad tracks that run along a portion of the river. But the most interesting aspect of this part of the cruise is the mailboxes along the route. They are novel, made from things around the barnyard — plowshares, grindstone wheels, etc. You'll eventually have to leave the river, taking a left, and then a right onto Jefferson Blvd. You will cross over the Sacramento Lock (officially the William B. Stone Lock) which is in retirement. Follow the Boulevard, take a right onto Capitol Road and you will pass over the beautiful Tower Bridge, opened in 1935. Directly across the river is Old Sacramento, where it all began, in what John Augustus Sutter referred to as "The Embarcadero." Old Sac' is a restored section of town, with plenty to see.

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