

Destinations | Great Places to Go!

The Pacific Crest Trail To Drakesbad Inn

By Jeff Crawford & Skip Oberdorf



Description

This is a 10-mile round trip ride along the Pacific Crest Trail, from Little Willow Lake to the historic Drakesbad Inn in Lassen Volcanic National Park. It's a 5-star destination ride that's suitable for intermediate and advanced riders with good navigational skills.

Drakesbad Inn and Guest Ranch

Drakesbad Inn and Guest Ranch (www.drakesbad.com) is a famous historic facility located within Lassen Volcanic National Park. There is a café, and lunch is served until 1:00 pm. Call Drakesbad in advance at 866.999.0914 to let them know you'll be coming with horses and also to make lunch reservations. If you buy lunch, they might also let you take a relaxing swim in their hot springs swimming pool.

At the inn, there is a long, shaded hitching rail for the horses, along with access to fresh water. You can purchase hay, if needed.

Riding

A majority of the ten-mile-long trail from Little Willow Lake to Drakesbad is easy-going and has nice, forest-floor footing. But some sections are rocky, so we recommend that your horse wears shoes or boots. Also, some areas have moderate climbs, so a breast collar is advised. There are several wooden

bridges to cross over, and the trail is shared with hikers, but no bicycles or motorbikes are allowed.

There are a couple of short side points of interest. There is Boiling Springs Lake, which is about 30 yards off the trail and is well-marked with a sign. Terminal Geyser is about a half-mile off the trail, and we like to visit it on the ride back to the parking lot.

We recommend that you take along a GPS and Lassen National Forest Service Map. Also, a permit is required to ride horses in the National Park, and one can be obtained by mail at no cost by calling the Mineral Ranger Station at 916.595.4444—tell the ranger you'll be staging at the Little Willow Lake Trail Head.

Parking/staging area

The parking area near Willow Lake is just a large, flat area off to the side of the dirt road, which is the only place with enough room to park four or five rigs. See directions below.

Why we like it

We really enjoy this ride because of the cool, high-mountain temperature and the stunning scenery. Also, Drakesbad feels like a step back in time, with its cozy cabins, historic lodge, and the wooden stock corrals. The side points of interest add to the adventure and give you

something else to look forward to on the ride.

Lodging

Because this is an all-day ride, we recommend spending the night close by. One great option is staying at the St. Bernard Lodge (www.stbernardlodge.com), which is ten miles west of Chester, CA on Highway 36. This comfortable, old-fashioned lodge has corrals for horses, parking for horse trailers, reasonable room rates, and wonderful food!

Driving directions

In Chester, turn west onto Feather River Road, which becomes Chester Warner Valley Road. Turn left at the junction to Section Old Red Bluff Road, which heads toward Domingo Springs Campground. Six-tenths of a mile past Domingo Springs, turn right. Stay on this road for seven-tenths of a mile. Take the second right towards Little Willow Lake. Drive approximately 3.6 miles to arrive at the staging/parking area. The GPS coordinates for this parking area are N40 23.917, W121 23.629.

Riding directions

From the parking area, ride the road straight ahead in a northerly direction approximately 250 yards. At the T-intersection, turn right. Continue approximately nine-tenths of a mile to the Little Willow Lake trail head. This is the end of the road, and there is only enough parking for a few small cars here.

From the parking area, take the trail straight ahead for approximately a quarter of a mile to Little Willow Lake. From here, the trail heads north, following the shoreline. At the north end of the lake you'll come to a trail junction with the Pacific Crest Trail. Do not take trail to the right; stay straight, heading north. This trail will take you all to Drakesbad Inn. H_1



About the authors

Jeff teaches riding and starts colts through Jeff Crawford Horsemanship (www.jeffcrawfordhorsemanship.com.) Skip "Scout Skip" spends lots of time riding in the mountains and loves it.