

# Chilling out in Chileno Valley

Explore the quiet country roads near Petaluma by car or bike

By Melanie Haiken

Photograph by George Olson

**Y**ou may never have heard of the Chileno Valley, but you've dreamed of it: a peaceful corner of Marin where green hills are still unbroken by the silhouettes of oversized trophy homes and where cows still outnumber people. It makes a lovely country drive—but to really savor every bend in the road, there's nothing like the intimacy of a bicycle. I take a leisurely approach by basing myself at the **Chileno Valley Ranch Bed & Breakfast**.

Now both a working cattle operation and a cozy B&B, the ranch has been painstakingly restored by owners Sally and Mike Gale, after Sally inherited it as a toppling ruin 16 years ago. "The property has been in my family since 1856," says Sally. "It seemed important to bring it back to what it once



This bounteous garden is part of Chileno Valley Ranch Bed & Breakfast.



was." The Gales have planted an apple orchard and restored the creek bed that runs through the valley, which had been destroyed by overgrazing and erosion. The songbirds who have returned to the restored habitat wake guests with their early-morning calls.

When I arrive in the afternoon, I like to pedal 9 miles west on Chileno Valley Road to Tomales, where a cold beer awaits at the **William Tell House Restaurant**, a colorful local hangout.

In the morning, I'm ready for a relaxing, day-long 22-mile ride, so I pack a picnic from supplies I brought along and pedal east on Chileno Valley Road. First stop is **Laguna Lake**, where wild swans nest in the reeds. I stop for a tour of the **North Coast Native Nursery**, which grows more than 200 native plant species, and then a tasting at the **Corda Winery**.

After all the stops, it's nearing lunchtime. I picnic just up the road in **Helen Putnam Regional Park**. (If you want a more substantial meal—or to stretch out the ride—check out options such as **Volpi's Italian Ristorante & Bar** in downtown Petaluma, just 2 miles northeast via Western Avenue.) Later, I loop back to the ranch on Spring Hill Road.

Wherever I bike, I'm always safely back by dusk so I can sit on the farmhouse's wide front porch and watch owls fly out of the barn. ♦

## Chileno Valley highlights

**Corda Winery.** By appointment only. 833 Chileno Valley Rd., Petaluma; (707) 781-9310.

**Helen Putnam Regional Park.** Sunrise–sunset; \$3 per vehicle. 411 Chileno Valley Rd., Petaluma; (707) 565-2041.

**North Coast Native Nursery.** 8–4 Mon–Fri. 2710 Chileno Valley Rd., Petaluma; [www.northcoastnativenursery.com](http://www.northcoastnativenursery.com) or (707) 769-1213.

### Lodging and dining

**Chileno Valley Ranch Bed & Breakfast.** Five rooms start at \$140; two-night minimum. 5105 Chileno Valley Rd., Petaluma; [www.chilenobnb.com](http://www.chilenobnb.com), (877) 280-6664, or (707) 765-6664.

**Volpi's Italian Ristorante & Bar.** One of many good options in Petaluma. Dinner Wed–Sun, lunch Wed–Fri. 124 Washington St.; (707) 765-0695.

**William Tell House Restaurant.** Dinner Wed–Sun. 26955 State 1, Tomales; (707) 878-2403.