

## Bear Creek – 6 mile route (round trip)

A groundbreaking bikeway utilizing a primary waterway was built with much fanfare in the early 1970's. The staff at Merced Parks and Recreation moved heaven and earth and a few federal agencies to get this 5-mile path built on the banks of Bear Creek.

The early '70s was a time of polyester and sideburns but it also saw a bicycling craze hit the US. The only problem with Merced's new bike path was that the younger generation got hooked on ten-speeds, not 3-speeds, spurned the bike path as too structured, and took to the open roads. They left Bear Creek bike path to joggers and the elderly, and those still clinging to their cherished 3 speeds.

Bicycle commuting, one of the proposed outcomes of bike path construction, never caught on. Downtown bike racks rusted from lack of use and slowly disappeared.

Still, Bear Creek bike path survived and offers a magnificent 5-mile route from the Applegate Park Zoo to McKee Avenue and back. It is the only bike-pedestrian route in Merced County that has rolling hills and curves. Bear Creek bike path meanders and offers several places to stop and enjoy the creek and surrounding. Applegate Park, of course, is a prime recreation spot.

Just east of M Street the path dips down to creek level and a strip park offers a chance to read a book, sun, and watch and talk with other commuters. On rare occasions during heavy rains, Bear Creek floods its banks here and one can witness the power of water.

At the intersection of Parsons Avenue and South Bear Creek Drive, the path features a small oasis of trees and drinking fountain for another relaxation point.

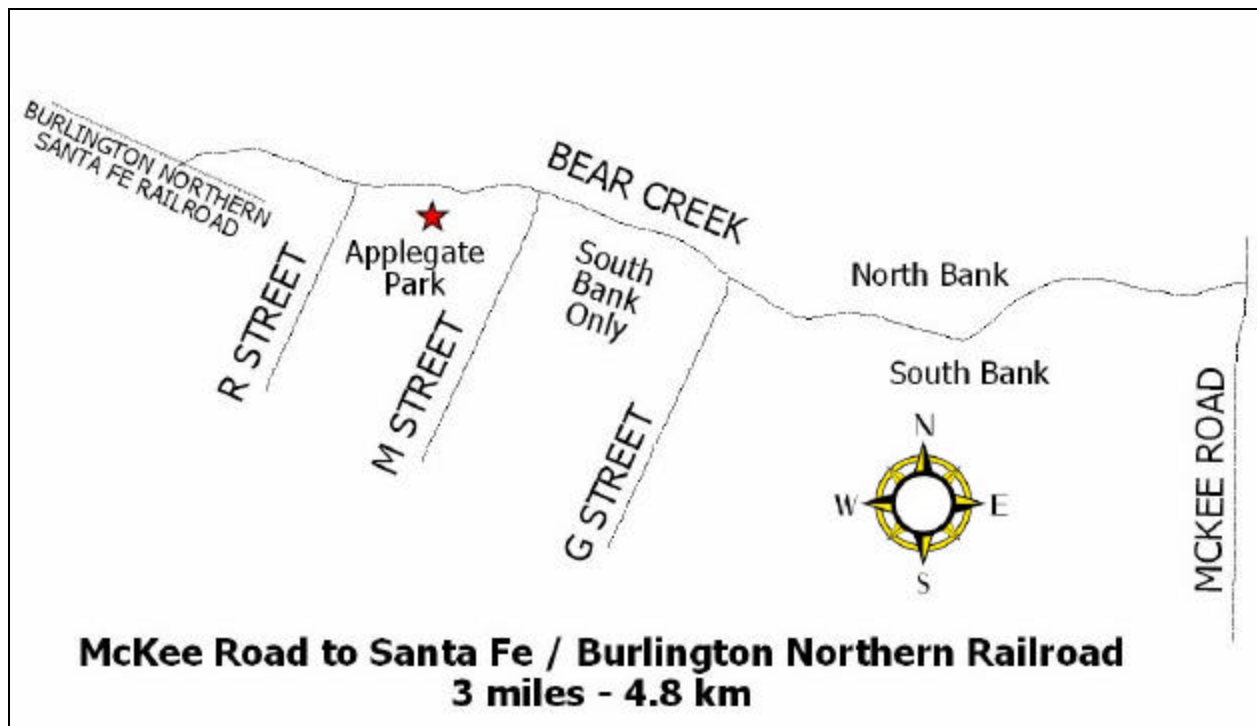
The path on the north side of the creek has fewer formal stopping places, but features better hills. The undulations are a far cry from the rest of the Merced Bike paths. On both sides of the creek, walkers, joggers, dog owners and dogs are fond of walking so some caution is warranted. High speeds may be only occasionally justified.

by Alan Beymer



Photo by Alan Beymer

**"LOOK MOM, NO EXHAUST FUMES"** – Cyclist cruises under the shade of redwood grove at South Bear Creek bike path near Parsons Avenue.



High Banks along a pleasant creek.  
Applegate Park.  
Slight ascents and descents under bridges.  
Park area with lawn just west of G Street.