

## South Bear Creek (12.3 miles, 19.8 km)

Many years ago the bridge over Bear Creek at McKee Road was a major observation post for viewing roiling floodwaters that inundated parts of the city. The banks here are steep and rise nearly twenty feet above the creek bed. At one time that waters almost touched the underside of the bridge roadway, and gazing down-stream, one could imagine being by a wide year-round river back East.

This location continues to be a favorite with locals as a beginning point for walking or jogging along the Bear Creek path and for just looking at the usually tranquil waters of the creek. We will head upstream on our fide along South Bear Creek Drive until we run out of road.

The bike lane disappears after .4 miles (.64 km), but there is little traffic on this road compared to other parallel approaches to Merced (e.g. Olive Avenue). The suburban houses disappear at about the same point and you find yourself very quickly in the country with orchards and fields all around.

The whole route is utterly flat and affords a pace, which is as leisurely as you choose to make it. In 3.7 miles (6 km) you will reach Arboleda Road where you want to be sure to come to a complete stop as cross traffic is often traveling very fast.

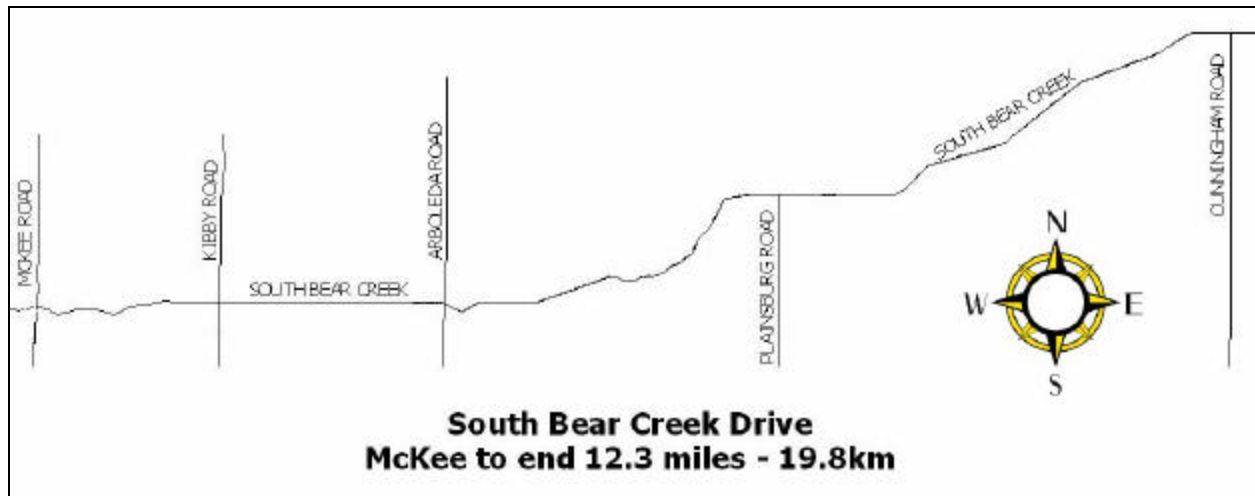
Beyond Arboleda, the road meanders through fields on the right and the creek on the left. At the 7.25-mile (11.7 km) distance you should be at Plainsburg Road. There is an orchard here that marks the beginning of a somewhat rougher road surface. The road gets narrower and rougher towards the end with patches, potholes and gravel in places. Don't despair. You won't want to go too fast through this charming countryside anyway. There are magnificent vistas of the Sierra Nevada range from here with row after row of successively more distant hills and mountains arranged like theater backdrops, one higher than the previous. They will change in color from green to gold and yellow, then blue, purple and, if you hit it at the right time of year (winter or spring), the pristine white of the high country under a mantle of snow which turns rose-colored during sunset.

There is a site of a Native American village in a pastoral looking declivity to the left along a wide bend of the creek. There are also several photogenic red barns along the way. Over all is the big sky of this bountiful valley. These are the proverbial wide-open spaces.

You will pass Cunningham Road at 11.78 miles (19 km) and at 12.3 miles (19.8 km) the paved public road will end in a little turn-around. Stop here

and be silent. Let the breeze blow around you and meditate for a while on the beauty of this world.

By Edward Blanchard



Flat all the way with variable surface.  
Rural farmland with riparian habitat.  
Very little shade.