

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARY KOZ MRAZ

# Observatories and Sanctuaries

*California's Angeles Crest Highway and beyond.*

# FAVORITERIDE



Mount Wilson Observatory boasts a 60-inch telescope, among the largest available for public viewing.



Author Gary is a rebel *with a cause*: discovering great riding roads, observatories and sanctuaries.

## Snaking through the San Gabriel Mountains, California's 66-mile Angeles Crest Highway, part of State Route 2, provides exceptional riding and spectacular views.

Part of the road was closed for repairs for five years before it was reopened briefly in May 2009, then the road was closed again due to fires. It finally opened again in June of 2011, inspiring epic rides on SR 2 from Griffith Park to Wrightwood, Big Bear and beyond, connecting observatories and sanctuaries along the way. Riding first a Big Dog Wolf and then a Triumph Bonneville, I traced hundreds of miles of its fabulous bends, twists and turns.

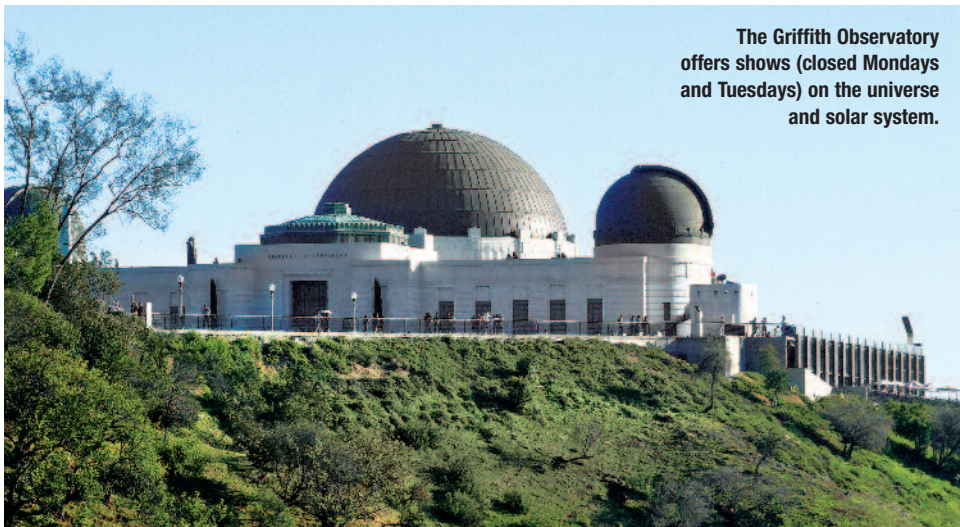
### Big Sky, Big Mountains, Big Dog

One the most iconic images of Los Angeles, Griffith Park Observatory opened to the public in 1933. The classic James Dean fight scene in *Rebel Without a Cause* was filmed here. The observatory (closed on Mondays and most Tuesdays) is a great place to start such a trek.

I left Griffith Park and took the Glendale Freeway/SR2 north to La Cañada-Flintridge where it connects to Interstate 210, and then took the Angeles

Crest Highway, beginning its ascent into the San Gabriel Mountains by rising thousands of feet in just a few miles. Twenty-five miles up I made the turnoff to the Mount Wilson Observatory. This is a well-marked, two-lane mountain road, but there is no margin for error here—make one small mistake and you will have a long time to think about it. Mount Wilson Road is often littered with anything from small rocks and gravel to football-sized chunks, too. On this ride, devastation from the recent fires was visible on the adjacent mountains.

Founded in December 1904 by George Ellery Hale, Mount Wilson Observatory would quickly rise to dominate astronomy worldwide. It was successively home to the world's two largest telescopes, as well as the



The Griffith Observatory offers shows (closed Mondays and Tuesdays) on the universe and solar system.



most powerful facilities in existence for studying the sun. It was here that Edwin Hubble discovered “redshift” proof that the universe was expanding, and his legacy continues in the angel’s views of the heavens from the Hubble space telescope. The public can actually view the universe through Mount Wilson’s historic 60-inch telescope, the largest in the world made available to the public. There is also a small Astronomical Museum on the observatory grounds. The Cosmic Café sandwich shop, located in the Pavilion above the main parking lot, serves sandwiches and other treats (weekends only) from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Back on Angeles Crest I quickly arrived at the recently renovated Newcomb’s Ranch Restaurant & Bar (closed for the season at this writing). It was built in 1939, and over the decades it has served as a hotel, general store and gas station; today it’s a restaurant and rider’s hangout on weekends. It’s the only stop until Wrightwood but gas is not available.

Angeles Crest is mountain motorcycling at its best. Long, sweeping curves, generous lanes and five years of roadwork and civic funds have paid off big-time for motorcycle riders, keeping in mind of course that all kinds flock here on warm and dry weekends, including plenty of law enforcement

for those riding way over their heads. Weekdays are a much better bet for riding this road

Left: Newcomb’s Ranch offers casual dining in the heart of Angeles National Forest.

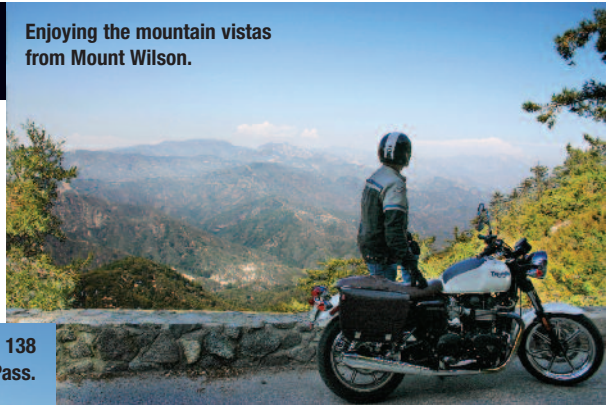


Mormon Rocks on the 138 near Cajon Pass.

Right: Savor a flame-broiled half-pound Yodeler burger while sitting outdoors at the Yodeler Restaurant in Wrightwood.



Enjoying the mountain vistas from Mount Wilson.



without witnessing its downside. The highway is generally closed between Islip Saddle and Vincent Gap from mid-December to mid-May due to snow and rockfall.

Angeles Crest Highway ends at SR 138, which takes you into the small town of Wrightwood.

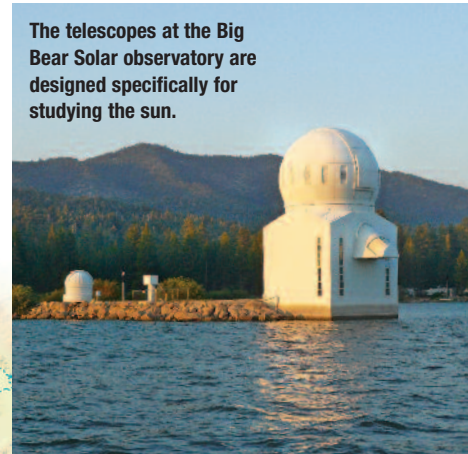
The Yodeler restaurant here is rider friendly and a great place to stop for lunch. It’s been serving patrons for decades and offers a menu of Yodeler dogs, flame-broiled half-pound Yodeler burgers and gourmet Yodeler pizzas.

SR 138 crosses Interstate 15 at the Cajon Pass, then ascends again providing a

magnificent panorama of Silverwood Lake. Route 138 becomes SR 18 in Crestline, gains elevation and multiple hairpin turns cascade into rollercoaster rhythms. The Big Dog Wolf handled this terrain adequately, but the Triumph Bonneville was right at home.

The Big Bear Solar Observatory is actually located on an island in Big Bear Lake and is the largest solar observatory in the world. A new 1.7-

The telescopes at the Big Bear Solar observatory are designed specifically for studying the sun.





meter clear-aperture solar telescope, the largest of its kind in existence, is now operational. The new instrument has three times the aperture of the old telescope and is ideal for studying the sun.

It's only about 150 miles from Griffith Observatory past Mount Wilson to Big Bear Solar Observatory, but it can still be a long day with all that winding road; an overnight in Big Bear is a good option before the next ride.



Sunset at Big Bear Lake.

## Wolf Mountain: Taming the Wild Beast

Big Bear Lake offers cooler temperatures and refreshing mountain air. Now I'm headed for the warmer desert down the backside of the mountain, toward Lucerne Valley. Turning left on Division Road, you'll make an immediate right on SR 38, which again turns back into the 18 toward Wolf Mountain Sanctuary. Loose gravel and 15-mph hairpin turns suggest you take your time. Riding down to 3,200 feet you leave behind the cool scent and shade of pine forests and enter the hot, arid desert.

Wolf Mountain Sanctuary is a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving and preserving wolves. Founded by Tonya Littlewolf, of Apache lineage, on this



I rode a Big Dog Wolf to Wolf Mountain Sanctuary. And, yes, that is a real wolf.

## A visitor to the Wolf Mountain Sanctuary howls at the moon.

visit it sheltered White Arctic Tundra wolves, Alaskan Timbers and Grays, a Montana Black wolf and even the rarest wolf in captivity, the Buffalo wolf. In exchange for a donation visitors can get up close and personal with these amazing wild creatures.

The ride continues toward Yucca Valley on SR 247 (Old Woman Springs Road). When you get to Landers and Linn Road, turn left toward another amazing sanctuary, the Integratron. Dr. George Van Tassel was a ufologist and paranormal research leader who organized annual "Spacecraft Conventions" at Giant Rock for 25 years. He also built the Integratron, a 38-foot high, 55-foot diameter, all-wood structure originally designed as a rejuvenation sanctuary and time machine. Today the Integratron offers neuroacoustic sound baths, UFO symposiums and an Unplugged Goddess retreat.

This amazing ride finishes in Joshua Tree National Park. The scenery here is surreal, with armies of Joshua Trees defending mounds of giant rocks and boulders that take on a strange liquidlike form, as if floating. It's an absolutely beautiful



Joshua Tree National Park is well-known for its dark skies, making it a popular location for stargazing.



ride. The vista at 5,575-foot Keys View is staggering; on a clear day you can see Mexico 300 miles away. It's the perfect cap to this observatories and sanctuaries ride before Eldorado Mine Road spits you out on Interstate 10 for the easy superslab ride back to Los Angeles. **38**

## Online Info

**Griffith Park Observatory**  
[www.griffithobservatory.org](http://www.griffithobservatory.org)

**Mount Wilson**  
[www.mtwilson.edu](http://www.mtwilson.edu)

**Big Bear Solar Observatory**  
[www.bbso.njit.edu](http://www.bbso.njit.edu)

**Newcomb's Ranch Restaurant & Bar**  
[www.newcombsranch.com](http://www.newcombsranch.com)

**The Yodeler**  
<http://wrightwoodcalifornia.com/village/yodeler.html>

**Wolf Mountain Sanctuary**  
[www.wolfmountain.com](http://www.wolfmountain.com)

**The Integratron**  
[www.integratron.com](http://www.integratron.com)

**Joshua Tree National Park**  
[www.nps.gov/jotr](http://www.nps.gov/jotr) **38**