

## Piedmont, Italy

# Le Strade di Coppi

By Graziano Pestarino

There is a place in Piedmont located in Italy's northwest where cycling is an important part of Italian history. The two towns that represent this heritage are Castellania and Cassano Spinola. The two towns are only 8 miles away from each other – Castellania is the birthplace of Fausto Coppi and Cassano is the hometown of Costante Girardengo and Sandrino Carrea.

### A little history

To understand why after so many years these cyclists are still very famous and still very popular, you have to go back and understand the context in which they lived. During Girardengo's time, (1930s) Italy was under the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini — Italy wanted to showcase its strength through its army, infrastructure and athletes to the rest of Europe.

Girardengo was definitely one of those athletes. He won against all the greatest European cyclists and later recruited Coppi to his team.

Coppi started his career right before World War II, but became very famous after the war ended. He was not just winning; he passed the finishline with huge time advantages. Also, Coppi was

► 10

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# Rides and events, from page 5

## **Buttes ride**

Also on April 27, an old favorite returns to take cyclists around the world's smallest mountain range: Bike around the Buttes. Beginning in Sutter, the 20, 40, 60, and 100 mile tours that follow the old stage coach route from Sutter to Meridian, then heads north around the majestic Sutter Buttes. Although the riding is on rolling hills, there is very little elevation change. The 100 mile route rolls by the Sacramento River.

*As April exits and May arrives, here are a few of the early month rides for May.*

## **Race Limestone Canyon**

On May 4, OC MTB Limestone Canyon takes place in Silverado, Orange County. High school competitors can mix it up with Beginners and Sports classes for one lap. Experts races two laps. The courses are a mix of singletrack and fire road, fast and smooth course with a few technical sections.

## **MTB & Maps**

For folks who relish map back-country challenges, on May 4 NavX MTB - Cool offers up the Olmstead Loop in Auburn State Recreation Area. You have a map, a compass, and your bike, and you race either a one-and-a-half hour or three-hour challenge. You score points by visiting checkpoints scattered across the trail network.

## **Siskiyou returns!**

Also on May 4 the Siskiyou Scenic Bicycle Tour takes off from Upper Greenhorn Park in Yreka. Ride distances are 8, 21, 38, 69, and 81 miles through the amazingly beautiful Siskiyou County. The longest route has about nine miles of gravel—the other rides are all pavement. That route features a loop around Irongate and Copco Lakes. There's camping at the park.



*March's rains have released their hold on Northern California, giving way to the sun-washed days of Spring. Cycle California! staff photo.*

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# Le Strade di Coppi, from page 8

not only one of the greatest cyclists in racing history, he represented Italy's comeback from the war. He came from a humble family in the hills of Piedmont and became the strongest racer in the world.

Many people say that Coppi partially owes his success to his wingmen — one of them was Carrea. People who knew Carrea, describe him as a strong man with an uncommon determination. I remember as a child, watching Carrea take off with his bicycle and people looking at him like they just saw a Ferrari passing by.

## Piedmont —

### A must-visit destination

When you ride a bike in this fabulous region and you think that you are just riding the same road where these great champions used to ride and train, you feel a sense of accomplishment. I think there is a reason why this small region was able to produce such great cyclists. The lay of the land is just perfect for cycling. It offers flat land right next to steep hills; perfect to train when you really want to challenge yourself to climb the Alps.

Castellania and Cassano Spinola are must-visit destinations for cycling aficionados. Castellania is located on top of the hill — it is the home of Fausto Coppi's memorial and also a little museum commemorating his achievements. As you approach the town, you are welcomed by murals that show the accomplishments of Coppi. You will see pictures of Coppi everywhere.

During my last visit with a group I was accompanying, we stopped in front of Coppi's old house. An older gentleman

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came out of his house and called for our attention and asked us where we were from. As soon as he heard that some members in the group were from the U.S., he insisted on showing us the Coppi museum that he curates, all of this with a strong sense of pride.

### Authentic charm

Beside these great champions, this land also offers great Italian wines and truffles.

Tuscany has been one of the most popular destinations for American tourists. They are amazed by the beautiful rolling hills. Now times are changing and more people are discovering Piedmont and its authentic charm. With the new technology offered by e-bikes, everyone has the ability to visit this land on a bicycle and enjoy the views, the colors, the smell of the air



*This twosome takes in the authentic charm of Italy's Piedmont as they make their way through the quaint towns of the region. Photo courtesy of Bike 'n Wine Tours.*

and experience the true Italian lifestyle.

Here you can still find the small authentic wine makers that have been taking care of their land and making wine for several generations. It is not uncommon to see

three generation working alongside in the same winery.

—Graziano Pestarino is an owner of Bike 'n Wine Tours [www.bikenwine.com](http://www.bikenwine.com)

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