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TRANSPORTATION

These roadside stops off I-80 between Sacramento and the Bay are totally worth it, readers say

BY ARIANE LANGE

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Two of the signature ice cream dishes at Fentons Creamery –the Banana Jr. and the Black and Tan Sundae – are ready to serve on Thursday in Vacaville. The creamery was founded in Oakland in 1894. PAUL KITAGAKI JR. pkitagaki@sacbee.com



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The automobile isn't great — belching harmful emissions and menacing pedestrians and cyclists. The car is no match for a train in terms of human connection, comfort or delight.

Alas, because of historical disinvestment in public transit and passenger rail service, the Capitol Corridor is not always the best option for travel between Sacramento and the Bay Area.

As a result, many of us suckers wind up in traffic on I-80 dreaming of a better world.

Below are some locals' tips for getting off I-80 while you're slogging in the car from one place to another.

Please email alange@sacbee.com with further suggestions or reflections on the hay bale Minions by the Cool Patch Pumpkins field.

THE JELLY BELLY FACTORY IN FAIRFIELD

Kristina Dial's recommended stop barely even requires a description because the very name is so evocative: the Jelly Belly factory. Take a self-guided tour and stare through the glass at people using whirring big machines to make little candy beans. Look at a portrait of Ronald Reagan made of jelly beans. Purchase misshapen jelly beans in the gift shop and chuckle to yourself about how they're called "Belly Flops."

Dial, a West Sacramento resident, said she first went to the factory in the late 1990s, when her oldest child was 3. The visit was a hit, and Dial has been back several times since. "If you have kids that are antsy in the car, it's a great stop," she said, but she's also taken her great aunt, then in her late 80s, who "loved it to death."



Jelly Belly candies rest during the manufacturing process at the Jelly Belly factory in Fairfield in 2008. Michael Allen Jones *Sacramento Bee* file

Another time, she invited family from Sebastopol to meet there as a halfway point. Dial's two children "are now both adults, and they would still, hands-down, go again."

Dial said the whole experience takes about two hours. She found out about it in an online parents' group in the 1990s, but it's become extra silly to her family in the years since because they now have a small, silky dog named Jelly Bean (mostly because Jelly was jealous of their other dog, Bella, and not because the family is particularly obsessed with jelly beans, but still).

Car-averse travelers should know that the factory is three miles from the Suisun/Fairfield Amtrak station in Suisun City. Jewish people and vegetarians should know that the jelly beans are kosher and vegetarian, but not vegan. Those of you who are history buffs should know that former President Ronald Reagan's successful

strategy to quit smoking during his run for California governor and his time in Sacramento [involved guzzling jelly beans](#) to keep his mitts off his pipe.

Address: 1 Jelly Belly Lane, Fairfield

I-80 exit: Exit 43 for Rio Vista / Suisun Parkway (heading west); exit 43 for 12 East to Suisun City / Rio Vista (heading east)

Hours: 9:15 a.m. to 4 p.m. seven days a week

Cost: Adults \$8, children 3 and up \$4, children 2 and under free

Time for the stop: Two to three hours

FENTONS CREAMERY AT THE NUT TREE PLAZA IN VACAVILLE

Fentons is an Oakland institution that opened in 1894; 113 years later, an outpost opened in Vacaville.

Land Park resident Cynthia Hearden goes to the Bay Area at least four times a year to see her ear, nose and throat doctor (sinus troubles!), and she used to make the drive with a friend who grew up in the Bay Area. About three years ago, that friend suggested an ice cream pit stop. “I had never heard of Fentons,” Hearden said, but the ice cream lover was hooked.

Hearden has tried a few ice creams, but she doesn’t even remember which ones because she has now settled on her favorite.

“All of their ice cream is really, really good,” Hearden said, but she “quickly became addicted to their chocolate milkshakes.”



Customers purchase ice cream from Fentons Creamery at the Nut Tree on Thursday in Vacaville. The creamery was founded in Oakland in 1894. Paul Kitagaki Jr. pkkitagaki@sacbee.com

She has some practical reasoning behind this little treat: A takeaway milkshake is easy to consume in the car, and Hearden usually doesn't like to dwell in the Nut Tree Plaza.

"If you're driving between here and the Bay Area," she said, "sometimes the traffic can be horrendous, and you don't want to stop for a long time somewhere because you know that's going to back you up getting home by another couple hours. This is just a nice, nice short, brief stop for something that's very pleasurable."

Fentons also serves savory foods that are not ice cream. Hearden made it clear that she cannot speak for the non-ice cream foods because she has never eaten them and doesn't care to do so.



The famous No. 5 Train is restored and ready for riders to board at Nut Tree Plaza on Thursday in Vacaville. Paul Kitagaki Jr. pkitagaki@sacbee.com

Address: 1669 E Monte Vista Ave., Vacaville

I-80 exit: Exit 55 for East Monte Vista Avenue (heading west); exit 56 for I-505 North to Winters/Redding (heading east)

Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays; 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sundays

Cost: Adults \$8, children 3 and up \$4, children 2 and under free

Time for the stop: 10 minutes to an hour, depending on your mood and ordering habits

PEDRICK PRODUCE IN DIXON

Luke McReynolds loves a particular Belizean hot sauce brand, and that is a draw to Dixon's Pedrick Produce, which has "a wall of hot sauces from all over the world." On that hot sauce wall, McReynolds reliably finds Marie Sharp's.

"It has a carrot base, so it's orange," he said. "It's a habanero hot sauce, so it's hot. But the carrot base just makes it really flavorful and good. ... That goes good generally on everything." The green Marie Sharp's sauce is nopal-based, "that's really good for breakfast, so, eggs, potatoes. You name it." He'll put the red hot sauce, he said, on pizza, pasta, "anything with cheese, burritos."

Beyond the wall, however, McReynolds also loves Pedrick Produce as a practical grocery stop with delicious fresh produce.

He goes from the capital to the Bay Area about four times a year — often to visit his grandfather, Paul, who lives in Half Moon Bay. On his way back to Sacramento, he'll pick up produce for dinner. When he's headed to Half Moon Bay, "If I can, I'll always buy satsuma mandarins, because they're great, they're local, and my grandpa loves them."

McReynolds doesn't actually remember how he first thought to pull off I-80 — maybe because the market is near a brewery he's been to? Regardless, it is now a staple of his trips, and he recommends it for your trips, too.



Henry Barraza started Pedrick Produce in 1989 and stands in the store in Dixon in March 2009.
Paul Kitagaki Jr. *Sacramento Bee* file

Address: 6850 Sievers Rd., Dixon

I-80 exit: Exit 67 for Pedrick Road (heading west and east)

Hours: 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. seven days a week

Cost: Depends what you picked up

Time for the stop: 10 minutes (or longer if you really want to take in the condiments selection)

DIXON FRUIT MARKET IN DIXON

Readers, please bear with me as I break the fourth wall.

When I was in a work meeting and I proposed soliciting the public for recommended stops on I-80, the digital strategy and audience editor launched into a rhapsody about this nut stand in Dixon.

Ordinarily, a reporter would not quote a fellow staffer (in this case, Savanna Smith). But ethics are not always black-and-white, and so I examined the two sides of this quandary.

On the one hand, we have a less-than-ideal source — the newspaper is not here to report on itself, and quoting Smith gives the appearance of a conflict of interest. On the other hand, the public has an interest in knowing a pistachio ice cream was so appealing that Smith risked an allergic reaction to sample it and claims she would risk it again.

To get more context on this allergy, I asked her whether she's had a serious allergic reaction, and she told me that she once used a coconut hair product overnight and "woke up gasping."

So, having weighed the pros and cons, I am including her recommendation on this list because I think your interest in knowing about this ice cream outweighs my interest in avoiding this particular conflict of interest.

The ice cream, she said, was "so creamy."

I am assuming that none of you are terribly concerned about Smith considering that she clearly survived her tango with this member of the cashew family. But for the record: She said that her allergic reaction to the pistachio scoop consisted of her mouth feeling "a little tingly but not bad at all."

Address: 7808 Batavia Road, Dixon

I-80 exit: Exit 63 for Dixon Avenue (heading west and east)

Hours: 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. seven days a week

Cost: Nut-dependent

Time for the stop: 10 minutes (more if you need an epinephrine injection)

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ARIANE LANGE
THE SACRAMENTO BEE

916-321-1039

Ariane Lange reports on regional transportation for The Sacramento Bee. She was a USC Center for Health Journalism 2023 California Health Equity Fellow. Previously, she worked at BuzzFeed News, where she covered gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

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