

COMES EASY
AT TOPANGA CREEK

// By Jen See

Chris Kelly has played a monster in a horror film, stood in line for soup in the famous “Soup Nazi” episode of *Seinfeld*, and in real life, driven a taxi cab in Boston. Now he’s the owner of Topanga Creek Bicycles, a quirky shop housed in a three-room building where the Doors used to make records. Kelly opened Topanga Creek seven years ago after owning a shop on Hollywood Boulevard.

“Fuck it, we need to live life,” he said of his decision to leave the intensity of downtown Los Angeles behind.

Turn east from California’s famed Pacific Coast Highway with its mesmerizing views of the Pacific, winking and glinting, and follow Topanga Canyon Road into the Santa Monica Mountains. The town of Topanga, which sits under a canopy of California live oaks, is a place time has forgotten. Woody Guthrie lived there, as did actor Will Geer, who moved to Topanga in the early 1950s after being blacklisted for his political activism. The houses where Geer and Guthrie lived are

next door to Topanga Creek Bicycles.

Kelly’s shop fits seamlessly into its tranquil surroundings. Tibetan prayer flags hang from the ceiling in the warm, wood-paneled room. Rover, the shop dog, owns the spot in front of the wood-burning stove that stands in the corner. There are coffee mugs and beanies for sale made by local artists. And, of course, bikes. Topanga Creek specializes in mountain bikes, but Kelly, together with Jay Barre and Jeovany Alvarado, stand ready to create the perfect bike for just about any adventure. Panniers and racks for bikepacking hang from the walls, and custom builds are a house specialty. If you buy 10 bikes from Topanga Creek, your 11th bike is free. So far, only one customer has made it to 10, but Barre says there a few getting close.

Each Wednesday Kelly and his crew close up shop and head out for a day of unscripted adventure. A recent “unpredict your Wednesday” episode included a train trip north to Santa Barbara followed by a 10-mile nightride to a campsite in Carpinteria. A loyal

customer waited there with a celebratory growler of local brew. The following day, the threesome rode home, 100 miles down the glorious California coast. Every Saturday morning, Topanga Creek hosts a more conventional mountain bike ride that welcomes riders of all abilities. An infinite maze of singletrack threads through the nearby Topanga State Park, and the Santa Monica Mountains offer adventure galore right out the shop’s front door.

Topanga Creek Bicycles offers an oasis from the frenetic energy of the world beyond its walls. Sitting under the shop’s trees, the high-speed freeways of Los Angeles feel forever far away. Join the guys for a Saturday morning ride. Stop in and learn how to set up your ride for an off-the-grid bikepack trip. Watch the seasonal creek warble by the shop as it carries the winter rain down to the shining sea. Pull up a rocking chair by the fire, sip a freshly brewed coffee, savor Jay’s signature banana bread, and listen while Chris spins tales of adventures past and those yet to be. 🍷



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