THE TOURS

part two

NORTH ON THE SILVERADO TRAIL

SHORTLY AFTER TURNING ONTO THE SILVERADO TRAIL FROM HIGHWAY 121, you'll see a rocky ridge ahead (Figure 73). The road here runs nearly due north—you are seeing the segment of the Vaca Mountains that rises up on the northeast side of the Stags Leap District. At Soda Canyon Road, the Silverado Trail bends left, to the northwest, and the view opens out. The ridge of the Vaca Mountains is on the right (Figure 74); on the left, in the distance, you can see the Mayacamas Mountains, which form the western boundary of the Napa Valley. The rounded hills on your right, in front of the

FIGURE 73. The view from the Silverado Trail, toward the Vaca Mountains. The high peak lies just east of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.

FIGURE 74. The rounded hills in front of the main ridge of the Vaca Mountains are the result of movement on large displacement surfaces.

sharper ridge of the Vacas, as well as the hills directly ahead of you, formed as a result of slip on the displacement surface represented by the Stags Leap cliffs (a process described in chapter 2).

The top of this segment of the Vaca ridge rises in elevation toward the north, ending in the steep slopes and gray cliffs that hang over the Stags Leap District. The slopes are either green or brown, depending on the time of year. In contrast to the hills of the eastern United States, those in the West are a golden brown during the dry summer and a verdant green in the wet winter. The Vaca Mountains form the eastern boundary of the Napa Valley, although the border of the Napa Valley AVA is actually a few miles to the east, across a wide swath of highlands. Composed entirely of Napa volcanics, the Vacas run all the way up the east side of the valley, culminating in Mount St. Helena, the highest peak in the region.

On your right, toward the hills, you can look up the rows of vines (at Clos du Val, for example) and notice how they curve gently upward as they intersect the base of the hills (Figure 75). These slopes are alluvial fans, accumulations of coarse debris washed from the hills (as explained in chapter 3). Vineyards also climb the lower, steeper slopes of the hills themselves, although

FIGURE 75. Vineyard rows at Clos du Val and Chimney Rock climb the lower slopes of the hills.

FIGURE 76. Looking north up the Silverado Trail toward the Pine Ridge hill. Vineyards owned by Robert Mondavi Winery occupy the flat stretch of land; Hartwell Vineyards lies on the slopes above.

FIGURE 77. The vineyards of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars appear in the center of this image, behind a small hill. The Fay Vineyard consists of the two rows of vineyard blocks extending from the small hill to the mountains. SLV is the adjacent set of blocks to the right. Aerial photography © 2003, AirPhotoUSA, LLC.

the vines here are planted in material that is quite different from that found in the alluvial fans below. The vineyards on the upper slopes were developed before the enactment of stiff regulations that limit planting on hillsides with a slope greater than 5 percent. Now, out of concern for erosion and "visual pollution," environmental organizations are working to prevent further vineyard development in the hills, maintaining as well that the Napa Valley already has enough vineyards. The craggy cliffs that cap the ridge are made up of a variety of resistant volcanic rocks.

At the end of a long, straight stretch of road (Figure 76), just as you climb a small hill, you'll see Stag's Leap Wine Cellars on the right (Figure 77). This winery is home to SLV, the vineyard that pro-

FIGURE 78. A cliff made up of Great Valley sequence rocks, slightly north of the entrance to Pine Ridge Winery. These rocks were baked by heat from the volcanic plug that forms the hill at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, just across the road. The outcrop is about twenty-five feet high.

FIGURE 79. An outcrop of Great Valley sequence on the east side of the Silverado Trail, north of Silverado Cellars. Sandstones on the left grade into finer-grained sediments on the right.

duced the winning wine at the 1976 Paris tasting, a pivotal event for Napa wines, as the introduction recounts. The Fay Vineyard, directly north of SLV and also a part of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, was the first Cabernet Sauvignon grown south of Rutherford when Nathan Fay planted it in 1961. Fay's wines influenced many Napa winemakers, including Warren Winiarski and John Kongsgaard. The caves at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars are dug into a volcanic plug, the remnants of one of the volcanic vents that fed the thick mass of Napa volcanics exposed in the hills to the east of the winery. Near the top of the hill, you can see volcanic rock in the banks on both sides of the road.

As the road descends gently on the other side of the hill, Pine Ridge Winery appears on the left. Here, the vines are planted mainly on sedimentary rocks of the Great Valley sequence. The high road cut just past the winery entrance (Figure 78) reveals the orange-red color of Great Valley sequence rocks that were baked by heat from the volcanic plug. Silverado Cellars, owned by the Disney family, sits on the northern extension of the Pine Ridge knob. Where the road bends

FIGURE 80. One of the knobs that dot the valley in and north of the Stags Leap District. The knobs are toe deposits resulting from megaslides along displacement surfaces.

FIGURE 81. The Yountville Hills from the Silverado Trail. These hills are the toe deposits of the largest megaslide.

to the right, after the entrance to Silverado, a roadcut reveals layered sandstone and shale of the Great Valley sequence (Figure 79).

A short distance beyond this roadcut, the view opens up briefly on both sides. On the right, the vineyards of Shafer climb the steep hillsides at the northern end of the Stags Leap District. These slopes produce Shafer Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon, long considered one of Napa's finest wines. From here, up to Oakville Crossroad several miles ahead, the Silverado Trail winds through a series of hills and knobs (Figure 80). As chapter 2 explains, these unusual features are the toe deposits of a series of large displacements that formed after the Vaca Mountains were uplifted. In the distance to the west, on the left, arise the rugged and tree-covered Mayacamas Mountains, fronted by the long ridge of the Yountville Hills (Figure 81). These hills also formed as toe deposits of one of the large displacements. Highway 29 runs on the other side of the Yountville Hills.

Slightly south of Rector Reservoir, the road curves up a slight rise onto a straight, flat stretch. Here, you are driving along the upper part of a small alluvial fan at the mouth of the Rector drainage. Paul Frank's Gemstone Vineyard lies at the southern end of this flat stretch. Frank de-

FIGURE 82. Screaming Eagle vineyard. The wine that comes from this fifty-eight-acre vineyard is made from the best 10 percent of the grapes harvested each year (the rest of the grapes are sold). The rarity and social cachet of this wine brought a price of two hundred fifty dollars a bottle in 2001.

signed the vineyard with the express purpose of growing grapes and making wine that would distinctly reflect the site. He planted Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, using types of rootstock and clones that he thought most suitable to the conditions. The wine has been very successful; how well and in what way it reflects the site is more difficult to establish.

As you leave this section of the road, Rector Dam is visible on the right. The next vineyard on the left is Screaming Eagle, source of one of the most expensive and sought-after wines in the valley (Figure 82). Screaming Eagle began as owner Jean Philips's homemade wine; word of mouth and the driving need of many wine aficionados to be in on the most recent discovery quickly transformed it into a phenomenon. The wine is now made by star winemaker Heidi Peterson Barrett from a few select sites that make up perhaps 10 percent of the vineyard.

After Screaming Eagle, the road bends to the right. On that side of the road, Joseph Phelps's Backus Vineyard appears (Figure 83). The lower, older part is terraced, while the newer vines on the steep upper slopes run vertically down the hill. Backus also has an upper section, planted

FIGURE 83. Backus Vineyard seen from the road. Owned by Joseph Phelps, this vineyard was expanded from its original seven acres of terraced vines (on the lower part of the hill) to include the newer vines planted vertically down the slope and another seven acres on the flat above.

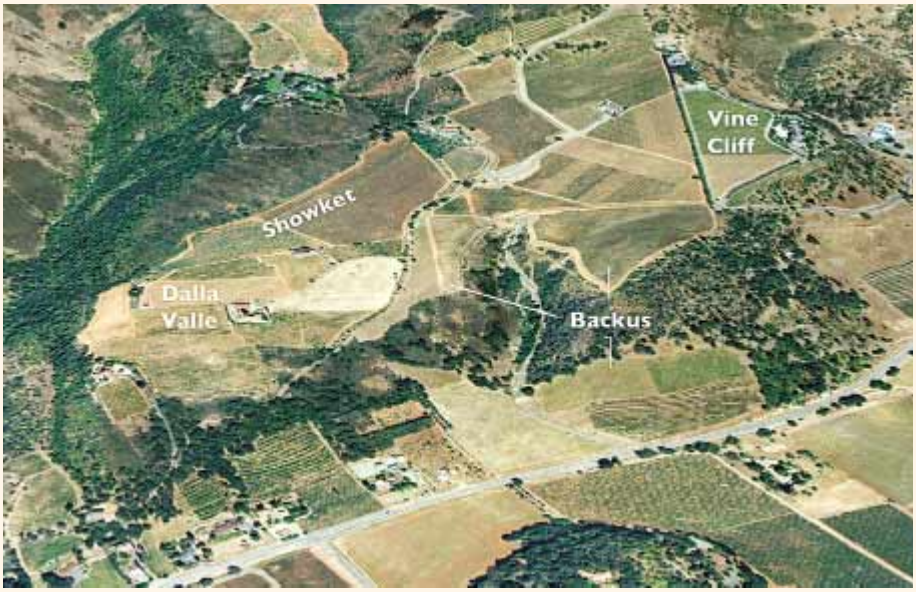

FIGURE 84. Backus Vineyard and its upper extension, which it shares with Dalla Valle, Showket, and Vine Cliff. Aerial photography © 2003, AirPhotoUSA, LLC.

on an extensive flat surface, that supports Dalla Valle, Showket, and Vine Cliff (Figure 84). For more than two decades, Backus Cabernet Sauvignon has been one of the most consistently excellent wines in the valley.

Beyond Backus Vineyard, Oakville Crossroad intersects the Silverado Trail on the left. Rudd Estate lies at the corner of this intersection. Geologically, it is related to Backus and the other properties occupying the flat surfaces that cut the slopes of the hills above, all the way up to Stagecoach Vineyards at the top of the Vaca Mountains ridge. The rocks that form the walls that surround Rudd were ripped from the vineyard. Similar, though larger, rocks were ripped from Stagecoach Vineyards, directly above Rudd. Though the two vineyards are separated by some 1,300 vertical feet, geologically they are very similar.

As the road passes Rudd, it descends the northern flank of yet another alluvial fan, which formed at the mouth of a large drainage that cuts into the Vaca ridge a little north of Rector Canyon. Past Oakville Crossroad, the valley opens out to its widest extent. The road runs along the base of the eastern hills, up and down a series of rises and swales that represent older, uplifted alluvial fans. Looking directly to the left, you can see the short, relatively steep, upper slopes of these fans (Figure 85). Mumm Napa Valley lies near the crest of the largest of these features. Next, a series of small cuts at the side of the road display the mixed character of the alluvial fan sediments—boulders and cobbles lying in a matrix of sand and mud (Figure 86). To the left, you have a fine view of the heavily wooded Mayacamas Mountains across the valley, topped by the triangular peak of Mount St. John (Figure 87).

FIGURE 85. Looking down the slope of a small, uplifted alluvial fan south of Mumm Napa Valley.

FIGURE 86. Alluvial fan sediments on the side of the Silverado Trail, at the bottom of a hill north of Mumm Napa Valley.

FIGURE 87. Mount St. John and the Mayacamas ridge, viewed from the Silverado Trail north of Oakville Crossroad, where the valley widens.

FIGURE 88. Serpentinite mélange on Highway 128 south of Lake Hennessey.

A short side trip east on Route 128 to Lake Hennessey will take you past outcrops of serpentinite mélange, a combination of ocean floor sediment and chunks of ocean crust, described in chapter 1 (Figure 88).

Back on the Silverado Trail, north of the junction with Route 128, a winery with a curved, rock-faced façade is built into a small hill on the left. This is Quintessa, whose vineyards occupy the slopes of a rounded, elongate ridge. Quintessa is one of the few properties in the valley where grapes grow in all exposures—north, east, south, and west (Figure 89). The Quintessa ridge is the northernmost of the hills that formed as toe deposits of the Vaca Mountain displacements.

FIGURE 89. Quintessa vineyards lie slightly north of the intersection of Highway 128 and the Silverado Trail, which runs along the right side of this image. Quintessa has a unique character, a ridge within the valley. Its shape provides diverse microclimates and sun exposure. The Napa River flows west of Quintessa, traveling diagonally through the view from center top to lower left. Aerial photography © 2003, AirPhotoUSA, LLC.

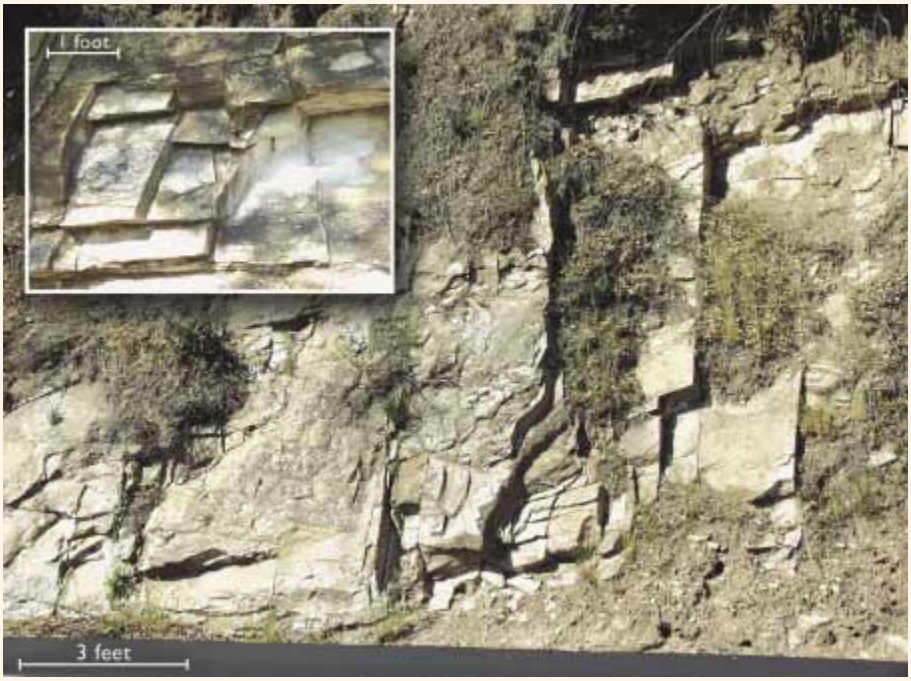

FIGURE 90. Vertical beds of volcanic ash line the road in many places north of Quintessa. This location is north of Deer Park Road.

FIGURE 91. Volcanic ash with layers and pods of obsidian, on the Silverado Trail at Glass Mountain.

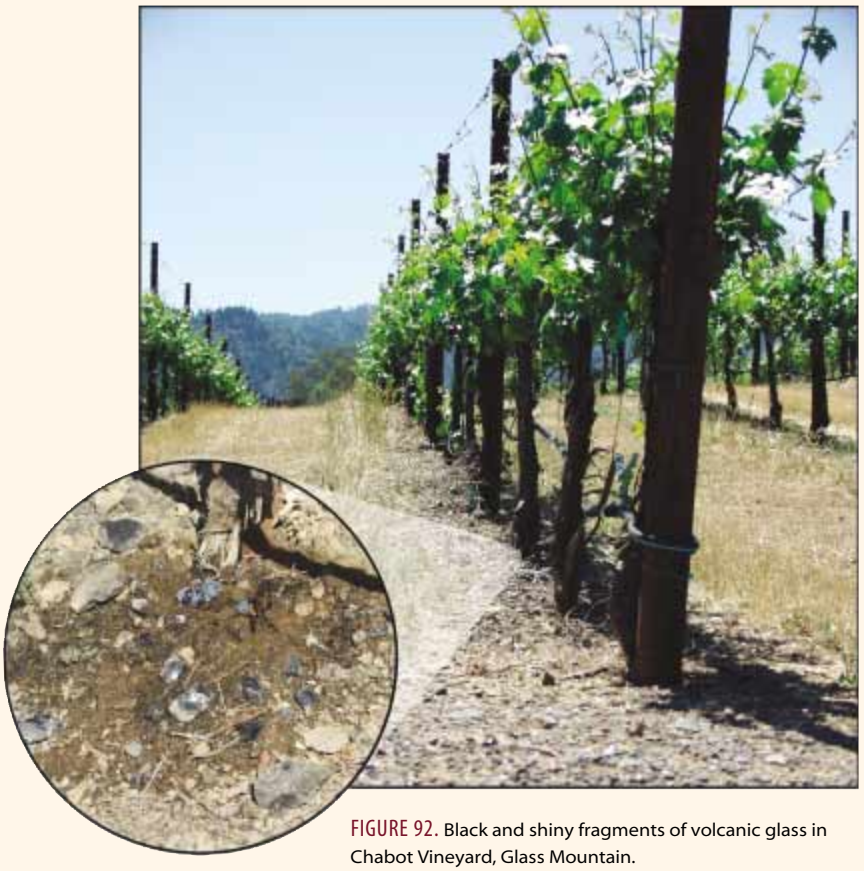

FIGURE 92. Black and shiny fragments of volcanic glass in Chabot Vineyard, Glass Mountain.

Once you pass Quintessa, a series of roadcuts reveal some of the volcanic rocks that make up the eastern hills. The road winds past these roadcuts for several miles. They are particularly well exposed at Taplin Road and along a stretch south of Deer Park Road. In many of them, the beds, composed mainly of volcanic ash, are nearly vertical (Figure 90), tilted by the forces that formed the Vaca Mountains. These exposures of volcanic rocks are interrupted only at Deer Park Road, where the rounded pebbles and cobbles of an older, uplifted alluvial fan can be seen in a road bank south of the intersection.

North of Deer Park Road, past Duckhorn Vineyards, you come to a bend in the road, where you can see a massive outcrop of beds of volcanic ash with pods and layers of obsidian (Figure 91). Obsidian, a shiny black, glassy-looking rock that forms when some types of lava cool very quickly, is the material that gave Glass Mountain its name. Collectors of the black volcanic glass have dug holes in this outcrop. Native Americans used obsidian for the heads of spears and arrows. The surface of Chabot Vineyard, owned by Beringer and located up Glass Mountain Road, is awash with glistening fragments of obsidian (Figure 92).

FIGURE 93. In this outcrop opposite the entrance of the Rombauer Vineyards, a zone of what is likely baked soil (orange) is visible below thin beds of tuff and black volcanic glass. The tuff and glass were still extremely hot when they fell to Earth, cooking the rocks or soils on which they landed.

Opposite the entrance to Rombauer Vineyards, one of the most colorful and interesting roadcuts in the valley appears. Here, thin layers of volcanic tuff and obsidian top a bright orange, rubbly rock that probably represents a soil zone baked by the heat of the volcanic ash as it accumulated on the surface (Figure 93).

Up the road and over the hill from this outcrop, the valley opens up again at the mouth of Dutch Henry Canyon. As you pass Larkmead Lane, Three Palms Vineyard, with its three isolated palm trees, is on your left (Figure 94). Here, near the upper reaches of the Napa River, the narrow valley is filled with coarse sediment delivered from the hills that rise steeply on both sides.

The road continues on to Calistoga, winding through the edges of the hills and along a wider flat at the mouths of Simmons Creek and Jericho Canyon. Eisele Vineyard, on Pickett Road, was originally planted by Milton and Barbara Eisele and is now part of Araujo Estate (Figure 95). It

FIGURE 94. Three Palms Vineyard. At the base of the hill behind the center palm tree, an alluvial fan slopes down into the valley at the bottom edge of the Mayacamas ridge.

FIGURE 95. Eisele Vineyard, in Simmons Canyon at the head of Pickett Road. Eisele has been producing critically acclaimed wines for more than thirty years. Aerial photography © 2003, AirPhotoUSA, LLC.

FIGURE 96. Mount St. Helena looms north of Calistoga.

has produced widely acclaimed Cabernet Sauvignon, made by a variety of winemakers, over its history of more than three decades. During the 1970s and 1980s, much of the fruit went to Joseph Phelps Winery for its Eisele Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, made by Craig Williams. After Bart and Daphne Araujo bought the vineyard, Tony Soter became the winemaker for some years during the early 1990s. Françoise Peschon now makes the wine, with Michel Rolland as consultant.

The hot springs of Calistoga—remnants of the relatively recent volcanic activity—have attracted visitors since the middle of the nineteenth century. Today, the area of potential volcanic activity centers on the region of Clear Lake, a few miles to the north. As you approach Calistoga, Mount St. Helena rises to the north of the town, providing a suitably majestic backdrop for this narrow northern end of the Napa Valley (Figure 96).