

Running Cross Country in Oxnard

Rio Mesa High is rooted in miles of farmland.

If you're on the cross-country team there, you run around these fields, sometimes far enough to make it to the neighborhoods beyond them.

It's all very flat, so on the weekends, you'll all meet in Camarillo to train on the steep grades of Spanish Hills or one perfectly inclined road off Las Posas. Of course, there's no parking at that road, so you'll meet at the community center off Carmen Road and then run to it as your warm-up. The run back is downhill and makes for the perfect cool-off.

As for the runs the team does during the week, those are all on the flat plains of Oxnard.

There are two ways to turn: toward Vineyard or toward Rose.

If you take Central toward Vineyard, you turn at the shoe store and take Vineyard all the way down, turning around at the fire station for a short run and lapping around Rio Vista Middle for a long one.

In the fall and spring, the fields smell more like manure than berries, so you'll want to run Vineyard. This avoids the crops somewhat, leading you closer to the diesel truck gas station, the juvenile detention center, and the stone and gravel supply.

If you take Central toward Rose, you jog past Rose and continue out onto Central.

The shade from the skyscraper tree line falls on the road in the afternoon, which is good for the runners on hot days.

For the first part of the run, you can avoid the cars by dipping into the path by the lemon trees, but don't take any lemons—they don't belong to you. Coach has an agreement with the field workers that we can run there as long as we don't steal.

If you turn around at the first light after Rose, it's three miles.

If you continue out to Beardsley Road, that's about a five-mile round trip.

No one knows for sure how far it is if you make it to the city limit and cross into Camarillo, but it's far. Sure, Vince did it all the time, but he never kept track—he just ran.

There's a third option that the whole team dreads: the boxes,

the huge rectangular routes that trace the fields.

For any of them, you run down Rose, cross through El Rio,
and then make your way back down Vineyard to Central.

El Rio is where all the field workers live;

you can pass by Rio Plaza Elementary on Simon Way to be short,
trek through the suburbs on Walnut Drive for a good medium run,
or you can run all the way out to Ventura Boulevard
and follow the side of the 101 until you hit Vineyard,
which is eight miles but feels like nine.

If it's a short day, or if it's raining,

Coach might let you run around the track
instead of going off campus.

If the field workers happen to be on the other side
of the school's fence, they'll always hand you
a few strawberries, freshly picked.