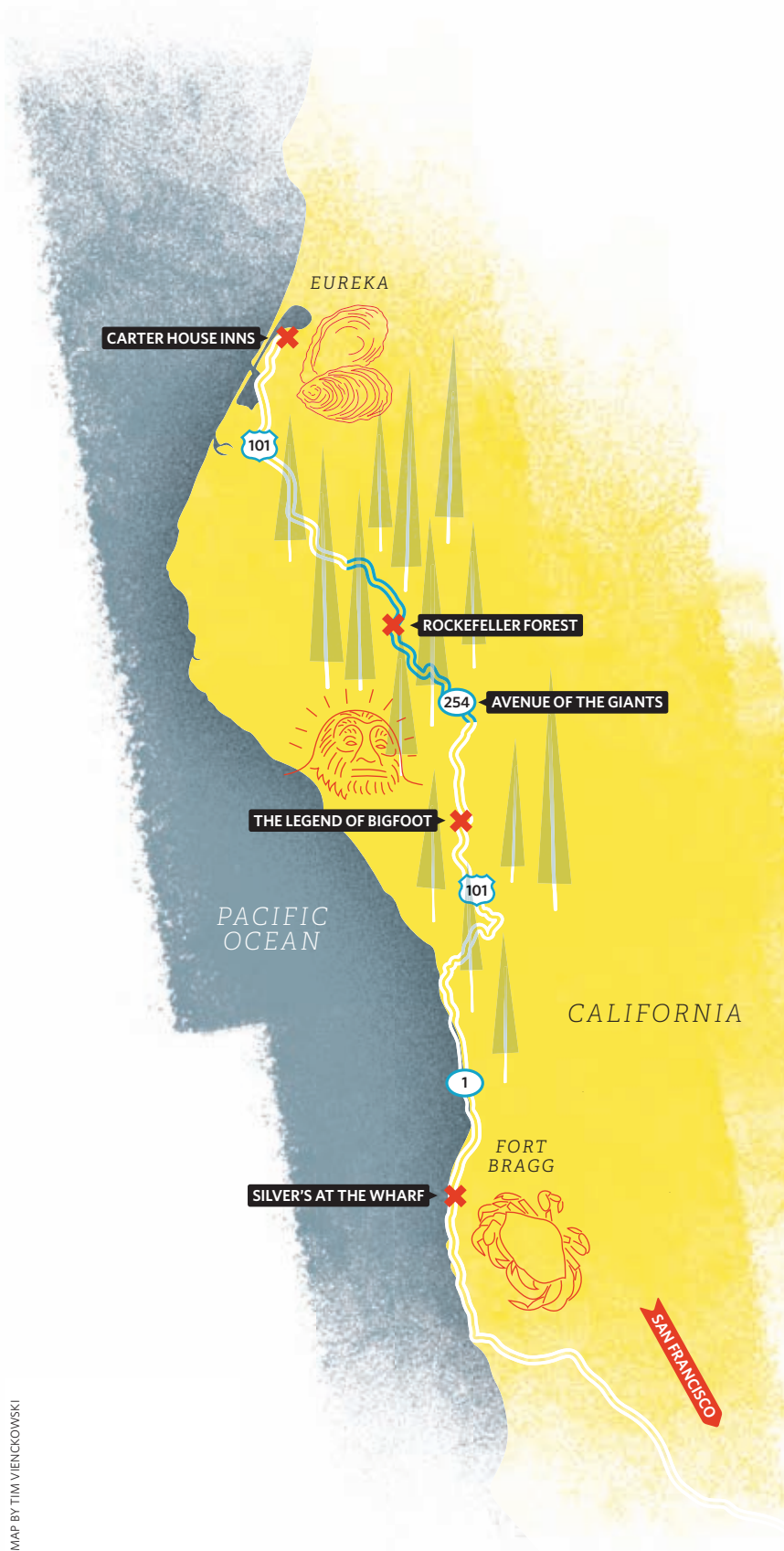


ROAD TRIP



CALIFORNIA

Into the Woods

Range Rover's brand-new Evoque goes for an epic spin among the redwoods

BY SAM POLCER

"DOES THE RED CAR in the lot belong to you?" asks the manager at Silver's at the Wharf, an elegantly homey seafood joint tucked below Highway 1 in Fort Bragg, Calif. I nod, figuring there's a good chance I left the headlights on. "Well, in that case, I don't mind telling you that your order may take a little longer than usual. Our cooks can't stop staring at it."

I don't blame them. While you wouldn't normally expect the sight of a compact SUV to bring a kitchen to a standstill, there's just something about the lines of the Range Rover Evoque that holds the gaze (as my old high school buddy Kris and I noticed at almost every stoplight we hit on our way out of the Bay Area). It's a look that seems to recognize both the familiar and the revolutionary; a look that all but gasps, "What is that?"

It's a fair question. British carmaker Land Rover and its luxury offshoot, Range Rover, have always excelled at producing behemoths that look equally at home »

» chewing up the outback and gleaming in Hollywood driveways. That the sporty Evoque fits in either scenario but can also tear up city streets, thanks to coupe-style handling and acceleration (and, to a degree, fuel economy), is undeniably appealing.

Fortified by our seafood lunch, we keep the ocean on our left before cutting inland, where, tempted by the Evoque's evident sure-footedness, I start tackling tight curves more aggressively than my copilot appreciates. I've been told that many car commercials are filmed here, and while trying to re-create the moves from a few, I suggest Kris concentrate on the scenery and busy himself with the iPod. We began the journey, as all good road-trippers should, with a mix of drive-worthy tunes, but as we find ourselves dipping in and out of pockets of sunlit fog, the forest getting taller and denser, the storybook landscape calls for something heavier on the reverb. Fleet Foxes, with its soaring Pacific Northwest harmonies, does the trick.

After cruising along the 101 for a while, we turn off to pick up the aptly named



TREES COMPANY The Avenue of the Giants, a 31-mile stretch of road in California's Humboldt Redwoods State Park, is lined with trees that can grow as tall as 370 feet

Avenue of the Giants. It's there that Kris realizes his favorite out of all the car's features: its panoramic roof, through which he can peer up at the cathedral of redwoods. And it's there that I realize

why this place gets top billing in Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land." It's truly humbling.

We stop to stretch our legs on a half-hour hike in the Rockefeller Forest, renowned for its old-growth trees. The redwoods, with their gnarled, knotty trunks, aren't especially beautiful up close, but what they lack in aesthetics they more than make up for in size, some boasting hollows bigger than my first apartment. We take a couple of goofy photos, noting how easily something so majestic can devolve into comedy, as evidenced by the numerous shops in the area with names like "The Legend of Bigfoot" selling wood carvings of cartoon characters. (When we pull off at one, the driver of a brand-new midsize SUV wanders over to confess, in a tone dripping with buyer's remorse, "I didn't know there was a new Range ...")

After cooling off with a brisk dip in a secluded river, we're again bound for the coast—this time to end our day's journey in Eureka, where we check into the Carter House Inns, home to the acclaimed Restaurant 301. We pick a bottle of wine from the list of 3,500—which Kris, whose nerves are still frayed, appreciates keenly—and order an extravagant meal that includes Humboldt Bay oysters and locally raised duck. But not before making sure the Evoque is safely out of sight of the kitchen.

Hemispheres executive editor **SAM POLCER's** beat-up pickup truck attracts stares, too—but for entirely different reasons.

2012 RANGE ROVER EVOQUE COUPE

The bells and whistles



Starting Price:
\$44,995

Engine: A 240-hp turbocharged direct-fuel-injected 2.0L four-cylinder engine means power and good mileage for an SUV (28 mpg highway/18 mpg city).

Performance: Selectable programs for different terrains, along with an agile suspension, full-time intelligent all-wheel drive and manual override paddle shifters, make this one of the world's most luxurious rally cars.

Perks: The design is highly customizable, thanks to options that include 10 exterior colors, while an 8-inch touchscreen control panel and an 11-speaker Meridian sound system will please tech-savvy road-trippers.