New Cycling Route Brings Underground Railroad Alive

Adventure Cycling Association

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 14, 2012
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518-mile Detroit Alternate guides touring cyclists through communities and landmarks in Underground Railroad's history from Oberlin, Ohio, to Owen Sound, Ontario

Missoula, Montana — Five years to the day after the unveiling of its 2,000-mile Underground Railroad Bicycle Route (UGRR), Adventure Cycling Association today announced the release of the final map section for the route's new Detroit Alternate.

The 518-mile Detroit Alternate provides alternate routing, and a host of new historic sites, for cyclists traveling between Oberlin, Ohio, and Owen Sound, Ontario. Departing from the main Underground Railroad route in Oberlin, the Detroit Alternate guides cyclists through Toledo, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan, around Lake St. Clair, tracing the shoreline of Lake Huron before heading to Owen Sound. The maps also provide a ferry option across Lake Erie from Sandusky, Ohio, through Windsor, Ontario. Maps are now available from Cyclosource, Adventure Cycling's online store and catalog.

"We're thrilled to offer this new alternate route between Oberlin and Owen Sound. Cyclists can now experience even more landmarks and historically important communities along the Underground Railroad," said Carla Majernik, Adventure Cycling's routes and mapping director. "The route also follows the Lake Huron shoreline to Owen Sound, which is an incredibly scenic ride."

"Detroit is an important highlight on the new route for its historic relevance and its contemporary efforts to improve conditions for cyclists," said Ginny Sullivan, special projects director and lead staff on the UGRR project. "Increasingly the city has invested in bike lanes, greenways, urban agriculture, and natural parks, making it an even more attractive stopover for touring cyclists on the new route."

Running through many smaller communities in northwestern Ohio, southern Michigan, and southern Ontario, the Detroit Alternate creates a cultural heritage corridor that not only offers education and recreational opportunities for people of all ages, but also promises increased tourism to the communities along this iconic corridor.

According to Jenn Milyko, cartographer, the Detroit Alternate links to other Adventure Cycling routes such as the Lake Erie Connector and the Northern Tier, "These new connections create numerous options for wonderful one and two week loop rides."

Adventure Cycling provides a list of key historic and cultural landmarks on each map section of the Detroit Alternate; a more extensive listing of historic sites can be found in the organization's online route highlights.

Important stops on the Section 1 map include:

- The Oberlin downtown historic district, Oberlin College, and the Oberlin Heritage Center, which showcases the abolitionist and UGRR history of the community.
- In Adrian, Michigan, visit the Lenawee County Historical Museum, which houses thousands of documents relating to the UGRR, and the **Laura Haviland Statue** (100 E. Church St.).
- In Detroit, cyclists can explore the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, the largest museum in the world dedicated to the struggles and perseverance of African Americans, the Historical First Congregational Church, also known as The Living Museum, which offers the Underground Railroad Flight to Freedom Program Tours, a "storytelling" simulation of a slave's journey to freedom, and the **Gateway to Freedom Monument** at Hart Plaza on the Detroit Riverfront, which marks the crossing of thousands of freedom seekers into Canada.
- A partner monument in Windsor, Ontario, is visible across the river. Known as the **Tower of Freedom Underground Railroad Monument**, this sculpture depicts the refugee's arrival into Canada and their overwhelming emotion upon encountering freedom.

The Buxton National Historic Site and Museum in North Buxton is an absolute must-see for those traveling on the Detroit Alternate's **Windsor Option** on the Section 2 map.

"We're so excited to welcome cyclists to the Buxton Settlement, which was the largest and most successful planned settlement for fugitive slaves and free blacks in Canada," said Shannon Prince, curator for the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum and 6th generation settlement descendant. "When you arrive, you will be able to visit the oldest home, built in 1850, and feel the original hand-hewn logs. You can enter the school built in 1861 or wander the 1866 cemetery to view the weathered headstones of some of the early settlers, or handle the original adult and children's ankle shackles. The experience will be memorable!"

More highlights on Section 2:

- In Chatham, Ontario, visit the **First Baptist Church Chatham** where American abolitionist John Brown held the last in a series of clandestine meetings to plan his "slave rebellion. At the **Chatham Kent Black Historical Society** you can experience a self-guided exhibit containing numerous artifacts, an audio-visual presentation, and an interactive display honoring black residents.
- Cycling on to Dresden, Ontario, you can visit the **Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site/Josiah Henson House**, which was the home of Rev. Josiah Henson and houses exhibits, period buildings, and an interpretive center. Rev. Henson, a fugitive slave who found freedom in Ontario in 1830 via the Underground Railroad, established the Dawn Settlement. Henson's experiences were the reference for the title character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- Between Sombra and Owen Sound, there are only a few historic landmarks, however cyclists can enjoy the beautiful Lake Huron waterfront for many of these miles. The historic highlights along this stretch include the **Wilberforce Settlement Plaque** found at the Lucan post office, which commemorates the establishment of the settlement in 1830 by a group of fugitive slaves with the assistance of Quakers from Oberlin, Ohio.
- In Owen Sound, be sure to visit the Grey Roots Museum and Archives**,** and its exhibit, *From Slavery to Freedom, African Canadians in Grey County*. Established in 1856, the **BME Church** (241 11 St. W.) served the needs of former slaves arriving on the Underground Railroad and parishioners are considered the founders of the **Annual Emancipation Day Celebration** www.emancipation.ca, which is held the first weekend in August each year. In August 2012, the celebration marks its 150th Anniversary, making an attractive end-date for cyclists touring the new alternate or the main Underground Railroad route, which also

terminates in Owen Sound.

Adventure Cycling began working on the Underground Railroad Bicycle Route in 2004. After the main 2,000-mile route was established between Mobile, AL and Owen Sound, ON, Adventure Cycling committed to developing more UGRR routes, both alternates and spurs, in order to involve more communities and historic sites. The first Underground Railroad spur route was developed in 2007, and runs from Pittsburgh to Erie, Pennsylvania. This route highlights an important UGRR corridor while also honoring Adventure Cycling's partnership with the Center for Minority Health at the University of Pittsburgh.

Adventure Cycling's members and donors supported the creation of the Detroit Alternate, as did a generous $20,000 grant from REI (Recreational Equipment, Inc.), a retail co-op providing quality outdoor gear and clothing.

From February 22-28, Executive Director Jim Sayer will visit Detroit, Toledo, Oberlin, Cleveland, Columbus, and Pittsburgh to promote the new route.

Media contacts: Maps and photos available. Contact Winona Bateman at wbateman@adventurecycling.org.

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Adventure Cycling Association *is the premier bicycle-travel organization in North America with over 43,500 members. A nonprofit organization, its mission is to inspire people of all ages to travel by bicycle. It produces routes and maps for cycling in North America, organizes more than 50 tours annually, and publishes the best bicycle-travel information anywhere, including* Adventure Cyclist *magazine and the* online Cyclists' Yellow Pages*. With 41,399 meticulously mapped miles in the Adventure Cycling Route Network, Adventure Cycling gives cyclists the tools and confidence to create their own bike-travel adventures. Contact the office at (800) 755-BIKE (2453), info@adventurecycling.org, or visit www.adventurecycling.org.*