TEN TOP TOURING AREAS

There are a lot of sublime places on our planet to ride your bicycle, but, alas, most of us don’t have time to ride them all. To help you choose, we’ve handpicked the following list of world-class riding areas, with at least one or two hopefully near you, to stoke your cyclotouring fires. Some, like the Pacific Coast and Nova Scotia’s Cabot Trail, are well-known dream rides; others, like Yukon’s Canol Road, are hidden gems. All are worthy of your velo-dreams.

GAP and C&O Canal towpath
Pedaling through history is a traffic-free adventure on the Chesapeake and Ohio Towpath and Great Allegheny Passage. The linking of these two very different bicycle trails in late 2006 created an off-road bike route from Washington, DC, clear across the Eastern Continental Divide to the outskirts of Pittsburgh.
Cyclotourists making the journey leave behind the monuments of the nation’s capital as they pedal 335 miles to the former Steel Belt capital. Along the way, they encounter Civil War battlefields, historic canal and railroad structures, and other landmarks of the nation’s westward development.
The C&O towpath is a virtually flat run for 184.5 miles from Washington to Cumberland. Bicyclists ride beneath a forested canopy, bounded by the old canal on one side and views of the rushing Potomac River on the other.
By contrast, the Great Allegheny Passage climbs to about 2,500 feet between Cumberland and McKeesport, rewarding bicyclists with spectacular vistas of mountains and valleys. Don’t worry; you don’t pedal over the Alleghenies, you go through them. Three old railroad tunnels — the longest is the 3,294-foot Big Savage Tunnel — pass through the highest mountains.

A look at some of the most mouth-watering bicycling destinations in North America
Edited by Aáron Teasdale
There are adequate campgrounds, motels, B&Bs, and restaurants along the route for camping or credit-card bicycle travelers.

Leave the racing bike at home. While the crushed limestone of the GAP trail-trail makes for an even ride with wider tires, the gravel and clay surface of the towpath turns to mud after rain then hardens to a washboard surface best suited for mountain bikes, preferably with suspension.

Resources: Check for destinations and accommodations at the Great Allegheny Passage website (www.atatrail.org/index.cfm) and Bike Washington’s C&O Canal guide (bike washington.org/canal/index.php).

AARON TEASDALE

The Canal Road, Yukon

Wilderness lovers and anyone looking to truly, truly get away from it all should look north to the mighty Yukon Territory. The landscape in Alaska’s Canadian neighbor is wild, rugged, and largely untouched by human hands, which, frankly, doesn’t leave a ton of options for bicycle adventures. Fortunately, there is the Canal Road. It slices through the wildlands of the territory’s rugged, and largely untouched by human

Not living up to their name. The White Mountains explode with vibrant fall colors.

into the wilds. Pedaling along Quiet Lake on the Yukon’s Canal Road.

beautiful southern reaches and, for the truly hardy, extends into the remote Mackenzie Mountains of the Northwest Territories. Originally built to access oilfields during World War II, the route now lives on as a backcountry byway nonpariel with three distinct sections.

The South Canal is the classic option. Perfect for a weekend tour, it features glorious mountain views and abundant camping along its 145-mile length. There is light local traffic — mainly locals in pickups going camping — and a fairly smooth, if consistently bumpy, road surface.

The North Canal, which runs to the Northwest Territories’ border, is less-traveled, less-maintained, even more remote, and must be ridden out-and-back (unlike the South Canal which links two highways). When the route crosses into the Northwest Territories at Macmillan Pass, it becomes the Canal Heritage Trail, where it degrades (or improves, depending on your perspective) into an unmaintained wilderness track complete with rockslides, river crossings, and more grizzly bears than humans.

Resources: Kena Peple (867-868-2859, www.kenapeople.com) in the Yukon capital of Whitehorse rents serviced Kena hardtails and can shuttle you to and from the Canal.

Mac’s Favored Books (800-661-0508, www.yukonbooks.com) in Whitehorse has a complete collection of Yukon topographic maps.


AARON TEASDALE

White Mountains

Vermont’s Green Mountains are known for great riding, but don’t overlook the top-notch touring next door in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and western Maine.

Home to 6,188-foot Mount Washington — with its legendary bike race up the Northeast’s highest peak — the White Mountains are filled with rolling hills, challenging mountain passes (called “notches”), and the ever-present chance of spotting a moose. Carry a tent, or opt for comfort. The stunning White Mountain National Forest is loaded with camping options while small towns feature friendly inns and B&Bs.

The sinuous 30-plus mile Kancamagus Highway showcases the region’s forested and alpine beauty and is frequented by many cross-country riders. Under jagged cliffs and by the site of the former Old Man of the Mountain rock profile, the Franconia Notch State Park hike path is a pleasant diversion. Rugged Pinkham — which runs along Mount Washington’s base on Route 16 — and Crawford notches (Route 302) are challenging yet scenic, while Route 113 through Evans Notch borders the two states and wiggles under a tree canopy. Maine’s Grafton Notch on Route 16 through the Mahoosuc Range is another treat of honor. Many of these notches are North Rim of the Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon is one of the most spectacular and popular natural wonders in America, but less well-known is the fact that its remote North Rim harbors one of our continent’s finest mountain-bike tours. For five days or more, cyclists can ride through the forests and meadows along the edge of this staggering geologic marvel on a combination of singletrack and jeep roads linking the multitude of little-used campgrounds that are perched on the lip of the canyon itself.

The tourist outpost of Jacob Lake (basic supplies, no bike shop) is the jumping-off point for 18 miles. The Point Sublime jeep road takes riders on a rollicking ride into the...

Not living up to their name. The White Mountains explode with vibrant fall colors.

The White Mountains explode with vibrant fall colors.

The tourist outpost of Jacob Lake (basic supplies, no bike shop) is the jumping-off point for the many opportunities on the Grand Canyon’s North Rim.

July, August, and Columbus Day are peak periods. Summers are hot with humid days. Autumn is cool, when the foliage is beautiful but the roads are busy.

Bike shops are many, with hubs like Bridge Bicycle and the ever-present chance of spotting a moose. Carry a tent, or opt for comfort. The stunning White Mountain National Forest is loaded with camping options while small towns feature friendly inns and B&Bs.

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The heart of Grand Canyon National Park, where the wide-windowed Grand Canyon Lodge offers some of the world’s finest diminutive views.

The Arizona Trail then leads riders north from the lodge and campground into the forested interior of the Kaibab Plateau (keep an eye out for the rare and peculiar Kaibab squirrel) before remerging at the canyon’s rim again at the East Rim Viewpoint. From here, the Arizona Trail — like the Rainbow Rim Trail, quite manageable with a trailer — leads back to Jacob Lake, and still further north for those fortunate enough to pedal on. June through September is best time to ride here, when highs average in the 60’s and nights in the 40’s.

Resources: The North Kaibab Ranger District (928-643-7395, www.fs.fed.us/r3/den) offers maps and information on the Kaibab National Forest. The North Rim, feel free to email Aaron Teasdale at ateasdale@advenventurecycling.org for a detailed route description.

Lake Superior

The enormity of Lake Superior, the world’s largest freshwater lake (by surface area), becomes clear when you consider that circumnavigating it by bicycle covers 1,450 miles — nearly equivalent to cycling halfway across North America. The entire loop is a great tour, but if you only have a week or so to spare, head to Minnesota’s portion of the lake (known as the North Shore) where a growing bike-path network and delightful on-the-shore cycling presents the rider with outstanding views, and abundant camping and lodging. The historic city of Duluth, Minnesota, is an ideal jumping-off point for cyclists spinning north to the lakeside village of Grand Marais and, eventually, the Canadian border.

National and state forests with their campgrounds and conifer trees are one of the defining features of Lake Superior. Filled with hiking trails and waterfalls, wildlife are the natural inhabitants of the forests here; humans are merely interlopers. Inns and b&bs abound along this stretch, as do developed campgrounds in the many state parks and Superior National Forest (which can fill up during tourist season, so make reservations).

Riders wishing to continue around the entire lake will cross into Ontario and follow Canada’s Highway 17, which has paved shoulders but also significant truck traffic. Though supplies are limited (bring food supplies and a water purifier), lake-front camping at improved highway rest stops are wonderful. Don’t miss Pukaskwa National Park, just south of Marathon. An immense, lovely, hilly and solitary ride greets cyclists on their way through Lake Superior Provincial Park to Sault Ste. Marie. Crossing back into the U.S. at the Michigan Panhandle, many cyclists will prefer the riding on highways 18 and 41, with their paved shoulders, to the rugged dirt roads along the lakeshore. Camping is a mix of national forest and private campgrounds, and locally owned motels, guesthouses, and b&bs are abundant in the small towns and larger cities back to Duluth.


Wisconsin: www.dot.state.wi.us/travel/bike-foot/bikemaps.htm


- Harvey Botzman

Blue Ridge Parkway and Skyline Drive

Imagine bicycle touring the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains on one continuous highway for 575 miles. From Front Royal, Virginia, to Cherokee, North Carolina, the Skyline Drive and the Blue Ridge Parkway enable cyclists to experience a rush of mountain sensations. Whether it’s 40-mph-hour downhill runs, slow climbing on short black faces, or easy pedaling past fields of wildflowers, these roads contain thrills, challenges, and scenic rewards.

Riding the Blue Ridge is physically challenging, with extended climbs of over 1,000 feet. For every down there is an up and elevations change fairly quickly, with the lowest point on the Parkway at 649 feet and the highest at 3,950 feet. One benefit of these roads is their low speed limits: 25 miles-per-hour on the Skyline Drive and 45 miles-per-hour on the Parkway. With both roads managed by the National Park Service, the Blue Ridge is physically

Blue Ridge Parkway Association (828-372-4779) and the Shenandoah Valley Tourist Association (www.svta.org) for directories of facilities. Plan one to two weeks to enjoy this tour end-to-end.

- Elizabeth Skinner

Cascades and Okanogan Valley

Breathtaking views of craggy alpine landscapes, easy spins along river valleys, and visits to quirky western towns are part and parcel of bicycle touring in the Okanogan region of north-central Washington. Basking on the eastern flank of the Cascade Range, this area gets twice the sun and half the rain as the western part of the state, another reason why bicyclists love it here.

Highway 20, dubbed the North Cascades Highway, is considered the most scenic route across the mountain range. Grasslands in the Methow Valley give way to Douglas fir as cyclists grind up the highway bounded by towering glacier-carved peaks of Needles, Silver Star Mountain, and Liberty Bell. The highway summits at 5,477-foot Washington Pass where cyclists can hike, enjoy a 35-mile downhill to Newhalem in western Washington, or retrace their route.

More than one. There are lots of blue ridges along Skyline Drive.
Not every ride requires a steep climb, though. There are many gender cycling routes that follow the Okanogan, Methow, Chewuch, and Columbia river valleys or twist and turn around the brown foothills. Keep your eyes open for vineyards and apple orchards.

Low-traffic roads are easy to find through this area (see Resources). Highways 20 and 97 carry a little more traffic, but they’re well-paved with good shoulders.

Camping is available throughout the region, and motels and B&B inns are abundant. Consider riding on puncture-resistant tires for protection against the prolific thorny weeds in the lowlands. Lastly, while this area can be hot and dry, weather in the mountains passes is unpredictable.

Resources: The Bicycling in Washington website (www.wsdot.wa.gov/bike/) offers advice and tells how to order a free Washington State Bicycle Map.

-Gene Bisbee

Big Sur and the California Coast

You’ll be awing to the tunes of “Catch a wave and you’re sitting, on top of the world,” the Beach Boys’ ode to the California beach scene, as you gaze down on crashing waves.

Taking it all in. There is no shortage of mind-expanding overlooks along the Pacific Coast. From atop your bike at one of the many scenic overlooks along the coast between San Francisco and Los Angeles. These world-class cities booked one of the classic bike tours of North America.

Starting at the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, the route follows the Pacific Coast Highway south for almost 900 miles through grasslands, redwoods, and some of the finest coastal scenery in the world. Hidden coves, waterfalls, creeks, and rivers cut into the coastline as the road dips and dives.

Wildlife abounds along the coast. Besides the many seashorebirds, keep an eye out for migrating elephant seals, and don’t be surprised to spot endangered California Condors in Big Sur. You might even see a gray whale in season. State park campgrounds abound and, combined with the occasional hostel, there are plenty of options for cyclists. You can even overnight in historic lighthouses operated by American Youth Hostels at Monteria Beach and Pigeon Point. It’s possible to credit-card tour, but the cost of inn and b&b’s here is frighteningly stratospheric.

Anytime from spring through fall is ideal during spring and fall. Pedaling north to south allows you to take advantage of the prevailing winds. Those looking to avoid the Los Angeles megapolis should consider making Santa Barbara their endpoint.

Resources: AAG (www.aag.org) has comprehensive campground maps. Adventure Cycling’s Pacific Coast Route (www.adventurecycling.org/routes/pacificcoast.cfm) details the best places to ride, as well as camping and roughness guides.

-Aaron Teasdale

Montana’s Great Divide

In its 19 years of existence the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route has established itself as North America’s premier long-distance mountain-bike tour. Each section of the route has its own appeal, but time and time again complete GDMBR finishers say that Montana is their favorite section. It’s easy to understand why, with the route passing through some of its most remote and spectacular stretches as it skirts the border of Glacier National Park, the massive Bob Marshall wilderness complex, and the sweeping, sparsely populated valleys of the Treasure State’s southern reaches.

This author’s favorite section runs from Eureka to Seeley Lake, in both the North Fork of the Flathead Valley and the Swan Valley, two of Montana’s wildest and most scenic swaths of forests, rivers, and mountains. From Eureka, forest roads lead into shadowy, old-growth woods and climb over the Whitefish Divide into the North Fork Valley, where you pedal south along the border of Glacier Park. The tiny hamlet of Polson bridge, five miles off route the other another 26 miles to the town of Ovando where the Stray Bullet Café serves up a fine Montana breakfast.

Resources: Great Divide maps: www.adventurecycling.org/routes/greatdivide.cfm


On your own. Great Divide riders should know how to fix their own flats.

The rustic North Fork Hostel (www.nfbhostel.com) in Polson bridge is one of the most charming and unique places you’ll ever stay.

-Aaron Teasdale

Nova Scotia’s Cape Breton and Cabot Trail

Cape Breton’s spectacular seaside Cabot Trail is the crown jewel of Nova Scotia cycling on an island with a treasure chest of touring possibilities. There is a touch of Scotland in the province’s northern reaches, heard in the local lilt and seen from the rugged coastline that plunges into the Atlantic.

Resources: The Cabot Trail Map (1.280.736.2453) offers European bicycling tours, custom adventures and superior service at cbttours.com

For a complete list of trip rentals bikes, panniers, and trailers.

Resources:

1.800.736.2453
E-mail us at information@cbttours.com

Get signed up at www.adventurecycling.org and you’ll be entered in the 2008 Bike Giveaway.

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If you are a current member on the respective dates, your name will be included in our 2008 Bike Giveaway drawing. In February, we’ll draw a name to win the Surly touring bike and the ACA tour.

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Just planting any type of tree along the route wasn’t going to work. Steve learned from his father, who is an arborist, that the survival rate for trees planted in the wild is just seven percent. So Steve and Ben spent considerable time researching which non-invasive species of tree would work in a particular environment.

To improve the odds that the trees would thrive, they coordinated the plantings with townspeople en route, hoping that they would become caretakers of the trees, helping to ensure their survival. Before the trip, they anticipated planting around 100 trees (103 was the final total), but they knew that one day they would like to ride the route again and see where the trees were planted, so they decided to plant trees along the way.


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The hopping village of Baddeck south of the famous Bras d’Or Lake with its undulating shoreline of farms, cows, and villages.


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To improve the odds that the trees would thrive, they coordinated the plantings with townspeople en route, hoping that they would become caretakers of the trees, helping to ensure their survival. Before the trip, they anticipated planting around 100 trees (103 was the final total), but they knew that they couldn’t take all of these with them at once so, as Ben was readying their bikes for the trip he fashioned a Styrofoam cooler to the top of Steve’s rear rack to carry the trees. They started out with 10 trees in the cooler, and every few weeks had another shipped to them at towns along the way.

Both Ben and Steve say that one day they would like to ride the route again and see which trees survived. They’ll have a long time to do it, as giant sequoias can live for over 3,000 years. To learn more about their trip and see a list of where the trees were planted, you can visit spokesandstems.