

“It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best, since you have to sweat up the hills and can coast down them. Thus you remember them as they actually are . . . you have no such accurate remembrance of a country you have driven through as you gain by riding a bicycle.”

Ernest Hemingway, in *By-Line*

INTRODUCTION

This book is a guide for people who want to go bike riding on the roads of Washtenaw County. It's for people who are new to the county, perhaps moving there to attend college or take up a new job. It's for people who are new to bike riding and want some suggestions about where they can ride. It is also for more experienced bicyclists who want to expand their repertoire of rides or learn a bit more about where they are riding.

All the routes described in this book start or end in Washtenaw County, Michigan, although some edge into neighboring counties. There are many potential routes. The criterion for selecting the rides is simply that each route is one I like and have ridden many times. The routes are also selected with a strong preference for rides outside of cities.

Washtenaw County has an active city life but has retained (at least for now) both woods and farms, which makes for a wide range of pleasant bike rides. The dominant city is Ann Arbor, home to the University of Michigan, but the county has a diverse range of communities and environments. There are lots of pleasant towns and villages throughout the county, many of which are visited on the rides described here. The rides in this book go predominantly north and west of Ann Arbor into the less-populated regions of the county. Rides to the north tend to be somewhat more wooded and perhaps a bit hillier; those to the south feature more open space and, when the winds blow, less shelter from the wind and a greater chance of a windy ride.

All of these rides can be done on a road bike—the sort of narrow-tire bike that many members of the baby boom generation know as a “ten speed” (though most today offer more than 10 speeds). However,



A bicyclist on Huron River Drive heading out of Ann Arbor

all of these rides can also be done on any sort of bicycle; a hybrid (cross bike) or mountain bike will work fine. The only issue is whether you feel comfortable riding long distances on something other than a road bike—and that judgment will vary for each rider.

All of these routes are paved. Thus, routes specific to mountain biking are not included. There is excellent mountain biking available in the area, but that's not the subject of this book. Riders on a mountain or cross bike can easily go down dirt roads, and many of the rides in the book connect with dirt roads that make for wonderful riding. Those who like that sort of riding are encouraged to explore these options, which are occasionally noted but not detailed.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The book's intent is to provide the rider with the sort of flexibility necessary to produce the ideal ride for a given rider on a given day with a given group or by oneself. The routes provide a set of options from which to select, combine, or mix and match.

The reasons for this flexibility are at least threefold. For one thing, it's hard to calibrate rides across a wide range of riders. One person's

“killer” hill is another person’s barely perceptible rise. One person’s “long” ride is a warm-up for another. One person hates riding anywhere close to cars while another is quite comfortable with heavy traffic. People differ. This book attempts to offer all sorts of riders some enjoyable rides.

Second, each day is different. Do you want a hard ride or an easier one? Do you want a short ride or an all-day one? Located on the western edge of the Eastern Time Zone, summertime offers Washtenaw County riders the chance to ride relatively late into the evening, with some sunsets in June and July occurring well after 9:00 p.m. Washtenaw County also offers the opportunity to enjoy all four seasons of the year, and while year-round bicycle riding poses challenges it also offers rewards.

Finally, at the outset of a ride it’s not always possible to predict how it will go. Some days you will find that you feel strong while on other days you may want to relax. Sometimes the weather cooperates, sometimes not so much. The point of this book is to provide you with



Snowy trees frame Huron River Drive on a wintry day



In the southern part of the county the scenery features fewer forests and more open fields

a range of options. You can use those options to decide what you want to do on a given day, including the option of changing in the midst of a ride. That way you can enjoy some of the variety that the area has to offer while creating a ride that is just the one you want.

THE RIDES

Each ride starts with the route's length. This is followed by "links," other named routes in this book with which the route can link. There are also "options," alternative routes or extensions from the given route that may or may not link up with another ride.

Many riders will be able to ride their bikes to the starting point. For those who will be driving, there are parking suggestions, but please take care to honor any parking restrictions or limits that may be in place!

The route is given twice. First, there is a description of what to expect on that ride as well as information about its sights, sounds, and smells. Following that description is a cue sheet for those who just want to know where to go and where to turn. All distances are in miles. Compass directions are approximate.

The essence of this arrangement is the ability to mix and match routes, to use the links and options to combine rides or discover something new. You can go out on one route and come back on another. You can combine two short routes to make a longer one or combine two long routes for a full day in the saddle!

Although the routes are described as proceeding in one direction, do not forget that you can ride each one in the opposite direction for what is often a very different experience. *Be careful when following a route.* Things change. Road conditions change. Some roads with a great surface may deteriorate; some crumbling roads will be resurfaced. Some of these rides go over bridges that need repair. Roads may be impassable while repairs are ongoing. Changing road conditions are a fact of life, especially for bicycle riders seeking quiet roads that are less used by cars than the main thoroughfares. Caution is advised. Should you find any impassable obstacles, the routes listed will usually provide you a way of getting around them.

RIDE CATEGORIES

RIDES WITH CHILDREN ON TRAINING WHEELS OR WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE JUST LEARNING TO RIDE: Gallup Park, Hudson Mills Metropark (see the North Territorial Extension under the “Huron River Drive” ride).

RIDES OVER 45 MILES: East Lansing, Manchester.

RIDES WITH HILLS: Dixboro Road, Manchester, Ride to Hell, Joy Road (see the Joy Road Extension under the “Huron River Drive” ride). Riders who are seeking long hills will find none in Washtenaw County. A guide to shorter hills in the city of Ann Arbor can be found at the Ann Arbor Bicycle Touring Society Web site.

ESPECIALLY SCENIC RIDES: Huron River Drive, Waterloo Loop, Manchester.

AREA BIKE CLUBS AND OTHER USEFUL ORGANIZATIONS

One of the best ways to learn more about riding or routes is to join one of the local biking groups. Riding with a club is a good way to learn about the area rides and how to ride. It’s a good way to get to

know people who ride like you and find people with whom to ride (if that's what you like to do). It will also help you learn the local mores. Each group has a Web site that will serve as an entrée to much more information.

Ann Arbor Bicycle Touring Society (AABTS), www.aabts.org

This is the society with which I first rode in Washtenaw County. I am grateful to the AABTS for starting me and others on what has become a bicycle obsession. Riders of all ages, speeds, shapes, and proclivities are welcome and are well represented on club rides. The Web site provides links to the almost daily rides, and nonmembers may participate free of charge. Club members receive discounts at most local bicycle shops. Each July the club sponsors “One Helluva Ride” in which 1,500 to 2,000 participants enjoy road rides of 15 to 100 miles, as well as mountain bicycle rides. The Web site offers a wide range of maps and routes, some of which overlap the routes described in more detail in this book. For anyone wishing to learn more about routes throughout the county and beyond, this is the place to go.

Washtenaw Bicycling and Walking Coalition, www.wbwc.org

This local organization combines an interest in bicycling and walking. It pays particular attention to issues of bicycle commuting, especially for year-round commuters, as well as safety issues for pedestrians and bicyclists. The group's Web site is a treasure trove of news coverage and local governance related to bicycling.

Michigan Wolver-bents, www.lmb.org/wolverbents/index.htm

Do you ride a recumbent bicycle? Do you want to know about issues specific to recumbent bicycles? If so, this organization and its Web site are for you!

Ann Arbor Velo Club, www.aavc.org

The Ann Arbor Velo Club is a group of bicyclists interested in racing with the mission of developing skills and abilities across all groups

(junior riders, senior men and women, and masters racers). The group fields several racing teams each year and has Michigan's largest racing club roster.

University of Michigan Cycling Team, www.mcycling.org/index.php

This team is open to any student at the University of Michigan regardless of skill or experience.

Washtenaw County Heritage Tours, www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/planning_environment/historic_preservation/histweb_tours/home.html

While it is not a bicycle organization per se, the Washtenaw County Heritage Map initiative has created four driving tours of Washtenaw County, which provide a wonderful guide to the area's architecture and history. Each tour comes with a brochure and detailed maps. The tours overlap some of the routes in this book and can easily be incorporated into a ride.