

A
FALCON
GUIDE®

Road Biking™ Ohio

A Guide to the State's Best Bike Rides



WHERE TO RIDE SERIES

CELESTE BAUMGARTNER

Road Biking™ Ohio

HELP US KEEP THIS GUIDE UP TO DATE

Every effort has been made by the author and editors to make this guide as accurate and useful as possible. However, many things can change after a guide is published—roads are detoured, phone numbers change, facilities come under new management, etc.

We would love to hear from you concerning your experiences with this guide and how you feel it could be improved and kept up to date. While we may not be able to respond to all comments and suggestions, we'll take them to heart and we'll also make certain to share them with the author. Please send your comments and suggestions to the following address:

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Guilford, CT 06437

Or you may e-mail us at: editorial@GlobePequot.com

Thanks for your input, and happy riding!

Road Biking™ Series

Road Biking™ Ohio

A Guide to the State's Best Bike Rides

Celeste Baumgartner

FALCON GUIDES

GUILFORD, CONNECTICUT
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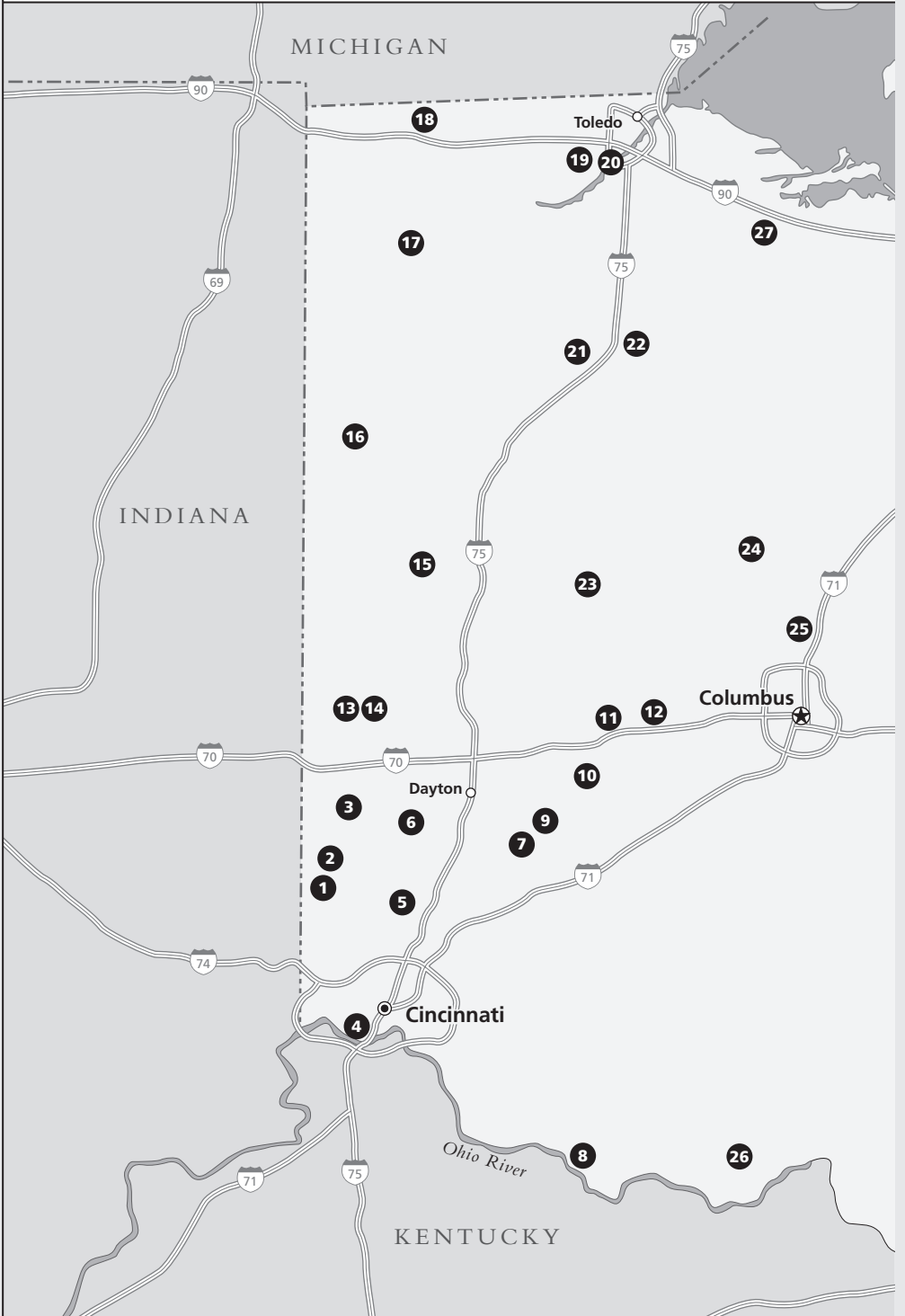
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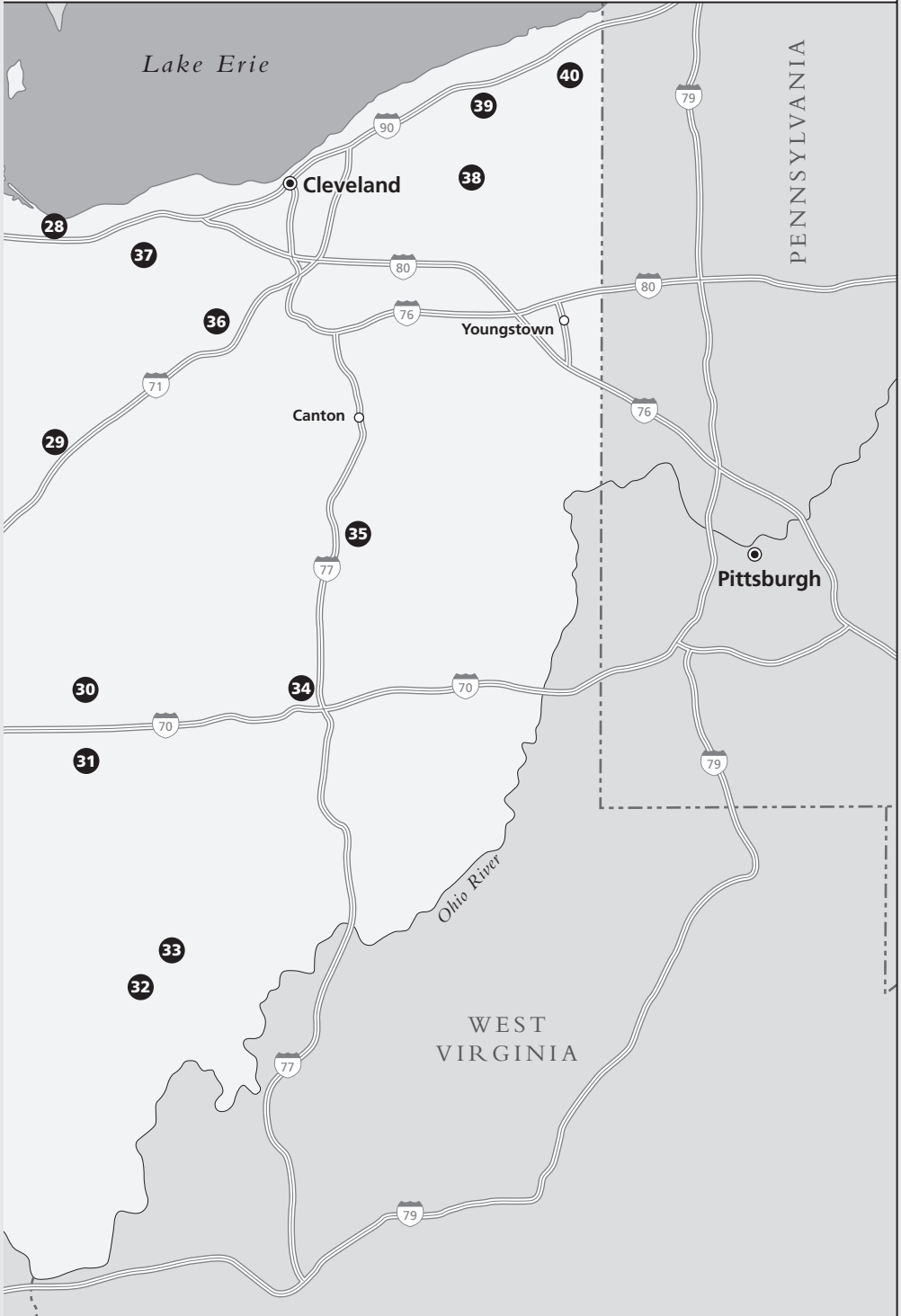
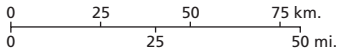
Preface	ix
Introduction	1
Basic Equipment.....	4
Road Safety and Rules of the Road.....	6
How to Use This Book.....	8
Ohio Bicycling Resources	9
Map Legend	10

The Rides

1 Oxford Ramble	11
2 Hueston Woods Ramble	16
3 Fort Saint Clair Cruise.....	21
4 Ohio River Ramble.....	26
5 Butler County Ramble	30
6 Germantown Challenge.....	34
7 Caesar Creek Challenge.....	39
8 Ripley Ramble	44
9 Little Miami Scenic Trail Challenge.....	48
10 Clifton Ramble.....	53
11 Buck Creek Cruise	58
12 Clark Lake Ramble.....	62
13 Fort Jefferson Ramble.....	66
14 Bear's Mill Ramble	71
15 New Bremen Cruise.....	75
16 Ohio City Ramble.....	80
17 Defiance Ramble.....	84
18 Harrison Lake Cruise.....	88
19 Wabash Cannonball Ramble	93
20 Maumee River Challenge	97
21 Rawson Ramble	102
22 Findlay-to-Fostoria Cruise	106
23 Logan County Cruise	110
24 Prospect Ramble.....	115
25 Alum Creek Challenge	120
26 Scioto County Classic.....	125
27 Fremont Ramble	129
28 Huron-to-Milan Cruise	134
29 Lexington Ramble.....	139
30 Licking County Cruise	143
31 Thornville-to-Somerset Challenge.....	148
32 Albany Challenge.....	152
33 Athens Quilt Barn Cruise	157

Overview Map





34	Cambridge Challenge	162
35	Muskingum Valley Classic.....	166
36	Medina Ramble.....	172
37	Oberlin-to-Vermilion Cruise	176
38	Geauga County Cruise	182
39	Harpersfield Cruise.....	186
40	Ashtabula County Covered Bridge Cruise.....	191
	Index of Rides by Name.....	196
	About the Author	197

Preface

Thanks for green grass, blue skies, hills and valleys, a smooth road on which to ride, a friend to ride with, and being pleasantly tired at the end of the day.

Ohio and biking make a match. Good roads, multi-use trails, plentiful bike clubs and shops, the Buckeye State's got what it takes. Finding good routes for this book was easy. I have written a bicycling column for the *Journal-News* in southwestern Ohio for more than fifteen years. The roads there are like my backyard. For the rest of the state, I sought the advice of bicycle clubs and shops. Funny, the people there, wherever, were always convinced that their territory was absolutely the best in the state for biking. Convention and visitors bureaus were also helpful in finding bike routes. Several came up with a route of their own; others put me in contact with a bicyclist who could help. The challenge was in choosing the best forty rides. I went for low traffic, high scenery. They're spread over Ohio. I want to thank all of those people for their help. Is it just me or are bicyclists really a friendly, helpful lot? And what is it with bicyclists and eating?

- We contacted a bike club in Mansfield asking if they could suggest a route. They rode and mapped a route before we arrived, and then the whole gang went along with us just for fun and to show us where to get the best apple pie.
- We had a problem while on the road, called a bike shop in Geauga County; could we stop in? They stopped what they were doing, met us at the door, carried our bikes up the steps, fixed the problem, and suggested a route to ride and where to eat lunch.
- At another shop in Delaware, they mapped routes for us and most importantly directed those routes around the best ice cream shops and the restaurant with the best fried baloney sandwiches anywhere.

Many bike clubs and shops sent maps, offered to ride along, and gave us cell phone numbers in case we got lost. They include the Cincinnati Cycle Club, Cycle Path Bike Shop (Athens), Flatlanders Bicycle Club (Fremont), Hancock Handlebars (Findlay), Licking County Bicycle Club, Medina County Bicycle Club, Mid-Ohio Bikers (Mansfield), Toledo Area Bicyclists, and Michael Hart at Mycle's Cycles (Ripley). Extremely helpful were recommendations from convention and visitors bureaus in Ashtabula County, Lorain County, Cambridge/Guernsey County (thanks for introducing me to Tom Davey), Carroll County, Van Wert County and Licking County, and the chamber of commerce in New Bremen. Thank you, Charley Conley at DeLorme, who spent patient hours on the phone helping me learn to use my GPS.

Thank you to Scott Adams, John Burbidge, and everyone at Globe Pequot Press for their help and patience in turning my meanderings into something very organized and nice.

Thanks to John, my husband, who encouraged me to do this from day one and made sure I always had air in my tires. Thanks to Penny Westrick, who immediately said “Let’s go” when she heard the idea. She biked from one end of the state to the other with me, our bike bags stuffed with her Sunny Morning Muffins (recipe included). She also introduced me to fried dill pickles. Thanks to John and to Penny’s husband Pat for taking care of the dogs while we were gone. And to my kids Eric, Amy, Tim, and Jenny, who inspired me to get on a bike again when I was a grown-up and convinced me that I could go down the Darrtown Road hill without braking, and to my long-gone parents, who stirred in me a love of being outside, birds, trees, flowers, and quiet nonmotorized things.

I hope that you enjoy these rides as much as I did.

Introduction

About fifteen years ago many of my friends were taking vacations to far-distant places. Being a little light in the pocket, I was staying home and feeling sorry for myself. Then some little spark suggested I explore my own territory on a shoestring in the form of a bicycle. I've been doing that ever since, and what a wealth I have discovered. Ohio is one cool state, varying from corner to corner, with the Lake Erie region being its own environment. You want hills? The southeast has unabashed hills and breathtaking scenery. You like flat? Go northwest. The graceful wheat, bean, and corn fields stretch on until you feel dizzy. You like anything in between? Try almost anywhere else in the state.

I like to put in my biking miles. It's a fitness thing. Going fast, especially downhill, is fun. Yet I am not a macho-dude biker who has to go as far and as fast as possible. I relish seeing well-tended farmsteads, gardens, and great old barns. I stop to look at flowers and birds and always carry a camera and binoculars. I hope that the routes in this book accommodate those interests yet can still be enjoyed by those who like going as far and as fast as possible.

Ohio has some of the most picturesque farm country anywhere. We raise mostly corn, soybeans, and wheat, and there are wineries, especially in the northeastern part of the state. There are dairy farms, hogs, and beef cattle operations; we have one of the largest horse populations in the country. Besides farms, Ohio has great forests, some prairie, a Great Lake, the Ohio River, and a good number of covered bridges.

These bike routes will often bring you face to face with Ohio history, especially as related to:

- Covered bridges—many routes traverse one or more. Most were built between 1825 and 1875, according to Rickie Longfellow, who knows because she is with the Federal Highway Administration. The cover was originally used to protect the bridge's trusses and decks from snow and rain—an uncovered bridge would last about twenty years, but a covered one could last a hundred. The cover also kept horses from being spooked by the water underneath.
- The Underground Railroad, which was a loose network of antislavery folks and safe houses that helped thousands of slaves escape to the North and Canada. Traveling at night, the slaves followed the “drinking gourd” (Big Dipper) on hidden paths that became quiet country roads.
- Canals—between 1825 and 1847, 1,000 miles of navigable canals were built in Ohio. These canals gave Ohio farmers and businessmen access to the Ohio River and Lake Erie. They were the state's first transportation system and opened markets for agricultural and industrial products. But then came the railroads; canals were mostly abandoned, only to make a comeback years later as a tourist attraction. The towpaths tend to be flat and transpose into excellent bike trails.



On Silver Hart Road

- The “Indian Wars,” as they’re called, delayed the settlement of the Northwest Territory. England (the former owner of that territory) used Native Americans to create havoc, which made settlers reluctant to buy land. Generals Arthur St. Clair and “Mad” Anthony Wayne built a series of forts, and the battles raged until the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 convinced the English and the Native Americans to yield. That led to the signing of the Treaty of Greenville and settlement. Many of the rides in this book are in and around places connected to that struggle.
- Johnny Appleseed, aka John Chapman, was a real person who developed into a folklore legend. You may not meet his presence often—but think of him when you see an apple orchard. He was a kind man and a successful nurseryman who gained fame by distributing apple trees all over the Midwest. It is said that he wore his cooking pan as a hat when he traveled.

I don’t know if Johnny Appleseed traveled over the entire state, but if he did, he experienced a wide variety of terrain. Glaciers entered Ohio several times during the last two million years, but they did not cover the entire state. Generally, the glaciated portions of the state tend to be flatter—but nothing is simple. Those glaciated regions have their share of hills and valleys. The southeast portion of Ohio is part of the unglaciated Appalachian Plateau. The highest place in the state is Campbell Hill in Bellefontaine, at 1,549 feet above sea level; this hill is one of several in the region atop a geologic island called the Bellefontaine Outlier. Then there’s the northwestern part

of the state; eons ago it was covered by a large lake. When the lake receded to become Lake Erie as we know it today, it left behind the Great Black Swamp. Settlers avoided the swamp because the mud and mosquitoes made travel difficult. Eventually, when all of the surrounding area was settled, the swamp was tamed with drainage tile. Funny how things go; now people are taking out the drainage tile and restoring the wetlands. Yet the northwest, although it has some big cities, is still sparsely settled. All of this is a way of saying that bicycling in Ohio is never boring. You can find nice spells of flat road, challenging hills, and pleasant rolling land almost anywhere in the state.

As far as Ohio weather, we have a saying: If you don't like it, wait a while and it will change. Summers are glorious—warm and sunny with pleasant temperatures. If those temperatures climb into the 90s for a few days, we will probably say, “It's not the heat, it's the humidity.” That's when nothing beats a crisp bike ride at dawn. In April and May the temperature range is 37 to 70 degrees F in the northeast and 41 to 72 in the southwest. A day in spring when the oak leaves are the size of squirrels' ears and spring beauties are peeping through is amazing. Fall is the sunniest season, with warm September days running at 52 to 71 degrees, resulting in some of the most beautiful fall foliage you can imagine. Winters can be cold, 17 to 43 degrees in the dead of it. Sissy that I am, I rarely bike in the winter, but some diehards go at it year-round.

Ohio is becoming more and more urbanized. We lived in farm country for a long time. Now there's a Wal-Mart and Applebee's down the road, with fields sprouting more houses than corn, and that's typical of most of the state. Some roads where I once biked are now too busy. Riding a route in Springfield on quiet roads suggested by local bikers, we came upon a detour; construction crews were building a subdivision and a mall and rearranging the roads. We changed the route. Yet many pleasant, one-lane rural roads remain. We asked a man in Prospect how busy the roads were and he said, “There's nothing out there but farmers and cows,” and he was right. When we looked for bike routes in some northwestern counties, we were told repeatedly that you could ride anywhere; all the roads were flat and all had low traffic. That was pretty much the case. Also, multi-use trails seem to follow development. Many are a pleasant ride on their own. Oftentimes we used multi-use trails to get out of busy cities and onto quiet rural roads.

It's interesting that the roads in the northwestern part of the state are laid out in a grid. A county engineer told me that early surveyors experimented with many surveying systems before finally settling, in northwest Ohio, on the grid. They continued to use that system as they traveled west. In other parts of the state, roads seem to follow the lay of the land. As far as road signs go, I find it interesting that different counties have the signs facing different directions. It can be a tad off-putting until you figure out the local system. Also, some counties have every road carefully signed and some—well, some seem to have come up short on road signs. At intersections without road signs, I have done my best to include landmarks or other indicators. I know there are also times when the view of roads from your bike seat does not look like the map. I tried to be specific in those instances.

The publishers and I have done our best to provide accurate, up-to-the-minute maps in this book. Yet detours, road closings, and new subdivisions happen. Carrying a local county map is a good backup; it also enables you to leave the route and go exploring on your own should you choose. Maps are available from the county engineer's office in the seat of each county, and some counties have maps with bicycling routes highlighted. There is no general phone number for engineers' offices, but if you have Internet access you can do a Web search. You can pick up the map or have it mailed. Some are free, some cost a dollar or two—money well spent if you come face to face with a bridge that's out.

Basic Equipment

The only thing worse than, or at least as bad as, a bridge out is a flat tire or other bicycle malfunction while you're on the road. A good, well-maintained bicycle is a joy to ride and can increase your biking safety. Buying one at a good bike shop instead of the local box store will cost a few more dollars but is worth the expense. Folks at a bike shop will take time to help you find the right bike for your style of riding. They'll fit you to your bicycle, making any necessary adjustments to the cranks, handlebar stem, handlebars, and saddle; saddles are incredibly important, and in recent years manufacturers have made vast improvements. Finally, a bike shop will establish a regular maintenance program. For any bike, an annual tune-up is important whether you do it yourself or take it to the shop. It's a critical aspect of safe and happy riding.

I have a bicycling friend who will not ride with anyone not wearing a helmet. He doesn't want to see their brains scattered all over the road, he said. A high percentage of cyclists' brain injuries can be prevented by a helmet; estimates range from 45 to 88 percent. To do its job, a helmet must be fitted securely, level on your head, and have the straps carefully and properly fastened. Helmets should be replaced every couple of years—suggestions on exactly how often vary. They must be replaced if you crash, even if the helmet looks fine. Higher prices are mostly for style and pizzazz. As long as a helmet has the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) seal and is properly fitted, it will do the job.

When I first got back into biking as an adult, I took an organized ride—maybe 30 miles. I drank water at all of the stops, but I did not carry a water bottle. That evening I almost passed out in the grocery store. The next time I rode, I had a frame-mounted water bottle. Now I carry two. Keeping hydrated is critical. One rule of thumb is to take a big drink every fifteen minutes, and obviously, drink more if it's hot. On the flip side, when it's cool you still need water but may need to remind yourself to drink. Another bicycling rule of thumb is to eat before you're hungry and drink before you're thirsty. Even on a short ride, you can get amazingly hungry and that will sap your energy. Keep your bike bag stuffed with a supply of commercial energy bars, bananas, Penny's Sunny Morning Muffins, or whatever tickles your fancy. I have included restaurants or places where food is available on or near the route.

PENNY'S SUNNY MORNING MUFFINS

2 tsp. baking soda

2 cups flour (you could use half whole wheat)

1 cup sugar

2 tbsp. honey (or skip the honey and use 1¼ cups sugar total)

½ cup old-fashioned oatmeal

1 tbsp. cinnamon

½ tsp. salt (optional)

1½ cups finely shredded carrots

1½ cups peeled and shredded apple

½ cup raisins (try golden)

¼ to ½ cup pecans (optional)

2 Egg Beaters® or the equivalent

1 egg, beaten

¼ cup apple butter

¾ cup nonfat plain yogurt

1 tbsp. vanilla

In a large mixing bowl, combine baking soda, flour, sugar, honey, oatmeal, cinnamon, and salt. In another bowl combine carrots, apples, raisins, pecans, beaten eggs, apple butter, yogurt, and vanilla. Add to dry ingredients and stir until moistened. Use paper muffin cups and spray them with Pam. Bake at 350° to 375° for 18 to 20 minutes. Makes 24 muffins.

For trips of any distance, a bike bag of some type is helpful. I carry food, maps, a first-aid kit (Adventure Medical Kits, 800-324-3517, has waterproof Pocket Medic™ kits that will fit in your pocket), a lightweight windbreaker, a bike lock, and tools—you can now find handy-dandy *little* tool kits or multipurpose tools that will do everything except change a flat for you; you need to be able to fix a flat. For this you will need a tire patch kit, tubes, and an air pump, and you need to know how to use them. Except in the heat of summer I carry a balaclava and full-finger gloves. It's a good idea to take your credit card and cell phone. Hope you will never need it but carry identification and carry a cell phone with an ICE (In Case of Emergency) phone number. Enter "ICE" followed by the name of the person to be contacted in case of emergency.

I have had a few scares but have never been too concerned about dogs. If I hear barking, I pedal faster—once you're out of a dog's territory, it will usually stop. I carry



Bicycle/pedestrian bridge over US 24

a can of mace but have never used it. Other ideas are squirting water from your water bottle into the dog's face or carrying a plastic bottle filled with coins or rocks or something that will make a lot of noise if you shake it. Or maybe throw it.

If you ride a recumbent bike as I do, you don't really need bicycling-specific clothing—just no pant legs that would catch in the chainring. On an upright bicycle, bike shorts or tights definitely make a long day in the saddle seem a little shorter. Fingerless gloves provide cushioning comfort against road shock from the handlebars and protection in case of a spill. You can find a great selection of rain gear; I use a water-resistant windbreaker that I keep in my bike bag. The one caveat is to be sure your rain gear will not catch in your wheels. Some things are worse than getting wet.

Road Safety and Rules of the Road

Road biking is fun and healthy—no question. Learn the rules, use common sense, and then ride correctly and confidently to increase your safety level. In Ohio most of the motor vehicle rules apply to bicyclists as well as motorists. Some rules apply to bicyclists only. For a paraphrased list of those rules, get a copy of *Ohio Bicycling Street Smarts*, an all-round helpful book available online or in hard copy. Contact the Ohio Department of Transportation, 1980 West Broad St., Columbus, 43223; (614) 752-4685; www.dot.state.oh.us/bike.

If you ride in violation of traffic laws, you increase your risk of a crash and you may give up your rights. If you get into a crash, the courts will almost always find it was your fault. Stop at stop signs, signal your turns, and ride with the traffic flow—studies show that is safer than riding against traffic. Stay in the right lane unless you need to turn left. Then, when it's clear, move into the left lane, signal your turn, be certain that everyone who needs to know is aware that you're turning by making eye contact or moving the hand with which you are signaling, and then go.

When you're in the right lane, don't stay too far right. If you are riding next to parked cars on the right, someone may open a door into your line of travel. Also, cars passing on the left may try to crowd you. Take up your space. It makes you more visible. Motorists will know you're there and be less likely to sideswipe your knee. Use common sense about riding side by side with another cyclist; it's fine on quiet roads, but on narrow, winding, or busier roads it can be rude and dangerous.

In towns with busy roads, I have mentioned where sidewalks are available for riding. Local jurisdiction may prohibit that in some places. If you feel safer on the sidewalk, ride there—we always did. It is important to maintain a good image for bicyclists by being extremely courteous to pedestrians.

If you ride at night, you are required to have lights—a headlight is a must and a red taillight may be required. For safety, reflectors on the rear of your bike as well as reflective ankle bands make you more visible.

Some bicycling cautions: First, I have wiped out on loose gravel, and I warn of it wherever it was a problem, but keep in mind that loose gravel is not a constant. Second, you'll find lots of picturesque covered bridges in this book. They are great fun to see, but most are floored with wooden slats that can be tire-grabbers. I prefer to walk across. Know also that roads get slippery in rain and brakes are not as efficient when wet. Be especially cautious on wet painted lines, sewer grates, railroad tracks (wet or dry, always cross at a right angle), and fallen leaves. Dry fallen leaves can also trip you up, as can potholes and lots of other things; biking, like life, has hazards. Being a couch potato is not a healthy choice and it's no fun; so, to repeat myself, learn the rules, use common sense, and then, correctly and confidently, go ride a bike.

How to Use This Book

Rides are divided very generally into four categories, but cut me a little slack here; it's meant to be a guide and it's rather subjective. One cyclist's gentle elevation is another cyclist's hill, and a gentle elevation after 50 miles may seem more daunting than it did early in the ride. The Thornville route is short for a challenge, but its hills are relentless. On the other hand, the Little Miami Scenic Trail Challenge is 73 miles long but is an easy ride. Typically you don't ride it all at once.

- Rambles are the easiest and shortest rides. At 35 miles or less, they are pleasant outings on flat to rolling terrain. Don't rule out the possibility of a hill or two, but nothing daunting.
- Cruises are intermediate rides at 25 to 50 miles long and may have some moderate hills.
- Challenges are difficult and are for riders with some experience and in good condition. They are usually 40 to 60 miles in length.
- Classics are long and hard; they are over 60 miles. You might want to give yourself two days to cover the distance, or you might not.

But don't let those categories limit you—if you're in the neighborhood of a ride listed as a classic and feel like cycling, you can always ride a short distance as an out-and-back ride. Likewise, on a ramble you will surely come upon a road just begging to be explored to add more miles. You can do it without a map, but carrying a county map will give you more possibilities to lengthen or shorten a ride as you see fit.

I have included mileage marks and the names of crossroads where that seemed appropriate, for example, where road signs are few and far between or in places where the route gets confusing. I have not included them where they became tedious, as when you're riding through a little town on Main Street and you cross First, Second, Third, and Maple Streets each a block apart, or on a long straight stretch of road where you cross a road every mile or so, or on bike paths.

I once rode a bike route described in a book and came to a T intersection that was on the road but not in the book. I was miles from anything familiar and had no choice but to backtrack. I and the publishers have done our best to be precise and ensure that does not happen with this book. Having said that, I urge you to read the mileage marks as a general guide, not a rule. On many of our rides, Penny logged about a half mile farther than me although we rode the same route. Bicycle computers are not yet perfect and are definitely no more perfect than the people who measure the bike wheel and set the computer. Also, rounding up or down to the tenth can make a difference between my reading and yours, to say nothing of having to turn around and pick up a dropped water bottle or a map that blows out of your hand.



Passion Flower Quilt Barn

And finally, things are in a constant state of change. A subdivision might have been built along what was a quiet road when I rode. And a road that is quiet in the middle of the day might get busy during rush hour.

Ohio Cycling Resources

Bicycle Museum of America, 7 West Monroe St. (SR 274), New Bremen; (419) 629-9249; www.bicyclemuseum.com.

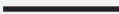





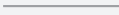
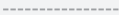
Columbus Outdoor Pursuits, 1525 Bethel Rd., Suite 100, Columbus; (614) 442-7901; www.outdoor-pursuits.org. This group annually puts on the Great Ohio Bicycle Adventure (GOBA) and several other organized rides.

Ohio Bicycle Federation; www.ohiobike.org. Their Web site is a great resource for bike clubs, organized bike rides, the Ohio Bicycle Calendar, and more.



Ohio Department of Transportation Bicycle/Pedestrian Office, 1980 West Broad St., Columbus; (614) 752-4685; www.dot.state.oh.us; click on the bicycle link for bicycling information of every kind and ordering information for *Ohio Bicycling Street Smarts*. This manual teaches safe bicycling techniques on roads and streets. It is available in a printed version or online.

Map Legend

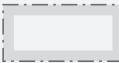
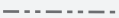
Transportation

Featured Route	
Featured Trail	
Optional Route	
Interstate Highway	
U.S. Highway	
State Road	
County/Local Road	
Dirt Road/Trail	




















Hydrology

Lake/Reservoir/ Major River	
River/Creek	

Land Use

Large Park/ Large Wildlife Area	
State Line	

Symbols

Trailhead (Start)	
Mileage Marker	17.1 
Small Park	
Visitor Center	
Wildlife Area	
Historical Site	
Point of Interest/ Structure	
Lodge	
Picnic Area	
Capital	
City	
Town	
Bridge	
Church	
Marina	
Airport	
University/College	
Direction Arrow	
Option Arrow	

1 Oxford Ramble

This is a great ride from Oxford, home of Miami University and a tidy, attractive college town. You can choose the route to Brookville Lake or the shorter option. It's a country ride with lots to see and enough hills to have an edge without making you beg.

Start: Oxford Community Park.

Length: 31.7 miles with a 21.2-mile option.

Terrain: Flat to rolling with a couple of small hills; more hills (one big one) around Brookville Lake.

Traffic and hazards: Mostly quiet rural roads; some traffic around Oxford. On the longer route there is fairly heavy traffic for 0.1 mile on SR 101.

Getting there: Take Oxford Millville Road/US 27 into Oxford. Coming from the north, turn right (south) onto Locust Street and then right (west) onto Spring Street, which becomes Fairfield Road out of town. Coming from the south, turn left (west) onto Spring Street. The park is on the right at 6801 Fairfield Road (the park also has an entrance from Brookville Road).

The Ride

The 113-acre Oxford Community Park, the staging area for both routes, is nicely designed and a popular place to be. It has athletic fields, hiking trails, play areas, and more. You can spend some time and add some miles just biking around it. Kay Rench Drive goes through the park and is accessible from Fairfield and Brookville Roads.

The longer ride and the shorter option both cross into Indiana and then back again. Road names change when you cross the border, but don't look for signs on these rural roads.

Exit the park and go left on Fairfield Road; pass the airport. It takes a couple of hills to get out of town. The traffic soon thins and you're in the country. A mile after you enter Indiana you will come to Harmony Road. To follow the shorter option, turn right onto Harmony Road. The longer ride keeps on going through New Bath, where they used to keep the bank locked because they had so many robberies—customers had to knock to get in. Next you'll come into Old Bath, but you'll hardly notice—it's just a cluster of homes.

I have tried to be precise with directions because many roads are not marked. In Old Bath cross unmarked CR 200 East. It is a mix of gravel and rough pavement. Keep going. At the second crossroad turn left onto Liberty Pike, just before the Franklin County water tower. In the middle of a pleasant downhill glide, turn right onto Whitcomb Road and go up that pleasant glide. Just past the buck deer standing on a rock on the right, the road bends a hard left. Take the next road to the right; this is narrow, unmarked Pea Ridge Road. Cross SR 101 and keep going. Enjoy that long swoop down to the lake. You'll see the entrance to the Scenic Trail before you come to the lake.