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### COLUMN

## Set of rides in beautiful Boothbay region can make every family member happy

Bicycle adventure has it all – for all ages and interests.

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Can you really satisfy the whole family on a destination bike ride? The kid wants fun places to stop and play. The weekend warrior husband wants a real workout. I want interesting things to look at, good food stops and nice views. I think I've finally found a place where we can all get what we want: Boothbay. And before you think of tourist-heavy Boothbay Harbor, imagine instead a watery world unto itself, where morning fogs lift from ponds and rivers to reveal tiny islands and inlets you can't even see on the map.

There really is something for everyone on this ride, or set of rides, in the Boothbay region. For a starting point, I chose Knickerkane Island Park, a tiny island off Hodgdon Island.

To get there, take Route 1 to Wiscasset. Just north of Wiscasset, take Route 27 south about 9.3 miles. (We stopped along the way at Railway Village so my toddler could have a ride on a steam locomotive - heaven! - and that satisfied him for the morning.) At Boothbay common, turn right at the monument, go straight through the stop sign, and then take the first right, in 0.3 miles, at the fork onto Barters Island Road.

In about a mile, you will see the entrance to the brand new 248-acre Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens ([www.mainegardens.org](http://www.mainegardens.org)). If you haven't heard about this beautiful spot, then make this a must-stop place. It's the largest botanical garden in New England and has about a mile of tidal shorefront, interesting topography, integrated sculpture, ornamental gardens, native plants and much, much more.

We stopped at the lovely Visitors Center and hiked some of the trails, admiring all the various plants, some familiar and some completely new to me. We built a miniature log cabin in the Fairy Village and had lunch in the cafeteria. The beautifully designed grounds are spacious and the pretty outdoor terraces with ample seating areas have tranquil views of the water. I'd hoped to make this the starting point for our bike ride, but the half-mile-long hilly dirt access road made me change my mind.

Instead, we kept going west on Barters Island Road, driving over the pretty bridge to Hodgdon Island. Immediately after the bridge, on the left, there's a good-sized parking lot and sign marking Knickerkane Island Park. This became our base for exploring the area on two wheels.

From here, there are three small loops that you can combine according to your (or your family's) biking needs.

The first is a loop around Barters Island. Turn left out of the parking lot and ride up a short, steep hill. In about half a mile, you'll come downhill to a scene that's such a stereotype it feels like a film set. There's a beautiful inn on a hill. The general store has a lobster shack in back and a deck on the front. Fishing boats float on moorings. Tall docks tilt recklessly into the water. Piles of lobster traps balance next to weather-beaten shacks. A scraggly-bearded fisherman with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth waves from his boat as you pass by on the bridge - and it's a drawbridge.

Climbing up the steep hill after the drawbridge brings you back to reality. At the fork in the road (Mile 0.7, where East Side Road

goes to the right), bear left on unmarked West Side Road to do a clockwise loop around Barters Island.

It's a narrow road with a nice backcountry feel. You'll have some short ups and downs to contend with (I felt like it was painfully hilly, but that could be because I was towing a trailer with a sleeping boy in it). Turn right at Mile 2.7 to continue the loop. You'll pass the trailhead to Schoolhouse Pond, a Boothbay Region Land Trust property. The trust has another property on Barters Island; check out its Web site ([www.bbriit.org](http://www.bbriit.org)).

As you loop back south, you'll get some lovely views of the Back River with picturesque docks jutting out into the rocky shoreline. At Mile 4.8, turn left and head back down over the bridge. Just across the bridge, Trevett Country Store has everything you could want or need, including outdoor tables with umbrellas so you can sit and soak in the ambience.

The second loop starts just up the hill past the Hodgdon Island Inn with a right turn onto Sawyers Island Road (Mile 5.2). This road gets you terrific water views and the smell of salt air, as you cross a bridge from Hodgdon Island onto Sawyer Island, then another from Sawyer back onto the mainland (where the road becomes Samoset Road). There are more ups and downs here, but I was happily distracted by the views of sailboats and islands and the smell of beach roses.

At Mile 7.8, turn left at the stop sign onto unmarked Lakeside Drive. You'll pass by pretty West Harbor Pond with still more tree-dotted islands and people gliding lazily along in canoes. At Mile 9.4, turn left onto Barters Island Road to return to Knickerkane. I found this road to be busier than I expected and not much fun to ride on. But it's only about 1.5 miles to get back to your starting point.

This makes for an 11-mile ride suitable for advanced beginners. If you want more, take the third loop to add nine more miles. Just before the bridge onto Hodgdon Island and Knickerkane Island Park, take the steep right turn onto Knickerbocker Lane. This is a loop on backcountry roads that are at times very narrow, very curvy, a little hilly and lots of fun.

After a mile and a half, turn left at the stop sign onto unmarked Back River Road. In another mile and a half, turn right onto Dover Cross Road and climb uphill. As you do still more hill climbing, be thankful for the smooth pavement and lovely views of the Cross River to your left. You'll come to a yield sign; bear right for an awesome stretch of skinny curvaceous road that hugs the shore of Adams Pond.

Climb up from the pond and into a more residential area. You'll come smack-dab onto Route 27 and the Boothbay Chamber of Commerce Information Center. Traffic flies on Route 27, but there is a shoulder and you're only going about three-tenths of a mile. At the common, bear right and then turn right in 0.3 miles back onto Barters Island Road.

You'll be back at Knickerkane Island Park in no time. This little park is fun to explore, too, with a quirky bridge leading to a droplet of land that, I'm assuming, is Knickerkane Island. A spongy trail leads to several picnic tables and barbecue grills all under shady pines. According to the Department of Marine Resources, there is a swimming float and outhouse here, but I did not see either of these. There is a nice paved boat launch on the other side of the road and there's room in the parking lot for a dozen or more cars.

If the weekend warrior is still not satisfied, send him (or her) around the Adams Pond loop in the other direction and go have a lobster roll at the Trevett Country Store. Not that I did this, of course!

For a route map and more photos, visit my biking blog at [outdoors.mainetoday.com/biking](http://outdoors.mainetoday.com/biking).

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England Biking: 100 of the Best Road and Trail Rides" (Foghorn Outdoors/Avalon Travel Publishing).

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