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COLUMN

In Kittery Point, an idyllic bike ride

By MELISSA KIM

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Melissa Kim photo

The blockhouse at Fort McClary, which was refurbished in 1987, is the focal point of this state park.

Ingredients for a great lazy Sunday ride: Three beaches, two forts, ocean views complete with lighthouses and a pier, lobster shack with picnic tables right on the water, fields of wildflowers, no serious hills, and a walk-up ice cream window.

If that's a recipe that suits your taste, then make your way down to Kittery Point. Many cyclists have already discovered the pleasures of this area; I saw cyclists of all types, from serious Lycra-clad speedsters to casual sightseers, when I rode this 15-mile loop on a recent Sunday.



Melissa Kim photo

A paved road leads to the pier at Fort Foster, on Gerrish Island. It juts out into the Piscataqua River and offers great views of Whaleback Light, the Wood Island Coast Guard station and, off in the distance, the Isle of Shoals.

I began at Fort McClary State Historic Site, off Route 103. To get here, take Route 103 or Route 236 from Kittery; it's about three miles from the intersection with Route 1 and is clearly marked. There's room for about a dozen cars to park here. There is a \$2 entrance fee to walk in and explore the grounds.

Defensive buildings have been guarding the Piscataqua River here as far back as 1689. Peaceful now, the site has a distinctive central blockhouse, several outbuildings and a granite wall. Perhaps one of Fort McClary's most appealing features now is its wonderful views of the river.

Leaving the fort behind, ride down the dirt access road and turn right onto Route 103. In half a mile, riding along a winding road with smooth pavement but no shoulder, you'll come to the village of Kittery

Point (said by some to be Maine's oldest town), anchored by a post office and Frisbee's 1828 market. There's also Cap'n Simeon's Galley, a restaurant sitting right on a scenic wharf. Here's where you'll find the ice cream window, worth remembering for the end of the ride.

At Mile 1.0, turn right onto Chauncey Creek Road. You'll soon come to Chauncey Creek Lobster Pier, with its tempting aroma of fried seafood, colorful picnic tables and tranquil creekside setting.

At Mile 1.6, you'll come to an intersection where, on the right, a well-paved bridge crosses the creek taking you onto Gerrish Island. Over the bridge, turn right on Pocahontas Road towards Fort Foster. This up-and-down road takes you through the forested interior of the island, dead-ending at the gate to Fort Foster. This would also be a good place to start a ride, if you want to make a day trip of it. The grounds include picnic areas, a pavilion, playground, three beaches, pier, bathhouses and walking trails. It costs \$10 for a vehicle, but \$5 per person to bike in.

I paid the fee and rode around the park's paved and dirt roads, taking in the views of Portsmouth Harbor, Whaleback Lighthouse, and, off in the distance, the Isle of Shoals. The paved road takes you to Pier Beach and the long pier. It's marked as a sandy beach, and perhaps there's sand at low tide, but it seemed quite rocky to me, more suited to beachcombing than sunbathing or swimming. The road in to

Whaleback Beach (also known as Windsurfers Beach) and Rocky Beach (also called Scuba Beach) is primarily a rocky dirt road, but it's worth it for the great views and sweet picnic spots.

After exploring Fort Foster, make your way back out and retrace your route along Pocahontas Road, back off Gerrish Island. At the bridge (Mile 5.7), go straight at the stop sign on Gerrish Island Lane. At the end, turn right at the stop sign onto Brave Boat Harbor Road.

Now you've got about three miles of easy, winding road with all kinds of things to look at. It seemed to me that every house or yard had some distinctive feature or curio, demonstrating a lot of pride, ingenuity or artistic sentiment.

I saw graceful wrought-iron garden sculptures, lovely dried flower arrangements on doors, little cairns marking out a path in a yard, a giant wooden carved squirrel on top of a large wooden stump, teddy bears having a picnic, colorful Japanese-style paper lanterns hanging off trees, and unusual rock sculptures. That was just the man-made stuff; nature is putting on a display here too, with lilacs and azaleas in full bloom.

At Mile 8.4, the road forks; Route 103 continues to the left and Brave Boat Harbor Road heads right uphill. You can climb the hill and come right back down again, or stay on Route 103 (my choice). At Mile 9.2, the two roads meet again at an intersection overlooking York Harbor. Cross the road to turn left onto Seabury Road (the hill looks a lot worse than it really is). This pretty woodsy road takes you up and down till you descend towards a bridge crossing York River. Before the bridge, take a sharp left onto Southside Road (Mile 10).

In half a mile, you'll see a cemetery on your right as the road curves. Take Bartlett Road angling off to your left. This quiet road has one major hazard for bikers: about half a mile of it is dirt, some of which is very bumpy indeed. It was OK for my thick touring tires, and hybrids will be fine too, but slicks won't like it one bit.

You've then got 3.3 miles on rural Bartlett Road until it comes to an end. Take a left onto the unmarked Haley Road. Pretty homes and a small hill take you up to a church on the right; take a right onto Crockett Neck Road (Mile 14.3). There's a screaming downhill, across a bridge over a little inlet, and suddenly you're back at Route 103. On your left is a large picnic grounds, part of Fort McClary State Park. Take a dogleg right and left turn and you're back where you started.

Depending on how much of Fort Foster you explore, this is a 13.5- to 15-mile ride with negligible elevation gain, suitable for advanced beginners. Now for the really tough choice: lobster roll or ice cream cone -- or both?

FREE-WHEELING

Maine's summer biking calendar is packed with great events. The best place to find a statewide biking calendar is www.BikeMaine.org. My picks for the month:

THE COUSINS AND LITTLEJOHN ISLANDS GARDEN TOUR; YARMOUTH; SATURDAY, JUNE 21.

Cousins and Littlejohn Islands are lovely islands to explore by bike. This month, there's a rare opportunity to have a behind-the-scenes tour as residents open their garden gates for a great community cause: restoring the 1894 Island Chapel. There are three loops, adding up to about seven miles, on the tour, with 20 or so private gardens open to the public. It's a self-guided, go at your own pace tour, with a shuttle if you want to walk part of the way. It's mainly flat, with one big hill on Littlejohn Island, so this is a nice family outing especially if you include a stop at Sandy Point Beach, just on the Cousins Island side of the bridge. Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 on the day (\$10 for kids

under 12). For directions and more information, visit www.cousinsandlittlejohnislands.org.

BIKE SHOP SECOND ANNUAL COMMUNITY RIDE AND PORTLAND BIKE EXPO; PAYSON PARK, PORTLAND; SUNDAY, JUNE 29.

Ride one day, help a kid bike for a year. The Bike Shop is a nonprofit child-centered bike project located in Portland's Kennedy Park that helps children repair, maintain and purchase bicycles; organizes group rides and bike events; and supports a Tri Team. This year, the Bike Shop's annual fundraiser, the Community Ride, joins with Portland's first Bike Expo.

For the ride, adults pay \$25; kids under 12 are free. Three levels give you plenty of choice. There's a 50-mile ride that leaves Payson Park at 9:00 a.m., heading out through Falmouth Foreside then turning inland into Pownal, New Gloucester, Gray, North Yarmouth and Cumberland. The 25-mile ride leaves at 10 a.m. and does a nice figure-eight loop through Falmouth Foreside and Cumberland Center. At 11:00 a.m. there's a family fun ride around the four-mile Back Cove trail.

The event is sponsored by Whole Foods Market and local bicycle shops and riding clubs. For more information and to register online, visit www.thebikeshop1.org.

TREK ACROSS MAINE; 180 MILES FROM SUNDAY RIVER TO BELFAST; JUNE 13-15.

The annual pilgrimage raises money for the Maine Lung Association. If you haven't registered by now, it's too late to ride, but you can always pitch in by sponsoring a cyclist or team. Visit www.mainelung.org for more details.

Melissa Kim, a freelance writer in Portland, is the author of "New England Biking: 100 of the Best Road and Trail Rides" (Foghorn Outdoors/Avalon Travel Publishing). She welcomes comments at: bikes@melissakim.com

You can also visit her biking blog at outdoors.mainetoday.com/biking/melissakim

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