

COLUMN

A York County ride offers Maine's late-season charm

MELISSA KIM / BIKING

It's not winter. Really, it's not. Just because there's a little frost doesn't mean you have to hang up your bike and head to the gym. Instead, as daylight shortens and temperatures drop, head south toward York County to extend your cycling season.

Try this lovely and varied route where you can see lighthouses, check out a beach, climb a mountain, do a little backcountry riding, take in fall foliage, view historic homes and more, all in less than 30 miles. In tourist-laden summertime, this route would be impossible. Now, the roads are yours.

This route has a quick warm-up, then a short, steep climb up Mount Agamenticus for some great foliage views. It then meanders on some rural dirt roads before heading back to the coast through historic York Village, past the beaches and ending with Nubble Light. It's suitable for intermediate riders but with some adjustments is fine for advanced beginners and beginners looking for a challenge.

I started at Short Sands Beach in the Cape Neddick area of York. At the waterfront Ellis Park, off Ocean Avenue, with its pretty gazebo and playground at one end, there is ample parking at meters that you don't have to pay after Oct. 15 – another off-season bonus.

Turn right onto Main Street (Route 1A) and make your way out of the village. Half a mile later, there's a fork in the road. Bear left, staying on Cape Neddick Road.

Ride to the end and turn right onto Route 1, then take the first left onto Mountain Road (Mile 2.1). You immediately plunge into the woods, climbing slowly but steadily away from the ocean and into the hills. Consider this your warm-up as Mount Agamenticus beckons.

You'll soon see a parking area on the right (Mile 6.5) where you can find trail maps, information and trailheads for the hiking and mountain biking trails around Mount Agamenticus. Just past the parking area is the summit road. Take a deep breath, shift down, crank away and, whatever you do, don't stop (alternately, if a hill climb is not for you, just keep riding). It's steep, but it's also very short; about six-tenths of a mile to climb what I estimated to be 350 feet (the summit is 691 feet above sea level).

After a few hairpin turns, you're at the top, confronted by a fire tower, lodge, picnic tables and a small lookout tower where you can gaze toward the White Mountains and look for the snowy peak of Mount Washington. This is a great place to catch the tail end of the fall hawk migration.

Check your brakes before you hairpin back down the mountain. Turn right at the end (Mile 8.0)



[enlarge](#)

Lobster buoys decorate a shack along the York River just past Sewall's Bridge.



[enlarge](#)

The 41-foot-high tower, keeper's house and outbuildings at Nubble Light will be strung with lights on Nov. 28 for the annual Lighting of the Nubble festival.

Photos by Melissa Kim



[enlarge](#)

Pumpkins line the fence at a pumpkin farm on Southside Road in York.

and you'll enter the next phase of this ride. The road immediately becomes a hard-packed dirt road, full of small craters but not too many rocks. A dry, cool fall day presents the best conditions for riding this road. It can be done on a hybrid, cyclo-cross or mountain bike or even a road bike with tough tires; alternately, if dirt roads and your bike just do not get along, you can turn around and make this a decent out-and-back ride.

The road descends, and now you're really in the middle of nowhere with woods all around. Dappled sunlight creates shifting patterns on the wavy road. After about a mile and a half, the pavement resumes. Ride another mile, then turn left at the junction onto Bell Marsh Road.

The rural feel continues as you cross a small bridge over Hoopers Brook; I saw an enormous great blue heron in Hoopers Swamp. Then you've got another mile or so of dirt road taking you through a Wildlife Management Area and above the banks of the Bell Marsh Reservoir.

Once you pass the reservoir, woods give way to open fields and a more pastoral motif. Horses switch their tails and watch me ride by.

Cross Route 91 (Mile 15.1) and continue straight on Birch Hill Road. Large farmhouses, fields of hay, patches of late-blooming asters and antique rusted farm equipment posing on lawns bring to mind gentlemen farmers.

The road comes to a T-junction (Mile 17.4); turn left onto Beech Ridge Road. You'll ride uphill and swing to the right, and in the blink of an eye pastoral becomes suburban. In two miles, you'll go over the turnpike and come to Route 1. Ride straight across onto Southside Road to return to rolling green fields, stone walls, pumpkin farms and distant views of the York River.

The road curves to the left past an historic cemetery. At the stop sign (Mile 21.9), turn left onto Seabury Road, pass the Elizabeth Perkins historic home and ride over 18th century Sewall's Bridge, taking in the lobster traps, fishing boats and (looking back over your shoulder) the oddly placed cigar store Indian gazing at the river from the lawn of the Perkins' house.

Across the bridge, turn right onto Lindsay Road. Lobster shacks, historic homes and museums usher you into York Village. Turn right onto Route 1A and make your way through the heart of the village, still busy even in late October.

Eventually, tasteful, stately hotels and manors give way to touristy seaside fun, with RV parks and small beach cottages lining the edge of Long Beach. Somewhere it is written that there's always a headwind on a beach, so try to enjoy the smell of the ocean as wind makes your eyes water.

At the end of Long Beach (Mile 27.1), turn right onto Nubble Road and climb up onto this tiny peninsula. After a mile, turn right into Sohier Park. The lighthouse here, Nubble Light, is one of Maine's most photographed lighthouses. Set apart from the mainland by a tiny channel, the lighthouse perches on its own little island where it has warned ships to "beware the savage rocks" since 1879.

Leave Sohier Park, turn right back onto Nubble Road and follow it around as it becomes Broadway to return to Route 1A. Turn right and it's a short sweep back down into Short Sands and your starting point. Total mileage: just shy of 30 miles.

Melissa Kim, a freelance writer in Portland, is the author of "New England Biking: 100 of the Best Road and Trail Rides." She welcomes comments at bikes@melissakim.com or on her biking blog at: <http://maineoutdoorjournal.maine.today.com/freewheeling>