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## Portland Press Herald    Maine Sunday Telegram

### COLUMN

## Biking to the beaches of Biddeford

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#### COMING UP

The Bicycle Coalition of Maine's annual bike fest, the Maine Bicycle Rally, takes place in Yarmouth from July 6 -- 8. The rally will feature nearly 30 rides, both off-road and on-road, ranging in distance from five to 100 miles. For more information visit [www.BikeMaine.org](http://www.BikeMaine.org) or call 623-4511.

Beach season is upon us, and here's an easy ride that will get you to some of southern Maine's most beautiful beaches in an unexpected spot: Biddeford.

Going by bike is the best way to get to some of Biddeford's loveliest stretches of sand, because parking is limited, non-existent or expensive. So take two wheels down to Biddeford Pool for this beach-and-bird loop. This route is about 14.8 miles long, with very little elevation gain, and is suitable for advanced beginners.

#### TAKING THE BEACH LOOP

To get there, take Route 9 south from Biddeford/Saco. Turn left, following Route 208, to get to Biddeford Pool. Follow Mile Stretch Road to the very end and you'll see a small sign for the East Point Audubon Sanctuary. There is room for about 10 cars to park on the side of the road here; if it's full, turn around, head back and turn right at the fork on to Lester B. Orcutt Boulevard, the street that goes down to the dock and Vines Landing.

There's a general store called F.O. Goldthwaites and a small, pretty park with benches. Three-hour public parking on the street is allowed here from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. between June 15 and Labor Day. Goldthwaites has groceries, supplies and sandwiches, as well as lovely picnic tables out back, right on the water's edge.

I started out at the East Point Sanctuary entrance and turned right onto Ocean Avenue. You get your first taste and smell of the ocean right here, where waves pound the rocky cove. Turn right onto 1st Street, loop back to Mile Stretch Road and ride along the edge of the lagoon that gives this area its name. As you ride along this narrow strip of land, with the ocean on your left and the pool on your right, listen for all the different bird calls -- this is a prime birding spot -- and smell the bountiful beach roses.

At the bridge, turn right onto Route 208 (marked as Bridge Road) and then take the next right onto Old Pool Road. This leafy, twisty road is a pleasant ride past some beautifully-landscaped houses and small portions of a National Wildlife Refuge.

At Mile 3.9, you'll come to an intersection in the middle of the sprawling campus of the University of New England. Turn right and soon you'll enter the beach community of Hills Beach.

When I rode here last Sunday morning, I felt like I'd entered another world; dogs lolled in the shade of trucks, people snoozed on beach chairs on sunny porches, and a few industrious folks were pruning shrubs. It all reeked of summer vacation -- a tantalizing aroma.

The long sandy beach is just steps away over low dunes on your left. There is a small public access path across from mailbox 110, just before you come to Buffleheads, the one restaurant at Hills Beach.

The beach stretches out long and low with lots of sandbars, so

check the tide charts first if you want to do more than just wade. I rode to the end, circled around on Sky Harbor Drive, and admired the picture- perfect views of the islands, Wood Island Lighthouse and myriad tide pools. There's also a small public park, Park in the Pines, where you can stop and relax on a grassy lawn or sit on benches overlooking Biddeford Pool.

#### THE ROUTE HOME

Retrace your route out along Hills Beach Road, past UNE, until you hit Route 9. Take a left and then, at Mile 8, your first right onto Newtown Road. This peaceful backcountry-like road takes you past woods and fields and the occasional home. At Mile 9.5, turn left at the stop sign onto the unmarked West Street. There's faster moving traffic here, and no shoulder, so keep that in mind as you stop to check out the geese and goslings in the ponds on either side of the road. I found this road to be surprisingly pastoral, with farms and horses grazing the field.

At Mile 10.8, you'll come to an intersection with Route 9. If you want to extend your ride and you don't mind riding on a busy road, turn right to get to Goose Rock's Beach and the pleasures of Cape Porpoise and Kennebunkport. Otherwise, turn left on Route 9 and take your second right, at Mile 11.2, onto Fortunes Rocks Road. As you reach the coast, there's a tiny pocket of a pebble beach lined with a rock wall and beach roses; you could rest here but the main attraction is still to come.

Just a few pedal strokes down the road, the gorgeous stretch of Fortunes Rocks Beach opens up, first with rocks and tide pools to explore and then the vast sandy beach to massage your sweaty toes. There are a few amenities here: porta-potties, a hot dog stand named The Good Dog and a lifeguard.

From here it's a straight shot to Mile Stretch Road, back to Biddeford Pool and your starting point.

Two other parking alternatives: To park at Fortunes Rocks Beach, you can get a parking permit from the Biddeford City Clerk's office at the city hall on Main Street. A day pass is \$10 and you can purchase a pass in advance if you are coming on a weekend. Hattie's Restaurant, at the end of Mile Stretch Road, sells \$10 parking permits for the lot across the street, which also gives you direct access to Bathhouse Beach, a continuation of the sandy stretch from Fortunes Rocks Beach.

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

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).

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