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Sunday, August 15, 2004

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Quick ferry ride, and you`re ready for a day on Islesboro

By MELISSA KIM,

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During Maine's short summer, it seems only right to focus on cycling spots near the coast or on the islands. There will be plenty of time in the fall to enjoy the colors in the interior hills. Now's the time to enjoy the splendors of the spindly island of Islesboro. With only a 20-minute ferry ride, you'll get beautiful water views, glimpses of 19th-century homes and beaches ripe for picnics on this unspoiled island tucked in the western side of Penobscot Bay.

Islesboro is served by the Maine State Ferry Service from a terminal in Lincolnville (5.6 miles north of Camden on Route 1). There's ample free parking, water, public rest rooms and free island maps. Study the map for a quick orientation of the skinny isle. You'll see a fatter northern section, called up-island, and a narrower southern section. Both sections have a few modest hills to climb, making this outing suitable for advanced beginner and intermediate riders, or families with older children. The roads are smooth and well-paved but generally lack shoulders. Though there are not that many cars, the roads are narrow and twisty. I went in May; mine was the only bike on the ferry and I had the roads all to myself. That probably won't be the case in mid-August, so try going on a weekday or a September weekend if you want more solitude. There are two general stores on the island, but I'd strongly recommend bringing your own water and food with you.

The ferry leaves you at Grindel Point with its picturesque lighthouse and marine museum. Ride straight on Ferry Road for about a mile and you'll come to a junction. For a nice 19-mile up-island tour, turn left onto West Bay Road, where you'll have outstanding views across the water back toward the mainland and the Camden Hills. In about two miles, you'll reach a junction with Main Road; turn left and ride across The Narrows onto the northern section of the island. Coves on either side may harbor great blue herons and other bird life. Seal Harbor, on your left, is a nice place to stop for a picnic.

There's a short hill before you come to a fork in the road (at Mile



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6.2). Bear right at the fork, staying on Main Road. This will take you on a sweeping counterclockwise loop past the hamlet of Pripet and the lovely conservation area of Turtle Head, where you can stop and enjoy the rocky beach before cycling up a long hill. You'll come back to the fork in about six miles, and retrace your route back over The Narrows. Pass West Bay Road where you came in and continue straight on Main Road past the island's town center, which includes a historical society, library, town office, post office and general store. Just past the post office (at Mile 16.8), turn right onto Mill Creek Road. Ride 1.3 miles, then turn left onto Ferry Road and ride 1.1 miles back to the ferry.

If you've got more time and energy, add a tour of the southern half of the island. Instead of turning on Mill Creek Road, keep going straight on Main Road. It's about 4.7 miles to the southern tip of the island at Pendleton Point. You'll ride through the tiny village of Dark Harbor and up a hill before reaching the picnic area and town beach. When you're ready to leave this idyllic spot, retrace your route back to Mill Creek Road and turn left for the remaining 2.4 miles back to the ferry, bringing your total mileage to 28.4 miles.

THE FERRY leaves Lincolnville almost every hour, on the hour, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and returns on the half-hour from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with a few exceptions. An adult round-trip ticket costs \$6 plus \$5.75 for a bicycle. FOR COMPLETE schedules and fares, contact the Maine State Ferry Service in Lincolnville, 789-5611 or (800) 491-4883, or visit the Web site: <http://www.state.me.us/mdot/opt/ferry/215-ilseboro.php>.

Melissa Kim, a free-lance writer in Portland, is the author of "New England Biking: 100 of the Best Road and Trail Rides," due out this winter from Foghorn Outdoors/Avalon Travel Publishing. She welcomes comments at: bikes@melissakim.com

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