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Sunday, August 14, 2005

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BIKING: *Melissa Kim*

**Miles of roads, no vehicles, wildlife aplenty**

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Some people bike for the exercise. Some bike for transportation. Others bike for the social aspect. Still others bike as a means to an end, as a way, for example, to enjoy the scenery, appreciate nature, view wildlife and experience the great outdoors.

If that's you, then you'll understand why I'd recommend a biking trip to the Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge in the middle of a hot dry summer. This ride is not for everyone. It's all the way Down East, just outside of Calais. There's no beach in sight, and very few tourists. There are no hot dog stands, no T-shirt shops and no flea markets.

It's just 50 miles of dirt roads with no vehicles. No cars, no motorcycles, no mopeds, no RVs and no ATVs. Just you, your bike and a few bald eagles. And maybe some osprey, owls, woodcock, warblers, leopard frogs, painted turtles, beaver, white-tailed deer, moose, and even black bear.

In other words, Moosehorn is a delight for wildlife lovers. If you pedal slowly and stop often, biking can be a good way to experience it. The 17,000-plus acre refuge is split in two regions; the northern Baring Division and the southern Edmunds Division. Try a 15-mile route in the Baring Division to get a taste of what the refuge has to offer.

To get there, take Route 1 North from Calais. Go 3.3 miles and turn left onto Charlotte Road. Drive 2.5 miles and turn right into the main entrance to the National Wildlife Refuge. At the headquarters, you'll find a well-stocked information kiosk with trail maps (essential), wildlife checklists, brochures, a picnic table and clean and spacious restrooms with drinking water.

The Baring Division is bordered on the west by a restricted-access Wilderness Area and cut down the middle by Charlotte Road. I found the dirt roads on the western side of Charlotte Road to be smoother, flatter and generally easier, while the eastern side of Charlotte Road had more bumps, more grass on the trails and more ups and downs. It felt a bit more like real

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mountain biking. This route does a semi-circle on each side, so you can pick and choose and always return to the headquarters along Charlotte Road. The terrain is fairly flat, so this route is suitable for advanced beginners and up.

Starting at the headquarters, at the far end of the parking area, ride straight out past the gate onto a dirt road. You'll pass a sign for Mile Bridge Road. In about three quarters of a mile, turn left onto Two Mile Meadow Road. You'll basically be hugging the edge of the restricted Wilderness Area as you head south through rolling meadows, alongside woodlands typical of northern hardwood forests punctuated by stands of white pine, and past watery features including ponds, streams, bogs and marshes.

Most of the roads are unmarked, but the trail map made navigation easy. I rode along Two Mile Bridge Road, joined Mile Bridge Road and turned right onto Youngs Road. There's a slight hill up Youngs Road, but it's short. Turn right at the next two intersections, then turn left at the pond onto South Ridge Road. After one mile, turn left onto Beaver Trail and ride east until you hit Charlotte Road.

That's about 7.5 miles, so if you've had enough, you can turn left and ride back to the start. Otherwise, to explore the eastern side of the reserve, turn left onto Charlotte Road, ride a mile and a half, cross the railroad tracks, and turn right onto Snare Meadow Road. Ride about 3.8 miles and turn right at the intersection onto the unmarked Moosehorn Ridge Road. In less than a mile, the trail ends. Turn left onto Howard Mill Road and left again at the end to reach Charlotte Road. You'll come out almost directly across from the access road that leads to the headquarters.

For best wildlife viewing, visit early in the morning or late in the afternoon. The refuge is full of swamps and "flowages," so bugs can be a problem. I was torn between riding fast to escape the flies and stopping to be quiet and look for signs of wildlife. Bug spray is a must.

One of the highlights at Moosehorn is the pair of bald eagles that has been nesting there for more than 10 years. Ride or drive back to Route 1, turn right and stop at the observation platform on the left. Here's your sure-fire chance to see the majestic bird. Springtime, nesting season, might be a bit more exciting than August, so consider a return trip in April or May. That's also the best time to see Moosehorn's other star winged attraction, the woodcock. Also called the timberdoodle, this bird does a spectacular courtship song and dance with spiraling flights and complex sounds.

Even if you don't see timberdoodles or bald eagles, you'll still find peace and quiet here. So if that's your biking fancy, this ride's for you.

## FREE-WHEELING

Even though the roads at Moosehorn are closed to traffic, I'd still urge you to wear a bike helmet while riding. I've been talking with people about helmet use and anecdotal reports indicate that helmet wearing is on the decline. If you ride without a helmet, please e-mail me ([bikes@melissakim.com](mailto:bikes@melissakim.com)) and tell me why.

*Melissa Kim, a free-lance 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](mailto:bikes@melissakim.com)

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