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Biking

Sunday, August 28, 2005

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**Route offers challenging ride, pretty vistas - and guilt-free treats**

By MELISSA KIM

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In my last column, I mentioned some of the reasons that people like to cycle - fitness, wildlife viewing, transportation - but I didn't include one of my favorite reasons. If you've ever done any long-distance cycle touring, you know that you are burning so many calories that you can eat as much as you like, practically guilt- and pound-free. I like to plan rides that have good food stops, and it doesn't get much better here in Maine than a stop at Hodgman's, home to some fine frozen custard.

To me, then, this route in Upper and New Gloucester is just about perfect. It's got a great starting point that's a lovely destination in and of itself, it's hilly and challenging without being painful, Hodgman's is about two-thirds of the way along the route, and the scenery is bucolic, rural and relaxing.

The starting point is Pineland Farms in New Gloucester. This 3,000-acre working farm, with an adjacent campus of tidy brick buildings, has a spacious and welcoming visitor center where you can get supplies at its general store, have coffee and baked goods at the outstanding Foley's Bakery and use the restrooms to change. The visitor center is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday and Monday.

The Pineland campus has walking trails (great for cross-country skiing in winter), two ponds, tennis courts and plenty of great

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picnic spots. There's also the working farm with scheduled tours and programs. Pineland Farms ([www.pinelandfarms.org](http://www.pinelandfarms.org)) is on Route 231 between New Gloucester and North Yarmouth, east of Gray. Follow the signs; the visitor center is on Farm View Road, just off Morse Road.

For this 22-mile loop, start by leaving the visitor center and turning left onto Morse Road. Take a right onto Route 231 and then an immediate right onto Depot Road. This is a narrow road with uneven pavement and no shoulder, but very little traffic. You'll soon come to a very steep downhill, bottoming out over rough railroad tracks. The mile-long climb up and out is steady, but not excruciatingly steep.

At Mile 2.6, turn right onto the smoothly paved Mayall Road. The other-worldly scooped out terrain as you pass the Portland Sand and Gravel company land is the only blot on an otherwise pastoral, agricultural landscape. At Mile 5.2 you'll come to an intersection with very busy Routes 4/202/100. Go straight across, continuing on Mayall Road, and the street signs tell the story: Tractor, Cow, Deer. Large fields of late summer crops, with sprinklers making little rainbows, stretch as far as the eye can see.

At Mile 7.2 you'll cross over the Maine Turnpike on a rough, narrow bridge. The well-kept fields and white buildings of Gillespie Farms frame the scene. Enjoy this nice stretch on a quiet, flat, smooth road.

At Mile 8.6, you'll hit busy Route 26. Don't fret; you'll only be on it for a second. Turn right, then take an immediate right onto Snow Hill Road. If you need food or supplies, you can stop at Buddy's General Store. With the slogan "Eat here and get gas" it's hard to resist.

Snow Hill Road cuts a nice path between Sabbathday Lake to the west and the gentle slopes of Snows Hill and Little Hill to the east. Keep checking on your left for an occasional view of the lake. At Mile 11.6, you can take a right onto Chandler Mill Road to make this route shorter. This will take you to Route 231 where you can head south back to Pineland Farms. But continue straight and come with me to Upper Gloucester. You'll bear right at the Yield sign (Mile 13.2) onto Bald Hill Road, and climb the short, very steep hill. At the top, there's a triangular intersection. Turn left onto Upper Village Road and then left onto Routes 4/202.

This is a busy road and the cars zip along, but there is a wide, smooth shoulder. It's only about three-tenths of a mile until you reach Hodgman's, on the left. This Maine institution has been around for almost 60 years, serving up the richest, creamiest frozen custard you can imagine. It's open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. There are picnic tables, porta-potties and water here as well. (What's the difference between frozen custard and ice cream? More egg yolk, less air pumped into the mix, and other nuances in production and processing make for a smoother, softer, altogether more flavorful treat.)

Whenever you're ready, head back south on Routes 4/202. There's also a general store here if you need supplies. At Mile 14.5, turn left at the flashing yellow light onto Route 231. You'll take this all the way back to Pineland, after rolling up and down

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a fair few hills. In two miles you'll reach the tiny center of New Gloucester with its Meeting House, Library and Town Hall. Now comes the big thrill - a screaming long and steep downhill on some uneven pavement bottoming out, once again, at a railroad track.

After this it's one hill after another, with beautiful vistas of ridges, flower-filled fields, rolling farmland and rambling farmhouses. If the hills are making you sweat, think about how you're working off Hodgman's so you can enjoy a treat from Foley's Bakery back at the Pineland visitor center.

This loop, a total of approximately 22 miles, is best suited to advanced beginner or intermediate riders. There's a total elevation gain of about 1,200 feet, and a third of this comes in the last five or six miles along Route 231.

*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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