

**HOME**

- > **MAINEJOBS**
- > **REAL ESTATE**
- > **WHEELS**
- > **MARKETPLACE**
- > **Place an Ad**

**NEWS**

- Local and State
- Midday/4PM Reports
- AP Wire
- Week in Photos

**WEATHER**

- 5-day Forecast
- On the Ocean

**SPORTS**

- High Schools
- Red Sox
- Sea Dogs

**BUSINESS**

- News
- Blogs
- Maine News Direct
- Classifieds

**ENTERTAINMENT**

- Calendar
- Movies
- Dining
- Music
- Theater
- Art

**TRAVEL**

- Maine Regions
- From Away
- Vacation Rentals
- Lodging Guide

**OUTDOORS**

- Hiking
- Fishing
- Trail Head
- Campground Guide

**BLOGS**

- Late Hits
- Kid Tracks
- A Dog's Life
- More blogs

**20 BELOW**

- Teen Blogs
- One-Minute Wonders
- Reindeer Rock-off

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Sunday, July 2, 2006

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## Maine Bike Rally sets up in Yarmouth

By MELISSA KIM

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The Maine Bike Rally rolls into Yarmouth this summer, bringing its annual show to the southern coast for the first time (following stints in Belfast, Bethel and Bath).

Cyclists will have a chance to sample almost 30 on- and off-road rides during the festival, which runs from Friday to Sunday July 7 to 9. It's a nice way to ride with other bike enthusiasts, explore an area you might not know and celebrate all things cycling.

The Bicycle Coalition of Maine, together with the Casco Bay Bicycling Club and the Merrymeeting Wheelers, [To top of story](#) organizes the event, which includes entertainment, awards, social events, camping, meals and more. But the main attraction is really the cycling.

The Yarmouth area offers all kind of interesting destinations. Short rides take in ice cream stands, historic homes, gardens and farmers markets. Longer rides get you to beaches and mountains and even a wildlife park. Some routes incorporate ferry rides (to Chebeague or Bailey islands). There's a century ride and a time trial for expert cyclists. And there are off-road rides for mountain bikers as well.

Each ride comes with a leader and a sweep (someone riding at the rear of the group), maps and cue sheets (mile-by-mile directions). For rides more than 50 miles long, sag wagons (support vehicles) aid tired riders.

### MAINE BIKE RALLY

WHEN: Friday through Sunday

WHERE: Yarmouth

HOW MUCH: All three days, \$105; Saturday only, \$75; Sunday only, \$40; children 6-15 years, \$30; children under 5, free. Registration fees include camping, meals, entertainment, ice cream social, rides, awards ceremony and more.

WHAT ELSE: People who live in Yarmouth, North Yarmouth, Cumberland, Freeport and Pownal can join the rides for free, thanks to sponsorship from L.L. Bean.

FOR MORE information, call 623-4511 or visit [www.bikemaine.org](http://www.bikemaine.org)

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The good folks at the Bicycle Coalition of Maine gave me a sneak preview of the rides, and I sampled one recently to share with you. It was a tough choice: beaches or ice cream? I went for the beach.

An advanced beginner ride, this route starts from the rally site at Harrison Middle School and gets you to Cousins Island and lovely Sandy Point Beach. If your motivation for this ride is the chance to swim, you'll need to check a tide chart before you go. Tides make a big difference at this shallow sand bar. If your heart is set on swimming, you'll want to be here at or near high tide. Otherwise, be prepared for wading and exploring the flats at low tide.

The first few miles of the ride are all in suburban Yarmouth, taking you through neighborhoods and the edge of downtown. Traffic can be moderate, and there are no shoulders, so make sure you're comfortable with the rules of the road. Ride out from the parking lot past the middle and elementary schools on McCartney Street and turn right onto West Elm Street, then left onto Portland Street. At Mile 1.8, ride with care straight across the busy Route 1 intersection. At Mile 2.4, as you skirt downtown Yarmouth, turn right onto Main Street. Fork right and ride downhill to the stop sign. Turn right onto Route 88 and take an immediate right uphill on to Pleasant Street.

As you grind up this short, steep hill you can take comfort in knowing that this hill is the steepest one on the route, so the hard part's over. The road then sweeps left and you'll come to an intersection with Route 88. Go straight across onto Princes Point Road; now you can relax and enjoy the view as you leave town behind and head toward the water. At Mile 3.6, turn left onto Gilman Road. Lawns are replaced by fields of wildflowers, and uneven pavement turns into a smooth shoulder on the road.

A few gentle rolling hills underneath imposing power lines bring you to the bridge to Cousins Island. From here you can see Casco Bay's many islands, the Portland skyline (such as it is), pleasure and working boats and all manner of shorebirds. Turn left just after the bridge into the parking lot for Sandy Point Beach. There are no supplies along the way and only a porta-potty at the beach, so prepare accordingly.

For the Maine Bike Rally, this ride is an out-and-back one, so you can retrace your route back to the middle school for a total of 10.9 miles. If you want more, then turn the route into a loop by heading back over the bridge and continuing straight on Gilman Street all the way to Route 88 (don't turn right back on to Princes Point Road). Turn left onto Route 88; you'll be riding past horses in fields, old cemeteries and showcase homes. You can admire the lovely vistas across Broad Cove just over your left shoulder.

Route 88 is extremely popular with cyclists who enjoy the twisty, rolling road. You could ride all the way to Portland and still loop back to Yarmouth, but if you want a nice short loop (a 12-mile total), turn right at Mile 9.3 onto Kings Highway. This will merge you onto Tuttle Road and take you across Route 1 and Route 295. Take an immediate right onto Middle Street. At Mile 9.8, turn left onto West Elm Street and retrace your route back to the middle school.

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The Bicycle Coalition of Maine will post cue sheets for all the rides on its Web site after the rally, so if you can't make it in July, check online later for plenty of good route suggestions.

*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). She welcomes comments at [bikes@melissakim.com](mailto:bikes@melissakim.com)*

[To top of page](#)



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