

A carriage road and stone bridge near Eagle Lake in Acadia National Park

The Bliss of Biking Acadia

Wide Open Carriage Roads with No Cars in Sight

By SHERRY BALLOUHANSON

Photograph by GREG A. HARTFORD

Back in 1913, when John D. Rockefeller, a summer resident of Mt. Desert Island, began planning the 57-mile network of gravel paths for horse-drawn carriages, he could not have envisioned the thousands of cyclists now using this network of paths that runs through Acadia National Park.

He saw the automobile as a threat to the peace and splendor of the park and the people who walked and rode horses there, and his response was to create this auto-free zone. Rockefeller's construction efforts spanned 27 years and resulted in a system of paths that winds around lakes, over hills, through forests, and over and under handsome granite bridges that connect pathways.

Each bridge span is unique, designed for the area where it was built. Some remind the visitor of ancient Roman gothic structures,

while others seem to grow naturally out of their surroundings. The paths themselves, designed for Maine's climate, are constructed of native granite, boulders, and logs. Three layers of rock make up the base, and all have stone culverts and wide ditches. Between 1992 and 1995 the paths were extensively rehabilitated; drainage was improved and surfaces rebuilt.

Visitors biking along these hard-packed gravel roadways can follow any number of routes with no worry about meeting up with the dreaded automobile. You may, however, encounter horses and carriages, hikers, and other bikers. But the carriage paths absorb them all with ease.

Want to challenge yourself on a path up a steep mountain ridge? Or cruise along beside a quiet lake and stop for a picnic where nary

a ripple disturbs the surface until you skip your stone across? This is the place.

If you've got kids, Acadia's carriage paths provide a great cycling opportunity—wide open “roads” without car traffic—whether you bring your own bikes or rent them in nearby Bar Harbor. You can also rent car racks, child trailers and seats, and even baby backpacks.

The surface of the paths is crushed gravel and suitable for any type of bike. The two rental shops in Bar Harbor provide half-day and full-day rentals. Depending on the type of bike you choose, rates range from \$13-\$19 for a half-day adult rental to \$19 and up for all day. Kids' bikes cost less, and tag-alongs and trailers are \$12-\$17. For about \$9 you can also rent the car rack to transport your rental bikes to one of the carriage path entrances. Ask either shop about

a guided tour planned with your family in mind.

Acadia Bike at 48 Cottage Street can be reached at 800-526-8615, or visit their website at acadiabike.com. Bar Harbor Bike Shop, located at 141 Cottage Street, is at 207-288-3886, or barharborbike.com. Both shops provide helmets and free maps. You can also request a bike with a wider seat for comfort. Bikes have a bracket to hold your water bottle, and the shops sell any accessory you might need.

You can access the carriage paths directly from either rental shop by riding north from the north end of Cottage Street on Route 3 and taking a left at the first intersection. The Duck Brook entrance is on your right about a half mile up the road. This is an uphill climb on heavily traveled roads and not the best route to take children.

If you want to avoid having to ride your bikes on any public roads, you can carry your bikes on your car and enter the system from several places. Try the gatehouse entrance adjacent to the Jordan Pond House and cycle a short out-and-back along the scenic pond. Or continue on that path and ride the Eagle Lake loop for a total of 14 miles. These trails consist of rolling terrain and long climbs, with beautiful views of the lakes and forest. There are several scenic stops along the way to take a break or have a picnic.

You can also drive Maine Highway 198 to the Parkman Mountain parking area just north of Upper Hadlock Pond and try the Hadlock Brook Loop, a good introduction to the carriage paths at 3.9 miles in length. This route has two hand-hewn stone bridges and a sparkling 40-foot waterfall. And for the seasoned athlete, the rugged

Around-the-Mountain loop will leave you gasping.

Acadia's misty heights and mix of green forest and spectacular ocean panoramas are known worldwide, and cycling the carriage paths is a great way to enjoy them. *

IF YOU GO:
Keep a few basics in mind as you plan your biking adventure, whether you bring your own equipment or rent.

- Traffic on the carriage paths in the prime vacation months can be heavy, so ride at a safe speed and be prepared to stop.
- Stay to the right and give a clear warning if passing another cyclist on the left.
- Bicyclists yield to all other users, and everyone yields to horses.
- Avoid stopping in the middle of a path to ooh and aah; instead, move to the side, and make sure your children know to do so, too. It's a good idea to conduct a brief biking etiquette session before embarking.
- Wear a helmet and bring water.

For more information on Acadia National Park, call 288-3338 or see nps.gov/acad.



Sevi
1831

It's a Jungle out there.
Choose SEVI. Choose Wisely.
Safe, natural & kid-friendly.
Wooden toys since 1831

Available at:
Treehouse Toys
PORTLAND PORTSMOUTH
Exchange St Market St
www.treehousetoys.com

Rapid River Company

4 School Street, Freeport, Maine
207.865.6403

Dresses for All Occasions



Kiko • TSD • Salaam • Niche • Zoe