

6 paved trails for a spring bike ride

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Published 10:03 a.m. CT March 31, 2017 | Updated 11:42 a.m. CT April 6, 2017



(Photo: Sara Knutson)

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For the hardy cyclists who pedal on through winter, spring is a chance to ditch some layers before hopping on the saddle.

But for everyone else, a turn to warm weather means it's time to pull bikes out of storage for another season of cycling.

The warm weather, however, brings with it another challenge: soft and muddy trails.

Pedaling on limestone or other crushed-stone trails when they're still wet in the spring can leave deep ruts when the trails dry out.

Lucky for us, Wisconsin is home to miles of paved city, county and state trails for plenty of hard-surface, off-road options for riding in the spring.

And since April 1 is the start of the 30 Days of Biking challenge (30daysofbiking.com), an initiative that encourages people to pledge to ride their bikes any distance every day for a month, it's a good time to get back on the bike.

Here are some paved routes worth checking out.

For a long ride: [Oak Leaf](#), [Ozaukee](#) and [Sheboygan Interurban](#) trails



A biker rides along the Oak Leaf Trail through Brown Deer. (Photo: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Combine these gems for a long, off-road ride from Milwaukee's lakefront through Ozaukee and even Sheboygan counties.

Start at the Milwaukee Art Museum for a relatively easy ride north on the bluffs on the lakefront, along the Milwaukee River, past Estabrook Park and through neighborhoods and towns.

In Brown Deer, continue following the Brown Deer Trail before it transitions into the Ozaukee Interurban at the appropriately named County Line Road. From there, the 30-mile trail spans the length of the county, traveling through Mequon, Cedarburg, Grafton and Port Washington.

North of the county line, the Sheboygan Interurban Trail continues for 5.5 miles off-road and 8.5 miles on low-traffic roads, including along Kohler-Andrae State Park in Sheboygan.

Things to know: The trail is well-traveled and popular in Milwaukee, but you'll lose most of the crowds north of Silver Spring Drive.

Pit stops: The new [Café Hollander](#) just off the trail in Mequon was built with cyclists in mind, featuring covered bike parking, water and a bike pump. The restaurant is at 5900 W. Mequon Road, about 14 miles from downtown Milwaukee, making it a good resting and turnaround point for a 28-mile out-and-back ride.

Or continue about 6 miles more to Cedarburg, where a slew of shops and restaurants in the downtown historic district await. Grab a sandwich at the Vintage Café, a burger and a beer at the Stilt House or a quick coffee at Fiddlehead's.

RELATED: [Trails in southeastern Wisconsin make for biking bliss](#)

For a dose of spring flowers: [Mariners Trail](#)



The Mariners Trail links Manitowoc County's coastal cities of Manitowoc and Two Rivers. (Photo: Shana Shoblaska/Courtesy of Friends of Mariners Trail)

This 5.5-mile trail links Manitowoc and Two Rivers via a paved route along Lake Michigan.

Volunteers make the picturesque pedal even more beautiful with nearly 50 flower beds planted along its route. The trail's friends group has also placed four sculptures along the trail, with hopes of adding a large bronze monument, "Spirit of the Rivers," next year.

Find parking at either end of the trail — the Manitowoc Marina to the south or the Lighthouse Inn to the north — as well as at waysides along its route.

Things to know: The trail parallels a fairly busy road, Highway 42, but Lake Michigan's beauty is enough of a distraction from traffic.

The lake can also create a chilly breeze in the spring. Expect temperatures to be cooler than inland and plan clothing accordingly.

Pit stops: Maretti's, 823 Buffalo St., Manitowoc, is a classic Italian deli offering sandwiches, soups, salads, pasta salad and pizza to fuel up before or after a ride.

For more flower power, stop at the West of the Lake Gardens just north of Manitowoc. The grounds include six acres of gardens and are free and open to the public 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily Mother's Day weekend through mid-October.

For Northwoods pine and lake time: [Heart of Vilas County](#) trail system

More than 45 miles of paved trails connect the Northwoods communities of Manitowish Waters, Boulder Junction, Sayner and St. Germain.

The most popular, the Crystal Lake Trail, runs 11 miles from Boulder Junction south past Trout Lake, Crystal Lake, Plum Lake and their associated campgrounds before reaching Sayner.

From Sayner, the paved, off-road trail continues for another 7.5 miles south to St. Germain. On the north end, the paved route goes west from Boulder Junction for more than 16 miles to Manitowish Waters.

Things to know: Unlike most rail-trails, this paved route has some hills, but nothing too challenging. There are plenty of spots for resting and bathroom breaks along the way.

Vilas County has a trails app that not only includes all of the biking trails in the county, but also trails for hiking, paddling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and more. See trailsapp.vilas.org or search for "Map It Vilas County" in your app store.

Pit stops: North of Manitowish Waters, the [North Lakeland Discovery Center](#), 215 County Highway W, features a variety of nature programs and activities. Visit May 12 during the Northwoods Birding Festival for sunrise bird walks, bird banding, lectures and field trips.

In Boulder Junction, the [Aqualand Ale House](#), 10450 Main St., serves up sandwiches, salads, wood-fired pizzas and a wide selection of craft beer. The restaurant reopens for the season on May 2.



Trees line much of the Bugline Trail, providing shade in the summer and beautiful scenery in the fall. (Photo: Waukesha County Parks)

For families: [Bugline Trail](#)

This nearly 17-mile trail linking Menomonee Falls and North Lake in Waukesha County got a paved facelift from 2012 to 2014, making it more accessible to more people.

The trail follows an old rail line, which means it's a relatively flat and easy ride for families. It passes through groves of trees, farm fields, working quarries, small towns and three parks. Start near the western terminus in Fireman's Park on Highway VV in Merton to ride east through the more rural section of the trail.

Things to know: While most of the trail travels through rural and small suburban communities, there are a couple of busy road crossings.

Pit stop: In Lannon, Quarry Coffee serves up coffee, pastries and other breakfast fare in a comfy cafe off Main St.

RELATED: [Bugline Trail great for a bike ride in Waukesha County](#)

For a spring camping trip: [Old Abe State Trail](#)

Three excellent state trails converge in the Chippewa Valley, which is fast becoming a biking destination on par with the Milwaukee and Madison areas.

The Old Abe has the most pavement, traveling 20 miles between [Lake Wissota](#) and [Brunet Island](#) state parks. Brunet Island offers direct access to the trail via a link on its northern end, plus access to the Ice Age Trail.

Set up camp at either and spend the day pedaling along an abandoned railroad line between Cornell and Chippewa Falls.

A future trail extension will connect the trail with the [Chippewa River State Trail](#) in Eau Claire. That 30-mile trail (paved for 18 miles and asphalt emulsion for 12) heads southwest from Chippewa Falls along the river to Durand. Just north of there, it intersects with the [Red Cedar State Trail](#), a 14.5-mile limestone path that heads north to Menomonie.

When the final link is completed, [the system](#) will feature 80 miles of continuous, off-road biking.

Things to know: Cyclists age 16 and older need a state trails pass to ride the Old Abe (\$25/annual, \$5/daily). Pick one up at either state park.

Pit stops: [Leinenkugel's](#) celebrates its 150th anniversary of brewing beer in Chippewa Falls this year. Stop by the lodge for tastings and a tour of the historic brewery. Tours cost \$5 and include five, 5-ounce samples. They run from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. Visit Aug. 11-12 for the 150th anniversary party.

Fill up on homemade ice cream, fresh cheese curds and lunch fare at [Dylan's Dairy](#), just off the trail on Main St. in Cornell. Owner Lori Crabb started the café in honor of her son, Dylan, who lost his battle with leukemia at the age of 16 in 2009.

For a day in the state capital: [Capital City State Trail](#)



A cyclist rides on the John Nolen Path along Lake Monona in Madison. (Photo: Journal Sentinel files)

The toughest thing about riding in Madison is deciding where to do it.

The state's only platinum-level bike-friendly city, the highest award given by the League of American Bicyclists, Madison has almost as many bike lanes and trails as roads.

This 17-mile paved state trail circles the southern edge of the city, intersecting with the [Badger State Trail](#) and connecting with the [Military Ridge State Trail](#) at its western terminus, and linking with paved paths along Lake Monona in the east.

Start there, and ride along the lake to catch views of the state capitol before heading south then west through the Capital Springs State Recreation Area and the Dawley Conservancy. There, a new "bike hub" offers a shelter, restrooms and tools for tuning up your bike.

Things to know: Cyclists age 16 and older need a state trails pass to ride the 9-mile segment through the state rec area.

This is a city, so there are a few busy road crossings. Be aware and cross with caution.

Pit stops: There's plenty to do in Madison, from meandering down State Street and the capitol square to relaxing on the Memorial Union Terrace.

In Fitchburg, hop off the trail at Fish Hatchery Road for a burger and a beer at the [Great Dane](#). The brewpub also serves up a big brunch buffet on Sundays.

Biking tips

Before you hit the trail, give your bike a tune-up. Most local bike shops offer a basic maintenance package that includes cleaning and lubrication of parts, plus an overall safety check.

Make sure you always carry a spare bike tube, pump and tools for changing a tire — and that you know how to. Plenty of YouTube videos outline the process for doing so if you don't know, and stores like [REI](#) also offer basic bike maintenance classes. Practice changing a tire at home before you're stuck on the side of a trail with a flat.

Some state trails require trail passes for cyclists age 16 and older. They cost \$25 for an annual pass and \$5 for a daily pass and are available at state parks, some bike shops and trailside kiosks. The passes are also good for cross-country skiing in the winter.

Need a new bike? Stop by Wheel & Sprocket's [Bike Expo Sale](#) April 7-9 at Wisconsin State Fair Park. You can also trade in an old bike for credit toward buying a new one. It's open noon to 9 p.m. April 7, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. April 8 and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 9. Admission is free.