

Gravel Cycling Market Research Report

MAY 2019





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. ABOUT GRAVEL CYCLING

WHAT IS GRAVEL CYCLING

Gravel cycling is a relatively newly categorized and increasingly popular type of cycling. While cyclists have been riding on gravel roads for decades the recent surge in interest and classification of gravel cycling is fuelled by the increasing interest in cycling as a whole, for both recreation and sport; new bike technology, and the proliferation of gravel cycling events.

"Gravel riding is exploding in popularity",

Bicycling Magazine (2019)

Gravel cycling takes place on a variety of unpaved surfaces which can include:

Unpaved Roads – Unpaved or gravel or dirt roads are all varied in surface quality dependent on how well they are maintained. Unpaved roads can be smooth hard packed or freshly graded with new gravel or in poor condition with washboards, ruts, rocks, sandy patches and pot holes.

Unpaved Trails – Any type of trail that is unpaved can be considered for inclusion as part of a gravel ride. These trails may be maintained to different standards and be single or double track.

Connecting Routes – Often a gravel cycling route will incorporate portions of paved roads or trails to connect the route, making it a multi-surface ride.

WHAT IS THE APPEAL OF GRAVEL CYCLING?

There are a number of aspects that combined, and which may be particular to individual riders, are making gravel cycling increasingly popular. These include the following:

- Less road traffic
- Slower moving traffic
- Improved bike technology
- Allows for off the beaten path adventures
- Bike packing, potential for self-supported cycling trips
- Large number of gravel events

SAFETY CONCERNS

There are many of the same safety issues that cross over from road and trail cycling to gravel cycling. The following should also be flagged as potential to affect the safety of gravel cyclists.

- The often remote aspect of gravel routes
- Quality and condition of gravel road surfaces
- Passing vehicle traffic
- The impact on gravel rocks flying from passing vehicles
- Tire punctures and other equipment failures due to rough surfaces
- Use of wrong type of bike, one that is not sturdy enough to handle conditions

2. GRAVEL BIKES

TYPE OF BIKES USED FOR GRAVEL ROAD CYCLING

Recent advances in bike technology have made riding gravel and unpaved surfaces easier, more comfortable and safer over the past decade. While a variety of bike types can be used, bikes specific to gravel cycling are growing in retail sales, again showing the popularity of this type of riding.

Gravel Bikes - In recent years bike manufacturers have been making a bike specific to gravel cycling. These types of bikes generally have disc brakes, higher clearance, wider tires, a comfortable geometry and drop handlebars. The development of disk brakes helped open this market as they provide better bike control on gravel roads and allow drop bar bikes to have wider tires. Generally, gravel bikes are sturdy and can be ridden anywhere, on the road and off.



Cyclecross Bikes – Gravel bikes are similar to and were built from bikes designed for cyclecross, yet built more specific to gravel cycling and are less about speed. Other subtle differences include gravel bikes having more control, versatility and comfort features, wider grippier tires and higher clearance generally than cyclecross bikes.

Other Bikes – Other types of bikes can be used for more casual gravel riding. Any type of mountain bike is suitable, so too is a sturdier hybrid bicycle. Most road bikes would not be suitable due to their thinner tires, which may pose a safety issue and also be uncomfortable for rider.

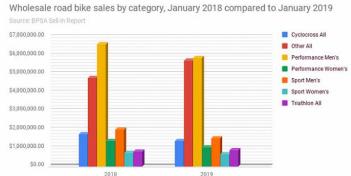
SALES OF GRAVEL BIKES

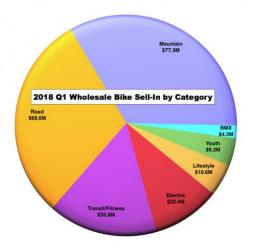
The sale of gravel bikes is one of the few data points and indicators available that show the growing popularity of gravel cycling. Gravel bikes sales are reported under the road bike category and included in the 'other' subcategory. According to Bicycle Retailer who tracks US retail sales, overall sales in the road bikes category have been declining for a number of years. However, there is a constant growth showing from the 'other' subcategory, which includes sales of gravel bikes.

Bicycle Retailer reports that in the 12 months prior to January 2019, wholesale sales of the "other" category, which includes gravel bikes, grew 20 percent, while most other road categories declined. ²

Additional published data supporting the growth in demand for gravel bikes is evident from reports from the first quarter of 2018. During this period the combined subcategories under 'other' that include cyclocross and gravel bikes had \$28.9 million in wholesale sales, up from \$10.1 million in the same quarter of 2017.

The data above is further substantiated by Canadian bike manufacturer contacts who state that the decrease in road bike category sales over the past 4 to 5 years is somewhat mitigated by the increase in gravel/adventure drop bar sales. ⁴





2018 Wholesale Bike Sell-in by Category

3. GRAVEL CYCLISTS

TYPES OF GRAVEL CYCLISTS

Gravel riding cyclists are often referred to as 'Gravel Grinders', a term coined by U.S. based enthusiasts who enjoy cycling on gravel roads and trails; gravel grinding.

Leisure / Recreational – Cyclists have long been riding gravel roads looking for a safer ride, more often as an alternative to busier roads and lack of trails. These types of cyclists continue to use unpaved back roads when choosing routes when travelling to explore a new area and or for transportation.

Gravel routes being developed for this type of market should be shorter in distance (10 to 50km maximum) and should include a number of points of interest for stops during, before and after ride. As is generally preferred, a looped route helps cyclist more easily return to start point.

Experienced / Sportive – From all that could be learned from research into gravel cycling market, this type of market segment would appear to be more common among cyclists that identify as gravel cyclists. Many of these types are training for or participating exclusively in gravel cycling events.

The focus of route development for this market should be on creating routes (preferably looped) that range in distances from 50km to 160km. These types of cyclists are experienced riders, and often also road cyclists, but it should be noted that distances experienced cyclists are able to cover on gravel are smaller than they would be able to on paved road, due to the differences in surface quality. Sportive gravel cyclists would be more likely to stop infrequently on rides, and prefer to have fueling options (cafes, restaurants) or other activities at start / end of ride.

Bikepacking – More experienced types of gravel cyclists may choose to participate in what is a relatively newly named activity, but which has been popular with a subset of cyclists for decades: bikepacking. Bikepacking is generally a multi-day self-supported adventure in remote areas and on rough terrain, a mix of what may include gravel roads and off-road trails. Camping is the most common form of accommodation and may include tents being pitched in unauthorized off the beaten track locations.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF GRAVEL CYCLIST

Similar to accessing demographic data on the overall cycling market, and with gravel cycling being a niche market, it is all the more challenging to source this type of data and research.

However a survey completed by <u>GravelCyclist.com</u> and published in January / February 2019 shows the following results based on a survey where 79% of the 823 surveyed cyclists identified as gravel cyclists: ⁵

- The largest number of respondents was aged 40 to 49 years old followed closely by the 50 to 59 age group
- 93% of respondents were male
- 70% own gravel specific bikes
- A fairly even mix stated they rode for fun versus rode to race
- These gravel enthusiasts are riding considerable distances on gravel, the largest numbers estimating 2,500 miles to 4,999 miles annually (4,023km to 8,045km)
- Over 65% stated they do bikepack at times (travel overnight by bike, self-supported)

4. PROMOTION OF GRAVEL CYCLING

The promotion of and information on gravel cycling is primarily found in online resources. There are few tourism organizations that we have been able to source for this report, that are actively marketing gravel cycling routes in their jurisdiction. There are however a number of gravel enthusiasts who manage websites either dedicated to gravel cycling or including gravel cycling information as a small piece of overall cycling information. Gravel cycling events play a large part in the promotion of this type of cycling activity, with further information included in section 5 below.

MARKETING OF GRAVEL CYCLING ROUTES BY TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS

Travel Oregon – This state-wide tourism organization is a leader in the development of cycle tourism. It also appears to be the only one that has dedicated digital information resources to promote gravel cycling routes. There are 18 gravel routes online, with detailed descriptions and links to route directions using RideWithGPS.

www.traveloregon.com/map/oregon/gravel-ride/?s= www.traveloregon.com/things-to-do/outdoor-recreation/bicycling/gravel-riding

Tourism Brome Missisquoi – Located in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, this regional tourism organization has a single page blog posting dedicated to a looped gravel route in the area. www.tourismebrome-missisquoi.ca/en/blogue/gravel-road-bike-circuit-in-frelighsburg-and-dunham

MARKETING OF GRAVEL CYCLING ROUTES BY TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS IN ONTARIO

There appears to be no direct examples of tourism organizations in Ontario actively marketing gravel cycling routes within their jurisdiction. However some tourism organizations do play an active part in marketing gravel events in their area.

Some information on gravel cycling, while not explicitly promoted, is included on a number of cycling maps in Ontario that do display roads that are gravel / unpaved. These maps are produced more commonly by tourism organizations, often in partnership with municipality/region.

Examples include:

Grey County Cycling Routes

www.visitgrey.ca/sites/default/files/GC Cycling 2018 Web.pdf

Lanark Cycling Map

www.lanarkcountytourism.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/LCTA-2015-Cycle-Map.pdf

Mississippi Mills Cycling Map

www.ontariobybike.ca/images/stories/2014/mm%20bicycle%20map%202014.pdf

Peterborough & the Kawarthas Cycling & Trails Map www.peterborough.ca/Assets/City+Assets/LIS/Documents/Bikeways+and+Trails+Map.pdf Ride Prescott Russell www.tprt.ca/uploadFCK/45528 ZC-Cornwall%20Tourism%20C1678%20fpo.pdf

MARKETING OF GRAVEL CYCLING ROUTES BY OTHER ORGANIZATIONS / ENTITIES

<u>GoCycleCollingwood</u> – A blog site by event coordinator of the gravel event Growling Beaver, and also a photographer from the area, that has 2 gravel routes online, text descriptor and RideWithGPS map. <u>www.gocyclecollingwood.com</u>

<u>www.gravelmap.com</u> – Gravelmap is an interactive database entirely online. It shows countless gravel and dirt roads and paths predominantly across North America, all submitted and managed entirely by gravel cycling enthusiasts.

<u>www.gravelcyclist.com</u> – This digital resource is well populated with news on gravel races, events and rides, and is primarily populated with information posted by Florida based gravel cycling enthusiast.

<u>www.ridinggravel.com</u> – A culmination of the efforts of a couple of U.S. based gravel enthusiasts and other contributors, this site first published in 2014, contains a wealth of info on events, gear and news.

VT Dirt – An interesting website run by what appears to be avid cyclists with affiliated business interests that touts themselves as being the one-stop-shop with everything relating to gravel and adventure cycling in the State of Vermont. The activities seem to be more like that of a cycling club, but also include developing, promoting and featuring gravel routes and events in Vermont. Information on gravel routes is simply displayed under the headers of: notes, details, refills, downloads and maps using RideWithGPS. www.vtdirt.com

Adventure Cycling Victoria – From Australia, this website is the unofficial cycling / touring / bikepacking site for the state. It has 11 routes, including several longer distanced multi-day routes, featuring gravel cycling. The details included for each route feature are both useful and informative and include many ride photos along with RideWithGPS maps.

www.adventurecyclingvictoria.com

Gravel Cycling: The Complete Guide to Gravel Racing and Adventure Bikepacking – Published in January 2018, this attractive coffee table style book is packed with photos that feature 18 top one-day gravel races and 8 epic multi-day bikepacking adventure routes. Written by Nick Legan, also of Adventure Cyclist Magazine, info on how to, gear and other practical tips are included within the 304 page book.

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO GRAVEL RACING AND

GRAVEL CYCLING FOCUSSED BUSINESSES

The following are some examples of businesses (tours operators, clinics and ranches) gearing up for and catering to the growing gravel cycling market, and hence helping promote gravel cycling:

<u>Pedal Pushers</u> – Running gravel riding training clinics on roads around Collingwood, Ontario, plus other cycling training courses.

Nonesuch Cycle Tours – Offering multi-day gravel itineraries in Nova Scotia, this operator is touting itself as North America's first gravel-grinder / cyclocross adventure travel company.

<u>The Cycling House</u> – This U.S. operator has multi-day gravel tours in Montana and Colorado, and a variety of other types of rides in the U.S. and Europe.

<u>Treo Bike Tours</u> – Operated from a ranch providing accommodations in rural Oregon, cyclists can choose to ride gravel road routes and enjoy a range of extra services.

5. GRAVEL CYCLING EVENTS

Gravel cycling events have largely been the driving force in helping to create, develop and define this bike category. While gravel cycling has been a recreational activity for decades, it has not been until the relatively recent initiation of large scale gravel events in the U.S. that this category has exploded, growing exponentially.

The U.S. website <u>RidingGravel.com</u> lists gravel cycling events around the world. The site operator estimated the following numbers, showing the growth in number of gravel events over the last few years.⁶

- 2016 Between 250 to 300 gravel events listed
- 2017 420 gravel events listed
- 2018 487 gravel events listed
- 2019 556 and counting gravel events listed

GRAVEL EVENTS IN ONTARIO*

The popularity of gravel cycling events has also taken hold in Ontario. While there were several early events (Paris to Ancaster now in its 26 year and Almonte Paris-Roubaix Cyclosportif Ride now in its 30th year) the surge of new gravel events in Ontario is noticeable. Below outlines Ontario based gravel events and provides additional information about each event.

Event Name & Website	Location	2019 Date &	Route	Race	Recreational	About & Additional Facts
		Annual	Distances		Aspects	
Steaming Nostril	St Jacobs,	April 14	65km or	Yes –	40km,	Coordinated by Cycle Waterloo. The
www.cyclewaterloo.ca/events/ste	Waterloo		40km	65km	shorter	terrain is rolling to flat surfaces: 60%
aming-nostril	Region	7 th		only	route	gravel roads, 20% paved roads, 10% farm
						laneways, trails and farm property in
						Waterloo Region. There are a number
						of different categories for the 2
						distances.
Hell of the North	Newmarket	April 21	75km or	Yes	75km,	Event starts and ends at the Ballantrae
www.realdealracing.ca/projects	, York		90km		slightly less	Community Centre, east of Newmarket.
	Region	11th			challenging	The 90km route is all dirt and off-road
						trails, with some dismounts needed.
						The 75km has no off-road segments.
						Coordinated by Real Deal Racing.
Paris to Ancaster	Paris, Brant	April 28	70km,	Yes – 1 st	Variety of	With over 2,700 riders, this is the
www.parisancaster.com	County;		40km,	wave/eli	route	original gravel event in Ontario, and
	Ancaster,	26th	25km,	te	distances	world renown. It features mud shoots,
	Hamilton		kids	riders.	and kids ride	gravel, single track and challenging
						climbs, often on private property
						inaccessible other times of the year.
						Demographics: 85% make; age 40-50 is
						largest age category. 75% of riders are
						visitors to area; 38% stayed overnight.
						More on page 14 or report, here.
Almonte Paris-Roubaix	Lanark	May 5	80km or	No	Sportive, not	Sells out annually with 160-180 riders.
Cyclosportif Ride	County;		40km		race	On mixed surfaces including mud,
www.ottawabicycleclub.ca/paris-	Ottawa	30 th				gravel, sand, rocks, unmaintained
roubaix						roads, woodlots and climbs. Previously

Event Name & Website	Location	2019 Date &	Route	Race	Recreational	About & Additional Facts
		Annual	Distances		Aspects	
						coordinated by a private individual, in
						2019 by Ottawa Bicycle Club.
Clarence Rockland Classic	Prescott-	May 19	85km or	Yes	Yes	Takes place most years just south of
www.ridewithrendall.wordpress.c	Russell;		60km			Ottawa, hosted by OCA affiliated club,
om/events	Ottawa	9 th				Ride With Rendall.
						A charity ride.
Turas Mor	Simcoe	May 25,	60km or	No	Yes	Based out of the village of Creemore
www.creemorespringsturasmor.c	County	2019	40km or			and coordinated by Creemore Springs
<u>om</u>			20km			Brewery, this bike tour is on a mix of
		4 rd				road surfaces, paved and gravel and has
						a theme of vintage bike and gear.
Gravel Growler	Middlesex	June 2	160km or	No	Yes	Starting from Inverton (NW of London)
www.bit.ly/2J1JkWS	County		80km or			this ride is on Middlesex County's gravel
		2 nd	40km or			back roads.
			5km			
Fretori Gravel Ride	Peterborou	July 14	170km or	No	Yes	A social ride on choice of challenging
www.fretori.com/fretorigravelride	gh &		125km or			and lengthy routes from Warsaw.
	County	2 nd	100km			Coordinated by Wild Rock Sportive.
BT700	Waterloo;	July 15 or	~700km	No	Yes	The inaugural event has a start date
www.bt700.ca	Dufferin;	anytime				from St Jacob's, but can be ridden at
	Huron;					any time independently. It incorporates
	Bruce; Grey;	1 st				mixed terrain; rail trails, unpaved /
	Simcoe.					unserviced roads and singletrack.

Event Name & Website	Location	2019 Date &	Route	Race	Recreational	About & Additional Facts
		Annual	Distances		Aspects	
The Noble Pursuit	Peterborou	July 24	170km	No –	No	A team ride, of 20 teams, 4 riders each,
www.noblepursuit.ca	gh &			but		on a challenging and long route with a
	County	8 th		timed		mix of roads, paved and unpaved, and
						some farm lanes. Starting and ending in
						Peterborough.
The Eager Beaver	Grey	August 10	100 mile	Yes	Yes	Featuring gravel roads near Duntron,
www.substanceprojects.com/port	County		or 100km			south of Collingwood.
folio-item/eager-beaver-100		4 th	or 50km			
El Bandito	Durham;	August 24	118km or	Yes	Yes	5 different course lengths on mixed
www.substanceprojects.com/port	Northumbe		102km or			terrain, with ride starting and ending
folio-item/elbandito	rland		77km or			near Orono, Durham Region east.
			52km or			
			42km			
The Gravel Cup	Lanark;	April to	Various	Yes	Yes	A series of 5 gravel events in eastern
www.gravelcup.com	Renfrew	September				Ontario, all with multiple route length
						options, and taking place primarily on
		2 nd				gravel and unmaintained roads.
The Growling Beaver	Grey	September	200km or	No	Yes	Social brevet style event that sells out
www.growlingbeaver.com	County	28	100km or			annually and is capped at 200 riders.
			60km or			The routes cover scenic rail trails, gravel
		5 th	40km			roads, and paved roadways in Beaver
						Valley.
Fretori Fall Classic	Simcoe	October 19	125km or	No	Yes	A social ride on gravel roads and trails,
www.fretori.com/fretorifallclassic	County		75km			starting from Orillia. Coordinated by
						Wild Rock Sportive.

^{*}All events may not be listed.

EXAMPLES OF GRAVEL EVENTS IN UNITED STATES

There are a large and growing number of gravel cycling event in the U.S. Below is information about three of the largest events.

Event Name & Website	Location	2019 Date & Annual	Route Distances	Race	Recreational Aspects	About & Additional Facts
The Mid South (formerly Land Run 100) www.midsouthgravel.com	Stillwater, Oklahoma	March 17 7 th	or 50 miles. Also 50	Yes	Yes	Started in 2013 with 121 riders grown to 1,760 for 2019, with more than 400 on waitlists. 100 mile route capped at 1,000, with those spots selling out in seven minutes. Riders come from 46 US states,
Barry Roubaix www.barry-roubaix.com	Hastings, Michigan	April 13	mile run 100 mile or 62, 36, 22 miles	Yes		Canada, the UK, Denmark and Brazil. ⁷ Touted as the largest gravel race worldwide, this event attracts 3,500 riders. A nod to Paris Roubaix, the well-known European professional race, the race course through Barry County Michigan incorporates 80% rolling gravel roads, some pavement, rough track and more. The economic impact of the one day event is estimated at \$750,000 USD. ⁸
Dirty Kanza www.dirtykanza.com	Emporia - Flint Hills, Kansas	June 1	350 miles, 200, 100, 50 or 25 miles. Also additional events.	Yes	Yes	Started in 2006 with 34 riders, riders now have to enter a lottery system to get one of 2,500 spots to participate in this self-supported race. Viewed as ultra-endurance and world's premier "Gravel Grinder" event. Riders travel to attend from around the world. Local tourist board estimates economic impact of event is approximately \$2.2 million US dollars.9

6. SUMMARY & INSIGHTS FOR MUNICIPALITIES, REGIONS & TOURISM ORGANIZATION

From the research completed on gravel cycling the following insights were gained. These insights can be translated into opportunities for municipalities, regions and tourism organizations and further pursued to develop the gravel cycling tourism product.

- There are not many tourism organizations actively marketing gravel cycling, and none in Ontario, hence this appears to be an opportunity, especially considering bike sales data, event participation and anecdotal evidence.
- There are two types of markets within gravel cycling: leisure / recreational (looking for routes 10km to-50km) and experienced / sportive (looking for routes 50km to-160km). Developing routes to cater to both would maximize impact and promotional appeal while reaching the largest audience in what is already a niche market.
 - Routes developed should fall within distances suited to and marketed to above mentioned types of gravel cyclist.
 - Create and publish ride itineraries that include relevant information specific to markets.
 - There may be an opportunity to develop a longer route that can be equated to the 'Century Ride' (100 mile equivalent). Starting with several smaller routes to test the market can also be an approach.
 - ➤ Bikepacking is a type of activity that is growing. To create an optimal route a sizeable distance must be covered with routing that takes in more remote and wilderness settings that these types of cyclists prefer.
- Events are helping to drive this market. The size and scale of U.S. gravel events and their
 exponential growth is off the charts. These events are having a significant economic impact
 on the small host towns, with their location being a good match for gravel cyclists who are
 looking for quiet roads, natural and rural scenery. There are a growing number of gravel
 events in Ontario.
 - Actively reach out to gravel event coordinators to promote municipality/region/destination as a potential event host region. Be prepared to assist event coordinators with logistics and other needs.
- Gravel cycling while predominantly on unpaved roads and trails, often uses a mix of multiple surfaces to connect routes. Gravel roads and trails do require maintenance but at a different level and cost to managing jurisdiction. In addition to safety concerns that are relevant to all types of cycling there are some specifics to gravel cycling.
 - On any published gravel routes, include information on surface type and cycling safety.

ENDNOTES

- ³ Bicycle Retailer & Industry News. (April 17, 2018). First quarter wholesale bike sales up 2.4% thanks to e-bikes and gravel bikes. www.bicycleretailer.com/studies-reports/2018/04/17/first-quarter-wholesale-bike-sales-24-dollars#.XK4flgJKjct
- ⁴ Live to Play Sports / Norco Bicycles. (2019). Cycle Tourism in Ontario. www.transportationoptions.org/uploads/8/7/2/0/8720033/2019 cycle tourism_sector_report.pdf
- ⁵ Gravelcyclist.com. (January & February, 2019) Survey Results: How do you Roll on Gravel? Part One & Survey Results: How do you Roll on Gravel? Part Two.

 www.gravelcyclist.com/training-rides/survey-results-how-do-you-roll-on-gravel-part-one & www.gravelcyclist.com/training-rides/survey-results-how-do-you-roll-on-gravel-part-two
- ⁶ Land Run 100. (2019). Data and info gathered from sources at <u>www.ridinggravel.com</u> and shared for this report.
- ⁷ Land Run 100. (2019). Data and info shared for this report.
- ⁸ Bicycling.com. Rojek, Taylor. (August 8, 2018). Gravel Rides Are Saving Small-Town America. www.bicycling.com/rides/a22652025/gravel-rides-are-saving-small-town-america
- ⁹ Bicycling.com. Rojek, Taylor. (August 8, 2018). Gravel Rides Are Saving Small-Town America. <u>www.bicycling.com/rides/a22652025/gravel-rides-are-saving-small-town-america</u>

¹ Bicycling.com. Yeager, Selene. (March 29, 2019). Gravel Riding is Everywhere. Here's How You Can Get in on the Fun. www.bicycling.com/bikes-gear/a27021852/gravel-biking

² Bicycle Retailer & Industry News. (February 26, 2019). January wholesale bike sales flat; but who bought that 26-inch dualie? www.bicycleretailer.com/industry-news/2019/02/26/january-wholesale-bike-sales-flat-who-bought-26-inch-dualie#.XJEiEclKics