



THE BALANCED LIFE

by John Swart

Cycling in Ontario 2021—a resource not just for bikers

Seems we're all balancing our lives on our own personal teeter-totters: trying to remember if work dress today is white blouse with pyjama bottoms for Zoom, or long skirt and actually go to the office. Are the kids in school or is it a virtual learning morning. Does my spouse or partner need a gentle hug or a stern shove. And desperately waiting for a vaccine and knowing it won't come until an age-appropriate time this summer or fall.

What we do know for sure is that being outdoors helps clear our minds and improve our life balance, and

that cycling, walking and hiking are a large, COVID-safe part of this equation. For those that embraced these activities early on in 2020, discovering new adventures within Ontario will be the challenge for at least the first half of 2021, and realistically, into the fall.

Whether your preference is cycling, hiking or themed road-tripping by car, *Cycling in Ontario 2021*, a just-released, free, 45-page guide produced by Ontario By Bike, may be your timely answer to researching undiscovered territory and experiences. Although primarily a cycling guide

to those regions of Ontario a day's drive or less from Niagara, because it deals with road biking, urban and rural trails, and mountain biking, it's easy to find many diverse non-cycling activities within its comprehensive pages.

As road cyclists, we're searching for traffic-free routes, which means off the traditional tourist path. We need lots of small town stops for home-cooked pastries and unique lunches, plus the occasional micro-brewery or local cultural attraction to give our rear ends a break from the saddle—prerequisites equally important to an enjoyable road trip.

Oxford County offers the Cheese Trail, York Region has the Butter Tart Ride, Hastings has the Heritage Trail, and in Cornwall you can find the Grand Tour



Els Swart on Doube's Trestle along the Trans Canada Trail west of Peterborough. This spectacular 200-metre-long rail-trail bridge rises 29 metres above Buttermilk Valley, and is easily accessible to walkers and hikers from Orange Corners Sideroad.

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de Breweries, a personal favourite. This 83 km route, which can be cycled or driven, island-hops the Long Sault Parkway surrounded by the beautiful St. Lawrence River, passes the Lost Village Museum at Long Sault, and Humble Beginnings Brewing in In-

gleside, then ends at Rural Brewery in Cornwall, after winding through the historic hinterland of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Counties.

Pelham's Gerry Berkhout Trail offers ample proof that walkers, hikers and cyclists can comfortably

enjoy the same off-road facilities, each experiencing the pleasure and benefit in their own personal way. *Cycling in Ontario 2021* is crammed with information on gravel trails and mountain-biking single track

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that can also provide excellent hiking and walking opportunities.

The Red Hill Valley Trail, just 45 minutes from Pelham, is a local example. Park at Lake Ontario near the beach and walk the massive pedestrian bridge over the QEW into the Red Hill Valley, or begin atop the escarpment at Albion Falls and head to the lake along Red Hill Creek to traverse this 12 km trail. If your plan is a few kilometres out and back, the amount of exercise you're seeking may determine from which end you begin. Serious hikers already vaccinated or comfortable sharing a short ride car ride with others wearing masks can leave a shuttle vehicle at each trailhead and attempt a through hike.

Further evidence for the suitability of this resource to walkers and hikers is an article on Ontario-by-Bike's website entitled, "Pairing Culture and Cycling: Eight Cycling Trails in Stratford, Ontario." Five of the eight trails are excellent for walking too.

The Festival Route meanders past the Avon Theatre, the Festival Theatre, downtown Stratford, and the Avon River. It is completely accessible to walk-

ers. The Avon River Cycling Path extends this walk through Shakespeare Gardens and historic residential neighbourhoods. The Anne Hathaway Loop is a walk-friendly cycling loop that includes Stratford's Market Square and the cafes of downtown.

A few minutes southwest of Stratford, the St. Mary's Grand Trunk Trail borders the limestone waterfalls of the Thames River and passes by the historic Sarnia and Queen Street bridges in its short 2.6 km distance, ideal for a refreshing walk before your evening Shakespearian performance. There is no question that a thorough search of the *Cycling in Ontario 2021* will yield more than just cycling adventures.

The *Cycling in Ontario 2021* guide entices with some 50 day-trips and multi-day options scattered through western, eastern and central Ontario, primarily south of Highway 17, stretching from Sault Ste Marie through Sudbury and North Bay.

Without doubt, *Cycling in Ontario 2021* is designed to promote cycling and those communities in Ontario that have adopted cycling as part of their tourism and lifestyle strategy. You will not find the streets of Toronto's urban core, nor the tourist traps of Clifton Hill, represented in the guide. In my opinion, this is a benefit rather than a limita-

tion for those of us seeking fresh destinations and physical activities that are to some degree social, yet are at low risk for transmitting the coronavirus.

Instead, the gravel roads of rural Waterloo Menno-nite country and the river-side paths of Peterborough are the stars. For every recommendation set in a well-known tourist area such as Prince Edward County's Millennium Trail, there is a route like the Park to Park River Ramble between Fitzroy Provincial Park and Morris Island Conservation Area, along the Ottawa River, which is unknown to 99 per cent of us.

The 2021 guide is written by cyclists using quality information provided by local enthusiast clubs and cycling advocates. The articles capably walk the line between promotion and factual information, which is an important benefit for those researching destinations and planning safe cycling outings. Louisa Mursell, Editor-in-Chief, has spent years cycling throughout Ontario, developing relationships with local cycling clubs and establishing a network of bicycle-friendly businesses that understand the specific needs of cyclists. Before any route offering is accepted into the guide, including those identified as family friendly, you can be assured that a knowledgeable, safety-conscious cyclist has ridden it.

This engagement with all facets of cycling and the cycling industry ensures that *Cycling in Ontario 2021* provides timely information on cycling trends. In 2020 (all previous issues are available online) the focus was bike-packing and trail rid-

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ing in Ontario, the most recent segment of adventure cycling.

This year, ebikes and their riders are featured. This cycling demographic is exploding, powered by older riders unwilling to give up on cycling, new riders wanting to expand their trip distances without fear of tackling too much physically, and utility riders. For anyone lamenting that they may have missed the opportunity to enjoy cycling, an ebike might allow them to begin riding at any age. The rider profiles in the guide are inspirational.

Cecil from Georgetown says, "I have always enjoyed cycling and when I

turned 80 I decided I was old enough to get my first ebike. When I visit my 10-year-old granddaughter in Parry Sound, she looks forward to a ride on the local trails with me, and the ebike makes it possible."

Chris from Huron County uses his ebike to monitor and assist cyclist and hikers as a trail ranger along 50 kilometres of the Guelph to Goderich rail trail, and Kelly, with gimpy legs from 20-plus years of rugby, rode Crank the Shield, Ontario's iconic three day mountain bike stage race held in the granite and bogs near Sault Ste. Marie, on his new ebike.

Cycling in Ontario 2021 is a production of Ontario by Bike, which is a program of Transportation Options, an Ontario not-for-profit organization dedicated to fostering sustainable transportation and tourism ideas. The guide is available as a free download, or can be ordered as a print copy, on Ontario-by-Bike's website: <https://www.ontariobybike.ca/2021>

Whether you intend to use it as research tool for cycling, hiking or walking, the guide and Ontario-by-Bike's website are incredibly inspirational and informative resources aimed at helping you explore Ontario sustainably, and generate the enthusiasm necessary for Ontario travel to safely navigate one more year of COVID with optimism. ♦