

## Spectacular 300k Loop of Biking Trails Offers Northwest History and Culture

By Estar Holmes

When visiting the Spokane-Coeur d'Alene Metro area in the Pacific Northwest, cyclists can take a bike tour of the outlying areas on some amazing biking trails within an hour or two of town. The new 300k Bitterroot Loop is steeped in history and makes for a scenic and interesting bicycle touring option.



**The Bitterroot Loop** is made up of two dedicated biking trails: the paved 72-mile [Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes](#), and the 15-mile packed gravel [Route of the Hiawatha](#), both of which were named to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Hall of Fame in 2010. Two gravel multi-use trails – the NorPac, and the Milwaukee Route – connect the two dedicated trails. A 12-mile stretch of rural SR-5 along Lake Coeur d'Alene's south end is the only segment of the 300k-loop that requires highway riding. [Silver Bike Tours](#) of Spokane offers full logistical support along the Bitterroot Loop trails for self-guided tours and group tours. [Friends of the Coeur d'Alene Trails](#) provide detailed directions and maps on how to make all the connections along this spectacular network of trails.

### Learn About History and Culture the Cyclists' Way

The bike tour follows railroad routes established after the discovery of gold caused a stampede to the Coeur d'Alene Mountains in the winter of 1893. There are many opportunities to learn about the area's history along these biking trails. If you're not a history buff, just take in the spectacular scenery. Most of the ride is along water, including the southeastern shore of Lake Coeur d'Alene, the Coeur d'Alene River, and the St. Joe River.



You can start the tour thirty miles south of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in Plummer. Downtown Spokane is 45 miles away. This trailhead on the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation features a metal sculpture commissioned by the tribe to honor veterans and warriors of the Coeur d'Alene people. Riders who like to stop and appreciate arts and crafts during their bicycle touring experience will find galleries in Harrison, Wallace, and St. Maries, and cafés that feature local artists in Kellogg and Mullan. The Warpath gift shop in Plummer carries handmade Native American items.

The first fifteen miles of these cycle trails lead through the Indian reservation and the interpretive signs along this stretch reflect places and events of cultural importance to the tribe. From Plummer, enjoy a six-mile downhill cruise through a forested canyon to Heyburn State Park. After that, the bike trail hugs Lake Coeur d'Alene before reaching Harrison, Idaho.

## Plenty of Good Eats on this Bike Tour

Take your pick of which deck to dine on in Harrison. There are three choices in this quaint town of 260 residents. You'll find a lot of cyclists at The Creamery getting a giant ice cream cone. You can stretch out in the grassy park overlooking the lake before embarking on the next leg of the journey. There are plenty of good restaurants up ahead in the Silver Valley, too. You have a choice of Chinese, Mexican, Greek, Hawaiian, and of course, good old American food, from McDonald's to gourmet specialties in Kellogg and Wallace. However, other than restrooms at trailheads, there are no services along the next 25-mile stretch along the Coeur d'Alene River. Most of this area is a Wildlife Management Area, so keep your eyes peeled for moose, deer, elk, eagles, and even turtles. Bicycle touring doesn't get much better than this.



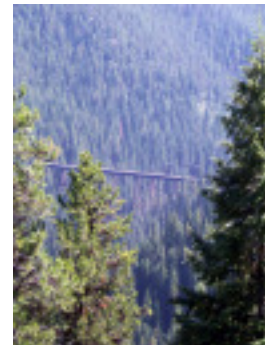
## Tours, Museums, and Theater Ahead

The Coeur d'Alenes Old Mission State Park is about three flat miles from the Cataldo Trailhead. The *Sacred Encounters* exhibit at the visitor center is a new multi-media exhibit you won't want to miss. Up ahead in Kellogg, the Staff House Mining Museum is a good way to get grounded in the area's mining roots. The Silver Valley is one of the most prolific silver producing districts in the world. Check out the Silver Mine Tour in Wallace. There are also historic trolley rides here, three museums, and lots of shops to browse. Watch a performance at the Sixth Street Theatre, where the shows feature the lighter side of the rough and tumble world of mining in the old days. Then it's on to the end of the Coeur d'Alene trail at Mullan.



## Bicycle Touring Through the Wilderness

The Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes and Route of the Hiawatha biking trails are linked here with an 11.5-mile uphill ride to Lookout Pass on the NorPac Trail. A mountain bike or other bike with at least 700x32c tires is recommended. From Lookout Pass, it's twelve more miles of remote bicycle touring through the backcountry to the Route of the Hiawatha. This dedicated trail offers a dramatic downhill trip through some long dark tunnels and over towering train trestles.



Pearson Trailhead at the bottom of the Hiawatha is the end of the dedicated biking trails for now. Riders have the option of back tracking by taking a bus to the upper trailheads or proceeding south

ten miles on the multi-use Old Milwaukee Alternative Route, to the little outpost of Avery, Idaho. There is food and lodging here, along with a small museum, old jail and relic railroad car.

It's 46 miles of rural riding on packed gravel along the St. Joe River, between Avery and St. Maries. To see a display of early 20th century logging, take a break after 13 miles at the Marble Creek Interpretive Area,



### **The Home stretch**

There is a 12-mile stretch of highway between St. Maries and Heyburn State Park. This rural commuter route is narrow and winding and lacks good shoulders. Cyclists who prefer to avoid riding in traffic may inquire about a courtesy shuttle if lodging at Fort Hemenway Manor, The Pines Motel, or St. Maries Inn.

You can ride one, two, three, or all four of the Bitterroot Loop trails for a memorable pedal-powered vacation steeped in local history and culture.

*Estar Holmes writes the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes Unofficial Guidebook. The 2012 version includes a new section on the entire Bitterroot Loop.*