

GREEN PORTAGE

Family fun on wheels

Plenty of bike-friendly trails to enjoy in Portage

Presented by the Portage Park District

Bicycling is one of those wonderful activities that can accommodate a variety of ages, physical fitness levels, and interests— and happily, more people in Portage County discover this every year. The Portage Park District (www.portageparkdistrict.org/) has a variety of trails designed for use by cyclists (and shared with hikers, strollers, and occasionally equestrians).



DIANE STRESING

What the trail means to you depends on how you roll. A cyclist craving solitude and a break from daily demands can turn off his Blackberry and ride incognito behind his sunglasses and helmet, lowering his blood pressure in the process. A runner training for her next event can get a light workout and give her knees a break while rolling along the trail. A young couple looking for a cheap date can pack a picnic and a blanket and have their choice of romantic dinner settings — no reservations required. And for families, the trails provide a perfect setting for cheap, healthy, ‘unplugged’ outings.

One way to encourage a child’s developing fitness habits is to plan a family bike ride on car-free trails. In a kids’ perfect world, every family outing would probably start and end at a playground. Because Headwaters Trail connects Garrettsville Village Park and Mantua Village Park, you can honestly describe it as “seven miles between playgrounds.” Those seven miles also offer multiple fitness benefits and plenty of time to reconnect with your family. (Tell your teens to leave their iPods at home; it’s unsafe to ride with earbuds, anyway.)

Families seeking a shorter ride can start from Towner’s Woods in Franklin Township and follow The Portage about four miles east to Ravenna’s Chest-

nut Hills Park, with its elaborate, new playground that’s all but impossible for children to resist. (Or leave — remember that when you plan your trip!)

A much shorter excursion that’s ideal for very new trail riders could begin at Towner’s Woods in the Park District and stop at Beckwith’s Orchards (open for peach season starting next month, 330-673-6433, www.beckwithorchards.com) for a tour of the Children’s Garden. After returning to Towner’s Woods, the little ones can brag they’ve completed their first bike tour in Portage County!

Before you get rolling, consider these tips to enjoy safe, fun family bike outings:

Take the essentials — helmets, sunscreen, and water — to ensure the outing is a good, comfortable, safe one for each member of your family.

While most of the Portage County Park District’s bike-friendly trails are also training-wheel-friendly, remember that young legs expend a lot of energy pushing four wheels along the trail. Plan accordingly, and expect frequent stops for water and “sight seeing.”

No wheels? No problem. Bicycle rentals are available at Kent State University’s Outdoor Rental Center (330-672-2803, 330-672-2803, www.kent.edu/recservices).

I’ll end on a personal note. A helmet is like a seat belt. You may never need it, but when you do, you really need it. I needed mine on September 3, 2004. If I hadn’t been wearing a helmet, I would have died that day. Don’t just wear one to set a good example for your kids. Wear a helmet because it’s the right thing to do. Here’s hoping I’ll see you on the trail!

For information on trail locations, parking, or other park info, go to visit the Portage Park district web page at www.portageparkdistrict.org/.

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