



Biking the Maritimes

Introduction

The Maritimes are the eastern Canadian provinces of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Here, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, land, sea, and sky join to create an invigorating climate with varied landscapes that are superb for cycling. These provinces, within a day's drive of eastern Ontario, Quebec, and the northeastern United States, offer the cyclist seemingly endless miles of quiet country roads. Some trace the shore and call in at tiny fishing ports, while others wind through river valleys, past woods and farms, to small towns that seem to have magically escaped the stress afflicting larger urban centers.



New Brunswick is the least well known of the three Maritime Provinces, but it offers splendid surprises for the cyclist. The St. John River Valley, the Acadian and Fundy Shores, and the idyllic Kingston Peninsula have some of the finest bicycling routes in the Maritimes. Prince Edward Island is justly famed for its gentle landscape, a patchwork quilt of greens and gold, rimmed with red bluffs and pink sand beaches. Nova Scotia is more diverse — from the spectacular vistas of Cape Breton, to the rich farmland and historic towns of the Annapolis Valley, to the rugged Atlantic coastline, dotted with lighthouses and picturesque port towns.



Enjoying the land, sea, and sky of PEI

The Maritime Provinces together are almost as big as New England, but their combined population is less than two million. Much of this population is concentrated in the region's biggest cities and towns — Halifax and Sydney, Nova Scotia, St. John and Moncton, New Brunswick, Charlottetown and Summerside, PEI — so the uncrowded countryside retains all its rural appeal. Since the shoreline of the three provinces totals almost 10,800 kilometres (6622 miles), the supply of unspoiled beaches, coves, and promontories seems endless.

The Maritimes offer more than beautiful scenery. Some of North America's earliest European settlements were established here, and tumultuous events during the Colonial period helped shape the history of Canada and indeed of North America. During the Maritimes' economic heyday, in the 19th century, prosperous towns were built whose architecture still delights the visitor. And the Maritimes' Scottish, Irish, English, French, and First Nations heritage





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Maritime musicians – talent informed by tradition

has produced a rich culture that draws appreciative visitors to hundreds of galleries, concerts, and festivals every summer.

The people of all three provinces extend an extraordinarily warm welcome to visitors. In fact, we think the friendly people and comfortable communities of the Maritimes are the greatest attraction of all.

The Origin of *Biking the Maritimes*

We began serious research for a comprehensive cycling guide to the Maritime Provinces in 2003. Over two years, we spent eight months on our bicycles with GPS units on the handlebars and our laptop in a pannier. Each evening we downloaded trip data and recorded photographs and impressions.

It was a labor of love for us. Although we are U.S. citizens, our first real home as a married couple was on Prince Edward Island, all three of our sons were born there, and the Maritimes have a special place in our hearts.

Cycling again in the Maritimes for this book, enjoying the glorious scenery and seeing old friends, has been a joyful experience for us, as we hope it will be for you.

The book was originally destined for print publication, but the number of routes and the amount of information we accumulated made the project too big. Our publishers said the sheer size of the manuscript and the number of maps needed would make it uneconomical. Rather than dropping routes to the extent our publishers required or abandoning the project altogether, we decided to try something different. We are releasing the entire book, *Biking the Maritimes*, as a series of three CD-ROMS, one for each province – *Biking Prince Edward Island*, *Biking Nova Scotia*, and *Biking New Brunswick*.

At first we thought of CDs only as a way to publish economically, but we quickly became excited by the potential of a cycling guide in digital form. We have been able to include hundreds of color photos and scores of maps without adding significantly to the cost. You can view the entire book on screen and then print only what is needed for a particular trip. Furthermore, a version without the color photos is also provided on each CD for economical printing. If you wish, you can print just the directions and maps, or only the maps you need and the cue sheets that accompany them. (For clarity, it is best to print maps in color if you can do so.)

Cyclists for Whom These Guides Are Written

These guides are written primarily for recreational cyclists who have the time – from a few days to a week or more – for enjoyable touring by bike. We make the assumption that you have some experience, so we do not go into matters like choosing and fitting bikes, mounting racks and panniers, effecting basic repairs and so on. You





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should also be reasonably fit, although there's no need to be a stellar athlete. Most rides are less than 80 kilometres/50 miles per day, and many days are considerably shorter than that. If you are completely new to bicycle touring, you can still use this book and enjoy cycling the routes it contains, but you should take time beforehand to study one of the how-to cycling books listed in the Appendices.

Organized Tours

Most readers of *Biking the Maritimes* will probably be cycling independently – solo or with family and friends. However, you may prefer to ride on an organized tour. The Maritimes are a popular destination, and many companies offer commercial tours, especially in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island – too many, in fact, for us to list them. However, we have direct knowledge of three companies and can recommend them highly:

Freewheeling Adventures operates bike tours and multi-sport tours all over the world, but the company is based in Hubbards, Nova Scotia, and the guides leading Maritime tours really know their way around.

www.freewheeling.ca, telephone 800-672-0775

New Brunswick is a superb cycling destination, but it is little-known compared to Nova Scotia and PEI. Peter Williams' Eastwind Cycle Tours, based in Sussex, New Brunswick, is one of the few companies to offer tours in New Brunswick as well as the other provinces (and Mexico in the winter.) www.eastwindcycle.com, telephone 902-471-4424.

We have known and liked the folks at MacQueen's Island Tours in Charlottetown, PEI, for many years. As well as conventional guided bike tours, Gordon and his family offer what they call "supported independent touring." On PEI they will prepare an itinerary and make reservations for you; shuttle your gear from each inn or B&B to the next, rent you a quality bicycle, and even send an emergency vehicle to help you in the event of a breakdown or mishap. MacQueen's also operates tours during the winter in Cuba and has a full-service bike shop in Charlottetown. www.macqueens.com, 800-969-2822.

Choosing the Routes

We cycled about 8000 kilometres (5000 miles) during the months that we worked on this book. That sounds like a lot of biking, but it represents only a small portion of all the roads that could have been explored. Although we



Lighthouse, inn, bluff, ferry, and fishing weir – This must be the Maritimes.





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have spent years in the Maritimes, we never would have presumed to choose the best routes without the generous advice of cycling enthusiasts in all three provinces. We talked with club members, bike shop owners, even cyclists we met on the road, constantly asking about favorite rides. Clear consensus often emerged. Even then, we would not include any route unless we cycled all of it ourselves and really enjoyed it.

While we hope that cyclists who live in the Maritimes will use and enjoy this book, we expect that many readers will be vacationers who are visiting the Maritimes for a cycling holiday. That is why we have not included rides in the biggest metropolitan areas – Halifax and Sydney, Nova Scotia, and St. John, New Brunswick. We find it difficult to imagine a vacationing cyclist who would deliberately choose to ride in city traffic when there is so much lovely countryside to enjoy. In fact, avid cyclists who live in cities like Halifax or St. John tend to escape for weekend rides on the very routes included in these guides.

Practicalities

Climate

The climate of the Maritimes can best be described as, well, maritime (bordering on the ocean). In Nova Scotia, PEI, and coastal New Brunswick, the sea keeps temperatures comfortable in summer and moderates the winter cold. While July, August, and early September tend to be drier than other times of year, rainy spells occur any time. Coastal fog is always a possibility, especially on the eastern and southern coasts of Nova Scotia. The interior of New Brunswick has a more continental climate – that is, warmer and somewhat drier summers and cold, snowy winters.

In general, July, August, and early September are the best times for cycling – though they are also the times when the most tourists appear. At any reasonable time for cycling – mid May through early October – the highly variable climate of the Maritimes requires careful selection of clothing for bicycle tours.



Art honoring the mosquito – the Maritimes' mascot

Bugs

Black flies and mosquitoes thrive in the Maritimes. The problem tends to be worst in late spring and early summer, but there are many places where the bugs are annoying even in July and August. Wally recalls stopping one summer afternoon to camp on a grassy bluff overlooking the Bay of Chaleur in northern New Brunswick. The site had a stunning view, oriented perfectly for watching the sun set over the water. Tent pitched and panniers stowed, Wally cycled to a nearby village for some cold beer and prepared to enjoy a couple of perfect hours of relaxation in camp. However, just as the late afternoon light was at its most radiant, the bugs came out to celebrate, and he had to cower inside the tent. When cycling in the Maritimes, always pack bug repellent, comfortable long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt. This brings us to clothing recommendations.



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Clothing

Maritime days can be warm, even on the coast, and nights are often chilly. If you cycle for several days, you will probably be caught in the rain at least once. If you are camping and riding fully loaded bikes, it will be a challenge to pack everything you need for such varied conditions. Here are some tips:

Carry a good quality, breathable rain jacket. Gore-Tex seems to be the popular favorite, but we use rain gear from Patagonia, using Patagonia's own water repellent fabrics. Many good retailers, including Eastern Mountain Sports, REI, and Campmor, have their own versions. We also carry tights for riding in cold or wet weather, but we don't worry about keeping our legs dry; it is a futile effort, and keeping the torso dry and warm is good enough.

Carry very little cotton. It's heavy and chilly when wet, whether from rain or sweat. We recommend proper cycling jerseys and shorts for riding. We pack brushed nylon travel pants – never heavy cotton jeans. (Wally likes the ones with zip-off legs that double as shorts.) We never carry bulky sweaters. Instead we pack thin fleece tops – Patagonia's capilene fabric is one example – and lightweight fleece vests. If it is really cold, these garments can be layered under the breathable rain jacket for warmth.

To minimize the chore of washing smelly socks, we recommend cycling sandals over conventional cycling shoes. Sandals made by Shimano and Lake accept cleats that click into standard SPD pedals. They are sold in some bike shops or online by Performance and Nashbar. When the weather is chilly or wet, Smart Wool socks keep our feet warm enough in the cycling sandals. We also carry another pair of comfy sandals or athletic shoes for wearing off the bike. Even in summer, lightweight gloves are a good idea for early starts on chilly mornings. Our own packing list is included in the Appendices.

If you run out of clothing while touring the Maritimes, Frenchy's stores may come to the rescue. This chain of used clothing stores got its start in the Acadian region of Nova Scotia, but there are now Frenchy's stores in towns all over the Maritimes. They are like year-round rummage sales, with all kinds of bargains. We have found virtually new fleece vests, windbreakers and other useful apparel at Frenchy's, at astonishingly low prices.

Bikes

Any route in this book can be successfully ridden on any type of bike. Dirt roads are used infrequently, and they tend to be well traveled and maintained so that road bikes are practical. Mountain bikes are never a necessity. Because of the distances involved in some rides, we strongly recommend that cyclists using mountain bikes replace heavy, knobby tires with higher pressure tires with smoother tread.

Tools and Spares

While there are many excellent bike shops in the Maritimes, the nearest one may be a day or two away. We decide what to bring based on the length of our trip and the



Well, perhaps not any type of bike



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probability of different types of adjustment, maintenance, or mishap. Flat tires are in first place by far, followed by chain lubrication after rain, cable adjustment and replacement, wheels going out of true, and chains or spokes breaking. Recommended tools and spares are listed in the Appendix.

Money, Food, and Lodging

You're in Canada now, so if you are from the U.S. or elsewhere, get used to the Loonie and the Toonie – \$1 and \$2 coins. Of course, the Canadian dollar hasn't been worth as much as the U.S. dollar since the 1970s, but at publication time the gap between them was narrowing. Many stores and restaurants accept U.S. currency, but they rarely give the best exchange rate available. We find that using a bank debit card in ATMs – not a credit card – is most convenient, and the rate is generally better than in banks or currency exchanges. Just be sure to plan ahead and pick up enough cash for long rides in rural areas.

Costs vary considerably from the U.S., with some items costing more in the Maritimes and some less. For example, beer is more expensive than in New England, to Wally's dismay, but restaurants and lodging are, in general, slightly cheaper. Overall, a cycling vacation in the Maritimes should cost a little less than in New England.

In the overview of most routes and in the directions themselves, we suggest places to dine, buy groceries, and spend the night, including motels, B&Bs, and campgrounds. However, we do not try to provide complete or detailed lists of accommodations. The fact is, these places change from year to year, especially the B&Bs in which we like to stay when we are not camping. For complete and up-to-date information, you can rely on provincial publications and information centres.

Free Visitors' Guides and Information Centres

Each province publishes an annual visitors' guide which gives complete lists of lodging and campgrounds, with prices and contact information. These are free, and they are indispensable. You can order the guides by telephone or over the internet, and they are also available in all Visitor Information Centres (VICs). The guides are bulky: Tear out the pages that apply to the routes you will be cycling and bring them along for ready reference. These are the names and access information for the provincial guides:

- **Nova Scotia:** *Doers' and Dreamers' Guide* 1-800-565-000
www.novascotia.com
- **Prince Edward Island:** *PEI Visitors Guide* 1-888-734-7529
www.peisplay.com
- **New Brunswick:** *Exploring New Brunswick; The Official Travel Guide* 1-800-561-0123
www.tourismnewbrunswick.com.



Port Greville, Nova Scotia B&B





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Provincial and municipal information centres provide wonderful services. They will help you locate restaurants and lodging, answer all kinds of questions, and provide local literature and maps. Most will also telephone ahead to inquire on your behalf about accommodation and to make reservations if necessary. Many offer free email and internet access. They invariably have clean restrooms and good drinking water. For these reasons, we often start and/or end our rides at these information centres, and they are always noted along the routes. Some are called Welcome Centres, others are Tourist Information Centers, Visitor Information Centres, and so on. In the text, we

invariably call them **VICs** (for Visitor Information Centre), and this is the only unusual abbreviation we use.



Lupins and morning mist – New Brunswick

Using This Cycling Guide

Each route begins with a general description or overview, including distances and some idea of the difficulty of the ride. In the directions that follow, turns are indicated in bold type with an arrow pointing left or right.

Turns noted in the directions are also indicated on our maps, with distance numerals on the maps that correspond with those in the directions. Each map is also accompanied by a list of cues; that is, a barebones list of turns. The maps in these guides should be adequate for following the routes we describe. However, if you wish to do more exploring on your own,

you should also carry a road map. In all three provinces, the information centres provide free road maps. However, the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick maps are not sufficiently detailed for cycle touring because of their large scale. We recommend that you purchase supplementary maps for these provinces.

The best provincial highway maps come from MapArt, a Canadian company in Ontario, at 1-877-231-6277, on the web at www.mapart.com. Staples office supply stores in many Maritime towns sell the MapArt series.

In this guide we use symbols in the directions for those services that are most vital for cyclists:

-  A place to sleep indoors – motel, hotel, B&B
-  Restaurant
-  Campground
-  Visitor Information Centre (VIC)
-  A store that sells groceries – from convenience stores to supermarkets.

Bicycle shops in the Maritimes are listed by town in the Appendix.

Distances throughout Canada are posted only in kilometres, so we follow the same practice in the directions, though we give the overall distance of each ride in miles as well. (See [Metric Conversions](#) in the Appendix.)





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If you are from the U.S., rest assured that it is easy to start thinking in kilometres. A kilometre is 0.625 mile, which means distances are more impressive when expressed in kilometres. A 50-kilometre ride is the same as a 31 mile ride; it just sounds longer. Since a kilometre is 1000 metres, and a metre is little more than a yard, each tenth of a kilometre is approximately the length of a football or soccer field. If a turn is 0.2 kilometres down the road, just think of two football fields! There is a metric conversion chart in the Appendix.

We measured distances for these routes using GPS units on each bike. We also checked them against high-resolution digital maps. However, even a 1% variation between your cycle computer and our measurements translates into significant discrepancies over the course of a ride. If you use a cycle computer, don't be surprised if your readings differ from those in the directions by several tenths after an hour or two of riding and by a few kilometres before the day is over. Therefore, as you ride, focus on the distance from each turn or landmark to the next, not on accumulated kilometres.



Low tide on the Fundy coast

On the maps and in the directions, we occasionally note Points of Interest. This is a very subjective business, and we do not even try to list all the places that will interest *you*. Rather, these are places that caught our fancy for one reason or another. The provincial visitors' guides have comprehensive listings and brief descriptions of museums, historic sites, and other attractions.

We designate rides as *Tours*, *Loop Rides*, *Linear Rides*, and *Connections* – with a few *Excursions* thrown in. Generally speaking, a Tour is a multi-day, circular ride. That is, it ends where it began, but it takes at least a few days to complete. A Loop Ride can be done in a single day. Sometimes a long Tour will incorporate several Loop Rides. A Linear Ride, as the name implies, starts in one place and ends in another; it is not a loop. Connections are Linear Rides that are useful for getting from one Tour to another, and Excursions are short, out-and-back rides from a base where you may choose to stay for a day or two.

When a minor road leaves a major road and then comes back to it farther along, we call it a *jughandle*.

Getting There

From many parts of the northeastern U.S. and eastern Canada, driving is the most practical way to visit the Maritimes when you are bringing bikes and gear. These are some approximate distances and driving times:

- **Montreal to Edmunston, New Brunswick** (start of the St. John River Valley Tour): 340 miles / 544 kilometres via the Trans-Canada Highway; **6 hours**
- **Montreal to Amherst, Nova Scotia** (start of the Amherst-Chignecto Tour): 650 miles / 1040 kilometres via the Trans-Canada Highway; **11 hours**
- **Montreal to Confederation Bridge** (crossing to PEI): 675 miles / 1080 kilometres via the Trans-





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Canada Highway; **11.5 hours**

- **Boston to Bar Harbour, Maine** (for a ferry to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia): 280 miles / 448 kilometres via Interstates 95 and 295, US Route 1A, and Maine Route 3; **5 hours**
- **Boston to St. John, New Brunswick** (for a shorter, cheaper ferry crossing to Digby, Nova Scotia): 400 miles / 640 kilometres via Interstates 95 and 295, US Route 1A, Maine Route 9, and New Brunswick Route 1; **7 hours**
- **Boston to Woodstock, New Brunswick** (for the St. John River Valley Tour): 370 miles / 592 kilometres via Interstate 95; **6.5 hours**
- **Boston to Confederation Bridge** (crossing to PEI): 590 miles / 994 kilometres via Interstates 95 and 295 and the Trans-Canada Highway, 590 miles; **9.5 hours**

Making part of your journey by sea can save driving miles if you are coming from the northeastern U.S. “The Cat” is a high-speed catamaran car-ferry that crosses from Bar Harbour, Maine, to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, on Mondays through Thursdays. The Cat sails from Portland, Maine, to Yarmouth on Fridays through Sundays. It is not cheap. In 2006, the crossing from Bar Harbour cost about \$90 for each adult with a bicycle, one way. A less expensive ferry crosses from St. John, New Brunswick to Digby, Nova Scotia. And as an alternative to Confederation Bridge, there is still a scenic ferry crossing from Caribou, Nova Scotia, to Wood Islands, PEI. All these ferries are now operated by Northumberland Ferries Ltd. – Bay Ferries. Information can be obtained and reservations made on the web: www.nfl-bay.com, or telephone 1-888-249-7245.

Air travel can be considerably more expensive than driving. Standard rates from New York to Halifax in the summer of 2006 were over \$400 U.S. dollars round trip, plus up to \$100 per bike, *each way*. Add \$100 to \$150 for the fare to Charlottetown, PEI, or St. John, NB. From Toronto, rates were around \$200 higher in each case. Of course, there may be discount and charter rates available to and from some Maritime destinations.

VIA Rail train service connects Toronto and Montreal with Maritime destinations. There are many intermediate stops. Overnight coach from Montreal to Moncton, New Brunswick, for example, can cost as little as \$110 per person, but reservations must be made *far in advance* to get such rates. Bikes are carried and packaging is provided for an additional \$20. Information is on the web at www.viarail.ca or call 1-888-842-7245.

However you travel to the Maritimes, you'll be eager to ride your bike after the long trip, so let's get started!



Peaceful harbour