



Biking IS AN *All-Season Sport*

AN *Instagram* CYCLIST SHARES HIS FAVORITE CT RIDES

guide & photos *by Matt Holmgren*

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Getting outside in Connecticut means taking to two wheels and slowing down to ride on the beautiful terrain of our great state. We have nearly 100 miles of great coastline and beaches to enjoy, there are some gorgeous rides to the north as well with satisfying views, historic sites, local eateries, breweries and homestead farms.

TRAILS FOR EXPLORING



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BICYCLE TYPES FOR THE TRAIL SYSTEMS

The Airline Trail as is the Farmington Canal Trail both feature gentle slopes and hills and are predominantly flat and level due to the historic rail usage from the mid 19th until late 20th century usage. This allows single speed beach



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For some local great coastline access there are several terrific options. Hammonasset Beach State Park is one of my favorites in the area. It has an easier difficulty rating for terrain and is approximately 3.8 miles with extensions as well for longer riding. It is not only popular for biking but camping, bird watching as well as the local beach and Meigs Point for fishing. Plenty of places to rest and relax or to purchase food and drinks (seasonal) along the route near the bathrooms. There is an entrance fee for out-of-staters based on time of year but the scenery and views are worth the trip. The surface is both crushed rock and paved in certain sections and there are hiking options as well. For mountain bikers the Hay House and Great Cedars East Loop is a more challenging trail in Old Saybrook, CT. It is popular for hiking, trail running and mountain biking. Although some parts are not well marked, it is relatively flat and easy to navigate for the most part. There are maps available at the trailhead. At 5.6 miles it takes a few hours to hike. If you would like to cover a bit more distance and venture away from the coast to the north there are two other trail systems that offer even more variety at an easy grade and difficulty level, Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (54 miles), Farmington River Trail (16 miles) There really is no bad time of year to visit these two amazing trail systems and they are open year-round from sunrise to sunset. The path originated as a canal towpath in the 1820s, became a railroad in the 1840s and was converted to a multi-use path in the early 2000s. I prefer riding one of my various bicycles but roller blades, walking, jogging and even cross-country skiing during the winter. The Farmington Canal is completely paved and just about 90% complete as far as being connected from New Haven to lower Massachusetts. The Airline Park State Trail is wellpacked dirt and crushed stone, which is great for cyclocross, mountain biking and runners/walkers alike due to the softer surface. On the Farmington Trail during the springtime when temperatures are in the 40s and sunny, you can see beautiful blooming flowers in Cheshire, waterfalls in Avon and wildlife throughout the corridor. The Farmington River Canal Trail, as the name suggests, is a spur from the Heritage trail but follows the Farmington River for even more impressive views. It is mostly paved and well-traveled and forms a loop with the Heritage Trail, which has a more direct route heading north. The Airline Rail Trail (50 miles) follows the bed of the abandoned New Haven, Middletown & Willimantic Railroad in Eastern Connecticut. The lower 22 miles is designated as the Airline Trail State Park, an additional 28 miles (Airline North) continues northeast to Putnam. The packed stone trail passes through forests and wetlands in Beaver Brook State Park, Goodwin State Forest, Grayville Falls Park, the Hampton Reservoir, Salmon River State Forest, and the Lyman and Colchester viaducts, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. These viaducts were filled in many years ago to support the increased weight of train cars and the path today runs across the top of this fill. The Airline State Park Trail showcases colorful foliage as the leaves change in the fall months, and enjoyable fat tire biking and cross-country skiing in most sections during the colder months. cruiser types of bikes to be well suited for either terrain. However, due to the dirt and gravel of the Airline Trail, more aggressive and larger tires are recommended to offer more stability and control in a variety of conditions. The Farmington Canal Trail is mostly paved so roller blades, road bikes and other types of recreational activities would suit more wet conditions as well as a more predictable surface without mud or debris year-round. I have tried road to mountain to classic Schwinn and chopper type bicycles with great enjoyment. You can't go wrong with a hybrid type bicycle for either trail during the drier months in either trail system and they are both well marked and have online map support to help connect with local amenities and businesses. For greater peace of mind, the Farmington Canal Trails trail heads have self-serve repair stations to keep you going should you require mechanical adjustments.



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