Advertisement

METRO

Biking 95 miles on Ohio's North Coast Inland Trail offers tranquil farmland, dense forest, waterfalls from Lorain to Genoa (video, photos)

Updated: Sep. 06, 2023, 10:12 a.m. | Published: Sep. 05, 2023, 10:02 a.m.

Biking 95 miles on Ohio's North Coast Inland Trail

564
shares

By John Pana, cleveland.com

LORAIN, Ohio -- Every day, hundreds of people pass by a small, arrow-shaped sign on Lakeside Avenue in downtown Lorain that reads: 'Mile 0.' As I biked past this sign on a warm evening this summer, it was like an exclamation point at the end of a fascinating yet peaceful two-day journey.

In that time, one single trail had given me a tour of vastly different landscapes. It stretched out in a straight line across quiet farmland. It curved through dense forest and bridged both sides of the scenic Black River. It let me sample small towns along the way until culminating with a lakefront finale, first at Lorain's Mile Long Pier and then at the sandy Lakeview Beach.

Advertisement

This was my first overnight bike trip and I took it to discover what's possible in Ohio in terms of outdoor adventure. To me, and many others, the state's growing network of bike trails is a new frontier. I've counted seven trail-based, 100-mile bike rides in Ohio, and these do not include the extensive possibilities found in the U.S. Bicycle Route network. I chose the North Coast Inland Trail because it's flat and I'm still out of shape. I also chose it for the reasons you're about to read.

Where is the North Coast Inland Trail?

The current western end of the trail is in Genoa, a small town about 10 miles southeast of Toledo. The North Coast Inland

Trail has segments in Ottawa, Sandusky, Huron and Lorain counties. The official eastern end of the trail is in Elyria, however, Lorain County Metro Parks has built multiple connecting trails which allow riders to continue north to Lake Erie. My total ride distance was 97.6 miles, which included some small excursions.

Much of the North Coast Inland Trail is surrounded by uninhabited areas like this field in Lorain County. John Pana, cleveland.com

Advertisement

What is bikepacking?

Bikepacking means taking a multi-day cycling trip in which everything you need is packed onto your bike. Many bikepackers bring a tent or hammock so they can camp, while others choose lodging near the trail. The added weight of carrying a tent was one of the things that slowed me down. This was my first bikepacking attempt and I was not used to it.

I turned to my local bike shop, Century Cycles, for all the gear I needed for the trip. In particular, I needed a larger trunk bag for the back of my bike so I could carry my tent and still have room for the rest of my gear.

The trail passes through an open landscape in Lorain County. John Pana, cleveland.com

The 3 signs of a great cycling trip

Here are three aspects of my trip that made it a great time.

1. Food and drink options near the trail

While I could have packed freeze dried meals and a camp stove, where's the fun in that? Part of the enjoyment of visiting new towns is getting to try restaurants and coffee shops. I spotted these food and drink options along the trail and stopped at some of them.

Christy's Corner Cafe was my first stop. The coffee shop is a non-profit which employs and supports people with special needs. John Pana, cleveland.com

Advertisement

Christy's Corner Cafe - Elmore

Serves: Coffee, ice cream, baked goods

Distance from trail: 500 feet

This non-profit cafe employs people with special needs and helps them reach their goals, paving the way to long-term employment. Their coffee warmed me up on an otherwise cold morning.

The Cookie Lady in Fremont has plenty of desserts. I chose Buckeyes. John Pana, cleveland.com

The Cookie Lady - Fremont

Serves: Cookies, cakes, baked goods

Distance from trail: 25 feet

I stopped in for a pack of Buckeyes to keep me going.

The Garrison in Fremont has a large outdoor patio John Pana, cleveland.com

Advertisement

The Garrison - Fremont

Serves: Euro/American Bistro style with craft beers on tap

Distance from trail: Quarter mile

Stopping for a bubble tea at Wild Brew in Clyde. The coffee shop is in a former bank building where patrons can sit inside the vault room. John Pana, cleveland.com

Wild Brew - Clyde

Serves: Coffee, tea, baked goods, sandwiches

Distance from trail: 200 feet

I opted for a bubble tea.

Benchwarmers - Bellevue

Serves: Subs, burgers, sandwiches, salads

Distance from trail: 500 feet

Pean's Pizza - Monroeville

Serves: Pizza, subs, beer

Distance from trail: 0.25 miles

The Freight House Pub & Grill - Norwalk

Serves: American pub food in a former train depot

Distance from trail: 300 feet

The eclectic Wakeman Elevator Craft Beer and Wine Barn is sure to make an impression on first time visitors. John Pana, cleveland.com

Advertisement

Wakeman Elevator Craft Beer & Wine Barn

Serves: American food and brewery inside a former grain elevator

Distance from trail: Next to the trail

The Slow Train Cafe was a great stop for lunch on my ride. John Pana, cleveland.com

The Slow Train Cafe - Oberlin

Serves: Bagels, bakery, coffee

Distance from trail: 0.5 miles

The Foundry Kitchen & Bar - Elyria

Serves: Local pub food

Distance from trail: 500 feet

The perch dinner on the outdoor patio at Erie Steak and Seafood Co. John Pana, cleveland.com

Erie Steak and Seafood Co. - Lorain

Distance from trail: 700 feet

I ended my ride with a rewarding perch dinner on the outdoor patio overlooking Lake Erie.

Advertisement

2. Memorable places

A long-distance bike ride should feel like an escape from everyday life. These sights and attractions gave vigor to the trip and make it worth returning in the future.

Lakeview Beach is about a mile west of Lorain's Mile Long Pier. John Pana, cleveland.com

Lakeview Park

This sandy beach was a beautiful cap to my nearly 100-mile journey. There's plenty to do in Lorain, including nearby ice cream stands and restaurants.

Mile Long Pier in Lorain makes for a beautiful sunset watching location. John Pana, cleveland.com

Mile Long Pier

This spot in Lorain is renowned for watching a sunset. I did just that from a second-floor restaurant patio. Make sure to stroll down the pier and enjoy the lakefront vista.

Rural landscapes abound on the western sections of the North Coast Inland Trail. John Pana, cleveland.com

Advertisement

The Ohio countryside

While corn fields may not be everyone's idea of an escape, I found the farmland segment of the journey to be peaceful and quiet. My trip across the rural landscape was a chance to be surrounded by a different way of life than my routine in Greater Cleveland.

Inside the Monroeville Depot, visitors can see photos and read stories about the rise and fall of the railroad that became the North Coast Inland Trail. John Pana, cleveland.com

Monroeville Depot (Donald E. Morrow Park)

Restored to its 1914 appearance, the Monroeville Depot is now a museum with photos and artifacts that tell the story of how the railroads of yesterday paved the way for us to enjoy the trail today. Open on select weekend days and run by volunteers of Firelands Rails to Trails. Restrooms and water available.

The East Falls riverwalk gives visitors a peaceful place to take in the large waterfall. John Pana, cleveland.com

Advertisement

Cascade Park

My ride took me through the dense forest areas of several Lorain County Metro Parks reservations. Cascade Park is home to two major waterfalls. The quiet Black River is a focal point of this segment.

The Bridgeway Trail is aptly named, as it has multiple long pedestrian bridges where cyclists can ride over the scenic Black River. John Pana, cleveland.com

Black River Reservation

In contrast to the flat rail trail, this part of the path was hilly enough for me to break a sweat on several strenuous inclines. There were some breezy downhill sections that were quite fun as well. The Bridgeway Trail is characterized by huge bridges crossing the Black River multiple times. There's another waterfall at the Day's Dam area.

The eclectic interior of the Wakeman Elevator Craft Beer and Wine Barn provides the backdrop for a nice dinner and a drink. John Pana, cleveland.com

3. A great place to stay the night

Trail angel is a term used to appreciate people who support long distance cyclists on their trek. It's a term that fits perfectly for Darlene Krieger, owner of Wakeman Elevator Craft Beer & Wine Barn. In addition to enjoying a burger and craft beer inside a former grain elevator, cyclists and hikers can camp on the property overnight. There's an open lawn and fire pit overlooking a wooded creek.

Advertisement

Krieger loves showing hospitality to campers who need a break after a long day on the trail. She was concerned about me staying outside in a tent because it was going to be unseasonably cold that night. So she offered for me to stay inside the restaurant!

Sleeping inside a restaurant patio was a strange experience indeed, but it reflected the kindness of the owner who was concerned about me being outside in cold temperatures. John Pana, cleveland.com

I asked Krieger whether she would be able to make such accommodations for other trail users and she said yes. I certainly recommend a stop at Wakeman Elevator, whether you camp or simply enjoy the food and drink.

A deck overlooks the Black River right next to the trail. John Pana, cleveland.com

How to ride the North Coast Inland Trail

For experienced cyclists: This ride can be done in one or two days. For those who choose to make it an overnight bike trip, Monroeville, Norwalk and Wakeman are reasonable stopping points with lodging.

This full ride is not for beginners or the faint of heart due to a stretch of road riding in the middle of the trail between Norwalk and Wakeman. The section is five miles of narrow, rural road with no berm. For someone unfamiliar with road riding, this section is at best uncomfortable and, at worst, fairly dangerous.

Advertisement

This section of the North Coast Inland trail currently involves riding on narrow road for about five miles to make the connection between the paved trail and

Wakeman. John Pana, cleveland.com

For casual cyclists and beginners: Consider a smaller excursion on the North Coast Inland Trail.

Elmore to Norwalk:

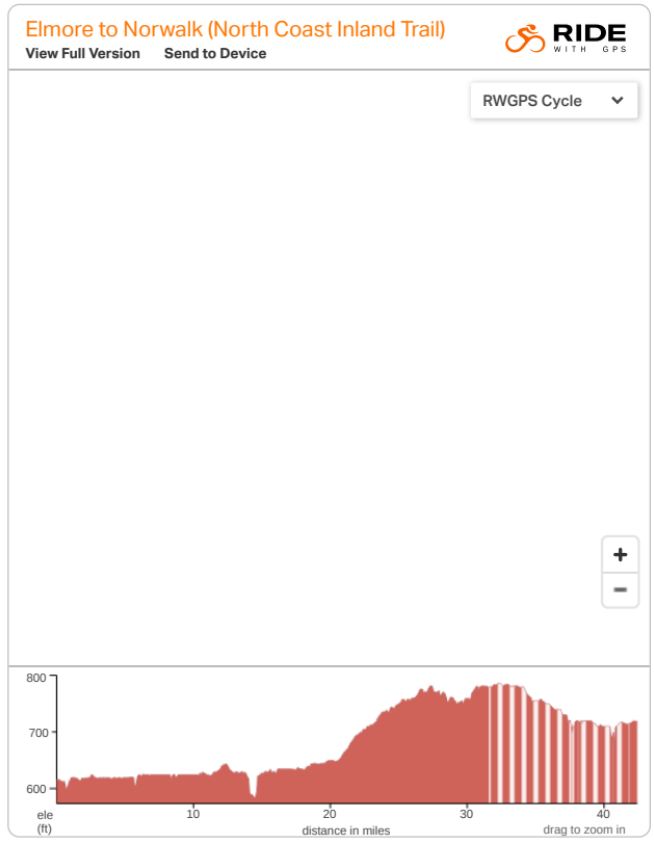
Distance: 42 miles

Starting place: Walter Ory Park

Finish: Suhr Park

Downtown Norwalk has restaurants, coffee shops, a splash pad and slushie stand among other things. John Pana, cleveland.com

Advertisement



Wakeman to Lorain:

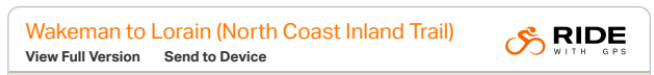
Distance: 33.4 miles

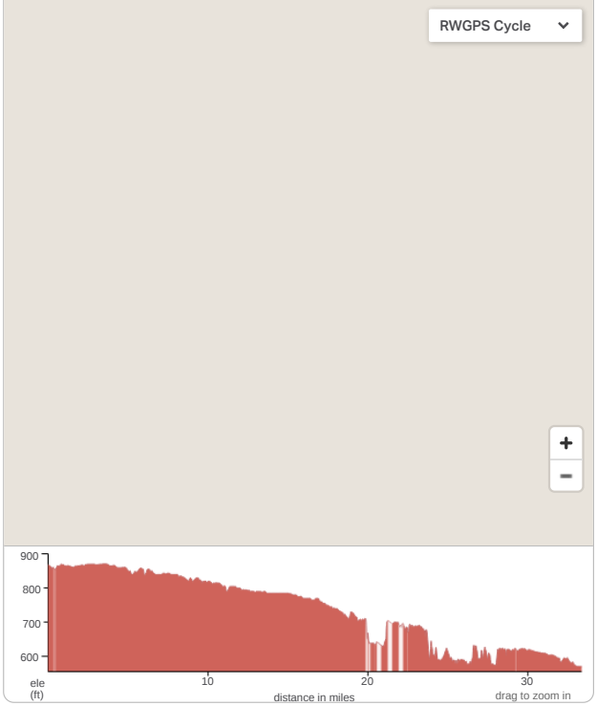
Starting place: Wakeman Community Park

Finish: Mile Long Pier or Lakeview Park

This fountain is the centerpiece of a large plaza in downtown Elyria. John Pana, cleveland.com

Advertisement





A former railroad line, the North Coast Inland Trail is straight and level for most of its length. John Pana, cleveland.com

Coming back

Having a trail like this in Northern Ohio is a privilege that I hope to enjoy again with family and friends. Numerous agencies and volunteers have created this asset over decades. I'm grateful to Firelands Rails to Trails, Inc. for a lot of logistical support on my ride. One volunteer drove me from Monroeville to Wakeman at the end of my first day when I came up 15 miles short of my 65-mile itinerary. I wanted to blame the stiff wind, but it was quite clear I just wasn't in cycling shape. We'll chalk it up to a rookie mistake.

To start planning your trip on the North Coast Inland Trail, check the park district websites for Ottawa County, Sandusky County and Lorain County. See the Firelands website for Huron County.

The Steel Mill Trail is one of the connecting trails that allows riders of the North Coast Inland Trail to reach Lake Erie. John Pana, cleveland.com

Related content

If I ride my bike 100 miles, these kids get new bikes!

21 bike trails to explore in Northeast Ohio

America's largest paved bike trail network, Miami Valley Trails, is in Southwest Ohio

Ohio now has the most U.S. Bicycle Route miles in America (maps)

If you purchase a product or register for an account through one of the links on our site, we may receive compensation. By browsing this site, we may share your information with our social media partners in accordance with our Privacy Policy.

cleveland.com
an ADVANCE OHIO platform
in partnership with
THE PLAIN DEALER

More on Cleveland.com

Sponsor Content
Sell your car
Post a job
Sitemap & search
Post a classified ad
Sell/rent your home
Weather
Videos
Archives

Follow Us

Twitter
Pinterest
Facebook
Instagram
RSS

Cleveland.com Sections

News
Sports
Entertainment
Politics
Opinion
Living
Betting
Rentals
Obituaries
Jobs
Deals in Your Area
Classifieds
Autos
Real Estate

Mobile

Mobile Apps

Your Regional News Pages

Lakewood
Beachwood
Brunswick
Strongsville
Parma & Parma Heights
More Communities

About Us

Advertise with us
About Cleveland.com
About Advance Ohio
Contact Us
Career Opportunities
Delivery Opportunities
Audience FAQ

Subscriptions

cleveland.com
The Plain Dealer
Newsletters
Sun News

Already a Subscriber

Make a Payment
Manage your Subscription
Place a Vacation Hold
Delivery Feedback

ADVANCELOCAL

Use of and/or registration on any portion of this site constitutes acceptance of our User Agreement (updated 4/4/2023), Privacy Policy and Cookie Statement, and Your Privacy Choices and Rights (updated 7/1/2023).

Cookie Settings/Do Not Sell My Personal Information

© 2023 Advance Local Media LLC. All rights reserved (About Us).
The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Advance Local.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

YouTube's privacy policy is available here and **YouTube's terms of service** is available here.

Ad Choices