



Maine Bicycling with Lou Zambello

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Cycling in Maine Leads to Myriad Adventures, Including Fishing

While dismounting from my touring bike, I looked across the river and watched caddises bounce up and down over the water along with a few stoneflies, helicoptering cross-river.

While cooling down from my ride on the warm late June afternoon, I continued to observe the wide run that characterizes this part of the river. Every so often, a trout or salmon showed, either in a gentle rise or with a substantial boil.

After a few minutes of watching, I turned toward my bike leaning against a tree to grab my rod tube and open my small backpack to find a reel and fly-fishing gear. I dislike wasting too much time rigging up when fish rise, so I was soon wading out to drop my Elk Hair Caddis in front of the nearest rising fish.

Fishing with a bike means traveling light, so I was wading wet with a pair of quick-drying, artificial-fiber shorts. I had traded my riding shoes for a good pair of wading boots that I had stashed in my backpack. I had no bulky fishing vest with a net, but rather, just a lanyard with a small box of flies, a few spools of tippet, nippers and floatant.

Rapid Access

I was on the Rapid River in western Maine, slightly upstream from where the famous Lower Dam had sat for many years (before officials removed it several years ago for safety reasons).

Just several hours before, I had finished my family responsibilities and was thinking about a place to fish. The usual reliable sources had indicated the Rapid was fishing well, and it is one of my favorite fishing destinations.

I have experienced memo-

orable fishing, staying at Aldo French's Winter House, but today, I had two hours – not an entire weekend. This setup offers a perfect scenario for conveniently riding a bike to navigate Maine's back roads.

Anglers cannot drive all the way to the Rapid River. A gate blocks access, and the rest of the several miles has to be traversed by foot or on a bike, the distance depending on where on the river folks want to fish.

Walking is okay, but it cuts into serious fishing time, particularly if anglers want to fish further downriver. However, a bicycle cuts the travel time to where I like to fish by a half-hour each way.

Maine Cycling

My bike has been a useful mode of transportation for fishing, birding, sightseeing and photography all over Maine. We all know that automobiles can access much of Maine's natural environment these days, a lot more than when I started exploring Maine 30 years ago.

Thousands of miles of improved dirt logging roads crisscross the state. Still, more areas are accessible on foot, but a multitude of wonderful fishing, hunting and birding spots aren't easily accessible by car and are a little too far to walk, unless someone has unlimited time and energy. Riding a backcountry bike opens up dozens of miles of new ter-

ritory.

Biking has other advantages. It is good exercise and easier on joints than walking or running. Folks can exchange the motorized din of modern society for the sound of wind washing over their faces.

While on a bike, folks are more in touch with the environment. For birding, pedalers can cruise down a country road and stop to investigate an interesting call or a flash of color that might be from a rarely seen bird. It is difficult to do that in a car, even if the driver and passengers have turned the radio off.

In anticipation of upland-bird season, hunters can investigate interesting bird covers on overgrown logging roads a lot faster on a bike than on foot – and with less hassle than on an ATV.

Beware of dirt logging roads that are supposedly drivable, particularly when more of us are driving smaller, gas efficient cars – not always the high wheel-based SUVs or trucks. Bicyclists save wear and tear on automobiles by biking the same road – particularly in the spring when washouts and potholes abound.

Pedaling Adventures

This monthly column will explore cycling in Maine with an emphasis on backcountry biking that combines the sport with other activities. I will write about my favorite locations around Maine to bike and

how to combine cycling with fishing, sightseeing, birding, kayaking, and other activities.

Enjoying back-country biking means getting to a destination and back safely without incident or feats of superhuman endurance. So, I'll also cover bike safety, the various bicycle types and the trade-offs between them, including other cycling gear and where to purchase what folks need.

I am not a hardcore fitness nut, so most of what I am writing about will be manageable trips that take reasonable amounts of time – and normal levels of fitness

That afternoon on the Rapid River ended up being quite satisfactory. Dry flies that imitate caddis and stonefly imitations, sometimes with a nymph dropper, fooled a number of smaller salmon and brookies.

Two larger fish were harder to fool, but on the Rapid, a natural, drag free drift can be critical. Taking several steps upstream to get a different angle, lengthening the

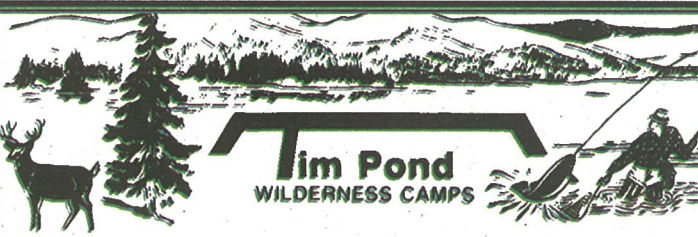


leader and executing a downstream, slack-line cast finally resulted in a 3-pound salmon taking my Goddard Caddis with confidence.

Too soon, the angle of the setting sun signaled an end to this trip. With a 45-minute bike ride back to the car and then another 45 minute car ride to reach pavement – all tasks best accomplished before dark – it was time to break down the rod, pack everything away and hop on the bike.

Alas, it is almost always uphill between a river and car, but with recent memories of dancing salmon in my head, I didn't mind the time riding in lower gears.





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