



## Maine Bicycling with Lou Zambello

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# The Bicycle/Canoe Shuttle Offers Anglers Perfect Option

I cast my Marabou Leech towards the bank and retrieved it between two underwater rocks. A strong tug surprised me a little, and I set the hook hard. Almost instantly, a bronze smallmouth went airborne not far from the canoe.

"Have you ever had a bass jump into the boat, Dad?" my son asked from the back, where he was slowing our craft with his paddle.

"No", I said, "but I once had a landlocked salmon take a fly beside my boat on Pierce Pond, and when I set the hook, he jumped into the boat. That's called landing them fresh!"

That bass was the last fish of our short canoe trip, because around the bend, I spotted my bicycle chained to a small cedar at water's edge. The bike was my shuttle back to the put-in point and our Ford Explorer.

I love to drift down a river in a canoe or kayak. There is always the intrigue of what is around the bend, be it fish, birds, animals or bikini-clad

sunbathers (the former three categories prove more common than the latter in Maine).

What I dislike about a river float is this:

Floaters must logistically figure out how to return to the starting point, or shuttle an automobile to the take-out location. This usually involved floating with another driver and taking two cars (leaving one at the ending point), arranging for a pick-up at a prearranged time or long ago, hitching a ride back to the car at the launch spot.

Every option offers downsides:

- It wastes gas and money to take two cars for any distance of these floats.

- My experience with pre-arranged pick-ups or hitchhiking involves long waits — usually in the rain.

- Also, what if a kayaker or canoeist has just a few hours and wants to drift alone? Then what does he or she do?

I have discovered a bicycle makes the perfect shuttle.

Most of my float trips on rivers have roads paralleling them, really common in Maine. Due to the serpentine nature of most rivers, the actual road distance to return to a vehicle is quite modest and easy to cover quite quickly on a bike.

### Bicycle Solution!

There are two ways to shuttle with a bicycle:

- One way is to drop off a bike at the take-out location, lock it, drive to the put-in point, float the river, bike back to the car and then drive back to where the canoes or kayaks are sitting for pick-up. The advantage of this option makes sense. It is straightforward to start the float, but the downside is riding the bike at the end of the day, when folks may be tired and hungry.

- The second shuttle option involves dropping kayaks or canoes at the put-in spot, drive the car downstream to the take-out location and then ride the bike back up to the boats. The advantage of this option is obvious. Partners are drifting with someone else, so one floater can get all of the boats and gear organized for the float, while the other is biking. At the end of the drift, the car is right there.

Which shuttling option do I choose?

It usually depends on the fishing. If I think the fishing will be better first thing in the

morning, then I quickly drop off the bike, leave the car at the put-in, get on the water fast and bike back to the car later. If I am starting mid-day for an evening paddle — when I usually fish until dark — then I leave the car at the take-out point and bike back to the boats.

To make the bike/canoe shuttle work, folks need a car rack combination that can handle both. I have a kayak rack on top of my car, and a bike rack that hangs off the back. It is usually a good idea to secure the canoe or kayaks first, before the bikes. A dropped canoe can do more damage to a bike than vice-versa.

If floaters are unsure of how far they will drift downriver (for me, this usually depends on how good the fishing is), they can drop two bikes at different locations on the river.

### Favorite Floats

What are my favorite kayak (or canoe) and bike shuttle options?

The smallmouth mentioned earlier hit my Marabou Leech on the lower Magalloway River. (Please check DeLorme's *The Maine Atlas and Gazetteer* (MAG), Maps 17 and 27.)

I like to put in at Wilsons Mills where the river crosses under Route 16 and then drift down past The Azischohos Valley Campground under the covered bridge and onward to one of several take-out places near the road. The Magalloway crosses under Route 16 again about five road miles from the first bridge.

Anglers never know what they might catch in this part of the river. I have caught large salmon, brookies, smallmouths and fallfish (some call them chubs). It all depends on location and time of year.

For years, another favorite

trip of mine required a float on the Kennebec River from Shawmut Dam to the take-out in Fairfield. It took about a half-day to do that short trip when fishing was good, and it was an easy bike ride back. I don't do this drift much anymore, because the large brown trout prevalent over a decade ago are now few and far between.

The Androscoggin River (anywhere from Auburn to Brunswick) provides a number of float options for those who like fishing variety — smallmouth bass, pike, stripers and shad are all possibilities. I have also never failed to see an osprey on this paddle and bald eagle sightings are common.

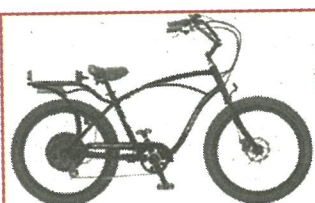
Access points are well marked and roads parallel the river. There is even a paved bicycle and walking trail below Water Street in Brunswick.

When I sit in my car at the end of a typical float/bicycle shuttle trip, I always notice how balanced my body feels. I have exercised both my upper and lower body, so my cluttered mind feels cleansed, as if by the flowing water that I paddled on.

Please e-mail me with your suggestions on good paddle/bike shuttle options and I will include them in a later article.



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