

Somber stroll
Five years after the Sept. 11 attack, volunteers with connections to the tragedy give tours of ground zero in New York | **F3**



Travel

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THE RIDE STUFF

West Virginia rail trail takes cyclists through beautiful area



Cyclists on the Greenbrier River Trail must sometimes unmount and guide their bikes through the dark 402-foot Droop Mountain tunnel.

DORAL CHENOWETH III | DISPATCH PHOTOS

By Robin Chenoweth
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

MARLINTON, W.Va. — Bumping along a crushed-gravel bike path in southeastern West Virginia, a cyclist has ample time to ponder ghosts of a lost era. Gone are the railroad ties and rusty iron rails that once steered belching locomotives through the area's timber towns. Gone are the shrill steam whistles that sent passengers hurrying to gather their belongings at stations ahead. Gone, indeed, are many of the towns and stations themselves.

What remains is a gently sloping path — the Greenbrier River Trail, converted from an abandoned Chesapeake & Ohio rail line. The 77-mile trail from Cass to North Caldwell rewards hikers and mountain bikers with striking views of rugged landscape.

The trail snakes along the verdant waters of the Greenbrier River, crossing 35 bridges and passing through two tunnels. It skirts 4,000-foot Allegheny peaks and bucolic farms.

Deer, box turtles and the occasional black bear or bobcat amble across the trail. Blackberries, wild strawberries and apples, free for the picking, entice cyclists to throw on the brakes and partake.

The trail, a grassy median sandwiched between firmly packed gravel paths, winds through the landscape. Cyclists race through shady glens, then emerge onto sunny outcroppings. The Greenbrier burbles close by, inviting bikers to scramble over the trail's edge and wiggle their toes in it.

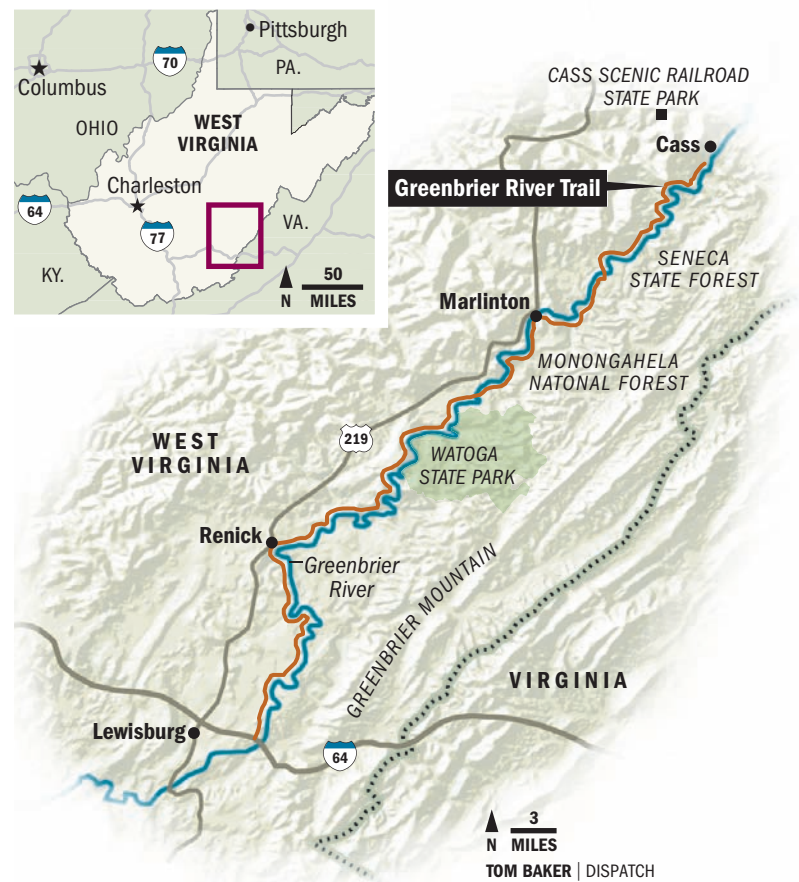
The surrounding hills pitch and roll like a Hank Williams tune, but the path itself has less than a 1 percent grade.

Seventy-seven miles might seem like 10,000 to the novice cyclist, but the

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Nicely landscaped along the trail, the Marlinton station was once part of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway system.



A bikeman packeth: Wet chill separates needs from luxuries

By Aaron Beck
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

March is not the ideal month to bicycle from Portland, Ore., to San Francisco. Anyone living in and between those cities will tell you — even if you don't ask.

But even if the unsolicited advisers in every diner, restaurant, hotel, campground, hardware and bike store *don't* inform you that the ideal time to ride the Oregon-to-California coast is summer, the sleet, snow, wind and sideways rain ought to clue you in.

Why did I engage in an unassisted late-winter bicycle battle on the Northwest coast? No bet was lost, as some have posited.

My brother, Jason, and our friend Travis wrangle forest fires on the West Coast. When the time is prime for cycling — summer — they are inhaling smoke, scarfing meals ready to eat and hiking mountainsides.

Their work season begins in early spring, so we decided on a three-week cycling send-off until we would meet again (in July at a wedding attended by Lyle Lovett, the singing gentleman

from Texas, but that's a story for another day).

In any month, cycling the West Coast mountains would present challenges. Northeastern and southern Ohio boast several nasty climbs, but few require 45 to 50 minutes to ascend. In March, add cold, wet weather to the equation, and the challenges double.

But on this 17-day ride — not supported by a van shadowing us with food, drink and dry clothes — I learned a little about what my mind and body require to ramble 45 to 65 miles every chilly, saturated day.

Coffee, a valid credit card and a detached frame of mind, for example.

Here are a few suggestions for any bike tour, especially one that is cold and wet.

- **Bike:** My brother rode a bike that folds into the suitcase that doubled as his trailer. I rode a cyclocross bike (a mountain/road hybrid) with front and rear racks and panniers (bike bags).

Each had its advantages. His set-up was easier to pack. Mine was more wind-resistant. A flat trailer tire near Mendocino, Calif., took an hour and many calories to change. A flat rear tire on my bike took only five minutes away from a conversation with a man with two first names (Joe Ray) in Anchor Bay, Calif.

- **Zippered freezer bags:** At the top of the what-I-can't-live-without list are zippered freezer bags. When I pack my four so-called waterproof bike bags I put almost everything in zippered bags. What doesn't fit in those bags goes into small garbage bags.

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Under all those layers, reporter Aaron Beck enjoys a snow-covered beach.