



DORAL CHENOWETH III | DISPATCH PHOTOS

ABOVE: Bikers can take a side trip to explore the abandoned town of Watoga, where blackberry bushes and weeds cover the few remaining buildings.

LEFT: Just outside Marlinton, bikers enjoy one of the bridges on the Greenbrier River Trail.

## GREENBRIER

FROM PAGE F1

Greenbrier River Trail offers plenty of chances to stop and take in the history and flavor of the area.

Evidence of the trail's past pops up along the way. White posts painted with black numbers track the miles for cyclists as they did for engineers. Whistle markers, engraved with "W," reminded operators to belt out two

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long, one short, and then one long final blast to warn people at crossings and bridges.

"Saying was, the towns were so close together the train had to back up to have whistling room for the next town," said former *Pocahontas Times* editor William McNeel.

In the boom days a century ago, as many as 11 scheduled trains rumbled daily through towns such as Clover Lick, Marlinton and Spice Run, hauling pulpwood to paper mills in Virginia.

"Train time was a big time in town," McNeel said. "People migrated toward the station to see who had come to town."

When the timber was away, so did many towns built around the industry. Sitting in his Marlinton newspaper office — a relic itself with its hulking old Babcock printing press — McNeel pointed to a map rid-

dled with towns that have drifted into obscurity.

"There is no Camp Allegheny. . . Loopemount's not there; Brink's not there; Bowe's not there. Deeter's totally gone."

The Greenbrier River Trail passes them all as well as the clutches of houses and towns that survived. Rusty skeletons of truss bridges have been resurfaced for mountain bikes and barefoot boys casting fishing lines.

Two tunnels, blasted from mountains a century ago, are so eerily dark inside that bikers must disembark and guide themselves by spotting the light at the other end.

At milepost 49.3, near the final ruins of a house, bikers cross the flag stop once known as Violet. Here, where no stop was scheduled because there was no actual station, travelers could flag down trains to board. (Because the trains never exceeded 35 mph, stopping was not a problem.)

Across the path, the same swimming hole that once cooled the verve of youth now tempts sweaty cyclists to take the plunge.

The remains of the logging town Watoga lie but a few steps from the trail at milepost 48.1. Its sawmill and houses have long since been dismantled, and its foundations consumed by undergrowth and trees.

But the intrip can climb a steep embankment into a rusty vault, once part of the company store where timber

workers purchased goods on credit. The building itself has been scavenged or reclaimed by nature.

The state maintains the site of the town, a meadow mowed with paths that lead to a rusted claw-foot tub, an outbuilding, a fishing pond and blackberry brambles.

Electrical lines crisscrossing the fields date from the 1920s and '30s, when black entrepreneurs bought the land and laid out a community. Even then, Watoga never grew beyond 30 or so residents, McNeel said.

By the 1950s, it, too, was gone. Other abandoned Greenbrier towns have been absorbed by dense deciduous forest.

"The trail is unique in that it passes through some of the most remote scenery in the eastern United States," said Leslee McCarty, president of the Greenbrier River Trail Association. "Half of Pocahontas County is national forest and state park."

Monongahela National Forest and Watoga and Seneca state parks, among others, border the trail. Several offer camping and lodging to weary cyclists.

For those who prefer queen-size beds and hot tubs to sleeping bags and outposts, indoor accommodations are within ridding distance from much of the trail.

McCarty's bed-and-breakfast, the Current, has hosted guests such as National Public Radio announcer Carl Kasell and

U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va. The antique-packed inn, at milepost 38, is surrounded by rolling farm country alive with hummingbirds, cattle, cats and dogs.

Or cyclists can rest their heels on the front-porch banister at Marlinton's homey Old Clark Inn. Share a brew with owner Nelson Hernandez, and he'll tell how the old guesthouse once sheltered railroad travelers and Civilian Conservation Corps wives. Breakfasts are hearty, the carb-filled variety that pack lots of energy for the trail.

Before leaving town, bikers can step into the once-segregated waiting rooms of the old Marlinton Depot, now the Pocahontas County Convention & Visitors Bureau. The old rail agent's desk is studded with a path of nails that marked the mileposts of the railway.

Bureau employees relate stories of old-timers, who remember when rail riding was the rage and people came to town just to shop at the mercantile.

Back on the trail, and just outside of town, cyclists glide past Cramer's Lumber Co., among a handful of remaining sawmills in the area. Smoky plumes rise off piles of burning sawdust, casting a haze over the path.

The woody fragrance lingers for miles, tickling the imagination to conjure up other sojourners, and other times, along the Greenbrier.

## If you go

### GREENBRIER RIVER TRAIL

The Greenbrier River Trail in West Virginia takes bicyclists of even moderate skill through some of the most beautiful parts of the state. And the grade is a gentle 1 percent.

### GETTING THERE

The Greenbrier River Trail is north-east of Lewisburg, W.Va., off I-64. From Columbus, go south on U.S. 23, east on U.S. 35, south on W.Va. 34 and east on I-64 through the West Virginia Turnpike.

Take the Lewisburg exit to U.S. 219. Travel north 39 miles to Marlinton. To continue to Clover Lick or Cass, take U.S. 219 north to County Route 1. Continue north.

### BIKING THE PATH

Most people bike the trail from north to south because the 1 percent grade, though slight, runs downhill that direction.

Biking the entire trail takes three days for a cyclist of average skills. Many people, however, choose to cycle only a portion of the trail. Outfitters and inn owners can arrange pickup and drop-off along the trail.

Except for 3 miles of paved path at Marlinton, the trail is crushed gravel. Bikes with fat tires are recommended.

Limited water and toilet facilities are available along the trail. Cyclists should plan ahead by studying mile-by-mile guides, available at [www.greenbrierrivertrail.com](http://www.greenbrierrivertrail.com). A second, more detailed guide is produced by West Virginia State Parks and is available at area inns, parks and visitor centers.

Take plenty of water and food.

### STAYING THERE

► Appalachian Sport Outfitters, 3 Seneca Trail, Marlinton, near milepost 56 will shuttle bikers and

bikes to several points on the trail. It also shuttles vehicles from Cass to North Caldwell for about \$90. Mountain-bike rental is available. Call 304-799-4050 or visit [www.appsports.com](http://www.appsports.com).

► The Old Clark Inn, 702 3rd Ave., Marlinton, milepost 38.5, charges \$40 to \$65 nightly. Rates include breakfast. The inn offers shuttle service to trail access in Seebert or Clover Lick for \$1 a mile for each person. Call 1-800-849-4184 or visit [www.oldclarkinn.com](http://www.oldclarkinn.com).

► The Current, on Denmar Road in Hillsboro, milepost 38.5, is about at the halfway point of the trail. Rates range from \$70 to \$95 nightly, which includes breakfast. Call 1-866-537-5336 or visit [www.currentbnb.com](http://www.currentbnb.com).

► Watoga State Park is at milepost 45.8. Cabin rates range from \$67 to \$104 nightly for two to four people. Camping rates range from \$17 to \$20. Call 304-799-4087 or visit [www.watoga.com](http://www.watoga.com).

► Cass Scenic Railroad State Park, at the northern terminus of the trail, offers flatcar train rides, powered by original Shay steam locomotives, to a reconstructed logging camp. The railroad is open May through October. Call 304-456-4300 or visit [www.cassrailroad.com](http://www.cassrailroad.com).

► Lewisburg, 5 miles from the southern terminus of the trail, is a good place to wind down after completing the ride. The town's historic district is packed with fine dining, art and antique galleries and hotels such as the Gen. Lewis Inn, built on the site of an 1862 Civil War battle.

## BIKE

FROM PAGE F1

• **Clothes (off the bike):** Five days into this trip I paid \$22.19 to ship extra "town clothes" from Florence, Ore., to Columbus.

When I wasn't wearing Lycra and other clonish cycling clothes, I needed few other clothes to wear in towns, hotels, campgrounds other social settings.

My clothing needs evoked a short list: one thin, long-sleeve wool shirt (black); one pair of thrift-store slacks (olive); one pair of thin wool socks (black);

one Patagonia vest (black); one micro-something-or-other down jacket (blue); one baseball cap or one wool watchman's cap (gray); one pair of fingerless wool Army-Navy surplus gloves (black); one wool T-shirt (black); and one pair of shoes: high-top Chuck Taylors (black).

Why black? Black always looks clean even if people know from 25 feet away it isn't.

• **Clothes (on the bike):** I took cycling-specific shorts, shoes, gloves (three pairs), arm warmers (three pairs), tights (one pair), waterproof pants (one pair), one waterproof, breathable (zippered armpits) rain jacket. I shun anything billed

"water-resistant." Such clothing is suitable only for trips with groceries in hand from the car across the lawn to the comfort of home.

• **Sleeping bag and pad:** It's best to take featherweight models that stuff to the size of foot-balls.

• **Notebook:** Even if you don't habitually jot snippets of colorful conversations, obsessively mark roads that you've biked or automatically record how much you spend on daily breakfasts, and food vendors. Go with a pocket-size Moleskine or a pocket-size Dollar General number and a rubber band.

• **Food:** Carry little. Buy and eat as you go. As the sun was setting one evening in Orick, Calif., we bought pork chop dinners from a diner, bungee-corded the foam-encased things to our bike racks and rode 10

• **Cookware:** Were it up to me, I would live on Snickers until the party rolled into the next town. If you travel with my brother, you will eat oatmeal, nuts and berries, and cowboy coffee by the fire; you will save \$5 to \$10 a meal and, eventually, you will agree with him that his choice is wise.

I shared his ultralight propane stove, but I also ate Snickers bars and sandwiches bought at hippie grocery stores just before we would set up camp.

• **Currency:** You will need an ATM/credit card, of course, but if you're rolling into a campground in March, be sure to carry quarters for the showers. Only the he-manliest of he-men can withstand a cold shower after 60 miles of cold rain.

• **Tools:** Carry a pump, a patch kit, two spare tubes, tire irons, a set of Allen wrenches and a multitool. Whatever else you think you need you can

borrow from overpacked lunatics like the fellow we met riding up a mountain on Highway 101.

Alan — we didn't catch his last name — was pushing a heavy rig with four panniers, one of which was dedicated entirely to tools. Two Global Positioning System units were strapped to his handlebars as was an odometer. He was riding from Tacoma, Wash., to Los Angeles — and he said he had done the trip twice already.

On 101 any motorist can tell you which direction you are riding and how many miles are between you and the next town or campground. Leave the GPS at home. If motorists and locals can't help you, the excellent Krebs cycling maps you will

have bought before your trip will.

The best detail about Alan? All that gear and — as another dark cloud formed behind us — he said, "I'm going to have my sister mail me my rain jacket."

• **Camera:** A hard-deck-size digital (in a freezer bag), kept in jersey pocket for easy access, is a must.

A minimalist could live without a camera, but without photos a minimalist more easily forgets how rainy and cold Oregon and northern California can be in March.

Words turned into stories over beers, coffee or dinner can always be used to romanticize a trip. Photos, however, never lie.

[abeck@dispatch.com](mailto:abeck@dispatch.com)

**HOW TO REACH US**

**EDITOR**  
Cindy Decker .....614-461-5027  
cdecker@dispatch.com

**REPORTER**  
Steve Stephens .....614-461-5201  
sstephens@dispatch.com

Travel fax .....614-559-1754

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