

Article Tools



Hitting the Trails: Wheeling Heritage Trails

Ride along Wheeling trails proves easy, picturesque and pleasant

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By Christopher Snowbeck, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WHEELING, W.Va. -- We're going beyond the bounds of Pennsylvania with this summer's Hitting the Trails -- our second annual guide to hiking and biking paths in the region -- and our first out-of-state trail is all about wheels.

For a few centuries, now, Wheeling has been a hub of fuel-powered modes of transportation, but the vehicles of choice in this Ohio River town increasingly are of the two-wheeled self-propelled variety. A little more than an hour or so from Pittsburgh, Downtown Wheeling serves as a picturesque starting point for roughly 15 miles of paved trails heading north and south along the Ohio, and east along Wheeling Creek. Perfect for an afternoon of cycling along the Wheeling Heritage Trails.

My wife, daughter and I arrived in town around 11 a.m. Sunday and were impressed by the easy parking at the Wheeling Convention and Visitors Center. Unfortunately, the visitors center was closed for the Memorial Day holiday weekend, but it's usually open seven days a week and provides trail maps to cyclists.

It's hard to miss the Ohio, so we weren't worried about finding the Ohio River Trail, but I wasn't sure how we'd get to the trail alongside Wheeling Creek. A friendly passerby directed us to on-street bike lanes that chart an eastward course to the trail.

I'm generally uncomfortable biking on streets, particularly when I've got a 2-year-old on my bike, but the city was quiet and the bike lane was well-marked. After about 10 blocks, the lane turned into a trail, crossing over freeway ramps and then a trestle with a lovely view of the creek. You can't see it from the trail, but the trestle is called the Hempfield Viaduct, a stone arch structure that was built in 1853 and includes five spans of 45 feet each.

"It's pretty spectacular," said Hydie Friend, executive director of the [Wheeling National Heritage Area](#), which is in the process of installing historical markers along the trail. I missed them, but steps just before the trestle take you down to Tunnel Green Park, where you can view the structure, Friend said.



Darrell, Sapp, Post-Gazette photos

A cyclist makes his way up the Ohio River Trail section of the Wheeling Heritage Trails toward the locks and dam at Pike Island. The trail stretches 11 miles along the Ohio River.

[Click photo for larger image.](#)

Hitting the Trails

- The summertime feature spotlights hiking and biking trails in the region with weekly profiles, as well as maps and getting-there-and-doing-it information. The series debuted last year. Past installments are [indexed here](#).
- [More pictures](#) from the Hitting the Trails series.
- [If you go](#): Directions, facilities maps and a caution.

The park's name refers to the 1904 brick tunnel that the trail passes through just beyond the trestle. After the tunnel, the trail runs beside I-70 for a mile or two -- it's a similar experience to biking along

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The Wheeling Heritage Rail Trail also passes under the Suspension Bridge leading to the Island.

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Ohio River and the longest bridge in the world when it was completed in 1849.

My wife and daughter stayed to play while I cycled northward on the riverside path. It immediately offers unexpected beauty with a view of old stone retaining walls and green space behind Downtown buildings and a historic neighborhood.

The 4.5 mile ride from Downtown to the Pike Island Dam is pleasant enough. The trail runs beside W.Va. Hwy. 2 for a time, before veering with the river away from the road and behind the town of Warwood.

At the Pike Island Dam just north of Warwood, there's an observation deck for watching boats pass through the locks. Unfortunately, a swarm of bees denied access to the observation area, so I joined other cyclists in watching boats from the parking lot of the Army Corps of Engineers facility.

I continued on the trail for a couple miles north of Pike Island, but the riding here is best for fitness or commuting. There are no trees as the path runs alongside the four-lane highway. Trail groups hope eventually to connect the path with the 3-mile Brooke Pioneer Trail, which runs south from the lovely old river town of Wellsburg, which also has a short bike trail. But the Ohio River Trail dead-ends, for now.

I circled back to the dam, where I met my family. With a cranky child in our midst, it wasn't an option to head back to Wheeling and cycle the 3.5-mile trail section that runs south out of town. But I know from previous experience that it's worth a look, offering views of Wheeling's historic redevelopment efforts.

Pittsburgh's freeway-bound Eliza Furnace Trail, but nicer. There is a street crossing at the I-70 exit for Washington Avenue, but a well-painted crosswalk gives plenty of slow-down clues to cars.

The final mile or so of the Wheeling Creek Trail is especially pleasant, as the creek runs between the path and I-70, before it ends at a parking lot in the Elm Grove section of town. We turned around and pedaled back to Downtown, where my daughter enjoyed a riverside playground. I hunted for food in Wheeling's sleepy business district and was thrilled to find a Mexican restaurant called Nogales.

We enjoyed carry-out tamales -- at an incredibly low price -- while watching boats traverse the river, passing beneath the 150-year-old Wheeling Suspension Bridge. It was the first bridge to cross the

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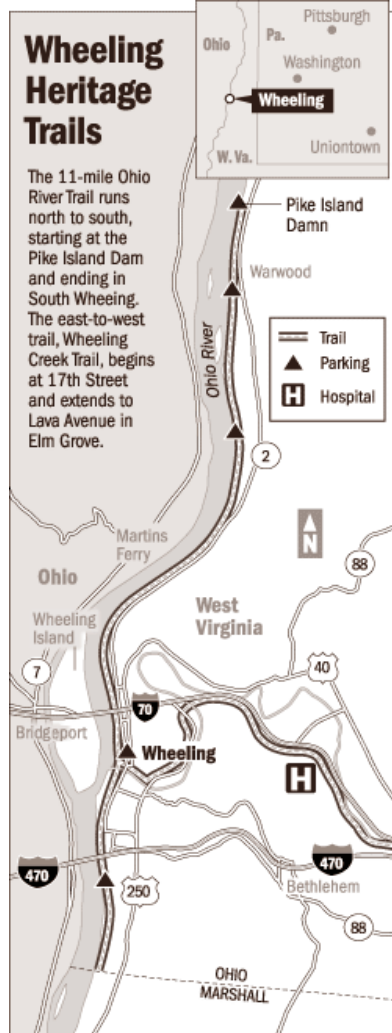
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