

## Hitting the trails: Beaver Creek Greenway trail

### An overlooked treasure

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Douglass Oster, Post-Gazette

**Hitting the Trail:** Sara Baronzzi, 16, left, and her mother, Missy Baronzzi, meet a jogger headed the other direction as they enter the Little Beaver Creek Greenway Trail at the trailhead off Ohio Rt. 164 in Lisbon.

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**By Christopher Snowbeck  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

LISBON, Ohio -- The bike trail that leads north from this quaint county seat gives new meaning to the term backpedal.

Cyclists pedaling along the Little Beaver Creek Greenway Trail look back at contrasting views of the past, starting with a pristine view in Lisbon and ending with a more haunting one in Leetonia.

Lisbon celebrates its history at every turn, from a century-old hardware store with tin ceilings to the Steel Trolley Diner, where poodle-skirted waitresses serve homemade pie.

At the trail's end, the tired town of Leetonia is home to the Cherry Valley Coke Ovens, billed as the largest installation of beehive coke ovens ever built in this country. Coke fueled a steelmaking boom in the region in the late 19th century, but the ovens that once buzzed with activity now sit silently, overgrown with vegetation like a forgotten cemetery.

I made the 90-minute drive from Pittsburgh on a recent morning to find the trail head parking lot in Lisbon filled with cars. Walkers and cyclists were enjoying shady trips along the paved path, which follows the creek along the south and west edges of town.

The Greenway Trail crosses St. Jacob-Logtown Road at several points during the first 3 miles, but the bike trail seems to get more traffic. So don't worry about the half-mile or so when the trail actually runs on the street.

Just past the 5-mile mark, a sign points toward a nearby covered bridge that was built in 1876. Called Centennial Bridge, the white oak structure spans 67 feet and is one of only five still standing in Columbiana County. At one point, there were more than 250 covered bridges here, including 16 that carried trains.

Beneath the bridge, the brown creek suddenly bubbles white as it passes over rocks. A historical marker here says extensive kidney iron deposits were mined and shipped on the Erie & Lackawanna Railroad to, among other places, the furnaces to the north near Leetonia.

I hopped back on the railroad -- the trail, that is -- and rode for a mile before stopping to talk with Paul Zacharias, a 53-year-old steelworker from Elyria, Ohio. Zacharias spends his vacations on bicycle trails and rated the Greenway Trail "at least a 6," saying he liked it because "I like a trail with atmosphere."



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**Mark Ramsey, of Lisbon, Ohio, walks his bike through the Teegarden-Centennial Covered Bridge. The bridge is just off the Little Beaver Creek Greenway Trail on Eagleton Road in Lisbon. The bridge was built in the late 1800s and was still used by motor vehicles through 1992. Now the only traffic going through the bridge is people on foot and bikes.**

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### If you go

■ [The Beaver Creek Greenway trail](#)

**Hitting the Trails**



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**Terri Davis of Beaver exits the bridge.**

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My grumbling stomach told me to forget the sites and focus on finding food. But I had to get off my bike at two points on the north end of the trail to marvel at the changed scenery. Whereas the southern half of the greenway trail is wooded, shady and cool, it opens to delightfully sunny stretches near Leetonia. A lovely field of amber grain waves at cyclists around mile 7, and the trail is sunny and hot as it passes through wetlands near mile 9. Dead trees stick out of the swamp like spears, while frogs sing gulping songs.

The trail ends abruptly about one-quarter mile before the town, but cyclists may ride on the ballast rock here to make the connection. Trail organizers say this final bit of path should be completed this summer.

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I cycled into Leetonia to find a sleepy town that was snoring. I'd hoped to eat at a little shop called British Pastries & More, but it was closed. I instead pedaled across the tracks to a Mexican restaurant near the highway.

I made it back to Lisbon and struck up a conversation with a woman planting flowers at the trail head. Turns out, her name was Dottie Betz and she's chairman of the volunteer board for the Columbiana County Park District. She took me to a nearby county office and gave me a trail map, which includes a tiny photo of the Cherry Valley Coke Ovens in Leetonia. I told her I'd somehow missed the ovens, and asked about them. But Betz said she'd never visited them -- a response I got from another office worker, the owner of the local hardware store and even the lady at the Lisbon historical society's headquarters, which you'll find in a delightful old train depot.

I got in my car and drove to Leetonia to see what everyone was missing. It's worth the trip. If you're on a bike, follow the main street north and west out of town for about a mile. When you get to a trailer park, you'll see a sign to the quiet county park where the ovens sit in neglected glory.

Some 200 in number, the ovens are like brick caves dug into the earth. They are aligned in opposing rows along two canals that stretch the length of a couple football fields. Like so many other sites along bike trails in the region, the ovens offer a silent testimonial to the industrial heritage of the region. But don't miss this one -- not only is it interesting, but it will extend your bike trip to roughly 11 miles each way.

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