

How Do You Bike On A Shoestring? by Pete Bellin and Ron Vitale



Simple: You take a great group of eager GSSC bikers, pile them into one of the most unique hostelries on the N.J. Shore, throw in a big dollop of sumptuous food, plus ample wine and beer, then send them all out two days in a row to pedal their bikes along the brisk and breezy shoreline, then inland through gorgeous rolling farmland, tree-shaded parks and tranquil neighborhoods. And to keep the whole menagerie on the move, you need one energetic and dedicated ringmaster named Margaret O'Brien.

Margaret's Biking On A Shoestring Weekend—an annual event that grows larger every year, was held Sept. 27-29. Its minuscule cost (“on a shoestring”) is due largely to the off-season rates specially granted to us by The White House in Belmar, an old *grande-dame* of the shore, with a wrap-around porch facing the ocean and quaint and cozy rooms holding 45 beds booked solid by the GSSC. There was no heat, guest brought their own sheets and towels, and if you wanted hot water you had to time your shower for an off-hour.

But for those with a typical GSSC sense of adventure, it was a fine place to call home for the weekend. The large, well-equipped country kitchen was the bustling focus of our morning breakfasts. And the spacious front rooms, decked in antiques and Victoriana,

were a nice setting for a Saturday afternoon *apres-bike* happy hour—a gourmet affair that featured Swedish meatballs, chicken, quiche, vegetable platters, fruit, wine and beer.

Most people arrived on a rainy Friday night, in time to grab dinner locally and hit The Columns for dancing. Others stayed in B&Bs and joined us for the rides and happy hour. Despite a rainy forecast, the whole weekend's weather was sunny with temperatures in the 70s and cool ocean breezes —just perfect for bicycling. Some simply road around the neighborhoods of Spring Lake and Ocean Grove. Others went roller-blading or walked along the boardwalk.

Why Bike on a Shoestring?

For many to whom the Shore means little more than beaches and bars, biking offers an entirely new perspective—in fact, more than one. There is scenery, there is history, there are communities and natural areas that, especially during the season, are usually overlooked in the mad rush to get from one party to another.

In past Shoestrings we have ridden from Belmar to Allaire State Park—a world apart, only 9 miles inland. This year, Ron Vitale planned rides starting from Allaire and continuing westward and inland: a 30-mile tour to Turkey Swamp Park, and a shorter, 20-mile ride led by Pete Geisler to the Manasquan River Recreation Area. An intrepid group comprising Pete Bellin, Mike Scugoza., Kas Kasprowicz, Jackie Hynds, Laura Van Riper and Russ Bebb actually began their ride from the White House, meeting the others at Allaire.

From there, almost 40 bikers of all ability levels started out together. After watching the main body take two traffic light changes to cross Rt. 547, Mike, Pete, Laura, and Russ left the main group to ride at a faster pace. They rode to Battleground State Park, site of the Battle of Monmouth, the longest engagement of the Revolution (we won!) and back to the White House, a trip of 44 miles.

Meanwhile, the main group split up further down the road, some riders following Pete G. for the short tour, and the rest visiting the quaint town of Farmingdale to pick up sandwiches before continuing on to Turkey Swamp Park. Both groups enjoyed pleasant, lightly trafficked, virtually flat roads and scenery that included manicured horse farms and the Manasquan Reservoir—all under a cloudless sky.

The Saturday afternoon happy hour was a lively affair with tons of food, socializing, music and dancing. People signed up for dinner at one of the four area restaurants Margaret had reserved: Jimmy's, Moonstruck, Piancone's and Klein's. Jimmy's (Italian) took the prize as most expensive—\$40/person. After dinner, while others enjoyed themselves at the Columns, Pete B. dutifully spent the evening drawing up a cue sheet for a 50-mile ride to Holmdel Park.

By 9 am Sunday morning, Pete, Russ, Kas, Laura and Zoltan were on their way to Holmdel through beautiful back roads, woods, ranch and farmland. Russ and Laura crossed the 1000 mile mark for the season.

Later Sunday morning, Pete Gisler and Ron V. led a ride to Point Pleasant, meandering along the waterfronts of Brielle and Manasquan. The destination was Joey Tomatoes on the boardwalk, for a pleasant afternoon of pizza and socializing. The return trip featured a jaunt through toney Spring Lake.

The friendly owners of The White House allowed us to linger until 5 pm. Many sat on the porch enjoying the sunset, shooting the breeze, and trying hard not to leave. For some, an early evening dinner at Klein's Fish Market was a delicious ending to an awesome weekend.

Watch for another "Biking on a Shoestring" next year—but sign up early, as its popularity is growing. And remember: a weekend like this doesn't just happen. We all owe a heap of gratitude to Margaret, who took on the responsibility and skillfully managed the endless details it takes to make trips like this a success. All of us participating appreciate her efforts.