

Northern Breezes

Cycling enthusiasts rave about the great conditions in Boulder. Spacious bike lanes and paths, hordes of bike shops and free advice, and mild climate bring avid cyclists out. But the place does have its drawbacks. Too many routes seem like one hill grafted onto another in a daisy chain from Hell. The dry and dusty air does not benefit those with respiratory problems. At the height of summer, the unrelenting afternoon heat takes the fun out for some. What to do?

I escape to Minnesota, our country's Good Neighbor to the North. The Lake Superior area is replete with good roads, cool lake air as clean as the driven snow (do not fear, the latter won't come before September), and few hills. My favorite routes start right in front of my summer place in [Two Harbors](#). It is a nice little town that time forgot. Every Thursday evening during the summer, a century-old city band plays Sousa marches, from the stage of the Two Harbors town bandshell. Actually, the current band members aren't actually a century old, although they play like it. One third of the town sits and listens to them, another third congregates at the nearby Dairy Queen, while the rest sit in the Moose Lodge (a.k.a. "The Moose"). Come to think of it, just about every other storefront has the word "Moose" on it, e.g. The Mocha Moose coffee and gift shop. Perhaps the precedent for this sort of thing is Northern Wisconsin, where every other storefront has the word "Badger" on it. Local legend holds that Bernard Hinault, 5 time winner of the Tour de France, was born in Northern Wisconsin....

But I digress. Two Harbors is named for its location on two small bays. One is Agate Bay, but you wouldn't hunt for agates there. It is a place where 1000 ft. ore carriers arrive to be loaded with iron ore pellets stockpiled by train. Its lighthouse and park make it more picturesque than it sounds. The other is Burlington Bay, a place where people and their dogs go bathing. It is also the locale for the Two Harbors Kayak Festival. The best agate hunting is up the road on Flood Bay, a natural activity for those cyclists already used to spending hours looking at the ground in front of them.

I am not one of them, as I ride a recumbent and get to look around at the scenery -- a good thing in these parts. I leave a recumbent up there so I won't have to haul it across country. A photo of one just like it is seen below:



One of my favorite bicycle routes is the easiest -- just hop on the North Shore Highway 61, made famous by Bob Dylan's eponymous song. From Two Harbors, it winds along the North Shore of Lake Superior. After 13 miles of easy riding one can stop for a walk through the [Gooseberry Falls](#) area, continue another 6 miles or so to the historic [Split Rock Lighthouse and Museum](#) and take a guided tour of the facility. Then have lunch at either the Rustic Inn (somewhat of a misnomer, because it isn't an Inn) or the more pretentious [Grand Superior Lodge](#) (which is), and then return. Those desiring a longer ride may continue another 60 miles or so up to the trendy (for this area) town of [Grand Marais](#), staying overnight at one of the many spots there with haute cuisine. Alternatively from Two Harbors, one can head south along Hwy. 61 for 20 miles to Duluth, the Big Apple of the Northwoods. There, you can attend a [Tall Ships rally](#), a large open air [Blues Festival](#), or [Grandma's Marathon](#), spread throughout the summer.

Inland routes are nice, too. I frequently ride up the aptly-named 5 Mile Hill to start a 15-20 mile loop encompassing Greater Two Harbors. The average grade would not impress anyone from Boulder, but you will still want to investigate Dixie's Bar at the top of 5 Mile Hill, where you can relax while nursing a beer during a Minnesota Twins telecast. If it isn't Miller Time, you may keep a' goin' (as Haven Hamilton sang in "Nashville") all the way to Ely, MN., an entry point to a large, mosquito-ridden wilderness called the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. From that point you will have to ditch the bike for a canoe. If that doesn't appeal, you should seek out the world headquarters of [Gene Hicks Gourmet Coffees](#). Gene escaped the East Coast professional life to become a fishing guide in Ely. He soon noticed that a good cup of java was as hard to find as a Packer fan. The local Scandinavians seem to like their coffee in one of two ways: weak or burnt. Why else would Gevalia have to give away a coffee maker just to sell a bag of beans? So Gene had a roasting machine and beans shipped in, and started experimenting. He found that his fishing clients liked his coffee even better than the eelpout they hooked through

the ice. Next thing you know, ol' Gene was selling the stuff in local groceries and over the web. I recommend his Signature Blend for light-medium roast fans, and his Good Morning blend for the unemployed Generation X'ers that hang around Amante in North Boulder.

But again I digress, so let's return to the subject at hand. Be sure to bring spare tubes and such, because outside of Duluth the nearest bike shops are few and far in between.

Finally, I cannot overstate how good it feels to ride along Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Gitche Gumee in that cool, clean, sea-level air. Your high altitude-induced hemoglobin and hill-trained legs will permit riding long spans without breaking much of a sweat. So head North and leave the Triple Bypass and Ride-The-Rockies to others. You will have more more fun than human beings should be allowed to have while pedaling.

One more piece of advice: if your trip makes you want to buy property there, stay away from the time-share hotel/condos and the like. Just buy something in town, where a house can be had for less than the purchase price of a Tesla electric car bought on Pearl Street. Your Garrison Keillor-esque neighbors will make sure that nobody turns your detached garage into a Meth Lab, and their strong, above-average daughters will mow your lawn and shovel your walks for far less than you contribute to Starbucks every month.