

A Guide to Overnight Bicycle Touring in Wisconsin

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Introduction

One of the many aspects of bicycling is self-contained touring. That can mean anything from camping every night and cooking your own food, to staying in motels and eating in restaurants. The common element is independence from the automobile.

Why, you ask, should you go the trouble of carrying all that gear and do without so many of the comforts to which you have become accustomed? Answering that question is akin to trying to explain why some of us enjoy riding bicycles in the first place, when it would be so much easier just to drive our cars. The most tangible is probably the freedom and flexibility: When you don't have to meet a sag vehicle or make a motel reservation, you are free to change your plans according to the wind, weather, or whatever interesting detour you happen across. There's also the satisfaction of knowing you got yourself and the necessities of life there under your own power. When you don't have the option of just jumping in the car and driving into town for dinner, you have to operate under a different set of rules. There's some satisfaction in that, too. If just a single member of your group shows up with a car in the middle of your trip, the rules suddenly change dramatically. Even though you are biking among motor vehicles most of the time, you don't normally have access to them, so you are really living in a different world. Some of us like that world.

Carrying touring gear doesn't have to make bicycling a lot more difficult. Assuming you haven't grossly overloaded your bike, the same time and effort required to ride an unladen 60 miles will take you about 50 miles with your camping gear. There's no reason you have to ride 60 miles every day on your tour! With appropriately low gears on your bike and reasonable distances each day, it doesn't have to be any more work than a supported tour.

Camping and cooking give you the greatest flexibility but, of course, mean you have to carry more weight. On the other hand, the need to arrive at restaurants and motels may restrict your choice of routes or require riding longer distances. It's a choice you have to make, depending on your style, the availability of services, and budget. Even if you are camping there's no reason you can't rent a roof or eat in a restaurant sometimes. When traveling with a group, cooking meals does require a higher level of organization than eating in restaurants, so sometimes it works best to camp, but not cook.

Touring with a Group

Touring with a small group is great fun, but also presents some challenges. You first must decide to what extent you are going to try to stay together. Staying together allows you to share equipment and enjoy each other's company. It also allows you to change plans in mid-route if, for example, you learn of a better campsite. Staying together invariably requires some sacrifices, though. The faster riders will often have to stop and wait, unless your group is extraordinarily well matched, and conditions may make the waiting unpleasant. If everyone waits while you all use the outhouse one at a time, the delay gets multiplied. While riding closely together makes it easy to talk, it also makes it harder to deal with traffic, road hazards, and dogs, and can even result in collisions. Staying together is often worthwhile, but don't underestimate the effort it takes. It may be helpful to agree that no one will get out of sight of the following rider. What you *don't* want to do is agree to stay together, then get separated anyway. Talk about it before the ride starts.

The other extreme is complete independence, which only works if everyone in the group is self-sufficient. You can ride at your own pace, stop whenever you feel like it, explore alternate routes, etc. But if you get lost or your bike breaks down, you can't count on someone else being around to help. If you are sharing camping equipment, you need to somehow all arrive at the same campsite eventually, so you have to agree on the day's destination in the morning. All this doesn't mean you spend all day riding alone, of course, and often the group just breaks up into smaller ones. It's a good idea, though, to agree on a telephone contact, or whatever, so you can communicate if someone gets seriously separated from the rest of the group. Decide what you will do if you get to your destination and someone doesn't show up.

A compromise is to deliberately split up into small groups, then keep each of them together. If each small group is self-sufficient, you don't even have to end up at the same destination. If some are

inexperienced, you can make sure some of the more experienced cyclists stick with them. Again, you need to discuss this before the ride starts.

Emergencies

With a group, make some arrangement to communicate if someone gets separated from the group. An answering machine everyone can play back remotely is one possibility. Don't count on continuous cell phone coverage, and cell phone voice mail only works if everyone in the group has a phone. In an emergency, you can leave a message with a local law enforcement agency, but decide ahead of time which one to use. (For example, the sheriff in which county, the one you started the day in or your destination?) If you have to use a local resident's phone, use a credit card or offer to pay for the call.

If you find yourself stranded somewhere by a mechanical failure, a minor injury, darkness, etc., consider offering to pay one of the locals to drive you to your destination. S/he probably won't take your money, but will appreciate your offer to pay. If you're not going to make it to where your group is expecting you by dark, leave them a message so they don't send out a search party. If you haven't made other message arrangements, leave a message with the local Sheriff's department. Likewise, if someone doesn't show up at the day's destination by dark, see if s/he has left a message by the designated method. If not, you may want to call the local Sheriff's department. (Note that in over 30 years of bicycle touring, I've never known anyone to have to resort to such measures, but it could happen.)

In a medical emergency, of course, call 911 from the nearest house or a cell phone. **Always** call 911 in case of possible head injuries.

Planning Guide

General Information

Southwestern Wisconsin's extensive network of quiet, paved, farm roads makes the area a true cyclist's paradise. Aside from the occasional milk truck, for which the roads were built, traffic is generally light. You probably won't find anywhere a better combination of lightly traveled roads, scenery, and all the other things that make for enjoyable bicycle touring. Other parts of Wisconsin also offer excellent bicycle touring conditions, with less demanding topography. While many of the comments below apply to most of Wisconsin, they most accurately apply to the area south of I-94 and west of Madison.

The information below is intended for planning of overnight tours. Much of it, however, applies equally to day trips. There are no specific tour descriptions, as the purpose of this guide is to provide the information cyclists need to plan their own tours.

Wisconsin Topography

The southwestern fourth of the state, known as the driftless area, has never been glaciated, resulting in hilly topography. It is generally a rolling plateau with deeply eroded valleys. Near the major rivers, the valleys are nearly 600 feet deep. The driftless area is hilly, to be sure, but the scenery can make all that climbing worthwhile. The most pleasant cycling routes are those which generally follow the valleys, rather than cutting across all the drainages. Ridge-top riding can be quite demanding, especially with a headwind, because the ridge-tops are exposed and far from flat. It is often possible to find driftless area routes which follow valleys most of each day, with just a few climbs over the ridges.

Elsewhere in Wisconsin, the topography is varied. While some areas are quite flat, the glaciers have left behind some serious hills in others. The most difficult cycling is in those areas, such as Lafayette County in the far south, where straight roads follow the section lines over all the hills rather than following the valleys.

Wisconsin Maps

To take advantage of Wisconsin's excellent cycling roads you have to be prepared to do some navigating. Simply following the major highways guarantees you'll see plenty of traffic and breathe a lot of exhaust. Once you have a suitable map, make copies of the sections you need, mark your route on it, and attach it to your bike where you can read it as you ride. *Having the map before you all the time is essential:* It helps you avoid getting lost and allows you to check out interesting alternatives along the way.

By far the best are the *Milwaukee Map Service* maps. A set of four covers the entire state, and they show virtually every road, except in cities and towns. They show rivers and streams, which can tell you a lot about topography. These maps show road names, but use caution in navigating by them: Often signs are missing or the names are wrong. The maps contain some errors, and do not indicate which roads are gravel. Also, when you make copies of these maps, mark the centers of the towns, as the yellow shading won't show up. Careful adjustment of the copy machine will preserve most of the other details like those little blue lines indicating rivers and streams, the only topographical clues. They are available at many bookstores or:

Milwaukee Map Service
4519 W. North Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53208
414-445-7361

The Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin publishes a set of four Wisconsin State Bike Maps, which show suitability of state and county roads for bicycling. They are otherwise similar to the Milwaukee Map Service Maps, though probably even more difficult to copy. There is no information on campsites or services. They are probably best used as references in conjunction with other maps. They are available in some bike shops or by calling (800) 262-4537. BFW members can order them directly from BFW at a discount.

The state Department of Transportation publishes a book of *traffic count maps* covering the entire state, which is very useful. The DOT also publishes individual county maps, but they generally offer less information than the Milwaukee Map Service maps.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Publications and Map Sales
3617 Pierstorff
Madison, WI 53707
(608) 246-3265

County maps (without traffic data) can be downloaded free from:

<http://www.dot.state.wi.us/dtid/bhd/maps.html>

County maps with traffic data can be downloaded free from:

<http://www.dot.state.wi.us/travel/counts/maps.htm#list>

The official state highway map doesn't even show all the county roads, and the ones omitted are precisely the best for cycling. It's a useful reference for longer trips, but must be used only in addition to more detailed maps.

The USGS 1:250,000 series topographic maps are useful references, though the road information on them is hopelessly out of date. The hills, for the most part, are still there. The DeLorme Atlas is also a useful reference, but is far too large to carry and copies very poorly.

Campsites

The most pleasant campsites are often those out-of-the-way places like town and county parks. One of the best ways to find them is to send a letter to the county clerk of each county you plan to visit. Asking the locals along the way sometimes leads you to interesting campsites. There are many public spots where camping is permitted, but not particularly encouraged. In small towns, bicyclists can often get permission to camp in parks or schoolyards. (The mayor is probably tending bar just down the street.) Be considerate, though, for the sake of future cyclists: Keep your group small and *don't ask for special camping considerations when you have a car available*. While you are not likely to have a serious problem, try not to advertise the location of your campsite. Discrete camping usually results in a more peaceful night, especially on weekends.

Camping on private land is possible, but it is often difficult to find the landowner to get permission. If you find a great spot, you may not be able to find the owner. On the other hand, if you find a landowner, s/he may have no concept a decent campsite, even with the best of intentions. In any case, be sure the landowner understands the difference between tired cyclists getting some sleep, and that bunch of high-school kids who "camped" on his land last spring and left a big mess behind.

Many state parks have campgrounds, as indicated on the state highway map. There has been a long-standing policy of providing campsites for cyclists who arrive late in the day, if there are no nearby alternatives, even if all the park campsites are full. The park staff may not be aware of this policy, so you may have to be persistent. Don't expect the park to find room for you, though, if there's a commercial campground right across the road. The wardens take an extremely dim view of unauthorized camping in state parks.

Camping is often allowed at the county fairgrounds, usually in the county seat. Contact the county clerk. It may be necessary to call ahead.

There are many places along the Wisconsin River where camping is possible on public land within the Lower Wisconsin Riverway. When the river level is low enough, it is possible in some places to wade out to a sand bar.

Wisconsin has hundreds of commercial campgrounds, most of which are distinctly unpleasant. There are some exceptions, though. The smaller ones listed in the commercial campground guides are your best bets. Note that in some counties, commercial campground operators have apparently succeeded in eliminating all public campsites. In others, public campsites may exist, but they aren't well publicized.

Route Planning

The first step in planning an overnight tour is usually to select overnight stops. Then try to map a suitable route between them. It's often an iterative process. You could, of course, plan the route first, then look for overnight stopping places. A drafting divider is handy for measuring distances on the map (but leave it at home). For longer trips, you can often plan day-by-day, as long as you have along maps and campsite or lodging information. Depending on your style, you may or may not want to try to include a number of towns on your route each day. While there are lots of towns in Wisconsin, sometimes the most pleasant route doesn't go through any.

Some general rules for route planning:

- The most direct route is hardly ever the nicest.
- Take the smallest road.
- Follow valleys.
- Avoid straight roads.
- Tolerate some gravel.

In most of Wisconsin the county roads, designated with letters, are the best for cycling. Almost all are paved, and traffic is usually light. Those county roads which lead directly to or connect major cities are often busy, but in such areas the township roads are usually paved. *State and US highways are*

usually far too busy for pleasant cycling, though some have paved shoulders. There are a few state highways with light traffic. The state traffic count book (above) allows you to identify them. Roads with traffic counts of under 400/day are pleasant for cycling, while those with counts over 1000/day are not, unless the shoulder is paved. Cycling conditions deteriorate very quickly as the traffic count goes up.

Township roads are my favorites, where they are paved. Unfortunately, no published maps show which of these roads are paved. Virtually all the township roads are paved in Dane, Green, Columbia, Dodge, Marquette, Waushara, Waupaca, Door, Walworth, Waukesha, Rock, and most other southeastern counties. Elsewhere they vary. If you don't mind an occasional stretch of gravel, your route possibilities are greatly expanded.

Then there are the well-known Wisconsin rail trails. The Department of Tourism has information on them, and they are shown on the official state maps. The surface may be soft, and they can be quite crowded on weekends. Often the surrounding roads are excellent for cycling and less crowded, but sections of the trails sometimes make useful connectors. The towns they pass through often have nice campsites, and one of the parking lots along the trail is often a convenient place to leave a car.

A few favorite overnight routes:

- Muscoda-Wyalusing-Platteville-Muscoda (Grant County)
- Trempealeau-Strum-Alma-Trempealeau (Buffalo/Trempealeau Counties)
- Gays Mills-Wilton-Esofea-Gays Mills (Kickapoo River Valley)
- Montello-Waupaca-Montello (Sand Country)
- Madison-Blanchardville-Dodgeville-Madison
- Madison-Spring Green-Madison
- Madison-Monroe-Madison
- Madison-Muscoda-Madison

Overnight Tour Guidelines

Even if you are traveling with a group and intend to stay together, it is very easy to get separated, so each cyclist should be fairly self-sufficient. Trouble with equipment, getting lost, etc. can affect everyone in the group, so it's only fair to do everything possible to avoid these problems. Following these guidelines should help you and everyone in your group have a more enjoyable trip.

1. Be prepared to navigate using a map without a cue sheet. Note that road names shown on maps may be wrong, or signs may be missing. (Even if you have a cue sheet, it won't help if you run into unexpected road construction, etc.)
2. Check your bike, especially the tires, before the trip to be sure everything is in sound condition.
3. Be prepared to fix a flat tire.
4. Bring your telephone calling card number. Decide on a contact with whom you can leave messages. Don't count on cell phone coverage; they may work only from the ridge-tops, and not always even there.
5. If you have not carried camping gear before, or have changed your panniers, etc., load everything on the bike before the trip and take a short ride to make sure there are no problems. Make especially sure your heels don't hit the panniers.
6. Travel light! For summer weekend trips, your gear shouldn't weigh more than 25 pounds. (That's everything not bolted to the bike except food and water.) Weigh it!
7. Lash gear tightly to the top of the rack with nylon straps, **not** bungee cords. (Bungee cords stretch too much, and they're heavy.) Panniers must be securely attached, so they can't wobble.
8. Do not take any cotton or wool clothing, which soaks up lots of water and takes forever to dry.
9. Take plastic bags to keep clothes and sleeping bag dry when riding in the rain.

Wisconsin Bicycle Touring Campsite List

6/25/03

Notes: Only selected campsites are shown. There are many more commercial campgrounds, though not all are particularly pleasant for bicycle camping. Those listed are generally better.

(?) indicates uncertain status. No guarantees in any case! If in doubt, ask locally.

In many other town parks, it may be possible to camp if you ask permission.

Sand bar camping on the Wisconsin River usually requires wading, which is possible only when the water is low.

In State Parks, the people working in the office are often unaware of the policy about not turning away cyclists late in the day, when there are no nearby commercial campgrounds.

Most campsites have drinking water.

Showers are indicated where known. Others may or may not have showers.

Key			
T	Town Park	SC	Sportsman's' Club
C	County Park	R	Riverside
S	State Park	U	Undeveloped
SF	State Forest	Com	Commercial
B	State Bicycle Trail	O	Other

Buffalo County

Town	Type	Notes
Mondovi	T	South of town
Alma	C	River, north 1 mile. Road noise. Showers
Fountain City	S	Merrick State Park

Crawford County

Town	Type	Notes
Gays Mills	T	No showers
Steuben	T	Town Square or Softball Field. No Showers
Ferryville	T	
Soldier's Grove	R?	?
Wauzeka	R	Plum Creek Rd. Primitive site.

Dane County

Town	Type	Notes
Blue Mounds	C	Brigham County Park. No showers.
Mazomanie	U	Racek Road, Lower Wisconsin Riverway
Mazomanie	Com	Cedar Hills, Dunlap Hollow Rd.

Grant County

Town	Type	Notes
Muscoda	T	Also sand bar west of bridge. Showers at park.
Platteville	T	Cty B East. Showers. Register at Police Dept. downtown.
Potosi	R	Corps of Engineers. Showers. Lots of trains.
Cassville	S	Nelson Dewey
Wyalusing	S	Wyalusing State Park. Showers
Millville	R	Cty C boat landing. No drinking water
Woodman	R	Boat landing 3 miles west. No drinking water.
Belmont	Com	
Kieler	Com	
Boscobel	Com	
Lancaster	Com	

Green County

Town	Type	Notes
Albany	T	E. river bank. No facilities. Get water at other park across river.
Monroe	O	Fairgrounds, May 1 through Oct. 1. Showers. Call: (608) 325-9159
New Glarus	S	New Glarus Woods. Road noise, especially at walk-in sites.
Broadhead	Com	F west. Quiet, roof. Bad if crowded. Trailer court.
Broadhead	Com	E north. Buggy, quiet, no roof.

Green Lake County

Town	Type	Notes
Green Lake	T	
Berlin	T	?

Iowa County

Town	Type	Notes
Avoca	T	Could be buggy.
Highland	C	Blackhawk Lake (difficult access)
Ridgeway	O	Folklore Village, Cty BB south. Showers
Mineral Point	O	County Fairgrounds (608) 987-3490
Dodgeville	S	Governor Dodge. Showers
Blue Mounds	S	Blue Mounds State Park
Spring Green	S	Tower Hill
Clyde	Com	Spring Valley Trails, Spring Valley Rd.

Jackson County

Town	Type	Notes
Merrilan	T	No showers.
Melrose	T	River Park
Hixton	T	
City Point	C	Merlin Lambert Co. Park, 8 miles SW
City Point	C	Spaulding Pond Co. Park, 6 miles W
Millston	SF	Pigeon Creek Campground, 3 miles NE
Hatfield	SF	Black River State Forest

Juneau County

Town	Type	Notes
Elroy	B	No automobile access! Showers in town.
Wonewoc	T	Park, also walk-in sites along trail

La Crosse County

Town	Type	Notes
West Salem	C	Veterans Memorial Park. Showers

Lafayette County

Town	Type	Notes
Blanchardville	T	Subject to flooding. No showers.
Darlington	T	Serious ATV infestation. To be avoided.
Woodford	C	Maybe subject to flooding.

Monroe County

Town	Type	Notes
Sparta	B	Road noise (I-90)
Wilton	T	Nice. Showers, pool.
Kendall	T	
Norwalk	T	Showers
Warrens	C	McMullen Co. Park, Cty O north.

Pepin County

Town	Type	Notes
Stockholm	T	Not great. No showers.
Arkansaw	C	NN, 2.5 miles south.
Pepin	Com	Two, in town

Portage County

Town	Type	Notes
Amherst Junction	T	

Richland County

Town	Type	Notes
Viola	T	Showers
Cazenovia	T	Poor, but usable. No showers.
Rockbridge	C	Register at store, No showers.
Richland Center	Com	Alana Springs, NW off Cty A
Eagle Corners	Com	Eagle Cave

Sauk County

Town	Type	Notes
La Valle	C	Redstone Lake
Plain	C	White Mound County Park. Showers.
Spring Green	U	Sand bar near Bob's Riverside, 1 mile west of town center
Lake Delton	S	Mirror Lake
Baraboo	S	Devil's Lake

Trempealeau County

Town	Type	Notes
Whitehall	T	Swimming pool
Blair	T	Industrial noise. Showers
Arcadia	C	Pietrek Park, 4 mi. north on 93. Showers.
Arcadia	T	Shank Walk-in Park. 2 Blocks south of Main St.
Strum	C	In town, near golf course. Showers
Trempealeau	S	Perrot State Park. Showers
Pigeon Falls	T	Ekern Park. 715-983-2205

Vernon County

Town	Type	Notes
La Farge	T	
Viola	T	Showers
Coon Valley	T	??
Reedstown	T	
Esofea	C	Very nice. Cty B, 6 miles NW of Viroqua. No showers.
Viroqua	C	Sidie Hollow
Viroqua	O	Fairgrounds
DeSoto	C	Blackhawk Park (north)
Avalanche	SC	Spring across road. Showers
Ontario	S	Wildcat Mountain
Ontario	Com	Several canoe outfitters have camping

Waushara County

Town	Type	Notes
Hancock	T	2 miles east on GG

Equipment Recommendations

General Information

This is a guide to equipment for unsupported, independent overnight bicycle camping tours. There's an emphasis here on self-sufficiency, as experience shows that on these kinds of tours, even with a group, you can't count on someone else always being around when something goes wrong.

Self-sufficiency need not mean excessive weight. *In general, carry only what you really need, and select each item to be as light and compact as possible.* For mild summer weather, even carrying cooking equipment, the weight of all your gear, including panniers, should not exceed 30 pounds. (This does not include food and water.) A very common error is carrying way too much gear, so it's essential that you pack up all your stuff, *and actually weigh it.* You'll be surprised how fast the weight accumulates. Remember that each item you pack is guaranteed to extract a price on every hill. You'll also have to deal with it every time you pack and unpack. For every ounce, you have to ask yourself whether its value is worth that price.

Some of these recommendations apply most accurately to the kind of bicycle touring found in southwestern Wisconsin, where the terrain can be very hilly, most roads are paved, but occasional stretches of gravel must be negotiated.

Bicycle

The bicycle must, above all, have triple chainrings and low gearing. Chainstays must be long enough so your feet don't hit the panniers, and there must be eyelets for attaching a rear rack. The frame should be very stiff to prevent instability due to the extra weight of gear, particularly if it is a large frame size. Tires should preferably be 32 mm or 1 1/4 inches wide, with an absolute minimum of 28 mm or 1 1/8 inches. A road bike is preferable, because it is more efficient, but overnight touring is certainly possible on a mountain bike.

Panniers, etc.

Rear panniers with a capacity of about 3,000 cubic inches are adequate for summer trips. The sleeping bag and tent may be securely attached to the top of the rack with nylon straps. *Do not use bungee cords!* If you think you need both front and rear panniers, you have too much gear, except possibly for an extended trip through remote areas in cold weather. A small handlebar bag may be handy, but is not essential. For cold weather, an extra stuff sack lashed along side the tent and sleeping bag can be used to carry additional clothing.

Tools, etc.

A spare inner tube, patch kit, tire irons, and a pump are essential. Needless to say, you need to know how to use them. A spare tire is heavy and bulky, but can be essential, even on weekend trips. (It seems few touring cyclists carry one on short trips, but try finding a 700 mm tire in Vernon County on Sunday!)

Each person should have a basic tool kit, including allen keys, a small screwdriver, a small adjustable wrench, and a chain tool. Spare shifter and brake cables, as well as a few spare screws and nuts, are recommended.

Don't forget the Swiss army knife.

Tent

Lightweight backpacking tents are excellent for bicycle touring, though in Wisconsin you really don't need one designed for alpine conditions. There are many fine "two-person" tents weighing around 4 pounds. These are very cozy for two, but quite comfortable for one. Many of these come in a larger "three-person" version weighing 5-6 pounds, which may be more comfortable for two. Good ventilation is important for summer trips. Consider only a tent with a separate rain fly, and avoid single-wall tents. A ground cloth ("footprint") can help keep the tent dry, but cut it so it doesn't extend beyond the floor of the tent, and use thin (1 mil/ 0.025mm) polyethylene.

A larger and heavier tent may be justified for touring in severe climates, where shelter is not likely to be available in bad weather. If it's likely you'll have to spend days at a time waiting out bad weather in your tent, you may want more room and protection. On a spring or fall tour in Wisconsin, for example, you'll probably never be far from someplace where you could rent a room or cabin. That might not be the case elsewhere. As always, you have to decide whether the benefit is worth the price.

Be sure to dry your tent thoroughly after every trip. Otherwise, mildew will soon render it leaky and useless.

Sleeping Bag and Pad

For summer touring in Wisconsin, a sleeping bag rated to about 40 degrees is adequate. Either a down or synthetic bag can be used. Down bags are about the same price as comparable synthetic bags, and are lighter and much more smaller when packed. Compared to a down bag, a synthetic one will weigh about a pound more and be about twice the volume when packed. You do have to be careful not to let a down bag get wet on the road, but two concentric trash bags *inside* the stuff sack will keep it dry under even the most extreme conditions. A down bag is more trouble to wash, of course. A synthetic bag will work fine, as long as you don't mind the extra weight and bulk, and there are some conditions in which a synthetic one is preferable. A down bag weighing about 2 pounds is ideal for summer touring, while 3 pound bag might be required for colder conditions. Add one pound for synthetic bags.

The pad is largely a matter of personal preference. Use the smallest and lightest one you can comfortably sleep on. The 3/4 length is probably adequate, unless you are very tall, since you can always pile some spare clothes under your feet. For summer trips, when you won't have much extra clothing, a really lightweight inflatable travel pillow may be nice. (Put it inside your stuff sack with some clothes.)

Clothing

Packing excessive clothing is another common mistake. Plan on washing your underwear, etc. every day, so 2 or 3 sets is enough. Otherwise, carry just enough to keep you warm under the worst conditions expected. A highly breathable windbreaker is most comfortable for riding in cool weather. *Do not pack any cotton or wool clothing*, as it absorbs a lot of water and takes forever to dry. A small "camp towel" is adequate. When you ride in the rain, always keep some dry clothing in plastic bags so you will have something to change into when you stop riding.

Rain Gear

Don't expect to stay completely dry when riding in the rain. You can, however, stay comfortably warm with the right clothing. Layering synthetics under a lightweight waterproof jacket usually works well. When it's warm, leave the rain jacket off, and just get wet, adjusting the number of layers to suit the temperature. Rain pants are essential in cold rain, but often it's more comfortable to just let your legs get wet. Likewise, some thick socks will keep your feet comfortably warm in all but the coldest rain. Rain booties won't keep your feet dry, but may keep them warmer on spring and fall trips. Warm gloves, however, may be needed even in mid-summer. A helmet cover helps keep your head warm and dry, and doesn't interfere with visibility as does a hood. In colder weather, a light Gore-Tex parka is useful when you're not riding, providing both warmth and rain protection. Gore-Tex seems to be waterproof only when fairly new.

Shoes

Comfortable walking shoes are essential on some bicycle tours, depending on how much walking you expect to do. Some cycling shoes may be comfortable to walk in for short distances around towns, etc. If you use clipless pedals and cycling shoes and plan to do more than just a little walking, you will probably have to carry a pair of walking shoes, another two pounds to haul up the hills. If you don't think it's worth it, just use toe clips and ride in your walking shoes. If you do carry two pairs of shoes, get the lightest walking shoes you can find, like a pair of really cheap tennis shoes, unless you plan to do some serious hiking. (Walking is often a very pleasant change from cycling!)

If you use clipless pedals for touring, be sure you have spare screws, cleats, and the proper tools. Put Loctite on the screws to keep them from working loose.

Cooking Gear

Backpacking equipment is perfectly suited for cooking on bicycle tours. Aluminum pots are lighter and heat more evenly than stainless steel or titanium, though they are getting hard to find. When traveling alone, all you really need is a stove, spoon, and one pot. With a group, you may want a second pot and a light plastic bowl. Forget the fancy mess kits with plates, forks, knives, etc. You can eat anything with a spoon, bowl, and a Swiss army knife.

Miscellany

Light, small, and necessary should be the criteria for all the other stuff. For example, a day pack is handy for walking around away from your bike, but you can get a cheap one at a discount store which weighs only a few ounces, as opposed to a heavy-duty one that weighs over a pound.

Overnight Bicycle Trip Equipment List

Scott Ellington 4/15/99

Shelter

Sleeping pad
Sleeping bag
Tent

Hygiene, etc.

Ibuprofen, etc
Chapstick
Sunscreen
Iodine
Bug juice
Alcohol wipes
TP
Ear plugs
First aid kit
Toothbrush
Clothesline
Comb
Soap

Bike Stuff

Helmet
Water bottles
Panniers
Handlebar bag
Speedometer
Straps
Pump
Mirror
Tools
Oil
Spare tire
Patch kit
Spare tube
Spare spokes
Bike parts
Lock/Cable

Cooking

Stove
Fuel
Wind screen
Scrubber
Matches
Plastic sheet
Al foil
Spoon
Bowl
Pot(s), etc.
Salt
Food

Misc

Money
Wallet, etc.
Head lamp
Spare batteries
Spare bulb
Camera
Film
Light ropes
Day pack
Book
Maps, etc.
Sunglasses
Note pad
Plastic bags
Compass
Pen
Felt pen
Pencil/eraser
Safety pins
Rubber bands
Knife
Keys
Nylon tape
Sewing kit
Pad repair kit

Clothing

Shorts
Underwear (3)
Jersey (2)
L. S. shirt (2)
Thick socks (2)
Light socks (2)
Bandana
Sweat band
Biking gloves
Hankies
Polypro bottoms
Polypro top
Windbreaker
Towel (light)
Rain gear
Sun hat
Helmet cover
Warm gloves

*Ear band
*Stocking cap
*Goretex parka
*Pile jacket
*Wind pants

*(cold weather only)