

GAP and C&O Trail October 2023 - 4 friends on bikes.

Tue Oct 17 - Arizona to Pittsburgh - by plane. Fly to Pittsburgh and arrive around 6pm. Free shuttle to La Quinta Airport Hotel (\$106.70). In the morning, Bills taxi 412-855-4484 shuttled us from La Quinta to the start of the GAP trail (\$125 for four people with bikes). I recommend checking out Bus 28X from the airport and booking the Drury Inn by the Amtrak station. They have a large bike/luggage storage room, very nice free breakfast and are close to the start line.

Wed 18 - Pittsburgh to West Newton - 36 miles

Bill's taxi dropped us near the start and then we pedaled to the official starting point.

Boston PA for lunch at The Betsy Shoppes & Bistro Tea shop, delicious food at great prices. Half block from the trail. <https://www.thebetsyshoppe.com/>

Camped right next to the trail in West Newton at the Gap Trail Campground (724) 244-5859 • ppritch493@aol.com • gaptrailcampground.com 234 Collinsburg Road West Newton, PA 15089 Four people for \$111.79. Outdoor roofless showers. Covered luxury outdoor seating area with kitchen and coffee. Train noise with horns all night. Train is across the river. Ate at Gary's Chuckwagon in town - good food and cheap. He also owns the bakery next door. Then pedaled about a mile to the grocery store for some supplies.

Thur 19 - West Newton to Confluence - 55 miles.

Connellsville for lunch at Kickstand Kitchen - biker friendly, right by the trail and delicious food. There is a bike store next door and a Spotto hardware store a few blocks the other direction, which has a camping/music store next to it. I bought their last can of MSR fuel. The camping/music store has a doorbell that must be rung outside to get service.

The Trail in Connellsville is on road for a few blocks, but is bike designated and very safe. There is also a Comfort Inn right on the trail as you come into town, for those who want a hotel.

Ohiopyle for 2nd lunch - good food near the trail.

Wendy World campground in Confluence(814) 395-2474 wendycampmanager@gmail.com 629 Flanigan Rd. Confluence, PA 15424. Close to the trail, just a short way uphill. (everything is always uphill from the canal). Stayed in Bunkhouse, 4 people for \$100. The rest of the campground was closed for the season. Showers take quarters. Expect no food to be open after 6pm in Confluence. We ate some dehydrated meals we brought with us around the campfire.

Fri 20 - Confluence to Meyersdale PA - 33 miles

Stopped in Rockwood for some good pizza for lunch. There is also a gas station with snacks down the road and a bakery nearby. Stromboli was amazing and so were the homemade cinnamon rolls that we took to go.

In Meyersdale we ate at Donges Diner for dinner and breakfast - low prices and good diner food. They make their own real Maple Syrup and you can order some online to ship home. Family Dollar is a few blocks away.

Maple Festival Park Campground \$20 per tent. Grace Shaffer 814-634-0213 pamaple@verizon.net Office Hours Mon, Wed & Fri from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. calling Susie Decker at 814-442-4284 (from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.). They had firepits and firewood.

Sat 21 - Meyersdale PA to Cumberland MD. - 34 miles

The Eastern Divide is between Meyersdale and Cumberland. After the Tunnel at the Eastern Divide there is the descent to Frostburg which is very fast and then gets less steep as you approach Cumberland. Frostburg has a steep climb to town that we skipped. There is a park with patio covers and water right by the trail to stop and eat at. Frostburg has a 15 mile section of train track/rollercoaster that can be pedaled by four people on a special car - mostly downhill and a good way to see the leaves if you are not biking, but dress extra warm.

C&O trail starts in Cumberland and so do the many free campsites along the canal. The trail is part of the National park and is in poor condition until about Hancock, especially if it rains. Expect mud puddles and a rougher ride. Not many services until Hancock 60 miles away. Pack extra food. Apparently there is a Dollar General in PawPaw but we didn't venture into town.

Ate dinner in Cumberland at a El Jinete Mexican food place that wasn't very authentic. They served ranch dressing with the tortilla chips, but the prices were not bad. I don't know why I thought I would get good Mexican food in Maryland! There is a bike shop called Wheelzup right at the start of the C&O trail. Very helpful and I bought a new rear tire to replace my really old one just to be sure I wouldn't have problems. They also sell fuel and dehydrated food.

We camped at YMCA with showers for \$15 each. Generally can't check in until after 6pm, But on Saturdays must check in earlier because they close at 5pm.

Sun 22 - Cumberland to Little Orleans MD - 44 miles

Dinner at Bill's Bar, got there just in time as he was closing the kitchen at 6pm and wasn't going to be open again for a few days. They DO NOT offer a tap for water bottles, but you can buy gallons of water. They also have some other basic grocery supplies.

Ridge Rider Campground Phone: 301-478-2325 Email: ridgerider@roadville.com
31661 Green Forest Dr, Little Orleans, MD 21766

Campground has nice showers and laundry and a small store with some food and campground supplies. Open all year. It is a very steep climb up to the campground after an initial descent from Bill's Bar. **\$12 per tent primitive site.** This was our only night below freezing - the heavy dew froze into small ice balls on my tent.

The Western Maryland Rail Trail path starts right by Bill's and parallels the canal on the opposite side from the C&O trail. It is paved for 26 miles except for a very brief section that shares the C&O right after Little Orleans because of a closure of the bat tunnel. We rode the WMRT because we were having problems with one of the bike's rear racks and wanted a smoother ride to Hancock for repairs. We continued on the trail to Big Pool and refilled our water bottles at a spigot on the way into the state park. Bring zipties, gorilla tape and extra hardware for repairs!

Mon 23 - Little Orleans to McCoys Ferry Campground - 37 miles

Stopped at Hancock on the way for Bike repairs and to eat lunch and replenish supplies. (BTW - Weaver's pies in Hancock has closed). Prices started getting more expensive for restaurants here to the end, compared to Pennsylvania which was really inexpensive.

Camped at McCoys Ferry Campground. \$5 per person plus a \$6.50 fee and yes the National Park ranger does come around to check. Book on-line - descent cell service in parts of the park. The ranger also warned us about a fugitive on the loose who had just murdered a judge.

There was a free biker campground about a mile further, but it did not have much level space for tents nor would it have sunshine in the morning, which is important because of the cold weather and heavy dew. McCoys has pit toilets and also a boat ramp. Other than one sprinter van, we had the place to ourselves and found enough left over firewood laying near the other fire pits to build a nice fire. Tip: check other fire pits for half burned logs - they are great for a new fire. Also try to find a spot that will have sunshine in the morning.

Tues 24 -McCoys Ferry Campground to Harpers Ferry WV - 55 miles

The section of trail here has a couple miles of paved trail right along the Potomac river. An amazing section! The Potomac was totally still for 2 full days, offering amazing reflections in the water.

We stayed at the KOA near Harpers Ferry which was at the top of a very long and steep climb. I did 32mph coming down the next day, which got a little wobbly because my front end was light. The KOA had great showers and in the summers has \$1 pancake breakfast. They have a well stocked store and all the amenities you would expect from a KOA. There is a short walk to a descent restaurant and also a breakfast/ice cream spot via a steep path through a gully.

Note that to get to Harpers Ferry you need to carry your bike up a spiral staircase to the bridge to cross the river.

Wed 25 - Harpers Ferry WV to Lock House 22 - 47 miles

We rented one of the Canal Lock Houses for \$110 a night. It had four uncomfortable beds. But still an upgrade from tent camping. It had a firepit in the rear and wood. No electricity and NO water nearby. We caught some water flowing from the small stream going from the canal into the Potomac and boiled it. The parking lot nearby has a porta potty. The road down to the parking lot has homes if there is a real emergency. There is also a mountain bike trail system shortly up the road from the parking lot.

Thur 26 - Lock House 22 to Mile Zero in DC - 22 miles.

It is very easy to lose the canal trail as you get into DC because of a few other trails that also follow the Potomac. You also start encountering more locals on the trail and they got grumpier the closer we got to D.C.

The canal trail seems to stop at the end of some red brick pathway, and lock #1, but there is one more lock called "Tide Lock" and is lock #0, which is to the west. Follow the paved path/sidewalk along the road and past a bridge and then turn into a parking lot, go through that, around a row boat business and find "tide lock" and the mile zero marker. We took pictures and then went to the Watergate Hotel for an expensive but tasty lunch. From there we got back on the trail that heads to the Capital mall and look around. The Amtrak station is not far behind the Capital building. Pay \$20 in advance reserve a spot on the train to have your bike shipped unboxed (and not needing to take it apart) or pay \$15 for a bike box and take off your pedals and turn your handle bars sideways. One of our bikes had pedals that would not come off (we needed a bigger wrench for more leverage), so we stuffed the bike in the box with the pedals still on. The box was bulging but it worked out okay. We reassembled our bikes at the train station in Pittsburg at Midnight and left the boxes with an Amtrak employee.

Since we arrived at DC a day ahead of schedule, we had to rebook Amtrak. There were change fees. The train ride back to Pittsburgh was really nice. We were so hungry we bought a lot of microwaved food in the diner car. Better to bring some of your own food on board!

Fri 27 - Downtown Pittsburgh to Airport - 17 miles.

Ate a big breakfast for free at the Drury Inn.

Bicycled the roads from the Drury Inn downtown to La Quinta Inn by the airport. Ate some great BBQ at a church fundraiser that we happened to ride by. It was a black church and black neighborhood and yes four white folks on touring bikes stood out and got lots of questions in this very friendly neighborhood. It was a real cherry on top of a great trip.

The ride from downtown Pittsburgh to the airport was our biggest and longest hill of our entire ride on the way up from the river to La Quinta - a real butt kicker! Overall the ride mapped out by google maps was safe but there was not always a shoulder. Be sure to ride the sidewalks going over the bridges. DO NOT ride in traffic on the bridges, regardless of the Shared Lane Markers (SLMs).

Sat 28 - Pittsburgh to Arizona - Fly home.

free shuttle from LaQuinta to Pittsburgh airport. American Airlines tried to charge me \$150 to take my bike even though they flew it out for free. The local Pittsburgh employees were determined to collect some money from me even though the American representative on the phone told them it should be free. In the end I had to pay them \$100, which American Airlines later agreed to refund. My bike and bike bag weighed 62 pounds which normally incurs an overweight fee, except when overweight fees are waived because the customer has platinum pro status with American, in which case the customer gets three bags up to 70 pounds.

Also I had to change planes and terminals in DFW which was experiencing heavy rain. Some rain got into my Thule bike bag but not much. However my semi-waterproof duffle bag with all my clothes and gear got soaked inside. It was okay since I was home and could dry it, but this would have been a problem on the out-bound trip. I recommend finding a very waterproof large duffle bag for all your gear.

Note that it is possible to ride the Montour trail from the Pittsburgh Airport and pick up the GAP trail in McKeesport after about 46 miles of riding and thus miss the first 16 miles of the GAP trail, but I have not tried this.

I'm glad I brought a good gore-tex rain jacket with a hood. It did rain significantly one day, but we escaped a lot of the downpour while eating lunch. Besides rain protection, the jacket was a good wind-breaker layer.

I'm glad I had a rear bike rack that had a built in fender instead of open bars. It significantly helps the tent I had on top not get drenched when riding through puddles. Plus when my gear is off the bike it blocks the water from hitting me.

I road a Surly Straggler, but something like a Surly Disc Trucker geometry would be better. However, I think drop bars were not all that useful, I very rarely got into the drops. I would use flat bars with bar ends or butterfly bars or similar if I had a choice. Also glad I used Flat pedals.