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# WILLIAMSBURG

by **BRENDA RUBY** *bruby@verizon.net*

# VIRGINIA'S HISTORIC TRIANGLE

Living in an area where our local news IS the national news and where historical settings are the backdrop of our everyday lives, it's easy to become immune, even jaded, about the significance of where we live. (Case and point, Mt. Vernon isn't just a water stop and turn-around point on a bike ride). We forget. And perhaps this is a good thing, lest we become immobilized by an awareness of the grandness of it all, but making a conscious effort every now and then is a worthwhile exercise, particularly when we can so easily pedal through a living history lesson called Williamsburg.



**WHILE IT'S TRUE THAT EVERYWHERE** you look you'll find history, Williamsburg and the adjacent Jamestown and Yorktown make up what's called "the Historic Triangle," and do history in a way that learning about it (or remembering it) is entertaining and practically incidental. Its residents and businesses know this and have created a particularly hospitable environment for two-wheeled visitors. From their wide roads and bike lanes that don't suddenly disappear to their well-groomed bike trails, making the area bike-friendly has been a decades-long goal which pays dividends in the effortless riding.

Reed Nester, planning director for Williamsburg, told SPOKES that in 1992 Williamsburg, James City County, and York County banded together and adopted a regional plan to improve and create more bicycling opportunities in the area. To date, there's over 50 miles of bicycle facilities, be it lanes or paths, in the greater Williamsburg area.

Nancy Carter, president of the Williamsburg Area Bicyclists says that Williamsburg as a city has embraced the bike lane concept, noting that it comes down to great planning. "The planners set forth this

goal and it's backed by the local governments."

Indeed, the combination of history-made-fun and easy riding makes a Williamsburg weekend ideal for bikers of all abilities while still being quite suitable for families with young or inexperienced riders. Carter, a former resident of Howard County, Maryland, is familiar with suburban sprawl and how it can curtail not only biking opportunities but safety as well. With the James River on one side and the York River on the other, she notes "we're a small town on a peninsula, not swamped with traffic and the development pressure isn't nearly as much which means traffic is much less of a burden or obstacle."

Likewise, Ted Moreland, the club's vice president says, "I can go out of my driveway and, in a matter of minutes, be out in the country on lightly traveled country roads. I don't have to drive anywhere to enjoy great biking. While we don't have mountains, we do have rolling terrain with the occasional ravine created by a creek that bed make things a little more interesting. You don't have to go far to find water; there's an abundance of rivers, streams, and reservoirs within a few miles."



My experience came courtesy of the Potomac Pedalers Touring Club's Williamsburg bike weekend and our cues came from the extremely hospitable Williamsburg Area Bicyclists (WAB) club. Planning a similar trip is easily accomplished, especially with help from the updated Williamsburg Area Bike Rides book available through the club's website, the "Williamsburg Biking Trails" brochure made available by the Chamber of Commerce, and the new "Bicycling in Virginia" brochure which is the state's first official map dedicated to biking. In addition, local bike shops Conte's and Bike Beat both have routes available online. (See end of article for all website addresses and contact information.)

The obvious choice is to start your trip by taking in the sites of Colonial Williamsburg, a living breathing community where you can experience life as it was in the 18th century from farmers working fields and craftspeople practicing trades to watching a young government in action.

Stay at a hotel nearby (we stayed at the Patrick Henry Inn) and you'll have a quick ride into the Colonial area and Merchant's Square. Pick up a map from the Visitor's Center just outside the historic area or inside at the information booths on South Henry or Duke of Gloucester Streets and you'll know what historic buildings you're seeing.

In order to enter the buildings you'll need to purchase a ticket (\$36 for adults; \$18 for youths), but that's not necessary for pedaling through or stopping to shop or eat. Worth the price though, a ticket will gain you entrance to dozens of reconstructed and restored buildings like the Capitol and Courthouse, museums like the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, and trade shops such as the bookbindery and blacksmith.



Wonder what someone from the 18th century would think of our lycra getups? Ask one of the roaming “costumed interpreters”—you’ll see housewives and gentry, soldiers and slaves, artisans and future presidents.

Those costumed people? You’ll see some of them whether you pay or not so if you don’t have a lot of time or don’t really care for seeing building interiors, you’ll still get the Colonial Williamsburg ambience with a leisurely pedal through town. Even more so if you pick up some great snacks from The Cheese Shop in Merchant Square. Sample a few of their 200 cheeses before deciding on one, get some of their freshly baked bread, pair it with a glass of wine (or bottle), and sit on their patio for a pre- or post-ride treat. Their sandwiches are a draw for present and even former William & Mary students, as I learned from two alumni who were going out of their way to stop in for their favorite.

Wanting heartier fare you’ll find plenty of restaurant options, from 18th century dining at one of the taverns in the historic area to modern fare. Dining outside one evening at Berret’s Grill, located off of Merchant’s Square, was another relaxed moment and highlight.

Stay overnight and you’ll have the opportunity to catch the Ghosts of Williamsburg tour, available every

night at 8 p.m. You might think it’s cheesy but it sure is fun and all those flickering candle lights in the historic area make it easier to transport yourself into the right frame of mind. For a mere \$11 you’ll get eerie stories, a bit of folklore, and a few fun facts to tuck away. Entertaining and knowledgeable guides answer questions and steer the tour in the direction of the group’s interests. Our guide gave us an interesting history lesson about Williamsburg during the Civil War and the role the Rockefeller’s had in restoring the historic area to its former glory after it had fallen into dilapidated conditions by the 1920s. Williamsburg was not only a leading force during the Revolutionary era, but also a leader in civil issues thanks to Rockefeller’s demand of equal schooling and housing for black residents and employees.

Before heading out, complete your tour of Williamsburg’s historic area with a swoop through the College of William & Mary located across from Merchant Square on the Western edge; it’s the second oldest college in the country and the alma matter of Thomas Jefferson. The route I took, the Williamsburg Area Bicyclist’s “Three Pond Cruise” cue took us past the college, through neighborhoods and up to the Waller Mill Trail, a paved and wooded trail through Waller Mill Park and pond.

You won’t get very far without coming upon the Colonial Parkway. Dubbed “America’s Historic Highway,” its 23-mile route cuts right through Williamsburg, connecting the Historic Triangle and the entire 167 years of Colonial experience in America—from the first permanent English Settlement at Jamestown, through Virginia’s first capitol of Williamsburg, to Yorktown, the site of the last and deciding battle of the Revolutionary War. It’s an easy, map-free solution to getting up and out quickly on the bike and offers dramatic open vistas of rivers as well as shady passageways through pine and hardwood forests. It’s wide, lightly traveled, and seems to be patrolled often. (Note: Park Police will give you a gentle first warning to ride single file; take them seriously and fall in line.) The ease and beauty does come with a few perils however—while there is no loose gravel, its surface of paved stone proves to be rather bumpy for thin-tired bikes whose wheels can also get stuck in the connecting groove if not paying attention. It’s one of the area’s best assets so you should definitely incorporate it into your plans, but less-experienced riders should be reminded to be vigilant. Carter, WAB’s president, admits that it can be a little bumpy

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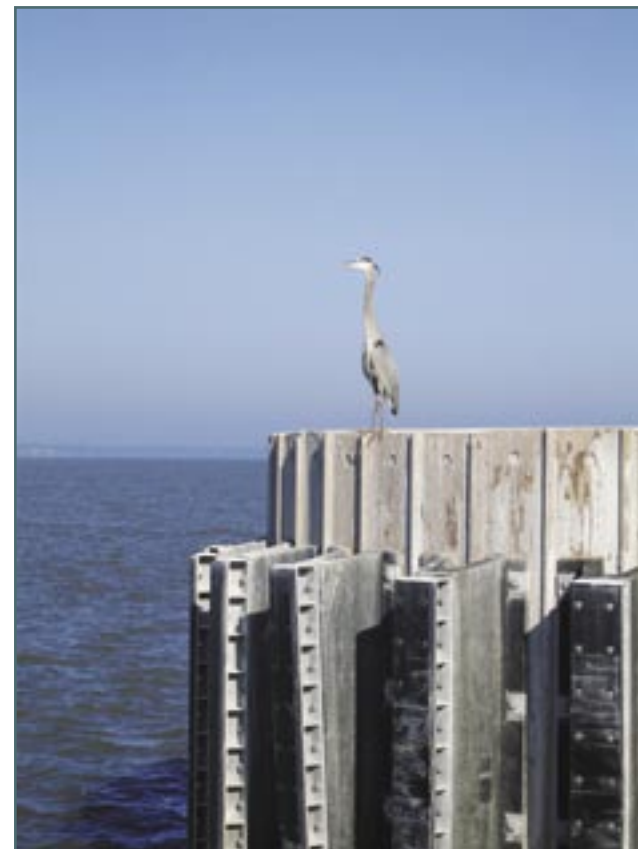
Cockeysville

but it doesn't deter her. "The scenery is so beautiful. Visually it's very lush with all the flora and fauna."

Something to put on your calendar, bikers can experience the Colonial Parkway car-free the first Saturday every May when the National Park Service closes it off to motor vehicles between Williamsburg and Jamestown. Says Mooreland, "This is a great way for families to bike together in a safe and scenic environment." An added bonus for younger riders is the Bicycle Skills Rodeo.

Bike east on the Parkway from Williamsburg 14 miles and you'll come upon Yorktown which represents the end of the English Colonial period in North America. There you can follow the Battlefield and Allied Encampment Tour route, biking through battlefields, the French encampment, and Washington's headquarters. Traffic is light, slow, and one-way. Many cyclists bike the tour roads without a pass, but a \$10 pass should be purchased from the Visitor Center located at the end of the Colonial Parkway near the waterfront. (The seven-day pass also includes access to Jamestown Island at the other end of the Parkway.) Again, costumed historical interpreters recreate a Continental Army encampment and a 1780s farm. Before or after, be sure to spend some time on Yorktown's Main Street enjoying the waterfront.

At the western end of the Colonial Parkway, nine miles from Williamsburg, is Historic Jamestown, site of the first successful English settlement. Your pass from above gives you access to Jamestown Island and ongoing archeological digs at the original fort built by settlers in 1607. Before crossing onto or right after crossing from the island, the route also passes by the Glasshouse where you can watch a demonstration of one of our first industries.



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An easy seven-mile loop passes past these and through woods and marshes. "The wonderful flat terrain allowed us to take in the birding treasures on this little gem of an island" raved Ziva Schuchman who recently rode the loop. She adds that, "the 'island' is a bike riding bird watcher's paradise! We stopped by a marsh to watch swallows catching insects in mid-air, gorgeous red-wing black birds feeding on the rushes, and nearby we saw frisky gold finches and a beautiful, uncommon indigo bunting."

Get off the bikes, take a little more time, and buy a pass to Jamestown Settlement and you'll have access to a recreation of the colonist's fort and the first colony and be able to board replicas of the three ships that sailed from England to Virginia. It should be noted that while passes can be bought for the individual locations from \$10-\$15 and are ideal if only hitting one location, the best deal is to purchase a multi-day pass (costing \$10-\$30) good for use at both the Jamestown Settlement and the Yorktown Victory Center, both of which are run by the Commonwealth of Virginia. (For clarification, the actual Jamestown Island and the Yorktown Battlefield and Visitor Center, along with the Colonial Parkway comprise the Colonial National Historic Park which is covered through that earlier \$10 park pass.)

Another way to Jamestown would be to take the Virginia Capital Trail starting from the Chickahominy Riverfront Park, a 20 minute drive from Williamsburg located on Rt. 5—the John Tyler Memorial Highway. Don't let the word "highway" scare you—the paved trail quickly crosses over this not-too-busy road and in the seven miles it takes to get to Jamestown, you'll wind through wooded areas and cross decked bridges with views of the surrounding pristine wetlands.

This trail is of particular note and one to watch as it will eventually span 54 miles along the scenic Route 5 corridor and connect "Capital to Capital," Williamsburg to Richmond "connecting Virginia's past and present" along one of the first inland routes in North America. It will eventually run past original James River plantations, the homes of Presidents John Tyler and William Henry Harrison, numerous Revolutionary War and Civil War battlefields, through historic Charles City County, and snake along the James River to Richmond's modern waterfront where it will connect to the Canal Walk and the James River Park System. Sections are being worked on simultaneously with several areas due for completion in 2009 and 2010, but the full extent won't be complete until 2012. If the seven miles I rode was any indication, this trail is going to be spectacular.

It is just seven miles from Chickahominy Park to Jamestown but you can easily expand your ride (or start a different ride) by taking the Jamestown Ferry over to Surry County. The half-hour ferry runs regu-

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## WILLIAMSBURG *continued from p.12*

larly and is itself a treat—we were lucky enough to spot eagles on our crossing. Once there you'll have access to the lush farms and rural roads of Surry and Isle of Wright counties, the quaint town of Smithfield, Bacon's Castle, and Chippokes Plantation and State Park. The ferry is free and you can bike as well as drive onto the ferry which means if a long route starting from Williamsburg or Chickahominy Park doesn't suite you, you can easily drive to Chippokes Park and start from there. A favorite route of many area bikers has you starting at that park and lunching in Smithfield.

Smithfield may sound familiar because it's home to Smithfield Hams, but more than that, the town is a terrific place to stop and treat yourself to one of the soft-ball-sized muffins from the bakery or a cool treat from the town's ice cream parlor—conveniently located practically next to each other, you can mull over your decision while you browse through a few antique stores. It's billed as Williamsburg's #1 day trip because of all it has to offer. For instance, a little off the beaten path, you'll find Ivy Hill, a picturesque cemetery which overlooks the Pagan River and dates to 1886; it's located just north of Smithfield (follow Church Street out of town, cross a short bridge over the Pagan River, entrance up the hill and on the left). South of town you'll find historic St. Luke's Church which dates to 1632 and is our nation's only surviving Gothic building. A visit to Fort Boykin, important during the Revolution, rounds out the visit. Wanting more details? Downtown walking tours are available.

"It's so nice that most of our really historic attractions are bikeable," says Williamsburg's Planning Director Nester. Locals know what they've got, are proud to share it, and have an attitude and area embracing to cyclists. Make that 2-3 hour drive down south and this is one history lesson you won't soon forget. A final bit of advice for families comes from Mooreland, "If parents have trouble getting their children excited about coming to Williamsburg and learning about history, they can always dangle Busch Gardens and Water Country as enticements."

### General Resources

Williamsburg Area Bicyclists  
[www.wabonline.org](http://www.wabonline.org)

Williamsburg Area Bike Rides book (\$20.90)  
[www.wabonline.org/book.html](http://www.wabonline.org/book.html)

Historic Triangle Map  
[www.visitwilliamsburg.com/maps-local-info/download.aspx?id=533](http://www.visitwilliamsburg.com/maps-local-info/download.aspx?id=533)

Williamsburg Biking Trails Brochure (Chamber of Commerce)  
[www.williamsburgcc.com](http://www.williamsburgcc.com)

Bicycling in Virginia Brochure  
[www.virginia.org/site/features.asp?FeatureID=352](http://www.virginia.org/site/features.asp?FeatureID=352)

[www.virginia.org](http://www.virginia.org)  
(select Get Outside/General Sports/Biking for specific trail information)

Jamestown Ferry  
[www.virginiadot.org/travel/ferry-jamestown.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/travel/ferry-jamestown.asp)

### Bike Shops

Conte's (757) 565-1225  
[www.contebikes.com](http://www.contebikes.com)

BikeBeat (757) 229-0096  
[www.bikebeatonline.com](http://www.bikebeatonline.com)

Bikes Unlimited (757) 229-4620  
[www.bikewilliamsburg.com](http://www.bikewilliamsburg.com)



### State Parks & Bike Trails

Colonial Parkway  
[www.nps.gov/colo/parkway.htm](http://www.nps.gov/colo/parkway.htm)  
[www.byway.org/explore/byways/60441/stories/61879](http://www.byway.org/explore/byways/60441/stories/61879)

Virginia Capital Trail  
[www.virginiacapitaltrail.org](http://www.virginiacapitaltrail.org)

Chickahominy Riverfront Park  
[www.jccegov.com/recreation/parks-trails/chickahominy-park.html](http://www.jccegov.com/recreation/parks-trails/chickahominy-park.html)

Chippokes Plantation State Park  
[www.dcr.virginia.gov/state\\_parks/chi.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/chi.shtml)

### Things to Do / Places to Visit

Colonial Williamsburg  
[www.history.org](http://www.history.org)

Jamestown Settlement  
[www.historyisfun.org](http://www.historyisfun.org)

Historic Yorktown  
[www.yorkcounty.gov/tourism](http://www.yorkcounty.gov/tourism)

Surry County  
[www.toursurryva.com](http://www.toursurryva.com)

Smithfield  
[www.visitsmithfieldisleofwight.com](http://www.visitsmithfieldisleofwight.com)

Williamsburg Winery  
[www.williamsburgwinery.com](http://www.williamsburgwinery.com)

Berkley Plantation  
[www.berkeleyplantation.com](http://www.berkeleyplantation.com)

The Ghost Tour  
[www.theghosttour.com](http://www.theghosttour.com)



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