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Bike trails abound in Southwest Florida

Looking for a little outdoors activity? You can get on your bicycle nearly anywhere in Southwest Florida to get fit, enjoy the scenery and have an adventure.

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Cyclists race in the amateur division Nov. 18 during the Florida State Championship & Coconut Cup Series at Caloosahatchee Regional Park in Alva. / Crystal Schupp, special to news-press.com



Written by

[Laura Ruane](#)

Now's a great time to go bicycling in Southwest Florida, and with late fall and winter's more comfortable climate, you don't have to be a hardcore athlete to pedal a few miles or more.

Although cycling advocates yearn for more connecting bike lanes and paths, options for pedalers of all ages already exist.

“I hear about people trucking their bikes to north Florida,” says Bert Hamilton, “and I ask, ‘Have you ever biked locally?’”

Hamilton, 61-year-old president of south Fort Myers-based Harvey Software, cycles a lot in Lee County for fitness, for stress-busting — and for wildlife-watching.

Riding late at night or before dawn along the Ben C. Pratt/Six Mile Cypress bike path, “I’ve seen deer, wild pigs. It’s amazing,” Hamilton says. He says alligators, otters, birds, fish and turtles are best seen at John Yarbrough Linear Park Trail and North Colonial Linear Trail early in the morning.

Lee County

Starting this fall in Fort Myers, new signs alert cyclists into Lee Tour de Parks: It’s a marked route with 35 miles of paved, shared-use paths leading to eight parks, nature preserves and other recreational spots.

Key components include Lakes Regional Park with its own bike-friendly trail network and Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve. The latter isn’t open to bike traffic but sports a few miles of pedestrian-pleasing boardwalks, a visitor center, picnic facilities and a decent amount of bike racks.

Just outside the slough entrance is the paved path along Ben C. Pratt/Six Mile Cypress Parkway leading to other links such as the 10-mile-long John Yarbrough Linear Park and North Colonial Linear Park. The latter spills out near the entrance to Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium.

Reasonably sturdy adults can ride the entire Tour de Parks network. There are some stretches, though, that folks with younger children might want to skip. Taking the Six Mile Cypress shared-use path to Lakes Regional Park, for example, requires crossing six-lane U.S. 41. Even using the signaled pedestrian crosswalk, this experience is not for the faint of heart.

Sanibel Island also gets high marks for well-kept bike paths cover 22 miles taking pedalers to dining, shopping, residential neighborhoods and Gulf access points.

Less known perhaps, are cycling options on Pine Island. Riders may park at Phillips Park at Pine Island Center, and follow a paved path south to Saint James City or north to Bokeelia. As the name implies, shared paths also attract joggers, walkers, skate-boarders and such.

Collier County

Marco Island has about 25 miles of roadways with either bike lanes or multiuse concrete walks, said Matthew Walthour, owner of Island Bike Shop. He recommends The Estate area along

North Barfield. It has a few baby hills and boasts one of the region's highest spots: some 36 feet above sea level.

Show photo ID, and the Key Marco gated community will accommodate cyclists. The roads are serene, with marshland that's great for wildlife-watching, according to Walthour.

As for Naples, Pathways Coalition volunteer Deborah McCormick says, "If I had children, I would consider staying on sidewalks in the busy areas."

Grown-ups will take nicely to Gulfshore Boulevard and Gordon Drive bike lanes. "Take side streets into Third Street and Fifth Avenue shopping areas for great ice cream and coffee stops," McCormick says. She calls the Pelican Bay community "completely wonderful to ride."



This is one of the many scenic bicycle and equestrian trails located Caloosahatchee Regional Park in Alva. / Crystal Schupp, special to news-press.com

Here's a sampling of cycling opportunities you might enjoy:

Biking best bets

For shade-lovers

- Sanibel Island bike path, along Periwinkle Way. Leafy canopies are most noticeable from the Donax to Main Street intersection and from Dunlop Road west to Palm Ridge Road.
- The sidewalk along west side of McGregor Boulevard, Fort Myers gets a workout from walkers, joggers and cyclists. Lightly traveled streets west of McGregor also have some nice tree canopies, making for a cooler ride.
- Bird Rookery Swamp: 1295 Shady Hollow Blvd. West, off Immokalee Road east of Naples. Twelve miles of hiking and biking trails, including an 1,800-foot boardwalk. Go in the dry season. Great for wildlife-watching, but fair warning: The unpaved, grassy trail makes for slow cycling.

For the very young pedaler

- Lakes Park, 7330 Gladiolus Drive, south Fort Myers. The 279-acre park has about 2.5 miles of paved or dirt trails. Bring your own bike or rent from an on-site concessionaire. Canoes, kayaks and pedal-boats also available for rent. An imaginative playground, water play areas and a miniature railroad and museum are other pluses.
- Freedom Park, 1515 Golden Gate Parkway, North Naples. The 50-acre park includes about 3,500 feet of boardwalk and a five-acre lake.

For unpaved adventure

- North side of Caloosahatchee Regional Park, 18251 N. River Road, Alva. More than 20 miles of trails, a mix of single-track for the hard-core mountain bikers and wider paths that casual cyclists, hikers and horseback riders frequent.
- Jane's Memorial Scenic Drive in the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve. This 11-mile, old logging road (County Road 837) begins one mile west of State Road 29 in Copeland, and includes a 2-mile, dirt spur road called a "tram." Both roads get rave reviews for wildlife and subtropical plants.

For scenery

- Gasparilla Island-Boca Grande Trail, Gasparilla Island, County Road 771, south of Placida. The former railroad trail is just over 6 miles long, but leads to beaches, shops, restaurants and galleries, the Boca Grande Lighthouse Museum and Gasparilla State Park. And did we mention the iguanas? Golf carts and bicycles outnumber cars. Be prepared to pay a \$6 toll for the island causeway. Although Boca Grande is part of Lee County, it's more than an hour by car from Fort Myers.
- Wildlife Drive, J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island. From the refuge Education Center, it is an 8 mile loop, returning on the main bike path along Sanibel-Captiva Road, or a 4 mile loop along Wildlife Drive returning along the refuge's Indigo Trail. It costs \$1 per biker, with children under age 15 free. Along the trail, visitors often spot alligators, night herons and white ibis.

Sources: Reporter Laura Ruane and other area cyclists



Denise and David Parsons of Toronto ride the bike trails of Sanibel Island. / Andrew West/news-press.com
