



Heart-to-Heart

HEARTCYCLE BICYCLE TOURING CLUB

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President's Spin

By HeartCycle President
Mark Lestikow

HeartCycle celebrates another outstanding year—with 2026 tours already filling fast! Our Annual HeartCycle Luncheon on Saturday, October 18th, was a great success! We had a lively crowd of members sharing stories, reconnecting with old friends, and celebrating another fantastic year of cycling adventures together. It's always inspiring to see how much energy and camaraderie this club continues to generate—both on and off the bike.

During the luncheon, I shared a few highlights from our 2025 season, and I'd like to recap them here for those who couldn't attend:

Club Highlights – 2025

- We continue to have excellent member participation—our 2025 tours ran at 93% capacity, hosting 298 riders!
- We welcomed 70 new members, many of whom have already renewed for 2026.
- To help attract younger riders, we launched our first “NextGen” tour in Steamboat, encouraging two generations of riders to sign up

together. It was such a success that we're adding a 16th tour in 2026 ([San Juans: Durango & Silverton, CO](#)) with the same focus. It's important to note that all members can register for this ride!

- We also added a new tour leader from my son, Greg's generation, who rode the Steamboat ride and will help Greg lead the 2026 NextGen tour. This generational crossover is sparking fresh ideas—including optional gravel routes—which were a big hit with riders of all ages. Thank you, **Matt Seiler**, for stepping up!

- Our members continue to ride safely and responsibly. We had no incident reports in 2025.

- HeartCycle remains fiscally strong. As a nonprofit, we aim to run tours to break even while maintaining a healthy reserve fund, which allowed us to purchase a new Sprinter van in 2024 and weather the challenges of COVID when other clubs did not survive.

- And a big thank you to **Cody Ensanian** for the revitalized monthly newsletter, which has been a great upgrade in both quality and content. Cody has also agreed to serve on the board!



I would like to give a shout-out to **Scott MacCormack**, who is coming off the board. Scott served admirably as webmaster and as a tour leader. He has agreed to stay on as a working member to help with special projects.

It's been a remarkable year for HeartCycle—full of beautiful rides, safe miles, and a shared passion for cycling that keeps our community rolling strong. Clearly, our members are excited about what's ahead,

and our tour leaders continue to deliver the high-quality cycling experiences that make HeartCycle special. Thank you to every rider, volunteer, and tour leader who makes this club what it is.

Here's to finishing the year strong—and to another incredible season ahead in 2026!

Ride safe and stay strong,
Mark Lestikow



From the Tour Director's Saddle

By HeartCycle Tour
Director Janet Slate

In case you missed the HeartCycle annual meeting and luncheon, here's a summary of my report to those assembled: As your new tour director (1 year into the position), I want to thank former tour director, Judy Siel (who was unable to attend the luncheon), for her ongoing (truly invaluable!) efforts to help me, serving as assistant tour director, in a working member role. I honestly could not do this job without her. I've learned a lot over the past year, but please be patient with me as I continue to learn the ropes.

We have 16 tours on the 2026 calendar, which is more than we've had in the last 5 years, amounting to about 20% more tour days! We are so pleased to have five new tour leaders for 2026. We're offering some smaller, more intimate tours in three national parks as well as some tours that offer options in addition to riding. We hope that one or more of these tours interests you because we wouldn't be where we are as a club without you—our members!

The first batch of tours opened on October 25th, and the second batch opened on November 1st. Some are full (waitlists are available), but several have space for you and your friends! In particular, I want to draw your attention to three tours:

1) [Vietnam](#) - February 24 (meetup), 25–March 13, from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi (14 days riding and rest days as well as 2 days on a small luxury cruise ship). The accommodations are mostly rated as deluxe (equivalent to U.S. 4-star hotels), with one rated as premium (5 star) and two as superior (3 star). Fully supported by guides and bike mechanics; bicycles are included, e-bikes are an additional \$270. All breakfasts are included as well as 14 lunches and 13



dinners on this 18-day tour. We have 7 openings on this intermediate-level tour. \$4,000 double occupancy; single supplement +\$700. Review the tour description for more information and contact the tour coordinator if you have any questions. See the article in the [Sept newsletter](#).

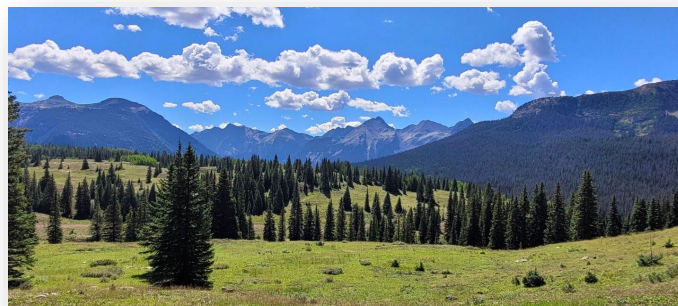
2) [Katy Trail](#) – May 26 (meetup), 27–June 6, from Kansas City, MO, to St Louis, MO (10 days riding including 2 rest days). Last run by HeartCycle in 2012, the Katy Trail is the longest rails-to-trails route in the U.S.,



through the heart of Missouri, and is officially designated as a segment of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. The crushed limestone surface is easily navigable; 28-mm tires or wider are recommended. The start date was set to try to capture the best weather. Expect lush greenery as the route winds through forests, wetlands, valleys, prairies, and farmland on this intermediate-level tour. Layover towns (or whistlestops)—where days off will be taken—are known for their wines, cafes, museums, and small-town hospitality. Quaint towns, steeped in railroad history, cater to Trail visitors. We'll visit the capital of Missouri, Jefferson City, with its vibrant downtown, numerous parks and nature centers, and a unique blend of historic and modern attractions.

Accommodations on the tour are mid-range (3 star) as well as a couple of historic railway houses. A comparison with another bicycle touring group found that their tour is 4 days shorter than ours, has no support (you must carry your belongings in panniers), accommodations are likely lower quality than ours, and their tour costs \$850 more! Review the tour description for more information and contact the tour leaders if you have any questions.

3) [NextGen San Juans: Durango and Silverton, Colorado](#) – June 15 (meetup), 16–20, semi-fixed base with 3 nights in Durango, 1 in Silverton, and a final night in Durango included in the tour price. Because of the success of the 2025 Steamboat Springs NextGen tour, our enthusiastic NextGen crew wanted to keep the momentum going by offering this tour. You don't have to be NextGen to register though! All are welcome. Spend a couple days riding in the Durango area before you tackle the ride up to Silverton; ride up Red Mountain Pass the next day, explore Silverton, and return to Durango by train! If you've never taken the narrow gauge, this is your opportunity to enjoy the train ride on the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railway from Silverton back to Durango in first class! Review the tour description for more information and contact the tour leaders if you have any questions.





Acadia: Rocky Coastal Maine

Cycling, Ferries & Lobsters

By HeartCycle Member Barbara Klein



When did the Acadia HeartCycle tour really begin?

- A) In 2023 when the illustrious Tour Leader, in this case Patty Menz, casually mentions she's planning a tour to Maine? My brain screamed "Yes!!! Lobster!!!"
- B) When every ride you do during 2025 is a "training" ride?
- C) The morning after the Orientation Meeting, when the riders have their helmets and lobster bibs on ready for the first day of riding?

Bar Harbor North Ride (Day 1)

So much for training, clocking in at 59.9 miles, this was my longest ride of the year so far. And for the longest ride of the year, it sure wasn't boring. I didn't stop to take pictures because the most scenic coastal views suddenly appeared on a breezy downhill. My brain was conflicted between stopping to take the picture vs. enjoying the ride/downhill at 15+ mph. For me, the ride won almost every time. Fortunately, for those that don't bother to read tour write-ups we had many photographers on the trip that did want to stop, especially Bill Buckley (THANK YOU)!

Before I knew it, 25 miles flew by, and we were indulging in the first of Kathleen Schindler's and Mayoma Pendergast's rest stops. The group was living the good life wiping out the week's supply of peanut M&M's in less than 2 days. Another 5 miles down the road, right onto Raccoon Cove and we found ourselves at Marlboro Beach. What struck me was the litter... lobster litter. The raccoons are living the good life too!

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention we biked on Maine 3W for 7.3 miles—the same road we drove into Bar Harbor on. Let's just say it is a BUSY road and I'm from New Jersey, so I feel I know busy. What made this more



challenging was how wide the vehicles were: 18-wheelers, RVs, RVs towing SUVs, and then there were the dump trucks. I have never done a ride anywhere where so many dump trucks passed me on my bike. It wasn't just Route 3. Nice quiet roads and rumbling up here come the dump trucks. I felt like I was living in a truck-obsessed toddler fantasy.



Swans Island Adventure (Day 2)

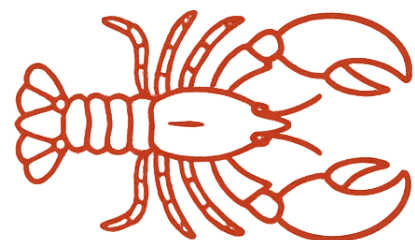
What *didn't* HeartCycle find on Swans Island? Traffic (population 350) or swans! But I jump ahead. It was 17 miles of climbing and downhills out of Bar Harbor to Bass Harbor and the Swans Island Ferry mainly (or *Mainely*) on ME-102. There we boarded the ferry for a 40-minute boat ride to the island. (The ferry trip was six miles; and if anyone knows how to stop *Ride with GPS* from recording the ferry miles, please let me know!)

Curses on the ferry operators for bringing a dump truck over with us. What we did find on Swans Island was interesting low-traffic riding, Burnt Coat Harbor Lighthouse with very friendly and knowledgeable docents that took four cyclists up at a time to the top of the lighthouse, Whoopie Pies (no pictures because we ate them), and a delectable lunch provided by Kathleen and Mayoma overlooking the rugged coastline with light ocean breezes.



All too soon it was time for us to join “rush hour” with the six cars heading to the ferry. Again, I padded my miles with the ferry returning to Bass Harbor. Back on ME-102 with narrow, beat up shoulders (if there were any), I learned it was better to ride the paved, undulating sidewalk, but not too fast otherwise I was slightly airborne. Those same downhills we enjoyed coming out of Bar Harbor were now climbs back to our lodging at the Bar Harbor Villager Motel.





Acadia Park Loop with or without Cadillac Mountain (Day 3)

What a day! HeartCycle heads to Acadia National Park! Thank you John Penick (Patty's co-leader) for another perfect weather day! A quick three miles over residential roads and a left turn into the main entrance of Acadia, HeartCycle has arrived. About half of our group decided to climb the four miles to the Cadillac Summit with an elevation of 1,530 feet—the highest peak on the US eastern seaboard. The sun is beating down on us, my arms are glistening, sweat is dripping down my back, the air is becoming thinner, and granite blocks line the side of the road to prevent runaway bikes from careening over the ledge.

Actually, the climb wasn't bad at all with very consistent 5% grades. The highlight of the summit was not the gift shop at the top but the panoramic views of the jagged coastline, Frenchman Bay, and the Porcupine Islands. The Wabanaki people consider the mountain to be a sacred place. Even with all the tourists scrambling over the pink granite rocks and pathways at the summit, there is majesty and serenity in the view below.



All too soon it was time to descend and see more of the park. The four-mile downhill was quick. My bike was flying down the well-paved road at 25 mph back to Park Loop Road. Why only 25 mph? The speed limit in the park was 25 mph, and I wanted to uphold the standard of HeartCycle as a responsible, law-abiding citizen.





A BIG SHOUT OUT to our National Park Service for designating Park Loop Road one way for most of our journey through Acadia. What a pleasure to have our own lane with the cars using the second lane to go around us. Along Park Loop Road, there are numerous sites to stop and enjoy: Sand Beach, Thunder Hole (at low tide, it's more like Little Burp), Otter Cliff, and Jordan Pond, which disappointingly had a sign saying two-way traffic ahead. There are four gift shops in the park, and **NONE are selling bike jerseys; talk about a missed fundraising opportunity!**



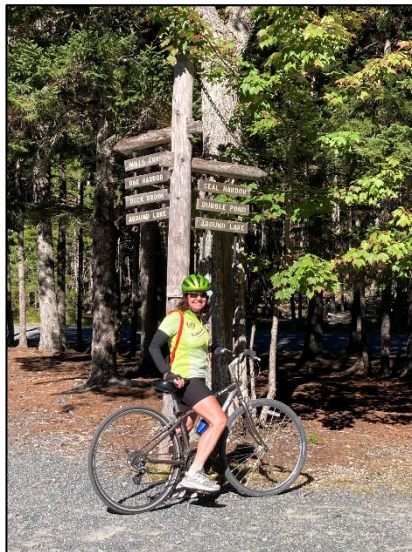
Acadia Carriage "Roads" (Day 4)

Today put capital A's in AcAdia and Adventure! How does that happen? Adventure was HeartCycle members on rented hybrids and sending them out with paper maps! Finding Acadia was no problem, but after arriving in the park we stopped at every intersection to discuss the route. Yes, we did that, but we really didn't need to bother. There was no "wrong" route. Yellow on our paper map was "easier" than orange. Orange meant "longer" gradual climbs, but the downhills were equally long and a little swoopy. The carriage "roads," or really trails, are hard-packed gravel and are very rideable. These carriage paths are really the ONLY way (other than hiking) to see the interior of the park. With 45 miles of carriage roads, we covered less than half of that, but we had panoramic views of Eagle Lake, Jordan Pond, and a close-up of those famous Jordan Pond popovers. Getting really crazy, we supplemented our sack lunches with Jordan Pond House Popover Sundaes, sampling both vanilla and blueberry ice cream.



And is getting a new bike ever really a downer? For Rita Kurelja, the answer was yes because she got a flat and had to hike to Jordan Pond for said new bike. The sadness of the day for all of us was when it was time to leave Acadia and bring our rental bikes back. For me, the Acadia carriage roads were the most scenic, stress-free ride of 2025. A day when your rearview mirror was used ONLY to check on your friends.





Rest Day (Day 5)

HeartCycle does not rest on rest days. We started our day with a Lobster Talk given by Glenn at Acadia Bike. As a lobsterman for 50 years, Glenn knew a lot about lobsters.

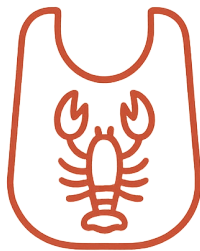
Larry, the lobster, was our model. What did we learn about lobsters? The lobster mafia (it's a real thing), lobster sex (and if this wasn't a PG publication I'd have a lot more to say about this), eating lobster, and more on lobster sex so there's always more lobster to eat!

Some activities after our lobster talk included laundry, shopping (there are lots and lots of gift shops on Main Street in Bar Harbor), walking the Shore Path, yoga, whale watching, and a schooner ride.



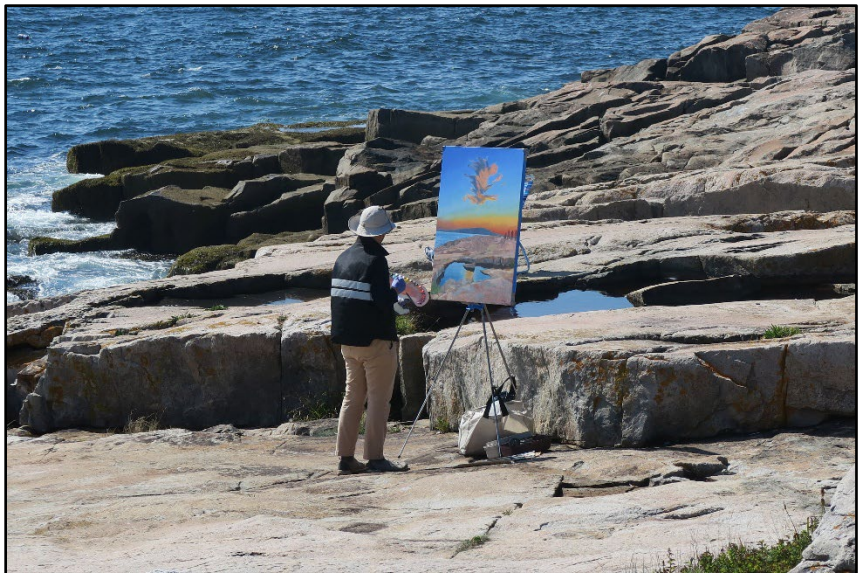
Ferry to Winter Harbor / Schoodic Peninsula (Day 6)

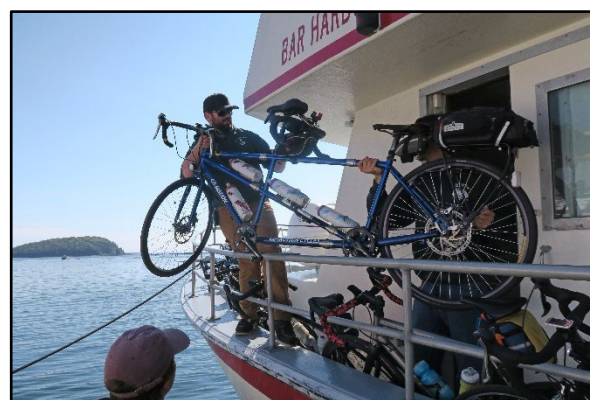
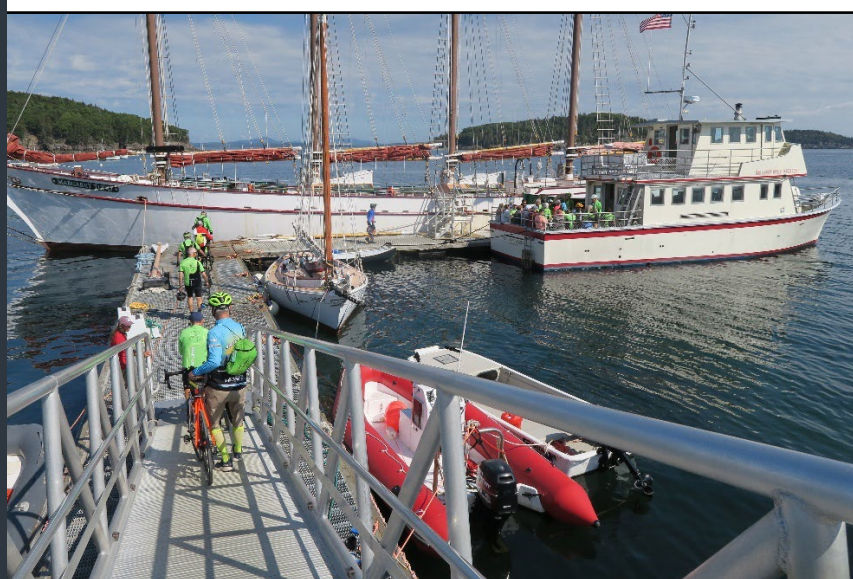
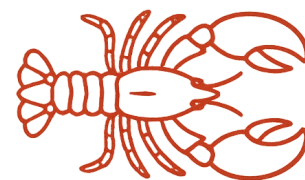
This HeartCycle tour had a little something extra... what could be more appropriate than a lobster bib (or *lobstah* as they say in Maine) to go with our new, green HeartCycle jerseys for our photo op? Then it was onto the ferry, and then a few terrifying seconds watching our bikes go up and over the ferry rails. The crew on the Margaret Todd Schooner were pros taking our bikes up and over the rails four times. E-bikes were not allowed on the small ferry, so Kathleen and Mayoma “ferried” them in the van (an hour drive vs. 45 minutes on the ferry) and met us in Winter Harbor.



Acadia Park controls group sizes, thus HeartCycle broke into two groups once we were in Winter Harbor. Some tackled the big climbs at the beginning of their ride and some at the end. What we all had in common were the stunning ocean views with pink granite boulders tumbling into the ocean, which made it difficult to ride a mile without stopping to take pictures. And, we all were very hungry for the lunch stop!

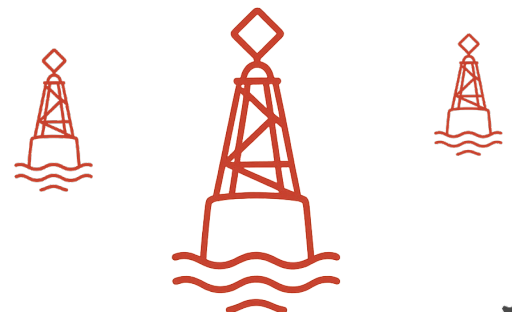
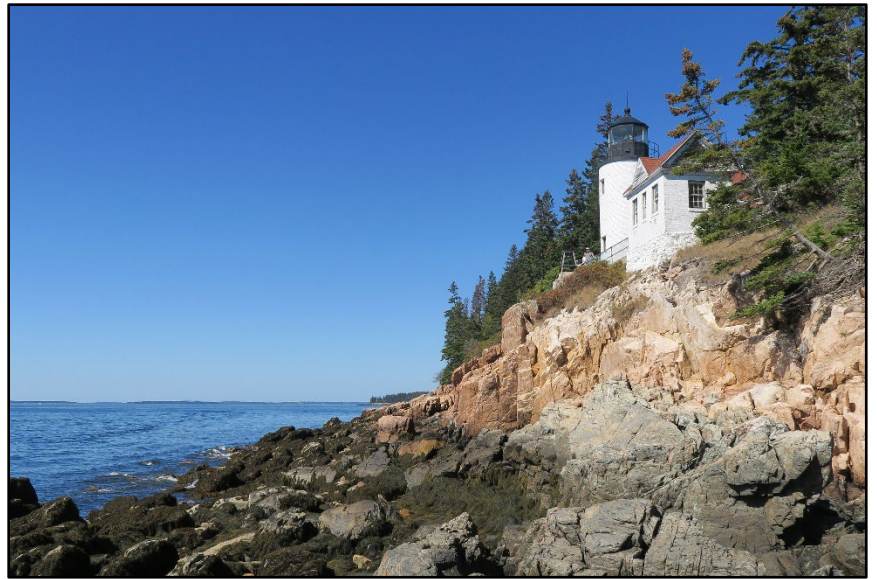
With the sun shining, everyone made it back to the ferry in time for the return trip to Bar Harbor. How were we rewarded? A little rain sprinkled on our HeartCycle parade up Main Street back to the Village Motel. One last Happy Hour and then we enjoyed our group dinner/pizza party followed by blueberry pie for dessert. Blueberries—it’s a Maine thing.





Bass Harbor Loop (Day 7)

Our last day was spent riding around Mount Desert Island. This is the day that Mayoma's and Kathleen's call to EAT goes into overdrive. The first four miles were familiar, hilly terrain, and we traversed more familiar roads (there aren't that many roads in this area to begin with) on our way to the rest stop at the Seawall Picnic area. After a week, we still weren't tired of sitting by the ocean, smelling the briny air, feeling the breeze, and refueling for the next portion of our ride. Lots of rollers on our way to lunch and rural roads lined with spruce and balsam fir trees. Our way back to our home away from home (aka the Bar Harbor Villager Motel) took us through Acadia one last time with some well-graded climbs before the final "coast" into town.





When was this Acadia tour officially over?

- A) When the illustrious Tour Leader, Patty, drags your sorry a\$\$ up a Cadillac Mountain-like climb in New York 13 days before the group even meets in Bar Harbor, ME?
Definitely, possibly, yes!
- B) When the hard-working and ever-cheerful SAGs, Kathleen and Mayoma, empty their pantry and coolers?
- C) When I hug my fellow tour riders and leaders John and Patty good-bye, and cry my salty tears on their brand new 2025 HeartCycle jerseys?

Le Monastere Tour Report

By HeartCycle Member Julie Cepulis



For the last 30+ years, Chris Georgas has been welcoming bikers to Limoux and the amazing cycling adjacent to the Pyrenees in Southern France. Chris, his wife, Fabienne, Isabel, and their warm, capable team once again welcomed 10 HeartCycle riders for an incredible week of fall riding in the Occitanie

region. Tom Kissinger served as ride coordinator and through the week corralled our nine HeartCycle riders. With patience and humor, he kept the group organized and moving forward toward the goal of five full ride days.

Day 1 – Saturday, October 4 BIKE TEST DAY

Distance: 11 miles

Elevation: 360 feet

Terrain: Flat to gently rolling.

Weather: Cool, intermittent sun.



Saturday morning, the participants were transported by the Le Monastere team from Toulouse Airport to their full plan, bed-and-breakfast location in Limoux. Once we arrived, rooms were assigned, introductions made, and house rules were conveyed. Le Monastere is a richly restored convent with five bedrooms (each with its own bathroom), a lovely dining room, sitting room, and bike room (plenty of room to make everyone comfortable).

After settling in, Chris presented riders with their bikes for the week. They were already adjusted for each rider based on metrics Tom had collected during previous weeks. When Chris is not hosting guests at Le Monastere, he is a coach for various bike teams. As a result, he has a stable chockfull of amazing, high-end bikes.

The group then rode out on a quick, “get-to-know-your-bike” ride. Riders tested fit and comfort during an easy pace ride to the neighboring town. The ride destination was an out-and-back journey to the town of St. Polycarpe, which has a lovely abbey that was christened by Charlemagne himself!



Bike modifications were applied once we regrouped back home at Le Monastere. Dinner, catered by a local restaurant, shortly followed. The group ate with gusto and soon after retreated to their rooms. Breakfast was set for 8:00am the following morning.



Day 2 – Sunday, October 5
CATHAR VILLAGE DAY

Distance: 27 miles

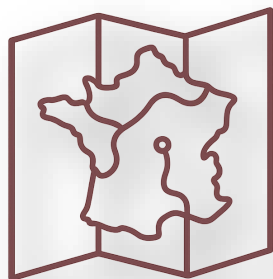
Elevation: 2,129 feet

Terrain: Rolling

Weather: A merry-go-round of chasing the sun, skirting the rain, and gliding with a tailwind. 40s to start, mid 50s-60 for the bulk of the ride.

Wildlife: Kestrels

Chris met us in the breakfast room at 8:30am to discuss the daily route and distribute personal maps. He rises every morning before sunrise to pick the day's route. Based on all the micro-climates around Limoux, Chris finds the right path that matches the group's ability and avoids rain and headwinds. He detailed the route, distance, weather, terrain, and points of interest. Every ride at Le Monastere is a "choose your own adventure" ride with supported sag vans at the numerous road intersections. This system enables the rider to jump into the van and not ride a segment if the rider needs a terrain break, clothing adjustment, weather break, etc. If a rider would prefer a "chose-your-own-adventure" entire ride day off, one is welcome to take the day off.



Some days the selected ride intersects a village where lunch/beverages can be purchased around noon and enjoyed at a cafe. Other days, a cafe does not exist or might be closed, and riders pack their own nutrition into the van for a noon break.

Our first ride was a pack-your-own picnic ride. We loaded the vans with our food, layers of all

possible bike clothing we could conceivably need, along with any anticipated après-ride, dry clothing/shoes.



Welcome to French Paradise

We had a remote launch location from the town of Malves-en-Minervois, a 30-minute drive from Le Monastere. A good omen, in the form of a colorful rainbow, greeted us as we locked in our cleats and embarked on our rolling ride.

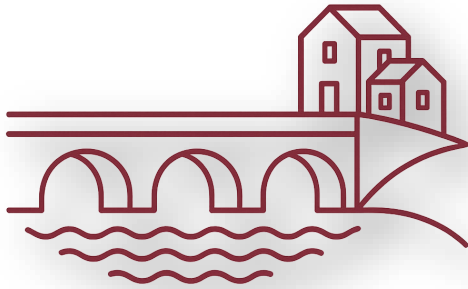
Along the route we passed many fields of previously harvested grapes, which were showing the first signs of yellow and red fall leaf color. We entered and exited a handful of villages under the canopy of symmetrically aligned London Plane trees. Our riding surface was an asphalt lane barely one and a half car-widths wide, framed by limestone rock-stacked walls. It tricked the imagination into believing we were back in time, traveling from small town to small village, along an ancient trading route.

Interestingly, most of the groups that ride with Chris stay together with some distancing based on rider strength and regrouping at various points. Our group bifurcated into tourists and racers. The racers put their heads down and largely—ignoring the beautiful countryside (or so it seemed to me)—hammered from ride start to finish. They were lovingly dubbed the wild horses. My group—more focused on the amazing scenery and history—was dubbed the

slow horses.

Chris modified his management to meet the needs of the group without hesitation. He shifted from a “zone” management approach to a “man-to-man” (or better put “man-to-horse”) defense and did a wonderful job keeping us all on track and safe.

Shortly after noon we arrived in the ancient town of Minerve, clamored into the two vans for warm gear and instantly, heavy rain descended. Rather than an outdoor self-supported picnic lunch, we gobbled our food inside the aluminum walls of the vans. Soon enough the sun reappeared.



Minerve was an important Cathar fortification dating from the 13th century and is presently one of “Les Plus Beaux Villages de France” (a designation given to a small number of particularly beautiful French locations).

The group crossed the high foot bridge to explore the narrow winding stone lanes of town. Some indulged at the crepe shop, others



sipped hot chocolate or tea at the bookstore. All were charmed by the beauty and the depth of time Minerve has housed humans.



Soon enough, Chris and his team transported us back to Le Monastere. The day concluded with a group dinner at the town café (le Grand Café!). We shared restaurant space with the local Limoux Rugger who were celebrating their victory over archrival Toulouse. The rugger provided the boisterous evening entertainment and host Chris arrived at night’s end to pay the bill!

Wildlife sighting: a pair of Kestrels, hovering 20 feet above a harvested field, fluttering their wings, scanning the dirt below.



Day 3 – Monday, October 6
BEACH DAY

Distances:

Wild Horses: 60 miles

Slow Horses: 50 miles

Elevation: 3,176 feet (Slow Horses)

Terrain: Gentle climb, descend; repeat.

Weather: Cool start, warm finish, wind 18mph with gusting 23-38mph. Sunshine.

Wild Horses: Launched from the hotel.

Slow Horses: Launched 10 miles along the route, via van support.

Destination: Leucate-Plage

Wildlife: Snails attached to grass stalks in the fields; hundreds of snails in all directions!

The Fast Horses were chauffeured and supported by Isabel and the Slow Horses by Chris. The majority of the day was spent hill climbing and descending within the French national park system. We had steep, downhill sections and moderate climbing sections and lush views of the green forested country. Traffic was light to nonexistent in the parks.

One unexpected land feature was charred countryside about 8 miles from the coast. We were riding through land that three weeks prior had been scorched by the worst wildfire in 80 years in France. The blackened terrain exposed ancient stone buildings and hundreds of stone-terraced walls, previously camouflaged by dense undergrowth.



Not unexpectedly, we encountered a strong wind as we approached the Mediterranean shore. Windsurfers were ripping across the water as we rode by the inner coastal bay waters. Soon after, the blue sea came into view. Several in the group quickly switched from bike suits to swimsuits and soaked their tired muscles in cool salt water. After an espresso, we mounted the sag vans for a lift back to le Monastere.



We had a true French experience later in the evening when we were treated to a home-cooked dinner in the Limoux countryside. Chris's longtime friend, Patrice, and his wife, Olivia, decorated a long country table with wildflowers collected from the garden. They prepared a meal of chicken terrine, garden-grown tomato salad, duck fat potatoes, oven-roasted heritage chicken, and meringue roulade with fresh fruit. As the wine and conversation flowed, the full moon filled the night sky. The end to a spectacular day!



Day 4 – Tuesday, October 7

MIREPOIX EXPLORATION DAY

Distance: 60 miles

Elevation: 2,933 feet

Terrain: Rolling countryside.

Weather: Cold start, warm finish,
light wind, sunshine.

Wildlife: Great Blue Heron,
fishing in the river, hawks.

Tuesday was a loop ride completed by all. Riders departed from the hotel in their two groups led by Chris. He escorted each group on bike, through Limoux, along a safe route to our launch location.

We had a perfect day riding the magnificent French countryside, passing through ancient villages built with limestone. We enjoyed the many fields planted with grapevines, fields planted with dark brown sunflower plants with their heads directed down toward the soil, fields of miniature untasseled corn, which were later identified as sorghum.

Our two groups reconvened at our lunch destination, the town of Mirepoix. The covered terraces that lined the square in the center of town are built from stone and ancient exposed wood beams. The structures date from the 13th to the 15th centuries. The timber supporting the raised structures rests in places at steep angles, adding to the wonder of how the structures can still be standing in the stunningly preserved town.



A few among us found a charming women's boutique and managed to support retail operations in Mirepoix. Many shops were closed for siesta—our wallets were thankful—a tradition still observed, taking place from about 2:30pm to 4:00pm.

A highlight during the return ride to Limoux was a flock of sheep, following their shepherd (a new age shepherd who was using a cell phone and not carrying a staff). The flock was being driven by two Great Pyrenees dogs and a Border Collie. The sheep managed to commandeer the entire road for $\frac{1}{4}$ mile, stopping the flow of smiling humans, temporarily stilled in their movement in trucks, cars, and on bikes and feet.

When our bike ride concluded back home at Le Monastere, some had weary bottoms and tired legs, but all were revived by dinner, hosted at a neighborhood cafe. Their specialty was mussels, and most of the group indulged in the regional cuisine. We eventually said our good nights—looking forward to Wednesday, our designated “free day” of the week.



Day 6 – Thursday, October 9

LAGRASSE OUT AND BACK DAY

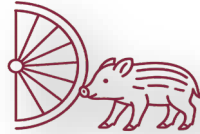
Distance: 65 miles

Elevation: 3,720 feet

Terrain: Rolling countryside with minimal traffic.

Weather: 60s and cloudy, tailwind out and unpleasant headwind on return.

Wildlife: Baby wild boar ran into the lane while bikes were moving slowly and knocked into the front wheel of a rider.



The Wild Horses and the Slow Horses left the barn together at 9am, with the wild horses quickly pulling ahead. The route passed through open rolling farmland and villages, culminating in a magnificent valley descent with 360-degree views. Riders then entered the French national parks and pedaled under dense forest canopies where we experienced little to no car traffic.

The ride ended in Lagrasse, another of the French-designated “Les Plus Beaux Villages de France.”

After enjoying a tailwind for the first 35 miles (to Lagrasse) a headwind challenged riders for the 30-mile return to Le Monastere. The good news was that we returned to Limoux utilizing a more



direct, less hilly route that saved our legs to focus on the breezes that we faced.

We departed early for dinner in the country town of Bugarach, made famous because of the rumors that an alien spaceship was hidden in the mountain bearing the same name adjacent to the town. When the Aztec calendar came to an end, folks flocked to Bugarach hoping to hitch a ride with the aliens as our world came to an end. They were disappointed on both counts.

What did not disappoint was the feast that awaited us. We were treated to an open-fire, spit-turned feast of lamb and chicken at a small inn that felt like it had been built in the Middle Ages. Upon arrival, the table was set with sweet aperitivo wine and salty, mixed pretzels. Appetizers were then paraded to the table: freshly dressed green salad, purple cabbage vinaigrette, shredded carrots, sliced cucumber, crunchy endive salad, wild boar terrine served with pickles, and charcuterie of thick prosciutto and hot plus mild cured sausage. Main dishes then followed: roasted duck gizzards, cumin-finished fennel, purée of butternut squash, pomme frites, peppery plum sauce, fresh bread, red and white wine, ginger and fruit kombucha, and purée of butternut squash.

While none of us were even remotely hungry at the end of the meal, dessert was served. Dessert choices were a tarte citron, an apple tarte, or a chocolate brownie tarte. Each rider departed feeling a little too full with a lot of gratitude for the unique and delicious experience.

Day 7 – Friday, October 10
GORGE AND CLIMB DAY

Distances:

Slow Horses: Finish in Quéribus, 33 miles

Fast Horses: Finish in Limoux, 50 miles

Elevation: 3,400 feet (Slow Horses)

Terrain: Rolling with a big climbs at the end.

Weather: Cool to begin and short-sleeve shirts to finish.

The Wild Horses and the Slow Horses started the ride on the edge of the thermal bath town of Rennes Le Bain. The two groups rode the familiar forested terrain of the national parks. Shortly before the noon break, we came upon the morning highlight, a route section through the famous Gorges de Galamus—a magnificent river-carved chasm, hundreds of feet deep, of geologic importance.

The views defy description. The stone walls tower above the narrow road and, except for a small stone edge, drop precipitously down hundreds of feet to the river below. The road is barely wide enough for one car to pass but periodic turnouts enable traffic to make progress. Chris met us on his bike toward the end of the section and led us through to an unexpectedly intense wind tunnel. He shared a story of his first effort through this gorge years before. The wind hit him so hard at this particular corner that it caused him to flip rear over front tire, when met with the terrific blast of tunneling wind.



After lunch, the groups split toward separate destinations. The Slow Horses rode rolling hills and several long climbs finishing up a long hill to the base of a Cathar castle. To reach the castle grounds, perched precariously on a high peak, required an additional 1-mile climb up a 20% grade. There we were rewarded with the marvelous ruins of the Château de Quéribus. We loaded our bikes on the sag van and spent the afternoon exploring the remains of the fortification, one of the most important and successful Cathar outposts of the Middle Ages.

The Fast Horses piled on some miles and conquered rolling hills as they rode back to Le Monastere.

The final evening, we celebrated our week together and our new friendships. Fabienne prepared an Audé gourmet feast, served in the outdoor courtyard under the wisteria canopy. We were spoiled with her bountiful vegetable salad, perfect roasted duck breast, roasted potatoes, and delicious, fresh-from-the-market

vegetables. It was a seminal meal, perhaps the final gourmet meal to be prepared by Fabienne, for a bike group. She said that she is retiring at the end of this season.



Saturday morning, packed, and fulfilled with a great week of riding, we said our goodbyes and made our way to our next adventures.



HeartCycle Volunteer Member Bios

Each month, we'll shine a spotlight on two of our amazing volunteers—the folks working behind the scenes to keep HeartCycle rolling smoothly!

Janet Slate

Tour Director



Hi, I am Janet Slate and took over the HeartCycle Tour Director position from Judy Siel after the 2024 annual meeting and luncheon. Before that, I served on the HC board as secretary and as a general board member starting in 2021. Thanks to Judy, I became a HeartCycle member in 2010. I've been going on tours every year since 2014 and began leading and coordinating tours starting in 2017.

Since retiring from my work as a geologist with the U.S. Geological Survey at the end of 2021, I've upped my HeartCycle involvement, leading or coordinating at least one tour a year. Having grown up and worked for a time in the Bay Area of California, I am partial to tours in northern California. My specialty in geology (desert landscapes) has also given me a love of deserts. Almost goes without saying that living in Colorado since 1987 and completing 20(!) Ride The Rockies tours, bicycling in Colorado is high on my list of places I like to ride. Friends know, however, if they ask me to go somewhere, I'll almost certainly say yes. So, HeartCycle friends, now that the 2026 tours are scheduled, please let me know where you want to ride in 2027 (or beyond), and we'll try to make it happen!

Thanks, Janet

Jim Bethell

Webmaster



Hi everyone. I am Jim Bethell, currently HeartCycle's Webmaster. I first joined HeartCycle in 1991, 34 years ago. Based in Albany, NY, I started leading tours in the Northeast in 2000. I have also served on the HC board as Safety Coordinator and Club President. Throughout the time I've been involved with the club, I have both led and participated in many tours and I'm looking forward to the same going forward.

My background is in Logistics and Operations Management where I spent most of my career working for one of the major US trucking companies. Retiring after 38 years in the industry, I am now part of a 10-person team making custom titanium bicycles.

Thanks, Jim



Thank you to all who attended
the 2025 Annual Luncheon!



If you want to mark your calendar for next year, the 2026
Annual Meeting and Luncheon will be October 24th, 2026.

//// 2025 Tour Facts ////

Tours completed:
13

Total riding days:
114

Total tour miles:
~5,068

Total tour climbing:
~253,992'

2025 Tours remaining:
0 !!!

*Anticipated number of
tours in 2026:*
16 total...

N. America: 12

S. America: 1

Europe: 2

Asia: 1

//// 2026 Tour Facts ////

*2026 Tours already sold
out (waitlist only): 6 of 16
(That's nearly 38%!)*





About HeartCycle Bicycle Tours

2026 tours that are currently scheduled are highlighted on the next few pages. Tour details are also available on the [HeartCycle website](#).

To read and observe the procedures for announcing new and planned tours please review the [Tour Announcement and Registration Policy](#).

Links to tour policies (illness, conduct, waitlist, etc.) can be found at the bottom of the [HeartCycle Tours](#) web page.

Send a message to tourdirector@heartcycle.org to let us know (1) where you'd like to go on a future tour and (2) if you have an interest in leading or co-leading a tour.

February

Vietnam

Ho Chi Minh City/Hanoi, Vietnam

Dates: Feb 24 – Mar 13, 2026

Days: 16

Rating: Intermediate

Cost: \$4,000

Link: [Vietnam Trip Details](#)

Contact: Tom Kissinger

tom_k@pipeline.com

April

Patagonia Argentina: Lakes & Volcanoes

Patagonia, Argentina

Dates: April 10 – 22, 2026

Days: 11 Rating: Interm / Adv

Cost: \$3,750

Link: [Patagonia Trip Details](#)

Contact: Lisa Evans

iceski@comcast.net

May

Tug Hill & Thousand Islands Region

East Syracuse, NY, USA

Dates: May 15 – 23, 2026

Days: 7

Rating: Intermediate

Cost: \$2,100

Link: [Tug Hill Trip Details](#)

Contact: Jim Bethell

bethell.jim@verizon.net

June

Acadia: Rocky Coastal Maine

Bar Harbor, ME, USA

Dates: June 1 – 9, 2026

Days: 7

Rating: Intermediate

Cost: \$2,600

Link: [Acadia Trip Details](#)

Contact: Patty Menz

pmenz@verizon.net

March

Death Valley, California

Death Valley, CA, USA

Dates: March 21 – 28, 2026

Days: 6

Rating: Intermediate / Advanced

Cost: \$2,700

Link: [Death Valley Trip Details](#)

Contact: Kevin Schmidt

hillslope@gmail.com

May

Napa Vine & Surf Loop

Santa Rosa, CA, USA

Dates: May 9 – 17, 2026

Days: 7

Rating: Intermediate / Advanced

Cost: \$2,300

Link: [Napa Trip Details](#)

Contact: Cindy Alvarez

sindelou2@gmail.com

May

Katy Trail, Missouri

Kansas City, MO, USA

Dates: May 26 – June 6, 2026

Days: 10

Rating: Intermediate

Cost: \$2,250

Link: [Katy Trail Trip Details](#)

Contact: Tina Vessels

tina.vessels@gmail.com

June

NextGen San Juans: Durango & Silverton, Colorado

Durango, CO, USA

Dates: June 15 – 20, 2026

Days: 4 Rating: Interm / Adv

Cost: \$2,000

Link: [NextGen Durango Trip Details](#)

Contact: Greg Lestikow

glestikow@gmail.com





HeartCycle Bicycle Tour Rating System

/// EASY -----

Approx Daily Miles:
< 40

Avg Daily Gain (ft):
<= 1,500'

/// INTERMEDIATE --

Approx Daily Miles:
40 to 60

Avg Daily Gain (ft):
1,500' to 3,500'

/// ADVANCED -----

Approx Daily Miles:
50 to 70

Avg Daily Gain (ft):
2,500' to 4,500'

/// EXPERT -----

Approx Daily Miles:
> 65

Avg Daily Gain (ft):
> 4,000'

June

Northern New Mexico: Los Alamos & Santa Fe

Los Alamos, NM, USA

Dates: June 26 – July 2, 2026

Days: 5 Rating: Intermediate

Cost: \$1,600

Link: [New Mexico Trip Details](#)

Contact: Alan Church

alan.church@comcast.net

July

Jackson Hole Wyoming #1

Jackson, WY, USA

Dates: July 15 – 20, 2026

Days: 4

Rating: Easy

Cost: \$2,000

Link: [Jackson Hole #1 Trip Details](#)

Contact: Clare Bena

cbvamoots@gmail.com

July

Jackson Hole Wyoming #2

Jackson, WY, USA

Dates: July 20 – 25, 2026

Days: 4

Rating: Easy

Cost: \$2,000

Link: [Jackson Hole #2 Trip Details](#)

Contact: Clare Bena

cbvamoots@gmail.com

August

Moselle River: Germany / Luxembourg / France

DEU, LUX, FRA

Dates: August 4 – 11, 2026

Days: 6 Rating: Easy

Cost: \$3,200

Link: [Moselle River Trip Details](#)

Contact: Rita Kurelja

ritakurelja@hotmail.com

August

Montreal to Quebec, Canada

Montreal/Quebec City, CAN

Dates: August 15 – 23, 2026

Days: 7

Rating: Inter / Adv

Cost: \$2,100

Link: [Montreal to Quebec Trip Details](#)

Contact: Jim Schroeder

jimmyschweb@gmail.com

September

Underground Railroad Year 3

KY/OH/PA/NY, USA & CAN

Dates: Sept 11 – 27, 2026

Days: 15

Rating: Inter / Adv

Cost: \$3,500

Link: [Underground Railroad Trip Details](#)

Contact: Jim Schroeder

jimmyschweb@gmail.com

September

Puglia, Italy

Bari, Italy

Dates: Sept 15 – 28, 2026

Days: 12

Rating: Intermediate

Cost: \$5,700

Link: [Puglia Trip Details](#)

Contact: Janet Slate

jslate@ultrasys.net

October

SW Wisconsin – The Driftless Area

Madison, WI, USA

Dates: Oct 9 – 18, 2026

Days: 8

Rating: Intermediate

Cost: \$2,400

Link: [SW Wisconsin Trip Details](#)

Contact: Jim Bethell

bethell.jim@verizon.net





HeartCycle Bicycle Touring Club Contacts

Please feel free to contact any of the members listed to the right with questions, comments, or concerns. We are more than happy to field your questions and get you in touch with the appropriate club contact.

Board of Directors

- **Mark Lestikow (2024-26) | 303-919-0426**
President - president@heartcycle.org
- **Tom Kissinger (2024-26) | 303-475-8669**
Vice President
- **Janet Slate (2025-27) | 303-683-6128**
Tour Director - tourdiretor@heartcycle.org
- **Alan Church (2024-26) | 303-489-1789**
Treasurer
- **Laura Davis (2024-26) | 970-581-1361**
Secretary
- **Ron Finch (2025-27) | 303-656-5573**
Safety Coordinator & Insurance
- **Rita Kurelja (2025-27) | 970-231-7163**
Registrar - registrar@heartcycle.org
- **Richard Crocker (2025-27) | 520-539-8019**
Asst. Registrar - registrar@heartcycle.org
- **Cody Ensanian (2025-27) | 570-419-9453**
Newsletter Editor, Co-Webmaster, IT Guy - newsletter@heartcycle.org

Working Members

- **Jim Bethell | 518-466-8490**
Co-Webmaster - webmaster@heartcycle.org
- **Graham Hollis | 720-323-6479**
Asst. Treasurer
- **Jeff Messerschmidt | 303-904-0573**
SAG Supply Manager
- **Dan Palmquist | 303-638-2535**
SAG Vehicles
- **Jimmy Schroeder | 260-450-2007**
Ride-with-GPS Coordinator
- **Judy Siel | 720-519-9401**
Asst. Tour Director
- **Scott MacCormack | 720-939-6099**
Special Projects

/// About HeartCycle ///

The HeartCycle Bicycle Touring Club is a not-for-profit Colorado corporation that began providing bicycle tours in 1978. The club is organized and run by volunteers who enjoy the challenge and the fun of cycle touring and want to share their enthusiasm.

HeartCycle has the unique distinction of having originally been formed as a cardiac research project (hence the name), but has long since become simply a not-for-profit bicycling club that promotes multi-day, SAG-supported tours. A volunteer Board of Directors meets monthly and welcomes member attendance and participation in planning and running events. HeartCycle also has many other volunteers working to assist the Board.

