November 2026

Heart-to-Heart

CLUB NEWSLETTER

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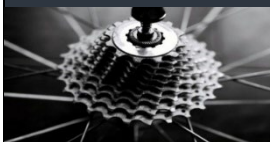
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President's Spin

By HeartCycle President Mark Lestikow

A Great Year, a Great Luncheon, and Some Very Special People

What a wonderful way to celebrate another successful year of HeartCycle!

On Saturday, October 24, we gathered at the Mt. Vernon Canyon Club for our Annual Luncheon and Meeting. I'm delighted to report that **94 members and guests attended—our largest turnout in seven years!** It was terrific to see so many familiar faces, welcome some newer members, and enjoy the camaraderie that makes HeartCycle such a special organization.

One of the highlights of the afternoon was recognizing **Jeff Messerschmidt with HeartCycle's Distinguished Service Award**, presented by Rich Crocker.

If you've participated in a HeartCycle tour, you've benefited from Jeff's efforts, whether you realize it or not.

Jeff's love of cycling goes back to his childhood, from his first tricycle to delivering newspapers on a J.C. Higgins bicycle. In 1974, he toured through England, Belgium, and Germany on a ten-speed Raleigh. After moving to Colorado in 1979, he became involved in bicycle touring and eventually connected with HeartCycle through Jerry Bakke during the 2001 Ride the Rockies.

For more than 20 years, Jeff has served as the caretaker of HeartCycle's SAG supplies, generously dedicating a large portion of his basement to storing and organizing everything our tours need. And we're not talking about simply stacking boxes on shelves! Every item is carefully cleaned, labeled, organized, and ready for the next tour.

After each tour, Jeff spends countless hours cleaning and putting everything back in its proper place. He also graciously allows members to drop off or pick up bicycles at his home, often when he's not even there. His dog, Zarnoff, may not always appreciate the parade of cyclists coming through the house, but Jeff takes it all in stride with his trademark sense of humor.



Jeff represents the very best of HeartCycle—someone who gives generously of his time, expects nothing in return, and helps make our tours possible. **Thank you, Jeff, for your extraordinary dedication to HeartCycle!**

Our luncheon also gave us an opportunity to celebrate another successful touring

season. Here are a few numbers worth sharing:

- **352 riders** participated in our 2026 tours, which operated at **86% capacity**.
- We welcomed **75 first-time members**, many of whom have already renewed for 2027.
- We added **five new tour leaders**, helping ensure a strong future for our club.
- Our second **NextGen tour in Durango** was so successful that we're adding a third NextGen tour in the **Black Hills in 2027**. Again, all members are invited to sign up!
- We introduced our **New Rider Discount Program** to encourage a new generation of cyclists to experience HeartCycle.

These accomplishments reflect the dedication of our tour leaders, working members, board members, and, of course, all of you who participate in our tours.

Another highlight of the luncheon was the unveiling of our **2027 tour schedule**. Tour Director, Janet Slate, and Assistant Tour Director, Judy Siel, have worked tirelessly to put together another exciting collection of cycling adventures. Following the presentation, members had an opportunity to visit with tour leaders, learn more about the destinations, and begin planning next year's adventures.

I'd also like to recognize Laura Davis, who has completed her term as our Board Secretary. Laura has been a dedicated contributor to HeartCycle, and we are grateful for her service. Unfortunately, Laura was unable to attend the luncheon as she continues recovering from a serious cycling accident. Please keep Laura in your thoughts and prayers. We wish her a full and speedy recovery.

Finally, thank you to everyone who helped make our luncheon such a success, especially Tom Kissinger who organized the Luncheon, Cody Ensanian for another wonderful tour slideshow, Polly Lestikow for welcoming our guests, and the staff at Mt. Vernon Canyon Club.

As I look back on 2026, I'm reminded that **HeartCycle is about much more than bicycling. It's about friendships, shared adventures, and people who willingly give their time to make those experiences possible.**

Our record luncheon attendance was a wonderful reminder of just how strong that sense of community remains.

Thank you all for another great year. I look forward to seeing you on the road in 2027!

Happy cycling!

Mark







From the Tour Director's Saddle

By HeartCycle Tour Director Janet Slate

We rolled out the 2027 domestic tours at the annual meeting and luncheon on Saturday, October 24th. We hope you've had a chance to review the tour descriptions and have already started signing up for ones that interest you. The first group of tours is open now; the second group opens on Saturday, November 7th. Below are some tour highlights:

Springtime in Southeastern Arizona—Deserts, Forests, and Grasslands

March 12–21, 2027

Experience iconic saguaro and the beauty of the Sonoran Desert on this multi-base tour with stays at three hotels. Visit the east and west sections of Saguaro National Park and take a private tour of the Titan Missile Museum, a Cold War-era historic site.





Paso Robles, California—Riding and Kayaking

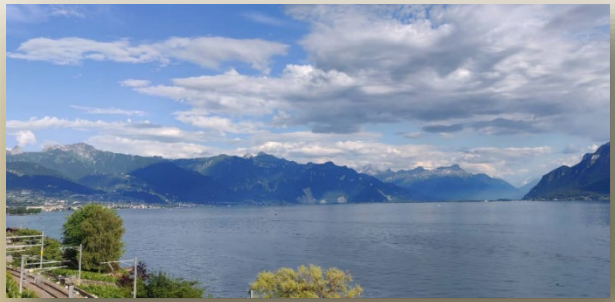
April 10–18, 2027

Ride on quiet, windy, rolling backroads through vineyards, farms, and oak-lined lanes on this popular fixed-base tour. New this time, spend a day kayaking in Morro Bay and see marine wildlife.

Southeast Wisconsin—Lakes and Rivers

June 3–12, 2027

Cycle on lightly traveled roads along picturesque shores of many lakes and rivers on this new multi-base tour (more than 1 night at some lodging enroute). Take a tour of Trek Bicycle Corporation headquarters.



Willamette Valley, Oregon, Cruise—Wine and Sights

July 11–17, 2027

Join this beginner and tandem-friendly tour on quiet and scenic backroads and paved bike paths that wind through fertile farmland, world-class wine country, river valleys with ferries and covered bridges, and forested hills and waterfalls. Tour the Oregon Garden and the North American Aerospace Museum.





Pacific Northwest—Skagit Valley and San Juan Islands

July 31–August 9, 2027

Explore some of the most beautiful spots Washington State has to offer including breathtaking views and charming historic towns on this semi-fixed base tour. Spend 4 nights in La Conner in Skagit Valley cycling Fidalgo Island and the historic Deception Pass Bridge and Chuckanut Drive with beautiful views of Padilla Bay and Bellingham Bay. From our 5-night base on San Juan Island, cycle Orcas, Lopez, and San Juan Islands.

Cycling in the Finger Lakes Region of New York

August 21–30, 2027

Lightly traveled roads, scenic vistas, waterfalls, and routes along the shores of unique beautiful lakes make this multi-base tour a favorite of cyclists. Visit historic towns, small cities, and villages such as Canandaigua, Corning, Ithaca, and Seneca Falls.



Black Hills, South Dakota, 2027: The Mickelson Trail and Mount Rushmore

September 6–11, 2027

A semi-fixed base tour—with stays in Custer and Hill City—will enable us to explore the spectacular terrain and abundant wildlife of the area. About a third of the tour will be on well-maintained gravel although a gravel bike is not required.





Carolinas Blue Ridge, South Carolina & North Carolina—Greenville and Asheville

September 17–25, 2027

Showcasing the best of the southern Appalachian Mountains including the Blue Ridge Parkway and Caesars Head on this loop tour, discover a network of quiet, bike-friendly roads that wind through charming mountain communities, lush forests, and peaceful countryside. World-class cycling, stunning natural beauty, and Southern hospitality will leave you with a deep appreciation for the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Greater Allegheny Passage – Gettysburg – Chesapeake & Ohio Canal – Washington, DC

October 3–17, 2027

From Pittsburgh, PA, to Washington, DC, this point-to-point tour will ride up the gentle grades of old railbeds of the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) trail on crushed-limestone gravel; ride pavement to Flight 93 National Memorial and Gettysburg and Antietam Civil War battlefields; and descend on old towpaths of the C&O Canal that parallel the Potomac River. With about half the route on gravel, a gravel bike with 32-mm or wider tires would be the way to go.





New Rider Discount Program

By HeartCycle Newsletter Editor Cody Ensanian

Great news! **Discounts are still available** through HeartCycle's new **New Rider Discount Program** for the upcoming 2027 tour year!

This program offers cyclists **age 45 and younger who have never participated in a HeartCycle tour** a chance to receive **20% off one domestic tour**, along with priority registration.

If you or someone you know has been thinking about giving bicycle touring a try, this is a great opportunity to experience HeartCycle at a reduced cost!

Program Highlights:

- **20% discount on the cost of one domestic HeartCycle tour.**
- **Open to first-time HeartCycle tour participants.**
- **Applicants must be age 45 or younger at the time of tour registration.**
- **Award recipients receive priority registration for the tour they choose.**
- **The discount applies to either double-occupancy or single-occupancy tour pricing.**

For eligibility details and instructions on how to apply, visit: **www.heartcycle.org/new-rider-discount-program**

Please help spread the word and share this opportunity with friends and fellow cyclists!

Those interested should email Cody asap!



Travel Insurance for Bike Tours

By HeartCycle Newsletter Editor Cody Ensanian

Whether you're joining HeartCycle for a domestic or international tour, **travel insurance is worth considering** as part of your trip planning.

Unexpected challenges such as illness, injury, canceled flights, or lost luggage can disrupt even the best-planned adventures. Depending on the policy, travel insurance may help cover medical expenses, trip cancellations, interruptions, and emergency evacuation.

International travelers should pay particular attention to medical coverage, as regular health insurance *may* offer limited protection abroad. Riders should also verify that their policy covers their planned cycling activities.

One helpful resource I often utilize when shopping around is travelInsurance.com, which allows travelers to compare coverage and pricing from multiple insurance providers.

HeartCycle does not endorse any specific insurance company but encourages riders to explore their options and carefully review policy details and exclusions.

A little preparation can provide valuable peace of mind, letting you focus on enjoying the ride!



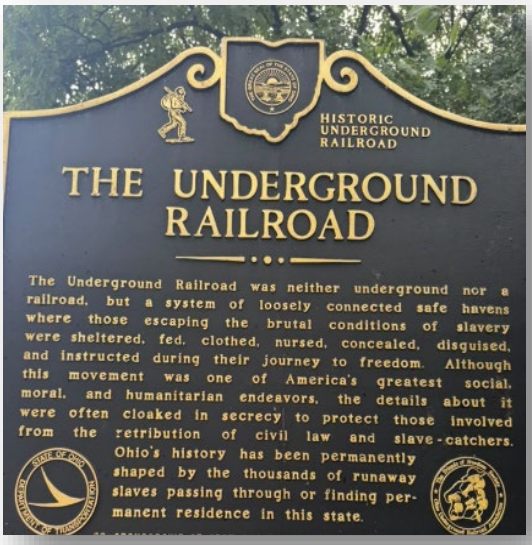
HeartCycle Adventure Series Year 3: 2026 Underground Railroad Ride Cincinnati to Niagara Falls



Written by Bev Louie; **Edited** by Chris Kralick and Ron Finch; **Photos, Quotes and Thoughts from** Kathleen, Mayoma, Alan, Belinda, Beverly, Bill H, Bill L, Bill M, Clare, Dan, David, Fran, Guy, Helayn, Joe, Jim, Julie, Laura, Mike, Neal, Randy, Reenie, Roger, Scot, Scott, Sharon, and Sue

Background: This ride was the third 2-week segment of the south-to-north Adventure Series that started in 2024 in Mobile Alabama and finished in Niagara Falls. The first year carried riders through miles of swampy forests and over the Natchez Trace (Trail of Tears) pathway on the way through Mississippi to Tennessee. In 2025, the ride started in Memphis, where we saw the National Civil Rights Museum and rode alongside the wide Ohio River, making us wonder how freedom seekers made it across such an expanse over 200 years ago. All three years were led by Jim Schroeder and Ron Finch.

After the first 1,600 miles of the journey, the 2026 group of HeartCycle riders met in Cincinnati to embark on the last leg of the 800-mile journey, one that would expand our knowledge of the Underground Railroad (UGRR), meet today's keen historical workers, build new and old friendships, and challenge our bicycling abilities. We would gain access to UGRR homes that provided secret shelter for slaves seeking freedom, visit museums with collections of artifacts and insights, ride next to huge rivers and lakes where former slaves would seek to cross unseen often being chased by horse and dog, and see and hear stories extolling their bravery and dedication.











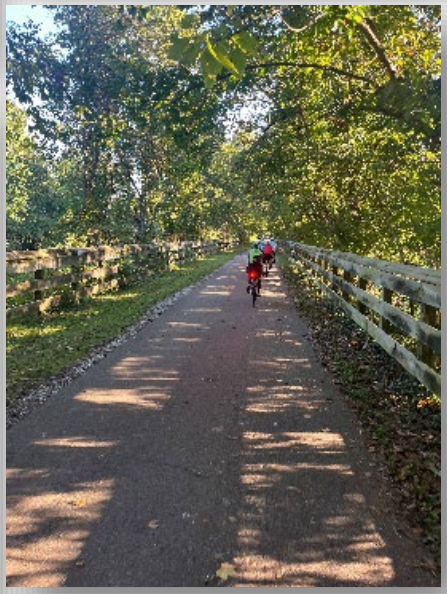












Eye-opening UGRR stops that enhanced our knowledge...

• The largest remaining slave pen was rebuilt and located in the National UGRR Freedom Center in Cincinnati. It housed captured slaves before they went to auction to be sold as commodities.

• The Beecher House, family home to Harriet and her many siblings, was where she wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, a novel based on true stories that captured the attention of the northern U.S. and spurred the abolition movement.

• John Rankin's house sat high above the Ohio River near Maysville, Kentucky. By word of mouth, over 2,000 slaves would find boat passage and shelter, guided by the candle glowing in the window.

• The National Afro American Museum adjacent to Wilberforce University, the first privately owned historically black university, highlighted numerous achievements by black Americans over time.

• The Hanby House in Westerville Ohio was home to abolitionist William Hanby. His son Benjamin, a minister and abolitionist, composed holiday favorite "Up on the Housetop" among other songs.

• Slaves were sheltered in the Hubbard House in Ashtabula, Ohio, awaiting the next crossing of Lake Erie by William Hubbard's brother and boat captain. The Hubbard family were active members of the Ashtabula Anti-Slavery Society.

Miles of quiet bike paths on our way to Canada…

Over 250 miles of a dedicated bicycle/pedestrian pathway called the Ohio to Erie Trail brought us from Cincinnati to Xenia. The Little Miami Trail led us to Columbus, and the Alum Creek trail was beyond. We shared the trails with Amish buggies and families. We followed the Heart of Ohio Trail, the Great Lakes Seaway, the Empire Path and the Erie Canal Pathway through Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and into Canada! History, culture and natural beauty accompanied us every mile.

We passed by Ulysses S. Grant's boyhood home and saw his school. Early billboards on the sides of houses greeted us. We had a great day cycling as we observed historical plowing by horse and hand.

Interactions with Amish travelers on bike paths and through covered bridges were common. Some paths were marked for safe travel by bicyclists (to the left side) and buggies (to the right) that helped us to avoid close encounters with horse buggies, or droppings! Buggy Up!











The locks on the Erie Canal in Lockport told of the human effort to develop the commercial riverway for traffic from Lake Erie to the Hudson River.



Glimpses of Lake Erie could be seen from the back patio of the Suncliff House where we spent a day off.



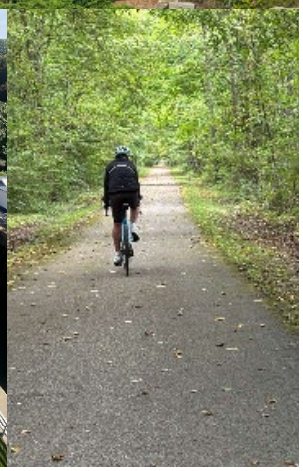
Or at the harbor in Erie, Pennsylvania.



Or when viewing Frank Lloyd Wright's Graycliff House in Derby, NY.





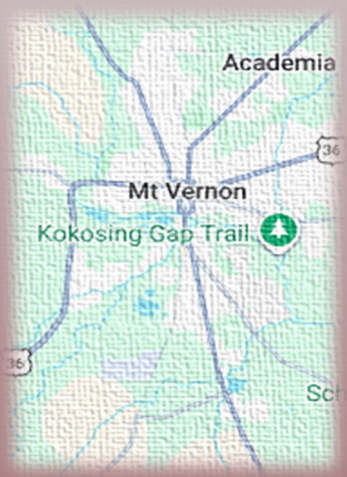



We had a few detours on the way but were guided by some friendly roadside workers!





We even met some water-spouting dogs in Mt Vernon, Ohio.







Sometimes, we gathered around the bike, of course! And sometimes over a meal, an ice cream, or a pint.













“I don’t drink and drive, don’t text and drive… but I do 🚴 and 🚤 🤳 ”





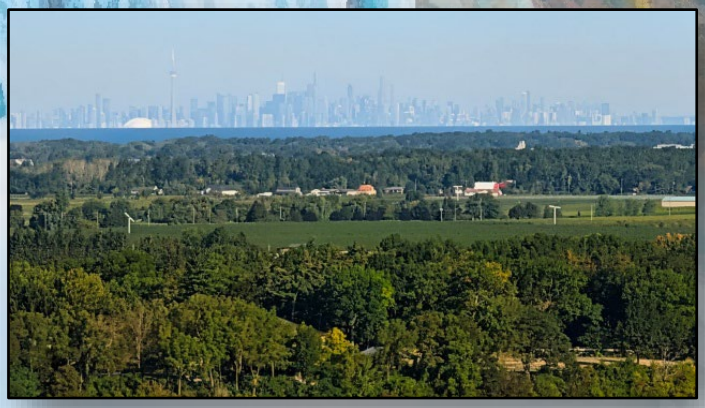
Getting closer to our final destination–Niagara Falls!





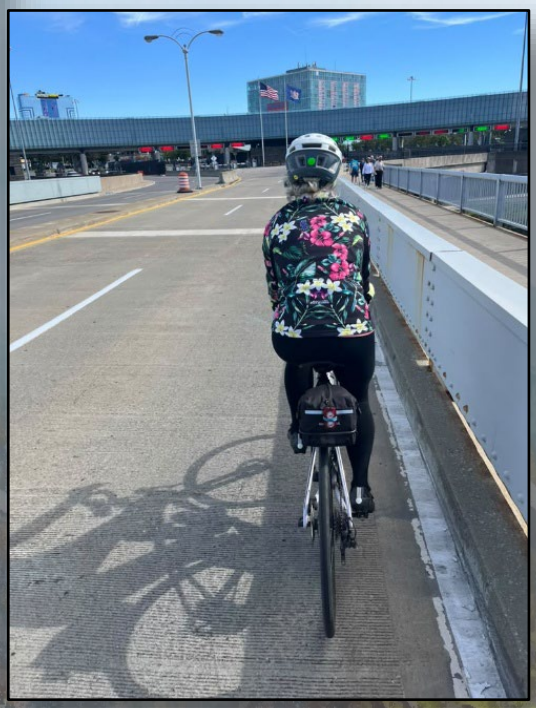
We could see Buffalo, NY, across Lake Erie.





We started in Kentucky and rode so far north that we could see the skyline of Toronto.



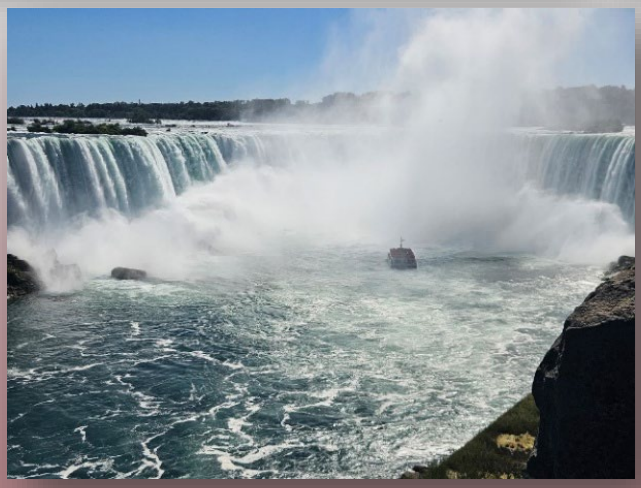


We rode over the Peace Bridge into Canada and the Rainbow Bridge back into the USA passing through the Border Patrol.

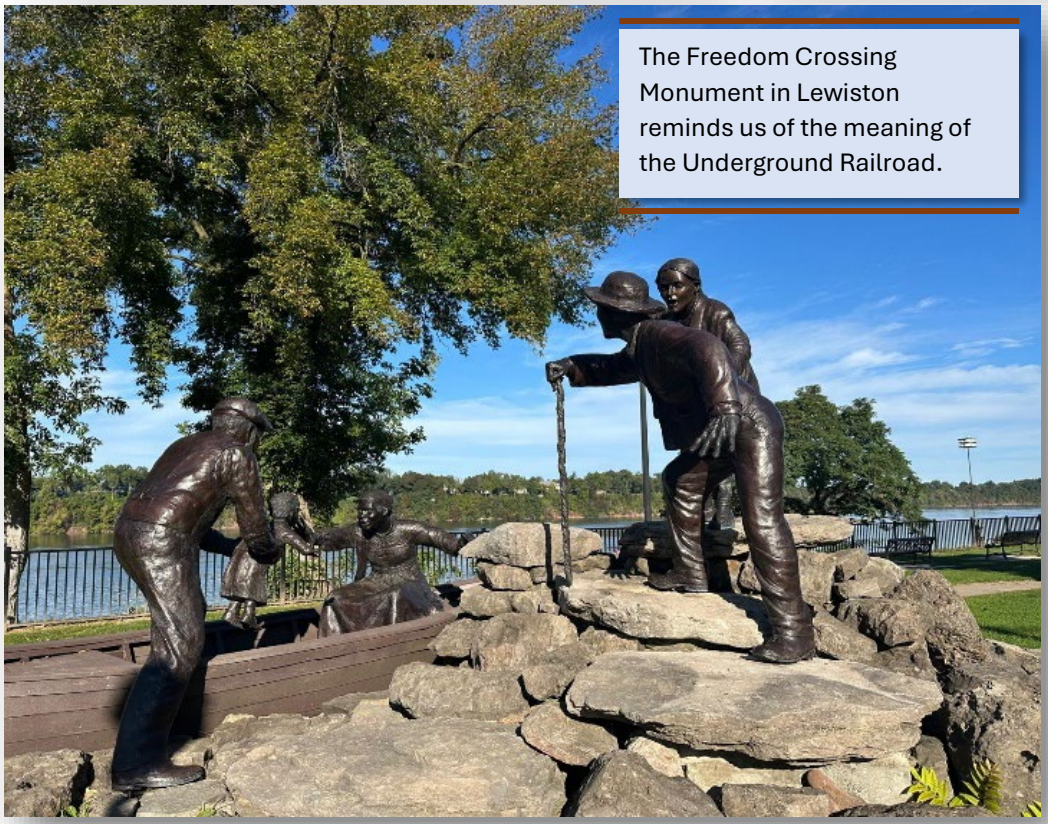
And then we were there! Breathtaking, exhilarating, and spectacular Niagara Falls!











The Freedom Crossing Monument in Lewiston reminds us of the meaning of the Underground Railroad.



Two injured riders had to leave the group. Our thoughts are with them as they recover.

Drumroll, please...



UGRR 3-year finishers!



UGRR 2-year finishers!



UGRR 1st-year finishers!



HeartCycle Adventure Series 2026 Underground Railroad Ride

HeartCycle Volunteer Member Bios

Danna Korak

SAG



Greetings, Friends!

My name is Danna Korak, and I am from Indianapolis, IN. I have been bicycling for most of my adult life, commuting to work, participating in AIDS Rides, and organizing self-guided, self-supported bicycle camping tours with friends.

After retiring from the United States Postal Service in 2013, I became a Tour Leader with the Adventure Cycling Association. In 2018, I met Cindy Alvarez on a tour of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. By the end of that tour, Cindy had convinced me to join HeartCycle, and shortly afterward, I became a HeartCycle SAG.

As a cyclist, I understand how valuable it is to have a good support team, and it brings me joy to provide that part of the experience for other cyclists. Through HeartCycle, I have made a new circle of friends and had the opportunity to witness some amazing views.

And from the seat of the Penske truck, it's always an adventure!

Martha MacCormack

SAG



Hi, I'm Martha MacCormack. Scott and I moved from Denver to Castle Rock, CO, in June. Over the years, it was getting tiresome listening to Scott brag about all the beautiful places he'd ridden and the fun people he'd met on HC tours while I was working. So, in 2022, after retiring from teaching math for 33 years, I started SAGing to see if his stories were true.

I enjoy road trips, driving slowly to take in the sights, and driving on the wrong side of the road to avoid hitting cyclists. :-) I do know how to ride a bike, but I only ride on trails.

Next time we're on the same tour, feel free to offer suggestions and share stories. Until then, happy riding!

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our SAGs!

Behind every successful HeartCycle tour is a dedicated team of SAG volunteers. From providing refreshments and encouragement to handling logistics and keeping riders safe, our SAGs are the backbone of our tours. Their hard work, generosity, and positive attitudes help make every ride a memorable experience.

Thank you to all our incredible SAGs! Your time, energy, and dedication are essential to HeartCycle's success. We couldn't do it without you!



About HeartCycle Bicycle Tours

Full tour details are available on the **HeartCycle website**.

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To read and observe the procedures for announcing new and planned tours please review the **Tour Announcement and Registration Policy**.

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Links to tour policies can be found at the top of the **HeartCycle Tours** web page.

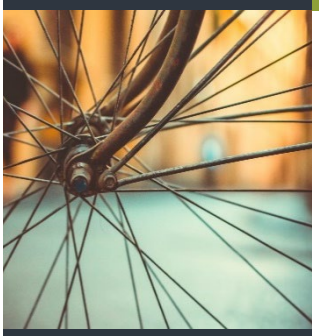
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View our **tour ratings** to see how we rate tours based on daily mileage and elevation.

- - - - - - -

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.

Tour	*Rating*	*Days*	*Cost*	*Click for details*
Southeastern Arizona **March 12, 13 – 21, 2027**	Intermediate	8	$3,100	More info...
Shikoku Pilgrimage, Japan **1 of 3: April 1, 2 – 13, 2027**	Intermediate	11	$4,500	More info...
Paso Robles, CA **April 10, 11 – 18, 2027**	Interm./Advanced	7	$2,900	More info...
Shikoku Pilgrimage, Japan **2 of 3: April 15, 16 – 27, 2027**	Intermediate	11	$4,500	More info...
Le Monastere, France **May 29, 30 - Jun 5, 2027**	Interm./Advanced	6	$4,500	More info...
SE Wisconsin--Lakes & Rivers **June 3, 4 - 12, 2027**	Intermediate	8	$2,400	More info...
Dordogne, France **June 7, 8 - 21, 2027**	Easy/Intermediate	13	$5,200	More info...
Willamette Valley, OR **July 11, 12 - 17, 2027**	Intermediate	5	$1,800	More info...
PNW Skagit Valley & San Juan Islands, WA **July 31, Aug 1 - 9, 2027**	Interm./Advanced	8	$2,900	More info...
Via Claudia Augusta **August 18, 19 - 31, 2027**	Intermediate	12	$5,400	More info...
Finger Lakes, NY **August 21, 22 - 30, 2027**	Intermediate	8	$2,900	More info...
Hungary by Bike: Europe's Oldest Kingdom **September 3, 4 - 17, 2027**	Easy/Intermediate	13	$4,300	More info...
Black Hills: Mickelson Trail & Mt. Rushmore **September 6, 7 - 11, 2027**	Intermediate	4	$1,650	More info...
Carolinas Blue Ridge, SC-NC **September 17, 18 - 25, 2027**	Int.-Adv.	7	$2,400	More info...
GAP-Civil War-C&O Canal **October 3, 4 - 17, 2027**	Advanced	13	$3,900	More info...
Shikoku Pilgrimage, Japan **3 of 3: October 17, 18 - 29, 2027**	Intermediate	11	$4,500	More info...



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 - tourdirector@heartcycle.org
- **Alan Church (2024-26) | 303-489-1789**
  Treasurer
- **Clare Bena (2026-28) | 505-412-5526**
  Secretary
- **Ron Finch (2025-27) | 303-656-5573**
  Safety Coordinator & Insurance - safety@heartcycle.org
- **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 - newsletter@heartcycle.org
- **Jim Bethell (2026-28) | 518-466-8490**
  Webmaster - webmaster@heartcycle.org

Working Members

- **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 - tourdirector@heartcycle.org

/// 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.