

# Quiet Roads and a Vibrant City

The prime road routes and trails of Ontario's Peterborough and the Kawarthas aren't well-known, but that will change

by **Diana Ballon**

**W**e followed our guides on a rainy day in June. We were travelling over rolling hills in Ontario's Kawarthas on road bikes against soft winds and under grey skies. Grazing horses gazed out at us over wooden fences as we went down hills. Curious perhaps or simply startled? Certainly, we travelled at speeds that made the farm animals seem frozen in place.

Our group began in Peterborough, a city of 81,000 people that sits on the Otonabee River in central Ontario, a 90-minute drive east from Toronto. Although Peterborough has a strong local group of avid cyclists—the Peterborough Cycling Club boasts some 275 members—the city and the surrounding Kawarthas is still relatively unknown as a destination for road and mountain bikers outside the area.

But no doubt the word will get out to cyclists. Downtown Peterborough is 10 minutes from almost-deserted country roads, and not much farther from beautiful lakefront vistas. The landscape is also diverse: some sections are quite flat, such as the Trans Canada Trail, while more challenging routes meander through the undulating hills created from glaciers thousands of years ago. Throughout the area, cottages, resorts, quaint country inns and B&Bs also make for good overnight stops for tired cyclists.

"Peterborough is the bridge between Toronto and the north, with an intimate connection to the land and water," said Michael VanDerHerberg, co-owner with his wife Andrea of the Silver Bean Café in Millennium Park, next to the Otonabee River. He is also an avid cyclist and supporter of Ride for Africycle, an fundraiser that has included a ride around Lake Ontario to support sending used bikes to Malawi.

"In a half hour, you can get anywhere. If you're really adventurous, you can go from downtown to the Trent-Severn Waterways," said VanDerHerberg, referring to the 386-km chain of lakes and rivers linked by more than 40 locks and canals that extend from the Bay of Quinte on Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay.

Kieran Andrews, who led our group with his partner Dee Hutchison, is another cycling advocate. Andrews was a key person in the mapping out of the Peterborough and the Kawarthas Classics Road Cycling Routes: six signed bike routes that range in length from 45 to 100 km, covering a total of about 350 km. Each route starts and ends in Peterborough. They all feature recommended stops for photo ops and places to fuel during your ride.

Our 185-km trip, which we did over two days, incorporated several of these routes. We began at the Silver Bean Café in Peterborough, then pedalled southwest, along hilly terrain, until we reached the town of Millbrook, where we stopped for lunch at the Pastry Peddler, a bike-themed café with the Frog Cycles shop just upstairs. We then headed east, with a short stop at Lang Pioneer Village before arriving at Rice Lake, where we stayed in lakefront cottages at the Elmhirst Resort.

The next day, we travelled north through the town of Warsaw on fairly level terrain. We stopped for lunch on Stony Lake at McCracken's Landing, and then headed west to reach the town of Lakefield later that afternoon. We spent the night there. The next morning we had a quick 20-km bike ride along the Rotary Greenway trail back to Peterborough.



THE SCENE

**48 HOURS**

OPPOSITE BOTTOM  
**MacArthur Hobson**  
rides the trails at  
the Harold Town  
Conservation Area

## Details

### How to get there

Peterborough is roughly 140 km east and a bit north of Toronto. It's also about a three-hour drive from Ottawa. The GO commuter system connects to Peterborough from Oshawa by bus. There's also an airport shuttle ([centurybus.ca](http://centurybus.ca)) from Toronto's Pearson International Airport.

### Where to stay

The Elmhirst Resort ([elmhirst.com](http://elmhirst.com)) on Rice Lake in Keene has 30 cottages with one to five bedrooms. You can barbecue outside your door or eat in the resort's dining room overlooking the lake. Use it as a stopover on the 101-km ride around the lake, or as a base for meandering through the countryside. Elmhirst has a cycling package, a guide available if needed, and provides bikes for rent. Manager Greg Elmhirst rides close to 10,000 km a year, so is a good source for cycling information.

In Lakefield, The Village Inn ([villageinn.ca](http://villageinn.ca)), offers 26 comfortable rooms, two suites and indoor bike storage.





While road riding is gaining momentum in the area, mountain bike infrastructure is growing, too. The Harold Town Conservation Area (HTCA) saw the development of trails start in 2006. It's a 323-acre property that has a large drumlin, a ridge formed by a glacier, in its centre. An active volunteer-based trails program, following IBMA guidelines, was behind the area's more than 14 km of mountain biking trails. Wide doubletrack circumnavigate the area with singletrack routes leading off to different features, including switchback climbs, tight turns, bridges, log hops and technical rock gardens.

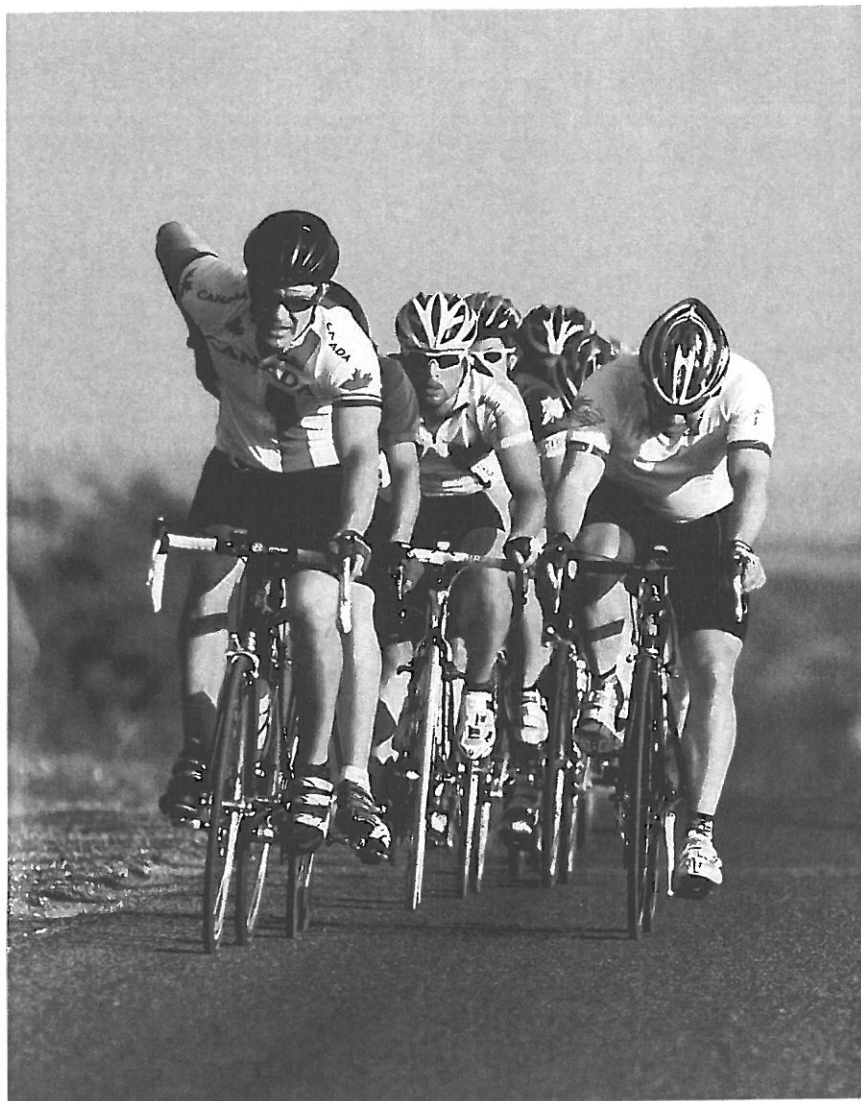
The park is easily accessible: there is no entry fee; parking is free; and you can find an HTCA mountain biking trail map online.

#### Where to eat

In Peterborough, get your day underway with a latte and scone at the Silver Bean Café ([silverbeancafe.com](http://silverbeancafe.com)) and finish your day with a pint at the Ashburnham Ale House ([ashburnhamalehouse.ca](http://ashburnhamalehouse.ca)).

Stop at the Pastry Peddler ([thepastrypeddler.blogspot.ca](http://thepastrypeddler.blogspot.ca)) in Millbrook for the warm, cosy vibe of a country café catering to cyclists: their pastries are first class.

If you're near Stony Lake, bike up to the water and have a bite at the Lantern Restaurant & Grill ([lanternresto.ca](http://lanternresto.ca)).



"The time has come for the area to be appreciated by more than the local community."

More than 20 years ago, when Andrews and his business partner Scott Murison first started up their outdoor gear and boat shop, Wild Rock Outfitters, in Peterborough, there was no cycling club in the area, and no real community of cyclists. But they recognized the potential for cycling and other outdoor pursuits. In their early days, Andrews and Murison slept in sleeping bags on a dirt floor in the basement of a 900-square-foot space. Now, 23 years later, they have 27 employees, an 8,000-square-foot space, and offer everything from bike repairs, rentals, gear and guided tours.

"The time has come for the area to be appreciated by more than the local community," Andrews said. "What we have here is truly outstanding. Peterborough and the Kawarthas have a big enough population to have a significant road network, but not enough of a population to make these roads really busy."

Clearly, more cyclists will be coming to ride the area's roads and trails very soon.

#### Where to find support

In Peterborough, Wild Rock Outfitters ([wildrock.net](http://wildrock.net)) is the main game in town for bike rentals, biking apparel and bicycle-fit services.

For more details on the Peterborough and the Kawarthas Classics Road Cycling Routes, including maps to download, visit [thekawarthas.ca/experience/cycling](http://thekawarthas.ca/experience/cycling). You can go to the city's tourism information centre to pick up printed maps, which are also available at various bike-friendly locations around the county.

For a map of the Harold Town trails, head to the Otonabee Conservation website ([otonabee.com](http://otonabee.com)). ◀