

Site makes two-wheeled tourism easier

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Donald Wiedman lives in a trendy downtown neighbourhood. But it's the suburbs around Toronto that make his heart beat that little bit faster.

The attraction isn't cheaper housing or big-box stores. When Wiedman dreams of the 'burbs, he longs for quiet paths, the wind rushing past his ears and the satisfying crunch of dirt beneath his tires.

The avid cyclist is the founder of [bikesandtransit.com](http://www.bikesandtransit.com), a website that has been guiding cyclists and carless city folk back to nature for the past four years.

If you're craving a day in the country but you don't know how to navigate your bike on commuter services such as GO Transit or the TTC, the site provides detailed instructions and maps that will tell you precisely where the concrete ends and serenity begins.

One of the first trips Wiedman mapped was to Ajax. It remains his favourite among the 20 trips that are carefully documented on his site.

"You get off the train and there's an expanse of parking lot. Cross the asphalt and there's a dirty little gravel trail. That's the Trans Canada Trail," he says. "Within three minutes of getting off the train you're actually in deep woods. You're in nature there."

The trips, which lean heavily on the Toronto Cycling Map, the Waterfront Trail and the Trans Canada Trail, have been adapted to cyclists of varying abilities. All are affordable and doable in a day.

The father of an 11-year-old and an 8-year-old, Wiedman takes the family along on trips of up to 30 kilometres.

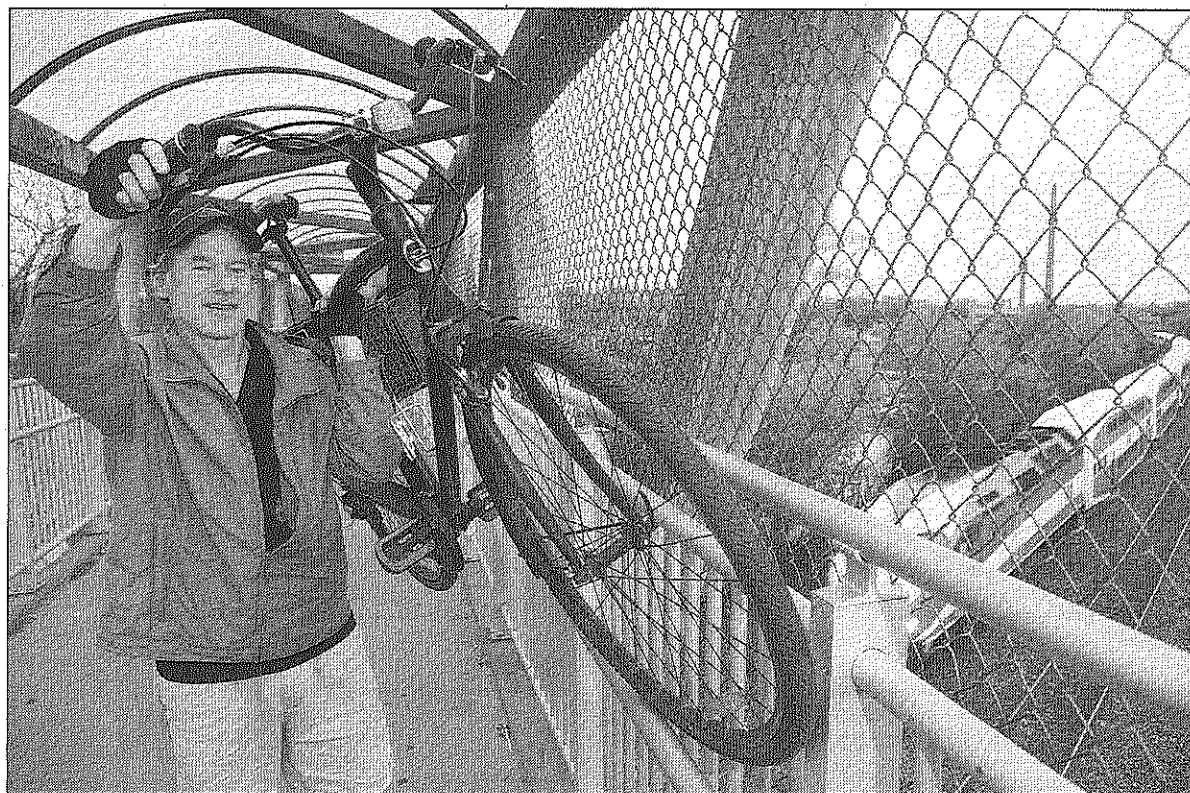
"If you take your time, with a kind of daylong picnic atmosphere, and break up the ride for the kids' short attention spans, you'll have a real memorable day," he said.

This year Wiedman, who doesn't own a car, has added a bike tour of Ontario wine country, suggesting cyclists board private carrier Coach Canada from the bus terminal in downtown Toronto.

He stresses, however, you don't need to leave town for a change of scenery. Take the subway to Leslie station, north of Highway 401. Get off and you'll see a gate that will lead you through to the Don Valley for a ride that takes you all the way down to the lakeshore.

About 8,000 people have visited Wiedman's site. More jump on board as transit agencies reach out

Don't have a car but still want to explore nature?
No problem. Bicycle blogger Donald Wiedman will get you there



MATTHEW SHERWOOD FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Donald Wiedman carries his bike along a pedestrian walkway on Pape Ave. at the north end of Gerrard Square. Wiedman is the creator of www.bikesandtransit.com, a website that offers instructions for cyclists who are unsure about how to navigate with their bicycles on commuter services such as GO Transit or the TTC.

BEST BIKE DAY TRIPS

Grimsby to Hamilton to Burlington, 75 kilometres: Catch the early morning Coach Canada bus at the Bay St. Toronto Coach Terminal (and buy a \$10 plastic bike bag). You'll be standing on Grimsby's main street in about 65 minutes.

BikesandTransit.com shows how to cycle some wine country, up the escarpment, then the picturesque Ridge Rd. west to the Dofasco Trail and down to the Hamilton Beach Trail across the end of the lake. Take the Burlington GO train home.

Ajax South, 15 to 45 kilometres: Surprise, surprise — the Trans Canada Trail down Duffins Creek to Lake Ontario starts right at the southeast corner of the Ajax GO train station parking lot. Once you reach the lake, head west to a wonderful beach, marina and new waterfront community at the base of Pickering's Liverpool Rd. Catch the GO train home from



Wiedman's site will guide you to the Dofasco Trail without needing to use a car.

there, or continue along the trail to the train at Rouge Hill.

Ajax North, 40 kilometres: The Trans Canada Trail also leads north from the Ajax GO station. Wonderfully planned and groomed bike trails take you north to one of the region's best-kept mountain

biking secrets, the Durham woods, and more. With spectacular landscapes, bring a Trans Canada Trail map and ride all the way to Uxbridge, then take the GO bus home.

Aldershot, 15 to 45 kilometres: Long the favourite of serious Golden Horseshoe cyclists, the GO train (and VIA) station at Aldershot leads to a number of great cycling opportunities, north to the Burlington escarpment, southwest to the Waterfront Trail to Hamilton, and/or rail trail to Brantford. Along the way, stop at Burlington's Royal Botanical Gardens, Hamilton's Dundurn Castle or the Canada Marine Discovery Centre.

Mimico, 20 kilometres: A simple GO train ride to the Mimico GO station opens up a bike ride east along Humber Bay all the way to Ontario Place and the Harbourfront, with a great view of the Toronto skyline.

Source: bikesandtransit.com

RIDE A BICYCLE BLESSED FOR YOU

One by one, they wheeled their bicycles down the red-carpeted centre aisle to the front of Trinity St. Paul's United Church.

One by one, Reverend Ted Reeve sprinkled holy water on their heads, handlebars and baskets.

"May the road rise to meet you; may the wind be ever at your back; may all your journeying be joyous; may you and your bicycle be held in God's hand," Reeve said.

The second annual blessing of the bicycles drew about 50 riders to the church, located near Bloor St. and Spadina Ave., on Sunday afternoon.

Scooters and motorcycles were blessed outside.

"It is an opportunity for us to celebrate the technology of a simple, efficient machine that also brings us closer to nature and God's abundance," Reeve said in an interview.

"It's a way to slow down and appreciate life."

Reeve administered blessings along with Alexandra Horsky, a board member at Trinity St. Paul's and a chaplain at a Toronto hospital.

The event transported riders of all stripes to the intersection of faith, green activism and urban living.

Paulette Blais took a moment to wipe tears from her eyes after she and her 14-year-old daughter Simone had their bicycles blessed.

"I find it touching when someone is blessing a bike for your child to be safe," she said.

"As a parent, you teach them how to ride a bike. Then they ride off without you, but it's also a step towards independence."

For Audrey O'Handley, who recently started riding a bicycle again after moving to Toronto's Annex neighbourhood, the event was about faith.

"I feel the Holy Spirit is protecting me. It's like, I recognize the divine and He has a special blessing for me. It makes me feel at peace."

Madhavi Acharya-Tom Yew

to cyclists, he said.

Metrolinx, one of the partners listed on the website, was ahead of the curve, installing bike racks on buses across the region and upgrading the bike shelters at GO stations.

GO Transit has taken things a step further on summer trips to Niagara, where trains run with specially designed bike coaches on weekends.

The TTC is also embracing bike culture. Although there's been no

formal tracking, more people are using the bike racks on city buses — an observation supported by the increased number of queries about how to use them, said spokesman Brad Ross.

Wiedman cautions everyone to take the right tools, including a tire tube, pump and water . . . and maybe a little toilet paper.

"Be a pioneer. Just go for it," he says. "Be adventurous."