





# Bike In and Camp at Henry Horton State Park

By John Doss

**B**ike tourism has come to Tennessee and we are on the forefront. Touring on a bike, specifically bike camping, is not a new sport, but two factors have contributed to its recent growth: development of cycling routes across the United States and accommodations for bike campers in our parks.

Tennessee State Parks is in the forefront in the area of accommodations for bike campers. One accommodation is a policy change stating that no cyclist, not supported by a vehicle, will be turned away from a full campground at any Tennessee State Park that allows camping ([tnstateparks.com/about/policies](http://tnstateparks.com/about/policies)). Second is the installation of a bike mechanic station at Henry Horton State Park.

The “no turn away from a full campground policy” may seem insignificant, but the touring cyclist only stays one night in each campground after a long day in the saddle.

“If they arrive at a full campground, normally they would be turned away. This makes it very difficult to make it to another nearby campground, if one exists, before dark,” writes Keith Misegades, a bike camper for over 30 years who worked on this policy change, in an e-mail to members of the Franklin-based Harpeth Bike Club. Tennessee is one of a few states to adopt this policy according to Misegades. The policy is effective immediately.

The addition of a bike mechanic station at Henry Horton State Park is a great start for bike camping in Tennessee. The transition of bike camping from a sport for hardcore bike enthusiasts to a more manageable sport for casual cyclists, even families, means more people are participating. These participants may require more services, and maintaining cycling equipment while on the road is an area where casual users often need help.

Bicycles, unlike cars, require frequent maintenance. For example, chains should be cleaned and lubricated at approximate 200-mile intervals, and more frequently in adverse weather conditions. Tires on bicycles only last about 1,500 miles according to [RoadBiking.org](http://RoadBiking.org). Bicycle tires are very porous and must be ‘topped off’ daily to maintain acceptable tire pressure. These are some of the reasons why bike maintenance stations are so beneficial to bike campers.

Bike mechanic stations include a jack, pump and tools for repair. They are placed on concrete pads. The new station at Henry Horton State Park was installed adjacent to the campground store. Some of the costs will be borne by TDEC. The mechanic station is a project of the Friends of Henry Horton State Park.

Henry Horton was chosen specifically because it is already a bike-friendly park working with the Bike Ride Across Tennessee (BRAT) to sponsor a ride: the Horton 100. This is a big event for the park on April 27–28, 2019. Ryan Jenkins, park manager at Henry Horton State Park, notes that “current patrons of the park often bring their bicycles to ride in the park during their stay.” Jenkins also states that the park is particularly attractive to the touring cyclist because the park has a “full service restaurant.”

Cyclists on the 2018 BRAT (Bicycle Ride Across Tennessee.) The BRAT is a multi-park event in Tennessee State Parks, set for September 14–19, 2019. This year’s BRAT basecamps will be at Montgomery Bell and Natchez Trace State Parks.

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The new bike repair station at Henry Horton State Park. It is located at the park's camp store.



State Parks/TDEC Healthy Parks Healthy Person program, found online at [app.healthyparkstn.com](http://app.healthyparkstn.com). This app was developed by Tennessee State Parks and the Tennessee Department of Health in 2017. It allows people using a mobile device to create a profile and earn points and rewards for getting active in Tennessee parks.

“This program is providing incentives for people to get outside and improve their health while creating new stewards for our parks,” Brock Hill, deputy commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation stated in a July 2017 TDEC press release. The program received national attention with a 2018 SHIFT Awards Official Selection designation by The Center for Jackson Hole in Jackson, Wyoming. The program includes a Park Prescription feature that allows healthcare providers to prescribe outdoor activity for their patients.

This focus on health is supported by a recent study in Britain on aging effects of active cyclists between the ages of 55 and 79. “The cyclists proved to have reflexes, memories, balance and metabolic profiles that more closely resembled those of 30-year-olds than of the sedentary older group.”

Dr. Janet Lord, the study author concludes: “the message of these studies is that much of what we previously thought of as inevitable in aging is in fact preventable.” You can read Gretchen Reynolds’ story “How Exercise Can Keep Aging Muscles and Immune Systems ‘Young,’” in *The New York Times*, issue of March 14, 2018.

Just as motorists enjoy the Interstate highway system for our automobile transportation, there is a parallel for biking: the United States Bike Route System. Adventure Cycling,

## Grant Process

The Friends of Henry Horton State Park applied to Jeff Roth Foundation for a grant for the bike mechanic station to be placed in the park's campground. One of several organizations supporting bike camping, this foundation was created in honor of Jeff Roth, who was, sadly, killed while cycling. It supports various cycling activities. Ryan Jenkins states “they hope to capitalize on our close proximity to Nashville and other counties where biking is popular.”

Jenkins says they hope to use Henry Horton as a pilot for this program that may be rolled out to other parks that have an attraction for cyclists.

Ryan Ray, the grant author, states that the Jeff Roth Foundation was “one of the most cooperative and supportive organizations” he has worked with in developing grants. One of the points made in the grant application is that this mechanic station encourages cycling, which in turn supports the Tennessee

the largest nonprofit supporter of cycling, has developed this system of highways throughout the United States specifically for cycling in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Transportation. This is a work in progress to develop and document bike routes and signage. USBRS 23 is the bike route that goes north and south from southern Kentucky through Tennessee to Alabama. USBRS 23 runs about four miles from Henry Horton State Park. The route designates how to reach the park and how to return to the route from the park. Currently, Tennessee is one of the states that have official USBRS routes which include over 13,000 miles of bicycle routes in the U.S., according to a September 28, 2018 e-mail from Adventure Cycling.

## Economic Benefits

The economic impact of outdoor activities and specifically bicycling is significant. Outdoor recreation accounts for \$887 billion in annual consumer spending in the United States, according to a 2017 report by the Outdoor Industry Association. And “wheel sports” which include cycling and skateboarding, account for \$96.7 billion annually. Geographically, the East South Central states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama account for \$56.4 billion.

Bike camping brings economic advantages to the localities where bike routes go. One such place is nearby Collinwood, where there is an exit from the Natchez Trace Parkway. Local communities can enhance their economies by attracting bike campers. See “Bicycle Tourism and Rural Community Development: An Asset Based Approach.” by Sally Broadaway,



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A bicycle packed for a multi-day mountain bike trip.

Kansas State University, 2012.

Still not convinced? Imagine all the contents of those suitcases taken on your last car trip or airplane flight. Now, imagine putting everything you need into a couple of packs or panniers and attaching it to a bicycle and taking off on your trip! Joe Friel, author of *Cycling Past 50*, professional cycling coach and trainer sums it up as follows: “Bike touring is unlike any other form of transportation. Instead of zipping along at 75 miles per hour in a car, on a bike you can truly see, smell, hear, and understand the countryside you travel through. People are friendlier and treat you differently than when you are in a car. Without even being asked, total strangers offer directions when you are lost, food when you’re hungry, and even shelter when it rains.”

## Get Started

A great way to begin is with a portaged bike tour, like the Bike Ride Across Tennessee (BRAT). The BRAT is a six-day ride, often with one, two, or three-day options emphasizing the beauty of rural Tennessee within Tennessee State

Parks. Camping is the primary overnight option, although hotel accommodations are usually available. The BRAT is a great opportunity to develop touring experience on a bicycle and camping experience with minimal investment in equipment. The September 14–19, 2019 event will be the 30th anniversary of the BRAT and promises to be a great ride.

If you want more information, here some good sources. Adventure Cycling’s site [www.Bikeovernights.org](http://www.Bikeovernights.org) has a variety of information and blogs about other bike campers’ experiences. Another site that features information ranging from planning for a trip to actual routes is [www.bikepacking.com](http://www.bikepacking.com).

All Tennessee State Parks ([www.tnstateparks.com](http://www.tnstateparks.com)) with overnight camping accommodations will accept you if you are traveling by bicycle, even when they are full. And, if you travel by bike to Henry Horton State Park, there is a shiny new bike mechanic station there for you.

(John Doss lives in Nashville and is an avid cyclist. He is author of *Best Bike Rides Nashville* published by FalconGuides.)