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PRACTICAL TRAVELER | GAS-FREE TRIPS

Vacation Plans That Avoid the Pump



Julia Kuo

By MICHELLE HIGGINS
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WHEN Robert Huether and his fiancée, Heather Wierowski, go on vacation, they typically take a plane or a car to get away from it all. But summer spikes in gas prices, reaching beyond \$4 a gallon, spurred them to try a new kind of trip this year. Over the last weekend in July, they set out from their home in Buffalo on their bikes for a four-day trip, following the Erie Canal to Albany, with the goal of using only pedal power the entire 346-mile vacation.

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"Heather and I are active and love to bike," said Mr. Huether, a graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo, "so we combined traveling and biking as a way to save on the cost of gas."

Eco-travelers have long embraced low-impact travel, biking from campsite to campsite or taking cross-country jaunts on buses powered by veggie-oil to make a point. But the high cost of fuel is inspiring even more mainstream travelers to embrace a new kind of road trip this year — the gasless vacation.

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people — and got a landslide of stories” from cyclists taking gas-free trips this summer, said Winona Sorensen, media director for the Adventure Cycling Association, in [Missoula](#), Mont. Inquiries about bike trips were up 7 percent from last October to July, she added, while the group added 6,496 members, a nearly 15 percent gain over the previous year.

Recognizing an opportunity, the association has been marketing cycling as the ultimate gas-free trip. “When you travel by bicycle, all you need — oil-wise — are a few drops (chain lube, anyone?), not many gallons,” stated its Web site, www.adventurecycling.org, earlier this month.

“As far as we’re concerned, less expensive, gas-free vacations rule.”

Gas-free travel poses some obvious vacation limits. To cover any significant distance by bike, on foot, by [kayak](#) or even on horseback you’ll need a lot of energy and a lot of time off.

Marvin and Nancy Webster from Bloomfield, [Mo.](#), are both retired so they didn’t have to worry about missing work when they decided to take a mule-drawn wagon to visit their two sons in Richland Center, Wis., earlier this year. The couple, both 65, set out on April 29, using a homemade wagon, pulled by three mules. The trip, which typically takes about 11 hours by car, took them 26 days by mule, traveling roughly 30 miles each day, they said.

While the wagon trip was a lifelong dream of theirs, “saving on the gas,” Mr. Webster said, “that was all right with us, too.”

Lacking time the Websters had, most fuel-conscious travelers compromise by taking short gas-free trips, not far from where they live or by using public transit or car-pooling with friends to cut fuel bills.

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority has been adding tourist videos to its Web site, www.metro.net, to show where you can go by public transit after seeing a spike in ridership. Its not known how many were on vacation but last month, 319,582 passengers boarded [Los Angeles](#) Metro Rail trains on an average weekday, up 20 percent over a year earlier. Metro bus average weekday ridership rose 6.5 percent to 1,227,752.

Pamela Fischer and her husband, Scott Spaulding, from New Gloucester, Me., had planned a 10-day bike vacation from their summer home near Millinocket, Me., to the far north around Caribou, Fort Kent and Presque Isle. But work obligations forced the couple to scale the trip back to five days, so they ended up driving close to Presque Isle before heading out on a 260-mile meandering bike loop.

“We ultimately ended up having to settle for a gasoline-minimized vacation instead of a pure gasoline-free vacation,” Ms. Fischer said.

Weather can be an issue when traveling without a car roof over your head. And a flat tire or a wrong turn may be a bigger deal than when traveling by motor vehicle, as Mr. Huether and Ms. Wierowski learned on their four-day Erie Canal trip.

When a spoke on Mr. Huether’s back wheel broke a good 20 miles from one day’s destination, the couple had to call a family member to pick them up, and break their gas-free rule. The next day they got off to a late start and ended up riding in the dark to their next stop.

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"Night came and we were not prepared," Mr. Huether said. After missing a turn, the couple ended up on a two-lane expressway. "It was dark enough cars could hardly see us," he said. "Heather was close to tears."

But soon the couple saw a light. "I am not a fan of [Wal-Mart](#) but I have never been happier to see one," said Mr. Huether, who bought two headlights and taillights at the store.

Packing for such trips can also be a challenge. Marsha Brown, who has taken many bike trips with her husband, Al Brown, from their home in Lake Placid, Fla., recommends attaching a small suitcase to the bike's rear luggage rack. She recommends the Ortleib Shuttle Bike, a lightweight wheeled suitcase that attaches to a bike rack.

Keith Hickerson, a professional mountain-bike racer from [Boise, Idaho](#), prefers BOB trailers, which roll behind a bike. On a recent backcountry-trip with his wife, Ashley, and four friends, each biker pulled trailers with food and clothing for four days.

Here is a list of online resources to help plan your own gas-free vacation:

The **Adventure Cycling Association** offers online tools to help cyclists plan a gas-free trip, including the Cyclists' Yellow Pages at www.adventurecycling.org/cyp, which lists tour operators and other bike travel resources. The association also sells maps specifically for cyclists, with elevation profiles, turn-by-turn directions and symbols that mark bike shops, lodging and other services. Twenty-one routes are available for \$12.75 each or \$9.75 for members, who pay \$35 a year.

[MapMyRide.com](#), a fitness site, allows cyclists to create a route and download global positioning coordinates to a G.P.S. device before heading out on the road. It is one of several sites run by MapMyFitness, which hosts an online fitness community with tools to track and plan athletic pursuits like jogging, [hiking](#) and biking.

[Trails.com](#) is a subscription Web site that offers more than 43,000 maps of the [United States](#) for all kinds of activities, including hiking, kayaking and [skiing](#). Access to the downloadable maps and guides costs \$49.95 a year, though some trail information is free.

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