

Celebrating Cycling: Manitoulin Island Cycling Advocates' Achievements

On June 6 and 7, 2020, Manitoulin Island Cycling Advocates (MICA) will hold a 10th anniversary Manitoulin Passage Ride, bringing cyclists to the island for free by the Chi-Cheemaun ferry from Tobermory. On June 6 there will be an evening event in M'Chigeeng, a First Nations community, with a mini powwow and a special local beer.

The two-day ride offers three route options each day, a short, medium and long-distance ride, and is fully supported with mechanical support and light snacks.

MICA also offers five-day Alvar Cycle Tours. While the June tour has already sold out, tours in September are still available. These tours provide an in-depth island experience, letting you explore marine and geological history, natural alvar formations, art galleries, First Nations culture, local food and drink and more.

In 2012, MICA published the first Manitoulin Island and La Cloche Mountains Cycle Routes and Road Map, making it easier for cyclists to navigate in the area. By 2017 there were more than 5,500 cyclists taking the ferry to the island. This year there are five different map editions, featuring more than 800 km of cycle loops and routes. These maps can be bought on MICA's website manitoulincycling.com and on the ferry, among other places.

In 2018 eight bilingual wayfinding trailheads were opened on the island, giving points of interest and cycle route descriptions at all route starting points: Little Current, Mindemoya, South Baymouth, Providence Bay, Kagawong, Gore Bay, Julia Bay and Sheguiandah.

Paved Shoulders

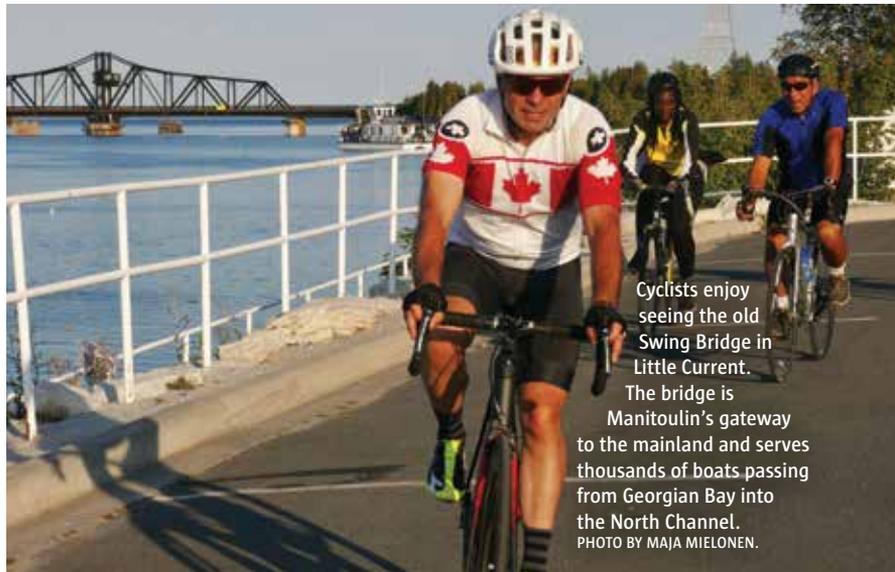
Another significant achievement has been the establishment of paved shoulders for cyclists on the Island's provincial highways 551, 540 from Little Current to Kagawong, and Hwy 6 from Ten Mile Point to Little Current.

"Cyclists from all around North America choose Manitoulin as a cycle destination to experience our quiet roads, Manitoulin's rich limestone flora and observing our wildlife still protected by the old split rail fencerow way of farming," says Maja Mielonen, MICA's president. "They find peace cycling on quiet hardtop rural roads along the gentle rolling hills. Smelling the tall lavender bushes in spring puts a smile on your face, hearing the migratory Sandhill Cranes enriches all fall rides and resting on the many lonely beaches is a highlight for all seeking an off-the-beaten-path holiday experience."

Thousands of Km

MICA is credited with forming the Georgian Bay Cycling Route, a 1,000-km route around Georgian Bay and onto Manitoulin Island. This route is part of the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail that goes from Parry Sound to Midland to Owen Sound, to Espanola and Sudbury and west to Sault St. Marie.

"In partnership with many," notes Maja, "among them the Great Lakes Generation Trust, Share the Road and Ontario by Bike, the north-south connection was opened



Cyclists enjoy seeing the old Swing Bridge in Little Current.

The bridge is Manitoulin's gateway to the mainland and serves thousands of boats passing from Georgian Bay into the North Channel.

PHOTO BY MAJA MIELONEN.



▲ Lakes on an island in a lake: Manitoulin's 108 inland lakes offer wonderful views and swimming opportunities. PHOTO BY MAJA MIELONEN.

up and is now part of the CycleOn provincial cycle web. A good portion, about 3/4 of this route is ready and fully signed as part of the over-3000-km Great Lakes Waterfront trail."

MICA has been formally recognized for their efforts. In April of 2019 the group won the Wheels of Change Organization of the Year award from Share the Road Bike Summit in Toronto. In November 2019 MICA was given the Industry Leader Product Development Award from the Destination Northern Ontario Summit.

MICA's efforts are making inroads close to home, as well.

"Seeing so many cyclists along the roadways over the years has resulted in local residents picking up cycling as well," declares Maja. "We are very happy to see that more and more children are cycling to school. MICA encouraged all municipalities to include mobility plans into their strategic planning to consider the safety for all road users, making the road safe for people between eight and 80 years of age."

MICA's website is www.manitoulincycling.com.