

# Life: Cycle.

**Whether rural or urban, paved or unpaved, mountain or prairie, Oklahoma bike trails beckon two-wheel adventurers with physical challenges and breathtaking scenery.**

**By SUSAN DRAGOO | Illustrations by J.J. RITCHEY**



# Lake Thunderbird State Park

**I**T'S THE BEST trail in the world—not that I'm biased," says David Swanson of Norman, trailmaster for the Clear Bay Trail at Lake Thunderbird State Park. Over the past eighteen years, Swanson and his fellow cyclists with the Bicycle League of Norman have helped build

and maintain a twenty-six-mile unpaved trail system with something for everyone. Thunderbird's trails range from easy to expert, winding through the Cross Timbers, skimming the shore, and offering a surprising variety of terrain and elevation changes. The most recent addition is the Plaid section of the 4.5-mile Blue Loop

that is a favorite for racers who want to work on their speed as well as novices who want a flat, nontechnical trail. "We wanted to make the Plaid a section that would lure riders looking for a fast trail," says Swanson. The Green and Yellow Loops are short and mellow, with gentle ups and downs

and two easy drop-ins. The 10.25-mile Gold Loop challenges expert riders with steep climbs and drops; technical elements like Quadzilla; the Teeter Totter; a long, downhill boardwalk known as the Lumber Yard; and the recently added Over/Under Bridge. During the week, riders may have the area to them-

selves, scaring up a few white-tailed deer in the woods or a great blue heron along the shore. In addition to access at the Clear Bay Trailhead, the Gold Loop and Plaid section are accessible at the South Dam trailhead about a mile east of the Clear Bay entrance. And there's plenty of RV

and tent camping available in the state park for cyclists who want to make a weekend of it. Lake Thunderbird State Park, 13101 Alameda Drive in Norman, (405) 360-3572 or [TravelOK.com/parks](http://TravelOK.com/parks). The Bicycle League of Norman, [bicycleleagueofnorman.com](http://bicycleleagueofnorman.com).



JAMES PRATT

**T**HE ARKANSAS RIVER is one of Tulsa's defining physical features, and more than forty years ago, city leaders envisioned a public use area along the riverfront that would become a centerpiece for the community. Today, that vision is reality in Tulsa's River Parks, where twenty-six miles of paved trails weave along both sides of the Arkansas.

Cyclists on the east bank trail enjoy the tree-canopied route along River-

side Drive sprinkled with playgrounds, seating areas, and a large collection of bronze wildlife sculptures. On the trail's south end near Ninety-sixth Street, cyclists can cross the river to Jenks or connect to the Creek Turnpike Trail, which provides another sixteen hilly miles for those looking for a good workout. To the north, a path connects Tulsa with Sand Springs via the Katy Trail, and on the west bank, the trail runs south from Eleventh Street to the Turkey Moun-

tain Urban Wilderness Area, which has miles of dirt trails for mountain biking.

A recent rerouting motivated by traffic safety issues created one of the most appealing sections, which runs behind the River Spirit Casino Resort near Eighty-first Street and Riverside Drive. Now, cyclists can enjoy a pleasant roll with the river on one side and the casino's Margaritaville Resort on the other.

On the north end of the east bank trail is Cry Baby Hill, infamous for the Mardi

Gras-like antics along the difficult climb during the annual Tulsa Tough bicycle race.

"Words alone are inadequate to describe Cry Baby Hill," says Malcolm McCollam, executive director of Tulsa Tough. "It must be experienced in person."

River Parks, 3408 South Boston Avenue, (918) 596-2001 or [riverparks.org](http://riverparks.org). Tulsa Tough is June 8-10. [tulsatough.com](http://tulsatough.com). A Tulsa Bicycle Club family membership is \$20 per year. (918) 749-3298 or [tulsabicycleclub.com](http://tulsabicycleclub.com).



## How To Get Started

### Join the Club

Getting involved with a bicycling club is a great way to get to know other cyclists. The Oklahoma Bicycle Society ([okcbike.org](http://okcbike.org)) and Tulsa Bicycle Club ([tulsabicycleclub.com](http://tulsabicycleclub.com)) hold group rides, social events, and educational programs. Maps and suggested routes are available on their websites.

### Volunteer

Mountain bike trails in Oklahoma often are the product of volunteer labor, and the Oklahoma Earthbike Fellowship is the state's most prominent organizer of trail building and maintenance activities. Volunteers always are needed for trail work days. The OEF website also offers maps and details

about unpaved trail systems in Oklahoma. [okearthbike.com](http://okearthbike.com).

### Shop Around

Find a reliable local bicycle shop. It will be a place to connect with fellow cyclists who can provide expert advice on proper bike selection, sizing, and setup, as well as providing maintenance and repair.

### Train Up

Oklahoma's cycling community has a full calendar of events for both road cyclists and mountain bikers. Pick an event and start small; many organized cycling events offer a low-mileage category for riders who prefer a short distance or less challenging course.



# Lake Murray State Park

**L**AKE MURRAY IS Oklahoma's largest state park, and on more than forty miles of trails, cyclists can see it in ways other visitors may not. But the extent of the system at Lake Murray is a well-kept secret according to Phil Charalampous of Davis, one of the volunteers who help maintain the trails and who enjoy the ride lacing the shore of the 5,700-acre lake.

Charalampous and others recently helped complete Ski Jump, which is part of a new nine-mile section from the Lake Murray park office to Tucker Tower. With tons of lake frontage, it's one of the park's most scenic sections of trail. It's rocky and technical and falls into the intermediate-to-difficult category, as does much of the trail system at Lake Murray.

In addition to the new section, two main trails—Anadarche and Buckhorn—run north and south, connecting to each other and multiple spurs. Anadarche is the oldest, starting just east of U.S. Highway 77 on Field Trial Road. The main trail is about five miles long and connects on the south with the Buckhorn Trail. Buckhorn's trailhead is on Lodge Road

west of the water tower. Along the way, these paths travel through woods and wetlands and connect with such routes as Beaver Lookout, Duke's Forest, Elephant Rock, and Race Loop. For Charalampous, this diversity is the best part of the Lake Murray system.

"There's a little bit of everything, from long, fast straightaways to slow techni-

cal, a fair amount of climbing, and of course the landscape," he says. "A lot of the trails run by the lake, so there are beautiful views."

For the less hardcore cyclist, Charalampous says the easiest sections are on the New Deal Trail north of Highway 70 headed toward the Air Park and the Anadarche spur segment south of High-

way 70 to Pecan Grove. For novices who'd rather step off their bikes than worry about the more technical sections, he notes they also are easily walkable.

Maps for cyclists are available at the Lake Murray State Park office. 3528 Scenic State Highway 77 in Ardmore, (580) 223-4044 or [TravelOK.com/parks](http://TravelOK.com/parks).

LORI DUCKWORTH



JAMES PRATT

# Oklahoma River Trails

**A**T SPOTS ALONG the Oklahoma River Trails, the Oklahoma City skyline dominates the horizon. As the smooth, paved path south of downtown follows the river, it provides thirteen miles of easy, scenic riding. From any of several trailheads from Southwest Fifteenth Street and Portland Avenue to the Boathouse District, a cyclist can cruise for about 6.5 miles, cross the river—the Portland and Robin-

son bridges have pedestrian lanes—and continue on the opposite bank. The trails pass Wiley Post and Wheeler parks—near which, on the south bank, a stop at the Ferris wheel makes for a festive break—and skirt the edge of the skate park at the Mat Hoffman Action Sports Complex before entering the Boathouse District. But one of the system’s biggest assets is its connection with the city’s system of trails.

“I can do a loop of Oklahoma City by using the Katy Trail on the east side, the Lake Hefner Trails, the Two Lake connecting trail, and then a loop of Lake Overholser,” says Gary Cannon, past president of the Oklahoma Bicycle Society. The 7.5-mile West River Trail, which opened in 2015, connects the Oklahoma River Trails to Lake Overholser. The latest addition is the Will Rogers

Trail, an eight-mile path stretching from Lake Hefner to the Oklahoma River, and when the Draper Trail is complete, it will create a hilly, twelve-mile loop through the woods and grasslands surrounding Lake Stanley Draper. For trail maps and more information, visit [okc.gov](http://okc.gov). More information on Oklahoma City’s bicycle-pedestrian master plan is available at [bikewalkokc.org](http://bikewalkokc.org).



## Keep It Safe

**Ride in the Street**  
According to Tobin Vigil, owner of Norman’s Buchanan Bicycles, the sidewalk is statistically one of the most dangerous places to ride. Stay on the street as far to the right as possible.

**Be Visible**  
Wear reflective colors, and use lights on your bike. “New cars usually have daytime running lights, so cyclists also need to run lights in the daytime,” says Vigil.

**Obey Traffic Laws**  
Stop at stop signs, and use hand signals to indicate your intended direction of travel.

Besides being courteous, this helps make your behavior predictable for motorists.

**Wear a Helmet**  
Helmets are critical for protecting your head from injury. They’re also a visual signal to motorists. “Wearing a helmet when you’re riding on the road makes you look like you belong,” says Vigil.

**Maintain Your Equipment**  
Check your tire pressure and brakes before every ride. Get to know the people at your local bike shop. They’ll help you learn how to properly care for your bike.



# Medicine Park Trails

**T**HE SOUTHWESTERN OKLAHOMA village of Medicine Park has cultivated a fresh, mountain-town vibe and, because the surrounding bike trails are easy to access from town, it's a one-stop shop for mountain bikers seeking a weekend of fun.

The Mountain Bike Club of the Wichitas developed the system, which includes more than twenty-five miles of trails, most of them rocky and technical, in the foothills of the Wichita Mountains surrounding Medicine Park and along the shore of Lake Lawtonka. The newest section is the 1.6-mile Fish Trail, which begins on the south side of State Highway 49.

"The Fish Trail has one of the most scenic spots around," says MBCW cofounder Chad Everett. "At its highest point, the view is incredible. Mount Scott looks like you could reach out and touch it."

The Fish Trail is the closest thing to a beginner trail here, says Everett, but most of the Medicine Park trails are intermediate to advanced. Even the relatively easier 5.7-mile Mount Scott Firebreak Road, though not technical, involves a lot of climbing. But what goes up must come down, and those downhills are a big attraction for mountain bikers.

Larry Wolcott, MBCW cofounder and longtime trail builder, says that's why his favorite piece of trail is Itchy Scratchy. It's a section of the Black Loop with about a half-mile of downhill leading into Bus Camp, a gathering spot, campsite, and tool shed for trail users near the Black Loop termination. But what makes the Medicine Park trails unique is their accessibility from within the town limits.

"Most places you go to ride mountain bikes, you're out in the middle of nowhere," says Mark Ellis, owner of Basecamp Adventure Outfitters. "Here, you can park right in the middle of town and go ride, then come back and eat a good meal and have a refreshing beverage."

The Mountain Bike Club of the Wichitas holds a group ride every Saturday at 9 a.m. and a ride and trail run on Wednesday afternoons. [facebook.com/mountainbikeclubofthewichitas](https://facebook.com/mountainbikeclubofthewichitas).

LORI DICKWORTH

**C**ACTI, CLIMBING, AND getting away from crowds—for mountain bikers seeking something completely different, the unpaved trails at Roman Nose State Park offer just that.

“These are real mountain trails,” says Brian Urquhart, a longtime leader of the Oklahoma Earthbike Fellowship, which has helped maintain trails at Roman Nose since 2000. “Anywhere out there, if you stop and listen, you hear just the wind and birds, sometimes coyotes, and your heart pounding.”

The seven miles of biking and hiking trails at Roman Nose feature steep climbs and descents along rocky outcroppings amid a cactus-strewn landscape. They are challenging trails more suited for experienced cyclists than beginners.

“Seasoned riders appreciate the challenge,” says Nick Grba, OEF’s trail steward for Roman Nose.

From trailheads near the park store and lodge, the trail meanders between bluffs and ravines and travels the plateaus surrounding the park. Inspiration Point is a popular stop because of its spectacular view of the lake. Urquhart says cyclists who venture this far are glad they did.

“Ask anyone in the Oklahoma City area who has been riding more than ten years, and odds are, they will speak highly of these trails,” he says. “It is a nice break from the normal trails close to home.”

The OEF has worked at Roman Nose for more than two decades to maintain the trails. One of park management’s priorities is to improve the accuracy of trail signage to keep people from getting lost, and OEF has helped.

“Roman Nose is remote and arid, and it can get very hot in the summer and cold in the winter,” he says. “Throw in spotty cell phone coverage and users unfamiliar with the trail, and this is a valid concern.”

But with a lodge, cabins, and camping at the state park, it’s easy to spend a whole weekend on the trails at Roman Nose, where a short ride can make a visitor feel blessedly far from home. ■

Roman Nose State Park, 3236 South State Highway 8A in Watonga, (580) 623-7281 or [TravelOK.com/parks](http://TravelOK.com/parks).



# Roman Nose State Park

JAMES PRATT