

‘EnCYCLEpedia’ guide details the best bike rides of Orange County



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Richard Fox devotes the longest section of the 375-page "enCYCLEpedia" book to Orange County.

By **SUSAN CARPENTER** | Orange County Register

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Richard Fox had three criteria in selecting the “best easy scenic bike rides” for his Southern California guidebook, “enCYCLEpedia.” The scenery had to be beautiful, the trails mostly flat, the traffic kept at bay.

“I was trying to exude the absolute joy of cycling that can be achieved if you’re on the perfect trail,” said Fox, who covers a lot of ground in his 375-page book (Westcliffe Publishers, \$26.95) but devotes the lengthiest section to Orange County.

About a quarter of the 200 or so rides in “enCYCLEpedia” are in O.C., trekking from nature reserves in Crystal Cove and harbors including Dana Point and Newport to the woods of Aliso Creek and, of course, the beaches.

Geographically, Orange County is one of the smaller areas covered in a guide that roams from San Diego to San Luis Obispo to Palm Springs. But when it comes to bicycling infrastructure, O.C. ranks first.

“There’s a lot of newer areas that included biking in their planning and zoning,” said Fox, who walks the talk of what he writes. He cycles between 15 and 25 miles each day.



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Richard Fox, right, author of "enCYCLEpedia," a book detailing the best bicycle rides in Southern California, with his riding partner Steve Fisher, ride the bike trail along the ocean in Huntington Beach.

Splitting his time between San Clemente and Palm Desert, and RV camping in between, the 58-year-old author has cycled all of the trails he writes about. For the book, he reverse-engineered each of them starting with the most scenic places and evaluating how best to see them by bike. Like the environmental consultant he once was, Fox brought a scientific approach to "enCYCLEpedia."

In addition to riding each route, often repeatedly, he spoke with city officials to get detailed information on municipal codes and whether it's legal to bicycle on sidewalks, as well as to discover what projects are in the works that might impact the cycling experience.

Each route includes a detailed map, the distance the ride covers, how long it typically takes and utilitarian details such as where the restrooms are located. If a specific type of bicycle is needed, such as a mountain bike for riding Santiago Oaks Regional Park, for example, or if the terrain is unusually demanding, Fox spells it out, even including mile markers.

And if a trail is prone to flooding or rattlesnakes or a homeless encampment, that too is noted in the "knocks and hazards" entry listed with each ride.

"If it's not someplace I want to send people, I didn't include it," said Fox, who does include the event that could motivate more people to get on their bicycles: brunch. Fox carries a pineapple-print Hawaiian shirt in his bike bag so he can dress properly for the suggested "eats" he builds into all his recommended rides.

May being National Bike Month, I asked Fox to take me on a tour of his favorite O.C. rides and share some of his insider information. We started with his favorite – the Huntington Beach trail, which spans 17 miles (round-trip) from the Santa Ana River Regional Trail at its south end up to Sunset Beach. Fox recommends starting at its northernmost end and riding the stretch north of the Huntington Beach Pier because it is the most scenic, offering great views of the ocean from a slightly elevated trail that runs parallel to, but separate from, Pacific Coast Highway.

I had ridden this trail before, but it was so long ago it might as well have been another lifetime. Like most casual cyclists, I was playing it by ear back then. I didn't own a bicycle at the time and had to find one on the fly. I knew nothing about the trail conditions or amenities, which is why I ended up riding an insufficient 1-speed, battling headwinds late in the day, having a miserable time and never repeating the experience.

If “enCYCLEpedia” had existed back then, I would have known my options for local rentals and the best type of bike, and time of day, for the ride. Fox rides an Electra Townie he bought last year because of its comfortable upright riding position and accommodating 21 speeds. Its slightly wider tires were also handy for negotiating the sand that blows onto the path from the beach. We were riding on a low-traffic Monday, when many of the “knocks and hazards” listed in the book were nonexistent, though Fox did point them out. During summer evenings, the fire pits blow smoke on to the path. On weekends, cyclists often run an obstacle course of inattentive pedestrians who share the trail. One hazard that wasn't noted: squirrels, one of whom ran under my wheels. True to the book's subtitle, the ride was flat and easy, except for a slight headwind riding north. Like all the “enCYCLEpedia” rides, the distance was manageable, providing exercise without incapacitation.

In the book, Fox specifically recommends a sandwich at the trailside restaurant Sandy's for lunch and, more generally, the restaurants along Main Street, where we enjoyed a brief meal before heading to Fox's second favorite bicycle ride in Orange County.

If we were interested in endurance riding, we could have cycled there, but instead we drove to the Back Bay of Newport Beach, which Fox prizes as “a good workout loop with great bird watching.” A 10.3-mile loop of bicycle trails, “legal” sidewalks and picturesque, low-traffic residential surface streets, the Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge loop is moderately difficult because it includes some hills. Stashing our vehicles in Castaways Park, we rode out to a trail along the bluffs and took in spectacular views of the bay, harbor and peninsula on one side and pristine Newport Beach homes on the other.

This particular stretch of official bike trail lasted a half-mile, before dropping us down to the idyllic and well-groomed homes along Santiago Drive for a couple miles, then joining the Brown Trail bike path along water's edge through rolling hills. Fox recommends traveling the loop in a clockwise direction to stay close to the bay, where the blue Back Bay Loop signs serve as a good guide. But for bicycling the best of O.C., “enCYCLEpedia” is even better.