

Share the road. AND THE OFF-ROAD.

By Joquita Burka

IT'S JUST PLAIN FUN. SINCE THAT FIRST TIME YOU WOBBLER DOWN THE DRIVEWAY WITH YOUR DAD RUNNING ALONGSIDE, YOUR BIKE HAS BEEN A TICKET TO FREEDOM.

As you grew up and graduated to more gears and cushy bike seats, the bicycle has remained a unique combination of fun and adventure. Lucky for you that South Carolina is a truly bike-friendly state. Admit it—you've gotta love a state that creates names such as Sumter Chain Gang (local bike club) and Tour de Dump (rolling route that circles a landfill). And with 610,000 acres of National Forest; 80,061 acres of natural beauty preserved in our state parks; lakes and rivers forming our "Freshwater Coast" on the west; incredible beaches on the East Coast; and mountains in the northwest, our state is an incredible playground that seems made to be explored from the seat of a two-wheeler.

So grab a water bottle, a map and start peddling. It's a great way to see the state at a slower pace.

HIT THE ROAD.

When you say "biker" around the South Carolina Upstate, residents will be quick to tell you all about our favorite local hero, George Hincapie. At the international level, fans have seen George leading the way for seven-time champion Lance Armstrong in the Tour de France. When he's at home in Greenville, his frequent training rides take him up and down the local hills at a pace few can match. In 2006, George thrilled the hometown crowd by winning the USA Cycling Pro Championships. The 2007 Road Race Championship again traversed the steep switchback climbs of Paris Mountain and the crowd-lined streets of downtown Greenville. Hincapie finished a close second to Levi Leipheimer who just months earlier stood in third place on the podium

in the prestigious Tour de France. Thousands of cyclists participate in this Labor Day weekend event that includes activities for the whole family, fun rides for amateurs, as well as the national time trial and road race championships. (www.usacyclingchampionships.com). Don't miss the race in 2008 as the championships return to Greenville for the third year of a three-year run.

For those mere mortals among us, the Palmetto Cycling Coalition keeps an online calendar providing the dates, times and links to weekly rides as well as competitive events across the state. Rides vary from casual family rides to single-day century

rides to cross-state journeys of several days (www.pccsc.net).

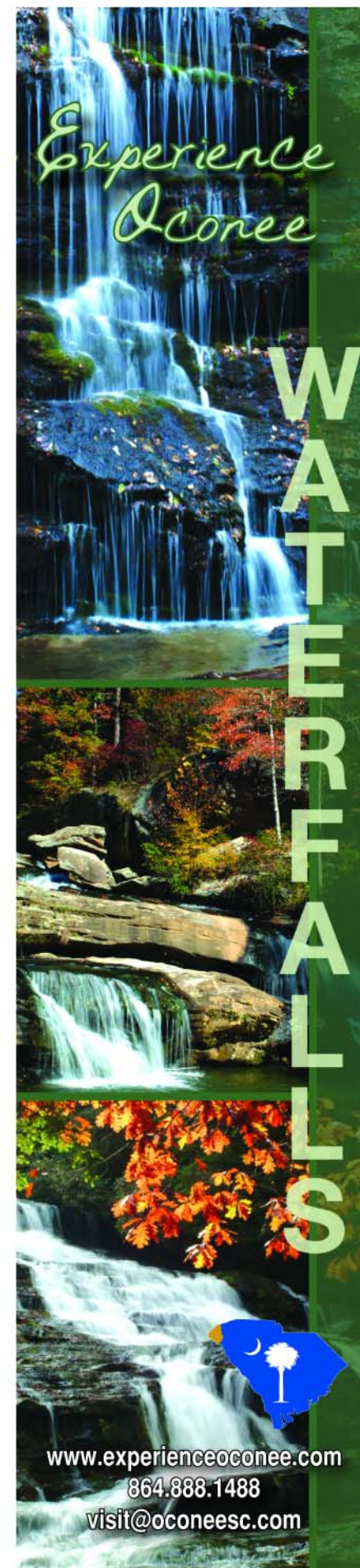
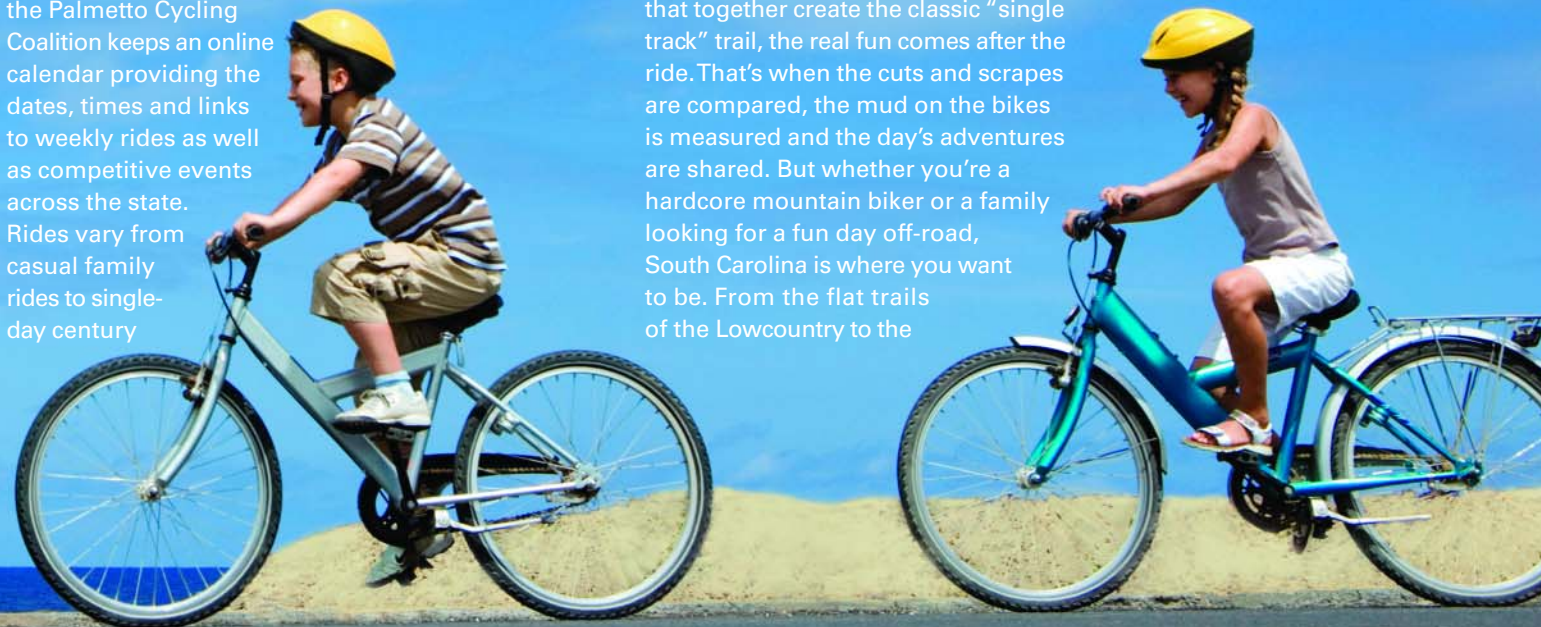
To make your own ride in your own time, local riders suggest a South Carolina state map (available through www.DiscoverSouthCarolina.com) and the South Carolina Bicycle Touring Guide. With routes covering the entire state, the guide offers a variety of possibilities, from those that pass beneath Spanish moss-draped trees to loops along freshwater lakes to the rolling challenge of our breathtaking mountain landscapes. You'll find this and more information at www.sctrails.net/trails. You'll also find links here to many local cycling groups and clubs who will be glad to share their own preferences and tips for making the most of your bike trip.

OFF-ROAD: FAT TIRES AND DIRT.

Ask any true mountain biker, and the truth comes out. As much fun as it may be to navigate the twists, turns, rocks, roots and other natural obstacles that together create the classic "single track" trail, the real fun comes after the ride. That's when the cuts and scrapes are compared, the mud on the bikes is measured and the day's adventures are shared. But whether you're a hardcore mountain biker or a family looking for a fun day off-road, South Carolina is where you want to be. From the flat trails of the Lowcountry to the

bone-rattling descents of the Blue Ridge foothills, this state is mountain biking heaven. One of the most exciting ventures in the state is the Palmetto Trail, which will, upon completion, be one of only 13 cross-state trails in the country. This 425-mile mountain-to-sea trail system will stretch from the Blue Ridge Mountains in Oconee State Park to the Atlantic Coast near McClellanville. Many segments of the trail are open now, and you'll find clear trail maps, difficulty ratings, natural and historic sites along the trail, and other information at www.palmettotrail.org.

South Carolina also offers a number of trails within our state parks. A trip to www.SouthCarolinaParks.com will give you a quick overview of parks which have mountain vistas, deep woods, lakeside or coastal routes. Many also have a number of convenient campsites or cabins to allow bikers a bit of rest after a day in the saddle.



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