

Favorite Camping Spots for Road Biking

Like many people, I love the West Virginia Highlands and there is no better way to enjoy them than by cycling and camping there. For many years, that meant taking my mountain bike with me and exploring the many trails in the [Monongahela National Forest](#). In recent years, it means taking my road bike with me and enjoying the many miles of rural paved roads.

I use to enjoy backpacking, but my knees no longer allow that, but when car camping, I am still looking for places that come close to providing me the peace and solitude of the backpacking experience.

For me, camping means spending the nights in a tent, which provides protection from rain and wind, but lets you still experience the sounds of the wind in the trees and the hoot of the owl. (Rv's and camping trailers are trailer parking, not camping, but that is a personal preference.)

Camping Facilities:

There are three types of camping experiences available in WV which I refer to as *primitive*, *rustic*, and *full service*. Primitive is where you dig your own restroom facilities. I have utilized a few of these in the national forest. Rustic is where they have pit toilets and may or may not have water available. Full service is where showers, flush toilets, and running water are available and usually electrical hookups. Almost all the state parks are full service and a few of the National Forest (NF) campgrounds are full service. However, most NF, state forest and wildlife management area campgrounds are rustic.

With the exception of [Seneca Shadows](#) near Senecas Rocks, [Stuart](#) near Elkins, MNF campgrounds are rustic facilities with pit toilets.

Favorite Camping sites for Road Biking:

Over the years, I have developed a preference for a few camping areas that also provide convenient access to scenic road biking. These areas provide a decent tent camping experience, with shade and some protection from the wind and are usually quiet.

1 Starting in the Northern part of the state is [Horseshoe Campground](#) between St. George and Leadmine in Tucker County. This is a Monongahela National Forest (MNF) campground managed by the YMCA, which runs an adjacent Summer camp. The campground has undergone some recent upgrades with the roads and parking pads paved and new fire pits (terrible designs) installed within the last few years. The trailer parking area has electric and the sites are in a circle around a small field. The tent camping area is separated from the trailer parking area by a large field and is in an old growth stand of trees (mostly hemlock) along Horseshoe Run. There are no shower facilities, but running water and flush toilets are located in the tent camping area. There are a couple deep pools in Horseshoe run where you can take a dip to cool off after a ride on a hot day. The YMCA facility is next door, so if any issues arise, they can be easily contacted.

The tent camping area is in shade all day so you have a nice cool area for relaxing around the campsite. Horseshoe Run is just a few steps away from most of the tent sites so there is the sound of the proverbial babbling brook to tickle your senses. There are some short (less than 3 miles each) hiking trails that can be taken from the campground. There is a large field adjacent to the camping area that can be used for field games, heating your sun shower, or drying your tent prior to packing if necessary.

[Blackwater Outdoor Adventures](#) is located in St. George and provides flat water canoe/kayak

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rental and guided raft trips on the Cheat River. They will take you 4, 6, or 9 miles upriver and you can float back down river to St. George. The distance you want to go will often depend on the river level. I have seen bald eagles, osprey, green and blue herons on this section of river.

The nearest stores are in Parsons.

Rides that can be done from the campground are [Limestone Mountain](#) (add 14 miles if riding from the campground), [Parsons - Kerens Loop](#) (add 8 miles if riding from the campground), and [St. George Loop](#), (add 14 miles if riding from campground). In addition to the above rides, you can do some out and back routes past Leadmine.

DIRECTIONS:

From Parsons, WV, take State Rt. 72 north 6 miles to sign for right turn to St. George, WV. Go into St. George .4 of a mile and turn right onto State Rt. 1. Proceed on Rt. 1 for 3 miles to State Rt. 7. Turn left onto Rt. 7 and go 3.7 miles to campground.

Private campgrounds in the area are [Patriots Four](#) in St. George and [Five Rivers Camp Ground](#) in Parsons.

2 Handley Wildlife Management Area

in Pocahontas County has been a regular camping spot for several years now. Not the most convenient for road biking, as there is a mile of gravel road between the campground and the nearest pavement, but the location, and usually light use during the Summer, provides the quiet non riding camping experience I'm looking for. There is plenty of beautiful riding in an easy commute from the campground.

The campground consists of 12 campsites place in a large circle around an open area. The campsites are set back in woods, so they are shaded and protected on three sides during the

day. There are two pit toilets located at one end of the open area. Water can be obtained at the pump house next to the log home that serves as an office for the area wildlife manager.

In addition to the excellent road riding in the area, there is a fishing lake (more of a big pond) and a smaller pond within easy walking distance to the campground. This lake is frequented by locals in the evening. There are almost always beavers in the lake, which makes for enjoyable late evening watching. Beyond the ponds are several large fields that are mowed for wildlife habitat. They provide hiking and are great for butterfly and bird watching. From the far end of the fields, you have a great view of the Williams River watershed. **Mountain biking is not currently allowed in the wildlife management area.**

The wildlife manager for that part of the state used to live below the lake and made frequent checks on the campground, but when he retired in 2013, the house was torn down reducing the amount of supervision of the area, but I have had no issues in 2014.

Road biking opportunities include the [Upper Scenic Highway Loop](#). The paved road to access the Handley Wildlife Management Area is part of this loop. The Woodrow - Williams River Road provides many miles of beautiful riding. From the Highland Scenic Highway bridge to Cowan is flat along the Williams River. From the bridge to Edray, you will encounter some climbing. The [Marlinton Loops](#) are an easy commute to Edray, or can be extended by riding from the WMA access road, however you will also have the 2 mile Woodrow climb coming back. All of the above is beautiful riding.

Other camping opportunities in the area are the numbered campsites along the Williams River Road, [Tea Creek Campground](#) near the Scenic Highway bridge and [Day Run Campground](#). Day Run was my favorite before finding Handley WMA. However, it also has the

disadvantage of having a mile of gravel road to get to it and has higher useage the Handley. The Williams River Road numbered sites and Tea Creek provide easy access to paved riding. Tea Creek is a favorite of mountain bikers. Tea Creek has the highest usage rate, if you like company camping. There are plenty of mountain biking opportunities off the Scenic Highway in the area.

3 [Seneca State Forest Campground](#) is located on State Route 28 between Huntersville and Cass. It is a small (12 sites) campground right off the paved road. Though rustic, there are pay showers behind the forest headquarters about a mile down the road. The campsites are almost entirely shaded all day, which is great for those hot Summer days.

[Marlinton Loops](#) and can be done from the campground and the [Cass Loop](#) can be done with a short commute.

[Seneca State Forest](#) provides hiking, fishing, boating and mountain biking opportunities. [Cass Scenic Railroad](#), [the Greenbank Observatory](#), [Watoga State Park](#), [Droop Mountain Battlefield State Park](#), and [Beartown State Park](#) are in convenient commuting distance.

4 [Watoga State Park - Beaver Creek State Campground](#). This campground has been a base for many bike adventures over the years, whether mountain or road biking. Watoga is the largest park in the WV park system and has two campgrounds, Beaver Creek and Riverside, separated by seven miles. Both campgrounds are full service facilities.

Beaver Creek is the older campground and lessor used. Most campsites are shaded and with the exception of those in the middle circle, are well spaces apart. The large field in the upper end of the campground used to be a landing strip and is an excellent place for star

gazing. The Alleghany Trail goes thru the campground and connects with other hiking trails in the park.

There are several rides you can do from the campground. A loop around the park by the office will give you an eight mile ride with one good climb and a great view over toward Droop Mountain from the overlook. Out and back to Huntersville is 16 miles. The [Assault on Droop Mountain Ride](#) is done from the campground and the shorter [Hillsboro - Lobelia Loops](#) are an easy commute. The [Marlinton Loops](#) can be done from the campground, adding 16 miles for the out and back to Huntersville.

[Seneca State Forest](#), [Cass Scenic Railroad](#), the [Greenbank Observatory](#), [Droop Mountain Battlefield State Park](#), [Beartown State Park](#), and the [Birthplace of Pearl Buck](#) are in easy commuting distance.

For over twenty years, it was the site of the Mountain State Wheelers Bicycle Clubs Fall camping weekend.

5 [Keatley Campground](#), [Bluestone Wildlife Management](#) Area is one of seven campgrounds within the Bluestone WM with 15 campsites. All the campgrounds are rustic and do not have water sources, so bring a good supply. Keatley is across the road from the WMA office at Indian Mills. The campsites at Keatley are situated around a small field adjacent to Indian Creek. There is a nice rock ledge and swimming hole under the bridge for cooling off after a hot ride. Bring your own firewood as there is none for sale at the campgrounds.

Other Favorite Camping Spots:

Spruce Knob Lake Campground: This has been a long time favorite camping site. I love camping here and was a base for many mountain bike adventures. It is a good base

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for doing the [Spruce Knob Climb](#). It is also my base when riding the [Franklin - Upper Track Loop](#), but [Seneca Shadows Campground](#) is more convenient and also has showers.

Favorite Primitive Spot: My favorite primitive spot(s) is along the Little River north of Durbin along Forest Service Rt. 17. You have easy access to the [West Fork Trail](#) and 6 mile commute to do the [Cass Loop](#) from Durbin.

References:

Best Tent Camping - West Virginia, by Johnny Molloy is a good reference guide. Can usually be found at Tamarack or regional section of major WV book stores as well as Amazon. I might be a little prejudice as you can find my name in the acknowledgments in the front.

Campground etiquette.

Most campground have rules posted. Generally these specify a quiet hours between the hours of 10 to 6 or 7. Quiet hours includes not running **GENERATORS!**

These hours also apply to outside lights. Many people enjoy experiencing the true darkness of the night or seeing their shadow by

the light of the full moon. If I wanted natural light, I would camp under the street light in the front of my house.

Even if it is not quiet hour, it is not cool to share your music with other campers. Everyone has different taste in music, plus others enjoy hearing the sounds of nature, like birds, and frogs. If you want to listen to music, use earphones. There are no walls to stop your music traveling to other campsites. The only music I find tolerable sometimes is when people are making their own.

In general, National Forest campgrounds (NFC), can be hit or miss. They are generally unsupervised, so your experience is entirely dependent on the good behavior of your fellow campers. Some of my best and worst camping experiences have occurred in NFCs.

They are usually visited once a day by MNS rangers or WV State Police under contract, but these visits usually occur once during the day. Don't expect there to be anyone around to enforce quiet hour rules. In general, most people are observant of the rules, but it only takes one for an unpleasant experience. <http://www.forestcamping.com/dow/eastern/m>



Handley WMA



Keatley Campground