

Raritan Headwaters Association
20th Annual 2023 Ride For the River
June 17, 2023

Interpretive Tour of the Ride for the Ride for the River Route

History

Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA) was formed by the 2011 merger of two effective nonprofit conservation groups, the Upper Raritan Watershed Association (URWA) and the South Branch Watershed Association (SBWA), both founded in 1959 to engage New Jersey residents in safeguarding water sources and natural ecosystems.

URWA and SBWA were established at a time when few laws existed to protect clean water and air. The first Earth Day and the federal Clean Water Act were more than a decade away, and the Clean Air Act was several years in the future.

The momentum to create the two organizations grew out of a series of grassroots meetings in local living rooms. ***Our founders*** were concerned that the area's natural resources were being destroyed by the fast pace of development, and they were looking for a way to preserve the local environment and quality of life.

Over the course of 50-plus years, URWA and SBWA successfully fought battles over issues like inappropriate land use proposals and threats to stream and groundwater quality. Both groups preserved key properties that protect rivers and streams, and both were pioneers in offering environmental education programs. SBWA's signature Community Well Test Program was established to allow citizens to test their drinking water for contaminants.

In 2010, the trustees of the two organizations met to explore the idea of a merger. Combining staffs and resources, they concluded, would produce a stronger organization that could assume a larger role as an environmental watchdog and advocate for science-based planning.

Today, Raritan Headwaters is known as a state leader in environmental education and outreach, and for our work in water quality monitoring, ecological research, habitat restoration, land preservation and stewardship to protect the natural resources of the 470 square mile North and South Branch Raritan River watershed.

The Ride for the River route you are following takes you through some of the most important areas that the Raritan Headwaters Association has worked to protect. Encompassing all or parts of 38 municipalities in Hunterdon, Somerset and Morris counties, the North and South Branch Raritan River watershed is the largest watershed located entirely within the State of New Jersey.

Segment 1: Round Valley Reservoir, South Branch Watershed and Echo Hill Park

The journey begins in an area steeped in Revolutionary War history and home to Echo Hill Park, which holds a significant historical connection to the Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA) and the South Branch Watershed.

The first segment passes by the Round Valley Reservoir, New Jersey's largest manmade reservoir that is over 200 feet deep in some locations and can hold 55 billion gallons of water at capacity. Round Valley supplies drinking water to over one million residents in central New Jersey and is piped downstream to residents in the greater Newark area. The reservoir was constructed in the 1950s by the State of New Jersey and was an extremely controversial project as the state used its power of eminent domain to evict residents and farmers that lived in the valley for many years. During periods of severe drought when water levels are low, evidence of

the town can be spotted below the surface of the water. The reservoir is surrounded by the Round Valley Recreation Area, a popular spot for hiking, camping, and fishing.

Next, you'll pass by Echo Hill Park which holds great importance for RHA. Hermia Lechner, founder of the South Branch Watershed Association, was a visionary environmentalist and activist who recognized the significance of protecting the South Branch Watershed and its natural resources. She played a crucial role in establishing the South Branch Watershed Association, which later merged with the Upper Raritan Watershed Association founded by Helen Woodman to form the Raritan Headwaters Association.

In addition to her contributions to the SBWA, Hermia Lechner also spearheaded the creation of Echo Hill Park. Her dedication and tireless efforts led to the establishment of this beautiful park, which serves as a testament to her passion for preserving the natural environment and educating the community about the importance of watershed conservation.

Today, Echo Hill Park stands as a living legacy of Hermia Lechner's vision and RHA's commitment to protecting the South Branch Watershed. This scenic park encompasses a portion of the Prescott Brook, a Category 1 waterway that is a tributary to the South Branch of the Raritan River. The park provides a serene setting for outdoor activities and environmental education programs. Its trails, meadows, and riparian areas showcase the beauty and ecological significance of the region. The park was previously the home of Hermia Lechner and her husband Bob Lechner. In summers they ran a camp at this park and introduced many children to nature.

Segment 2: Spruce Run Reservoir, Spruce Run, and Rocky Run

Continuing along the route, riders will pass within a few miles of the charming town of Clinton, known for its iconic Red Mill, a former four-story grist mill located along the South Branch Raritan River built in 1810. This well-preserved 19th-century mill stands as a testament to the area's industrial past. The mill played a vital role in the development of the community, serving as a hub for local farmers and providing resources for the growing region. Its presence reminds us of the interplay between human endeavors and the natural environment that RHA strives to safeguard. Make it a destination on another ride!

Shortly after crossing I-78, you will cross over Mulhockaway Creek on your way to Spruce Run Reservoir. Mulhockaway Creek is a 24-mile-long (39 km) tributary of Spruce Run Creek in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. The creek rises in the Sourland Mountains and flows generally northeast to empty into Spruce Run Reservoir. The creek is a popular spot for fishing, hiking, and camping.

As the ride turns onto Van Syckles Road, riders are greeted by the magnificent Spruce Run Reservoir.

Spruce Run Reservoir is a stunning man-made reservoir located in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, along the designated route of the motorcycle poker run. It covers an area of approximately 1,290 acres and is a significant part of the Spruce Run Recreation Area. The reservoir was constructed in the late 1950s/early 1960s by damming the waters of the Spruce Run and Rocky Run, two major tributaries of the South Branch of the Raritan River. The reservoir can store up to 11 billion gallons of water at full capacity and is the third largest man-made reservoir in the state. Along with Round Valley, Spruce Run Reservoir plays a critical role in supplying water to much of central New Jersey.

Spruce Run, the primary tributary, is a picturesque stream that meanders through the rolling countryside of western New Jersey. It originates from natural springs and small tributaries, gradually gaining strength as it flows eastward. The clear waters of Spruce Run contribute to the pristine quality of the reservoir, supporting a diverse

array of aquatic life and serving as a recreational hub for boating, fishing, and swimming activities. The presence of this reservoir along the route underscores the importance of responsible water management and the Raritan Headwaters Association's commitment to preserving the region's natural resources for both human and ecological well-being.

After a quick jaunt on CR 31 N, your quick right onto Rocky Run Rd, rides you along its namesake.

Rocky Run, another tributary feeding into Spruce Run Reservoir, adds its own unique character to the landscape. As its name suggests, Rocky Run flows over rocky terrain, creating small cascades and tranquil pools along its course. This scenic stream, with its vibrant aquatic ecosystems and surrounding woodlands, enhances the natural beauty of the area and provides a haven for wildlife. Notice the numerous spring houses along the Rocky Run Road reminding us of the importance of abundant and clean groundwater. How many do you count?

Segment 3: Hoffman's Crossing, Raritan River, South Branch River Reservation, the Columbia Trail, Long Valley, and Pottersville

Along the longest segment of the run, the route takes riders on a captivating journey through scenic towns and picturesque landscapes, starting from Bunnvale and passing through Califon, Long Valley, and culminating in the charming village of Pottersville.

Beginning in Bunnvale, riders are greeted with the tranquility of the countryside. As they venture forth, they witness rolling hills, vibrant fields, and the beauty of nature unfolding around them before coming to Hoffman's Crossing, a bridge over the South Branch Raritan River.

Continuing onward, the route leads to the quaint town of Califon. Nestled along the banks of the South Branch Raritan River, Califon exudes a nostalgic ambiance. Riders pass through its historic downtown area, lined with well-preserved buildings that tell tales of yesteryears. The river itself adds to the town's allure, reflecting the surrounding natural beauty.

Leaving Califon, as they venture forth, they have the chance to experience the renowned Columbia Trail, a former railway line transformed into a scenic multi-use trail. The trail winds through lush greenery, offering stunning views of the surrounding woodlands, streams, and wildlife. It provides a peaceful and nature-filled experience for riders, showcasing the commitment to preserving natural spaces along the route. Definitely warrants a return trip with your bicycles or hiking boots!

Continuing along the hilly countryside, riders will come upon Long Valley - a delightful blend of history and charm. The town's rich heritage is evident in its well-preserved buildings and historic landmarks. Riders can appreciate the architectural beauty. The quaint downtown area is lined with shops, eateries, and a vibrant community atmosphere.

Next on the journey is Pottersville, a serene hamlet nestled in the rolling hills where Hunterdon, Morris and Somerset counties all meet. The settlement of Pottersville began in the 1750s as a milling center owned by the Sering Potter family. The property was named "Potter's Mills," but later changed to Pottersville with the establishment of the post office in 1840. Pottersville's tranquil ambiance and stunning natural surroundings make it a hidden gem along the route. Riders can enjoy the sight of old stone houses, tree-lined lanes, and the meandering waters of the Black River (a tributary to the North Branch Raritan River), which adds to the area's enchanting allure. Some say the Black River Road is some of best riding roads of the poker run!

The final leg of the route leads riders to Oldwick, a historic village steeped in colonial heritage. Oldwick exudes timeless beauty with its well-preserved buildings, classic architecture, and picturesque streets. As riders pass through, they can admire the historic Tewksbury Inn, a prominent landmark that stands as a testament to the area's cultural legacy.

Throughout the journey from Bunnvale to Oldwick, riders are treated to panoramic views of the rolling hills, verdant landscapes, and winding roads that epitomize the beauty of the region. This captivating route showcases the unique blend of natural splendor and historical charm that characterizes the North and South Branch Raritan River watershed.

Segment 4: Rockaway Creek, Mountainville, Tewksbury, and final stretch with a breath-taking view of Round Valley Reservoir to finish the ride.

Starting from Oldwick Fire House, riders set off, immersing themselves in the serene beauty of the surroundings. As they follow the road along the Rockaway Creek (a tributary to the Lamington River in Hunterdon County), they are treated to the soothing sounds of flowing water and the tranquility of the riparian landscape. The creek, with its gentle currents and picturesque banks, adds a touch of serenity to the journey.

Continuing along the route, riders reach the charming village of Mountainville. Nestled amidst rolling hills and lush greenery, Mountainville exudes a peaceful ambiance. Riders can appreciate the quaint charm of this small community, with its well-preserved homes, gardens, and local landmarks like the Tewksbury Historical Society, that reflect its historical roots.

Leaving Mountainville, the route takes riders along Water Street in Tewksbury Township (circa 1755), where they can enjoy views of the charming houses and establishments lining the road. A group of 150-year old frame homes cluster around the intersection of Water Street and Cokesbury Road. This stretch of the ride may offer glimpses of the Rockaway Creek as it meanders alongside, another meaningful water source to protect.

As riders continue to Cokesbury Road at the border of Clinton and Tewksbury Townships, they will pass the Cokesbury United Methodist Church featuring Greek Revival architecture that was built in 1851. In this area, an iron mine and furnace also existed which was first operated by the British before the Revolutionary War.

Riders will traverse through beautiful countryside, passing by verdant fields and open landscapes as they descend down the mountain on Cokesbury Road toward Route 22. This part of the route showcases a spectacular view of the Round Valley Reservoir along with the rural splendor of the region, offering riders a chance to appreciate the natural beauty that surrounds them.

Throughout the route, riders are treated to the harmonious blend of nature and community as they traverse portions of the 470 square mile North and South Branch Raritan River watershed. The Ride for the River serves a crucial purpose: to showcase the awe-inspiring beauty of nature and emphasize the significance of our role in safeguarding its most precious resource - water. ***Conserve and protect.***