

Bicycling to High Adventure



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Offered by the
HIGH ADVENTURE TEAM
Greater Los Angeles Area Council
Boy Scouts of America

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The High Adventure Team of the Greater Los Angeles Area Council-Boy Scouts of America is a volunteer group of Scouters which operates under the direction of GLAAC-Camping Services. Its mission is to develop and promote outdoor activities within the Council and by its many Units. It conducts training programs, sponsors High Adventure awards, publishes specialized literature such as Hike Aids and The Trail Head and promotes participation in summer camp, in High Adventure activities such as backpacking, peak climbing, and conservation, and in other Council programs.

Anyone who is interested in the GLAAC-HAT and its many activities is encouraged to direct an inquiry to the GLAAC-Camping Services or visit our web site at <http://glaac-hat.org/>. The GLAAC-HAT meets on the evening of the first Tuesday of each month at 7:30 pm in the Cushman Watt Scout Center, 2333 Scout Way, Los Angeles, CA 90026. These meetings are open to all Scouters.



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*Bicycling to
High Adventure*

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“Outdoor adventures don’t happen only in forested wilderness and on untamed rivers and lakes. In fact, back roads and bike paths can be just as inviting, just as strenuous, just as exciting as any hiking trail.”

Robert Morgan, Fieldbook

Dedicated to Roy Heughins, an ardent advocate of bicycle programs and High Adventure during his tenure on the LAAC-HAT.

Introduction

Bicycles have been around for almost 150 years. Learning to ride one is still a childhood achievement. Who would have thought back in the 1970's that bicycles, and riding, could change as dramatically as they have? The impact that new materials and equipment designs in the 60's had on backpacking has happened with cycling in the 90's. Bicyclists are no longer limited to paved streets and highways. They can now seek High Adventure on many of the same trails that are used by hikers.

These changes may be seen as both a blessing and a curse. The Unit can take bicycle trips to different locations that appeal to different members than backpacking trips. The downside is that bicycles are often a trail hazard and can cause more destruction than the typical hiker.

Begin the Unit's cycling program by having an orientation for all potential participants. It should cover such matters as:

- ◆ the condition and adjustment of the bicycles,
- ◆ bicycle safety,
- ◆ traffic laws,
- ◆ riding technique, and
- ◆ the nature and purpose of the cycling program.

Bicycles that are not in adequate condition or that lack required safety equipment, such as reflectors, must be disqualified until the defects are corrected. Most bikes will require little more than adjusting the height of the seat and handlebars and inflating the tires to their recommended pressure. Several very fine books on maintenance and repair are listed in the Bibliography. Participants whose bikes lack a license should be instructed as to how and where to acquire one.

Consider having a bicycle rodeo or field day, either as a part of this orientation or as a separate event. Use it as an opportunity for participants to demonstrate riding skills and techniques, and a knowledge of safe riding practices and traffic laws.

The next step is to conduct a Cycling merit badge program. Have everyone participate, to demonstrate skills and physical ability. This can provide an attractive transition into a more challenging High Adventure Program and the awards that are available.

Have a safe, enjoyable riding program. May the wind always be at your back.



Risk and Safety

A bicycle is as safe as its rider, barring a deliberate act by a motorist that causes an accident. Cyclists in the Tour de France average 25 miles per hour in driving rain and can reach 60 mph downhill on alpine roads, with minimal accidents. Inexperienced or careless riders routinely fall or are hit by cars in their own neighborhoods. Oh sure, Tour riders have state-of-the-art equipment and don't share the road with cars, trucks, or pedestrians. Most of the time they just ride in tight pack, at high speeds, where the slightest error can cause them to crash.

So you say that risk and safety for the Tour de France just aren't the same as for a Unit cycling trip. However, before dismissing this analogy as faulty, consider that there are some lessons to be learned.

- ◆ The Tour rider's bicycle is in perfect condition and adjustment.
- ◆ The Tour rider wears appropriate safety equipment.
- ◆ The Tour rider is in top physical condition.
- ◆ The Tour rider is constantly aware of the other riders and what is happening around him.
- ◆ The Tour rider rides under control at all times.
- ◆ The Tour rider obeys the rules that apply to the sport.

The Unit Leadership that accomplishes these things will have gone a long way to minimizing risk and having a safe and enjoyable cycling program.

Two major risks to riding on city streets are caused by indifferent or inattentive motorists.

1. Making a sudden turn across the path of a bicyclist.
2. Opening a car door in front of a bicyclist.

In both instances, the motorist is at fault, but it is the cyclist who is injured.

These risks may be reduced by practicing good riding technique.

- ◆ Be visible by riding to the side of the traffic lane.
- ◆ Be clear as to where you are going and what you are going to do — use arm signals; make eye contact.
- ◆ Ride in a straight line to the left of a parking lane, rather than weaving in and out between parked cars.
- ◆ Be especially watchful for persons sitting in parked cars.
- ◆ Be a considerate, courteous rider.

Bicycle vs. automobile accidents invariably result in broken bones for the rider. Never challenge a motorist. Consider that the vehicle is a lethal weapon, independent of anything that might be inside it.

On rural highways and trails, loose sand, dirt, rocks, or other debris pose a risk. As these are conditions that can change almost daily, the Unit won't be aware of them until they are encountered. This environment accentuates the importance of good riding technique.

- ◆ Be alert to roadway or trail conditions.

- ◆ Be in control of the bicycle.
- ◆ Ride at a safe speed.
- ◆ Maintain an adequate distance between bikes.

Dismount and walk the bike through or around the problem. Try to ride through it and you will go down.

When beginning an off-road riding program in the local mountains, use the fire roads before attempting trails. Participants need to get the feel of their bikes and learn any special techniques on these graded roads, which are quite different from city streets. As with backpacking, start with easier, developed routes and progress to more challenging ones as the requisite skills are attained. A stream crossing usually means dismounting and carrying across the bicycle. They are almost always rocky, uneven, and slippery — treacherous conditions for even skilled mountain bikers.

Other risks that are unique to the mountains are cougars, rattlesnakes, and poison oak. Leave them alone; cycle as a group; stay on the trail. Avoiding a problem with the flora and fauna is not that much different from on a backpacking trip. As when on foot, do not try to get away from a cougar. It can run faster than you can ride, and will take your flight as a challenge. Dismount and use the bicycle as a weapon; scream and shout for the rest of the Unit.

Wet weather and bicycles are not a good combination. Streets are slick and tires lose traction. Wet brakes grab and lock up, causing abrupt stops and falls. Motorists are a greater hazard. Water is kicked up by the tires and passing vehicles, making the rider wet and uncomfortable. Cancel any scheduled ride when it is raining or when the roadways are still wet from rain. For the Unit, bicycling is a fair weather activity.

Injuries from a bicycle accident can range from bruises and abrasions to broken bones — and worse. Wearing protective clothing and equipment will reduce the extent. Carry a first aid kit and a “Consent For Emergency Medical Treatment” release for each participant. Anyone who falls must be examined for broken bones. Any head injury requires immediate medical treatment.

A safe cycling program is based upon three simple concepts.

- ◆ Know and obey the traffic laws.
- ◆ Practice good riding technique.
- ◆ Wear protective clothing and equipment.

Doing these things well will keep the risk to a minimum, while adding a new dimension to the Unit’s High Adventure Program.



Traffic Laws

A bicyclist must obey the same traffic laws as a motorist, when riding on streets and highways. A failure to do so can result in the rider receiving a ticket. To recap the more significant ones:

- ◆ Stop at all traffic lights and stop signs.
- ◆ Ride in the same direction as automobiles, unless a bicycle path provides otherwise.
- ◆ Make the appropriate arm signal before making a turn.
- ◆ Do not ride on the sidewalk, unless it is also a bike path.
- ◆ Yield the right-of-way to all pedestrians.
- ◆ Have a bicycle license.

Free booklets on traffic laws for bicyclists are usually available at offices of law enforcement agencies. Review them with the Unit before beginning a cycling program. They are for the safety of the bicyclist; enforcing them is an act of due diligence by the Unit Leadership.



Cycling Technique

Developing and practicing good cycling techniques results in safer, more efficient riding. Their use identifies the person as a proficient cyclist who cares about himself or herself and is considerate of other users of the highways and bikeways. Many of them are quite obvious and some are required by law. However, boys generally need to be instructed in these techniques and encouraged to use them at all times.

1. **Ride at a steady pace.** Avoid speeding up, slowing down, and making unnecessary stops and starts. Watch the traffic signals and try to arrive at the intersection when the light is green. Starting up uses more energy than riding; speeding up, then slowing down is wasteful of it.
2. **Stop on a yellow light.** Do not enter an intersection after a signal has turned yellow or red. Too many motorists jump the light, and a cyclist is defenseless.
3. **Maintain proper lane position.** Ride to the left edge of any parking lane. Where parking is not permitted, ride to the right of the roadway.
4. **Right turn only lanes.** When coming to an intersection that has one, move to the left edge of the lane before proceeding through it. Vehicles making a right turn can do so without having to worry about what you are going to do.
5. **Left turn only lanes.** Use them to make left turns when traffic is light or where there is a left turn arrow. Stay to the right of the lane, make your turn, and move immediately to the right of the roadway. Vehicles making the turn should always be behind you or to your left.
6. **Rest breaks.** Once an hour—just like backpacking. Water; adjust clothing; do a headcount; check progress.
7. **Single file.** Absolutely. Keep a gap of several feet between bikes.

8. **Passing another rider.** Yell “passing,” then pass on his/her left.
9. **Being overtaken.** Yield to your right.
10. **Controlling the bike.** Ride at a safe speed and under control at all times. Resist the urge of an unbraked, all out, downhill run. Do not permit any horseplay while riding.
11. **Railroad tracks.** Even when dry they are a road hazard. Cross them at as close to a right angle as possible. If there are several or if the roadway is in poor condition, dismount and walk the bike across.
12. **Crossing busy roadways.** Where traffic is heavy and there is no stoplight, stop the group and dismount. Walk the bikes across when it is safe. Some approaching motorists will eventually realize that you are pedestrians and that the Motor Vehicle Code requires that they stop for you to cross.
13. **Visibility.** Wear light colored clothing; mount reflectors; use reflective tape. Use a headlight when riding in the early morning, late afternoon, and night. Ride where you can be seen.
14. **Turning a corner.** Brake before making the turn (just like a car). Applying the brakes, while in a turn, can cause the bike to veer or skid.
15. **Posture.** Keep your elbows slightly bent to absorb bumps. Shock transmitted through rigid arms can cause the bicycle to veer; over time, it is very tiring.
16. **Dogs.** Ignore them, or try a firm, loud “NO.” If a dog won’t stop chasing you, dismount with the bike between you and the animal. Do not resume riding until it leaves.
17. **Dress down.** At the start of the ride, strip down to the clothing that you would be wearing if it were 20 degrees warmer. You will be a bit chilly for a few minutes, but will avoid overheating and the need to stop and remove clothes.
18. **Hands.** Keep both hands on the handlebars ready to apply the brakes, at all times, except when making arm signals.
19. **Parked cars.** Pass on their left. Be alert for someone about to exit or enter it. Stop behind any car that is about to pull out into traffic. Always assume that the driver does not see you, or will not yield you the right of way.
20. **Breathing.** Breathe all the way down to the stomach, using all of the lungs, not just the chest area (same as when hiking). Easy, deep breaths supply more oxygen, which increases endurance.
21. **Braking.** Use both brakes to make a stop. The front brake provides more stopping power, but must be applied with the rear one to keep from going head over heels.
22. **Gears.** Ride in the highest gear that is comfortable. Shift down when beginning to make a stop and beginning to climb a hill.

Be constantly alert and aware of what is happening around you. Think and behave like a considerate, careful motorist. Ride smoothly and predictably with traffic, without abrupt or unsignalled moves. Keep in mind that many motorists ignore bicyclists, if not resent their being on the street or highway. Many do not seem to understand or care that you may be going 15-20 miles an hour and that they are obligated to give you adequate space before they pass or make turns. Ride defensively everywhere and at all times. In any accident with another vehicle, it is the bicycle rider that is injured.



Clothing

A lot of really neat stuff is available, if you want to dress high fashion or high tech. Most of it is more a matter of vanity than need, at least for a Unit cycling program. Light-weight, loose fitting, and suitable for layering are the basic criteria. Shorts and a short sleeved shirt sound like the attire of choice, until you consider how many hours, over how many days, the ride will take. Sunburn is no more pleasant for a cyclist than for a backpacker. Choose the basic clothing to match the weather and other riding conditions.

A lightweight pair of sport shoes will work just fine. Specialty shoes are available, but are not necessary, unless the person's bicycle has pedals that engage in built-in shoe clips. Check shoe laces before every ride and shorten any long, floppy ones. They can become hung up in the sprocket and cause a fall.

Cycling shorts with a padded insert ease the pain for the first few rides of an extended program. Your rump should be toughened up after that, and the expensive shorts won't do much. Cycling gloves are recommended. The padding helps to absorb the shock from the handle-bars, as the hours roll by. They also provide some protection, in the event of a fall.

Carry rain gear when the weather is threatening. However, a better action is probably to re-schedule the ride. If you do proceed and it begins to rain, the raincoat or poncho will keep you dry, as you wait to be picked-up. As mentioned earlier, rain and cycling are a dangerous mix.



Equipment

Bicycles, and the associated equipment, have gone high tech, specialized, and (more) expensive. The Unit Leadership need not be too concerned, beyond the basic, mandatory items: a tuned, well-maintained bicycle and a helmet. The other items that are needed can be borrowed from a person's backpacking gear and the hand tools from the garage, until it goes into a touring program.

The bicycle must fit its rider, and be adequate for the Unit's program. Multi-speed and off-trail are certainly needed once it includes the local mountains and unpaved routes. However, a well maintained, traditional bike will do very well for an around town merit badge and weekend program. For a varied riding program, several styles are available, with a mid-priced, "hybrid" bicycle probably the best suited. The magazine, "Consumer Reports," occasionally does reports and ratings on bicycles (and other cycling equipment), so check it before making any buys.

The helmet must fit properly and meet the standards set by Snell or ASTM. A perfectly satisfactory one may be had for around \$30; of course, a person can also buy one for several hundred dollars. Check for the availability of a local service or program that provides helmets for children for \$20 or less.

Any helmet that was worn in an accident probably should be replaced. It must be, if it sustained a blow or shows any sign of damage. As a helmet works by dissipating impact forces within its liner, damage is not always obvious. However, it will likely fail in any subsequent accident.

Personal Equipment

Each participant should carry the following items:

- ◆ Daypack.
- ◆ Water bottles: a person needs at least a pint per hour, and more on a hot, extended ride.
- ◆ Snack/lunch.
- ◆ Sunglasses.
- ◆ Sunscreen/lip balm.
- ◆ Bandanna.
- ◆ Cuff clips: for long pants.
- ◆ Knee and elbow pads: desirable, if not mandatory.
- ◆ Lock and cable.
- ◆ Map of the route, noting check points.

Unit Equipment

Items to be spread among the participants; just make a note of who has what:

- ◆ Cell phone.
- ◆ First aid kit.
- ◆ “Consent For Emergency Medical Treatment” release for each Scout participant (carried by Adult Leader).
- ◆ Tire pump(s): to fit Schader and Presta valves, or an adapter.
- ◆ Pressure gauge that registers up to 120 psi.
- ◆ Tube repair kit with tire levers.
- ◆ Spare tubes: to fit types and sizes on bicycles.
- ◆ Pocket knife.
- ◆ Assorted tools: 4, 5, and 6 millimeter Allen wrenches; Phillips and standard screwdrivers; crescent wrench (2); 10 mm combination wrench; and spoke wrench.
- ◆ Extra water.

Consider having the Unit purchase a pair of small, pole-mounted, orange, triangular flags and mounting brackets. Put one on the lead and last bikes, when riding on city streets and other roadways. They will help to define the extent of your group and provide an additional measure of visibility.

Bicycle Touring and Camping

Should the Unit go into this program, the participants will need some specialized equipment:

- ◆ Racks and panniers (wheel bags).
- ◆ Headlight: battery type that clamps onto handlebar.
- ◆ Extra batteries and bulb.
- ◆ Handlebar bag.

These items are, unfortunately, expensive. Watch for sales at the specialty stores; check yard/garage sales; shop the thrift stores - you may get lucky.

Backpacks are not satisfactory for wearing on a bicycle, although a standard daypack may be used for carrying some items. Anything larger puts too much weight high on a person's back. This is very uncomfortable and creates a top-heavy condition.

The final item that is needed for extended rides and tours of two or more days is a vehicle with a trailer. The driver must have a map of the route and instructions as when and where to rendezvous with the Unit. This should occur at least every two hours, as things do happen that are beyond the scope of a field repair. Food and equipment for one or more nights of camping are as the Unit would take on a backpacking trip.



Selecting Routes in the City

Many of the Unit's rides, particularly while earning the Cycling merit badge will occur in the local community. Taking a bicycle trip in the city involves, or should involve, more than merely selecting a destination or riding for some pre-determined distance. It should be planned with the same care as is given to any other outing. Many of the same considerations apply to bicycle trips as to backpacking trips. They have the same bearing on their success or failure and on the pleasure derived. Part of this planning, of course, includes obtaining the same permits as for other outings. The 25 mile rides for Cycling merit badge will usually begin and end at the same point. They may be either circular or out and back. A circular route is usually more interesting and keeps you closer to familiar territory than an out and back route of the same distance. A circular route, ridden on a clockwise basis, means mostly right-hand turns — a safety consideration. However, a route will often look and ride differently in the opposite direction, so the Unit may want to do some of them each way.

There are a number of considerations in selecting the streets to be used on a ride. A street with a designated bike lane is preferable to a street with no bike lane. Remember that traffic volume and patterns are substantially different on weekends, when the ride will probably be taken, than on weekdays. Since you will want to inspect the route before taking the ride, do so at approximately the same time and on the same day of the week as it will be. That quiet little residential street near the shopping center may a veritable freeway on Saturday mornings. Conversely, streets that carry heavy industrial traffic on weekdays are often deserted on weekends.

Second in importance is the condition of the street. Wide ones are preferable to narrow ones. The surface should be in good condition; chuck holes and large cracks invite accidents. Glass

and other debris in the gutter and along the roadway are equally hazardous. Try to avoid a street that has a railroad track on it.

Routes that include long stretches without stop signs or signals are easier and more interesting than those that require frequent stops and starts. Look for ways to include a portion of a bike-way, such as along the beach or the Los Angeles River, for this reason.

Supplement the route plan with a good, current street map for the location. It will be a great help if you have a problem or make a wrong turn, provided that you have it with you. Give each participant a copy of the plan, along with explicit instructions as to the location of each checkpoint on the route.



Where To Go

Let your program be your guide. As with backpacking, the adjacent beaches, mountains, and deserts offer outstanding opportunities for rides of varying length, surroundings, and challenge. Look close to home for one-day routes that are suitable for getting started and for earning Cycling merit badge (see the prior section). Once the Unit is ready for more challenge, and wants to earn some of the other awards, consider using these three excellent sources for advice and assistance.

Guide books and maps.

Twenty years ago, there was next to nothing in print. The Bibliography lists those guides in outdoor stores as of this date. More will undoubtedly be available when you look. Most of these are very good, with route descriptions, maps, difficulty ratings, points of interest, etc.

Cycling groups.

While these groups organize rides and other activities for their members, most of them also are interested in promoting bicycle riding. Give one or more a call, particularly if you have a question about a route or riding in a certain location. You might even get lucky and find someone who will assist in developing the Unit's program. The name and telephone number for the more prominent local groups appears in a following section. Check the local bicycle shop for other possible contacts.

Merit badge counselors.

Do not overlook them as a source of information and assistance. Many of them are active riders, with an interest in cycling beyond just being a counselor. Check your own and adjacent District's merit badge counselor rosters.

- ◆ Any limitations on where to go cycling are basically the same as for backpacking.
- ◆ Don't exceed the ability of the participants.
- ◆ Avoid routes that have unacceptable risks or hazards (including vehicular traffic).
- ◆ Be certain that the route is open to bicyclists.

Use good judgment in selecting a route, then prepare a detailed riding plan.

Catalina Island was once a great place to ride, but restrictions and usage fees all but eliminate it. If the Unit has an interest, contact the Catalina Conservancy (310-510-2800) for information. There may also be fees and other restrictions when riding in certain Los Angeles County Parks. LA County-Department of Parks and Recreation (213-738-2961) will tell you what you need. Likewise, contact the local USDA-FS District Ranger's Office about riding on trails and fire roads in the National Forest.

Some good routes.

- ◆ Flood control channel bikeways. Portions of the roadways along the Los Angeles, San Gabriel, and other Rivers are open to bicycle riders. They are noted in "Los Angeles County Bike Map" that is listed in the Bibliography.
- ◆ Santa Ana River Trail. Open from Barton Flats to Newport Beach. The USDA-Forest Service for the San Bernardino National Forest has a map (see Bibliography).
- ◆ South Bay Bicycle Path. Ride along Santa Monica Bay, from Santa Monica to Torrance Beach. Do it early, as it gets busy by 10:30.
- ◆ Los Angeles Harbor area. Little traffic on weekends. Alameda Street (southwest from Pacific Coast Highway), "C" Street, Harbor Blvd.; put together a route along the harbor and down to Cabrillo Beach Scout Camp. Watch out for trash and railroad tracks.
- ◆ California Aqueduct. When not undergoing repairs, cycling is permitted along most of its roadway. The California Department of Water Resources has a brochure (see the Bibliography).
- ◆ Hungry Valley. This portion of Los Padres National Forest, near Quail Lake, is virtually dedicated to mountain biking.

Stay off the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Some interesting, challenging rides can be taken there, but they are not for the inexperienced, or a large group. The roads are narrow and rough; the motorists drive too fast and are generally unfriendly towards bicyclists.



Transporting Bicycles

Some rides that the Unit decides to take will require transporting the bicycles to the start and/or from the end port. Usually, this will happen as a natural growth in the cycling program, as the boys want to take more challenging rides in locales away from the old neighborhood. And that's great; just what a High Adventure Program should be doing. So, don't let the matter of how to transport all of those bicycles deter you.

Bicycles may be trim and lightweight, but they are certainly awkward to carry. On the one hand, they are fragile; on the other, the protruding pedals, axes, handlebars, etc., can inflict a lot of damage, unless a person is very careful. Bike racks typically haul 2-4 in a safe and secure manner. But, they have gotten expensive, and loading bikes on many of them is now a tricky matter. (The "inexpensive", bumper-mounted rack has gone the way of the

Cycling Groups

There are many groups, both local and national, that organize and promote cycling activities. These are some of the more prominent.

1. Bicycle Club of Irvine .. www.bikeirvine.org
P.O. Box 50845, Irvine, CA 92619-0845
2. Canyon Velo .. 714-231-1198
21520 Yorba Linda Blvd., Suite G, Yorba Linda, CA 92887 www.canyonvelo.org
3. Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Assn. (CORBA) www.corbamt.com
4. LA Wheelmen www.lawheelmen.org
P.O. Box 341301 Los Angeles, CA, 90034
5. League of American Bicyclists 202-822-1333
1612 K Street NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20006 www.bikeleague.org
6. Marina Del Rey Cycling Club 310-398-7655
..... www.mdrcc.org
7. Orange County Wheelmen 714-956-2453
OCW P.O. Box 219, Tustin, CA 92781 www.ocw.org
8. Pasadena Mountain Bike Club 818-584-6391
1670 E. Walnut Street, Pasadena, CA 91106 <https://pmbc.org>
9. Peninsula Cycle Club (Palos Verdes) www.peninsulacc.com
1600 S Pacific Ave., San Pedro, CA 90731
10. SHARE Mountain Bike Club of Orange County www.sharemtb.com
3535 E. Pacific Coast Hwy., P.O. Box 226, Corona Del Mar, CA 92625

Check with your neighborhood bicycle shop for a local group or a local contact for one of these.



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60 minutes.

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Angeles National Forest.

Cleveland National Forest.

Los Padres National Forest.

Santa Ana River Trail.

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◆ Other

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Bicyclists' Discourtesies

The things that many bicyclists do that cause people to dislike them.

- ◆ Failing to yield to pedestrians.
- ◆ Almost never stopping at stop signs.
- ◆ Riding in the wrong direction on streets.
- ◆ Riding on sidewalks and in crosswalks.
- ◆ Riding two or more abreast, anywhere.
- ◆ Making erratic, sudden moves.
- ◆ Failing to make turn signals.
- ◆ Forgetting that they are subject to applicable sections of the Motor Vehicle Code.

Ride courteously, using good cycling techniques. Avoid these discourtesies, which are also dangerous and can cause an accident. Be a positive force in changing the public's perception of bicyclists.

