

Summertime, and the bikin' is easy

AND SOMETIMES MODERATE, AND SOMETIMES HARD, BUT ALWAYS FANTASTIC.

BY REBECCA STOWE AND VICTORIA ROSENWALD

The best thing about biking in Claverack is the terrain—miles of open road through pastures and meadows and planted fields, spectacular views of the Catskills in the west and the Berkshires and Taconics in the east and south-east, cool, shady country lanes winding through woods and swamps.

The worst thing about biking in Claverack is also the terrain. We have hills. We have lots of them.

Here are five rides, each starting in a different hamlet within the Town of Claverack. We tried to stay off the main highways as much as possible, but there are several rides with short stretches along Route 217, Route 66, or Route 9H, all of which, at least, have nice big shoulders. Remember what your mother told you: ride on the right and wear your helmet.

We consider ourselves average bikers—a ten to twenty mile ride, especially one with hills, is about our speed. We both have hybrid bikes, and most of these rides contain sections on dirt or gravel roads. Since most of these are double loops, they also work for hikers who want to do only one leg.

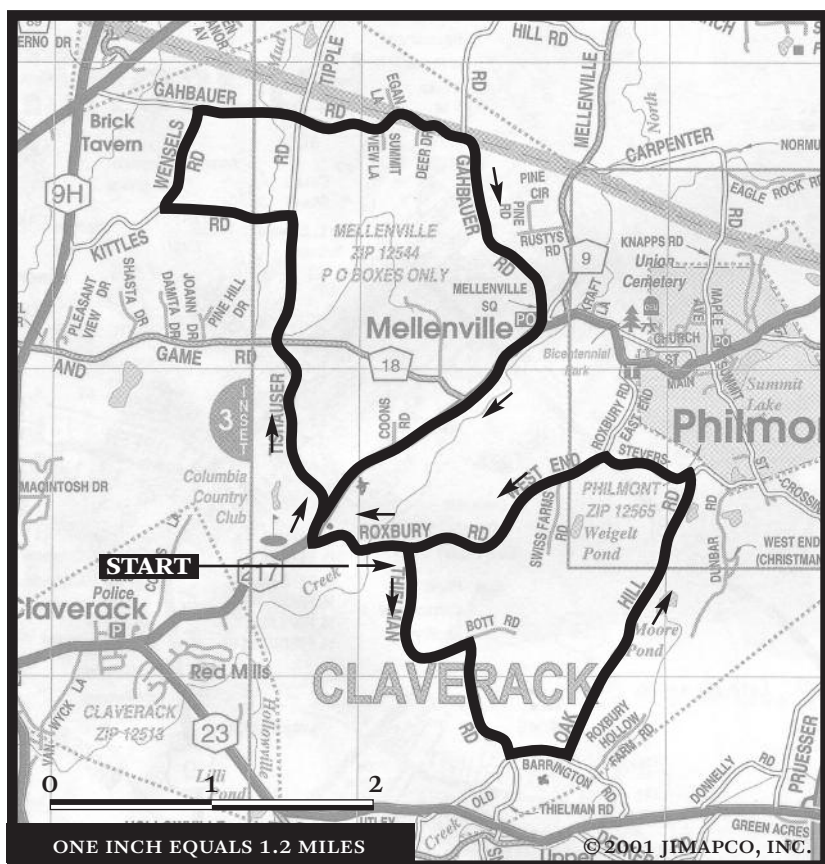
We've rated the rides according to the following system:

EASY = Vicki and Becky could do it.

MODERATE = Vicki and Becky could do it, but they walked up some hills.

HARD = Vicki and Becky could do it, but they're never doing it again.

THE LONG RIDE *Endangered Views*



Theoretically, all of the views on all of these rides could become endangered as development pressure increases, but this ride has two views that are endangered right now. The Dan Ray Farm on Tishausen Road is for sale, and the hillside that borders Old Barrington Road, visible from the top of Thielman Road (not to mention Route 23) has already been sold to developers (See *New Developments: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*).

This is a 16 mile double loop through rolling farmland and cool, shady woods. It also has the toughest hill, which gets a **HARD** rating, but it's at the very beginning, and after that the rest of the ride is **MODERATE**, with a couple more hills. Each section of the loop takes about an hour.

Directions: Begin at the Cashen Farm (The Farm at Miller's Crossing) on the West End of ROXBURY ROAD. The Cashens have asked that you park in the field between the houses and not at the barn, as there is always a lot of traffic and activity there. (There is also a small turn-off two-tenths of a mile up Roxbury Road on the right.)

Continue **EAST** on Roxbury Road to THIELMAN ROAD. Turn **RIGHT**.

Thielman is a rutty dirt road with a killer hill. But once you make it to the top,

you're rewarded with a splendid view of rolling meadows with a panoramic view of the Catskills in the distance (*Endangered View*).

Thielman ends at **OLD BARRINGTON ROAD**, which is not marked. Make a **LEFT**. Old Barrington is very, very rocky, but as you're only on it for three-tenths of a mile, you might want to walk your bike along the side of the road, if you have narrow tires.

Turn **LEFT** on **OAK HILL ROAD**, and after (what else? a climb) you'll be on a quintessential country road—winding, wooded, with stone walls, varied and interesting flora, charming houses with lovely gardens. A refreshingly cool, 2-mile, downhill ride through the woods will end at **STEVERS CROSSING**. Make a **LEFT**.

Continue on Stevers Crossing (all blissfully downhill) to meet up with **ROXBURY ROAD** again. Make a **LEFT**.

Continue on Roxbury past the cows out grazing at Trillium Acres, and back to The Farm at Miller's Crossing. You can stop here or continue on to the second part of the loop.

Roxbury ends at **ROUTE 217**, make a **RIGHT**.

Go one-tenth of a mile and turn **LEFT** on **TISHAUSER ROAD**.

An easy ride up Tishausen passes through the Dan Ray Farm, with open fields, meadows, and pastures on both sides of the road, and unobstructed views of the Catskills (*Endangered View*). Cross Fish and Game Road and continue on Tishausen until you reach **KITTLE ROAD**, on your left.

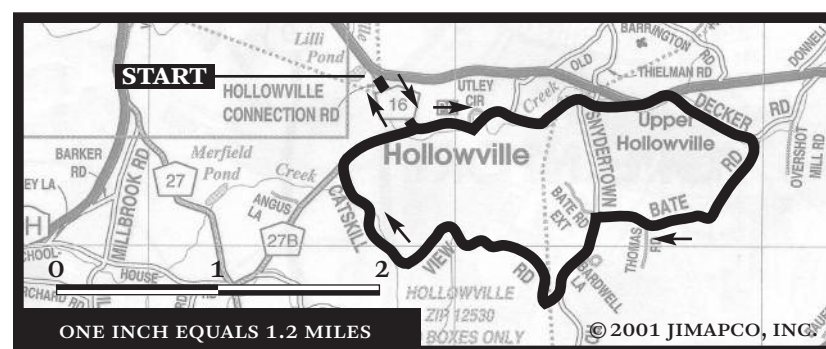
Make a **LEFT** and ride down a pleasant dirt road, with fields on either side, but thoughtfully planted with trees, so it's shady. There's also a lot of bird activity on this road. We were delighted to see what we later decided was a cedar waxwing.

About three-quarters of a mile down the road, you'll see an unmarked dirt road leading off to the right. This is **WENSELS ROAD**. Turn **RIGHT**. Ride up Wensels Road (watch out for chickens in the road at the farmhouse) until it ends at **GAHBAUER ROAD**. Make a **RIGHT**.

Continue on Gahbauer, which is hilly, all the way into Mellenville, where it meets up with **ROUTE 217** again. Turn **RIGHT** on 217.

An easy 2-mile ride on 217 will take you back to **ROXBURY ROAD**, on your left. Turn **LEFT** and return to the beginning.

THE SHORT RIDE *The "Where's the view?" Hollowville Loop*



This short, 7.6 mile loop takes about an hour because of hills, rough roads, and stops along the way. Rating: **MODERATE**.

Directions: There is a small turnoff on **COUNTY ROUTE 16**, just past the west junction with Route 23. This is where we parked.

Continue riding **EAST** on 16, the **HOLLOWVILLE CONNECTOR**, through the hamlet of Hollowville, following the Hollowville Creek. You will emerge on **ROUTE 23** again, turn **RIGHT** and then make an almost immediate **RIGHT** onto **DECKER ROAD WEST END**, still following the Creek.

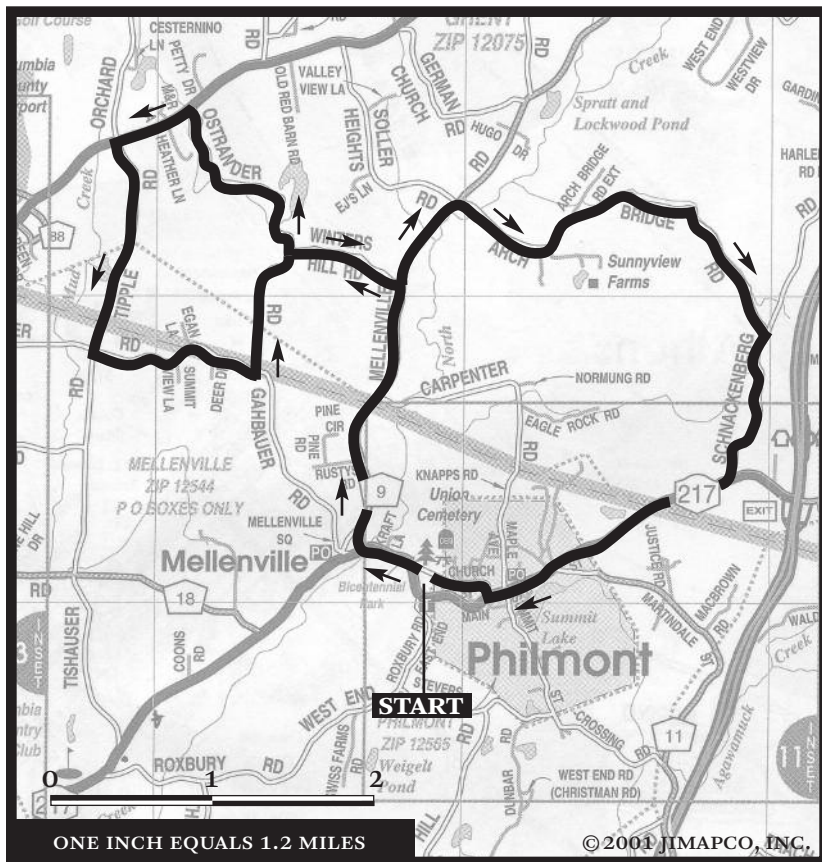
You will have traveled almost 3 miles when you turn **RIGHT** on **BATE ROAD**, which we gave five stars for charm. A sign on the right saying "Hill" denotes the name of the residents and the upcoming landscape feature. There is no one around to witness you walk your bike uphill.

Coast downhill and turn **LEFT** on **SYNDERTOWN ROAD**, passing the 1805

House B&B before turning **RIGHT** on CATSKILL VIEW ROAD. This is a dirt road through woods, and skirting the Shad Swamp, but with no view of the Catskills at all. Just when you're starting to think about petitioning the Town Board to rename the road to Swamp View, you go up a rise, around a bend, and there it is. The Five-Star View. Good road-naming after all, and well worth the climb.

Continue, downhill now, past a white farmhouse with fabulous gardens, to the intersection with ROUTE 27B. Turn **RIGHT** on 27 B, then **LEFT** back onto ROUTE 16, and back to the beginning.

GET OUT OF TOWN #1 Ghent



This is a 16 mile ride with several very steep hills, but worth the effort for the beauty of the land. Much of this ride will take you down winding dirt roads, through meadows, farmland, woods and swampland. Another plus: you come through the Village of Philmont at the end (the downhill part), so you can stop for refreshment. Go ahead. You earned it.

It took us two and a half hours to complete the two loops. Rating: **MODERATE** to **HARD**. (But we would do it again, for the views.)

Directions: Beginning at the Claverack Town Park on CHURCH STREET in Melleville, turn **RIGHT** to get to ROUTE 217.

Turn **RIGHT** on 217 for half a mile. Take the second **RIGHT** (It's COUNTY ROUTE 9/MELLENVILLE ROAD, but it's not marked coming from this direction. Look for the MELLENVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY sign)

Go up MELLENVILLE ROAD past Melleville Square (which is really a triangle) bearing to the **RIGHT**. Continue 1.8 miles on this relatively flat paved road (all "flatness" in Claverack is relative) to WINTER HILL ROAD on your **LEFT**.

There is a steep but short hill up Winter Hill Road; when you get to the top be sure to turn around, while you're catching your breath, for a sweeping view of the valley, with several farms nestled beneath the Berkshires in the distance.

Continue on Winter Hill and soon you'll be facing the Catskills. The views are better in the early spring, before the trees are fully in leaf, but you can still get a complete view of the Catskills all the way to the Helderberg Escarpment, if you peek through the trees.

Turn **RIGHT** on OSTRANDER ROAD, winding through farmland and woods and wave to the horses in the paddocks at Liberty Stud.

Ostrander ends at ROUTE 66. Turn **LEFT** for half a mile, and take the first **LEFT**, which is TIPPLE ROAD.

Tipple is a nice flat road that passes through mostly open farmland, heavily posted by the Ghent Archery Club. Didn't see any archers, though. Ride 1.3 miles to GAHBAUER ROAD. Blue Spruce Farms will be on your left, and make a **LEFT**.

1.0 miles on Gahbauer until you meet up with the other end of OSTRANDER ROAD. Make a **LEFT** and ride up this charming stretch of dirt road, past some beautiful homes and lovely working farms. At the crest of the hill, where Ostrander meets with Winter Hill again, there are more nice Catskill views.

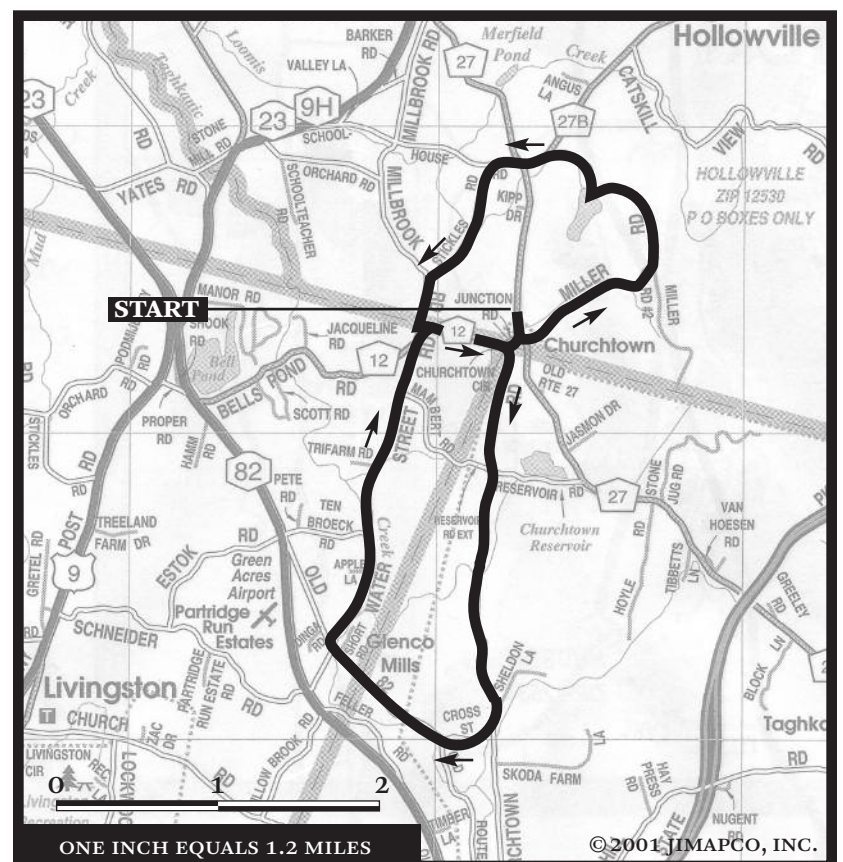
Turn **RIGHT** onto WINTER HILL ROAD. It's easier coming down. Make a **LEFT** at the end of Winter Hill back onto COUNTY ROUTE 9 (or, you can turn **RIGHT** and return to the beginning if you want to skip the second loop).

Ride 0.6 mile to ARCH BRIDGE ROAD and make a **RIGHT**. Ride past Sunnyview Farm and make a **RIGHT** when you reach the offices of Sunnyview Farm. This will lead you to a splendid stone train bridge. Eventually, the Harlem Valley Rail Trail will be extended up here on its way from Copake Falls to Chatham.

Unless you're a very strong biker, you might as well get off your bike now, because you will be climbing a very long, very steep hill. The road travels alongside a stream, which was still running when we did the ride. Just when you think the hill will never end, it does, at SCHNACKENBERG ROAD. Turn **RIGHT**.

Ride 0.9 (mostly) downhill miles on this shady road until it ends at ROUTE 217. Turn **RIGHT** on 217 and ride 2.3 easy miles into Philmont. After you've refreshed yourself, continue on 217 back to CHURCH STREET (it's a very sharp **RIGHT**, and easy to miss as you're coasting down the hill) and the Town Park.

GET OUT OF TOWN #2 Taghkanic and Livingston



This ride, which will take you from Churchtown, to Taghkanic, to Livingston and back to Churchtown, is a 13 mile double loop mostly through open farmland. It offers spectacular views, with some interesting animal viewing, as well. Of course, to get the spectacular views, you have to climb a few hills. It takes us about an hour and a half, depending on how often we stop to—ahem, "admire the view." Rating: **MODERATE**.

Directions: Begin in Churchtown at the Fire Station. Turn **RIGHT** onto ROUTE 27 into the hamlet and then make a **LEFT**, as if you were going up the hill. Almost immediately, you'll make another **LEFT** onto MILLER ROAD.

A relatively easy 2.3 mile ride down Miller Road (don't be alarmed by the rhinoceros charging from Jonas Studio) will take you to ROUTE 27B at Ewe Haven Farm, where we stopped to see the baby lambs and goats. Make a **LEFT** on 27B.

Crossing Route 27, the road becomes SCHOOLHOUSE ROAD. Continue west (you'll get a glimpse of the Catskills in the distance) to STICKLES ROAD. Make a **LEFT** on Stickles.

Ride just about a mile on Stickles, which is a rather rocky gravel road with open farmland and pastures. Very charming, except for the rocks. When Stickles ends, you'll be meeting up with MILLBROOK ROAD. Make a **LEFT**.

Veer to the **LEFT** when Schoolhouse ends at COUNTY ROUTE 12, about

a third of a mile. Make a **LEFT** onto **ROUTE 12**, and ride about a half mile, between two corn fields, back into the hamlet of Churchtown. You may see a splendid pair of Percherons in the pasture on your right.

When you get to the top of the hill, you'll come upon a confusingly marked intersection. Take a **RIGHT** on **TAGHKANIC CHURCHTOWN ROAD**. The lovely wooden 19th century Lutheran church should be on your left.

You'll have a nice long, rolling ride now, along Taghkanic Churchtown Road, with really fabulous views of both the Catskills, as you're riding up, and the Taconic foothills, as you're coming down. Look for the llamas – who seem to be very curious about passers-by – in the meadow, before you head downhill, past the dairy farm, past another lovely wooden church, into the hamlet of West Taghkanic.

Bear to the **RIGHT** at the fork just before the church, and then to the **RIGHT** again on **OLD POST ROAD**. Make an immediate **RIGHT** onto **OLD ROUTE 82**, passing in front of the fire station.

You'll now have a leisurely 2.4 mile ride on Old Route 82, along the Taghkanic Creek, ending up in Glenco Mills. At the four-way stop just over the bridge, make a **RIGHT** onto **WATER STREET**. (Or make a quick detour, left, to take a look at the buffalo grazing in the pasture.)

A pleasant 2 mile ride through the hamlet of Glenco Mills, continuing along the creek, will take you up a steep (but short) hill, past the Triform Camphill Community.

Merge **RIGHT** onto **COUNTY ROUTE 12**, and ride back into Churchtown. This time go past Taghkanic Churchtown Road and make a **LEFT** onto **COUNTY ROUTE 27**, which will take you back to the firehouse.

house. At two miles, turn **RIGHT** on 23B and you will see the Shortcake Farm stand on your left just over the bridge.

Return to **SPOOK ROCK ROAD** which runs along the Claverack Creek. Diligent readers of *Our Town* will find the Spook Rock and remember the story behind its name. If the corn is not high, an old Van Deusen family graveyard can be seen in a field on the left.

All of the fields you pass on the left are part of the Keeler Farm. Just before a brick house, about 2.5 miles up the road, bear **RIGHT** up a hill onto **HISCOX ROAD**. The fields on the left belong to B-Jack Farm, whose blue silos appear through the trees. All the land on your right belongs to St. Lawrence Cement.

At the crossroads, go straightish onto **FINGAR ROAD**. Ride half a mile, turn **LEFT** at a white house onto **CROSS ROAD**.

Carefully cross Routes 9/23 to continue straight ahead on **KIPP ROAD** to the end.

A **LEFT** turn onto **CHURCH ROAD** brings you immediately to a barn with a sweeping 360 degree view, from the Taconics to the Catskills. This is a good place to rest before plunging with great speed down a long, steep hill.

Church Road stops at **ROUTES 9/23**. Meisner's Farm Stand is just to your **LEFT**.

Continue across Routes 9/23 riding on **YATES ROAD** past the Meisner fields. Continue to bear **RIGHT** around the curve until you reach **ROUTE 9H**. Bryant Farms is just ahead, to your **RIGHT**.

Leaving Bryant Farms, ride north on 9H for about a half mile. Turn **RIGHT** on **ORCHARD ROAD**, which deadends at **MILLBROOK ROAD**. Turn **LEFT** and ride to Merrifield's Barn at the crossroads with **SCHOOLHOUSE ROAD**.

Turn **LEFT** on Schoolhouse and **LEFT** on **ROUTE 9H**.

Make a sharp right on **COUNTY ROUTE 29** (Spook Road Road) and continue straight ahead to Holmquest Farms.

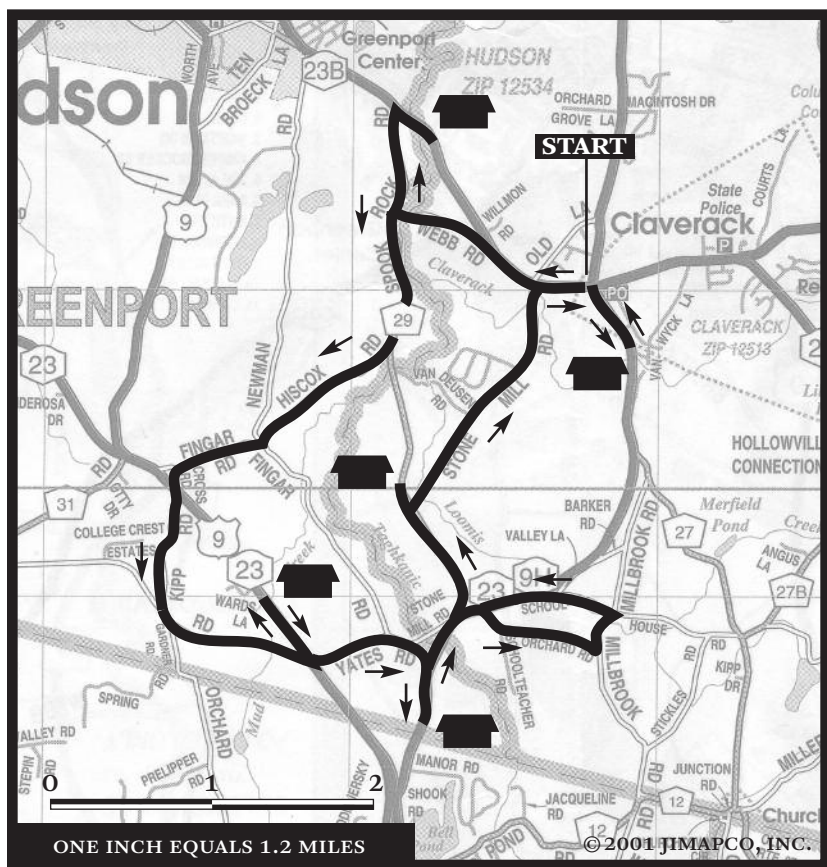
Facing west, you get another great view of the Catskills looming beyond the Holmquest fields and the blue silos of B-Jack Farm.

Retrace your path about 100 yards. Turn **LEFT** onto **STONE MILL ROAD** and continue past more Holmquest fields.

Stone Mill ends at 23B. Turn **RIGHT** to return to the hamlet.

The final farmstand, Hallenbeck's, is just a few hundred yards **SOUTH (RIGHT)** of the light on **ROUTE 9H**.

GET OUT OF TOWN #3 The Five Farmstand Ride



This is an **EASY** ride of about 12.5 miles. We did it in about an hour and half, allowing time for viewing and shopping.

Directions: Start this ride in the cookbook section of the Claverack Free Library or in the parking lot outside. Bring an empty backpack and proceed carefully **WEST** on **ROUTE 23B**. While you are admiring the beautiful examples of 18th, 19th, and early 20th century domestic American architecture lining both sides of the road, you might also consider whether a sidewalk or bike lane here would improve your experience.

At 0.5 miles, bear **LEFT** onto **WEBB ROAD**, ignoring the Dead End and Bridge Closed signs. Cars cannot travel this route, but bikes can. Pass the homesite of the Revolutionary War hero General Webb. The road falls between fields and crosses the Claverack Creek. The ridge looming in front of you is where the St. Lawrence Cement plant would have risen. (No-longer-endangered View.) You can easily walk around the barriers at either end of the bridge.

Turn **RIGHT** on **COUNTY ROUTE 29**, known as **SPOOK ROCK ROAD**, passing the lovely Keeler Brothers farmhouses and barns, which include an old Dutch

Victoria Rosenwald, a part-time research nurse at the Beth Israel Cancer Center in Manhattan, lives on Stone Mill Road. Rebecca Stowe, a novelist and teacher of fiction writing, lives in Churchtown. They would love to hear from other bikers. If you have a favorite Claverack ride, please send it to: ourtown@mhcable.com.



Base maps from JIMAPCO Columbia County map, available at www.jimapco.com and convenience stores throughout Claverack.