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Pedal through history from Cannon Falls

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Last May, Bicycling Magazine named Minneapolis its No. 1 Bike City. Not to be left out, greater Minnesota more than holds its own in bike-friendliness with more paved rail-to-trail bikeways than any other state. A gem of a bikeway, the Cannon Valley Trail meanders a scenic 20 miles between Cannon Falls and Red Wing. Cannon Falls, a town of 4,000, is a popular starting point for the trail. Rich in history, it's well worth exploring after your ride.

Cannon Valley Trail

Popular with cyclists of all abilities, the **Cannon Valley Trail** (1-507-263-0508; www. cannonvalleytrail.com) runs on the old Chicago Great Western railbed. The mostly flat trail offers easy pedaling and gorgeous views of the Cannon River, scenic valley and cliffs that flank the trail. You may see wildlife and rare plants, such as the Dwarf Trout Lily, along your journey. Pack a picnic and pedal to the Welch Station, an ideal halfway rest stop.

Those seeking a longer ride can pedal to Red Wing and back for a 40-mile trek. Bicyclists and inline skaters 18 and up are required to purchase a "Wheel Pass" available at various businesses or pay stations along the trail. The day rate is \$4, a season pass \$25. Walkers are welcome to use the trail for free.

To rent a bike there, check out **Cannon Falls Canoe and Bike Rental** (615 N. 5th St.; 1-507-263-4657; www.cannonfalls canoeandbike.com). In addition to regular bikes, tandems and recumbents, it has baby carts and trail-a-bikes for older children who may not be up to riding their own bike. The outfitter also offers canoe rentals, with shuttle service, for 8- and 18-mile trips on the Cannon River. Call 24 hours ahead to assure availability.

Walk into the past



Cannon Valley Trail's 20 miles of mostly flat surface is ideal for families and cyclists of all abilities.



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After enjoying the trail, take some time to explore Cannon Falls' downtown, which is sleepy on a Sunday but bustling the rest of the week. A self-guided walking tour highlights 40 historically significant buildings and sites in and around the heart of downtown, including many on the National Historic Register (maps available at the Chamber of Commerce, the Cannon Falls Museum and various businesses). Be sure to take in some of the 250 homes built before the turn of the century and the beautiful **First Congregational Church**, founded in 1856 (220 W. Main St.; 1-507-263-2901; www.cannonfallsucc.org). The church office is open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. Call to schedule a visit at other times.

A fine example of Italianate architecture is the **Cannon Falls Museum** (206 W. Mill St.; 1-507-263-4080; www.citlink.net/~cfmuseum). It was built in 1888, after fires in 1884 and 1887 nearly demolished the city. In the spring, the free museum is open on Saturdays and by appointment.

The Scofield Brothers Drug Store, now **Scofield Drug & Gift** (108 N. 4th St.; 1-507-263-2881), served as a fire break during both fires. The only downtown business operating in the same location since before 1900, Scofield keeps old medicine bottles and displays pictures from the early years.

Hjermstad Hardware (138 N. 4th St.; 1-507-263-2611) has been serving the community -- and doing basic bike repairs -- since 1959. Inside, note the hand-lettered signs and rows of hardware and household supplies. Outside you can see faded lettering from back in the days when Meyer & Johns Dry Goods occupied the building.

A gorgeous tin ceiling was uncovered during renovation of the Bremer Brothers building, home to **Fourth and Main Fabrics** (103 S. 4th St.; 1-507-263-7000; www.fourthandmainfabrics.com), which stocks notions, patterns, batting and quilting and specialty fabrics. Other shops that might catch your interest include: **Schaffer's Antiques** (111 N. 4th St.; 1-507-263-5200); **Amy's Savvy Seconds** clothing store (105 N. 4th St.; 1-507-319-4749); and **What In Yarnation!** yarn shop (421 W. Main St.; 1-507-263-0005; www.yarnation.com).

Civil War connection

As the nation commemorates the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, history buffs may want to visit the memorial to local hero Col. William Colvill. Under Colvill's leadership, the First Minnesota Volunteers played a vital role in the Battle of Gettysburg. In 1909, his statue was placed near the graves of Colvill and his wife, Jane, in the **Cannon Falls Cemetery** along Hwy. 19. In 1928, a monument to Colvill and the First Minnesota Volunteers was dedicated there in a ceremony attended by more than 25,000 people, including President Calvin Coolidge.

Refreshing end to the day

After a day of biking and exploration, an ideal stop at day's end is the **Cannon River Winery**, known for award-winning wines from locally made grapes and housed in the lovingly restored former Kruse Garage (421 W. Mill St.; 507-263-7400; www.cannonriverwinery.com). Relax with a glass of the crisp and citrusy St. Pepin or one of the other hand-crafted wines, paired with local artisan cheeses. Self-guided tours of the winery are available; guided tours are offered on weekends.

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