

My Dozen Favorite Resting Spots Along The Pine Creek Rail Trail

By David Kagan

Having bicycled over 6200 miles since July 2007, with most of that rolled up on the Pine Creek Rail Trail, I have come to know that 62-mile stretch of heaven-on-earth quite well. I thought that perhaps my readers, who have also experienced the delights of the path in Lycoming and Tioga Counties along Pine and Marsh Creeks, might be interested in reading of my selection of “the twelve best stopping places” along the route.

After beginning at the southern terminus in Jersey Shore, where stone mile-marker 168 stands outside the fence at the parking area, and traveling north up past marker 164, you see the first of the bridges across Pine Creek, and the first on my selection list of the most worthwhile stops. Get off your bicycle on the middle of the bridge and enjoy the views both south and north. The former offers the waters of Gamble Run burbling down out of the mountain to merge with the creek, and just below that the water rippling over the rocks of the shallows before a bend in Pine Creek; the latter offers a gorgeous half-mile view upstream.

My second choice comes just about a half-mile past stone marker 162. Here is a mountain run, marked by a short piece of fencing. The run cascades over a rock outcropping perhaps three yards wide. It reminds me of a very miniature Niagara Falls. And not too far up the run, you get a view of the run split in two, with cascades up each fork. On a hot summer day, this is one of the coolest rest spots along the trail.

My third selection is a melancholic, shady spot about 50 yards north of mile-marker 161. If you walk over to the left (west, non-creek side) where two ancient, large, weathered pine trees stand close together, you’ll find the gravestone of a pioneer child, Catharine V. Bonnell, who died on August 20, 1852. Less clearly etched is her age at death. Is it one year, two months and 22 days? And on the other side of the trail is Camp Kline, quiet now, but if you listen closely, maybe you can almost hear the voices of the Boy Scouts who spent many happy summertime hours there from 1920 until the middle of the 1970s.

Fourth is the second bridge over Pine Creek at mile-marker 160. From the middle looking south, you see the big “horseshoe” bend in the creek and a stone wall (buttressing Route 44) built by Works Progress Administration (WPA) laborers before World War II. To the north are a steep, heavily wooded mountainside on the left and, on the right, the peaceful village of Ramsey, with its tamer, more ordered line of trees and very gentle slopes down to the creek.

Up at Waterville is another bridge, the one over Little Pine Creek, and my selection number five. A look to the left (west) rewards you with a glimpse of Little Pine’s entrance into Big Pine just a couple hundred yards downstream. Looking east you see the Route 44 concrete highway bridge over Little Pine just in front of you, and beyond it the valley leading east up to Little Pine State Park.

My number six is just above the village of Jersey Mills at the bend in Pine Creek. The panoramic view of open water and adjacent mountain is well worth a stop to enjoy.

And then between the villages of Cammal and Slate Run, along a long, pleasant, fenced section running parallel to and just off Route 414, just where the path passes over Wolf Run, my selection seven offers a déjà vu experience. Much like the previous view is this curving expanse of Pine Creek with its mountain backdrop. It is a very popular fishing location also.

Choice spot eight is above Slate Run at Hilborn Fields. Here an extensive, open, grass and brush-covered expanse stretches from the rail trail down to Pine Creek. For me it has been “wildlife central,” as I’ve come across a black bear, a porcupine and a large herd of deer, all right near the comfort station, either walking right on the path in front (the bear!), lounging at the entrance (the porcupine), or grazing behind in the field (the deer).

Nine is little-known Hoffman Campground just above the Rattlesnake Rock Access Area and just before the village of Blackwell. What a beautiful rest stop area, with its tree-shaded picnic tables, water pump, “almost like home” comfort facility, and a soft bank along Pine Creek that beckons to your buttocks.

Tiadaghton Campground, a little over eight miles north of Blackwell, is my tenth selected site. After the rather long haul from Blackwell, the shaded picnic table tops at Tiadaghton seem intended for use as beds for napping. While catching a few re-energizing z’s, you can dream about how different this location must have been back in the late 1800s when it was a booming lumber village. And then you can wake to the soothing, purling sounds of the very nearby waters of Pine Creek.

Another four miles takes you to my eleventh selection, at the base of the Turkey Path, coming down from Leonard Harrison State Park. Now at the gorge’s deepest location, you can take a break and go down the easy path to Pine Creek and walk out on the many rocks there. Or you can take a short walk up the Turkey Path and sit on a bench in the shade, overlooking the run. Or you can just stand and stare in amazement at the cliffs high above you, with Leonard Harrison State Park on the east side, Colton Point State Park on the west.

Well, you’ve ridden along with me now to my twelfth, and last, choice—the confluence of Pine Creek with Marsh Creek just above the Darling Run Access Area. Something about this location just south of the Route 6 bridge strikes me as being idyllic, as worth stopping to enjoy. Maybe it’s the way the two waterways seem to so gently unite, or how green and verdant it is here, or how bucolic the house on the point looks.

Let’s make it a baker’s dozen, okay? My thirteenth selection is one that my stomach insists on adding. It’s the Pag-Omar Farm Market at the very northern end of the rail trail, just off Route 287. The two times that I have ridden all the way from my home in Torbert Village to there (a one-way distance of 58.5 miles), I have rewarded myself with a large hot-fudge sundae, with whipped cream and a cherry.

Ah, shucks. How about a baker's dozen plus one? My fourteenth, and final, I promise, selection of "favorite resting spots" has to be my own home back in Torbert Village. Especially at the end of my 117-mile, roughly 12-hour, round-trip bicycle odysseys on my beloved Pine Creek Rail Trail!