HUNTING FOR BIGFOOT

RIDING THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

FRACKING ON AMISH FARMS

RUNNING YOUR FIRST ULTRA-MARATHON

Our 5 favorite trails

Destination: Davis, WV

The best roadtrip ever (without getting lost)

Eat your way green: sustainable, seasonal food

BADASS GRANDMA on the Appalachian Trail

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Hi,

I'm Colleen O'Neil, Switchbacks' editor-in-chief. I'm currently finishing my last semester at the College of Wooster.

But earlier this year I was a bit lost—I had no idea what to do for my Independent Study project (which I needed to graduate).

One day I was slumped at the kitchen table in my apartment flipping though Outside magazine. It was early September, but the thick, soupy air made it feel like July. I had my first class in an hour. I sighed and stared at the page: it was a full-page spread with pictures of snow-capped peaks and dudes in hiking boots scrabbling down a scree field. I wanted to do that. The pictures were framed by a block of text. I wanted to write that.

Well, why couldn’t I make that into my senior project? Sure, Ohio doesn’t have alpine ranges. But it’s got a lot—vast hemlock forests, rivers, rolling hills, and sprawling fertile fields. Most importantly, it has people who are passionate about the outdoors. There’s Melissa Liebling, who rode her bike more than 2,000 miles last year on the Tour Divide; the quirky individuals who spend their weekends chasing after Bigfoot in Ohio’s state parks; and Rody Walter, who builds beautiful bicycles in his workshop in Wooster.

I wanted to meet them, and then I wanted to tell other people their stories. Thus, Switchbacks.

Throughout writing and working on this project, I've had some really cool experiences. Hopefully Switchbacks communicates them to you and inspires you to get outside in this awesome state.

Many thanks to the people involved in the process, especially Benoit Denizet-Lewis, Montana Miller, and everyone who provided the great photography featured in these pages.

Wishing you clear skies and clean trails,
Colleen

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MISSION STATEMENT

SWITCHBACKS is your source for Ohio's outdoor news, gear reviews, expert advice, and travel in and around the Buckeye State for hikers, runners, mountain bikers, and more. Our goal: to inspire adventure anytime and anywhere.

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Cleveland to host Gay Games in 2014

The Olympics have passed, the Winter Games are a whole year away, and we've lost the goldenboy of the Tour de France. It seems like America doesn't have a lot to look forward to now.

Well, what about the world's first gay rodeo?

In August 2014, the Cleveland-Akron area will host the ninth Gay Games. Founded in 1982 by the late Dr. Tom Waddell in San Francisco, the Games' goal is to create a more inclusive community for LGBT and Ally athletes. Cleveland is the fifth U.S. city to host the Games.

The Federation of Gay Games expects more than 11,000 people to participate in 35 sports from track and field to ballroom dancing. That's nearly 1,000 more athletes than the 2012 London Olympics. Since registration opened last spring, more than 600 athletes from 17 countries have signed up to compete. Running is the most popular event so far.

Cleveland is prepping to host the event with flair. In January 2013, the city's Terminal Tower (pictured) lit up with rainbow-colored lights to promote next year's Games.

"The responses we've received have been overwhelmingly positive about Cleveland as the venue," Thomas Nobbe, executive director of Gay Games 9, said in an interview. He hopes to put on "the best Games that have ever been."

In addition to sports, Gay Games 9 will have concerts, theme parties, art displays, and—of course—the gay rodeo.

photo: Larry E. Highbaugh, Jr.

COMING UP

DEEP THOUGHTS

As a female athlete (a cross country runner in high school and college), I've always had trouble finding guys who understood me. So I'd put them through tests: I wouldn't shower for a couple days, skip dates to do workouts, and maybe even wear open-toed shoes. If they didn't run away, that was a start.

In summer of 2010, after a disappointing track season and a breakup with a guy who'd quit playing soccer to spend more quality time with his X-Box, I got a job at an outdoors store.

On my first day, my other coworker wasn't there. Apparently he was riding his bicycle in the woods somewhere.

"Wait till you meet Montana," my manager said, raising his eyebrows. "You'll really like him."

Yeah, I thought. I sure do love a man in Spandex shorts.

When I came into work the next day, Jesus was standing at the register. He was wearing sandals and a t-shirt with a picture of a green dinosaur riding a mountain bike. He glanced up to look at me from underneath long eyelashes. Wavy dark hair fell into his deep brown eyes.

"Oh, hey. I'm Montana."

It was a real name. I nearly swooned.

Our first "date" was a four-mile trail run—he'd been a runner in high school. Halfway through, he knocked his head on a low-hanging branch and almost got a concussion. I laughed nervously and offered to buy him a Gatorade.

On our second date, I agreed to go mountain biking with him. After ending myself into multiple ditches (which made him laugh), I wiped the sweat and dirt off my face, hoping I still looked mildly attractive.

In a few weeks, he convinced me to buy a mountain bike. Then he convinced me to be his girlfriend.

He was funny and smart—an excellent writer and a great athlete. Every morning that summer, I ran while he rode his bike. We went camping and read Jack Kerouac by flashlight in his tent. I showed him my black toenails, and he didn't break up with me.

We've been together for a couple years. He's tried to nurture my interest in bikes: he patiently teaches me how to fix basic components (and then fixes them himself), tells me what kind of gear to buy, and takes me on easy rides in the woods. I'm much better at riding bikes now, but I'm still not fast.

We went on a ride together this fall. A mile into the trail, he stopped to let me to catch up. I was already wheezing.

"Okay," he said, "just hang onto my wheel." I hate it when he says that. I glare at his back and rode behind him for a few minutes. Then we hit a technical spot. He crashed away. I got on the bike again and mashed the pedals down harder, grinding my teeth and cursing under my breath.

Also, I go to his mountain bike races and sit in a camp chair with the other riders' girlfriends and wives. Sometimes he wins, and I make him sandwiches afterward. I fake a smile and pat him on the back, feeling like an unfit loser, wishing I were out there winning something, too.

But I'm not running so well lately. Throughout college, I've gained weight and lost speed. But Montana eats 3,000 calories a day, doesn't follow a training plan, and drinks beer with his friends every weekend. And he can still beat me in a 5k race (even wearing a banana costume).

If I think about this too much, a nasty jealous bug starts squirming in the pit of my stomach. Then I stupidly fuming and cold-shouldering him for a couple days. Poor guy.

Here's the crux of the problem: I'd gotten used to being the sporty one in the relationship. I get so much fresh air. Look at my glowing skin. Why don't you get outside more? I'd thought that they didn't quite understand me. But maybe I was keeping them at a distance on purpose, enjoying the superiority.

But Montana isn't someone I need to impress. We think the same way. Like me, he really loves his sport, and he loves being outside. And the end of every trail, he's waiting for me with a Cliff Bar and a smile. Maybe I need to find some ladies to ride with so I can stop making my boyfriend feel bad about being faster than me.

For the moment, I've found a solution: Montana's recently taken up mountain unicycling. I run while he wobbles up the trail on his one wheel. It's hilarious. But I make sure to keep up because I like to laugh at him when he falls off. I also want to make sure he doesn't hurt himself. Bikes aside, I still like the guy a whole lot.
Finding the right combo of gear to take backpacking can be hit-or-miss. Your super-light tent might be too light for chilly mountain nights, or that fancy camera might not stand up to being dropped in a stream. Luckily, we made those mistakes so you don’t have to. Here’s some of our favorite stuff to take on a long hike in the woods.

**Ahnu Montara Boot**: more sneaker than boot—breatheable and light with a funky color scheme, but still waterproof and durable.

**Light My Fire Titanium Spork**: backpackers know how important it is to cut down weight. They also like to eat. A ti spork lets you do both.

**Montbell Down Hugger 3**: light, packable, and warm, this is the perfect bag.

**Gregory Jade 60**: female-specific with soft shoulder straps mean your girlfriend will finally stop whining when you ask her to carry the tent.

**Kershaw Blur**: always tucked in a pocket for emergency trail cleanup.

**MSR Whisperlite Universal Backpacking Stove**: packs down to about the size of a water bottle. It burns almost any fuel source (including white gas and isobutene/ propane), and boils Ramen Noodles super fast.

**Nikon Coolpix AW100**: waterproof, shockproof, and freezeproof. This little guy can probably stand up to adventure better than you. Plus it packs a 5x zoom lens, 16 megapixels, and a built-in GPS to record your whole trip.

**Mountain Hardwear Monkey Jacket**: our favorite standby fleece layer. Warm and durable, it’ll last for years.

**GoLite Shangri-La 1**: it’s gone with us from the Adirondacks to New Zealand and back, stowed away in a backpack and set up with hiking poles. This is one of the lightest tents on the market.

**SCIOTO AUBURN METRO PARK**: A 120-acre outdoor oasis in the heart of downtown Columbus, this park is a magnet for wetland birds (and birdwatchers). Visitors can also river boat, hike, jog, play volleyball, or scale the largest free outdoor climbing wall in the country. There are also two dog parks, each with an obstacle course for agility training.

**SURF THE GREAT LAKES**: Strong storms in the fall and winter kick up big swells on the Great Lakes. But Great Lake surfing isn’t for wimps. Hardcore surfers wear wetsuits, gloves, and neoprene booties to keep warm on the icy water.

**CATCH DINNER**: The Ohio Division of Wildlife stocks trout in creeks, lakes, and ponds in the spring and fall. What to do with the catch? Fillet the fish, then make a soy sauce rub with some salt, pepper, and sugar. Toss some garlic, ginger, and green onions in a pan with olive oil and sauté the fish until it’s brown and crispy. Bon appétit.

**CA-BREWING THE MOHICAN**: The best way to spend a lazy summer afternoon: grab some beer and some cheese, and head to the Loudonville Canoe Livery. You can rent a canoe and float down the river as slow as you’d like. This trip could take all day with low water, so make sure you take a garbage bag for your empties.

**EAT LOCAL**: Ohio overflows with farmer’s markets in the spring, summer, and fall. Check out the 100-year-old West Side Market in Cleveland, housed in a huge Byzantine hall across the street from the Great Lakes Brewery. It was voted “Best Food Lovers’ Market” in 2010 by Food Network Magazine.
Before you go...

**THROW OUT THE ITINERARY** Schedules are stressful. So have an open mind. Besides, good road trips are about experience, not racing to visit as many places as you can. Relax. You’re not trying to go anywhere fast.

**BUT DO SOME RESEARCH** Have a general idea about where you want to go. Get online and ask a few questions. What’s the weather like? Are there hiking trails? Is it even a town?

**CHECK THE OIL** Make sure your vehicle’s in good shape before you leave. Road trips are no fun if the car breaks down 20 feet from your driveway. (Heat and A/C are important, too.)

**BUY MAPS** Not apps. You want real, honest-to-God paper maps that you can fold up and keep in the glovebox. A nice atlas is a good idea, too. Because even the best GPS is totally useless if you lose signal in the middle of nowhere.

**ORGANIZE** Pack the trunk right. That antique lamp you picked up for your mom can go in the back. Things you need most often—the tent, your clothes, and the beer cooler—should go in front where you can find them.

On the road...

**CALL HOME** Every once in a while, tell a friend or spouse where you are in case something goes wrong.

**EAT ON A BUDGET** Make most of your meals easy and cheap: PB&J, scrambled eggs on a camp stove, bags of chips, etc. Make a few grocery-store stops and keep a cooler full of food. Give yourself one nice meal at a restaurant every couple days so you don’t get scurvy.

**DRESS (AND PACK) IN LAYERS** If you’re traveling in an unfamiliar mountain range, weather can get nasty fast. Make sure you’re prepared for anything. Expect wind, rain, cold, and heat.

**SLEEP FOR FREE** The USDA Forest Service allows free camping in any National Forest land—as long as you bring your own water, clean up after yourself, and sleep 100 feet from water sources. Or find a friend in the area, but be a good guest (i.e. don’t drink all the milk). In a pinch, power-nap at a highway rest stop. Steal showers from local pools, campgrounds, and rivers.

**BE PATIENT** Your road trip buddy is going to get on your nerves. When this happens, don’t yell or storm off into the forest. Just take a breath, talk it out, and try to have a good time. Because you’re stuck in the car with them until you get home.

Road tripping is an art as American as a well-crafted burger. The US of A’s highway system has nearly infinite travel routes. With just a little prior planning and some common sense, you can have your own highway adventure. We’ve got some tips to get you on the road disaster-free.

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**KIDS THESE DAYS...**

We surveyed 100 College of Wooster students...

99% say they don’t get outside enough.

92.5% of students use most of their free time outside of class to do homework.

**Their own words:**

**DO YOU THINK YOU SPEND ENOUGH TIME OUTSIDE?**

“No, I sit at my desk and look out the window.”
Patrick McWilliams, sophomore

“I would love to have more of a chance to camp or run on trails, but there isn’t always time, especially with school work and cross country.”
Erin Andrews-Sharer, sophomore

“Absolutely not. I grew up in California and went hiking a lot. I haven’t been able to get outside as much here. It’s hard to do outdoorsy things without a car.”
Brianna Tarpey, junior

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**SO HOW DO YOU GET YOUR FRESH AIR FIX?**

**BEST ANSWER:** “Getting drunk, often outside.”
Anonymous, junior
Farmer’s wife, mother of 11 children, and grandmother of 23, Emma Rowena Gatewood was the first woman to solo hike the 2,168-mile Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine in a single season. And she was 67 years old.

Better known as “Grandma Gatewood,” she was born in Gallia County, Ohio in 1887. In 1955, Gatewood hiked the A.T. wearing Keds sneakers and carrying an army blanket, a raincoat, and a plastic shower curtain in a homemade bag slung over her shoulder. Today she’s known as a pioneer of “ultralight backpacking.”

Gatewood first read about the trail in National Geographic. “I thought it would be a nice lark,” she told Sports Illustrated after completing the trail. “It wasn’t,” she said. “For some fool reason, they always lead you right up over the biggest rock to the top of the biggest mountain they can find.”

Gatewood hiked the AT twice more in 1960 and in 1963. She was the first person to tackle the trail three times and the oldest female through-hiker until 71-year-old Nancy Gowler in 2007.

In the summer of 2009, Brede set out in a green 17-foot Kevlar canoe to tackle all 3,800 miles of Lake Huron.

A train-hopper in his 20s, Brede has always been a travel junkie. “I just like open spaces,” he says. “I think [traveling] keeps people young and open minded.”

The inspiration for Brede’s paddle around the Lakes came from the late Verlen Kruger, who holds the Guinness World Record for canoeing (he paddled more than 100,000 miles in his life). When Kruger was in his 80s, he said that he would like to paddle around the Great Lakes.

“I thought that was a great idea,” Brede says, “and my ego picked Lake Huron. I couldn’t find a record of anyone having paddled around it.”

Brede was on Huron for three months. At night he slept in a hammock or a one-man tent. During the day he ate granola and dehydrated backpacker’s meals. And he paddled.

“Paddling engages my body harmoniously,” he wrote on his blog. “Twist from the waist away from the paddle side, plant the paddle straight into the water, twist toward the paddle side, pulling the boat to the paddle, then rewinding for the next stroke, and the next, and the next. The first few days I felt a few aches in my arms and shoulders, but after a week or so, my muscles firmed up and my love handles started melting.”

His mind busy with everyday survival, Brede’s days passed quickly.

Those gulls are beautiful, he thought. Will the next marina have a restaurant? Damn Jet Skis. Not another nuke plant. I wish Ralph Nader were president. I need to floss. This lake is so big. I’m so small. I am so lucky to be able to do this.

90 days after he set off, Brede and eight of his friends paddled to the south end of the Mackinac Bridge where his journey began.

After that, Brede was hooked on the simplicity of traveling with just his canoe and the supplies he could carry in the hull. In 2010 he circled Lake Michigan. He took the year 2011 off from paddling after the death of his father, but 2012 brought him back to the boat to paddle around Lake Erie.

He embarked from the mouth of the Detroit River into the warm brown waters of western Lake Erie on June 23 last year. A bald eagle soared overhead as he cut a new path through the water.

On Erie, Brede spent a night in Sandusky Bay listening to screams from Cedar Point roller coasters. He passed two nuclear plants and paddled through potentially deadly algal blooms. He hung out with a dozen chain-smoking fishermen in Ohio on the Fourth of July, made friends with newlyweds in Erie, Pennsylvania, and ate pizza at a Pirate Festival in a campground near Buffalo. He took a week off to vacation with his wife in Ontario, and finished the trip in late August.

Three down, two to go. Not that Brede is counting. “I’m only looking ahead one lake,” he says. “Each is big and uniquely challenging. If life doesn’t get in the way, I’ll attempt Lake Ontario in 2013.”
These days, there’s a lot of pessimistic news about unemployed college grads. But Sarah-Beth Loder—a 2012 College of Wooster graduate in chemical physics—found a way out of living in her parents’ basement. She made up a job for herself as Wooster’s sustainability coordinator.

At this fall’s Reduce, Reuse, Recycle event on campus, I found Sarah-Beth (S.B. to her friends) sitting at a fold-out table outside the college’s student center. A cardboard sign hung from the table. “SUSTAINABILITY HELP 5¢, the coordinator is IN.” There was a mug on the table with a few pennies in the bottom.

With short brunette hair, a bone hook pushed through one earlobe, a blue flannel shirt, and a pair of Crocs peeking from underneath the frayed hem of her jeans, S.B. looked like a rural hipster. She was flanked by a few other kids wearing flannel and t-shirts printed with pictures of windmills. One of them handed me a green button with windmills on it. A gaggle of students (more flannel shirts) were crouched on the sidewalk scribbling chalk drawings of rainbows and trees. An another group tie-dyed old t-shirts on the grass. On a small stage across the sidewalk, a moppy-haired singer plucked his guitar for a sparse crowd.

I dropped a nickel in her cup. “How’s it going?”

S.B. sighed. “Well,” she said, “it’s going… We don’t have a big turnout. But there were more people here earlier.” A few students trickled part on their way to the library, glancing sideways at the young environmentalists before adjusting their backpacks and continuing on. S.B. shrugged.

During her junior year at Wooster, S.B. got hooked on environmental advocacy after a friend invited her to live in a campus house with an environmental group. The housemates planned to do eco-friendly renovations. But they didn’t turn out to be a very motivated construction crew, so S.B. took over as sustainability house leader her senior year. She made lists of projects, gave her housemates ideas, pointed them to all the right people to contact on campus, and checked on their progress every week.

“We had a compost bin the second year,” she said with a laugh, “and we drilled a hole in the roof and installed a solar tube in it. But we had to do that, because there wasn’t a light in the common room in the first place.”

S.B. had a long list of green improvements for the campus. And nobody to help her carry them out. So she turned that list into a job description and pitched it to a faculty committee.

“I just said—you guys need someone to do this job.”

And she was right—many other liberal arts colleges in Ohio are jumping onto the environmental bandwagon. Wooster is scrambling to keep up. Four years ago the college put together an environmental studies department, and last year the school constructed a multi-million dollar LEED-certified recreation center. Wooster was also trying to hire an experienced environmental coordinator, but hiring S.B. was an easier solution.

Now most of S.B.’s job consists of making posters, sitting at staff meetings, talking to students, and riding around in the Grounds Crew golf cart. She has countless ideas and has to push the administration to accept them.

“I’m in a strange position,” she admitted, “because I have to make them care about environmental issues. But the hardest part of the job is feeling like not all students are on board. There is a small group of students who care about seeing things happen, but the rest... don’t see the same picture.”

For instance, a few students have been working for the past four years to ban bottled water sales on campus. The measure would save the school money and reduce the amount of plastic in Wooster’s waste stream. In the spring of 2012, the motion finally passed. But not many students noticed, since the school convenience store still sells Glaceau Smartwater, a type of bottled water enhanced with electrolytes.

S.B. has also worked to put compost bins around campus. But not many students know where they are, and they don’t try to seek them out. It’s easier to throw garbage into trash cans. She also pushed campus Bike Club members to revamp their program. They’ve moved the bike garage to a new location, fixed their fleet of broken bikes, and organized a game of bicycle polo on the recreational quad.

Aside from students’ involvement in the environmental scene, S.B. has more serious things to think about.

“By the time my contract runs out,” she said, “I want to have a group of students involved in food policy on campus and get dining services more involved in buying locally. And we need to work on sustainability policy—it’s not in the College of Wooster’s mission statement. I want to get a climate policy so we can get the presidential pledge for climate change signed. We totally missed the boat on that.” Still, she acknowledged that the school needs a plan before it can approve anything.

As my chat with S.B. wrapped up, she shivered in the autumn chill. The sun was going down. The guitarist had packed up and moved on. The chalk drawings were scuffed and smeared. She stood up and stretched.

“Well,” she said, “I guess it’s time to clean this stuff up. Are you coming to the vegan dinner on Sunday?”
Rody Walter builds custom bikes. His company, Groovy Cycleworks, is a one-man shop. And he does it all—tube cutting, welding, component orders, painting, and assembly—in a small studio behind his house in Wooster, Ohio. Walter’s funky painted frames tear up trails and fly down roads from the Jersey Shore to the Pacific Coast. He’s even built bikes for customers in Australia and Thailand. And the wait list is seven years long.

The shop is behind a modern ranch home in the middle of rolling Ohio farmland. The front office, where his wife Christie manages the books, is bright and clean. Through the next door, the workshop is packed with metal-cutting machines, stacks of aluminum tubing. A high-tech computer sits on a desk under a wide window. The white-walled paint room is in the back corner. Naked metal bicycle frames hang on the walls.

This is where Walter, a stocky redhead with dimples and a penchant for Vibram Fivefingers, spends most of his time. He has a huge smile and a big laugh, and he likes to talk about bikes.

Walter’s garage is stuffed with custom frames—his sons’ old single-speed, his wife’s road bike, a royal blue frame dotted with pink hibiscus flowers, a green mountain bike with Frankenstein-style stitches across a weld in the top tube from a rough ride in Moab last year.

Walter is a big part of the Ohio cycling community. He helped start 331 Racing, which is a popular mountain bike race series. Profits are split between Vulture’s Knob Mountain Bike Park (which he helped build) and a “Bikes for Kids” program that gives underprivileged kids a chance to ride. Next year he’ll be involved in planning the 2014 Gay Games in Cleveland to promote LGBT athletes.

Walter’s always loved to ride. When he met his wife, the couple got interested in tandem biking. But most tandem bikes weren’t designed to handle the rough terrain they wanted to tackle. So in 1994, Walter designed his own tandem. Then he contacted Bill Grove, a custom bicycle builder from Pennsylvania. Grove took on the project.

After months of phone calls and prototypes, Walter visited Grove to watch the final assembly. The shop was a dingy, dark cinderblock building full of old machines. It smelled like chemicals.

“Now [building bikes] takes up every spare moment I have,” Walter says.

Walter stands out from other builders because he controls the process—from design to paint. Once a customer gets a spot on the wait list, he talks to them about their body measurements, riding style, and bicycle preference.

“We can pretty much create whatever you can dream of—if you have the money to pay for it,” he says. Walter laughs again.

Right now he’s working on a bike for a surfer from San Diego. The guy wants an old-school cruiser with an integrated handlebar-stem combo, custom cranks, an internally-geared 14-speed hub made in Germany, internal cables, an integrated surfboard rack, and internally wired LED lights. In titanium. It’ll cost $20,000.

“Each design has its own challenges because you’re designing for an individual,” Walter says. “And that’s incredibly challenging, since each person’s needs are different.”

In the garage, Walter wades through the clutter and grabs the bike that started it all—a rainbow-painted dual-suspension tandem with funky drop bars rad parts from the 90s.

“My son and his girlfriend ride this more than anybody else now. They took it to prom and homecoming,” he says. Walter chuckles. “A tandem will either end your relationship or make it that much stronger.”

“It was like watching a new mechanical life being born. I wanted to experience that for myself.”

Walter packs up the bikes.

“Well,” he says, “it looks like a great day for a ride.”
I walked through the dark woods with three strangers. They all carried knives. A sliver of white moon hung between the black, bare tree limbs. My dim headlamp barely illuminated the mossy trail. The man in front of me walked without a light, finding the path with his feet. It was silent as we shuffled through the dead leaves.

Behind us, the woman in our party stopped. We paused to look back at her.

"Wait a sec," she said. "I'm gonna call."

She caught her breath for a moment. Then she leaned back, cupped her hand around her mouth, and released a high-pitched wail that made my toes curl inside my hiking boots. It echoed through the empty forest, over the lake and through the valley. The woods were silent for a moment. We listened.

"Not much activity tonight," she sighed. "Let's keep going."

Illustration: Colleen O’Neil
I was on a hike with three members of the Southeastern Ohio Bigfoot Investigation Society (that’s SOSBI for short). With a whopping 228 sightings listed on an Internet database, Ohio has the third most Bigfoot sightings in the nation. According to some, the Ohio Bigfoot has been living in the area for centuries. He just doesn’t want to be found.

In 2008, a small-but-eager group of “Bigfooters” founded SOSBI. For the past four years, the club has hosted monthly meetings at a public library in the small town of Cambridge. According to its Facebook page, SOSBI is an open forum created “to give everyone and anyone the chance to talk about Bigfoot without the fear of being made fun of or taunted.”

In early 2012 when Animal Planet featured the group in a reality show called Hunting Bigfoot, the club saw a spike in popularity. Now the meetings draw up to 80 people from across the Midwest. This summer SOSBI started hosting group campsouts in Salt Fork State Park. The 17,000 acres of dense forest in Salt Fork are perfect for concealing dreadlocked gorilla-men.

Seriously, though? Bigfoot? I figured that these meetings must be an excuse for some weirdo redneck-types to venture out of their parents’ basements for the night. So, in late September, I decided to find out.

On my first trip to Salt Fork, I found a dozen or so men and women lounging in lawn chairs around a campfire. I’d expected a few skinny, acne-speckled teenage boys and maybe some shotgun-wielding folks in tinfoil hats. But these people looked normal—a group of middle-aged men and women in blue jeans and lumpy sweatsuits. The men sported camouflage hunting hats, and the women had short frizzy hair. They looked more like volunteer firefighters than paranormal enthusiasts.

I sat down next to a man from Pittsburgh. He offered me a cookie.

“Don’t believe in Bigfoot; I just believe in Shawnas’s cookies,” he chuckled, gesturing toward one of the women. “I just happened to be lost in the woods one day and come upon these people. And next thing you know, they start talking about hairy guys with big feet who live in the woods.”

Then the self-proclaimed non-believer pulled out his phone and opened a photo album called “Evidence.” He scrolled through 300 photos of log piles and bent trees, patiently explaining to me that Bigfoot likes vandalizing the forest shrubbery.

Tall tales and vague pseudo-science swirled around the campfire. I learned that the Sasquatch looks like a large, hairy man with a pronounced brow ridge. They can be 3 to 15 feet tall and come in any color. And yes, we can talk about Bigfoot in the plural. The Ohio Bigfoot population, someone told me, ranges from 30 to 300 individuals. But since they’re migratory, there’s no good season or area to spot one. They can be anywhere, at any time.

Just like bears, they spend their days foraging for berries, small animals, and sometimes even garbage. Just like deer, they peel the bark off trees in the winter. Like hippies, they stack rocks next to trailheads. Their eyes have the reflective membrane tapetum lucidum, the same thing that makes cats’ eyes glow in the dark. They communicate with long, moaning howls that sound like ambulance sirens. They exude the fetid stench of sewage, urine, and dead animals. Oh, and they’ve never been found. They’re too darn smart.

Here’s what we really know: Bigfoot is rooted in folklore. Legends of humanoid creatures in the wilderness come from all over the world. There’s the Yeti of the Himalayas, the Yowie in Australia, the Yeren of Mongolia, and a plethora of wild-man myths from native tribes in North America. Even Daniel Boone claimed to have shot and killed a 10-foot hairy man he called a Yahoo.

Historically, most Bigfoot sightings are concentrated in the Pacific Northwest. In the 1920s, a Canadian journalist coined the term “Sasquatch” from the Halkomelem Indian word sásq’ets, the name for the tribe’s version of Bigfoot. In 1924, five miners in Washington claimed to have been attacked by several “apemen” throwing rocks at their cabin. Later, one of the men wrote a book about the experience, in which he claimed that the creatures were mystical beings from another dimension. In 1958, a bulldozer operator found tracks at a worksite in Bluff Creek, California and presented a plaster-casted replica of the footprints to a local newspaper. After his death, his children came forward with a pair of 16-inch wooden feet that he’d used to fake the tracks. In 1967—also in Bluff Creek—Roger Patterson and Robert Gimlin captured the iconic film of Sasquatch tramping through the undergrowth. The most recent sighting was in 2007—a Pennsylvanian hunter thought he’d caught an image of a creature with an automatically-triggered camera. Turns out it was probably a juvenile bear with mange, according to the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

But there’s been never been one conclusive piece of evidence. No real documented sightings. No captured individuals. No carcasses. Not even a stool sample.

In the book Anatomy of a Beast: Obsession and Myth on the Trail of Bigfoot, Micheal McLeod writes that the Bigfoot craze is “a silly slice of history ... the first widely popularized example of pseudoscience in American culture.” The fad reached its peak in the 1970s when self-identified “experts” started spouting theories to magazines and television networks. Real scientists, not wanting to get mixed up with the crazies, fled from the Bigfoot scene. Then, nobody was around to challenge what McLeod calls “junk science,” and it was effectively legitimized in the minds of those who wanted it to be. Enthusiasts took heart; the beast couldn’t be
Back at the campfire, everyone was eager to pull out their favorite monster story. One person had an elderly neighbor with a Bigfoot-infested barn. Another guy’s friend saw it cavorting in his garden. He had the footprints casted in plaster as proof. Someone else had been followed by the animal while on a hunting trip. The listeners nodded, then huddled in to tuck on extra details to the end of each yarn.

“Yeah, what do you think? What do you think?”

I wanted to shout, What does that even mean? Did these people really think there’s a giant gorilla man sneaking around rural Ohio?

But they kept offering me cookies, calling me “honey,” and showing me pixilated photos of dark shrubbery. They told me about their daytime stakeouts. The next morning, I met Nancy and Bernie, a middle-aged couple from West Virginia. Nancy was bubbly and enthusiastic. She looked like a woman who could belong to my mother’s book club. Bernie was a stoop-shouldered man with a silver crew cut and square glasses. He shied away from my handheld recorder. They asked me not to use their last name to save Bernie from workplace ridicule. They encouraged me to use any creatures that might be nearby. They wanted me to believe that I was hearing something.

Every once in a while, we’d stop so Nancy or Todd could shriek and post the gibbonish into the forest. That’s how they communicate with any creatures that might be nearby. They encouraged me to try it. Bernie was even more excited and encouraged me to have an “experience.”

We continued tramping through the undergrowth. Todd had been talking about paranormal activity for a half-hour. His girlfriends, he said, had never been into Bigfoot or ghosts. He was single. He paused. “You know,” he said to Bernie, “you guys are lucky to have each other to do this with. It’s good to have anyone to go on these hikes with—especially someone like a mate.”

Bernie smiled.

Half-an-hour later, the trees finally thinned out and we emerged onto a moonlit road. Nancy shook her head. “I really wanted you to have some activity,” she said to me. “Did we convince you?” I shrugged. I didn’t have the heart to tell her no.

The road curved into a long hill. Nancy and Todd fell back; Bernie and the rest of the Bigfooters seemed like genuinely nice people. More than that—they’re genuine people, albeit unhappy. Then they had their sighting, and things finally started looking up. Bernie finally found a new job. Now he and Nancy drive to Salt Fork and hike on his days off. They come two or three days a week, even in the winter. They’re out of the house so much that they’ve canceled their Internet and cable plans.

“We’re probably never going to see it again,” he said, resigned. “But it’s been good. We’ve met so many people that we never would’ve met any other way. I wouldn’t be here talking to you right now if it weren’t for Bigfoot.”

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Bernie and the rest of the Bigfooters seem like genuinely nice people. More than that—they’re genuine people, albeit people who happen to spend their free time chasing after a mythological forest beast.

Are they delusional? The statistics—zero documented sightings, ever— might suggest so. But they also care deeply about what they do. When I asked questions about their research, they bubbled over with enthusiasm, offering me documents and photographs and DVDs of their findings. They invited me to their meetings and let me borrow flashlights and camp chairs. And they seriously wanted me to have an “experience” of my own to report to the world. Whether or not they’ve actually seen anything or had their own “experiences,” doesn’t really seem to matter.

We paused at the top of the hill to wait for Nancy and Todd.

When we reached the parking lot back at the campfire, Nancy opened a bottle of wine and Bernie threw a few logs into the fire pit. Todd pulled a cooler out of the Hummer and offered me a bottle of water. Nancy was beaming with happiness that I tagged along on the hike. She wished me luck with my writing and invited me back any time. Todd offered to carpool with me. I grinned but declined.

“Call us when you’re back safe!” Nancy called as I drove away. “If you hit a Sasquatch, make sure you bring it back so we can show Bernie’s mother-in-law it’s real!”

I smiled and waved.

Back at home, I pulled out my phone to text Bernie:

Back safe. No Squatch. Thanks!

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Finding Bigfoot might not be real, but at least he’s inspired some impressive beers. Maybe fuel for your next nighttime hike?

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Clockwise from top left: Lilja’s Sasquatch Stout, Ninkasi Brewing Company Sasquatch Legacy Wheat Wine, Sierra Nevada Bigfoot Ale, and Great Divide Brewing Company Yeti MONSTER BREWS: Bigfoot might not be real, but at least he’s inspired some impressive beers. Maybe fuel for your next nighttime hike?

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It is considered a mythological forest beast. The existence of Bigfoot is often debated, with some people claiming to have seen it and others discounting the reports as hoaxes or misidentifications. The information here suggests a mix of skepticism and interest in the phenomenon, with the author describing both the challenges and the camaraderie among those involved in the search for the elusive creature.

The text delves into the personal experiences of the author, reflecting on her encounters with those who believe in Bigfoot, as well as her own reflections on the experience. The author also mentions the social aspects of the community, such as the meetings and events they attend, which often include discussions on the nature of Bigfoot sightings and the overall experience of being part of such a community. The personal stories of the individuals are highlighted, showing their dedication and the shared interest in exploring the possibility of Bigfoot's existence.
The Tour Divide Challenge is the longest mountain bike race in the world. It follows the 2,745-mile Great Divide Mountain Bike Route from Banff, Canada to Antelope Wells, New Mexico. It’s no ordinary race. There are no course officials, no aid stations, and no prizes. There’s just one rule: ask for help, and you’re disqualified. Riders carry their own gear and food. Last June 105 men and 11 women started. 67 riders finished.

Ohio native Melissa Liebling, 33, was the only woman racing on a bike without gears. She didn’t have any multi-day riding experience, and she was out to break the single-speed women’s world record. Here’s her story, as told to Colleen O’Neil.
I left Ohio and moved out West. I always go for things that are bigger than me. I was an ultrarunner before I started mountain biking. When I found out about the Tour Divide, I definitely didn’t matter on the Tour Divide. My body needed fuel.

I was Directionally-challenged on the trail. When I finally got to Antelope Wells, there was nothing there. It took forever.

I decided to ride a single-speed. I was pretty sure I could break the women’s single-speed record.

Still, I didn’t have any experience with such a long event. It was like doing an Ironman without ever doing a triathlon. But I’m glad I went into the event so naively. If I had known about all the hard times I’d experience, I might not have done the race at all.

The week leading up to the race, it snowed every day. But the morning of the start was clear. Everyone was excited and tense and stressed at the start—I could feel it.

I’d been over my gear a thousand times. I’d been thinking about this moment for six months. I was ready to go.

After the third day, I gave up on racing.

No antelope, no wells. Not even a finish line. Just a road, some grass, and a border post. I showed the border patrol my passport and crossed into Mexico. A few friends from the running store where I work were waiting for me. They took my gear, put my bike on the rack, and then we drove away.

I fished the race in 31 days, 7 hours, and 48 minutes.

After the Tour Divide was over, it was weird to be back in society. I wasn’t this strange person on a bicycle anymore. I was just a regular person again with regular things to do. Now if I see a dirt road or a long mountain climb, I cringe. I guess it’s hard to see something I’d hated so much during the race.

Even though I gained a lot of courage and confidence from the race, I won’t be riding the Tour Divide again. I prefer mountain biking on trails instead of dirt.
FRACKING ON AMISH farms?

David Kline won’t lease his farm to the gas company. He wears a frayed straw hat, a faded blue button-down shirt, black suspenders, and navy blue Crocs, and he drives a horse-drawn buggy. But he’s also a businessman and an author. Kline sells organic milk to a distributor in Wisconsin, has written three farming books, and edits Farming Magazine with a solar-powered computer in a wooden shed behind his house. And unlike most Amish, he’s an environmentalist.

Kline clears his throat and rubs his gray chinstrap beard. He speaks softly, barely audible over the hay baler whirring behind the barn.

“The Amish have been in this community for 200 years,” he says, “and we’ve built a sustainable agriculture. But the oil and gas companies would destroy that.”

Like the Marcellus shale in Pennsylvania and New York, the Utica shale is an underground rock formation. In the 1800s, drillers in Ohio started pumping oil from a shallow formation called the Clinton. Across the state, fields are still dotted with rusty Clinton pumps.

The Utica formation is older and deeper than the Clinton, and the oil is trapped tightly in the rock. The US Geological Survey estimates that nearly a billion barrels of crude oil are trapped in the Utica formation. But simple vertical drilling can’t get it out. The rock has to be crushed and squeezed by horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing (or “fracking”). By drilling down and across the deposit, drillers can access nearly a mile of Utica shale from each well.

But if a horizontal drill hit an old Clinton well, wastewater could get into the local water supply. That could put a farm like Kline’s out of business. If his water were contaminated, he’d lose his organic certification, and the dairy distributor would cut him out of the supply chain.

Dr. John Stolz, a Duquesne University biologist, has studied the non-economic effects of Marcellus shale drilling in Pennsylvania. After speaking with landowners who’ve sold their mineral rights to oil and gas companies, Stolz has found that people usually regret agreeing to let drillers on their land. Like everyone else, the Amish who leased weren’t prepared for the effects of horizontal drilling.

The fracking process produces hazardous air pollutants, stresses the local water supply, can contaminate groundwater, and creates problems with chemical wastewater disposal (reinjection of the wastewater caused a series of earthquakes in Youngstown, Ohio, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources). Plus it’s noisy, dirty, and disruptive.

“Fracking,” says Stolz, “will destroy [the Amish] way of life. It’s totally the antithesis of what they stand for.”

Fracking has been around since 1947. But it’s so expensive and resource-intensive that it wasn’t used much—a horizontal well requires up to five acres of land, eight million gallons of water, and a special crew of workers to operate the machinery. But now that the price of natural gas is so high, horizontal drilling is viable.

To set up a well, bulldozers level five to ten acres of land, trucks haul in a few tons of concrete and steel. Then a metal scaffolding tower rises from the flattened land. A high-powered drill set inside the tower bores down a few thousand feet, then turns 90 degrees to cut into the gas reservoir horizontally. During drilling, the first few thousand feet of the well are coated in layers of steel and concrete to protect the groundwater. Then an explosive is dropped down the pipe to blow holes in the lowest part of the casing. Six million gallons of water, chemicals, and sand are pumped into the well to create tiny holes in the rock formation. Then the gas is free to flow to the surface.

The Utica shale is “the biggest thing to hit Ohio since the plow,” according to a statement from Chesapeake Energy Corporation’s chief Aubrey McClendon. At the current price, the Utica is worth about $98.6 billion. Chesapeake claims that the United States has at least a 100-year supply of natural gas that we can use for home heating, glass melting, food processing, transportation, and more than 99% of our domestic fuel needs.

“Those companies,” Stolz explains, “are supposed to reclaim the land after they drill, but the drilling pads usually just

Utica shale is “the biggest thing to hit Ohio since the plow.”

Aubrey McClendon, Chesapeake Energy Corporation

But Kline sees those numbers as the start of a boom-and-bust cycle.

“This economic system is unsustainable,” he says, voice rasping. “It creates nothing, and it’ll collapse. The only real creation comes from agriculture. That’s because we capture sunlight. It can be renewed every year.”

In the past year, drillers have sent letters to landowners all over Ohio, offering production royalties in exchange for mineral rights. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the number of horizontal drilling permits jumped from only a handful in January 2011 to 250 in November 2012. Of those permits, 106 wells have been drilled, and 36 in the eastern part of the state are producing gas.

In Pennsylvania where Marcellus drilling is in full swing, Stolz has started to see green rolling hills scarred with well footprints.

“Those companies,” Stolz explains, “are supposed to reclaim the land after they drill, but the drilling pads usually just

"American Gasland" courtesy Marcellus Outreach Butler
stay there.” Acres of farmland in Pennsylvania have essentially been converted into industrial lots, which will never go back into production. Dairy sales are down 18 percent in areas that have been drilled.

“Fracking and farming are incompatible,” says Stolz. “You can’t do two things at once.”

But the Amish are more savvy about industry than most people imagine, according to David McConnell, anthropologist and author of *An Amish Paradox*.

For instance, the Amish don’t farm with machines, but they do use chemical fertilizers. They’ve also been dealing with natural resource corporations for a long time—many Amish farms still have well pads from Clinton drilling.

“Their view of nature,” McConnell says, “is shaped by the Christian idea that God gave humans dominion over the earth. There’s a very pragmatic, utilitarian streak amongst the Amish. They view the land as a resource, and they love to invest in it.”

In some ways, says McConnell, David Kline’s view of nature makes him a radical in the Amish community.

Kline was losing sleep last winter because drilling companies wouldn’t leave him alone. But he refused to lease his land—no matter how many thousands of dollars the companies offered him.

The love of money, in Kline’s opinion, is contrary to the teachings of the Amish Church. But in Holmes County where Kline lives, there are already a few Amish millionaires—some people call them the “uppity class Amish.” And the fracking situation is likely to widen the economic gap even more.

One Amishman who lives near Kline needed money. So he sold his land and moved into a tiny house at the edge of the property. The new owner signed a lease with a gas company. They put in a well pad and started to drill.

Now the current owner is raking in royalty money, and the previous owner still lives in his shack—right next to the road where supply trucks rumble past to the drilling site.

But Kline, an Amish pacifist, won’t try to convince his neighbors not to lease. By hanging onto his mineral rights, Kline hopes that he might be able to keep drillers away.

“I don’t have full confidence that they can’t just drill here anyway,” he says. “These energy companies are so powerful. The Amish don’t use the courts, and they don’t sue. And the gas companies will soon discover that. They’ll do whatever they please.”

The wells in Kline’s area of Ohio have been coming up dry, and companies are flipping leases fast. So Kline and his farm might be safe.

Kline folds his weatherworn hands in his lap and looks out over his fields for a moment. Two blonde, bonneted little girls in blue dresses toddle over, and Kline scoops them into his arms. They giggle.

“We have such a nice way of living,” Kline sighs. “There are close to 200 organic farmers in our community. These young farmers and their families are happy. But the gas companies would sacrifice that for the sake of making money.”
Brian Polen, ultrarunner and co-owner of Vertical Runner, Wooster’s specialty running shoe store, shares his advice on training for a long race on the trails.

So what’s the allure of running an ultra marathon? For me, running is a way to get away from everyday life. It’s hard to do that on a road where cars are constantly flirting with running you over. There’s something about being out in the trails, all alone or with a friend, that lets you forget about everything. But if you have a ton of stuff on your mind, it takes a long time to get rid of it all. Thus, ultra running! Plus the events have a great, laid-back atmosphere, and the camaraderie can be addicting.

Who can run an ultra marathon? Anyone. There are skinny runners, big runners, short runners, tall runners, young runners, old runners, etc. One thing they all have in common is toughness. There will be times in training and racing when your body’s shot and you want to stop. But if you’re tough mentally, you can get through it.

How should you build up your mileage to race distance? Run! Then when you are done with that, run some more! If you’ve tackled the marathon, the 50K is the next logical step—it’s only five miles longer. But most 50K races are held on trails, and the terrain can make you 2-3 minutes slower per mile. So your typical 4-hour marathoner may take 6-6.5 hours in a trail 50K. That’s a long time to be on your feet. Nice, long trail runs are the way to go. I also love back-to-back long runs: to train for a 50K, I’ll do a 25 miler one day, then a 12-15 miler the next day. It’s good to train on tired legs, because your legs will be pretty darn tired on race day.

You’ve got a family, a full-time job, and a business to run. How do you squeeze in time to train? And how do you get your family and friends to stop calling you crazy? When I get my family and friends to stop calling me crazy, I’ll let you know! Seriously, though, if you want to find time to train, you’ll find time to train. It’s not uncommon to find me running the trails from 5:00am-9:00am to be home for breakfast. Or I’ll throw on my headlamp and run from 10:00pm-1:00am while the trails from 5:00am-9:00am to be home for breakfast. Or I’ll take a nice stroll, sometimes taking breaks to soak my feet in the river or skip some rocks.

How do you handle the training volume mentally? Find a great training partner. If you get lost in conversation with a good friend, a couple hours can fly by. Also, try to enjoy each run, because you never know how long you’ll be able to continue doing this awesome sport.

How much rest do you give yourself after races? Rest? I don’t rest much. Because of the slower pace and variety of muscle usage during a trail ultra marathon, I don’t get too sore. I usually cut my running by 10-20% the week after a race, but then I get back at it.

What do you do about nutrition? Ultra races are like eating contests! When people crash, it’s not from undertraining or injury—they’re usually just depleted from running for hours and hours without food. You should take in at least 150 calories per hour and 16-20 ounces of electrolyte-replacement fluid. The more tired you get, the harder it is to make yourself eat and drink, so you’ll need someWillpower. It also takes a lot of trial and error to find out what your body needs. Gels and sugary products are bad news for me, so I’ve resorted to turkey and cheese croissant sandwiches with lettuce, tomatoes, salt and pepper, and olive oil. Toting a sandwich around doesn’t work for everyone, but that’s what I like to do.

Any race day tips? Eat a good breakfast, clear your head, and prepare to have fun. Ultimately, most of us aren’t getting paid for running, so we need to have fun no matter what. Things will turn out badly if you get too serious. So try to smile as much as you can. And take a crew. I love to see a friendly face at checkpoints during a race, and it’s really helpful to have them there to refill your water bottles or make you sandwiches. After the race, try to find a nice cool river to sit in, or take an ice bath. The next day, force yourself to run and get the blood pumping in those beat up muscles. Oh, and eat a lot! You’ve earned it.

What about speed work? If I’ve had a stressful day, I run fast. If life’s been good to me, I take a nice stroll, sometimes taking breaks to soak my feet in the river or skip some rocks.

RUN YOUR FIRST ULTRAMARATHON

photo: Central Ohio Trail Runners
Ohio might be better known for its farmland than its mountain bike scene. But if you know where to look, you’ll find trail systems around towns and cities all over the state. There are steep, sketchy climbs and even a few unexpected downhills built in river valleys and reservoir contours. Riding in Ohio is pure, unpretentious fun. Just don’t get lost in the cornfields.
Follow the wooden vulture’s pointing wing past the cornfields and the compost pile. You’ve reached the Midwest’s most technical mountain bike trail. Vulture’s Knob is 125 acres of rolling, mountain-bike-specific singletrack built on an old county landfill. The quirky trails, decorated with stolen road signs and rabbit carcasses, will keep you riding the brakes and clenching your butt cheeks—until you crash. The Knob is open 365 days a year, and it hosts a series of cross country races, endurance events, and a winter cyclocross series. It’s just a $5 donation to ride. (If your ego comes out too bruised, there’s a liquor store just a couple miles down the road.)

REAGAN PARK TRAILS
MEDINA
Reagan isn’t backcountry riding. You’ll come up on hikers, roll past playgrounds full of kids, and cross a main road. But don’t be put off—these trails are really fun. Each loop is about two miles long with a few gradual hills and a couple steep drops. Reagan is a great place for new riders to work on their technical skills without getting too far out of their comfort zones. There are short bridges, a couple rock gardens, and some log piles to practice your bunny hop. Plus the sharp switchbacks are good practice for riders who aren’t comfortable taking corners. Take the kids on a ride after soccer practice, then grab muffins in one of Medina’s many downtown cafes—only a mile from the trailheads.

WEST BRANCH STATE PARK
RAVENNA
These ex-snowmobile trails were lovingly converted into singletrack by the Cleveland Area Mountain Bike Association. The 5-6 mile lakeside route, with fun ravine contours, big log piles, gnarly roots, and slick log bridges, is good for adventurous newbies. The south side of the network is harder, with heaps of Appalachian-style glacial till and jaw-shattering rock gardens. Rock Gorge Trail winds around and drops into a flowing creek. After that a snowmobile trail rolls down to the ironically-named Bit-O-Honey, a technical one-mile loop. Another trail, Rock Wall, is labeled “EXPERTS ONLY.” That’s no joke—rookie riders beware.

LAKE HOPE STATE PARK
MCArTHUR
The perfect place to go if you’re getting burnt out. A network of swooping trails branches out from the lakefront, flows across narrow forest gorges, and climbs to a 7-mile ridgeline trail through hickory forest. These simple, clean trails will make even the most timid rider feel like a pro. The Athens Bicycle Club recommends a 10-mile loop starting at the top of the ridge on Copperhead and riding downhill. A few short climbs glide into smooth downhills that empty out next to an old brick furnace by the lake. Climb the road back to the parking area or follow more singletrack around the lake and back to the trailhead. Plus the area’s not half bad—there are backpacking trails, a beach for swimming, canoe rentals, and clean cabins and camping sites. Bring the family and hang out for the weekend.

MOHICAN STATE PARK
LOUDONVILLE
Home of the Mohican MTB 100, one of the biggest ultra-endurance events in the country, these trails attract world-class endurance freaks and recreational riders alike. One big loop winds around the gorge, passes through Mohican State Forest, and empties out back at the trailhead. There’s a bit of ridge riding, roller-coaster hills, a rustic covered bridge, and some small rock gardens to pass through. None of the features are too extreme, so you can either do an easy out-and-back or get in a long ride without breaking a bone. The trail is marked with mileposts and turn-by-turn arrows, and the dirt is excellent. When all the other trails in Ohio turn into muddy rivers, Mohican is usually in good shape.
DESTINATIONS:
Davis, West Virginia

Sometimes you need a little backwoods charm. We roadtripped to Davis, West Virginia—the perfect base camp for an Appalachian adventure. At 3,100 feet, this tiny village is the state's highest incorporated town. But what it lacks in size it makes up for with excellent forest access, a hopping local bluegrass scene, great food, and homespun hillbilly-hipster character. We found the best spots to hit that’ll have you maxed out on fun by Sunday.

THE DOLLY SODS WILDERNESS

The Sods are famous for sweeping views, wind-carved boulders, colorful huckleberry plains, and dense hardwood forests. With 17,371 acres and 47 miles of hiking trails, this area is perfect for backpacking trips. There are designated campsites in the forest, and leave-no-trace camping is allowed 200 feet from roads, streams, and trails. The Sods explode with spectacular scenery all year—fields of mountain laurel bloom from May to late June, and the forest glows with color in September and October. In the winter, the snow-blanketed forest roads are perfect for cross-country skiing.

CANAAN VALLEY INSTITUTE

MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS

A half-mile from Davis, this semi-flat 15-mile loop of single- and doubletrack winds through meadows and woodlands. Some parts are super technical, especially a long sheet of white, pitted rock nicknamed “Moon Rocks.” Other sections are nice and buff. These trails are featured in the West Virginia Mountain Bike Association’s oldest mountain bike race, the Revenge of the Rattlesnake. If you get a flat, no worries. Blackwater Bikes has you covered. The shop, a full-service bike shop with retail, rentals, and certified mechanics, has been around for more than 20 years.

CHEAT RIVER RAFTING

Blackwater Outdoor Adventures has enough activities to keep your adrenaline pumping for days. They hold guided rafting trips on the Cheat and Tygart Rivers, provide kayak lessons, guided fly-fishing tours, canoe and tube rentals, and rent camp sites along the riverbank. Their main office is next to biking and hiking trails, cross-country ski trails, and backcountry wilderness areas. Need some extra gear? They’ve got supplies in stock at their outfitter store.

HELLBENDER BURRITOS

Burritos as big as your face for under $10. Welcome to heaven. Hellbenders is a no-frills dive with a funky, down-home feel. (The wood-paneled walls are covered with carvings and crinkled photos of local mountain bikers.) The menu is a welcome change from the average beans-and-rice—burritos are stuffed with anything from pulled pork and coleslaw to Fritos and chili. The staff is friendly and efficient, and ice-cold local brews are always on tap. Bring a healthy appetite and a friend, because you won’t be able to finish a Hellbender burrito on your own.

THE PURPLE FIDDLE

A West Virginian bluegrass hub, the Purple Fiddle has live music on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. On one side of the building, two huge wooden bears flank wooden stained-glass doors. On the other side, a little sign underneath a purple elk head reads: “Hippies Use Side Door.” The café menu includes organic sandwiches, wraps, salads, coffee, tea, and homemade desserts. Plus they have a long wine list and microbrews at the bar. Enjoy a cup of hearty soup in the outdoor courtyard and then move inside to sip your favorite beverage and listen to the tunes. It’s a great place to chill after a long day on the trail. Want to stay a while? They have a guest house, too.

BRIGHT MORNING INN

If the weather’s too harsh for camping, check into this cozy B&B—a repurposed 19th-century lumberjack lodge. At the front entrance, a flower garden spills over onto the sidewalk. The common room has a big-screen TV, board games, and shelves full of West Virginia literature. The Inn’s eight guest rooms are rustic, with pine floors and hand-made quilts. And when you wake up, a hearty homemade breakfast (included with your stay) is an order away. The restaurant is open to the public, so you can indulge even if you’ve spent the night shivering in your tent. If you visit in the fall, don’t skip out on the pumpkin pancakes.
The next time you’re at the grocery store, check out the apples. Take a peek at the little stickers on the side. Where did they come from? Brazil? New Zealand? Most likely, those apples were harvested days ago, packed in a refrigerated airplane and then loaded onto a huge, carbon-spewing diesel truck to get to you.

According to the World Watch Institute, a typical Midwesterner’s Sunday meal of beef, potatoes, and vegetables travels about 1,600 miles before it reaches the dinner table. Researchers estimate that this food generates up to 17 times the carbon emissions as the same meal made from locally-grown ingredients. And with all that traveling, food has to be wrapped in more plastic for extended shelf life. Even organics are guilty, since they usually have a long way to travel, too.

Instead, try going local. Eating locally protects Ohio’s economy and ecology by supporting small-scale farmers and protecting the biodiversity of our crops. Local is better for your wallet, too. You’ll be eating the freshest, cheapest, and most flavorful foods. We rounded up our favorite recipes to keep you eating with the seasons all year.
SPRING

asparagus pesto pizza

3/4 lb. asparagus, cut into 3/4 inch lengths
1 Tbs. oil
1 Tbs. pine nuts
1 cup fresh basil leaves
1 clove garlic, chopped
2 Tbs. Romano or Parmesan cheese, grated
1 Tbs. oil
1 large baked pizza crust
1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
1/2 lb. shredded mozzarella cheese
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

• Preheat oven to 350.
• Place asparagus in a steamer basket over boiling water. Cover pan and steam until asparagus is green and almost tender. Drain, rinse under cold water.
• Heat oil in a heavy saucepan over medium high heat. Sauté pine nuts 3-5 minutes or until lightly browned.
• Transfer pine nuts in oil and next four ingredients to a blender or food processor and process until smooth.
• Spread pesto over crust with asparagus, pepper, mozzarella, and Parmesan.
• Place pizza on an oven tray and bake 15 minutes, or until topping is golden brown.

FALL

spicy pumpkin soup

4 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 medium yellow onions, chopped
1/4 tsp. minced garlic
1 tsp. crushed red pepper
2 tsp. curry powder
2 tsp. ground coriander
Pinch ground cayenne pepper (optional)
6 cups chopped roasted pumpkin purée
5 cups chicken broth (or vegetable broth for vegetarian option)
2 cups milk
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup heavy cream

• For pumpkin purée, cut a sugar pumpkin in half, scoop out the seeds and stringy stuff, place face down on a tin-foil lined baking pan. Bake at 350 until soft. Cool and scoop out flesh.
• Melt butter in a 4-quart saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onions and garlic and cook, stirring often, until softened, about 4 minutes. Add spices and stir for a minute more.
• Add pumpkin and 5 cups of chicken broth, blend well. Bring to a boil and reduce heat, simmer for 10 to 15 minutes.
• Transfer soup, in batches, to a blender or food processor. Cover tightly and blend until smooth. Return soup to saucepan.
• With the soup on low heat, add brown sugar and mix. Slowly add milk while stirring to incorporate. Add cream. Adjust seasonings to taste. If a little too spicy, add more cream.

WINTER

roasted cauliflower with raisins and almonds

1/2 cup golden raisins
2 heads cauliflower, cores removed, cut into florets
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Coarse salt and ground pepper
1/3 cup roughly chopped raw almonds
2 tbs. sherry or cider vinegar

• Preheat oven to 425, with racks in middle and lower third.
• Place raisins in a measuring cup and cover with very hot water.
• Arrange cauliflower on two rimmed baking sheets. Toss with oil and season with salt and pepper. Bake until cauliflower is browned and tender and almonds are toasted, about 10 minutes.
• Drain raisins.
• Transfer cauliflower to a serving dish; top with raisins and drizzle with sherry vinegar.

SUMMER

bacon, basil, and tomato sandwich

8 slices sourdough bread
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
2 small tomatoes, sliced
8 slices bacon, grilled or fried
1/4 cup mayonnaise
1/4 cup fresh basil leaves
1 tsp. lemon zest
1 Tbs. lemon juice
1 Tbs. pepper
1/2 Tbs. salt

• Brush sides of bread with olive oil.
• Grill or broil bread until warm, but not hard.
• Put mayonnaise, lemon juice, basil leaves, and salt and pepper in blender, mix until fairly smooth.
• Assemble sandwiches with bacon, tomatoes, and basil mayonnaise.