



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Cape Cod Rail Trail: The Complete Guide to Biking 25 Miles from Dennis to Wellfleet

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



capecodcertified.com/guides/cape-cod-rail-trail-complete-guide

The Cape Cod Rail Trail is exactly 25.1 miles one way — and you can drop into it from seven different parking areas, which means you never have to ride the whole thing to have a great day. That flexibility is what makes it the most practical bike route on the Outer Cape, and what separates the locals who actually use it from the tourists who show up at 10am in July wondering where all the bikes went.

Here's what this guide covers: where to park, which direction to ride, what's along the way, and how to avoid the most common mistakes that turn a great ride into a frustrating one.

The Route at a Glance

The Cape Cod Rail Trail (CCRT) runs along the former Old Colony Railroad bed from South Dennis northeast to South Wellfleet, passing through Harwich, Brewster, Orleans, and Eastham along the way. The surface is paved asphalt the entire length — no gravel, no roots, minimal grade changes. It's legitimate flat, making it accessible for casual riders, families with kids in bike trailers, and anyone coming back to biking after years off.

Key stats: - Total length: 25.1 miles, Dennis to Wellfleet - Surface: Paved asphalt - Elevation change: Negligible — the old railroad grade kept things nearly flat - Parking areas: 7+ official lots along the route - Connections: Nickerson State Park trail network, National Seashore bike paths

Parking: Where to Start (and Why It Matters)

Parking location is the most underrated planning decision on the CCRT. Choose wrong and you're either hiking back to your car or fighting Route 6 at the end of a 25-mile day.

Dennis (South End Trailhead)

The official southern terminus sits off Route 134 in South Dennis, near the junction of Old Bass River Road. Free parking, ample spaces, and a clean start. If you're doing the full trail south-to-north, start here. The lot fills by 9am on summer weekends.

Harwich (Depot Road Lot)

Off Depot Road in Harwich Center — a good midpoint start that cuts the ride to about 18 miles round-trip if you're heading north and back. Free parking.

Brewster (Nickerson State Park)

This is the most strategically useful parking area on the trail. Nickerson State Park has multiple lots directly on the CCRT. There is a day-use fee in season — check the Massachusetts DCR website for current rates. The park itself is worth exploring: the trail network inside connects to Flax Pond, Cliff Pond, and Little Cliff Pond, all accessible for swimming.

Orleans (Route 6A / Eldredge Park Area)

A smaller lot near Eldredge Park in Orleans. Useful if you want to cover the most scenic stretch — Eastham to Wellfleet — without tackling the full southern section.

Eastham (Salt Pond Visitor Center)

The Salt Pond Visitor Center for Cape Cod National Seashore sits right on the trail near the Doane Road crossing. Free parking, bathrooms, water, and rangers on site. The Seashore's own paved bike paths branch off here toward Coast Guard Beach and Nauset Marsh overlooks. If you're only doing part of the trail, this is the highest-value staging area on the route.

Eastham (Brackett Road Lot)

A smaller, less-known lot in Eastham that's often available when the Salt Pond lot is full. Free.

Wellfleet (Northern Terminus)

The trail ends in South Wellfleet near the Wellfleet Drive-In theater on Route 6. Free parking. If you shuttle a car here, you can do the full 25 miles one-way without backtracking.

What You'll Pass: Mile by Mile Highlights

Dennis to Harwich (~6 miles)

The southern section is wooded and quiet, with less traffic from casual riders. You'll pass through a mix of residential neighborhoods and scrub oak forest. It's not the most dramatic stretch, but it's uncrowded and good for shaking out your legs. The crossing at Route 28 in Harwich is the trickiest road crossing on the trail — wait for the signal, don't assume cars will stop.

Harwich to Brewster (~5 miles)

The trail opens up here and starts feeling more like a destination. You'll cross Long Pond Road near Long Pond — one of the larger kettle ponds on the Upper Cape, visible from the trail. Seymour Pond sits close to the trail on this stretch. The Brewster section is popular with families because of the proximity to Nickerson State Park.

Brewster and Nickerson State Park (~3 miles through the park)

This is the most popular stretch for good reason. The trail bisects Nickerson State Park, and you can duck into the park's internal network to ride to Flax Pond or Cliff Pond for a swim before continuing. Cliff Pond has a small beach with a lifeguard in season. The park has restrooms and water.

Brewster has several good food stops within easy reach of the trail — check the [Cape Cod Certified directory](#) for current listings near Brewster Center.

Orleans (~2 miles)

The Orleans section is brief but worth noting because this is where the trail passes closest to Rock Harbor — Cape Cod Bay's working fishing fleet dock, about 1.5 miles off-trail to the west. Not worth the detour mid-ride, but worth knowing for a pre- or post-ride visit. Orleans also has the densest cluster of bike-adjacent services on the trail: repair shops, food, and Nauset Beach access road is a short side trip east.

Eastham (~5 miles)

The best stretch of trail. The terrain opens into the classic Lower Cape scrubland — low pitch pines, clear sight lines, and that specific quality of light that makes Eastham photographs look like nowhere else. The Salt Pond Visitor Center stop is worth building into any itinerary: it's free, has bathrooms, and if you have kids, the ranger programs are genuinely good.

The National Seashore paved bike paths branch off here. The Fort Hill trail and Nauset Marsh Loop are walking-only, but the paved path toward Coast Guard Beach extends about 1.5 miles from the main CCRT — a detour worth doing at least once.

Eastham to Wellfleet (~4 miles)

The northern section feels the most remote. Day-tripper traffic thins out considerably. You'll cross Route 6 once near the Wellfleet Drive-In — there's a dedicated crossing signal. The trail ends near the drive-in parking area. Wellfleet Center is about 1.5 miles from the northern terminus via roads, not accessible by the trail itself.

Bike Rentals Along the Route

You don't need to bring your own bike. Rental shops are positioned at key access points:

- **Little Capistrano Bike Shop** — Eastham, directly on the trail near Salt Pond Road. One of the best-positioned rental shops on the Cape; helmets, child seats, and trailers available. Check ahead for current rates and hours.
- **Orleans Cycle** — Orleans Center, a short ride off the trail. Full-service shop with rentals and repairs.
- **Idle Times Bike Shop** — Wellfleet, near the northern terminus. Practical if you're doing a one-way shuttle from the south.
- Additional rental options exist in Brewster and Harwich — check the [CCC directory](#) for current listings.

E-bike note: Electric bikes are permitted on the CCRT. Rentals are increasingly available at most shops — ask specifically when reserving.

Best Time to Go

September and Early October — Best Overall

Post-Labor Day is the clear winner. The trail empties out, temperatures drop to ideal riding range (60s–70s), and parking is never a problem. The light on the Eastham and Wellfleet sections in early fall is exceptional. Rental shops remain open but aren't slammed. This is when locals actually ride the trail.

May and June

Good riding conditions with reasonable crowds. The shoulder-season challenge: some rental shops operate reduced hours before Memorial Day weekend, so confirm availability in advance if you're going in early May.

July and August

Expect company. The trail sees its heaviest use between 9am and 2pm on summer weekdays, and essentially all day on weekends. If you're going in peak season, start at 7am or wait until after 4pm. Parking at Nickerson State Park fills early on weekends. The Salt Pond Visitor Center lot tends to turn over more frequently.

Winter

The trail doesn't close, but some sections see ice and the Nickerson lots have limited hours. A handful of local cyclists ride it year-round on appropriate tires.

Rules, Fees, and Practical Notes

Pets: Dogs on leash are permitted on the CCRT itself. They are not permitted on National Seashore bike paths or walking trails.

Helmets: Required by Massachusetts law for riders under 16.

Nickerson State Park day-use fee: In-season fees apply for vehicles entering the park, even if you're just parking to access the trail. Credit cards accepted at the gate. Check the DCR website for current rates — they adjust seasonally.

National Seashore access: The Cape Cod National Seashore bike paths connecting from the CCRT are free to ride. If you drive directly to Nauset Light Beach or Coast Guard Beach, there's a vehicle entrance fee in season.

Water and restrooms: Available at Nickerson State Park, Salt Pond Visitor Center, and at a few road crossings with portable facilities in season. Carry water — the stretch from Brewster to Eastham is long enough that you don't want to run dry mid-ride.

Trail surface: Varies by section. Some areas near road crossings are rougher than mid-trail sections. Rideable on road bikes with 25mm or wider tires or any hybrid/mountain bike.

Shuttle Logistics: Riding It One Way

A one-way south-to-north ride from Dennis to Wellfleet is logistically clean if you plan it:

1. Drop one car at the Wellfleet terminus lot (near the Drive-In, Route 6)
2. Drive second car to the Dennis trailhead and park
3. Ride 25 miles north, finish at the Wellfleet car
4. Drive back to retrieve the Dennis car

Alternatively, some rental shops offer shuttle services in season — worth asking when you book. One-way e-bike rentals with shop drop-off are an emerging option; inquire directly with shops.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take to bike the full Cape Cod Rail Trail? At a casual 10–12 mph pace with stops, expect 3–4 hours of riding time for the full 25 miles. Add at least an hour for breaks, food, and swimming stops. Most people doing the full trail allow a full day. If you're fit and not stopping, two hours of moving time is realistic.

Is the Cape Cod Rail Trail good for beginners or families with young kids? Yes — it's one of the most family-accessible long-distance trails in New England. The grade is nearly flat throughout, the pavement is in decent condition, and multiple parking areas let you choose whatever distance makes sense. Kids who are comfortable on bikes handle the Brewster-to-Eastham section (roughly 8 miles) well. Bike trailers and tag-along bikes work fine on the paved surface.

Can I swim along the Cape Cod Rail Trail? Yes, and this is one of the trail's best features. Nickerson State Park ponds — Flax Pond and Cliff Pond — are the most accessible swimming stops, a short detour off the main trail in Brewster. In Eastham, the National Seashore paths connect toward Nauset and Coast Guard Beach. Bring your swimsuit and plan a mid-ride swim; it makes the return trip considerably more pleasant.

Where can I rent bikes near the Cape Cod Rail Trail? Little Capistrano Bike Shop in Eastham is the most trail-adjacent option. Orleans Cycle is close in Orleans, and Idle Times is near the Wellfleet terminus. Brewster and Harwich also have rental options. Reserve in advance for July and August — shops sell out on peak weekends.

Is the Cape Cod Rail Trail paved the whole way? Yes, the CCRT is paved asphalt for its full 25-mile length from Dennis to Wellfleet. Road crossings are at-grade with either traffic signals or marked crosswalks. Surface quality varies by section — mid-trail tends to be smoother than areas near road crossings — but the entire trail is rideable on road bikes with 25mm or wider tires.

Plan Your Ride

The Cape Cod Rail Trail is one of the best reasons to visit the Outer Cape — and it's even better with the right stops built in. Use the [Cape Cod Certified directory](#) to find bike shops, food stops, and lodging options in Dennis, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, and Wellfleet. Every business in the directory has been field-verified, so you're not showing up to a permanently closed restaurant after a 12-mile ride. Browse [Experiences](#) for guided options and seasonal activities along the route.

◆ THINGS TO DO

Make a day of it

Bookable experiences that pair perfectly with this guide. Scan any code to reserve.

BOOK · VARIES

Cape Cod Rail Trail Bike Rentals

Idle Times Bike Shop · Orleans

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book

BOOK · FROM \$14

Bike Rentals — Bourne

Buzzards Bay Bikes · Bourne

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book

BOOK · FROM \$75

Electric Bike Tour of Martha's Vineyard

Bike Martha's Vineyard · Martha's Vineyard

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book



Headed to the Cape with friends? Share this guide.

Every share helps a real local business get found — and keeps Cape Cod guides free. Scan to send it along.

[Explore Cape Cod →](#)



Cape Cod Certified · capecodcertified.com/guides/cape-cod-rail-trail-complete-guide · Real guides, real local knowledge. Verify seasonal details before you go.



FOR CAPE COD BUSINESSES

This is what being Cape Cod Certified looks like.

You just read a guide that travelers and locals download, keep, and share. The businesses inside it were chosen on merit — real vetting, real local knowledge, never pay-to-play.

Own a Cape Cod business? Get Certified and earn your place in guides like this one — in front of the exact people planning their trip and their spend.



Get Certified → capecodcertified.com/join