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Best Sections of the Cape Cod Rail Trail: Which Stretches Are Worth Biking & Why

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Best Sections of the Cape Cod Rail Trail: Which Stretches Are Worth Biking & Why

The Cape Cod Rail Trail runs 25 miles on a former Old Colony Railroad bed — paved, mostly flat, and completely car-free — connecting South Dennis to LeCount Hollow Road in Wellfleet. That distance sounds manageable until you realize a full out-and-back is 50 miles with mid-summer heat, Route 6 crossings, and a serious headwind. Knowing which sections earn your time makes the difference between a highlight-reel ride and a slog.

This guide breaks the trail into its five-town stretches, tells you what's actually worth riding and why, and covers the logistics (parking, fees, bike rentals, swim breaks) that most trail guides skip.

The Trail at a Glance

- **Total length:** ~25 miles, South Dennis to Wellfleet (LeCount Hollow Road)
 - **Surface:** Paved asphalt, 10 feet wide on most sections
 - **Elevation:** Mostly flat to gently rolling; most significant grade is in the Eastham–Wellfleet stretch
 - **Best for:** Road bikes, hybrid bikes, e-bikes, families with trailers, casual riders
 - **Trail rules:** Bikes, inline skates, and non-motorized users only (check current e-bike regulations before you go); dogs must be leashed; yield to pedestrians
 - **Dogs:** Allowed on leash throughout; not allowed on National Seashore beaches accessed by trail spurs
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Section-by-Section Breakdown

Dennis: Route 134 to Brewster Line (~5.5 miles)

Starting point: Locust Road / Route 134 trailhead, South Dennis — free parking lot, well-signed off Route 134.

The Dennis section is the functional entry point for most day-trippers arriving from the Mid-Cape. It's the least scenic stretch of the trail — you cross several busy roads (Route 28 at grade, Route 6A by underpass) and pass through residential neighborhoods — but it's also the flattest and easiest warm-up. If you're riding with young kids who need to find their legs, starting in Dennis gives you a long, confidence-building runway before the more interesting terrain begins.

What Dennis does offer: a paved, wide path with minimal conflict, clean sight lines, and quick access to the trail's full length. The trailhead parking lot is free and rarely fills before 10am even in peak season. You're a 15-minute ride from the Brewster line once you're rolling.

Skip Dennis if: You're an experienced rider or you only have half a day — enter at Nickerson State Park in Brewster and go from there.

Brewster: The Scenic Core (~7 miles through town)

Parking: Nickerson State Park, Brewster — large paved lot, seasonal fee (check MassParks.org for current rates before you go). Also: Underpass Road lot (smaller, no fee, fills fast).

Brewster is where the trail earns its reputation. The route cuts through the western edge of Nickerson State Park — 1,900 acres of pitch pine and oak forest, eight kettle ponds, and a campground that books out months in advance in summer. You don't need to pay the state park entrance fee to ride the Rail Trail through it; the trail passes through on its own right-of-way. But you will want to stop.

What to do in Brewster:

- **Flax Pond:** A short walk from the trail inside Nickerson, with a sandy beach, lifeguards in season, and crystal-clear freshwater. This is the best mid-ride swim break on the entire 25 miles.
- **Seymour Pond:** Another Nickerson kettle pond accessible from the park's internal trail network — quieter than Flax, no lifeguard.
- **Bike rental proximity:** Brewster has rental shops within a mile of the trail. Check current availability and rates directly with local shops — the area around Underpass Road has historically had rental options.

The Brewster section is the one most likely to produce a “this is why people bike Cape Cod” moment: pine-filtered light, a breeze off the ponds, almost no road noise. Ride it slowly.

Orleans: Connector Town (~2 miles through town)

Parking: Orleans Town Hall area or Rock Harbor area — short on dedicated Rail Trail parking; plan accordingly.

Orleans is the shortest town section and the one that catches riders off guard. The trail runs just a couple of miles through town before hitting the Orleans–Eastham line, but those miles are notable for two things: road crossings at busy intersections (including Route 6A and Main Street) that require real attention, and proximity to the town center if you need to stop for lunch or supplies.

Orleans Cycle has long been a fixture near the trail — call ahead for current hours, rental availability, and repair services. The town center is an easy walk or very short ride off the trail.

Locals' tip: If you're doing a point-to-point ride and need to reverse direction, Orleans is a natural turnaround for families or less experienced riders who want a ~14-mile out-and-back from Nickerson without pushing into the more challenging Eastham hills.

Eastham: National Seashore Territory (~5 miles)

Parking: Salt Pond Visitor Center (Cape Cod National Seashore), Eastham — the best-positioned lot on the entire trail. Free parking. The Visitor Center itself is worth 20 minutes: maps, ranger programs, exhibits, and clean restrooms.

The Eastham section is where the trail transitions from wooded Cape to National Seashore. The landscape opens up, the pitch pines thin out, and you start catching glimpses of salt marsh and distant water. The Salt Pond Visitor Center sits right on the trail via a short spur — it's impossible to miss and genuinely worth stopping at, not just for the restrooms.

What makes Eastham stand out:

- **Nauset Bike Path connection:** At the Salt Pond Visitor Center, a separate bike path forks toward Coast Guard Beach and Nauset Light Beach. This is one of the best short side trips on the entire corridor — about 1.6 miles each way to Coast Guard Beach, which has parking only for bike/walk-in visitors during peak season. Riding to the beach instead of driving is the way locals do it.
- **Terrain shift:** The Eastham section has gentle rolling hills — nothing technical, but enough to notice if you've already put 10 miles on your legs.
- **Wildlife:** Great blue herons, red-tailed hawks, and osprey are regularly spotted over the salt marshes near the trail's eastern edges.

The Eastham stretch — particularly the run from the Brewster line to the Visitor Center — is among the most rewarding on the trail for riders who want more than flat pavement.

Wellfleet: Remote, Quiet, Worth the Climb (~5 miles to terminus)

Terminus: LeCount Hollow Road, Wellfleet — small turnaround area, no real parking lot. Most riders reach this end by coming from the south.

The Wellfleet section is the trail’s quietest and most remote stretch. Traffic thins dramatically, the forest closes back in, and you’ll share the path with far fewer riders. There are some real grades here — not long, but steeper than anything in Dennis or Brewster — which is why casual riders often turn around at the Eastham–Wellfleet line.

Why go anyway: The solitude. In July and August, the Brewster section can feel like a bike-path version of Route 28 in traffic. Wellfleet never does. You’re riding through National Seashore land on both sides, and the trail feels genuinely removed from the tourist infrastructure below.

The Wellfleet terminus at LeCount Hollow Road leaves you near Wellfleet’s ocean beaches — Cahoon Hollow and White Crest are a short bike ride from the trail end. Both have lifeguards and the Beachcomber (open seasonally, check current hours) is nearby. Don’t expect parking if you drive there — ride in from the trail instead.

Wellfleet caveat: Cell coverage is spotty in this section. Download an offline map before you go, and know where your nearest bike repair point is.

Best Time to Go

Early morning on any day, late May through mid-June or September: The trail is quietest before 9am and in shoulder season. Summer weekday mornings are manageable; weekend afternoons from July 4 through Labor Day are genuinely crowded, particularly in Brewster and Eastham.

Avoid: Weekend afternoons in July and August, especially near Nickerson and Salt Pond. You will be stopping constantly for pedestrians, slow family groups, and oncoming riders — not a flow state.

Fall: September and October offer the best riding conditions on the trail. Temperatures drop, crowds thin dramatically, the pines turn warmer shades, and you’ll have long sections entirely to yourself. This is when experienced riders and locals do their best rides.

Spring: The trail opens as soon as pavement is clear — typically April. Cold, but beautiful, and completely empty.

Practical Logistics

Parking

Location	Fee	Notes
Route 134 / Locust Road, Dennis	Free	Southern terminus, fills by late morning peak season
Nickerson State Park, Brewster	Seasonal fee	Largest lot, best amenities, check current fee at MassParks.org
Underpass Road, Brewster	Free	Smaller, fills fast
Salt Pond Visitor Center, Eastham	Free	Best mid-trail option; National Seashore lot
LeCount Hollow Road, Wellfleet	Minimal roadside	Not a real lot; not recommended for driving to

Bike Rentals

Rental shops cluster near the Brewster and Eastham sections. Call ahead for current rates, availability, and e-bike options — inventory varies by season and changes year to year. Rentals typically run by the hour or half-day; half-day is usually the right unit for a 10–15 mile out-and-back.

Food and Water

The trail has no food vendors on the path itself. Stock up before you start or plan a detour into a town center. Key resupply points: - **Brewster:** Short detour to Route 6A shops and cafés - **Orleans:** Town center within a mile of the trail - **Wellfleet:** Nothing on the trail; plan ahead

Carry more water than you think you need. On a hot August day, the pine-shaded sections offer no wind, and heat fatigue arrives faster than expected.

Which Section Should You Ride?

Your situation	Recommended stretch
First-time riders, families with kids	Locust Road (Dennis) → Nickerson (Brewster), ~5.5 miles each way
Half-day, want best scenery	Nickerson State Park ↔ Salt Pond Visitor Center (~12 miles RT)
Full-day strong riders	Dennis → Wellfleet, full 25 miles (shuttle car at each end)
Beach access as goal	Eastham spur to Coast Guard Beach
Avoiding crowds	Wellfleet section, morning start

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take to bike the entire Cape Cod Rail Trail? A fit recreational rider covers the 25 miles in roughly 2.5 to 3.5 hours of saddle time, not counting stops. Add swim breaks, lunch, and detours and you’re looking at a full 5–6 hour day. Most people don’t do the full length in one shot — they pick a 10–15 mile section and ride it well.

Is the Cape Cod Rail Trail good for beginners? Yes, with caveats. The Dennis and Brewster sections are genuinely beginner-friendly — flat, wide, well-paved, low-traffic. The Eastham and Wellfleet sections have rolling terrain that’s still accessible but will challenge very casual riders. Road crossings require alertness at any skill level.

Are e-bikes allowed on the Cape Cod Rail Trail? As of 2026, Class 1 e-bikes (pedal-assist up to 20 mph, no throttle) are generally permitted on MassDOT multi-use paths, which includes most of the Rail Trail. The sections running through Cape Cod National Seashore land (Eastham, Wellfleet) may have different rules under National Park Service authority — check current NPS and MassDCR regulations before you go, as these rules are subject to change.

Where should I park to access the Cape Cod Rail Trail? Nickerson State Park in Brewster and Salt Pond Visitor Center in Eastham are the two best mid-trail parking options. Both put you within reach of the most scenic sections without committing to the full 25 miles. The Route 134 lot in South Dennis is best if you want to ride north-to-south from the start.

Can I bring my dog on the Cape Cod Rail Trail? Dogs are allowed on leash on the main Rail Trail. The Nauset Bike Path spur in Eastham that leads to Coast Guard Beach is Cape Cod National Seashore property — dogs have restricted access on the beaches themselves. Keep your dog leashed and carry water for them; the paved surface gets hot in summer.

Explore More Along the Trail

The Rail Trail passes through some of the most interesting towns on the Outer Cape — and the businesses, experiences, and eats near the path are part of what makes it worth riding. Browse the [Cape Cod Certified directory](#) to find verified local bike shops, restaurants, and places to stay in Dennis, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, and Wellfleet. Everything listed is field-verified — no chain outposts, no filler.

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