Lube your chain; while this loop is only 9.8 miles, you’ll have good reasons to shift gears often. But with gourmet coffee along the way, you’ll make it! Riding time: 2–4 hours, depending on stops. Worthy of 3 hours college credit.

From the Hub Spot, head north along The Principal Riverwalk (1) to the bike lanes on Grand Avenue. The first mile is pancake-flat, skimming the ancient riverbed left by the last glacier. At the 2400 block, turn onto brick-paved Forest Drive leading to Terrace Hill (2), built in 1868 by tycoon Benjamin B.F. Allen, Des Moines’ first “velocipede” bicyclist. After decades in the Hubbell family, it’s now the Governor’s Mansion (Tues.–Sat. tours; terracehilliowa.org).

Follow Forest Drive west, north on 29th, and east on Ridge Road, looping through the Edwardian splendor of the Owl’s Head Historic District (3). Head south on 28th, west on Terrace Drive to Lincoln Place Drive, north one block to St. John’s Road, then west under a bridge to spacious 37th Street.

Turn south to John Lynde Road, curving to 42nd Street, and uphill to Tonawanda Drive. Turn east to discover Salisbury House (4), carefully reassembled in the 1920s from a 16th-century English manor (Tues.–Sun. tours; salisburyhouse.org).

Return to 42nd and pedal north to the Ingersoll Avenue District, and turn east, taking advantage of bike lanes. Stop by Caribou or Zanzibar’s for coffee. Turn north on 24th Street and east on Woodland Avenue. There, admire the restored gates at Woodland Cemetery (5). For a side trip, explore its curvilinear brick drives to plots where Des Moines’ founding families are buried.

Just past Gateway Market (Woodland & MLK Jr. Parkway), climb the hill on 19th Street into Sherman Hill (6), Des Moines’ oldest neighborhood. It’s filled with lovingly restored Victorian homes worthy of a photo (historichermanhill.com).

Order a cool drink or a bite to eat atop the hill at Smokey Row (19th & Cottage Grove). Then backtrack south to Center Street. Head east on 16th Street, south to Pleasant Street, and east to 15th Street. Coast down the hill, passing four cottages and a home on Bridal Row.

Next door is Hoyt Sherman Place (7), built in 1878 by the brother of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman. It’s been restored to include an art gallery and a beautiful auditorium (hoytsherman.org). One block south on High Street is A-Dong, a popular Vietnamese restaurant (closed Mondays). Then whiz back to The Principal Riverwalk on Locust Street, stopping at the Pappajohn Sculpture Park (8).

Route Scout John P. Zeller, local historian, photographer, writer, and Italophile

Copyright 2013 by the Des Moines Bicycle Collective. Online versions intended for limited home use by individuals. No part of these maps can be reproduced in any way without the permission of the Des Moines Bicycle Collective.