Mesabi Trail: The Untapped Cycling
Heaven of Minnesota’s Iconic North

The Mesabi Trail stretches 162 miles from the Mississippi River in Grand Rapids, MN, to the gateway of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) in Ely. 150 miles are paved with approximately eight more to be completed this fall. The trail consists of four segments—Mississippi (Grand Rapids–Nashwauk), Mesabi (Nashwauk–Gilbert), Laurentian (Gilbert–Tower), and Vermilion (Tower–Ely). Each segment offers different natural and manmade landscapes—from glacial lakes to active mines, hardwood forests to pines, and wetlands to rock cuts.

A Paved Cycling Heaven
The Mesabi Trail is not a typical “rail-to-trail.” It is not straight nor flat. There are curves and switchbacks, approximately 3,300 feet of elevation change over the full distance, and hills of up to 8% grade with sustained climbs and seriously fun downhill.s. “Cycling groups travel from all over the country to ride the Mesabi Trail—even from Winnipeg, Canada—because there is nothing else like it,” said Sarah Ciochetto, St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority Deputy Director. “With such a diverse landscape and 28 communities, it can be a completely different ride each time.”

Off-Trail Adventures
The trail passes through 28 Iron Range towns, each with their own history and recreational adventures, as well as locally sourced eats and craft brews. “Each community offers unique experiences, from museums and county fairs to mine lakes and scuba diving,” explained Ciochetto. “Golfing, camping, kayaking, fishing—you name it. There’s something for everybody along the trail.” For the natural-surface trails enthusiasts, the Mesabi Trail joins three world-class mountain biking systems—Tioga Recreation Area (Cohasset), Redhead Mountain Bike Park (Chisholm), and Giants Ridge Bike Park (Biwabik)—adding up to 75 miles of purpose-built, IMBA-approved, natural-surface singletrack.

Plan A Spring or Summer Cycling Trip
Reserve lodging as your home base for out-and-back cycling or arrange for a one-way return trip using the Mesabi Trail Shuttle Service. Additional options for trail experiences include bike-packing from town to town or using the Mesabi Trail Lodge-to-Lodge service to transport gear and luggage to each stop.

The Mesabi Trail is a one-of-a-kind trail in a one-of-a-kind place. Learn more: www.mesabitrail.com.

Where is the Mesabi Trail?
The Mesabi Trail is located in northern Minnesota—running from Grand Rapids to Ely.

- 3 hours north of Minneapolis
- 1 hour northwest of Duluth
- 3 hours east of Fargo
- 5 hours south of Winnipeg

Summer ride info on pages 8 & 9!
Active Transportation At the Capitol in 2023

by Dorian Grilley, Executive Director

BikeMN has been strategizing and asking legislators to introduce bills that support active transportation and safe routes to school for more than a decade, but in 2023 the Minnesota Legislature will do more for biking and walking than ever before. The legislative session will end May 22nd. Check the latest details at bikemn.org/blog.

Thanks to the many of you that responded to action alerts and sent messages to your state legislators asking them to support biking and walking and vote for the omnibus transportation bills. It worked! The House passed their transportation bill 71-59, largely on a party line vote. The Senate passed their version 36-31 with all the Democrats and two Republicans voting yea. BikeMN’s successes this year are rooted in those constituent relationships, effective communications and messaging, direct lobbying by BikeMN staff, supporters, the Transportation Forward Coalition members and other supporters, and persistence.

For many years BikeMN has proposed omnibus bills that included all our policy and funding recommendations in one bill and bonding bills to fund safe routes to school and active transportation infrastructure grants. Many thanks to former State Representative Connie Bernardy, Senator Scott Dibble, and former Senator Ann Johnson Stewart for being our chief authors for several years. Bits and pieces of the policy recommendations in those bills have been passed in the general transportation omnibus bills over the years and the state level safe routes and active transportation grant programs were established, but neither state or federal funding ever came close to the demand for these programs. Bonding for safe routes to school became a bipartisan issue and was funded at modest levels, but safe routes for everyone - active transportation - was not bipartisan.

Late in 2022, BikeMN’s Advocacy Committee and its long time chair, Bill Dooley (pictured above), met several times to discuss the implications of the change in leadership in the Minnesota Senate and what might be possible with DFL leadership in the House, Senate and Governor’s Office. The result was an omnibus bill that included all the bicycle policy best practices from around the country recommended by the League of American Bicyclists, PeopleForBikes, and the National Conference of State Legislatures and funding levels that would come close to meeting the demand for both safe routes to school and active transportation. Separate from the omnibus bill, BikeMN, in partnership with PeopleForBikes also proposed an e-bike rebate program. Unfortunately, Bill Dooley passed away in December, but, to honor his legacy, the authors in the House and Senate agreed to name the omnibus bill the Bill Dooley Bicycle Safety Act.

Continued on the next page...
Very special thank yous to Senator Kelly Morrison (DFL, Deephaven) and Representative Steve Elkins (DFL, Bloomington) were the chief authors of the Bill Dooley Bicycle Safety Act and to their co-authors Senators Dibble, Fateh, Port, and Marty, and representatives Hornstein, Tabke, Kraft, Lillie, Koegel, Curran, and Spencer-Mura. Additional special thank yous are due to the chief authors of the e-bike bills Senator Omar Fateh and Representative Lucy Rehm and their co-authors senators Dibble, McEwen, Rest, and Carlson and representatives Clardy, Hornstein, Spencer-Mura, Her, Hill, Koegel, Freiberg, Hollins, and Kraft. Notes of thanks are always welcome. You can find their contact information at www.leg.mn.us.

Great things like this don’t just spontaneously happen at the Capitol. Legislators look to organizations, local governments, businesses, their constituents, and other special interests and their lobbyists for suggestions. Bill Dooley’s active transportation leadership skills and knowledge came from his experience as a lobbyist and attorney before he retired and a passion to pursue things that were good for the community. BikeMN’s legislative agenda would also not be nearly as effective without the experience, support, and guidance of our professional lobbyist, Vic Moore. Vic has been advocating at the Capitol for 50 years. Like Bill, Vic also knows that the return on investment in biking and walking is very high and advocates for our proposals with a passion. A final bit of inspiration can be found in former Minnesota Congressman Jim Oberstar. Jim helped start all this by championing the significant increase in federal funding for biking and walking more than 30 years ago and the creation of the safe routes to school program in the 2000’s. Watch our e-news this summer for details on a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Jim Oberstar Bike Route, formerly known as the North Star Route.
Last month BikeMN announced that I would be retiring from BikeMN in July this year, but I like to think of it as shifting gears. My plan is to step down from being Executive Director but still be involved in BikeMN’s advocacy work and fundraising. I still love to engage people in BikeMN’s mission and enlist partners in implementing it with the simple message that I/we understand that biking, walking, and rolling are not the only solution to our public health challenges, climate change, and community sustainability, but the return on investment is very, very, high.

It seems like just yesterday when the steering committee that guided the development of BikeMN was formed following a statewide bike summit hosted by Quality Bicycle Products (QBP) and MnDOT’s Nonmotorized Transportation Advisory Committee at QBP in the spring of 2008. Many thanks to Lisa Austin, now with MnDOT, for co-chairing that committee with me. I also want to extend many, many, thanks to QBP Erik’s Bike Shop, Park Tool, Dero Bike Racks, the former Penn Cycle, and the people that responded to our first mailings using the more than ten year old mailing list from the Minnesota Coalition of Bicyclists for providing the initial startup funding. I’m also thankful that QBP Erik’s, Park Tool, and some of those initial members have continued to be major donors to BikeMN every step of the way.

There are countless others to thank, too many to mention here, but there were a few key partners that I would like to thank. Many of the MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation staff have been extremely helpful over the years. They started us with our first contract which was to prepare Bicycle Friendly Community reports and recommendations for some communities along the Mississippi River. That was soon followed by Chris Kimber, now retired from the Minnesota Department of Health, helping establish the partnership between BikeMN and the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) more than a decade ago. That contract work is still ongoing. I also want to thank Jill Chamberlain of the BlueCross BlueShield Center for Prevention for leading and managing the initial contract with MnDOT to create the Walk! Bike! Fun! Curriculum. The SHIP partnership and Walk! Bike! Fun! truly transformed BikeMN into a statewide organization. That statewide reach and an advocacy partnership with the Minnesotans for Healthy Kids Coalition, led at the time led by Rachel Callanan when she was with the American Heart Association, led to the creation of the state level safe routes to school and active transportation grant programs that are positioned to be funded by the legislature at much higher levels in 2023.

Progress takes time. It has been my pleasure to be part of these critical advances in biking advocacy, infrastructure, and education that Minnesota has made in the past 15 years. But, none of it would have been possible without the dedication of the BikeMN staff, board, and supporters to the organization’s mission and vision. Again, too many people to list here, but it is to you all that I extend my most heartfelt thanks. I’ll see you at an active transportation planning meeting in your community, at a hearing at the Capitol, or on a bike ride.

Very truly yours,

Dorian Grilley
Our Walk! Bike! Fun! (WBF) season is underway! BikeMN educators didn’t let the snow stop them at a few recent trainings in Hopkins and Minneapolis, either. Utilizing our brand new WBF curriculum, BikeMN staff walked, biked, and rolled with educators for an in person training. The updated curriculum includes double the lessons of our previous version - 12 pedestrian and 12 biking focused lessons adapted for each grade level. Educators had a blast exploring the activities and getting out on bikes. With each training, the Education Team teaches teachers and community educators about pedestrian and bicycle safety, Minnesota bike laws, Principles of Traffic, and bike fleets. These educators take their new skills, knowledge, confidence and excitement back to their community’s and school’s kids and parents.

BikeMN is looking forward to continuing to support schools participating in our WBF program with ongoing technical assistance. BikeMN offers access to bike fleets (including a library of adaptive bikes), phone coaching, assistance on bike rides, and more. Technical assistance is a vital part of sustainable implementation of the WBF curriculum and BikeMN is honored to be available to provide support.

The WBF season has started off strong with a winter training in Hopkins and two spring trainings in Minneapolis. In April, we completed two trainings in LaPorte, and delivered educator, ambassador, and maintenance trainings in Grand Marais. We have a busy season ahead of us with trainings in Dakota County, Saint Paul, Chisago County (angela’s home town!), and Brooklyn Center. WBF continues to connect and collaborate with schools and organizations across Minnesota to provide quality bicycle and pedestrian education training. It has been extremely rewarding and thrilling to hear from teachers with students, and kids and families—all walking and riding more. The result is healthier and happier people!

Students look forward to the bike unit all year long, and it has a positive impact on the classroom and on students’ lives. Gaining bike skills helps students experience the beauty of Minneapolis, the adventure of bicycling, and the joy found in this healthy, affordable and sustainable activity.

Kyle Hansen, District Program Facilitator, Physical Education and Health

This training is a great opportunity for some of the smaller districts to come together to receive Walk Bike Fun Training! It also highlights the forward thinking of Laporte Schools to pursue this opportunity for not only Laporte educators but also the surrounding communities.

Tony Klaers, Community Development Planner for the Headwaters Regional Development Commission
Bicycle Advocacy in Washington, D.C. in March

This year’s National Bike Summit, hosted by the League of American Bicyclists, was a huge success drawing dedicated bicycle advocates from all over the country. Presentations were offered both in person and online and covered a wide range of topics including panel discussions about how the Federal Highway Administration is shifting toward complete streets and improved safety, the legacy of Black women cyclists, federal technical assistance tools and projects, and equitable community engagement. As in years past, the League crafted a packed agenda with some of the most forward-thinking, innovative, and influential bicycle advocates both nationally and internationally. We encourage you to explore the League of American Bicyclists YouTube page to review and watch all of the presentations!

BikeMN was also proud to applaud Dorian Grilley, our Executive Director, for being recognized by the League of American Bicyclists as Advocate of the Year! This award goes to leaders of a bicycling or walking advocacy organization and recognizes their tireless commitment to promoting bicycling and walking in their state and community. Dorian truly goes above and beyond the call of duty to transform Minnesota into a great place for biking and walking. His time, knowledge, creativity, and commitment are the highest standard of excellence, and he is a true role model. We are deeply proud!

Also at the Summit, BikeMN’s Education Director, angela olson, and owner of Venture North Bicycles and Coffee, Kennis Littleton, presented to an in person and virtual audience about the Adult Learn to Ride program. Kennis gave insights into the importance of working with community-centered bike shops when establishing programs like Adult Learn to Ride that empower individuals and communities. angela shared how essential partnerships are when building access to programs like Adult Learn to Ride, and some important strategies to track grants and gain local and business partners.

Closing out the Summit on Wednesday, attendees took to Capitol Hill to meet both virtually and in person with our representatives. Dorian Grilley, angela olson, and Maya Sheikh of BikeMN, were joined by Sarah Risser of Families for Safe Streets (pictured) as they spoke with staffers from the offices of Senator Smith, Senator Klobuchar, Representative McCollum, Representative Omar, Representative Finstad, Representative Fischbach, and Representative Craig about the E-BIKE (Electric Bicycle Incentive Kickstart for the Environment) Act which creates a tax rebate for people buying electric bikes similar to the tax incentive for buying an electric car, a Dear Colleague letter asking NHTSA to include vulnerable road user crashes when completing the truck side guard research required in section 23011 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and asking them to sign onto HR 1668, Sarah Debbink Langenkamp Active Transportation Safety Act, which makes it easier for state and local governments to use Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) dollars as local match funds for government identified projects, which can boost critical safety programs and investments.

We are so very grateful to the League and all their sponsors for pulling together to create a hub of energy and talent and enthusiasm as we move confidently forward into 2024.

Roll Call: Meet the Minnesota Randonneurs!

The Minnesota Randonneurs: Love riding long miles but want some company? Check out the local chapter of the Randonneurs, an international organization devoted to unsupported endurance cycling. With a full calendar of great routes in and around the Twin Cities, the Minnesota Randonneurs includes a blend of new and experienced riders, all who share not only miles but gear recommendations, training tips and touring recaps. Rides are scheduled all year long, and range from 100k distances all the way up to 1200k. Pace will vary based on group, terrain, and weather, but all are welcome. Come on out, and ride far with friends! To check out upcoming events and learn more, visit mnrando.org
**welcome! NEW STAFF**

We’re excited to welcome new staff to BikeMN, and we hope you are too! Here’s to a fantastic 2023 and the work of the Board, staff, members, and supporters to make Minnesota an even more bicycle-friendly state!

**Mel Gonzalez Vazquez**

Howdy! I’m Mel Gonzalez Vazquez (she/hers) and I am thrilled to join BikeMN as the Communications Director. I look forward to working with the team to continue providing safe, healthy and equitable transportation practices to BIPOC and Spanish-speaking communities in Minnesota.

My love for the outdoors began when my parents passed down their passion for urban horticulture where I learned how to plant, harvest, and cook produce native to East Texas. Seeing my interest grow, they encouraged my involvement in a local Girl Scouts of San Jacinto troop for a decade where I met other fearless, outdoorsy women. These experiences fed my enthusiasm to involve more urban BIPOC folks in learning how to unplug during their busy city lives. I moved to Northfield from Houston in 2018 to pursue a degree in Political Science International Relations at Carleton College and discover the joys of walkable and bikeable small-town living. Since my relocation, I have not driven a car of my own and do not plan to anytime soon.

I worked within nonprofits in California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Texas where the bulk of my responsibility was to provide customized social media strategies. I am passionate about creative and accessible online content that increases community organizing engagement. Community organizing throughout the U.S. means considering various demographics, and I grew adept at intercultural communications through this work. For instance, social media content creation must consider people of varying ages, educational, and linguistic backgrounds. A key practice of mine is remembering the difference between information access versus excess. So while I strive to include as many community members, it is just as important to consider when, where and how published content is consumed for the most productive audience engagement. Social media is a tool I wield carefully and am excited to co-produce with the rest of BikeMN’s communications team.

In my political campaign experience, I taught groups of volunteers how to organize their respective communities during and shortly after a pandemic using both English and Spanish language guides. I organized around voter engagement, immigrant/asylee rights, and leadership development in a social media management capacity across the nation. With BikeMN, I have the opportunity to re-engage with the outdoors alongside a talented team to make Minnesota safer for people who walk, bike, and roll. I look forward to designing insightful media campaigns and learning from everyone in BikeMN.

Now, I live in uptown Minneapolis with my gray tabby, Zeus. I enjoy lifting heavy weights in the gym, cooking fusion dishes, practicing portrait photography, and all things in the fantasy genre.

**Maryellen Saltzar**

Hi, my name is Maryellen Saltzar (she/her) and I am BikeMN’s new Membership & Accounting Clerk.

I grew up in the south Metro, went to college in Moorhead, and then spent some time living with my extended family in North Carolina. Driving was something I had to do to get around, but I always dreaded it. After moving to Minneapolis in 2019 I was able to start living without a car and moving through the city on foot, by bike, and via transit changed the way I see Minneapolis and cities in general.

Mostly I use my bike for running errands and recreational rides around Minneapolis. I love trying new trails and seeing what new parts of the area I can be connected to. Walking, biking, and transit safety have become an unexpected passion of mine, and I’m excited to help BikeMN work towards its walking and rolling goals.

Besides keeping up with local transportation news, I also enjoy reading fiction, knitting garments, and pet-sitting.

**Ilse Griffin**

Hi! I’m Ilse (they/them/their), and I am Bike MN’s new Education Assistant!

I grew up in St. Paul, went to college in Madison, and then spent time teaching abroad in Uganda, Laos, and China before resettling back in Minnesota. The last time I regularly drove a car was in high school, and I have never owned a car as an adult. I enjoy getting around the cities (and suburbs) in creative ways: by foot, by bike, and by transit.

I use my bike for commuting and embarking on long, meandering bike journeys with plenty of stops for food and lying down in meadows. I also love going bike camping with friends! I am excited to teach and support others to get around in more empowering, simple, and enjoyable ways.

I spend my other time writing, creating music, meditating, and communing with friends and trees.
For 43 years, more than a thousand cyclists have gathered in St. Joseph to wend their way along quiet back roads with rolling hills, savor treats and relish the verdant summer morning. Come for the surprising scenery, stay for the fresh strawberries. Join the tradition. Make this the year you ride the Tour of Saints.

With 2023 being the ride’s 43rd year, the Tour of Saints is truly a Minnesota tradition. Choose from three fully supported phenomenal routes of 18, 35 or 50 miles with well stocked Rest Stops on each course. Not a race. A heavenly little ride. Registration is now open at tourofsaints.com. This ride is a fundraiser for BikeMN and members enjoy a $5 discount.

Central Minnesota’s Favorite Bike Tour is Sunday, July 9

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Keep BikeMN Pedaling By Becoming a New Member or Renewing Today!

Did you know that when you hop on your bike to participate in one of our rides you’re supporting our work? Your pedal strokes will help us educate kids and adults about safe bicycling, lobby at the state capitol in support of bicycle and pedestrian programs and projects, work with cities and towns who want to become more bicycle-friendly, and more. BikeMN wouldn’t exist without the support of those who ride our fundraiser rides and our members. Save a stamp and envelope and easily and securely renew your membership, become a member online at bikemn.org/join.

Join the Saint Paul tradition on Sunday, September 10

Join us for a rolling showcase of the handsome parks and parkways of Saint Paul — from dramatic overlooks of the Mississippi River to historic neighborhoods. Celebrate our historic capitol and the trails and bikeways we love.

Every step of the way there is music to move you and treats to fuel you. You’ll be grooving to the spunky sounds of the Brass Messengers while chomping on a fresh apple turnover and sipping premium fresh-brewed coffee! This ride is called “Classic” for a reason! Registration is now open at bikeclassic.org. This ride is a fundraiser for BikeMN and members enjoy a $5 discount.
Explore the autumnal beauty of the Minnesota River Valley at the annual Mankato River Ramble. The landscape will be dressed in peak fall colors. Try one of four scenic tours ranging from 12 to 50 miles. You’ll pass charming waterfalls, epic river valleys, and bountiful farmland at the easy pace of a bicycle.

Don’t miss the other treats, attractions, and amenities while on the River Ramble. Plus, all of this great entertainment is family friendly — kiddos and teens up to age 17 ride for free! Registration is now open at bikeriverramble.com. This ride is a fundraiser for BikeMN and members enjoy a $5 discount.

Volunteer at the Ramble and Classic!

The Mankato River Ramble and Saint Paul Classic would not be possible without the help of lots of volunteers. We need volunteers to put up signs, help with registration, pass out treats at Rest Stops and encourage riders. Help make your favorite rides a success — volunteer!

Visit bikerriverramble.org or bikeclassic.org to learn more about the roles and sign up — but hurry, some duties and locations fill up quickly! Volunteers receive a free T-shirt and enjoy a volunteer appreciation party after each ride.

The Best Harvest-Time Ride Rolls Out

Sunday, October 8

Explore the autumnal beauty of the Minnesota River Valley at the annual Mankato River Ramble. The landscape will be dressed in peak fall colors. Try one of four scenic tours ranging from 12 to 50 miles. You’ll pass charming waterfalls, epic river valleys, and bountiful farmland at the easy pace of a bicycle.

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The Family-Friendly Minneopa-Meander!

NEW! This year you can sleep in a little bit by signing up for the Minneopa-Meander! We’re offering a out-and-back ride from Land of Memories to Minneopa park and back with a group start at 10AM for a total distance of about 8 miles. Learn more at bikerriverramble.com.
thank you

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

We extend our deep gratitude to all the members, donors, volunteers, and supporters who make BikeMN a great and effective organization. The list below represents contributors between November 31 and March 31, 2023.

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Samantha Van Wechel-Meyer
Jeffrey Ricker

James Steenburgh
Michael Fuhrman
Adam Bock
Abraham McEathron
Charles Townsend
Nick Miller
You’re Invited!

Dorian’s Big Bash

Dorian will be the first to tell you that he’s not retiring, he’s simply shifting his focus from helping to run the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota to deepening his advocacy work. And in celebration of his bike, walk, and rolling legacy and BikeMN’s bright future, we have a few fun things up our sleeves.

To celebrate Dorian shifting gears and recognize his work for Minnesota, we’re inviting BikeMN members, colleagues, community members, and organizations to Indeed Brewing on July 19, 2023 for a big birthday bash and celebration!

Save the Date!
July 19, 2023

Celebrate Dorian’s legacy and work for Minnesota with a big bash! Join BikeMN staff, Board community members, advocates, and more at Indeed Brewing on July 19, 2023.

Contribute to Dorian’s scrapbook! In celebration of his bike, walk, and rolling legacy and BikeMN’s bright future, we’re creating a photo scrapbook and giving folks an opportunity to send retirement regards to Dorian. Share some kind words, a memory, a poem, or even a doodle—we’ll have them all on display at Dorian’s send off and birthday bash on July 19. Simply fill out a quick form to send your retirement regards to Dorian, which you can find on BikeMN’s Blog, or here: https://forms.gle/rqgkG2WpeAVsqJax5