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## Environment



Summer 2013



### The Cape Cod Rail Trail

Your Scenic Escape From Summer Traffic

by Grace Finch

As I walked along the bike trail, in Brewster, I was enjoying its beauty when I felt a deep connection to its history. So I decided to research the role this route had once played in Cape Cod's development when it was in use as the old Cape Cod Railroad.

From its arrival in Sandwich, in 1848, the Cape Cod Railroad played a varied and vital role on Cape Cod; its 94 miles of track connecting Buzzards Bay, Woods Hole, Hyannis and Provincetown. The rail service encouraged tourism by providing reliable transportation for visitors and for the goods to fuel the growing economy.

One of the Cape's earliest rail travelers, in 1849, was my favorite nature writer, Henry David Thoreau. I was pleasantly surprised when my research revealed that Thoreau had written a lot of stories about the railroad.

He actually wasn't very fond of the new transportation as he thought it represented a "loud, rapid, unclean, indelicate drive of technology." He also

said "it contrasted with his own inward and organic drive toward simplicity." Thoreau believed the train and all developing technology was a distraction.

The most important issue for Thoreau, however, was "the way the train interacted with nature." He disliked the railroads "interruption with the flow of nature." He once complained that "the whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter."

The one thing that Thoreau DID like about it was the fact that "it brought people to new places and in the process to have new thought."

Thoreau used the train many times to come to Cape Cod and explore and write about the Cape's beaches, woods and nature. All things that are also of great importance to me.

By 1959, the railroad was no longer used as a passenger service because the automobile offered independence from the train schedule. The railroad track was reduced to 38 miles and mainly used for delivering cargo and goods until the late 1960's, when it was shut down indefinitely.

In the mid 70's, part of the tracks were torn up and all station houses removed. Shortly after that the trail was paved, piece by piece, throughout each town, to be used primarily for recreation.

Now the paved path runs 28 miles along the abandoned railroad bed from South Dennis to Wellfleet. Bicyclers, walkers, runners and horseback riders all enjoy the trail. It is a pleasant ride along a natural Cape landscape that offers a variety of scenery from marshes, ponds, Cape Cod Bay and foliage throughout the seasons.

I have used the trail since I was very young and feel a strong connection to its history and the passengers who came here to be inspired by such a special place. I simply enjoy the Rail trail as a quaint walking path at all times of the year.



**Orleans Bridge Crossing Rte 6**

It is dog-friendly and has plenty of space for them to explore. I also enjoy rollerblading along the path as its flat, smooth surface allows a nice, easy glide.

In midsummer the trees cover the path like a canopy creating an abundant amount of shade for a pleasant ride on a hot day. There's also many restaurants and stores to stop at along the way for a cold beverage or snack.



**The Eastham Trail**, Photo by Katie O'Sullivan

Recently, a friend and I rode bikes along the trail from the Eastham town hall to Wellfleet, where the trail ends at Ocean View Drive. There we stopped at PB Boulangerie French Bistro for a cup of coffee and a chocolate éclair. We sat outside and enjoyed every moment of our accomplishment and looked forward to the 35 minute ride back after our sweet, delicious treat.

We also stopped off on a side path to look at a small kettle pond where the spring peepers were abundant and loud. This day was a perfect start to the season and I'm hoping to have many more rides on the trail all year long.

This summer the railroad service is up and running once again on the tracks that remain from Hyannis to Boston. The CapeFLYER is the first train service to run this route since 1988. It will operate seasonally on weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day.



CapeFLYER train travel offers summer passengers an easier commute to the Cape from Boston – instead of sitting in gridlocked traffic they can sit back, relax and enjoy a cocktail or a bite to eat from the on-board concessions service.

Although the train ride will take just under 3 hours (about 45 minutes more than by car due to regular stops) it is a great scenic route that provides a welcome escape from the frustration of heavy traffic increasingly high fuel costs.

What a great way to start off your day or weekend trip to Cape Cod!

All my life, when crossing the Bourne Bridge, I would look over at the train bridge in the distance and think "what is that ancient structure?" It looked like the tall towers of a castle on either side of the canal.

I was only 5 years old when the last train crossed it and I honestly never thought I'd ever see it in use again. This year I will not only see it cross the train bridge, I now have the chance to experience it too.

I hope that you take advantage of Cape Cod's beautiful Rail Trails and enjoy as much as I do the Cape's scenic beauty either on foot, on

bikes or even rollerblades. NO VEHICLES REQUIRED! I also hope you find time to ride the new CapeFLYER as it trundles along its historic ride from Cape Cod to Boston. See you onboard!

One way tickets from Hyannis to South station cost \$20 and round trip tickets are \$35. [Click here](#) for a full schedule and ticket prices:

**Photographs courtesy of Grace Finch & Katie O'Sullivan**



Grace Finch is a native Cape Codder who has been landscaping for over 15 years and now has her own small gardening business that focuses mainly on perennial and vegetable gardens.

Grace enjoys spending her free time walking Cape Cod beaches year round with her dog Kaya and writing about nature.

You can visit her blog at [grace-findings.blogspot.com](http://grace-findings.blogspot.com).