



# Hoosier Country

by ALLY MABRY



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lat farmland, corn, casseroles, and race cars — the charming quintessential staples of the Midwest, right? Bloomington, Indiana, is almost none of those things, *especially* not flat. Tucked into a verdent utopia just an hour south of Indianapolis, you'll find Bloomington. This dreamy, Midwest college town, dubbed the "Gateway to Scenic

Southern Indiana," has a surprising penchant for cycling.

Bloomington is built upon the ancestral homelands of the Miami, Delaware, Potawatomi, and Shawnee Tribes. About 20,000 years ago, the melting glaciers that formed the Great Lakes halted here, which created topography that resembles a ripple. The varied landscape in southern Indiana makes Bloomington a hotbed for cycling. Pick any direction from Bloomington, and the rolling hills and lush vegetation will both take your breath away. A web of county roads, hilly farmland, and surrounding state and national forest land lends for creative route planning.

Now home to Indiana University's main campus of 45,000 students (over half the city's 80,000 non-university population), you might recognize Bloomington from the Academy Award-winning cult classic *Breaking Away*, which features a reenactment of IU's weird and wonderful Little 500 bicycle race — if you know anything about the Indy 500 race, imagine the exact same scene, except swap the race cars for 33 teams of four college students each riding the same singlespeed bicycle around a quarter-mile cinder track. I didn't know much about the Little 500 before traveling to Bloomington, and I have now achieved maximum fangirl status. I was truly elated to watch Cutters cross the finish line first for the 2023 men's race and even got to have a drink with the members of Willkie Sprint, the team that won the first-ever Little 500 women's race.

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## GO AND STAY

If you're flying into IND or taking Amtrak to the Indianapolis station, there's a great shuttle service via GO Express Travel to and from Bloomington — just make sure you get in before 10:00 PM and leave after 9:00 AM to utilize the shuttle. You may bring a boxed bicycle on the shuttle as long as you're not carrying any additional bags. At the time of publication, a one-way shuttle ticket costs \$29 (including luggage).

The bike ride from Indianapolis to Bloomington is about 50 miles on county roads through Monrovia and Paragon. If you're riding our Eastern Express bicycle route, Bloomington is a 22-mile detour south of Martinsville.

I had the pleasure of staying at the Indiana Memorial Union, which is situated right in the center of the college action. Other good lodging options are the Graduate (downtown), Scholars' Inn, and Airbnb. For camping, check out Hoosier National Forest, one of the largest national forests in the U.S., or reserve a site in advance at Yellowwood or Morgan Monroe State Forests.

## Bloomington, Indiana

BEGINNER/DAY RIDE
• ROUTE: Griffy Lake Loop
• DISTANCE: 10 miles
• ELEVATION GAIN: 757 feet

Get a taste of what the hilly farmland surrounding Bloomington has to offer in terms of road riding. Start at the university and head north out of town on North Eagleson Avenue to pass by IU's fraternity row. A quick dogleg onto David Baker Avenue with a right onto North Fleet Lane will lead you to East Matlock Road, a quiet neighborhood street that quickly turns into North Headley Road. Enjoy the roller coaster of green as you descend to Griffy Reservoir, part of the Griffy Nature Preserve, as the road turns into tree-lined North Hinkle Road. Then left onto East Bethel Lane and another left onto North Old State Road 37, a relatively quiet road that passes parks and brings you back to Bloomington.

BEGINNER/DAY RIDE
• ROUTE: The B-Line to the Limestone Greenway
• DISTANCE: 14 miles
• ELEVATION GAIN: 379 feet

For a DIY adventure focused less on cycling and more on exploring Bloomington, hit up the B-Line, Bloomington's immaculate separated pedestrian path that runs from north to south on the west side of town. Along the B-Line, you'll find farmers markets, coffee shops, restaurants, parks, and public art — all with excellent wayfinding signage. The B-Line is only three miles long, but it connects to a network of rail trails (eventually you'll be able to ride over 60 miles of connected rail trails right from downtown).

INTERMEDIATE/MULTIDAY RIDE
• ROUTE: Bloomington to Nashville Loop
• DISTANCE: 75 miles
• ELEVATION GAIN: 3,977 feet

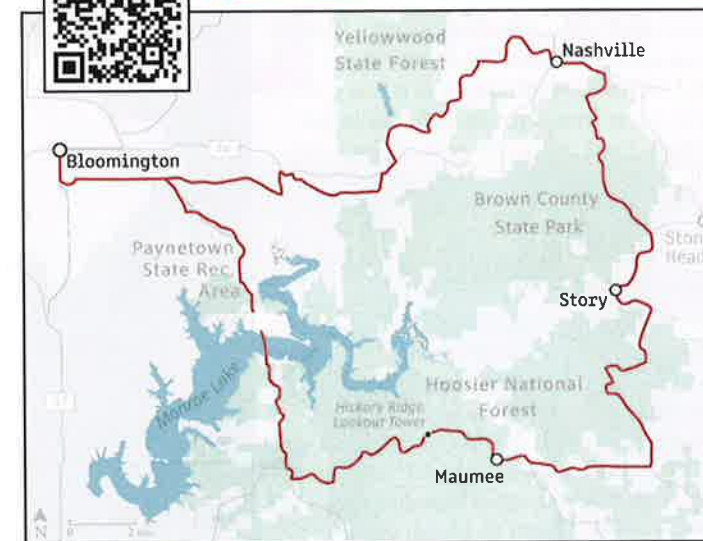
Have a morning coffee at Hopscotch or afternoon lunch at the Bloomingfoods co-op off the B-Line and then head east out of town on East Lampkins Ridge Road. Make your way past Yellowwood State Forest to Nashville, home of the Brown County Art Colony, which was formed by artist T. C. Steele in 1907 — the route brings you right by the State Historic Site. Nashville has been described as a "storybook town" with crafty stores and plentiful lodging options. The busy seasons are spring and fall — leaf peepers flood the town streets in search of gorgeous foliage — and beware that a lot of businesses close on Mondays and Tuesdays. If you still have some life in your legs once you reach Nashville, restock and get ready to tackle the biggest hill of the route: Weed Patch Hill, a two-mile, 400-foot climb through Brown County State Park (home to an incredible mountain bike trail network). After descending, arrive in Story, Indiana, and stay the night at the old (like, 1851 old) Story Inn, where the Brown County-born,

Michelin-acclaimed chef Dan Thomas will serve you a *prix fixe* dinner. If camping is your preferred sleeping mode, from Story, continue on route to Hoosier National Forest, where there are many options.

From Story, get ready for gravel: head up South Mount Nebo Road to Berry Ridge Road in the Hoosier National Forest. Road conditions can be quite varied. A fresh grade of gravel will result in larger loose stones that can be punishing, but ride later in the season in August or September and the tire tracks will likely be worn in and relatively smooth — it's a small gamble. Descend to Maumee before climbing back up to the Hickory Ridge Lookout Tower, built in 1936 to watch over the Charles C. Deam Wilderness. Roll your way back north over Lake Monroe and pass the Paynetown State Recreation Area. When you arrive back in Bloomington, finish your ride at Upland Brewing Company or one of the many restaurants on 4th Street. 🍷



[ridewithgps.com/routes/43293985](https://ridewithgps.com/routes/43293985)



MAP: HALEY BRUECKMAN

## GROCERIES AND FOOD

Indiana University attracts people from all over the world, which has translated to bountiful culinary offerings. Just blocks from the edge of the university is 4th Street, known locally as "International Row," which is where you'll find flavors from everywhere: Thai, Korean, Cajun, Burmese, Tibetan, and more. Uptown Cafe is a fancy Cajun/Creole spot with a casual feel (and crab cakes to die for). Bloomington Bagel Co. is a local favorite, as is Taste of India's incredible lunch buffet. Eclectic coffee shops are plentiful: Hopscotch Coffee (also a restaurant) has big-city vibes and quality coffee; Soma is a quaint spot where many college students study; Rainbow Bakery offers coffee and vegan baked goods and is set in an old service station with a midcentury-modern-meets-circus atmosphere. Bloomingfoods is the local organic co-op with an amazing salad bar. For drinks, Farm (also a delicious restaurant) has very sophisticated cocktails for unsophisticated cocktail prices. Kilroy's on Kirkwood is one of the highest-grossing bars in America (enter at your own risk, lest you encounter drunk college students).

## CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS

For reasons I haven't been able to pin down, the Dalai Lama's brother lives in Bloomington at the Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Center. The grounds are absolutely worth a walk or a ride through. As I mentioned earlier, the Little 500 bicycle race is the most unique sporting event I've ever attended — if you're lucky enough to pass through Bloomington on this legendary spring weekend, you won't be disappointed to grab a seat in the Bill Armstrong Stadium. The Lilly Library is a treasure trove of rare books (including a Gutenberg Bible), manuscripts (like *James Bond*), and special collections. Try to catch any kind of live music performance at one of the many venues (the Bluebird or the Orbit room, for two). If you're hanging out around campus, the Indiana Memorial Union is worth checking out — it has a bowling alley!