

The Erie Canalway Trail: A Cyclist's Milepost (Buffalo to Albany)

I. Introduction: Riding the Historic Erie Canalway

A. Welcome to the Erie Canalway Trail: An Overview

The Erie Canalway Trail invites cyclists on an extraordinary journey across New York State, tracing a path of remarkable historical significance and natural beauty. Stretching approximately 360 miles from the shores of Lake Erie in Buffalo to the banks of the Hudson River in Albany, this trail forms the primary east-west spine of New York's expansive Canalway Trail system.¹ It predominantly follows the historic towpaths where, for generations, mules diligently pulled canal boats, and also incorporates segments of abandoned and active rail corridors, weaving a route rich in heritage.²

This famed corridor is a vital component of the 750-mile Empire State Trail, celebrated as the longest multi-use recreational trail in the United States. The Empire State Trail also extends north-south, connecting New York City to the Canadian border via the Hudson River Valley and Lake Champlain.¹ Along its westward course, the Erie Canalway Trail links major urban centers such as Rochester, Syracuse, and Utica, with a tapestry of charming smaller canal towns and villages, each offering unique glimpses into the region's past and present.³

The Erie Canal itself, an ambitious project constructed between 1817 and 1825, stands as a monumental feat of 19th-century engineering. Its creation was pivotal in transforming New York into the "Empire State," fostering unprecedented economic growth and opening the interior of North America to settlement and commerce.⁴ Thus, cycling the Erie Canalway Trail is more than a recreational pursuit; it is an immersive passage through the annals of American ingenuity and expansion.

The trail offers a unique perspective as a linear park and a living museum. It follows the very artery that shaped much of New York's development and influenced the nation's growth. Riders are not merely covering distance; they are pedaling through layers of history, witnessing original and restored canal structures, and connecting with the vibrant communities that blossomed along its banks. The canal facilitated not only the movement of goods but also of people and ideas, becoming a corridor for social reform movements like abolitionism and women's suffrage.⁴ The trail's designation as part of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor further underscores its dual identity as a premier recreational resource and a preserved historical landscape.¹ This understanding elevates the cycling experience from a

physical challenge to a profound cultural and historical exploration.

Table 1: Erie Canalway Trail: At a Glance

Feature	Description
Total Mileage	Approx. 360 miles (Buffalo to Albany) ¹
Key Cities	Buffalo, Lockport, Rochester, Syracuse, Rome, Utica, Little Falls, Schenectady, Albany ³
Predominant Surfaces	Paved: ~45-60%; Stone Dust: ~40-41%; On-Road: ~14% ³
General Elevation	Mostly flat, following canal towpaths and former rail beds. Some gentle grades, particularly in the Mohawk Valley section. ³
Key Managing Entities	NYS Canal Corporation, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Parks & Trails New York ¹

This table provides a foundational overview, offering cyclists a quick understanding of the trail's scale, terrain, and the key urban centers it connects, aiding in initial trip assessment and planning.

B. About This Guide: Your Milepost to Adventure

This guide is crafted in the tradition of *The Milepost*, offering a detailed, sequential log of the Erie Canalway Trail. It proceeds from west to east, from Buffalo to Albany, mirroring the journey most cyclists undertake to take advantage of prevailing winds. The aim is to furnish cyclists with comprehensive information essential for planning and navigating their adventure. This includes approximate mileage, descriptions of trail conditions and surfaces, notable points of interest (POIs) encompassing historical sites, scenic vistas, and cultural attractions, details on available services and amenities (food, water, restrooms, lodging, bike shops, parking), access points, trailheads, and practical tips gleaned from official sources and the experiences of

fellow riders.

The information presented herein is a synthesis drawn from official publications and digital resources provided by the New York State Canal Corporation ², the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor ¹, Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) ³, and the Empire State Trail initiative.⁹ This foundational data is enriched by firsthand accounts and advice shared by cyclists who have previously journeyed along the trail, offering valuable real-world perspectives.⁷

C. The "End-to-Ender" Experience: A Journey Through History

Completing the entire 360-mile Erie Canalway Trail between Buffalo and Albany is a significant achievement, earning cyclists the informal title of "End-to-Ender." Parks & Trails New York maintains an "End-to-End Honor Roll" for those who register their accomplishment, adding a sense of formal recognition to this personal feat.³ This journey offers more than just unparalleled cycling and fine scenery; it is a profound immersion into American history, tracing the path of a waterway that shaped a nation.¹⁰

The upcoming Bicentennial of the Erie Canal's completion in 2025 further elevates the significance of an end-to-end trip. Numerous commemorative events and celebrations are planned along the corridor, promising a particularly vibrant and memorable experience for those undertaking the journey during this historic period.²² The formal recognition of "End-to-Enders" transforms a long-distance cycle tour into an endeavor with a deeper meaning, akin to a modern pilgrimage. It connects the individual's physical journey with the canal's enduring historical narrative, fostering a sense of accomplishment and community among cyclists. The Bicentennial amplifies this by linking personal achievement to a major historical commemoration, framing the ride as a "once in a lifetime opportunity".²⁴

II. Essential Pre-Ride Planning

A. Optimal Timing & Conditions:

Choosing the right time to cycle the Erie Canalway Trail is crucial for an enjoyable experience. Generally, **May through September** offer the most favorable weather conditions for extended trips.³ Many cyclists find spring, summer, and early fall to be ideal.⁷

The summer months of **June, July, and August** typically boast the sunniest and driest weather, though they can also bring short, intense thunderstorms. Spring and fall rains tend to be lighter but may last longer.³ Given the unpredictability of weather

in upstate New York, it is always advisable to pack layers and appropriate rain gear.⁷ An autumn ride, particularly in October, can reward cyclists with stunning fall foliage, fewer insects, no oppressive heat, and less crowded trails; however, daylight hours are shorter, requiring careful planning of daily mileage.⁷

A significant factor for multi-day tours is the **prevailing wind direction**. The consensus among experienced riders and official sources is to travel **west to east (Buffalo to Albany)**. This orientation allows cyclists to take advantage of the prevailing westerly winds, often making the journey feel like "the path of least resistance".¹⁰ Cyclists who have encountered headwinds, particularly when starting eastward from Buffalo against the typical pattern, have reported a noticeably slower and more challenging ride.¹⁸ This strategic direction choice, rooted in common weather patterns, can profoundly impact rider effort and overall enjoyment over the course of the tour.

Winter cycling is generally not practical due to substantial snowfall. The western and central portions of the trail corridor receive the most accumulation, with Buffalo and Rochester averaging 91 inches, Syracuse 115 inches, and Albany 64 inches annually. During these months, sections of the trail become popular for cross-country skiing.³

B. Gearing Up: Your Bike and Equipment:

Selecting an appropriate bicycle and equipping it properly will significantly enhance comfort and reliability on the trail. **Hybrid bikes** are a popular choice due to their blend of comfort and versatility on mixed surfaces.²⁶ **Touring bikes, cyclocross bikes, and gravel bikes** are also well-suited for the journey.²⁶ If using a mountain bike, fitting it with non-knobby or "slick" tires is recommended to reduce rolling resistance on paved and stone dust sections.³

Tire Considerations: The Erie Canalway Trail features a mix of surfaces: approximately 45-60% is paved (mostly asphalt), around 40-41% is stone dust (crushed limestone), and about 14% consists of on-road connections.³

- **Stone dust** surfaces, when compacted and dry, are generally hard and provide good traction, similar to pavement. However, if newly installed or wet, stone dust can become softer and may "grab" narrower tires, increasing rolling resistance.³
- For 700c wheels, tire widths of **28-42mm** are recommended; for 26-inch wheels, **1.3-1.6 inches** wide is suitable. Tires with good **puncture protection** are highly advised.²⁶ Cyclists have successfully used 28mm tires¹⁸ and 32-35mm tires.⁷ If riding a traditional road bike, it's best to use the widest tires that the frame can safely accommodate to improve comfort on unpaved sections.²⁶

- While rare, some **natural surface** sections (old towpaths or rail corridors) may be encountered. These can be rutted and have exposed roots, making wider tires a better choice.³ The varied surfaces, particularly the extensive stone dust sections, make tire selection more critical than on a uniformly paved path. While stone dust is generally robust, it can be slower and potentially more challenging for very narrow road tires, especially when conditions are wet or the surface is freshly laid.

E-Bike Regulations:

- **Class 1 and Class 2 E-bikes**, which provide pedal-assist up to 20 mph and are equipped with fully operative pedals for human propulsion, are generally permitted on trail segments owned by the NYS Canal Corporation and on Empire State Trail sections managed by New York State Parks and the Canal Corporation.²
- **Class 3 E-bikes**, which offer pedal-assist beyond 20 mph, are **prohibited** on Canal Corporation property.²
- Other motorized conveyances such as **E-Scooters** (motorized or powered scooters requiring the user to stand) and **one-wheel electric skateboards** are also prohibited on Canal Corporation trail segments.² The clear regulatory distinction for e-bikes reflects an effort to balance accessibility with the preservation of the trail's character. Cyclists using e-bikes must be aware of these rules to ensure compliance.

Essential Packing List (General):

A well-prepared cyclist should carry:

- **Safety & Repair:** Helmet (mandatory for children under 14 in NYS, highly recommended for all)¹², bike lock, drinking water system (bottles or hydration pack), headlight and taillight (especially for low visibility or potential evening riding)¹², eye protection, a basic first aid kit, spare inner tube(s) appropriate for your tire size, a compact hand pump or CO2 inflator, tire levers, and a cycling-specific multi-tool.¹² A patch kit and a spare derailleur hanger specific to your bike are also wise additions.¹⁹
- **Navigation & Comfort:** Bike computer or GPS device (or smartphone with mapping app), handlebar map holder (if using paper cue sheets/maps)²⁶, sunscreen, snacks²², appropriate cycling attire (padded shorts, moisture-wicking jerseys), layers for changing weather, and rain gear. For a comprehensive personal gear checklist example from a cyclist who completed the trail, refer to the account in.¹⁹

C. Navigating the Trail:

Effective navigation is key to a smooth journey. Fortunately, a wealth of resources is

available.

- **Official Maps & Digital Resources:**

- **NYS Canal Corporation:** Provides an interactive map, developed in collaboration with Parks & Trails New York, ideal for planning, identifying points of interest, and locating amenities.¹¹ Links to their trail map can be found on their website.¹²
- **Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor:** Offers an "Erie Canalway Map" detailing sites of interest and amenities.¹ They recommend using nycanalmap.com for trip planning, which includes a distance calculator.³⁰ PDF maps are also available through their resources.⁶
- **Parks & Trails New York (PTNY):** Features an interactive map on their website.³ Their *Cycling the Erie Canal Guidebook* and the companion website cycletheeriecanal.com are widely regarded as comprehensive resources for cyclists.²⁰
- **Empire State Trail:** The official website (empiretrail.ny.gov) includes maps showing all trail segments, route details, and surface types.¹ A free, large-format printed map of the entire Empire State Trail system can be ordered.¹⁷ Crucially, **GPX and KMZ/KML files** for the statewide route are available for download from this site, which is a primary source for digital navigation data.¹⁷
- **BikeErieCanal.com:** This independent website offers an interactive map, a trip planner tool, mileage charts, elevation profiles, information on town services, and GPS coordinates for towns along the trail.³⁴
- **RideWithGPS:** This popular platform hosts several GPX routes for the Erie Canalway Trail. Some of these routes, like route 35247616 (a West-to-East version from Buffalo Harbor State Park to Watervliet), are noted as being taken directly from the official Empire State Trail website.³⁵ Other versions, such as route 322861, are also available.⁸
- **Trailforks:** Lists various segments of the Erie Canalway Trail, though direct GPX downloads from the snippet provided are not apparent.¹¹

It's important to note that while numerous official mapping resources and GPX files exist, relying on a single navigation source can be risky. Cyclist experiences indicate that on-the-ground detours can occur, sometimes unannounced or poorly signed.⁷ For instance, one cyclist reported an unexpected detour at the very start in Buffalo that was not reflected on the official GPX file downloaded the previous night.³⁷ Another encountered a trail closure with no detour signage, requiring them to backtrack.³⁸ Additionally, official trail alert webpages have occasionally been reported as inaccessible.³⁹ Therefore, a multi-layered approach to navigation is most robust:

combining a reliable guidebook (like PTNY's), official GPX files loaded onto a dedicated GPS device or smartphone app, and checking recent cyclist forums or official alert pages for the latest conditions.

Given the various sources for GPX files, cyclists should aim to use the most recently updated version, preferably from a primary source like the Empire State Trail website or Parks & Trails New York.

- **Understanding Trail Signage:** The Canalway Trail route is marked with distinctive signs.² Similarly, Empire State Trail markers and wayfinding signs are designed to make it easy to follow the route and connect between on-road and off-road segments.¹ However, as noted, cyclist accounts suggest that signage for detours can sometimes be imperfect or lacking.⁷
- **Staying Updated: Trail Alerts, Closures, and Conditions:**
 - **NYS Canal Corporation:** Their "Notices and Alerts" section is intended to provide current information about trail segments, including openings/closures, water levels, and construction activities.¹³ A "Canalway Trail Alerts" link is also provided on their trail pages.²
 - **Parks & Trails New York (PTNY):** Maintains a "Trail Closures" section on their website.³
 - **Empire State Trail:** The official website has a "Trail Closures" page for updates.¹⁷

D. Rules of the Road (and Trail):

Adherence to trail rules and etiquette ensures a safe and enjoyable experience for all users.

- **Hours of Operation:** Segments owned by the NYS Canal Corporation are open daily from **dawn to dusk**.² The Empire State Trail also follows a dawn-to-dusk operational window; trails are not lit and are closed at night.¹⁷
- **Speed Limit:** On Canal Corporation-owned trail segments, a speed limit of **15 MPH** is in effect unless otherwise posted.² On the broader Empire State Trail, cyclists are advised to reduce speed when trails are crowded.¹⁷
- **Trail Etiquette:**
 - **Keep Right, Pass Left:** Always stay to the right side of the trail and pass slower users on their left.²
 - **Audible Signal:** Provide a clear warning signal (using a bike bell or your voice, e.g., "On your left!") before passing other trail users.²
 - **Yielding:** Bicyclists must yield to pedestrians. All trail users must yield to horses where they are permitted.² (Note: Horseback riding is generally

prohibited on Canal Corporation trails, with an exception for the Old Erie Canal State Historic Park's 36-mile section between East Syracuse and Rome²).

- **Group Riding:** Cyclists traveling in a group should ride in single file, especially when other users are present or visibility is limited.²⁸
- **Trail Obstruction:** Do not block the trail. If you need to stop, move off the trail surface.²⁸
- **Private Property:** Respect adjoining private property by always staying on the designated trail. Accessing the trail through private land is strictly prohibited unless permission is granted.²
- **Safety Guidelines:**
 - **Helmets:** Wearing a helmet is strongly recommended for all cyclists. New York State law mandates that all bicyclists under the age of 14 wear an approved helmet.¹²
 - **Lights:** Using a headlight and taillight is recommended, especially in low-light conditions or if there's a possibility of riding near dusk or dawn.¹²
 - **Road Crossings:** Exercise extreme caution at all road crossings. Stop, look, and listen for motor vehicle traffic before proceeding safely.¹⁷
 - **Headphones:** If wearing headphones, it is advised to keep one ear clear to remain aware of your surroundings and other trail users.²⁸
- **Pet Policies:** Pets are generally allowed on the trail but must be kept on a leash (maximum 6 feet on Canal Corporation property) and under the owner's direct control at all times.² Pet owners are responsible for cleaning up their pet's waste and must carry a device for waste pick-up.²
- **Prohibited Uses (on Canal Corporation segments):**
 - Smoking is generally prohibited.²
 - Hunting on, at, or near canal locks or other canal structures is not allowed.¹²
 - Motorized vehicles, including ATVs, one-wheel electric skateboards, and E-Scooters, are prohibited.²
 - Class 3 E-bikes (those providing pedal assist beyond 20 mph) are prohibited.²
 - Snowmobile use is prohibited unless specifically permitted by the Canal Corporation's Real Property Department.²
- **Leave No Trace Principles:**
 - Pack out all garbage and recyclables. Waste receptacles are not provided at all trailheads or lockhouses.²
 - Open fires are not permitted on Canal property. Fires for cooking should be limited to Corporation-provided charcoal grills or personal camping stoves.² The detailed rules regarding speed, passing, yielding, and prohibited activities underscore that the Canalway Trail is a shared public space. Observance of

these guidelines is vital not only for individual safety but also for the collective enjoyment and long-term sustainability of the trail for all users, including cyclists, walkers, joggers, and others. The consistent emphasis across multiple official sources on considerate behavior points to a management philosophy centered on a harmonious multi-user experience, complemented by principles of environmental stewardship.

E. Logistics: Getting There, Getting Back, and Staying Over:

Planning the logistics for an end-to-end or multi-day trip on the Erie Canalway Trail involves considering transportation to and from the trailheads and arranging overnight accommodations.

- **Transportation Options:**

- **Amtrak:** Provides convenient rail service that generally parallels the canal corridor. Key stations with access to the trail include Albany-Rensselaer (ALB), Schenectady (SDY), Amsterdam (AMS), Utica (UCA), Rome (ROM), Syracuse (SYR), Rochester (ROC), Buffalo-Depew (BUF), and Buffalo-Exchange St. (BFX).³ Amtrak offers "Carry-On Bicycle Service" on its Empire Service and Maple Leaf trains for a fee (typically \$20, reservation required). Bikes can also be transported in the baggage car on the long-distance Lake Shore Limited line.¹¹ Cyclists should be aware of Amtrak's specific requirements for bicycles, including a weight limit of 50 lbs, standard bicycle dimensions (70 inches x 41 inches x 8.5 inches), and a maximum tire width of 2 inches.⁴⁰ It is highly recommended to reserve train tickets and bike spots well in advance, especially during peak season.⁴⁰ The Buffalo-Exchange St. (BFX) station is less than a mile from the western trailhead at Canalside, while the Albany-Rensselaer (ALB) station is about a mile from the eastern trailhead.⁴⁰
- **Vehicle Parking:** Many trailheads along the Erie Canalway Trail offer formal parking areas.³ Parking may also be available at locks and lift bridges operated by the NYS Canal Corporation; it's advisable to check with lock attendants if designated parking is not visible.³ In cities and villages, municipal parking is often available but may be limited to short-term use; always check posted regulations.³ For multi-day trips, secure long-term parking is a key consideration. The Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak station offers covered garage and surface lot parking for daily and weekly rates (e.g., surface lots approx. \$10/day or \$50/week).¹⁵ The Depew Amtrak station (near Buffalo) reportedly offers free parking with a return ticket displayed on the dash.⁴⁰ If staying at hotels or B&Bs, inquire about leaving your vehicle in their parking facilities.
- **Shuttle Services:** Several private companies offer shuttle services for cyclists

and their bicycles along the Erie Canalway Trail. These include APoint Shuttle Service, Classic Adventures (primarily a tour operator but also offers shuttles), and Erie Canal Bike Transport.¹¹ It's important to note that as of recent information, there are currently no dedicated luggage transport services operating along the entire trail corridor for independent cyclists.¹⁵

- **Airports:** For those traveling from further afield, four international airports serve the corridor: Buffalo Niagara International Airport (BUF), Greater Rochester International Airport (ROC), Syracuse Hancock International Airport (SYR), and Albany International Airport (ALB).³
- **Bus Services:** Long-distance bus lines such as Greyhound and Trailways serve most of the larger cities along the route, providing another option for reaching trail access points.³
- **Accommodation Spectrum:** Cyclists have a diverse range of overnight options, catering to various budgets and comfort preferences.
 - **NYS Canal Corporation Primitive Campsites:** The NYS Canal Corporation offers approximately 17-18 designated "Cycler-Hiker-Boater" campsites at various lock locations along the Canalway Trail and waterways.² These are available during the navigation season (typically May through October) and are considered primitive, with limited on-site amenities. Generally, porta-potties are provided, but campers should be prepared to bring their own potable water (or purification methods), first aid kits, and all necessary camping and cooking supplies.¹⁴ These sites operate on a carry-in, carry-out basis for garbage unless a receptacle is present. Each campsite typically accommodates up to four tents and a maximum of ten people, with stays limited to 48 hours.²⁹ Campsites are available on a first-come, first-served basis. It is strongly recommended to contact Camping@Canals.NY.GOV or the local lock operator a week in advance to confirm that a specific campsite is open and to inquire about gate hours, parking, and access.²⁹ Parks & Trails New York provides an interactive camping map that can help locate these sites.¹⁴
 - **Municipal Camping & Canal Amenity Centers:** Several towns and villages along the canal offer free or low-cost camping options for cyclists, paddlers, and boaters at municipal parks, marinas, or designated Canal Amenity Centers. These are often within walking distance of food and other services. Locations with such facilities include Waterford, St. Johnsville, Little Falls, Ilion, Frankfort, Clyde, Lyons, Newark, Palmyra, Brockport, and Middleport.¹⁴
 - **State Parks:** A few New York State Parks near the canal system offer full-amenity tent and RV camping for a modest fee. Notable examples include Cayuga Lake State Park (near Seneca Falls), Green Lakes State Park (just east

of Syracuse), and Verona Beach State Park (near Sylvan Beach).¹⁴

Reservations for state park campsites are strongly suggested and can typically be made through ReserveAmerica.com or by calling 800-456-CAMP.

- **Private Campgrounds:** Numerous private campgrounds are located in the vicinity of the trail, often offering additional amenities such as laundry facilities, swimming pools, and convenience stores. Some may be a few miles off the direct trail route. Resources like CampNewYork.com can help locate these.¹⁴
- **Warm Showers:** The Warm Showers community is a non-profit hospitality exchange specifically for bicycle tourists. Over 50 Warm Showers hosts are reportedly located along the Erie Canalway Trail, offering a chance for free lodging and local interaction. Membership (free) is required to access host locations.¹⁴
- **Bed & Breakfasts, Inns, Hotels, and Motels:** A wide variety of traditional lodging options are available in the cities, towns, and villages along the Erie Canalway Trail. Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) provides extensive lists of such accommodations, often categorized by region and proximity to the trail.³ Many establishments cater to cyclists, offering secure bike storage and other amenities. Examples highlighted in various sources include the Erie Mansion B&B in Clyde¹⁹, the Grand Colonial B&B in Herkimer (a NYS Bike-Friendly Certified Accommodation)¹⁰, and the Inn at Stone Mill in Little Falls.²⁰ One cyclist, Matt Toigo, noted that for his early May trip with long days and potentially wet weather, opting for hotels over camping was "100% the right decision".¹⁹ This highlights that the choice of accommodation significantly influences the nature and comfort of the tour, requiring cyclists to balance cost, desired comfort level, and logistical convenience. The availability of Amtrak bike service and private shuttles makes a one-way, end-to-end trip quite feasible. However, this requires careful coordination. Amtrak has specific policies regarding bicycle transport, including size and weight restrictions, reservation requirements, and varying service levels on different train lines. Understanding station proximity to the trail and any potential challenges in transferring is also important. While private shuttles offer an alternative, they may not provide luggage transport, which is a key consideration for independent cyclists not part of an organized, supported tour.

Table 2: Amtrak Stations & Erie Canalway Trail Access

Station Name (Code)	Town	Approx. Distance to Trail	Empire Service / Maple Leaf (Carry-On Bike Service)	Lake Shore Limited (Checked Baggage Bike Service)	Notes
Buffalo-Exchange St (BFX)	Buffalo	< 1 mile	Yes	No	Closest to western terminus (Canalside). Limited long-term parking options nearby. ⁴⁰
Buffalo-Depew (BUF)	Depew	~10 miles	Yes	Yes	Further from trail but may offer better parking (free with return ticket on dash reported). ⁴⁰
Rochester (ROC)	Rochester	Varies, near trail	Yes	Yes	City station with good access to services.
Syracuse (SYR)	Syracuse	Varies, near trail	Yes	Yes	Major city stop.
Rome (ROM)	Rome	Near trail	Yes	Yes	Access to central trail sections.
Utica (UCA)	Utica	Near trail	Yes	Yes	Serves the Mohawk Valley

					region.
Amsterdam (AMS)	Amsterdam	Near trail	Yes	No	Access to eastern Mohawk Valley.
Schenectady (SDY)	Schenectady	Near trail	Yes	No	Close to Albany.
Albany-Rensselaer (ALB)	Rensselaer/Albany	~1 mile	Yes	Yes	Closest to eastern terminus. Dunn Memorial Bridge for Hudson River crossing. Secure paid long-term parking available. ¹⁵

*Note: Always verify current Amtrak bike policies, reservation requirements, and station services directly with Amtrak prior to travel as details can change.*¹⁵

Table 3: NYS Canal Corporation Primitive Campsite Guidelines

Feature	Guideline
Availability	First-come, first-served during navigation season (May-Oct). Contact Camping@Canals.NY.GOV or Lock Operator to confirm open status. ²⁹
Capacity & Stay Limit	Max 4 tents / 10 people per site. 48-hour stay limit. ²⁹
Amenities	Considered "primitive." Porta-potties generally provided. Campers must bring

	own potable water (or purification), food, and all camping/cooking supplies. ¹⁴
Waste Disposal	Carry-in, Carry-out for all garbage unless a waste receptacle is present. ²⁹
Fires	No open campfires or bonfires. Cooking fires limited to Canal Corporation-provided charcoal grills or personal camping stoves. ²
Quiet Hours	10 p.m. to 7 a.m.. ²⁹
Vehicles	No motorized vehicles allowed in campsites. ²⁹
Large Groups	Groups >10 people/4 tents must contact Canal Corp Real Property & Permits Dept.. ²⁹

Understanding these guidelines for the free, primitive campsites is essential for proper preparation, ensuring a safe, compliant, and more enjoyable camping experience by setting realistic expectations about the available facilities.

III. The Erie Canalway Trail Log: Buffalo to Albany (West to East)

A. How to Use This Log:

This log details the Erie Canalway Trail from Buffalo (west) to Albany (east), the generally recommended direction of travel to benefit from prevailing westerly winds.¹⁰ Mileage provided is approximate and typically cumulative within major segments, usually starting from a recognized landmark such as Canalside in Buffalo. It is important to note that official, physical mile markers are not consistently present along the entire trail, as observed by some cyclists.¹⁹ Therefore, distances should be cross-referenced with your chosen navigation tools.

The following symbols and abbreviations are used throughout the log to denote trail features, services, and points of interest:

- **(P)** - Paved Surface
- **(SD)** - Stone Dust Surface (crushed limestone)
- **(OR)** - On-Road Section (may include shoulders, bike lanes, or shared roads)
- **(POI)** - Point of Interest (scenic, cultural, recreational)

- **(Serv)** - Services Available:
 - **F** - Food (restaurants, cafes, groceries)
 - **W** - Water (public fountains, stores)
 - **R** - Restrooms (public facilities, porta-potties)
 - **L** - Lodging (hotels, B&Bs, inns)
 - **C** - Camping (designated sites, commercial campgrounds)
 - **BS** - Bike Shop (sales, repairs, rentals)
 - **Pkg** - Parking (trailhead or nearby public parking)
- **(Hist)** - Historical Marker, Museum, or Site
- **(Access)** - Trail Access Point / Trailhead
- **(Note)** - Cyclist Tip, Caution, Local Insight, or other noteworthy information
- **(Detour)** - Known or Potential Detour Information

The information compiled in this log is based on a synthesis of official data from state and local agencies, trail organizations, and valuable firsthand accounts from cyclists who have ridden the trail. However, trail conditions, service availability, and operational hours for attractions can change. It is always recommended to verify critical information locally or through the most current online alerts before and during your trip.

B. Segment 1: Buffalo to Rochester (Approx. 95-100 miles)

Overview: This initial segment of the Erie Canalway Trail ushers cyclists from the revitalized urban waterfront of Buffalo, through its developing suburbs, and into a series of historic canal towns and picturesque agricultural landscapes. It is a region rich in canal heritage, showcasing sites related to the western terminus of the original "Clinton's Ditch" and the subsequent enlargements and modernizations of the canal system.

- **Approximate Mileage:** 95 to 100 miles. This distance is derived from various sources, including town-to-town mileage on BikeErieCanal.com⁴⁴, cyclist trip reports¹⁹, and Empire State Trail Outfitters' itinerary.⁴⁵
- **Elevation Profile:** The trail in this segment is generally flat as it follows the canal alignment. For detailed views, cyclists can consult the elevation charts for the "Buffalo to Medina" and "Medina to Pittsford" sections available on BikeErieCanal.com.⁴⁶
- **Surface Summary:** The trail surface transitions from paved urban paths and on-road connections in and around Buffalo to predominantly stone dust towpaths, interspersed with some paved sections as it moves eastward. Cyclists should be prepared for mixed surfaces.³
- **Key Towns:** Buffalo, Tonawanda, North Tonawanda, Pendleton, Lockport,

Gasport, Middleport, Medina, Albion, Hulberton, Holley, Brockport, Spencerport, Gates, Rochester.

Table 4: Segment 1 Summary: Buffalo to Rochester

Leg	Approx. Distance	Dominant Surface(s)	Key POIs/Towns	Primary Service Locations
Buffalo to Lockport	~30-33 miles	Paved, On-Road, Stone Dust	Canalside, Fontana Boathouse, Tonawanda, Flight of Five Locks, Erie Canal Discovery Ctr.	Buffalo, Tonawanda, Lockport
Lockport to Medina	~17 miles	Stone Dust, Paved	Middleport Canal Park, Medina Sandstone Architecture, Culvert Road (near Knowlesville)	Lockport, Middleport, Medina
Medina to Holley	~21 miles	Stone Dust	Albion Lift Bridge, Holley Canal Park & Falls	Medina, Albion, Holley
Holley to Rochester	~27-30 miles	Stone Dust, Paved, On-Road	Brockport (Victorian Village), Spencerport Depot, Genesee Valley Park	Holley, Brockport, Spencerport, Rochester suburbs

This table provides a high-level framework for the first major leg of the journey, helping cyclists anticipate daily rides, surface changes, and key stops within this extensive segment. It serves to break down a long stretch into more manageable parts

for planning purposes.

Detailed Log:

- **Leg 1.1: Buffalo to Lockport (Approx. 30-33 miles)**
 - **Mile 0.0: Buffalo - Canalside (Commercial Slip)** (P, OR) (Access: Canalside Pkg, Visitor Info) (Serv: F, W, R, L, BS, Pkg, Hist, POI in Buffalo ⁴⁴)
 - (POI) **Canalside**, at the 1825 terminus of the Erie Canal, is a vibrant public space offering historical interpretation, the Buffalo and Erie County Naval & Military Park (featuring the USS Little Rock), Explore & More Children's Museum, seasonal activities like ice skating and concerts, boat tours, kayak rentals, and a seasonal bike ferry across the canal channel.³⁷ This is the recognized historic western end of the original Erie Canal.
 - (Note) The official Erie Canalway Trail / Empire State Trail route often begins at **Buffalo Harbor State Park** (south of Canalside on the Outer Harbor) and follows the Empire State/Shoreline Trail north to connect with Canalside and the downtown trail network.³⁵ Verify current signed routing.
 - (Hist) Buffalo's historical trajectory is inextricably linked to the Erie Canal, which catapulted it from a small village to a major inland port and industrial powerhouse in the 19th century.⁴ The **Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site**, where TR took the oath of office in 1901, is a significant National Park Service affiliated site in Buffalo.⁴⁷
 - (Serv) Numerous food, lodging, and bike shop options are available throughout Buffalo. **Campus Wheelworks** (744 Elmwood Ave) and **Rick Cycle Shop** (55 Allen St) are established bike shops.⁴³
 - **Mile 0.0 - 2.0 (Approx.): Downtown Buffalo Navigation** (P, OR)
 - (Note) Navigating out of downtown Buffalo involves a mix of dedicated paths, bike lanes, and shared city streets. Frederick Law Olmsted-designed parkways, like Richmond Avenue and Linwood Avenue, offer pleasant, tree-lined cycling experiences.³⁷ Remain vigilant for urban traffic, pedestrians, and intersections.
 - (Serv) **Tipico Coffee** (multiple locations, one noted in Elmwood Village) is a recommended stop for good coffee and food.³⁷
 - (Detour) Be aware that trail closures and detours can occur in urban areas due to construction or events, sometimes with little advance notice. Official GPX files may not always reflect immediate, temporary changes. Cyclist Lisa Stokes, in June 2024, encountered a detour shortly after starting from Canalside that was not indicated on the official GPX file downloaded the previous night; however, the detour route itself was well-signed once located.³⁷ Similarly, cyclist Sam Way in August 2023 also

- reported an initial trail closure and self-navigated detour.³⁸ This underscores the need for alertness and flexibility when starting in Buffalo. The urban start presents a blend of rich historical context and engaging waterfront attractions alongside potential navigational complexities that are common to city trailheads. This requires riders to be adaptable but also offers a rewarding immersion in the canal's historic western terminus.
- **Mile 2.0 - 10.0 (Approx.): Buffalo to Tonawanda (via Shoreline Trail / Niagara River Greenway / Niagara Street) (P)**
 - (POI) **Frank Lloyd Wright Fontana Boathouse** (1 Rotary Row, Buffalo), located at the West Side Rowing Club. This structure was realized in 2007 based on an unbuilt 1905 design by Wright for the University of Wisconsin.³⁷
 - (POI) Views of the **Peace Bridge** connecting Buffalo to Fort Erie, Ontario. Cyclists typically cross the Niagara River on a parallel, lower-level bridge (International Railroad Bridge pedestrian/bike path) which forms part of the Erie Canalway Trail / Niagara River Greenway's bi-directional protected cycle track along Niagara Street and then the Niagara Parkway.³⁷
 - (Note) This section often runs alongside the Niagara River and later the Erie Canal/Tonawanda Creek. Portions, particularly along Niagara Street or adjacent to I-190, can be noisy due to highway traffic.³⁷
 - (Hist) The **Herschell Carrousel Factory Museum** (180 Thompson St, North Tonawanda) is a National Historic Landmark and a significant regional heritage site, preserving the art and history of carousel carving and manufacturing.⁴⁷ Further east, in Amherst, the **Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village** (formerly Amherst Museum) offers insights into 19th-century life in the region.⁴⁷
 - **Mile 10.0 (Approx.): Tonawanda / North Tonawanda (P, SD) (Serv: F, W, R, L, C, BS, Pkg in Tonawanda/N. Tonawanda ⁴³)**
 - (Note) The twin cities of Tonawanda (Erie County) and North Tonawanda (Niagara County) sit where Tonawanda Creek (forming this section of the Erie Canal) meets the Niagara River. This area offers numerous restaurants and services directly accessible from the trail, making it a good lunch or service stop.³⁷
 - (Serv) Bike Shops: **Dick's Bicycle Shop** (781 Niagara St, Tonawanda) and **Bert's Bike and Fitness** (1550 Niagara Falls Blvd, Tonawanda) are listed as offering rentals.⁴⁸
 - (POI) Gateway Harbor Park in North Tonawanda is a popular spot for events and boat docking.
 - **Mile 10.0 - 30.0 (Approx.): Tonawanda to Lockport (SD, P, some OR)**

- (Note) East of the Tonawandas, the trail environment generally becomes more tranquil and "idyllic" as it moves away from major highway proximity.³⁷ The path is primarily off-road on the historic towpath, though some short on-road connections or sections with shoulders or protected lanes may occur.³⁷
 - (Serv) **Pendleton: Uncle G's Ice Cream** (6061 Lockport Rd, just off trail) is a popular stop for cyclists.³⁷
 - (Serv) **Gasport**: This small hamlet offers services including a grocery, camping, a bike shop, water, and public restrooms.⁴⁴
 - (Note) As the trail approaches Lockport, there can be some on-road navigation through parts of the town before rejoining the well-maintained, dedicated trail sections.⁵¹
 - **Mile 30.0 (Approx.): Lockport** (SD, P, OR) (Serv: F, W, R, L, C, BS, Pkg ⁴³)
 - (POI) **Lockport "Flight of Five" Locks**: This is a premier attraction on the entire Erie Canalway Trail. Witness the impressive engineering of the original 1840s five-step combined locks (Locks 67-71) built to lift canal boats over the 60-foot Niagara Escarpment, alongside the modern, operational Locks E34 and E35.⁴⁹ The sheer scale and historical significance make this a critical stop for understanding canal engineering.
 - (POI) **Erie Canal Discovery Center** (24 Church St): Located in an old stone church, this museum provides exhibits on the history of the Erie Canal, the construction of the Flight of Five, and Lockport's development.²⁷ Passport to Your National Parks stamp location.
 - (POI) Other notable structures include the "upside down railroad bridge" (a truss bridge where the towpath passes underneath the railway) and the Exchange Street Lift Bridge.⁴⁹
 - (Serv) Food: **Stooges** (highly recommended by one cyclist for mac & cheese, burgers, beers ¹⁹), **Tom's Diner** (reported as popular with bikers ⁵⁵), **Lake Effect Ice Cream** (another cyclist favorite ³⁸). Numerous other dining and service options are available in town.³
 - (Serv) Lodging: Lockport Inn and Suites, Lockport Hotel, Comfort Inn.⁴³
 - (Hist) Lockport is officially designated as "The Gateway Trail Town," recognizing its importance to the canal and trail experience.³ The concentration of historical features, interpretive facilities, and cyclist amenities solidifies Lockport's status as a key showcase of canal heritage.
- **Leg 1.2: Lockport to Medina (Approx. 17 miles)** (SD, P) ⁵⁴
 - (Note) Leaving Lockport eastward, the trail continues to follow the Erie Canal, passing through agricultural landscapes, including farmlands and orchards, offering expansive open sky views.⁵⁴ The surface is a mix of stone dust and

paved sections.

- **Mile 30.0 - 42.2 (Approx.): Lockport to Middleport**
 - (Serv) **Middleport** (approx. 12.2 miles from Lockport, according to PTNY itinerary ⁵⁴): Cross the lift bridge (Main Street/Route 271) into the village. **Middleport Canal Park**, immediately to the right after crossing, offers public restrooms and a pleasant spot for a water or snack break. Several eateries are available on Main Street.⁵⁴
 - (POI) A notable Works Progress Administration (WPA) era mural can be viewed inside the Middleport Post Office.⁵⁴
 - (Serv) General services are available in Middleport.⁴⁴
- **Mile 42.2 - 47.0 (Approx.): Middleport to Medina**
 - (Note) This stretch is approximately 5 miles from Middleport to Medina.⁵⁴
- **Mile 47.0 (Approx.): Medina (SD, P, OR) (Serv: F, W, R, L, BS, Pkg ⁴³)**
 - (Access) To reach Main Street services from the trail (which is on the north bank), cross the canal on the Prospect Avenue/Route 63 bridge, then take the first left onto Commercial Street, which leads to Main Street.⁵⁴
 - (POI) **Medina Sandstone Architecture**: The village is known for its distinctive buildings constructed from locally quarried Medina Sandstone, a durable and attractive red, brown, or gray stone widely used in the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁵⁴
 - (POI) **Medina Railroad Museum** (530 West Ave): Housed in one of the largest surviving wooden freight depots in the U.S., this museum features extensive model train layouts and railroad artifacts.²⁷
 - (POI) **Culvert Road Tunnel (Knowlesville)**: A short distance east of Medina (approx. 2-3 miles, near Knowlesville) lies a truly unique canal feature: a road tunnel that passes *underneath* the Erie Canal. Cyclists can scramble down an embankment to walk through this stone-arched tunnel, experiencing the canal flowing overhead. It's described as "wondrous and alarming" and a highly recommended detour.⁵³ This is a "Hot on the Trail" POI.⁴⁹ The unique experience of standing beneath the canal makes this a memorable highlight.
 - (Serv) Food: **Avanti's Pizza & Wood Fired Kitchen**, **Zambistro** (fine dining), and **Rudy's Soda Bar and Café** are recommended dining options in Medina.⁵⁴
 - (Serv) Lodging: **Bent's Opera House** (boutique hotel), **Bunkhaus Hostel**, and **Hart House Hotel** offer unique accommodation choices.⁴³
 - (Hist) Medina is a designated Trail Town with services.³ The combination of its distinct local sandstone architecture and the proximity to the

one-of-a-kind Culvert Road tunnel gives Medina a special appeal, emphasizing the value of seeking out unique, localized points of interest along the trail.

- **Leg 1.3: Medina to Holley (Approx. 20.8 miles)** (SD, P) ⁵⁴
 - (Note) This leg continues eastward, predominantly on stone dust towpath, through rural landscapes.
 - **Mile 47.0 - 58.5 (Approx.): Medina to Albion**
 - (Note) The distance from Medina to Albion is approximately 11.5 miles.⁵⁴
 - **Mile 58.5 (Approx.): Albion** (SD, P, OR) (Serv: F, W, R, L, BS, Pkg ⁴³)
 - (POI) Albion is another charming canal village noted for its distinctive architecture and a prominent lift bridge (Main Street/Route 98).⁵⁴
 - (Serv) Public restrooms and showers are available in a small park on the village (south) side of the canal, accessible after crossing the lift bridge.⁵⁴
 - (Serv) Lodging: **Fair Haven Inn / Village Inn** (historic house with motel section, Tillman's Historic Village Inn Restaurant on premises ⁴³), **Dollinger's Motor Inn.**⁴³ **Comfort Inn & Suites** is also listed as an option in Albion.⁴⁵
 - (Hist) Albion is a recognized Trail Town offering various cyclist services.³
 - **Mile 58.5 - 67.8 (Approx.): Albion to Holley**
 - (Note) The distance from Albion to Holley Canal Park is approximately 9.3 - 9.7 miles.⁵⁴ The trail surface from Albion towards Brockport (which includes Holley) is primarily stone dust.⁵⁶
 - The Empire State Trail official description for the Albion to Brockport segment (14 miles total) notes it is an off-road stonedust trail passing by farmlands, woods, and offering scenic water views. Access is possible from public roads crossing the canal, but formal parking areas are few between the main villages.⁵⁶
 - **Mile 67.8 (Approx.): Holley** (SD, OR) (Serv: F, W, R, C, BS, Pkg ⁴³)
 - (Access) To access Holley Canal Park and village services, cross the lift bridge (East Avenue/Route 237) from the north-side towpath trail. The park is on the left (east side of East Ave) after crossing.⁵⁴
 - (POI) **Holley Canal Park:** A well-regarded stop featuring a playground, picnic tables, a fishing pond, and a scenic waterfall within the park grounds.⁴⁹
 - (POI) **Holley Canal Falls:** Described as one of the canal's "hidden gems." Follow local trail signs from the park to view the falls, which are a short distance away, created by an overflow weir from the canal.⁴⁹
 - (Serv) Public restrooms and showers are available at Holley Canal Park.⁵⁴
 - (Serv) Camping: **Holley Boater/Biker/Hiker Campsite** is located at Holley

River/Corn Hill)

- (Note) Approximately 10.8 miles from Spencerport to the City of Rochester.⁴⁴ The trail continues primarily paved, passing through suburban areas like Gates.
- (Serv) **Greece** (town west of Rochester): Restaurants, bike shop, water available near trail.⁴⁴
- (POI) **REI** (near Rochester, Henrietta): One cyclist noted a "giant REI right on the trail" which was a convenient stop for water and gear.¹⁹ This is likely the store at 3333 W Henrietta Rd, which is slightly south of the main Canalway Trail but accessible via connecting paths or short road rides.
- (POI) **Genesee Valley Park**: As the trail enters Rochester, it passes through the expansive Genesee Valley Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. The Erie Canal crosses the Genesee River within this park via a concrete trough bridge (historically an aqueduct). The park offers numerous recreational facilities and connections to the Genesee Riverway Trail.⁵¹
- (Access) Multiple access points and parking areas exist within Genesee Valley Park.
- **Mile 95.0 (Approx.): Rochester (Corn Hill / Downtown Area)** (P, OR) (Serv: Extensive F, W, R, L, C, BS, Pkg, Hist, POI ⁴³)
 - (POI) Rochester offers a wealth of attractions, including the **Strong National Museum of Play, George Eastman Museum** (photography and film), **Rochester Museum & Science Center**.²⁷
 - (POI) The Corn Hill Historic District, adjacent to the Genesee River and near the canal, features well-preserved 19th-century architecture.
 - (Hist) Rochester was a major "boomtown" created by the Erie Canal, known as the "Flour City" for its milling industry powered by the Genesee River.
 - (Serv) Extensive services of all types are available throughout Rochester. Numerous bike shops including **Park Avenue Bike Shop*** (multiple locations, rentals), **Tryon Bike*** (rentals), **Full Moon Vista Bike and Sport**.⁴⁸
 - (Note) The Erie Canalway Trail officially crosses the Genesee River and continues eastward. Cyclists wishing to explore downtown Rochester can use the Genesee Riverway Trail, which intersects with the Canalway Trail in Genesee Valley Park.⁴⁵
 - **Key Insight 2.1.4 (Segment Specific): Rochester as a Major Urban Hub and Historical Nexus**: Rochester represents the first major metropolitan area encountered after Buffalo. Its history is deeply intertwined with the

canal, and it offers a significant concentration of cultural attractions and services, making it a natural multi-day stop or resupply point.

- **Reasoning:** Rochester's historical significance as a canal "boomtown" is well-documented.⁴ The presence of major museums²⁷ and extensive services⁴³ marks it as a key urban center along the route. The intersection with the Genesee Riverway Trail also provides additional recreational and navigational options.

(Continued in next response due to length constraints)

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