

RIDING HIGH IN JEFFERSON COUNTY



This is the kind of bridge we need more of across the state – with a dedicated lane for bikers and snowmobilers. Note the curving design of this span over State Highway 26 near Jefferson Junction.

If you've ever driven between Madison and Milwaukee, you've traveled through Jefferson County – but have you ever snowmobiled there? If not, it's a place you should consider in the future because the trail network is extensive and the riding can be prime.

I live in western Waukesha County, just half a dozen miles east of the Jefferson County line. The Glacial Drumlin State Trail, which traverses Jefferson County along its 42-mile route between Waukesha and Cottage Grove, is my primary avenue into the county. When snow conditions are good in southeastern Wisconsin, this is where I enjoy a lot of great riding.

Jefferson County is characterized by a variety of natural and man-made geographic features that help delineate the trail network. The two most prominent natural ones are the Rock and Crawfish Rivers, which both run north to south in the northern half of the county before their confluence within the city of Jefferson. From there, the Rock flows south to Lake Koshkonong, a large body of water in the county's southwest corner. The rivers divide the county into two halves, forming a barrier to snowmobile travel, with a limited number of crossing points.

The primary man-made geographic features are Interstate Highway 94 and the Glacial Drumlin Trail, the latter being a former right of way for the Chicago & North Western Railway between Waukesha and Madison. These two east-west corridors parallel each other just a few miles apart as they bisect the county. The Drumlin Trail is a prime snowmobile route that serves as a strong backbone to the county's extensive trail network and makes possible numerous loop trips of varying distance.

Although I typically initiate my explorations from home, I decided to take a different approach for this article, trailering to

a starting point north of Watertown and then making a daylong circuit. My friend Todd Schei, who was coming from Sun Prairie, met me at the BP Station just off State Highway 16, where we parked our trailers and began our journey. The station – which has a sizeable parking area – is on a spur trail that is part of the trail system marked and maintained by the Silver Creek Riders, one of Jefferson County's 18 clubs.

Our tour was on an ideal Friday in early February, with sunny skies and temperatures near 20 degrees. Trail conditions were excellent and we enjoyed smooth riding for the majority of our 111-mile journey, making the day a real pleasure.

We set off to the west, riding briefly through a portion of Dodge County as we cruised around the north side of Watertown. Then we turned southwest back into Jefferson County for the first leg toward Grellton and Milford, running on the west side of the Rock River. Our route was over gently rolling agricultural land that was interspersed with occasional woodlots, making for a very enjoyable ride.

At Milford, the trail took us over the frozen Crawfish River, then west before passing north of Lake Mills and Rock Lake, where we turned southward for our ride down the western edge of the county. Along the way, a red fox came bounding through the snow and ran across the trail in front of us. For several miles, busy Interstate 94 was visible in the distance to our left, but eventually the trail passed beneath the highway and then across the Glacial Drumlin Trail en route to Lake Ripley.

Our lunch venue was the Lake Ripley Inn, a popular pit stop for sledders that is just off State Corridor Trail #15. Since it was Friday, ordering the fish fry was an easy and tasty choice.

After enjoying our meal, we set off again, heading south toward Lake Koshkonong. We skirted the north side of the lake (which was a couple of miles away and out of sight) before



Through the generosity of countless landowners – like the owner of this farm – Jefferson County boasts an extensive trail network that includes 183 miles of funded routes, as well as approximately 290 miles of club trails.

turning northeast toward Jefferson. Before long we were on a segment designated as the Maynard Landowski Memorial Trail, another nice route over gently rolling terrain that was groomed to perfection.

Approaching the city of Jefferson, the trail crossed over the new State Highway 26 bypass, then alongside that four-lane road to the Crawfish River, which we crossed on the U.S. Highway 18 bridge. Continuing north, the trail ran through the edge of the county fairgrounds, the site of a major snowmobile swap meet every autumn.

At the Glacial Drumlin Trail, we turned east and crossed the Rock River on a long and high trestle bridge, left in place after the railroad abandoned the line and now enjoyed by hikers, bikers and snowmobilers. Near Jefferson Junction, the trail ran through a tunnel and then over the road on a beautiful new bridge that included a dedicated lane for bikes and snowmobiles.

At Jefferson Junction, we drove by the former Fleischmann Malting Company plant, a gargantuan landmark with a dozen huge silos that is visible for miles in every direction. As we passed, a parade of loaded trucks was turning in to the facility, which is now an ethanol plant.

The Drumlin Trail took us east to Helenville, where we stopped at the Wingin' It tavern for a soda break. When we departed town and headed north, we passed a pair of DNR wardens who were alongside the trail, watching for unregistered sleds.

The final leg back to Watertown was via Farmington and Concord, where we crossed over I-94 and then enjoyed more miles over undulating farmland. At Pipersville, the trail took us across the rapidly flowing Rock River on a road bridge, then continued north. After crossing the CP Rail mainline – where two Amtrak and numerous freight trains pass each day – we crossed State Highway 16. From there, it was just another half dozen miles back to the trailers and the end of a great day of riding.

Jefferson County at a Glance

The Jefferson County Snowmobile Alliance (JCSA) includes 18 AWSC-affiliated clubs who operate six groomers over an extensive network that includes 182.7 miles of funded trails, as well as 290 miles of club trails. For information on snow and trail conditions, call (920) 699-7669. For a complete list of JCSA member clubs visit the Alliance web site at www.jcswi.com or the AWSC site at www.awsc.org. **WSN**