

GRAVEL GUIDE

Hungary



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**What is
„Gravel”?**

**How to choose
a gravel bike...**

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**4 Gravel Bike
Tour around
Lake Balaton**

**Gravel
Paradise**

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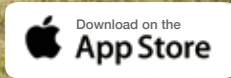




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Balaton BIKE365



Photo: János Tirszin

Gravel Encounters

In this publication we try our best introducing cycling newest trend, gravel bike and its spirit. The first is a technical device, the second is a style of riding, and the two terms carry a different meaning for most riders. Numerous definitions and approaches can be found on the following pages. Hopefully the publication succeeds at depicting the new riding style for the uninitiated, as well as offering incentive to try it, perhaps in our gravel paradise, the foothills of Lake Balaton. For those who are already familiar with this style of riding, perhaps these pages provide some assistance to fine-tune equipment and plan new adventures.

While working on Gravel Guide, I was looking for definitions, however it turned out that the task is next to impossible. In fact, that's what makes gravel so exceptional. Nonetheless one word stands out: Encounters. Different categories of bicycles, landscapes, terrains, paved roads and forest paths come across and merge. And let's not forget the people, riders who take part in this sport. Then from all the host of variables an unforgettable adventure is born.

Tamás Takács – editor

Gravel bike

a do-it-all machine or an unparalleled experience?

What factors contribute to the ever increasing popularity of the gravel bike? The primary one is the quickness, as most cyclists prefer a fast and versatile touring bike as opposed to the conventional design based on comfort. Of course, the definition of the gravel bike is not so simple...

In addition to the electrically assisted bicycle, the gravel bike displayed the most dynamic development in the last decade. This bicycle category only surfaced a few years ago, and the term "gravel" was first applied in the mid-2010s. Designated touring bikes existed before, but cyclists preferred to build them part by part as opposed to purchasing a ready to ride model. Such bikes have been primarily used to cover long distances at a more rapid pace than on a cross or trekking bicycle.

Swiftness requires a more dynamic body position, hence bike manufacturers opted to use a drop handlebar for gravel riding. And since adventure cyclists will eventually end up riding unpaved road sections, these bikes have been prepared to deal with such requirements as well. Conventional road bikes cannot handle trails due to the narrow slick tires. On previous touring bikes the tire size and the brake performance was improved to some extent enabling the bike to be taken off road, and these can be considered ancestors of the modern day gravel bike. Users also tended to tune the touring bike according to their specific requirements just like it's done today on gravel bikes.

The widespread use of disc brakes a decade ago provided the main push for the

development of the new gravel category. Following in the footsteps of mountain bikes, more cyclocross and road bikes were equipped with effective disc brake systems enabling light drop bar





bikes to be taken on unpaved trails. Disc brakes facilitate bike control for less experienced riders, who lack the skills of a professional. With the use of modern disc braking, manufacturers finally have the freedom to specify larger volume tires (up to 40–50mm) to further enhance bike control on dirt roads.

From the technical perspective, gravel bikes derived from the world of cyclocross racing. Whereas the latter are primarily used for competitions, the frame design and geometry of the new genre targets the general public. Notwithstanding the user-friendly intention, drop handlebar and unusually wide tires are employed to allow serious off road riding. Presently gravel bikes are generally a replacement for not only the cyclocross, but also for the popular flat bar fitness category, both becoming more “gravel-oriented”.

The popularity of gravel bikes is also apparent in competitive riding. Recently many gravel races popped up, some sanctioned by the international governing body, the UCI, where top competitors and amateurs hit the dust on sub 18 pound lightweight carbon bikes. On the other end of the gravel spectrum, bike riders favoring touring and



adventures ride sturdy steel bikes which can take bags without the use of frame racks. This enables long-distance off-road riding unhindered by the burden of conventional luggage. This category has its own name: "bikepacking". The present publication will cover both gravel segments in detail.

Nowadays gravel biking is more than a bike category: it's an out-and-out lifestyle. While its definition is rather ambiguous, we'll attempt to explain it from two sides. From the technical aspect the main attribute is the use of the drop bar, similar to the ones seen on road bikes, but the frame is designed around wide tires to allow for enjoyable off road riding for the average cyclist. **Such a**

bike is capable of being ridden on a variety of terrain at a relatively fast pace, outshining the flat bar MTB, cross and trekking bike on well-maintained dirt roads, also virtually matching the speed of road bikes on tarmac.





The term “gravel” refers to roads covered usually by fine stones. From lifestyle perspective gravel riding is best described by a member of our local community in Café du Cycliste:

Gravel unifies dirt and tarmac, the rider thus can access special destinations on a variety of road surfaces, linking up public roads and trails. “Gravel” therefore encompasses almost any surface ridden by the average cyclist.

The gravel rider is only limited in road choice by the width and tread of the tire and his or her riding skill. Finally, the challenge posed by the terrain overrides the endurance aspect of riding.

Gravel riding can be either an adventure or a race. Its definition encompasses both: it’s your choice which aspect is more appealing. One day you may be fighting it out to be the first to cross the finish line, the next you are discovering new routes in the wilderness. It’s only up to you!

A gravel bike doesn’t have to be a specific type: it can be converted from many different

bikes, and the cost may vary on a very wide scale. The designated models are the best match for the intended purpose, nevertheless your present bike can also be tuned for the job.

All in all, gravel gives you freedom to go on adventures. Your bike can be tailored to your specific needs, you can freely customize it to your liking.



How to

CHOOSE A GRAVEL BIKE?

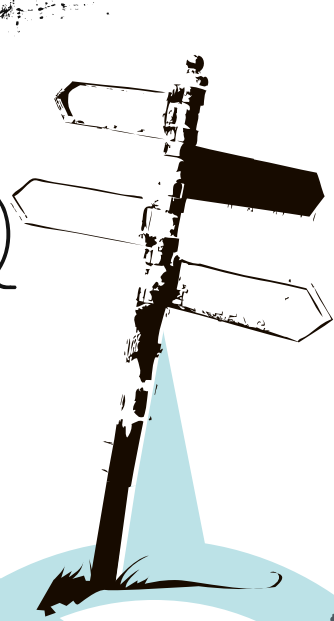
The first question you have to ask yourself when buying a gravel bike is whether this type of bicycle is appropriate for your needs and lifestyle. The choice may also be influenced by the number of bikes in the shed: is it going to be your only bicycle or to compliment other machines you already ride.

WHAT KIND OF TERRAIN?

One of the main criteria when buying a gravel bike is the type of terrain you ride. Keep in mind, gravel models in general are not suitable for challenging trail riding. You have to be very experienced or skillful in controlling the bike to enjoy riding a gravel bike on mountain bike tracks. That is to say that **a gravel bike is most suitable for leisure cycling on built roads, surfaced with tarmac or fine gravel, and perhaps relatively smooth dirt trails.** Hiking trails or tracks found on higher mountain ranges are generally covered with larger rocks and tree roots, involve steep descending, making gravel bikes much less appropriate. In Hungary the Lake Balaton region features well-maintained dirt roads negotiating vineyards, these are predominantly gravel surfaced. Such quiet lanes specially lend themselves for gravel riding. Likewise, in order to cover long distances swiftly on mixed road surfaces, the gravel bike is a good option. **All in all, gravel bicycles are intended for exercise, leisure riding and possible commuting, on varied, but not too challenging terrain.**

FOR LEISURE AND ADVENTURE RIDERS

Prior to purchasing the first gravel bike, it's sensible to have some experience riding on road bikes in order to avoid the familiarization process with the drop handlebar setup. Thus the gravel bike is a good choice for road rid-





ers who wish to link up tarmac roads with some back-country paths, chiefly to fight the monotony of riding the familiar training grounds.

This does not mean that gravel riding is not

suitable for MTB enthusiasts, in fact, it makes for a great second bike to improve fitness and endurance. Skilled riders have little difficulty getting used to riding a road handlebar on trails. The less experienced will probably have to spend more time on hard surface roads: the good news is that gravel bikes sacrifice very little compared to the skinny-wheel road bike when it comes to fast pace.

Finally, the gravel bike makes a lot of sense for those venturing on long rides and cycling adventures. A conventional touring bike with the frame racks holding the luggage makes riding off-road a chore, while modern gravel models usually take all kinds of bags without the need of a rack. This arrangement is more stable as well as being faster.

Looking at the scenarios above, it's evident that gravel bikes appeal to a wide range of riders. Since gravel has many subcategories and options to customize the setup, choosing the right one is essential for every buyer.



CYCLOCROSS VS. GRAVEL

Although cyclocross, road and gravel bikes look similar to the naked eye, their frame geometry and ride character is markedly different. Gravel bikes are mostly intended for sporty adventure riding, their cyclocross brethren target a special branch of competitive sport. They show more similarities with the conventional road bikes, their frame angles, the short head tube, seat stays are more or less the same,

hence both types are agile in handling, ideal for quickly changing direction and sprinting. The main difference between road and CX is the latter's slightly wider knobby tire, limited to 33mm by the International Governing Body (UCI). The compact frame design of both leave no space for fenders, bags, racks and other accessories. Hence they are chiefly aimed at performance-oriented riding, offer little comfort, and require good fitness that not all potential cy-





clists possess. One can sense that most riders require a different type of bike for an enjoyable cycling experience.

This is where gravel bikes come into the picture. Their frame dimensions and tube angles are rather different, the head tube angle is shallower, allowing for more stable handling. Additionally, a shorter top tube paired with a taller head allows for a more upright body position. The longer chainstays leave more room

for mounting bags and accessories, thus widening its potential application. This new bike breed with a drop handlebar empowers the rider with increased efficiency and a faster pace while providing a more suitable body position to cover long distances. The frame design accommodates wider tires that offer better traction, more control and a generally comfortable ride. Typically 38-45mm size tires are used which make the gravel bike suitable for dirt roads.

CUSTOMIZATION

Many gravel bikes not only give you the choice to mount bags and use different tire widths, but tolerates the use of different wheel diameters. A popular choice is the 27.5" size which is slightly smaller than the road and cyclocross wheel, altering the ride feel, further increasing control, traction and comfort. Some gravel models are even designed to take front suspension in the form of a telescoping fork or a special stem. The gravel bike can take all types of accessories including fenders (mudguards) and a variety of specially designed frame bags for more customization, thus serving as a full-fledged touring bike, a commuter, a road training bike as well as other applications.

SPECIAL FEATURES

The parts on gravel bikes show a greater variety than found in other bicycle categories. Gearing for example can be the conventional double front chainring setup found on road bikes, or a single ring made popular on current mountain bikes. The latter uses a 40 or 42 tooth front chainring with a wide range 10-42T rear cogset for simplicity. Fortunately both configurations are available straight from the factory. All gravel bikes offer disc brake systems, either the reliable and more budget-friendly mechanical setup or the more performance-oriented hydraulic. Furthermore the handlebar shape shows more variation than on road and cyclocross bikes, providing the rider the choice of some degree of flair and rise. These options can greatly enhance the ergonomics of a gravel bike, allowing some customization accord-



ing to need and application. In addition, wider bar options leave more room to mount handlebar bikepacking bags. Finally, there is a myriad of different tire tread designs to personalize the ride character according to the terrain and personal preference.

WHICH GRAVEL BIKE SETUP?

- If you ride mostly on tarmac, the gearing should be modified toward the higher speeds, preferably with a double front chainring setup as opposed to a single. The tire can be as narrow as 35mm with little tread which makes the bike slightly faster when riding on paved roads.
- If you have your sights on competing in the ever more frequent gravel races, or would like to chase personal best times on given routes, choosing the right bike geometry becomes crucial. Then the gravel frame should mimic road bike geometry, and the frame material –

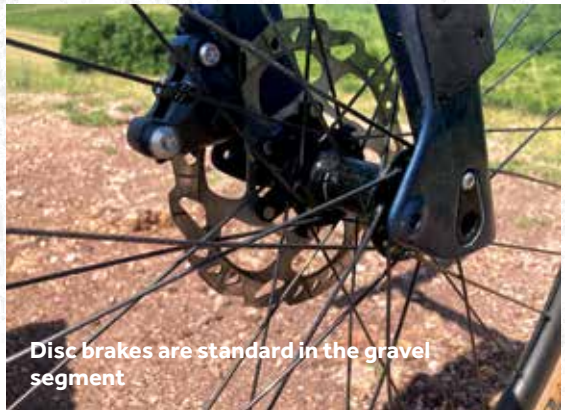
The Bianchi Arcadex is a good all-rounder gravel bike



The aerodynamic 3T Exploro is a popular choice for gravel racing



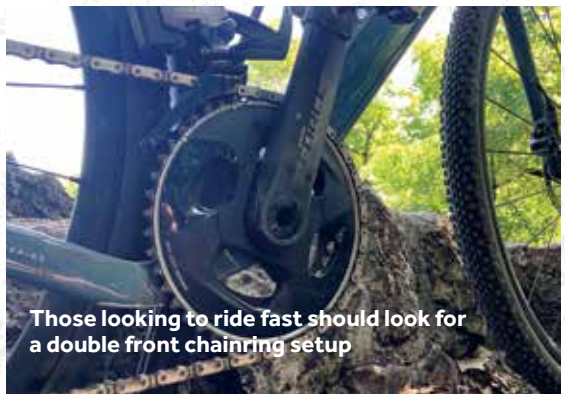
The Merida Silex is a gravel bike designed for off-road riding



Disc brakes are standard in the gravel segment



Cannondale CaadX cyclocross aluminum frame built up primarily for bike touring



Those looking to ride fast should look for a double front chainring setup

budget permitting – needs to be carbon composite for low weight and good power transfer. Further requirement is a light wheelset, preferably set up tubeless to improve ride quality, save weight and lessen the chance of an untimely puncture.

- If you envision discovering new places on your gravel bike, your frame should have shallower head tube angle, longer top tube and a short stem to increase stability and ease of handling on challenging terrain. The maximum tire size the frame accommodates also needs to be considered as bumpy trails require more traction and comfort. Finally the gearing should also be tuned lower for rough conditions, steep gradients.

- If you are looking for a companion for long-distance bike touring far-away, reliability

becomes paramount. It's best to choose steel as the frame material which can be repaired in most places, including third world countries. Steel also provides more sturdy attachment points for accessories lessening the chance of problems. This trusted material is reported to give a springier, comfortable ride. For long distance touring a mechanical disc brake is preferable to the more effective and modern hydraulic, since it can be adjusted or repaired with basic tools. The same can be said for the transmission, which should be as simple as possible providing care-free and reliable gear selection.



BALATONBIKE365:

No matter the type of bike or occasion, when it comes to cycling, Hungarians generally target for the Balaton. Landscape and road conditions dictate that a gravel bike is the best candidate, and undoubtedly it's best to find routes where cycling is truly enjoyable. The BalatonBIKE365 program was set up to assist riders to discover the most suitable roads in the region, but it does way more.

LAKE BALATON AS A BIKE PARADISE:

When cycling at Balaton is mentioned, most think of the bikeway circumventing the lake. For many it's a bucket list item, either as a single day endeavor or as a multi-day adventure. As the largest lake in Central-Europe, the Balaton shoreline can be pedaled completely on signed cycle paths with a touristic spectacle practically in every mile along the way. This aspect may be particularly appealing to the general public who are not deeply involved with bike riding. But for those who take the sport seriously, who use the bicycle as part of their lives or like to train, riding along the lakeside paths among the holiday-makers are much less tempting. Fortunately the **region offers so much more: the famous vineyards and cottages in the surrounding hills are generally connected by double track dirt or gravel roads, making its infrastructure ideal for adventure cycling.** In recent years, some of these rural roads have been surfaced, however the traffic remains very moderate. Although the lakeside is bustling with tourists during the holiday season, a handful of miles away a surprisingly quiet and peaceful countryside awaits the visitor, mostly surrounded by vine-



GRAVEL PARADISE



yards, with many lookout points, natural springs and other spectacles. The abundance of dirt roads makes the variety of routes seem endless. The BalatonBIKE365 program was set up to promote Lake Balaton as a cycling destination year round. There's a reason why this publication features so many routes in the Balaton region: one is hard-pressed to find such a varied landscape with magnificent lookout points anywhere in the country. BalatonBIKE365 not only aims to endorse the area as a cycling destination, but highlights all the various activities to compliment the ride experience. This could be a family bike trip to one of the beaches on the lakeshore, or to a

well-known ice cream shop located around the quay. Likewise a cycling adventure may be combined with fine dining or other special-interest activity, else simply to discover the hidden secrets in the countryside. Balaton has so much to offer!

WHAT IS BALATONBIKE365?

The BalatonBIKE365 is the first project to undertake comprehensive cycling development within a specified region in Hungary. Its purpose is not only to develop cycle road infrastructure or to organize bike-related social programs, but all the above, accompanied by other strategies,

all in a well-coordinated strategy. At the heart of the BalatonBIKE365 program is the **800km (500 mi) signposted cycling route around the well-known Balaton bikeway, organized into several thematic bike tour itineraries and 3 regional bike centers** in Balatonföldvár, Balatonfüred and Keszthely, where cyclist have resources at their disposal to plan bike rides, rent bikes and much more. Moreover, the establishment of the BalatonBIKE365 saw the creation of a completely new IT background, including a comprehensive website written in several languages, as well as a dedicated app with GPS navigation function to guide cyclists along the chosen routes. **The www.balatonbike365.hu website was designed to handle a dynamic database to gather the region's cycling-friendly providers, furthermore local spectacles, programs which may appeal to bike riders at large.** On-board a modern gravel bike, all these places can be visited and relished.

BALATONBIKE365FEST GRAVEL EVENTS

BalatonBIKE365Fest is a series of events in the Balaton region, including two gravel rides



BalatonBIKE365 signposts around the Balaton hills

on the north and the south side of the lake. **The distance of these events are tailored to the**





capabilities of average bike riders as opposed to the gravel racer. Thus participants are presented with a chance to glimpse into the world of gravel racing, experience the terrain these bikes are meant to be ridden on. The northern shore event was hosted by the picturesque village of Balatonszőlős, where partakers cycled 44km (28 mi) along sections of pre-set BalatonBIKE365 routes on July 12th. A much more difficult task awaited gravel enthusiast and novice alike in the south: the second event left the Alirét hunting lodge near Balatonföldvár on August 13th covering 54km (35 mi) with over 1100m (3500 ft) of elevation and some seriously steep hills along the way. Despite what common knowledge may let you believe, South Balaton is far from flat! Perhaps it's best to let a foreign rider talk about this event, so let's hand over to Nathaniel Wallis from Holland to recollect his experiences of **the BalatonBIKE365Fest ride as well as cycling the region as such.**

The route gave a great taste of what Lake Balaton has to offer for gravel riding. It was a good distance, long enough to be challenging when ridden at max effort but you could also cruise around in a more relaxed manner and enjoy the quiet scenery. I enjoyed the mix of quiet back roads, long gravel

sections and a small amount of single track. There was a variation of interesting climbs and the descents were so much fun. It was very cool being able to catch glimpses of Lake Balaton in the distance and the views were awesome.

Organization of the day was smooth and seamless. The location was easy to get to from Budapest, organizers spoke English (which was really helpful!) and junctions were manned with police officers to make the ride feel very secure. Chip-based timing was included so we could quickly get an accurate finish time and see how we ranked.

This was the best gravel event I've ridden so far; I'll happily return in the future!

Lake Balaton is an ideal gravel riding location. There's a huge variety of gravel roads to choose from, from dry dusty hard pack, to sandy loose sections and fast farm tracks. Once you're done with riding, there's plenty of towns and villages to explore, grab some food in or cool off with a post-ride swim in the lake. Staying around Lake Balaton there's plenty of places to choose from that are close to amazing gravel roads. Additionally, Lake Balaton is very well connected to Budapest by train which means it's also the perfect location for a day trip or an overnight bikepacking adventure for those traveling from abroad.

Photos: KLND - Karancsi Rudolf

WHERE DOES THIS NARROW DIRT ROAD LEAD?

Interview with the Hungarian gravel authority, Marcell Gangel

Marcell Gangel's events and the KLND.eu are synonymous with Hungarian gravel biking. Most local cyclists are familiar with the Hungarian Divide, a 1400km (870 mi) race across the country on dirt roads and trails- Marcell also established a new event called Balaton Bike Derby, as well as a series of one day gravel races. His story is a fitting introduction to the local gravel scene.





How did gravel riding come into your life?

For me the most appealing aspect is cycling is discovering locations where I have never gone before. It all started with a scooter at the age of 14. Mine could be used both on and off-road. I was always intrigued what would happen if I took this small dirt road, and where it would lead. Soon I got to know every nook and cranny of my homeland in Vas county. Time passed, the obsession with scootering gradually transitioned into endurance sports, finally to bike riding. Nowadays I don't ride with an engine at all.

Back in 2016, I read about the so-called gravel bike. Immediately I realized that this is what I was always looking for: it united my love for discovering places with fitness and endurance. Soon I bought my first gravel bike, and continued my adventures just where I left off with scooters. I have not looked back since.

Which came first: the bikepacking trend or gravel bikes?

It's difficult to say, I think they evolved independently. Riding dirt roads was nothing special

at the birth of cycling: in fact most roads were unpaved for a long time. Roads evolved, gradually more and more were surfaced, first with gravel, later with tarmac. It all started with dirt/gravel, later bikes evolved to take advantage of the better road surface. The desire to tour on bikes also dates back to the 1800's, went in and out of fashion, never disappeared.

I consider bikepacking and gravel riding to be two sets which intersect, so one is not a subset of the other. It's possible to do bikepacking on any bike or ride a gravel bike without any bags and accessories. The intersection is actually not all that wide: gravel bikes are used for all kinds of riding, and relatively rarely for touring, but then bikepack touring today is predominantly done on the new breed gravel bikes. It's the perfect machine for these endeavors: it's efficient to pedal, enables riders to cover long distances, can be used on any road surface or entirely off-road.

How did you become the Hungarian gravel "guru"?

When I bought my first gravel bike in 2017, one

of my first rides was on the Torino-Nizza Rally, a truly unforgettable bikepacking experience. I came home with a huge grin on my face, bursting with emotions, and said to myself: this experience needs to be replicated in Hungary! I immediately set up a Facebook chat group where we started discussing the possibilities of organizing gravel rides in Hungary. The first event was a night out in the Börzsöny Mountains near Budapest. Based on this experience, and what I learned in the Alps, we started organizing a larger event. It was soon established that the ultimate goal would be a route that crossed the country. First time around we weren't sure we could pull off such a challenge, hence the Five Peaks 500 was born. It takes riders through Hungary's North-Eastern mountain range encompassing five peaks in the Börzsöny, Mátra, Bükk and Zemplén region. As the event was clearly a success, we continued to pursue our original goal establishing the **Hungarian Divide. We set it up for two distances: the longer version is a 1400km (870 mi) out and out bikepacking adventure route.** In addition, we offer the Balaton Bike Derby, which is a much easier, shorter endeavor, an ideal entry into the world of organized bikepacking. It can be completed as a one day gravel race or a leisurely 3-4 day biking adventure. The former continues to draw a field of competitive gravel riders, which convinced us that there is a demand for single-day races



Photos: Tamás Szabó

in our county. Thus in 2022 we set up four such one-day events to complement the other familiar bikepacking adventures.

How extensive is the interest for such events in Hungary and how does gravel fit into local cycling culture?

The social aspect of gravel and adventure riding is the distinct feature. A new hub of cycling enthusiasts emerged, who regularly take part in all the available organized events. These riders also organize their own gravel outings, they get new cyclists to join in. In our events approximately 20% of participants have a competitive spirit, they are mainly there to thrash their peers. The rest come for a social experience. They want to enjoy their leisure time with like-mind-



ed folks, they usually go to the pub after the ride, and spend a night in a remote lookout point in their tent. The majority I think is here for the fun and adventure aspect, and these people are the core of the new phenomena. We may call our event a race, and some will certainly consider it as competition, but those are in the minority. For them it's probably not a new sport: they could have entered any other type of bike race in the calendar.

What differentiates your events from the other organized mass rides, gran fondo and MTB marathon happenings?

This feature is taking shape at the moment: not only here in Europe, but also in the heartland of gravel, America. In contrast with other cycling

events the distances are much longer. Our one-day gravel rides are generally 130-140km (80-90 mi) long, and include 1500-2000m (5000-8000 ft) of elevation gain, international gravel events are generally even longer and more difficult to complete. The most famous one is Unbound Gravel which is 200 mi long, and there are plenty of 100-120 mi events worldwide. Despite the huge distance, a gravel race attracts a large and wider audience, numbering several thousand in the USA. This is remarkable, since one would think that shorter events are more compelling for the wider public.

Most of our routes are off-road, paved sections merely serve to connect these. The chosen asphalt roads are always low-traffic and as-

sure maximum safety. We do our best to include more dirt roads that are hard packed, built with stones, to make the route more gravel-like, but in reality we have much fewer stone covered roads than in America. It's not possible to design a route with predominantly gravel surface. We tend to have double-track dirt roads, intended originally for horse carriages, later used by agricultural machinery. These are often linked up by paved forestry roads in order to design a feasible route.



These gravel events are also special since the routes rarely overlap. Organizers don't generally design loops into the course, like on most MTB and road competitions. We usually go from point A to B, or do one large loop. The advantage of this route design is the greater variety of landscape for the riders to experience, the flipside is that these are more difficult to organize, less predictable and the greater chance of things to go wrong. Gravel races in general don't use cordons to mark the course, and may include some sections that are hard to negotiate due to trail damage by the weather or other issues. There are two schools of thought when it comes to course marking: in America there are quite a few events with absolutely no marking, so every participant must use a GPS computer to navigate. This is most typical of single-day races. On the other hand, there are some events where or-

ganizers do full course marking, and direct traffic on the paved public roads. Our events are a halfway house: we paint arrows to show direction at every junction, which helps riders to find the way, so they spend less time staring at the GPS navigation. We think this extra effort on the part of the organizers makes the event more professional, go some way to validate the entry fee we charge.

Finally we consider the scenery and ride aspect of the course design to be very important. We do our best to include at least 3-4 sections or lookout points which catch the eyes of participants. **There is usually a lot of positive feedback about the scenery, highlighting the spots we put in to please riders.** We also get feedback from the races, who are pushing the envelope during the event, which illustrates that the scenery is so profound, that even they managed to take notice.

Another important element of course design is the social aspect. This can be underlined by the design of the start/finish area and the feed stops in order to provide a better ride atmosphere. **We do our best to make the event feel more like a small country fest than a bike race.**

We don't hand out nutrition gels, tortilla chips and canned coke at the feed stops, instead we set up a proper food with traditional local nourishment. The food is less race-focused, which we believe adds to the ride experience. We organize more and more events with a pre- and post-event party with music in order to get the participants to stay and build on the experience while socializing with like-minded folks. This is one area we'd like to develop as well as getting more women riders in our events. Allowing E-bikes at the events should also open a door for another group of cyclists. Many are looking to enhance their riding which they normally do with motor-assisted cycling. It fits nicely into our ethos the participants are not required to have 300W leg power to stand on the start line. It would be nice to follow in the footsteps of gravel races abroad - albeit with a slight lag - and grad-

ually gather a broad range of participants to ride these gravel and adventure events. One or two of these could be made into an out and out annual mass sport happening with 500-1000, or more, participants.

Let's finally transfer from events to our main topic of this publication, the gravel bike. Who is this new breed of bikes for?

There are two ways to answer this question. One is the gravel bike's unique capability to unite the two main disciplines of cycling: MTB and road riding. There is a significant number of riders in both camps, who wish to open their horizon towards the other segment, and this bike offers something in-between. The trail rider need not lean on the top tube of a road bike and stare at the pavement for hours on end, while the "rodie" is not forced to ride steep downhill trails at neck breaking speed. **This gravel bike allows riders to experience something unique, covering long distances, linking all types of roads in order to get to places, which are not easily accessed by either bikes in question.** This is the essence of gravel riding.

There is the other perspective: the rider who has no deep roots in any discipline of cycling – granted they are the majority –, and simply want

a good, modern bike for leisure riding, one that provides the most enjoyment in most circumstances. This type of rider is simply looking to take outings in their free time, maybe through the forest, the park, the canal pathway, possibly on city streets. They commonly have plans to improve fitness, but do not envision a great endeavor or entering organized rides. The gravel bike can serve as an introduction into cycling, either on or off-road, thus it's just the right bike for beginners.

Thanks for your time, and the detailed explanation of what KLND is about!



HOW TO PLAN A GRAVEL RIDE?

It may be evident from the different sections of this publication that gravel as "genre" is quite diversified, yet it carries more or less the same meaning for many: adventure on two wheels. This is precisely the reason why it's rather difficult to offer guidance on planning gravel routes, conversely this section is an attempt to lay down the chief guidelines.

A gravel ride can be as short as 20km (12 mi), or as long as 200 or 2000, and the time to cover it also varies greatly. It's often useless to give advice on these aspects as they really depend greatly on personal ability and preference. But as a general rule gravel riding tend to target extremities, thus tilting the ability vs. challenge balance toward the latter.

When it comes to choosing the right gravel bike and the type of terrain, the guidance is more definitive: **it's best to avoid exceeding the limits of both our own capabilities and that of**





the bike. Otherwise the rider may end up in severe difficulty when the equipment fails, as well as being forced to push the bike when the terrain is too difficult to ride.#

In addition, planning a satisfying route itself takes skill and experience. And who better to take guidance from than the best known organizer of gravel events in Hungary, Marcell Gangel.#

EXPERIENCE

For the best experience during a single-day gravel ride, it's advisable to limit the distance to 60-80km (40-55 mi), and also to include 2-3 rest stops with some scenery or cultural spectacle as well as a memorable destination. The stops can also serve as a place to refuel. Although riding non-stop for 50 miles on dirt roads looks good on paper, it's probably not ideal. The intermediate stops certainly add to the ride experience, and the time spent is no great loss for cyclists who are choosing the gravel genre. The route itself should also be designed to provide an exploit, chiefly by making it exploratory, else a novelty for the rider. A unique experience tends to stay with us for a long time, needless to say that busy paved roads should be avoided.

EQUIPMENT

First and foremost, the rider should have handlebar-mounted GPS navigation. The smartphone with a secure mount and a protective case is an entry-level solution, they are widely available from many brands and places. Nevertheless they are far from ideal, and a paper map is an even poorer substitute. When it comes to navigation, adventure riding necessitates dedicated technology. Although the apps for phones work well in everyday situations, no phones offer more than a few hours of live screen GPS operation, so if you



choose this path, it's best to put the phone in energy saving mode. For a truly trouble-free ride experience, you'll have to get hold of a cycling-specific GPS device. The price of these have gone down in recent years, and are now available from many budget brands like Bryton or IGSports as well as the industry leader Garmin. The price starts as low as HUF40,000, however it is worth spending a little more for better reliability.

MANUAL OR APP-ASSISTED ROUTE PLANNING?

Those not familiar with route planning from other recreational activities are advised to refrain from planning from scratch. It maybe worthwhile to consult bike forums and social groups like KLND.hu for route advice, or choose one of the many ready-made ones on the website.

In case you don't heed this advice or perhaps have some experience in other activities, it's still best to take advantage of the assistance



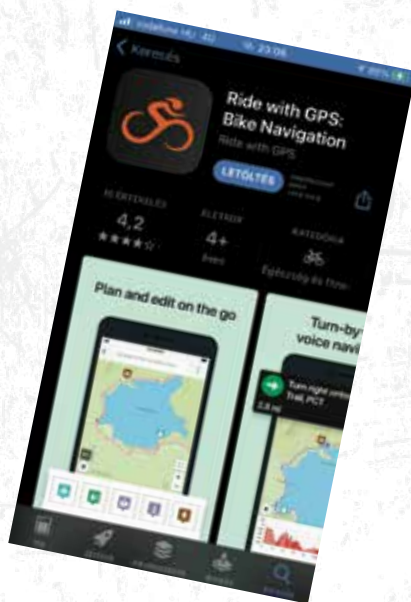
of some of the popular route planning apps like Komoot, Rides with GPS, Bikemap. Their algorithms employ heat map technology, meaning, the apps refer to rides posted by oth-



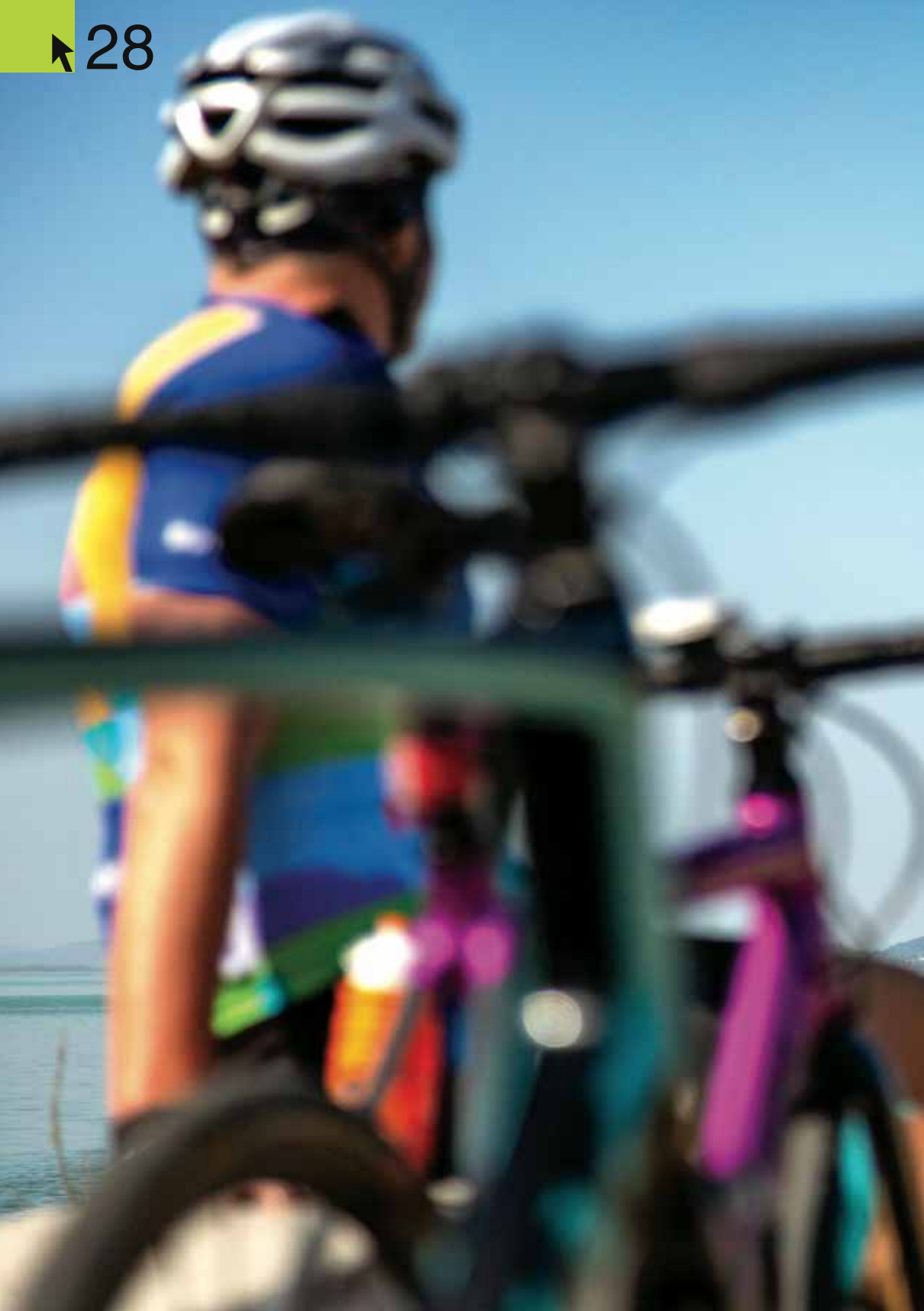


er cyclists, and use the most frequented, best rated ones to plan one based on your requirements. In most cases these routes are hard to beat, as the better ones have probably been discovered and used by others. If alternative trails seem to exist, and the app doesn't include it, it's most likely to traverse private land, or is not properly maintained.

Despite all said beforehand, **tackling unfamiliar, difficult to access trails may in fact enhance the adventure experience of more advanced cyclists.** Nevertheless our advice for most riders would be to play it safe, and avoid



taking unnecessary risks. Getting stuck in deep mud, fighting through overgrown vegetation, having to turn back due to a fence is not fun, and will probably not advance the enjoyment of a gravel ride.




Gravel Tour offers around Lake Balaton

What the Lake Balaton offers to gravel riders: The famous vineyards and cottages in the surrounding hills are generally connected by double track dirt or gravel roads, making its infrastructure ideal for adventure cycling. Although the lakeside is bustling with tourists during the holiday season, a handful of miles away a surprisingly quiet and peaceful countryside awaits the visitor. The abundance of dirt roads makes the variety of routes seem endless. We present four tours with different levels of difficulty.



FROM THE SPRING TO THE PENINSULA: GRAVEL TOURING IN THE BALATON HIGHLANDS



A cyclist wearing a blue jersey and a black helmet is riding a gravel bike on a narrow path through a lush green vineyard. The path is flanked by rows of grapevines with vibrant green leaves. In the background, rolling hills and a body of water are visible under a clear sky. The overall scene is bright and scenic, capturing a moment of outdoor recreation in a rural setting.

This gravel trip links some of the scenic spots of the Balaton “Felvidék” (Highlands), crosses Balatonszőlős and Dörgicse to loop back to the lakeside on the Tihany Peninsula. With plenty of places to rest, including the Felvidék’s typical vineyards offering breathtaking vista over the Balaton. Once at the peninsula, the rider will get a taste of the natural splendors of Tihany. Although there is plenty to see and experience, this gravel route is not overly difficult to complete, the 46km (29 mi) distance includes just over 500m (1600 ft) of elevation, and the trails are generally easy to navigate. Thus it’s recommended for novice and more experienced bike riders alike.

↑ The Balaton Felvidék is located west of Balatonfüred, so this route can be combined with our other gravel adventure passing through Balatonszőlős. The resulting "mega tour" is 90km (55 mi) long with over 1000m (3000 ft) elevation gain, fully deserving a "difficult" rating. The present itinerary covers half the distance, moreover it contains very few sections which are difficult to negotiate. The 500m (1650 ft) elevation is also something a newbie to bike touring can accomplish with satisfaction. Our gravel rides generally run on less busy paved and virtually traffic-free unpaved roads. Here the byroads around the vineyards are perfect for adventuring on a gravel bike, but we show that even the busy Tihany Peninsula can be discovered on less crowded ways. The route's other aim is to bring the rider closer to nature and to provide plenty of opportunity to enjoy the scenery. These special spots are perfect for taking a rest in order to prepare for the upcoming sections.



In this gravel tour we cover a considerable distance on paved roads, but these are mostly low-traffic byways located in splendid environments. The off-road sections are generally fire roads, making them safe and easy to navigate for those not accustomed to hiking trails. For some riders, gravel cycling means linking different exciting off-road trails with paved sections, for others it's the opposite: to join the more attractive asphalt roads with non-paved ones in order to make the ride more exciting.



We consider this route the middle ground between the two perceptions: it covers almost equal distance on pavement and off-road, both providing plenty of enjoyment with an emphasis on spectacle and experience. In a nutshell we start in a north-westerly direction from Balatonfüred, first to the charming Szent Jakab spring in Vászoly, then to the exquisite church ruins in Dörgicse, a flawless spot to take a memorable photograph. In the end we cross the Tihany Peninsula on its less-known side in order to experience a memorable scenery with lavender and gray cattle. There are not many steep climbs along the way, yet weariness in the legs is assured by the end.

DIRECTIONS:

The starting point is the roundabout on Highway 71 within Balatonfüred. There is a large parking lot with supermarkets where provisions are available for the upcoming adventure. Since it's a gravel ride, we approach the paved road to Aszófő on a trail heading to Tihany. In a few hundred meters the GPX tells us to turn right, followed by a left turn, all still on a dirt road. Leaving the resort town, our trail joins the paced road heading to Aszófő. Along the way we are treated to a scenic view over the lake. Just prior to the village sign we take a right turn onto a hard-packed, well-maintained dirt road that is negotiable even after pronounced rainfall. 4km (3 mi) further we arrive in Balatonszőlős, where we need to make a left turn in the direction of

Pécsely. The paved road linking these two villages is considered as one of the most beautiful lanes in the Balaton Highland, it's pleasantly rolling paired with unmatched scenery. 1km (0.6 mi) after Pécsely we take a slight left turn onto a narrow paved path, later turning into a dirt road, which takes us to the charming Szent Jakab Forrás, the most famous natural spring of the Balaton Felvidék. We experience the steepest gradient of the route just before the well, so it's high time to refill the bottles. The nearby pond lends itself as a welcome place to rest and rejuvenate.

From Vászoly we take the low-traffic minor road to Dörgöcse. Just prior to arriving at this picturesque village, at the bottom of a steep descent we turn onto a trail through the lavender fields toward the cemetery. Passing the cemetery on the local streets takes us to the lovely church ruins, from where we enjoy a lavish

view over the heartland of the Balaton Felvidék. Breathtaking is the best word to describe this scenery with the lake serving as a backdrop: no wonder Dörgöcse has become so popular with visitors to the region! From here we take a nicely surfaced dirt road in an easterly direction, back where we came from. When we reach the forest, the incline gets steepens, making it easy to pick up more speed than what we can control. The rider should also pay attention to the GPS navigation since there are quite a few corners and junctions along the way. At the end of the downhill we reach the vineyards of Udvari where the dirt trail turns into a proper gravel road. This then leads us onto the paved road heading back to Vászoly. At this point we could take a shortcut to join the Balaton bikeway: if this is your choice, simply turn right following the merger with the paved road. However, our route takes the grav-



el road to Örvényes, and this will be the point where we turn onto the lakeside bikeway. This option also gives the rider the chance to stop at the water mill in Örvényes, a lovely place to stop for a welcome break. The bikeway actually passes the Tihany peninsula, so we need to turn right at Sajkod, next to a fish grill eatery.

Passing by the open beach in Sajkod we continue to follow the waterfront on a narrow paved road. Then we turn left onto a steep road which is about 200m (600 ft) long, then at forest school the paved road turns into a dirt track leading us deep into the Tihany Peninsula. Soon there is the option of taking small detour to the lookout point called Órtorony, a place well-worth a visit, but it doesn't feature in GPX file since the trail leading up to the steep climb is not open to bicycles. Instead, our route heads straight to Belső-tó, a well-known wildlife reserve on the peninsula. If we're lucky, we may spot the legendary gray cattle next to the lake. From Belső-tó we take the bikeway running parallel to the main road, later we pass another lake as well as the lavish



lavender fields Tihany is famous for. The peninsula offers many more landmarks like the Abbey on the hill and the lovely old village that gave its name to the area, these can be visited by taking a detour, or in course of a separate journey from "Füred".

PLACES TO STOP ON THE ROUTE:

Tihany: 1000 year of rich history jammed into a tiny village on the Balaton peninsula: this is the essence of Tihany, with its Benedict Abbey, the friars' dwellings as well as various cultural events. In addition the visitor can experience the legendary echo effect from the hilltop, where loud voices bounce back from the Abbey's northern side 700m (2000 ft) away. The natural habitat around the Belső-tó is a great place to relax, surrounded by vast lavender fields and the visitor center established to demonstrate the cultivation of this plant over many centuries. Unsurprisingly even the ice cream shops parades the lavender culture, the one on Tihany's main street is in fact called "Levendula", the other notable confectionary is the Erzsike Fagyizó on Pisky Sétány directly overlooking the lake. The area is surely a mecca for those with a sweet tooth, nonetheless meat-lovers can also get their fulfillment on the Sport Terrace located on the pier.



Szent Jakab spring in Vászoly: Since touring cyclists need to replenish the water supply during the journey, the famous natural spring in Vászoly is the perfect place to stock up. According to local legend, the water has healing power, so despite the warning sign at the spring, it's constantly being tested by visitors, hikers and cyclists alike. Although not certified by the authorities, it springs from the mountain's limestone, looks clean, tastes good, so we have no reason not to recommend it.

ELEVATION:



ROUTE PLAN:

- **Distance:** 46 km (29 mi)
- **Elevation gain:** 507 m (1665 ft)
- **Terrain:**
- **paved public road:** 16km (9.5 mi)
- **dirt road:** 20km (13 mi)
- **paved bikeway:** 10km (6.5 mi)
- **Difficulty:** beginner to intermediate

GPX track download





IN THE GRAVEL
PARADISE
OVERLOOKING
BALATONFÜRED



The following bike tour is one of the classics of the Balaton region, packed with an abundance of gravel roads, short paved sections – including the region’s bikeway – winding through the hills north of Balatonfüred. A good proportion of the route delivers spectacular views over the lake, and there is also the option of visiting lookout points along the way. This bike tour is not a walk in the park, certainly not for newcomers to gravel riding. However, frequent pedalers should have no difficulty dealing with the almost 600m (2100 ft) of elevation and the varied terrain.



Since Balatonfüred is the most crowded holiday resort on Balaton's north shore, no cyclist with any sporting ambitions is recommended to ride along the lakeside, especially not in peak season or at weekends. The only option is to head out into the northern hills overlooking the lake, and - in case of a gravel bike tour - targeting the unpaved roads in the forest and around the vineyards. There is very little traffic outside the harvest season, and the route appears to be far away from civilization, especially considering how close the bustling lakeside is. Since the hills were reforested with pine, expect dirt roads and trails to be slashed by roots and littered by the rocks due to volcanic geology. It could be challenging to find tracks compatible with gravel bikes, as such machines cry for fast rolling terrain. As we are literally directly above Balaton, lookout points offering great views over Central Europe's largest lake are a must-have for this bike tour. **The spectacle from the hills is truly exceptional, the water surface is noted to show itself in countless shades of color.**



Over two-thirds of this route runs on dirt roads, yet virtually free of rocky or impossibly steep sections. Tackling it on a gravel bike is likely to be the ideal choice. This makes the tour suitable for those who have just recently started riding on

ROUTE PLAN:

- **Distance:** 51km (31.5 mi)
- **Elevation gain:** 574m (1865 ft)
- **Terrain:**
- **paved public road:** 9km (6 mi)
- **dirt road:** 37km (23 mi)
- **paved bikeway:** 5km (2.5 mi)
- **Difficulty:** intermediate

GPX track download



off-road: it doesn't require special bike-handling skills. Moreover, the 574m (1865 ft) elevation gain is spread out, so there is less of a worry about having to push the bike up long, steep climbs. The first few kilometers are a little more difficult in this regard, but a proper warm up should alleviate the problem. Once we leave the resort town, the roads typically lead through shaded forest areas, vast open fields are only seen near Felsőörs and Veszprémfajsz. As a bonus, the section after Tótvázsony is an out-and-out gravel trail with spectacular views over the lake.

DIRECTIONS:

If the destination is Balatonfüred, and the aim is to take an awesome bike ride, then the start



should be from the parking lot at the Highway 71 roundabout. The bravest can fill their bottles on the spot with the natural “smelly waters” of Balatonfüred, as it’s commonly acknowledged to help boost energy levels, but it might be safer to buy provisions at the supermarket near the road junction. Either way, some added vitality is needed since the route heads directly into the hills. At every junction we simply take the steeper option making GPS navigation more or less superfluous. In exchange, just 4-5km (3 mi) into the tour the heroes of the day are greeted to a spectacular view overlooking the lake. If riding in a group or lack fitness for a non-stop ascent, this lookout point is an ideal place to stop, rest and regroup. The other difficulty of

this road section is the lack of shade in summer, but as forestation continues, this area will soon be covered by trees like the rest of the route. From the peak we head downhill, soon after another opportunity awaits to do more climbing. Fortunately this is optional, as it heads up to the Noszlopy Gáspár tower, in order to enjoy another magnificent view over the lake and the Koloska Valley. To reach this peak, take the green hiking trail westward, then south, looping back onto the route.

10km (6 mi) into the ride the terrain flattens somewhat, and the trail turns into a double track forest road. This section is where we can pick up some speed on the bike. Having intersected Highway 73, the descent steepens somewhat all the way to

Felsőörs. On the way to the village we come upon a charming resting place called Királykút. If you're planning more than one stop during the ride, this one lends itself to replenish. The road from Királykút to Felsőörs is on winding and rolling terrain, quite pleasant, but rising abruptly just before the town sign. Here is the place to refill the bottles, enjoy riding a paved road before it changes to gravel with some serious uphill sections. We're surely collecting a good number of vertical meters from Felsőörs to Veszprémfajsz. Leaving "Fajsz", the route runs on the border of open fields, luckily without long, steep inclines as before. We soon reach the paved bikeway which takes us into Tótvázsony. It's mostly descending, leaving the rider to stretch the overworked muscles from the previous efforts. It may also be a place for the fitter riders to do on-bike refueling.



We leave Tótvázsony southward on a paved road, but soon make a slender right turn onto a wide gravel road to take us all the way to Balatonszőlős. **In a few kilometers the lake emerges in our sight with the captivating backdrop of the Tihany Peninsula.** It's advisable to take heed with the tempo while riding downhill, as the gravel surfaced turns can be skittish. Recommending a visit to the Szőlős Pub (Kocsma) in the village is a no-brainer: the end of the ride is only a short distance down the road, so the meal will surely not cause discomfort! We approach Füred from the direction of Aszófő, where we turn right, shadowing the lakeside to our destination.



PLACES TO STOP ON THE ROUTE:

Balatonfüred: Being the most popular holiday target on the north shore, Füred is perfect for complementary activities before or after the bike tour. This can be a dip in the lake, relaxation on the beach, sailing or one which probably best complements cycling: enjoying an ice-cream. Bagaméri and Bergmann are two confectionaries that will surely not disappoint, and the Korzó ice-cream shop on the city's famous promenade is another safe bet. Although a bit far-off the lakeside, the Arácsi confectionery is the place most locals recommend.

Királykút: Approaching Felsőörs, Királykút could serve as a great place to take a rest stop. The water from its well is safe to drink, and according to the legend, King Mathias often used this place as a resting-stop, hence the name. The pleasant forest setting is large enough for a group of cyclists, and there is a campfire place and a stove furnace to prepare meals.

Noszlopy Gáspár lookout point: To visit this notable viewing platform, a short detour is needed 8km (5 mi) into the ride in order to climb to Recsek hill. This spot used to be a military radar station overseeing the eastern side of the Balaton Basin, the lookout got its present name from a famous general serving in Kossuth's army in the rebellion of 1848.

ELEVATION:







BEGINNERS GRAVEL BIKE TOUR ON LAKE BALATON'S SOUTH SHORE

The following 40km (26mi) round trip starting and finishing at the popular holiday resorts on the south shore of Lake Balaton should be pleasing for beginner gravel riders. The route is scenic, diverse in the landscape as well in the road conditions. We'll be taking dedicated bikeways, quiet streets and dirt roads paths, without major climbs to tackle.

It's a common misconception that Lake Balaton's south shore is less suitable for cycling. Attempting to move around pedestrians carrying SUP and air mattresses at the peak of tourist season can ruin a bike tour, and there is not much that a cyclist can do, other than be patient and polite. On the other hand, the tourist season is relatively short, merely the summer weekends are truly crowded, and moving away from the lake shore should alleviate the problem. Spring and autumn on weekdays offer exceptionally quiet, traffic free riding experience. **Choosing a route further away from the lakeside in the rolling hills of Somogy can offer many exceptional touring possibilities.** Discovering these less frequented places is best done on a gravel bike, since unlike on the north shore of the lake, the scenic routes will contain some unpaved sections, and small roads rarely possess a smooth tarmac surface. If you are familiar with the local dirt roads, you can string the quiet, low-traffic roads for a very enjoyable bike trip.

GPX track download

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ROUTE PLAN:

- **Distance:** 40km (25 mi)
- **Elevation gain:** 125m (410 ft)
- **Terrain:**
- **paved public road:** 10km (6.5 mi)
- **dirt road:** 12km (7.5 mi)
- **paved bikeway:** 13km (8 mi)
- **Balaton cycle route:** 5km (3 mi)
- **Difficulty:** easy





The route starts in Balatonszéplak, runs along the so-called Aranypart ("Gold Coast") to the hunting lodge in Alirét. There we find an enchanting forestry road all the way to Sárvár. A bikeway traverses the village, then along the Kiliti vineyards to Siójut. There we reach the picturesque Sió Canal, and turning south leads us back to the town of Siófok, the main town situated on the lakeshore. This route features a mixed road surface with 12km (8 mi) on dirt roads. The rest of the tour takes on quiet paved public roads and bikeways. Any type of gravel bike is suitable for this type of terrain, in addition cross and trekking bikes are also a good choice. The dirt section covers agricultural roads which comprises of some loose surface sections, predominantly sand. Riding these should not pose much difficulty in dry or slightly wet conditions, but prolonged rain can make these sections muddy.

DIRECTIONS:

The GPX track starts at the parking lot of Ciao, Ciao Pizzeria in Balatonszéplak. This is near the re-



sort's "Alsó" (not "Felső") train station. From here we follow the BalatonBIKE365 bikeway signs, first crossing the railway, then the highway onto a quiet road that leads towards Töreki. Just as we reach the village, there is a double track dirt road slightly turning the right. This trail takes us to Sárvár. 1km (0.6 mi) further the road crosses a stream with a chance to refill water supplies. The natural spring is on the right on a steep incline.

From the Cinege spring we continue our journey along the wide dirt road. At a shooter's post there is a fork in the trail, and the left one needs to be followed. This is where we find the steepest climb of the route: fortunately it's short, less than 500'. At the top there is another shooter's post, where we turn right and descend all the way to the Alirét hunting lodge. With a small pond, a pier this could be a picturesque rest stop, usually deserted, unless the lodge has some guests who are just setting out for a hike.

From the hunting lodge we follow the short paved road which leads into a T-crossing. There we turn left, and follow the BalatonBIKE365 sign, and the hard-pack dirt road takes us into Sárvár.

Once reaching the village main street we take the bikeway to the left which leads us through, then out of Sárvár. The bike path to Kiliti has a very smooth paved surface. Just before the village we turn right at the "Siókom" plant, and continue along the dirt road passing the Kiliti's

vineyards. There is a fishing pond, then we arrive at a short, steep descent that takes us to Hidegvölgyi Vadaspark (wildlife reserve). Be careful if you're unfamiliar with the gravel bike's brake system! At the sanctuary we follow the road to Siójut, in the village there are directions to the canal bikeway, where we turn left. There is nothing left but to enjoy the scenic route along the Sió Canal. The directions are hard to miss and there are always the BalatonBIKE365 signs to follow. This bike path leads us all the way to the lakeshore, avoiding the busy streets of Siófok. Once on the shore there are plenty of opportunities to eat and drink at local restaurants, buffets, cafés and pubs.

PLACES TO STOP ON THE ROUTE:

Alirét hunting lodge: This lodge serves as accommodation to small groups of tourists, there is a pond, some benches, making it ideal for a rest stop in the middle of the bike tour.





Hidegvölgyi Vadaspark: This wildlife reserve is near the end of the ride, but worth a look-around even if you're not planning to take a rest stop. Next to it there is a quiet wooded area and a fishing pond. The reserve can be visited, where you'll find the common species of local wildlife, mainly swimming birds.

Sió Canal: The bikeway takes riders along a 5km (3 mi) stretch of the canal from Siójut to

Siófok. This quiet, scenic route offers places to stop to enjoy the atmosphere. Many swimming birds can be spotted on and near the canal.

Siófok Pier: As one of the main attractions of the "capital city" of Lake Balaton, the Pier offers a supreme view over the lake.

Balatonszéplak Beach: Since it serves as the start and end point of the tour, the resort's open beach is the perfect place to dip your toes in the water, or even plunge in the lake for a refreshing swim at the end of the ride.

ELEVATION:



Gravel challenge

in the shadow of Balaton's Valley Bridge

Looking for a gravel ride challenge on the south shore of Lake Balaton? Longish routes are easy to find, here is a shorter 44km (28 mi) ride encompassing plenty of elevation, steep gradients, as well as seriously technical trails for a gravel bike. Aptly you'll also enjoy breathtaking scenery from the many lookout points, offering a vista over the Balaton as well as onto the iconic Völgyhíd (Valley Bridge).







The south shore of Lake Balaton is considered to be flat. Really? Ride this route around the iconic valley bridge in Köröshegy, and report back on how the legs feel at the end! Most likely it's sufficient to glance at the highest viaduct in Eastern Europe to realize that there is a stark climb at both ends from which you'll have to descend afterward. Then ascent the next hill and do the same on the other side. And once at the foot of the bridge, you'll realize that the slopes are also rather steep. **On the flipside, accepting the challenges of the route, the cyclist is sure to enjoy nearly traffic-free paved and unsurfaced forest roads with a magnificent backdrop.** Though these places are located just a stone throw away from the bustling holiday resorts at the lakeshore, the rider will find a calm, peaceful environment, surprisingly free from noise off the highway.

As a warmup, we ride a short distance on the bikeway from Balatonföldvár, which starts to rise slightly from Szántód. From here on we'll either be climbing or taking nose-dives, contradicting the common knowledge about the area's geography. Moreover, there are many rather challenging trails to tackle, in fact 17km (10.5 mi) of the distance runs on dirt paths. **The difficulty of navigating some of these trails is likely to be outside the comfort zone of riders not accustomed to off-road conditions, there are numerous steep sections and ones with deep ruts.** Such terrain would force even experienced mountain bikers to slow down. But once we arrive to the stat-

ues in Szólád, the rest of the ride is an easy paved descent on the shore. One must remember that difficult trails are made even more treacherous when wet, so this beautiful gravel tour is best avoided after prolonged rain.

DIRECTIONS:

Due to its easy access whether arriving by train or car, Balatonföldvár's railway station serves as the route's start point. You can park the car, there is ample space and no restrictions. The first part of the ride leads us through the villas of one of

ROUTE PLAN

- Distance: 44km (28 mi)
- Elevation gain: 565m (1850 ft)
- Terrain:
- paved public road: 16km (10 mi)
- dirt road: 17km (10.5 mi)
- paved bikeway: 2km (1.5 mi)
- Balaton cycle route: 9km (6 mi)
- Difficulty: hard

GPX track download:



the oldest resorts of Balaton, its bikeway is lined by giant plane-trees. Since Földvár is a very popular resort, cyclists need to be observant with the holiday-makers. Just before the ferry crossing in Szántód, it's time to turn right from the lake-side bikeway to another one heading towards the main road. Once having crossed the old highway, the tour continues on a small, very quiet, shaded road ideal for bike riding. This has a slight gradient all the way to the valley bridge making it a perfect warm-up for the numerous climbs awaiting.

There is a small drop to a shrine, another small incline, and then comes the junction where we turn onto a dirt road. The first 5km (3 mi) of the trail is not too steep, but it's at the crossing of the new highway where the real climbing starts.

At the viaduct we are faced with a fun roller coaster: if enough momentum is gained on the drop, the bike will probably make it up the facing wall. At the top of the climb the rider is greeted by a magnificent spectacle, overlooking the resort and the lake. The fire road back to the bridge pil-



lars has a slight downward gradient with just a few small inclines. At the end we cross the paved road again. If the rider is looking for a special treat of refreshments, turning left on the asphalt road leads to the Konyha&Rét Buffet. There is a superb view of the valley bridge from below, then we turn left onto a road surfaced with concrete slabs which otherwise serves as water drainage. This leads into the most difficult ascent of the tour, a 2km (1.5 mi) long and steep drag to the top.

At the end of the concrete surface we turn acutely left onto a single track trail which further on widens. This trail goes down then up again to the statue park in Neзде. A long and steep downhill section awaits the rider where one is advised to pick a speed consistent with the handling skills, mainly due to the gullies, the uneven surface and the gradient. At the end of this challenging section we again reach the small paved road leading to Szórád. This runs along the countless vineyards, but just prior to the village it's time to take



a right turn onto the main road that takes us back to the lakeshore. We reach the waterfront in Balatonszárszó, and from there the signs on the bike-way guide us to the train station in Földvár.

PLACES TO STOP ON THE ROUTE:

Völgyhíd Konha&Rét: Choosing to go under the Völgyhíd viaduct on the paved road, the rider will not fail to spot this special buffet just after the roundabout. It's an ideal place to replenish the lost calories, just a few bites of a full meal. The lemonade and the craft beer are delicious, and the guest has the option of sipping any of these, or some snacks in a hammock. Did we mention the unrivalled view from the buffet over the valley bridge?

Statue Park in Neзде: The hilltop with the statues have been known for its healing power for centuries. The villagers pushed the elderly in wheelbarrows to the place, and many believe that one of the famous protagonists of Hungarian history was also buried in this ground. The village started to erect statues from the bottom up to the top, nine in total. First is Attila the Hun, then Csaba the conqueror and the Transylvanian wooden entrance, followed by the nugget of Ba-





ján, the medium between the concrete and spirit worlds, the statue of Koppány, Maria Babba, Veronika's pitchfork and the Hungarian dual cross: all iconic symbols of the nation's ancient history. The lookout point at the top is a great place to rest, replenish and the shadow is large enough for a group of cyclists. From here the road only goes down, all the way to the lakeshore.

Szólád's loess cellars: Szólád is best known for its unique row of cellars carved into loess (Aeolian soil). The caves were dug into a loess wall which measures as high as 6-8m (20-25 ft), commonly before and at the beginning of the 20th century. Originally they were used as a hiding place, later wine was stored here from the sight of constabularies. Inside the temperature is more or less 15 Celsius all year round, making it ideal for storing wine as well as crops. More than 100 cellars are presently used by the villagers for storage. To see this famous sight, you have to turn slightly right at the first junction in Szólád, followed by another right turn, then straight up the hill.

ELEVATION:





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