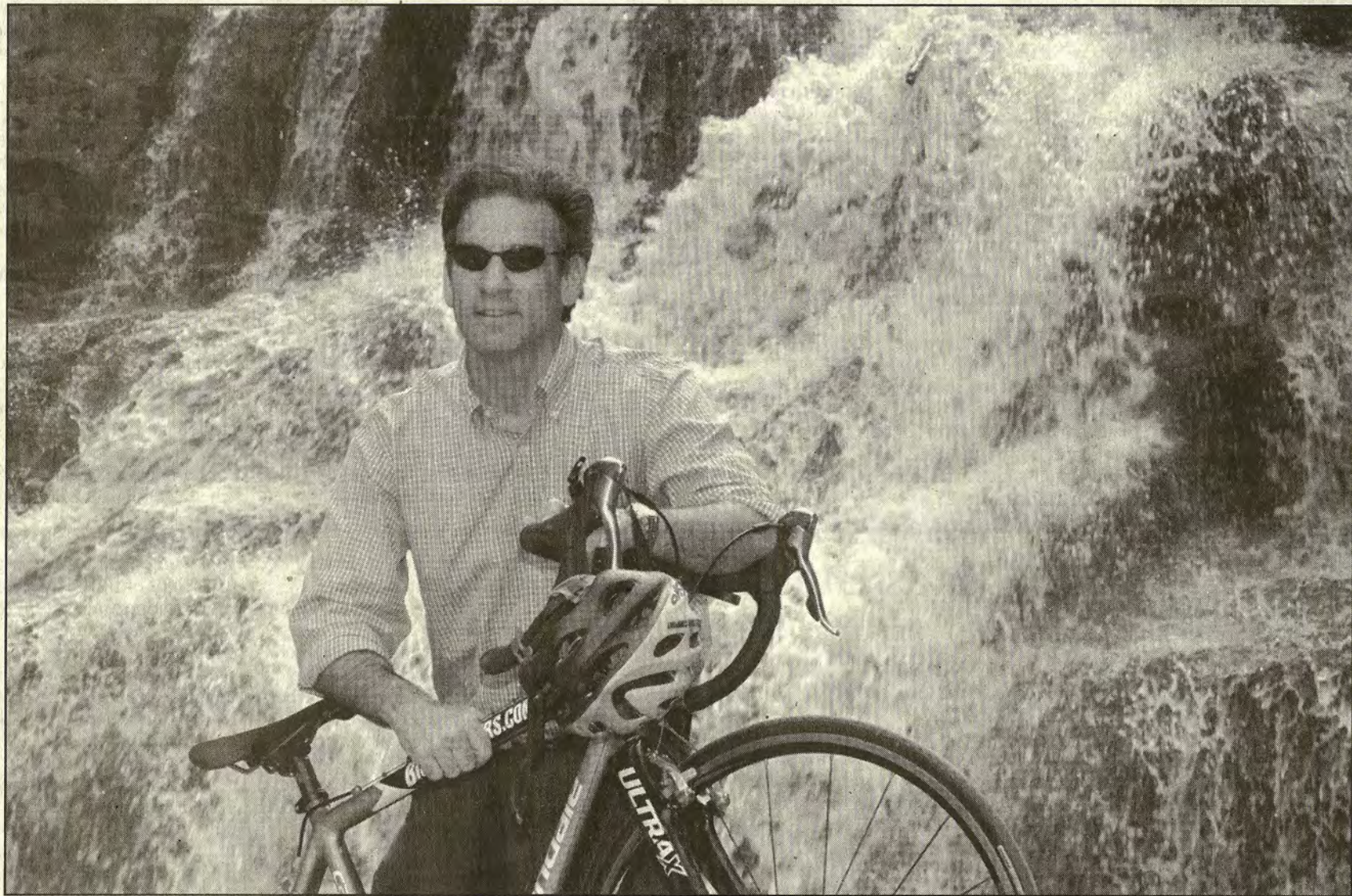


In Kent, Follow the Bike Trail



Kent Bike Trails Committee member and The Bicycle Tour Company owner Sal Lilienthal at Kent Falls State Park in Kent.

Walter Kidd

By MAX WITTSTEIN

Cyclists will now have even more reason to come to Litchfield County, aside from the region's breathtaking geography, fine restaurants and covered bridges. Kent may not have made the cut among communities that were finalists for where Google will beta test its new fiber optic network, but it has been selected as the site of a new pilot project—the Kent Bike Trails Project, an official cycling program of the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area.

The heritage area, which extends from Kent northward to Lanesboro, Mass., in the Berkshires is one of 49 National Heritage sites in the country designated by Congress as worthy of his-

toric preservation because of their unique natural, cultural, historic or scenic resources. The National Park Service plays an advisory role in preserving and maintaining each area.

The Kent Bike Trails Committee formed to oversee the 45 miles of bicycle trails in the heritage area, and it includes Dan McGuinness, executive director of the Northwestern Connecticut Council of Governments, Dan Bolognani, executive director of the heritage area, two members of the National Park Service, and Curtis Rand and Tom McKeon, the first selectmen of Salisbury and Colebrook, respectively. Particular expertise comes from another member, Sal Lilienthal, owner of The Bicycle Tour Company, based in Kent.

Mr. Lilienthal offered his

already-substantial knowledge of the area's best spots for biking to help design the Kent Bike

'The roads for cycling are great, there are a lot of cultural things to do, people can go visit great restaurants, go on hikes ... everything's right here.'

—Sal Lilienthal,
The Bicycle Tour Company

Trails Map, which the committee hopes will entice more riders to the Northwest Corner when it is distributed at various businesses. The Kent-Cornwall area is an ideal

place for cycling, as, in addition to the scenery and quiet side roads, the bike trail is the only one in the state with two active covered bridges.

"We're going to be putting together different maps for the heritage area," said Mr. Lilienthal. "The template we used for this map, it's all going to be set up with the logo from the national park service, which Dan and his people designed."

The Kent map will be distributed at tourist-heavy businesses, such as gas stations and bed-and-breakfasts. There are five bike routes currently charted out on the rough draft of the map, ranging from easygoing routes for beginners to grueling ones recommended only for seasoned athletes.

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Heritage Area Highlights Bicycling in Kent Area

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Mr. Lilienthal's personal favorite runs from Kent center to Bull's Bridge and back, because it offers a balance between being physically challenging but also possible for people in average physical condition to complete—and it has beautiful vistas.

"I like that route because for people who are average athletic ability, they feel like they've gotten a workout but they haven't gotten over the top," he said. "You don't want to feel so tired after a bike ride that you can't complete other activities."

Mr. Lilienthal hopes that the maps will hit the printer by May 16, coinciding with a free bicycling clinic at Lime Rock Park that will educate children ages 5 to 12 on the importance of bike safety—something that

Mr. Lilienthal makes a top priority in running his business.

"Part of the reason we're doing the bike routes where they are is to keep people off the busy roads like Route 7, for safety reasons," he said. "It's not a problem in Kent currently, but as director of a bicycle tour company, I'm always concerned with safety."

The Kent Bike Trails Committee is also preparing an application for a \$10,000 grant from the Bikes Belong Coalition, a Colorado-based nonprofit group sponsored by the cycling industry. The money would be spent to help problem areas along the Housatonic Covered Bridge Trail. The grant initiative has the support of numerous area bike shops, the Central Connecticut Bicycle Alliance, and Roxbury First Selectman

Barbara Henry.

"The Northwest Corner is a great area to ride," said Ms. Henry in her letter to Bikes Belong. "We believe the Housatonic River Bike Trail would be a great way of encouraging more people—local residents and tourists alike—to take advantage of

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—Barbara Henry,
Roxbury first selectman

the region's many cycling opportunities."

Mr. Lilienthal, who worked on the mechanics team for seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong in the early 90s, before Mr. Armstrong began his successful battle with cancer, said that Litchfield County is a natural draw for cyclists.

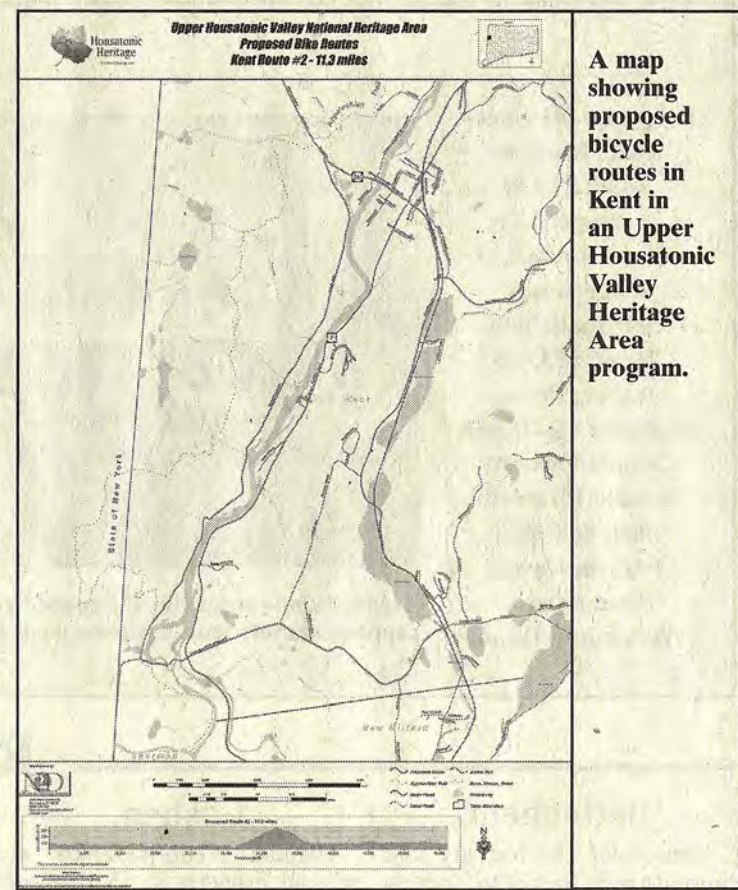
"The roads for cycling are great, there are a lot of cul-

tural things to do, people can go visit great restaurants, go on hikes ... everything's right here," he said.

There is indeed no place quite like Litchfield County, and to Mr. Lilienthal, no form of recreation quite like cycling. Bringing the two together has led to success since he opened his business in 1997, and now that the trails will become more accessible to tourists, he hopes that more people than ever will be getting out of their cars and tuning their gears.

"To me, it's a really great, liberating feeling," he said. "It gives a real feeling of freedom. People come to my office and ask where the bike trail is, and I ask them, 'Where isn't the bike trail?'"

Kent's Bicycle Tour Company can be reached at 888-711-KENT, or on the Web at www.bicycletours.com. More information about the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area can be found online at www.upperhousatonicheritage.org.



A map showing proposed bicycle routes in Kent in an Upper Housatonic Valley Heritage Area program.