

NOTEBOOK

Wolf Creek signs installed

GREENEVILLE, Tenn. – It was hot June day digging in the dry soil along State Route 25/70 to complete installation of Wolf Creek Trailhead signs in the Cherokee National Forest.

Special Trails Ranger Gray Buckles and Back Country Horseman of East Tennessee volunteers, Herb Heinze, Tom Conner, Robert Slagle and Dianne Noyes were joined by a cadre of BCHET volunteers to complete installation of the signs leading into the back country of the Wolf Creek Cherokee National Forest in Cocke and Greene counties in Tennessee.

The volunteers have already completed 400 hours of trail work this year, clearing forestry trails and building new trails for equestrians, hikers and hunters. Reflective tape on the familiar brown forestry signs direct trail enthusiasts to the newly completed parking lot at the Wolf Creek trailhead to access the natural beauty of Wolf Creek and its waterfalls.

For detailed maps, visit the Cherokee National Forest Service, 344 Asheville Hwy. (SR 70), Greenville, Tenn., or call (423) 638-4109. Wolf Creek is just one of a number of trail systems maintained by the Back Country Horseman in the Cherokee National Forest. For additional information for directions or on how to help, contact Heinze at (423) 787-7476, heinze2@netscape.com or www.bchet.org.

Knoxville to hold 2011 Wing Ding

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – The Knoxville Tourism and Sports Corporation has booked The Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRA) to hold their annual Wing Ding 33 Convention in Knoxville on July 6-9, 2011.

GWRRA is a social organization for owners and riders of Honda Gold Wing/Valkyrie motorcycles.

The convention will attract representatives from 800 chapters in all 50 states and 53 countries.

Sites of Wing Ding 33 will include Chilhowee Park, the Knoxville Civic Coliseum and the Knoxville Convention Center, which will host exhibitors and vendors.

At each Wing Ding convention, GWRRA chooses a local charity to benefit.

For more, visit www.gwrra.org.

Fee bundles are reappearing

LOS ANGELES, Calif. – In airline industry parlance, the practice of charging separate fees for extra services and products – such as blankets and pillows – is called “unbundling.” It’s the equivalent of ordering off an a la carte menu.

American Airlines recently became one of the first U.S. carriers to “rebundle” some of those extras. Think of it as the equivalent of ordering a combo meal at a fast-food chain.

Passengers who buy the “boarding and flexibility package” can board the plane early; pay only half the regular service fee if they need to change flights at the last minute; and get to fly standby on an earlier flight at no extra charge. The price ranges from \$9 to \$19, depending on the route.

Rick Seaney, founder of the airline pricing website FareCompare, said he expects more airlines to start rebundling. “You are seeing the first wave,” he said. “It’s a marketing and merchandizing strategy.”

From VARIOUS SOURCES



PHOTO BY J. DAMASE/CRT CENTRE-VAL DE LOIRE

TOUR DE FRANCE

stirs a passion to cycle; so why not surrender?

LOIRE VALLEY, France

– Each year, the televised coverage of the Tour de France (through July 25 this year) inspires a passion – not only among serious cyclists but anyone who enjoys getting out on two wheels to discover backroads and beautiful landscapes.

If you’ve ever dreamed of rolling through fields of poppies and historic villages of France, the Loire Valley offers an amazing, long-distance cycling trail called Loire a velo, following the meandering path of the Loire River.



TRAVEL NOTES
ANN YUNGMEYER

Over mostly gentle terrain, the cycling route is ideally suited for leisurely biking and discovering the many chateaus and rich heritage of the region where nine kings of France spent their holiday time.

During the last 10 years, the Loire Valley regions have developed 650 kilometers of the sign-posted cycling route that stretches from central France through the main cities of the Loire Valley – Orleans, Blois, Tours, Angers and Nantes – to the Atlantic coast.

A combination of cycling paths and small roads with little traffic, Loire a velo will encompass 800 kilometers when completed and tie into the trans-European cycle route Eurovelo 6, eventually linking the Atlantic to the Black Sea.

With fascinating history as a backdrop and excellent wines and gastronomy of the region, it follows that cycling is only part of the appeal. I set out with friends who were more into the culture than time in the saddle, so we rode sections of the trail and shuttled between stops with a guide.

We began in Angers, a progressive city with an urban square and a pleasant pedestrian zone and cycling path. Angers’ main attraction is its formidable 13th century fortress with 17 towers, where inside the world’s largest medieval needlework piece, the Apocalypse Tapestry, is displayed.

Heading east towards Tours, we explored riverside villages, vineyards, medieval towns and fortified castles along the way.

Saumur is a popular stop for cycling tourists, an attractive town once inhabited by Coco Chanel and home to the famous French National Equestrian School. Its chateau boasts splendid views across the valley, and the surrounding area is famous for troglodytes – cave dwellings converted to wine caves, mushroom farms, unique restaurants and underground attractions.

Not far from Saumur, the Royal Abbey of Fontevraud makes a nice excursion where one can tour the beautifully restored church, cloisters, gardens and intriguing Romanesque kitchen of the 12th century monastic settlement – one of the largest in Europe.

On the Vienne River (a Loire tributary), the medieval fortress town of Chinon is a quaint, cobblestoned town with a colorful history well preserved. From Chinon, the cycling path continues to many Loire Valley gems, including the “fairytale” castle of Usse, the Italian Renaissance-style Azay-le-Rideau and Chateau Villandry, famous for its terraced Renaissance gardens.

Villandry is a must-see for garden enthusiasts who will delight in the geometric patterns and artistic floral expression in garden designs of various themes: ornamental, water, sun, vegetables and herbs.

We ended our tour in the medieval town of Amboise, where it is said that Renaissance art first came to France from Italy. Touristy but nonetheless charming, Amboise boasts two jewels: its chateau and the well-visited Clos Luce, Leonardo de Vinci’s home during the last years of his life. One can tour his quarters, see models of his inventions and even take a painting class if so inspired.

The Loire Valley is France’s third leading

Following the Loire River, the Loire a velo cycling route can be ridden in stages from village to village. The trail and extended paths are marked for biking to many historic stately “homes” like Chateau Chambord (above).

Inspired Travel

... Peddling through the ‘Valley of the Kings’

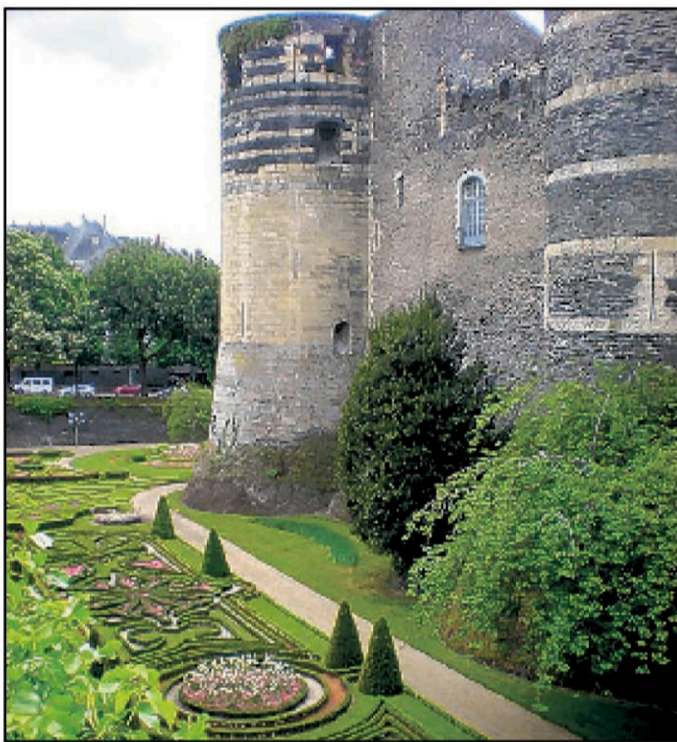


PHOTO BY ANN N. YUNGMEYER

Angers’ main attraction is its formidable 13th century fortress with 17 towers and elaborate gardens where inside the world’s largest medieval needlework piece, the Apocalypse Tapestry, is displayed.

wine producer, well known for white wines of the chenin grape. A highlight of our winery visits was Bouvet-Ladubay, a producer of award-winning sparkling wines, where we sampled a recently launched “bubbly” that was created with actor Gerard Depardieu, the label bearing his name.

Like the Tour de France, Loire a velo can be ridden in stages from village to village, or, as we did, a few sections along a chosen itinerary. In addition to the Loire a velo trail, extra circuits designated chateaux a velo are marked for biking to many more historic stately “homes” of the Loire Valley including Chambord, Chaumont and Cheverny.

Bike rentals, luggage transport and accommodations can be arranged for a self-catered trip through the tourism network Accueil velo. If planning is not your cup of

tea, turn-key trips are offered by many tour operators that handle all the details and logistics.

By the time you’ve seen so many grand chateaus, you think you’re dreaming when you wake up in one, as it was for me at Domaine de la Tortiniere near Tours. A Relais du Silence chateau hotel, the family-run Tortiniere offers a relaxing stay in a park-like setting. Some privately owned chateaus offer bed and breakfast accommodations through the organization Bienvenue au Chateau. It’s possible to cycle and tour the chateaus by day and sleep in one at night.

With a currently favorable exchange rate of the dollar relative to the Euro, there is no better time to live like a king while discovering the heritage of a royal land.

ANN N. YUNGMEYER is a freelance writer. She may be reached at features@bristolnews.com.

MORE TO DO AND SEE

■ **Cointreau distillery** near Angers – see how the revered orange liqueur is made and discover new cocktails.

■ **Terra Botanica** – kids and adults will enjoy Europe’s first theme park devoted to plant life.

■ **Dine in a troglodytic cave** restaurant where menus feature mushrooms grown in the caves, escargot (snails) and other troglodytic cuisine.

■ **Take a riverboat** ride from Candes St. Martin, designated as one of the most beautiful villages of France.

■ **Visit fourth generation artisan** chocolatier, Bigot, in Amboise and attend a chocolate-making demo/tasting (pre-scheduled times).

■ **Check out candlelight** visits and evening sound and light programs at many chateaus during summer season – Blois, Chenonceau, Azay-le-Rideau, Amboise, Villandry, Clos Luce and others.

■ **Getting there:** Air France flies direct from Atlanta to Paris. From Paris, Rail Europe offers TGV (high speed) and regional rail service to many Loire Valley cities.

■ **For trip planning visit:** <http://us.franceguide.com> or www.cycling-loire.com.



PHOTO BY ANN N. YUNGMEYER

Kids and adults will enjoy Terra Botanica, Europe’s first theme park devoted to plant life, in Angers, France.