

# RIDING TORRANCE BARRENS CONSERVATION RESERVE

Allison Dawes

Today's mountain biking adventure takes us to the Torrance Barrens Conservation Reserve. So grab your sun screen, a little bug repellent and lots of water, and let's hit the trail!

The Torrance Barrens trail head is easily found off of Hwy 169 at Torrance. Simply turn onto Southwood Road (Muskoka Road # 13), and follow the road for approximately 8kms. Be sure to hang a left at the fork in the road, and keep your eyes peeled for the signage leading you to the Barrens. Parking is on the left (or west) side of the road.

The Torrance Barrens offers riding conditions unlike any other trail in the Muskoka region. Rather than trekking through trail amongst the woods, over roots and rocks, the Torrance Barrens is relatively flat and smooth. Large sections are actually reminiscent of sidewalks, making the Torrance Barrens perfect for family rides, and ideal for beginners.

The Torrance Barrens Conservation Reserve has a geologically rich history. The rather lunar looking landscape is totally unique to the park. Upon arrival at the Barrens, you will feel as though you have just stepped out of a spacecraft, and that you are about to set forth on an exploration of the moon on your bicycle. The smooth granite ridges which the trail follows were formed during the Pre-Cambrian Era, between 1.5 and 2.5 billion years ago. Like much of Muskoka, the Barrens were once the home of mountains, mile high glaciers, tropical jungles, and submerged under seas and lakes. During the last period of glaciation, the Barrens were scraped clean of topsoil, and today remain scattered with boulders sheared from the ridges, left to lie where the melting ice abandoned them.

Be sure to take in the unique landscape and plant life while you are riding. The ground is littered with blueberry bushes, patches of quarts, and various forms of vegetation I could not name. Numerous folks have also taken the time to build their very own inukshuks. Watch for an entire village of stone people at the intersection of the Main Trail, the Barren's Extension, and the Pine Lake Loop.

While the trail can be somewhat difficult to follow, keep your eyes peeled for the park markers, as well as white stripes on the granite and trees. In addition, ribbons tied to small trees and shrubs will help you find your way. I recommend starting only from the parking lot, and following the loops in the direction promoted by the park signage. Back-tracking is next to impossible, so stick to the trail (take along this map).

After only a few minutes of riding you will be rewarded with a grand view of the Barrens from an elevated ridge. Riding the Barrens is an altogether different experience. The Conservation Reserve offers 8.5 kms of trail, and I highly recommend the Barrens for beginner riders. The trail is just plain out of the ordinary for intermediate and expert riders looking for a leisurely expedition. In fact, the Torrance Barrens make for a great outing for the riders and the hikers in the family. Due to the length of the trail loops, hikers can enjoy a complete loop, while the cyclist enjoy the entire trail system. I just did the Barrens with my mom! Mom on foot, and me of course on two wheels.

Be sure to lather up with sun screen before heading out. You won't be finding much shade along the route. And water or sports beverages are a must in the arid landscape.

Don't forget that the Torrance Barrens are also home of the world's first "Dark Sky Reserve". Due to the wide open landscape, 360 degree viewing, and minimal light intrusion, the Torrance Barrens provide an ideal location for viewing our solar system. Meteor showers are at their peak in mid August, so be sure to stop by the park after dark.

For a guide book on the Torrance Barrens and many other hidden mountain biking trails across Ontario, stop by the shop and pick up "Rider Mel's Mountain Biking Guide to Ontario". You'd be surprised by the number of trails in Ontario...even in the southerly regions. And don't forget that this weekend the Ontario Cup Provincial Race Series will be running right here in our very own back yard. Stop by Buckwallow Cycling Centre this Saturday August 7th and Sunday August 8th to race, or just to cheer. For more information, pick up the provincial race guide at the purple bike shop or log onto [www.chicoracing.com](http://www.chicoracing.com). Until we ride again, keep spinning and enjoy the Torrance Barrens Conservation Reserve!