

ORGANIC LIVING

By
Robert Rodale

Finding Ideal Ways to Exercise

Rising energy prices and concern with our environment are having a profound effect on American recreational habits. Millions of Americans are returning to activities that rely on human muscle power for energy and which can be performed in a natural setting—bicycling, kayaking and backpacking, for instance. These activities do not pollute the environment but they do build muscles.

Some sports are clearly more harmful than others. Snowmobiling, auto racing, trail biking and motorboating don't provide much exercise, while blatantly fouling the environment and wasting increasingly scarce fuel.

Perhaps worse than these obvious offenders are other sports which do benefit health, but cause less noticeable environmental problems. Sometimes, even a sport that appears to be ideal can have hidden side effects.

Take bicycling for example. Bicycle riding is fun and healthful, a useful means of transportation, a great source of competition in bike racing and a lifetime sport that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and skills.

But with 15 million Americans a year buying bicycles, the road can get crowded. In Philadelphia, Professor Ralph Hirsch of Drexel University reported that injury-producing accidents between bicycles and motor vehicles more than doubled between 1970 and 1973. Accidents involving persons 20 and over rose 425 percent.

Bikeways are one solution to this problem. A number of cities have established some bikeways and bike routes for commuters. We should press for more.

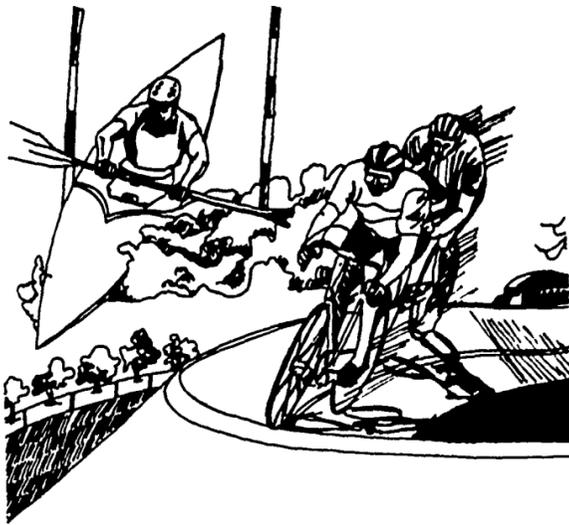
Even bikeways, however, cannot be isolated from pedestrians and pets. Since the conditions that caused the bicycle boom are likely to continue indefinitely, we need more velodromes.

What's a velodrome? Americans have to ask that question, but in Europe everyone knows from childhood. A velodrome is a banked, oval track for bicycle racing and a safe place for recreational bicycling.

There are only eight velodromes in the entire United States. Yet as sports facilities go, velodromes are relatively inexpensive to construct. In towns like Northbrook, Illinois, Kenosha, Wisconsin and Encino, California, velodromes have become centers of recreation. When people aren't riding on them, they're out watching bicycle racing, which, on a velodrome, is an exciting, non-polluting sport.

The Amateur Bicycle League of America, Box 669, Wall St. Station, New York 10005, has available on request detailed engineering plans for groups interested in building velodromes. The plans are taken from the plans for the track in Rome, which is regarded by cyclists as one of the finest in the world.

Hiking and backpacking are other sports where too many participants threaten to spoil a good thing. People are invading nature in "head-banging battalions," in the words of John G. Mitchell of the Sierra Club. Even the careful hiker cannot leave the wilderness exactly as he found it, and not all hikers are that careful.



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You can help this situation by blazing your own trail through the woods. All that you need besides permission of the landowner (the government in the case of public land) is a good geological map, a few simple tools and a lot of energy.

Blaze your trail to avoid fragile, natural constructions like hawk nests and animal burrows. Design it so that off-road vehicles can't use it.

If not a threat to our environment, many popular sports are surprisingly deficient in fitness benefits. Golf is a pleasant outdoor activity, but does not provide the cardiovascular conditioning that many people need. In a recent report in the "Medical Tribune," Dr. Lewis Krakauer of the University of Oregon said that downhill skiing also has almost no value as exercise.

Dr. Krakauer did not include cross-country skiing in his criticism of the sport. Cross-country skiing is a great body conditioner and doesn't require large, energy-consuming resort areas carved out of mountainsides.

The important thing to remember when choosing a sport is to consider its effect on you, other people and the environment. There's a good variety of environmentally and physically sound sports. As long as we concern ourselves with the constructing of facilities for these sports, we'll give present and future generations the opportunity to enjoy year-round recreation.

(Editor's Note: The opinions appearing in "Organic Living" are those of its author, Robert Rodale, an independent columnist. Rodale's comments do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Lancaster Farming editor or anyone else on the Lancaster Farming staff.)

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