

[NOT YOUR TYPICAL]

TOP TRI TOWNS

BY HOLLY BENNETT

Straightaway, erase cities such as Boulder and San Diego from your mind. Sure, these cities rock hands-down as places to live, work and train, but open your Oakley-wrapped eyes a bit further and you'll find a wealth of alternate towns and cities that serve up ample swim, bike and run appeal as well. —————>

LAWRENCE, KANSAS

Click the heels of your ruby red bike shoes three times and you just might end up in Lawrence, Kan., triathlon's best kept secret and our pick for 2010's Top Tri Town. As the U.S. home base to Aussie pro Pip Taylor, and host of Ironman 70.3 Kansas, Lawrence is as active as it gets. Just ask Don "Red Dog" Gardner, who leads twice daily year-round boot camp-style workouts, free to the thousands who participate in the community. Lawrence is also a fervently bike-friendly city, anchored by historic downtown retailer Sunflower Outdoor & Bike Shop, host to the annual Tour of Lawrence, and boasting some of the nation's most considerate motorists on the area's constantly rolling rides.

There's no lack of swim and run opportunities in Lawrence, either. Athletes train on the 10-mile Lawrence Riverfront Trail and adjoining single-tracks. "The Levee," as it is known, "is the best maintained and most amazing surface I've ever run on," says Taylor. Multiple city pools (including two 50-meter facilities) support the swim crowd, and the enviably low cost of living in Kansas equates to a \$20 monthly all-access pool pass.

For Taylor, who moonlights as a nutritionist, great food is a must-have, and Lawrence's vibrant downtown restaurant scene does not disappoint. The Community Mercantile, or The Merc as it's known to locals, is a much-revered co-op natural food grocery, and weekly farmers' markets keep local pantries stocked with the freshest of seasonal produce.



Courtesy Lawrence CVB

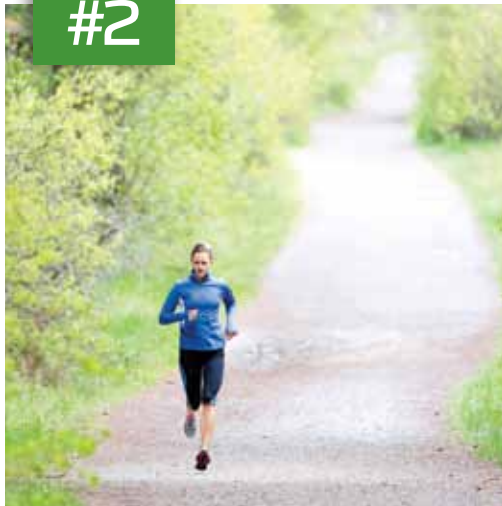


✓ LOVE IT IF You're all about the neighborly, down-home vibe in a city rich with recreation, arts and culture.

✗ LEAVE IT IF You thrive on a totally tri geek-filled social scene. Aside from Lawrence's Rock Chalk Triathlon and Multisport Club, triathlete-specific gatherings are notably absent. Also, long winters can hamper a triathlete who loves training in the great outdoors.



#2



MISSOULA, MONTANA

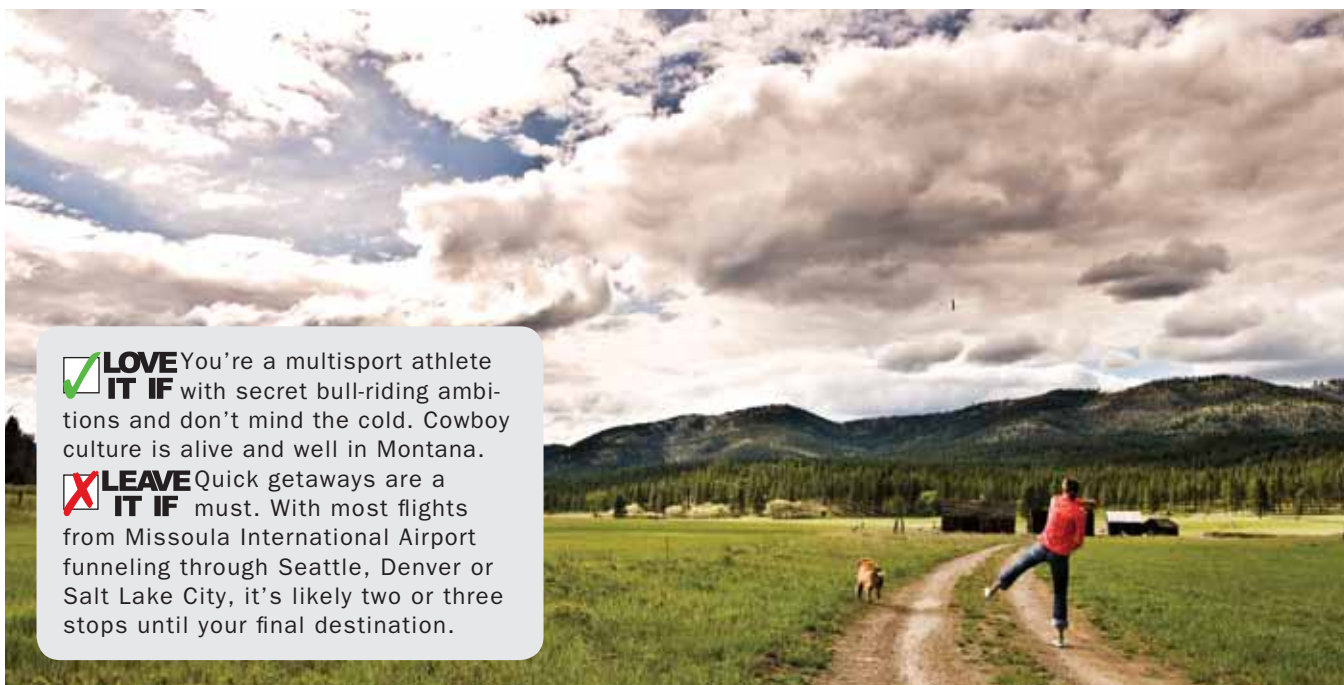
Head straight out your door in Missoula and you'll ride for hours without stopping—unless you're not yet fit enough to tackle the challenging climbs which ascend in three breathtaking directions. Mountain biking is equally awesome in this outdoor enthusiast Shangri-la, and an impressive trail system and downtown dirt track provide plush run options as well. Olympic medalist Dave Berkoff coaches swim sessions at the University of Montana and the city's recently rebuilt 50-meter pool. Or, take a break from the black line and swim briskly upstream in one of the three rivers that converge in town.

Team Stampede, where local pro and Ironman Coeur d'Alene champion Linsey Corbin first cut her triathlon teeth, boasts more than 200 members—all of whom will eagerly join you for a Big Sky brew or Big Dipper ice cream post-training. Retailers Missoula Bike Works and Runner's Edge also provide training partners, gear and advice aplenty.

The heartiest triathletes train outdoors year-round here, while others opt for winter indoor training on treadmills and trainers, or else take part in a snow sport-inspired segue from the swim, bike and run grind. A cold weather inversion layer can cast a cloud over Missoula's pristine mountain beauty, but with the money you'll save due to the low cost of living, you'll easily be able to afford a January training jaunt to Kona.

✓ LOVE IT IF You're a multisport athlete with secret bull-riding ambitions and don't mind the cold. Cowboy culture is alive and well in Montana.

✗ LEAVE IT IF Quick getaways are a must. With most flights from Missoula International Airport funneling through Seattle, Denver or Salt Lake City, it's likely two or three stops until your final destination.



John Segesta/johnsegesta.com

A NOD TO THE TRIP'D & TRUE

We can't help but give a little "Best Of" list love to these perennial winners:

Kailua-Kona, Hawaii Tropical island home to our sport's pinnacle, near-spiritual event. Need we say more?

San Diego, Calif. Land of surf, sun, sand—and loads of Lycra. Plus, it's the balmy home base to *Triathlete* magazine and our sister publication, *Inside Triathlon*. Yup, we're biased.

Boulder, Colo. Open roads, winding trails and (literally) breathtaking mountain vistas. A pro (or three or four) in every swim lane. If only their talents were contagious.

Bend, Ore. The Pacific Northwest's Boulder—at two-thirds the altitude and half the price.

Tucson, Ariz. Year-round opportunity to get schooled heading up Mount Lemmon's 19-mile climb.

San Francisco, Calif. Café society city living with spellbinding natural resources and a lavish spread of tri sport events.

Austin, Texas Hip music and club scene meets equally happening cycling and running culture.

Clermont, Fla. Home to Florida's only actual hills—and to the country's only National Training Center, a 300-acre campus designed to bring out your inner über-athlete.

Bellevue, Wash. Upscale cross-lake neighbor to Seattle's Emerald City. Less earthy, more affluent, equally outdoor-affectionate.

Madison, Wis. College town energy and ambiance with big city assets—not to mention heaps of swim, bike and run rewards.



#3



Shmuel Thaler

✓ LOVE IT IF You want world-class competition but the big names in Boulder and San Diego are a tad too intimidating.

✗ LEAVE IT IF The higher cost of living isn't something you can live with.

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA

Bookended by The Forest of Nisene Marks and Wilder Ranch State Parks, and best known for its surfing heritage, Santa Cruz is a trail runner and mountain biker's dream come true. The road rides are equally magnificent so it's no surprise that employees from several nearby cycling industry manufacturers live in Santa Cruz. Likewise, two-time triathlon Olympic medalist Bevan Docherty discovered this pristine training ground a year ago and has never looked back. "I left Boulder in search of an even more perfect training spot," says Docherty. "I wasn't sure I'd find it—until I discovered Santa Cruz."

The club scene—offering both the Santa Cruz Triathlon Association and the Santa Cruz Track Club—provides plenty of hard-core company, and you'll gain the home turf advantage in stellar races such as the Santa Cruz Triathlon and the Big Kahuna long-course event.

With a cost of living 46.7 percent above the national average, Santa Cruz's price tag will certainly be too steep for some. But, if you're willing to sacrifice here and there, this coastal paradise will reward you with idyllic year-round training, a surf-culture casual atmosphere and ocean access worth every penny you pinch.



#4

✓ LOVE IT IF Music is your fourth passion. The annual Folks Festival delights with the laid-back likes of John Prine and The Swell Season.

✗ LEAVE IT IF The occasional rattlesnake, bear or mountain lion traipsing through the backyard sends your heart rate soaring.



LYONS, COLORADO

It's no accident that Australian legend Chris Legh makes Lyons his April through December home. Legh bases his Penny's Peak Performance Camps here, taking full advantage of the quad- and calf-busting trail runs and road rides that emanate in every direction. Nestled north of Boulder's endurance athlete Mecca, this picturesque Rocky Mountain hamlet serves as a high-altitude training retreat for numerous pros, including Ironman champion Belinda Granger and Team Sky's Tour de France stage winner Simon Gerrans. July marked the inaugural Lyons-based Centurion Cycling event, which offered all-ability rides of 100, 50 and 25 miles.

Tough training days in Lyons are rewarded with a dip in the icy cold St. Vrain River, gourmet goodies from the newly refurbished St. Vrain Market or a beer at local brewpub Oskar Blues. With 242 sun-drenched days each year and only 34 inches of snow on average, winters in Lyons are milder than one might imagine. The tiny town's only drawback is its lack of a swim facility, but that's easily remedied with a short 17-mile drive to one of Boulder's many community recreation centers.

Courtesy of Brian Donnell/Ducks in a Row Studio



TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN

Perched between two peninsulas in Northwestern Michigan, Traverse City borders copious amounts of the clearest, cleanest open water a triathlete could hope for. Tagged one of America's best beach towns by AOL Travel, this endurance sports haven is aptly nicknamed the "Caribbean of the North."

But Traverse City's tri sport charms begin well before the water's edge. Cyclists—both mountain and road—are treated to a variety of terrain, with choice views spanning multiple bays, bucolic farmland and rolling vineyards. Runners can course through the area's TART trail system—estimated to span more than 55 miles. Xterra pros Josiah and Yaro Middaugh hail from Traverse City and base their Middaugh Bros. Triathlon Camp here, introducing eager athletes to the triathlon-rich resources of their hometown.

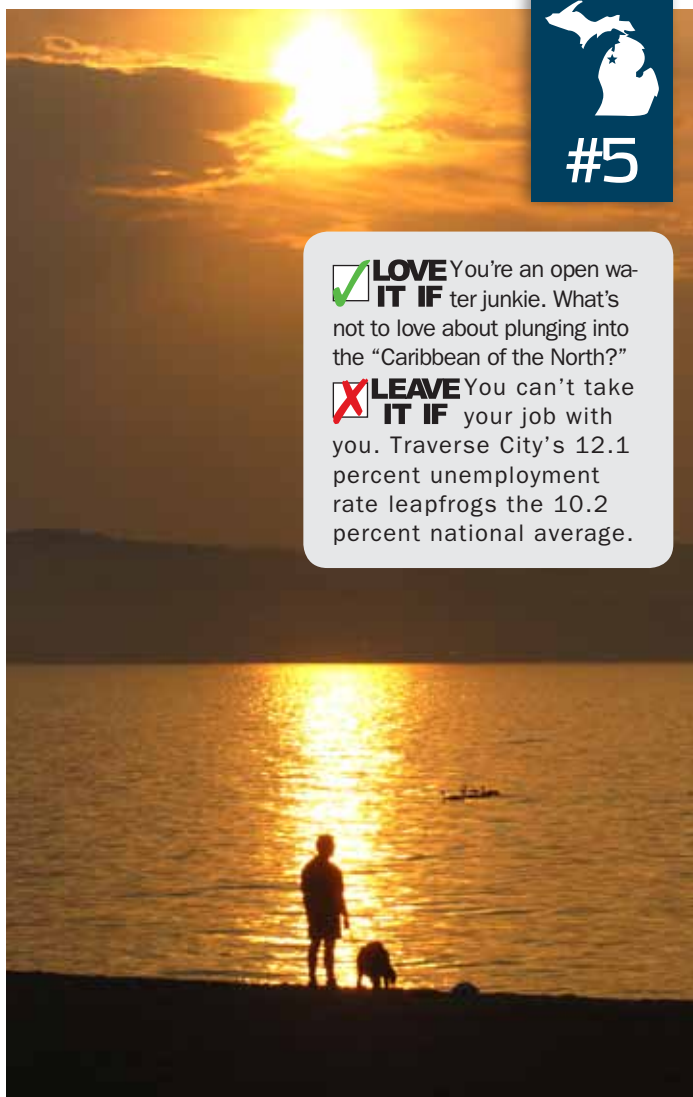
Traverse City also teems with endurance events including a handful of local triathlons, the Bayshore Marathon and the legendary Iceman Cometh Challenge bike race. When winter blankets the area in white, it's best to buck up like a local and strap on snowshoes or Nordic skis.



#5

✓ LOVE IT IF You're an open water junkie. What's not to love about plunging into the "Caribbean of the North?"

✗ LEAVE IT IF You can't take your job with you. Traverse City's 12.1 percent unemployment rate leapfrogs the 10.2 percent national average.



Courtesy of Traverse City CVB

TOP FIVE HONORABLE MENTIONS



#1 Albuquerque, N.M. With 280 annual days of sunshine, bountiful outdoor resources, a moderately high altitude and a remarkably low cost of living, the Duke City deserves a date on your tri training calendar, if not serious consideration as a long-term destination.

#2 Santa Rosa, Calif. Home to cycling superstar Levi Leipheimer and hardcore Ironman 70.3 Vineman, Santa Rosa serves up seriously hot summer training days amidst its rolling hills and trails. Spend your rest day at any of the area's numerous wine cellars, and you'll taste the true splendor of this Northern California wonderland.

#3 Flagstaff, Ariz. High-altitude hideout for multiple Olympic medalists and hopefuls, Flagstaff is one of the best U.S. venues for running and off-road riding. Sadly, many trails were destroyed during 2010's summer fires—even more reason to express our support for this quaint college town.

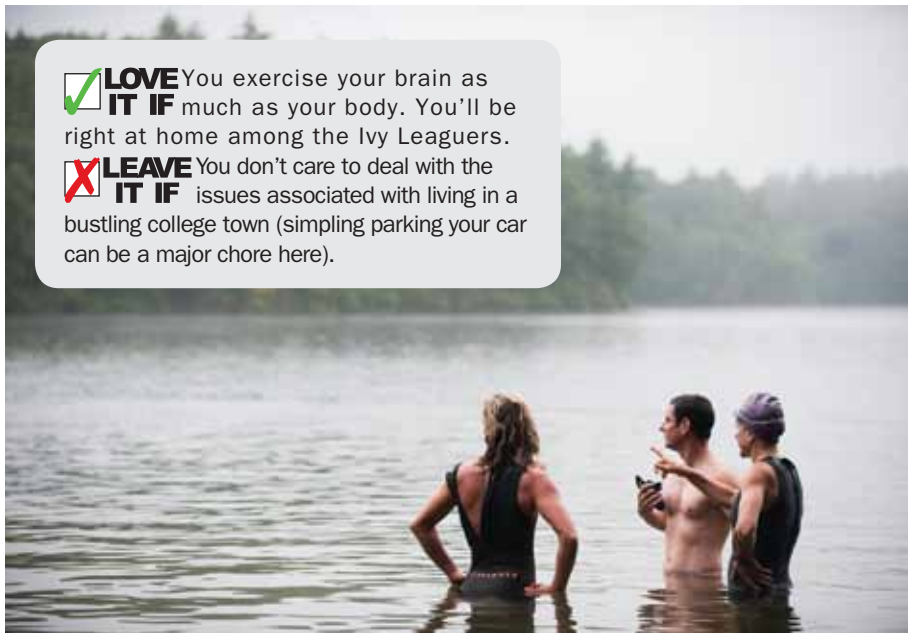
#4 Ogden, Utah Altitude, affordability, and abundant outdoor athletics—all reasons why Ogden earns a multisport "A" grade in our opinion. Utah winters are no joke, but the substantial snow allows Ogden to host the annual Xterra Winter World Championship.

#5 Greenville, S.C. Serious roadies, tough trail riders, bike-to-work junkies and two-wheeled weekend warriors—if it's cycling related, Greenville's got it. Add plenty of run and swim resources, plus a big dose of Blue Ridge Mountain beauty, and you've found another Southern endurance hot spot.

#6



✓ LOVE IT IF You exercise your brain as much as your body. You'll be right at home among the Ivy Leaguers.
✗ LEAVE IT IF You don't care to deal with the issues associated with living in a bustling college town (simpling parking your car can be a major chore here).



Natalia Medttrick/Pedal Power Photography

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Neighboring the marathon's historical hub of Boston lies Cambridge, a hotbed of East Coast triathlon training. Runners pack the scenic Charles River multi-use path and enjoy Massachusetts' multiple rails-to-trails. Revered academic institutions Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology host competitive Masters swim programs, or one can transcend society's scurry with a dip in the tranquil water of nearby Walden Pond. Cambridge is an extraordinarily bike-friendly city, but if you don't want to battle traffic, pack up and drive to reach the solitude of open roads in nearby New Hampshire or Western Mass.

With clubs and coaches in abundance, and proximity to marquee races such as Rev3 Quassy and Rhode Island's Ironman 70.3, it's no wonder that Cambridge hosts the annual Multisport World Expo. The area is home to accomplished professionals Dede Greisbauer and Caitlin Snow—along with thousands of other Type-A triathletes ready to run and ride hard on your heels and wheels.

Median homes prices hover around \$440,000, so Cambridge is not for the faint of budget. But the relatively low unemployment rate (nearly half the U.S. average) bodes well for those willing to give it the old college try.

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

San Luis Obispo, better known as SLO, is a college town with a sublime Mediterranean climate and unequaled outdoor access. Whether you prefer to ride the panoramic Pacific Coast Highway or a variety of vineyard-packed hills and steep mountain ascents, cycling in SLO offers something for every appetite. Running routes are similarly diverse, and multiple pools and nearby ocean access make your tri training complete.

Between Team Kman and the TriSLO RoadRunners, you'll have your choice of more than 20 group workouts each week. Cal Poly State University also boasts a strong tri team, and students volunteer with a vengeance at the nearby Wildflower Triathlon Festival. Multisport retailers Art's Cyclery and GH Sports stock essential gear for every swim, bike and run pursuit.

As the first U.S. city to ban smoking in public places, host to a year-round farmers' market block party, and fan of cycling and all things green, San Luis Obispo exudes a healthy, high-spirited atmosphere backed by progressive action. The only tempering factor is its lack of affordability.



✓ LOVE IT IF Money is not a concern for you or you don't mind being a renter.
✗ LEAVE IT IF The exorbitant cost of living forces you to auction off your tri gear on eBay.



Nick Lucero Photography



#8



LOVE IT IF You embrace a wealth of hydration options. Winsome wineries, potent coffee and handcrafted ales are everywhere.



LEAVE IT IF You don't live and breathe the "Just Do It" creed. Eugene is Nike's birthplace.

EUGENE, OREGON

Long-famed as Track Town, USA, Eugene is gaining momentum in the multisport world as well. Certainly Eugene-local Cristina Caldwell—USAT's lone Oregon council member—has a hand in this. Her newly opened MultiSport Advantage's Performance Training Center offers a full range of coaching, group training, performance testing and retail services.

With a quality assortment of swimming pools, miles of multi-use paths, nearby hills for tougher trail running and a rich medley of riding opportunities, it's a wonder that Eugene seems yet to be discovered by the triathlon community at large. Perhaps the lack of local races (the Duck Bill Thrill Olympic Triathlon is the sole contender) dissuades some, or possibly the rumors of relentless rain. In reality, while Eugene's grey skies can dampen an outdoor enthusiast's spirits, the precipitation is rarely more than a thick mist—hardly enough to discourage the most tenacious triathlete.

Weged an hour's drive each way between the mountains and the coast, Eugene may well be an unspoiled swim, bike and run Eden—it just needs a bit more tri buzz.



Chris Pletsch / chrisplaymedia.com



#9



✓ LOVE IT IF You're right at home among the young college crowd. With the local university student body comprising half the town's population, the median age barely tops 22.

✗ LEAVE IT IF Beat-the-heat tourists from Florida cripple your enjoyment of this otherwise secluded sports-friendly sanctuary.

BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA

Small town feel meets cutting edge sports science appeal aptly characterizes Boone, N.C. Boone-based Appalachian State University's Human Performance Lab is considered one of the best in the country, and its Community Testing Program offers a full battery of fitness tests to the public at a fractional cost.

Atop nearby Beech Mountain, Lance Armstrong famously found inner peace and outer strength while contemplating his post-cancer return to cycling. He calls this Alps-like area his favorite U.S. training ground. Hit the trails in Moses Cone Park and you might be equally inspired by a flock of fleet-footed Olympic distance running hopefuls, athletes from nearby ZAP Fitness' non-profit training center.

While lap swim lanes are in short supply, Boone is nestled near a number of pristine mountain lakes, including Watauga Lake, host to a well-loved annual triathlon. If a stacked pro field is more your style, a three-hour drive deposits you on the start line of the newly launched Rev3 Knoxville race.

Tommy Penick/tommypenickphoto.com

ATHENS, GEORGIA

Great bike towns make great tri towns, and Athens certainly passes cycling muster.

Home to the renowned Twilight Criterium pro cycling event, Athens is supportive of both its traditional and underground bike cultures. The growing Classic City Tri Club, with several Ironman-accomplished members, is evidence that more and more Athenians are embracing multisport. For beginners wanting to test the triathlon waters, coaches from WoW! Boot Camp lead the way with their fun-filled holistic approach. Swimmers with ties to the University of Georgia benefit from the 50-meter pool at the Gabrielsen Natatorium, while others can access the local YMCA. The State Botanical Gardens offer shady trails where runners can escape the Georgia heat and also enjoy an educational experience in this living laboratory.

Powerman Alabama is a half-day drive from Athens, and only a two-hour drive east takes you to Ironman 70.3 Augusta. Or you can also head west to catch the nearby Aflac Iron Girl Atlanta and visit triathlon retailer All3sports' flagship store, where you're sure to cure your consumer cravings.



#10

✓ LOVE IT IF You successfully balance your three-sport obsession with a family foundation. You'll love Athens' safe, small town feel.

✗ LEAVE IT IF The terms "New Wave" and "alternative rock" are turn-offs. The B-52's, R.E.M. and Widespread Panic are examples of local bands made good from this modern music hub.

Josh D. Weiss/joshdweiss.com

Methodology

Our methodology for choosing this year's top tri towns merged a mixed medley of techniques, including:

- ▶ Referrals from professional and age-group athletes, friends and various online forums
- ▶ First-hand familiarity
- ▶ Combing prior "best of" lists to avoid over-

awarded spots and to find less famous neighboring locales

- ▶ Data from Sperling's Best Places and various city websites
- ▶ Significant Google-sleuthing to find fitness facilities, clubs/teams, nearby races, retailers and training venues
- ▶ Old-fashioned phone calling to prime area contacts