

Hill training

BY CHARLES HOWE

By the calendar, spring arrives on March 20, but for road cyclists in northeast Ohio, a more practical demarcation is March 1, when average daily high temperature reaches 40° F, and it continues to warm at a rate of 2.6° per week until the second week in June. Also by this time, more than 2 hours of daylight will have been recovered since the winter solstice, but here the upswing is inevitable and even more dramatic, with over 19 minutes gained per week.

There can be wintry relapses, of course, despite these trends, but for the most part, March is when outdoor training begins in earnest, so this month we'll discuss your conversion from Basement Beast to Road Warrior.

Transitioning outdoors

No matter how road-realistic your stationary resistance trainer is, there will inevitably be an adjustment period when you begin training outdoors, but it need not require more than a few days, since the resulting adaptations are mainly neuromuscular in nature, and occur quite rapidly. So start off at the same weekly volume you so diligently maintained through the winter (right?!), but make sure the first few rides on the road are a bit shorter and easier than a typical indoor session, and on flat terrain. By the end of the first week (or even sooner), the peculiar leg sensations typical of the transition back to the road should have dissipated, and you'll be ready to build aerobic fitness beyond what was possible indoors as both daylight hours and temperatures continue to rise; increase weekly training load steadily by ~10% throughout March, whether you assess volume by hours (simple and practical), or with a power-measuring system and analysis software such as [CyclingPeaks](#) (sophisticated and precise).

Beginning in the second week back on the road, include a ~90 minute tempo ride over rolling terrain, then add another the next week. Choose a route where the hills are neither too long nor too steep, such as West River Rd. north of Valley City. Don't attack each gradient too hard, but rather, try to maintain as smooth and steady an effort as possible both going up and coming down.

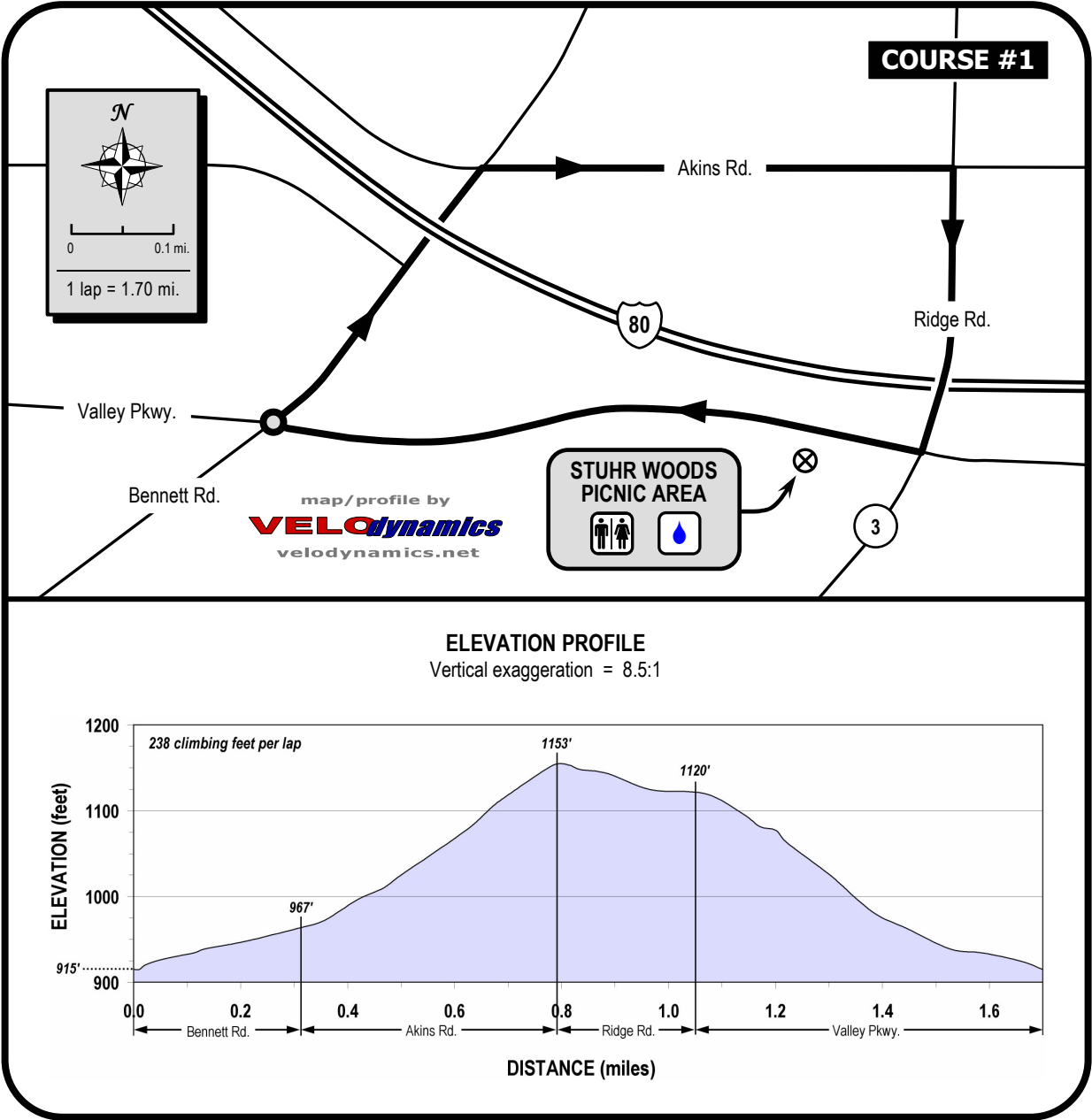
Heading for the hills

By April, with a solid 4 weeks of road training and a weekly volume of 8+ hours, you'll be ready to up the intensity somewhat, swapping out the rolling-terrain tempo rides for a session of hill intervals during the week, and a Sunday ride over truly hilly terrain, while maintaining load each week. The rest of your training week should consist of 3-4 flat-terrain, steady tempo rides of 90 minutes to 2 hours, plus a very easy 30-minute recovery ride.

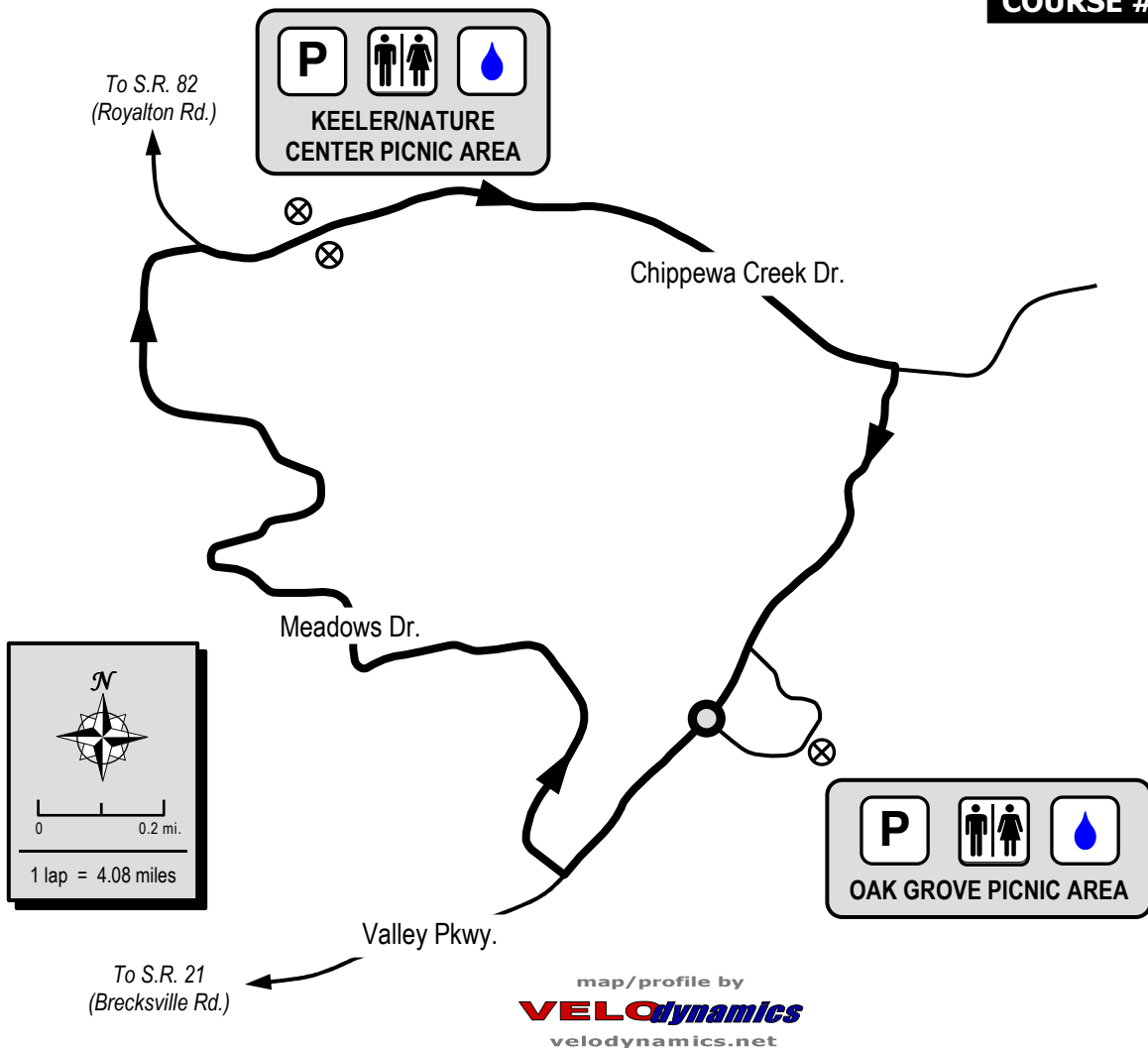
For the former, give this loop ([Course #1](#)) in North Royalton a try. If your riding access to the road from home is limited and you must drive out, you might use Bonnie Park as a starting point (located on the Valley Parkway just south of Pearl Rd.), where there are restrooms and a source of drinking water. From there, head east on the Parkway for about 5½ miles. The circuit begins with a left turn (northbound) on Bennett Rd., then turns right on to Akins Rd. (eastbound). By the time you reach Ridge Rd., where you turn right (south), a total of 238 feet have been gained in 0.77 miles (an average grade of 5.8%), but this is somewhat deceiving; after the initial 0.31 mile, 3% approach on Bennett, the remaining portion on Akins averages a challenging 7.5%. Best of all, the grade is quite even, increasing steadily until the end, and although no great technical skill is required, you must make the right gear choices at the right time in order to pace yourself correctly and avoid "blowing up" (fatiguing from lactic acidosis) before the top. As you return to the starting point by turning right (west) on the Parkway, be certain to exercise due care on this fast (40 mph) descent, even if it is familiar to you, since conditions may have changed since the last time down – and fully heed the STOP signs at the Parkway/Bennett intersection (base of climb) as well as at Akins/Ridge (top of climb).

The uphill section of this course is useful for Level 5, or maximal aerobic power intervals (e.g., ~5 minutes at ~110% of functional threshold power), which are scheduled at the end of a period of aerobic base training. The downhill portion, on the other hand, takes about 3½ minutes – just about perfect for the recovery interval. On the way back, you might throw in 2-3 × 5 minutes on the flat stretch of Parkway between Royalton Rd. (S.R. 82) and Bonnie Park. The work intervals should add up to ~25-35 minutes in 5-7 repetitions total. If using a power-measuring system, you will have paced yourself correctly if you can gradually increase power output throughout each interval, and the last one is just about the same wattage as the first, or slightly greater.

Although it lacks a sustained climb as long as Course #1, the Brecksville Metropark circuit ([Course #2](#)) offers a more complete workout. After starting from the entrance to the Oak Grove Picnic Area, turn right on Meadows Dr., a curvaceous, up-and-down section of road that will give your climbing and technical skills a thorough test, then comes a 45+ mph descent on Chippewa Creek Dr., followed immediately by an 0.4 mile, 6.6% climb back up to Oak Grove. There is a total of 459 climbing feet per 4.08 mile lap.



COURSE #2



ELEVATION PROFILE

Vertical exaggeration = 9:1

