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Seattle Guide: Parks, Bike Routes, and Walking Paths

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The Euro-American city of Seattle was founded by a band of Midwestern settlers in 1851. For the first 40 years of its existence, there was little need for parks, as the pioneers were intent on harvesting local trees, minerals and fish for economic gain. Pioneer David Denny donated a piece of land from his claim to serve as Seattle's cemetery in 1861. By 1883, this land had become the center of a thriving residential area, and recreational demand for the land caused the graves to be relocated and the space to be rededicated as the first City of Seattle park, Denny Park. While the park has undergone radical reshaping due to a regrade that lowered its elevation 60 feet, Denny Park has remained the heart of the Seattle Park System since that time.

Gradually, other Seattle citizens willed land to the city, creating an isolated patchwork of small parks. Things began to change in the 1890s, when the new "safety" bicycle--with its wheels of equal size, rear-chain drive and pneumatic tires--replaced the older "ordinary" bicycle with its huge front wheel and solid rubber tires. The burgeoning popularity of bikes catalyzed the development of a city-wide circuit of bike trails by June of 1897. This interwoven system of trails prompted Seattleites to think in terms of creating an *integrated* system of parks. In 1903, city officials invited the famous Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm of Brookline, MA, to come to the city to take advantage of the city's majestic site and to create an interwoven park system, what is often referred to as an Olmsted "emerald necklace."

This 1897 bike trail system served as a template used by the famous Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm to integrate the city's parks. "Park planners across the country recognize Seattle's Olmsted park system as one of the best preserved and best designed in the United States. More importantly, while many eastern cities have only one or two Olmsted-designed parks, Seattle has an extensive multi-park plan linked by boulevards. It is this legacy that makes Seattle one of the most livable spots in the country."

Many parks have been added to the system since the Olmsteds, but their work has laid the foundations for all subsequent activity.

For more on this see Knute Berger, *Crosscut*, "[The car that broke the back of Seattle's bike craze.](#)" and "[How bikes led Seattle's first roads renaissance.](#)"

Bikes for rental can be had at the [Pronto Bike Station](#) at Westlake Ave & 6th Ave. This station has 16 bike docks, but each dock is not always occupied by a bike. There are other stations nearby at 2nd Ave & Pine St (16 docks) and 7th Ave & Union St. (19 docks), among others in the Downtown area.