

ELEVEN MONTHS AGO, MOUNTAIN BIKE reported that the International Mountain Bicycling Association, IMBA, was at a crossroad—facing important tasks but hindered by problems common to young, non-profit organizations. By the end of 1990, IMBA seemed to have chosen the right direction.

The growing list of supporters is one indication. More than 50 clubs and 80 dealers are members of the 3-year-old organization. IMBA has also progressed toward true international status. Clubs from Canada, Puerto Rico, Italy, and Finland have joined, and queries have come from Japan and Singapore.

Perhaps most important is the success of IMBA's work. "We've put land access on the national agenda for the bicycling community," says spokesman Jim Hasenauer. "It used to be that we went knocking on people's doors and waited by the phone for calls that were never returned. Now land managers are contacting us. They're trying to find models that work, to mitigate problems and

biking clubs. For 18 months it operated on a tiny budget without support from the bicycle industry. Specialized was first to make a major contribution and it tried to rally other manufacturers to IMBA's cause. At first there was little response. But then Fuji, Raleigh, WSI-Diamond Back, Blackburn, Klein, Salsa, Mavic, and others gave cash and initiated promotions for IMBA's benefit. Interbike, organizer of the biggest industry trade shows, donated \$5,000. Diamond Back produced an IMBA water bottle and paid half the \$60 fee for its dealers to join.

Trek recently joined, and its employees are maintaining trails at a Wisconsin state park. Shimano, Pearl Izumi, Hind, and Bike Boyz are among the growing number of companies

that have created imaginative promotions to support IMBA and responsible off-road riding.

Ibis Cycles is even paying for an IMBA membership (\$15) for every person who buys one of its bikes. Hasenauer sees this as a crucial development. "It is an indication that membership in IMBA is fundamental," he says. "It comes with the bike."

Specialized, by donating more than \$10,000 and supporting the work of its land-access coordinator, Linda DuPriest (an IMBA board

member), continues to be IMBA's No. 1 industry supporter.

At last fall's Interbike shows in Anaheim, California, and Atlantic City, New Jersey, IMBA representatives spoke to hundreds of dealers. They recommended point-of-purchase information, giving employees paid time off to attend access meetings, supporting local mountain bike clubs, offering discounts and premiums to those who belong to bike patrols and do trail work, and monitoring advertising for inappropriate portrayals of the sport.

In the national cycling press, this magazine has led the way. For the last year, *NORBA News* has also dedicated a monthly column to access issues, and other publications are following suit. News of IMBA has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Business Week*.

IMBA also has received more than \$10,000 from philanthropist Al Farrell of Beverly Hills, California. IMBA president Don Douglass considers Farrell "a prime mover, not only with money, but also with his sense of when we need encouragement, connections, or suggestions."

Last year, IMBA nearly tripled its income to \$41,000 and was a few dollars in the black. It also received major donations of in-kind services, including airplane tickets for directors to attend events.

A key financial development was approval of 501(c)3 tax-exempt status by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. This designation allows donors to deduct IMBA contributions from federal income tax. It is avail-

IMBA UPDATE

THE LEADING OFF-ROAD CYCLING ADVOCACY GROUP IS GROWING, BUT SOME PROBLEMS WON'T GO AWAY

BY GARY SPRUNG

IMBA

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establish policies.

"IMBA has really established itself as the authority on issues relating to safe and appropriate use of mountain bikes. We've been able to help a lot of clubs get established. We've staved off some closures, and changed negative policies into positive ones, as in Pennsylvania. I think we're doing really well."

INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

Based in Bishop, California, IMBA was founded in early '88 by representatives of 5 California mountain

ble only to organizations with primarily educational purposes. Rodney Johnson, a board member and attorney for Stanford University, wrote the IRS application. He says IMBA qualified because of its widely circulated "Rules of Trail," its newsletter (10 issues per year), and its financial support of such projects as the soil erosion study conducted by a Montana State University researcher.

HARD WORK AHEAD

Despite these organizational improvements, IMBA still faces daunting problems. Closures of trails in designated Wilderness and national parks, as well as the Pacific Crest and Appalachian trails, have cut access significantly. "Closures are now occurring more in city, county and state parks, regional open space, and local forest preserves," says Douglass. "It's hundreds of closures across the country, a 10-mile trail here, a two-mile there. My rough forecast is that by 1994 or '95, we may have lost as much as half of our land access."

An example appears in the March edition of IMBA's newsletter, *Land Access Alert*. The Coalition of Connecticut Bicyclists, an IMBA-affiliated group, faced a proposal last year to ban bicycles from all hiking trails in state parks and forests. The agency in charge had not received complaints about mountain bikes, but officials feared problems. They also felt pressure from the well-established Connecticut Forest and Parks Organization, a volunteer group that maintains hiking trails on state land. The state agency "had never spoken with a mountain biker until our group approached officials with our concerns," wrote member Sarah Meigs. "Initially, we were graciously brushed aside."

The Coalition received tactical advice and educational material from IMBA, and launched a letter-writing campaign. Its voice was soon heard. The proposed policy was abandoned, but the future of off-road bicycling in Connecticut remains unclear.

Every edition describes at least one case study similar to Connecticut's, and the number of access battles doesn't seem to be decreasing. To help mountain bikers and the sport, IMBA needs to grow. Money is still an obstacle.

"We have no income that we can really count on, no long-term commitments," Douglass says. "That makes it very difficult to budget." To provide effective, consistent representation for mountain bikers, he says, IMBA needs a central office and a small professional staff. "This means we have to sign employment and rent contracts. You can't sign contracts without a better concept of where the money will come from. We have not solved this problem, but we're working on it."

One source of new income could be a small surcharge on race entry

problems. Many businesses have folded when their growth exceeded their administrative skills. So far, IMBA is coping.

All 7 directors are volunteers. A few—Hasenauer, Douglass, and Berkeley attorney Michael Kelley—routinely work 25-35 hours per week on IMBA matters. Burnout is always a danger. (Gary Klein of Klein Bicycles and MOUNTAIN BIKE managing editor Tim Blumenthal join these 3, Johnson and DuPriest on the board.)

Johnson, who serves as secretary-treasurer, says, "There is not just

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- ▶ Educate yourself about responsible and safe off-road techniques, then carry the message to others. Learn IMBA's *Rules of the Trail* (see p. 27), and all local trail rules. Get to know your local land managers.
- ▶ Work on trails, either single-day repair projects or continuing adopt-a-trail efforts.
- ▶ Join (or organize) a local land access club. Join IMBA (see address below).
- ▶ Support the manufacturers that are promoting and supporting responsible riding. Buy their water bottles, bikes, clothing, and other accessories.
- ▶ Write and call your local, state, and federal representatives. Let them know how you feel about trail closures and the right of responsible mountain bikers to pedal on public land.

fees. Hasenauer says racers have a special responsibility to promote land access and responsible riding for 2 reasons: "First, their ability to race, and the whole existence of the sport, depends on having places to ride. Second, a lot of racing images and some poorly run events have caused a lot of problems for land access. We've helped improve racing's image. NORBA [the National Off-Road Bicycle Association, which governs racing] recognizes our role and supports us."

Bob Holderith, a New Jersey-based race organizer who works with Fuji, has set a good example. He tacks a 10% surcharge onto every race entry and sends the money to IMBA. Hasenauer notes that NORBA has not taken this route "because they get flak from racers over high fees." Nevertheless, he hopes that someday each national championship series entry fee will have a 50-cent surcharge for land access.

Meanwhile, IMBA is growing, and growth can present its own

one crossroad. There are a number of crossroads. A lot of us at the beginning just assumed IMBA would be immediately successful, that we'd jump into full-fledged organization with offices around the country and a stable financial base. In the real world, things do not work that way.

"Whether you call it development, growing up, or moving in small steps, I think that's what we're doing. We must develop our financial base each year, develop programs, increase communication with land managers, industry, bike dealers, and members. Each segment of the organization must develop a little bit each year."

Off-road bicyclists have ample reason to support the only international organization that solely addresses the problems of land access and responsible riding. IMBA needs more members. Annual dues are \$15 for individuals, \$30 for clubs, and \$60 for dealers. Contact IMBA, Rt. 2, Box 303, Bishop, CA 93514. ●