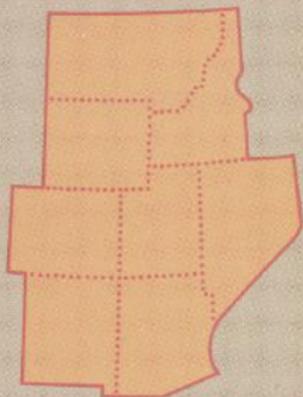


ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION



As I drove across Bobcat Pass near Taos, New Mexico, last summer, I noticed a U.S. Forest Service road sign: “Nordic Ski Area, 1 mile ahead.” At the turnoff, another sign directed me to the Enchanted Forest cross-country ski area. Perhaps it might be worth a

look, I thought. Maybe I could ask the owners for permission to ride on their trails.

I drove through a small residential subdivision. At the end of the road I found a fence and parking area but no ski lodge or people, only a sign: “National Forest property beyond this gate.” It turns out that Enchanted Forest is one of the few nordic ski areas in the Rockies entirely on public land. In winter, the Forest Service issues a special-use permit to private ski operators to set tracks and charge fees. But in summer, it’s open to the public without charge.

I started riding up the Jabberwocky Trail, rated intermediate for skiers. Its hilly terrain felt intermediate for mountain biking, too. As a nordic track designed to

accommodate both classic- and skating-technique skiers, it was wide enough for cars. But no motor vehicles are allowed in this section of the forest, and I had the entire place to myself. The path was free of big rocks and deadfall—cleared to create a smooth surface for tracksetting in minimal snow.

Jabberwocky wasn’t spectacular or romantic. But in the absence of other trail users, it allowed me to go fast with little fear for my safety. I later discovered a few advanced trails—steep, but also wide and smooth.

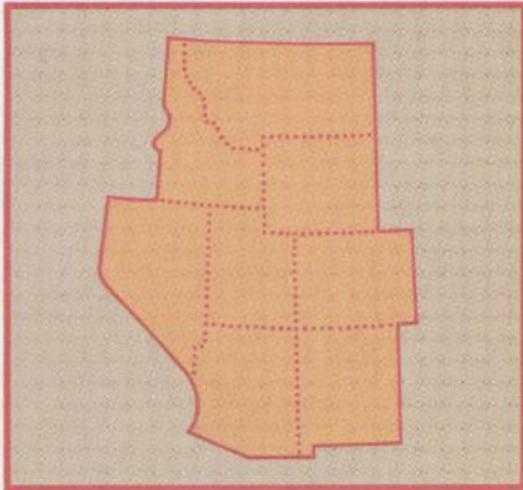
South of Taos, the Forest Service is dealing with problems in the Manzanita Mountains outside Albuquerque. This thin mountainous strip between the city and desert serves as a primary recreation area: several million visitors annually share a mere 100,000 acres of public land.

The Forest Service is trying to designate a mountain bike trail system on old jeep roads that are now closed to 4-wheel-drive vehicles for environmental reasons. Neel Marsh, public affairs officer for the Sandia District of the Santa Fe National Forest, sees some conflicts between cyclists and the hikers who have used the area for many years.

With half a million people “darned near within shouting distance, we must be very active with user groups and talk to them before establishing use patterns,” says Marsh. He works with bike shops but says he’s frustrated that Albuquerque cyclists aren’t organized.

—Gary Sprung

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needles into a valley with 6 hot springs.

The existing trails were once used primarily by motorcyclists, but recently bicyclists have become dominant, says Leo Hennessy, the non-motorized trail coordinator for Idaho's Department of Parks and Recreation.

Access is a problem because private property lies between the city and the mountain trails that are located

Idaho off-road cyclists are expanding their opportunities. In the mountains near Boise, the state's biggest city, a group of activists calling themselves the Boise Front Coalition is building new trails. One exciting ride descends 3,000 feet on an old wagon road covered with pine

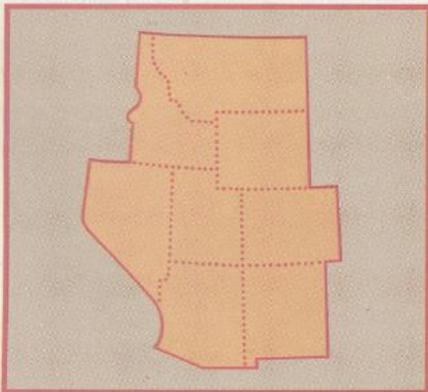
in the national forest. So the Coalition is negotiating with 15 landowners to obtain easements. The Coalition is receiving assistance from engineers at the Morrison-Knudsen construction company, who are creating a 3-dimensional map. The trails on private land will remain unmapped until the easements are formalized and gain legal status.

Hennessy says there are 18,000 miles of trails in Idaho. The Idaho Trails Council, which has worked since '77 to maintain and improve them, says the state is second in trail miles only to California. Bicyclists now play an active role in this statewide organization. The group has created an excellent set of backcountry trail etiquette guidelines that covers all types of recreation. And it's still possible to be the first person ever to ride a mountain bike on some of Idaho's trails.

Hennessy monitors other organizations' activities affecting trails, and he often comments on U.S. Forest Service plans. "I need ground-level people for that," so he asks that Idaho cyclists contact him when they learn of trail problems or proposals. Write Hennessy at the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Statehouse Mail, Boise ID 83720; or call 208/327-7444.

—Gary Sprung

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION



ing in Leadville sharply declined.

Today, only zinc and molybdenum are mined. And while Leadville (population 3,000) is burdened by unemployment and toxic waste, the town is trying to make a comeback with recreation and tourism.

What Leadville has is sensational mountain views in every direction. At 10,200 feet, the Two-Mile High City is one of the loftiest towns in the nation. To make it easier to reach the peaks, the town is identifying and mapping old mining routes.

Initially, community leaders planned to construct a new paved bicycle trail connecting the town to 2 nearby reservoir recreation areas. But then forester John Buehler showed them the extensive road and off-road cycling opportunities that already existed and convinced them to temporarily abandon the expensive project. Instead, the town is now promoting "Six Passes to Leadville."

Three of them are rough jeep roads that are excellent for mountain biking. In fact, Leadville is surrounded by dozens of old 4-wheel-drive roads. The Turquoise Lake Reservoir ride, says Buehler, will challenge the rider

In 1860, large deposits of silver attracted almost 40,000 people to the town of Leadville, Colorado. It was one of the country's biggest mining booms. For more than 100 years, mining continued as the cornerstone of the community. But in the 1980s, the price of silver dropped and min-

ing with lots of hills and curves. West of town in the Sawatch Range lie Colorado's highest peaks, Mt. Elbert (elev. 14,433 ft.) and Mt. Massive (14,421 ft.). Many miles of singletrack access these mountains. Some sections, however, are inside Wilderness areas so bikes are prohibited.

After mapping existing trails, community planners want to establish new routes. Besides the resources needed for trail construction, they will have to negotiate with private property owners, including one who owns a large parcel in the Mosquito Range east of town that includes historic mine sites.

Leadville's recreation activists also want to create longer trails to nearby communities. Located at the headwaters of the Arkansas River, Leadville sits among Buena Vista and Salida (see "Salida: High & Dry," June 1991) to the south and Breckenridge, Copper Mountain, and Vail to the north. Buena Vista offers the gently graded Midland Trail, a route built on the ashes of the abandoned Colorado Midland Railroad, which was constructed in the 19th century to serve Leadville's big boom. The 17-mile trail includes spectacular views of 6 "Fourteeners."

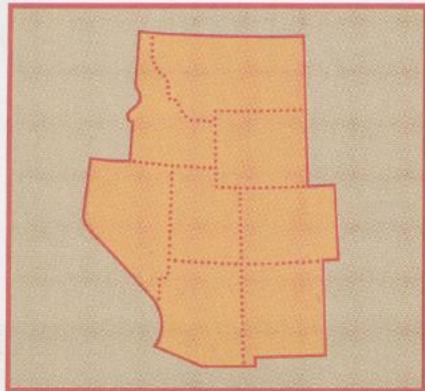
Someday, perhaps, off-road cyclists will take a tour that begins in Vail, follows the existing bike path to Breckenridge, climbs the Ten Mile Range to Leadville, and then follows the spine of the Mosquitos south to Salida. The return trip north might trace the west side of the Arkansas River valley, traversing the Collegiate and Sawatch ranges back to Vail. This route would require extensive trail building, but the seeds for such an effort have been planted in each community. And their sprouts are beginning to grow.

For more information, contact John Buehler, U.S. Forest Service, Leadville Ranger District, 2015 N. Poplar, Leadville, CO 80461; 719/486-0749.

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Thanks to the enthusiasm of organizer Brian Gravestock, a new Colorado mountain bike activist group in Colorado Springs is helping ease trail conflicts in the Pikes Peak area.

Gravestock, a former race promoter, formed Medicine Wheel in '90 "to save our riding," he says. He chose the name because of his heritage. "I have a small amount of Indian blood, and the Wheel is a teacher and healer for me." Last summer Medicine Wheel's 40 members performed 6 days of trail maintenance. Membership grew to 100 this spring, and the group was planning 12 summer work sessions.

The biggest challenge facing Medicine Wheel is the possible closing of the Barr Trail to bikes. It starts in Manitou Springs on the outskirts of town and ascends 14,110-foot Pikes Peak. A tremendous number of hikers, equestrians, and runners use the route. (It's the course of the famous Pikes Peak Marathon foot race.)

Besides being popular, the trail is imposing. It rises 3,800 feet in 4½ miles with many switchbacks and water bars. "Many mountain bikers aren't strong enough to climb it," says Gravestock. "[On the descent, they] aren't skillful enough to avoid skidding around the switchbacks. They speed between, which can be an

aesthetic problem for hikers."

Gravestock's group proposes to designate the Barr Trail as an uphill-route-only for cyclists and ask for voluntary compliance. "I'd rather have to ride reasonably than not ride at all," he says. To complete the loop, the Wheel has identified an alternate downhill seldom used by hikers.

Built several years ago for access to an experimental state forest, Longs Ranch Road has reverted to relatively easy singletrack that includes 3-foot-high gravel berms placed as water bars. "You can catch air off them because they're smooth," says Gravestock, who says he's ridden the route 20 times and has yet to see a hiker.

The state forest service controls most of the land and is amenable to this plan. Before it becomes official, though, cyclists must gain the approval of the Manitou Springs Water Board, which owns a third of the land on the Pikes Peak Massif for watershed protection. The board also controls a half-mile section of the downhill route. Although it hasn't vocally opposed the idea, neither has it approved it.

Traditionally, the board doesn't allow public recreation in the watershed, but cyclists have strong political support from the Colorado Springs business community, says Gravestock.

Medicine Wheel is also advising Colorado Springs cyclists not to pedal the Waldo Canyon trail on weekends. While this winding singletrack is an appealing ride because of its medium grades and widely spaced technical sections, it's overcrowded, says Gravestock.

For more information, contact Brian Gravestock, The Criterion, 326 N. Tejon St., Colorado Springs, CO 80903; 719/599-0149.

—Gary Sprung