

WASHINGTON, FLORIDA

WASHINGTON

The Interurban, northwest Washington. Submitted by Gary Sprung, MOUNTAIN BIKE environment editor. From 1912 to 1930, the Puget Sound Traction, Light and Power Co. ran an electric interurban railroad in northwest Washington, not far from Vancouver. The railroad is long gone, but in '87 local governments and the Puget Power Co. saved a 5-mile stretch to create one of America's classic rail-trails, and it's well suited for mountain biking. Riders (and runners, hikers, and equestrians) will enjoy a quick escape from the urban area into lush forests and stunning seascapes.

The trail begins a couple miles southwest of downtown Bellingham. But you may want to start your ride with some relaxation and bird watching on the shore of Puget Sound at a park in the lovely Fairhaven district by the Alaska Ferry terminal.

From the terminal, ride down Harris Street to 6th, take a right on 6th, then a left on Donovan Street. Go 4 blocks to the intersection of 10th and Donovan. Then find the trail that dives from the corner into a ravine called Padden Creek. Follow the creek half a mile to Fairhaven Park, a beautiful place where you can view the rose garden and its elaborate trellises. The trail ends on the north side of the park. From there, pedal east on the railway grade to Julia Avenue. At Julia, turn east, then left on 20th, then right on Old Fairhaven Parkway to the trailhead.

You're soon cruising through a rich, second-growth forest, typical of the Pacific Northwest. After a mile or so, the trail seems to end abruptly on a high embankment, but it's only the abutment of a missing bridge. Look for a singletrack that takes a winding course into the gorge, down to a road, then back up the other side. This short section through Arroyo Park is advanced terrain, easily pushed by beginners, and the best technical challenge of the ride.

Before long you're coasting along a mountainside, high above the ocean,



This former Northwest railroad corridor is now a stunning forest trail.

which peeks through the trees. The air is cool and damp, insulated by the forest. A stream rushes down the steep cross-slope and slips under the trail. Expensive homes appear on adjacent private land.

Though the official rail-trail ends when you reach Larrabee State Park, the railbed continues. Cross the paved highway and continue southward. The trail degrades into mush, with many fallen trees. But persevere—it's worth it—for soon you'll reach the sea. Descend diagonally across the railroad tracks and head through the trees to the beach. You can see Seattle, and westward across the Sound to Anacortes Peninsula, Orca Island, and the San Juan Islands.

You can return the way you came.

If that's not enough exercise, ride up the road into the state park. It's possible to cross the Chuckanut Mountains, a small, local range, via several trails and roads located primarily on privately owned timber lands. In the Northwest, timber companies frequently open such lands to mountain bikers.

When You Go: Rex Brainard has developed an area trails map that's available at local bike shops or at Village Books in Fairhaven. You can also contact the local cycling access group, WHIMPY (Whatcom Independent Mountain Pedalers and Yoyos). It runs a group ride on weekends with 4 groups of varying abilities. For information, call 206/671-4107.



COLORADO

Hermosa Creek Basin, San Juan National Forest, southwest Colorado. Submitted by MOUNTAIN BIKE environment editor Gary Sprung of Crested Butte, Colorado. Hermosa is the Spanish word for beautiful, and along this creek, north of Durango, is an awesome, intermediate-level singletrack that stretches 15 miles and reveals 17 ecosystems, varying

from rockland, pine and oak forests at lower elevations to fir, aspen, and Engelmann spruce at higher altitudes.

The core ride begins at Purgatory Ski Area, perched in Colorado's biggest mountain range, and climbs 3 miles on a gravel road. The smooth surface and warm sunshine (or cool Colorado rain), will keep you cruising to the top. Crossing a low pass, the road begins a gradual descent into the headwaters of the Hermosa Creek drainage. As your downhill speed increases, you'll pass through wet, subalpine meadows and a private ranch. Don't let your speed carry you past the Sig Creek Campground. Stop and read the historical sign along the road, take a drink, then refill your bottle from the campground's well.

A few miles farther, the road forks. Turn left and take it down to the river. Try to cross without dismounting. The gradual descent continues through open fields of the Hermosa headwaters. The creek's namesake peak crests the skyline.

Then you begin a 15-mile downhill singletrack that follows the creek, which drains a huge, broad basin. Conifer forests lushly cover the land. The tall, strong ponderosa pines glow rust colored at sunset. You travel through the heart of a 73,600-acre backcountry, currently open for bicycle and ORV travel on designated routes.



Fifteen miles of gradual downhill singletrack has made Hermosa Creek one of the most popular trails in southwest Colorado.

The trail is pleasant and fun. The land's relatively low altitude makes it extremely valuable for wildlife habitat and general bio-diversity. You cruise on and on, the miles unwinding while your heart soars with the changing terrain and new challenges. Occasional uphills keep you warm. You can stop to hike a side trail or explore the forest.

At about mile 12 of the single-track you begin the route's only serious climb. Advanced riders will enjoy the challenge while the less powerful will have to push their



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bikes. The last 3 miles of singletrack are smoother, wider, faster, and exhilarating.

The singletrack ends at Forest Road 576, and the ride concludes

with 3 miles of easy, descending gravel road to Hermosa. This is a good place to leave a car before the ride, since the return to Purgatory is 15 miles of uphill highway.

If you don't want to shuttle cars, park at the end of Forest Road 576 and enjoy a loop trip beginning at the south end. Ride up Hermosa Creek trail as far as you want, and turn off onto one of many singletracks that climb east or west to the edges of the basin. More trails follow the perimeter of the basin, so you can ride up one side of the creek, along the rim,

then down another and back to Hermosa Creek Trail.

If you want a tough loop, follow the main trail for 3 miles. Turn right at Dutch Creek and climb 5

miles to the eastern rim. Turn right and go south. It's a roller coaster for about 4 miles. Then the trail descends moderately for 2 miles to the end of 576.

There's another advanced option that includes the rim section. After about 4 miles on this trail, cut left and drop steeply on a rock-strewn series of switchbacks through Hermosa Cliffs. This route ends at the Tamarron Resort.

When You Go: The Hermosa Creek basin is wild. It enjoys no legal status as Wilderness, nor any Wilderness Study Area interim protection. But it is wilderness nonetheless and Colorado's environmental movement has formally recognized this in a new Conservationists' Wilderness Proposal for Colorado's National Forest lands.

To get to Purgatory Ski Area, follow Highway 550 north from Durango for 25 miles. The entrance is located on the west side of the road. For information, contact the U.S. Forest Service office in Durango; 303/247-4874.