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Park City Makes the West Accessible to Beginner Mountain Bikers *A committed mountain bike community supports and encourages beginners, drawing visitors to Park City*

Located 7,000 ft. above sea level in the Wasatch Mountains, the ski town of Park City has officially added to its resume and become a mountain biking hub. With more than 400 miles of award-winning trails, and careful attention paid to safe and convenient bike commuting paths, this is a community committed to pedaling. Beginners, expert bikers, and everyone in between can experience the lifestyle firsthand while visiting Park City. This diversity is part of the reason the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) has designated Park City as the world's first Gold Level Ride Center®.

While the idea of mountain biking out west can be intimidating, Park City is dedicated to breaking down any apprehensions that visitors might have. With lots of shops providing affordable rentals and lessons and a free public transportation system that brings riders to a wide range of introductory trails and terrain, there is a support network in Park City that makes mountain biking accessible to bikers of all levels.

As Park City's Mountain Trails Foundation director Charlie Sturgis says, "There is an atmosphere of encouragement in Park City—encouragement to get on a bike for the first time, and to experience our trails with the support of people who ride them every day."

White Pine Touring, a local bike shop, dedicates a great deal of time and money to providing free guided group rides for all levels. On these rides, beginner mountain bikers have the opportunity to experience mountain biking on trails that promote confidence and skill development, while more advanced riders get a chance to ride in camaraderie and enhance their skills as well. With the guidance of some of the most experienced riders in town, these group rides are enjoyable and valuable experiences.

Jillian Ritter, a Boston transplant turned four-year local, said, "When I moved to town I initially held off on getting into riding because people are really into it here, and I was intimidated." Ritter then accompanied a friend to a weekly women-only ride. "That's what helped me go from pure beginner to intermediate-level rider. I didn't feel the intimidation of riding with guys, and started at the true beginner level to just learn the basics without having to worry about keeping up, or slowing down better riders," says Ritter.

The mountain bike scene in Park City is an integral part of the community. The commitment on the part of local bike shops to sponsor these free group rides—both women-specific and for all abilities and genders—is indicative of the community-driven efforts to make mountain biking more accessible to anyone with a desire to learn and get involved. Not only do the shops offer discounted rental rates during the group rides, but they also provide experienced guides to lead the groups.

Intimidation is not the only thing keeping people from flocking to the trails. A real concern for any would-be beginner mountain biker is the initial financial commitment required. With those concerns in mind, several local nonprofit organizations join forces each spring to sponsor a bike swap with the goal of promoting the distribution of affordable bikes within the community. Some new mountain bikes can cost thousands of dollars, and the bike swap allows interested beginner mountain bikers the opportunity to acquire a bike without spending a fortune on the uncertain.

Actively involved in the bike swap through his work with the Mountain Trails Foundation, Sturgis says, “We started the swap in the mid-90s as a way to get people to recycle their old bikes. We knew that there were tons of bikes just collecting dust in garages and basements, and we wanted to facilitate a way for those bikes to find their way back onto the trails.”

True to the idea that mountain biking is a community activity, it is not just adults who are encouraged to get out and ride in Park City. The nonprofit Young Riders Youth Mountain Bike Program has been operating since 1996 in an effort to help youth improve fitness, build friendships, explore the environment, and establish responsibility throughout the Park City area. As the lead sponsor of the bike swap, the Young Riders program is dedicated to providing kids with opportunities to experience mountain biking. “This year at the swap we had over 200 kids’ bikes change hands. It’s a great way for parents to be able to afford to get their kids out on the trails and riding,” says Sturgis.

The community-wide understanding that, for all ages, mountain biking is a healthy and fun way to experience the outdoors, can be felt in the way that visitors are so actively encouraged to get out on the trails and ride. The local guides and shops are eager to help facilitate these first-time experiences, and create the memories that will spread the sport of mountain biking to a wider audience.

The Park City mountain biking community has a network of support and encouragement that extends to locals and visitors alike. The city’s expansive and diverse trail system offers riders plenty of miles of singletrack to go around, and Park City locals have no problem sharing. It’s the “get out and ride” attitude and the overall welcoming atmosphere that makes the IMBA gold-level distinction possible.

ABOUT MOUNTAIN TRAILS FOUNDATION

Founded in 1992, Mountain Trails Foundation is a nonprofit organization based in Park City, Utah, whose focus is on the development and maintenance of local trails for nonmotorized, recreational use. The Executive Director, Charlie Sturgis, is an original cofounder of the foundation, and has lived in Park City for over four decades. Since its creation, the mission of Mountain Trails Foundation has been “to advocate the building and improvement of trails while working with local governments, private landowners, developers, and the general public in an effort to educate these groups on the benefits of a nonmotorized, outdoor recreational amenity.” Mountain Trails Foundation, with the help of extensive volunteer efforts, now maintains 400+ miles of summer- and winter-use trails in Summit County, Utah, with Park City as the epicenter of the trail network. Working closely with both the Snyderville Basin Recreation District and Park City Municipal Corporations, Mountain Trails Foundation has developed the trail system of the world’s first IMBA-designated Gold Level Ride Center. The long-term goal of Mountain Trails Foundation is to provide the greater Park City community and its visitors with diverse recreational opportunities utilizing a seamless, year-round trail system.

ABOUT IMBA

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit educational association. Its mission is to create, enhance and preserve great mountain biking experiences. Since 1988, IMBA has been bringing out the best in mountain biking by encouraging low-impact riding, volunteer trail work participation, cooperation among different trail user groups, grassroots advocacy and innovative trail management solutions. IMBA represents its members, supports its chapters and its work benefits the mountain biking community. Learn more at IMBA.com.

The Ride Center™ designation represents IMBA’s Model Trail recognition for large-scale mountain bike facilities that offer something for every rider. The recognition is rated on a system of bronze, silver, and gold levels.