Volunteers are instrumental in creating sustainable, ecologically friendly, single-track mountain biking trails.

For the Thrill of It

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All mountain bike riders are encouraged to follow the rules of the trail: Ride only on trails, leave no trace, control your bike, yield to others, never scare animals and plan ahead.

Illinois is intersected with hundreds of miles of scenic, fun and family orientated bicycle trails. For the second year in a row, Peoria has been listed as a Best Adventure Town in National Geographic's Adventure Magazine. Highlighted in this recognition are the single-track trails at Jubilee College State Park and the local volunteer organization responsible for blazing the trails.

Mountain biking is a good form of exercise and a great way for health-minded people to congregate in the outdoors.

Bicycling has been a favorite pastime in America for more than 100 years. Whether you are out for a workout, casual ride or using these trails to commute to work, a network of bike trails are available in many counties throughout the state. From Lake Michigan's shore line in Chicago to the Illinois and Michigan Canal to Tunnel Hill State Trail in deep southern Illinois, Illinois' bike trails have become a hot spot for recreation and tourism. Adventurous cyclists often are attracted to a more challenging ride—the relatively new pastime called single-track mountain biking.

Some people say the actual birthplace of the mountain biking craze started back in the1970s in Colorado, while others say it started in California. Regardless, in the last 40 years, mountain biking and single-track trails have been built all over the world, and mountain biking has become a popular and competitive sport.

Single-track trails are, by definition, very narrow trails with a 6-inch tread or pathway. Ideally no more than 5 feet wide, single-track trails differ from

Some trails are wider than others and are excellent locations for learning mountain-biking skills.

the more common paved bike paths that generally are as wide as a single-lane road.

Single-track trails are best when they traverse woodlands, tour up and down hills and pass through the occasional open field or prairie. By working with the contours and natural features of the landscape, these trails are exciting and physically demanding, and the narrow footprint of these trails helps to conserve trees and vegetation.

Located "off the beaten path" and often quite far from other facilities, safety when biking on single-track trails cannot be overstated.

Wearing a helmet is a must. A person could sustain a serious injury from a relatively small fall. Some mountain bikers also wear safety glasses due to the presence of small branches along the sides of the paths.

Make sure you bring extra water, because trail riding can be strenuous and dehydration can be a concern.

Before you head out, get to know the course. See if there is a detailed map indicating exit points in case you get tired, hurt or simply want to head back for the day.

The main thing to remember about mountain biking is to know your limitations. If you are a beginner, do not go on an expert course. Make sure you research this first as well. There are plenty of experienced mountain bikers out there who can give you pointers and advice, and may even accompany first-time riders.

Exciting as this activity may be, it is not for everyone and the skills demand substantial practice.

Mountain biking organizations

The International Mountain Bike Association is a world-wide advocacy group designed to create, enhance and protect great trail experiences for mountain bikers. The structured system offered from a group such as IMBA provides individuals and user groups the tools they need to properly build, ride and advocate for the sport.

IMBA members hail from all 50 states and 40 countries. Illinois, with 16 affiliated clubs, is bursting with little treasures of single-track—and plans for more—that entice new riders every year.

DNR Mountain Trail Sites

Site	County	Miles
Argyle Lake SP	McDonough	8
Newton Lake SFWA	Jasper	5
Jubilee College SP	Peoria	35
Illinois Beach SP	Lake	6
Jim Edgar Panther Creek SFWA	Cass	24
Kickapoo SP	Vermilion	20
Pyramid SP	Perry	20
Red Hills SP	Lawrence	5
Rock Cut SP	Winnebago	23

With the cooperation of supportive land managers, our state parks are blossoming with new trails that offer healthy recreational choices for the whole family. The vast majority of these trails are shared, meaning they are used by hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders.

Some skeptics, even those who love the outdoors, become nervous when they hear that a volunteer organization has been given permission to start manipulating the land. But experience tells us that almost always the reviews are glowing.

The work that the Peoria Area Mountain Bike Association undertook at Black Partridge Park in Metamora brought about this reaction from one community member: "I have hiked that park since I was knee-high to a

Narrower trails require individuals to hone their skills before attempting them.

grasshopper, when there were no trails. I heard about the trail project going on and I thought to myself, 'Well, there goes the park.' When I went down there, much to my surprise, it looked great. Now I am avidly pursuing the love of mountain biking."

IMBA supplies its club affiliates, such as PAMBA, with the tools they need to succeed.

Full-time, paid IMBA experts tour the country working with clubs and land managers to design and build new trail systems. They conduct classroom and hands-on trail schools for volunteers so they, too, become experts in the art of building sustainable, ecologically friendly trails.

IMBA also offers a National Mountain Bike Patrol training program, which certifies cyclists in bike maintenance, first aid and CPR. After certification, these volunteers are available to assist, educate and inform other riders and land managers on issues related to mountain biking.

Well-planned and carefully built trails can traverse creeks, woodlands and some of Illinois' most beautiful prairies.

IMBA encourages all riders to follow the rules of the trail: Ride only on trails, leave no trace, control your bike, yield to others, never scare animals and plan ahead.

Collectively, this ensures a safe, well thought out and fun experience for trail users.

Mountain bikers are known for traveling to new destinations, and always are in search of a new thrill. The work done by IMBA and its affiliate clubs is good news for the state, as Illinois is gaining a reputation for its inviting trails, especially those traversing river valleys.

Great trails means tourism for the state, not to mention happy and healthy residents. Illinois has a love for the outdoors that is worth sharing.

Get out and give it a try.

Building Partnerships and Trails

Building and maintenance of single-track mountain bike trails can be just as challenging as using them, and are best accomplished through cooperation between park managers and local user-group organizations.

Any trail, whether it is single-track or a full-scale bike path, could benefit in some way through volunteer efforts. Local user groups can be an integral part of the planning, building and maintenance process of single-track trails, providing input on trail corridors, configurations, emergency access points and structures. They also can assist by recruiting volunteers and conducting workdays.

The very nature of narrow trails limits the amount of equipment that can be used to build and maintain them. A sustainable design is key to limit future maintenance problems. Installation of trail structures can be cumbersome, and materials often need to be brought in on foot as opposed to trucks and tractors.

The local user group and site managers need to be in constant communication to stay attuned to any concerns or emergencies that might arise. Site managers also may provide valuable insight into the main goal of the land-holding organization—protecting the natural resources. The local user group needs to keep this in mind when assisting in planning a sustainable trail system. Whether the trail system is owned by the federal, state or municipal government, there are specific rules to the use of the site. A local user group can act as an advocate and help educate other users on why these rules exist and answer other questions about the trail system. User conflicts sometimes develop in a shared trail system and various user groups can, at times, assist in calming these conflicts.

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Learn more at imba.com and pambamtb.org.