



Riding with Giants

World-class alpine terrain, legends cruising past you on every trail...Breck's mountain biking scene is in a league all its own. Here's how to make the most of it.

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I'll admit it: Every summer, I spend an inappropriate amount of time checking out men's legs. Why, you (and my wife) ask? I'm looking for greatness. It's not just the telltale shaving nicks around the knees or Lycra-induced tan lines. Those are common signs of a professional mountain biker, but not all greatness is sanctioned and sponsored. No, I'm looking for the cut of the riders' calves, those mosaics of triangular muscles, chiseled by the boulder-field climbs and hip drops. In Breckenridge, I see those legs everywhere—on man, woman, and child.

If, like me, you spend the summer months looking for mountain bike greatness, you've come to the right place. Other mountain towns may make their claims as fat tire destinations, but few actually swing the combo punch of Breckenridge's diverse trail system, world-class resident riders, and activist cycling community. That's right, my little rockhopper, welcome to the promised land.

Strolling around town during Breck Bike Week in July, it's hard to imagine a time when mountain biking didn't exist in Breckenridge. But until outdoor activists like Ellen Hollinshead and Mike Zobbe starting transforming the remnants of mining trails and narrow gauge railroad lines around town into world-class singletrack—and locals like Mayor John Warner mustered up the courage to ride them—mountain biking was little more than a novelty in town.

By the mid 1990s, when mountain biking worked its way into the national mainstream, Breckenridge was already far ahead of the curve. The 24-hour mountain bike race was (arguably) born here, with Mountain Bike Hall of Famer John Stamstead visiting Breck as early as 1991 to participate in a local 24-hour ultra-endurance race called Montezuma's Revenge—one year before East Coast race promoter Laird Knight claims to have "invented" 24-hour racing. Races like the Firecracker 50, the Breck 100, and the three-stage Fall Classic helped forever etch Breckenridge into the national pro endurance circuit.

The result? Today Breckenridge is a town where folks joke that it's easier to place at nationals than at their local weekly races. It's a cultural thing; race promoter and community activist Jeff Westcott runs the Mountain Bike Junior League,





a youth mountain biking program that has bred a whole new generation of shredders. One of the league's first graduates, Kevin Soller, spent last year all over the podium at national downhill competitions. New stage-style race formats—like that of the Breck Epic—push American mountain bike racing further down the evolutionary path. There seems to be neither trail nor race that can stop this town and its people. The nine-year-old girl with ice cream melting down her forearm? The Alison Dunlap Junior MTB Series champion. That friendly barista at the natural foods cafe? One of the top adventure racers in the world.

Still, it's one thing to lounge around Amazing Grace ogling the athletic clientele and hoping that Monique Merrill will pour some of her magic into your coffee cup—and it's another to go out and carve some calves of your own. So enough yakking; it's time to ride.

Here are four of Breckenridge's best mountain bike rides, one for every skill level. Ride them enough and you might catch me next year, staring at your legs.

BEGINNER

Boreas Pass, 12.5 miles

START Boreas Pass Road, 3.5 miles from Highway 9

WHY WE RIDE IT Boreas Pass is the quintessential beginner's ride, the perfect destination for folks who want to leave the pavement without risking their necks. It's also a path steeped in history; the trail follows an old narrow gauge railroad bed that once connected Breckenridge to Como and South Park. At the top you'll find an old ranger station and other artifacts from Colorado's mining glory days.

The ride only gains 1,120 feet of elevation on

wide and well-maintained dirt, so don't head out expecting to shred through banked switchbacks or hop boulders. But your cousins from the Midwest will make it up safely—and you'll all be rewarded with phenomenal views of the Blue River Valley and an aerial shot of Breckenridge from the top.

INTERMEDIATE

Peaks Trail, 9 miles

START From Peak 8 trailhead in Breckenridge (easier) or from South 2nd Avenue in Frisco (harder)

WHY WE RIDE In both directions, rooty singletrack, rock gardens, and several moderately technical climbs tunnel through the thick forest corridor. The descents are snappy, and if you watch other folks on the trail, you're likely to discover a handful of optional jumps, many of which are the ideal height for riders who are just learning to leave the ground with their bikes. The ride goes from Frisco to Breck (or vice versa) so you'll need to arrange transportation, ride the road home, or double back for an epic 18-mile day. Start in Frisco for more challenging ascents.

Peaks Trail arguably receives more mountain bike traffic than any other trail in the area because it's accessible directly from town and accommodates such a large variety of skill levels. Yes, that means the trail can be crowded on the weekends, but it also means that you're participating in a near-universal Breckenridge mountain bike experience—it's thrilling to imagine your rubber rolling on the same tracks as someone like local resident Josh Tostado, ultra-endurance megastar and six-time winner of the Breck 100.

DIFFICULT

Colorado Trail, Kenosha Pass to Breckenridge via Georgia Pass, 33 miles

START Kenosha Pass Trailhead, 20 miles west of Bailey on Highway 285

WHY WE RIDE Because this trail is packed with all of a mountain biker's favorite treats in one ride: Singletrack through wildflower meadows and thick aspen groves, quadricep-busting climbs, rolling alpine descents, and a hearty helping of sharp rocks, gnarly roots, slippery-when-wet boulder fields, and hairpin switchbacks.

This ride often requires a big stash of dark chocolate or microbrew beer—for bribing a friend to drop you off at the Kenosha Pass trailhead—but you'll be the one who gets the sweet deal. There's nothing quite like a homecoming ride into the streets of Breckenridge after a grand adventure.



EXTREME

The Breck Epic 6-Day Stage Event, 240 miles

WHY WE RIDE This young race boasts six challenging stages, each 30–45 miles long, always starting and finishing in Breckenridge—a very atypical mountain bike race format in America. Think of it like a miniature, knobby-tired Tour de France where every stage ends on the Champs-Élysées. Unlike Le Tour, however, the Breck Epic lacks the pretense, multilingual posturing, and doping scandals. Race organizer Mike McCormack has created an inspiring celebration of trail and town, of local rider and sport—and one of the hippest gatherings of Breckenridge's top riders.

Wanna taste the pain without racing? Try the Guyot Loop, a 44-miler that covers over a dozen different local trail sections and boasts 9,400 feet of lung-shredding climbs. If you eat rides like this for breakfast, sign up for the race, August 14 through 19. Visit www.BreckEpic.com to download high-resolution route details and find registration info. *

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