

ferry county cycling federation

Barstow Dispatch 6.1

Summer 2026



Get some

As it turns out, the Barstow Dispatch is an annual thing. But given how quickly this one came together with so many hands, perhaps we can do two this year. Want to get one? Send snail mail with a human-generated limerick and your mailing address to:

FCCF

1 Rooner Way

Kettle Falls WA 99141

Blather

Even though the original idea of this newsletter was to be aggressively analog, our crack team of engineers, sitting idle most of the year, decided we should have a stronger web presence. To that end, we put a web log, aka, a blog, on our web-page. You can go find that.

Gripes, comments, ideas, submissions, etc.?

Bring it!

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Stine

Photos:

By contributor unless noted.

On the covers

Front/Inside: Lyle, WA April 2026.

Photo by Alex

Inside Back: Ben's kid getting rad.

Photo by Ben

Back: Hike a bike in Lyle.

Photo by Fancy Fred



PHOTO BY RORY

Summer 2026

Here's the truth: the motivation for this Dispatch is to tell the world about the Elephant NFZ. I'll spare you the elevator pitch on the NFZ here since Alex (the guy who designed it) and Lee (the guy who prodded it into existence, as he is wont to do, see Dispatch v1.1), both wax eloquent on the bike in these pages. Since the reach of our little Dispatch is so tiny, I will give away the Zed in NFZ. We wanted to call it the National Forest Zeitgeist. This name recognized that the essential design of the bike: sort of a mountain bike-lite-muscley-bike packer was one that is springing up across the bike landscape. It's a bike of the moment. Time will tell if it's a bike with long legs, as it were. As it turns out the folks at Swift (as in bike bags – see profile of Martina in Dispatch

2.3) just released a line called Zeitgeist. Elephant and Swift have a little history together from way back when Swift folks ran some bike gatherings in Seattle – where we debuted the NFE (another Alex-Elephant creation that sold well for a while). So we definitely didn't want to go out with that name. But we liked the sound of NFZ. So we stuck with it.



Bob really delivered for this Dispatch. First he sent me his commute pics. Man I love this idea. I'd love to do this again with other commutes. If you have a daily commute and you want to do this Bob trick: take the same photo every day (or so) at the same time. I love the chop wood-carry water vibe of this sort of thing. Anyway – take photos for 4 seasons and send them my way.

I knew Bob was doing a musician deep dive on his commutes, which happened to be the perfect length (40 minutes each way) – corresponding roughly to a side of a record. He's done a bunch of artists, but mentioned how thoroughly captured he was with Dylan. So captured, that he can't get off at the moment. That's significant for a dude with a music brain like Bob. So it belongs here.

Speaking of Dylan, we have here an article from Dylan about finding and riding moto trails. The east side of the Colville National Forest is packed with moto trails. We've talked about this in Dispatches past, but given the messy state and poorly managed trail clearing (more on that later) of Kettle Crest and feeder trails, Dylan's treatise has me thinking I may spend more time on the east side next summer.

Then there's the rocks – weirdly, Rory and Denny are super into geology. Rory has talked about

this in the past and I've tried to get him to write something on this because, frankly, I am not interested in it. Rory conscripted Denny and wrote a ditty. I love it. Turns out it is interesting. I hope we get more of this in the future.

Thomas comes in with an update on his journey through the bike industry. This article is kind of a follow up to his way into the bike shop that he wrote in Dispatch 3.3. I like the evolution here.

First time contributor, Nikki! As a geezer bike nerd, it's gratifying to watch people find their way into bikey times. Nikki's trip report for her first bike tour gives a familiar, but fresh accounting of the lessons cycle touring gives us. But it's the conclusion that matters: do those lessons close or open the door to future adventures? Nikki's conclusion is clear.



Taylor Report

By John

The bad news: Upper Taylor

The snow melted out super early this year. I had logged out the Taylor trailhead/KCT intersection by May 15. That's a record.

The contractor logged out KCT north from Taylor intersection in that same time frame. I did a legit lap on May 22. Seemed like a banner year was in the works. Oh how wrong I was.

Wind storm happened. Effectively buried chunks of KCT north. And dumped a bunch on Taylor. But a single wind-storm can be handled. The crusher this year was how the Forest Service rec manager changed the contractor logout protocol: rather than have the contractor commit to clearing out trail

segments, the contractor cleared a set number of trees per trail, then stopped. Then went to a new trail. So on Upper Taylor, for example, from the trailhead to the wall of deadfall was only about 2.5 miles. And it's impassable at that wall of dead fall. Tons of huge trees.

It's easy to direct my frustration at the FS rec manager or the contractor, but no doubt this was a result of the bullshit Trump, Elon, and Big Balls wreaked with the DOGE fiasco. That's it on that.

So the last time I rode up to the wall of trees, I brought a chainsaw and cut deadfall on about .25 mile of trail, but did not clear it. That was the first or second week of June. Based on my discussions with a new mountain bike trail guide service guy (more on that below), those trails have not been cleared. Soon the Industrial Fire Pre-caution Levels (IFPL) will close all trail work for the season.



PHOTO BY MELINDA @ EVERGREEN



So the upshot is that at the time of this writing, Upper Taylor is off the menu for this year and that's a god-damn shame.

The good news: Lower Taylor

On the last weekend of May, the good folks at Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance showed up for a work party at FCCF World HQ. About 10 of us spent a full day logging out Lower Taylor.

This was the second full log out of the season. In early May, a local crew of about 6 or 7 went in and did a huge log out. Truly massive trees. This lower section of Lower Taylor is sandy and burned out. Trees topple like dominoes through there, the biggest gnarly ones tend to fall right along the trail. Hard work!

The upshot here though, is that Lower Taylor is open and rideable. Though it still desperately needs brushing and tread work. It's got lots of tree root holes and divots. Tons of growth. Bru-

tal rocky drop off cutouts at the water drainage corners. And really, without the Upper Taylor connection, it's a hard sell to ride the lower only since it's a 9 mile/45 minute drive into the Lower trailhead.

Other good news: Tim Horton's donuts. Mic made a run north while he was here to deliver a fresh batch for me. True love.

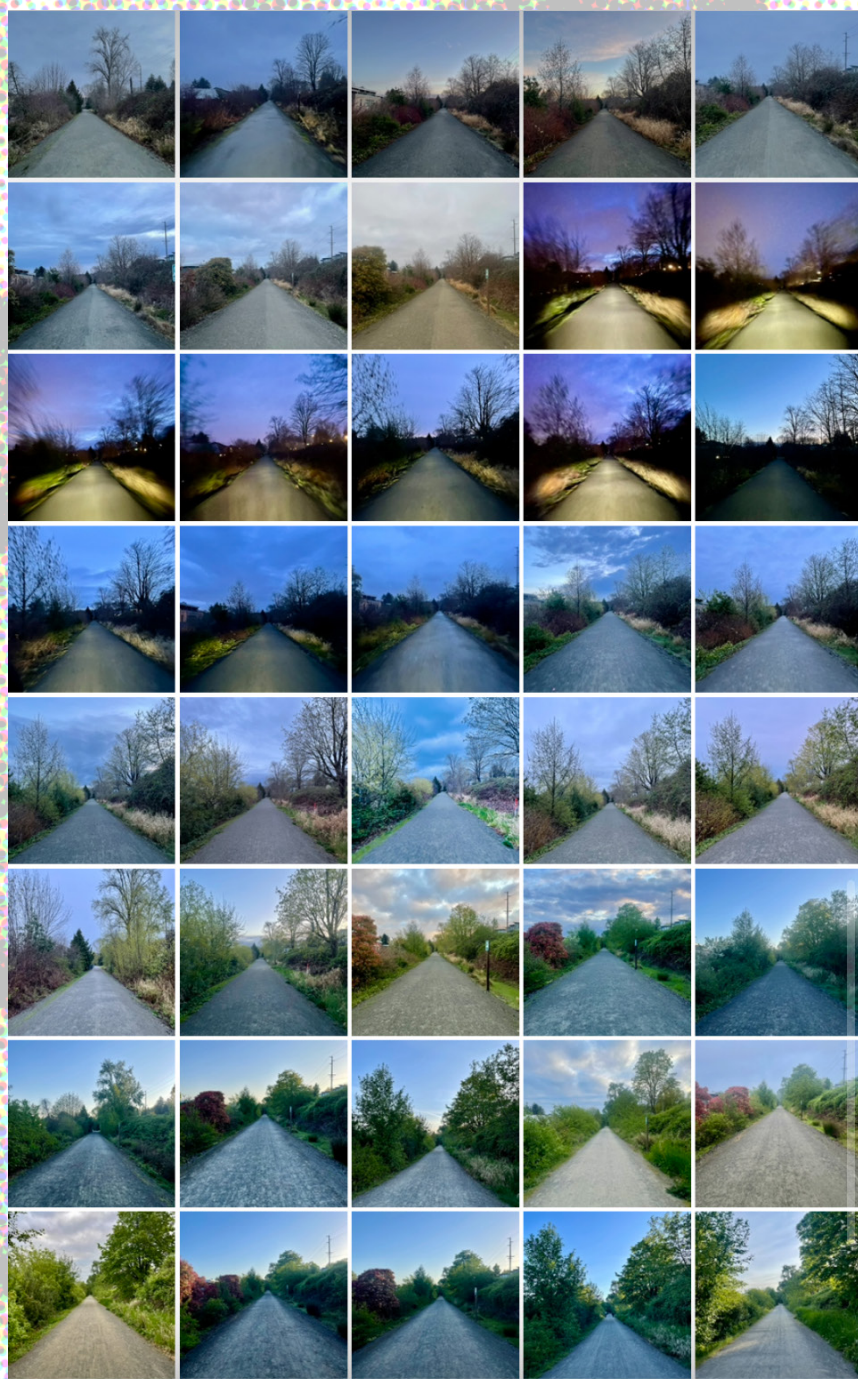
I've got a lot of whinging going on here, but let's talk about Evergreen, an org that does a bunch to keep trails open over in the Colville. They have full time crews over here doing the work. Real money going in to clear trails.

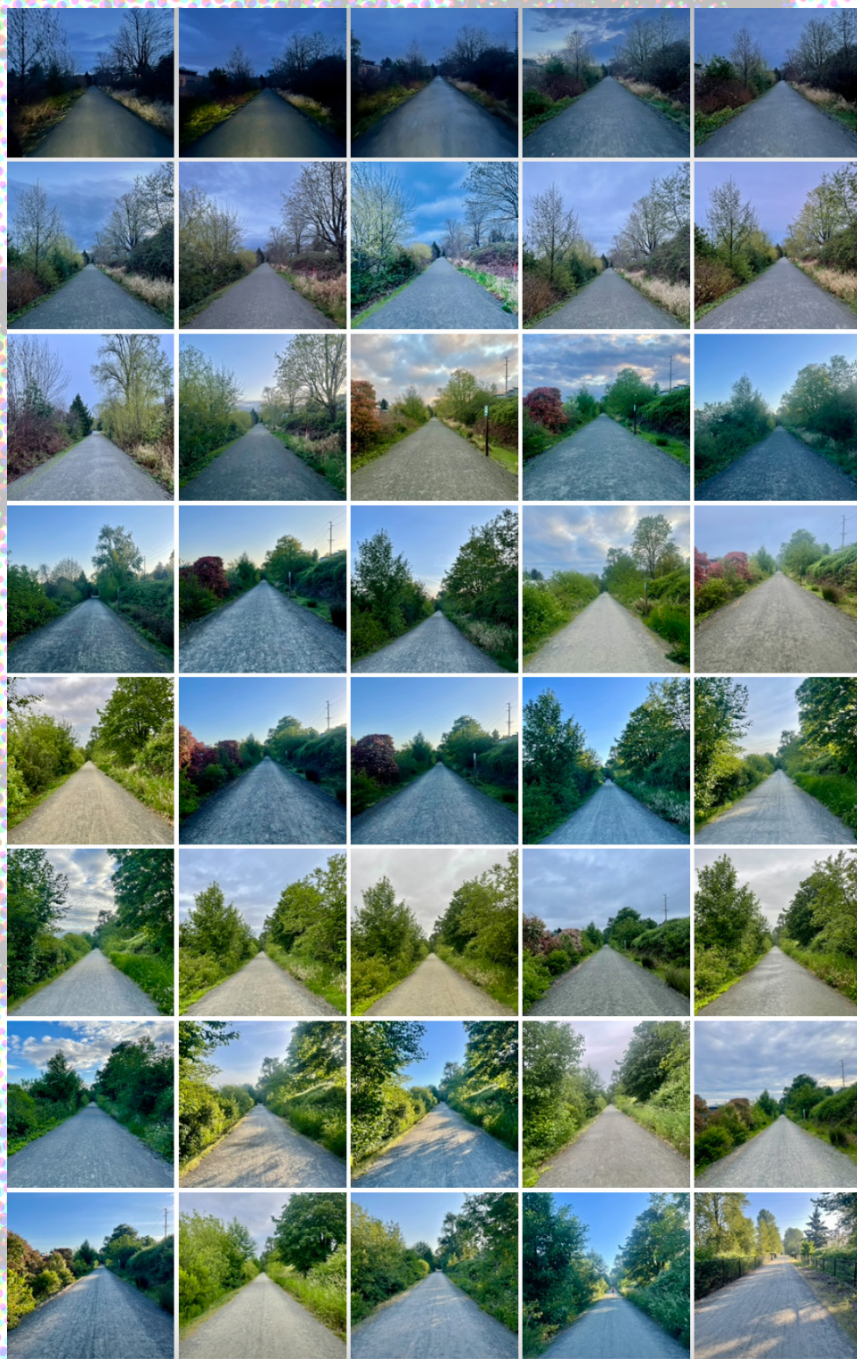
And Mic, specifically, is the guy who is in the guts of meetings with all the players that need to play to do stuff on federal forest land. I've gotten to know him over the last couple years and there is no one more committed to clearing trails – not just meetings, but boots on the ground, saw and tool maintenance, driving all over the state, problem solving, grill cooking, volunteer corralling, etc etc – than Mic.





150 days/3500+ miles of commuting in the books for this school year. I've heard both Rick Rubin and Barry Lopez both speak about the power of returning to the same place repeatedly; how, through habit and attention, subtle shifts in light, air, color, and sound begin to reveal themselves. The more often you return, the more these nuances expand. Over time, the beauty of a place and moment slowly unfolds itself to you. Or as Prince sings, "there is joy in repetition."





Photos are from the Eastrail along Lake WA in Renton, time 6:30am

Bob's Bob

by Bob

I'm an elementary music educator in Bellevue, WA who commutes by bike most days of the school year. It's a 20-mile round trip, with each leg averaging about 40 minutes. Most would agree it's the perfect commute. Better yet, 40 minutes is just about the length of an album. Two rides, two albums a day. (*Shokz OpenRun headphones deserve a shoutout here.)

I decided it would be rewarding to start taking deep dives into artists by listening to their entire catalogs in chronological order—to understand a body of work through the lens of its evolution. Bob Dylan felt like the perfect place to start. I was a casual fan, but my knowledge didn't extend much beyond what most people already know. And Dylan's catalog is massive: 40 studio albums, 21 live albums, and 18 official Bootleg Series releases. Enough to keep me busy for months.

American composer Henry Threadgill said, "Music should go right through you, leave some of itself inside you, and take some of you with it when it leaves."

That's exactly what happened.

The Bob deep dive changed me. Working through an artist's complete body of work was unexpectedly moving. Somewhere along the way, objectivity disappeared, and I simply fell in love with Bob and his world.

With that came a profound respect for one of the most important artists of my lifetime—not because I was told he was important, but because I experienced the work on its own terms, my own terms, one album at a time.

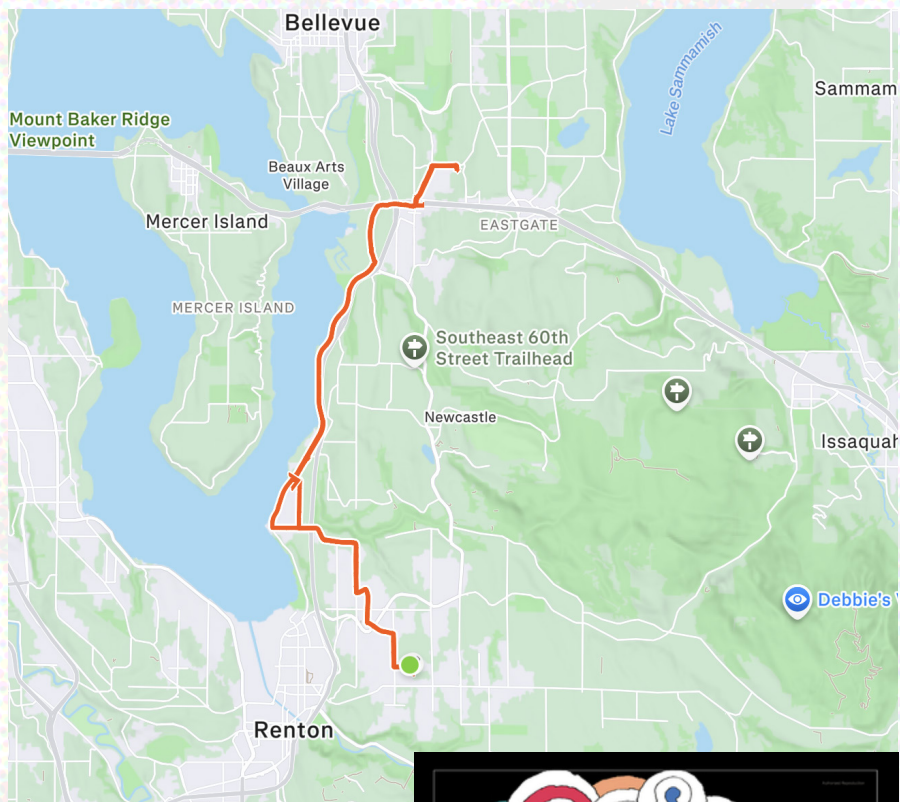
Nothing new needs to be written about Bob Dylan. But the experience reminded me how satisfying it can be to nerd out on something at your own time and pace for no reason other than curiosity. Whether it's brand new or a thousand years old, there's always artistic awe and creative wonder waiting to be discovered and considered by anyone willing to spend time with it.

Go deep and narrow sometimes and may you find something that rocks your socks off.

Sidenotes and digressions:

My Bob's Bob playlist, compiled after listening to everything





After being immersed in everything Bob, it occurred to me that my daily commute actually resembles a Bob silhouette. A happy coincidence and simple twist of fate?!

*Dylan poster by Milton Glaser



Bob is a musician, educator, daily bike commuter, dad, etc. More of his bio in Barstow Dispatch 4.2

Gneiss Riding on the Kettle

By Rory, with an assist by Denny.

Geology tells a story. Washington has a lot of complex geology stories (pun intended), and if you're interested in the history of the areas you visit, figuring out the geological thread in that history is a cool piece.

Complex, located primarily in British Columbia extending into north east Washington.

Kettle Dome was made during the "Crazy Eocene" (Nick Zentner) era,

which is when the earth was really warm (e.g. no arctic ice), and the tropic lines were much further away from where they are now. Before the Eocene Epoch, the Kettle Dome was getting its metamorphic components from either sedimentary or volcanic (igneous) deposits dating back 1 billion years. This is around the time Spokane had ocean front real estate in the form of the



PHOTO BY ALEX

The picture above shows a bunch of guys sitting on a bunch of rocks, probably metamorphic, which in turn are on top of the Kettle Dome. Specifically, this is around the KCT-Taylor connector, on top of the Kettle detachment fault, looking east.

Ferry County mountain bike riding usually takes place off of Sherman Pass (Hwy 20) or Deer Creek Summit (Boulder Cr Rd). The height and elevation for these trails are the result of the Kettle Dome, which is part of the Shuswap (Secwépemc)

ancient north American continent Laurentia. These sediment and igneous rock metamorphosized into the gneisses and schists.

Denny's side note: "Gneiss is metamorphic in origin, compared to granite which is igneous and comes directly from magma. They both form Plutons, which is my favorite geology word. I love the idea of granite or gneiss domes slowly rising and crystallizing underground, forming the base of a mountain range. As opposed

to volcanic rock that cools rapidly above ground, fracturing into a sharp brittle mess. "

That's a Gneiss looking rock!



Gneiss looks like granite, but it's totally not granite. It's sort of like saying Pearl Jam and Creed sound alike. Not the same at all. Gneiss is metamorphic, while Granite is igneous. Kettle is formed from Gneiss, and not granite. Gneiss has layers and looks like a crepe cake.



What the Schist is that rock?

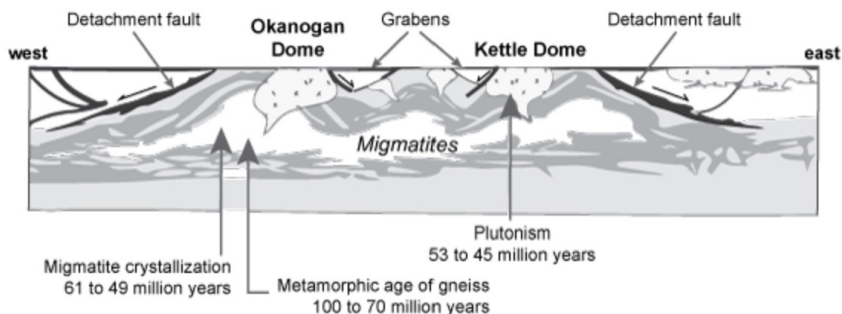


Schist has layers like Gneiss. Gneiss' layers flake easily, and have sparkly minerals like mica crystal, and sometimes garnets.

The finish

A little while later, during the Eocene era that occurred 56.0 million years ago (Ma) to 33.9 Ma, mountains formed pretty much everywhere, and Ferry County wasn't going to be left out. Tectonic motion reversed course, thinning the crust in the Kettle region as the plates moved apart. This allowed a warm, taffy-like metamorphic core to swell up into a dome at the detachment fault.

The Gneiss and Schists began to pop up and said hello about 55-52



Diagrammatic cross section across the Okanogan and Kettle gneiss domes, which were exhumed and cooled in early Eocene time in response to extension deep in the Earth's crust. Modified from Kruckenberg and others (2008).

FIGURE 1-DIAGRAMMATIC SECTION STOLEN FROM DNR WEBSITE (<https://dnr.wa.gov/washington-geological-survey/explore-popular-geology/geologic-provinces-washington/okanogan#EOCENE>)

Ma when its detachment faults formed. After the detachment faults formed, the uplift happened 52-49 Ma during the Sanpoil volcanism. Around 49-48 Ma things really cooled off, and then everything stabilized after.

Rory and Denny: there's more to say about these two. But for now, Rory is one of my favorite funny people, because he's not funny in an obvious way. Or maybe at all. Dry humor? Not sure. But an engineer by day and a fantastic thinker always and a generous dude.

Denny is literally a rocket scientist. He designs rockets and sends shit into space. But he's not just an egghead. He's that, but he's also super hands-on fixer designer, solutioner, nerd. And so calm and goddamn competent, it seems, at everything. But most critically, he can legit manual and wheelie for days.

more info

Roadside Geology of Washington State

<https://store.geosociety.org/products/201-rdgwa2>

WA100: Washington Geotourism

<https://wa100.dnr.wa.gov/okanogan/sherman-pass>

Corrugated architecture of the Okanogan Valley shear zone and the Shuswap metamorphic complex, Canadian Cordillera

<https://pubs.geoscienceworld.org/gsw/lithosphere/article/8/4/412/188491/Corrugated-architecture-of-the-Okanogan-Valley>

Kettle Falls Gneiss - Nick Zentner

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxxZBQtesOM>

The Next Chapter

By Thomas

As a lifetime cyclist, the day I started working at a bike shop was a very special day. It was the fruition of something I'd always considered inevitable and finally, at 33 years old, everything in my life was going in the same direction. Nothing getting in the way of my riding like every other job I'd had. The final piece in the lifestyle puzzle. An achievement by my own standards.

We've all heard the quotes something along the lines of "Don't make your passion a job."

I'd heard stories of people burning out, being grumpy and moving on from the shop and it boggled me. Of course, I thought I was different. Riding bicycles is my entire life and it always will be. I will retire from here. This is what feels right.

For the large majority of my cycling life, it was my only interest. There was a brief two-year period where I introduced snowboarding as off season entertainment but otherwise, bicycles were all I could see. I wasn't willing to let anything into my bubble that would inhibit riding bicycles. A very myopic existence and very likely to my own detriment as I probably missed out on a lot of fun things because of it. I was obsessed.

I can't really pinpoint a day when the decline started but I would wager a



bet that it was somewhere around the time E-bikes became a thing. I viewed them as a novel flash in the pan that would just go the way of Shimano Air Lines or Rapid Rise. (I won't get into the reasons I dislike E-Bikes but let's just establish that it's not the experience I am looking for in my own cycling currently so I have no interest in them at this time.)

I had the experience of working at a bicycle shop during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing "bike boom" of 2020-2021. Holy jumpin' shitballs. Hundreds of bikes going out the door as fast as we could build them. People were leaving on incorrectly sized bikes but it was all we had and they didn't want to wait. Record profits, for one person at least. Then the pendulum swung the other way. Factories shut down, parts

shortages, no bikes in the warehouses, selling people hopes and dreams on a pre-order spreadsheet with year long wait times in some cases. Mainly though, my complication was that people noticeably changed during that period in a way that made my job less fun than it was before. I'll leave it at that.

As a few more years passed, E-Bikes gained momentum and things were getting complicated. Fixing modern bicycles now requires proprietary software and subscriptions to digital service tools. At some point, someone decided it would be a great idea to route cables and hydraulic brake hoses through the headtube. I began adjusting a derailleur's "cable tension" with my phone. Auto shifting, electronically controlled suspension damping, regenerative braking and a new Transmission® mounting standard brought on by the "Trojan Horse" of SRAM's UDH, a scheme that was brilliantly executed, in my opinion.

I fell in love with bicycles because of their mechanical simplicity. It's part of the "romance" of the bicycle for me. I like simple things that work forever and I was starting to feel out of place in an industry increasingly obsessed with batteries and planned obsolescence. You won't find a fully functional XX1 T-Type rear derailleur in a parts bin 20 years from now but that X9 derailleur from 2010 will be as crisp as ever. I'm not against all technological advancements in cycling, I love dropper posts and I'd be willing to try 32" wheels but I personally draw the line at a motor assisting me up the hill.

An engine is fine though.

I've always had a backburner interest in motorcycles but other than an 80cc 2-stroke in my formative years, I'd never rode them. An extended motorcycle trip of some kind had long been on my bucket list and I planned to get to it eventually. Eventually, I also turned 40 years old, much to my own dismay. As a man approaching middle age, I suppose I was due for a midlife crisis but motorcycles came to me more as a curious test of my mechanical capacity. I had refined my process working on bicycles professionally and wondered if I could apply that process to something different but similar.

My Wife was initially not supportive of the idea and stated I could not buy a motorcycle. So I got one for free. Ha. It had sat outside for 40 years and I had zero experience. Just a manual and a dream. Over the next 2 months I spent every free minute and dollar on it and to my own amazement, I got it running. I will never forget the satisfaction I felt when it started. The sound, the rumble of an engine right below your ass, the speed, understanding how carburetors work. Motorcycles had effectively captivated my mind and my name was added to the running list of cyclists ruined by them. But I was obsessed again and that felt really good. This all added to my growing disconnect with a bicycle industry that I was already losing faith in.

Unfortunately, that Covid pendulum is still swinging today and we were constantly hearing from Brian about



shops closing around the country nearly every day. (I refer to Bicycle Retailer and Industry News as BRI-AN because I think it's funnier than BRAIN.) Reduced margins, direct to consumer sales, brands in direct competition with the independent shops that helped build them, dwindling consumer spending among other complications.

A perfect storm.

Being the buyer for the shop, I probably had a little more visibility than others but I could see the cracks forming, I could see the writing on the wall. My internal alarms began chirping probably over a year in advance. I'd never thought about what I would do after the bike shop as I had never planned on leaving but there I was. Tired, jaded, frustrated and each day closer to what I knew

was coming. A month or two before I left, I had given up. Threw in the towel. The restrictions of a business near closure were making my daily job impossible and it wasn't worth the stress anymore. Eventually I was laid off completely, 9 years to the day. 4 months later the shop closed. Gone. The end of an era. The last-day party felt like a funeral.

I don't regret my time in the bike industry, it was the most insane job I have ever had. Like seriously, I couldn't even make up the stories that I have. It was a wonderful way to spend a decade but even if the shop didn't close, I would have left anyway. It was time. I had gotten the experiences I wanted from the bike industry and I wanted out before it fully turned into something else entirely.

Riding bicycles will always be my first love and will be a part of my life forever. Working at the shop refined my interest in mechanics and I've since applied that to motorcycles which progressed to a vintage Toyota pickup. My Wife and I now work remotely with flexible schedules. We bought a van to travel in that holds bicycles and a motorcycle. Starlink, you get the picture. This is the next chapter of my life. This is what feels right now and I can go back to my bubble where bicycles don't have motors and derailleurs don't have batteries.

My life has been a series of progressions, taking an interest in something, following it to its logical



conclusion and moving on to discover something else. Bicycles were enough for 30 or so years but I've learned it's okay to let other things in. Motorcycle trips, restoring the car I drove in High School, playing bass guitar in a band, fly fishing, van trips. There's a lot of fun shit to do in this world and I shouldn't limit myself like I did in the past. Variety is the spice of life and my horizons have been expanded throughout this whole process. I'm interested to see where we go next.

It's hard to know where you're going if you don't know where you've been. One thing leads to another, which

leads to another, which leads to another and I suppose that's called life.

Stay thirsty, my friends.

I met Thomas during Covid, when he worked at Bike Hub downtown. I had my shocks serviced. The shop had a door-to-door service, picking up and delivering the bike. In truth, I had watched him on Instagram before that and was taken by his irreverent and smart postings. Of course we curate the aspirations of our possible selves on social media, but having met Thomas and finally riding with him, I found him genuinely represented all the more so IRL.

Elephant NFZ: An Ode to Overbiking

By Lee

*"My bicycle masters boardwalk and
quagmire with aplomb!"*

Tom Nuttall, Deadwood S2E8

Like many, my first commuter bicycles were mountain bikes, starting with a 90s era rigid Skykomish and eventually upgrading to an aluminum Stumpjumper with a suspension fork. These bikes crossed campus, soaking up cobbles, bombing stairs, and dipping through rooty shortcuts between buildings. Also like many, I was eventually seduced by the siren song of skinnier, faster tires for the road and fatter, chunkier tires for the singletrack. Over time, cyclocross bikes became a compromise choice, tracking down light 35mm tires that would fit and still allow some pinch flat protection when tackling the park trails, while still feeling fast on the road.

Underbiking was the name of the game, riding the roadiest setup on the rowdiest trails. Even the Vintage Bicycle Quarterly 650b revolution and the advent of gravel bike racing still approached the problem from the pavement, with wider tires finally being available but the geometry remaining steadfastly road-oriented. For me this ended up with building a carbon fiber gravel bike with 55mm knobby tires, a midlife crisis machine for taking on singletrack but with the fit of a road racing bike.



Meanwhile, ironically I also found myself frequently riding my first-generation Surly Karate Monkey, an early 29er and a cross between a 00s-era mtb and a touring bike. While it wasn't as fast as my midlife crisis machine, I wasn't that much slower - not nearly as slow as when riding my actual mountain bikes with their super-steep seat tubes and heavy tires. The dirt detours on my commute were even more fun to just rip through, and loading it up for bikepacking I looked forward to enjoying the technical bits rather than an exhausting exercise in line-picking.

For me, the NFZ is the next logical step. It's eminently rideable on road and gravel thanks to the slacker seat tube, but still keeps the long mountain bike front end geometry that makes for a truly capable singletrack machine. It also fixes the Karate

Monkey's other main annoyances - sliding dropouts keep singlespeed capability without the frustrating track ends, modern headtube and seattube diameters allow for a wider range of forks and dropper posts, and the tire clearance fits modern wide but still fast rolling 29er tires.

Of course the reality remains that all design is a game of compromises: with the NFZ the slack seat angle impacts the climbing a bit, and as the trails get steep it can be more challenging to keep the front wheel weighted while sitting. Finding the optimal gearing for both road and steep mountain segments remains a challenge even with a modern wide drivetrain 1x 11-51 cassette - this might be a signal that 2x drivetrains will be back in fashion soon.

In the end though, hopping on the NFZ brings back the fun of riding an old hardtail around town, finding the shortcuts (and long-cuts) that cut through greenspaces, sending curbs and not fearing the crumbling parts of the city's road network. I was able to gear up for a S240 bikepacking adventure out on the Kitsap peninsula, it felt just as capable bouncing along ORV trails with a camping load as it did as a pure hardtail machine in the Teanaway a few weeks later. There's still room in my stable for bikes that are more suited to a longer road and gravel ride (my Rodriguez NFE clone) or for pure mountain biking (an Ibis Ripley AF) but for the 90% case of "bike" the NFZ fills so many roles. I don't know if I've put my midlife crisis behind me, but I've put the carbon fiber bike up for sale.

What does the "Z" stand for?

Naming the new NFZ went through a bunch of options, eventually landing on liking how "NFZ" sounded (and as a rhyme with the NFE) without ever really settling on what the Z stood for.

Editor: Consider the King's pronunciation of Z, /zɛd/, and it all falls apart.

So you can pick your own Z, or choose one from the suggestions below:

Zoomer
Zipper,
Zeitgeist
Zexplorer
Zardo
Zirconium
Zenith
Zephyr
Zhuzher
Zestier
Zonda
Zowie
Zootier
Zinger
Zeppole

*Lee's bio is in Dispatch 4.2.
He's superb.*



Introducing Alex's Elephant NFZ

By Alex

For 25 years I've been exploring and touring in the PNW forests, and this bike is my latest tool for that job. I made a big shift in the last 5 years from road/touring oriented bikes to flat bar. I was so into road-shaped bikes for this job that I learned how to make frames 20ish years ago and built a series of skinny tubes, fat tired, light and low trail offroad machines.

Things changed when I got a "modern" or "progressive" MTB about 5 years ago, an Ibis Ripley. That bike is amazing on pure singletrack, it climbs and descends amazingly. However the geometry is really uncomfortable for rolling or flat terrain and I found myself avoiding even 5 mile delivery sections on routes. I also missed the simplicity of a hardtail, and almost immediately started looking for deals on cool frames.

One that I scooped up quickly (late 2021/early 2022) was a 2014 RSD Triumph, which was built as a trail/enduro hardtail for 140mm forks and had a radical looking geo for

the time. What really attracted me to it was the Reynolds 853 steel tubing and having been made in the US.

I rode the Triumph as a mountain bike for a while and it was great in that regard, but it really clicked when I built it up with a rigid fork, put on fenders and racks, and started using it as my family bike (for riding with kids), commuter, and then my favorite adventure bike. It was really different than my low trail, drop bar, fat tire bikes. It was a little slower on the road -- but not a lot. It was more capable on trails and really fun. My last bike ride on that bike was through Swale Canyon (near Lyle, WA) this spring on a loop that was 20 miles of pavement, 30 miles of gravel and trail. It was one of my favorite rides in a long time, and that bike was perfect.

The Elephant NFZ pictured here is the culmination of thinking through what the best mixed-surface, all-day, road/gravel/trail mountain bike would look like for me. I helped



design it, but Elephant Bikes is making a small production run. It's basically a modern MTB up front (long top tube, slack-ish 67 degrees head tube angle) and a classic one in the rear (slacker 73.5 degree seat tube angle, long chainstays). We kept the front triangle fairly large so it carries lots of water and has room for big frame bags.

I built it up with the normal mix of modern MTB parts: 12sp Shimano (XT, SLX), hydraulic brakes. But when I had to pick between comfortable and outright performance I went for comfort. So it has my favorite Ritchey Kyote bars (27 degree sweep and the forward bend works nicely with inner barends). Originally I thought I'd design this bike for rigid forks exclusively, but made it suspension-ready to add versatility and because it opened up more options for rigid forks too. The SID feels at home here, it's light but the 100mm travel that I'm running provides firm suspension that fits the bike's DNA.

I've had the bike for 5 or 6 weeks and it's been on all sorts of fun day adventures so far. On its first ride I took it 20 miles around Seattle exploring pockets of single track before

realizing I was late and jumping on the light rail to get back home. In the photo above I took it on a weekend of mountain biking with some friends (including one who has the other NFZ prototype) and covered many miles on new trails in Teanaway before going over to Wenatchee to see what they've done there. This week I've been exploring Orcas Island on it including a few trips up Turtleback Mountain (more gravel than trail).

I love the bike. I'm going to keep my drop bar adventure bikes too, but if I don't know what I'm getting into this is the bike that I'm taking.

Alex's bio is in Dispatch 4.2. TL;dr: Great human. Beautiful mind. Excellent friend.





The evolution of the e-logger

By John

I'm too old and wretched to lug a chainsaw in a backpack as I climb up Taylor Ridge. Anyone paying attention to the Dispatch will recognize that Taylor Ridge is the main FCCF hobby horse trail. Since the 2015 Stickpin fire, keeping Upper Taylor Ridge clear requires multiple passes a season. The most minor of windstorms topple a seemingly endless number of standing dead trees.

The Upper Taylor trail is a steady climb – rising about 2000 feet over the 5ish miles from the trailhead to the old lookout site. In years' past I could manage the climb on my mountain bike with a chainsaw, fuel, oil, etc, in a backpack. But only so far. I was good for 1000' or so of climbing, but with heavy downfall, I would often only be

able to clear ¼ or ½ mile of trail at most. The time and energy investment was going more to the climb than the clearing.

This scenario is an obvious solution for an ebike.

I've tried a couple different ebikes. In 2023, I started with an off-the-peg clown bike from Bikes Direct. I bought this bike (a "Motobecane" in name only) mainly for the great deal on the Shimano Steps motor. Glen (Elephant Bikes) and I planned to harvest the motor from the Motobecane so he could make a purpose-built trail maintenance ebike. Since the Motobecane showed up in the spring, I decided to do the season of trailwork on it before we chopped it up.

The Motobecane sucked in a number of ways as a trail bike. It's not the Motobecane's fault. It was designed to be an urban commuter: folding with a giant hinge to make it easy to stow. It has 20" wheels. The stock derailleur hung about 2 inches from the ground, picking up and smashing everything along the trail. Its tiny short wheelbase made it an unintentional wheelie machine when loaded with a saw and torqued on the steep bits of the climb. It's hard to imagine a shittier design for trail logging.



As a quick solution, Glen hacked an Extracycle Freeradical kit onto the back of the Motobecane. This modification spread out the wheelbase and gave me more storage for tools and supplies. Meanwhile, I installed a BOX derailleur on it which gave me a couple more inches of clearance. These mods made it suck a lot less. This got me through the 2023 season. But it was clear that the Motobecane was not a long term solution.



That said, the ebikeness of it was a winner. Getting up Taylor Ridge way quicker and with less meat energy spent on climbing and more dedicated energy for clearing trail: the ebike was a Good Thing. We were on the right track.

At the end of the season, I dumped the Motobecane clown bike off with Glen. We had a vague plan to one day turn those bits into a purpose-built trail maintenance bike.

Spring 2024: Buddy Alex suggests using a Benno mid-tail long bike as a platform and pairing it with a GMAC hub from Grin. In classic Alex style, he finds a great deal on a used Benno and builds the bike up for me. I get it at the end of the summer and I end up using this bike for 2025 logging season.





The Benno + GMAC was a huge improvement over the Motebecane clown bike. The Benno was sturdier, more powerful, and much easier to load up with gear. Also, the GMAC is both pedal assist and throttle motor. The throttle makes a big difference when starting under load and on steep sections of trail. The motor is seriously powerful and is paired with relatively sophisticated controller. For example, Alex tunes the torque to optimize slow speed, heavily-loaded starts.

The drawbacks of the Benno were two fold: firstly, the weird wheel size is 24" (BMX). There's just not many fatter options for this tire size and tubeless compatible rims are virtually non-existent. So you're stuck with fairly narrow, low volume tires for heavy duty back country conditions. In fact, I have some tire issues that require some unnatural acts (ever hear of belt dressing?) to keep inflated. Secondly, it's a big bike. Generally, when I'm doing a trail logout, I'm hauling

the bike + gear to the trailhead in the truck. Lifting and loading the bike into the truck is a big lift. As is generally maneuvering the bike on the trail when fully loaded.

And finally, I found that descending on the Benno was a bit sketchy at speed. There's just too much bike and too much rigid bike with all the gear. It's not like I want to bomb down the descents, but I really wanted more tire volume and a bit of suspension. That said, I love the brake battery regeneration on the GMAC system. Since I felt like I needed to finesse the descents, feathering the brake regen made a pretty mellow roll down the steepest bits of the trail.

Winter: 2026. Glen surprises me by re-engaging with the e-logger bike. Last fall, I found a good deal on a Rockshox 150mm travel fork for 27.5. I had a nice wheelset for it. And we had the brake and shifting bits set aside from the Motobecane. By this spring, Glen has the e-logger built and ready to roll.





Turns out this is what I've been after. It's a mountain bike. It rides like a mountain bike. It descends like a mountain bike. It's got plump high-volume tires. It's got a squishy fork. It's a tad longer in the rear, and it just happens to have a super mega rack welded into the frame. My chainsaw straps to the rack for quick deployment. I've got a giant Ortlieb for everything else. And the motor from the Motobecane helps me up hills.

The e-logger is also big and heavy, but much more maneuverable in a familiar mountain bike way. I have no idea what the full loaded weight of the bike + me is, but I suspect it's pushing 300 lbs. In a perfect world, the e-logger would have that GMAC motor, because it's so powerful and the controller allows super fine grain dialing in. But the Shimano Steps system is good enough. A couple weeks ago, I climbed up Taylor about 3 miles (1500 feet?). This used to take me about 2 hours when I did it on my analog bike with

a pack. Now it's about 45 minutes and I'm not blown to bits by the time I start cutting and clearing.

I'd also kill for a bike/kick stand solution that can handle the mega loaded bike on shitty steep rocky trails.

This bike will be the keeper. I think we'll end up selling the Benno shell, but sitting on the GMAC motor system for a future project.





VIEW FROM THE AMBULANCE. SAUF PATCH BY TARIK.
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Team Injury Report

Player Name	Injury	Practice Status	Game Status
Fancy Fred	Pneumothorax. Broken ribs. Bell rung, verily.	LP	Available
John	Kneecapped: broken asunder	DNP	Out
Alex	Violent gas	FP	Available
Glen	The gout	FP	Available
Lee	Barfing	LP	Available

Status Reference Legend

Practice Participation Codes

- DNP: Did Not Participate in practice.
- LP: Limited Participant (less than 100% of normal repetitions)
- FP: Full Participant (100% of normal practice workload).

Official Game Status Designations

- Out: Will not play (0% chance).
- Doubtful: Unlikely to play (25% chance).
- Questionable: Uncertain to play (50% chance).
- Available: Expected to play (no designation required, but listed for clarity).



Summary:

Fred has mostly recovered from his megafuct Spring 2025 bike explosion. See Dispatch 5.1 for a full accounting of that accident. But progress is slow and non-linear. Nerves around the rib/costal region are growing back incrementally with serratus muscle pain. Fred rides, but he's not 100% yet.

Meanwhile, John is out for a couple months with a broken kneecap. He pulled a classic old man move and missed a step while walking off the side of a fire engine, thereby landing with all of his weight and that of the accumulated gravity on the right foot. The shock of the landing moved up his leg to find the weak link, which turned out to be his kneecap.

Previous to that both Alex and Lee battled some brutal GI issues during the spring climbing camp in Roslyn. Alex was taken out by a vicious bout of gas during the climb up Big Sandy, whilst Lee woke up the previous night with violent stomach issues and bouts of vomiting. He elected to sit out the following day's sojourn to Number 2 Canyon,

where perhaps the worst injury was when John decided not to purchase the cherry pie (pictured) at D'anjou Bakery in cashmere, an oversight he regrets daily, nearly by the hour.



The gout, in its relentless commitment to Glen's downfall, visited again only to be thwarted by Glen's homegrown remedy: kick something hard, repeatedly, with your toe to break up the gout crystals and move on with your life. Try this at your own risk. It's about an 11 on the 10 point pain scale, but it does work.



Cycle, Skate, and Survive

A beginners Guide to a weekend bike pack trip on Vashon Island

By Nikki

I started cycling in the summer of 2024 mainly just to get to campus. The first time I rode a bike that summer I fell over turning onto a bike path. This summer with some motivation from my partner, Maya, and my buddy Pete, we planned a 32 mile weekend trip on Vashon Island. We drove from Portland, OR to Point Defiance in WA. We parked our car and jumped on the ferry- Which is awesome because you get to board before the cars, and save money by biking on! There were tons of other cyclists kitted up and ready to race. I knew that





I was going to be the anchor going up that first climb.

What drew us to Vashon was the sweet skatepark and the bay view bike/hike only camping sites. There's no better place to spend a weekend.

My personal record of miles in one day is around 50, so I thought 35 miles over the course of two days would be completely reasonable factoring in the weight of the camping gear and skateboard. Boy was I was mistaken!

I forgot to check the elevation gain!! I did some of the most elevation climbing in my whole cycling career. I cried, I fell over once and I had to walk up a gravel hill.

I made up for it by getting some awesome vegan eats and a big iced coffee in town.

I also was able to enjoy amazing views and campsites I wouldn't have been able otherwise access on foot or by car. What a rewarding feeling.



Cycling allows me to maximize my weekends. I'm able to combine all my hobbies into one adventure. I also am learning new skills like upcycling and sewing. I made this frame and feed bag from an old backpack! Saved me a few bones and worked perfectly to carry gear and beer XD.

I'm looking forward to my next trip already. I would like to try the fire and ice loop in Washington for my next adventure.

Here are my three key takeaways from my first backpacking trip:

1. **LAYERS**, I got so cold on the descents and at camp. I really wish I brought a windbreaker and will not make that mistake again.
2. Go with your friends that you **TRUST** and are very comfortable around. My girlfriend and my bestie were there cheering me on,

helping me get back up, and not getting upset when they had to wait for me at the top of the hill. That made me feel supported even at my lowest point.

3. Maybe account for a **rest** day!! The next day at work I was so exhausted and sore! While each adventure gets more difficult, and I get better and better at cycling, I still need to recover... especially from this one.

Nikki lives in Portland, OR. She grew up in Deerpark, WA. After high school, she went to WWU in Bellingham where I met her as she and my daughter became friends. She's a skater. She's a designer. She's a doer who gets shit done. She got a bike about a year ago and now she's a cyclist! When I heard she did her first overnight tour I was excited to hear about it and asked her to share it here. Great energy. Thanks Nikki!





An ode to the moto trail

Hi, I'm Dylan, and I like riding my bike in the woods. I've been doing it off and on for most of my 43 years on this planet, mostly in my home state of Washington. Despite that, I'm still amazed that mountain biking always offers new skills to hone, new experiences to have, and as I'll lay out over the next few hundred words, new places to ride.

As you can probably guess from the title, I will assert that the motorcycle trail can be, and often is, a great place to ride your mountain bike.

Horses for Courses

It's often tempting to segregate outdoor recreators and trail users into distinct and non-overlapping groups:

- *hikers*
- *mountain bikers*
- *motorcyclists*
- *horse people (there's probably a better term?)*

It's even possible to create sub-genres within those groups as well. Trail runners, XC mountain bikers, DH bros, you get the idea. Each of these groups has a tendency to frown upon the other groups' use of the outdoors, and we've all been guilty of thinking that whichever activity we're participating in at the moment is the one that is making the best and most legitimate use of a given trail network. I've done it, you've done it, we all like to talk a little shit about those other trail users.

To be clear, I think trail use restrictions are a very important concept and should be strictly enforced where established! I don't want MTBs riding in official wilderness areas for example and I would hate to find motorcycles ripping up a fresh new secret loamer that some mountain bikers built.

Despite the fact that some motorcycle trails end up becoming trenched-out, poorly-drained, eroded messes of sand and ruts, GOOD motorcycle

trails have several things going for them that are often overlooked by the average MTBer:

Maintenance

Moto trails tend to get cleared of dead-fall, storm debris, and general winter damage quicker than non-motorized trails do. This makes pretty obvious sense when you realize that it's much easier to carry a chainsaw and cover dozens of miles and thousands of feet of elevation in a day on a motorcycle. The moto trails near me are usually completely cleared shortly after the snow melts, while the nearby non-motorized trails require a handful of forays with saws and tools in hand in order to make them rideable after a long winter.

Location, Location, Location

In some regions, motorized trails are the only established trail option! Do you want to see a given peak, ridgeline, aspect, or drainage? Sometimes your choices are: a) moto trail or b) go home. Backcountry moto trails can often take you to incredibly beautiful locations with sweeping views and plenty of solitude.

I encourage you to make your own discoveries, but I can say that incredible trails that are worthy of your time exist in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, large swaths of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (I'm partial to the Mad River/Entiat areas), and Colville National Forest, just for starters.

Difficulty

At the risk of over-generalizing, I'll go ahead and assert that almost all moto trails are less technical than the hardest MTB-specific trails. There are obstacles that you just can't take a motorcycle up, down, over or through that work just fine on a MTB. If you're used to riding black or double-black MTB trails, you're likely not going to find a moto trail with harder features than you can handle.



MAJOR caveats apply to the above statement when it comes to climbing and gradients though! Moto folks love to cut in a trail that climbs at an impossibly steep pitch, that you simply cannot pedal up. In those cases, a MTBer will often find themselves pushing up a

steep trench, cursing themselves for not looking closer at the elevation profile of a ride they planned.

"Moto Duff"

Believe it or not, a moto trail can sometimes have a tread that is amenable to bike tires, without being too sandy or chewed up. The larger knobs of a motorcycle tire, coupled with their increased power can sometimes leave a nice, soft, permeable layer of what I like to call "moto duff" on a trail. If you're lucky enough to get just the right conditions, riding such a trail becomes the "chef's kiss" meme personified. Pushing into soft dirt in every corner, leaving a trail of dust clouds behind you, pulling off an enthusiastic schralp, I'm getting goosebumps just thinking about it.

The Holy Grail

With these points in mind, I hope I've made the case that it's entirely possible to find a backcountry motorcycle trail that has been cleared by motorcycles, isn't too steep to pedal up, that has amazing scenery and a trail surface that will caress the supple knobs of your expensive MTB tires. The feeling of blasting down a well-maintained moto trail with good sightlines and great soft dirt simply can't be beat.



When you're planning your next backcountry MTB ride, don't immediately look past the hundreds and thousands of miles of motorized trails that are available to you. Some of them can be absolute gems!

Speaking of gems... amirite? Dylan is a Spokaneite. He grew up in Hillyard. Moved to Seattle. Pretty sure he got a CS degree many years ago at UW? But not 100% on that. I don't think I can remember how we met, but I have to assume it was on the internet. He showed up for a Black Friday ride decades ago and we clicked. He's a monster rider: cyclocross racer, single speed CX too, mega elevation mountain biker guy, and has done his share of rando'ing. Kind. Smart. Funny. The whole shooting match.



