



Southern Off Road Bicycle Association
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For Area Mountain Bikers, It's an Uphill Battle *IMBA-SORBA Works Tirelessly to Make Sure You Win*

by Robin Allen (please include attribute if reprinted)

Have you ever ridden a bicycle? Do you know what it feels like to push yourself and your machine to the apex of a hill? Have you felt the sun on your shoulders and heard the wind whistling in your ears as you savored the fruits of your labor, the end of the challenge, as you glide down the hill you so recently conquered? Can you imagine experiencing these sensations on a mountain, in the middle of a forest or on an urban wooded hillside, as the woodpeckers drum, the raptors scream, the deer graze, the insects drone, and you meld man, machine, and the beauty of the outdoors? Imagine that, and you have perceived the essence of mountain biking. Mountain biking is a great way to exercise. It's a gateway to the outdoors. It's enjoyed by families, individuals; people of all ages, all skill levels, all genders, and all ethnicities. It's saved lives and led thousands to an active, healthy lifestyle. It's an enhancer and strengthener of communities. It's recreation, transportation, and about as Green as you can get. On top of all that, it's just plain fun. It's an activity enjoyed by thousands in the Metro Atlanta area, and it's an activity championed by the International Mountain Biking Association-Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (IMBA-SORBA).

Metro Atlanta's mountain bikers first became organized 21 years ago and founded SORBA, so that they would not be excluded from riding their bikes on public lands. That initial group of 20 concerned Georgians has grown to over 4000 members in 26 local chapters in 7 Southern states, and last year they partnered with IMBA, an international organization with like goals, to make their voice even stronger and their efforts more effective. IMBA-SORBA's mission is three-pronged and multi-faceted—advocate, educate, recreate--and the organization relies almost entirely on its members and other volunteers to carry out this mission, having only one full-time and six part-time staff members. IMBA-SORBA members get permission to build trails, they design and construct the trails, they maintain the trails, they educate trail users about riding, rules, and upkeep, and they offer events so that all can enjoy the trails, as well as to fund their work. IMBA-SORBA's members have volunteered countless hours over the past two decades, and their accomplishments are nothing short of phenomenal, and the ways they fulfill the mission can be varied and as unique to the communities they serve.

Public land managers do not wake up in the morning and think, "I know! I'll build a mountain bike trail in my park!" Getting permission to put in a mountain bike trail can take years, and it requires leadership, persistence and solidarity--many phone calls, many meetings, many shows of support, and many promises. IMBA-



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SORBA members spend a lot of time in city, county, state, and federal government offices, patiently building a relationship built on trust, and continuing that relationship through ongoing stewardship and community development. Land managers who work with IMBA-SORBA respect the organization and consider their trails and volunteers to be an asset to the lands they oversee and the communities they serve. Communities with trails are discovering that mountain bikers are good for business, bringing in customers and revenue.

Mountain biking is a learned skill, and IMBA-SORBA members have given up their time freely, so that others can learn to ride safely and improve their skills. They offer clinics, many free-of-charge, for kids, beginning riders, women, as well as racers and advanced riders. They also offer group rides, which provide opportunities to practice skills, make friends and meet new riding buddies. Mountain bikers are passionate about their sport, and dedicated to making it accessible.

Mountain bikers build most of their own trails, and IMBA-SORBA members have spent hours doing so by hand, and, more recently, assisted by machines. Even with a machine, it still requires hours of manual work to build a trail. In the process of building hundreds of miles of trails, our trail builders have developed processes and techniques that withstand the forces of man and nature. IMBA-SORBA trails are designed and built to last--that are environmentally sustainable and don't cause erosion. Members continue to learn new ways to build it even better, and they pass that learning on, teaching others how to build lasting trails that are enjoyed by bikers, hikers, dog-walkers, runners, and equestrians.

Mountain bikers often engage in uphill battles off the trail. Erroneous perceptions abound, and much time is spent refuting negative assertions. Below are some common misperceptions about mountain biking, along with an explanation of why this perception is not accurate or true.

Mountain bikes cause erosion. In a nutshell, nature and all trail users can cause erosion. Mountain bikers have a saying, which has led to a trail-building philosophy. *Water always wins. The trick is not to let it play the game.* The biggest culprit is often the trail itself, as most existing trails came into being through use (old logging roads, animal trails, historic throughways), rather than by design. Ill-designed trails erode, period. Mountain bikers have spent years studying trail design, and they've created ways to mitigate the effects of water. A properly designed trail drains well and lasts for decades. Mountain bikers have developed best-practices for trail design, construction, and maintenance, and these practices are recognized by land managers throughout the world. Mountain bikers are conscientious stewards of the lands they traverse.



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Mountain bikers won't stay on the bike trails only, and, they'll go off and create their own trails. IMBA-SORBA asserts that all riders should ride only on trails that are open to mountain bikes, and does not condone riding off trails or on trails that are explicitly closed to mountain bikes. IMBA-SORBA works to educate all trail users on proper use and trail etiquette. In truth, hikers and horseback riders are more likely to strike off on their own, into the woods, without a trail, because they are much more sure-footed off the trail. Bikes don't ride well over a thick carpet of leaves and forest debris--they need a smooth, hard surface to ride on. If a trail is properly built and enough trail exists to satisfy the area's riding population, riders won't feel a need to ride off the trail or on a closed trail. Signs of illegal riding on closed trails more often point to a need for more legal bike trails.

Illegal trail construction is illegal trail construction, and is never condoned by IMBA-SORBA.

Mountain bikers go so fast, they'll run over someone on the trail. IMBA-SORBA asserts that mountain bikers should maintain control at all times. If you're in control, the chances of crashing are reduced. Crashing a bike hurts, and can lead to serious injury (which can lead to time off the bike). Mountain bikers avoid crashing, and will slow down for pedestrians. Mountain bike/pedestrian crashes are anecdotal, a form of urban myth. There have been no reported incidents of pedestrian/cyclist crashes on Metro Atlanta trails.

Proper trail design and management creates long vistas, so that users can see what's ahead. Although the tread of a singletrack trail is narrow, brush is cleared back at least three feet on each side, to increase the rider's view. The farther ahead you can see, the better able a hiker or mountain biker is to anticipate, and react, to circumstances. In urban areas, extra steps should be taken to avoid user conflicts. One-way bike trails with reverse directions for bike and pedestrian travel reduce potential conflicts. Bikes moving in the same direction won't ever meet head-on. If a hiker can see a rider approaching, and a rider can see the hiker, neither will be surprised at a meeting, and can easily avoid meeting in a crash. All trail users need to keep in mind that they are sharing the trail with other users. Awareness goes a long way in avoiding conflicts.

Over the years, time and time again, IMBA-SORBA has proven its worth. Metro Atlanta boasts several successful mountain bike trails and trail systems, thanks to IMBA-SORBA's efforts. Some venues are small parks with a gateway trail for beginning riders and families. Others are complete systems with a variety of trails that cater to all riders, beginner to expert. Below is a partial list of trails and the agency that IMBA-SORBA has partnered with to create or maintain the trail:

Big Creek Park—Roswell, City of Roswell Recreation and Parks Department



Blankets Creek Mountain Bike Trail System—Woodstock, US Army Corps of Engineers

Chicopee Woods Mountain Bike Trail System—Gainesville, Chicopee Woods Area Park Commission

Harbins Park— Gwinnett County, Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation

Mt. Tabor Park—Dallas, Paulding County

Olympic Mountain Bike Course—Conyers, City of Conyers and the International Horse Park

Sara Babb Park—Dallas, City of Dallas

Sope Creek Mountain Bike Trail—Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, National Parks Service

Tribble Mill Park-- Gwinnett County, Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation

Yellow River Park--Gwinnett County, Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation

Mountain biking is a great way to get outdoors to enjoy nature, friends, and family. It's a great way for adults and children to get the exercise they need. A singletrack mountain bike trail is a great use of green space, and an asset to a community. Grab a bike, a helmet, and a friend, and begin your adventure today!

To learn more about IMBA-SORBA and mountain biking, visit www.sorba.org.

Rules of the Trail (available at imba.com):

These guidelines for trail behavior are recognized around the world. IMBA developed the "Rules of the Trail" to promote responsible and courteous conduct on shared-use trails. Keep in mind that conventions for yielding and passing may vary, depending on traffic conditions and the intended use of the trail.

1. Ride On Open Trails Only

Respect trail and road closures -- ask a land manager for clarification if you are uncertain about the status of a trail. Do not trespass on private land. Obtain permits or other authorization as may be required. Be aware that bicycles are not permitted in areas protected as state or federal Wilderness.

2. Leave No Trace



Be sensitive to the dirt beneath you. Wet and muddy trails are more vulnerable to damage than dry ones. When the trail is soft, consider other riding options. This also means staying on existing trails and not creating new ones. Don't cut switchbacks. Be sure to pack out at least as much as you pack in.

3. Control Your Bicycle

Inattention for even a moment could put yourself and others at risk. Obey all bicycle speed regulations and recommendations, and ride within your limits.

4. Yield to Others

Do your utmost to let your fellow trail users know you're coming -- a friendly greeting or bell ring are good methods. Try to anticipate other trail users as you ride around corners. Bicyclists should yield to all other trail users, unless the trail is clearly signed for bike-only travel. Bicyclists traveling downhill should yield to ones headed uphill, unless the trail is clearly signed for one-way or downhill-only traffic. Strive to make each pass a safe and courteous one.

5. Never Scare Animals

Animals are easily startled by an unannounced approach, a sudden movement or a loud noise. Give animals enough room and time to adjust to you. When passing horses, use special care and follow directions from the horseback riders (ask if uncertain). Running cattle and disturbing wildlife are serious offenses.

6. Plan Ahead

Know your equipment, your ability and the area in which you are riding -- and prepare accordingly. Strive to be self-sufficient: keep your equipment in good repair and carry necessary supplies for changes in weather or other conditions. Always wear a helmet and appropriate safety gear.

IMBA-SORBA is a nonprofit organization that promotes mountain biking in the southeast through advocacy, education, and recreation. SORBA serves over 4000 members throughout Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. IMBA-SORBA chapters build and maintain hundreds of miles of singletrack mountain bike trails throughout its service area. www.sorba.org