

RIDE ON

Mountain Biking at Smugglers' Notch

by Vicky Parra Tebbetts



Gearing up for a new season is not always elegant — or simple. Each spring the crew at Smugglers' Notch moves mountains to create a biking hub where visitors of all ages and abilities may, in the spirit of the resort's legendary approach to learning, discover the thrill of being a mountain biker. Sir Henry's Hill, where ski and snowboard novices learn in winter, transforms into skills parks; skis turn to wheels on the Wonder Carpet conveyor lift; and the Morse ski patrol headquarters gives way to the bike shop, built in the spring of 2015 to house Smugglers' blossoming mountain bike operations.

Tracks, bridges, and banked turns in the skills parks are punctuated by rock gardens, a teeter-totter, and jumps, adding a new layer to resort guests' summer experience. Trails weave through field and forest to form a network of three miles of single track and twelve miles of double track, providing a new window to summer's scenic, truly Green Mountains.

At Smugglers', if you can walk, you can ride. The resort's full-service Bike Shop offers rentals (with helmets included), lessons, and tours for all ages and abilities. Three and four-year-olds balance on pedal-free balance bikes. Bigger kids, teens, and adults select premium bikes with high-tech front or dual suspension to stay steady on park and trail features. Bikes specifically for women have lower clearance to smoothly touch toe to ground as needed. Cruisers for the open road take their place on the racks.

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Tailored for the beginner and intermediate rider from preschooler to practically pro, a combination of camps and programs kick into gear starting in June. Ten mountain biking camps, clinics, and special sessions offer excitement for all ages and abilities. Instructors create a warm-weather mountain experience, with coaching patterned after Smugglers' time-tested and kid-approved ski school.

From trained mentors to professional bike fitters who match riders' skill with their level of comfort, adults play and learn at their own clinics, families meet for tours with special pricing, and women may pedal with the girls in workshops designed specifically for females.

In a world where mountain biking is on the rise, the resort offers bigtime amenities with a warm welcome. "Smuggs has the family experience dialed," says Tom Stuessy, executive director of the Vermont Mountain Bike Association. "It's big enough for any level of rider to have fun all day, and small enough so parents can keep an eye on their kid — all day."

The popular children's day camp offers variety and independence in a fun and safe environment: all day, all features, all trails. The camp is offered weekdays from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm. "If your kids want fun and thrills, it's gotta be Mountain Bike Camp," notes Operations Director Jeff Spring.

Kendall MacLeod would agree. At age 11, she's "growing up Smuggs," returning to camp every summer. While mom Lindsey is delighted that Kendall is just as excited about Smugglers' as the first day she started, Kendall loves meeting new kids all summer and the ever-growing variety of activities. She can't pick one favorite, but the mountain biking trails, pump track, skills parks, and obstacle courses top the list. If she's not biking, water parks, pools, ziplines, disc golf, and so much more await.

In the resort's grow-with-me style, Smugglers' mountain biking programs

are evolving with guests' experience. The resort has created programming to respond to guests' desires, developing more tours and clinics with Vermont as its backdrop and tapping into a rich tapestry of nearby mountain biking resources. "Experiences such as the Guided Bike Tour are designed to be inclusive for everyone, even those with no mountain bike experience, as several tours are on gentle roads and pathways," explains Spring.

In the near future, Smugglers' hopes to offer shuttle service to downhill trails. Counter to most resort-centered downhill biking development,

Smuggs plans to create a beginner-friendly downhill network defined by sweeping switchbacks and flow trails. At the hand of Brooke Scatchard, one of Vermont's most creative multi-use trail designers, Smugglers' potential is almost limitless. Building off its successful base, the trail network will expand as it continues to cater to new riders in an approachable and fun manner. Lift service is not currently planned for Smugglers', but not ruled out of future mountain biking development.

Smugglers' off-site guided tours and transportation allow bikers to roam beyond the Mountain Bike

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Center's skills parks and contiguous trails. Nearby destinations include the 100-mile Lamoille Valley Rail Trail that stretches across northern Vermont and Stowe's Cady Hill Forest, internationally recognized village greenway path, and the trail network at Trapp Family Lodge. These day trips offer access to all levels of terrain, from meandering on pavement to the jumps, dips, and step ups of expert single track. The Brewster River and Stowe Mountain Bike Clubs, regional chapters of the Vermont Mountain Bike Association, contribute to a network of trails on public and private land. This web extends the local and regional trail system to make north central Vermont the epicenter for mountain biking.

Vermont's mountain bike leaders credit the state's people and destinations for the bike revolution sweeping the state. The loyal support of enthusiasts, 26 active Mountain Bike Association regional advocacy chapters, and a

handful of professional designers and builders who have made it their mission to keep building better trails are creating world-class mountain biking opportunities from Vermont's rolling terrain. This unity, blended with a Yankee flair for independence, is spurring Vermont's rise as a mountain bike mecca. Vermont's people and traditions are creating a new standard in mountain biking.

No matter where you look in Vermont this summer, you'll see mountain bikes. Within this statewide landscape, resorts' low-impact trails in accessible areas have created a catalyst that is encouraging mountain biking to take root in communities of locals and visitors alike. And amid this revolution, Smugglers' Notch is defining the family mountain biking experience.

Ryan Thibault of Mountain Bike Vermont, an online resource for all things bike, describes Smugglers' as having "lit the wick" — as in

dynamite — on Vermont's mountain biking world. He credits this explosive growth in opportunity to the Smugglers' tradition of catering to the beginner, and grooming them for the advanced. Gone is the limiting selection of intimidating parks for elite riders; new experiences are accessible to everybody, and families who vacation together, play together. "It makes complete sense," says Thibault. "Mountain biking is taking root and I'm looking forward to seeing Smuggs develop. They're making history, and that's exciting."

Born and raised in southern New England, Vicky Parra Tebbetts drifted north, eventually making her way to Vermont. A freelance writer with a passion for the Green Mountains, she spends most of her work time playing with words. Hiker, swimmer, swinger of birches, and a pretty mild biker, Vicky rides a Specialized. She and her family pedal home to their farm in Cabot.

**RESORT MOUNTAIN
 BIKE PROGRAMS**

Please stop by Smugglers' Bike Shop anytime between 10:00 am – 6:00 pm daily or call x1523 to inquire about any of the following sessions.

- Balance Bike Session
- Intro to Mountain Biking
- Intermediate Park & Trail Riding
- Family MTB Clinic
- Morning Trail Ride
- Backroads Bike Tour
- Guided Bike Tours — transportation included
- Women's Mountain Bike Clinic
- MTB Open Park
- Park Session

Day passes for the Mountain Bike Center are available.



**Vermont Mountain
 Biking Resources**

Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA): www.vmba.org

Mountain Bike Vermont (MTBVT): www.mtbvt.com

Lamoille Valley Rail Trail: www.lvrt.org

Brewster River Mountain Bike Club: www.brmbc.org

Stowe Mountain Bike Club: www.stowemountainbike.com

Cady Hill Forest, Stowe: www.stowemountainbike.com/trail-maps-info/cady-hill-forest/

Stowe Recreation Path: www.stowerec.org/paths/item/51-rec-path

Trapp Family Lodge: www.trappfamily.com