

RECREATION
REPORT

LEARN ABOUT FISHING IN THE POWDER BASIN — BAKER CITY — The Powder Basin Watershed Council will have a presentation about fishing the Powder Basin as part of its annual meeting on Thursday, May 23 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Crossroads Carnegie Art Center, 2020 Auburn Ave. in Baker City. Speaker Tim Bailey, district fish biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, will talk about fishing various bodies of water in the Powder Basin. There is a suggested \$5 donation.

BIKE FOR THE HEALTH OF IT EVENT JUNE 8 AT PHILLIPS LAKE — The Trailhead in Baker City has scheduled a Bike for the Health of it event Saturday, June 8 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the day use area at Union Creek Campground on Phillips Lake, about 17 miles southwest of Baker City via Highway 7.

This free mountain bike event for kids and families will include guided rides, a kids skills park, basic bike-tuning clinics and terminology, as well as a barbecue to benefit Baker Loves Bikes. There will be a limited number of bikes and helmets available for use.

FISHING
FORECAST

HIGHWAY 203 POND — Has received its second stocking of 2,250 legal-size and 825 trophy rainbow trout.

MORGAN LAKE — Open to fishing and has been stocked with 500 trophy-size rainbow trout.

PHILLIPS RESERVOIR — Reservoir is about 56 percent of capacity. The second stocking this spring, of about 4,700 legal-size and 2,200 trophy rainbow trout happened earlier this week.

WOLF CREEK RESERVOIR — Boat launch is operational and the dock is in place. Anglers have had good success recently catching chunky rainbows, 12 to 15 inches.

THIEF VALLEY RESERVOIR — Reservoir is full and was stocked earlier this week with 5,000 legal-size rainbow trout. This was the final stocking of the season. In all about 12,500 legal and 500 trophy rainbow have stocked this spring.

BICYCLING MOUNT EMILY RECREATION AREA

Magical riding at Mt. Emily

Mount Emily Recreation Area is booming with potential fun and nature's beauty. The multi-use trails, a mere three miles from the bustling downtown of La Grande, are shaping up to be some of the best in Oregon and a delightful economic stimulus.

Hikers, bikers, runners and horseback riders are converging on this wonderful piece of land to de-stress, exercise and appreciate the countryside. The preeminent trailhead for the non-motorized parcel of MERA is situated at the top of Owsley Canyon and houses approximately 50 miles of magnificent single track. Each year the MERA board, Union County Commissioners and the Blue Mountain Single-track Trail Club strive to make this 3,670-acre Union County park reach its full potential.

A couple of the newest developments are a year without cattle grazing and more trails being built and groomed. The cessation of grazing is due to a combination of lack of forage, a result of the high percentage of steep timbered land, protective cows charging younger patrons, and the absence of financial gain.

One long-term goal within sight has been to establish a single track, moderate climb to the top of Mount Emily. This article will focus on using a couple of the newer routes — Slammer, Depends and Ride On — to eventually tee into a crowning jewel trail, Caffeine. This combination of trails makes a marvelous 10.9-mile figure-eight that gains 1,309 feet of elevation before swooping back to the trailhead.

Begin by exiting the Owsley Canyon Trailhead parking area to the north. Veer east onto Red Apple, Trail 700. This path is highly trafficked by walkers, runners, equestrians and cyclists so be on the watch for other users. Trek farther north crossing a meadow frequently full of blue camas and graveled paths toward a small creek crossing.

Follow the signs to MERA Loop past another gate and bridge. Marvel at the recent improvements to the trail and how the water, diverted and controlled by the application of culverts and gravel, has elongated the trail use season. Watch for intersection 3 — a little over one mile from the trailhead, it is where MERA Loop revisits itself and one of the easiest places to get lost. Follow the sign that says West MERA Loop and gains elevation.

Weave up the mountain-side crossing old logging roads and enjoying the flowers, mushrooms and charming trees. Near mile 3, junction 4 comes into view with three trails to choose from. For today's ride choose Slammer, trail 765, as it commences its rippling climb



THE NEXT RIDE
MAVIS HARTZ

in the direction of the top of Mount Emily.

A fairly new trail, Slammer still sports some remnants of tooling and gently travels almost two miles at an average 3.5% grade to a roadbed where the Doing Time trail travels north and Depends takes off to the south. The trail climbs consistently but bumps along in such a manner as to make it doable for riders who are active but not necessarily elite athletes.

The Grande Ronde Valley peeks out in patchwork wonder and the trees are dense and comforting. Benefit from and treasure the swoop of three-day corner, built and reinforced with T-posts, rocks and cleared timbers by a prison work crew a handful of years ago.

Slammer ends as it enters the roadbed spur off Mount Emily Road. Continue away from Doing Time on the road spur and over a little bridge to the trail called Depends. Depends continues to gain elevation for another almost two miles with an average of 4.2% grade before it pops out at the newly painted blue gate and the voyager is once again faced with options.

To call it a day, turn around and zoom down Depends and Slammer to Upper Hotshot and back to the trailhead. Slammer is becoming a smoother and worthier ride with every trip and is gratifying to descend as well climb. Those ready for another eight-tenths of a mile of climbing can select the black diamond rated Doing Time trail number 789.

Doing Time is an aggressive trail with inclines that pass a 10% grade. I personally walked a couple of the steeper sections but was well rewarded when Ride On, trail 790, came into view. Ride On is a relaxed little connector, put in place within the past three years, that skims through rocky little meadows and flirts with impressive views before ending into Caffeine, Trail 716.

Those still wanting to climb to the top of the mountain can continue up to the top on Caffeine. Cyclists like myself, looking for a marvelous figure eight, can launch into the little over two-mile plunge on a pleasingly tidied trail to MERA Loop.

Caffeine is one of the main downhill trails and is known for its hot, wildflower-strewn, vertigo-inducing hillside at the top that later morphs into a wooded paradise of banked corners and huckleberries. The Ride On trail enters Caffeine approximately a mile from the top and misses most of open hillsides that make some riders feel close to God and others feel decidedly uncomfortable. Relish the plunge to MERA Loop and a



Photo by Mavis Hartz

Lots of work has gone into improving trails at the Mount Emily Recreation Area near La Grande.



Photo by Mavis Hartz

The intersection of Ride On and Caffeine trails.

picturesque little area with picnic tables. Turn south on MERA Loop in the direction of the trailhead and revel in the buffed-out glory of a mature trail.

Upon returning to junction 4, continue the flow down Upper Hotshot, named for the energetic firefighters who originally scratched it in on a training excursion. Hotshot drops into one of the main access roads. There are three possibilities to return to single track. If you turn north there is a trail that drops down onto MERA Loop

within 50 feet. You can turn south and have two trail opportunities. The first is just prior to an access gate and cattle guard. It also drops to MERA Loop but in a rather technical manner. I generally go for choice number three which is to travel south, past the cattle guard and off the next corner to the east. The trail takes you to the junction of Red Apple and MERA Loop. Continue south and follow the signs to the trailhead.

However you choose to explore it, MERA is improving life for those living in and

around Union County. Mapping is still a work in progress and some of the trails have limited use until the dirt hardens.

Those looking for a digital map can download Trail-Forks, Strava or look at MTB project and Ride with GPS. Please as always, be mindful of the trails and other users. Remember to pick up after yourselves and your pets, smile, appreciate the other enthusiasts and volunteer time, product or money to keep this treasure growing.

Those looking to donate product can talk to Sean Chambers at Union County Parks, 541-963-1319. Those excited about the county park and the lack of grazing should let the County Commissioners know by sending a letter to 1006 K Ave. in La Grande. If you are looking to connecting with a group of riders or working on trails contact the Blue Mountain Single-track Trail Club through Facebook or The Mountain Works Bicycles.

To celebrate, raise money and introduce riders to the area, BMSTC, Union County Chamber of Commerce and a plethora of supportive local businesses have organized a weekend of exploration and adventure at MERA. The Mount Emily Madness Shuttle Day, June 22, should be entertaining for the whole family. Come glory in the almost 50 miles of trail at MERA with shuttle rides, provided by Mountain Works Bicycles and BMSTC to the top of Caffeine, a barbecue and social gathering when you get tired and hungry. The Owsley Canyon Trail Head is the main staging area for the event. Shuttles and bicycle demos start at 10 a.m. Hope to see you there.