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THE REGION'S HUB FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Each week in this section, you will find the area's most complete guide of what's open and closed; outdoor activities and events; top picks of places to explore; conditions of hiking and biking trails, fishing holes, water flows, camping spots, parks and more — as well as features from outdoor writers and field experts.

VERT- FEST

Winners reflect on thousands of feet climbed and skied and the joy of touring Central Oregon backcountry



BARRY WICKS

EMILY KEDDIE

Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Going back to biking basics spurs rediscovery of parks

BY BRIAN LONGORIA
For The Bulletin

During the pandemic, my daughter learned to ride her bike without training wheels. After riding for so many years, it's easy to forget how scary and exciting those first couple of rides can be. Luckily, learning to ride a bike unlocks a world of ad-



PARKS

venture, new views and fresh air, which I think we can all use after the last year.

As she has progressed, we have been exploring new parks and trails nearby, and it's exciting to share some of my favorites with her. Having the added benefit of also being a Bend Park & Recreation District employee, I am familiar with the bike-friendly parks and trails in our system, and I want to share a few of my favorites.

Let's get the bigger, often-visited parks covered first:

Shevlin Park has more than 9 miles of trail with several loops and out-and-backs available with no road crossings. Shevlin is a great fit for families. The paved service road is closed to vehicles, which is perfect for beginners or little ones on scoots and training wheels. The park also offers a series of trails for beginner to intermediate mountain bikers so my spouse can pick up dust and meet up with us later.

Pine Nursery Park has a nearly 2-mile loop around the park's perimeter. A fishing pond, playground and Cascade views make it a nice half-day outing. With just two in-park road crossings and relatively level, this trail is good for biking with grade-school aged children and older.

Big Sky Park is a great east-side choice with a 1.6-mile out-and-back trail and no road crossings. Like Pine Nursery, it has great Cascade views, a playground and an off-leash area. Unlike Pine Nursery, it has amazing natural area and feels like it's much farther out of town that it really is.

If you're looking for longer rides, Larkspur Trail — South and the Old Mill section of the Deschutes River Trail are popular.

Here are a few favorite hidden gems in the park system:

Rockridge Park and Trail is a newer park in northeast Bend. This is another great family-friendly option, with two playgrounds, a skatepark, Frisbee golf course and unique rock outcroppings. Rockridge also boasts more than a mile of unpaved and accessible, paved paths that meander through the park with no road crossings.

See **Biking** / B10

This was Barry Wicks' chance to live out the ski-bum dream. And, man, did he make the most of it. Wicks, a Bend resident and cyclist by trade, recently won the Central Oregon Avalanche Center's Virtual VertFest, climbing and skiing a total of 137,469 vertical feet over nine days from Feb. 27 to March 7.

"My goal going into it was just to do 15,000 feet a day, which seemed like a huge amount, but achievable," Wicks said. "I kind of did some calculations on how long it would take to do that. I was thinking 1,500 to 2,000 feet an hour."

Wicks, who often summits and then skis down Cascade volcanoes during the spring, knew he could take the time off to maximize his vertical feet over the

nine days. The avalanche center typically stages its VertFest as a one-day event at Mt. Bachelor ski area, but this year, due to COVID-19, the virtual event had a nine-day window and competitors could log their vertical feet anywhere they wished. Still, most stuck to Bachelor, which has a free, easily accessible skin track up the cinder cone and then along Ed's Garden run up to the Pine Marten Lodge.



MOUNTAINS

Wicks, 39, went to Tumalo Mountain on the first day of the virtual event and promptly skied 11 laps up and down, which took nearly 11 hours. The next day, he headed to Bachelor and began liv-

- ing out of his van.
- "It was four cone laps plus nine Pine (Marten) laps every day," said Wicks, the sports marketing director for Kona Bikes and former pro mountain bike and cyclo-cross racer. "That took 8.5 or 9 hours to do. That was more achievable."
- Bend ultrarunner Emily Keddie, 34, won the women's division of the Virtual VertFest, finishing with 83,037 total vertical feet.
- "It's a great workout," Keddie said. "I just enjoy pushing myself at long distances for a long amount of time. Backcountry skiing lends itself to that really well. It's a really healthy, low-impact exercise. It's really versatile. You can keep it low-key and just tour around. Or you can go up mountains and back down."

See **Vertfest** / B9

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