



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.

Freeride fun in Madras



Bend's Mark Johnson rides the Bridge to Nowhere at the Madras East Hills trail network on Sunday.

The Madras East Hills trail system is Central Oregon's new playground for mountain bikers

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK MORICAL • The Bulletin

MADRAS —

To the west, Mount Jefferson and the Three Sisters glowed a bright white against a clear blue sky. Just below us, winding down an otherwise unimpressive hill in the middle of the high desert, were five different trails, all filled with jumps, berms, concrete pavers and wood features. A mountain biker could spend most of a day here, climbing and then riding down a different trail packed with freeride flavor.

Combine the efforts of visionary mountain bikers and forward-thinking land managers and the result is the Madras East Hills trails, the latest playground for mountain bikers in Central Oregon.

Located just east of Madras near Juniper Hill Park, the trail system includes 14 miles of mountain biking trails and 6 miles of horseback-riding trails.

Led by the Madras Chapter of the Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA), trail work on Madras East Hills began in 2019 and has transformed the area into a true destination for cyclists coming from Bend, Redmond and even Portland.

"We've had a lot of folks come out," said Brennan Morrow, the Madras Chapter representative for COTA. "They've gotten rave reviews. They're such awesome, unique trails, and they're so fun because they're designed in a way that you can just ride out there all day, sessioning and doing different stuff. It's been super popular



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because of the unique nature of the trails, having fortified berms, large jumping features, and wood features."

Because the trails are located on land owned by the City of Madras and other private entities, wood and concrete features are allowed to be built in the system. That is not the case on most other trails in Central Oregon, which are mostly located on federal land, including the Deschutes and Ochoco national forests and the Bureau of Land Management.

"A lot of our trails in COTA are on Forest Service and BLM land, which really limits the scope of what can be built," Morrow said. "But as we move to land that cities or private entities own, we end up with the freedom to build a better system. The Forest Service just has different parameters on what can be built. We've had total support from the city (of Madras). They've been hugely helpful in developing this."

See *Freeride* / B10

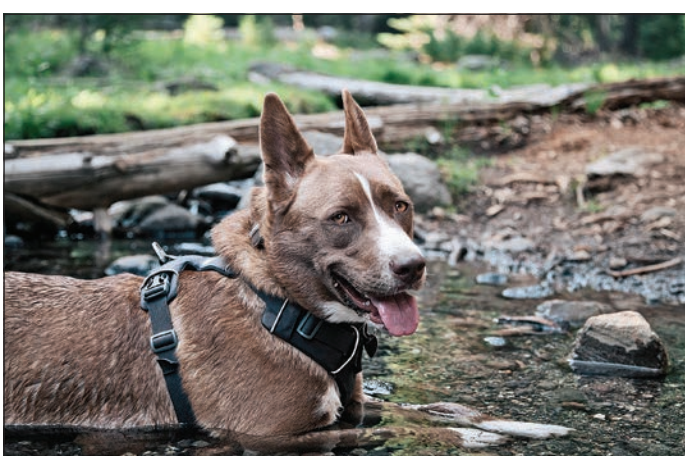


Bend's Andrew Williams rides a wood structure at the Madras East Hills trail system.

If Oregon is cougar country, then Steins Pillar is their neighborhood

Emily Doerfler and Philip Aulie adopted their dog, Wichita, a year ago from the Madras Humane Society. "She's a mixture of a bunch of stuff," Doerfler said. "One of these days, we're going to do a DNA test to figure it out."

Submitted



BY DAVID JASPER
The Bulletin

On a sunny Friday two weeks ago, my oldest daughter, Caroline, and I drove east from Bend to Prineville to hike the Steins Pillar Trail.

It was a mostly sunny day, cool but not cold, perfect for a 4-mile round trip trek through a picturesque section of forest.

But if spring can be counted on for one thing, it's "springing" surprises on you.

From sunny one minute to a brief but impressive snow storm, from

dusty-dry trail conditions to lobbly sections of snow lingering on shaded or north-facing trails, spring will smile in your face while it picks the hope from your pocket.

No, I'm not much of a winter person. That works to my disadvantage several months of the year — for instance, the day before our hike, when my colleague McKenzie Whittle warned that we might encounter still-snowy trails, but I thought, "Meh, spring usually comes earlier to the Ochocos than



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the Cascades. How much could there be?"

Guess which one of us was right?

As we drove in, Caroline talked about what to do in the event we saw a cougar.

This was triggered, in part, by my mention of a 2006 piece by longtime Bulletin outdoors writer Jim Witty, who died in 2008. For some reason, the paranoia-inducing piece induces Ochocos paranoia in me to this day.

See *Steins* / B9