



New York Mountain Bicycling Coalition

NewsLetter

Spring, 1999

Time for a new Pow-Wow?

That was the question that Todd Calvin of RBC posed on the mailing list last month. NYMBC didn't meet last year, keeping in tune with our focus on working with our local groups rather than attending state-wide meetings. However, 1999 may be the time to plan a more informal meeting to gauge the state of mountain biking in NY, and to exchange information first hand with others "on the front lines" of advocacy in the state. This would also give an opportunity for those who were unable to attend our previous meeting due to the Rosh Hashanah holiday.

Rather than set up a formal weekend long meeting like the 1997 summit that founded NYMBC, a meeting this year could be a more informal one-day event, with plenty of riding opportunities before and after. An excellent opportunity may be to coordinate the meeting with the September 26 State Series race at Chenango Valley State Park near Binghamton. This is a centrally located area with great riding, and many folks might be there for the Chenango Valley Challenge, #12 in the NY State Championship Series. We could meet on Saturday and ride or race on Sunday. For those who have never been to this park, the riding is excellent, and all trails are open to bikes last I checked. It is a great example of access working well. Please forward your ideas and comments on this possibility to Jon Sundquist (716-655-5130 or jsundqui@buffnet.net)

IMBA's Advocacy Coordinator Jen Lamb Holds NYC Metro-area Mini-Summit

Responding to new threats to access in the metro NYC area (including northern NJ and lower Hudson Valley), IMBA's Jen Lamb this month set up on short notice some meetings with area advocates and land managers. Many City riders head to NJ for the nearest legal trails. Some prime riding areas such as South Mountain have been closed in recent years, putting greater pressure on remaining forests.

In April '99, Morris County, NJ proposed a trails use plan that included a mountain bike policy which eliminated bicycle access to two parks, the Tourne and Schooley's. The Tourne is a 546-acre park with a good network of multi-use trails less than an hour by car from New York. As a result of many phone calls, testimony and letters from cyclists and IMBA, and work by local advocates, the Parks Commission voted on April 26th to postpone the closure for six months while a trail assessment is performed at the Tourne (the cover of IMBA's May newsletter provides more background). IMBA and local advocates from JORBA set up meetings with land managers to work towards keeping these trails open.

Jen then convened a meeting with Lower Hudson Valley advocates to review the state of trail access in that area. This is the first meeting of its type that held in the area. For this reason, and because lead time was a little short, attendance was somewhat small but the discussion was useful, and the foundation was laid for regional cooperation that will be built on

upon over time. Representatives from NJ (JORBA, Ramapo Valley Cycling Club, and CycleCraft), the Gunks Off Road Biking Association (GUMBA) in NY, and a land manager from Harriman State Park (north of Manhattan) attended.

There was considerable discussion about access in Harriman, the enormous state park in the Hudson Highlands. A recent pilot program to allow cycling on a new trail in the park (all other trails have been closed) had not been going anywhere, with cyclists essentially abandoning this effort. While regional hiking groups were making a big deal out of this (<http://www.nynjtc.org/beechny.html> for example), the real issues were discussed in this meeting. Specifically, the trail offered as the pilot access trail was not very interesting compared to the rest of the trails in the park. And cyclists did not feel that the park was very committed to opening more trails, making support of this trail not a priority on advocates' lists. However, based on input from the Harriman manager, local groups and bike shops will reconsider whether to support this trail. If you or anyone you know would like to work on this program, contact Jon Sundquist (contact info above), Jen Lamb at imbaJen@aol.com or 303-545-9011, or Peter Gallagher of GUMBA at petemtb@idsi.net.

Jen also met with the New York/New Jersey Trails Conference in their Midtown Manhattan offices. While no new developments arose from that meeting, developing such contacts helps in ongoing access debates in the downstate area.

Two New York Groups Change Names

Two active and successful advocacy groups on either side of the lower Hudson valley have recently changed their names to better reflect the areas they represent and the types of work they do. The 'Gunks Off-Road Patrol (GORP) recently changed to the 'Gunks Mountain Bike Association (GUMBA) to reflect its development beyond simply patrolling Mohonk to more general advocacy issues. For more info on GUMBA, contact Peter Gallagher (address listed above). Similarly, the Cortland Area Mountain Bikers are now the Westchester Mountain Bicycling Association (WMBA). Check out their website at <http://www.wmba.org>

DEC Evaluating Recreational uses of Forests in Region 7.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation is developing a Recreation Master Plan for State Forests and Unique areas in the counties of Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Tioga, and Tompkins. The goal is to address present and future recreational needs and to plan recreation-related management activities. To get input from the public, the DEC held a series of public meetings throughout region 7 in April. MTBers were represented at these meetings, but a strong voice needs to be raised to demonstrate that cyclists need continued access to State Forests in these regions. Right now, access is very good, with most trails open, with the notable exception of the Finger Lakes Trail. However, the DEC may consider limiting access to some trails. And nearly as bad, DEC has recently started to "improve" some trails used by bikers to make them wider and smoother. The DEC needs to hear that this is not the type of trail we are looking for.

If you missed the public meetings, the DEC has also prepared a questionnaire that can be filled out and sent in to let them know we want continued access. Copies of the questionnaire are available from Jon Sundquist, or on the web as an acrobat (.pdf) file at <http://www.nysorva.org/decsurvey.pdf> The due date for the questionnaire is June 1, which is about when you receive this newsletter. However, I've heard that they'll accept ones sent in soon after the deadline as well.

While this review process is technically focussed on state land in central NY, there is always the possibility that the findings of this process could be applied elsewhere in the state as a precedent. So it is important that cyclists from around the state get one of these questionnaires, fill it out and send it in. At the least, send your comments to the DEC at

P.O. Box 594, Route 80W
Sherburne, NY 13460
(607)674-4036 or

1285 Fisher Avenue
Cortland, NY 13045-1090
(607) 753-3095

Cyclists Represented at FLTC/NPS Trail Design and Construction Seminar

The Finger Lakes Trail Conference recently held a Trail Design and Construction Class in Naples, NY. This class was led by Bill Menke of the National Parks Service. Bill is essentially the entire NPS staff of the North Country Scenic Trail, a National Trail (like the Appalachian or Pacific Crest Trail) that runs from North Dakota to New York. In much of New York, it follows the Finger Lakes Trail. Bill offered to lead this trail after doing GPS mapping of the FLT last year, and finding many sections of the trail poorly designed.

The class was a one day seminar, given both on a weekday and on a weekend day. I and two other representatives from WNYMBA attended the weekday class. This class was heavily attended by DEC foresters (including ones we have been working with on new trails) and other government employees responsible for trails in parks.

Bill Menke is a knowledgeable trail designer and builder with a clear vision for his trail. Unfortunately he made it quite clear that that vision did not include bicycles, which was already known. However, he acknowledged that the decision to allow bikes is made at the land manager level. While he would like to see land managers decide to ban bicycles, it is clear that our time is well spent working with land managers showing our commitment to the trails, and working to get individual sections open.

What was equally clear was that well designed and constructed trails would go a long way to eliminating the complaints that often get bikes kicked off the trails in the first place. Much of what he covered in the class was common sense to anyone who has spent much time maintaining or developing new trails. Specific issues included limiting grades to 10% on average (individual sections can go up to about 20% without additional erosion potential), and careful routing to avoid wet spots. Hands-on training in the use of a clinometer was helpful in demonstrating appropriate grades. Trails designed according to these guiding principles would be long lasting and require minimal maintenance.

The free time available between sessions allows time to talk with FLTC officers, and DEC officials. While nobody is expecting any change in the FLTC's generally restrictive policy towards bikes (Bill Menke suggested that we use the knowledge from this course to build our own trails, and avoid the existing sections of the FLT/NCT), we had a chance to demonstrate our commitment to constructing and maintaining good trails.

IMBA Trail Care Crews to Visit NY This Summer

Mike and Jan Riter (IMBA TCC #1) will be passing through NY twice this summer. They will first swing across upstate NY from Ontario eastward on August 12-16. They will focus on the Western NY on 8/12-14, hit Central NY on the 15th, and then the Capital region on the 16th before heading into New England. The following month, they will be hitting downstate on their way back. Specific plans for their downstate dates of September 23-27 are not yet firmed up. Contact Scott Gwozdz, TCC Coordinator at imbascott@aol.com to set up work days with Jan and Mike. Now in their third year on the road, they are top notch trail experts, and work real well in getting the advocacy message out to land managers.

National Trails Day set for June 5

National Trails Day is again the first weekend of June. Trail work and celebration activities are planned by WNYMBA and Mohawk Hudson Cycling Club. WNYMBA will be working with the newly formed Ellicottville Trails group, which has secured a grant from Eastern Mountain Sports and Swiss Army Brands to buy trail work tools. They will be completing a new section of trail in Ellicottville, and working on FLT maintenance projects.

MHCC will be working at Grafton Lakes State Park. Work will be in the morning with riding in the afternoon, followed by a cookout. Contact John Butkus at 674-5108 or team.hairball@juno.com for more information.

For more information on NYMBC:

New York Mountain Bicycling Coalition
P.O. Box 784
Syracuse, NY 13209-0784
Tel: 716-655-5130
web: www.ggw.org/NYMBC/

For info on how to help keep trails in your area open, contact your local MTB advocacy organization.

Founding Organizations:

Western NY Mountain Bicycling Association
Rochester Bicycle Club (RBC)
Central NY-DIRT (Dedicated Individuals for Responsible Trail-use)
Mohawk-Hudson Cycling Club (MHCC)
Westchester Mountain Biking Association
'Gunks Mountain Biking Association
Fats in the Cats
Concerned Long Island Mountain Bicyclists

NYMBC
c/o Jon Sundquist
279 Oakwood Ave.
East Aurora, NY 14052