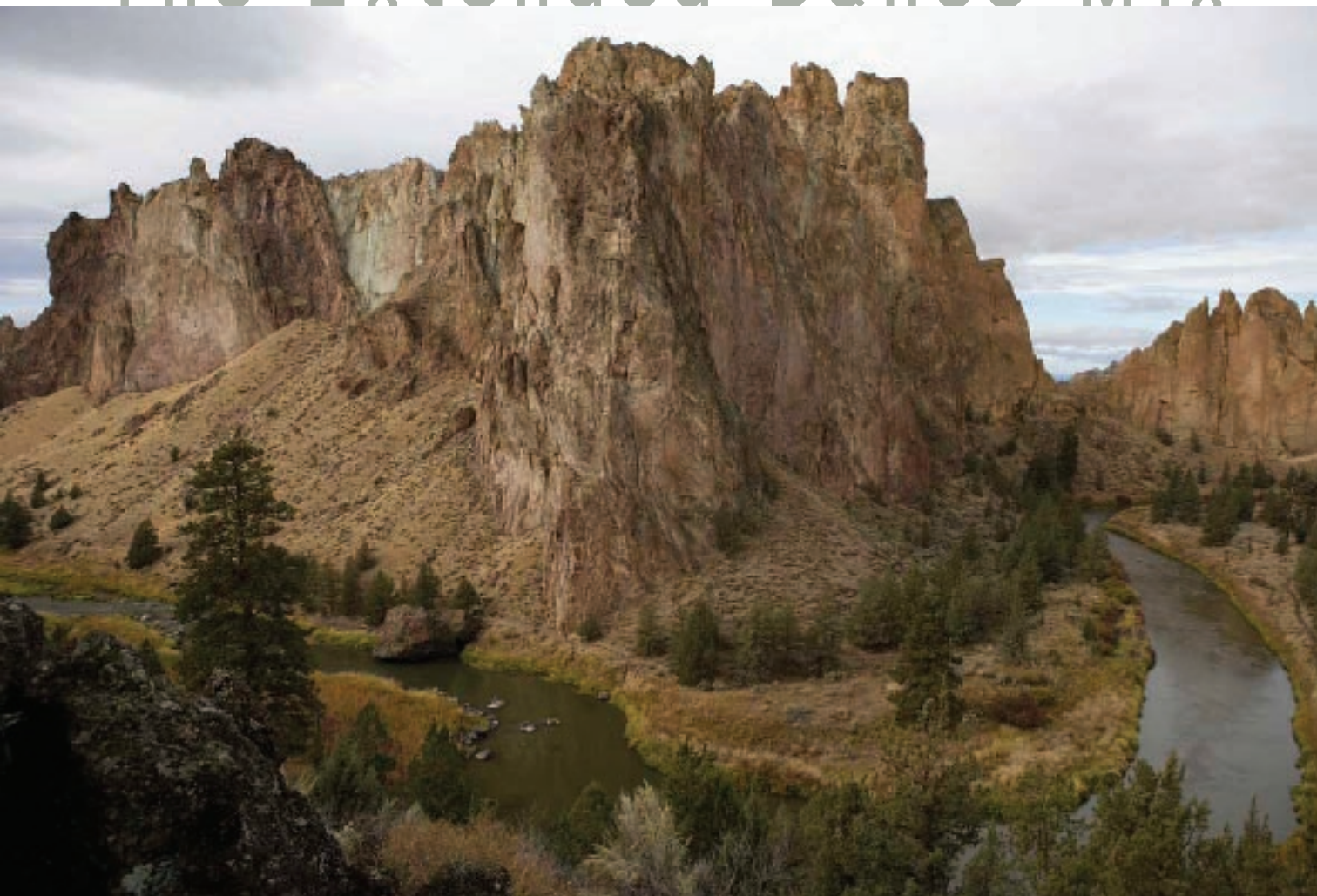


BEND OREGON

The Extended Dance Mix



Ride the Multisport Training Ground of the Stars
By Johnathon Allen

WHY HERE, WHY NOW:

Maybe it's something in the water, or maybe there's a superathlete molecule in the air; more than likely, it's some magical property in the beer. Whatever the reason, Bend has become the porch of preference for some of mountain biking's biggest big dogs. Team Giant's Carl Decker and Adam Craig, Santa Cruz stunt pilot Kirt Vories, Maxxis-sponsored DHer April Lawyer and Shimano product spook Paul Thomasberg all hang their helmets here, and they're not alone. The U.S. cross-country ski team, winter biathlon team and a host of other Olympic and professional athletes all live in this former lumber town turned gravity-sports mecca at the base of Mt. Bachelor in central Oregon. Straddling the banks of the Deschutes River with the Cascade Mountains to the west and Oregon's high-desert plateau to the east, Bend is a year-round playground for all species of adventure sports athlete. The region's geographic schizophrenia makes it more than just another Durango or Moab. When riders like Craig and Decker aren't ripping up the area's vast network of singletrack, they're kayaking class-

IV rapids, clocking laps at the Nordic-skating track, or tearing around on dirt bikes searching for the perfect burrito—often, all in the same day.

While Decker is a dyed-in-the-synthetic-wool local who graduated from Bend High School, Craig moved from his home in Bangor, Maine, after researching the ideal place to relocate. Unlike Bangor, which freezes into a solid block of suck for six months, Bend has a year-round riding season combined with all the winter sports your car-top rack can handle. The lower-altitude foothills and desert canyons make for good interval training, while the 10,000-plus-foot Cascade Mountains provide enough vertical relief to hone altitude chops. Most importantly for Craig, who has a leprosy-like reaction to poison oak, there are no toxic or thorny plants anywhere in the valley. The absence of treacherous fauna combined with a notable lack of jagged rocks or extended root sections gives the trails around Bend a surreal aura of plushness.

The local ski area, Mt. Bachelor, boasts the most vertical ter-

BEND PROS ON...

Fitness Stuff You'd Still Do If You Had A Real Job

ADAM CRAIG: I'd still drink a lot of water. Obviously, I would try to hang on to most of what I do. Actually, I think it would make my life a lot simpler if I could just put in a regular workday and then go do my own thing.

CARL DECKER I would try to keep a variety in my daily routines. It would be important for me to change up my activities a lot.

PAUL THOMASBERG: I still try to keep a lot of my riding block-oriented. I'll go out and ride for blocks of days on end and try to simulate real-world race conditions. There's nothing like a well-run stage race, as opposed to single-day races, to really get you in the zone.

APRIL LAWYER: Opening a boutique [Vanilla Urban Threads] has turned out to be a really tough transition from eating and breathing bikes year-round. I just try to incorporate as many of my training habits into my daily routine as possible, whether it's riding to work or taking my dog for a run on lunch break.

BEND PROS ON...

Travel

APRIL LAWYER Well, I hate to admit it, but I actually do have a little travel pillow that was given to me by a friend years ago that I can't sleep without. In fact, I've left it in my hotel room before and had to spend a considerable amount of money and time to get it back.

ADAM CRAIG: I generally live in denial of the fact that my life is a logistical nightmare and have simplified it by not having to bring anything with me except a pair of flip-flops and a Nalgene bottle. I see a lot of people who need to have their big bag of vitamins or their special pillow in order to function. I just bring myself and try to be as low-maintenance as possible because there are plenty of other things to maintain in when you're on the road.

PAUL THOMASBERG: Good coffee and a bag of 10-grain cereal because it's easy to prepare anywhere.





PAUL THOMASBERG: Baggie shorts. They look dumb, get caught on the seat, and shift around. I tried a pair of MotoFox baggie shorts last year that worked okay, but they were still too hot for the day. On the other hand, good clothes and layers in general are critical. I was always one of the guys who showed up with more layers than I needed, but I won a couple races because everyone else was hypothermic and I was the only guy who started out with the right gear.

ADAM CRAIG: Um...Gears?...Wait...I can't say that.

CARL DECKER: I'm a nonbeliever in the 29er. It's heavier and then there all the other standards that need to be accounted for, like rims, and spokes and frame sizes. My main beef is that the chainstays become longer and the bike doesn't handle as well. Adam will tell you something else because he wants Giant to make one, but I'm still skeptical.

rain of any resort in the Pacific Northwest, 3,400 feet of steeps, glades and groomers alongside 65 kilometers of Nordic-skating track that connect to an unfathomable amount of marked back-country trail. Because Bachelor is so tall, its lid stays snowy and skiable from November to as late as early July.

While the terrain, talent and climate easily make it one of the premier adventure lifestyle communities in the country, it's the beer that really sets Bend apart. Oregonians have an obsession with making handcrafted microbrews and some of the best beer in the country comes out of Bend's Deschutes Brewery. In the post-automobile era, savage battles will be waged over the last keg of Deschutes' Black Butte Porter.

Long a haven for the spandex and leg-shaving set, Bend's freeriding scene has also been taking off. Southern California refugee Kirt Vories was so freaked out over the eminent loss of sunlight

when he moved to Oregon that he built an indoor jump park in his eight-car garage and promptly landed a sponsorship with Deschutes Brewery to keep him in premium ale all the way through retirement. At nearby Prineville Reservoir a backhoe brigade of bike-hucking locals are busy building a series of drops, hips, step-ups and step-downs as part of a multisport playground catering to freeriders, motocross riders and ATVers that's called the Prineville Adventure Park (prinevilleadventurepark.com).

Before you quite your day job and hang a "Bend or Bust" sign on your Subaru, remember that the city has grown at an astounding rate in the past 20 years—transforming from a nearly obsolete

THE DESERT-MEETS-ALPINE LANDSCAPE MAKES BEND IDEAL FOR ANY ATHLETE

mill town of 14,000 in 1990 to a bustling fitness-opolis of more than 70,000 today. That also means that the cost of living here is constantly climbing.

On the plus side, a young, active populace draws a vibrant nightlife. The Les Schwab Amphitheater (520 SW Powerhouse Dr.; 541/312-8510) brings big-name acts like Coldplay, The Pixies and Ween to what is for all intents and purposes the middle of nowhere. And it's not uncommon for downtown's token nightclub, The Grove (1033 NW Bond St.; 541/318-8578), to present underground phenoms like Russian turn-tablist DJ Vadim to a room full of sweaty, Patagonia-clad partiers.

DIRT: A significant force in the mecca-fication of Bend is the Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA; www.cotamt.org). Part mountain bike-advocacy group, part trail-building cult, COTA members have worked with the National Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to develop one of the largest maintained trail networks in the world. A casual glance at COTA's work log reveals that area trails are being groomed, cleared and expanded on nearly a daily basis. Thomasberg, one of the organization's founders, spends as much time hauling a chainsaw and shovel around in his BOB trailer buffing out trail as he does carving it up on his 29er.

When it comes to trail flavors, there's not a lot of rocky road or chunky monkey, but Bend serves up all the smooth, fast French vanilla and dust-covered chocolate (more generically known as buffed-smooth singletrack) your knobbies can handle. And what the valley lacks in diversity it makes up for in volume. Next to a minitool, pump and tube, the most useful thing you can stuff into your hydration pack is one of the excellent central-Oregon trail maps made by Scott Rapp and Jane Meissner that can be found at every sports-oriented store in town.

A fundamental staple in the diet of every Bend mountain biker is Phil's Trail. Combined with its similarly named tributaries (Ben's Trail, Jim's Trail, etc.), the vast, mazelike network generally known simply as Phil's constitutes more than 20 miles of pure

handcrafted mountain bike trail that meanders through the ponderosa-covered foothills west of town. Much of Phil's is laid out in perfectly spaced back-to-back slalom gates and rollicking whoops that, when ridden for miles on end, can induce catatonic states of knobby euphoria. It also serves as a convenient connection to many of the area's other trails. Given that the rapid-fire turns and few steep altitude changes make Phil's an ideal singlespeed training ground, it's no wonder that Craig and Decker are two of the fastest singlespeed racers in the world.

Bend's GPS-choking amount of terrain makes an experienced guide invaluable; especially if that guide has a 15-passenger van and intimate knowledge of the valley's tastiest runs. The best bet is Cog Wild Bicycle Tours (www.cogwild.com; 866/610-4822), which offers half-day singletrack samplers (\$60), multiday epics (\$720-\$895), and shuttle service on the nearby McKenzie River Trail (\$25-\$75).

Speaking of the latter, the MRT is frequently voted among the top 10 rides in the nation. Over the course of 26 miles and a gradual, 1,650-foot descent, you'll weave around countless gnarled, twisting ribbons of singletrack that crisscross the boulder-strewn rapids and waterfalls of the McKenzie River. The upper section pumps and dives through dramatic lava fields with short, steep climbs, technical drops and moments of high exposure not for those lacking in bike-handling skill or commitment. The lower section rolls in and out of thick hemlock forest and jams at hallucinogenic speeds through stands of 600-year-old Douglas fir. While



Caption about the photo are were they are and who they are. There are plenty of other breweries in town including the popular Bend Brewing Company popular Bend Brewing Company

the hardcore will insist on riding both up and down it, doing the MRT as a one-way shuttle run will provide plenty of bar-story-glory moments, and give you more time to tell them.

Nearer to Bend, there's no shortage of alternatives for those too proud, cheap or square to shuttle. One of the more challeng-

ing loops starts at Tumalo Falls Trailhead (12 miles west of town out Skyliner Road). Pedal 3.5 miles up North Fork Trail along Tumalo Creek, which features dramatic, 100-foot waterfalls interspersed with sustained, occasionally steep but rideable climbs, then zigzag along a rolling traverse across the flower-strewn alpine meadows at the base of Broken Top Mountain. The 10-mile descent from here drops down Flagline and South Fork trails, which feature frequent launch-inspiring lips, grin-inducing natural berms and eye-watering speed zones. Dust and braking bumps are the biggest trail hazards, so it's good to maintain space between riders at the lower elevations. In late summer the end of this trail becomes more sandbox than singletrack.

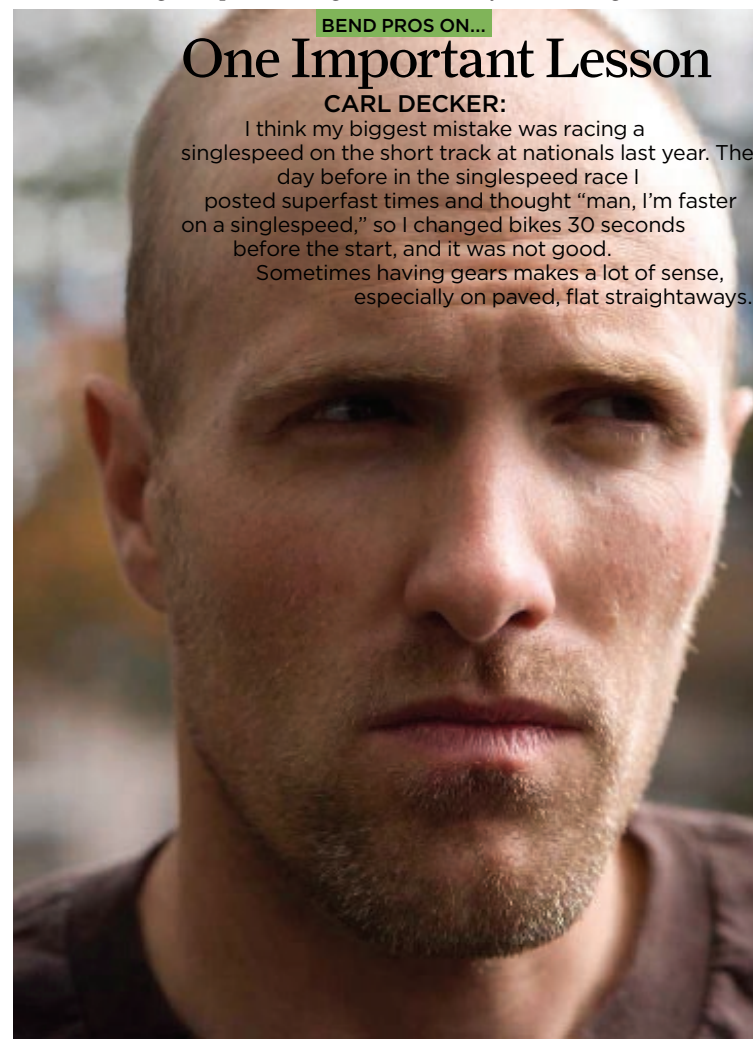
Twenty-five miles north of Bend on Highway 97, Smith Rock State Park is not only one of the world's premier rock-climbing destinations—with more than a thousand bolted routes—it also has a number of pedal-worthy pockets. One of the most notable is Skull Hollow, also known as Zen Trail by the locals. Originally created by free-roaming cattle, this single- and doubletrack features fast, open sightlines cutting through arid desert terrain with big-ring rollers and no switchbacks so you can pin it 'til the cows come home.

SHOP: There is no dearth of bike shops in Bend, but the best is inarguably Hutch's. In operation since 1981, Hutch's has shops on both the east (820 NE 3rd St.; 541/382-6248) and west (725 NW Columbia St.; 541/382-9253) sides of the Deschutes River. In addition to carrying Specialized, Giant, Bianchi and Haro, Hutch's offers rentals of mid-to-high-end mountain bikes, kids' bikes, trailers and tandems. The main guru of grease at Hutch's West, Jimmy T, has been building both bikes and trails since you were trying to figure out how to

BEND PROS ON... One Important Lesson

CARL DECKER:

I think my biggest mistake was racing a singlespeed on the short track at nationals last year. The day before in the singlespeed race I posted superfast times and thought "man, I'm faster on a singlespeed," so I changed bikes 30 seconds before the start, and it was not good. Sometimes having gears makes a lot of sense, especially on paved, flat straightaways.



“SEASONS ARE THE REASON THERE’LL NEVER BE 17 BAJILLION CYCLISTS HERE.”—ADAM CRAIG



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take your training wheels off. He owns more than 25 bikes, including every mountain bike he’s had since 1984. So cultish is his following that many locals won’t let anyone but Jimmy touch their bikes. Gear Peddler (1017 NE 2nd St.; 541/617-5254) is a consignment store that sells used bikes, wheels and components, as well as a sizeable selection of boating, snowboarding and climbing gear. Freeriders should note that the shop also carries Cove and Transition bikes as well as body armor. Web-Cyclery (550 SW Industrial Way; 541/318-6188) started out as an Internet-based company but has upgraded space three times in the past six years. Located in a 3,000-foot space in the Old Mill District, it specializes in trials, singlespeed, track and cyclocross.

GRUB: Deschutes Brewery Public House (1044 NW Bond St.; 541/382-9242) is Bend’s gravitational center and many of the area’s greatest adventures start or end here. Aside from pouring a half dozen of the best handcrafted ales this side of the International Date Line, the kitchen serves reasonably priced food a couple notches above your average pub grub. There are plenty of other breweries in town including the popular Bend Brewing Company (1019 NW Brooks St.; 541/383-1599), and McMenamans (700 N.W. Bond St.; 877/661-4228), so don’t fall in love with the first pint you drink.

The only thing rivaling Bend’s selection of beer is its variety of burritos. Super Burrito (118 N.W. Minnesota Ave; 541/317-1384) rolls up one of the best and cheapest gut bombs in the city, while the unoriginally named Taco Stand (221 NW Hill St.) has a large selection of succulent hot sauces and a religious following; Longboard Louies

Why Bend is a Mountain Biker’s Paradise

I love Bend because it has distinct seasons. They not only provide contrast to the milder locales most cyclists dig, but they’re also the reason why there will never be 17 bajillion professional cyclists here, or even more Californians, which is just fine with me. Riding your ‘cross bike for five hours by yourself in the snow is a nice departure from the hyper-social scenes of Boulder, Durango, Tucson, etc. Carl Decker and I have a personal vendetta against “meeting at the coffee shop at 10, bro.” Around here it’s more along the lines of “my house whenever we get around to it,” or “I’ll ride toward you and we’ll meet in the middle, then decide which direction to get lost in today.” We like to keep ourselves on our toes at all times. Today we ended up on a deer trail in 4 inches of sand for a kilometer with two other guys. If we’d met a dozen dudes at the coffee shop we definitely wouldn’t have been able to pull that off without incessant complaining and turnarounds.

This M.O. is the essence of why Bend works for those who have chosen to live here, why we can be hermits when we want but still get in some time with other folks if we feel like it. These tendencies are greatly complemented by the plethora of recreational and cultural diversions that abound here in the high desert. I can legitimately, when daylight permits, ride singletrack for a few hours, get in a float on the Deschutes (whether it’s in my trusty whitewater kayak or aboard an inner tube with a locally brewed beverage in one fist), ride the Supermotard downtown for burrito time and end up at the amphitheater or The Grove for some solid nightlife. These activities change with the seasons, the world goes round, and the challenges nature throws at us provide flavor—and plenty of solitude.—Adam Craig

BEND SERVES UP ALL THE SMOOTH, FAST, BUFFED SINGLETRACK YOUR KNOBBIES CAN HANDLE.



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(1254 NW Galveston Ave.; 541/383-2449) has the talent to whip out a mean taco and features a cool covered patio where you can dine.

Mother's Juice Bar (1255 NW Galveston Ave; 541/318-0982) is an essential lunch stop if you're a vegetarian or a sucker for fresh fruit smoothies. Carnivores can give themselves a coronary at Baldy's Barbeque (235 SW Century Dr.; 541/385-7427), which offers an array of baby back ribs, pulled pork and barbecued chicken, or a meat-gasm platter that features all three.

The Alpenglow Café (1133 NW Wall St.; 541/382-3221) makes its own bread, muffins, buns, and rolls, and uses local Oregon produce whenever possible. The berry-stuffed French toast is possibly the biggest breakfast breakthrough since the doughnut. Hit up Bella Taza (869 NW Wall St.; 541/318-0606), for a wired morning quickie (bagel + coffee + WiFi).

CRASH: McMenamins Old St. Francis School (700 N.W. Bond St.; 877/661-4228; \$90-\$150) has the town's quirkiest digs: a 1936 Catholic schoolhouse turned into a theme hotel and movie house

complete with 19 suites (all former classrooms), a theater/microbrew pub and a Turkish-style swimming pool. There are also a half dozen cottages of various sizes that can be shared by up to 10 people. Phoenix Inn Suites (300 NW Franklin Avenue; 541/317-9292; \$89-\$179) is a good option because the stairway leading from the back of the hotel leads directly to downtown. Entrada Lodge (19221 Century Dr.; 541/382-4080; \$79-\$129), on the road to Mt. Bachelor, has access to the Deschutes River Trail—a scenic cruiser following the lava flows, rapids and swimming holes of the Deschutes that can be used to connect to the rest of Bend's trail system. More rustic accommodations can be found at La Pine State Park (off US 97, 27 miles southwest of Bend; \$20-\$38), which has yurts and cabins with locking doors that can sleep four to six people. Of course, if you have an extra \$400,000 lying around you could just buy a home and move here like the rest of the mountain bike world.