



SUGARLOAFgolf

Golf & Stay from \$99!

CLICK HERE FOR DISPLAY AD INFO



MaineToday.com

Portland Press Herald / Maine Sunday Telegram KENNEBEC JOURNAL Morning Sentinel

Hello, m | Preferences | Log Out

HOME

- > MAINEJOBS
- > REAL ESTATE
- > WHEELS
- > MARKETPLACE
- > Place an Ad

NEWS

- Local and State
- Midday/4PM Reports
- AP Wire
- Week in Photos

WEATHER

- 5-day Forecast
- On the Ocean

SPORTS

- High Schools
- Red Sox
- Sea Dogs

BUSINESS

- News
- Blogs
- Maine News Direct
- Classifieds

ENTERTAINMENT

- Calendar
- Movies
- Dining
- Music
- Theater
- Art

TRAVEL

- Maine Regions
- From Away
- Vacation Rentals
- Lodging Guide

OUTDOORS

- Hiking
- Fishing
- Trail Head
- Campground Guide

BLOGS

- Late Hits
- Kid Tracks
- A Dog's Life
- More blogs

20 BELOW

- Teen Blogs
- One-Minute Wonders
- Reindeer Rock-off

MAINEJOBS

- Search Jobs
- Post a Job
- News and Resources
- Employer Profiles



Choose an activity:

Biking

Go

Sunday, June 18, 2006

[E-mail this story to a friend](#)

Give the Clifford Park Assault course a try

By MELISSA KIM

[Copyright](#) © 2005 Blethen Maine Newspapers Inc.

One week from today, more than 100 of southern Maine's best mountain bike racers will be joined by racers from all over New England as they converge on a course that many mountain bikers in Maine may never have ridden.

Tucked away in Biddeford, Clifford Park is an unexpected urban adventure destination and a mountain biker's playground.

The Clifford Park Assault, now in its fourth year, will be held on June 25. This year, for the first time, the race is one of the New England Championship Series races that are overseen by the governing body of mountain bike racing, Eastern Fat Tire Association.

There are only three championship series races this summer in Maine (the others are July 30 at Bradbury Mountain State Park in Pownal and Oct.1 at Reid State Park in Georgetown), and the EFTA promotion is sure to attract riders from away. Last year about 90 people raced at Clifford Park, and Pat Hackleman, the race director, expects about 120 riders this year.

If you're an intermediate or advanced rider looking for a fun, challenging ride, try riding the course of the Clifford Park Assault. It's marked with orange arrows, and during the week before the race it will be marked with eco-friendly neon orange tape. The course markers will stay up all summer.

If, on the other hand, you're an advanced beginner looking to improve your skills, then I'd recommend the route that Hackleman showed me when we rode there recently. Either way, there's something for everyone here.

To get to Clifford Park from the north, follow Route 9 through the center of Biddeford and turn left uphill. Stay on Route 9 for half a mile, and the park will be on your right. From the south, take Route 111 (Alfred Street) to Biddeford and turn right onto Route 9 (Pool Street). Drive half a mile and look for the parking lot on the right. There is a playground, a basketball court and tennis courts. From the parking lot, head toward the tennis



REAL ESTATEa

Renting
Buying
Town Info
Moving Here
Retiring Here

WHEELS

Classifieds
Resources and Info
Featured Dealers

MILESTONES

Graduations
Celebrations
Obituaries

MARKETPLACE

Classifieds
Special Sections

ADVERTISING

5 Reasons
Advertising Products

MEMBER CENTER

Press Herald
Sunday Telegram
Kennebec Journal
Morning Sentinel
MaineToday.com



Network Affiliate

courts. You'll see a signboard with a rudimentary trail map.

We started on the wide jeep trail, which was a bit rutted and washed out after all the spring rain. The rule of thumb is to follow this trail in a big counterclockwise loop that follows the circumference of the park. Trails loop on and off this trail and it's hard to get lost. The center of the park is marked by a large granite outcropping (mountain might be overstating it), so you can orient by keeping that to your left.

At the start, you'll have a short uphill climb on some rocky, rooty terrain. Immediately you're in thick woods and it's easy to forget that Biddeford is a stone's throw away. There's a fork in the trail; stay right on the main track. At 0.5 mile, there's a triangle; take the left. You'll see a large granite rock face on the left. The trail gets a bit less rocky and pine needles soften the surface. At 0.7 mile, go straight (there's a path to the right) up a gentle hill. You'll see more large boulders and what looks like rocks from a former quarry.

At 0.8 mile, bear right at the fork. You'll see a sign with a blue arrow that points in both directions; it looks like a snowmobile route marker. There's a small pond with granite rising out of it on your right. An open ledge of smooth granite is on your left as you ride down a short hill. The race course comes down that face, and I'm secretly glad I'm not riding that route.

At the bottom, continue straight (there's a trail off to the right). You'll soon get to a small fork; the main trail goes straight. It's pretty washed out, so we took the left branch, a skinny singletrack that parallels the main trail and meets it again at a 5-way intersection. Bear right toward the river; if you stand quietly for a moment, you can hear the rush of the West River as it tumbles over a small set of falls. Ride toward the falls on a grassy double track. The trail narrows as you reach the river. There are some nice rocks suitable for a picnic here and the small falls are pretty. On a hot day, it'd be tempting to wade and splash around in the still water just above the falls.

There's also a sweet sandy singletrack trail that follows the course of the river above the falls. This requires more skill, but it's scenic and well worth exploring. There are a few ladder bridges and some twists and turns, and eventually it loops back to a double track where you can then make your way back to the main loop.

We took a small trail to the left and did a fun little down-and-up loop before joining the trail we rode in on to get to the river. Back at the 5-way intersection, turn right on the main trail. You can see buildings through the woods to your right. The trail makes a broad curve to the left. At Mile 1.7 look for an orange arrow pointing left; that's the race course marker. Crank up a gradual hill, and you'll come to a fork. Either branch will take you back to the parking lot. The right branch is more direct but more washed out, so we took the left branch. After coming over another little incline, you'll see the main trail you came in on. Turn right to return to the tennis courts and parking lot, or turn left to do another lap and take some of the tempting spurs. According to Hackleman, there are about four or five miles of trails in the park, and all the singletrack trails loop back to the main trail.

There are inviting singletrack trails everywhere you look. This is the kind of place where you could ride over and over, improving your skills each time by trying new trails or stunts. There are some technical challenges like granite ledges and erratics, logs and ladder bridges. Ride it enough, and you'll be ready for the Assault, either this year or the next.

MORE INFORMATION

IT'S NOT TOO LATE to join this year's Clifford Park Assault. There are several categories (novice, sport, expert) for men and women, and there's also a kid's race for fun. The course looks quite challenging to me, but race director Pat Hackleman says plenty of first-time racers enter. You can pre-register online (www.bikereg.com) or show up between 7:30 and 9:30 a.m. June 25 to register. The fee is \$20. There's also a charity challenge and plenty of opportunities for spectators to see some cool mountain biking action. For more on the Clifford Park Assault, phone Cape-Able Bikes at 967-4382, visit www.capeablebikes.com, or e-mail pat@capeablebikes.com

Melissa Kim, a freelance writer in Portland, is the author of "New England Biking: 100 of the Best Road and Trail Rides" (Foghorn Outdoors/Avalon Travel Publishing). She welcomes comments at bikes@melissakim.com

[To top of page](#)



[Questions/Comments?](#)

Copyright © 2006, Blethen Maine Newspapers, Inc.