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Sunday, September 25, 2005

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**Off-road trails offer fun, adventure for parents and kids**

By MELISSA KIM

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Saturday is National Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day, as promoted by the advocacy group International Mountain Biking Association. IMBA wants to help reverse the trend of childhood obesity by getting kids back on bikes.

In the spirit of sharing the excitement and pleasure of biking off-road in wilderness areas with a kid, here are some suggestions for introductory mountain bike rides, with no stump-jumping or rock-hopping required (ranked from easiest to hardest).

For all these places, trail maps are readily available (kids aren't impressed if you get lost on the trail) and you can adjust the length of the ride as you go.

Don't forget to bring basic safety and first aid gear, wear helmets, take pictures, bring water and snacks, ride at the pace of the slowest rider and have fun!

**MOUNTAIN DIVISION TRAIL  
Windham to Standish**

This is the perfect off-road trail for a total beginner. The multi-use trail, which runs alongside the tracks of the former Mountain Division Line of the Maine Central Railroad, is almost completely flat.

The surface is crushed gravel, and it's an out-and-back trail so you can turn around whenever you want.

There are trail maps at either end of the 4.7-mile stretch, the trail is marked every quarter of a mile, and there are benches all along the way. Though you're not exactly in deep wilderness, there's still a lovely sense of being off-road as you ride through forests and fields.

There are trailheads in Standish and Windham; I suggest starting in Windham and riding as far as the Otter Pond camp turnoff, which you'll reach in 3.5 miles. There are four road



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crossings, so make sure you don't let the kids get too far ahead of you.

Directions: From Portland or Westbrook, drive northwest on River Road toward Windham. Just past the intersection with Routes 4 and 202, turn left onto Gambo Road. Go 0.4 mile and turn right onto the access road; drive 0.1 mile to the parking lot at the Gambo Recreation Area trailhead.

More information: No fee charged. Trail maps and more on the Web at <http://www.gpcog.org/mountain-division.php>

## **PINE TREE STATE ARBORETUM Augusta**

Check out all the interesting plants along this 5-mile multi-use trail system, open daily from dawn to dusk. Five miles isn't much, but it's perfect for beginners, and the plants, rock garden and birds give little ones something to stop and look at if they get tired. Birders and walkers frequent the paths, so remember to ride courteously.

Directions: From Augusta, drive south on Route 9 (Hospital Street). The arboretum is at 153 Hospital St. across from the AMHI campus.

More information: No fee charged. Call 621-0031 or visit the Web site: [www.pinetreestatearboretum.org](http://www.pinetreestatearboretum.org)

## **CARRIAGE ROADS Acadia National Park, Mount Desert Island**

This is a sweet time of year to visit Acadia, as there are fewer tourists and more fall foliage colors to admire. The extensive network of carriage roads gives you lots of options for wonderful rides.

The roads are hard-packed crushed gravel and are wide enough so you can ride side by side if there are no other trail users.

One suggestion for a good kid-friendly route: Start at the parking area at the north end of Eagle Lake. Ride along the eastern shore of the lake (the western shore has a steep hill) and out to the Bubble Pond parking area, approximately three miles. If you have more steam, ride along the edge of pretty Bubble Pond with great views of Cadillac Mountain on your left. There are plenty of places to stop to explore the flora and fauna at the water's edge.

Directions: From Bar Harbor, drive west on Route 233 for 2.5 miles. Go past the entrance to the Park Loop Road. Look for a sign for Eagle Lake Carriage Road. Just past this sign, turn right into the parking lot (there are restrooms and a trail map here). Pick up the carriage roads at the far end of the parking lot and ride left, under the bridge, to get to the northwest corner of Eagle Lake.

More information: There is a \$5 fee, good for seven days, for an individual on foot or bicycle to enter the park. Visit the Web site: [www.nps.gov/acad](http://www.nps.gov/acad)

## **PINELAND FARMS New Gloucester**

There are 15 miles of trails to choose from in this bucolic setting, some through open fields and farmland, others through wooded terrain (all the trails except the pedestrian-only Campus Loop are open to bicyclists).

Try the 3.6-mile River Loop with its rolling terrain and pleasant scenery. The trail is wide, so you can easily ride two or three abreast. The surface is a soft gravel, which does offer some resistance, so teens who want to ride fast may get frustrated.

Directions: Pineland Farms is on Route 231 between New Gloucester and North Yarmouth, east of Gray. Follow the signs; the Visitor Center is on Farm View Road, just off Morse Road.

More information: A trail pass costs \$3/day for adults; children 17 and under ride for free. Trail maps are available at the Visitor Center. Call the Visitor Center at 688-4539 or visit the Web site: [www.pinelandfarms.org](http://www.pinelandfarms.org)

## **BRADBURY MOUNTAIN STATE PARK**

### **Pownal**

Bradbury is a favorite of mountain bikers who enjoy its single-track trails, cut especially for off-road riding. But if your kids aren't ready for the single-track, there are plenty of multi-use trails that are good for beginners or advanced beginners.

It's a great introduction to riding on woody trails, with occasional rocks or roots to either ride over or around. Get a trail map as you enter and you'll see trails marked by level of difficulty.

On the mountain side, the Tote Road is the easiest, but you're likely to encounter hikers.

On the eastern side of the park, across Route 9, the wide, flat Link Trail and Snowmobile Trail are fun to explore, as is the Knight Woods Trail, though there are a few small hills on this pine-strewn path.

Directions: Take Route 9 to Pownal and look for the signs to the park.

More information: Free for children under 5 years; \$1 for ages 5 to 11; \$3 for ages 12 and up. Call 688-4712, or look up Bradbury on the state park Web site: [www.state.me.us/doc/parks](http://www.state.me.us/doc/parks)

## **OTHER TRAILS**

If your kids are advanced beginner or intermediate riders and the above places seem too tame, try these other popular mountain biking spots: Hinckley Park in South Portland; Clifford Park in Biddeford; Kennebec Highlands in the Belgrade Lakes region (visit [www.belgradelakes.org](http://www.belgradelakes.org) for more information); Mount Agamenticus in the York/Cape Neddick area (visit [www.mtanemba.org](http://www.mtanemba.org) for more information); and the Sugarloaf Outdoor Center in Carrabassett Valley.

*Melissa Kim, a free-lance 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](mailto:bikes@melissakim.com)*

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