

Mountain Biker Takes On Bobcat Ridge

Natural area's new trails provide quite a challenge

BY FELIX WONG
For Fort Collins Now

I had just crested what I hoped to be the last hill as my eyes

were already stinging with a mixture of salty sweat and sunscreen. Along the right side of the trail was a horse, and for a moment it looked like it was talking to me—in



Wong

English.

"Did you just ride up Powerline Road?" I heard. Still gasping for breath, I merely nodded and muttered a meek "yeah." A man munching a fat sandwich spilling with vegetables then stepped around from behind the horse. I hadn't encountered Mr. Ed after all. "That's really rocky. And steep."

"I'll say," I replied.

It was on this balmy afternoon—the last truly warm day of November—that I decided to explore the City of Fort Collins' first regional natural area, Bobcat Ridge, on my mountain bike. West of Masonville, its 2,600 acres encompass grassland meadows, foothill shrublands, ponderosa pine and Douglas fir forests.

The Bobcat Ridge Natural Area opened to the public in late September 2006, but two new trails—the Ginny and D.R., named



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The ascent of Powerline Road in Bobcat Ridge is steep and rocky.

after the previous owners of the property—were completed in October of this year. Construction was funded by the Virginia D. and D.R. Pulliam Charitable Trust and the City of Fort Collins Natural

Areas Program's dedicated sales tax revenue. Both trails cross U.S. Forest Service land in the Roosevelt National Forest.

Just beyond the parking lot, I started riding north along the Valley

Loop Trail, which was wide and well-groomed with gravel, over to Powerline Road. I leisurely pedaled in the warm rays of the sun while keeping a lookout for flying creatures known to frequent the area, including Lazuli bunnings, broad-tail hummingbirds, Anise swallowtails, red-tailed hawks, turkey vultures and woodland butterflies.

Other wildlife that roam the area include rock squirrels, lizards, rattlesnakes, coyotes, mountain lions, bears, and, yes, bobcats. I did not encounter any of these, but perhaps that was a good thing. Bobcat Ridge is also one of the few Fort Collins Natural Areas where dogs are not permitted.

Along the way, I inspected some old, rusted farm equipment and stopped by a log cabin built in the late 1800s, due to be restored

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AND BIG

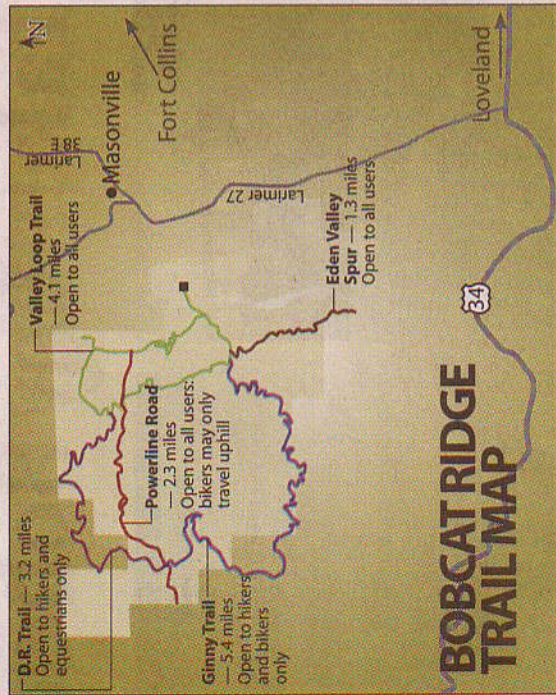


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in the next couple years. Upon departing, I reflected on how this cabin was built around the time the first chain-driven bicycles were being developed.

I then rode my mountain bike up Powerline Road, which bikers are only allowed to ascend. Or should I say, pedaled and pushed the bicycle up the road, as some stretches were so steep that it was easier (and faster) to walk than to try to spin the granny gear. I was beginning to feel like a weakling for dismounting and walking the bicycle so frequently until I passed by a sign that knowingly read, "Caution—Steep Grades with Unstable, Rocky and Loose Surfaces."

After the horse encounter, I turned onto the Ginny Trail and rode through a honey-colored meadow before proceeding to more roller-coaster terrain. This area, while closely surrounded by



Source: City of Fort Collins SANDRA MACHUCA/smachuca@fortcollinsnow.com



The view toward Fort Collins from the Ginny Trail of Bobcat Ridge.

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Like myself, the mountain bike was getting a workout with its front suspension trying its best to level the rocks, boulders, and fallen tree branches in its path. Several of these obstacles were large enough that I had to resort to Yeti More Walking. But most of the time, I had a silly grin on my face as I rolled and rock-hopped along this winding, 5.4-mile trail that descended a whopping 1,500 feet.

I coasted back into the parking lot by mid-afternoon, three hours after I had commenced. By

this time six other mountain bikers—who were trying to log some miles before the season's first snow would blanket the trails—were unloading their bicycles from their cars.

For one of them, this was also her first time to Bobcat Ridge. "Have you ridden on the Ginny Trail before?" she asked, wondering how to get to the trailhead.

"Yes," I replied, "I have ridden it. Walked part of it too. Had a blast."

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