

Spring into Cycling

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Spring is an explosive and wonderful time in the White Mountains. Streams are gushing crystal-clear water over rarely-used rock beds; grass is growing; wildflowers are blooming; the cool wind is blowing (and pollen is in the air). Animals are moving from wintering grounds and migrating birds are returning to their summer nesting areas. Too many of us get involved in our daily lives and forget to slow down and experience all this in person. This is a perfect time to get that bike out of the garage, out from under the tarp on the porch or down from the attic and get out there in the middle of it all.



Whether you are hitting the open road or venturing down a single-track, the White Mountains are a great place to get out there and ride your bike. Pavement, gravel roads, two-tracks, single-tracks and pretty-much-no-track game trails are all options for finding a place to unwind, explore our beautiful mountain environment and exercise your body and soul but what do you need to prepare for these adventures? In most cases what you need depends on what your goals are but, in general, it boils down to comfort and safety. In this article, I will try to outline most of what an average person will want to consider before beginning that epic journey into our beautiful A/S National Forest, a backyard we are lucky enough to call home.



Safety first: before beginning your epic ride or weekend adventure, please be sure that your bike is in great working condition. Sitting for months in that garage or under that tarp can cause tires to rot, brake pads to harden and derailleurs to mis-align. A good start to your adventure begins with a safety check, chain lube and tune-up of your bike -- whether done at home or at your local bike shop.

Safety checking your bike first prevents in-the-field issues and the associated frustrations involved. Now, assuming that your bike is in great condition, let's consider what you need to stay safe, comfortable and happy.

Starting from the head down -- acknowledging that our brains are the most important thing we possess -- you will want to be sure to have the correct helmet and be sure that this helmet is current and the optimal style for your riding. Most helmets have an expiration date where the protective padding begins to become brittle and less effective. Check your helmet for this date or bring it to your local bike shop for a safety check.

Here in the White Mountains, the weather can appear to be a warm spring day when you start your ride and you can end up back in winter a few hours later. Be sure to check the weather before you begin and carry at least a wind-shell in case of weather changes. A good place to store your wind-shell, snacks, emergency repair equipment and your water is a hydration-style pack. A pack with a "low-rider" water supply is recommended for cycling because it



distributes the water weight low on your back to help prevent back strain and aids in stability while on the bike. Water-bottle cages and bottles provide instant access to your water and also give you a place to carry an easily accessible bear spray canister if you are venturing into the woods. Correctly applied

bear spray is the most effective deterrent against attacks from almost any wildlife and is light and easily carried on your bike.

Safety demands that you are visible on your bike and day-time-visible strobe-style head and tail lights are a must when traveling on a road -- either paved or gravel. You should be prepared with a night-time headlight if traveling in dusky or dark conditions is even a remote possibility. High-visibility clothing provides drivers additional heads-up that you are sharing the road with them and makes it easy to spot a companion that might be either ahead of you or lagging behind on the trail. A bike bell can notify riders ahead of you that you might be passing them and a bear bell provides wildlife with warning that you are sharing their space.



And comfort...if you are not comfortable on your bike, your journey will certainly not feel like a magic carpet ride through the woods and you won't want to repeat the experience. If you are planning to ride more than a mile or so, biking shorts are a must. Biking shorts are the padded shorts that fit next to your skin, providing a barrier to the chafing and pressure felt from extended seat time. You can wear shorts under a pair of mountain bike

your biking shorts if the mountain be over. provide against handlebar against passing

brush. cycling protect your eyes from road debris and, of course, the sunlight and,



you wish but wearing them makes all difference between enjoying your adventure and wondering when it will Cycling gloves protection friction from grips and also scratches from

through overhanging Sunglasses or glasses will



finally, your footwear is something to consider. If you choose to ride with "clipless" pedals, you will want to consider the terrain you will experience while off your bike. If you are mountain biking and plan on wanting to walk over to experience that cliff view or think you might be doing some bike-hiking over rocks or debris, you might want to consider mountain bike shoes, specifically designed to accommodate hiking. If you are using flat pedals, you will want to use an as-stiff-as-possible shoe, such as a

mountain bike flat shoe. This prevents your foot from flexing as you pedal and will help you avoid foot strain.

If you have any questions on equipment, road/trail conditions or just want some professional advice, see your local bike shop -- any of them will be more than happy to help you get out there and enjoy your world a little more slowly -- on a bike.

Pic for ad