

# OUT WITH FRIENDS AND STRANGERS

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Humans are pack animals and being outside, metaphorically running with the wolves, is something that is encoded into our DNA as something that makes us stronger, more motivated and binds us together as one. Whether you are enjoying a group hike or team ride, the comradery is essential and healthy for us both physically and emotionally. Distances seem shorter, climbs easier and conversations more personal.

Getting out with other adults bonds us and pretty much instantly makes strangers friends who we care about and will be glad to help in whatever situation comes up during the activity. Broken chains, bent derailleurs, flat tires or sprained ankles are all things we readily jump in to help out with. We share a similar interest in whatever activity we are doing and this gives us a starting point for conversations. We also share the human experience and learn from each other's mistakes and triumphs. Being strangers initially, and having the possibility of never seeing that person again, gives us the opportunity to let down our guard just a little and be more willing to share viewpoints and ideologies we might otherwise keep to ourselves, and allows us to learn and grow emotionally.

Getting out with your kids is one of the best ways to find out about them as people and learn what is going on in their otherwise secretive lives. Walking or riding next to someone brings out conversations and snippets of life experiences that would never appear in a face to face conversation. While moving along outdoors, whether cycling, hiking or riding a horse, you are focused on the trail, focused on the movement of your body and have time to process your thoughts between statements. Electronics are off the table and imagination takes its place. Physically, being out in a group, accomplishing a group task such as trail building or clearing, highway clean-up, finishing a loop trail, participating in a race or just riding the roads gives us a joint buy-in to the activity and we support one another in the successful completion of that task. We might go a little further, travel more efficiently or be reminded to stop and refuel more frequently. Faster riders motivate others to move along more quickly than they might alone. More skilled riders can show us "the line" across a difficult patch and celebrate our successes. Slower riders give earlier finishers time to stop and chat before the next section. Some of us are better climbers and some better descenders. Some better leaders and some better followers, but as a group, everyone benefits from being a member of the pack.

There are many ways to participate in group activities: Join a club like TRACKS and participate regularly in their trail building days, group rides and/or group hikes. Contact your local bike shop and ask about group rides. Most shops sponsor or participate in group rides and will let you know the riding level expected. If you have kids who show an interest in cycling, contact NICA and find out if there is a team in your area and get involved as a parent supporter or coach. Get on STRAVA to share your rides/hikes and to find out about local activities. Join Facebook or other social media biking or hiking groups to give and get feedback on your chosen activity and to find similarly minded people to go out with. Having a group activity you are committed to reduces the probability you will allow yourself to stay home. You are part of the pack — get going! Whether you are "not good enough," are "too old," "too out of shape" or "too busy" you will find the motivation to change that thinking by participating in a group. There is somebody else there who has "been there" and can share their life experiences with you in a way that will motivate you to succeed.

Solo activities are great, and make us more aware of our surroundings, heighten our senses and empower us, but as human beings we have an innate need to run with the herd,

howl with the pack, fly with the flock and let ourselves become one with something larger than ourselves. Be safe out there and enjoy the ride. Life is way too short to spend it on the couch.