## BACK TO NORMAL

By Brian Zongker, NSP

Time to get back to normal. I'll bet you are thinking that this article is going to be about COVID-19. Well, you are wrong. It's about getting back to normal on your mountain bike. The real question is -- what is normal? Is it riding at the same frequency as you did last year? The same number of miles? The same trails? The same number of events? The bottom line is -- we don't really know. What was normal last season may not be normal this season.

Things change. You have a new job, new home, maybe moved to a new town or possibly have had an injury. All of which could affect your ability to ride. What if you moved to a new part of town and all at once getting to the trails was super easy, right outside your back door. You could put in more miles just because it's more convenient. What if the opposite is true and now you must put your bike on the rack and drive somewhere? Will you ride as much? Your promotion at work takes up more of your time. Or you got laid off, now you have lots of time. Maybe you now work from home and set your own schedule and you can hit the trails anytime you want. All kinds of factors affect your ability to get out on the trails. We will leave injury out of this one for the time being.

Do not let any of the above be an excuse for not riding. If you want to ride, find a way. Don't get caught up in the laziness or the excuses. Get out there because you know you love it. I haven't been riding as much this season as I would like and it is because of one of the above reasons. I don't like it. But for right now, it is what it is. When I am out there, I remember that I absolutely love it. It is where I find my soul, my peace and tranquility. My happy place. I'll get back to my normal soon even if it is slightly different than last year's normal. I owe it to myself.

Regardless of the quantity of time and miles, take care of your equipment. Did you know that the chain on your bike, depending on how hard you ride and maybe where you ride, only lasts around 750 miles? It's important to know this because your chain tends to stretch over time and miles. If it stretches too long, it could cause your bike to not shift properly and even break. Not to mention that it can cause damage to the cassette. Your cassette is that gear looking thingy that is attached to your rear wheel that the chain goes up and down on to make it easier to pedal or enables you to go faster. They make tools to check to see if the chain is wearing out but the best way to know for sure is to take it to your local bike shop and have them look at it for you. I take my bike to Cyclemania in Show Low. They are great and truly care about your riding experience. They're the ones who educated me on what the proper name for that gear thingy is.

Get out there and be normal. Whether it is on the trail or somewhere else, get out and find your happy place. You owe it to yourself. And where better to social distance than in the mountains and out on the trail? Darn it, I knew I couldn't get all the way to the end without some sort of Corona comment.

