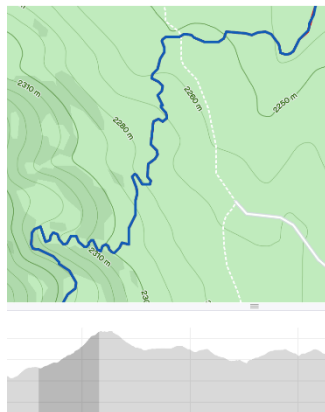


MTB Zen: Lessons learned from Ecks Mountain, Land Of Pioneers (LOP) Trail, AZ

I wonder why it is that every time I begin the climb up Ecks Mountain, I doubt my ability to make it to the top? I give myself reasons and excuses... I am too tired from what I did yesterday; it's too hot; the Trail is too dry and slippery today or any other number of things. After conquering this challenge nearly 50 times, you'd think that I would have the confidence to know it can be done one more time but I think it's human nature to second guess yourself and provide yourself an out. My husband says, "Never say you can't do something; just realize that **you haven't made the choice to do it yet.**" Ecks Mountain and Mountain Biking have taught me life lessons applicable to today's uncertain world.

Ecks Mountain LoP Loop North/Hard side



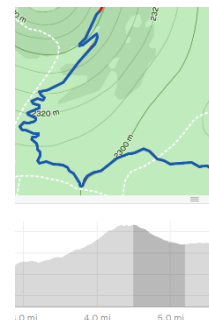
Don't doubt your abilities. In Mountain Biking -- and in life -- there are times when things seem too big, too overwhelming and too difficult. One adage of Mountain Biking is that **you climb a mountain one pedal stroke at a time.** Rather than take on giant tasks all at once, break it up into small, conquerable sections. The climb up Ecks follows a Trail which has multiple switchbacks. The Trail surface is loose and the switchbacks steep but there are flatter sections connecting the switchbacks. If you give yourself a chance to stretch and breathe between switchbacks, you will be able to muster the power to climb through the relatively short switchbacks one at a time. The sum of the switchbacks is close to the altitude gain of the climb, except for a couple of final pushes to the top. Just **keep on peddling**, there will be an easy downhill section to come. Before rushing to the downhill though, take time to look around. Enjoy the bigger picture -- the trees, the neighboring

mountains and the cloud patterns. Think about the fact that Ecks was once an exploding volcano -- less than two million years ago -- and how small and insignificant we may seem but how much we can affect the current world closely around us and our responsibilities to leave this world a better place than it was before our presence.

Slitherin

As you descend Ecks to the South, the Trail begins a section called Slitherin. The Trail gives you tight switchbacks down Ecks. As before, tackle these one at a time, relax between them and use caution not to get going too fast. There are times in life when we relax too fast, throw caution to the wind and end up making **critical mistakes.** This section of the Trail reminds us that there is often danger even when there are apparently clear skies.

When you reach the Southern base of Ecks, you are rewarded by the tail end of Slitherin with one of the most satisfying runs of the LOP Trail, a smooth, swooping run through the trees. Here is your reward to all your hard work, enjoy it and let your bike fly. **Become one with the bike** and feel the Trail beneath your wheels.



This is one section where you can let your mind relax and take in the joy and freedom of childhood that Mountain Biking can bring.

The Slitherin segment ends with a choice; take the shortcut cutoff to the Northern section of LOP or proceed South towards the Trail head. Neither choice is easy: one is rocky uphill; one is rocky downhill. Both provide challenges and reward s-- choose according to your final goal but know that both paths will challenge you in different ways. We can't expect life to provide easy paths forever but you are in control of how you react to change. Do you retreat from a challenge or take it on with a full head of steam? Rocky sections test our faith in ourselves and our tools. Do I trust the bike to carry me safely over the rocks with enough momentum? Do I believe that I have the power to climb that section? Which sections do I decide to walk through; which can I use momentum to blast through and which do I need to slow down and crawl through? **Decisions like this build our confidence** and force us to focus on the present for our own safety. Mountain Biking gives you a workout both mentally and physically. Be willing to take on challenging Trail section combinations and know that forging ahead is often the best choice.

One of the things I love about Mountain Biking -- besides the obvious wonders of nature and the fitness benefits -- is the fact that I have control over what I choose to do. One of the leaders of a Facebook MTB fitness group I am a part of posed the question: "What do you love about Mountain Biking?" I remember that the first word that popped into my head was "**control.**" Especially now, we feel like we are losing control over our lives. What's happening with the virus? What will happen to the economy? Will schools open? Will my job be safe? Are my family members going to be okay? What's going to happen next? With Mountain Biking, I have control for an hour or so. I can choose to go over that difficult rocky section or I can choose to hike-a-bike it for a while. I can choose to take the longer but more gradual Northern side climb up Ecks, with its steeper more difficult descent leading to the swooping treelined trail reward or I can choose the shorter, steeper Southern side climb, with its associated longer, faster downhill run. I can decide which route to take; when to stop for water or a snack and when to take a break with my dog alongside a tank. I can choose to challenge myself to go longer or harder or I can choose to take it easy and slow. Mountain Biking gives us a few moments of controlled clarity in our otherwise uncertain and stress-inducing world. No masks, no worries, no COVID, no traffic. Just ultimate clarity. As my good friend Lucas says, "**Two wheels heals.**"