

## **Show Low's Buena Vista Trail Loops: Not a Secret Anymore**

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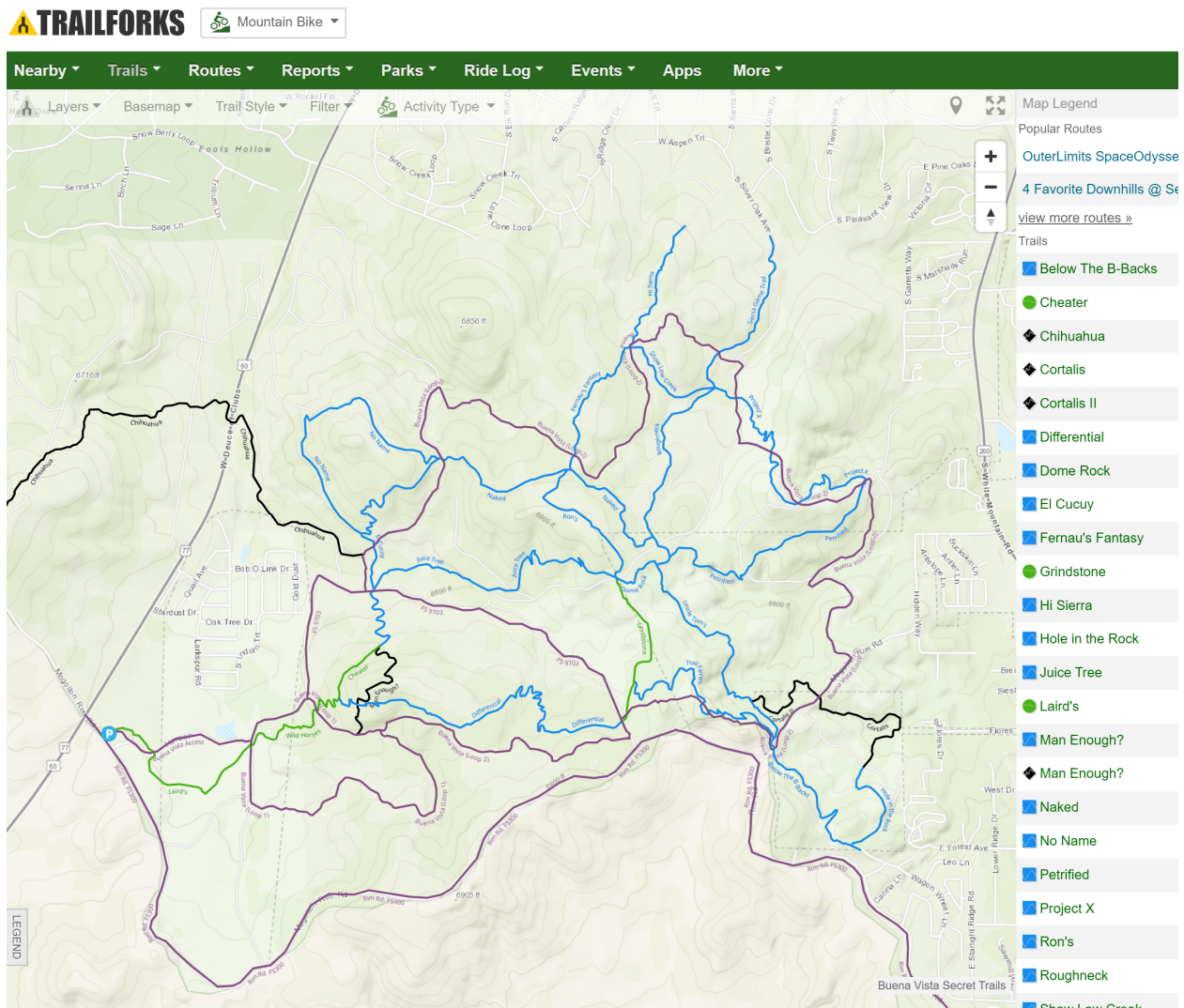
Several years ago, I was told about a “secret” trail system, marked by bones and guarded over by a full elk skeleton by the name of Walter. This local tale seemed a little far-fetched to be true, but warranted further exploration, and subsequently turned out to be just a small part of the actual story. As the years have passed, the “Secret Trails” have grown, mile by mile and new segment by new segment, all imagined, built and cared for by local outdoor enthusiasts. Historically, the trail has been a local “secret,” the City of Show Low being an unwitting host to one of the most exciting and dynamic trail systems in the State of Arizona. Today the Secret trails are extensively used by mountain bikers, hikers and equestrians alike, and are a popular local and visitor destination. A survey done by the save the Buena Vista Foundation (STBVF) last summer showed that the Secret Trails are a main destination attraction for mountain biking visitors and even play an important part in the decisions of many to relocate to Show Low. A recent Show Low PD recruitment video featured mountain biking as one of the highlighted draws to join the force and relocate to the community.

Always referred to by in-the-know locals as the “Secrets,” these trail loops are system of trails that wrap in and around the “Buena Vista” Trail south of the City of Show Low. These trails are on land managed by the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, and are accessible from multiple locations in and around the City of Show Low, offering visitors and local residents highly desirable trails right out their backdoors. The trail system offers a feeling of seclusion and isolation even with its central location. It offers fantastic and sweeping views at various points and in all directions . . . hence the name, “Buena Vista”, meaning “good views”. It offers well-built trails that flow like nature itself intended for them to be there all along. The system offers sections of trail that are a challenge for even experienced hikers, bikers and equestrians, while simultaneously offering many casual sections of trail that make even “green” folks who are new to the outdoors comfortable. Owing to its “stacked-loop” design and multi-directional usage, it also offers trail

experiences that don't become boring over time due to familiarity. It's possible to go into the trail system seven days in a week and do seven different rides or hikes.

The stacked trail-loop offers character and an experience that is different than any of the other officially recognized local trails in the White Mountains. Whether it is a narrow squeeze through sandstone rocks on a trail like "Crotalis," the experience of taking a moment to slide yourself through a window in a large sandstone rock on a trail known as "Hole-In-The-Rock," or a visit with the skeletal remains of wildlife like "Walter" or "Wilma" on trails known as "Roughneck," and "Sierra Game Trail" there is something unique and interesting around every corner. The trails themselves have, by tradition, been marked with animal bones, which over the years has led some people to refer to the system as "The Bone Trails." Local people have painted small rocks and placed them along the trail with positive messaging. This trail system is not just one that is heavily used and maintained . . . it is loved and affectionately cared for by its users. It's the kind of urban trail system that most cities can only dream of having. These are the kinds of trails that people want to use.

To be clear, the stacked-loop single track referred to as the "Secret Trails" is not the official "Buena Vista" trail that appears on published maps. The only readily available map of the Secret Trails is on the Trail Forks app. (TrailForks.com). The Secrets are an unrecognized social trail system that many local residents recall utilizing as early as the mid-to late 1980's. The system is separate and distinct from the official "Buena Vista," which consists of approximately 12 miles of what were originally logging roads . . . which hikers, bikers, and horseman find largely distasteful and which suffer from severe erosion problems. Unlike the "official" trail, the social trail system consists of approximately 17 miles of winding and sustainably designed 100% single-track through the forest. As many locals say, if you find yourself hiking or biking on a road in the "Buena Vista" area . . . "you're doing it wrong."



Please read: **Buena Vista's Secret Trails: A Troubled Past and Unclear Future** (pg....) to find out what can be done to help preserve the Secret Trails for generations to come and to find out how to volunteer or donate to TRACKS or STBVF