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Speed and air at Alsea Falls

Sometimes, it takes a trip to the good old Pacific "North-wet" to appreciate how good we have it down here in Southern Oregon.

At the tail end of October, I heaved my mountain bike onto the back of my car and traveled north to visit a friend in Corvallis. While there, I visited one of Oregon's newest mountain bike trail systems, Alsea Falls.

Situated between Eugene and Corvallis in the soggy Coast Range, the Alsea Falls Recreation Site, managed by the BLM, offers summer camping and a hiking trail along the eponymous river.

But a new multi-use trail system also is taking shape with help from the International Mountain Biking Association, the Northwest Youth Corps and the local IMBA chapter.

Six miles of trails — phase one of the project — opened in July.

Though the trails are open to hikers, they are designed for bikers as downhill flow trails. They're full of berms — banked turns that help maintain speed — and potential jumps.

As I left Mediterranean climes last week and entered the Marine climate zone, the rain began to fall. It didn't let up until I returned at the end of the week, but it did slow to a drizzle as I approached the Alsea trails.

The trailhead is a short ways up Fall Creek Road, which is between the campground and day-use area entrance.

From the trailhead, bikers can climb up a paved road 3.5 miles and about 1,000 vertical feet to hit Highballer, an intermediate trail chock full of roots, small drops (the tallest I saw was about a foot) and tight weaves through trees. Watch out for "Berm Lake," a large and deceptively deep puddle.

Less confident riders may want to skip Highballer by riding down the fire road and hitting one of the two other major trails: Dutchman and Springboard, the latter of which is the real star of the system.

Springboard is the epitome of a flow trail. For nearly 2 miles it twists and turns through the vibrant secondary-growth Douglas fir forest, rolling up and down, offering one tabletop jump after another, but with nothing too steep or too technical. Everything can be rolled, which I did on my first time down.

If I wanted to get a beginner excited about mountain biking, this is the trail I would take them to. It's fun and easy to ride again and again. I ended the day muddy and wet, but grinning.

The Alsea Falls system may be a 4-plus hour drive from the Rogue Valley, but if you find yourself in Eugene or Corvallis, it's certainly worth checking out.

Although we have a wealth of hiking trails, our corner of the state doesn't have any dedicated mountain biking flow trails. That's set to change as work moves ahead on the Mountain of the Rogue trail system in Rogue River.

The second official work day is tomorrow, Saturday, Nov. 8. Show up at 8:00 a.m. at the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 4300 N. River Road. Just bring boots and appropriate attire, and help us build the mountain biking community's next big thing. After all, it'll probably be another sunny fall day in the Rogue Valley.

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