



Students take to hills on bikes

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By **ERIN WALDNER**
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One afternoon, as most students at Yucaipa High School streamed off campus, 18 boys and girls stayed behind.

They're members of the school mountain bike team, which -- barring rain -- normally practices four afternoons a week in the hills behind campus.

"I love the challenge, like pushing myself physically. And I like being outside in nature," said team member Brittany McHargue, 17.

Brady Kiss, 16, used to race BMX bikes and joined the mountain bike team because he wanted to do something with the school. He said he's gotten to know classmates he wouldn't have met otherwise.

Math and computer teacher Mike Bagg, 41, is head coach of the Yucaipa team. He said he started the team because he loves to ride and knew it would appeal to students who may not be interested in traditional school sports.

Other schools have teams, like Hemet and Rim of the World in Lake Arrowhead. There is an effort is under way to start a team at Beaumont High School. Teams belong to the Southern California Interscholastic Cycling League. The mountain bike league and teams got under way last year.

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Kurt Miller / The Press-Enterprise

Members of the Yucaipa High School mountain bike team take a practice ride after school. Members will soon will be competing in bike riding as a school sport.

Biology teacher and cross-country coach Pete Kirkham said he was up in the air about starting the Hemet High team because he knows coaching is a lot of work. But the 53-year-old runner and mountain-bike rider decided to give it a try and about six students joined the team.

"It just kind of blossomed from there," he said.

Eighteen students have received waivers to compete in the spring

Kirkham noted a difference between some traditional sports and a mountain bike team: "There is no bench. Everyone rides."

He said the Hemet team consists of all skill levels. They practice for 1 ½ hours Monday and Wednesday afternoons, riding in the foothills by Simpson Park, which overlooks Hemet.

When the Yucaipa team gathered for practice on Dec. 17, following a short lecture from Bagg on the proper way to clean a bike, they rode away from campus for Crafton Hills, returning a around dusk.

Jeneane Crossley, a 15-year-old Yucaipa sophomore, said the sport "takes a lot of physical strength and you get to see the beautiful scenery."

Bagg said that during practice the team works on technique, such as how to negotiate ruts, rocks and roots on the trail, as well as proper breathing, trail etiquette and nutrition.

Kirkham said he also works at building up the students' cardiovascular fitness levels so they can ride for an hour to 1 ½ hours at a time.

Mountain bike riding, like any sport, poses dangers to participants. Bagg and Kirkham said their first priority is safety and that the teenagers usually don't ride very fast. Bagg said the average speed is 7 miles per hour.

"Eighty-five percent of your time is climbing," he added.

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Mountain bike club

An effort is under way to start a mountain bike team at Beaumont High School. Students or parents who want to get involved more may contact Greg Barker at 951-294-4230.
