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Nelson

Fly high, roll over, splash around and even enjoy the rush of nature along Stanky Creek

By John K. Nelson
Contact
April 17, 2006

Stanky Creek may just have the best name of any mountain biking location in the country.

But what does it mean?

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Chris Irving recalls how the Bartlett riding area was named:

"We were working down there one day and someone said, 'This creek stinks!'"

The creek in question isn't really a creek at all, just a drainage ditch from the surrounding residential area.

In the way all good names evolve, "stinks" became "stanks."

"Then it became Stanky Creek," Irving says.

Without question, Stanky Creek is the most challenging mountain biking location in West Tennessee. Other locations such as Shelby Farms have their fans, but Stanky Creek stands out for its creative trails and radical terrain.

And that is a tribute to riders like Irving, the mad scientist who dreamed up many of the rides, and the Mid-South Trails Association, which has developed and maintained the trails since 1997, when riding on the property began.

More than 9 miles of trails wind through the 300-plus-acre Bartlett park.

The trails are also a great running and hiking locale.

Three main loops make up Stanky Creek.

The White Trail was the first developed ride and is considered the easiest. It's also the fastest, with some beautiful wooded portions.

The Yellow Trail is a little more technical, with some large obstacles, tight turns, whoop-de-dooos (ups and downs) and a boardwalk system through a wet area.

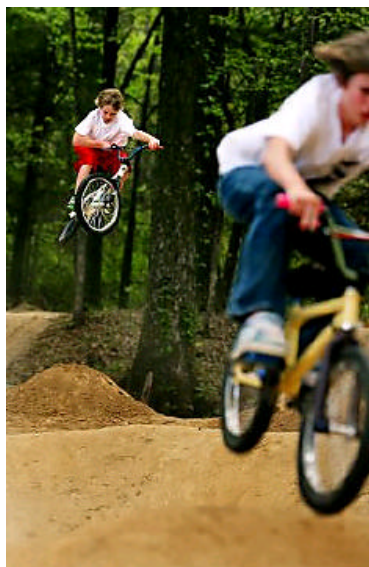
The Blue Trail is the shortest and most technical, with tight turns and "the drop," a truly steep downhill about midway through.

The beauty of these trails is that natural obstacles are embraced. Ramps have been built over several large downed trees, creating thrilling riding opportunities.

Several bridges cross the creek -- some narrow and scary -- and a creek crossing offers riders a chance to get wet.

One late afternoon last week, several riders from Mid-South Trails were at Stanky Creek.

As we rode along, a nasty hole sucked in rider Paul Hart's front tire, sending him on an "endo" over the handlebars into a woods.



Lance Murphey
The Commercial Appeal

BMX riders Austin Davis (left) and Mike Riesselman, both 13, ride through the "air zone" at Stanky Creek, with its trails, obstacles and technical difficulties for mountain bikers.



Photos by Lance Murphey
The Commercial Appeal

Paul Hart barrels through Stanky Creek during a trail ride through the area near Yale Road and Sycamore View.



It happens to all of us at Stanky Creek at one time or another. Hart shrugged it off, filled up his flattened front tire and we moved on.

We took in a new ramp over a downed tree and headed to the creek crossing, where all of us (except a certain writer) made it up the other bank and onto the White Trail.

Tim Wallace, who lives nearby and rides Stanky Creek four or more times a week, offered to take the lead, guiding me with the occasional good-natured warning of "narrow trees here!" and "watch out for these roots!"

About halfway through, we veered onto the newest Stanky Creek feature, "The Outhouse Trail," a roughly 1-mile side trip that rolls by an outhouse from an old home in these woods.

We returned to the White Trail, cruised through the BMX trick-riding area on the east side of the park and finally ended up in the parking lot as the light began to fade.

As I loaded my bike onto the car, Wallace bid farewell and headed back into the woods.

"I'd like to ride the Yellow Trail before the sun sets," he said over his shoulder.

Bike lane needs

Two readers responded to the last Life Cycles question, "What roadways in the region could easily accommodate a bike lane?"

Shawn Brereton of Memphis thinks Walnut Grove can be rehabilitated from its current unsafe condition.

"Walnut Grove in many areas can be re-striped to accommodate a bike lane and with it being a great east-west connector, it would be awesome to see a bike lane there," Brereton wrote in an e-mail.

Ed Owen of Fisherville, also thinks Walnut Grove could have a bike lane.

"Every time I drive Walnut Grove Road through Shelby Farms and see the sign indicating bikes are prohibited, I shake my head and mutter unpleasant stuff," he wrote.

Construction of the new bridge over the Wolf River on Walnut Grove is proposed to include bike/pedestrian access, so that's a start.

Brereton also points out that the Tennessee Department of Transportation is supposed to consider adding a bike lane anytime a road is repaved in Memphis.

Here are my five nominations for Memphis roadways that could handle bike lanes without too much trouble:

North Parkway, Southern, Goodlett, White Station and Shady Grove.

What did I miss?

Cliff note

You may remember a column from December about rider Cliff Heegel, a Memphis psychotherapist who was hit by a car on Summer last August.

Heegel's shoulder and jaw were severely injured, but he was back on the bike within weeks of the accident and his recovery is nearly complete.

These days, Heegel is devoting himself to bicycle safety. He recently was certified as an instructor for the League of American Bicyclists.

The certification allows him to teach safety classes through the local bike advocacy group, Share the Road.

For information on taking a class from Heegel, contact him at 763-0999, or fixedgearcliff@gmail.com.

Head south, young men

Reader Susan Hirsch of Germantown offered another ambitious "dream trip" after reading the last Life Cycles column.

Her son, Robert Hirsch, started in Vancouver, British Columbia, and is riding to the southern tip of South America. That's the goal at least.

He was joined by friend Marc Ramsey in Costa Rica in January. Ramsey and Hirsch are former Peace Corps volunteers and both are Houston High School grads.

Currently, the Memphis cyclists are in Peru. You can follow their journey on Hirsch's blog, makesomedaytoday.blog.spot.com.

BMX back on track

Spring has brought the return of BMX racing to Shelby Farms on Saturdays.

Registration is 4:30-5:30 p.m., with racing beginning soon after.

There are several race age groups and classes, all sanctioned by the National Bicycle League. For more information, go to witnessbmx.com or call 756-2691.

Life Cycles question

Is anyone planning to avoid the parking and traffic hassles of the Beale Street Music Festival by riding a bicycle?

Life Cycles appears twice a month in Health & Fitness. Send comments to John K. Nelson at 529-5243 or nelson@commercialappeal.com.

Tim Wallace traverses a fallen tree using a recently completed ramp on the Stanky Creek Bicycle Trails in Bartlett.

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