



Understanding Mountain Bike Tourism

Strategies and Recommendations for Increasing Mountain Bike Tourism Opportunities in Richwood, West Virginia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Located at the gateway to West Virginia's scenic highlands, Richwood lies within close proximity to many of the state's most renowned mountain biking destinations.

Each year, mountain bikers from across the country come to West Virginia to ride at Snowshoe, Slatyfork, Fayetteville, and other mountain bike trail centers. Many of these riders drive straight through downtown Richwood on their way to well-known trails in Pocahontas County.

Positioned as a great stopping place on the way to these other destinations, Richwood is already home to some great, though lesser known, mountain bike trails. So, what can Richwood do to attract more of these mountain bikers in our region?

This report highlights opportunities and marketing strategies that could help Richwood capitalize on mountain bike tourism. Specifically, this document provides:

- a brief profile of the mountain bike user group;
- an overview of existing trail resources in Richwood, nearby mountain biking destinations, and upcoming opportunities that may expand the presence of mountain biking in the region;
- recommendations to help Richwood business owners market specifically to mountain bikers; and
- examples of other rural communities that have used mountain biking to spur local economic development.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Ms. Cottingham is a planner who focuses on community and economic development in rural communities. Though well-versed in environmental analysis, she specializes in the preparation of economic development plans, recreation plans, organizational assessments, and feasibility studies for a variety of sectors. She has also worked extensively with nonprofits, ranging from small grassroots groups to regional and national organizations and offers expertise in grant writing, capacity building, fundraising, and volunteer management. Ms. Cottingham is an avid mountain biker and is a founding member of the Morgantown Area Mountain Bike Association.

Kasey Osborne, Staff Scientist

Ms. Osborne has broad experience in natural resources, ecology, wildlife biology, scientific and public communication, outreach, and geospatial information science. She has worked in various capacities with university research affiliates, state agencies, and private entities where she focused on joining research with place-based development and policy. She aims to cultivate a sustainable and interconnected environment and economy through promoting scientific literacy.

Cover photo: View from the PocaFork Trail between Richwood and Kennison Mountain. MTB Project, 2019

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1. WHO ARE MOUNTAIN BIKERS?

In the most general sense, “mountain biking” refers to any bicycling that occurs primarily off paved roads. Upon closer look, types of mountain biking range widely based on terrain and degree of difficulty.

Rail-trail riders enjoy unpaved roads or trails with relatively low grade and few obstacles. Picture a family taking a relaxing afternoon ride on a rail-trail or old logging road to enjoy the scenery.



Cross-country riders prefer single-track trails that cover a variety of terrain with a mix of moderate-to-difficult climbs and descents. Riders in this category range broadly: Some might enjoy riding recreationally for a few hours, whereas others participate in cross-country races that can cover anywhere from tens to hundreds of miles. Virtually any trail system can be a destination for these riders, though trails built specifically for mountain biking are especially popular.



Downhill riders, sometimes called “**gravity**” riders, fall at the most thrill-seeking end of the spectrum. Often located at ski resorts like Snowshoe, downhill trails systems frequently allow riders to take a ski lift with their bikes to the top of a mountain in order to ride the longest drop possible—similar to downhill skiing, only on a bike. Downhill riders often seek out developed bike parks with lift or shuttle services for this type of riding.



Gravel riding

“Gravel riding” is an increasingly popular form of cycling that combines aspects of road and mountain biking. Gravel riders seek out long routes on dirt, gravel, and other unpaved roads such as logging roads.

1.1 Rider demographics

Mountain bikes themselves vary for each type of riding, but as compared to road or street bikes, mountain bikes are often equipped with fatter tires for better traction and suspension frames. These features enable riders to pedal, jump, or coast over rocks, roots, and other obstacles with greater ease. Typical full-suspension bikes range from \$1,500–8,000

Approximately 50 million people—20% of Americans age 16 and over—mountain bike in the United States every year (Eades and Arbogast, 2019). While mountain biking is an activity for all ages, most available demographic data come from riders who are members of mountain biking clubs as well as those attending mountain bike races, festivals, or other events.

Youth riding in West Virginia

In recent years, the sport has risen in popularity among teens and young adults. West Virginia has 12 official youth mountain bike teams around the state, each affiliated with the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA), including two close to Richwood in Pocahontas County and the New River Gorge area.

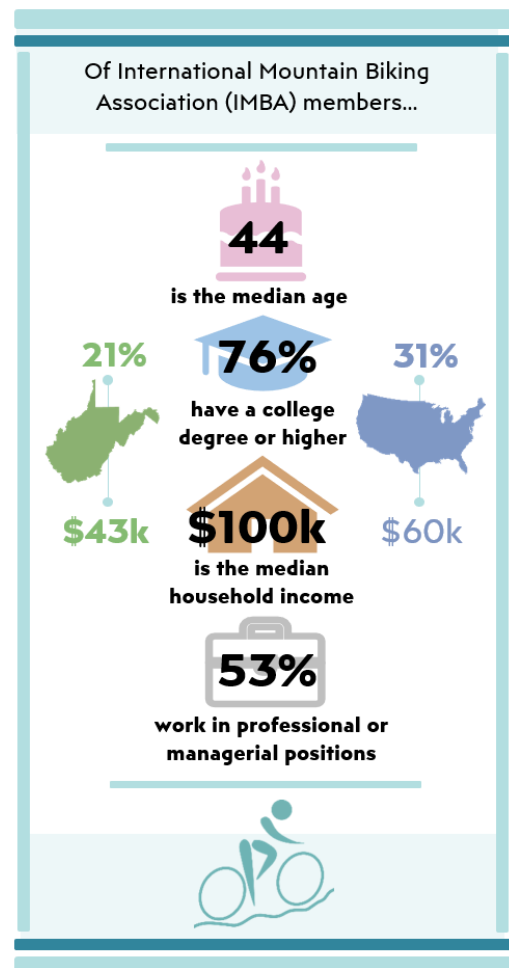
From the available data, we know that mountain bikers tend to be well-educated and well-paid young professionals. We also know that mountain bikers use their expendable income to ride and explore new trails.

1.2 Mountain bike tourism

According to a 2015 Singletracks.com survey of mountain bikers across North America, the average mountain biker takes two vacations each year specifically to mountain bike. (They also frequently bring their bikes along on other trips.) Half of these trips were within 250 miles of the riders' home, though the average trip distance was much further (566 miles from home). These trips tend to be short (typically two to three nights) and take place in the months of May, June, and September. (Barber, 2015)

According to the survey, most of these riders take mountain bike vacations simply because they want to explore new trails. Yet survey respondents report spending just under five hours per day riding on their typical bike vacation. This means mountain bikers have quite a bit of extra time to explore the area, eat and drink at local establishments, and spend money at local shops when they're off the trails. (Barber, 2015)

The Singletracks.com survey found that riders spend an average of \$382 per trip (Barber, 2015). This figure closely matches observed mountain bike visitor spending in West Virginia, which the West Virginia University (WVU) Extension Service found to be \$143 per day or roughly \$387 per trip (Eades and Arbogast, 2019).



1.3 What mountain bikers want

In a recent presentation, International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) Director of Operations and Construction Rich Edwards outlined the following key factors that enhance a mountain biker’s ride experience.

- **Access.** Riders look for trails that are easy to find and get to, clearly marked, and accessible for different types of riders, including beginner, intermediate, advanced, and even disabled bikers.
- **Exercise.** Exercise is the top reason that gets people out on their bikes and in the outdoors in general.
- **Skill progression and challenge.** There is an inherent level of risk involved in mountain biking, and most riders look for some level of thrill when they ride. Many of the most successful trail destinations around the country note that offering trails of all different skill levels—as well as trails intentionally built to help riders advance their skills—is key to their success.
- **Social aspects.** Riding bikes is a very social activity, especially among mountain bikers. Opportunities such as group rides, races, and other events can play a big role in making biking a fun, inviting, and rewarding activity.
- **Getting out in nature.** Many riders love mountain biking because it gets them out exploring the woods on a trail. In particular, many riders living in cities plan trips to ride in remote places with a backcountry feel.

Why mountain bike?

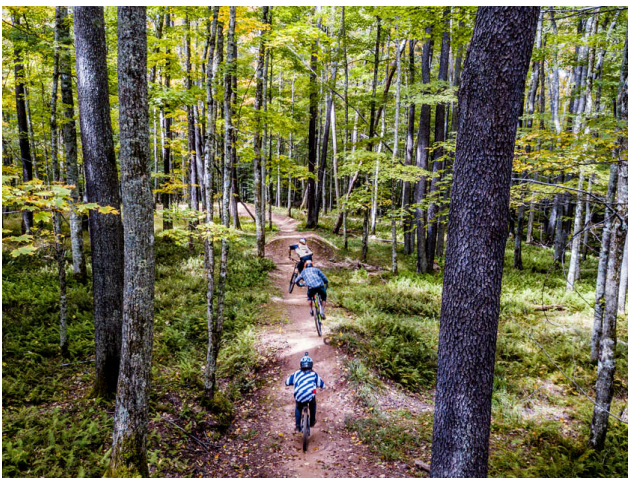
According to a recent IMBA survey, riders listed the following as their top reasons for mountain biking. (Edwards, 2019)

1. Exercise
2. Recreation
3. Relaxation
4. Connect with nature
5. Adrenaline

1.3.1 Key things that mountain bikers look for in a destination

Trails

Ask five mountain bikers to describe their favorite trails, and you’ll probably get five completely different answers. There’s no set definition of what makes a “fun” trail for biking, since enjoyment really hinges on the individual’s riding style and personal preference. Yet there are a few guiding principles that make trails attractive to mountain bikers.



Riders at the Snowshoe Mountain Resort. Source: Pocahontas

First, trails built specifically for mountain biking as opposed to hiking often have a different feel or “flow” when traveled on two wheels. Many bikers seek out places with such purpose-built bike trails. Variety is also a very important factor, since having a mix of easy, moderate, and expert-level trails will open the trail system up to a much wider range of riders.

Finally, the total length of a trail system is a very important consideration for mountain bike tourism. If you’re hoping to attract riders to your area for a day trip, you need enough trails to keep them occupied for a few hours. Given our terrain in West Virginia, that might amount to 10–30 miles of trail.

But if you're hoping mountain bikers will stay overnight or for the weekend, your trail network needs to be big enough to keep them entertained for several days. In choosing a location for a mountain bike vacation, many mountain bikers seek out large, well-known trail networks where they know they can ride single-track trails for days without getting bored.

To put this in perspective, the Singletracks.com survey found that the average mountain biker covers an average of 55.5 miles per trip, and many popular trail centers—including neighboring Pocahontas County—offer hundreds of miles of trails for mountain biking (Barber, 2015; Eades and Arbogast, 2019).

Lodging

Campgrounds and hotels were the top two lodging venues among mountain bikers in the Singletracks.com survey (Barber, 2015). Recent WVU Extension Service data below show top lodging choices among surveyed visitors at West Virginia mountain bike events.

Table 1 Lodging preferences among mountain bike tourists in West Virginia

Lodging	Percent
Family and friends	18%
Campground/camping	18%
Other	17%
Rented house	14%
Seasonal home	12%
Hotel/motel	11%
Airbnb	6%
Inn	3%
RV	2%

Source: Eades and Arbogast, 2019

While this shows quite a mix of lodging types and preferences, it reflects the diversity of mountain bikers as a user group. For example, a young biker might seek low-cost options like camping, whereas a middle-class family might rent a house or cabin, versus a downhill rider who might prefer to stay at a resort.

When Big Bear Lake Camplands holds mountain bike festivals and events each year at their 50-mile trail network in Preston County, they offer trailside camping onsite for hundreds of participants. Yet each year they see more and more participants instead renting cabins onsite, and still others who opt to drive offsite to spend the night at a nearby hotel (Simcoe, 2019). This shows that while proximity to trails is an important factor, many mountain bikers prefer higher-end accommodations.

Food and dining

Mountain bikers burn a lot of calories on the trail, so food goes hand-in-hand with this activity. Surveys show that mountain bikers eat about half of their meals in restaurants when traveling, with top choices including burgers, pizza, beer, and Mexican (Barber, 2015). Craft breweries and local

coffee shops are also top matches with this demographic. And beyond their restaurant meals, bikers also fill their backpacks with snacks to fuel them through all-day rides.

Bike gear and services

Most serious mountain bikers travel in their own cars and bring their own (often expensive) mountain bikes with them. However, many casual rail-trail riders or those travelling without their bikes often do look to rent bikes at their destination. Similarly, guide services are a great offering for entry-level riders, though most experienced riders opt to go on their own.

Mountain bikes are built to be tough, but they take a beating on the trail. As a result, it is important to have local shops that stock some bike gear such as spare tubes for flat tires; basic bike parts and tools; water bottles, snacks, or other essentials that may get accidentally left behind at home; rain gear or other clothes in case the weather changes unexpectedly; and any local trail maps.

Some long-distance rides are too far to complete in a day. “Bikepacking” is the equivalent of backpacking on two wheels, in which riders attach bags (called “panniers”) to their bike frames to carry basic camping gear for overnight bike trips. Bikepacking is a growing trend nationally: 21% of Singletracks.com survey participants have bikepacked, and 60% reported that they want to try it (Barber, 2015). As a result, shops selling camping supplies can be helpful for bikers setting out on overnight bike trips.

Yet in other cases, it makes more sense to set out on a one-way bike trip from point A to point B, rather than making a complete loop back to where you started. In these cases, bikers need to be shuttled back to their cars. This can be done using two personal vehicles if you’re traveling in a group, but oftentimes it’s more convenient to pay for a shuttle service. Such services can be offered on an as-needed basis, requiring only a working vehicle and a truck or trailer to haul riders and their bikes back to where they started.

Other activities

Other top activities mountain bikers participate in while traveling include hiking, drinking, camping, swimming, kayaking, fishing, eating, running, rock climbing, sightseeing, and photography (Barber, 2015).

2. WHERE DO PEOPLE MOUNTAIN BIKE IN WEST VIRGINIA?

Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center (Pocahontas County)

Right next door, Pocahontas County holds over 375 miles of mountain bike trails on over 350,000 acres of public lands on five state parks, two state forests, and a large portion of the Monongahela National Forest.

Just this year, the trails in Pocahontas County were designated as an official “Ride Center” by the IMBA. Known as the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center, this designation means that the area meets specific criteria for trails and services that elevates the overall mountain biking experience above the average destination. The Ride Center covers the area within a forty-minute-drive radius of Snowshoe Mountain. (Blue Ridge Outdoors, 2019)

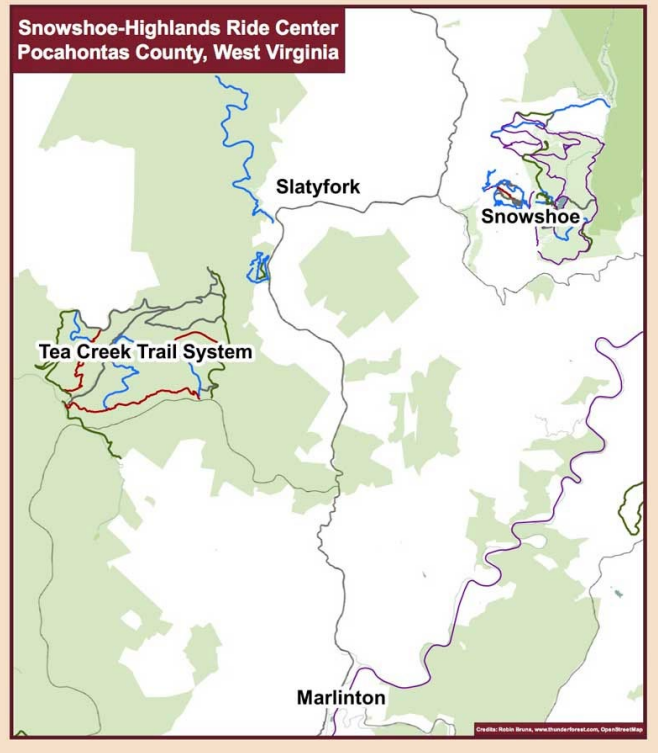
Ride Center designations are hard to come by: There are a total of 40 IMBA Ride Centers around the world, and the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center is the first in West Virginia. In 2017, 15% of visitors to Pocahontas County participated in mountain biking, contributing to the county’s annual tourism

revenue of \$94 million (Pocahontas County CVB, 2019). With the new Ride Center designation, the county is already gaining increased attention and tourism from mountain bikers.

Races and events: In September, Snowshoe Mountain Resort hosted the 2019 Mercedes Benz UCI Mountain Bike World Cup Finals—the top international competition for mountain biking. The event brought an estimated 13,000 people from all over the world to Pocahontas County—many of whom likely passed through Richwood on their way in (WV Metro News, 2019).

Other races include the annual Slatyfork Fat Tire Enduro, a 22-mile “enduro” race every August in which riders complete six timed stages. Eighty-nine racers competed in the 2019 race, and entry fees range from \$40 per youth rider to \$75 for elite riders. The race event includes two shuttles, food, music, optional onsite camping, and prizes including cash payout for the elite categories.

Types of trails: As part of the criteria for IMBA Ride Centers, the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center offers a variety of single-track riding for all levels of riding abilities. Beginner trails are located at the Greenbank Observatory and along the Greenbrier River Trail. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Snowshoe Bike Park offers a unique downhill riding experience, in which riders have access to 40 trails and 1,500 vertical feet of descent via high-speed ski lifts. With legendary berms, jumps, drops, and descents, the Snowshoe Bike Park was recently named the number one bike park in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic regions by MTBParks.com. (Snowshoe, 2019)



Source: Blue Ridge Outdoors, 2019



Riders at Snowshoe. Source: Pocahontas County CVB, 2019

In the intermediate range, the area hosts more than 300 miles of trails open to biking, largely in the Monongahela National Forest. Several well-known clusters of trails are located in and around Slatyfork, including the Tea Creek Trail System and the Sharp Knob Base Trails. These trails are renowned for providing iconic backcountry riding experience and tough terrain. The Gauley Mountain Trail, an IMBA-designated “EPIC” trail within the Tea Creek system, covers some of the best and most challenging riding in the heart of the Monongahela National Forest. Pocahontas Trails, an IMBA Chapter in Pocahontas County, organizes volunteers who build and maintain trails in the area.

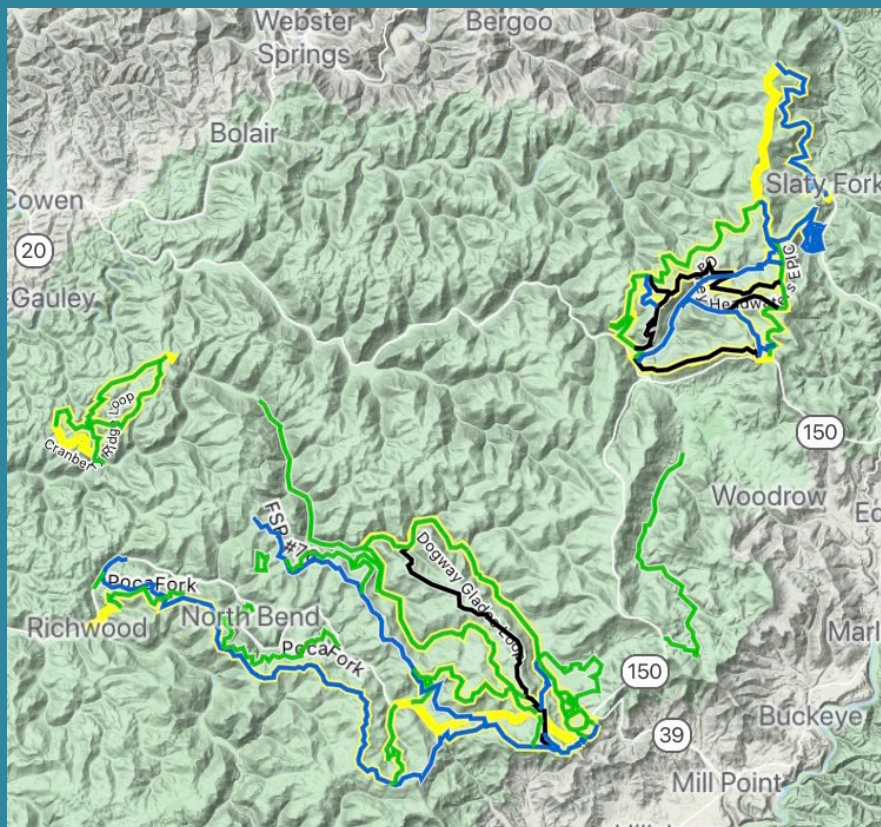
Richwood trails

Located just outside the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center’s footprint, Richwood lies right within a network of existing trails on and around Kennison Mountain. This network can be viewed online through several mountain bike trail mapping sites, including MTBProject and TrailForks.

The Fork Mountain Trail ends in downtown Richwood and can be linked into a 28-mile point-to-point ride starting at Kennison Mountain. Featured as the “PocaFork” route on MTBProject, this route is described as: “An excellent, long ride with all the roots, rocks, log jumps, boulder hucks, gully and creek crossings you crave. It’s mostly downhill, with several punchy climbs, ending with fun water bars” (MTBProject, 2019).

According to conversations with Pocahontas Trails, most of the trails within the Kennison Mountain network are concentrated around the mountain about 15–20 miles from Richwood. That distance is actually relatively small in the world of mountain biking. As a result, a few trail improvement projects could open the door for increased trail access and mountain bike tourism in Richwood.

In addition, Richwood is home to the Tri-Rivers Rail Trail and is an integral part of the planned Southern West Virginia Bike Trail route, which is funded by a \$1.4 million Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant to the New River Gorge Trail Alliance (NRGTA). The core of this trail is envisioned to connect Richwood to Pax in Fayette County, which would provide a key linkage between existing trails in the New River Gorge National River, the Summit Bechtel Scouting Reserve, and the Monongahela National Forest (Steelhammer, 2019). This trail project could hold the key to significantly increased rail-trail tourism in Richwood, which would likely spur further interest in the area’s backcountry biking opportunities, as well.



The map to the left shows a screenshot from MTB Project, a mountain bike-specific trail mapping app, showing mapped mountain bike routes in the Richwood area. Routes in green, which often follow old logging roads, are considered easiest. Blue routes (intermediate) and black routes (most difficult) generally offer backcountry single-track trails. Yellow routes follow existing roads.



New River Bikes in Fayetteville. Source: Fayetteville CVB, 2017

New River Gorge Trails (Fayette County)

Within an hour's drive of Richwood lies another renowned mountain bike center in West Virginia. Centered around the town of Fayetteville, the New River Gorge area is home to a number of mountain bike-specific trail systems that draw riders from all over the eastern U.S.

Long known as a destination for rock climbing and whitewater boating, the Fayetteville area has only recently risen to fame for mountain biking. In 2011 a unique partnership between the National Park Service, the Boy Scouts of America, and IMBA resulted in a 13-mile loop of stacked trails (meaning that one trail loop might have several other offshoots of varying length and difficulty), which connects to downtown Fayetteville via the Park Loop Trails at the Town Park. In addition, the nearby Boy Scouts of America Summit Bechtel Reserve boasts 30+ miles of purpose-built single-track for biking, and countless other bike-friendly trails connect mountain bikers with the beauty and history of the New River Gorge (NPS, 2019). Off the trails, Fayetteville offers two bike shops, New River Bikes and Arrowhead Bike Farm and Campground, which offers a bike shop, Biergarten, and campground right on the popular Arrowhead stacked loop trail. Downtown Fayetteville offers a number of great restaurants as well as two breweries for visitors and locals alike.

Canaan Valley (Tucker County)

Concentrated around the towns of Thomas and Davis, Tucker County boasts over 100 miles of world-class single-track mountain biking. Bikers can reach the vast majority of these trails riding straight from downtown Davis.

Since the early 1980s, this area has become legendary for its mountain biking, in large part due to early races such as the 24 Hours in Canaan, and has attracted a number of professional racers to relocate to the area. The area continues to host several notable mountain bike races annually, including the Blackwater Classic Mountain Bike Race, Revenge of the Rattlesnake Race, the Canaan Mountain Bike Festival, and the Mountain State Fat Bike Championships. (Blackwater Bikes, 2019; Tucker County CVB, 2019)



Mountain bike legend Sue Haywood rides at Moon Rocks. Source: Tucker County CVB, 2019

Based on survey data provided by the WVU Extension Service's Community Rural Tourism Program, attendees of these mountain bike events spend an average of \$533 per trip to Canaan Valley (Eades and Arbogast, 2019). As a result, mountain bikers contributed an estimated \$294,000 directly to Tucker County's economy during these six days in 2018 alone (Downstream Strategies, 2018).

Single-track options in the Canaan Valley area range from several beginner-friendly loop systems—including a new purpose-built beginner trail system at Canaan Valley State Park designed specifically as a youth racecourse for West Virginia's National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) teams—to long backcountry trail systems through some of the region's most iconic terrain. The area is also home to the 21-mile Allegheny Highlands Rail Trail, which runs from Parsons to

Elkins, and the 10-mile Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail that runs from Thomas through Blackwater Canyon. Blackwater Bikes, the county’s full-service bike shop located in Davis, offers shuttle services for rail-trail riders (Tucker County CVB, 2019). The area is also home Blackwater Bicycle Association, an IMBA Chapter dedicated to promoting the growth of mountain biking in the greater Canaan Valley area through education, sustainable trail construction, maintenance, and safety.



Rider at Big Bear. Source: DirtRag, 2018

Big Bear Lake Camplands (Preston County)

Established in 1972, Big Bear Lake Camplands in Bruceton Mills, West Virginia, is a private, family-owned RV campland. It is also home to one of the most prominent mountain bike trail centers in the Mid-Atlantic.

Within their 5,000-acre property, roughly 3,00 acres are now developed and managed as a mountain bike trail center with about 50 miles of bike trails open annually from January 1 to October 31.

As a business, Big Bear is primarily fueled by its camplands. However, they’ve found that their trail center enhances the offerings as a destination and brings a whole new set of users to the area. Big Bear sells approximately 200–300 season mountain bike trail passes per year for \$30 each, as well as an additional 500 or so day use passes at \$10 each. Yet they also hold several major trail events each year onsite, including:

- The Ragnar Trail Appalachia - Part of a national series of running relay races, this event brings 2,000 runners to Big Bear for the three-day event every summer.
- Dirt Fest WV - This is one of two mountain bike festivals hosted by Dirt Rag magazine. In its fourth year at Big Bear, the three-day 2019 event had 1,200 participants and 60 vendors, including 15 bike companies that offered onsite bike demos.
- Big Bear XC Classic - This eight and 16-mile bike race is part of the West Virginia Mountain Bike Association’s annual race series. 108 participants raced in 2019.
- Other events include an annual race hosted for the NICA youth mountain bike league and a number of smaller events, skills clinics, and camps.

In order to accommodate onsite event camping, the managers intentionally designed the trail area to serve as a turnkey camping venue, with tent camping space for 2,000 people as well as restrooms and portable toilets onsite. While Big Bear does not focus heavily on marketing, they get nationwide media coverage from the high-profile events they host.

As a result, these events have helped Big Bear get exposure among a wider network of riders around the region and country. They see many riders come from Pennsylvania, the greater Washington DC/Baltimore area, and more and more coming from Canada to take advantage of the milder climate.



Participants at Dirt Fest WV at Big Bear. Source: DirtRag, 2018

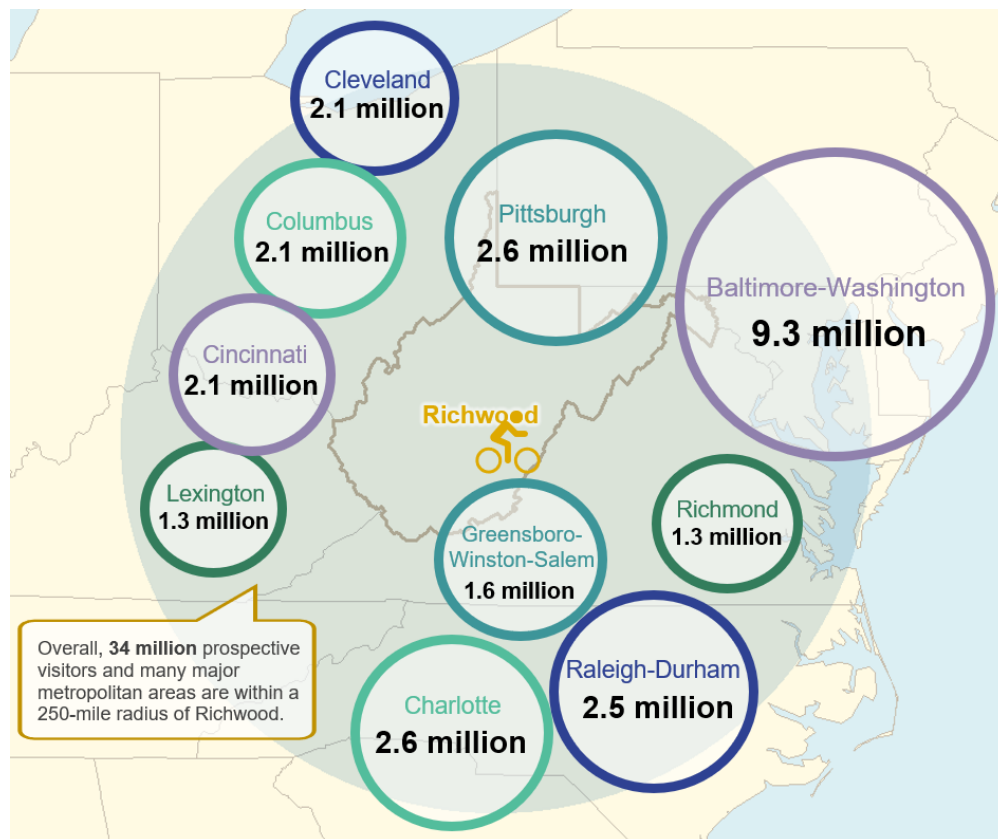
Regional recreation authorities

In March 2019, the West Virginia Legislature approved SB 317, which allows three or more adjacent counties to form a multicounty mountain biking trail network authority. Specifically, the law created the Mountaineer Trail Network Recreation Authority, which covers Barbour, Grant, Harrison, Marion, Mineral, Monongalia, Preston, Randolph, Taylor, and Tucker counties. Modeled after the Hatfield McCoy Regional Recreation Authority, this legislation seeks to create a similar pathway for non-motorized trail networks to form around the state.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RICHWOOD

As a user group, mountain bikers have money to spend and prioritize travelling to places where they can ride on new trails.

Richwood lies within about a 250-mile radius of many major cities in the eastern U.S. with active cycling communities, including Washington, DC; Baltimore, MD; Richmond, VA; Charlotte, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and Raleigh-Durham, NC; Lexington, KY; Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus, OH; and Pittsburgh, PA. As mentioned earlier, national survey data indicate that 20% of Americans age 16 and over mountain bike in the U.S. every year, and nearly 34 million people live within 250 miles of Nicolas County, WV. As a result, this puts Richwood in the target trip distance (<250 miles) for a captive market of approximately 7 million mountain bikers who are eager to explore new trail systems. (Eades and Arbogast, 2019; Downstream Strategies, 2019)



Source: Downstream Strategies, 2019

So how can Richwood tap into this demonstrated market opportunity? The following sections offer concrete suggestions and recommendations intended to help Richwood leaders and business owners increase the presence of mountain bike tourism within their community.

3.1 Marketing strategies

Given Richwood’s proximity to existing mountain bike destinations, opportunities abound for co-marketing with other nearby mountain bike destinations.

3.1.1 Promotional materials

Richwood leaders have already made great strides in updating marketing materials to highlight what the town has to offer. Building on this progress and materials like the “Why Richwood?” promotional document, Richwood should develop a marketing package specifically tailored to trail (and, specifically, mountain bike) opportunities and amenities in the area. The purpose of these materials should be to highlight what Richwood has to offer: existing trails and riding opportunities for various skill levels, great dining venues, and places to stay—all conveniently located near other major trail systems and outdoor attractions.

This package should include printed flyers and brochures that can be made available at bike shops, races, and other bike-related events around the state—particularly those within closer proximity to Richwood, including Snowshoe, Slatyfork, and Fayetteville. West Virginia already has a flourishing selection of bike shops, races, and events all throughout the state, shown on the following page. Reaching out to these locations will spur interest in individuals and groups already rooted in the industry and with heightened motivation to explore new trails. And since most mountain bikers take two trips annually with the express purpose of biking, advertising through these venues will help Richwood reach bikers from around the region who are eager to travel in search of great trails.



Riders gather for group ride at the 2016 Canaan Valley Mountain Bike Festival.
Source: Blackwater Bikes

Bike Shops	Bike Races and Events
Ride N Slide Sports (Beckley, WV)	<i>March</i>
Elevation Sports (Beckley, WV)	Tour de Lake (Spencer, WV)
Fat Tire Cycle & Sport (Bridgeport, WV)	<i>April</i>
Fat Tire Cycle & Sport (Buckhannon, WV)	Challenge at Mountwood (Waverly, WV)
*Country Trails Bikes (Cairo, WV)	Valley Falls Challenge (Fairmont, WV)
*Free Spirit Adventures & Bike (Caldwell, WV)	Cacapon Enduro (Berkely Springs, WV)
Mac's Cycle (Danville, WV)	<i>May</i>
Charleston Bicycle Center (Charleston, WV)	White Oak Challenge (Lost Creek, WV)
~Holy Moses (Clarksburg, WV)	Valley Falls Enduro (Fairmont, WV)
Blackwater Bikes (Davis, WV)	BBA Blackwater Classic (Davis, WV)
Joey's Bike Shop (Elkins, WV)	Black Bear 40k MTB Race (Charleston, WV)
Time 2 Shine Skate & BMX Pro Shop (Inwood, WV)	Greenbrier Trail 4-day with 156-mi of Gravel (Lewisburg, WV)
Speed Vision Bikes (Fairmont, WV)	Annual Wheeling Heritage Trail Bicycle Tour (Wheeling, WV)
New River Bike (Fayetteville, WV)	<i>June</i>
*Arrowhead Bike Farm (Fayetteville, WV)	Canaan Mountain Bike Festival (Davis, WV)
Harpers Ferry Outfitters & Bike Shop (Harpers Ferry, WV)	Chief Logan Wilderness Challenge (Logan, WV)
Jeff's Bike Shop (Huntington, WV)	Big Bear Classic (Hazelton, WV)
~Huntington Cycle & Sport (Huntington, WV)	Grand Vue XC (Moundsville, WV)
Dirtbean (Marlinton, WV)	Coopers Rock Enduro (Morgantown, WV)
Eastern Panhandle Bicycle Company (Martinsburg, WV)	Hilly Billy Roubaix (Morgantown, WV)
Wamsley Cycles (Morgantown, WV)	Space Race Rumpus (Green Bank, WV)
Pathfinder (Morgantown, WV)	WV All Roads Classic Road Race (Grafton, WV)
~Positive Spin (Morgantown, WV)	<i>July</i>
Summit Bikes (New Cumberland, WV)	Avalon Bikes, Blues, & BBQ (Paw Paw, WV)
Sports N Spokes (Philippi, WV)	Race to Lil Moe's (Philippi, WV)
*Big Bear Bike Rentals (Salem, WV)	Henry Clay 30K (Morgantown, WV)
Dive Tech & Sports Inc. (Scott Depot, WV)	Dirt Rag Dirt Fest West Virginia (Bruceeton Mills, WV)
Shepherdstown Pedal & Paddle (Shepherdstown, WV)	Gravel Race Up Spruce Knob (GRUSK) (Circleville, WV)
Pike Street Bikes LLC (Shinnston, WV)	<i>August</i>
Snowcreek Mountain Sports (Snowshoe, WV)	Brapps Then Taps @ The Arrowhead Bike Farm (Fayetteville,
John's Cyclery (St. Albans, WV)	Revenge of the Rattlesnake (Davis, WV)
Wheelcraft Bicycles (Wheeling, WV)	Slatyfork Fat Tire Enduro (Slatyfork, WV)
	Little Creek Classic (South Charleston, WV)
<i>Out-of-State</i>	<i>September</i>
Confluence Cyclery (Confluence, PA)	Snowshoe Epic Enduro (Snowshoe, WV)
Bikes Unlimited (Connellsville, PA)	Snowshoe World Cup (Snowshoe, WV)
West Newton Bicycle Shop (West Newton, PA)	Bluefield Trails & Ales Challenge (Bluefield, WV)
Cumberland Trail Connection (Cumberland, MD)	Rally in the Valley (Davis, WV)
~C&O Bicycle (Hancock, MD)	Battle at Big Bear (Bruceeton Mills, WV)
~Quick Service Bicycle Shop (Bridgeport, OH)	<i>October</i>
Marietta Adventure Co. (Marietta, OH)	Defend the Bend (Harrisville, WV)
The Pedal Shop (Marietta, OH)	The Stonewall Challenge (Roanoke, WV)
Rocktown Bicycles (Harrisonburg, VA)	<i>November</i>
Shenandoah Bicycle Company (Harrisonburg, VA)	Cranksgiving Wheeling (Wheeling, WV)
	West Virginia On the Bike Skills 101 (Cairo, WV)
	Bicycle in Bluefield (Bluefield, WV)
	Fall 4 All Team Relay (Morgantown, WV)

*Rental offered
~Repairs available

Ideally, the package should also contain digital resources, including a page on the City’s new website and potentially a short promotional video featuring everything Richwood has to offer in terms of outdoor recreation. Once these digital resources are available, they will open the door for Richwood to be featured and shared on other mountain bike event pages, which will guarantee exposure to a much larger audience.

Recommendations:

- Work with a designer to create and print trail-oriented brochures. This might range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars if a volunteer can help with the design.
- Distribute brochures to bike shops, races, and bike-related events as well as other outdoor attractions in the area.
- Work with City officials to add a page to the City website focused on mountain bike and trail opportunities.
 - *Example:* See how the small town of Marquette, Michigan features trails on their local CVB website: <https://www.travelmarquettemichigan.com/outdoor-recreation/biking/>.
- Maintain an online presence and advertise the trails and any relevant events on popular social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. A point-person should be designated to manage these pages, post regularly, and answer any questions received through these platforms.
 - *Example:* Check out Kingdom Trails, a mountain bike trail center in Vermont, on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/kingdomtrails/>) and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/kingdomtrails/?hl=en>).
- Consider thinking about creative partnerships and/or applying for grants to create a short promotional video focused on outdoor recreation opportunities in Richwood and the surrounding area.

Studies have found that 84% of bicyclists on the Great Allegheny Passage trail discovered local businesses or attractions online or through social media (The Progress Fund, 2015).

3.1.2 Co-marketing with the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center

Snowshoe’s recent designation as an IMBA Ride Center opens tremendous opportunity for Richwood. Now recognized internationally as a premiere mountain biking destination, this increased visibility is bringing people from all over the country—and the world—to Snowshoe, and many of them are driving through Richwood on their way. As a result, Richwood can and should be marketing specifically to mountain bikers coming to ride in Pocahontas County.

Visitors need to know that Richwood presents a great place for them to stop, eat, recreate, and even stay. A great starting place would be for Richwood leaders to communicate with entities in the area that are already marketing to mountain bikers. Entities such as the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) list nearby places for bikers to ride, eat, stay, and visit when they come to ride in West Virginia’s scenic highlands.¹ Though Richwood is located in neighboring Nicolas County, its proximity and quality of offerings like the Whistle Punk Grill and Taphouse make it well worth including on regional marketing materials. Potential co-marketing partners might include the Pocahontas County CVB, Snowshoe Mountain Resort, Elk River Touring Center, Pocahontas Trails, and the Dirtbean Café & Bike Shop in Marlinton.

¹ <https://pocahontascountywv.com/mountain-biking>

Recommendations:

- Reach out to potential co-marketing partners and make the case for adding Richwood to their lists of attractions and amenities in the area. Make it easy for them: Come armed with print materials as well as descriptions of and links to the Whistle Punk, local lodging opportunities, and outfitters in Richwood. An offer to help cross-promote their attractions could help sweeten the deal.
- Stay informed of big events taking place at Snowshoe Mountain Resort. Major events such as the 2019 Mountain Bike World Cup Finals often draw thousands of visitors to Snowshoe. Richwood businesses could easily capture some of these pass-through visitors by planning (and promoting) activities and events that coincide with the anticipated travel windows.

3.1.3 Mountain bike-specific media

There are a number of mountain bike-specific websites, magazines, and apps available that serve as powerful marketing tools within the national mountain bike community. For example, magazines and websites such as DirtRag, Singletracks, PinkBike frequently send their writers to check out trail towns and write about their experiences.

When folks at Big Bear Lake Camplands were trying to promote their trail center, they reached out to a journalist they knew through the mountain bike community and invited her to come ride the trails and write about her experience. This led to some great articles that were posted online and reached a wide national audience of mountain bikers. This great coverage increased Big Bear's name recognition as a mountain bike destination and very likely helped lure participation in some of the races and events that are now held annually at the trail center.

In addition, many mountain bikers use trail mapping apps such as MTB Project, TrailForks, and others to plan their rides and bike trips. These apps generally include driving directions and notable information, and they allow riders to upload and rate their rides and routes around the country. As a result, a few positive reviews of existing trails in the Richwood area (for example, "And don't forget to stop at the Whistle Punk for the best food and beer around!") would go a long way in promoting the town and its trails to out-of-town visitors.

Recommendations:

- Richwood sits right next door to Pocahontas Trails, a prominent bike club and IMBA chapter in neighboring Pocahontas County. Richwood leaders should consider reaching out to Pocahontas Trails and invite their members to come ride in Richwood, dine at the Whistle Punk, and publicize their experience. This would open the door to some great feedback from experienced riders and help introduce riders in the area to what Richwood has to offer. Developing relationships with members of this club could also have some very positive effects, in terms of helping to recruit potential volunteers to help develop and maintain trails in Richwood.

3.2 Bike-friendly services and amenities

3.2.1 Trails

At the end of the day, good trails are what attract riders to any given destination. Richwood already has trails featured on the major mountain bike trail mapping apps, which means local leaders can start promoting mountain biking from day one. However, trails need to be maintained—and enhanced—over time, especially in the interest of attracting both new and returning out-of-town visitors. By implementing the following recommendations, Richwood can immediately begin laying

the groundwork for capitalizing on this new stream of tourism that surrounding towns are already enjoying.

Recommendations:

- Enlist volunteers—preferably experienced mountain bikers—to check out the trails, give their feedback to local officials, and post reviews and any route updates on the major trail apps.
- Make connections with Pocahontas Trails to seek advice and assistance in maintaining existing trails and building new ones.
- Look for ways to clearly link trails directly downtown Richwood. Then designate a trail head area in downtown with dedicated parking and an informational kiosk to clearly mark the entry to Richwood’s trails.
- Create an inventory of local trails (rated by beginner, intermediate, and difficult) and include descriptions and trail maps in your promotional materials.
- Consider hosting a race or mountain bike event in the future. A good starting place would be to send local volunteers to a nearby race such as the Slatyfork Enduro in August to see the event logistics and get ideas for how a similar event might work in Richwood.

3.2.2 Food and lodging

Richwood currently offers dining and lodging opportunities that align with mountain biker preferences. With its great food and an extensive beer and cider selection, the Whistle Punk Grill and Taphouse is the kind of place mountain bikers look for to eat and drink after a long day of riding.

In terms of lodging, Richwood is moving in the right direction by opening new cabins, Airbnbs, and a hostel. As a user group with income to spend, many bikers prefer higher-end accommodations in cabins or houses, though campgrounds remain a popular option.

It’s important to remember the overnight visitors hold the key to generating significant economic impact from trails: Studies from the Great Allegheny Passage Trail in Pennsylvania and Maryland have found that the average overnight visitor spends *six times more* than a day user (The Progress Fund, 2015). In order to increase overnight visitor stays, Richwood will need to continue expanding its local offerings to keep visitors satisfied over multi-day trips.

Recommendations:

- Simple ways to make an establishment appealing to bikers include having bike racks easily available (and, ideally, visible from inside) and posting menus outside the building so that cyclists can easily see them from the sidewalk.
- Have sealable take-out containers available so that bikers can travel with leftovers or order food for on-the-go and not need to worry about spillage (The Progress Fund, 2015).
- Appeal to the tastes of the mountain biking demographic by providing such fare as burgers, pizza, beer, and Mexican, as well as craft breweries and local coffee shops (Barber, 2015).
- Portable, energy-boosting snacks are a must-have for bikers to take with them on their rides, so any business that sells food items should stock such products.

The average overnight visitor spends *six times more* than a day user.

3.2.3 Bike-specific offerings

To build and sustain a strong mountain biking presence in Richwood, facilities and considerations tailored specifically to biking needs are essential. Businesses don’t need to overhaul their inventory, but making a few strategic items available for bikers can help make Richwood more attractive to this user group.

- Work with local businesses to make sure that some basic bike gear is available for sale in town. This should include mechanical items such as spare tubes, tools, protective gear, some basic bike parts and tools, rain gear, packs, and other wearables. Other miscellaneous but essential items such as water bottles, snacks, and outdoor gear that might be easily transferrable to other outdoor activities are a good investment.
- While most will opt to bring their own bikes on their travels, having a small fleet of entry-level mountain bikes available for rent would meet the needs of casual rail-trail riders and other visitors packing light.
- Work with local outfitters and potential entrepreneurs to consider providing paid shuttle services for bikers. All you need is a truck to get started!
- Many bikers spend their time off the trails camping or fishing. Identify routes that lead to prime fishing spots or clear trailside campground areas for “bikepackers.” Promote access to these additional endeavors through marketing as well as selling or renting supplies such as tents, sleeping bags, and other camping essentials.
- Have stations where owners can wash off their bikes after a day of muddy riding.
- Because so many riders are drawn in from other areas and are likely unfamiliar with the amenities of the town and trails, ensure clear signage is readily available to point visitors to where they want to go and informs them of what they need to know.

4. CASE STUDIES

The following case studies offer examples of towns in other states that have used mountain biking to spur economic development in recent years. Several of these examples come from towns smaller and more remote than Richwood.

4.1 Copper Harbor, Michigan

Far northern Michigan was once known as one of the country’s biggest copper mining regions. Though the mining industry has greatly declined, today this region is home to some of the best mountain biking in the country. Copper Harbor (population: 120) is a tiny town at the northern-most tip of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. To say that Copper Harbor is out of the way is an understatement: The nearest mid-sized city is Green Bay, Wisconsin, nearly five hours due south. Yet over the last few decades, a grassroots mountain bike community has developed some of the nation’s top trail systems, earning an IMBA Ride Center designation along the way and attracting visitors from all over North America.

Learn more about Copper Harbor:

- **Under the Radar Michigan Episode 404: Copper Harbor Biking (5 min):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ps0WXEqL0-Y>
- **Earn Your Turns: Mountain Biking on Michigan’s Keweenaw Peninsula (12 min):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbHYn2Q6w9I>
- **Ride Guide: Copper Harbor, Michigan (DirtRag, 2013):**
<https://dirtragemag.com/articles/ride-guide-copper-harbor-michigan>

4.2 Kingdom Trails, Vermont

The village of East Burke, Vermont (population: 132) sits in a rural corner of the state known as the Northeast Kingdom. With dramatic declines in its traditional industry, dairy farming, in recent decades, this region struggles with many of the same issues West Virginia communities face: brain drain, lack of economic opportunity, high levels of poverty, and so forth. Yet in the early 1990s, a

group of visionaries came together to form Kingdom Trails Association, a nonprofit organization which has created a mountain bike-specific network *on private land*.

Today, Kingdom Trails is comprised of over 100 miles of mountain bike trails spanning four counties, offering some of the best mountain biking in the eastern U.S. To use the trails, bikers must purchase a trail pass. The trails themselves are located on the properties of 97 willing private landowners who allow the use of their land for free. The results have been tremendous: In 2018, 137,536 visitors used Kingdom Trails. The trails generate an estimated \$10 million annually to the local economy and have resuscitated the area into a thriving tourism destination. (Kingdom Trails, 2019)

Learn more about Kingdom Trails:

- **Riding Vermont's Kingdom Trails (3.5 min):** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pgoB-BDDLQ>
- **The Kingdom: Mountain Biking in Vermont (7 min):** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkZmV3nJlx8&t=181s>
- **Kingdom Trails:** <https://www.kingdomtrails.org/>

4.3 Other relevant towns

- **The Unlikely Mountain Bike Mecca of Bentonville, AR (Pinkbike, 2016):** <https://www.pinkbike.com/news/the-unlikely-mountain-bike-mecca-of-bentonville-ar-2017.html>
- **Why Bentonville, Arkansas Is the Hottest New Place to Ride (Bicycling.com, 2017):** <https://www.bicycling.com/news/a20013393/why-bentonville-arkansas-hottest-place-to-ride/>
- **Downieville, California. From Dying Mining Town to Mountain-Bike Mecca:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFAuFH9V5mc>

5. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Trail Towns Program

One of the best resources available for towns hoping to build trail-based tourism is the Trail Towns Program, created by the Progress Fund. The Trail Towns Program offers great resources and assessment tools for communities to amplify the economic impacts of trail tourism. The official Trail Towns Guide is a must-read for anyone interested in developing a trail town.

Visit <https://www.trailtowns.org/guide/> and submit a valid email address to receive a copy of the Trail Towns Guide.

Funding sources

The West Virginia Rails-to-Trails Council has put together a comprehensive list of funding sources for trail projects, available at: <http://wvtrailtrails.org/build/funding/>.

RECOMMENDATIONS CHECKLIST | MOUNTAIN BIKE TOURISM

Marketing

- Find a designer to help enhance the quality of the promotional materials.
- Prepare printed flyers, brochures, and digital content highlighting the trails and amenities (restaurants, lodging, etc.) Richwood has to offer.
- Distribute materials to bike shops, races, and other bike-related and outdoor events around the state.
- Work with City officials to include a trails page on Richwood's new website.
- Maintain an active social media presence and publicize trails, events, and opportunities.
- Create a short promotional video with aid from grants or creative partnerships.
- Seek out co-marketing opportunities with partners in Pocahontas County.

Trails

- Enlist volunteers—preferably experienced mountain bikers—to check out trails, give feedback to officials, and post reviews on major trail apps.
- Make connections with Pocahontas Trails for advice and help with maintaining and building new trails connecting to downtown.
- Create a trailhead in downtown Richwood, with dedicated parking and an informational kiosk to clearly mark the entry to Richwood's trails.
- Create an inventory of trails with maps, difficulty ratings, and descriptions.
- Send volunteers to scout nearby bike races and events to get an idea of how similar events might work in Richwood.
- Host a race or mountain bike event in Richwood.

Food and Lodging

- Promote local offerings such as the Whistle Punk Grill and Taphouse.
- Expand lodging and dining options for multi-day visitors.
- Have bike racks available and visible from inside buildings.
- Post menus outside the building so they can be seen from the sidewalk.
- Have sealable takeout containers to prevent spillage for bikers.
- Have portable, energy-boosting snacks available for purchase.

Bike-specific Offerings

- Work with local businesses to sell basic bike gear and miscellaneous essentials.
- Offer a small fleet of entry-level mountain bike rentals.
- Work with local entrepreneurs and outfitters to offer a paid shuttle service for bikers.
- Promote access to trailside camping and fishing areas.
- Sell or rent camping supplies for "bikepackers."
- Have stations where owners can wash off their bikes.
- Install clear and informative signage.

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