



breaking up the ban

Political savvy opens trails to Boulder riders

LEGALIZE IT
One down,
thousands
more to go

THIS NATION'S OLDEST BAN AGAINST MOUNTAIN BIKES HAS BEEN QUIETLY DIS- mantled in Boulder, Colorado. The opening of Doudy Draw last October was the latest in a string of small victories for Boulder mountain bikers, and while this meandering meadow trail won't set singletrack lovers' hearts aflutter, it represents a historic breakthrough in one of America's most hostile climates for mountain bike access.

Since the early 1980s, Boulder mountain bikers have lived with a reality that hardly matches the city's image as an outdoor lover's paradise. Sure, Boulder has bike shops on every corner, a superb network of bike paths and miles of uncluttered canyon roads for roadies, but city management has stonewalled mountain bikers for more than two decades. Now, propelled by the political savvy of the Boulder Mountainbike Alliance, the ban is history, new singletrack is being built, and Boulder Mountain Parks—a mouth-watering slice of Rocky Mountain terrain that includes Boulder's iconic Flatiron range just minutes from downtown—is under consideration for new mountain bike trails.

Boulder is known for two things: a mania for outdoor recreation and leftist politics. But the two don't always equate. Though the city's zealous commitment to open space is part of its appeal, its management of recreation has been, until recently, nonexistent. "The city of Boulder didn't do recreation," says Mike Barrow, president of BMA. "They were an acquisition and preservation agency."

Any progress is a long time coming. In 2000, BMA relinquished its non-profit status and entered the political fray by interviewing city council candidates and campaigning for those it supported. The next year it took a stance by publicly opposing open space taxes. "It was not being managed like it should," Barrow says. "We said until you start addressing our needs, we don't want to give you our money."

Seven years later, eight of nine Boulder city council members have been endorsed by BMA. "We're not the bunch of yahoos who were banned from trails back in the eighties," Barrow says. "Now we *are* the government."

With more than 120,000 acres of city and county open space under consideration for new trails, BMA is now beating a drum that carbon-conscious politicians can't ignore. "We want people to be able to ride quality trails from their homes without having to drive a car," Barrow says. "I always emphasize that last part because city council locks onto it like a pit bull!"

For years, Boulder's woolgathering city management earned it a lousy reputation among riders. But suddenly, with the right people in the right places, the potential seems nearly unlimited. —KIP MIKLER