

Massanutten Opens Mountain Bike Park

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MASSANUTTEN — Not everyone can ride a bike like Jeremiah Bishop.

The Harrisonburg native races in competitive mountain biking with the Topeak Ergon Racing Team in Europe and trains on the trails on the western slope of Massanutten.

“We’ve got a lot of really tough riding,” Bishop said of the Valley. “I try to tell people if you can ride here, you can ride anywhere in the world.”

A new bike park at Massanutten Resort could help introduce more people to the sport.

The resort’s downhill mountain bike park officially opens for business today. Resort officials held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday.

The park features six trails along four levels of difficulties. Five are open for use and the sixth should be finished by the end of August, said Kenny Hess, Massanutten’s director of sports and risk management.

Of the five trails open, two are for beginners, one is intermediate and two are for advanced riders. The last trail will be for experts only.

Riders can use ski lifts to get to the top of the trails.

A second set of lifts can take riders to the top of the mountain for a 1,100-foot vertical drop.

“You can essentially ride from the top of the run to the bottom without brake or pedal,” said Matthias Smith, the resort’s general manager.

Thomas Jenkins, a member of the Shenandoah Valley Bike Coalition, has been working with the resort on its trails on the western slope of Massanutten. He said the bike park joins Bryce Resort in Basye as the only courses with a lift system in the Valley.

“It’s going to [make] mountain biking accessible to a lot more people,” Jenkins said. “Harrisonburg hasn’t had something this close yet. ... To have two options now between Bryce and Massanutten is a great thing.”

Construction on the park began in April, according to Hess, but Smith said it’s been in the works for years.

“We think about a lot of projects years and years out,” Smith said. “It just becomes a question of when.”

An Augusta County company, 402Trails, designed and built the course. Smith would not disclose how much the park cost.

The resort anticipates 4,500 to 5,000 bikers using the course in its first year of operation for the three-season activity.

The bike park presents a new offering for the resort's guests, but may attract new clientele as well, Smith said, "Now, we've got something for the whole family to do in addition to the water park," he said. "We're going to introduce a lot of new people to the sport, but we're going to have a really loyal following from people that are ... really loyal to the sport."

Jonathan Albert, the bike park manager, said visitors can bring their own bikes or rent them from the resort.

Additional information about the park is available online at massresort.com/bikepark.

Biking Destination

Bishop said the park showcases the Valley's place as a biking destination and the bike park adds "what we're missing."

Harrisonburg is one of 37 localities worldwide designated as a Ride Center by the International Mountain Biking Association.

Massanutten also hosts various competitions, including this year's Gravity East Downhill race series and the UCI World Cup Downhill in 1997.

The trail has "beginner- friendly, welcoming trails" for casual riders, Bishop said.

"This is just another facet to our community cycling credibility," he said. "I've been telling people this is a diamond in the rough, but no longer is it a diamond in the rough. Harrisonburg and the Shenandoah Valley is a well- polished destination for mountain biking and road cycling. "Whether you be an active competitor like myself or just a 9 to 5 weekend warrior that likes to ride, this place has got it all now." Albert said the park is already attracting new cyclists. "What I am seeing now is people coming out of the woodwork that I didn't even know were riders," he said. Jenkins said bringing more people to the sport is always a goal. "Anytime we can expose people to two wheels we see that as a positive," Jenkins said. George Anas, Rockingham County's economic development director, said the bike park showcases the county's ability to take care of its workforce, which can attract businesses. "If you don't have the amenities, if you don't have the quality of life, if you don't have all of the things to take care of the work force and foster that, I'm not even going to look at you," Anas said. "We have amenities so you can attract a labor force and keep them here."

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