

Happy Trails: The ‘ti’ that binds on the trails

By Cath Washburn

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My husband, Steve, and I arrive at the La Cuchara parking lot on a beautiful morning in mid-March and unload the bikes. There’s a car from Rhode Island and we chat with a guy from Minnesota about the trails. Sorry, Santa Fe, the La Tierra Trails are becoming as famous as our art, music and restaurants. The new trail system joins the Dale Ball, Winsor and all the others as being worthy of a trip to the City Different.

I hop on my bike and hunker down on the handlebars to make the trek up to Intersection 11 — the central crossroads and high

point of the park. We get a great panorama of the Sangres and Jemez, still covered in snow. We head northeast on the winding trail to post 8, then drop down along the ridge towards post 5. It is a fast, curvy single-track that is so much fun I can’t help myself from letting go a “woo-hoo.”

It has been a long seven years since I’ve been able to ride a bike due to a wonky shoulder. An old titanium bike and a new titanium shoulder make me so happy to be alive.

The first time I saw this area four or five years ago, I couldn’t imagine it would become the fantastic trail system it is today. It had heaps of garbage, old homeless camps, a million broken beer bottles, and trails so rutted and rock it was hard even to hike along them. But the years of planning, cleaning and defining the network have made them trails worthy of international attention — which they got when the International Mountain Biking Association held its World Summit here last October.

As members of the Trails Alliance of Santa Fe, we worked with the city to build some of the new connector trails, closed off others, piled up and hauled out garbage, and cleared routes that I could not really appreciate until I was able to climb back on my bike. The trail work may not have been exactly what the physical therapist meant by “rehab,” but the satisfaction of digging in the dirt has always been therapy for my soul. And this trail feels truly divine.



We follow the trail along the western edge back onto Pipeline “Road” before heading up to post 21 so we can cross the meadow. There are no wildflowers yet, but I really look forward to seeing them pop up in a month or two.

Heading back to the parking lot, I feel a tremendous sense of gratitude to all the people who made the trails possible. I feel fortunate to live here, under the intense cobalt sky, swooping through the piñon and junipers. Happy that an old ti bike and new ti shoulder can make me feel like a kid again — and to be 62 years young.

Cath Washburn is a member of Trails Alliance of Santa Fe.