



## *Welcome to Mountain Biking Heaven*

*by Susan Mackie*

### *Moab, Utah.*

For mountain bikers, these two words spell heaven. And that's precisely what drew Venturers from the 108th Pioneer Company (Calgary, AB) to the rolling southern hills of Utah. These trails are considered by most to be some of the greatest mountain biking places on the planet. The teens weren't disappointed by the challenge and raw adventure they found.

Combining the best ideas from each youth, the Venturers worked up a basic trip outline. One of the first challenges they faced was making sure each member had the skills required to ride a bike in extreme

temperatures – both hot and cold – on rough and grueling terrain.

Wise planning and sober risk management made the Venturers demand that each participant take a course in standard first aid and wilderness survival skills. These trails would offer few second chances for failure by the unprepared.

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Only when each youth was certain that both individuals and the group were physically and mentally ready to tackle Moab's challenges, did they proceed with planning for equipment, activities and high energy meals.

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tain biking treks with full equipment. This identified weak skills and problem areas that needed attention. When everything was in readiness, they loaded their bikes and headed for heaven.

Mountain biking was the first reason the Venturers headed south, but another was simply to soak up the rich history flooding the entire route leading to Moab. Hiking adventures, historic tours and spectacular panoramics all drew the teens, as well as the biking. They just couldn't wait to hit the road with their bikes loaded in the vans.

#### **Heaven-Bound**

The group's first destination was the Fort Ponderosa campground in scenic Montana, where the rolling plains were punctuated by towering mountains which seemed to appear from nowhere. The Venturers spent their first cold, bitter night on the road telling stories and playing board games by the warm crackle of a campfire. Ahh! Perfect.

Driving through "Big Sky" country, the next day was every bit as breath-

# Primed and ready for Moab!



taking as they had expected. The mountains beckoned in welcome as the group headed for the Lewis and Clark caverns, named after the American explorers who mapped much of this area in the early 19th century.

The caverns were amazing. Deep within Cave Mountain, they lie 400 metres *above* a river. A guided tour takes visitors on a descent of 600 steps through rooms of calcium and limestone identified by names such as “Cathedral Room”; many are decorated by nature with amazing stalagmite and stalactite formations. These formations are the result of millions

of years of dripping mineral-laden water. With each level of descent the temperature grew colder, almost tomb-like in its rocky chill. The underground world is home to many interesting species of wildlife, including the Western Big-Eared Bat.

After emerging from the caverns, the group drove to a point of Canadian historical significance. A roadside viewpoint featured a vista of the valley that Métis leader, Louis Riel, had used as a sanctuary in 1878 after running from Canada in fear for his life.

Old Faithful geyser was the next attraction on the Venturers’ eventful and

## Did You Know...?

- ☞ Over 90 percent of children aged six to 16 ride bicycles.
- ☞ Less than 20 percent of reported bicycle injuries involve a collision with cars. Most occur in falls, or as a result of riders losing control.
- ☞ Night riding is dangerous for youth. Kids often swerve into the path of cars, and automobile drivers can’t see the bikers.

exciting agenda. Travelling to Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, to see this world-renowned site, at first they tasted disappointed when the geyser seemingly refused to cooperate; it merely rested like an innocent pool. Minutes later, they were treated to the sight of a 20-metre high spout of 180 degree C water shooting towards the sky in a mixture of bubbles and mist. The geyser repeats this performance at 30 minute intervals, day and night.

Next day, with the Grand Teton Mountains perched on the horizon, the teens headed for Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to conquer the Cascade Trail. What a fantastic hiking trail! The scenery was breathtaking as they climbed the steep and craggy rock



*“This is not a good place to be if you aren’t prepared.”*

formations, spotting moose and other wildlife on the way. Rain soon put an end to this day's climb. The group's risk-management practices helped members to recognize how slick rocks would prove very dangerous if they continued.

### **"Get Out the Bikes. NOW!"**

Finally, almost a week into their trip, the 108th Pioneers reached Moab, Utah – "the main event." They could barely restrain themselves. The sun baked down on them as the youths began their adventure on wheels at the first bike trail they came to. This trail was a mountain biker's dream come true since it had bumps for testing the shocks, and amazing hills that were a test of bravery and speed. The day sped by.

On the second day in Moab, the restless adventurers yearned for a trail that would prove more demanding. They were not disappointed; the Poison Spider Mesa Bike Trail gave them all the challenge they needed. Located just northwest of Moab, the terrain consisted of slippery rock, and steep hills. It was an uphill climb at first, but when the group reached the top, the spectacular view proved well worth the physical struggle.

That night their beds were a welcoming reprieve, after a very athletic day. Several of them checked their sleeping bags repeatedly, looking for snakes and poison spiders. The desert weather kept the Venturers warm throughout the night.

"Hey, let's go for an even greater challenge," someone called out when the sun finally poked above the hills next morning. The teens chose The Slick Rock Trail as a suitable test of



**Expect punctured tires and spills on a mountain bike trip, wherever you go.**

their abilities. The trail was exactly as its name suggested, punctuated with sharp turns, quick ascents, rapid acceleration and deceleration, multiple G-forces, and hair-raising cliffs.

After an hour of strenuous peddling along the main trail, the teens reached a fork, which split into two very different trails; each offered unique appeal to different types of riders – one trail for novice riders, and one geared to those with considerable experience.

When at last the brave 108th Pioneer Venturers finished this trail, they were certain of two truths: they had experienced one of the greatest adventures in their young lives, and they were exhausted.

In their own words, "the days (in Moab) were magnificent and fulfilling. The Slick Rock Trail... Bravo!" ^

— Susan Mackie works at the National Office.

## **BICYCLE SAFETY ADVICE**

This advice comes from the Canada Safety Council. You can find all sorts of safety-oriented activities and tips on their web site ([www.safety-council.org](http://www.safety-council.org)).

1. *Make sure your bicycle is safe.* Does your bike have a bell, a light and reflectors? Does it work properly? Check tires, brakes and all cables. Does it fit properly? You should be able to straddle the bike with both feet on the ground. A bike that is too big or too small is a safety hazard.
2. *Obey all signs, signals and rules of the road.* Know the signals for riding on the road (stop, turn right, turn left), and know how to do a shoulder check before turning. Practise it several times with all members of your group.

Child cyclists must obey the same rules of the road as adult drivers. This includes riding on the right side of the road, stopping for stop signs and red lights, signalling all turns, and yielding to traffic that has the right-of-way.

3. *Leaders should always model good bicycle riding practices.* When riding a bicycle with youth members, always wear a helmet and make sure it covers your forehead. Young people watch adults to see what they do; if leaders are excellent role-models, young people will follow their advice and direction. It could save their life.

## **WEAR YOUR HELMET CORRECTLY**

Three-quarters of all cyclist deaths involve head injuries. That's why it's critical for your members to wear a bike helmet that fits properly and is certified by the Canada Safety Association International.

Helmets can prevent up to 85 percent of all bike injuries. Even though youths wear helmets, many still wear them incorrectly – usually tilted too far back.

When a bicyclist falls, his or her forehead usually hits the ground first. That's why *helmets must cover the forehead*. If they are tilted back, they can become more of a hazard than a safety measure.

### **Tips for Choosing a Helmet**

When choosing a helmet, children should try on several helmets carefully.

Level the helmet over the child's forehead, and adjust the chin strap to fit snugly and comfortably. It should protect the forehead without slipping forward or backwards. The helmet should not move unless the scalp moves. A loose helmet may fly off during a fall, creating yet another hazard.