

'Singletrack Minds' Raises Debate Over Marin County Trail Access

BY JASON NORMAN

MARIN COUNTY, CA—"Singletrack Minds" isn't your typical mountain bike film. You're not going to find much in the way of big air or record-breaking speeds. What you will find is much more important to the sport's future—trail access.

The short film takes a look at the roots of the conflict between bikers and hikers in Marin County, California—the place where most agree mountain biking was born. Perspectives range from mountain biking pioneers Gary Fisher, Charlie Kelly and Wende Cragg to hiking advocates from the Sierra Club and Tamalpais Conservation Club.

Directors Jason Watkins and Wendy Todd learned first hand how polarizing this issue has become riding in Marin County some years ago.



Trail signs like this are common in Marin County where trail access is still a hot button issue.

"We were riding suspect single-track—maybe illegal but there were no signs—and came across a hiker and his wife," Watkins said. "We were verbally attacked and I engaged in an argument that got too heated. After that incident, Wendy I started thinking about all the history and passion behind that argument and decided it was time to document both sides of the story."

Marin's trail access issues trace back to the threat to develop the county's hills, according to Watkins. "This triggered an environmental movement which successfully transferred the threatened space into Open Space land—land that was now off-limits to development," Watkins said. "So these environmentalists [hikers] just spent all this time saving this land. Then, in the eyes of the hikers, bikers showed up and started messing up everything these people worked so hard to preserve."

While trail access issues are hardly relegated to Marin County, it seems

the area just north of San Francisco is still at the debate's epicenter.

"There are two groups that have a long history—longer than most areas of the country—where environmentalists have been fighting off threats of development and mountain bikers have been bombing down fireroads and seeking out the narrowest, most secluded trails to ride," Todd said.

Even though the directors consider it a mountain bike film, "Singletrack Minds" makes a point to include all sides of the issue—something Watkins and Todd were cognizant of when making the film.

"We didn't want to make a film that pushed a biking agenda," Watkins said. "We're hikers as well, so we understand that side of the story and

didn't want to ignore it. If we did ignore the hiking side, our film wouldn't promote discussion. It would just continue to polarize the two groups. We made this [film] to make mountain bikers and hikers realize that their actions affect an entire community."

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