

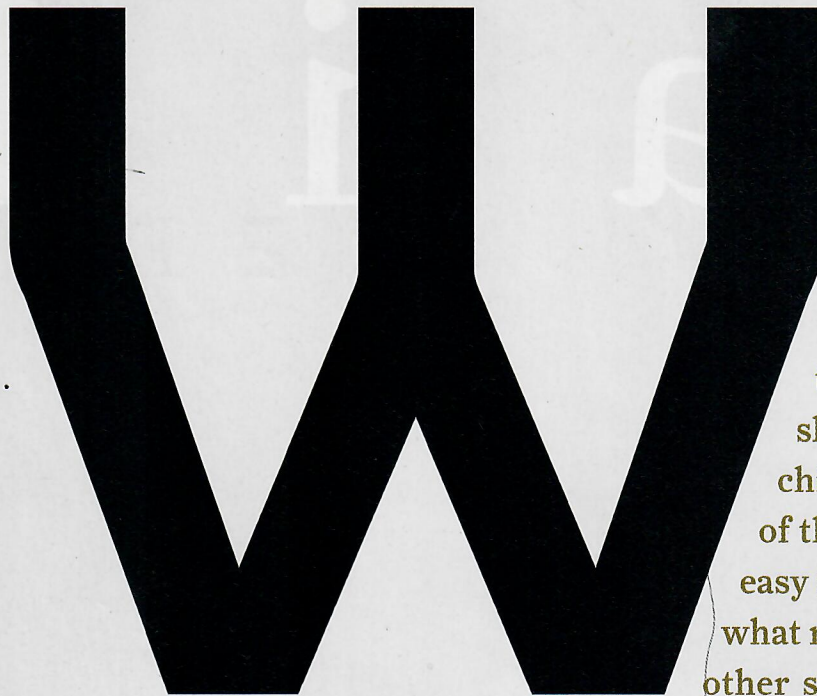


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MIKE (L) AND MORGAN HARRIS Trail-building twins on Gooseberry Mesa just outside Utah's Zion National Park.

photograph by LIN ALDER

photograph



and the trails that course through those places like the arteries that snake through your body. Without those veins of dirt there'd be no mountain biking. And yet those trails don't appear magically. They are made by real people. Real

people with amazing drive—but also with rough, calloused hands and sweaty brows.

On the following pages you'll meet a baker's dozen of the most important folks in mountain biking. These are the best trail builders in North America, the people who give shape to our playgrounds and a reason to ride a mountain bike in the first place. Still, it's likely that you haven't heard of a single one. So get to know them here and help us celebrate what really matters.

NAME:
Digger, aka Todd Fiander

DIGGER?: "When I started building trails, I was always digging with my hands. I'd be riding a hiking trail, see something nuts and say, 'Hey, with a little work, I can ride that.' And then I'd dig in."

AGE: 44

'HOOD: Vancouver, B.C.

ENLIGHTENING QUOTE: "I build the sickest stuff."

CLAIM TO FAME: Although it's perilous to pin a revolution on any one person, Digger is largely responsible for the shape of freeriding today: He was the first builder to incorporate huge drops and stunts in his trails, and the reverberations from his efforts have echoed across the world.

HOW IT WENT DOWN: Digger started riding in '84, mostly in the provincial parks around his Vancouver home. "I started by making shortcuts between established trails," says Digger. "And it just took off from there."

Indeed. Digger soon found himself building trails 40 hours per week, creating early North Shore masterpieces such as Ladies Only and Big Eye. Because he refused to use a chainsaw,

we tend to celebrate the tangible. It's human nature to covet the expensive bits of shiny alloy and admire the dude or chic at the top of the podium. None of that is bad, but in the process, it's easy to forget what really matters. And what really matters, what makes all the other stuff possible, are places to ride,

he'd sometimes spend a full week working on the landing from a single drop. And although he's widely credited for creating the first ladder bridge, he prefers to create stunts from the natural landscape rather than imported materials. "I'd dig or fill things in with rocks and dirt," explains Digger. Although, he does use manmade materials when necessary. To support his trail-building habit, Digger started a film production company, North Shore Extreme (his seventh flick, *Quick and Dirty*, was released last season).

In the early '90s Digger connected with "Dangerous" Dan Cowan, another North Shore innovator, and the collaboration resulted in paradigm-shifting trails such as Reaper and Hangman. Today, Digger still spends dozens of hours per week on the hillsides around Vancouver. "The North Shore builders are setting the pace. And that's not gonna change anytime soon."

DOWN THE TRAIL: By this summer, Digger hopes to have his showpiece, "Birdcage," ready for prime time. Birdcage will be a section of trail—seven stunts total—that's entirely suspended from trees, with no support from below.

WHO LOVES YA?: "Digger changed the face of trail building. He also inspired my buddy and me to build our own trails."
 —Mike MacGregor, North Shore ripper and budding trail builder

NAME:
Mike and Morgan Harris

AGE: 58 ("We're fraternal twins, but sometimes our kids can't even tell us apart," says Mike.)

'HOOD: Hurricane, Utah

ENLIGHTENING QUOTE: "We're people that think double-track really sucks."—Morgan



SCOTT MARKWITZ

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CLAIM TO FAME: The Harris brothers developed the Gooseberry Mesa and Little Creek riding areas just outside Utah's Zion National Park. Between the two regions, they've created nearly 35 miles of legal trail that constantly twists, turns and surprises.

HOW IT WENT DOWN: After burning out on motorized playthings (both Harris boys were avid ATV and dirt bike riders), Mike and Morgan picked up mountain biking in 1993. "The first time I rode a mountain bike, I thought 'I can't believe I wasted money on this thing,'" remembers Morgan. "But I got addicted pretty quick."

Once hooked, it didn't take long for the twins to catch the trail-building bug. "Everyone was talking Moab, but from hunting and dirt biking, we knew there was slickrock around here, plus a lot of other terrain," says Morgan.

At first, the trails were largely unmarked. But as the Gooseberry and Little Creek regions became more popular, Mike and Morgan began marking the routes with cairns and paint slashes. Unbeknownst to them, this action put them in violation of the Bureau of Land Management policy (all of the Harris brothers' trails are on BLM property), which allows mountain biking but requires a permit for official trails. After two years of red tape, Gooseberry Mesa was approved and dedicated; Little

EAST BURKE, VERMONT

Hundreds of miles of mapped, marked and maintained singletrack make up the Kingdom Trails Network.

Creek is now going through the same process (it's legal to ride now, but the Harris brothers have suspended trail-building efforts until the approval goes through).

Mike and Morgan credit their success to the dynamic created by working together. "It's a give-and-take relationship," says Morgan. "We're always going back and forth. But that just makes the trails better."

FUTURE SPIN: Pending approval of Little Creek for mountain biking, the brothers have big plans. "We've got our eyes on a 40-mile loop over there," says Mike. "It would be unreal."

WHO LOVES YA?: "I'm constantly amazed by their imagination. They carve out trails in places you'd never believe. And they do it for the right reason: Because they love to ride."—*Dave Johnson, longtime Gooseberry and Little Creek devotee*

NAME:
John Worth

AGE: 40

'HOOD: East Burke, Vermont

CLAIM TO FAME: Worth conceived of and created the Kingdom Trails network, which consists of more than 100 miles of mapped, marked and maintained singletrack in Vermont's rural Northeast Kingdom. Such a vast trail system is a rarity in a region that's 88 percent privately owned. Even rarer is Worth's trail-building style: Whereas most Eastern singletrack is a snot-slick menagerie of root and rock, Worth's creations are renowned for being buff, flowy and fast.

ENLIGHTENING QUOTE: "Sometimes I walk an area for days before I start cutting trail. You've gotta make sure what you're doing fits the landscape."

HOW IT WENT DOWN: Worth started building trails for the same reason most people start building trails: to ride them.

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This was back in the early '80s. Worth and his friends were pedaling at a hillside cross-country ski area in his hyper-rural corner of the state. "We starting connecting ski trails with singletrack, only we didn't know what singletrack was," remembers Worth. "But pretty soon we figured out that riding those connectors was where it's at, so we started making them longer and longer."

It took almost 10 years before the public stumbled onto Worth's creations. "I was pretty scared once people started noticing, because a lot of the stuff wasn't super legal and I didn't want to get shut down." Rather than disappear into the bushes, Worth decided to get legit and formed the Kingdom Trails Association (kingdomtrails.org). The result? This blue-collar community of loggers and hunters has embraced mountain bikers. "We've hardly had anyone say 'no' to us," says Worth. "People have seen how it drives the local economy. These days, if you were the one shutting down a Kingdom trail, you'd be the villain in the community."

DOWN THE TRAIL: With the Kingdom Trails network firmly established, Worth concentrates on evolution, not revolution, by constantly adding and updating trails.

WHO LOVES YA?: "John really looks at the terrain and

lays his trails out so they ride like pure butter. He's a great skier, and I think flowing style really shows in his trails."
—Sean Wallace, local ripper and ski tuner extraordinaire

NAME:
Joey Klein

AGE: 39

'HOOD: "I don't live anywhere," says Klein, who stashes his skis in a circa 1968 school bus in Colorado and his surfboards at a friend's pad in Hawaii. His Gary Fisher Sugar travels with him.

ENLIGHTENING QUOTE: "The real credit should go to the little bike clubs around the world. No one realizes just how much those little clubs matter."

CLAIM TO FAME: According to IMBA, Klein has overseen and personally built more miles of mountain bike trail than any other individual in the world. He's worked in 35 U.S. states and nearly a dozen countries, including Greece, Australia and France.

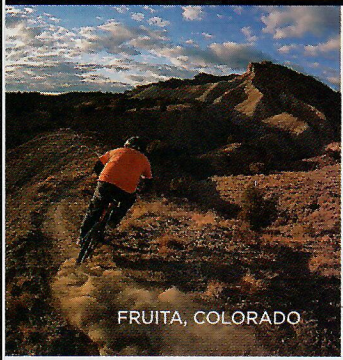
HOW IT WENT DOWN: Klein's trail-building career began in '94 when Colorado's Keystone ski resort asked him to create a mountain bike trail system. "I wanted to create a system that would prepare you for any other trail in the world," says Klein, who was introduced to world-class singletrack in Durango, where he attended Fort Lewis College.

Klein followed the Keystone gig with a four-year stint on IMBA's roving Trail Care Crew, which helped instill the diplomacy needed to work with often-sparring factions. "I spend a lot of my time acting as a go-between for hotheaded riders and hikers and land managers," says Klein. "It can be a pain, but it's really satisfying when it all comes together and everyone goes home happy."

And that happens more often than you might think. Klein points to a recent project where he codesigned more than 15 miles of multiuse trails in Colorado's Cheyenne State Park. "We got hikers, mountain bikers, trail designers and land managers to come together by saying, 'Look, we have a blank canvas. Let's do something really cool.' And we did."

DOWN THE TRAIL: Klein travels to the Black Canyon in Arizona to work on a BLM project. "We're putting in 50 miles of trail. It's going to be huge."

WHO LOVES YA?: "Like all trails, Joey's get you from point A to point B. But his tend to make the trip way more fun than most. It's obvious he puts a lot of thought into his layout; he'll take a rock outcrop and turn it into a low-speed technical section that slows you down for the blind corner coming up and just happens to shed water, too."
—Wayne Ruemmele, architect and mountain biker



FRUITA, COLORADO

WHAT MAKES A GREAT TRAIL?
THE MASTERS DISCUSS THE FIVE KEYS TO CRAFTING THE PERFECT PATH

Mystery: "Not knowing what might be around the next corner forces trail users to stay in control of their speed—or face the consequences. Mystery on the trail not only makes riders aware of their surroundings, it also raises their level of anticipation and consciousness."—Greg Williams

Sustainability: "Anyone can point a trail straight downhill and call it fun. But will it be fun five years from now? Twenty?"—Kevin Foote

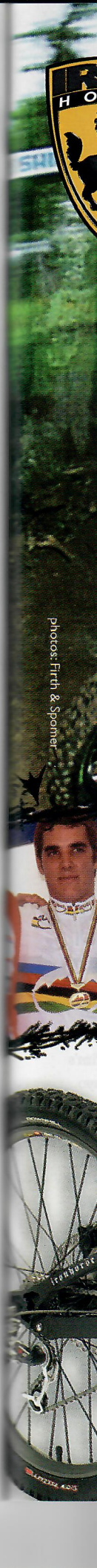
Flow: "Flow is so important for bicycles because you're relying on kinetic energy. Everyone knows what it's like to ride a trail that flows and everyone knows that's a feeling they want every time they ride."—Brent Thompson

Challenge: "The trick is to make a trail challenging but rideable. You want to make people work for it—it keeps them interested and coming back—without discouraging them."—Tim Quilty

Scenery: "I work hard to give riders views. Mountain biking can be hard work; a view is like a cold beer at the end of the day."—John Worth

photos: Frith & Spomer

DEREK FRANKOWSKI



t r a i l B L A Z E R S

Thirteen of
the most
dedicated and
skillful people in
mountain
biking
don't make
the bikes.
they make
the best
trails in
north america.

BY BEN HEWITT

75