

SPINNING THROUGH THE NIGHT

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Welcome to another edition of cycling in Muskoka. In this week's article we will be discussing night riding through the darkened wilds of Muskoka. Night riding, which commonly involves whisking through tall stands of white pine, and rocky fields of granite with only a narrow beam of light illuminating the trail, has recently become one of my favorite riding practices. There's just something about cycling at night that heightens the enjoyment of any mountain biking trail.

Any one of Muskoka's numerous biking trails offer ideal night riding opportunities. My personal location of choice for night riding is the Buckwallow Cycling Centre situated off Highway 11, accessed by the Gravenhurst Parkway (Muskoka Airport service road). These trails, which are lovingly maintained by Mike McLaughlin, offer exceptional night riding opportunities for both the new rider and the expert. The trailhead provides maps, and all trails are well marked, necessities for the nightrider. The Buckwallow trails are hard packed, easy to follow, and a sheer joy to ride at night. Night riding at the centre is by appointment only, so if you are planning to roll off into the dark, please be sure to contact Mike at Buckwallow first at: (705) 687- 8858.

For the less experienced rider, I suggest sticking to the "Inside Track". If you're looking for speed, try the "Border Run". And if you seek technical trail with challenging climbs, ride "Spur Line". Looking for something over the top, give "The Do Drop In" a spin. Careful though, the name is more than explanatory...the trail ends with an eight-foot drop!

Night riding does require a little extra gear. A helmet is a must! Remember you can't necessarily see everything that's rolling your way. Bright reflective clothing should always be worn when riding at night. Even though you may be riding in a designated trail systems where other vehicles are a non-issue, it is important that fellow riders can easily see you. Bring a buddy! Not only is riding with a friend, or multiple friends more fun, it is also a safety precaution. And last, but not least, lights...the more, the better, the brighter.

We here at Ecclestone Cycle recommend investing in a technical lighting system. These light systems are specifically designed for mountain biking, meaning they're durable, lightweight, attach to your bicycle or cycling equipment, and are very bright. These systems use halogen bulbs and are powered by rechargeable nickel-metal hydride batteries. Most of these lighting systems will provide ample light for riding for at least an hour and a half, and even up to 4 hours. In addition to a visual lighting system, you should also use a "Blinkie". Blinkies are small (usually red) flashing lights that should be attached to the rear of your bicycle or yourself. Their sole purpose is to allow others to see you.

Night riding is truly a unique experience. You are surrounded by darkness and all you can see is what you choose to illuminate. Obstacles or trails that once seemed beyond navigation are suddenly a possibility under the glow of a single beam of light. Group night riding is an excellent spectator event, if you opt not to ride. Magically, your friends and family are turned into giant speeding fireflies, turning and twisting through Muskoka's calm midnight air. And believe it or not, those merciless mosquitoes aren't so bad after the sun goes down.

Now that I've lured you into the possibility of night riding, may I suggest the perfect opportunity to plunge into the experience? We go for a night spin at various locations every other Saturday night, check with us for times and locations. Should you require further details, visit our website or contact the shop at 645-1166. We're just glowing with anticipation!