



Building Skills for Mountain Biking on Trails

by Sabrina Carlson

On May 10, 2016, six members of the Payson Rim Country Middle School Outdoor Adventure Club had the opportunity to test out their mountain bike skills with special co-leader Dara Marks Marino, a former professional mountain bike racer and certified cycling coach.

To start out, Dara had everyone practice their riding positions standing on the ground. Once everyone got comfortable with their general posture, the students hopped on their bikes and teamed up to help each other balance while practicing their positions. We then had the riders prop their bikes on the stadium bleachers first pointing “downhill” and then pointing “uphill” to see how adjusting their center of gravity makes balancing easier in these positions.



Wheel dropping down the stairs

Once they had their body positions covered, we went out to an empty field to practice riding at a slow pace. Being able to balance while riding slowly is crucial to improving technical skills and to master basic wheelies. Once they practiced riding slowly we taught them how to play “foot down” – a game in which all the riders ride slowly while balancing in a small area. Anyone who rides out of bounds or has to put a foot down is “out.” It’s fantastic practice for balance and lots of fun too!



Wheelie up!

This group was getting the hang of it quickly, so we moved on to the three basic wheelies; unloading the front tire, the wheel drop, and the pedal push. Each one of these skills is important, and each one is useful for a different situation. After practicing in the grass for a while, we took our bikes to a set of stairs to put the wheelies into action. The students practiced riding up and down the stairs over and over, while working on different wheelies in a variety of ways. All the while trying to get the timing just right.

Eventually, we headed out towards a nearby park where a short mountain bike trail was being built. Moments into our short ride, Dexter’s bike malfunctioned. His drive train gave up, and the

bolts on his seat post had become so stripped it wouldn't stay put anymore. So we turned around to a location where his mom could come and find him. This actually was fortunate timing, since Dexter is one of our Peaks to Park participants from 2015, and he planned to ride again this year. Much better to shop for a new bike now than on the way to the Grand Canyon!



Trying some bigger obstacles!

It was a great experience and everyone went away from the clinic feeling more confident and nimble on their bikes, including me! Endless gratitude to Dara for sharing her wealth of knowledge with these youth!



This Seeds of Stewardship outing made possible by grants from:

