

# LAGUNA BEACH

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Magazine

LAGUNA'S  
HEART &  
SOUL  
Q&A WITH  
MARK  
CHRISTY



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CREATE A THRIVING GARDEN IN A LIMITED AREA

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HOW TO ELEVATE YOUR OUTDOOR KITCHEN

HANS REY

MOUNTAIN BIKING INTELLIGENCE

An inside look at Laguna's dirt-riding scene

# MOUNTAIN

**Water sports like snorkeling and scuba diving, skimboarding, stand-up paddleboarding, surfing and open-water swimming get most of the attention in Laguna Beach, but people may not realize that this coastal town is also a mecca for mountain biking. The open spaces in the region – including Laguna Coast and Aliso and Wood Canyons wilderness parks as well as Crystal Cove State Park’s El Moro Canyon – are honeycombed with trails that are well-suited for dirt riders of all skill levels.**

**“Laguna Beach is an incredible location,” says local resident Hans Rey, a Mountain Bike Hall of Famer and one of the pioneers of highly technical trials riding. “You have the cool town, the great weather ... and the trails are abundant.”**

Indeed, you’d be hard-pressed to find a more ideal place to enjoy the sport.

*By Larry Urish*

Laguna Beach is known near and far as  
a top dirt-riding destination

# BIKING MECCA



Mountain  
Biker Hall of  
Famer Brian  
Lopes riding in  
Laguna

# TIPS AND TRICKS

Riders of every skill level recommend wearing protective gear. “Always wear a helmet,” says Brian Lopes, like Rey a Laguna Beach resident and fellow Mountain Bike Hall of Famer. “As far as other gear, including gloves and knee pads, if it doesn’t hinder you, why not wear it?”

New mountain bikers should also ride within their limits. “Keep your speed well within your control when you’re a beginner because you can get in over your head quick when going downhill,” Lopes says.

“Don’t underestimate a trail,” Rey adds. “Start slowly and learn the fundamentals, building up your skill level. Don’t rely on luck or courage.”

Those with more experience eventually learn how to position their bodies properly on the bike, depending on the terrain. “Don’t use your front brake in corners,” Lopes says. “If you’re going into a left-hand corner, keep your left pedal in the up position. Once you start going faster, look ahead and anticipate what’s coming up.”

YouTube offers helpful videos for all skill levels. And mountain bikers are encouraged to ride with others, either in organized clubs or informal groups. “Riding with friends is great for a number of reasons,” Lopes says. “It’s safer to ride with a friend. ... And you can always learn from riders with more experience.”

Local clubs include the Trail Angels, thinkMTB, Non Dot Adventures and Project Bike Love, among others. Local bike shops can also provide info on all manner of groups and regularly scheduled rides.

Another noted organization, the Laguna Canyon Riders, is a local youth racing team composed of riders in grades 6-12 that’s registered with USA Cycling and won the 2023 and 2024 SoCal Enduro Team Championship. “The group is great for the kids, physically, mentally and socially,” says Blair Liggatt, an LCR coach and board member. “They improve riding together, and it’s a wonderful way for a family to be involved, since parents are at all the races.”



COURTESY ANDRE MARABAO



Left:  
Brian  
Lopes

Above:  
Hans Ray

# RECOMMENDED ROUTES

“I’ve been riding around Laguna for over 35 years, and there’s a great selection of trails for all skill levels,” Rey says.

Lopes recommends fire roads for beginners. “Several traverse along the bottom of canyons and the top of ridges; they’re the easiest in Laguna,” he says. When it comes to single-track trails, Lopes notes, “Old Emerald ... is one of the easier single-track trails to ride down, but difficult to ride up.” Stagecoach South Trail, from the Nix Nature Center, is another of the easier single-track trails to try, he says.

David Browning, president of the Orange County Mountain Bike Association, recommends a route well-suited loop for beginners in Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park. Leaving the park staging area in Laguna Niguel, proceed down Aliso Creek Trail and onto Wood Canyon Trail. Then either turn around and return on Wood Canyon or loop around on Coyote Run Trail before hopping on a short connector to Wood Canyon and go back the way you came. “One could also make the side trip to Dripping Cave, which we were able to have reopened to bikes last year,” Browning says.

For intermediate riders in Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park he suggests another route. “It’s a loop that starts at Top of the World, heads down the Meadows Trail, runs into a fire road that follows the bottom of the canyon, then back up the Cholla Trail and along West Ridge back to the Top of the World,” he says. To get started from Top of the World, ride to the other end of Alta Laguna Boulevard, hop on the Aswut Trail, then down Meadows and continue the loop.

“We rate Meadows as a ‘blue,’ [or intermediate,] trail and the Cholla and West Ridge climbs do require some fitness. That said, we have used it to orient folks to the sport in the past,” Browning says.

Along with Top of the World, Rey



El Moro Canyon Trail

COURTESY OF HANS REY



Aliso Peak via the Valido Trail



Top of the World via West Ridge Trail



Emerald Canyon & Bommer Ridge Loop

PHOTOS BY JOSIAH ROE

COURTESY OF HANS REY



endorses the Coyote Run Trail, located in the same park, for beginners.

Liggatt suggests the following trails for intermediate riders: the Rock-It, Lynx, Meadows, Cholla and Mathis Canyon trails, all located in Aliso and Wood Canyons. Mountain bikers should understand that these trails, like so many in the Laguna area, connect with more advanced routes.

On that note, trails for those with significant experience can test their skill on such routes as the Laguna Ridge (popularly known as T&A), Willow Canyon and Lizard, all in the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park; Car Wreck in Aliso and Wood Canyons; and Rattlesnake in Crystal Cove State Park/El Moro Canyon. (Local riders in the know also ply their craft on a slew of unofficial trails, all of which require technical expertise.)

Bottom line: When in doubt about a given trail's suitability, connect with a local bike shop (such as Laguna Beach Cyclery, Crankbrothers or Troy Lee Designs, among others) to get the proper intel.



JOSH HROE

Car Wreck Trail and Mathis Canyon Loop

# HAPPY TRAILS

Mountain bikers impact trails more significantly than do outdoor lovers on foot. As such, riders seeking to have a positive impact (and collect good karma points) can engage in trail maintenance activities, such as those run by the Laguna Canyon Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to the protection of 22,000 contiguous acres of open space in the area.

"Riders should follow park rules and show courtesy to other visitors and wildlife," says Craig Dicht, trails project manager at Laguna Canyon Foundation. "Follow the speed limit, stay on authorized trails, put a bell on your bike so hikers can hear you coming, and stop to allow hikers to pass.

"We run trail maintenance events every Saturday morning, from October through the end of June," Dicht adds. "Anyone 16 and older can sign up on our website, [lagunacanyon.org/events]. And on June 7,

to celebrate National Trails Day, we hope to surpass last year's record of 40 volunteers."

Protecting these riding areas is key because, as Browning says, "We have some of the most iconic trails in the world." Aside from the trails, he adds, "We also are home to many professional mountain bike athletes, influencers and bike industry brands. Laguna Beach is even argued as one of the birthplaces of the freeride movement, a facet of the sport that has grown to great popularity."

In just a few words, he encapsulates what the vibrant town and surrounding outdoor spaces mean to the sport: "Laguna Beach is, in many ways, the heart and soul of mountain biking."

**"Riders should follow park rules and show courtesy to other visitors and wildlife"**

CRAIG DICHT