

MOUNTAINBIKING

Students take cycling off the beaten path

By Rachel Barry
THE BATTALION

David Minnigerode found out the hard way that a copper rod is not the same thing as a twig. Minnigerode, president of the A&M Cycling Team and a graduate computer science major, made that discovery as he flew over a hill on his mountain bike and came upon an unexpected rod.

"My front tire hit it and just stopped," he said. "I kept going."

Minnigerode's experience was just another in a series of bumps and scrapes associated with the sport of mountain biking. It was, however, not one that deterred him from climbing back onto his bicycle and heading out again.

"It just comes with the territory," he said.

The build of the bicycles for mountain biking are different from road bikes in that they have thicker wheels, straight handle bars and more gears. The trails the mountain bike races are held on are also different.

"Mountain bike races take place on some sort of trail, completely off the road," he said. "You go out to some farm or ranch, and it is usually a path through the woods."

Because of the terrain mountain bikers face, Minnigerode said staying on the bike can be one of the rider's main goals.

"You'll just be riding, and you'll have to go around a tree or something," he said. "The turns are short and quick, and the ground could be rocky or sandy."

Obstacles laid down by mother nature sometimes lead to unintended spills. These bumps and turns don't slow down some of the most

diehard mountain bikers, he said.

"Some people are so completely nuts and don't think about it and just go," he said. "They tend to do really well."

Minnigerode said focusing on the task at hand helps the rider stay on the bicycle.

"If you aren't thinking about wrecking or wiping out, you won't wreck or wipe out," he said.

Ryan Albert, a coach for A&M Cycling Team and a senior engineering technology major, said some amateur riders take on that mentality and end up getting hurt.

"It brings out the kid in you. You go out and get muddy and scratched up."

— Kirsten Wagner
member, A&M Cycling Team

"Some people rush into it and go through a trail that is way too technical, and those are the ones you have to pull off the side of a mountain with a helicopter," Albert said.

Kirsten Wagner, a graduate health education student and A&M Cycling Team member, said risk is part of the game, but it can be taken too far.

"It's good to take chances," she said. "But you don't want to be stupid."

The same risks that can get some people in trouble are part of what keeps Wagner motivated to get on her bike.

"It's good to take chances and try to push yourself to the outer limits to do something you didn't think you could," she said.

Albert said the rush he gets from biking is

what keeps him driven.

"You get a rush off of going fast and almost killing yourself," he said. "The more out of control you are, the more fun you are having."

Although the adrenaline rush may be one of the biggest rewards for a mountain biker, it can also be a signal of danger to the rider. Albert said he has ridden himself into shock during races in which he pushed himself too hard.

"I didn't know when to quit," he said. "I started feeling disoriented. Trees were dancing by me, and I felt spaced out."

After making it back to the cars off the trail, Albert said he took a drink of soda and passed out.

"People race past their limits and start crashing," he said.

Dangers and rushes aside, Wagner said she enjoys mountain biking for the sheer fun of it.

"It brings out the little kid in you," she said. "You go out and get muddy and scratched up. It's just a really good time."

The love people have for mountain biking sometimes starts when they are very young.

Albert said his grandfather taught him how to ride a bicycle with a girl's bike and a push down the driveway.

"I fell off and got hurt, but I just kept doing it again," he said.

Albert said he can't remember not wanting to ride a bicycle.

"It's hard to explain," he said. "It's a passion for some people. You have to do it to understand."

The passion comes from the surroundings when she is on the trails, Wagner said.

"You can end up in some beautiful places you wouldn't have been able to see otherwise," she said.



Nick Rodnicki, THE BATTALION

Brent Davis, a senior mechanical engineering major, speeds around the last curve of the Lake Bryan Challenge in October. He placed first in the sport class.

Exhibit explores man and nature

By Amy Protas
THE BATTALION

With an increase in modern technology taking over at a rapid pace, many people may wonder what will become of man's relationship with his natural environment.

This is the question that the art exhibit "Rethinking the Natural" concerns itself with.

The exhibit, selected by Jon Ippolito, Exhibition Coordinator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, is being presented at the J. Wayne Stark University Galleries until Dec. 16.

Catherine A. Hastedt, registrar and curator of the Stark Gallery, said the exhibition focuses on contemporary representations of landscape and the forces of nature.

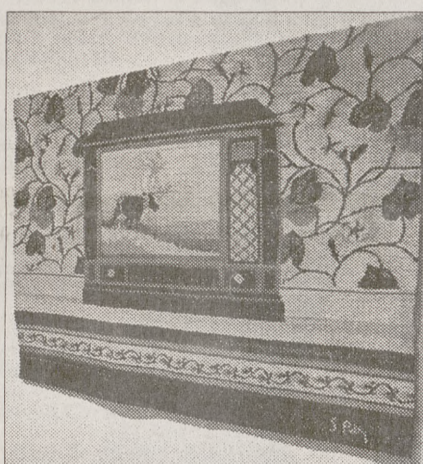
It examines our relationship with nature within and increasingly man-made environment, she said. "It has a strong environmental feel to it," she said. "It shows how much man tries to control nature."

One of the exhibit's six sections is "Civilization Encroaching." In this section, artist William Henry has an untitled photo showing grocery carts strewn among rocks.

In a press release, Henry said man's world is becoming a disease in the natural world.

"We are born into a world that has been nearly conquered by civilization," Henry said. "In place of desert flowers and evergreen forests spring up sterile human dwellings in neat rows. The city spreads like a virus, infecting the natural landscape and removing its beauty."

Artist Mike Javernick, in the



Amy Browning, THE BATTALION

The "Rethinking the Natural" exhibit will be on display at J. Wayne Stark Galleries until Dec. 16.

section titled, "Life Erupting," does his work on PVC pipe with torches and paint.

"Originally, my background is in the biological sciences," Javernick said. "Visually, these images are very much informed by my familiarity with the structures and processes associated with living things."

"I chose to work on a PVC surface with torches and apply paint with strings in order to push the metaphor of mutation."

Hastedt said viewers have to look further than what is on the surface to get the deeper meaning of each artist's work.

"He (Javernick) is a molecular biologist," Hastedt said. "We had a professor from the medical school come in, and immediately he understood his work and how it represents mutation."

Experience motivates fifth-year seniors

By Amy Protas
THE BATTALION

College — the best four years of your life. Well, not exactly. The traditional four-year degree plan has now turned into the five-, six- and even seven-year plan.

Nick Bown, a fifth-year senior and an animal science major, said he knew his degree would take longer than four years.

"I knew when I got to A&M that I wouldn't be out of here in four years," Bown said. "I had an idea that I would be pretty involved in extra-curricular activities, plus I changed my major two times. I knew all along that I wouldn't cruise in and out really fast."

Students' perspective on A&M and college life dramatically changes after being in Aggieland for four years.

Roderick Sample, a fifth-year senior electronics major, said he has relaxed since he started college.

"I've learned a lot since I was a freshman," Sample said. "I'm not so worried like I used to be. I used to be so up-tight. Now, I know the ropes — know what to expect."

The school spirit students obtain as undergrads does not fade over the years, Bown said.

He said seeing undergrads gives him a greater sense of Aggie Spirit.

"A lot has to do with attitude," Bown said. "My spirit has grown because of Bonfire, the Corps and Fish Camp. You see how excited the freshmen get and feed off that. If I ever feel burnt out, I see others' spirit, and it brings me back home."

The biggest adjustment to fifth-year life may be for those who were in the Corps of Cadets. After four years of an almost completely structured life, members leave the Corps and adapt to life as a non-reg.

Scott Whitaker, a fifth-year senior wildlife and fisheries sciences major, said

the biggest change since being in the Corps is the amount of free time he has.

"The biggest adjustment by far is the time demands," Whitaker said. "In the Corps, you get up at 5:30 a.m. for formation, go to class and go to formation again at night. Now, I have more time on my hands to do whatever I want. You live on campus for four years, living in a small dorm, then move to a big apartment."

Bown said he was ready to leave the Corps by his fifth year.

"If the Corps was five years long, it would be impossible to do," Bown said. "I'd do it again in a heartbeat, but once you've been in the Corps for four years, you're ready to move on."

With more responsibility as a fifth-year senior, some students find they do not go out nearly as much.

Michael Graff, a seventh-year senior business and management major, said sometimes it is hard to relate to freshmen.

"When I hear a freshman talk about problems and what they're going through, I sometimes can understand," Graff said. "A lot of times, though, I don't relate because of the age difference. I guess I know their experiences because I've been through them, but on a personal level, I have a hard time dealing with them."

Mindy Melching, a fifth-year senior psychology major, said going out all the time has lost its luster over the years.

"I go out a lot less," Melching said. "A lot of my friends have already graduated. It's different with fewer friends left in College Station. The fun of your freshman year is going out all the time. Now, I have a lot more responsibilities."

Melching said she's ready to start over and move into the real world. There are still chances for A&M alumni to interact and have fun outside of Aggieland.

"When you're ready to graduate, you go out in different ways," Melching said.

"Now, I go to Aggie Happy Hour in Dallas. Aggie alumni meet at a bar in Dallas and hang out. I'm still an Aggie at heart, and this is a way to be with other Aggies."

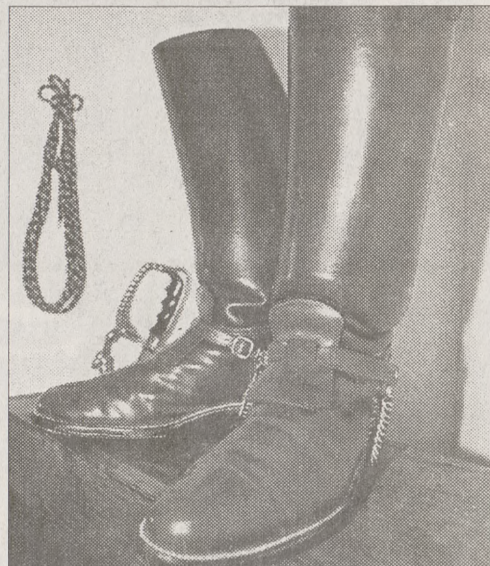
Not all students spent all their college time at A&M. Graff went to three other universities before attending A&M.

He said after going to so many different schools and being in school for so long, he is ready to leave.

"I really do love A&M, but I've been in school long enough," Graff said. "I'm frustrated because it's taken so long to get through it. I'm just ready to get out."

Graff said even though he has been in college for seven years, he is glad he has stuck with it.

"It's worth it to spend this much time to get a degree," Graff said. "I wish it wouldn't have taken so long, but I'm glad I've done it."



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

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