

Top 10 Reasons for Mountain Biking this Winter

10. It's warmer than riding on the road – when you are in the woods, there's little wind. You can ride in the woods when it's as cold as 10 degrees. (See note below about how to dress for winter mountain biking). Plus you aren't going as fast so you aren't generating as much wind chill. You'll be amazed how much you can sweat when it's below freezing. You can still get your endurance ride in even in winter. A 1.5 to 2 hour mountain bike ride is very possible in the dead of winter on a mountain bike. You won't freeze but your water bottle may!

9. You can still ride the trails when the roads are unridable. When there's three inches of snow on the ground and the roads are icy, you wouldn't think of going for a road ride. However, even when there's a few inches of snow on the ground, you can still mountain bike (assuming it's not melting – see note below about trail conditions).

8. Even though you may not have any mountains where you live (we certainly don't in Iowa), you can usually find some great trails to ride. Hilly trails will work just fine, but if not, flat trails are still fun and can give you a great workout. Or, if you don't have any trails or single track, try to find some gravel or dirt roads to ride on. Be sure to wear bright colors as people aren't expecting bikes on gravel roads. These trails and roads give you a nice change of scenery from your road biking.

7. It's great cross-training. You are still riding a bike so you are using the same muscles (legs, heart) and a few new ones, but it's a very different sport. Be sure to have your mountain bike seat in the same position relative to the pedals as your road bike so your body doesn't have to adapt to a different position.

6. It's a great change of pace, especially for your mind. It's such a different activity from grinding away the miles on the road that you won't even realize you are training! It's a great change of pace for your psyche while still getting in a good workout.

5. You can commune with nature. It's does one good to get out in nature and come in contact (sometimes literally) with the trees, squirrels, deer and birds.

4. Improve your bike handling skills. Before long you'll be whizzing through the trees, around tight curves, over fallen logs. The terrain and trail conditions are constantly changing and you'll learn to react quickly to the bike moving around unpredictably under you. Learn to not freak out when your rear tire skids out from under you. These skills will translate over to being a more competent and confident rider on the road.

3. It's one less day you have to ride your indoor trainer!

2. It's a blast! You'll feel like a kid again, outside bombing around on your bike, getting dirty, playing with your friends.

1. You have this urging to go buy a new bike, but you can't justify a new road bike yet. Well, you've now have nine reasons to convince your spouse (and yourself) you need a new mountain bike.

Dressing for winter mountain biking:

Body: Wear layers of clothing. Start with a wicking undershirt that pulls sweat away from your skin. Whatever you do, don't wear a cotton t-shirt. This will get wet and stick to

your skin, then get cold and you will too. Then put on a couple more layers. I usually wear a turtle neck to keep my neck from being exposed. Top it off with a windbreaker material to keep the wind from going through you. A heavy set of tights is all you will need for your legs.

Hands: Depending on the temperate wear light or heavy gloves. When its 35 or warmer, a light set of long-fingered gloves will work (not the finger-less riding gloves!). When its colder, invest in a heavier set of gloves, such as the lobster claw type which keeps sets of two fingers together.

Head/ears: Just a winter headband or a light riding cap that fits over your head and ears is enough on most days. When its gets below 30 degrees, consider a balaclava which covers your entire head/face. These fit nicely under helmets.

Feet: This is what gets coldest first for me. I wear a thin and then a heavier set of socks. When its below 35, I also put charcoal toe warmers in my shoes. These keep my toes from going numb for about 1 ½ hours. Hint – these become deactivated when wet, and your feet will sweat, so I put the plastic sandwich bags over my toes over my socks, which keeps the toe warmers drier a little longer.

Be sure to bring a heavier jacket for putting on when you get finished riding. You will be sweaty and will get cold really fast standing around.

Trail etiquette and conditions: It's important to respect trails and not ride when the conditions are unsuitable. Mainly this means staying off them when they are wet and muddy. Riding them when muddy leaves ruts and causes erosion. Riding trails on mountain bikes in the winter is possible even when there's a few inches of snow and makes it a very different trail riding experience. The trees along the trail and slower riding speed help reduce wind chill compared to riding on the road.

Another reminder, if you come across other riders or hikers on the mountain bike trails, yield to them, please be courteous, slow down and let them by. The last thing we need are people complaining.

Be sure to bring water – it's sure to stay cold. It may even freeze. Also bring a pump and spare tube.