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'World-class' trail system breaks ground in Colorado's San Juan Mountains

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Flagging some of what will be the Bakers Park trail system above Silverton. Silverton Singletrack Society envisions 30 miles in easy reach of town. The project recently broke ground. Photo courtesy Silverton Singletrack Society

Early into Silverton Singletrack Society's life nine years ago, some of the nonprofit founders gazed upon a mountain looming over their backyard party.

That was Boulder Mountain, among the alpine backdrop of the remote town above 9,300 feet in southwest Colorado. Those mountain biking enthusiasts in the backyard envied a mountain facing south to the snow-melting sun — close to town and perfect, they thought, for a trail system unlike any around.

"We've had our eyes on it from the beginning," said Klem Branner, one of those Silverton Singletrack Society founders. "But obviously, you don't get to just go do that kind of thing right out of the gate."

Years of planning, fundraising and relationship-building with the land-owning Bureau of Land Management led to a recent celebration.

Ground has broken on an ambitious trail system called Baker's Park. The name is a nod to Charles Baker, the pioneer who discovered gold in the area in 1860 and put Silverton on the map.



Boulder Mountain in Silverton is the focus of a 30-mile trail system that recently broke ground.

PhotoS courtesy Silverton Singletrack Society

The 30 miles of high-reaching singletrack envisioned are intended to put Silverton on the map for world-class mountain biking.

The goal is, indeed, that, Branner said: “world-class.” And “to fill the gap,” he said.



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By Marco Cummings The Denver Gazette

"What we have in Silverton is either just super-gnarly, where you have to carry your bike uphill, expert-only kind of stuff, or you can just ride around on the roads. But we really don't have any purpose-built mountain bike trails for the average beginner or intermediate type."

The first 10 miles of the system will be blue-rated, he said. The expectation is for International Mountain Bicycling Association's Trail Solutions team to take two summers to build the first phase. The 10 miles will be stacked loops weaving between aspen and conifers.



LEFT: Flagging some of what will be the Bakers Park trail system above Silverton. Silverton Singletrack Society envisions 30 miles in easy reach of town.

The first trails will also be for hiking and running, as will the vast majority of the total 30 miles planned. The blueprint calls for 6 miles to be bike-only.

"There'll be something for everybody in here, from green to full-on downhill, expert stuff," Branner said.

For Class 1 e-bikes, too, as per Bureau of Land Management rules.



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By KELLY HAYES kelly.hayes@gazette.com

"That is something that we as a Singletrack Society were kind of not super-happy about and tried to push back on," Branner said.

He said tensions had eased within the group.

"The motivation with this is, No. 1, for us that live here to enjoy these trails," Branner said. "But it's also for people to come and visit and spend money in town, and some of those people might come from sea level. ... Being able to have a boost, that'll be more for them to enjoy that experience."

The plan got the green light from local government after momentum stalling for many years on such an effort.



Flagging some of what will be the Baker's Park trail system above Silverton. Silverton Singletrack Society envisions 30 miles in easy reach of town.

Photo courtesy of Silverton Singletrack Society

Silverton riders have long sought options other than surrounding roads and steep, historic mule paths. Silverton Singletrack Society has counted fewer than 10 miles of local trails open to mountain bikes.

"It's a small town, only 600 or 700 year-round residents, so the town and county, they just don't have the resources to do these kinds of things," Branner said. "It's just taken someone to take the initiative."

Silverton Singletrack Society has pledged long-term maintenance of the trails, which are also being built thanks to the group's fundraising. A Colorado Parks and Wildlife grant was key to the \$900,000 cost of this first phase.

The entire project is anticipated to run about \$2.5 million. Branner said he hoped organizations and donors would catch on to the momentum — would see what he's seen on Boulder Mountain.

"The view from up there, just from walking around and flagging stuff the last couple of years," he said, "it's gonna be unreal."

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Seth Boster

Features writer