

Official says hiking trails suffer from heavy bike use

6/15/90

By LAURA WOODY
Post-Bulletin Staff Writer

Riders of the rugged mountain bicycle have traditionally pedaled to Quarry Hill for a challenging ride on steep paths. But the Rochester Parks and Recreation Department has taken steps to block them from the trails.

Last Friday signs were posted near the Quarry Hill Nature Center barring bicycles from all dirt trails.

"If you're trying to offer a nice place for people to walk in the woods, but someone flies over the hill hellbent for glory on a mountain bike, it detracts from the experience," said Greg Munson, director of the Quarry Hill Nature Center.

Greg Gall, employee of Rochester Cycling and Fitness and a mountain bike enthusiast, said he and several other riders who are trying to start a club for mountain biking were surprised by the signs.

Quarry Hill is the first choice of area mountain bikers who are looking for a tough ride close to home, Gall said.

"You are on actual off-road conditions, you don't have to deal with traffic, and the trails are seldom used so you don't worry about big crowds," he said. "And there's a lot of technical, challenging riding there. It's not just riding in circles on a trail."

The mountain bicycle was developed in the late 1970s and is designed for riding off-road. The bicycles are so stable and easy to

ride that they have begun to out-sell the traditional 10-speed road bike.

"It's not a fad and I don't see the sport dying soon," Munson said. "If it was a case where they only biked when it was dry, but some of them think the muddier you can get, the better."

Biking on wet ground has churned some stretches of Quarry Hill paths into rutted mudholes that are difficult to cross on foot.

The two problems caused by mountain bikes, are erosion and conflict with other people who use the trails, said Joel Wagar, area trails supervisor for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in Rochester.

"We don't get a lot of complaints about mountain bikes, but we are getting a lot of demand for places to ride," Wagar said. "They are now allowed on forestry land on undesignated trails, and in some state parks on designated trails. It's up to each area manager as to whether he feels it is an appropriate use of trails."

Munson said bikers have been tolerated in Quarry Hill for several years, but their numbers have grown too large to accommodate.

"Four years ago I knew four guys personally who biked the park. I told them they weren't supposed to, but we tolerated it," Munson said. "Now it has gone to 30 to 150 to 500 people who come out here to bike. We thought we better close the can of worms before it got too far because it's not consistent with what we want to

do over here."

With only 212 acres, Munson said, the nature center does not have the space to split part of the park off for use by mountain bikers.

In general, Gall feels most riders are courteous to hikers. "There are certain bad apples out of the whole crew, some people who don't pay attention to what they're doing and don't respect the hikers."

Gall disagrees with Munson's estimate of 500 mountain bikers using the park.

"I've been out there a lot in the last few months and of the 10 to 15 people I bike with, I've only seen another 10 to 15 people," he said. "Maybe 100 to 150 total bikers who use the park would be closer."

Mike Anderson bought his mountain bike a year ago and, with a seven-day work schedule, must squeeze in rides at Quarry Hill in the early morning and evening.

Anderson called Quarry Hill and the parks department to ask why bikes were banned from the trails. "They said they would be willing to reach a compromise with the bikers, but why couldn't they do that before they put the signs up?"

There are methods of riding mountain bikes that minimize their impact on trails, and Anderson said he would support an effort to educate riders on how to use trails and not destroy them, "but to say no one can go in there is going too far."