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Popular Trail Makes Way for Bikers, Skaters and Walkers

By Glen Rosales
For the Journal

Cottonwoods gleaming in yellowish hues. Golden eagles soaring gracefully against a blue-sky backdrop. Polar bears lounging in their home in the Rio Grande Zoo.

These are some of the things that make the 16-mile Paseo del Bosque bike trail a special place and a few of the reasons that Sunset Magazine named it the top urban bicycle path in the West.

Stretching along a paved ribbon from the Alameda parking space at the northern terminus to the loop at the southern end beyond Rio Bravo, the Bosque trail is "a great asset for the city," said frequent rider Brad Haslam.

It's a place where stressed-out city dwellers can leave behind their cares and woes for awhile.

"It's personal," said 55-year-old Don Rupe. "It's not about work. It's not even about fitness. It's about yourself. It's very, very personal. You can empty everything out of your mind."

The trail is the centerpiece of the Rio Grande Valley State Park, which was established in 1983.

In addition to the main bike path, there's a short loop near the Rio Grande Nature Center at Candelaria NW, providing access to the river. And single-track, off-road trails meander through portions of the bosque, some of which was scorched and blackened by a fire in 2003.

It's a bucolic setting amid the hustle and bustle of everyday life, although the portions under I-40 and Central provide a rumbling reality check.

"It's just getting away from congestion," said 60-ish Gail Lambert before she set out on a brisk walk that she takes every couple of weeks. "It's far away from traffic."

In-line skaters and even recumbent bicycle riders can be found cruising along the path.

The entire Haslam family enjoys taking in the wonders that abound along the trail's length.

"My wife rides on it," said Brad Haslam, 48. "Our kids use it for riding and running. My parents use it to walk. Our family uses it just about every day."

Most of the trail north of the interstate is fully exposed, but the southern end is pleasantly shaded. What's more, the south side is usually less traveled and offers glimpses of a different sort of life.

While the trail in the north provides views into the backyards of some of the city's priciest homes, in the south, graffiti mars large diversion channels. At one point in the south, high-power electrical lines tower overhead, with a spooky, audible hum emanating.

The setting is truly pastoral, yet the trail passes near the Bueno Foods plant, with the smell of roasted green chile filling the air.

And that's part of the attraction, Rupe said.

"Usually I'm riding for training," he said. "But I always stop and enjoy things. Sometimes it's the little things. The sunset. The smells of the piñon. Sometimes the sounds of the cranes."

While the path can resemble a two-wheeled autobahn, one of the true joys of the trail is the restriction on motor traffic.

"There's no vehicle traffic," said Larry Stout. "When it's kind of clear, it makes you want to go fast."

The 56-year-old Stout said he uses the trail several times a week, usually with a

group of friends.

"It's beautiful," Stout said. "Two or three of us try to get together as often as we can. It's more fun that way."

Of course, the trail is not just for bicyclists.

Sabrina Aragon gets together with friends to run the trail at least two times a week.

"There's no cars, no traffic," she said. "I like that. But there's lots of other people. There's other runners and bikers. It's safe."

That safety factor is important, Haslam said.

"We have two teenage daughters, and we feel real comfortable letting them come down here by themselves," he said. "We've seen policemen and other people."

It creates, as well, something of a communal feeling among people, Haslam said.

"I think one thing to the credit of the people of Albuquerque that they're willing to help out," he said. "If I have bike trouble or a flat, I can't be stopped more than 10 minutes without somebody stopping and asking if you need help. It says a lot about the people of Albuquerque and the people on the trail."

The trail isn't perfect, however, Rupe said, noting that the only bathrooms on the trail are at the Alameda parking space. And those are not cleaned frequently enough. What's more, the trail simply isn't long enough.

"I wish it went all the way to Belen," he said.

Until money for expansion materializes, however, the users will have to be content with what the trail offers now, a considerable bounty by most accounts.

"I've seen eagles in the wintertime," Haslam said. "I've seen the polar bears in the zoos. There's just a lot of energy from all the different people."

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