

CHECKING IN WITH THE ATHERTONS | GAME CHANGER: CANE CREEK'S ANGLESET HEADSET

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The Story of Max Malco
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BIKE PARKS:

**RAY'S MTB MILWAUKEE,
KERNVILLE, B.C. BIKE PARKS**



Hans Rey & Dave Watson Travel to
JORDAN



SWEET SOUTHERN SIERRA NEVADA SINGLETRACK

Kernville, California has hundreds of miles of trails, a new bike park and lots of recreation

By John Shafer

Located just above Lake Isabella's spillway and 12 miles south of Kernville, the Keyesville OHV recreational area consists of approximately 7,000 acres of BLM-managed land. It is home to the Keyesville Classic race and a web of trails for all types of recreation. Camping is free and over three miles of the lower Kern River Gorge run along the southeast side.





Paul Ferguson and Scotty Link take the Cannell Plunge.

LAST NOVEMBER, ON MY WAY FROM SALT LAKE CITY TO NORCAL, I DETOURED THROUGH KERNVILLE, CALIFORNIA TO GET A LITTLE TASTE OF SOCAL DESERT DIRT AND VISIT THE BIONICON USA HEADQUARTERS TO CHECK THEIR LATEST BIKES. THIS WAS MY THIRD VISIT TO THE AREA. MY FIRST TRIP WAS ABOUT SIX YEARS AGO WHEN THE GUYS AT BIONICON CONNED ME INTO CHECKING OUT THEIR UNIQUE “BACK-COUNTRY” ALL-MOUNTAIN BIKES BY TELLING ME ABOUT THEIR LOCAL SHUTTLE TRAIL — A 26-MILE RIDE WITH CLOSE TO 9,000 FEET OF DOWNHILL. I COULDN’T BELIEVE I’D NEVER HEARD ABOUT IT. HOW COULD I RESIST?

That trail is called the Cannell Plunge, which starts at 9,200 feet in the southern Sierra Nevada mountains, above the quaint mountain town of Kernville, California. Cannell is not your standard mountain bike trail and the mountains surrounding Kernville are big — really big. If you look north from the drop off trailhead you can see 14,505 foot Moun Whitney, the highest peak in the continental U.S. The trail starts out in classic high Sierra terrain — granite sand, big pines and lots of huge, round granite boulders. It drops almost 7,000 feet through at least four distinct climatic zones — rocky high alpine, mid-alpine meadows, oak-forested foothills and then classic Southern California desert. There’s a 2,300-foot climb in the middle of the ride so you end up with nearly 9,000 feet of total descent. The final eight miles of the trail drop 5,000 feet through yucca and sage on fast, exposed singletrack littered with sandstone slabs and steep, rocky switchbacks. The trail ends just outside of town at an elevation of about 2,500 feet, and handily near the Kern River Brewing Company, a great place to end a big ride.

That first trip to Kernville was an eye — opener and I’ve been back a couple times since, learning a little more with each visit. Cannell Trail is the obvious reason to visit but it’s really just scratching the surface. In the middle of winter while most of Cannel is buried under a few feet of snow, the desert

and foothills around Kernville have miles of rideable desert trails, from mellow beginner cruisers to steep, rocky, technical rippers. In the spring, Kernville hosts one of the longest-running fat tire festivals in North America, the Keyesville Classic. It’s also a hub for all kinds of outdoor activities, including fishing, hiking and boating on Lake Isabella not to mention the Kern River is a world-class rafting and kayaking destination. Last but not least, Kernville has a brand new bike park.

BIKE PARK

There’s a bike park movement in the U.S. and Kernville is part of it. The Kernville Bike Park opened last August on seven acres of city property within walking distance of the town center. Unsanctioned bike parks are usually just a few huge dirt jumps. They aren’t necessarily safe or well-maintained and they only cater to experienced dirt jumpers. Like a lot of new publicly funded bike parks, Kernville’s Bike Park is a whole lot more. It has a 950-foot ABA-sanctioned BMX track that is considered one of the best on the West Coast. It has a monster pumptrack (approximately 500 feet long) with an eight-foot wall ride that’s 60 feet long. The coolest part of the park, for me anyway, is the crazy “skills” section they’ve built out of local boulders, logs and ladders. The park has something for everyone and to my eye it’s a work of art.



I visited the bike park on a Sunday and there were people using all parts of the park. If you've ever been to local BMX races you know what a family scene it is. Kernville Bike Park is no different. There were riders on the BMX track and the pumptrack, there were mountain bikers on the ladders in the skills area and little kids on bikes were all over the place. Local ripper Scotty Link came with me and tore it up for the camera. My favorite parts of the park are the big wall ride and the skills section feature they call The Schlog (schlong + log).

The Kernville Bike Park is just getting started. Only half of the seven acres the city provided have been used so there's plenty of room to grow. One of the next things they want to do is build a beginner-friendly singletrack course through the whole park. It would be built so even your mom can have fun on it with extra-credit tech bits off to the side for more experienced riders. Not only would this be good for all levels of riders, but it would also be great for night races and cyclocross races, making the bike park even more valuable.

SIERRA SINGLETRACK

Kernville runs the full gamut as far as trails go. The epic 26-mile Cannell Plunge shuttle trail first lured me to the area and it's the main draw for most riders. It's seriously one of the best trails I've ridden in my life – right up there with the best of Downieville in NorCal, Porcupine Rim in Moab and San Juan Trail in Orange County. Kernville excels at long, shuttleable all-mountain rides for experienced riders. But there are super technical trails for the huckers and downhill racers as well as tamer stuff for more casual mountain bikers. Less experienced riders should check out the trails around the Keyesville area just south of Kernville. It's where the annual Keyesville Classic fat tire festival is held every spring (more on that later), it has free camping and there's everything from mellow fire road putt-putt rides to big chucker lines. Keyesville is also where you start the Kern Canyon Trail, a beginner to intermediate singletrack that follows the Kern River 25 miles down the canyon towards Bakersfield.



Scotty Link aims for a new high mark on the Kernville Bike Park wall ride.



Kernville

On my most recent visit, this past November, my buddy Paul Ferguson of Bionicon USA took me on a raw slice of new trail called “AGTO” (A Good Time Out). AGTO is a fresh offshoot of the well-established Just Outstanding to Dutch Flat trail network, which begins at Alta Sierra Ski Resort at an elevation of about 7,000 feet and descends to the Keyesville area next to where the Kern River comes out of the Lake Isabella reservoir. I’d ridden Just Outstanding on my first visit to Kernville and it was just as fun as I remembered – sandy singletrack through pines at the top followed by steep manzanita tunnels, oaks and grassy meadows. From there we rode a steep, rutted sandy trail with lots of exposed granite and a few drops and some Moab-style slickrock rollers. The trail ended on the shore of Lake Isabella where we’d left a car. Work in an 800-foot mellow fire road climb in the middle and that ride was about 5,000 feet of descending in something like 17 miles. And that’s just one trail option you can choose if you ride from Alta Sierra

Ski Resort. Between the trails and jeep roads, the Kernville area has hundreds of miles of rideable terrain for mountain bikers and they’re actively working on building and developing more.

KEYESVILLE CLASSIC

Two-thousand-eleven will be the 23rd continuous year for the Keyesville Classic. It’s a three-day event that always happens in March with a cross-country race, short track, kids race, a downhill and the Bionicon All-Mountain Stage Race, where riders race the downhill, cross-country and short track events on the same bike. It’s a great way for racers to get some pre-Sea Otter race practice in. Keyesville is next to the Kern River at the bottom of the Dutch Flat trail, a few miles south of Kernville. It’s got free camping and the festival adds free live music and lots of racers and spectators to drink beer and share smores with. Even if you aren’t interested in racing, the spring riding is great and Keyesville should be covered in wildflowers.



Paul Ferguson enjoys some slabby goodness on AGTO.

It’s trails and views like this that make the Kernville area a worthy destination. There are at least five routes that drop over 5,000 feet that you can shuttle including the Cannell Plunge shown here with a great view of Lake Isabella.



singletrack



Bionicon's Paul Ferguson.

BIONICON BIKES & RIDE KRV BIKE SHOP

Bionicon bikes are what got me to Kernville so it's only fair to give them some props. Paul Ferguson, president of Bionicon USA grew up in Ridgecrest, California about an hour east of Kernville. After traveling the world as a pro big mountain snowboarder, he came home to Ridgecrest with a German bike called Bionicon, planning to establish a base for Bionicon bikes in the U.S. A little over a year ago he moved up near Kernville to open a bike shop and Bionicon demo center. Tragically, within a few months the new shop burned to the ground. But sometimes blessings come in disguise. After the fire an opportunity for a shop and guest house right in the middle of Kernville presented itself. The new shop, Ride KRV, is a few hundred feet from the Kern River, and within walking distance of the Kern River Brewing Company. Above the shop, the guest house has a full kitchen and sleeps eight. Ride KRV is also the headquarters for Bionicon USA with Bionicon demo bikes available for free. Yeah, you read that right – free demos. And with their adjustable suspension and angles, Bionicon “back-country” mountain bikes are perfect for the real mountain terrain in the Kernville area.

WRAP UP

Kernville is probably one of the best mountain bike destinations you've never heard of. That's especially true if you live in California because it's right under your nose. It has good riding all year and it's within six hours of the Bay Area, three hours from Los Angeles, and five hours from San Diego and Las Vegas. It may not be a big name destination yet but if Paul Ferguson has his way, Kernville will soon be listed alongside other world class North American mountain bike destinations like Fruita, Hood River, Downieville, Vancouver and Moab.

Do yourself a favor and let this article con you into a trip to Kernville – just like the Bionicon guys hustled me into riding their fine bikes by telling me about the Cannell Plunge trail. It took me a little while to get used to the Bionicon bike but now I'm hooked – I've been on a Bionicon ever since that first ride. The Kernville trails, on the other hand – that was love at first site. Next time you've got a hankering for a big mountain bike trip make sure Kernville and the Cannell Plunge are on your list. 📍

*For info on the Kernville area and Bionicon bikes, check in with Ride KRV Bike Shop at ridekrv.com
For more information on the Kernville Bike Park go to kvbikepark.com*



Scotty Link enjoys some air time on the Cannell Plunge.



The Ride KRV bike shop, complete with an upstairs guest room.

