

Off-Season On The Trails

BY JOAN SCRIVANICH

The off-season is the time to add variety to your training by participating in different sports, for example cross country skiing or snow shoeing. This is for both the mental break and for the physical variety so that you start next season fresh and raring to go without any decrease in conditioning and a lower risk of injury. It's also the time when you can focus on your weaknesses and include more strength training into your program. But does that mean you should avoid swimming, cycling & running? Not at all!

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Now is the perfect time to do some trail running and mountain biking, especially if you're the type of athlete that always runs or bikes on the road. Both off-road versions help strengthen those stabilizing muscles that we don't use as much while pounding the pavement. Going off-road forces our bodies to work a little differently because of uneven surfaces, thus strengthening the muscles that we don't use while on even surfaces and moving only in a linear direction.

So, what other improvements will you notice? Mountain biking helps improve your handling skills and confidence, which will make cycling on the roads so much easier. Running on trails is softer than running on sidewalks so it won't beat your legs up as much, which means you'll have a quicker recovery post-run.

Trails come in all sorts of varieties; from green open spaces to technical single track in the mountains. So don't be intimidated when starting out. There's a trail out there that you'll be comfortable with. But before heading out into the trails, there are a few things you should know.



BONUS: TAKE YOUR TRAINING OFF-ROAD

Trail Blaze Symbols

Get a map of the trails you'll be on and keep it on you. Plan out your route and become familiar with the trail blaze symbols of the park you'll be visiting.

Below are common trail blazes that you should be familiar with when using trails. You'll find them nailed or painted to trees or rocks and color coded based on the trails you're on indicating which way a particular trail turns.

CONTINUE STRAIGHT 	START OF TRAIL 	RIGHT TURN 
SPUR LEADING TO A DIFFERENT TRAIL 	END OF TRAIL 	LEFT TURN 

Trail Etiquette

Minimizing our impact on trails and preventing erosion or damage to the surrounding vegetation helps keep these resources around longer for our enjoyment. So keep these in mind:

- No littering.
- Stay on the trails.
- Stay in the middle of the trails.
- Don't run on closed trails.
- Do not disturb wildlife or plants.
- If you're running with others, keep the group small. Large groups (in some parks that's 10 or more people) have a negative impact on the ecology.

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Trail Running & Cycling Tips

Keep it fun by following these tips:

- Trail running shoes aren't necessary on easy trails, but will help by giving you more grip and traction.
- Trails require a mountain bike for more traction and shock absorption.
- Go by time, not miles. Trails will take longer than running & cycling on roads.
- Run or ride with a buddy.
- Let someone else know where you will be & when you will return.
- Stay relaxed. Nervousness leads to a stiff body and will prevent you from running & cycling well and staying upright.
- Look ahead, not straight down, so you can plan your next move and expect an upcoming obstacle.
- It's OK to walk... Really, it is.
- Know what to do when coming across different types of wildlife.
- Bring a map, water & nutrition. Even if you're only planning a short run or ride, it could take longer than expected.
- Try to avoid scaring other people on the trail, call out when approaching from behind.
- Show respect & be friendly.
- And don't forget to have fun!!

ABOUT JOAN

Joan Scrivanich is a USA Triathlon and USA Track & Field Certified Coach as well as a Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist. She holds a Master Degree in Exercise Physiology from Columbia University and has been an endurance athlete for over 20 years.

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