

Handbook for Ride Guides 2018



New England Mountain Bike Association
Greater Boston Chapter

Welcome Ride Guides!

Thank you for volunteering to become a NEMBA Ride Guide! It is probably one of the most important (and certainly the most visible) volunteer roles in GB NEMBA. For new riders who show up for their first ride, you will represent both NEMBA and the community of mountain bikers, in general. Many of us remember our first GB NEMBA weeknight ride (for some, a first taste of real technical riding), where the patience, encouragement and support of the Ride Guides gave us the confidence and motivation to keep showing up to group rides. Certainly, there is a commitment of time and sometimes a sacrifice of your own training needs, but every ride guide would tell you that the rewards are both innumerable and immeasurable.

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1. History

NEMBA

NEMBA was born in October of 1987 when Heidi Davis and Mark Abrams attended a public hearing at the old Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) regarding mountain bike use on MDC land. During the course of that meeting, Heidi announced that she represented the New England Mountain Bike Association. Since then NEMBA has grown to 23 regional chapters and nearly 5000 members. We dedicate ourselves to taking care of the places that we ride, preserving open space, and educating the mountain bike community about the importance of responsible riding. The Greater Boston Chapter is proud to be the place where it all began.

Greater Boston Chapter

Our chapter has a mission of promoting and preserving mountain bike access to the trails in the Greater Boston area. We do this by hosting fun riding events, helping to maintain the trails, training new riders and acting as advocates for the mountain bike community with local land managers and government authorities.

The geographic boundaries between NEMBA chapters are intentionally fuzzy. Each chapter is responsible for preserving access to, maintaining and promoting events in, the parks in their area. Chapters often collaborate on programs and events.

Greater Boston NEMBA is responsible for:

- Middlesex Fells - Stoneham, Medford, Winchester, Melrose, Malden
- Various Town Conservation Lands - Belmont, Waltham, Lexington, Bedford, Burlington, Melrose, Weston.

Ride Guide Program

Initial Motivation - In the past, a significant number of Mountain Bike Riders we're perceived to be not heeding riding rules in the Fells; occasional rider conflicts with other trail users would arise and when confronted, the MTB riders cite ignorance of the rules and issues. Postings at kiosks and on websites were not doing enough to inform the MTB community of the rules that apply to riding in the Fells. We wanted to extend our reach to include as many of Mountain bikers riding in the Fells as possible; thus, we started running two ride series: a skills ride with trained ride guides on Wednesday nights and a social ride on Thursday nights. Today, GBNEMBA still holds the skills series rides at the Fells on Wednesday nights, and Thursday nights, both in the Fells or in Landlocked Forest. On average, 1520 riders show up to each ride series. Thus, we continue to educate new (and returning) riders to the issues and rules concerning riding in the Fells.

Guides

Ride guides are mountain bikers who love to ride, love their home parks, and also love to lead rides to show their home parks off. Their guidance to fellow riders helps to teach viable routes around the parks and also provides a communication link between riders, GB NEMBA and land managers.

Objectives

- Increase awareness of the issues present within the Fells (and other local parks)
- Increase awareness of mountain biking rules (general and park specific), and the dangers (to the park and to the sport) if the rules are not followed.
- Influence mountain bikers to ride responsibly and safely.
- Draw new riders to the sport
- Draw new members to NEMBA

2. GB NEMBA Weeknight Ride Series Program

Traditionally there have been two types of GB NEMBA evening rides, The PYT (Practice Your Technique) Rides, traditionally held on Monday nights, and the Social rides, traditionally held on Wednesday and Thursday nights:

"Practice Your Technique" (PYT) Rides.

The PYT ride are marketed to all riders who want to learn new techniques or polish old skills. The two groups will meet separately - advanced at Landlocked Forest, and Novice at Belmont. The newer rider is someone we especially want to learn the trail management skills and be educated to the right way of enjoying a trail: low impact/leave no trace.

PYT type ride is loosely instructional no particular curriculum, but will be led by a "very experience rider" who will:

- Educate anyone who shows up the riding rules in the Fells and make them aware of the conflicts, issues and challenges riders face.
- Lead the ride an appropriate distance based on the skills to be practiced and abilities of the group, returning before dark.
- Stop at various offroad problems/obstacles to let riders practice (session) conquering the obstacles while offering instruction, coaching, support, and possible spotting.
- Upon completing the ride will cross-sell the social rides, the next PYT ride, and whatever Trail Maintenance event is coming up and the value of NEMBA membership.

Social Rides

The Social ride is marketed to all riders who currently ride in Greater Boston. These rides are especially helpful for newer riders but are open to all abilities. The newer rider is someone we especially want to influence early on in their riding career and to educate them to the right way of enjoying a trail: low impact/leave no trace. It is important to engage the the experienced rider to align NEMBA riding values.

The objective of this ride is to:

- Greet and educate all riders to the riding rules in the Fells (or whatever location the ride is happening in) and make them aware of the conflicts, issues and challenges that riders and all trail users face.
- Depending upon the number of riders that show up, have 3 or more ride leaders who will take small groups of varying skill and fitness levels out for as much riding as can be done before dark on legal trails.
- Upon completing the ride, cross-sell the future Social rides, the future PYT rides, and whatever Trail Maintenance or other events are coming up.
- Remind riders about the value of NEMBA membership!

Ride Guides are also needed at special events such as:

- MBAS events
- Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day.
- Ad hoc series of MTB 101 skills rides
- Monthly kids rides. The kids rides require special training and background check. If interested in helping with those, please inquire with the program coordinator.

3. Ride Guide Program Mission and Parameters

Mission

Ride Guides will lead and educate the general Mountain Biking Community about the rules, regulations and best practices of riding in the specific location the ride is taking place. Ride Guides and Instructors are the backbone of the program; we are not intended to be enforcers or watchdogs, but rather Mountain Biking ambassadors. Our contribution to the Fells, the DCR, the rest of the park's community, the sport and to NEMBA, has had a huge impact on mountain biking in the region, and is greatly appreciated by all.

Goals

1. Educate MTB Trail users on issues involved in riding at the Fells and other locations.
2. Educate MTB Trail users on responsible riding habits.
3. Provide a positive user experience for MTB Trail users and other trail users

encountered in the park.

4. Promote further involvement in NEMBA activities to the MTB Trail users, such as membership and trail maintenance.
5. Provide our valued LBS's (Local Bike Shops) with a way to give back to the MTB community while gaining much needed visibility. (should clarify this)
6. Provide a safe, secure and comfortable entree to the world of mountain biking specifically for novice riders..
7. Give MTB riders an opportunity to learn new skills or polish old skills in a safe, secure and comfortable setting.
8. Enable us to show an increase in women riders in the Fells to soften the image of the "typical mountain biker".

Commitment and Structure

The commitment we are asking each Ride Guide is to lead (or sweep) 1 group of approximately 6 riders on Mondays, Wednesdays and/or Thursdays or from April 17th through October 1st. We attempt to schedule the ride leaders a month or 2 in advance for all rides.

Ride Start

Generally, on weeknight Fells rides, riders should meet at 6:00pm in the Marjam parking lot in Stoneham for a pre-ride meeting, and LLF rides similarly meet at 6:00pm in the Estbrook School parking lot in Bedford for a pre-ride meeting, but the actual rides usually starts at about 6:15ish. At the trail head each evening there will be a brief meeting of all leaders and riders that the Ride Guide coordinator (ride organizer) or another GBNEMBA Board Member will address with prepared remarks thanking everyone for their participation and giving an overview of the issues, rules and goals for improving the park and the riding within. We will require all participants to sign in for insurance purposes. We capture their emails at the same time, which will give us quantifiable data about usage. NEMBA does not share it's mailing list with any vendors at any time for any reason. We end all rides at sundown.

Group size

Even if sponsored and permitted by the DCR to ride in larger groups, we try to keep the Ride Guide to rider ratio to be less than 1:10. Thus, we generally try to have additional overflow or backup ride leaders available to split the group further into safe and manageable numbers.

Sweep

In addition to a Ride leader for each group there will be a "sweeper" who will be a strong

rider able to deal with small problems, keep the group together, and keep the leader informed of progress and issues during the ride. (If necessary the sweeper can split off and take a slower or faster part of the group or return to the parking lot with injured or mechanically impaired riders). It is a good idea to start cultivating sweepers right away and then train them to be Ride Leaders.

Second Rider Drop

One great technique to make sure Ride Guides bring back all the riders they took out is the "2nd Person Drop." With many thanks and kudos to our friends at VORBA (Vineyard Off Road Bicycle Association), we have adopted and adapted this great technique: at each intersection or trail split the rider directly behind the leader stops and directs all subsequent riders through the intersection or split and ensures that everyone makes it through by waiting until the sweeper arrives and gives the "OK to go ahead." No rider may ride behind the sweeper. All waiting riders must continue to wait until they are released by the sweeper. If there is an injury or mechanical issue, the sweeper will ask the last waiting rider to ride up to the leader and explain the issue. The leader should plan to make stops at regular intervals to allow for regrouping.

Benefit of Trained (assigned) Ride Guides

The Social ride is usually fine with getting on-the-spot ride leaders as there are regulars who can and will usually volunteer or don't mind being drafted. The drawback is that they won't be oriented as we are and won't be able to educate the MTB community as we do. Ideally, the novice PYT at Belmont, or mellow group on the Thursday night ride has been assigned a special ride leader for the entire season. This is the most important group because if they have a good experience they are "hooked" which means we can get them to come out for trail maintenance days and will become members we can continue to communicate with. Also, this group most needs to be shown where the legal riding is and how to ride with as little impact on the trails as possible.

Benefit of Structure

NEMBA will provide support in the form of information about the park and past issues, route maps, indoctrination to responsible and permissible riding practices, training on ride leader best practices, safety reminders, emergency procedures, and assistance in selection of sweepers or occasional fill-ins. This is a great deal more structure than usual for an evening of exercise and camaraderie. The benefit is that the more novice riders will feel vastly more secure with the structure and perceived professionalism and will return to future rides and likely bring friends along or tell people who ride the Fells about the program and they will come to subsequent rides. We are informing the ride

leaders of the following so they know why it is important:

- The riders (especially newbies) will appreciate the organization and professionalism and will continue to return because of it.
- We have specific educational goals for the program and need to utilize every opportunity to promote them.
- Preparation will make every ride go smoother and decrease stress for the leaders, the instructors, the organizers, the land managers and also the riders everyone gets to enjoy the rides.
- Structure shows the land managers and the insurance company that we are responsible.

Cancellations

If a Ride Guide or instructor is unable to make it to his or her scheduled ride, they will give us as much advance notice as possible so we can adjust ride leader assignments. If we have to cancel a ride due to weather, the Ride Organizer will make the decision and will post the cancellation as early as possible on BOTH Facebook pages as early as possible, but no later than 4PM day of ride.

Trainings

Besides the initial Ride Guide training/indoctrination in April, we may be able to schedule interim training for refreshers or newly drafted Ride Guides and various times during the year as demand dictates. They will be 1 day sessions and will be required to lead certain groups in this program.

GB NEMBA Board of Directors Support

GB NEMBA Board Members will ride with all of the groups for the first couple weeks to be sure of compliance, help get bearings, help learn the routes and further reinforce the techniques we use to have a successful ride.

Incentive

The incentive to ride responsibly in the Fells or any other park, for that matter, should be a sense of goodness, decency, and a regard for the wellbeing of the park. In this case, however, some MTB riders still feel the rules are unfair and unequally enforced and therefore choose to ignore some or all of them. NEMBA has been working with park officials for many years now to mitigate the image of MTB riders as scofflaws and instead to prove that the majority of riders are responsible, but that there are still a number of uninformed riders that need to be informed and that there is a small percentage of scofflaws that we simply cannot reach. Therefore, the incentive for MTB riders in the Fells to ride responsibly is actually to regain respect from the park

management and other trail users groups so that we can justify keeping the level of access the MTB community currently has, and possibly gain additional legal access to trails we prefer to ride.

4. Outreach

Promotion

The GBNEMBA website should have all the detailed information about the ride series posted on it. It is www.gbnemba.org. The ride schedule will be posted there and Facebook along with all our other events such as the Trail Maintenance series (to which we will cross-sell at the preride meeting). We will also list these rides in our printed monthly newsletter, "Singletracks". Remember, we are not intending to draw new riders to these parks, although that may happen. We estimate there are approximately 2000 mountain bikers who ride in The Fells each year, and somewhat less but also substantial number in LLF. Some ride many times per year and many ride only once per year. This program is intended to directly and indirectly contact and channel as many of those riders through our awareness, indoctrination, and education campaign as possible.

Cross-sell

Besides education of riders during the preride meeting and the ride itself, we will have the opportunity to talk to the riders about the various positive impact programs NEMBA, the DCR and even the Friends of the Fells, have put together for the public.

Trail Maintenance Series

Our first priority will be to promote the GBNEMBA Trail Maintenance Series. This trail maintenance series is planned each year to give much needed maintenance support to the DCR. It gives us the opportunity to give back to the trails we love and sometime love a little too much. Please stress to the riders you influence that it is most helpful if each rider can put in at least one day per season. If a rider wants to get more involved, we have a program for training Trail Crew Leaders in the art of trail design and volunteer crew leadership.

Membership

The next priority is to promote membership in NEMBA. A NEMBA membership has 3 positive impacts. The first is that we are able to communicate more frequently with a member about various issues and action alerts that may affect their local riding spots. The next is that we can count a NEMBA member as someone we represent – to a land manager this is important, as they want to know how many constituents we represent to them. The last is that we are able to use the membership dues and combined

fundraising proceeds to pay for materials that are put back into the trails and programs that help keep those trails open and enjoyable for all.

DCR Programs

The DCR has a large number of Fells programs including nature interpretation, boating, service opportunities that they would like the public to engage in. They also have programs for Children (No Child Left Inside) to get out and enjoy nature and healthy recreation promoting fitness. We help promote these programs with a frequent shout-out.

Fells Mountain Bicycling Brochure

The brochure is a legacy handout (probably needs a current revision) that briefly describes the park and the general and MTB specific regulations, as well as best riding practices. On the backside is a smallscale map that shows permissible riding trails: both singletrack and fireroads. It would be great to print out a few and carry this brochure with us to give to riders at the trailhead and out on the trails. It should also be available at the kiosks at most parking areas and in the Botume House Visitor Center.

Facebook Pages

Currently, the most effective method of outreach are the NEMBA and chapter Facebook pages - GBNEMBA and GBNEMBA Rides. They have made it easy to coordinate events, recruit volunteers, welcome new members and disseminate park and organization specific information.

5. Rules, Regulations, and Best Practices

Ride Guide must be aware of the rules and regulations for the parks in which they ride.

Mountain Bicyclist's Guide to Responsible Riding

This is the message we need to convey to the MTB riding community... Your mountain bike will bring you a great deal of fun and adventure. Woodlands, meadows, rolling hills, woods roads, single and doubletracks; some of these experiences are as close as our local state forests, parks and reservations. Be aware that not all properties are open to mountain biking, but in those that are, remember that you'll be sharing these lands with hikers, runners, equestrians and nature lovers.

It is our responsibility to insure that our use of the trails does not spoil that of other trail users, or spoil the trails themselves. The actions of a few individuals often speak for a whole group, and mountain bikes are no exception. We ALL must engage in a public relations and education effort to counter and eliminate any negative image which can

cause us to be excluded from using public lands. It is quite possible to have fun and be responsible at the same time (without much effort!). Remember that the future of the sport is in YOUR hands. Your cooperation today determines the future of mountain biking in the Fells. Please help us protect this Reservation while enjoying this splendid Resource.

All Encounters Should be Positive

Remember we are the relatively new folks in the woods. We must go out of our way to make a good impression on everyone we meet. Showing off, doing stunts, or riding fast can tarnish that good impression quickly. Your finely honed riding skills can look dangerous, crazy and irresponsible to everyone else.

When Encountering Hikers

Hikers have the right of way, so slow down, stop or pull to the side of the trail. Remember that they are there for a quiet, peaceful experience, so say "HI", be friendly. When approaching from the rear, slow to their speed, and let them know you're there (before you're right behind them). You cannot imagine how much of a shock it can be to meet up with or be passed by a quiet, swift bicycle. Expect that children or dogs will walk right in front of you as you pass. They are curious.

When Encountering Equestrians

Being surprised by bicycles can be a frightening, unpleasant, and dangerous experience for some equestrians. Give both the horse and the rider a chance to get used to meeting bicycles in the woods. A horse's instinct is to run when confronted with the unfamiliar. Never assume that an equestrian is aware of your presence or in control of the horse. If approaching from the front, ALWAYS stop and let them pass unless the rider indicates otherwise. If from the rear, slow to their speed, and from 50 to 100 feet away, ask if it safe to pass slowly or walk your bike around them. Say "HI", be friendly, admire the horses. The spoken word is the first indication to the horse that you are a person and not a threat.

Slow Down

Excessive speed is the single most common complaint that other trail users have about us. Slow down if you don't have absolutely unrestricted vision of the trail ahead. Assume that someone else is just out of sight, and be prepared to stop (in control) when you turn the corner. The most important and most difficult thing to remember when riding with your buddies is to save racing for organized races when you know that you'll be the only one involved in a crash. Speed training can be done on the road.

Ride in Small Groups

Whenever possible keep groups smaller than five, for the impression you make is magnified by the group's size. As an individual you should go out of your way to insure that your use of the trails will not spoil the outdoor experience of others. Make sure that everyone in your group feels that way and is willing to comport themselves in a civilized manner. Be sure that socializing while riding doesn't detract attention from the trail ahead. Trade off being "point person", riding ahead of the group to scout out who and what is around the corner.

Ride "Softly"

The most objectionable sign of our presence is a degraded trail. Conservationists love to point to bicycle ruts and use them as a reason or justification for banning use from suitable riding areas, so never ride when and where you will leave ruts. This means carrying your bike across soft spots and walking around mud puddles so you don't widen them. This means not riding on rainy days, especially during the spring mud season. It is tempting to get out on that first beautiful spring day, but this is a time in New England when the trails are fragile. Some trails are especially soft and wet when thawing. Damage can be done this time of year, and can take a lot of time to repair.

Don't hesitate to walk or carry your bike in technical or muddy sections. Learn cyclocross dismounts, mounts and carrying techniques if you are concerned with efficiency. Carry your bike through streams. The silt stirred up can smother water critters and their eggs. The cross-ruts can also divert the stream to create a puddle.

Be careful to not widen trails by riding over vegetation alongside the trail. Stay in the middle of the trail, and don't be too concerned about avoiding rocks. Your mountain bike is designed to go over rough terrain, and sometimes the "line" over rocks is the easier one. Keeping your weight on the saddle or over the rear wheel helps lighten the front of the bike so it will roll over rocks more easily, and with a strategic pull on the handlebars, larger rocks won't be an obstacle.

Don't skid. Don't brake slide. Locking up the brakes is not only an inefficient way to ride, but can degrade hills by forming gullies that water funnels down, can rut sensitive trails, and always indicates a lack of control to others. Modulating brakes both front and back will prevent skidding and increase control. Slow, even pedal strokes prevent "spinning-out" up hills (which can cause ruts), as well as increasing the chance that you'll make it over the top. Finesse is often more successful than brute strength. Don't be embarrassed to walk or run your bike up or down steep hills.

Keep in mind that a lot of work goes into building and maintaining trails including the work of other advocacy groups. Go easy on bridges and stone or wood steps. Respect waterbars, which are logs or piles of dirt or rocks placed across trails to prevent erosion. Ride them in such a way that you will not degrade them. This can be done by riding perpendicular to the bar, lifting first the front wheel, then the rear wheel over them. The key to lifting the front wheel is to shift weight back, then shift forward as the rear wheel touches the obstacle.

Leave No Trace

Ride only on existing trails. Never create new trails including short cuts, braids and "turnouts" around fallen logs, water bars, and muddy areas. Ride over the technical feature on the trail. Ride through puddles rather than around them. If you can't ride it, then get off and walk it. Avoid soft and wet trails. When slowing, modulate brakes - both front and back - to prevent skidding and rutting of trails.

Riding Habits for All Times

- Never take shortcuts or cut corners on tight turns or switchbacks.
- Ride only on existing trails, don't make new ones, including workarounds around puddles and fallen logs.
- Ride through the CENTER of puddles so as not to widen or braid a trail.
- Respect private property.
- Respect Nordic ski tracks by staying off of snow covered cross-county ski trails.
- Never litter. Try to pack out more than you bring in.
- Learn to fix a flat, repair a chain, etc. and carry tools that you will need to get yourself out of the woods.
- Wear a helmet.

Get Involved

Make some new friends get to know the staff in the public land areas in which you ride. Help them manage the area by informing them of fallen trees, large litter sites or illicit behavior. Volunteer for trail maintenance or cleanup days. A day or two a year is a small price to pay for the privilege of riding in the woods. Showing land managers that you are willing to give something back to the land that you use makes a huge impression. When they know they can count on us for assistance, policy makers are likely to decide in our favor.

So, happy trails! but remember, the future of mountain biking is in YOUR hands.

7. Conflicts and Issues

Conflicts

There have been conflicts over the years between MTB riders and other park users. Things have been improving, but only because a small group of riders have been campaigning to show MTB riders as responsible and positive. We are going to try to spread that image even further with this program. For example, if you are accosted by anti-bike trail users of any kind, the main thing to remember is to remain friendly and keep the encounter as brief as possible. They may try to tell you that bikes don't belong on that particular trail or for that matter anywhere in the park. It does not help the situation in the moment or in the grand scheme of things to argue legalities or rights. It is best to disengage immediately and report the incident. Simply thank them for the information, wish them "happy trails" and tell them you will be on your way.

Please note as many details about the incident as possible and email them to the Chapter President as soon as you can, and he/she will pass it on to the land manager.

If you have an encounter with off leash dogs, slow down or stop riding and wait for the owner to control the dogs before proceeding. It is best to communicate with the owner while waiting for the dog to become accustomed to the presence of riders.

If there is a serious issue, call the Rangers dispatch number immediately (see list in Resources).

If you have an encounter with anyone behaving in an illicit or offensive manner, continue riding and do not engage in any way. Please note as many details about the incident as possible and email them to the Chapter President as soon as you can, and he/she will pass it on to the land manager.

If you have an encounter with an MTB rider coming off of or turning on to a nonpermissible trail, you may want to greet them and query if they understand the trail is out-of-bounds for bikes. If non-confrontational, you may further explain that you, as a concerned fellow cyclist, are just letting them know that they are riding out-of-bounds, and that further such riding isn't helping to open new permissible singletrack to the entire community.

Remember, we are not there to enforce park rules. We are simply helping to educate as many riders as possible and hope that their common sense will prevail.

Issues

There may be other issues in the parks that the land managers should know about such as dangerous conditions, facilities in disrepair, downed trees, flooding, etc. Please report any such issues observed via email with as much detail as possible to the Ride Guide Coordinator or Chapter President who will pass the information on to the land manager.

If you have a medical emergency: CALL 911 and give them as precise a location as possible. Then call the Ranger Dispatch (see next section) and do the same.

8. Resources

Resource Contact or Link

GB NEMBA BOD Google Group gbnemba_bod@googlegroups.com

GB NEMBA Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/gbnemba/>

GB NEMBA Website <http://www.gbnemba.org/>

GB NEMBA Ride Guide Coordinator:

GB NEMBA Ride Guides Google Group gb_rideguides@googlegroups.com

GB NEMBA Rides Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/gb.rides/>

Middlesex Fells Official site (dcr) <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/metroboston/fells.htm>

Middlesex Fells Map <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/trails/fells.pdf>

MA DCR Ranger Dispatch Emergency 617.727.1199 or 617.722.1188