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Slate Valley Trail maps first step for Poultney group

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STAFF WRITER

POULTNEY — Gravel road bikers and hikers now have a new resource for finding trails with the Slate Valley Trails, a nonprofit organization based in Poultney.

The organization, which began in August, launched their website www.slatevalleytrails.org early this November.

"Our mission is to build, maintain and promote trails that are both foot and bicycle trails in the slate valley of Vermont," said Chuck Helfer, board president.

Although gravel road biking has finished for the season, Helfer and the group are preparing for next year.

The organization posted on its Facebook page an overview of the map and a note about what is yet to come.

"The gravel road network is laid out! What remains is the production of maps and cue sheets which will be ready by springtime," the post read.

Helfer said the trails range from 9 to 50 miles. On the Gravel Ride Network, the 14 different routes have names like Cheater's Hill and Climber's Delight and begin and end at the Poultney trailhead on the D & H rail trail at Main and Depot Streets.

"In the past few years there has been a regrowth in mountain biking and people wanting to bike on dirt roads," Helfer said. "I think that is partially because of increased traffic."

The organization is also a part of the Vermont Mountain Bike Association, the state-level advocacy arm of mountain biking.

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The Slate Valley Trails website is a recently launched online resource for finding hiking and biking trails in the Poultney area.

Maps

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"Chapters are the neighborhood voice of mountain biking," said Tom Stuessy, VMBA executive director. "Slate Valley Trails is the voice of mountain biking in the area. They set up and build trails in the area for locals to enjoy and develop trail networks."

With 25 VMBA chapters across the state, the SVT is the second in Rutland County. "That is a very big deal for us," Stuessy said. "There is so much potential there."

The group published its first newsletter earlier this month, with updates on the past few months of work, including the development of several miles of new single-track trails on private land in Poultney. The trails are planned for opening next summer. The group also received a $1,000 grant from the Vermont Mountain Bike Association for trail building and maintenance tools.

Helfer said the group will work with Green Mountain College and the Community Mapping Lab.

The lab is run by Professor John Van Hoesen, who teaches a class on geographic information systems, or GIS.

"It's a really fancy acronym for digital mapping," Van Hoesen said. The students use mostly publicly available information to create the maps, he said.

Van Hoesen said that at least two of the students who volunteered ride and have ridden on the trails or in the club-sponsored ride.

"They had a particular interest in having a hand in creating a resource they themselves would probably use," he said.

The organization also has plans to collaborate with the town, other groups and landowners to complete the 3-mile multi-use River and Rail Trail in 2016.

"It's a small fledging organization at the moment," Helfer said. "We've come quite a ways very quickly."

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