

Stinky Trail Gnome

Hi! I'm a trail gnome!



What this means in practice is I carry (some) trail tools with me – notably a Silky Katanaboy saw and a Gerber E-Tool (a folding shovel) – and, as happenstance to a ride, will take care of what (minor) trail problems I encounter. Anything I can't – too big, can't do it safely, ... – I document it (with photos) and alert the Land Manager (LM), the guy/gal in charge of that riding area. Of course, if I DO take care of it, I also document it and alert the LM, just cuz that's good practice.

I also keep a collection of standard trail tools in my truck: McLeod, Pulaski, Rogue Hoe, rock bar, regular shovel, rake, loppers, ... so I can partake of a work session, or after

conferring with the LM, go back to deal with something I couldn't while riding, e.g. grubbing out a stump.

As for the riding tools, they live in/on:



(That tripod is a new addition: it lets me take purty photos with my cell camera, so I don't also have to attempt to carry my "for real" camera.) Inside are bike-specific tools, first aid supplies and some survival stuff Just In Case, and, of

course, a Camelbak water bladder. The bear bell isn't so much for bears as other trail users like dog-poopers. (Actually, it's more for the dogs as the people have a bad habit of having earbuds in, to the detriment of their situational awareness.)

So what does this actually look like? Well, one morning (I like riding at sunrise), I rode upon:



a double blowdown completely blocking the trail. The problem with leaving it: the very next person coming upon it – rider, hiker, dog-pooper, it doesn't matter – will do what people want to do: go around it. This creates what's known as a "trail braid" – a beaten path around an obstacle. Essentially, it moves the trail someplace it doesn't belong, which since the whole point of having trails in the first place is to focus impact in one specific location, means you're extending it beyond, perhaps onto something delicate. So the goal is to get the original line reopened if at all possible, and as quickly as possible (and close any odd braid that had formed). Thus:



By myself, with hand tools, at (or just after) sunrise, while pedaling that big heavy orange beast around. When done, I'm usually pretty knackered.

Here's another one:



If you look up the side slope (on the left), you'll see a braid is already forming, even though you could fairly handily step (and even ride) over that log. So:



Alerting the LM also means a sawyer crew can follow up later with further cutting/clearing if desired.

Pack+stuff is twenty-something pounds. That big orange beast I like riding is itself forty-something pounds. I'm 180. Altogether that's about 250 pounds I'm propelling through the woods. And I wear armor: knee/shin guards and elbow guards.

Which brings us to the Next Thing:

Are you familiar with hockey gear? Mountain bike gear (mine anyway) and hockey gear have something in common:



STINK

While it's possible to wash gloves and even the armor, there's not much (other than a cursory rinse) you can do about helmets (especially their straps) or my pack.

And even what can be washed... with synthetics once the stink gets in, it ain't coming out. My riding laundry – shirts, shorts, shammies, ... – is strictly segregated from the rest of my laundry to keep the stink from migrating.

And when not only riding but from time to time stopping to cut and clear (and frequently I'm dealing with a tree the Katanaboy can easily cut, but which will still leave me with a big, HEAVY chunk of tree I need to move off trail), my stuff gets REALLY sweaty (cuz I do). Which then gets parked in my truck (now known as the Stinkmobile). It's sufficiently notorious that at one of our festivals it was remarked I smelled like:



How do I describe bikasaurus stink? Old coonhound and randy billygoat living in a hockey bag. So I'm known to tell people who see me riding and doing trail work: don't get too close to me unless you want to know what a trail gnome smells like.

There IS an upshot, tho. The deer don't seem to mind... but the bears DO. The worse I smell, the easier I can ride right up to deer... and the bears will smell me coming and say NOPE. The

three times I had bear encounters has been in clean and relatively decent-smelling gear. (There was a fourth just last year in stinky gear, but it doesn't really count since I was coming down a trail at speed – they were off-trail a few feet to the right, and I blew right by them. They still didn't much like it.)

So the rule of thumb is: Stinky keeps the bears away. And the humans, which is a feature, not a bug.

Moar gnomery:

