

MICHAUX

Words & images: James Murren

Steeped in infamy, wrapped in legend, never not living up to its reputation, Michaux in south central Pennsylvania is a mountain biking locale that is in its third decade of storytelling—tales being yarned by amateurs and elite pros alike that usually involve mentioning of rocks, broken bikes, getting lost, bodily harm, and somehow returning back to where you started, often much later in the day than you had expected. If you are unlucky, your story includes all of those things. Still, even if you do have such a bad luck day mountain biking Michaux, the odds are that you, like nearly everyone else, will be pulled back to Michaux for another go-round.

Not more than a small birthmark swath of green on a map, the 85,000-acre state forest hides hundreds of miles of singletrack, doubletrack and gravel roads that attract Mid-Atlantic riders seeking technical mountain biking. The rockiness is not the only challenge riders face, as most trails are not marked, meaning there are very few trail signs, which is an added mind-numbing challenge for some. The trails that everyone hears about are for sure not marked on a map, and nor do they have trail signs in the forest to indicate that you have found a particular trail.

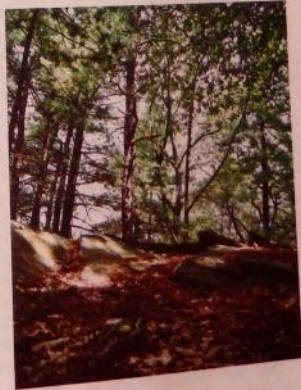
One way to learn the trails is to race the Michaux Endurance Series.

When you pull up to the start line, know that a world-class pro might be up there with you, or that it is a possible a future one is there with you. If not on that day, know that past and current racers who have won titles like National Ultra Endurance Series Champion (men's and women's), 24-Hour Solo World Cup Champion, La Ruta Champion, and members of the U.S. national team, among other major titles, have raced Michaux and have used this east coast MTB destination as a training ground. Lastly, know that they too have been beaten up by Michaux.

Another way to find the trails is to meet up for a group ride

with the local club: Mountain Bikers of Michaux (MBM). Do not be surprised if a few of them show up on fully rigid bikes. Showing such emotion would only make them happy.

The best way to find the trails, in my opinion, is to mine the interwebs for information and then get out there and ride your bike. Pack a water filter, perhaps. Throw some extra calories in your pack. Carry a mobile phone with you, as signals sometimes pop up for making an emergency call. If you go alone, let someone know which area of the forest you plan to explore. Be willing to take what looks like it could be a trail, and



do not get too upset when it dead ends a few hundred feet into the woods. Accept that to connect the trails into a big loop ride you will likely have to spin a few minutes on gravel roads. And for goodness sake, if the squiggly line on your smartphone says that the trail should be right where you are standing, but it is not, look around a little and chances are you will find the slightly visible dirt track leading to bliss under the forest canopy not more than several paces and a few pulls on the hydration pack away.

For further enjoyment, below is a list of 1980s metal songs, mostly, that could be used to better understand the trails. Michaux is old-school mountain biking. Whether it is heavy metal or hard rock or a hair band song, it seems that, for me, the genre fits the character that is Michaux mountain biking. Apologies for no Black Sabbath songs, but the best of those are from the '70s. Iron Maiden is missing, too. Of course, there are many other songs that could be on the list, and there are other Michaux trails that could be on there as well. Add on to the guide, if you would like to do so.

Nevertheless, here is the Metal Guide to Michaux Trails.

THREE MILE TRAIL

Song: "Holy Diver," Dio

Classic heavy metal song. Classic Michaux trail. Many people have their take on what "Holy Diver" is about, despite what Ronnie James has to say. No matter the opinion, most would agree that "Holy Diver" is timeless metal. The same can be said for Three Mile as being timeless Michaux. Dio and Three Mile are essential to understanding the music genre and old-school east coast mtb, respectively. Dive into the enduro-cut trail and see if you can navigate cleanly all the



way through to the other side. "Ride the tiger ... " if you have to.

VISTA TRAIL

Song: "The Hellion/Electric Eye," Judas Priest

Judas Priest may be the quintessential metal band of the 1980s. I remember hearing "The Hellion/Electric Eye" for the first time on my tape player. Halford's vocals and those ripping, driving guitar licks were pretty much perfection when it came to a heavy metal song. Throw in the angst of big brother watching over you, and you had a song for throwing fists into the air.

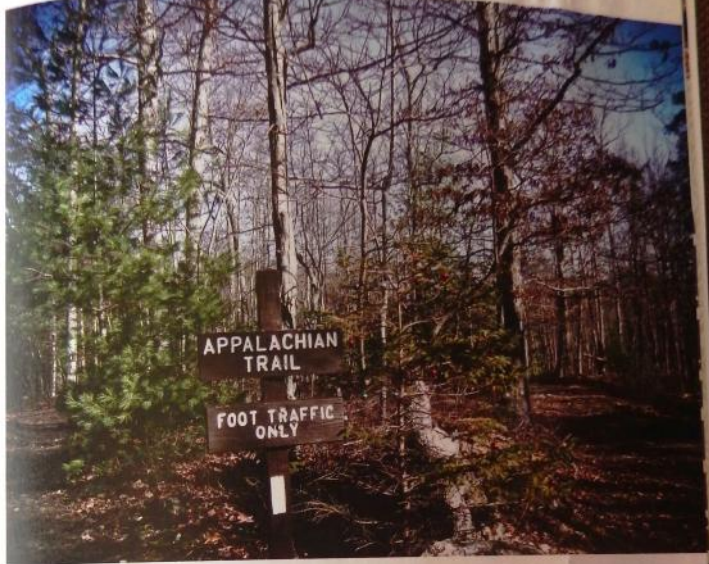
A few years back, I entered Michaux's Traverse trail and saw a small sign saying that I should smile because a camera was on me. What? Why? It was some thirty minutes or so later

when I connected to Vista that I remembered "Electric Eye." Up on Vista that day, I felt like I was connecting lines under the cover of deep woods, running from radar, despite that every now and then I was pedaling up on a rocky overlook with beautiful Appalachian views where I could be seen. Was the Electric Eye on me? Maybe so, but as I descended the final section of Vista that winds from one boulder to the next, hitting the lines that had me rolling rubber over rock without fail, the sign sighting was gone from my mind, and the Electric Eye did not matter.

THE BLOCKS TRAIL

Song: "Rock 'N' Roll Ain't Noise Pollution," AC/DC

Straightforward rock and roll with no frills matches well with trail segments that, like the song,



are a slower paced, methodical ass-kicker. My favorite song from Black in Black often emits from my lips while finding ways through Michaux's rocky madness. The Blocks are somewhat newer kids at Michaux, but they are no doubt leaving their mark in the form of bruised egos.

RATTLESNAKE TRAIL

Song: "Kickstart My Heart,"
Motley Crue

If you are near mtb dead, maybe thinking of putting the bike away for a while, or hanging up the helmet, ride the backside of Rattlesnake through the house-sized boulders and over the ledges, before dropping off the ridge, which is a wicked descent with some tight turns and pucker factor. I am willing to bet that it will kick start your mtb-lovin' heart. Whooooooaaaa Yeah!

WILDCAT TRAIL

Song: "Tooth and Nail," Dokken

Who was not rockin' with Dokken in the '80s?! All of their "albums" were worn out cassettes by the time I switched from jam box to CD player. "Tooth and Nail" has always been a favorite, as has Wildcat, especially with the new reroute that punches you in the face right up front with a nasty rock garden, letting you know you are riding Michaux. If I listened to music while I ride, I would have this one cued up for sure: "...tearing it up in the day time"

ABBY TRAIL

Song: "Peace Sells," Megadeth

I have no reason for putting this song with this trail! I simply love Abby and I love "Peace Sells." I wanted them both on the list somehow, and if the song pops into my head the next time that I

am working my way down to the reservoir, that will be fine with me. Abby's singletrack has widened over the years, but it still delivers its yesteryear yore and charm.

YELLOW RIDGE TRAIL

Song: "Cool Kids," Kix

So the rock band from nearby Hagerstown, MD may not be hard or metal enough for this list? What maybe they lack in that, they make up for in fun. "Cool Kids" is about two things, really: thinking you are cool and looking for fun. I am willing to bet that most of us mountain bikers know those feelings, having experienced them at some point out on the trail. Wheels turning atop Yellow Ridge and then down its descent line is a good time ride. It is not technical at all by Michaux standards, making it a big smiley face ride, a party romp that will make you feel like



a kid again, and maybe saying at the end of it: "That was a cool trail," and/or "That was fun!"

VIRGINIA TRAIL

Song: "Crazy Train," Ozzy Osbourne

Going from rock to boulder to rock garden to rocky path to boulder to rock garden to rocky ledge, with dirt tracks between the rocks, and a ride along the edge of a rocky ridge with spectacular views: you are on the crazy trail called Virginia. It is not long as the crow flies, unless the crow is a drunken winged animal flying in deranged half circles and circuitous patterns from rock to rock to boulder to rock garden to rocky path to rock to rocky ledge. Ozzy's a master, and this trail is for rock tech masters.

SOUTHERN GAS TRAIL

Song: "Master of Puppets," Metallica

If mountain biking can assist the healing process for someone who has had an alcohol or drug

addiction, and there are stories out there of such healing, one trail that could assist in that process, and could lead someone towards an mtb addiction, is Southern Gas. For around five miles, the trail wanders through eastern forest in a way that reminds me, every time I am on it, "This is why I mountain bike." It is fast, and it is slow and grueling. It is gnarly in spots, and it flows in others. It is back woody all the way. Perhaps, when on it, the puppeteer's strings pull less.

TUMBLING RUN TRAIL

Song: "Nothin' but a Good Time,"

Poison

We had to have some Poison in this mix, didn't we?! Glam band/hair metal, what have you?! If I am going to pick a Michaux trail that I know is a going to be a good time every time out, which includes that I might have a hurtin' put on me that I will feel the next morning, it is Tumbling Run, but only if it

can include all the new stuff that starts up at the Snowy Mountain fire tower. Get on it, and ride all the way down! By the time you arrive at the rock pathway/bridge-like trail with precariousness defined near the end, you will be tired, but quickly you will get energized. It is a rock art, mtb trail masterpiece. It is Tumbling Run trail in Michaux State Forest, Pennsylvania.

Spooge Trail

Song: "Welcome to the Jungle," Guns N' Roses

Yes, the entire album could be listed. Mr. Brownstone, if I had to pick a favorite song, might be mine, depending on which day you ask me. However, I am going with "Welcome to the Jungle" because when I first found and rode Spooge, I could not wait to get off the trail. It chewed me up and spit me out. That is what I think GnR did to a lot of metal bands. Welcome to Spooge. s