

Tracks and Yaks OUTDOOR EXCURSIONS

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Photography provided by: **Tracks and Yaks**

Unless otherwise noted

Adam Forshee (rhymes with “play”) was looking for a business model that would promote outdoor activities such as kayaking and biking. His parents’ experience with rail biking in New York State inspired him to add rail biking to his new venture, Tracks and Yaks, in Allegany County, Maryland.

Adam explored several sites in Pennsylvania that didn’t work out. Then he saw a picture of the GAP (Great Allegheny Passage) trail that runs along the former Western Maryland railroad tracks. He learned that the former Frostburg train station and the tracks were owned by Allegany County. Negotiations and preparation took nearly two years.

Adam and his crew built custom rail bikes with heavy duty brakes, acquired bicycles and kayaks, and created a selection of options for customers. The business has been successful from its beginning in the summer of 2021. Participants provide excellent reviews and word-of-mouth promotion of the activities they have enjoyed. It is usually necessary to make reservations in advance.

Tracks and Yaks provides the only rail biking location in Maryland. For the uninitiated, rail biking is riding on the rails in open two or four seat “rail bikes,” which are powered by foot pedals. Typically, rail biking routes are 3-4 miles long on relatively level terrain and riders pedal out and back. The section of track used by Tracks and Yaks is 10-15 miles



Top: Visitors from the Eastern Shore of Maryland get ready to leave Frostburg on their rail biking excursion to Cumberland with time to explore attractions there before their return shuttle to Frostburg.

Right: Another group has completed their rail bike excursion followed by a kayak float on the North Branch of the Potomac River before returning to Frostburg.



Above: All ages love the downhill ride on a two or four seat, foot-powered rail bike, with very little pedaling effort required.

Left: Participants can also rent adult-sized bicycles from Tracks and Yaks at their Frostburg train station location. At the end of the day, after riding the Gap Trail to Cumberland, rented bikes are picked up by Tracks and Yaks staff. *PHOTO BY MARY REISINGER*



long, depending on the end point, and all downhill. Very little pedaling effort is required, and machines sometimes referred to as speeder cars are used to pull the empty rail bikes back up the hill to the Frostburg Train Station while riders are shuttled back to the starting point or on to their next activity by bus or van.

In addition to rail biking, Tracks and Yaks activities include bicycling, kayaking, and tubing. Adam and the staff (along with Julie Forshee when she is not teaching) oversee several different recreational adventures. Currently, these are the tours available:

Helmstetter Hotshot, offered 2-3 times a day, involves rail biking for ten miles through scenic surroundings including an overlook of historic Mount Savage, going through Brush Tunnel, and returning by shuttle bus or van to Frostburg.



Rail bikes arriving in Cumberland — the *Queen City Excursion*, *Track and Yak Excursion*, and *Pedal and Paddle Excursion* stop in Cumberland before continuing their scheduled outings and return to Frostburg. PHOTO BY MIKE CALHOUN

Queen City Excursion, leaving promptly at 9:00 to be off the tracks before the Scenic Western Maryland Railroad run at 11:30, starts with a longer rail bike trip to the Cumberland's historic Western Maryland Train Station at Canal Place, time to explore the attractions there, and a pick up at 1:00 to return to Frostburg.

Bike Shuttle, for regular bicycles rather than rail bikes; participants can rent adult-sized bicycles from Tracks and Yaks or bring their own. Tracks and Yaks shuttles people from Canal Place in Cumberland uphill to the Frostburg Train station so that they ride at their own pace back to Cumberland on a downhill section of the Gap Trail. At the end of the day, rented bikes will be picked up in Cumberland by Tracks and Yaks staff.

Track and Yak, from 9:00-4:00 Thursday through Sunday, combines a rail bike excursion and kayaking on the North Branch of the Potomac River. After the 15 mile downhill rail bike trip, riders are taken by shuttle to the boat launch for the float and then returned to Frostburg.

Pedal and Paddle, a 4-6 hour adventure includes a bicycle ride downhill from Frostburg to Cumberland on the GAP Trail, time for lunch, four more miles of bicycling

on the C&O Canal path to reach the boat launch site, time on the water in kayaks, and a shuttle back to Frostburg. People who bring their own bikes will find them waiting at the station.

A new tour being planned for summer of 2023 will be a stand-alone river tubing ride on the North Branch of the Potomac in a part of the river that goes through some rugged cliffs and other scenic areas.

Safety is a priority for Tracks and Yaks. Rail bike schedules are carefully coordinated with the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad runs on the track. Flaggers check each crossing before waving rail bikes through. Safety harnesses are used to protect adults and children. Sensible limitations on weight, height, and age are set to make sure that every participant has a good experience.

Check the website to find up-to-date details and to make reservations. The season runs from May to October with the possibility of added weeks in November depending on factors such as the weather. If past seasons are any indication, trips will fill up fast.

Tracks and Yaks — <https://tracksandyaks.com>
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