

# Into dirt: Student film explores mountain biking, builds momentum for awards

By [CAROL LADWIG](#)

Snoqualmie Valley Record Staff Reporter

JANUARY 9, 2013 · 1:14 PM



It was a hard slog to make “Uncharted Dirt,” the top entry in the North Bend Amateur Film Challenge. There were weeks of shooting, plus building their own camera supports, hauling cameras and gear down remote mountain bike trails, and editing, editing, editing. By the end of it, though, director Dean Sydnor had a compelling film, and the answer to his question.

“I didn’t really realize what (mountain biking) meant,” he says early in the 6:39 film. “I mean, I know what a mountain bike is, but ... who cares?”

Off camera, the Mount Si High School junior laughs at the comment, but then explains it’s actually why he made the short, starring two mountain-biking friends, Chris Sellers and Graham Griffin.

“I’ve known them for a while, and I knew that they participated in this,” he said, remembering them coming to school in the eighth grade with broken bones, scratches and bruises. Because of that, he said, he’s always thought the sport was, well, “really dumb.”

“But hey, since you’re getting hurt, it might be interesting to film,” he told his friends. “And since we’re going to have some sort of story line, I might as well see if my opinion changes.”

It has changed, enough for Sydnor to create the winning entry in the North Bend film challenge, and earn high praise from his film teacher, Joe Dockery.

"I've never seen a more beautiful film come out of Mount Si. It was so well shot and edited," Dockery said, adding that he also appreciated it as a mountain biker.

Shots of armored riders jouncing down rugged trails contrast with spectacular scenery, tight detail shots and slow pans of bikes and gear in "Dirt," with contrasting narration by Sydnor and Sellers.

Sellers, a dedicated biker since he began riding cross-country with his father, is matter-of-fact about mountain biking and its dangers in the film, especially in his chosen style of downhill. "The only really scary weather (for riding) is snow," he says. He knows the film shows a few teeth-gritting wipeouts, but he generally shrugs off injuries as just part of the sport. He also wears a full-face helmet, and body armor, every time he rides.

Sydnor's apparent disinterest in the sport was not a problem for Sellers at all.

"I was just thrilled that he wanted to film mountain biking," he said, "because not very many filmmakers actually enjoy filming sports."

Mountain biking is also inherently difficult to film, simply because of the terrain.

"They're mountain biking trails... you can't really bring large equipment with you, easily," Sydnor said. The film crew, which also included photographers Emmitt Rudd and Willy Eand, ended up making most of their own camera stabilizers and sliders, he said, out of lightweight materials, and, in most cases, on the cheap.

"We decided we wanted one shot that was also special," Sydnor said, "so we used some of Chris's money—which we reimbursed... we spent about \$40 to build a cable cam which allowed our camera to essentially glide between two trees for a nice, smooth shot."

They used their own cameras, a Canon T3i and a Nikon 5100, for most of the film, and borrowed some special-use items like the bike-mounted camera used in several shots.

The resulting unscripted film gives you the full mountain-biking experience, injuries, revelations and all.

Sydnor and Sellers admit that they didn't really know the film would end with a deeper understanding of the sport when they started it.

"After we all kind of got out there and realized what it was all about, we kind of realized that's what the ending goal was going to be," Sellers said, "but from the start, everyone was kind of skeptical."

The film's initial success, placing high in the Change My School competition in November, and taking the top prize in the North Bend Amateur Film Challenge, has effectively silenced the skeptics, and Dockery has high hopes for the film in this spring's National Film Festival for Talented Youth.

To see the film, visit <http://www.changemyschool.com/entry/uncharted-dirt>.



Director and editor Dean Sydnor, and rider Chris Sellers worked together on the film, which was their quarterly class project, and an introduction to mountain biking for the uninitiated.

Contact Snoqualmie Valley Record Staff Reporter Carol Ladwig at [cladwig@valleyrecord.com](mailto:cladwig@valleyrecord.com).