

# The Best Mountain Bike Trail in North Texas Is in . . . the Suburbs

The tree-packed twists and turns of Northshore Trail are a magnetic draw for those looking to escape bustling suburban sprawl—without actually leaving said sprawl.

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Lake views along Northshore Trail in Grapevine.

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Mountain bikers are an **eager bunch**. Like skiers ready to glide down fresh powder or surfers stoked about wind-free conditions and glassy water, mountain bike riders are usually itching to put their knobby tires into some

dirt. Throughout North Texas, mountain bikers have a common refrain: “Is Northshore open?”

Off-road bike trails are typically closed by the trail stewards or park rangers overseeing them when rain has turned conditions muddy. This prevents the trails from becoming unnecessarily uneven and rutty once they’ve dried out—but it also causes frustration for those passionate cyclists who plan their entire weekends around getting a ride in. Peek in on one of the Facebook group pages dedicated to North Texas mountain biking, and it’s likely you’ll soon find someone new to the sport inquiring whether or not Northshore Trail is open in the days following some rain in Grapevine or Flower Mound. (Never mind that there are multiple easily accessed online resources available for inquiring minds other than a Facebook group discussion.)

There’s a vital reason why many want to know when Northshore Trail is open: it’s just so much darn fun to ride. Northshore Trail’s length, challenging terrain (the trail is considered intermediate, and even difficult in some sections), central location smack in between Dallas’s and Fort Worth’s proper limits, and mix of natural beauty with postcard-ready lake views, is simply too enticing for many to pass up. Of more than one thousand Texas trails catalogued on the popular mountain biking website and app MTB Project, Northshore Trail is ranked number two, thanks to the many four- and five-star ratings the site’s users have submitted over the years.

Stretching along the top of Grapevine Lake, Northshore Trail reveals an impressive palette of terrain for a little over 21 miles, split almost evenly between two directions. Biking the trail’s entirety means coming into contact with the campers and boaters of Murrell Park, the cabins and parked RVs at Twin Coves Park, and the skilled hikers and kayakers exploring the lake from Rockledge Park. Only a few blocks away from the trail’s southeastern trailhead in Flower Mound, cold beer and solid Tex-Mex for après-bike festivities are waiting.



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It can sound a little off to suggest there's true "mountain biking" in North Texas, but the tree-packed twists and turns of Northshore Trail have proven to be a magnetic draw for those looking to escape bustling suburban sprawl—without actually leaving said sprawl.

In the 1970s, Northshore was primarily used by off-road motorcyclists. Then the Dallas Off-Road Bicycle Association (DORBA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to maintaining trails, adapted it into a hiking and mountain bike-friendly track in 1989. Sean Laughlin, a director with DORBA, understands how out-of-towners often view the concrete jungle of Dallas–Fort Worth, but he's quick to note that perception isn't necessarily the reality in this case.

“Although North Texas is called the Central Plains and perceived to be mostly flat, we are fortunate to have access to mountain bike trails on some surprisingly hilly and diverse terrain,” he explains. “There are multiple DORBA trails which have over fifty feet of climbing per mile. We see a lot of riders from Houston and southeast Texas come to Dallas–Fort Worth to enjoy the diversity of riding here.”

There are days when it seems as though everyone in the Dallas–Fort Worth area is enjoying Northshore Trail at the same moment. Temperate autumn Sunday afternoons, especially when the Cowboys aren't playing, can bring hordes of hiking families and bike groups to the trail at once. Even when that's the case, there's plenty of room for each visitor to have their own fun without being intruded upon.

DORBA utilizes traffic counters on the many North Texas trails it oversees, and Northshore Trail regularly registers the highest traffic. Over the years, noted mountain biker George W. Bush has often hit Northshore Trail (with his Secret Service detail) to get some miles in, according to Rockledge Park manager Peter Demopoulos. Along with the former president, I too have made it my home trail.

Like many others, I took up mountain biking during the lockdown days of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and I've ridden Northshore over one hundred times since then. Thanks to my penchant for trying to run before I learn to walk, my early days on the bike included crashes on the trail that resulted in an emergency room visit, stitches, and X-rays. Each time, I get up and make sure my bike—Serena is her name—is intact, and I don't think twice about getting going again.

When I return to the trail after a gnarly wipeout, I take a silly amount of pride in clearing the spot that got me before. I feel like I've committed Northshore Trail's every blind turn, exposed root, sandy patch, and sharp rock to memory, yet the route never ceases to challenge me each time I hop on. Because of its impressive length, the trail allows for a rider to pick up considerable speed without regularly braking or slowing for turns. No one will ever confuse me for a land-speed record holder, but I still have to mind my pace and focus when it comes to hitting a small jump on Loop 4, where a couple of times I've landed inelegantly, and not always on my bike.

Northshore might be only a few quick miles from the gargantuan Grapevine Mills mall, but over the course of an hour or so on the trail, riders will

experience a verdant, and speedy, stretch of bamboo forestation, stamina-testing rocky climbs, speed-inducing up-and-down creek beds, and jagged downhill descents. An *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s worth of deer, turtles, Texas spiny lizards, water snakes, garter snakes, and even copperheads share the trail with the riders. According to Demopoulos, there are about 63 bird species that inhabit the trail system.

Along Loop 5, you can often hear a rooster excitedly crowing well into the day, as if he thinks we're not quite sure the sun has risen yet. There are also skunks. Pungent skunks.

You're also likely to catch sweet wafts of chinaberry or detect the meaty smoke of a backyard cookout from one of the nearby homes that back up to various parts of the woods.

Arguably Northshore Trail's greatest natural wonder, however, is just how quickly it dries out, especially when compared to the dozens of other neighboring bike trails. Although the soil is clay-based, which isn't great for water absorption, enough of the trail features fairly rocky soil that better handles rain saturation. Also, the northern side of the lake sits at a higher elevation than the land on the southern side, which is a big help in allowing the trail steward to keep the Open sign up as much as possible. After all, it's the wooden trailhead sign with green letters spelling out "Open" that just might be every mountain biker's favorite trail feature.

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