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Mine-Made Paradise Adventure Park ATV Ride

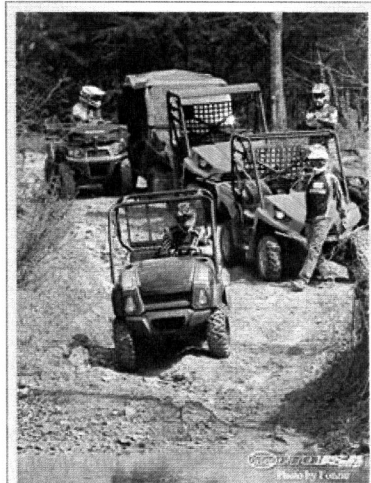

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He's been called dirty for plenty of reasons, but Hilde always likes it best when it involves two wheels. Riding crappy bikes since age 13 and devouring every moto mag in sight, he's an off-road enthusiast through and through.

Friday, June 04, 2010

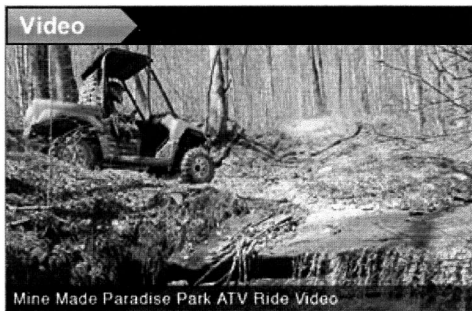
ATV riding is huge on the East Coast, and a new location in Knott County, Kentucky is the latest in an expanding network of trail systems. The **Mine-Made Paradise Adventure Park** is a joint private and public enterprise opening this fall with roughly 200 miles of multi-use trails, including 32 miles of single track for the dirt bike crowd. The Knott County Fiscal Court owns and operates the facility which is tucked in the Appalachian Mountains, based on 43,000 acres of reclaimed mining land just outside the town of Softshell.

We visited Mine-Made Paradise with our friends at **Kawasaki** and headed straight for the trails on a mixture of Brute Force ATVs, and Mule and Teryx side-by-sides. We immediately noticed that getting into the park is very easy, with smooth, wide gravel roads making RV access entirely possible. Our operations were based out of the training center, which is one of the features that make this place unique. The on-site motorcycle and ATV training center is accredited by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. With 10 acres dedicated to the learning facility, riders can practice the safety skills they will need once they hit the trails. The large paved area is suitable for street bike certification training as well, and a new building acts as the classroom and park headquarters. It was where we enjoyed a BBQ meal prepared by the local sheriff before heading out for our second half of the day.



Kawasaki brought a fleet of ATVs and UTVs to explore the Mine-Made Paradise Adventure Park in Kentucky.

Because we were on four-wheels, we never got a chance to sample the single track, but the multi-use routes were entertaining. Our single day of riding didn't allow for exploring all the trails. What we did have time to explore was fun, but relatively easy, even the stuff that was supposed to be more challenging. Trail markings were still being installed, but are displayed with a standard black, blue and green color system to designate levels of difficulty. Unlike some of the Eastern trail systems we've experienced, all the trails are open for two-way traffic, which we prefer. One-way direction is a great safety tool, but it also creates problems. Allowing travel in both directions requires a closer eye for oncoming riders, but it also makes getting around the park much easier. Riders can backtrack if they aren't comfortable on a particular trail as well, which is a safety feature in its own right.

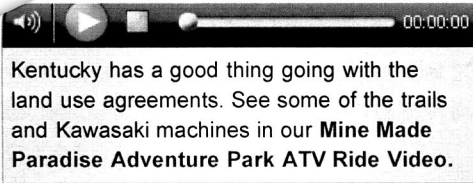


Video

Mine Made Paradise Park ATV Ride Video

Bill Reed was our guide and was keen on pointing out the working relationship between local government and private land owners. Reed is the president of the Off Road Division at Strategic Advantage Marketing (SAM), and the man tasked with developing the Mine-Made property. His background comes from the Hatfield-McCoy trail systems located to the east across state lines. Using Hatfield as a model, the ultimate goal is to expand the trail network and eventually link it to others in the surrounding areas.

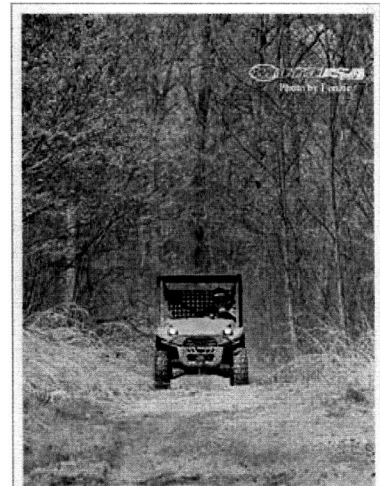
Virginia and West Virginia have legislation which grants individual municipalities with nearby



trail systems the ability to allow ATVs on public roads. Kentucky is working on the same type of legislation, and from what we can tell, the tourism departments are entirely supportive of the idea. They call it Adventure Tourism, and it's raking in the dough. The great hope is that someday riders will be able to travel across the tri-state area entirely from the seat of their ATVs and dirt bikes.

Our little party was a great example of how enthusiasts come to enjoy the exciting terrain, spending money with local businesses the entire time. By opening their arms to off-road users, these cities, counties and states are all reaping the financial benefits. At the Mine-Made Paradise in particular, Knott County Judge Executive Randy Thompson (what West Coasters might call a County Commissioner) has been instrumental in pushing this deal through. One of the important factors is that the 46K acres is owned by only two mining companies, making it much easier to negotiate a deal.

Here's how it was explained to us in layman's terms. Essentially, OHV enthusiasts, companies like SAM and government entities approach land owners regarding the use of their property on a basic premise: OHV users (and other groups) are already riding on the land, so why not avoid the potential headache of legal suits when someone gets hurt? The land is released to the investors for use as a designated recreation area who then indemnify the land owners of any responsibility for injury. This works especially well for mining companies, which are dumping money into reclaiming the land. You'd never guess that minerals were ever stripped from the area judging by all the lush vegetation, smooth, rolling hills and maintained roads. Mining companies are required by law to do heavy restoration and they actually continue to manage the land for things like timber harvesting. As a result, the trail systems are not fixed. As the property owners start new projects of their own, the trails move around to accommodate.



Everyone seems to win with the land agreements in the tri-state region. Does this look like a ravaged mining operation?

It isn't just ATV riders who are benefitting from the available trails. Equestrian activities and Kentucky go hand-in-hand, and the four-legged beasts are just as welcome as the four-wheeled. Annual spring and fall trail rides are large events that draw a different kind of outdoor enthusiast, but with the same result – fun for the participants and a large economic boost for Knott County. The fall event in recent years has attracted up to 10,000 people, 7,000 horses and nearly \$2.8 million for the local economy – on land that was basically just sitting there before.

Speaking of ungulates, Knott County prides itself as the elk capital of the East. Our guides and local representatives couldn't stop talking about the large, roaming herds of these massive animals, an estimated population of 11,000-16,000. We don't doubt the claims, but ironically nobody in our group saw a single elk throughout the day. We were happy to rib our good-natured guides about it, but they were genuinely baffled and a little irritated at the misfortune.



Even the difficult trails weren't very technical. We're sure the network will expand and look forward to more advanced routes.

Not only do SAM, the Kentucky Tourism Council and development firms like WMTM Corporation (We Make Things Happen) want to see the Mine-Made Paradise thrive, but they want to support it with other projects. One exciting project on the horizon is a living community called Chestnut Mountain. County developers are planning a large-scale property dubbed a "city in itself" with a slew of potential on-site activities to support the commercial and residential buildings. It could be something to look forward to if someone liked the riding enough to consider Knott county as a potential home. After seeing the potential at Mine-Made and hearing the lofty, but apparently attainable goals for the tri-state area, that doesn't sound so bad to us.

Overall, the Mine-Made Adventure Park is a worthy destination for Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia riders. With abundant enthusiasm, sufficient backing and expert guidance,

there's no end in sight as to how far ATV riding can go in eastern Kentucky. Our Kawasaki utility vehicles were excellent for sampling the park, and we're glad we did. A potential 23,000 additional acres are available and we're certain Reed and his crew will have more technical trails developed soon. As it is, the existing facility is a fun place to visit, and we'd love to come back to see how much it expands in the future.

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