

Local skiers have strong finishes in Colorado Ski Cup races

Shelby Reardon
Steamboat Pilot & Today

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — Wednesday morning's women's slalom course was hard.

Twenty-three of the 100 competitors didn't finish the first run, and 24 more didn't finish the second run. Five Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club women faltered on the first run, leaving just four to represent the hometown team at Steamboat Resort.

The slope was essentially iced over from the previously cold night, so there was no forgiveness in errors.

"What we saw were, I would say, supreme conditions for racing," said Tyler Shepherd, SSWSC Alpine Competitive Program director. "These were the kind of conditions, quite honestly, that they would see if they made it all the way to the World Cup. As an organizer, we couldn't have asked for better conditions. Ultimately, that's what we try to prepare them for."

Tatum Grosdidier was the top local finisher, taking fourth, her best finish of the four Colorado Ski Cup races. As a U16 athlete, she is among the youngest athletes permitted to compete at the FIS level but proved to be one of the best throughout the week.

"I'd say, top 15 would be really insane for me at nationals," Grosdidier said. "I'm pretty excited for it."

Sequoia Anstine had the next-best finish among Steamboat skiers, earning 25th. Her first run was the 49th fastest, but her second run helped her climb the ranks, with help from a number of wipeouts of course.

"Sequoia, she's the (veteran) on our team," Shepherd said. "She just did a phenomenal job of being fundamentally sound and really trying to push her threshold to get as far up that leaderboard as she can."

Anstine hung tight and finished both races Wednesday. In the afternoon race, she took 30th, leading all locals. Grosdidier didn't finish her first run, axing the possibility of placing in the top 10 in all four races.

Katya Thurston earned 37th in the morning and 52nd in the afternoon. Maren Elvidge finished 39th and 56th, while Nicole Nolting took 43rd and 57th.

The largest field and most competitive races of the year are setting up competitors for nationals next week in Aspen where Grosdidier, despite being just 16, is hoping to make some noise.

On Thursday, the boys raced in similar conditions to the girls Wednesday.

Cooper Puckett continued his excellent run, taking 14th and 12th in the races. Brother and Denver skier Cole Puckett earned 11th in the second race after



ROUTT COUNTY RIDERS/COURTESY

Connor Frithsen, 15, is the trail counter technician for Routt County Riders. His work collecting data from the counters helps the city of Steamboat Springs, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management gain knowledge about their land and helps them apply for grants for trail maintenance and creation.

A job that counts

Meet the man who keeps tabs on trail users in Routt County

Shelby Reardon
Steamboat Pilot & Today

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — Connor Frithsen is 15, and he might have one of the most important jobs in the Steamboat Springs outdoor industry.

Frithsen is the trail counter technician for Routt County Riders, spending the last two summers installing and maintaining counters and analyzing the data they acquire about area trail usage. Steamboat Springs lives and dies with the outdoors, and Frithsen's job helps track trends and provides information to area land managers, including the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the city of Steamboat Springs. The data he collects is used to help acquire grants used for trail maintenance and creation.

You could say that Connor and his father, Craig, the vice president of the Routt County Riders board, are Steamboat superheroes.

"We just like to be good community members," Craig said. "We're avid bikers, and we like to support the bike community."

Steamboat Springs has been using trail counters since 2015 to track usage on popular trails. Connor and Craig have been in charge of the counters for more than two years now, taking the job over



ROUTT COUNTY RIDERS/COURTESY

Frithsen spends 100 hours every summer placing and monitoring almost 20 trail counters. He analyzes the data to look for trends that may help area land managers make decisions about trails.

from Eric Meyer.

After learning the ropes over the first summer, Connor has become proficient in managing the counters. The job takes about 100 hours of his summer, starting in the spring.

"The first thing to do is set up the counters, which is making sure they have charged batteries, making sure they're all named the correct things, that the location name is the common name," Connor said. "Then it's figuring out where we're going to put the counters. After that, it's a matter of going

out to all the trails we want to have counters on and putting them there."

The process starts on Rotary and Ridge trails, which are the first in Routt County that are usable as the snow melts. Then they move up Emerald and finally move to Buffalo Pass. When the trail counting initiative began in 2015, there were just three at Beall, Rotary/Ridge and Blackmer. Now, Connor has 10 counters to maintain on Emerald and nine on the Buffalo Pass

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trail system.

Routt County Riders purchased the first counters, but the city has purchased the rest and replaced the originals that reached the end of their life.

Once the counters are in place, they require check-ins every week or two. Frithsen rides his bike around Emerald and Buff Pass, sometimes joined by his father, collecting data.

"It's just cool to go up on the trails and see the cool views from everywhere and be out in nature — get some exercise," Connor said.

The pair bring docks that take code from the counters. The dock later connects to a computer, and Connor inputs the code onto a website, TRAFx.net, which then displays the information in graphs and charts.

The data can't be ingested as is, though. Sometimes, the numbers are wrong.

PROBLEM SOLVING REQUIRED

Like all equipment, the trail counters can malfunction or have shortcomings. In the 2020 Routt County Riders annual report, it's stated that the permanent counter on Blackmer was reading 40% lower than the counter put there over the winter. The best guess as to why it's reading lower is, because the counter is so far off to one side of the trail, it's not picking up users traveling on the far side of the trail.

"Things happen," Craig said. "We'll put it on a tree,

and a bush will grow in front of the tree. Next thing you know there's a branch from a bush waving in front of it, and all of a sudden we have 20,000 riders a day."

Blackmer, Spring Creek and the Yampa River Core Trail all have year-round counters in place in addition to the seasonal counters.

When analyzing the data and looking for trends, the Frithsens have to take note of anomalies and sudden increases. They have to consider weather, local events and races while interpreting usage numbers.

"The infrared counter we had on Grouse last year must have been pointing towards the sun or something like that," Connor said. "Two weeks into the season, we started getting 10,000 riders a day on Grouse. We tried moving it; we replaced the battery. We did all sorts of stuff, but it was still getting weird numbers. We figured out it was a faulty counter. It had nothing to do with location or anything."

Infrared counters will count anything that breaks the infrared beam, including wildlife or falling branches. There are also magnetic counters, which have a trigger set off by metal, which is best for counting mountain bikes.

A few trails, like Beall, have both counters to compare bike usage compared to overall usage.

"We value knowing how the trails are being used as a system, and we can see what types of trails, and the location of trails, that are seeing the most use," said Winnie DelliQuadri, special

projects/intergovernmental services manager for the city of Steamboat Springs. "We can also see how the use changes by time of day and time of year, and how that use changes over time as new trails are introduced — all of which helps with planning future additions or changes to the trail system."

WHAT DID LAST YEAR'S DATA SHOW?

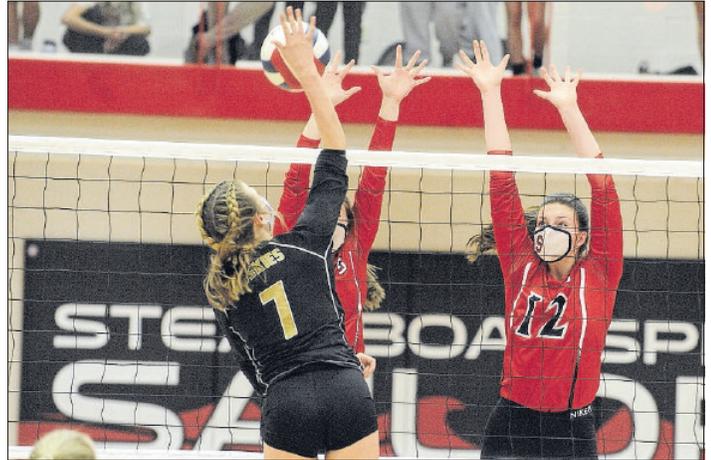
Looking at Emerald, usage more than tripled on Lupine, going up from 4,793 users in 2019 to 17,227. The Bluffs trailhead saw an increase from 38,707 users over the summer of 2019 to 48,448 users last summer. Users at the Beall trailhead appear to have gone down, but the magnetic counter at the trailhead showed no change in bike usage year over year.

Usage at the Rotary trailhead continues to climb. After an increase from about 4,000 to nearly 17,000 between 2018 and 2019, the summer of 2020 saw nearly 20,000 users at the Lower Rotary trailhead.

"Trail user experiences are impacted when trails get overcrowded," Craig said. "What number that is, we don't really know, but certainly counters can tell us what trends are occurring with certain trails. If we get feedback that says the experience on X trail is getting brutal, there's too many people, we can look at that and see the trail used to get 40 people a day, now it gets 400."

Read more and view graphs of trail use at SteamboatPilot.com.

SAILORS WIN



SHELBY REARDON/STAFF

Battle Mountain sophomore Sadi Petrovski works the ball around a block put up by Steamboat Springs High School senior Emily Schneider and sophomore Tya Drennan during a game Thursday evening. The Sailors defeated the Huskies 3-1. The Sailors won the first set handily, 25-14, but Battle Mountain came back and won the second, 25-20. Steamboat answered with a 25-17 victory in the third and finished off the Huskies with a 25-21 victory in the fourth set. See more photos from the game at SteamboatPilot.com.

SKI

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finishing 26th in the first.

World Pro Ski Tour skier and SSWSC assistant coach Garret Driller took a go at the course and finished 11th and sixth.

Jay Poulter had a great week as well, cracking the

top 25 in all four races. He finished 25th and 23rd Thursday.

Poulter and Jordan Simon, who earned 49th and 31st, spent time in Europe this winter, really immersing themselves in the Alpine ski world.

"Jay is one of the big guns on our team. He came

to us from the East Coast," said Shepherd. "He's just a really solid skier. He's really, from what I've seen on the hill, he's starting to find his comfort zone and push his limits."

See full results and photos at SteamboatPilot.com.

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