

Ride the Clear Creek Trail event gives wheelchair users a guided outing



Marsha Cutting, left, of Bainbridge Island, leads a group on a ride on the Clear Creek Trail on Saturday, July 24. *Nathan Pilling / Kitsap Sun*

SILVERDALE – After a round of introductions, the group of wheelchair users, cyclists and walkers scattered to one of Kitsap’s trail gems. Organized by Kitsap County’s Accessible Communities Advisory Committee, volunteers at the Clear Creek Trail on a sunny, picturesque Saturday helped to guide wheelchair users in an outing on the trail.

“Even though I’ve lived in the county for almost a decade now, I’d never explored the trail, and so I went to look and I was just blown away by what an amazing trail it is,” said Bainbridge Island’s Marsha Cutting, one of the organizers for the outing. “I thought, wow, I would really like to get more people out here.”

“There’s a lot of research that demonstrates that being out in nature has significant benefits for both physical and mental health,” said Cutting, who uses a wheelchair. “I think it’s important to open up opportunities to people to do that.”

And so groups split off throughout the trail Saturday.

“I just was interested, because I would love to be outdoors and take advantage of something like this, which I didn’t even know about,” said one Hansville woman at the event who uses a wheelchair and was trying out wheelchair hiking for the first time.

Charlotte Shepherdson, of Port Orchard, joined Saturday’s event with her daughter Hannah, who uses a wheelchair: “It’s just really important for people to be able to get out like everyone else,” she said. “It’s something that we like to do as a family, going outside and enjoying the outdoors.”

For Ian Mackay, of Port Angeles, Saturday was another in a long run of days spent out on trails using his powered wheelchair, which he directs using sips and puffs on a straw. He hasn’t missed a day on the trails in quite a while: “It’ll be five years on Halloween this year,” he said

He’s completed long journeys in his wheelchair, including rides across the state, but what he’s really proud of, he said, is [Sea to Sound, a three-day, multimodal, supported group ride](#) fundraiser that spans the length of the Olympic Discovery Trail. Mackay is the founder and executive director of Ian’s Ride, which seeks to promote accessibility in the outdoors.

Mackay was paralyzed from the neck down after a bicycle crash in 2008: “The first few years after I was injured were miserable, it was a really dark time of trying to figure things out,” he said. “I really just tried to embrace the television and computer games, but that wasn’t me. And so eventually I did get out on trails and found my solace there. I found my happy place, and I realized that I was trying to reinvent myself rather than embracing the things I always loved.”

For more information about Ian’s Ride, visit iansride.com. For more information about the work of the Kitsap County Accessible Communities Advisory Committee, visit kitsapgov.com/hs/Pages/ACAC-LANDING.aspx.

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Live Links:

Kitsap County Accessibilities web site [Kitsapgov.com/hs/Pages/ACAC-Landing.aspx](http://kitsapgov.com/hs/Pages/ACAC-Landing.aspx)

Ian’s Ride : <http://www.iansride.com>