

HOW TO STEER YOUR BIKE DOWN A ROCK FACE

A wrong turn can send your mountain bike down a sheer rock face.

1 Choose a line to follow.

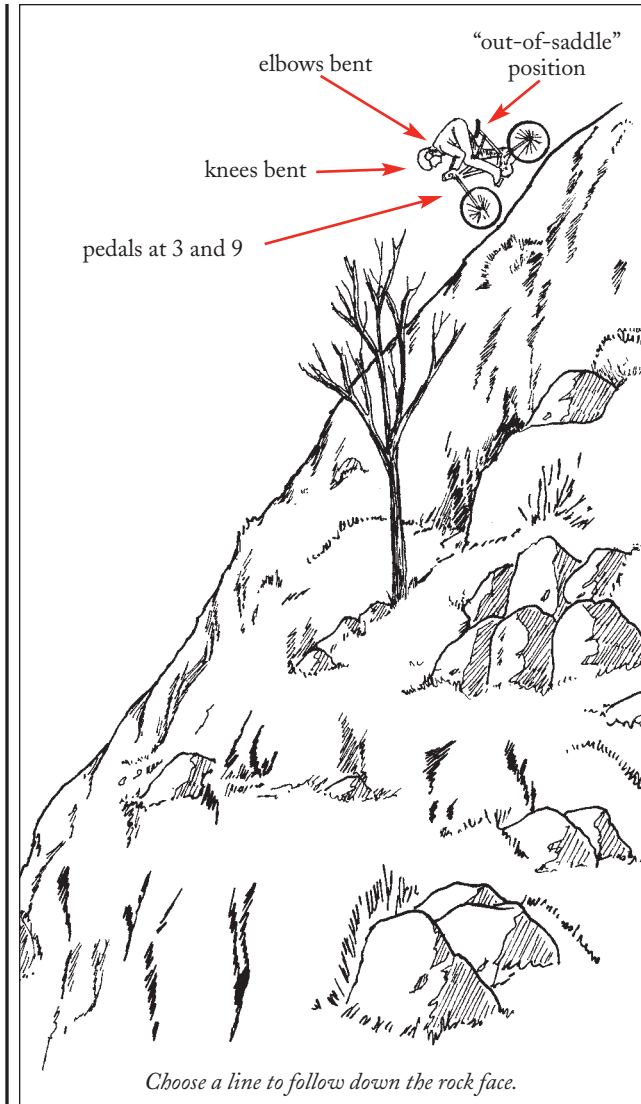
The instant you feel the bike pitching forward down-slope, look ahead of you and choose the line that you will follow down the rock face. The line should be as free of large boulders, drop-offs, and deep ruts as possible. Follow this line.

2 Adjust your seating position.

Move slightly “out-of-saddle,” above the seat with your knees bent, similar to a jockey on a horse running down the stretch. Keep your weight shifted toward the back of the saddle, or behind it, to counteract the pull of gravity.

3 Move the pedals to the three and nine o'clock positions.

Keep your feet on the pedals, with the pedals positioned across from one another. Do not put your feet straight up (twelve o'clock) and down (six o'clock), where the risk of making contact with rocks or the ground is greater. It is also more difficult to maintain a level position with the pedals straight up and down.



4 Heavily apply the rear brake.

On most bikes, squeezing the brake lever by your right hand will apply the rear brake. Do so as you ride downslope to maintain control of the bike. If you do not brake sufficiently, you risk “bombing,” or speeding out of control down the rock face. Apply the brakes enough to maintain a speed that enables you to see oncoming obstacles in your path.

5 Feather the front brake.

Using your left hand (on most bikes), gently apply the front brake as you climb obstacles, and release it to maintain momentum as you overcome them. This gentle apply-and-release action is called “feathering.” Avoid applying the front brake suddenly and with full force or the bike will stop short and you will pitch over the handlebars.

6 Keep the bike in the middle-to-low gear range.

Low gears are easier to pedal; high gears are harder. The gear should be low enough that you can pedal easily over an obstacle, but not so low that you don’t have any traction. It should not be so high that surmounting an obstacle becomes difficult or impossible.

7 Shift your weight.

As you approach large rocks and boulders, shift your body back to take the weight off the front wheel. This shift will allow the front wheel to more easily ride up and over the obstruction.

8 Keep your knees and elbows bent.

Bend your knees and elbows to absorb shocks and to make fast, fluid position changes easier.

9 Bail if you lose control.

If you feel yourself gaining sudden momentum and you begin to lose control, do not attempt to stay with the bike: You do not want to crash while riding at high speed. Let the bike drop out from beneath you, guiding it so it lands on the non-derailleur side to minimize damage that might make the bike unrideable. Tuck your elbows and knees in as you roll to safety.