



GAP CREEK TRAIL ALLIANCE

**SUBMISSION TO THE LORD MAYOR
AND
CIVIC CABINET**

**THE PROVISION OF FACILITIES
FOR RECREATIONAL DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN BIKE
RIDING
WITHIN BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL**

May 2006

Background

The introduction of the Mt Coot-tha Management Plan in 2004 provided an opportunity for Mountain Bike riders to work collaboratively with the Brisbane City Council to repair and maintain a number of bike riding trails at Mt Coot-tha Forest. This initiative has proven to be very successful, with a great deal of erosion damage repaired and sustainable trails built in its place.

Although the plan addressed the needs of Cross Country (XC) Mountain Bike Riders, it has not extended the same consideration to Downhill (DH) Mountain Bike Riders, who have been shut out of all natural areas within the Greater Brisbane area. At present Toowoomba City Council is the nearest precinct providing access for this type of recreational riding. A large unmet recreational demand has resulted.

Contained within the *Draft* Mt Coot-tha Management Plan were provisions for DH riding at Mt Coot-tha, which were well received by DH riders. It was not until the final Management Plan was revealed, too late to be contested by the community, that DH was struck from the Plan. It was promised research would be done for the purpose of providing an alternative venue.

Presently there is no evidence of any steps being taken by the BCC to address the situation. Most DH riders have become disillusioned by the BCC's ongoing inaction to assist in finding a suitable solution.

A Sustainable Model - GCTA

Gap Creek Trails Alliance has been working with the Brisbane City Council to support the mountain bike riding community and the environment by providing volunteer labor at trail care days. The purpose of this work is to create a sustainable network of trails by closing and rerouting sensitive sections of trail. Over 1000 hours of labor has been provided and the results have been impressive.

The model initiated in the Mt Coot-tha Management Plan sought to meet the recreational demand for Cross Country (XC) riding, whilst satisfying the need for sustainability.

Overall it can be said the project was very successful, as a number of positive outcomes were achieved including:

- The closure of significant amounts of erosion affected areas by Mountain Bike riders – Riders have shown their support for the environment and the long term goals of the Management Plan.
- Rerouted trails, through proper trail building, have shown to easily withstand rain events and the increased traffic.
- The tracks are well utilized and well received by the community. The popularity of the trails has increased considerably.
- Public acceptance of Mountain Bikes in natural areas has improved greatly.
- The labor was almost exclusively provided by volunteer workers, making it very cost effective project.

- Compliance has been excellent. Users are staying on designated trails and the building of unauthorized trails has been virtually eliminated.

The resultant environmental protection has been very positive.

Volunteer Mountain Bikers and the BCC members involved have built an excellent working partnership, resulting in positive outcomes for the environment, riders and the BCC. This project would be an excellent model to be used in the development of facilities suitable for the requirements of Downhill riders.

The Council's efforts to provide for DH

As pledged, the Council employed consultants to identify alternative venues to meet the recreational demand for DH riders. 'Community Life' was contracted to do the work and they identified two possible areas where DH facilities could be provided. The first obvious difficulty is that neither of these proposed alternatives – Upper Kedron and Kholo Hardrock resource - is currently owned by council.

The Upper Kedron site is inappropriate for DH use as it does not meet the needs of DH riders.

The Kholo Hardrock resource site is an excellent site for DH riding and possibly other outdoor recreational activities. Council should be encouraged to continue to investigate this area as a regional facility. Buffer land surrounding the quarry works or areas yet to be worked has potential as temporary recreation areas that could be relocated to other areas once quarrying commences.

While the provision of a site such as this would be welcome, it fails to address the issue of providing local opportunities. Alone it would be insufficient. In conjunction with other solutions, it could be part of a very effective remedy.

DH riders have abided by the closure of DH trails at Mt Coot-tha in good faith and still no provision of a suitable venue is forthcoming.

What DH Riders Are Asking For

XC riding has been given an opportunity to prove that the activity is environmentally sustainable. XC riders have also had the opportunity to prove that they are willing and able to put in the work necessary to build and maintain the facilities they require. All this in just 2 years. The number of people taking advantage of the facilities has grown and is proof that support from the residents of Brisbane is growing.

DH riders simply want the same opportunity that XC riders have so effectively used to meet the recreational demand in an environmentally sustainable manner.

DH Riding Requirements

- Trails built to International Mountain Bike Association sustainable trails standards.
- As a matter of safety, the trail must be single use and single direction.
- High profile signage clearly defining the conditions of use, code of conduct and expectations of the users.
- All weather, two-way shuttle access road with room for vehicles to turn around at the top and bottom.
- Trails must be significantly downhill. Short uphill sections following downhill sections are acceptable.
- Designed to have a high degree of technical challenge, with low consequence for failure to successfully negotiate.

Benefits

Compliance - DH riders need alternatives to illegally built and improperly maintained tracks that are being used in areas outside of Mt Coot-tha.

Fitness and public health - DH is an active and healthy recreation. It is a very physically demanding of strength and fitness. Outdoor activities such as DH riding provide a great opportunity to combat obesity. Unlike many other sports, young people who become avid bicycle riders tend to continue this passion well into adulthood.

Much effort is made to teach young people to be active, yet limiting access to modern appealing sports opposes such efforts. In this era, outdoor activities have a lot of competition from video games. For many people a rugby field or tennis court simply doesn't stack up. We need to keep up with current demands.

Education and exposure - the opportunity to expose our youth to the natural environment and educate them about the world around them should also not be overlooked.

Training opportunities for Australian competitors - Young people have plenty of heroes in Queensland to aspire to. We are home to more DH World Cup Champions than anywhere else in the world. Jared Graves, Mick Hannah, Chris Kovarik, Nathan Rennie and Bryn Atkinson are all current DH World Cup level racers who regularly stand on the podium for Australia and they all live right here in Queensland. James Maltman is an upcoming Junior local expected to podium at the World Championships in September. It is a shame that there are no legitimate trails for these and other aspiring racers to train on.

DH riding is a branch of mountain bike riding that can be undertaken in a responsible manner. If given the right opportunity it will become another valid form of recreation within the Brisbane area.

Recommendations

The most workable solution would be a 2-tier system

Tier 1: Locally provided lower level experiences in natural areas or open space parkland.

Due to the limited availability of land, it is not expected that a competition level track be available within the BCC area. The possibility exists to provide tracks that enable DH riders to get out on their bikes locally for some fun, fitness and training on shorter tracks without a large elevation drop.

The easiest way to envisage a lower level local track is to imagine an XC track similar to what is available at Daisy Hill and Mt Coot-tha, which is predominantly downhill. It would require marginally more technical features, but much of this can be provided in the form of rock armoring to protect the track. This would satisfy the demand when riders can't make a full day trip.

The easiest solution for low level experiences is for existing tracks to be legitimized and rerouted/repared to make them sustainable and to reduce user conflict.

Mt Gravatt is a good example of what is suitable for DH riders. It has a sealed road with little traffic, good turnaround areas and parking at the top and bottom and sufficient elevation drop. Rerouting and rehabilitation of water damaged areas and designing a sustainable track in its place is possible; just as it was for XC at Mt Coot-tha. Rerouting the exit to avoid vehicle conflict is also possible.

Mt Coot-tha has been home to DH tracks for many years until recently. One of the most sustainable is a track known as 'Original' starting near 'Eugena'. It has a large amount of stable rock and has shown very little erosion over many years. It also finishes at very low speed at the exit, so poses few conflict issues.

Mt Coot-tha's Channel 10, which started near the Channel 10 driveway, had a major flaw in that it crossed the road into the Simpson Falls area; however it could be rerouted into Bardon to avoid road crossings and user conflict.

Alternatively, new tracks can be built.

A possibility exists beside Gap Creek Rd at Mt Coot-tha, ending in the Gap Creek Reserve car park. It could be purpose built within the corridor of disturbance beside the road. It is out of the way of the public and within an area already designated for mountain bike use.

Other possibilities exist within the BCC area. Access roads to communications towers or power line easements often provide excellent opportunities away from residents.

It is extremely important to consider that more than one local facility needs to be provided. There are a large number of users and restricting them to one small local venue may result in overuse. At a minimum, it is suggested that there be at least 3 venues provided simultaneously to spread the demand.

In addition to BCC, there are existing tracks in Dayboro and Clear Mountain that could be legitimized in cooperation with the relevant councils.

Tier 2: A minimum of one high level regional facility within Brisbane City Council that can cater for competition events and higher level training.

A high level regional facility would differ from a local low level facility primarily in two ways. It would have a greater elevation drop and more technical features. Plus, it would have the capacity for a greater number of riders and spectators, enabling it to be used as a competition venue. This would require more room for parking and vehicle turn around areas top and bottom. Water, toilet and BBQ facilities would be welcome as well. Kholo is one possibility; Brisbane Forest Park could provide another option.

What are other councils doing?

DH racing in Australia is a major pastime, and like many sports we dominate the World Cup like no other country. The most recent Australian National Championships attracted nearly four times the number of competitors that entered the US Nationals.

It seems this has piqued Canberra's interest, as they have just announced a \$6M investment into Mt Stromlo for recreation facilities, focused on DH and XC mountain biking. In fact, Canberra will host the 2006/7 National Championships and will be bidding for the 2008 UCI DH World Cup. If unsuccessful this time, they will continue to bid until they win a future event.

Toowoomba has recently provided Jubilee Park as a DH venue. Local World Cup racer Jared Graves assisted in the design and construction of the track which attracts visitors from all over SEQ every weekend. They will host the 2006 SEQ DH Championships and around 250 entries are expected. They have more recently invested money into providing BBQ, water and shelter facilities at the site.

Adelaide has recently provided Fox Creek and Eagle MTB Park as designated DH areas where State level races are regularly held.

Hobart now provides for DH riding at competition level good enough to host the first 2005/6 National Round only 20 minutes from the city centre. They have a purpose built Mountain Bike Park with a range of mountain bike facilities.

Western Australia has facilities good enough to host the 2nd National Round last year.

Unlike previous years, Queensland was unable to provide a national level race last season due to a lack of facilities.
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Managing the project.

For a solution to be reached and DH riding managed effectively, the legitimate alternatives to illegal tracks must meet the needs of the riders. Though similar to XC riding in a lot of ways, DH riding is an activity with unique requirements. If the demand is effectively satisfied, the council can expect a high level of compliance.

Track design must incorporate the best interests of the environment, whilst providing the most suitable facility that the location can offer. The most effective way to achieve this is to have representation from the DH riding community assisting in the planning and execution of the project. Unless the Council prefers an alternative, as the DH representative of the GCTA I would like to assist.

I look forward to a time that our sport becomes a legitimate recreational activity.

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