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trail design-consultancy-construction

## **MOUNTAIN BIKING FACILITIES: INFORMATION FOR LAND OWNERS/MANAGERS/INVESTORS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decade, the sport of mountain biking has shown continuous growth, innovation, and development. Bicycle sales outnumber those of cars in Australia and have done so for the last eight years, with mountain bikes making up 70% of new bicycle sales<sup>1</sup>. Mountain biking as a sport, appeals to a broad age demographic and unlike many other public facilities, mountain bike trails are frequented by anyone from age five through to 70+. The construction of dedicated mountain bike facilities is becoming a fundamental aspect of natural areas utilisation, development, and management. The last few years have seen unprecedented growth in the development of dedicated mountain bike facilities, which has only increased the demand for such facilities Australia wide. Numerous worldwide studies have demonstrated that the impact of mountain bikes on the environment and trail surface is similar to that of bush walkers, and significantly less than that of horses or motorised vehicles<sup>2</sup>.

When viewed in a cost benefit ratio, mountain bike facilities provide enormous benefits, with relatively minor initial and long-term financial outlay. With correct design, mountain bike trails require minimal ongoing maintenance, and thus provide a very sound long-term investment. Dirt Art is at the forefront of sustainable and innovative trail design, our sole focus is to develop the worlds best riding trails. We can assist you in every facet of mountain bike facility development, from simple ideas through to world class riding facilities. Mountain biking is one of the fastest growing sports in the world, now is the time to join the growing number of land owners/managers/investors who have built successful mountain bike facilities. The following document has been developed as a basic guide for landowners, managers, and investors considering investing

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bicycle Industry (2006) *The Australian Bicycle Industry Report 2006*, page 11.

<sup>2</sup> Chiu, L and Kriwoken, L (2003) Managing recreational mountain biking in Wellington Park, Tasmania, Australia. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 6 (4). pp. 339-361.

in a mountain bike trail or facility. Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information or assistance in the development of your next mountain bike project.

## **MOUNTAIN BIKING- AN OVERVIEW**

Whilst the origins of riding bicycles off road can be traced back to the 19th century, it was in the early 1970's that the sport of mountain biking truly began. Since then the sport has seen massive progression in both bike design, and rider ability. At present there are 4 main riding/racing disciplines recognised, downhill, cross-country, head-to-head (mountain cross and dual slalom), and dirt jumping. These will be briefly explained below:

**DOWNHILL:** Downhill involves a point-to-point trail, which is predominantly downhill in nature. Downhill specific bikes are typically heavier, possessing more suspension travel, and stronger components. These bikes are not well suited to uphill riding. Downhill racing typically involves a course of between 2 and 5 minutes in length, relying on around 250m+ of vertical fall. In the last few years, enduro downhill racing has emerged as a popular racing format. Enduro downhill courses may involve courses of between 15 minutes, and one hour+.

**CROSS COUNTRY:** Cross country riding is essentially trail riding, which involves a broad spectrum of terrain, including uphill and downhill sections. Cross country trails are generally a circuit, though may be point-to-point. Cross country bikes are commonly lighter, and possess a wider range of gearing. Cross country racing consists of an average race distance of 1.5-3 hrs, typically utilising a loop of around 20 minutes. Enduro racing, consisting of 6-24 hours of cross country riding is a racing format presently very popular in Australia.

**HEAD-TO-HEAD:** Head-to-head riding is generally conducted in two forms: Dual slalom, and mountain cross. Dual slalom involves two parallel courses, incorporating a variety of jumps and banked corners. Mountain cross trails are wider, being built to accommodate four riders at a time, and generally incorporate larger jumps and obstacles. At present, mountain cross racing is more popular than dual slalom, and is the current head-to-head racing format used in the world cup series.

**DIRT JUMPING:** Dirt jumping involves a variety of jumps, dirt rollers, and banked turns. Dirt jumping can be competitive, but is generally social in nature. At present, dirt jumping is seeing a massive surge in popularity in Australia. Dirt jumping facilities are equally popular with BMX riders.

## THE BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING A MOUNTAIN BIKING FACILITY

1. ENVIRONMENTAL: Mountain biking is a “clean, green” sport, leaving no carbon footprint, and very minimal environmental disturbance. By introducing mountain biking into an area, other often less-desirable user groups, such as motorbikes, can be passively excluded. At Dirt Art we believe that even the most degraded land can often make an outstanding mountain bike facility. Dirt Art has a proven ability to turn poorly managed, weed-infested land into successful and productive facilities, which compliment and improve the local environment.

We believe in a collaborative development process, which may include a variety of groups such as Landcare, Greening Australia, TAFE, Adult Education, Work for the Dole, and many more. As motorised recreation pursuits continue to lose desirability, the popularity of mountain biking will only continue to grow. With the increasing number of mountain bikers subjected to limited riding facilities, some have resorted to illegal trail building. Removing these trails and punishing the culprits will never abolish this problem, hence why it continues to persist. The single best way to stop illegal trail building is to provide a legitimate, well-designed, and sustainable alternative.

2. SOCIAL: As society becomes increasingly plagued by obesity and the problems associated with an unhealthy lifestyle, outdoor recreational pursuits will continue to prosper. Mountain biking is accessible and exciting for the entire age demographic. Trail facilities bring together people of all ages and social demographics. The construction and ongoing maintenance of facilities generally involves a collaborative effort from local riders, and other stakeholders. Mountain bike riders are typically closely involved in their local facility, creating a degree of user group ownership and maintenance of the facility. This collaborative process assists greatly in reducing costs and land owner/manager/investor responsibility in the overall development and maintenance of these facilities.

3. ECONOMIC: Mountain biking has established itself as a major global market, with multi-million dollar mountain bike facilities, such as Whistler Mountain Bike Park in Canada, continuing to show enormous growth. In 2006 mountain biking in Whistler contributed over \$36m to the local economy<sup>3</sup>. In Scotland the Seven Stanes mountain bike project has brought £9.29m into the local community, and created over 200 new jobs<sup>4</sup>.

Mountain biking in Australia continues to provide massive flow-on benefits to local economies. Local bike stores in Tasmania are reporting an average annual sales growth of around 20%, with the average new bike spend increasing by around the same percentage annually<sup>5</sup>. Mountain bike facilities

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<sup>3</sup> Western Canada Mountain Bike Tourism Association (2006) *Sea to Sky Mountain Bike Economic Impact Study Overall Results*, Vancouver, Canada, Page 1.

<sup>4</sup> EKOS Limited and Tourism Resources Company (2007) *7 Stanes Phase Two Evaluation*, Forestry Commission of Scotland, UK. Page 6.

<sup>5</sup> Informal data collected from Tasmanian bike stores, 2007.

around the world have been associated with significant growth in accommodation, guiding, hire, and sales, to name but a few. Dedicated mountain bike trail centres provide huge direct and indirect economical benefits to their local, and surrounding communities.

4. TOURISM: Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries<sup>6</sup> and within it, nature-based tourism is a top five holiday purpose for Australian tourists<sup>7</sup>. In Australia 68% of tourists will engage in nature-based activities during their holiday<sup>8</sup>. We believe that the exponential growth in the sport places high quality mountain bike facilities in the prime position to benefit from this booming market. Bike resorts such as Whistler have developed a significant local market, drawing in an equally significant daily visitor spend. In 2007 the average overnight tourist daily spend was \$121.78 per person<sup>9</sup>. The Seven Stanes project in Scotland recently surveyed their visitors, finding that the Stanes mountain bike trail network was the 16<sup>th</sup> most popular overall tourist attraction in Scotland<sup>10</sup>.

The wide ranging environmental, social, economic and tourism benefits of mountain biking, outlined above, also places the developers and operators of mountain bike facilities in a priority position to receive grant funding and government support for developing and administering their projects.

## ADDRESSING CONCERNS

When faced with the prospect of developing a mountain bike facility, landowners, investors, and managers will often share similar common concerns. Below we will address some of the more commonly raised concerns:

1. LIABILITY: The issue of liability is often the first issue raised by land managers/owners when faced with developing a mountain bike facility. In reality, the current public liability laws in Australia make suing for damage caused during a sport such as mountain biking very difficult as long as the operators follow standard risk management procedures. Due to the inherent nature of the sport, namely the legal requirement to wear a helmet, participants must accept personal liability for their actions in undertaking an activity with obvious risks. For example the civil liabilities act NSW states: A person ("the defendant") is not liable in negligence for harm suffered by another person ("the plaintiff") as a result of the materialisation of an obvious risk of a dangerous recreational activity engaged in by the plaintiff<sup>11</sup>. As further assurance though,

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<sup>6</sup> World Tourism Organisation, 2008. *Tourism Highlights 2008 Edition*, Page 2.

<sup>7</sup> Tourism Research Australia, 2008. *Through the Looking Glass- The Future of Domestic Tourism in Australia*. Page 76.

<sup>8</sup> Tourism Research Australia, (2008). *Nature Tourism in Australia in 2007*. Page 1.

<sup>9</sup> Western Canada Mountain Bike Tourism Association (2006) *Sea to Sky Mountain Bike Economic Impact Study Overall Results*, Vancouver, Canada, Page 12.

<sup>10</sup> EKOS Limited and Tourism Resources Company (2007) *7 Stanes Phase Two Evaluation*, Forestry Commission of Scotland, UK. Page 53.

<sup>11</sup> Civil Liabilities Act NSW 2002. Section 5L.

Dirt Art has a comprehensive public liability and professional indemnity insurance policy, covering all of our work.

2. **ONGOING MAINTENANCE:** By their nature, all recreational trails will require some ongoing maintenance. Through careful trail design and construction techniques, Dirt Art has established a proven ability to provide trails, which require minimal ongoing intervention. With correct trail design, minimising rider braking, and maximising drainage, mountain biking facilities are proven to require very minimal ongoing maintenance.

3. **IS MOUNTAIN BIKING JUST A FAD?** Mountain biking has shown continued, exponential growth ever since the sport rose to popularity in the early 1970's. At present government and council agencies around Australia are showing unprecedented interest in developing mountain bike facilities. In Australia, Canberra has recently been awarded a round of the World Mountain Bike Cup in 2008, and also the World Championships, in 2009. These events will only continue to ignite interest in the sport throughout Australia.

4. **WILL PROVIDING NEW TRAILS INCREASE ILLEGITIMATE TRAIL USERS, SUCH AS MOTORISED TRAIL BIKES?** Providing a legitimate, professionally designed mountain bike facility will greatly reduce, or eliminate less desirable user groups such as motorbikes. By introducing more desirable users, such as mountain bikers, undesirable trail users are generally passively excluded. Dirt Art carefully designs trails that restrict petrol powered vehicle access, and provide limited benefit to these users should they gain access to your facility.

## **CONCLUSION**

The future prospects of mountain biking are undisputable, with the sport showing exponential growth since its beginnings in the early 1970's. In Australia, and world wide, mountain bike specific tourism is booming, and bike sales continue to soar. When viewed on a cost benefit ratio, mountain bike facilities remain outstanding value for money. When correctly designed and built, they require minimal ongoing maintenance, thus running costs are kept to a bare minimum. But be careful - a mountain bike facility requires high quality, world-class trails to be successful and there are very few people able to ensure that outcome. Dirt Art has a proven ability to deliver world class, innovative and sustainable mountain bike facilities. Our team of designers, environmental managers and trail specialists will ensure your project is a success, both now, and in the future. For more information, or to begin developing a world-class mountain bike facility please contact us.

Regards,

The Dirt Art Team

