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trail design-consultancy-construction

CHOOSING A SITE FOR YOUR MOUNTAIN BIKE FACILITY/PARK

INTRODUCTION

A successful mountain bike facility relies on successful site choice. Choose the wrong site and even the best design and construction techniques may not ensure the success of your facility. There are a number of factors which must be considered, see below for more information. Please contact us for more detailed information or assistance in selecting your site.

1. SITE LOCATION

The locality of your site will play a huge part in the success of the facility. As a general rule facilities within close distance from a major population centre will be more successful, particularly if the facility is easily accessed by bicycle. Larger facilities and major bike park developments will be successful if further from a population centre. Put simply, people will not mind travelling further for a greater variety of trails, and greater quality trails. When considering a site consider the access via all transport methods as many users will not be old enough to drive. Is the site reachable by bike? If so, is it a safe and convenient bike route? Is there suitable car parking at your site? There is no sense building a multi million dollar bike park if there is no where for users to park their cars.

2. LAND OWNER

The owner of your prospective site will also be a major influence on which site you should pursue. Degraded, crown land will always be easier to gain access to than land owned by groups such as National Parks. We often suggest aiming for a site that is degraded as a starting point as such sites often hold little value for other development purposes. There is nothing stopping you trying to gain access to national parks, or privately owned land, just be aware gaining access will typically be much more difficult.

3. TOPOGRAPHY

The terrain type and elevation is a defining factor in the type of facility you can build at your respective site. For example, you cannot build a downhill track in a flat, open paddock. Ideally your site would consist of a nice valley with a mix of gentle and steeper grades. To build a competition downhill track you will need at least 200m+ of vertical fall, preferable at least 400m. Cross-country trails can be built almost anywhere, though undulating terrain with gentler gradients is often preferable. When considering topography, also consider drainage. Building a bike facility in a major water run-off area will be very difficult. Steep, Hilly sites will involve much longer build times/costs due to more intensive trail construction needs.

4. SOIL TYPE

The soil type at your site is crucial to the success of your bike facility. While most soil types can be used, some soil types will make construction and maintenance very difficult. For example, avoid, loose, thin, sandy soils. Thick clay is very hard to work with though will generally result in less ongoing maintenance. An area that includes some rock is great for most bike facilities, though should be avoided if building dirt jump areas. Excess rock will make construction work very difficult and costly. Ideally, aim for a nice loamy mix of clay and sand/rich dirt, with some nice rock outcrops and features. As a quick guide, dark, rich coloured soils are often a good sign.

5. EVENT AREAS

If your site will be used for larger events or gatherings, attention must be paid to the areas required for these events. A large cleared area at the bottom of the site will allow better spectator access and viewing. If plans are to run race events, consider how spectators will gain access to your tracks for viewing. The success of large events relies heavily on providing an optimum experience for spectators. If planning large-scale events such as national series, consider vehicle access to your cleared area, and flat sites for tents and pits areas.

6. DOWNHILL SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

If a downhill course is planned for your facility, consideration must be given to how riders will access the top of the course. As a general rule, downhill riders will expect vehicle access to the top of the hill, as their bikes are not designed for uphill riding. Shorter courses may be ridden without vehicle access though this is not preferable. Ideally the access road will be open publicly, though some sites operate successfully opening only for organised events. It is preferable that the access road will be accessible by 2WD vehicles, though once again there are many successful 4wd access tracks currently operating. When considering a site for a downhill track also consider the ownership of the road, and who will be responsible for maintenance to the road. There may also be insurance issues related to public use of access roads. Chairlift accessed courses are obviously the ultimate option for downhill rider access, and such use is allowing once ski-only resorts to generate year round income.

7. LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE/RESOURCES

When considering sites, attention must be paid to the existing infrastructure and resources at the site, and in the surrounding area. Ideally the site will be serviced by a permanent water supply. This aids with building and maintenance of the site, also providing a water source for users. Construction costs will be higher if water has to be imported to the site. Ideally the site will be serviced by public toilets, though smaller urban sites may not require this. Local businesses such as general stores, and bike shops are also a consideration when selecting a suitable site. When considering a clear site with little vegetation, provision of shade may also be an important consideration.

8. SCENIC/ENVIRONMENTAL/ECOLOGICAL VALUES

Whilst a degraded site can be preferable, riders will always prefer to ride in an area, which has some scenic and environmental value. People will ride anywhere where there are great trails, but a scenic environment will always make for a greater riding experience. This is by no means a defining factor in site selection, though it should still be considered when choosing a bike facility site.

CONCLUSION

The above was intended as a brief guide into selecting a suitable site for a new mountain bike facility development. It cannot be stressed enough that choosing the right site is instrumental to the success of your facility. Please contact us for more information, or to arrange an audit of your short listed sites.