

Paper by Gillian Duncan, President Gap Creek Trails Alliance June 2009

How recreation contributes to conservation

The following quote from the Trevallyn draft Track Strategy (2008) encapsulates worldwide opinion that's been in circulation for more than 10 years.

"A body of empirical, scientific studies now indicates that mountain biking is no more damaging than other forms of recreation, including hiking. Thus, managers who prohibit bicycle use (while allowing hiking) based on impacts to trails, soils, wildlife or vegetation are acting without sound, scientific backing."

"The wisdom of prohibiting particular user groups in order to satisfy the desires of other groups is a matter for politics rather than science."

The current challenge is actually to reconnect people with the forest by creating opportunities for more people to visit bushland reserves by recognising that cycling on trails is popular, in fact more popular than bush walking.

Urbanisation Disconnects People from Nature

One obvious consequence of urbanisation on the natural environment is loss of bushland. Continuous development leaves behind only small pockets of bush, which are disconnected, resulting in fragmented wildlife corridors. Land managers and bush carers struggle to conserve what's left, worried about further loss of biodiversity.

Besides loss of bushland, urbanisation disrupts people's connection with nature. With ongoing development, the community is surrounded by a built environment of roads, footpaths and buildings.

Older generations remember when children could play outside exploring the local creek and surrounding bush, experiencing a sense of freedom and adventure. Children these days don't play in the same way. Outside activities are usually organised sport. Inside, they sit in front of a computer or television experiencing a virtual world.

Richard Louv, author of *The Last Child in the Woods* has suggested that this generation of children are suffering Nature Deficit Disorder from loss of connection with the natural world.

Some years ago researchers in Perth startled the community with the finding that children did not know milk came from cows. Urbanised families have lost touch with rural land and the ecology which underpins their daily life.

75% of Australia's population live in towns and cities. As ecological processes that sustain us are hidden from view, each generation is further disconnected from nature. If the natural environment is no longer relevant to people, it will be considered expendable.

James R Miller in *Biodiversity conservation and the extinction of experience* (2005) cites research showing that 'most Americans can identify hundreds of corporate logos, but fewer than ten native plant species.'

And 'adolescents in LA are more likely to identify correctly an automatic weapon by its report than they are a bird by its call.'

Leave No Child Inside

Richard Louv's book has galvanised communities to reverse these disturbing trends. Programs have been initiated such as the Chicago Wilderness project, *Leave No Child Inside* program and the *Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights*.

The US National Parks Service concerned by the decline in visitation by children with their families has partnered with the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) to improve mountain bike

(MTB) access in National Parks, realising that bicycle riding is fun for children and gets visitors further into the forest.

Loss of visitation gives new meaning to the imperative of the NSW National Park & Wildlife Act to 'foster public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature.'

Similarly, the Environmental Protection Agency states as Principle 6 in the Master Plan for Queensland's Park System 2001, "within the constraints of sustainability and resources, to maximise community use and enjoyment of parks in ways that enhance community support for conservation and to continue to provide opportunities for people to connect with nature."

Brisbane City Council (BCC) Open Space Policy (December 2008) has outcomes which recognise the importance of the community connecting with nature.

- Grow a diverse and resilient network of open spaces
- Well connected (physically and socially) open spaces for people and wildlife with regional and local habitat corridors, trails and pathways that link open spaces.
- A community that is able to safely and actively enjoy our open spaces.

BCC Open Space Policy has outlined principles to guide decision making which include:

- Community needs: Provide diversity of recreational opportunities
- Environmental sustainability: Build the community through inclusive processes that welcome community involvement and participation in planning, design, construction and maintenance to create distinctive local open spaces that foster social interaction and are accessible for the entire community.

Benefit of Outdoor Adventure

In 2008, the University of Canberra reviewed the benefits of outdoor adventure activities. Researchers have found that 'meaningful engagement with nature as a child has a direct correlation with involvement in environmental issues in the future.'

Adventurous activities, such as mountain biking offer other benefits.

Physical benefits

- Strength, stamina and coordination
- Resilience.

Psychological benefits

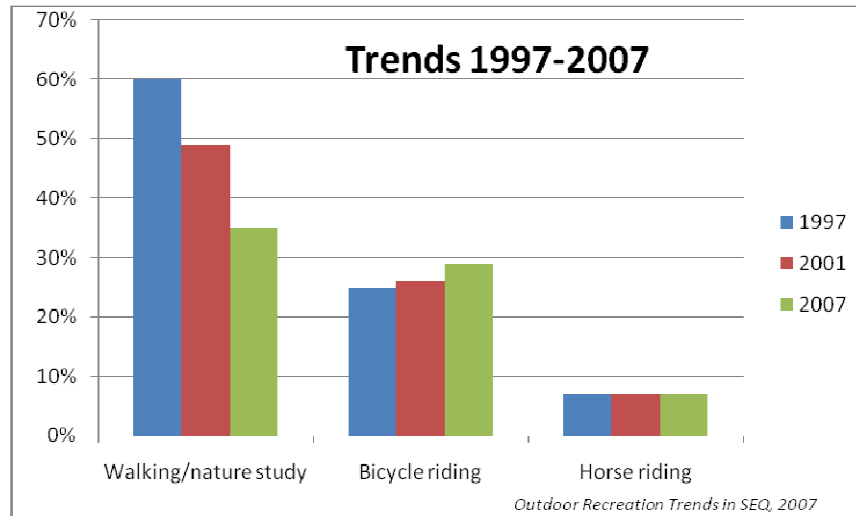
- Improved self-confidence
- Determination and mental resilience
- Sense of accomplishment
- Playfulness and fun.

Social benefits

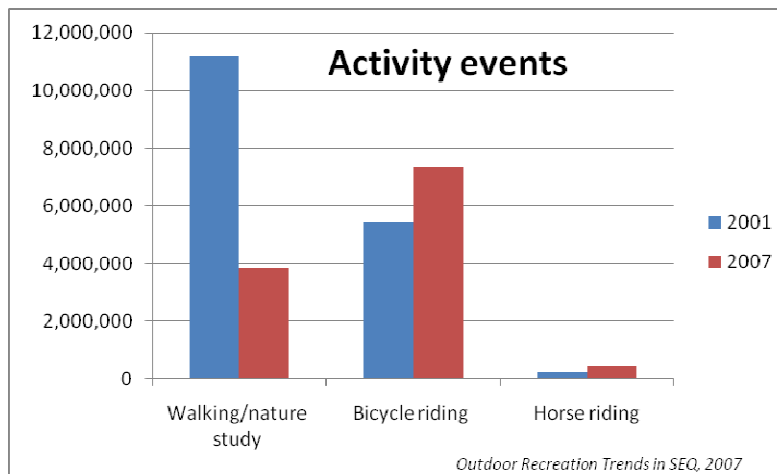
- Greater compassion and respect for others
- Tolerance and trust
- Leadership
- Cooperation and interdependence.

Follow a Trail on a Bicycle

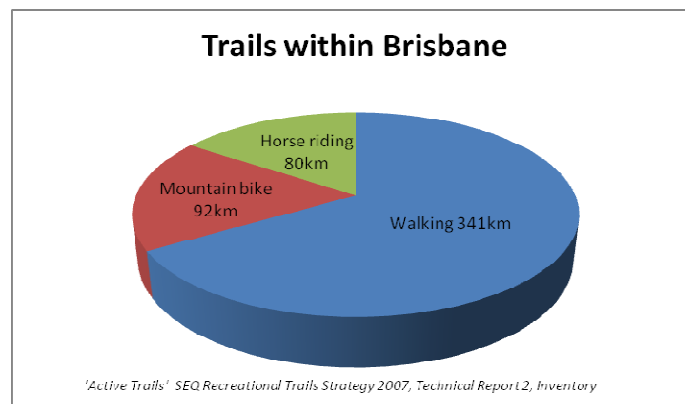
The Office of Sport and Recreation Qld has commissioned outdoor recreation demand studies in 1997, 2001 and 2007. The recent survey made a significant discovery. Bicycle riding in natural settings has grown while walking/nature study has declined remarkably.



When the number of participants per activity is multiplied by the median number of occurrences the outcome is even more remarkable. By 2007, bicycle riding in natural settings is occurring twice as often as walking.



In January 2007, the Strategy for Regional Trails in South East Queensland commissioned by State government departments and the Council of Mayors, revealed that the number of walking trails in the Brisbane region far outweighed the number of bicycle trails indicating an undersupply of natural places to cycle.



Bicycle Trails Connect People with Nature

Cycling is encouraged by all levels of government (local, State and Federal) as a remedy to traffic congestion, carbon emissions and lack of physical activity. Bicycle riding in natural settings have specific benefits.

Benefits to the environment:

- Greater appreciation of the value of the bush leads to a desire to protect and conserve it and extends to a respect for all living things
- When the community adopts a forest, bush care and trail care groups form.

And social benefits:

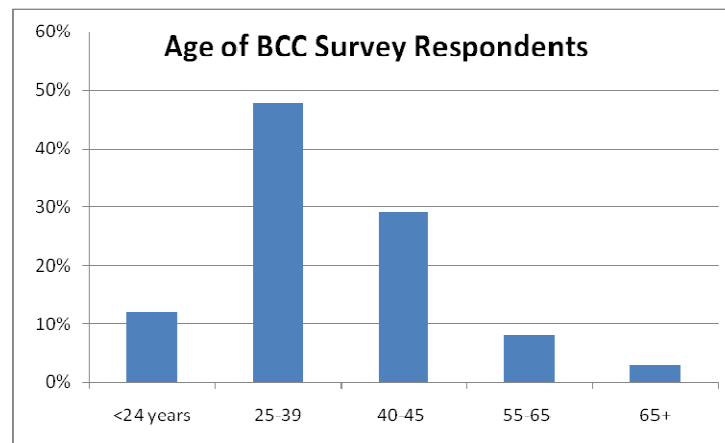
- Bicycle riding in the forest foster social connection and a sense of belonging to a group
- Connects parents and kids
- Engages adolescents and young adults in outdoor recreation.

Bicycle riders can benefit land management:

- Displace unwanted visitors, such as motor bikes, arsonists
- Report trail and forest conditions
- Clear fire roads of small fallen branches and trees
- Promulgate a trail code of conduct
- Orientate lost walkers

The Demographics – who's riding a bike?

The ages of respondents to the 2009 BCC online survey of residents shows that bicycle riders in Brisbane nature reserves are predominantly 25-45 years old.



The Tasmania Department of Sport and Recreation commissioned a report in 2008 on the tourism potential of mountain biking in Tasmania. The report has gathered research on the characteristics of mountain bikers.

- Mostly males, with an increasing number of females
- Tertiary level education
- High incomes
- 25-45 years old
- Travel on cycling holidays in small groups of 2-3
- Ride 1-3 times a week
- Travel to bike riding destinations half to full day away
- Fitness/challenge, scenery, local culture and accessibility are important attributes of destination.
- Access information by word of mouth or internet

The Tasmanian report used the following facts to indicate that growth in bicycle sales and use was expected to continue.

- 1.47 million bicycles sold in Australia, outselling cars for the 8th consecutive year
- Approx 70% of bikes sold in 2005 were mountain bikes
- 17% increase of cycling participants 2001-2006 nationally (ERASS)

Two globally significant mountain biking destinations have attracted tourism and economic benefits for the local community.

The 7stanes project is seven locations in southern Scotland offering a total of 400km of trails attracting 400,000 visitors by 2007 spending \$9.29 million in the region. www.7stanes.gov.uk

Rotorua centrally located in the north island of New Zealand has 65km of purpose built mountain bike trails attracting 6,500 visitors annually who spend \$4.35 million in town. www.riderotorua.com

Parks Victoria has engaged with various leaders in the mountain biking community to develop MTB destinations in Victoria at You Yangs Regional Park, Lysterfield Regional Park and the Otway National Park region.

Motivation of mountain bikers

Mountain bikers in the Launceston area responded to a survey in 2008 about the Trevallyn conservation area. Respondents indicated that their motivation for bicycle riding was:

- Fitness, exercise, health 96%
- Fun, enjoyment 80%
- Adventure 67%

The 2009 BCC outdoor recreation online survey asked three questions. Respondents replied they always ride for:

- Fitness, challenge 78%
- Leisure 68%
- Training for competition 27%

Just as government policies to encourage cycling has led to a growth in recreational riding, so mountain biking is also undertaken for recreation.

BCC Our Shared Vision – Living in Brisbane 2026

End quote "I go for a swim in the local creek. I see platypus, turtles, frogs. Wallabies scurry in the surrounding bush. I see families splashing, riding bikes. The air is fresh and clean. I feel safe." Peita Haycock (2006)
