

SUBMISSION BY GAP CREEK TRAILS ALLIANCE

TO BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL JUNE 2001

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Background

Mountain bicycle riding has grown rapidly as a recreational activity. Over the last 4-5 years there has been an increased number of mountain bicycle (MTB) riders visiting Mt Coot-tha Forest, particularly the Gap Creek Reserve. The reserve has a reputation throughout Brisbane and even interstate as a place for enjoyable mountain bicycle riding.

Although there are a large number of mountain bicycle riders, few have joined together to present the Brisbane City Council with their viewpoint. This submission is a starting point for discussions about the place of mountain bicycle riding at Gap Creek Reserve.

Site Value

Mt Coot-tha Forest was clear-felled around the 1900's and became known as One Tree Hill. The re-growth forest was again logged in the 1940's.

Today Mt Coot-tha Forest is a eucalypt forest which has enormous value as a wildlife corridor from urban Brisbane through Brisbane Forest Park to the rural setting west of Brisbane. The Mt Coot-tha Forest is a conservation zone to be protected, maintained and monitored. The range of trees in the eucalypt forest include red gums, spotted gums, ironbarks, mahoganies and brush box. The understory is often dominated by kangaroo grass which grows in shallow or stony soil. A rare species of vine is found on Mt Coot-tha. The green corridor is very important for species of birds, marsupials, reptiles and frogs. The fauna corridor is a significant habitat for possums, Noisy Pittas and a species of legless lizard.

Mt Coot-tha Forest covers 1,500 hectares and is part of Brisbane Forest Park's 28,500 hectares. Essentially this green belt is a breathing space for the city. Mt Coot-tha is a prominent landmark, visible from many viewpoints around Brisbane and has valuable aesthetic appeal.

Setting

Mt Coot-tha Forest is almost surrounded by suburban development with direct access from Brookfield, Kenmore, Chapel Hill, Taringa, Toowong, Bardon, Ashgrove and The Gap. With an elevation of 287 meters, the slopes of Mt Coot-tha often descend steeply, with many ridges and gullies fanning out from the summit. There are many different soil types with a predominance of brittle, rocky soil.

Type of Recreational Activity

Many visitors use the park on a regular basis. The local community visits for walks, dog walking or picnicking and cross-country running, horse and bicycle riding.

By far the largest number of visitors (to the Gap Creek area) is mountain bicycle riders. A typical bicycle ride lasts for 1 ½ to 2 hours with 10 – 20 km of tracks covered and is usually shared with friends. Cross-country runners and horse riders would typically cover a distance of 5 – 10 km and walkers 1 – 2 km.

A survey by GCTA conducted over four weekends from April to May 2001, found that 375 mountain bicycle riders visited 2200 times each month.

Proposals

1. Acceptance of mountain bicycle riding in designated sections of Mt Coot-tha Forest.

2. Designation of Fire Management Roads as multi-use trails for mountain bicycle riders and others.
3. Acceptance of designated single tracks for use by mountain bicycle riders.
4. Acceptance of mountain bicycle volunteers to assist BCC officers in the maintenance of single tracks.
5. That BCC consult with mountain bicycle riders in the planning of any new tracks for mountain bicycle riders.
6. Mountain bicycle riders Code of Practice.
7. Methods of educating visitors to Gap Creek Reserve.

Proposal 1

Acceptance of mountain bicycle riding in designated areas of Mt Coot-tha Forest

The area within the ring road Sir Samuel Griffith Drive includes picnic spots and designated walking tracks frequently used by families, walkers and visitors.

The riding of bicycles is inappropriate in this area. However, loss of access over Mt Coot-tha via the Powerful Owl Trail will mean that MTB riders will have to ride on Sir Samuel Griffith Drive to access Gap Creek Reserve.

MTB riding is most popular within the Gap Creek Reserve and west Gap Creek Reserve. We propose that these two areas be designated as open to MTB riding.

Proposal 2

Designation of Fire Management Roads as multi-use trails for mountain bicycle riders and others.

MTB riders are grateful for the extensive system of fire roads at Gap Creek Reserve. There is access from all sides of the forest with linking roads making it possible to select a varied route to ride.

MTB riders have no conflict with the other recreational visitors who use the fire roads.

Proposal 3

Acceptance of designated single track for use by mountain bicycle riders.

Currently the Brisbane City Council allows MTB riders the use of fire roads only, with no access to single tracks. This policy is implemented by Mt Coot-tha Forest rangers by way of verbal warnings and threats of penalties. There is obvious conflict between rangers and MTB riders regarding the use of single tracks.

Issues

3.1 Mountain bicycle riders are constructing their own single tracks.

This is a very serious issue and the Gap Creek Trails Alliance strongly advocates that this activity ceases immediately.

The Brisbane City Council management recently decided to upgrade the system of Fire Management Roads. This process involved bulldozing existing tracks used by MTB riders into wide, graded roads. MTB riders lost a large amount of track which was interesting, challenging and felt close to nature. This is when MTB riders created their own single tracks.

The reality is single tracks are used by 300-400 riders each month. The size of the MTB population riding in the Gap Creek Reserve is growing. It will be very difficult to close all single tracks and to enforce this closure with penalties.

A study by Cessford (1995 b) of 504 MTB riders in New Zealand has found that riders prefer scenic tracks close to nature and that variety of tracks is preferred. It is suggested that a satisfying selection of tracks will lead to more co-operation when some tracks are closed for revegetation or rehabilitation. (Sierra Club 1998)

3.2 All single tracks have been poorly constructed by mountain bicycle riders with no erosion control measures.

Each single track should be studied individually in relation to environmental impact, social impact and risk management.

3.3 Mountain bicycles riding on single tracks will cause erosion.

Studies have shown that most erosion occurs when the track is being constructed. (Cessford 1995a) Thereafter, heavy rainfall and the gradient of the track influence how much soil erosion occurs. A well planned track can be maintained in the long term without deterioration. (Foresthill Trails Alliance 1998)

3.4 Single tracks are not safely constructed.

The system of fire roads in Mt Coot-tha Park and in Gap Creek Reserve in particular need to be assessed in terms of bicycle riding. There are few fire roads suitable for the novice or casual rider. It is estimated that only 2-3km are easy to ride. The uphill sections of the fire roads vary from moderately hard to very hard. Conversely, riding down these sections can be difficult especially when the surface is loose. The water bars on some fire roads are dangerous if bicycle speed is not controlled.

In comparison there are easy single tracks for the novice and casual rider which are both more enjoyable and safe

3.5 Mountain bicycle riding on single tracks will spread exotic weeds.

Studies have shown that the most common way weeds are spread is in the droppings of birds.

Weeds can be targeted by a working party of interested volunteers. An education campaign could inform all visitors about weeds and how the land managers would prefer to eradicate weeds.

3.6 Single tracks will be used by others including walkers.

How many conflicts have arisen between walkers and MTB riders on single tracks at Gap Creek Reserve? Through an education campaign visitors to the park can learn how to share the forest with others. Several walkers and horse riders contacted by GCTA have indicated that MTB riders could use the single tracks while they could stay on the fire roads.

Proposal 4

Acceptance of mountain bicycle volunteers to assist BCC officers in the maintenance of single tracks.

The profile of MTB riders suggests the majority are physically active, committed and self-disciplined. A typical rider will enjoy 2-3 rides each week, riding for 1-2 hours each time. Riders will schedule a ride at dawn on weekdays or weekends in order to fit riding into their working week. Rides are often organised with friends.

The level of commitment to MTB riding reflects the investment of time and effort riders are prepared to offer to maintain the tracks they ride on. The Gap Creek Trails Alliance would organize track maintenance workshops for MTB riders and then would submit proposed maintenance regimes for each single track. Members of GCTA have indicated a keen interest in track maintenance.

Proposal 5

That BCC consult with mountain bicycle riders in the planning of any new tracks.

The Gap Creek Trails Alliance would like to co-operate with BCC officers in the improvement of the reserve. As resources and funds are limited, MTB riders are willing to contribute in any way they can to help BCC maintain and improve this natural asset.

Proposal 6

Mountain bicycle riders Off-Road Code for recreational riding.

The Gap Creek Trails Alliance proposes an Off-Road Code which has been endorsed by MTB clubs and Mountain Bike Australia.

Proposal 7

Methods of educating recreational users of Gap Creek Reserve.

It is proposed that well-placed and sensitive signage would inform visitors to the park about tracks and what to expect while visiting, including the Off-Road Code. The Gap Creek Trails Alliance has volunteers who could assist BCC with signage.

Information would be distributed through MTB clubs and points of sale (mountain bicycle shops). Also an internet site is available for information.

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