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Dirt Girls, Pony Express, Lantana, Roger's.....legal single track in Brisbane

Mt Coot-tha Forest forms the western backdrop of Brisbane's CBD, visible from afar, standing as an iconic image... a place to mountain bike. Over 15 years the Gap Creek Reserve area of Mt Coot-tha has grown as one of the most popular MTB locations in south east Queensland. Surrounded by suburbia, many locals simply ride from home to the trails.

Brisbane City Council management has recently approved 12km of exclusive use single tracks for mountain biking. Mix the single tracks with 26km of multiuse fire road and there's plenty of riding. A happy circumstance you might say, but only for those blissfully unaware of the journey to this point.

In 2001 I found out the shocking truth that Brisbane City Council (BCC) Local Laws state you may only ride a mountain bike on designated trails – and in Brisbane there were none. It was obvious the Local Laws were way out of date when the same paragraph referred to 'beasts of burden', but how could healthy, clean fun in the forest be 'illegal'? Righteous indignation took hold. I started a campaign for legitimate access.

Immediately, those who had previously gone into battle for the single track cause steered me towards the best information. The IMBA website had many articles about advocacy success stories. MTB parks had sprouted up in Wales and Scotland. New Zealand was the MTB capital of our region and Gordon Cessford had written prolifically about research on the environmental and social impacts of MTB.

Armed with these resources I formed Gap Creek Trails Alliance (GCTA), sought a member base, conducted a survey of riders and wrote a submission to BCC. Our catch cry was 'responsible riding on sustainable trails.'

I was given valuable advice from riders experienced with how bureaucracy worked. "BCC will be slow to change, even obstructive but never lose your cool and stay rational. You have a just cause and time will prove it."

The long journey to legitimacy started with an uncertain wait for the first signs of acceptance and then another tedious delay for official approval on paper. I like to think that GCTA had a hand in the official acceptance of MTB access, but maybe the whole truth is the time was right.

Hordes of mountain bikers riding Mt Coot-tha each week were a thorn in the side of on-the-ground management who had no effective, official policy as a guide. There are two ways to handle a MTB invasion: sides are taken and the fight begins or a solution is found. With 15 years advocacy experience, IMBA had shown that a solution could be found if we work together.

The proposals by GCTA were based on cooperation. We promised to work with the land managers and help maintain tracks in exchange for access to the wider trails and acceptance of the existing single tracks. The deal also included that GCTA would be involved in the promotion

of Rules of the Trails (modeled on IMBA) and an education process for all forest visitors. The website www.mtbdirty.com.au has been a very useful conduit in our education campaign.

Access to the network of fire management trails in forest throughout Australia has never been much of an issue. The process has always blocked on acceptance of single track. Many times I have heard the litany of objections to narrow tracks. The litany goes like this: mountain biking causes erosion on all tracks all the time. Riders are a hazard to others, and (I like this) a hazard to themselves. They are environmental vandals.

The truth is well designed trails hold up to use over many years. Thoughtful trail design deals with water flow and encourages responsible, sustainable riding. Without a doubt, this is the future of mountain biking. But I digress. Trail design is my favorite obsession.

While waiting for the wheels of BCC bureaucracy to grind forwards, I put the same deal to Qld Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) who manages the other local forests where we ride. The Bunyaville Trail Care Crew was born and riders started to work shoulder to shoulder with the rangers, repairing single tracks. Interestingly, QPWS were impressed with the quantity and quality of our work and other rangers came to have a look. We were beginning to prove that we did care about the trails and the forest. Nerang and Daisy Hill State Forests soon created their own Trail Care Crews and we are now talking about re-routing poor sections and diverting trails away from ecologically significant areas. Co-operation has created a win-win situation.

GCTA also collaborated with Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA) to invite IMBA's Joey Klein to Australia last October. Fulfilling the promise to educate ourselves in the latest trail construction techniques, over 40 riders attended sessions with Joey. Local and State government representatives also attended and a version of Joey's IMBA presentation can be viewed at www.mtbdirty.com.au. I hope the power of Joey's positive message filters through to the people making decisions about trails throughout south east Qld.

Mt Coot-tha's Gap Creek Reserve car park is now the starting point for several quality circuits using an equal mix of fire roads and single tracks. *Dirt Girls* and *Pony Express* offer a 2km warm up. Go further west to *Vietnam Track* for a 10km circuit. *Roger's*, *Roller Coaster* and *Steps Track* form part of a 7km race circuit. Out and back *Lantana Track* is an easy fun favorite. All these circuits may be ridden in either direction so you can create various combinations and have a completely different experience each visit.

Not every single track on Mt Coot-tha passed the assessment tests. Approved tracks were selected by using various criteria. They provided access from surrounding suburbs, were popular with riders and had a gradient consistent with sustainability. BCC management is also determined to keep walkers separate from riders. In exchange for exclusive MTB tracks, we are to keep off walking tracks.

Biodiversity protection guided the decision to close some tracks to protect remnant vegetation and other significant ecosystems. Our work with QPWS also involved closing tracks. Be prepared to weep while you work.

Mountain biking has come of age. Having decided to play by the rules, we have been accepted into the system.

Maps of Mt Coot-tha and the Gap Creek tracks may be purchased from local bike shops around Brisbane. Ask for *Where to Mountain Bike in South East Queensland*. All proceeds will be used by GCTA to promote trail access and responsible riding.