

HIGH COUNTRY RIDING ON THE UP

WORDS AND IMAGES: ANDREW HARRIS



The Australian high country has exploded with a huge array of bike parks

Driven in large part by the upcoming Terra Australis MTB epic, big things are on the way for riding in the Victorian High Country.

At Mount Stanley, home to Australia's longest DH run, 360 acres of land has been purchased, with a huge network of gravity-fed trails in mind. XC trails will be introduced, with difficulty across the park ranging from green to double-black diamond.

Meanwhile, the appropriately surnamed Rich Hill of Adventures With Altitude (and el Presidente of the recently established Great Alpine

Road Bikers (GARB)), says that at Dinner Plain, in addition to the existing public freeride trails soon to be properly signed and marked, new trails are to be completed by Christmas. At the moment there's also a novice XC trail, and a mostly singletrack trail to Hotham. Over the hill, Ormeo is slated for a national-level 4X track.

At West Tongio, half an hour from Dinner Plain, Rich will run day tours and bike camps on 80 acres of freeride mountain park, to be open by Christmas. All armour, bikes and catering will be available.

Also, the freeride area at the Beechworth MTB park has been

pulled down, the jumps park has just been redone, and its 7.6km XC trail re-aligned. A green beginners loop is being added, and, there'll be around 15km of XC trails, green to black. A committee of management is now in place to look after the MTB-designated area.

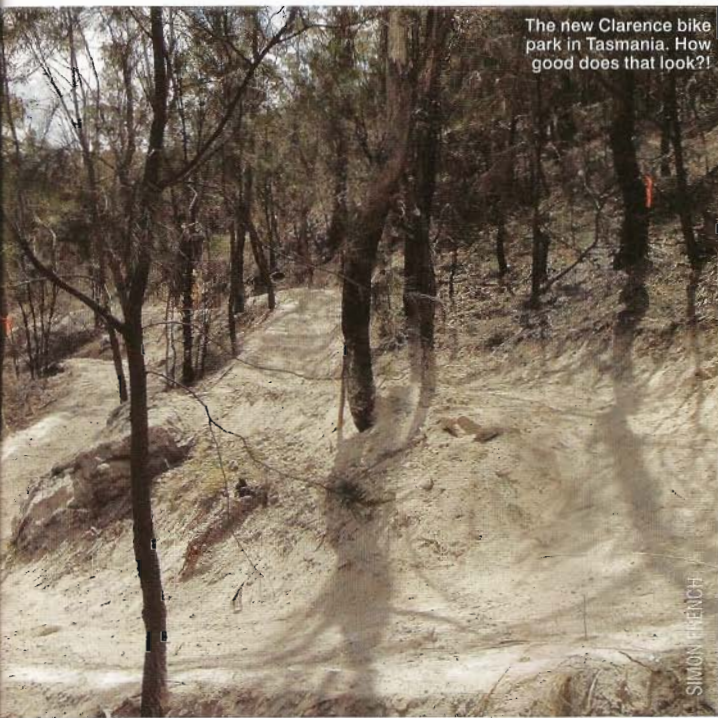
Meanwhile, approval in principle has been granted for Paul Fitzgerald to build XC singletrack parallel to 40km or so of rail trail out of Beechworth, within the 40m strip of reserve. For more information on trails in the area, check out:

www.murraytomountains.com.au,
www.adventureswithaltitude.com.au

DIRT ART

Australian mountain bike trail construction business Dirt Art is ramping-up its trail building operations and has released a brand new website. The new site features a comprehensive resource section, filled with information to assist you in getting a bike park underway in your town. Dirt Art offer obligation-free guidance and assistance to help riders and trail advocates develop successful proposals and approach land managers. Dirt Art not only design and build world-class trails, they are able to offer you guidance and practical skills throughout the entire administrative phase of developing a new bike park. The most recent Dirt Art project has been the new Clarence Mountain Bike Park (pictured) in Tasmania. We can't wait to get down there are do a full 'trail inspection' in the near future. For more details check out the new Dirt Art website at www.dirtart.com.au

The new Clarence bike park in Tasmania. How good does that look?!



SIMON FRENCH

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY GONE BEGGING?

NSW needs to mobilise to save the trails.

There has been a lot of concern and frustration in NSW trail advocacy circles this past month. The bitterness follows the release of long awaited report from the Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks in New South Wales. The taskforce was assembled to make recommendations of ways of increasing visitation to National Parks by 20% before 2016 while simultaneously protecting conservation values. In doing so the taskforce sought submissions from individuals and user groups. Obviously the report presented a golden opportunity for NSW mountain bikers to make their voice heard and possibly secure legitimate access to the vast, yet highly restricted, swathes of National Parks.

The release of the report in early December sparked howls of dismay – despite considerable and persistent calls for submissions through various outlets, there were less than 40 submissions from mountain bikers. This low number is a tremendous disappointment. But even more concerning was the failure of Mountain Bike Australia, the sport's peak body in Australia, to make a submission. The extra weight carried by a national representative body could have had the necessary sway to generate a more favourable outcome for mountain bikers. The most hopeful outcome for mountain bikers was a call for the Minister to have power to "issue permits for guided self-reliant activities by small groups in wilderness areas."

Is this a wasted opportunity, or can NSW salvage something from this situation? Ultimately this is probably a very good learning experience for NSW riders. This situation has shown us that there are mechanisms and channels in place for us to secure the ear of the people who matter when it comes to accessing more trails. What riders need to do is get pro-active and take the five minutes that is needed to sign a petition, fill out a form letter or draft a response. Without trails our sport can't grow, and without growth our needs and concerns will continually be pushed down the ladder in favour of more vocal user groups. You can be sure though, next time this kind of opportunity arises the response will be overwhelming.

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