

Mitcham Hills Mountain Bike Trails (Zone 2), South Australia

Finally, after 7 years of advocacy, Council meetings and lots of hard work, South Australians get their first glimpse of the new legal XC and Downhill trails in the Mitcham foothills. And boy, what trails!!

WORDS BY:

Ian Fehler of Escapegoat Adventures

www.escapegoat.com.au



IMAGES BY:

Sam Roberts

THE HISTORY –

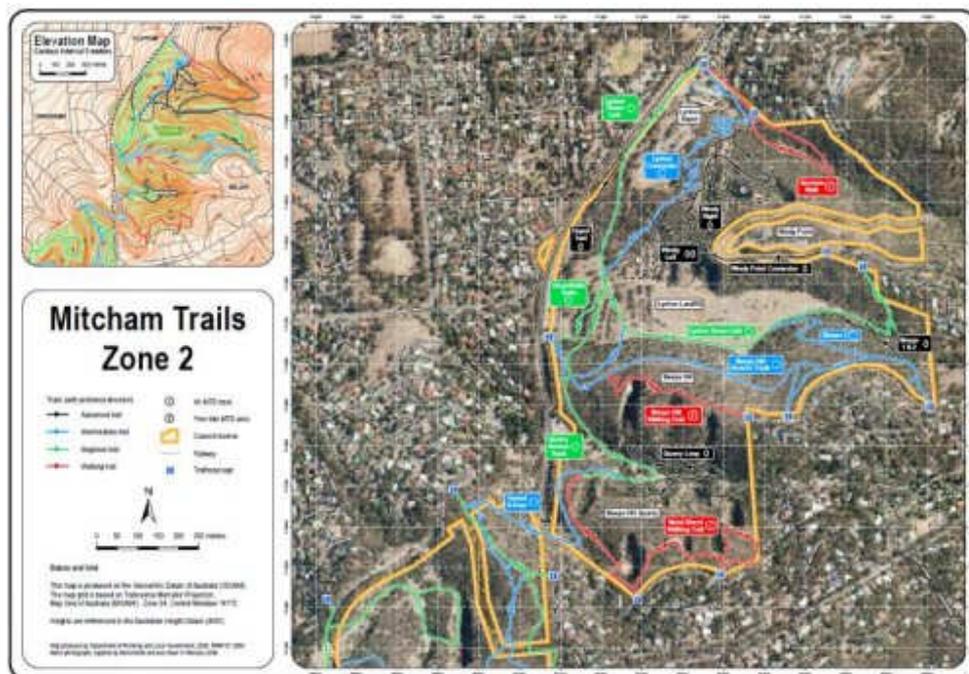
It is no secret that Adelaide has the potential to have some of the best legal riding close to a capital city in Australia. With the closeness of the city to the Adelaide Hills (in places just 6km from the city centre) it has been a major disappointment to most riders that the vast majority of the hills face were off-limits to riders- the choices were either to ride at Eagle Mountain Bike park, drive further afield, or risk riding illegally on the 100's of kilometres of rarely used walking tracks that criss-cross the entire hill face.



Such a problem was the unauthorised use of trails and building of jumps within the Mitcham Council reserves in 2002, that the council decided something needed to be done. But, rather than adopt the normal heavy-handed approach of stepping up fines and further reducing access to the riding public, the Council took the brave and at the time unorthodox (in Australia at least) approach of considering constructing legal MTB trails as the SOLUTION to resolving illegal riding and end trail user conflicts.

It all started in 2002, with the City of Mitcham, the Office for Rec and Sport, Bicycle SA, Trees for Life and the local MTB Clubs getting together to resolve these trail issues. After a series of meetings, a lot of talk and coffee and even full scale rows with community members, in 2004 the council commissioned a community survey and full scale strategy to outline the way forward. Then followed a lot of the hard work by Council Staff alongside continued pressure from a number of trail advocates and the local Mountain Biking community as a whole, and which culminated at a Council meeting in 2005 where hundreds of local riders turned up to show their support to riding in the area.

Out of all of this hard work came The City of Mitcham's Mountain Bike Strategy, which identified and assessed the suitability of nine Council reserves and identified appropriate locations for sustainable and legal mountain bike trails. This was approved by the Council, and slowly work started. Four separate 'zones' were earmarked, with work to begin on 'zone 2' around the Lynton Dump first.



Fast forward to 2008, and Mitcham council had employed local trail builder and general Mountain bike advocate Nick Bowman to work as the Council's own Trails Officer, and with a brigade of willing volunteers the trail building began. Glen Jacobs' World Trail company were contracted to produce some of the bigger projects and add their own special touch to the area.

Of the project so far, Nick Bowman is particularly proud of how well the project has gone, despite a lot of potential problems. *“Having been involved in numerous trail projects, Mitcham has by far, been the most challenging. Being so close to residential areas is one reason that passions run high. The high conservation value of the area and awesome potential for MTB trails are other reasons that the public are so interested. However, we have managed to find a balance between conservation and recreation in Zone 2 of the Mitcham Trail Network. We have included a mini MTB park with Free Ride, DH and 4X in an old quarry and dump area, while providing trail experiences in bush settings such as XC specific trails, walking only trails and shared use trails for everyone. Working with Glen Jacobs has been inspiring and his signature can be recognised on some of the core trails. This is the kind of success we hope to replicate in Zones 3 and 4, which are currently in the public consultation and approval stages.”*

The bulk of the work on Zone 2 was finished by early 2009, with all trails completed by June 2009. But, this is only the first of the four zones, with Zones 3 & 4 set for final approval and for trails construction to start later in the year. Once these other areas are completed Adelaide will truly have some of the best trails in the country, and they are all accessible with a short ride from the Adelaide CBD.



THE TRAILS –

So, what trails are completed so far and how do they rate? Well, it's fair to say at the moment there is a bit of everything, and whilst the trails do not link in the way a normal 'trail centre' would, the current trails have been developed with the intention for them to link with other trails to be introduced in adjoining reserves in the near future. But even now there is plenty to get excited about. An awesome 4x track has been built, and a freeride zone, pump-track and gap jumps with progressions from small to silly can all be found dotted around the area.

As for the trails, they vary from the easy cruisy greens, to some full-on rough and rocky double black diamond DH trails from Windy Point.

One of the most interesting sections is the World Trails-built 'Tunnel X-over' trail, which has been constructed as a key linking trail. It has cunningly been built into the hill face above the local train tracks and tunnel, to allow a link to nearby reserves. But rather than making this just a connection trail, it has been built for maximum fun value, with flowing corners, jumps, bumps and lots of air to be had. Riding down it is an awesome experience that feels like a magic carpet ride- luckily, however, riding up it is still a pleasant experience. It is one of the key trails of the whole project, and is machine-cut singletrack at it's best.

In contrast to that, you have a lot of the other trails that were hand-built. The trails that drop from Sleeps Hill into the old landfill (Sleeps 1,2 & 3) are rough and rocky, and even the blue-classified 'Sleeps 3' trail is narrow and technical and feels like it has just been scratched out by local goats, which of course was the intention!

Even some of the green trails are a blast- in particular the 'Lynton Green link' trail is a great ride downwards, and a reasonable uphill option to use to get to the Windy Point Trails.



Which brings us to the Windy Point black trails, which are as rough and rocky as you will find on any 'purpose built' trails. Firstly there is the 'Windy Point Connector' which clings to the slopes below the road, using a series of wooden platforms to get around the sections of un-ridable terrain. Then you get to the two DH trails. Using significant components of existing illegal trails, trail designer Nick Bowman readily admits he wanted these trails to remain tough and almost appear unfinished, to test the rider to the limit. Riders would certainly be wise to try 'Windy's Right' first (the 'soft' option as being classified as 'only' a single black diamond) before attempted 'Windy's Left', the double diamond. Whilst both trails are perfectly rideable on a good all-mountain bike, riders will certainly find themselves and their bike tested to the limits- full face helmets and protection is definitely the go on these trails.

But don't worry, if all this talk of black diamond DH trails sounds too much for you, There is also the XC-suitable 'Quarry Loop'- a black diamond XC trail to continue the challenge. Then there is the blue XC 'Lynton Connector' trail, which will give you a big grin with it's nice tight switchbacks, flowing singletrack and the option to pick a few different lines around the trees.

Whilst the trails currently work best as part of a longer ride through the adjacent areas, a good loop ride can be had by linking in a run or two of the Sleeps Hill trails, then heading up the Lynton green link and over to the Windy's trails, if you are game. It is certainly worth the ride out and back to experience the 'Tunnel X-over' trail too, and you can link that in with other trails in nearby Shepherds Hill Recreation Park. Or choose to spend a little extra time exploring the freeride zone and having a play on the big berms and jumps of the 4X track. Really, there is something for everyone!



GETTING THERE –

The Mitcham trails at Lynton are just 8 km south of the Adelaide CBD. There are a number of ways to access the trails by bike from the surrounding suburbs, with the best spot to park being at the Lynton Depot Trailhead. From the City follow Unley Road and then Belair Road, turn off right at Barretts Road prior to heading up the hill to find Beagle Terrace on your left. There is a small car park and trailhead at the end of the road.

The Lynton Depot Trailhead is also adjacent to the Lynton Train Station for access by public transport, but why not catch the train from here to the Belair station and ride back down through the park, avoiding the uphill.

Full details and a downloadable trail map can be found at <http://www.mitchamcouncil.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1260>

TECHNICAL NATURE –

There are trails for all levels here. The green trails vary from mellow firetracks to fun wider singletrack. There are sections of fun blue XC trails and more technical black XC and DH trails, all the way up to double black diamond DH trails with big rocky drop-offs.

YOU'LL NEED –

Body armour is a must if you are planning to tackle the DH trails. Print off a copy of the trail map to take along for your first visit. Obviously water and spares would be recommended, depending on your plans.

DISTANCES –

This really depends on what your plans are. You can manage a good loop within the Lynton loops to keep you busy for an hour or so. Downhillers and Freeriders will have lots to keep them entertained, and XC riders can add to the rides by exploring the adjacent areas to create a much longer ride.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE –

There are plenty of other areas nearby where riding is legal, including nearby Belair National Park (riding on firetracks only) and also the fantastic descent down Pony Ridge down to Brownhill Creek. Riding is also allowed on firetracks in Shepherds Hill Recreation reserve, which will be linked to the Lynton Trails by further trails to be built through the adjacent Mitcham Reserves. To get the most out of the riding here it would be best to grab a local to show you around!

AT A GLANCE:

TECHNICAL RATING: Everything from one to five!

FITNESS LEVEL NEEDED: again, there is something for everyone. A reasonable level of fitness would be required to ride the harder trails and climbs.

TYPE OF RIDING:

XC ---- Trail ---- All-mountain --- Freeride ---- DH ---- Dirtjump/4X

Again, there is pretty much something for all disciplines in the area.

FACILITIES:

Toilets: No

Drinking Water: At Lynton Depot Trailhead

Parking: Limited at Beagle Terrace, and adjacent roads. If possible ride to the trails.

Trails Signposted: Yes, trail markers and map boards at key entry points.

Mobile Reception: Yes

Shelter: No

BBQ Facilities: No

Camping: No

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO RIDE: The trails are open all year, but are closed to the public at times of extreme fire danger.

WHILE IN THE AREA, ALSO CHECK OUT: If you are new to Adelaide, why not check out nearby Eagle Mountain bike park for a more conventional Trail Park experience.

LOCAL BIKE SHOPS:

- **Mitcham Cycles** is just down the road from the trails at 21 Belair Rd, Highgate. Tel: 08 8371 0692
www.mitchamcycles.com.au
- Other good local shops include **Standish Cycles Unley** at 120 Unley Rd, Hyde Park
www.standishcyclesunley.com.au/ and **Lifecycles** at 45 Kensington Rd, Norwood
www.lifecyclebicycles.com.au/

LOCAL CLUB CONTACTS:

- For XC riders the **Adelaide Mountain Bike Club** organise plenty of races of various types through the year, and has a very active club forum to meet riders and find out about other areas to ride in. Go to www.amtbc.com for more information
- For local Downhilling, check out the **Insideline Downhill MTB club** at www.ilmtb.com for their race schedule and other information
- **Escapegoat Adventures** are a local MTB business that run skills training, short trips and local guiding in the Adelaide area (including Mitcham). They can provide you bikes, transport, and a full itinerary of riding and guiding if required, and also offer winery tours by bike. For more information check out www.escapegoat.com.au

Written 2009.