

Submission by the Australian Capital Territory Endurance Riders Association Incorporated (ACTERA) to the DRAFT CANBERRA MOUNTAIN BIKE REPORT

ACTERA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Canberra Mountain Bike Report, released on 8 September 2020.

We were surprised and disappointed by the scant regard given in the Draft Report to the potential impact of the proposed mountain bike development on other recreational users of the large area of public land involved in it. We trust that the needs of other users will be fully taken into account in the final report.

The development of mountain bike trails as proposed would impact severely on our ability to continue to conduct endurance rides in the ACT and would also reduce the ability of ACT riders to train their horses to participate in this sport. Endurance riding is a long-established sport in this region and has been attracting visitors to the ACT for almost 50 years. Despite its relatively small population, the ACT has produced some of the most successful endurance riders in Australia. Endurance riding provides outdoor recreation for people of all ages, whether or not they wish to ride competitively.

1. Endurance riding in the ACT

1.1 Organisation

Endurance horse riders in the ACT and surrounding New South Wales are currently represented by two volunteer associations – the Australian Capital Territory Endurance Riders Association (ACTERA) Inc and B7 Events Inc (B7). The first was founded in the early 1980s and has since primarily used the property “Brookvale” off Mountain Creek Road and just across the border from the ACT as a ride base to conduct annual rides using tracks in the Brindabella Ranges as well as Uriarra and Sherwood Forest. The second was created more recently and focuses on organizing ACT city-based rides from venues such as Equestrian Park, Mount Stromlo or Kambah Pony Club. Both associations are affiliated with the New South Wales Endurance Riders Association (NSWERA) and follow the rules set by the Australian Endurance Riders Association (AERA). AERA itself is affiliated with Equestrian Australia (EA). This allows associations such as the ACTERA and B7 to conduct events following the rules of the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) which are internationally advertised and recognized and contribute to qualifications of riders and horses at international level.

1.2 The sport

Similar to bike riding, endurance horse riding is a family sport that allows riders of virtually all ages to be involved. Riders participating in ACTERA rides over the years have been between four and 77 years of age. During events, two types of rides are usually available: non-competitive, speed-limited introductory (5-39km) and

intermediate (40-60km) rides and competitive, speed-unlimited endurance rides (80-160km within 24 hours). All horses ridden in any level of event are subject to strict veterinary checks before, during and after the ride and must comply with set heartrate limits as well as metabolic, hydration and gait parameters to successfully complete a ride.

In the ACT, endurance events have been held at several locations, including at Kowen Forest and in the city itself, from bases at Equestrian Park, Stromlo Forest Park, Kambah Pony Club and most recently, Block 514 near the corner of Cotter Road and Mt Stromlo Road. A 100km ride was run by B7 from Block 514 in 2017 and shorter rides from the same location since then.

Rides at International (FEI) and National Championship (160km in one day) level have been run from Equestrian Park. In 2003, a special 160km event titled the Australian Open Endurance Championship, combined with the 107km Australian Capital Challenge, ran from Equestrian Park through Commonwealth Park, past the National Museum and around Lake Burley Griffin. This event generated spectacular images of Canberra (see Figure 1 and Appendix 1), attracted international riders and significant sponsorship, and was able to make a substantial contribution to the Canberra bushfire appeal. **Due to its success, the endurance community of the ACT and surrounding NSW has been dreaming ever since of being able to hold the Australian National Endurance Championships, the Tom Quilty Gold Cup, or to develop a high-profile ride in the ACT that is based on the challenges of the Brindabella Ranges to rival mountain rides of international fame such as Florac in Southern Europe or the Tevis Cup in the USA.** However, due to the ever-increasing urbanisation, re-purposing of traditional riding areas and restrictions put on horse riding in the ACT, this has so far been an unfulfilled dream.



Figure 1: A local ACTERA member riding along Lake Burley Griffin at the 2003 160km Australian Open Endurance Championship.

Although introductory and intermediate rides are usually held concurrently with endurance rides, they can also be stand-alone events, such as the 10km rides from Equestrian Park to the Arboretum and back, organized by ACTERA in 2013-2017 to raise funds for Pegasus and the Scenic City Starter run by B7 Events on a number of occasions since 2014, which usually includes 10, 20 and 40km options.

In recent years, the non-competitive rides conducted by ACTERA at Sherwood and Uriarra Forest from the “Brookvale” base have enjoyed ever-increasing popularity with short-distance riders now usually making up at least half the ridership at events. Due to the possibility of participating in the non-competitive rides without having to be a member of the organisation, usually a large number of local riders of all ages and levels of fitness and ability attends to enjoy riding with their friends on a marked course in beautiful scenery. Non-competitive riders from further afield, on the other hand, are frequently either young children or retiring endurance riders who no longer want to subject themselves to the rigour and stress of long-distance, competitive rides. **Due to this demographic profile of short-distance riders, it is paramount that safe courses are provided for them during events.**

1.3 Endurance riders

Endurance riding provides a healthy, outdoor, nature-based activity for people of all ages, genders and abilities. **Many women and girls participate in endurance events and compete against men and boys equally and successfully.** This is undoubtedly a major reason for the attractiveness of the sport that has led in recent years to the majority of endurance riders being female, including those competing at the top level of the sport.

Endurance riders are prepared to routinely travel considerable distances in order to participate in events in the variety of scenery and terrain that their sport offers. ACT riders frequently join events from the coast to the Riverina and Central West and from the Hawkesbury to northern Victoria. The more competitive riders travel throughout Australia to take part in the Tom Quilty Gold Cup which is held in a different state each year.

The ACT is a prime location for hosting endurance rides because it is easily accessible to riders from a very wide catchment. Our rides attract participants from the local region and from far afield including interstate, ranging from novice to international standard in the sport. In several instances, riders and horses travelled from Victoria, a large area of NSW and even Queensland to attend rides organised by ACTERA or B7. **Endurance rides showcase the rural and urban attractions of the ACT very effectively and mostly to a different demographic than does cycling.**

The two ACT associations have fostered many endurance riders who have been successful at State (NSW) and National levels. One has represented Australia internationally, including at the 2012 World Endurance Championships. In 2019, three riders from Canberra and district finished in the national “top ten” in five of the nine categories. The same three riders, and their horses, topped the State point scores in their divisions, while a further two were among the top 10 at that level. A junior rider from the ACT also finished in the State “top ten” for the number of kilometres successfully completed by one rider on one horse.

Local endurance riders use the Canberra parks and reserves to train their horses, as well as for recreational riding. Access to tracks providing a range of distances and variety of terrain is needed to build long-distance strength and stamina in an endurance horse. For people who live in Canberra, tracks used for routine training need to be accessible from agistment facilities to enable them to ride before or after work.

Unfortunately, **public spaces in which horse riding can take place in the ACT have significantly diminished in the last 20 years due to development of the former urban pine forest (Stromlo Forest Park, the Molonglo suburbs and the Arboretum) and restrictions on horse riding in Canberra Nature Park**, which have limited horse riders' access to much of the Territory's reserve system. We cautiously welcomed proposals in the Canberra Nature Park Draft Reserve Management Plan 2019 that would increase access by horse riders, but were concerned about the unwarranted discrimination against horse riders, and endurance riders in particular, compared with other users and are awaiting release of the final Plan.

Competition with other uses in a shrinking amount of space impacts on the safety and usability of areas to the point where we are now unable to access tracks in certain areas for our events.

1.4 Contribution to the ACT economy

Endurance riders, like other horse owners in the ACT, keep their horses mainly at government paddocks or private agistment facilities. Many own more than one horse. They contribute to the local economy in many ways, including agistment fees; purchase of feed, supplements, rugs and other horse apparel; riding apparel; saddlery; professional services of farriers or hoof-trimmers, veterinarians, equine dentists, chiropractors and massage therapists; fuel and vehicle maintenance; and in some cases, fencing and weed control for the paddocks where their horses live.

Goods and services required to run our endurance rides are sourced, as far as possible, from the local area so that funds remain in the local economy.

Total entries in the National Capital Endurance Ride and the associated intermediate and introductory rides sometimes exceed 100 but are usually less than that. Riders are usually accompanied by strappers to help care for their horses and often by other friends or family members. The rides also involve a substantial number of support personnel including veterinarians, radio operators, caterers, photographer, stewards, ride administrators and volunteers in various roles at the ride base and on the course. Some of the support personnel come from outside the local region. The total number of people attending a ride would typically be around 250-300.

While the above currently holds true where all rides are held in places with no infrastructure and, in the case of the "Brookvale" ride quite a distance away from shops and motels, a multiple of the current number of attendees could be expected together with the need for motel accommodation, shops nearby and supply of horse feed, if facilities available would permit the staging of a prestigious event with a base close to suburbs and access to trails.

2. The importance of Sherwood and Uriarra Forest for endurance riders in the ACT and surrounding NSW

Continued safe access to Sherwood and Uriarra Forest is of highest importance for endurance riders in the ACT for two reasons:

- (1) Staging of competitive and non-competitive endurance rides
The first endurance ride in this region was a 120km ride from Canberra to Tumut, via Uriarra Forest and Brindabella, in 1971. A 50th anniversary ride from Canberra to Tumut is planned for 2021.

ACTERA held its first endurance ride from the property “Brookvale” in 1982, utilising tracks in the Brindabella Ranges, Sherwood and Uriarra Forests. Since then, the annual event has been held 33 times with the only ‘misses’ due to bush fires, drought, flood, equine influenza and the CoVID-19 pandemic. **We have strong support of the local community and landowners to continue our rides there.**

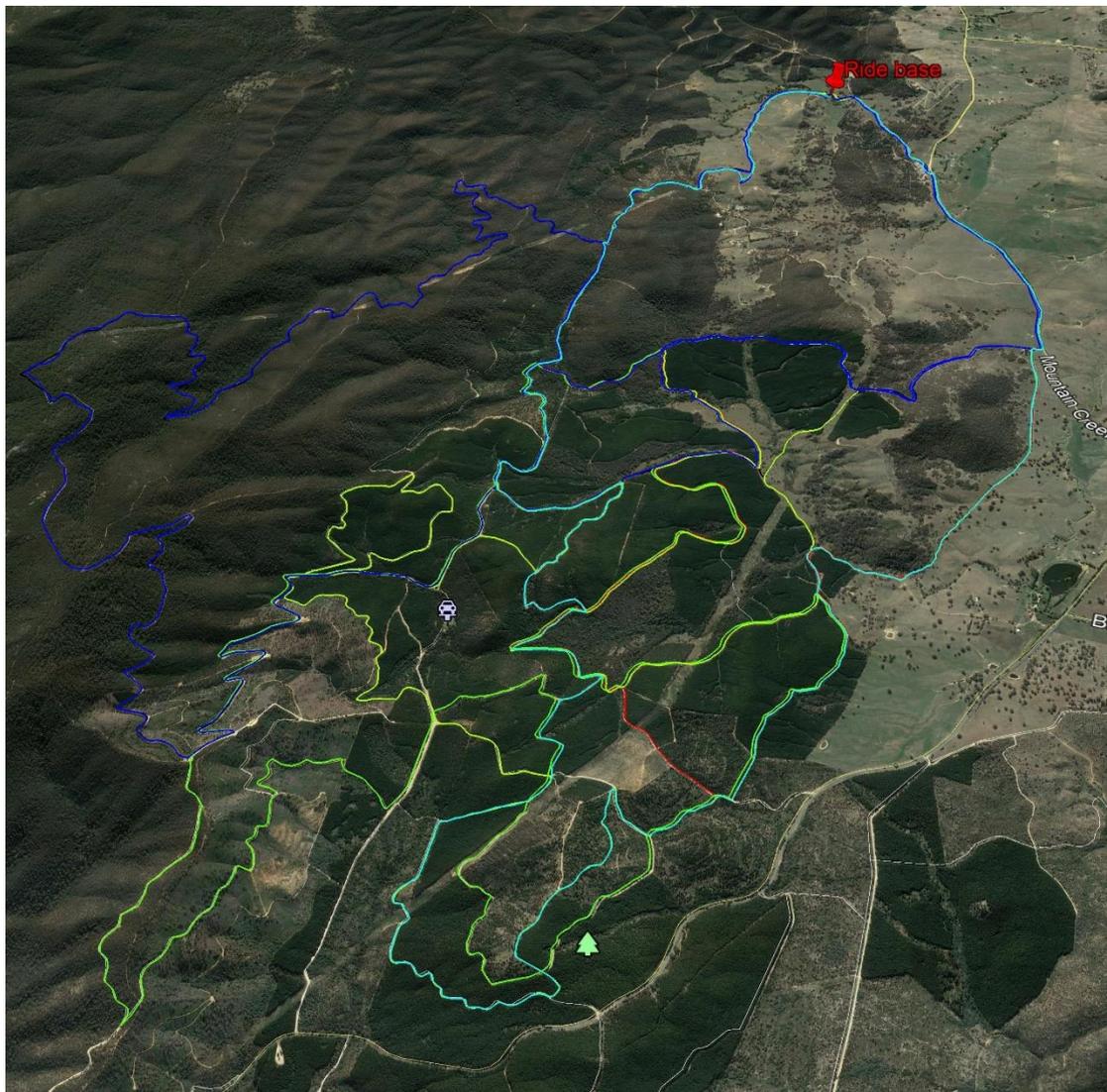


Figure 2: Tracks in Sherwood and Uriarra Forests and Blue Range used by ACTERA for introductory, intermediate and endurance rides since 2005.

Figure 2 shows the tracks we used in Sherwood and Uriarra Forest for rides varying in distance between 13 and 120km during the last 15 years. **From this it becomes clear that virtually all existing tracks in the area have been part of courses used during events, and that the impact of the proposed MTB development will be huge on what endurance riders will be able to do in future**, should this development go ahead unchanged in its current draft form and extent.

Before the bush fires in 2003, courses for 80km and longer rides frequently entered the Lower Cotter Catchment (LCC). However, restrictions imposed on horse riding in the LCC since then have limited the area available to us in recent years. While we welcome the ability to continue to conduct rides, under a permit, on tracks in the LCC west of Brindabella Road, the permit conditions do impose significant practical constraints on the use of that area as part of our ride course. The result is that our ride courses are now concentrated into the more northerly part of Uriarra Forest, on tracks outside the catchment. That is also the area with the greatest concentration of proposed downhill mountain bike trails, most of them leading to the proposed hub at Blue Range Hut.

Beside taking into account local access rules for horses, the placement of tracks is determined by a number of factors, the most important being:

- The tracks need to be connected to a suitable ride base that is large enough for a large number of vehicles, temporary horse yards and contains a flat area large enough for vetting and other temporary ride infrastructure such as the ride office, radio station, time keeper tent.
- Each leg (loop, section of the course) must not exceed the maximum distance as prescribed by the rules of the sport (i.e. 42 km for intermediate rides, 50 km for endurance rides).
- The course needs to be safe, both in terms of what riders come across and in terms of conditions underfoot (e.g. not slippery, boggy, eroded).
- The course needs to have vehicle access to enable retrieving of stranded/distressed/injured horses or riders.
- There needs to be enough scope to change the course at short notice, if parts of it become temporarily obstructed or unsafe (e.g. because of fallen trees, flash flooding).

Traditionally, the property “Brookvale” has fulfilled the role of the ride base for the annual ACTERA ride due its good connection to tracks both in the Brindabellas as well as in Sherwood and Uriarra Forest. Tracks in the latter are used for the short-distance introductory and intermediate rides as well as the second and subsequent legs of 80-120km endurance rides.

Due to its comparably ‘flat’ terrain, the tracks used for the short-distance rides are primarily located in Sherwood Forest and shown in Figure 3. As pointed out previously, the highest consideration for such rides is safety of participants and their horses. ACTERA is proud to say that, unlike B7, which had incidents at its events staged from Mt Stromlo due to unruly behavior of bike riders turning up at unexpected points on the course and not slowing down, we have so far been able to provide such rides without any safety incidents, as this area currently has limited usage by bikes and cars. **We are concerned whether this will still**

be possible in future and who will be liable in case of an accident due to unpoliced poor bike rider behavior.

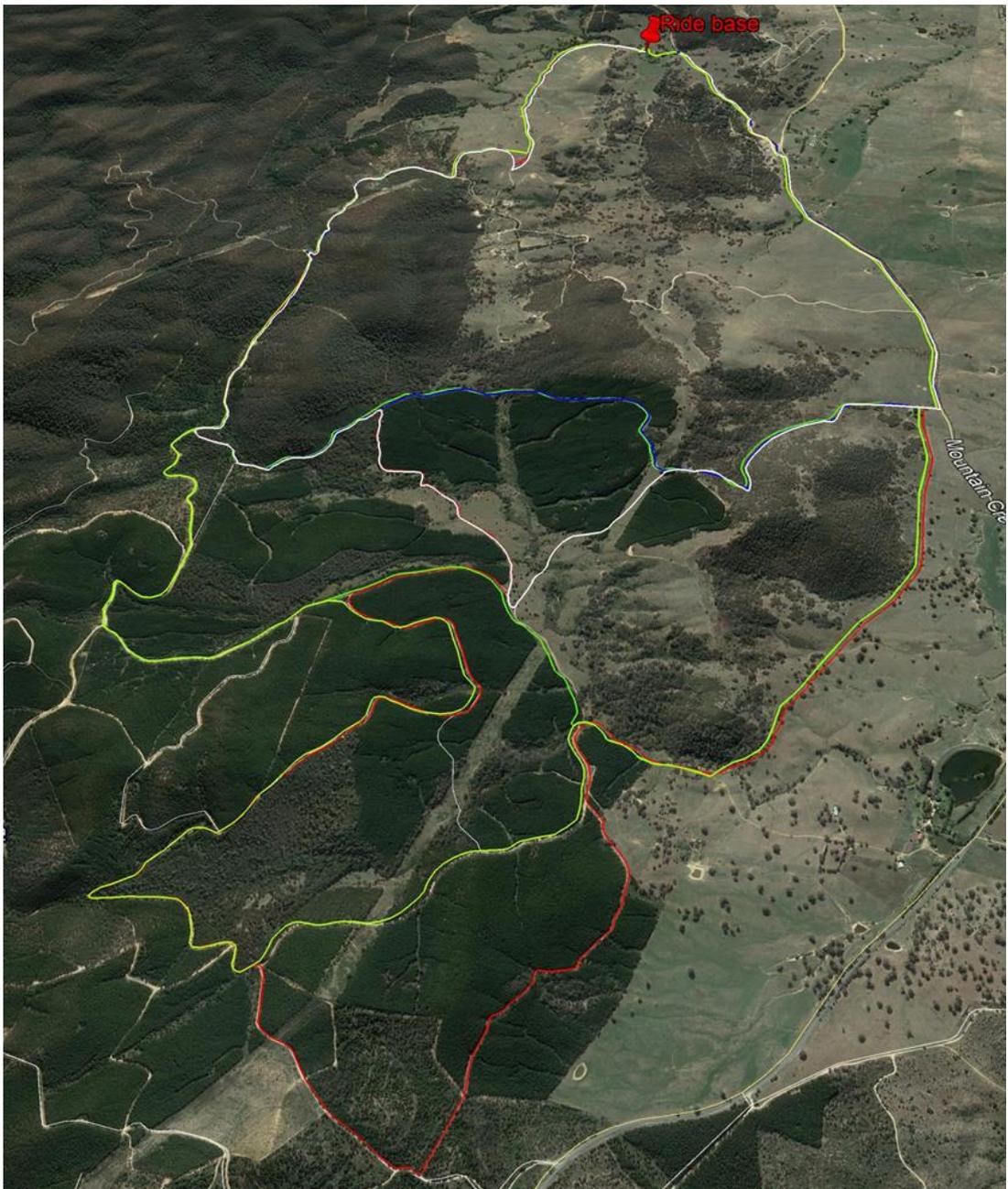


Figure 3: Tracks used by ACTERA for introductory rides of 13.3-21.9km length from the property "Brookvale" since 2005.

The tracks used for the second leg of competitive endurance ride distance need to cover a distance of 30-40 km, depending on the length of the first leg that usually follows tracks in NSW, to make up the required distance of 80 km. For this reason, they have traditionally extended as far as the top of Blue Range Road and Two Sticks Road.

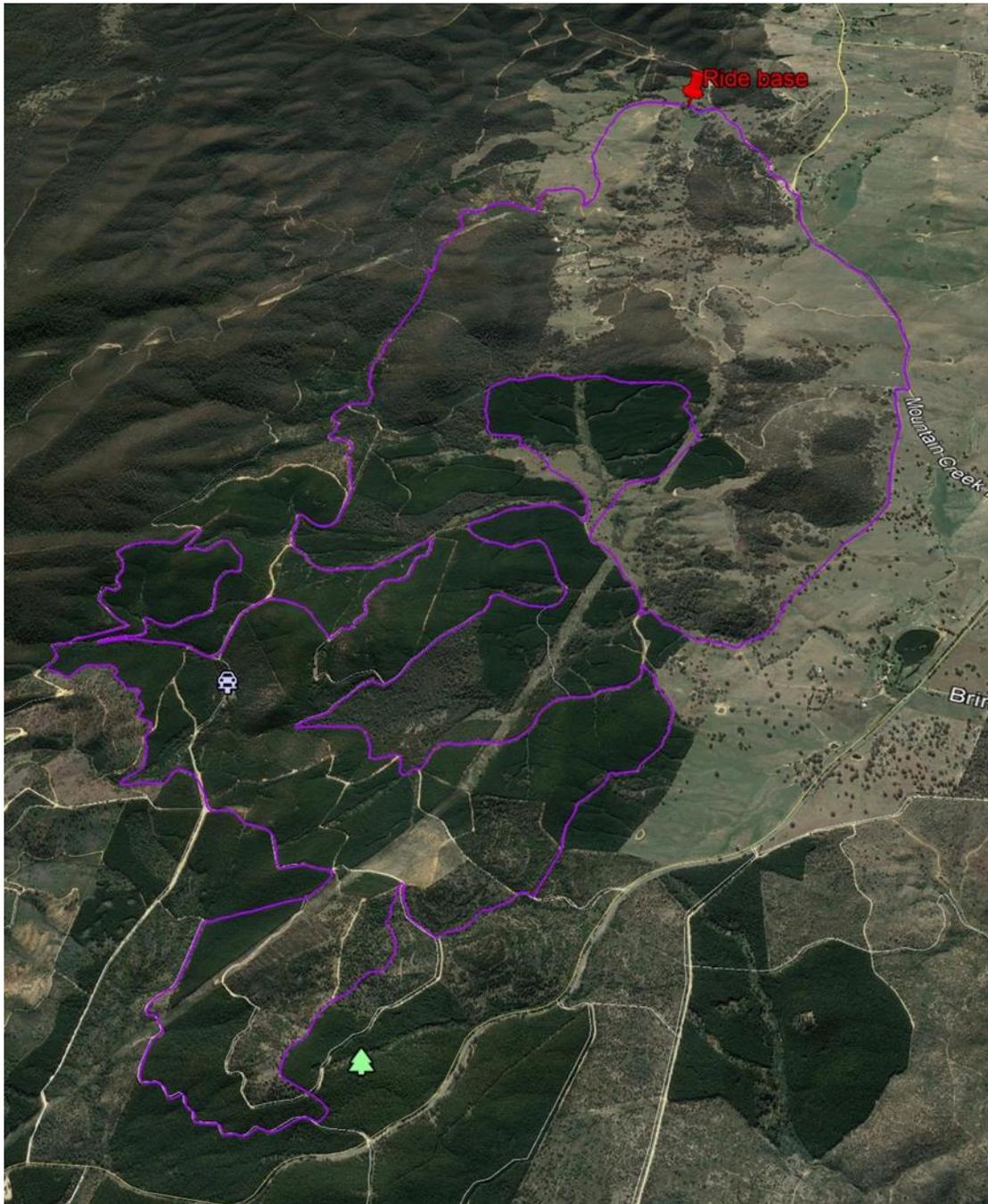


Figure 4: The 40 km Leg 2 that was intended for the 80 km National Capital Ride in 2020.

Figure 4 presents a 40 km course that was intended for use as the second leg of the 80 km ride and as an intermediate ride in 2020. It was delineated with the proposed MTB development in mind and tried to minimize intrusion into the Blue Range Road area. However, **despite utilizing as many of the Sherwood Forest tracks as possible, overlap with some of the tracks for the proposed bike development could not be avoided and would be unavoidable in future.**

While the Leg 2 course for the planned 2020 ride tried to minimize impingement of a future bike development in the area, it caused other difficulties: During course designs for competitive rides, it is paramount to consider the safety of

introductory riders who may be using parts of the same tracks and the nature of horses. This, for example, necessitates the minimisation/ avoidance of course overlap and particularly of counter traffic on the same track with one group of riders moving in one direction and another in the opposite. Inexperienced horses frequently get very excited and sometimes difficult to control when faced with horses and riders approaching them head-on at speed, easily leading to dangerous situation for the rider. Due to the reduced area used for the course, the 2020 40km leg had a lengthy part of overlap and counter traffic with the 22km introductory ride. We tried to avoid problems through appropriate scheduling of the starting time of the 22 km ride in relation to the likely fast-moving front runners of the 80 km ride, which would have avoided the likelihood of both groups being on the same part of the track at the same time. However, trying to separate groups in time is often not as effective as separating them physically by keeping them on different tracks.

(2) Endurance training

Initial training of horses for endurance distances requires extended periods of riding at slow speed to condition ligaments and bones. Despite the taking over by bike riders of most areas in the ACT that permit such long rides, thus taking a lot of enjoyment out of riding due to the constant need for vigilance and preparedness to rein in a startled horse, this sort of training is possible elsewhere in the ACT and is not restricted to the area of the proposed MTB development. This, however, does not reduce the importance of the Sherwood and Uriarra Forest area as the last area close to the city and suburbs where bike riders are not dominant, yet, and where therefore it is still possible for endurance and other riders to relax and enjoy themselves in a natural environment.

Due to its combination of a terrain with hills of various steepness and length and forestry roads that are wide, generally not slippery when wet and largely excellent underfoot, **the area under consideration is, though, superior to any other areas within easy travelling distance to the ACT for the training and preparation of high-performance endurance horses.** It is used both by ACT-based endurance riders and riders from surrounding NSW for this purpose. The fact that the comparatively small endurance ridership in the ACT and district is disproportionately successful at state and national level is arguably by not a small amount due to the access to Sherwood and Uriarra Forest and the upper reaches of Blue Range Road. The Sherwood-Uriarra Forest area is unique for enabling the building of superior stamina in horses through extended canter training at a steady speed independent of topography, while an ascent to the top of Blue Range Road at a steady trot is great for increasing strength. However, a fast-travelling horse unexpectedly and suddenly meeting an equally fast bike rider on a descent and emerging from the forest could lead to dangerous situations due to the short time available for corrective action on the part of both persons involved.

Despite its high intrinsic attractiveness to horse riders, the area is currently under-utilised by them due to the lack of even basic facilities:

- The only parking area that allows easy parking of horse floats and safe unloading, saddling and feeding of horses after the ride is located off

Mountain Creek Road at the cavalletti into Sherwood Forest. However, it is also frequented by other users (e.g. walkers, bird-watchers) and can only take a maximum of four vehicles and horse floats at a time, if nobody else is parked there. The area also becomes boggy after rain.

- Due to the lack of markers or maps in the area, even many local riders feel insecure in entering the area for fear of getting lost, unless they are accompanied by a rider who knows the area.
- The only toilets in the area are inaccessible to horse riders, because horses would have to be tied up more than 200m away and would need to be left there unattended, if no other riders are around to hold the horse.
- Since the only water sources for horses to drink from are located close together at the start of Sherwood Road, the area is only suitable for comparatively short rides within the Sherwood Forest during summer.

3. Implications of the proposals in the Draft Canberra Mountain Bike Report for endurance riding in the ACT

As a general comment, the maps in the draft report on the proposed MTB development are generally of such poor quality (low resolution images, not oriented north-south, and generally presented at angle that distorts distances) that it is difficult to see clearly what is proposed.

ACTERA acknowledges that the attributes of areas sought by endurance riders and mountain biker riders are in many ways similar: courses suitable for riders of varying abilities and interests, ranging from short and easy through increasing levels of difficulty up to challenging courses of 100km or more; from relatively flat to mountainous, with a substantial change of elevation; a preference for scenic locations; accessibility, quality and connectivity; and scope for variation.

However, **due to the nature of horses as prey animals and therefore their unpredictable reaction to suddenly appearing and to them not immediately identifiable potential 'predators' or to strange noises (e.g. the noise of bikes braking on dirt roads), co-existence of MTB riders and horse riders is only safely possible, if both parties acknowledge the needs of the other and stick to rules that have been created to ensure the safety of everyone.** Unfortunately, though, experience by horse riders in every other shared space in the ACT has shown that, in the absence of any form of policing of rules, a section of the MTB community behaves in a way that endangers horse riders or at least takes the enjoyment out of their chosen activity. This is due to the need for ever-present vigilance and the inability to relax, which in itself often has an unsettling effect on horses and increases their sensitivity and reactivity to their surroundings.

For this reason, the developments proposed for the Blue Range-Uriarra-Sherwood Forest area, currently the only larger area left close to Canberra where horse riders can follow their sport without having to deal with a large number of bike riders, have major implications not only for endurance, but also other riders in the ACT and surrounding NSW. This is particularly so, as it appears that no regard was taken during the development of the draft proposal to minimize the impact on other users by limiting the extent of the development and concentrating it in a certain area, but that essentially an ambit claim has been made for all areas that are not off-limit because they belong to the Cotter catchment or are National Park. We therefore

welcome the acknowledgement on page 37 of the Draft Report that: “There are also a range of other user groups with an interest in trails for walking and equestrian activities. It is important to consider the needs of these groups when planning for new or enhanced trails for mountain biking.” We hope that our concerns are not only listened to but will also be taken into account in the design of the final proposal.

However, if the intended development goes ahead as proposed in the draft report, it will have the following implications:

- (1) **Staging safe annual endurance competitions will no longer be possible in the Sherwood-Uriarra-Blue Range area** and ACT endurance riders will have to give up their dream to ever stage the National Championships or utilise the Brindabellas for a high-profile mountain-challenge type ride, even if we would be able to find a ride base with appropriate facilities, due to the following reasons:
 - Endurance rides in the Blue Range-Uriarra-Sherwood area use formed tracks, a number of which are named roads. The Blue Range Trails Concept Plan (Figure 12) shows many of those tracks being crossed by downhill bike tracks. Having tracks used by fast-moving, competitive horse riders shared or crossed by tracks on which mountain bikes are travelling at speed would create a very dangerous situation.
 - Furthermore, the proposed link trail between Mt Stromlo and the Blue Range Trails Precinct enters the Sherwood area at the cavalletti, installed off East-West Road to specifically allow access to the fenced area by horse riders, to make a semi-loop through Sherwood Forest outside the designated trails precinct. This unnecessarily further restricts the area where horse riders are currently protected from most wheeled vehicular traffic and, if experience in other ACT areas is anything to go by, will lead to increased bike traffic anywhere within the fenced area of Sherwood Forest where it has so far been safe to run introductory and intermediate distance rides. Since riders of horses and ponies that are from outside the ACT and are usually not accustomed to bikes regularly participate in short-distance rides, it may no longer be possible to hold such rides at all despite their popularity.
- (2) Due to the safety concerns associated with fast-moving horses meeting fast-moving bike riders, training for high-performance endurance would no longer be easily possible in the ACT and would instead require travel to an area like Bondo Forest near Tumut to achieve a similar outcome, if track conditions permit. This assessment is based on the lack of rule enforcement for MTB riders in any of the other ACT reserves, which results in new tracks being created illegally by bike riders with unsafe intersections with other tracks as well as bike riders using designated equestrian trails, not giving way to horse riders where they should do so or approaching from behind.
While long rides are still possible in the Brindabellas, the condition of the tracks (rocks) in the National Park are generally not such to allow for high-performance training.
- (3) However, in addition to the potential loss of our high-performance training ground, we are also concerned about further loss of training ground through the proposed Stromlo-Cotter Link Trail that is intended to provide an off-road

connecting corridor from Stromlo Forest Park (West) to Casuarina Sands and the Cotter Recreation Area. We note that the Draft Report states “there is an option to develop more challenging loops or parallel trails off the main green trail and to provide a return loop back to Stromlo Forest Park”. The western side of Mt Stromlo is an important area for local endurance riders for daily training of their horses and has become more so in recent years, due to the proliferation of other uses of Stromlo Forest Park and the development of Molonglo and the Arboretum. We are concerned about the increased cycle traffic in that area and increased potential for accidents that would be associated with the link trail and the potential development of further tracks in that area. One of our members was recently fortunate to avoid injury when a group of cyclists approached her and a riding companion from behind, without warning, on a sloping track.

4. Counter proposal

The current draft proposal, if implemented as put forward, will result in a clear winner-loser situation. MTB riders, an anyway already privileged sports group in the ACT that has taken over all reserves in close proximity to the city and, due to the uninhibited and unpoliced rogue element among its membership, has negatively affected the quality of the experience of other user groups in shared areas, will be the clear winners, while horse riders and other users will be clear losers. One group of people will get their dreams realized from funds paid by all rate payers, including horse riders, while another group’s traditional events and dreams will be destroyed. Tourism associated with one sport may increase, if the predictions the report is based on will hold true, despite the new MTB developments (Talbingo) across the border that have commenced since the report was completed, but the potential for visitors to the territory associated with another will completely dissipate.

ACTERA finds this situation unacceptable and would like to put forward a proposal that would – with a bit of give-and-take on both sides and depending on the availability of funds – allow both groups to at least co-exist, if not realize their dreams of having a high-performance training area that will attract visitors on an ongoing basis and may perhaps also allow them to stage world-class events.

The proposal has two elements: Risk management strategies and new facilities, including trails.

4.1 Risk Management

We note the statement that “Risk management, rider safety and emergency response are critical considerations for trail use in this area, due to the steep terrain and remoteness of the site.” We are disappointed, however, that the Draft Report appears to focus mainly on the safety of cyclists without considering the risks to other users arising from the proposed development of a mountain bike facility.

Co-existence of both sports in the same area covered by the Draft Report would require education for all users on sharing trails, in addition to appropriate risk management measures to minimize accidents caused by fast, downhill moving MTB riders and horse riders. Beside the installation of signage and potentially barriers, we would like to propose the following:

- Design of bike tracks in a way to ensure that, where they need to cross tracks used by horses, they do so safely.*

This has not worked in other areas, though, due to the rogue element among bike riders creating new tracks. In addition, part of the topography in the area under discussion, particularly in parts higher up in the landscape, may not lend itself to the construction of suitable approaches of bike tracks to forestry tracks.
- Temporary closure for a whole day/weekend of the area to other users during an event organised by one user group.*

This will, however, likely result in additional costs to the organiser of the event, additional efforts to effectively prevent violation of the closure and in inconvenience and disappointment of all other users. ACTERA in its 40-year history has always managed to conduct rides safely by using appropriate warning signs while sharing spaces with other users. However, closure of tracks to other users may have to be necessary, if affordable and risk cannot be managed otherwise.
- Designating time brackets within the day for each of the competing user groups for certain areas.*

In association with a (further below elaborated on) proposal for dividing the development area into zones, we would like to suggest the designation of daily time brackets of use by each major user group for weekends and public holidays. Endurance riders are early risers and are used to riding in the dark. 80 km rides usually commence at 4-5 am and 160 km rides begin at midnight. Therefore, installing a time-based usage system in shared zones, e.g. horse riders until 11 am or 12 noon and bike riders after that for the rest of the day, would allow horse riders to train their horses in that area or schedule a course through it during an event with only little inconvenience to bike riders.
- Geographic separation of bikes from horses by dividing the Sherwood-Uriarra-Blue Range area into zones.*

Figure 5 shows a suggestion for such zoning. It is based on the tracks used by ACTERA for its rides as well as by bushwalkers and bird watchers. It proposes three zones: Zone 1 (shaded red) for all users (horse riders, walkers, bird watchers, etc) except bike riders and cars, Zone 2 (shaded cream) for shared use of all users, and Zone 3 (the rest of the area designated as 'Blue Range Trails Precinct' in Figure 12 of the draft MTB proposal). The area of the Cotter Catchment has not been allocated, as we do not know how it is to be treated and protected in future.

Zone 1 is the area most used by non-MTB aficionados and would preserve and protect the Sherwood Forest area as the area where ACTERA conducts introductory rides and where most leisure riders like to ride due to the only slightly undulating topography. It contains the currently fenced area of Sherwood Forest but extends beyond it to existing tracks to enable the completion of loops and the safe access to Two Sticks Road for competitions and long, extended training rides.

Zone 2 could be slightly modified and tailored, but it would be the zone where time brackets for use by horse and bike riders could be applied most usefully but not in any case. This zone would include one longer and steeper ascent (the loop off Blue Range Road to a 960 m elevation) to enable stamina training in endurance horses and would also allow usage for courses during endurance events, while most of the time being accessible by bike riders. If not used in conjunction with time brackets for exclusive use, this zone would still be useful

for riders with horses that are accustomed to bikes and are less easily startled by them.

Zone 3 (not marked) would be a zone where horse riders are not normally permitted unless the whole area is booked and closed for other users. This area includes all the core bike track areas in the higher parts of the landscape where it, according to our assessment, would be difficult to design tracks that would allow a safe co-existence of bike and horse riders.

The zoning system would, however, depend on a way of effective policing.

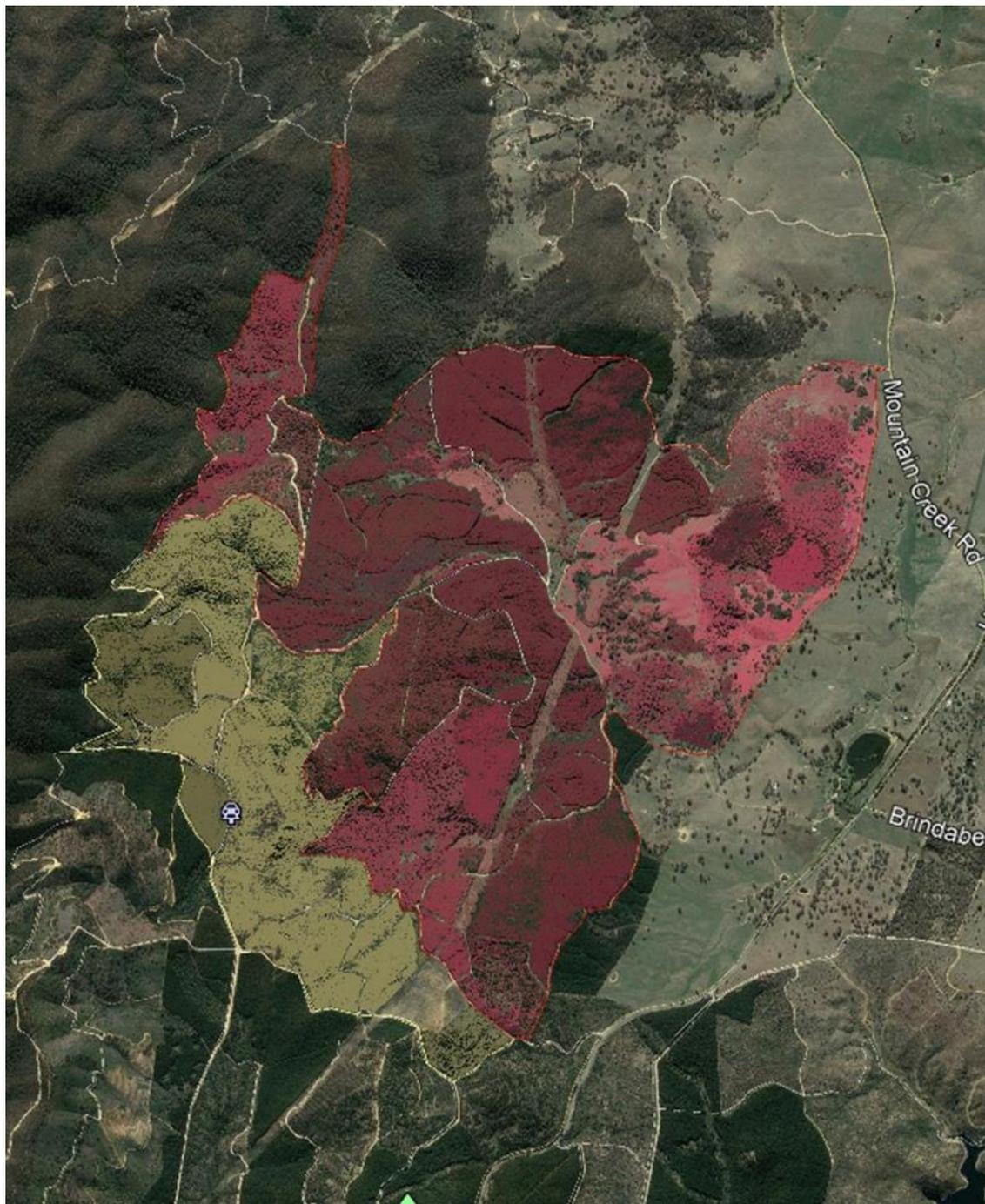


Figure 5: Proposed zones for the Sherwood-Uriarra-Blue Range area with the red-shaded area = Zone 1 and the cream-shaded area = Zone 2 (for further explanation see text)

- *Re-alignment of the proposed Link Trail from the intersection of East-West Road with Brindabella Road to Blue Range Hut.*

As mentioned previously, the course of the proposed Link Trail from the intersection of Brindabella and East West road onwards towards Blue Range Hut intrudes unnecessarily into the Sherwood Forest area where horse access has explicitly been permitted so far, while wheeled traffic (other than bikes, which are currently few) has been excluded. If this alignment will be realised, it will not be possible to keep increased numbers of mountain bike riders out of this area and therefore make it unsafe for horse riders. Therefore, we suggest a re-alignment along the lines presented in Figure 86. This would introduce another hill to be climbed. However, bike riders who are fit enough to make the trip from Mt Stromlo to Uriarra Forest via the Link Trail should not be intimidated by a short, steep hill with a climb of about 50 m in elevation.

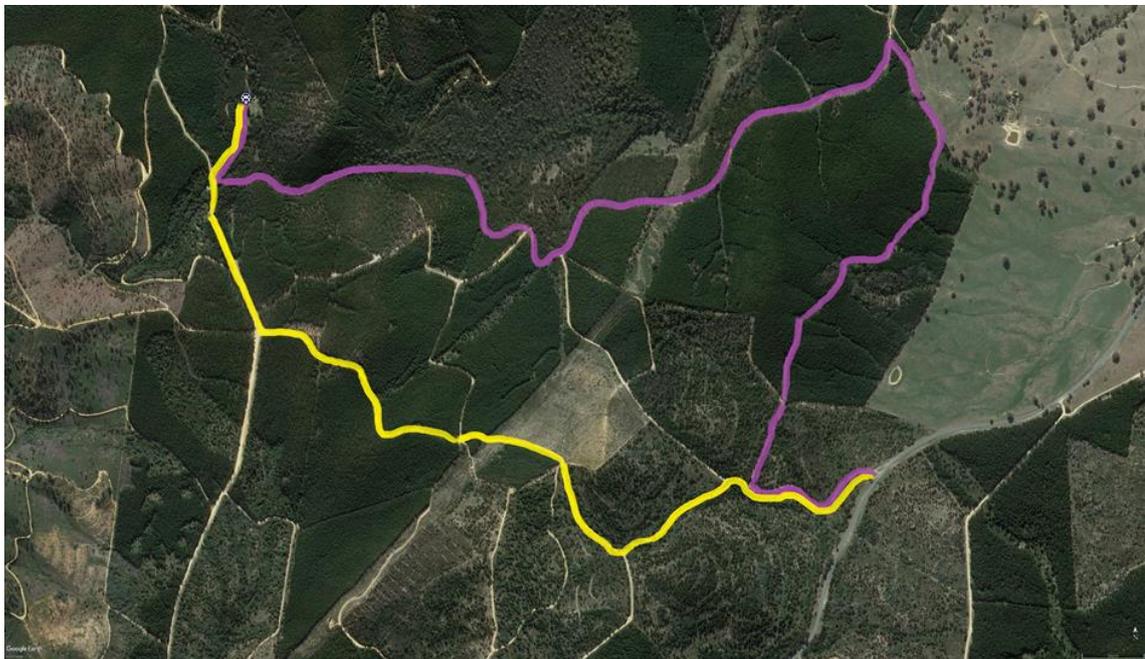


Figure 6: Original (purple) alignment of the Link Trail as given in the draft MTB development proposal and the re-aligned (yellow) Link Trail as proposed by ACTERA

- *Identification system for bike and horse riders.*
One of the reasons that has no doubt contributed to the rise of the rogue element among the bike riders is the fact that effective identification of bike riders is difficult unless they are known and recognised by horse riders and other users. For this reason, we are calling for and suggesting the creation of an identification system – number plating – for bikes and horses. Examples of bike and horse numbering systems used in competitions are presented below (Figure 7). All horse and bike ride users of the area would have to have a number for identification. Registration for a small fee could be online with a print-out produced that details the registration number and will need to be taken to authorised sign writers who would produce the label. Perhaps paper-based day labels could be issued at an automat at Blue Range

Hut (for bike riders) and at the Mountain Creek Road entry to Sherwood Forest (for horse riders).

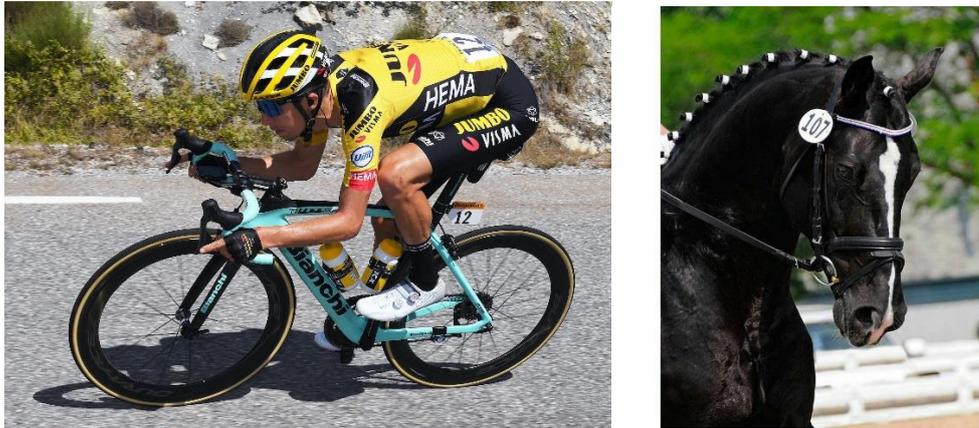


Figure 7: Bike (left) and horse (right) numbering system used in competitions.

Implementation of all or at least the three last risk management suggestions would ensure that endurance rides using the current ride base at “Brookvale” could continue in future, that endurance riders could still train horses and that other leisure riders, bird watchers and walkers could relax and enjoy themselves in the area despite a major MTB facility close by.

4.2 Trails and facilities

While the previously listed risk management strategies will allow the current endurance competitions and horse riding activities to continue, this part of our proposal is about improving what we currently have and enabling our sport to take on a more prominent role in contributing to ACT tourism and the local economy.

In this context, we welcome the statement on page 43 of the Draft Report that “Trail-based recreation opportunities for other users such as walkers, trail runners and equestrians is also an important consideration in the development of new trails.” The Draft Report thus provides an opportunity to build on the ACT’s credentials as a venue for endurance riding and enable it once again to attract major, high-profile endurance events.

Furthermore, in 2016 the ACT Government, in its response to public comment on the draft Stromlo Forest Park Management Plan, undertook to reinstate the equestrian event campground in Block 514 Stromlo District that was first proposed in the 2010 Master Plan. The purpose of this campground is to provide basic camping facilities to support equestrian events in the park. The Government also undertook to look at creating better equestrian linkages between this site and other parts of Stromlo Forest Park. B7 has held several endurance rides of various distances from Block 514 since then.

The endurance and wider trail-riding equestrian community would welcome improvements in the following areas:

- *Improved vehicle and float parking area at the Mountain Creek Road entry into Sherwood Forest*

A larger carpark with a firm all-weather base would encourage more horse riders to use the area more regularly. Currently, it is never certain that it is possible to park a vehicle with a horse float in that area, as sometimes walking groups with several vehicles use up almost all the available space or are parked in such a way as to make it impossible to turn around with a horse float. In addition, vehicles without 4WD may get stuck after it has rained due to the area getting boggy.

- *Basic amenities at the entry into Sherwood Forest*
A toilet block at the entry into Sherwood Forest off Mountain Creek Road would increase the attractiveness of Sherwood Forest to both horse riders and walkers. Combined with the possibility to camp overnight and perhaps a picnic shelter, it would give the opportunity to spend a whole weekend in the area to train in Sherwood-Uriarra Forest or explore the Brindabellas for riders coming from further away, or to watch and listen to birds at sunrise.
- *Permanently marked tracks in Sherwood Forest*
Permanently marked trails that give at least at the start an indication of how long they are will give riders confidence that they will not get lost somewhere in the forest and will be able to return home within a certain period of time. ACTERA would be more than happy to help in the design of the courses.
- *A link trail for horse riders between Mt Stromlo and Sherwood-Uriarra Forest*
A horse trail linking Mt Stromlo to Sherwood and Uriarra Forest, similar to what is proposed for mountain bikes under the Draft Report, combined with further development of Block 514 to enhance its suitability as an endurance ride base, would open up the scope for high-profile 160 km rides using tracks in Mount Stromlo, Sherwood-Uriarra Forest and the Brindabella Ranges. For some of the distance between the two venues, bike and horse trails could possibly even run beside one another, but separated from one another, to minimize the scope for accidents.
- *Facilities on Block 514*
Well-arranged facilities including access to permanent water 'on tap', if possible at a number of different points scattered across the site, a shed large enough to hold a group of 100 or more people, a toilet and shower block and a flat area that can accommodate several trot-out lanes would make this location suitable as a ride base for a high-profile, long distance ride of 120-160km. This would be particularly the case, if it could be connected better to Stromlo West and via an equestrian link trail to Sherwood Forest, as this would enable access to more challenging and longer tracks than would otherwise be available in the city.
An equestrian facility on Block 514 could also be used for educational purposes throughout the year. It could function as a venue for events lasting from one day to a week and providing practical information and coaching of people from Canberra and the surrounding district or even the whole of NSW who want to take up endurance riding as a sport, learn about training techniques or become a steward at a ride. ACTERA conducts these events from time to time, the most recent being an "Introduction to Endurance" day at "Brookvale" in 2017 where 47 riders, including novice riders and a few mentors, participated in the subsequent introductory ride. Increased use of Block 514 as an endurance ride base and for related purposes could be expected to create some commercial

spin-off for local businesses through the purchase of food, beverages, horse feed, fuel and accommodation.

5. Government assistance

ACTERA and the other organisations currently and previously running rides in the ACT have sought minimal assistance from government. We have not required the development of special infrastructure, including dedicated tracks, because riders are largely self-sufficient and organisers have had a wide choice of tracks on which to run rides and bases from which to run them. That situation is changing rapidly. In addition to the other factors restricting access to, and safe use of, tracks in the ACT, our sport is increasingly being impacted by ACT government initiatives and we are now at the point where the longer-term future of our sport is in jeopardy. Those government initiatives are not limited to the Best of Canberra Mountain Bike Experience project: they include the CBR Cycle Tourism Strategy and potentially the Commercial Tourism Framework Feasibility Project, if the resulting Framework promotes, rather than simply governs, commercial tourism in ACT parks and reserves.

Ensuring that endurance riding, and horse riding generally, is not jeopardised by the mountain bike development proposed in this Draft Report, and by the promotion of cycling tourism generally, is an important part of the 'social sustainability' aspect of the Canberra Mountain Bike Strategy and of the overarching CBR Cycle Tourism Strategy.

Endurance riding is a sport in which the riders from the ACT have consistently performed well. It is also a form of nature-based tourism. Riders are prepared to travel considerable distances in order to ride in a variety of locations and ecosystems over a wide area of Australia, in which they experience nature at close quarters. Endurance riding, and horse riding generally, benefits the health and wellbeing of the community through these nature-based interactions.

If adequate distance of safe trails can be accessed, there is significant potential to expand the endurance competitions on offer in the ACT. These could range from introductory rides of as little a few kilometres in length, that play a key part in attracting new people to our sport, to rides of up to 160km in one day. The latter would attract a large number of riders from interstate and potentially overseas, and even larger numbers of non-riders in volunteer, support and spectator roles. A fraction of the assistance that the ACT government has directed, and continues to direct, to the cycling community would help to make such events a reality, with direct and indirect benefits to local tourism and the economy. Our greatest need for assistance is ongoing access to the necessary length and variety of trails on which to train our horses and run events.

6. Governance

ACTERA believes that our long-established usage of the Sherwood-Uriarra-Blue Range area warrants us having a strong voice in the determination of its future, especially as we and other horse riders have already been forced out of riding areas, or had our safety and amenity severely reduced, by the proliferation of cyclists and cycle tracks.

We note that the Draft Report recommends establishment of “an effective governance model to manage risk and safety and to coordinate the implementation of this report” (page vii). We also note the statement on page 73 that “The recommended model for governance of the ACT Trail network is one which recognises the existing stakeholder groups and their significant knowledge and expertise on trail development.” While we strongly agree that existing stakeholder groups need to be recognised and included in the governance arrangements, the reference to stakeholders on page 73 appears to mean mountain bike riders and designers of mountain bike tracks, ignoring the many other people who like to use this area for recreational purposes including bushwalking, bird-watching, or simply enjoying the open spaces of the ACT, which they access by a variety of means including on foot, on horseback or by 4WD.

The governance model needs to provide for ongoing consultation with, and input from, other user groups, including ACTERA and representatives of other equestrian users. We are happy to provide advice on the placement of tracks for the purpose of risk management and consider our ongoing involvement in the proposed development is essential for the effective management of risk to both horse riders and cyclists.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ACT Government and the ACT Equestrian Association, which is the peak body representing horse riders in the ACT and of which ACTERA is a member, would be an appropriate means of ensuring the needs of horse riders are addressed.

7. Conclusion

Endurance horse riding has a tradition of spanning back 40-50 years with the first Canberra to Tumut ride held in 1971 and at least one annual competition, conducted by ACTERA or other groups, having taken place since 1982. Most of the latter have utilized tracks in the Sherwood-Uriarra-Blue Range area.

ACTERA objects to the Draft MTB Report in its current form and extent, as it will leave winners and losers. The winners will be a community group that has no ongoing connection to the area in question and that has been treated preferentially for years by ACT government agencies through the provision of extensive trail networks and facilities in the rest of the territory. This has led to a self-enforcing circular situation where provision of more tracks encourages more users, which again encourages government investment in more facilities, etc. and the overtaking of all shared recreational use areas by one user group at the detriment of everyone else.

On the other hand, horse riders have increasingly been locked out of areas or had their enjoyment in their sport and being with their favourite animal partner more or less severely curtailed by actions of members in the MTB community. Horse riders in general and endurance riders in particular stand to become the clear losers under the proposed development, as the report outlines a wholesale overtaking of the last area within the ACT, where bike riders have so far only had a low profile. This area has allowed endurance riders to hold safe events, train their horses to high-performance level, leading to clear over-representation of ACT and district riders at

the top level of the sport, and to enjoy themselves together with other horse riders, bird watchers and bush walkers in a beautiful environment. Depriving the sport of this area completely, as is envisaged by the Draft Report, will most likely – and in contrast to MTB riding - lead to a down-ward spiral of endurance-riding in the ACT and adjoining NSW. One sport, enjoyed and represented by people of all ages and both sexes equally, will be sacrificed to support another that is primarily represented by a different demographic composition.

In this submission, ACTERA has provided its ideas and suggestions that may enable at least co-existence of MTB riders and horse riders in the Sherwood-Uriarra-Blue Range area, if MTB riders cooperate by adhering to rules. With some government assistance, the size of only a small fraction of what is spent on MTB developments, they may even enable the endurance community's dreams to materialize and allow endurance riding to flourish. They could turn the ACT into a nationally and internationally known and prestigious endurance destination that offers endurance educational, training and competition facilities that can be visited and used throughout the year, contributing to the local economy on an ongoing basis. We hope that decision-makers agree with our vision and will find it as attractive as we do.

Canberra | FEI Ride



1st placegetters Kristie McGaffin and Rowellan Miss Lilly.



Renee Saxby-Lloyd and Peoria Valadiction walk through Canberra's decimated pine forests.



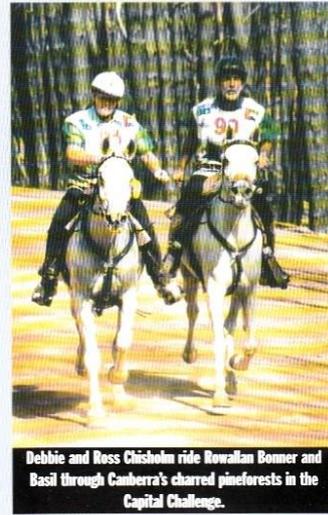
The frontrunners (L-R) Dato Kamaruddin behind Meg Wade, Kristie McGaffin, Peter Toff and Jennifer Gilbertson.



Rippling snuggles up to Jennifer Gilbertson after placing 2nd MWT at the Australian Open Challenge.



One of the oldest competitors in the Capital Challenge, Searle Johnson and Brindabella Bold Boris walk past the Australian Museum on the second leg.



Debbie and Ross Chisholm ride Rowellan Bommer and Basil through Canberra's charred pineforests in the Capital Challenge.

By Jo Arblaster

The beautiful city of Canberra was once again the venue for the FEI 160km Australian Open Championship in April despite the devastation left by the drought and bush fires. With generous sponsorship from the United Arab Emirates, the ride was able to go ahead and make a donation to the Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal.

The historic Yarralumla Woolshed was once again the ride base for the 160km CEI *** HH The President of the UAE FEI Australian Open Endurance Championship and the 107km CEI ** Australian Capital Challenge. There were 37 competitors in the 160km event and 57 in the 107km ride. What was different at this year's event was the stunning leg around Lake Burley Griffin which had taken months to organize.

As hot air balloons rose lazily skywards at dawn, riders from all over Australia - as well as those from New Zealand, Holland and Malaysia - rode their horses round one of the most scenic legs ever to be included in an endurance ride. The 42km leg was the second in both rides. As the sun came up over this man-made wonder, sporting Canberrans on their bikes and rollerblades, jogging and walking dogs, shared their bitumen track with close to 100 horses for the first time.

Riding past the imposing National Library building, the High Court, the

Australian Museum and Parliament House itself, riders seemed to enjoy this variation to the traditional course. Negotiating little bridges and walking past the very portals of power, the horses seemed to take the whole experience in their collective stride.

There were two compulsory walk sections in the leg due to government risk assessment requirements but no one seemed to mind the chance to dismount and enjoy the unusual scenery on foot. Those familiar with Canberra bureaucracy will appreciate the time and effort that must have gone in to obtaining permission to run this leg of the ride through the very heart of the city.

The third leg took riders through Belconnen and back to the Woolshed for further vetting before heading out for what had once been a beautiful leg through the pine forests, now a scarred landscape with little hope of regeneration. Competitors were well spread out by this stage and the heat and dust after months of drought made for uncomfortable riding conditions.

Travelling well and in the lead at this stage were some of Australia's finest endurance riders. Meg Wade riding Castlebar Macleod and Kristie McGaffin on Rowallan Miss Lilly set off two minutes ahead of Jennifer Gilbertson riding Webbs Creek Ripling and Peter Toft - with broken fingers and an injured leg - riding Magnum. The pair soon caught up with McGaffin and Wade and with Dato

Kamaruddin riding Bara Park Benjamin, the group set a scorching pace.

With Toft and Kamaruddin's horses going out lame at the end of the fourth leg, the Australian women were left to fight it out in the final 16km on undulating and sometimes deceptively steep forestry tracks around the capital.

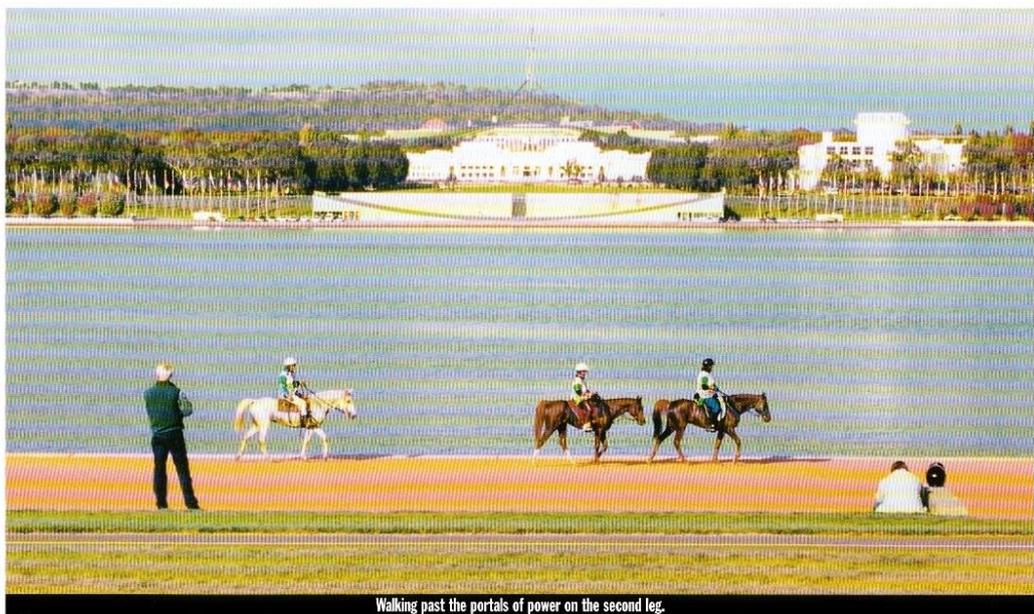
In a gallop finish, Wade and McGaffin crossed the line together with McGaffin just slightly ahead completing the ride in 8 hrs 44.39. Seconds later, Gilbertson and Ripling galloped across the line finishing in a time of 8 hrs 44.43.

But as always, it's not over until the fat lady sings, or in this case, until the vetting, and sadly for Wade, Macleod was pronounced lame.

Third home was Howard Harris riding Harmere Turfan (9.14.44) closely followed by Queensland's Anne Jones riding Tongarra Red Cloud (9.15.01) who was Best Conditioned. Of the 37 starters, 24 successfully completed the ride.

First and Best Conditioned in the Heavyweight division was the 10-year-old coloured part Arab gelding, Banner ridden by Jon Soper, the only combination out of four in the Heavyweight division to finish the ride (16.06.20). First home and Best Conditioned in the Youth division was Angela Molnar riding Snowy River Phantom (10.46.08).

In the 107km ride, Asher Batty riding Tierview Fire Danzer (5.10.19) was first in the Middleweight division closely followed



Walking past the portals of power on the second leg.

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by Roy Counsel riding Danjera Bharata (5.12.24) who also took the Best Conditioned award in the division. Murray Woods and Henley Farm Bimbashi (6.02.07) was the Fittest Horse in the Heavyweight division, with Dumaresq Twister ridden by Adrian Brickley (5.39.19) first in the Junior division and Fittest Horse. Of the 51 starters, 33 successfully completed.

The veterinary team was led by the USA's Dr Kerry Ridgeway who was obviously pleased to be back in Australia after 10 years and expressed his admiration at the quality of the horses and the way they were conditioned and presented.

He said, "It's just head and shoulders above what it was 10 years ago. There is more science behind the training. Breeding has improved and people are doing a better job of selecting stock."

Dr Ridgeway said he was impressed with the cooperation of riders as they brought their horses into vetting.

"If we have had to remove a horse from the ride, they say 'thank you' and what it is telling me is people are much more aware and they are also not considering the veterinarian as the enemy as in the early days of the sport."

There were a few cases of lameness at the ride which were to be expected but Dr Ridgeway noted there had been relatively few metabolic problems and they had been minimal. Treatment Veterinarian Steve Roberts had a relatively easy time with only one horse requiring treatment for mild dehydration colic after the ride which says much for the way riders rode to the conditions and managed their horses.

Results

HH THE PRESIDENT OF THE UAE AUSTRALIAN OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP - 160KM

OPEN DIVISION

1st Kristie McGaffin - Rowallan Miss Lilly 8.44.39, 2nd Jennifer Gilbertson - Webbs Creek Ripling - 8.44.43, 3rd Howard Harris - Harmere Turfan - 9.14.44, 4th Anne Jones - Tongarra Red Cloud - 9.15.01 (BC), 5th Rosemary Circosta - Shatari - 9.17.02, 6th Penny Toft - Bremervale Justice - 9.29.35

YOUTH DIVISION

1st Angela Molnar - Snowy River Phantom - 10.46.08, 2nd Kimberley Monger - Harmere Hariz - 10.57.54, 3rd Sasha Laws-King - Annandale Park Shanel - 11.08.05, 4th Renee McCreedy - Tallawarra Scoot - 13.54.13, 5th Emma McMurrich - V-Enduro Shahjah - 13.59.14

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL CHALLENGE - 107KM

MIDDLEWEIGHT

1st Asher Batty - Tierview Fire Danzer - 5.10.19, 2nd Roy Counsel - Danjera Bharata - 5.12.24, 3rd Andrea Laws-King - Allira Park Minarian - 5.14.15, 4th Corey Nix - Razorback Sierra - 5.18.16, 5th Daphne Phillips - Rowallan Lassitor - 5.19.32, 6th Kevin James - Castlebar Tradition - 5.23.01

HEAVYWEIGHT

1st Murray Woods - Henley Farm Bimbashi - 6.02.07, 2nd Alwyn Torenbeck - Lucille - 6.38.33, 3rd Virginia Blain - Salam Mezzlah - 7.02.24

JUNIOR

1st Adrian Brickley - Dumaresq Twister - 5.39.19, 2nd Kerry-Lee Sayer - El-Jannah Rafiq - 5.53.44