



The ACT Equestrian Association Incorporated

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Park Planning and Policy

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Murrumbidgee River Corridor Plan Review

The ACT Equestrian Association Inc and the National Trail Section 10 Coordinator would like to take the opportunity offered by the review of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor Management Plan to raise some serious issues with the viability of the Trail through the southern part of the ACT.

The 1998 Management Plan recognises that there are *regional leisure activities which involve passing through the corridor, including walking, car-touring, horse riding and cycling*¹ but then states quite baldly that *horses will be permitted within leased areas, on public roads as a thoroughfare only and on management tracks which are approved for the purpose, but not on walking tracks, in recreation areas or in nature reserves*². There is absolutely no reason offered for this singular and almost blanket exclusion.

Despite our best efforts we had great difficulty determining exactly where the National Trail ran. The maps in the 1998 plan are next to useless and the one in the discussion document is not a map. For the benefit of future users of the River Reserve the Management Plan should contain a series of accurate maps.

The consequence of the exclusion of horses means the National Trail through the Murrumbidgee Valley from Coleman Ridge, via Pine island, to Point Hut Crossing ducks, confusingly, in and out of the River Reserve.

The existing trail in this area is really rough in places and could do with some serious maintenance - filling in ruts, clearing grass and bushes around cavaletti and fixing gates. Despite these problems **the current route here is very pleasant and ACTEA strongly supports its maintenance as a result of this consultation process.**

¹ Functions Of The Murrumbidgee River Corridor In The ACT p 8

² Activities p 32

The only other place where the National Trail travels through the River Reserve is around Tharwa where it briefly passes through outliers of the Gigerline Reserve around Tharwa itself and on the Smith's Road verge, consistent with the 1998 policy in relation to horses.

The Review document, on page 13, says that *horse riding is permitted on the Bicentennial National Trail in the River Reserve*. While the issues for consideration in the new plan include drones, e-bikes and mountain bikes in no place does the Plan even envisage any kind of amelioration of the issues with the BNT route. We note that in the years since the current Management Plan was created mountain bike trails have proliferated through the corridor. The Centenary Trail takes bikes and walkers through the Bullen Range Reserve and there are demands for more like it. Clearly, it is not the making of the National Trail that is the problem, but that it is used by long distance and local horse riders.

Where the National Trail could not access non-riverine Reserves it was moved onto public road verges. This may not have been much of an issue in 1998 but in the last quarter of a century the city has expanded westward and the rural roads between Point Hut and Tharwa have become the playground for fast speeding 4 wheel drives and motorcycles; Point Hut crossing is used by fast moving vehicles including large trucks and is unsafe for anyone trying to cross the bridge on foot or on a horse; walkers and they are equally unsafe walking in the long grass on the Tidbinbilla Road where culverts force them to move onto the road or cross over to the other side; Tharwa Village has become an outer suburb of the Tuggeranong Valley where riders are forced to walk their horses down the main street; Smiths Road is so infested with dust-raising racing cars that ACT Forests have moved a section of the National Trail into Ingledene Pine Forest. The single lane bridge on the Naas Road south of Tharwa requires walkers and horse riders to have nerves of steel.

We strongly encourage the ACT Government to use the revision of the Management Plan as an opportunity to look at the potential for upgrading the National Trail as a walking and riding asset through the south of Canberra.

1. We would like to keep the current pleasant National Trail route from the back of Kambah to Point Hutt. Of concern is ongoing maintenance of the track. Our biggest concern, however, is the unreliability of the crossing at Tuggeranong Creek where the causeway is routinely washed away every time Lake Tuggeranong spillway has a substantial overflow.
2. We are not sure what the solution is to Point Hutt Crossing but big fast-moving vehicles and people on foot or on a horse are not a safe mix. ACTEA request the ACT Government to investigate a road safety management solution at the bridge.
3. Ideally, we would like to keep the great rural views on the Tidbinbilla Road while getting off its verge. We note that for much of its length the Road is bounded by historic Lambrigg which is leased for grazing purposes. ACTEA would like to propose that the BNT be routed along the western boundary of Lambrigg as part of the ACT's recreational assets. If that is impossible more effort needs to be put in to managing the verge on Tidbinbilla Road.

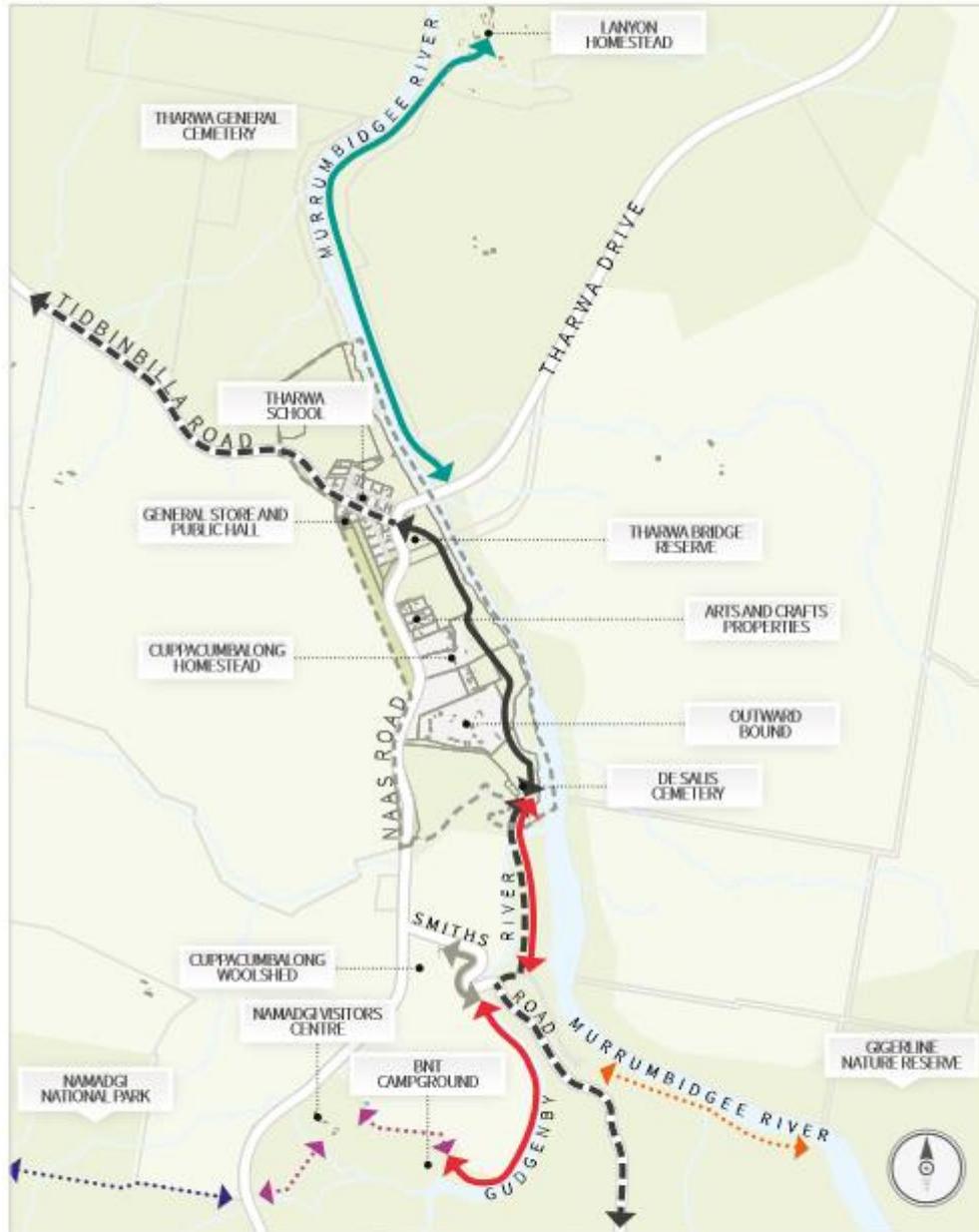
4. We also note that the 2018 Tharwa Plan placed heavy emphasis on developing recreational assets which would attract visitors to the Village. ACTEA and the BNT made a submission to that inquiry and we note that several of our suggestions have been incorporated in the final Plan. The proposed Recreational Trails in that report (Attached) show a clear linkage both to Smith's Road from the Village and to the BNT Camp at the Namadgi Visitors centre. We recommend an effort be made to implement that suggestion.
5. While thinking about Tharwa, it would be good to find an alternative route around rather than through the middle of the Village – deadly horse accidents probably add too much rural authenticity in the 21st Century.
6. The section of the National Trail from the Gudgenby River crossing to Ingledene is on a poorly maintained road verge next to a section of the Gigerline Reserve. It would be good to be able to use a management track inside the Reserve instead.

The Management Plan Discussion document indicates that the best of Canberra Mountain Biking Report recommendation to link West Stromlo bike tracks to the Cotter Reserve via the Stoney Creek Reserve will be considered in the revised Management Plan. The ACT Endurance Riders Association, who have watched all their training areas around the city disappear under suburbs, are very keen to know why such a link to the pine forests west of Uriarra Village and the venue for their annual Brookvale Ride should be exclusively an MTB route. A trail wide enough to accommodate horses safely with other users within the corridor including a horse-friendly crossing point on the Murrumbidgee River and equestrian access to Cotter Pines and beyond would provide a genuine national/international level track that could be utilised for larger/longer endurance events. We understand ACTERA will be making a separate submission.

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Map 19: Heritage and recreation network track connections



LEGEND

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|---|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|----------------|
| → | BICENTENNIAL NATIONAL TRAIL (BNT) | → | AUSTRALIAN ALPS WALKING TRACK | ● | NATURE RESERVE |
| → | THARWA EXPLORER TRACK | → | LANYON TRACK | ○ | STUDY AREA |
| → | THARWA SANDWASH TRACK | → | NAMADGI TRACK | | |
| → | NATIONAL PARK TRACKS | → | WOOLSHED TRACK | | |

