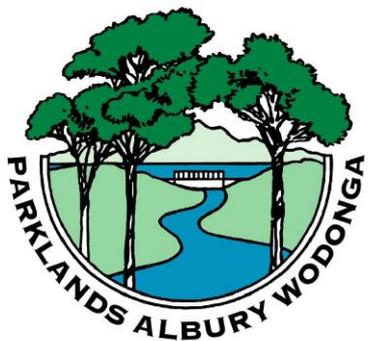


Report: Parklands Survey
McFarlanes Hill Trails 2021



*Bush parks and trails
connecting community*

McFarlanes Hill Trails Survey 2021

Introduction

In November 2021, Parklands invited community feedback on final plans for the mountain bike trail network on McFarlanes Hill, in line with the consultation and communications plan submitted to DELWP in October 2021.

The survey

Respondents were advised that the survey related to final plans developed over the past 5 years with government and community partners, guided by technical reports from environmental, cultural heritage and engineering studies, with the aim of restoring the natural environment and trails on McFarlanes Hill to IMBA (International Mountain Bike Association) standards.

Maps of proposed trails and closures were provided on Parklands website.

The survey was confidential and open to all. It opened on November 8th and closed November 23rd.

Promotion

The survey was publicly promoted in digital media including Parklands website and Facebook page.

Survey Participants

Respondents totaled 105 individuals. More than 50 responses were received by the second day of the survey, with over 100 within one week of publication. Two people who completed the survey also met with Parklands staff to discuss the plans further.

Survey Content

The survey set out the key elements of the proposal and invited people to use tick boxes to rank their approval for each element; 'strongly approve', 'approve', 'no opinion', 'disapprove', 'strongly disapprove'. Each element allowed one choice.

Respondents were invited to leave their details to join the Friends of Felltimber Creek stewardship group.

Respondents were invited to leave further comment, and to book a time to meet with Parklands staff onsite to discuss further.

Key Elements as set out in the survey

Trails will be one-way only - One-way trails have been shown to improve safety for riders and walkers. The proposed mountain bike trail network is three one-way loops.

Both the lower Mudstone Trail (mainly green) and the Slate Trail (blue) are proposed to be ridden anticlockwise. The Slate Trail is the more challenging section uphill from Ayers Rock. The Quartz trail is proposed to remain clockwise, with the climb and descent retained but the exit and entry from the lower Mudstone and Slate Trails realigned in the grazed paddock.

These 3 one-way loop trails will be open to both bike riders and walkers - Understanding that the one-way trails improve safety for all users, the mountain bike loops will also be open to walkers.

Existing mountain bike trails will be rationalised - It is proposed to rationalize the existing trails by retaining 8km within 3 loops and closing 9km of unplanned and degraded trails. If you have been out on the trails recently, you may have noticed some “Trail closed to be rehabilitated” signs on some trails.

Granite (Ridge) trail to be designated walkers only - Counters reveal over 45,000 people using the Granite walking trail over the past year. Sections of this walking trail have been impacted by mountain bikers creating downhill short cuts and removing barriers. It is proposed to make the popular Granite (Ridge) Walking Trail for walkers only.

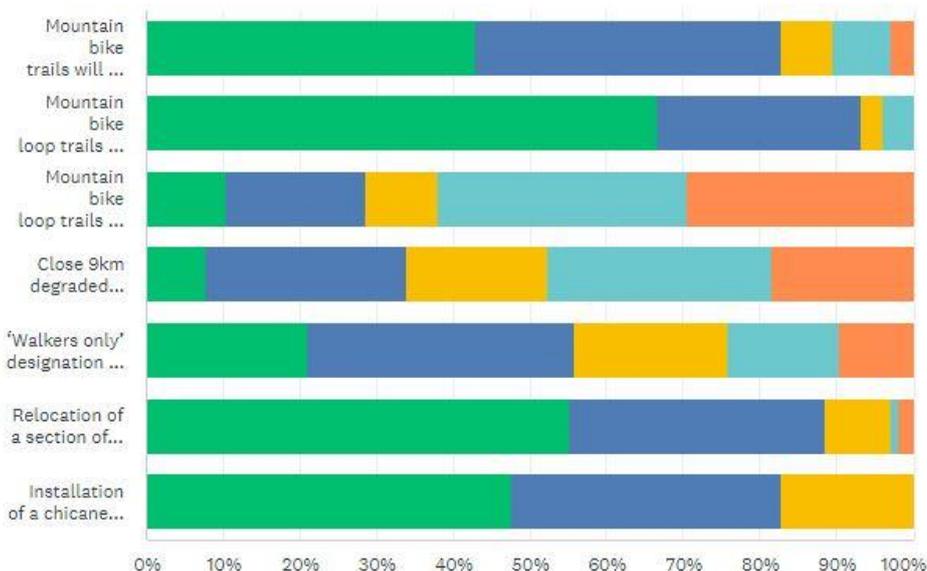
Felltimber Creek Rd boundary fence will be adjusted to increase road verge - It is proposed to relocate 400 metres of boundary fence east of the Pump & Jump trail a further seven metres off the busy Felltimber Creek Road. This will make it much safer for walkers, riders and runners to get off the road when there are vehicles and also provide additional informal parking during peak times.

Possible new chicane gate entry near Felltimber Creek bridge - There is an existing informal parking area near the Felltimber Creek bridge. With the installation of a chicane gate, this access would provide a much less steep access to the Granite Walking Trail and a safer entry for mountain bikers into the biking area than having to continue down the road. A chicane gate would also prevent entry by unauthorised motor bikes.

What we heard

Key Elements

The graph below illustrates responses received to date. Green = strongly approve, blue = approve, yellow = no opinion, light blue = disapprove, orange = strongly disapprove:



Summary of responses to key elements

- Mountain bike trails will be 3 loop trails – more than 82% overall approval.
- Mountain bike loop trails to be one-way only – more than 93% overall approval, with 67% strongly approving.
- Mountain bike loop trails to be open to walkers – more than 62% overall disapproval.
- Close 9km degraded existing trails – more than 40% disapproval, more than 30% approval, approx. 20% no opinion.

- ‘Walkers only’ designation for Grant (Ridge) Trail – More than 55% approval
- Relocation of a section of the Felltimber Creek Rd boundary fence – almost 90% overall approval, with 55% strongly approving.
- Installation of a chicane gate at the Felltimber Creek bridge end – more than 80% overall approval.

Friends of Felltimber Creek

Sixteen people expressed interest in joining the Friends of Felltimber Creek stewardship group.

Summary of additional feedback

41 additional written comments were received and two in-person discussions held, resulting in clear feedback on safety concerns and ideas for additional improvements to the amenity of the facilities for all users. The full transcript of comments is available as Appendix 1.

Notably, 14 of these expressed concern about the safety of shared use trails, strongly condemning this proposal as dangerous for both walkers and bike riders, and offering a number of possible solutions. This issue was also discussed in person, where respondents felt that single tracks should be either walkers only or mountain bike (MTB) only, with the wider fire trails as shared trails with ‘keep left’ signage.

Car parking and safe travel to and from the park were issues of concern. Five written comments and in-person interviews highlighted the urgency of this issue.

20 comments expressed enthusiasm for upgrading visitor facilities and expansion of trails, both to meet local needs and to capitalize on potential for regional tourism. While emphasis was placed on the mountain bike trails, the importance of making the park an ‘outdoor recreation hub’, attractive and available to other users was also highlighted.

Suggestions for upgrading facilities included picnic tables at the top of Coyles Road, a public toilet, a BBQ facility, more children’s facilities on the MTB Pump track along with a picnic table and benches, and car parking.

Suggestions were also made regarding the environmental restoration, with several commenters recommending the removal of livestock and a suggestion to install nestboxes for gliders and birds.

Several comments were critical of lack of on-ground action over the past 5 years.

Next Steps

Parklands thanks the community for such an enthusiastic response to this survey.

These results will be shared with the landholder (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning) and Wodonga Council, and made available on Parklands website.

Modifications to the proposed plans will be confirmed and submitted for landholder approval, which is required before works can proceed. With landholder permission, Parklands will work with community, government and business partners to fund and deliver the plan.

Updates on progress will be reported regularly on the Parklands website www.parklands-alburywodonga.org.au and social media.

APPENDIX 1: Comments received (sic)

1. Potential reversal of the quartz trail loop should be investigated as it may provide a more varied riding experience and remove the crossover in an event situation.
2. This mountain bike network needs to be expanded but in a way that is reasonably respectful to the surrounding environment. The construction of additional down hill trails, flow trails, and jump lines are needed and will be an amazing asset to our community given the local popularity of this sport. This should include further additions to the rock n roll trail as well. Given a lot of this area is either already developed with trails, had previously been developed (ie the current pump track and jumps area being the site of a previous building), or used for grazing, there should be no reason NOT to further develop MTB trails to something similar to what Mystic Park in Bright is, or the mountain bike parks in Toowoomba QLD.
3. Fix the old trails and make them like new
4. No smoking signs to be placed at all entrances
5. Walkers and MTB riders on same trails is a recipe for disaster
6. I have no issue with making the uphill or slower areas of trails marked for mtb and wslkers however feel there should not be walkers on the same trail in the faster/ downhill sections. I think it would be logical to utilise the same track and have it split into two lines for these sections. This will allow minimal impact on the land by utilising the same trail where possible however still keep it safe for both riders and walkers.
7. Mountain Biking is a great sport, just some local people within it are deranged.. and dangerous, This facility is unfortunately in the wrong spot given access issues. But it's here now so lets make it work. Encouraging more parking is a mistake, what it needs is a bike path adjoining the existing infrastructure, not encouraging more vehicle traffic.....
8. The incorporation single direction bike loops in the proposal has great merit. Though to ensure safety for both the walkers and riders, it would be beneficial to have no walkers on the downhill section of the loops. Climbs could still be maintained for walking use as linking tracks
9. To allow walks on the tracks has resulted in a lot of near misses from my experience. I couldn't see an issue on a climbing trail as riders army going as fast. But on a trail going down I could see this being an issue.
10. The sooner the better
11. You should update the middle section of rock and roller. You should also extend quartz trail to its a bit longer and has more jumps along with improve the climbing trail up. Clearly the changes you have already made have been going so why stop here? Make McFarlanes hill a true mtb park to increase tourism like Beechworth or bright.
12. Being one way somewhat helps safety but making the MTB trails also for walkers negates this. Blind corners and fast speeds of bikes compared to walkers is a recipe for disaster. Your proposal has a section for walkers only. Let them have their space and mountain bikers have theirs.
13. The loop idea is silly
14. It took 5 years to get to another survey? Can we have some tangible progress please?
15. Rock and Roller is currently awesome. Please do works on Quartz and mixed tape to get them to that quality of trail
16. Hopefully this is not just another five year "feasibility" study and that some leadership and motivation to act will be prevalent.
17. investing money in to the upgrading and maintenance of this area will be a huge positive for the Wodonga community. This feature is already a very popular sport and recreation area for all ages and will only grow in popularity as it expands and improves!

18. Please consider making a black diamond trail loop as a 4th trail
19. Please get the car park built before some body gets hit by speeding cars coming down the hill
20. If you spend the money, people will come! Make it awesome and let's get more visitors to the area! Let's make Wodonga on the list for visitors to the alpine area
21. Depending of trail type, having trails suited to mtb and walkers would be ideal. On trails that let mtb pick up a bit of speed, safety of both mtb and walkers becomes an issue. Overall I think implementing more trail work to the area benefits the community financially, mtb is picking up in popularity and an opportunity exists to take advantage of this. On top of that, you can never have too many trails!
22. Mtb and walkers using the same trail is fraught with danger. If a collision was to occur who would be in the wrong? People walking with EarPods in can not hear a bike coming down a path.
23. We need more than 3 looped mtb trails, for the amount of riders of all levels, every weekend the car park is packed with mtb rides of all ages. If you want to make Wodonga a mtb destination we'll need more choice of trails
24. Shared tracks with walkers can be dangerous for both parties
25. Shared tracks can be very dangerous as MTB riders move a lot quicker than walkers and generally walkers are looking out at the scenery and not what is coming at them on the trail
26. Yes, I strongly agree with relocation of the fence along Feltrimmer Creek Rd as I often worry when I see kids riding to or from home on the road and there are some blind spots and not to mention some drivers think they are at Bathurst when on that road. The other thing I would love to see, there isn't much in between the bottom of the Quarts trail descent when heading back to the start. A jump section along side the road (Hero trail Bright style) would be a awesome addition for the more intermediate riders rather than just riding back on the road.
27. Build more mountain bike trails, don't 'rationalize' them! Building more trails will bring more economic benefits to the region. Look at Tasmania, Harcourt, Canberra. Mountain Biking has huge economic and social opportunities within local community. Investing more money and rebuilding degraded trails is a better option than closing them. The hill is half farmland not a natural features reserve. If your committed to an approach of conservation, get rid of the cows and plant a couple of thousand trees. Mountain Bike trails should not be open to walkers, walkers should have their own trails. Having multi use trails is dangerous, especially on downhill sections where bikes will approach walkers at speed.
28. One way trails still leave the opportunity for accidents between walkers and mountain bike riders; Signage should include instructions for walkers to remain left at all times; It works particularly well at other sites
29. There needs to be a better up trail from the carpark to join onto laCabra, and again from the bottom of rock and roller back to carpark without having to ride the road, and suitable for all levels or riders. There are 2 bridges that cross the creek (main and unnamed), one should be for going up, and the other for coming down. With some trail realignment of main trail onto V2 and unnamed going up, there could be two one-way trails going both up and down to lacabra, but at the moment people ride it as a single two way trail. If some poorly designed trails are rarely ridden and not maintained why would you need to close them. If the trails that are mostly used are better aligned to where people want to ride and are maintained, then natural selection will simply see them used and others get overgrown and unused
30. Hunchback Mountain Bike park is a fantastic asset to the Wodonga Community. It is definitely something that if marketed correctly will bring tourists to the area - it is such a beautiful location with amazing views. I don't agree with the removal of the red paths as some of these are great for beginners whilst other tracks are out of their league. If anything I would love to see an entire green trail.
31. The closure of some trails can be good but there is a lot of land that is suitable for trail development, both MTB and Walking/Running. We have the potential to hold MTB Events as well as Trail Running events. Having been a trail runner, I can tell you we have a much nicer area to run than Nail Can hill.

Wodonga could hold an event that could surpass Nail Can Hill Run in popularity. We also need to look at loops where we can run MTB Events. There is so much potential to bring money to our City.

32. While I acknowledge the relocation of the boundary fence on Felltimber Creek Rd is a small step in the right direction, I feel this is to be an inadequate solution to the current parking problem. The existing parking area (located on a blind, downhill bend of Felltimber Creek Rd) poses a significant safety issue for all users of Macfarlanes Hill. This recreational area has received a significant increase in popularity, a trend that can only be expected to continue with the proposed new works. This increased use will result in more traffic (walkers, bike riders and vehicles) to the already inadequate car park on the aforementioned hazardous location of Felltimber Creek Rd.
33. I am worried about walkers and mtb-ers sharing the trails. I don't see an issue for the uphill part of the loops but I think it's incredibly dangerous to have walkers on the downhill part. Quartz for example is a very fast trail and having walkers on there is an accident waiting to happen. I love the idea of the chicane gate and moving the fence more inside. Felltimber rd is not the safest rd to ride on for the kids but those two adjustments would make a big difference!
34. Seems a bit unprofessional to blame mountain bikers for track cutting and barrier removal without any proof. It could easily have been walkers, it also seems weird to make the mountain bike trails open to walkers but close the walking trail to mountain bikers.
35. Duel purpose is a recipe for disaster! Make it Mountain bike OR Walkers, not both - have a look at the good bike parks close by like beechworth and Yack, they are not duel purpose for a reason.
36. It may be good to retain the trail to the immediate west of the creek as you enter from the Felltimber Creek Carpark.
37. Need more trails for both walkers and riders. Reduce the grazing and regeneration of native flora would be awesome
38. We need clearer maps of the trails.
39. I think I know where the new chicane gate is being placed. But most wouldn't This should really be shown on maps. You guys must do better. This whole saga has dragged way too long. - Do not put walkers on MTB trails. It will end in disaster.
40. Need more mtb trails. It's ridiculous how many riders we have locally and how little trails we have. Every hill should have some sustainable trail network. People are missing out on our amazing areas of town. Walking or riding.
41. I appreciate that you want to allow walkers on the MTB loops but that would then imply that walkers have right of way. This would be less than ideal given speed of MTB travelling downhill. It is also disappointing that the ridge/granite trail would be closed to MTB as it is an excellent challenging trail to ride and we are losing much trail with the existing proposed closures. Will further trails be developed to accommodate the demand from MTB in the area? Overall I'm a bit disappointed by the plan.
42. Sees McFarlanes Regional Park as a place that would attract lots of people with some maintenance of the trails and marketing.
43. Picnic tables at McFarlanes Hill at the top of Coyles Road, toilet, BBQ facility. Make this place somewhere you can just go to have a picnic and enjoy being, rather than just MTB or walking or running.
44. At the Pump & Jump track, want more roll-over jumps for smaller kids, a table or bench to sit on
45. Nestboxes for birds and gliders
46. Single tracks are either walkers only or MTB only. Fire trails / wider trails are shared trails with "This is a shared trail, please keep left" to be included on signage. This is what happens at Mt Stromlo in Canberra.
47. Mt Beauty MTB Club secured funding because 2 people employed for 6 months to do trail maintenance.
48. Parking is a real issue. Support moving the fence back the distance of the walking trail carpark to make it work.

49. It is important to see things happening after the survey. Making small things happen is good as people can see things are happening again.
50. It is really important that PAW report back to the community on the findings of the survey and face-to-face consultations, and also let the community know that this information has also been shared with DELWP and City of Wodonga.