



Destination Development Strategies

Submission from the Bibbulmun Track Foundation on behalf of the TopTrailsWA Marketing Project

“An iconic experience/attraction/event is awe-inspiring... unique to Western Australia, has the potential to draw significant visitors here gaining recognition nationally and internationally” (Tourism WA).

The Bibbulmun Track is an iconic experience...

- it is awe-inspiring
- it is unique to Western Australia
- it draws significant visitors from interstate and overseas
- and it is gaining recognition nationally and internationally

In 2007 – 2008, the Bibbulmun Track Foundation undertook a 12-month survey on the Track (full report attached.) Key figures include:

- 167,206 walks are undertaken on the Track each year. This can be anything from a short stroll to an 8 week end-to-end.
- 87% of walkers interviewed in 2007-08 were from WA (compared to 89% in the 2003 survey), 6% from interstate (7%) and 7% from overseas (4%).
- The Track clearly has a profile beyond WA, with a third of interstate and overseas visitors interviewed on the Track in both surveys having planned to walk on the Track before they came to WA.
- The estimated economic spend associated with the Track on equipment and a range of products and services (e.g. meals, food supplies, accommodation, transport, maps etc) is \$39 million per annum. Excluding equipment the spend is \$28 million – with a great deal of this being spent in the south west region.

The Munda Biddi Trail clearly has the same potential to attract people to Western Australia specifically to use the Trail. In fact, given that cyclists will be able to complete the Munda Biddi in half the time – it is likely to attract even more visitors as it can be completed during annual leave.

It has been observed from tourism surveys and marketing that cycling tourists, on average, spend more than walkers. Therefore, the potential spend in terms of tourism dollars from the Munda Biddi Trail is significant.

These are just two of the 55 Trails across Western Australia which will be promoted through the TopTrailsWA marketing project. Whilst the other trails may not be ‘iconic’ – they all offer a quality, unique experience which allows a visitor to immerse themselves in their surroundings, at their own pace.



What is the TopTrails WA Marketing Project?

The project is to cooperatively market WA's Top Trails – the trails that provide the best experiences across the State for visitors. The Bibbulmun Track Foundation is managing the project, however, the project is a joint initiative between DEC, DSR, Tourism WA and the three long-distance trails, the Bibbulmun Track, Munda Biddi Trail and Cape to Cape Track.

AusIndustry has funded \$407,400 towards this project, which aims to raise the profile of our trails interstate and internationally by:

- identifying Western Australia's Top Trails
- improving signage and marketing material for individual trails if required
- creating a Top Trails WA brand
- providing cooperative marketing of Top Trails through a central website and other initiatives

The project aims to:

- a) bring more visitors to WA, and
- b) disperse them to regional areas.

Walk, bike, canoe, equestrian, snorkel and drive trails are all included.

The primary focal point for promotion is the website www.toptrails.com.au. This will act as a gateway - providing a brief overview of each trail and linking to other websites, such as Naturebase or the local Visitor Information Centre, for additional information. (The website is live but will not be updated to reflect the Top Trails until the media launch in September 2009)

How were the Top Trails selected?

Nominations were invited through PR, networks and email to DEC, Tourism, DPI, DSR employees; user groups (such as bushwalking clubs) and the general public. 165 nominations were received.

All the nominated trails were assessed against a selection criteria designed to find the trails which provide visitors with the best trail experiences in each region of the State. The selection panel included representatives from a variety of organisations including Tourism WA.

55 trails have been selected and the project team is working with all local stakeholders to ensure maximum benefit is accrued. The website will be launched and marketing commence in September 2009.

What are the benefits?

The benefits for the visitor:

- Featuring the best trails from around the State on one website makes it much easier for visitors (including West Australians) to find information.
- Many areas have lots of trails. If a visitor only has one day, we let them know which trail we think will provide them with the very best experience. However, we will also link to further information where they can discover what else (including other trails) the area has to offer.
- Make it easier for visitors to find products and services linked to the trails.



The benefits for tourism operators:

- Trails are free and many trail managers don't have a budget to market them. The Top Trails will be promoted cooperatively using funds generated from advertising on the Top Trails website
- A higher profile for trails will hopefully bring more visitors to regional areas, benefitting local businesses.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

This two-year project has highlighted a number of areas where there is potential to develop products and services to improve the experience for existing trail users and potentially attract more visitors.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

There are a couple of areas to which public transport services could be extended. Mundaring Weir and Dwellingup are hubs for a number of trails but have no public transport and are virtually impossible to access unless you have a car.

Mundaring Weir

A popular ride on the Munda Biddi is from Mundaring to Mundaring Weir.

A popular walk on the Bibbulmun Track is from Kalamunda or the Calamunnda Camel Farm to the Weir.

In both instances, trail users have to walk/ride back, or have a friend or family member collect them. Visitors to the State don't have these contacts and the thought of walking/riding 15km/8km back to your starting point can be very unappealing – particularly for families. The Kep Track also passes through this area.

Suggestion: Trial a weekend service (with a trailer for bikes) that does a loop between Kalamunda, Mundaring Weir and Mundaring. It could incorporate key stops such as the Calamunnda Camel Farm, Golden View lookout, Mundaring Weir Hotel, Sculpture Park and John Forrest National Park. These are spots where trails can be accessed including the Railway Reserves Heritage Trail, and the Eagle's View Circuit Walk in John Forrest National Park.

Commercial businesses such as the Mundaring Weir Hotel, Kalamunda Hotel and John Forrest Tavern could be potential supporters of this service.

If feasible, the service could also be extended to the Goat Farm – a popular mountain bike park in Greenmount, just off Great Eastern Highway – and the Midland Train Station. The Railway Reserves Heritage Trail also passes this way.

Dwellingup

If walkers arrive in Dwellingup, they can possibly catch the Hotham Valley Tourist train to Pinjarra and get a bus or train back to Perth, but the service is so infrequent that walkers would have to stay in Dwellingup a number of days – time which they may not have. Bike riders have no way of getting their bikes back to Perth.



BIKES ON TRAINS

Following on from the point about Dwellingup. It is not possible to take bikes on buses – and virtually impossible on trains going to regional destinations. For example, the Australind will not pick up bikes at any stop other than at Perth or Bunbury. Also the Kep Track suggests taking the train to Northam and cycling back to Mundaring from there. The Avon link and Prospector have two bike spaces – which have to be booked in advance. However, these spots are also the only space available for wheelchairs. When trying to book bikes onto the train, a local trail user was informed that this space was booked daily by a commuter with a bike. It therefore took them weeks to get a booking for their bikes.

Southwest Coachlines will take 2 bikes if booked in advance.

If we wish to promote this as a serious suggestion to tourists, then this situation will have to be improved.

BIKE HIRE

Perth has a fantastic network of dual-use paths, however, it is virtually impossible to hire a bike anywhere other than on the Perth foreshore. One of the Top Trails is the Swan Valley Heritage Cycle Trail. To cycle on this trail, a visitor has to hire a bike from the foreshore and take it on the train to Guildford. This is not only very inconvenient, but would also be very expensive as riding to the train station, waiting and catching a train etc would add at least an hour to the bike hire fee – and would potentially limit the amount of time they would spend having lunch in the Swan Valley.

There are a number of bike trails in the Top Trails project – including the Munda Biddi, Kep Track, Railway Reserves Heritage Trail, Grizzly Trail, Great Ocean Cycle Way and Timberline Trail. The lack of bike hire facilities close to these trails will be a major limiting factor to the number of interstate and international visitors who can access those trails.

On discussion with the Swan Valley Visitor Information Centre, it appears that a number of people have looked into providing bike hire, but due to the high cost of insurance it is not a viable stand-alone business.

Suggestion: Is bike hire a potential income stream/service that could be provided by VICs? Insurance could be taken out by the VIC association, or Tourism WA, to cover all the centres, rather than one small business taking out its own policy which apparently makes the service unviable.

NOTE: Only one equestrian trail is being promoted (the Kep Track) as visitors cannot hire a horse – only go on an escorted ride. The Kep Track is the only trail where this experience is available.

CANOE HIRE

This is another area which has potential. We are only promoting the canoe trails near Mandurah, as currently they are the only canoe experiences where both a canoe trail map and canoe hire are available.



GROUP ACCOMMODATION

There is a lack of group accommodation which is not of a dormitory or back-packer style. Whilst there are a host of B&B's and self contained cottages, they are all set up for families. Groups of bushwalkers and cyclists (who are mostly not couples) often require accommodation with twin rooms at the same location. One problem is that while some accommodation providers can accommodate larger numbers, they invariably have rooms with a double bed which can therefore only accommodate one single person.

Suggestion: Many businesses in Europe have taken the initiative to supply two twin beds in lieu of the double bed which can be pushed together to make a double if required.

TRAIL FRIENDLY BUSINESSES

As already mentioned – trails are free. However, they attract people to an area – and trail users are like any other visitors – they spend money on accommodation, meals and visiting other attractions in an area.

Trails are often located in areas which are 'off the beaten track' and provide an excellent opportunity for regional businesses to increase their profile by linking themselves with the trail and offering trail-friendly services. This enhances the experience for the trail users,

Examples of trail-friendly services for accommodation providers (depending on which trail is nearby) include:

- A 'drying room' for boots or to hang wet clothes
- A boot scraper or tap to clean boots
- Somewhere undercover and secure to put bikes
- A washing machine
- Packed lunches available
- Early breakfast available on request (or continental to take away)
- Track transfers
- Tyre puncture kits for sale
- Basic first-aid items available e.g. blister kits

Other opportunities for local businesses:

- Pick-up/drop-off services (by local taxi or tour operator)
- Bike hire
- Canoe hire
- Food supplies suitable for trail users
- Equipment supplies – e.g. gas refills, puncture repair kits, methylated spirits for stoves
- Guided walks/cycle tours

Suggestion: Conduct Business Blitz seminars in regional areas to inform businesses about:

- the potential of trails tourism
- identifying opportunities in their area
- becoming a trail-friendly business
- leveraging off the TopTrailsWA marketing project.

We would be happy to work with Tourism WA to develop the content for these sessions, or information sheets to distribute throughout the Tourism Network.



THE BIG PICTURE!

Put WA on the map as a trails destination!

The potential of Trails Tourism in WA is big – particularly in the south west. The Munda Biddi Trail Foundation has received \$3 million from Royalties to Regions funding to take the trail all the way to Albany. This means the south west of WA will have two world-class long distance trails linking the following towns (the communities in bold are the ones through which both trails pass):

Kalamunda, Mundaring, (**Mundaring Weir**) Jarrahdale, **Dwellingup**, **Collie**, Donnybrook, Balingup, Nannup, **Donnelly River Village**, Manjimup, **Pemberton**, **Northcliffe**, **Walpole**, **Denmark** and **Albany**.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY – CREATE TRAIL ‘HUBS’

When looking at the towns through which both trails pass, some stand out as having the potential to become trail hubs.

Ideally, a trail hub will have the following:

- Good parking
- Bike hire
- Public transport access
- A café
- Toilets/showers (for day trippers)
- Accommodation
- Shop for trail supplies/bike repairs

From the list above, the following stand out as having the potential to be promoted as trail hubs due to facilities already in place and the number of trails in the region:

Mundaring Weir

Walk trails: Bibbulmun Track, Weir Walk Trail, O'Connor Trail

Bike trails: Munda Biddi Trail, Kep Track, Kalamunda Circuit, and the Department of Transport's 'Ride through the Hills' cycle route <http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/cycling/1927.asp>

Facilities include: The Perth Hills National Parks Centre, Mundaring Weir Hotel, YHA hostel.

Lacking: Public Transport, bike hire/supplies

Dwellingup

Walk trails: Bibbulmun Track + approximately 8 other trails ranging from 2km to 46km

Bike trails: Munda Biddi trail, Marrinup MB trail.

Paddling: Murray River

Facilities include: Various accommodation including caravan park with bunk rooms, Hotel, shop, café, mountain bike hire, canoe hire, camping equipment hire, Guided canoe tours and white water rafting

Lacking: B&Bs, public transport, track transfers for walkers.

Blackwood River Valley (Nannup, Balingup, Bridgetown, Boyup Brook)

Drive trail: The towns in this region are linked by one of the seven drive trails selected as Top

Trails: the Blackwood River Tourist Drive.

Walk trails: Bibbulmun Track, Golden Valley Tree Park, plus many local trails around each town.

Bike trails: Munda Biddi Trail, Sidings Rail Trail and Old Timberline Trail (Nannup)

Paddling: Blackwood River, Donnelly River

Facilities: Canoe hire in Nannup and Boyup Brook

Lacking: Mountain bike hire? Public transport / transfers linking the towns. A circuit bus service could include Donnelly River Village and Manjimup.



Both the Bibbulmun Track and Munda Biddi Trail (within the next 12 months) pass through Donnelly River Village (DRV) which provides a range of accommodation options including self-contained cottages, camping, walker (or cyclist) rooms and a B&B. Located half way between Nannup and Manjimup, DRV has the potential to be a trails hub. It provides a unique Australian experience for visitors, with kangaroos and emus roaming freely and a lake nearby for swimming in summer – it also has a general store open 7 days a week which already stocks good supplies for Bibb Track walkers and offers breakfast, hot drinks and snack foods. There's a building which used to be the club house when still a working mill town. It has a large function room with a fire, a bar, kitchen, billiards room etc.

Given that the Munda Biddi Trail is suitable for all ages and levels of experience, DRV would be the perfect spot for a fun, easy technical MB course with a few obstacles etc that all ages could tackle. This could be situated within the grounds and become another attraction for the area.

Northcliffe

Walk trails: Bibbulmun Track, Understory Sculpture Walk, other local trails

Bike trails: Boorara State Championship Trail, Forrest Park Trail, Federation Trail, Warren National Park.

Facilities: Range of accommodation, hotel, café, general store.

Lacking: Mountain bike hire?

A number of mountain bike trails have been developed in Northcliffe which is home to the State Championships and the annual Karri Cup MTB challenge which had 432 competitors in March 2009.

<http://www.karricup.com.au/>

Both Denmark and Albany also have potential.

Many of these towns are 'off the beaten track' and do not attract high visitation from interstate or international tourists. Becoming a trail hub will give them a point of difference and support many of the small businesses.

CONSULTATION:

This is by no means an exhaustive look at the possibilities for improving services and establishing trail hubs to attract visitors. Along with the Shires and VICs the following agencies would need to be consulted:

- The Department of Conservation and Land Management (DEC) - most of the trails mentioned are on DEC managed land.
- The Department of Transport - involved in cycle trail development and promotion with excellent information and resources on the website under cycle tourism:
<http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling/14943.asp>
- EMRC - has recently done a great deal of research into cycle tourism.



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT CRITERIA

1) Projects and priorities must result in either a positive economic, social and/or environmental return to the community

- The research report attached demonstrates that trails return a positive economic benefit.
- Trails also provide recreational opportunities to locals and, in some instances, an opportunity to volunteer.
- Trail maintenance involves the removal of weeds and other initiatives which enhance the natural environment.

2) Development projects and priorities must align with Tourism WA's strategic priorities

1. Improve the quality of visitor experiences
 - All the suggestions in this document are aimed at improving the experience for trail tourists.
2. Secure the future of regional tourism
 - Most of the suggestions in this document will increase tourism in regional areas.
3. Grow visitor expenditure faster than visitor nights (numbers)
 - Trails can attract a new type of visitor to WA.
 - Services and products can be developed to meet the needs of trail tourists.
4. Accelerate the development of Aboriginal tourism
 - Trails provide opportunities for aboriginal interpretation and tours.
5. Build recognition that tourism and events enhance the unique Western Australian lifestyle and support the natural environment
 - What better way to enjoy the natural environment than on a trail.

3) The project should have the support of local government and/or other key regional stakeholders

The following are just some of the stakeholders which support trails in some way; either through the marketing project, development of trails infrastructure or maintenance.

- Department of Environment and Conservation
- Department of Sport and Recreation
- Department of Transport
- East Metropolitan Regional Council
- South West Development Commission
- Great Southern Development Commission
- Peel Development Commission



CONCLUSION:

The Bibbulmun Track has only become a successful attraction due to the consistent marketing efforts of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation. This has been achieved with virtually no marketing budget and has relied heavily on PR such as articles and editorial in papers and magazines. The awareness outside of WA is largely through having a good website and word of mouth.

However, this awareness could be much greater if Tourism WA recognises the potential of trails as tourism attractions. Despite the Bibbulmun Track winning the Significant Tourist Attraction award at the WA Tourism Awards in 2004 and 2006 the following statement is written in the Australia's South West Destination Development Strategy 2007 – 2017.

Maintain

The following destinations or attractions falling within the maintain area in the matrix are market ready but are not seen as iconic destinations that attract visitors to Western Australia. This means they should not be the focus of any major tourism product and infrastructure development or resources at the statewide level (other than that required to maintain them). Cooperative activities should be the objective of any marketing.

- *Bibbulmun Track*
- *Munda Biddi Trail*

We sincerely hope that the Bibbulmun Track User Survey and the various research documents that have been done on Cycle Tourism will help to change this attitude and that more will be done to promote these iconic experiences – along with the other Top Trails – to attract visitors to Western Australia and provide the services and infrastructure required for them to have an enjoyable and memorable experience.

For some inspiration – have a look at the VisitScotland.com website and look at walking and cycling – particularly the mountain biking section.

To discuss any of the suggestions made in this document, please contact

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