



Recreational Trails Overview

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2.0 Recreational Trails Overview

2.1 Why have recreational trails?

The demand for recreational trails is growing. National physical activity trends indicate that participation in unstructured recreational activities is increasing. In addition, trail research undertaken by Market Equity in 2004 found that trails provide a strong incentive to exercise (up to 85% of users) and were used by many as a means to spend time with family and friends (up to 89%).

Both nationally and in South Australia, walking is the most popular and cycling the fourth most popular of fifty different recreational activities. 2006 data indicates that, in South Australia, there were over 120,000 cyclists and 476,000 walkers. Almost 54,000 South Australians specifically reported that they bush-walked for exercise or recreation in their leisure time².

Horse riding is another recreational activity pursued by many South Australians and is amongst the top 20 activities for women. Participation in canoeing and kayaking is steadily increasing, both Australia wide and in SA, while scuba diving continues to attract many enthusiasts. All these pursuits are becoming a significant component of South Australia's suite of recreational opportunities.

Recreational trails offer a diverse range of benefits to our communities and the environment. Social health, physical fitness, environmental management and awareness, cultural preservation and the economy can all benefit from the effects and experiences offered by recreational trails. The main benefits can be summarised as follows:

Social and Physical Health Benefits:

- Participation in trail activities improves physical and mental health, assists with disease prevention and management, particularly cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, respiratory, nervous and endocrine systems as well as reducing obesity, hypertension, depression and anxiety.
- Trail activities facilitate participation and interaction between a diverse range of community members, age groups, individuals and families and facilitate social interaction, e.g. community groups, voluntary trail maintenance and conservation work.
- Trails can offer a wide range of opportunities to a wide range of people. Depending upon design, trails can accommodate the elderly, people with mobility impairments or satisfy those seeking challenging adventures and a sense of achievement.
- Participation in trail activities is relatively low cost.
- Trails can introduce participants to other recreational and participation offerings in the community.
- Trails help to connect people and places and develop and grow community pride.

Environmental and Cultural Benefits:

- Trails provide opportunities for the community to experience natural and cultural environments.
- Trails help to protect the environment by localising impacts and managing visitation effects.

²
Statistics from ERASS Surveys
2001-2006

- Trails provide for educational and interpretive opportunities and increase environmental and cultural awareness and appreciation.
- Well-connected trail networks can decrease the use of motorised vehicles for transportation and recreation, therefore reducing the production of emissions that contribute to global warming and respiratory problems.
- Trail networks increase community ownership and assist to preserve natural and cultural values.
- Trails highlight our 'living heritage' by allowing the continuation of traditional activities such as horse riding.
- Trails provide opportunities for community participation in conservation and revegetation work.

Economic Benefits:

- Trails may generate intrastate, interstate and overseas tourism spending.
- Trails support and enhance local business opportunities.
- Trail visitors spend money in towns and communities along or near trails.
- Trail users spend money preparing for their trail experience or recreation activities.
- Trail construction and maintenance can generate employment opportunities.
- Participation in trail activities improves community health and reduces health expenditure.

2.2 Types of trails

South Australia features a variety of landscapes, population densities and climatic conditions. Patterns of settlement range from sparsely populated areas to peri-urban and suburban environments. Climatic conditions also vary significantly in both a geographic and seasonal sense. Similarly, trail opportunities and experiences vary widely and include a higher frequency of use within and around the populated areas of metropolitan Adelaide to more isolated and intimate experiences in the outback and regional areas. Existing and proposed trails must be designed and maintained in accordance with their landscape setting and to sustain the physical demands of use and climatic conditions.

The Draft Recreational Trails Strategy for South Australian establishes three categories for trails based on their significance as local, regional or national trails. The trail categories are determined by characteristics that focus on the trail's ability to demonstrate sustainability, experiential quality, attraction to tourists, generation of economic benefits and contribution to the lifestyle, health and social well being of South Australians. A series of key indicators has also been developed to guide decision-makers when determining the category of a trail. The trail category characteristics are briefly described below while the key indicators are detailed in Appendix B.

All Trails

- **Sustainable**
 - contributes to positive social, environmental and economic outcomes.
- **Quality**
 - meets the needs of the target users groups.
 - (see table next page)

Local Trails	Regional Trails	National Trails
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly attract local users • Generate economic benefits to the local area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract interstate and intrastate visitors • Generate significant economic benefits to the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract international and interstate tourists • Generate significant economic benefits to SA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality experiential values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent quality experiential values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding quality of experiential values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a significant contribution to the lifestyle, health and social well being of the local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a significant contribution to the lifestyle, health and social well being of South Australians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a significant contribution to the lifestyle, health and social well being of Australians

Trails that do not have the characteristics of local, regional or national trails will most likely be classed as 'unsustainable trails'. Such trails will require review and analysis by trail managers to determine if trail improvement or closure is appropriate.

2.3 Guiding principles

Prior to the consideration of a new trails initiative – either improving an existing trail or constructing a new one – it is important to ensure that the proposal is both sustainable and accessible. Adherence to these two 'guiding principles' will assist in attracting a desired user group, minimise the likelihood of environmental damage and maximise opportunities for funding. These 'guiding principles' are discussed further below.

Sustainable Trails

It is fundamentally important that recreational trails are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Given the limited amount of natural and semi-natural landscapes remaining in South Australia, recreational activities that diminish natural values (biodiversity and landscape amenity) are inappropriate and will not be acceptable to the community or other stakeholders. It is vital, therefore, that high quality recreational experiences are developed in landscapes that are capable of supporting the activities.

The conservation and enhancement of natural areas, protection of biodiversity and raising environmental awareness should underpin the development of an environmentally sustainable trail network. This can be achieved through appropriate trail design, location selection and ongoing management.

Trails must also be economically and socially sustainable. There is a growing body of evidence which identifies the economic benefits that well developed trails can bring to a local community and/or a region through increased visitation, including tourism³. However, the development of recreational trails must also take into account the sensitivities and desires of local communities.

While well designed and managed recreational trails can enhance the well-being of local communities by improving access and increasing physical activity, recreational trails should not be developed at the expense and safety of local residents and adjoining property owners.

In order to achieve a network of sustainable trails, it may be necessary to review the location, design, management and use of existing trails prior to the consideration of new trail projects. The development of new trails may then be contemplated following the closure or rehabilitation of existing trails that are inappropriately located or designed.

³ See, for example, Trails Research Project prepared by Market Equity Pty Ltd, June 2004

Accessible Trails

Intertwined with the objective of sustainability is the need for trails to be accessible. One of the main roles of trails is to link communities to a variety of high quality experiences and interesting natural and rural landscapes. In addition, trails can improve mobility and connectivity within and between urban areas. Trails which are readily accessible and provide links between communities and landscapes can enhance lifestyles through the promotion of physical activity, reducing the reliance on motorised vehicles and improving health and fitness.

Accessibility is determined by:

- proximity to the metropolitan area, population centres or tourist attractions
- proximity to related facilities such as horse agistment areas or other popular riding areas
- proximity to transportation facilities such as railway lines or road network providing access to the site
- existing or proposed linkages to other trails and the wider trails network.
- proximity to natural attractions such as scenic views, native vegetation, waterfalls, lakes, coastline, etc.
- presence of existing facilities that may support or facilitate use of the trail such as car parks, toilets, picnic facilities, camping sites, tourist information centres, cafes, tour operators, etc.
- the nature of the terrain and landform
- access for emergency vehicles.

Proposals for new trails, or upgrades to existing trails, should clearly demonstrate that they meet at least half of the accessibility determinants expressed above. This will assist in the promotion of the trail to prospective user groups and ensure that any associated economic and social benefits are shared amongst nearby communities.

2.4 Types of trail users

Following consideration of the type of trail proposed (local, regional or national) together with an assessment against the 'guiding principles' of sustainability and accessibility, it is necessary to think about the type of recreational users who will be attracted to the trail. The types of users will strongly influence the design of the trail in terms of width, materials, slope, degree of difficulty and linkages to other attractions and services.

Trails can be designed to accommodate a broad range of user groups with varying interests and needs or, alternatively, for a small sector only. Proponents of trails should carefully consider the range of users envisaged and then design the trail accordingly.

Potential users may include:

Walkers: A 'walker' broadly describes anyone who travels by foot on recreational trails. Walking includes all forms of recreational walking and a variety of trail experiences from a leisurely stroll in the local park to strenuous treks across rugged terrain. Walking may also involve exercising dogs, nature appreciation or overnight stays.

Walkers use both urban and rural trails. Urban walkers use trails within suburban reserves, linear parks and along transport corridors. The majority of these types of walkers use trails for fitness and social reasons. Walkers in rural areas often seek a

variety of trail experiences including more challenging trails that visit interesting natural features. They may be self-sufficient and carry adequate clothing, food and water for sustained and demanding walks. As fitness and expertise increase, these walkers often seek experiences in more remote and difficult terrain.

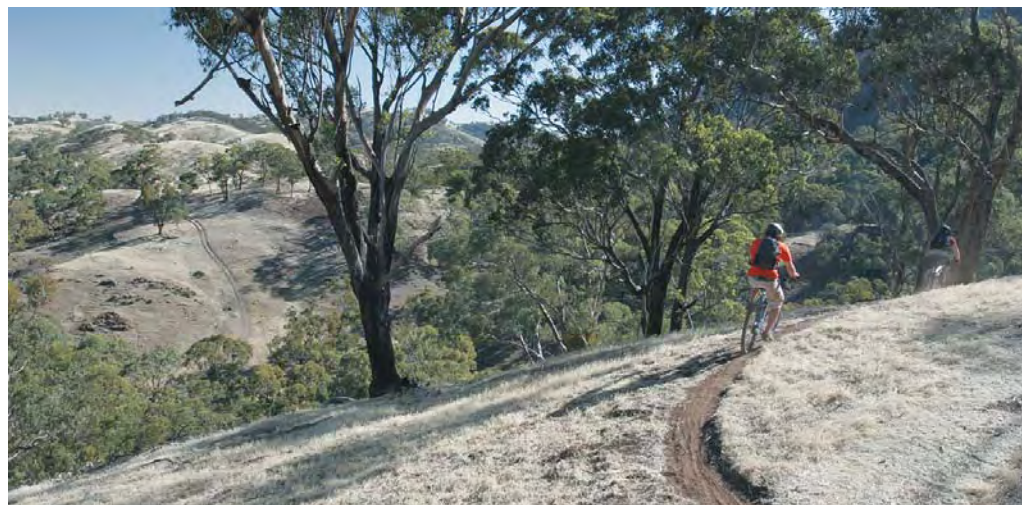
Photo 4:
Bushwalking
(Photo by Michael Mullan)



Mountain bike riders: Similar to walkers, there are a range of sub-groups which sit under the broad heading of mountain bike riders:

- *Family, Occasional or Beginner mountain bike riders:* These riders generally like short loops of fairly level terrain, with some challenges to introduce them to off-road cycling
- *Cross-country riders:* Cyclists of this nature seek moderate to very challenging terrain and like to get away from busy trails to areas of more solitude. They are usually self sufficient; carrying tools, water, food and spare tubes even maps and first aid kits. They like trails that include a variety of interconnecting loops that provide a 10 to 100 kilometre ride

Photo 5:
Mountain Bike Riding
(Photo by Michael Mullan)



- *Downhillers:* Downhillers seek steep challenging terrain and obstacles that appear unusable to outsiders. Most ride full suspension bikes, which are not designed to efficiently ride uphill, so shuttle access to the top of the hill is preferred

- *Technical/Trials riders:* these riders prefer trails that provide numerous obstacles to challenge their riding skills. Such obstacles may include fallen trees, drop offs, sea saws, stairs, rocks and very difficult obstacles. These can be incorporated into cross-country trails or in special-use areas.

Runners: Runners like to use a variety of trails ranging from urban, hard paved trails to more challenging experiences in rural areas. Orienteering events may also traverse trails.

Horse Riders: Horse riders can be divided into a number of sub-groups:

- *Recreational or 'weekender' riders:* These users will be looking to exercise their horses and ride in attractive rural settings for a few hours to a day-long ride. Traditionally their trails exist on roadsides and unmade roads. Trails with a durable tread that contain watering points are suitable for these riders
- *Endurance:* These competitive riders like very large circuits to train on but events are usually held on temporary loops.
- *Long distance riders:* These are non-competitive riders who often travel long distances along linear trails or on daily loops of up to 30 kilometres from a base. Their trail experience can range from overnight to rides that last a number of weeks.

Canoeists, Kayakers, Snorkelers, Scuba Divers: A variety of water based trails provides these users with experiences which can be stand-alone water based or they can be complemented by land based trails as a walker or rider. The path of the water, its inherent features and the surrounding environment guide these types of trail users. In some locations, land managers may provide direction, interpretive and safety information signs. Access points, including boat ramps, secure car parking, campsites accessible by water only, require due consideration when formalising water based trails.