

Why do we have to have dedicated mountain bikes tracks in Redwood Park?

Mountain Bikes have dominated the eastern section of Jubilee Park for a number of years. These stretch from Harvey Street in Mount Lofty down to Amos Road behind Withcott. Over the years the number of mountain bike tracks have increased to 23 for a total of 23 km. Some are very short while others are up to 2.3 km in length.

16 new trails have been proposed for the remaining “non-mountain biked” area of Jubilee and the Bridge Street quarry area with a total length of 46.2 km. This will virtually make Jubilee a mountain bike park with a total of almost 70 km.

In 1888 about 260 menfolk of Toowoomba signed a petition to reserve 2000 acres of escarpment land to be held in trust for conservation purposes for future generations. In 1911, 500 acres of this area was gazetted as Redwood Park and declared as a sanctuary for native birds. There were already some walking tracks in the Redwood Forest. In 1920/21, two Toowoomba citizens, solicitor Edwin Bernays and medical practitioner Dr Thomas Price were declared honorary rangers with a focus on preserving the area in Redwood Park for native birds and animals.

In 1988 The Toowoomba City Council opened several walking tracks between Ferny Gully and the Redwood Forest Walk. These tracks were closed in 2011. Today there are only about 500 metres of dedicated walking tracks in Redwood Park. All other tracks are along fire breaks.

Now the Mountain Bike proposal wants to bring another 7 dedicated mountain bike tracks totalling 20 km through the forest in Redwood Park. Several reasons have been given for that. The report says

- Up to 100 km of tracks are needed to make for a nationally significant mountain bike venue.
- The Amos Road trail head is considered too far away for adequate shuttle services. Redwood Park would permit an easier access to Withcott and shuttle services.
- Redwood provides the potential to develop more natural area trails.
- With the opening of the Toowoomba Bypass, some Withcott businesses are suffering a decrease in trade because of the loss of through traffic. Lockyer Valley Regional Council consider that opening up Redwood Park to mountain biking and accessing Withcott may rectify this.

On the Toowoomba Chronicle Facebook site some of the comments refer to Redwood Park as being a lantana and privet infested wasteland. There are areas in the west and south-west corner of Redwood Park that are heavily infested with privet and lantana. When I suggested to the consultant that the proposed trails go through these areas, he declined, declaring that the areas suggested were unsuitable. Instead the trails are marked to go through areas of dry rainforest and adjacent vegetation with a dense understory of prickly vines and shrubs. While the consultant states that trees with a diameter of 150mm or more are not removed, the removal of the vines and thick understory would change the very nature of the ecosystem. Another concern is that emergency access to this area is non-existent. Firebreak access is only available at the top of Redwood Park and along the Grasstree Track.

Another major concern that if these dedicated mountain bike trails are allowed in Redwood Park it will only be a matter of time before more and more trails are added to the park as has happened in Jubilee. Dedicated mountain bike parks such as Hidden Vale at Granchester are already looking at increasing the trails network to 200km. Then the pressure would be on the Toowoomba Mountain Bike Club to increase its offering.

The Friends of the Escarpment Parks have been working successfully for the last nine years on the restoration of the dry rainforest and the eucalypt forest in Redwood Park. In the last two years we have seen the return of the vulnerable black breasted button quail that lives exclusively in rainforest. There are a considerable number of birds and animals that inhabit these forests that

we do not find elsewhere in Toowoomba. While the expansion of mountain biking is seen as being economically beneficial to a development minded council, the same council has done nothing to develop eco tourism in the region. Lets look at getting some regional balance between our natural environment and human focused activities. Where is the fairness in 500 metres of purpose built walking tracks compared to 20km of purpose built mountain bike tracks when there are more walkers than mountain bikers according to Toowoomba Regional Council's "Toowoomba Escarpment Trails" report. We should be restoring and maintaining Redwood park and its valuable ecosystems for future generations. Once its gone, its gone and we will never get it back. With more passionate and dedicated people to assist with the restoration of this wonderful park, we could leave a legacy for Toowoomba to be proud of well into the future. According to state government documentation there is less than 10000 hectares of this type of eco system left in south east queensland, an area equivalent to a square with a side of 10km. And we have this on our doorstep.

More information and maps of the proposed trails in Jubilee Park can be found in the Toowoomba Chronicle 12th December.

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