

Minutes of a meeting of Hamsterley Trailblazers held on Monday 4 October 2004 at 6.30pm in the Forest Classroom

Present: Michael Chilcott
Simon Chilcott
Vicky Chilcott
Dave Church
Jill Church
Chris Dauber
Neil Gander
Ollie Graham
Craig Hunter
Peter Laing
Victoria Lloyd
Robin Lofthouse
Bill Pike
Ian Robson
Andy Samanjoul
Simon Wilson

Apologies for Absence: were received from Marie Brown, Simon Goodwin, Dean Grindle, Gerry Hehir, and Mick Richardson

1. Election of Chairman

Following the resignation of Simon Goodwin as Chairman, owing to new work commitments, it was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that Andy Samanjoul (Vicechairman) be elected Chairman of Trailblazers.

It was further proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that Oliver Graham be elected Vicechairman.

2. Peter Laing, Cycle Trail Designer

Pete Laing, who had been awarded the contract for design of cycle trails in Hamsterley Forest, was welcomed to the meeting. Pete said he had had a first opportunity to look at the Forest and it showed great potential for good, interesting cycle trail development. In particular there were watercourses and steep banks which offered the opportunity for contour trails. Sandstone slabs and rocks were available on site, unlike at Glentress where the shale surface meant rocks had to be brought in. (Although limestone for good trail tread would probably have to be imported.) The cleared, felled areas – whilst not interesting at first, meant that trees could be planted where they were wanted amongst the trails. In all, Pete was extremely optimistic that Hamsterley provided an ideal place for really exciting mountain bike trails.

3. Mapping

Pete said he was starting to map the area and was in contact with Bellingham FE over this, although the right software to get proper images could be

problematical. Victoria Lloyd said the County Council might be able to help in this respect.

4. Whinlatter

Chris Dauber drew attention to the Whinlatter trail development (also designed by Pete) and it was noted a planning decision on this had recently been deferred.

5. Cycle Trail Development at Hamsterley

Discussion took place on the type of cycle trails Trailblazers wished to see developed at Hamsterley and the following criteria were AGREED:

- Routes should be graded Green, Blue, Red and Black.
- Different graded routes should meet up periodically allowing cyclists of varying abilities to go out as a group with some doing black sections, some red, and some blue etc.
- Gentle gradients were required in a number of places, especially for family routes.
- There was a need to take people out along the trails in an interesting manner, especially to viewpoints – but there was also a need for quick, well signed escape routes back to main Forest roads and the Visitor Centre.
- Trails should link with other trails or roads leading into or out of the Forest.
- Pete said that whilst a shared out route for cyclists was not a problem, he would advise against having a shared return route, especially for the family route. In particular, this should be kept separate from the return black and red routes.
- Pete advised that the family route should be 2-rider width and out and back could be the shared. Out and back for other routes should be on different trails.
- Red and blue routes should have good lengths of singletrack and should not just be on fire roads (preferably at least three-quarters.)
- Pete advised having some unmarked/secret trails for local riders and special outings.
- Good signage was fundamental to the success of the trails including signs making it clear trails were designed for cyclists rather than eg walkers or horse-riders. These should not, for example, forbid walking or horse riding, but should advise it was a cycle trail (warning sign.)
- The growing popularity of Free Ride was discussed and it was agreed this needed to be taken into account in trail design.
- It was agreed that there was the need to have varying trails, features and facilities to suit all types of cyclists.
- Bill drew attention to the need to have safe and easy vehicular access to and from the Forest, without upsetting local residents. This was seen as fundamental to the success of the scheme and it was agreed to discuss this with the County Council as soon as possible.

6. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was agreed the next meeting be held on Monday 1 November 2004 at 6.30pm in the Forest Classroom.