

State targets key adventure tourism market

WA to be king of bike mountain



EXCLUSIVE
DANIELLE LE MESSURIER

THE South-West is on track to become Australia's mountain biking capital, with a new plan for nearly 500km of trails throughout the region.

The South-West Mountain Bike Master Plan – to be released today – shows how areas such as Margaret River, Pemberton and Collie will be developed over the next decade.

The ambitious 495km plan follows a strategy launched in June, which recommended raising the recreational sport and tourism profile of WA mountain biking.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the plan was developed in response to the increasing demand for “purpose-built facilities”.

Despite the lack of formal mountain bike trail development, there has been a 38 per cent increase in cycle tourism-related trips to WA's South-

West over the past five years. About 120,000 mountain bikes were bought in WA in the past year, with almost half a million West Australians now owning one.

Mr Jacob said he wanted to build on this momentum.

“We hope to have trails in the future of over 80km in Margaret River, Collie and Pemberton that are large enough to attract serious overseas interest,” he said.

“We've already seen increasing overseas interest

from the Munda Biddi Trail alone.” He said tourists would then spend money on other activities and attractions in the area, including wineries.

West Cycle chief executive officer Matt Fulton said the plan would cost about \$13 million.

“There's going to be a number of these master plans, but the South-West is the one we're focusing on,” he said. “It's close to Perth, so there are a variety of different tourism experiences that people

can add on to their trip. It's going to be a tourism hot spot and mountain biking fits perfectly into that dynamic.”

The first 660m section of an 8km trail network in Bramley National Park will be unveiled this morning. Mr Jacob said the Black Diamond trail was not for the faint-hearted.

“That's the adventure tourism side – if you don't know what you're doing, you might get injured,” he said.

While the \$350,000 needed for the Bramley trail had been

secured with the help of the Department of Parks and Wildlife's Parks for People initiative, Mr Fulton said discussions were continuing on how the rest of the strategy would be funded.

“The State Government will continue working with the mountain biking community to build more trails across the South-West on land managed by the DPaW,” Mr Jacob said.

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'Hairy moments' blazing a trail

MOUNTAIN bike enthusiast David Willcox has the honour of christening Bramley National Park's first purpose-built trail.

The former chairman of the Margaret River Off-Road Cycling Association has spent hundreds of hours over the past five years working on the trail.

Mr Willcox, 36, said he experienced “a few hairy moments” when he tackled the 660m Black Diamond trail with committee member and mate John Dingey, 52.

“It's definitely, by a long shot, the most difficult trail in Margaret River,” Mr Willcox said.

“It's got some technical rock gardens which are pretty challenging but really fun. There were a few hairy moments where some of the rocks are poking out, but we managed it.”

The descending-only trail features a number of technical rock drops and jumps that will be sure to challenge some of the most technical riders in WA.

Mr Willcox, who is also a Margaret River local, said the new trail presented an opportunity to grow the area into a “mountain bike-based destination”.

He said trail had been a combined effort, with volunteers dedicating time on weekends.

“That's one of the things mountain biking brings to communities – it's that really good sense of camaraderie,” Mr Willcox said.

Non-stop: David Willcox leads John Dingey on Bramley National Park's purpose-built mountain bike trail. Picture: Paul Donegan/in-sight-photography.com