



**Guidelines**  
**to assist**  
**Landowners**  
**in the**  
**Management**  
**and/or**  
**Development**  
**of**  
**Mountainbiking Trails**  
**and**  
**Facilities**

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**1. Are these guidelines for me?**

These guidelines have been written for landowners or land managers who wish to manage or develop a mountain biking facility on their land. The information will be appropriate for use where a cycle trail or facility exists or is planned on open ground, woodland, amenity areas or disused extraction sites such as quarries and pits.

These guidelines will be of assistance when managing:

- \* formal facilities where an investment has been made to develop trails or sites either alone, or in partnership with other organisations.
- \* informal facilities, developed in consultation with the landowner.
- \* informal sites and trails built without any discussion taking place or permission given.

**2. Which sectors may find these guidelines helpful?**

They have been developed to assist the owners or managers of estate owners or managers including:

- Private Woodland Owners
- Forestry Estates
- Woodland Trust Woodlands
- Forestry Companies
- Water Companies
- Local Authority Countryside or Park Departments

**3. The scale of the activity**

Mountainbike recreation has grown dramatically since the first bikes appeared in the mid 1980's, to the point where it is estimated that some 13 million adults in the UK now own a mountainbike.

The "must have" nature of the mountainbike means that a very high proportion of our children and teenagers also own and use mountain bikes. Although some of the associated demand is met by the bridleway and byway network, there remains a considerable unsatisfied requirement for use of tracks and trails outside the public rights of way network.

#### 4. Where may mountain bike trails be found?

This demand can be met, where appropriate by permitting the use of tracks and paths in areas such as:

- \* woodlands and forests
- \* estate and farmland
- \* mountain and moorland
- \* riparian, lakeside, reservoir and coast.

#### 5. What are the major categories of mountain bike recreation?

It should be noted that offroad cycle use is highly segmented, with each grouping having considerably differing requirements:

##### Family and casual cyclists

Require good surfaces, wide enough for "two abreast", relatively hill free and fully waymarked.

*Typical facilities will include disused railway lines, well graded tracks.*

##### Cross country / trail cyclists

Can be considered as "ramblers on two wheels", who have the ability to ride in most conditions and are proficient at self navigating.

*Will typically include virtually all natural or man made tracks and paths.*

##### Challenge cyclists

Cyclists with good technical skills, and will wish to ride fast on narrow paths. Likely to be less proficient in map reading and therefore require effective waymarking.

*Typical facilities will include Forestry Commission Challenge Trails.*

##### Extreme cyclists

Highly skilled riders who ride "on the limit"

*Typical facilities will include downhill and dual slalom courses, freeride areas and "North Shore" (timber based) constructions*

##### Jumpsite Users

Mostly young cyclists who will build jumps to challenge themselves with.

*Typical facilities will include steep slopes or disused quarries or other extraction sites.*

It is becoming increasingly common practice to grade the trails according to the level of difficulty. The ski grading system is used as follows:

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Green = easy.   | Mostly flat and good surfaces. eg. railtrails      |
| Blue = moderate | Undulating gravel / limestone tracks               |
| Red = difficult | Narrow paths / singletrack with technical features |
| Black = extreme | Rocks / drop-offs, very steep - for extreme riders |

#### 6. What are the main types of mountainbike facility?

Mountainbiking facilities can be placed into two specific groups.

##### 1. Cross Country Trails.

These will be used by all but a small section of the mountainbiking community and will normally be circular and likely to be several

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miles in length. They may be waymarked and promoted routes, or just ridden with the aid of an Ordnance Survey map and will include:

- \* Public rights of way - byways, bridleways and unsurfaced roads
- \* Relatively hill free linear routes such as canal towpaths and railtrails
- \* Stoned forest roads in Forestry Commission forests
- \* Permissive use of privately owned estate and forest tracks
- \* Permissive use of narrow paths - referred to as "singletrack trails"
- \* Purpose built "challenge" trails (mostly in Forestry Commission woods)

##### 2. Site specific mountainbiking facilities

These are highly specialised sites where highly skilled, and mostly young riders using specialised bikes will ride and re ride the same facility many times in a day. While these riders are small in number, the current lack of facilities means that these facilities are often built without the knowledge of the landowner.

They will include:

- \* Downhill trails. Usually highly technical descents routed down step hillside often with major "dropoffs"
- \* Dual slalom. Wider downhill trails used by two riders simultaneously - usually in competition.
- \* Jump spots. Sometimes called Freeride areas. Highly technical areas which will contain a number of jumps, dropoffs, berms. While some are purpose built, they are typically informally developed on sites such as disused quarries or extraction sites.
- \* Self built trails. Typically less than a kilometre in length, built to use natural features plus jumps and dropoffs which may be man made.
- \* North shore constructions. Named after the North Shore District of Vancouver where these structures were first developed. They are constructed of timber - often pallet wood, but the trunks of fallen trees may also be used. These may be simple horizontal boardwalks used to take a trail over a boggy area, or may be complex structures with slopes, dropoffs and tight turns, often several feet from the ground. Their use requires a mix of technical ability, a good sense of balance and a disdain for self regard!

## 7. Why build or agree to a mountain biking facility or trail?

It is likely that a number of factors will be involved, and are likely to include one or more of the following:

- \* As a profit centre in its own right
- \* As a means of gaining extra income by diversifying the use of an established recreational infrastructure
- \* Through a desire to encourage public enjoyment of the landholding
- \* As part of a certification scheme such as the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS)
- \* As part of a grant aided agri-environmental scheme such as Better Woodlands Wales.
- \* As a business indicator used in contribution to inheritance tax planning
- \* As a result of an approach by a cycle club, tourism agency or business
- \* As a means of managing informal MTB activities being developed otherwise without permission
- \* To help to fulfil the requirements of company or organisation public access / recreation policies.

## 8. What are the likely issues to be addressed?

A number of factors will need to be considered before proceeding with a course of action.

### i. Public liability and the risk of being sued for injuries.

This is likely to be a major concern as the landowner has a duty of care to all those on his land - even to trespassers. This duty of care increases once any informally developed sites is acknowledged, as the users may then be considered to have been "invited" onto the site.

Third party liability insurance is likely to already be in place on all farm or forestry holdings. However, insurers will need to be notified of any change in the use of the land which may lead to increased underwriting list. Surprisingly, however, experience has shown that this does not necessarily lead to an increase in premium.

Recent High Court rulings suggest that there is now a much reduced risk of successful litigation should "invited" riders be injured as a result of their activities. There is a well established principle of "user beware" which enables other hazardous activities such as rock climbing and caving to take place on an own risk basis - with little chance of successfully suing the landowner if they fall off or get injured.

### *Suggested solutions*

a. Mountain biking can be a hazardous activity, so it is essential to undertake a formal risk assessment to identify the hazards. and then to find solutions to minimise or even eliminate the potential for any unacceptable hazards leading to injury. This will need to include a formal written process of inspection and repair or maintenance. The IMBA Trail Assessment Service can assist with this process. On sites in which the trails and facilities are managed by the landowner the the risk assessment will need to be conducted by yourself or your agent.

However, the preferred solution in many cases is to come to a formal arrangement with a club or identifiable group wishing to use the facility, when the riders themselves may be given some responsibility for assisting with the risk assessment process.

b. There will be particular concern regarding liability for any injury caused to the general public not taking part in the activity. Much of this risk may be reduced by the use of suitable warning signs placed on the entry points into the area and on paths in the vicinity of the site / trail. Such signage will also inform any casual riders using the facility. The hazards associated with all built features should be visible and obvious to any less skilled mountainbiker who may injure themselves through finding themselves on a feature well beyond their ability to ride.

### ii. Unregulated Expansion

There may be a concern that if an activity is allowed on a controlled basis, the use may spiral out of control, and be difficult to manage, or that some riders will be tempted to expand the sites into "virgin" areas of land.

### *Suggested solutions*

An agreement with the riders will be of definite value here.

It may be considered desirable to limit the numbers using the site, and to request that the site is not publicised or promoted on the internet or through the usual grapevine of on line forums, cycle shops and newsletters.

On more formally managed sites, a permit scheme such as that operated by the Crown Estates at Swinley, Bracknell, or the "payment on entry" system used by the Buccleugh Estates at Drumlanrig, Dumfries may be used as regulating mechanisms.

It may also be necessary to restrict use to a designated area only, preferably using natural barriers such as scrub or fallen branches to deter riders from moving out of the agreed area.

### iii. Crop Management and Damage to Trees

From time to time to the cycle of tree management operations including weeding, thinning, harvesting and restocking will have implications for any cycling trail or facility.

Any unregulated trail or site development may also result in the inappropriate brushing of crops or undergrowth or even the felling of trees. It is also possible that fences may be "modified".

### *Suggested solutions*

It will be necessary to include in any agreement a provision noting that the site will be unavailable for use by cyclists when forestry operations are being undertaken.

A process of notification will be necessary, by alerting the group / club leader well in advance of any closure, backed up by notices on the site. Refer also to the APF Guidelines, available from Confor, & from IMBA-UK.

### iv.a. Implications for game shooting - Lowlands

The main consideration in the lowlands is likely to be pheasant

shooting, and while pheasants and mountain bikes should be able to coexist in reasonable harmony, a few basic rules will be necessary if the humour of the gamekeeper is to be retained.

Considerations will include disturbance near rearing pens, night time disturbance of roosting birds, and the potential for disruption on the actual days of the shoot.

#### *Suggested solutions*

Ensure that cycling activities are kept away from the rearing pens - at least during the period April to June.

Riding may be restricted to daylight hours only to avoid disturbing roosting birds.

The shooting calendar will need to be made available to riders - via

group leaders, through a website and through on site notices.

Ensure that riders keep well away from pheasant rearing pens while they are in use.

#### iv.b. Implications for game shooting - Uplands.

Grouse shooting and deer stalking will be the two activities which could be affected when moorlands are shared with cyclists.

Access to mountain and moorland is available to mountain bikers through the use of the byway and bridleway network in England and Wales, and largely unrestricted in Scotland following implementation of the Land Reform Act.

Although access may be increased through use of permissive paths south of the border, the main influence will be the increased scale of the activity as a result of the promotion of any particular upland route which could potentially lead to a degree of disruption during the days of shoots. There is considered to be little need for concern over disturbance of nesting grouse.

#### *Suggested solutions*

Any interaction between mountainbiking and shooting / stalking is best managed through having robust methods to provide information to mountain bikers about the timing of shoots.

Details of shoots can be provided to local cycle shops and cycle clubs plus Tourist Information Centres, backed up by information available on the web, and at the major access points in the area of activity.

Information should include the date and time span of the shoot, and suggestions for alternative routes to be used to avoid the shoot.

#### vi. Interaction with walkers or horseriders

Walkers and horseriders will have legal access to public rights of way on or near to the site, and there may, in addition, be non statutory paths that are used on a permissive or casual basis.

Cyclists and other users will coexist very well with other users on the wider access tracks and lightly used narrow "singletrack" trails. However, it may be necessary to develop management solutions where a risk assessment indicates a raised level of risk of collisions.

#### *Suggested solutions*

Any jumpsites should be located in areas that avoid using or crossing paths used by other users.

If the site cannot avoid all such paths then ensure a high degree of visibility by ensuring that the sight lines are really good.

When designing a cycle trail network, avoid using paths which are popular with walkers or horseriders, and introduce features such as chicanes which will slow cyclists to walking speeds where crossing other paths, or tracks - particularly if used by vehicles.

In addition, the use of warning notices may be desirable to inform other users - and perhaps to deter the use of any trail likely to be ridden at speed by cyclists.

#### vi. Nature conservation and Effects on local plant and wildlife

Many landowners have a keen interest in the local ecology on their land, and this may be reflected in agreements with local Nature Trusts or through compliance with grant aided environmental schemes.

These agreements will need to be checked to ensure that they are not adversely affected by a cycling project.

Some sites with rare or protected plant, insect and animal species may not be suitable for a mountainbike site, as UK and European legislation can protect fragile habitats with regulations with hefty penalties for infringement.

Typically these may include streams and marshy areas which support fragile aquatic habitats, but can also include apparently innocuous sites where protected species exist. For example, a high profile MTB project near Aviemore, the Laggan Wolfrax trail site moved several miles from the original site because a Capercaillie family moved to the rail corridor.!

#### *Suggested solutions*

Discussions with your local council ecologist or English Nature (soon to be Natural England) if SSSI's are involved should provide information which will help to avoid disturbance of any sensitive sites.

However, it should still be possible use use sites which are sensitive only at certain times of year if "out of season" use will not have an adverse effect on birds, plants, insects or animals.

It may also be necessary to restrict activity to a clearly defined area, and take steps to prevent riders straying outside the agreed boundaries.

#### vii. Privacy.

One of the more difficult situations to manage involves those sites where undesirable informal sites are developed without permission.

Total closure of such sites is often difficult to implement and police, and may involve considerable use of time and resources.

#### *Suggested solution*

The preferred solution is to use a "not here - but there" approach to move the use to a more suitable site or area.

This approach is easiest if the "there" is on your own land, but should still be an option following discussions with other landowners such as the Forestry Commission, Local Authorities or willing neighbours.

### viii. Funding Considerations

These notes do not attempt to summarise the varied funding sources available to the landowner. We would, however recommend approaching Regional Development Agencies for advice in the first instance.

Trail projects can generate income through:

- \* car parking charges
- \* day and season permit schemes
- \* sale of food and goods at visitor centre

## **9. Managing informal trailbuilding sites**

These are sites or small trails which are being developed with or without permission by groups of local mountainbikers wishing to build trails and jumps close to home.

Where such sites are found to have been developed without permission, three basic options exist:

### i. Turn a blind eye and let it continue unmanaged.

On some sites where damage is unlikely and there is little other public access this may be a pragmatic option.

However, there are potential public liability issues which a risk assessment may indicate that a more “hands on” approach should be adopted.

### ii. Destroy the trail or jumpsite

This can be effective - but may lead to a lengthy campaign of attrition, as the builders can be surprisingly persistent - or may move to an equally unwelcome location. This often means that sites will be rapidly rebuilt - often with less care, potentially increasing the hazards to the users and other visitors to the site.

### iii. Engage with the trailbuilders

This is the preferred option - and the one which is most likely to lead to an acceptable solution.

However, the trailbuilders are likely to be a loosely knit group with no formal structure, so some effort may be necessary in order to get in contact with them.

This will not, of course, be a problem where a club or more formal group has approached the landowner for permission to use the site.

The suggested procedure for contacting informal trailbuilders is by the use of on site notices. These will need to be conciliatory and non threatening, and should suggest a meeting on neutral ground such as the local pub. The notices should indicate that a mutually acceptable solution is being sought, but that the alternative may be complete site closure (even if, in reality, this will be difficult to implement).

### Meeting Outline

The meeting should address the following issues:

- \* An explanation of the implications of the landowner’s duty of care
- \* An understanding of the wishlist of the trail builders
- \* Nomination of a contact within the group to act as focal point within the group.
- \* An outline of the likely constraints and ground rules.

### Site rules and/ or agreements

Ideally these should take the form of a formal written agreement. It may, however, be necessary to settle for some agreed rules if the group has no formal structure and has a fluid “membership”

These rules / agreement may include some or all of the following:

Area of the site – definition of the boundary

Warning signs around the edge of the site

Type of construction that is acceptable / unacceptable

Location of pits and jumps

A risk assessment procedure to include inspection and maintenance requirements.

Inspection & monitoring procedure by landowner and group leaders

Safety rules, including the use of helmets or body protection

Requirement for owners third party liability insurance cover in case of proceedings resulting from accidents to riders using the site.

Accident reporting procedure

Use and provision of material or machines for jumps construction

Procedure for dealing with conflicts or hassle with others

Avoidance of litter

No dogs rule

## **10. Jumpsite / Downhill Construction Remit**

Landowner liability will be minimised by following these guidelines:

### **Type of material**

#### **Likely to be Acceptable**

Earth construction  
Fine road building material  
Fallen trees

#### **Possibly Acceptable**

Clean “pallet” wood  
Rock

#### **Unacceptable**

Metal  
Sharp edged or rotten wood

## **11. Course layout & location**

### **Design for:**

Open layout with good sight lines  
Obvious jumps and hollows  
Graded edges to pits  
Good visibility of routes and jumps  
Easily seen by walkers equestrians  
Defined border to the area used  
Good visibility at exits  
Provision of “chicken runs”

### **Avoid**

Sites used by walkers or horseriders  
Sites easily found by other MTB users  
Crossing tracks, paths or walks  
Poor visibility at exits to other trails  
Hidden, sharp edged or very deep pits/jumps  
Trees or stumps next to landing points  
Jagged broken branches

## 12. MTB Trail Sites - Case Studies

The following examples are drawn from England, Wales and Scotland (Northern Ireland sadly remains in a sort of mountainbiking dark ages), and all contribute to a greater or lesser extent to an income stream. All provide unrestricted access throughout the year.

### England:

Crown Estate, Windsor.  
Penshurst OffRoad Club

### Wales

Coed Trallyn Woods, Builth Wells  
Llandegla Woods, Wrexham

### Scotland

Drumlanrig, Buccleuch Estates, Dumfries.

### Crown Estate, Windsor

The 2800 acre Crown Estate Forest, Windsor (remember APF '88) has a network of tracks and trails which are open to walkers, equestrians and cyclists. The Lookout visitor centre / cafe is managed on a shared basis with Bracknell Council, and also hosts a number of events.

The mountain bike trails are managed by the local mountain bike club, Gorricks mbc, who develop new trails and maintain existing ones in partnership with the estate.

The trails are funded through a permit scheme which is policed by the club and has satisfyingly high levels of compliance.

### Penshurst OffRoad Club (PORC)

The 40 acre Viceroy Wood near Penshurst in Kent was once the domain of the Governor General of India. For more than a decade, however this hilly woodland has been the venue for knobbly tyres rather than horses and gracious ladies.

PORC has been successfully operating as a commercial enterprise for over a decade, hosting races, charity rides, corporate events.

However, it is predominantly used as an informal riding venue, with a daily charge of £4 or annual "membership" of £75 which facilitates use of the cross country and downhill trails and cafe, plus third party insurance.

### Coed Trallyn Woods, Builth Wells

Tucked away in a remote valley in deepest Wales is the creation of Confor enthusiast George Johnson which boasts three mtb trails, self catering cottages, camping as well as a cafe serving (reputedly) the best chocolate cake in Wales.

Nearby Llantwrtyd Wells is regarded as the birthplace of UK mountainbiking, and attracts significant numbers of cyclists despite the competition from the Wales FC trails.

### Llandegla Woods, Wrexham

This Tilhill owned and managed woodland is the first UK private sector project to start from scratch with significant European and match

funding to create a capital intensive commercial recreational facility. The philosophy throughout has been to attain high quality, and this it has achieved with a wide range of purpose built mountainbike trails plus walking routes with considerable bird watching opportunities - and more trails under construction.

This, together with the newly constructed visitor centre providing bike hire, cafe and conference facilities has led to visitor numbers from easily accessible Chester, Liverpool and Manchester exceeding all predictions. Day to day finance is provided from car parking and franchising fees.

### Drumlanrig, Buccleuch Estates, Dumfries.

Drumlanrig differs from other mtb facilities in that the mtb trails have been added to an already successful stately home enterprise.

Developed in partnership with the local cycle club, the low budget mtb trails have a charm all of their own as they wind through a mosaic of ancient broad-leaved and modern conifer woodlands.

All visitors pay £5 to gain entry to the estate, and no further charges are made for the use of the cycle trails. The castle courtyard contains a cycle shop / cycle hire facility as well as a small cycle museum plus the cafe.

These five examples illustrate that there is considerable potential for developing recreational facilities to suit a range of budgets and styles in private woodlands, and that there is a strong case for including mountainbiking as part of the package.

IMBA exists in the UK to help facilitate improved opportunities for offroad cyclists, and will be very happy to advise on the development of new trails - or even the management of unwanted informal ones.

## 13. Further information

IMBA is an acknowledged leader in trail design and trail management techniques which are illustrated in a library of books and booklets including the very helpful "Landowner Guidelines" available on the IMBA-UK website <[www.imba-uk.com](http://www.imba-uk.com)>

1. "Trail Solutions" - the IMBA trailbuilding bible
2. "Building Better Trails" - £7.50 f(free to members).
3. "IMBA Freeride Guide" - £3.00
4. "Better surfaced Trails by Design". A conceptual book about sympathetic trail design.
5. "Lightly on the Land" - guidance providing the nuts and bolts of trailwork
6. "Trail Building Handbook" - IMBA-UK guidance for clubs wishing to build trails. £3.00 (free to members)
7. "Jumpsite Guidelines" - guidance for informal trailbuilders.
8. The IMBA-UK Trail Accreditation Service. For checking out your trails.
9. Northshore guidelines - find at: [www.whistlercycling.org](http://www.whistlercycling.org) or [www.nsmba.bc.ca](http://www.nsmba.bc.ca)

In addition, IMBA-UK can provide information about professional trail designers and builders.