

Red Hill Regenerators Submission on the ACT Centenary Trail Ground-Truthing Report

Introduction

The ACT Government has invited comments on the ACT Centenary Trail Ground-Truthing Report. This document is the submission from the ACT Red Hill Regenerators Inc, a park care group that cares for the Red Hill Nature Reserve.

The Red Hill Regenerators appreciate the opportunities provided by the Centenary Trail Project Team to comment on the proposals, and their preparedness to listen. Although we have already made comments at meetings and provided written input, this submission combines all our comments.

Background

The ACT Government web site advises that the Centenary Trail Ground-Truthing Report has been written following the Canberra Centenary Trail Feasibility Report (CB Richard Ellis, January 2011), which was prepared during 2010 and was made available to the community in early 2011. The Feasibility Report identified a preferred alignment for the trail from a desktop perspective. The proposed route was then tested on the ground to determine its suitability. The Centenary Trail Ground-Truthing Report (Anthony Burton and Associates, August 2011) provides detailed advice on the route for the Centenary Trail including GPS data. Modifications to the trail proposed in the Feasibility Report have been suggested in some locations.

The ACT Red Hill Regenerators have considered both reports and have expressed appreciation for the concept of the Centenary Trail, but believe there are better options for some parts of the route through the Red Hill Nature Reserve.

On 9 December 2011, a useful site meeting was held between the Centenary Trail project team, Anthony Burton and representatives of the Red Hill Regenerators. Notes of that meeting have been produced and are attached.

On 15 December 2011, a general ACT park carers meeting was held specifically to discuss the Centenary Trail. At this meeting, park carers of other ACT areas expressed similar concerns to those of the Red Hill Regenerators.

Details

The Red Hill Regenerators appreciate the concept of a 'user friendly' cycle and walking trail that takes people through Canberra as the national bush capital. There is potential for significant user enjoyment and learning as well as benefits to the nature parks and wider commercial and other opportunities for the general Canberra community.

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Principles

The Red Hill Regenerators believe the following principles should be applied in considering the route through Red Hill Nature Park:

1. The Centenary Trail must be designed to maximize the safety of both cyclists and walkers who will use it.
2. The Trail should make use of existing tracks wherever possible.
3. Tracks that are not fire trails, that is, single tracks, should be exclusively for walkers. The Centenary Trail cycle route should follow maintenance and fire trails, consistent with the existing permitted trail use in Canberra Nature Park reserves.
4. Any sections of the Trail which are constructed as part of the Centenary Trail project should avoid steep slopes that are prone to erosion and where this is not possible, sympathetic anti erosion measures must be taken.
5. The Trail should be located to minimize damage to sensitive areas such as watercourses and known habitat for threatened species.
6. Construction of links between existing tracks should minimize damage to vegetation and soils.
7. Educational signs should explain the values of remnant bushland and how these can best be conserved (including information about threats such as invasive species and feral animals).
8. Promotional materials and signs located at the Red Hill Nature Reserve boundary should make clear conditions for bringing animals into the reserve, prohibitions such as dumping of rubbish, lighting of fires and collection of plants. Signs should also display a cyclists and walkers Code of Conduct to minimise conflict between Trail users.
9. Trail markers must clearly indicate where sections of the Trail are limited to walkers, and where sections of the Trail permit both walkers and cyclists.
10. Sufficient resources must be allocated over the long term, to maintain the trail and to manage negative impacts such as erosion, weed incursion and short cuts.

The Red Hill nature park route

General comments. Red Hill already has an extensive network of walking trails, fire trails and roads. We are concerned that any new development will further segment the nature reserve into smaller and less sustainable areas, with consequent negative impact on existing flora and fauna. There seems to be limited justification for the construction of additional tracks and paths merely to accommodate the Centenary Trail.

The Red Hill Regenerators believe that existing 'single track' walking tracks should be used only for walkers. With the proposed 1.1 metre width of new tracks, it will not be possible to have walkers and cyclists safely use the same track. In addition, if cyclists and walkers were to use the same walking tracks,

it would compromise conservation values as cyclists and/or walkers would make additional tracks to avoid each other. There are adequate maintenance and fire trails which can be used to provide Trail cyclists a positive experience of Red Hill.

Incorporation of new interpretive walking trail. In November 2011, an existing network of roads and tracks was designated as the “Red Walk” and signposted with interpretive material. It is suggested that this Red Walk should be incorporated in the Centenary Trail route for walkers. Because of its location, use of narrow and steep single tracks, and the potential for environmental damage (refer attached Conservation Values) it is not suitable for cyclists.

Proposed route.

The lookout near the rectangular water tank at the northern end at the top of the summit road is an important viewing point for aspects of Canberra from Red Hill. We think it would be valuable for this be included in the trails for walkers and cyclists.

Similarly, the trail should go to, or near, the summit facilities – toilets, restaurant and car park.

The preferred route for walkers and cyclists is:

- The proposed path to the summit, following fire trails.
- Continue on the sealed summit road or between the casuarinas and Reserve fence to the south/west of the road between the summit restaurant and the water tank lookout. This section would need to be made suitable for both cyclists and walkers.
- Stop off at the lookout near the rectangular water tank.
- Continue down the sealed summit road on a wide verge (where possible) to the roundabout on Mugga Way.

Alternatively:

- From the lookout, continue down the summit road on a wide verge, cut across the golf club road (about 50 metres from the intersection of the two roads) and then west along the fire trail.
- Continue down the existing fire trail near the end of Strickland Crescent or down the cleared area under the power lines that lead down to Deakin.
- Traverse along the fire trail on the outside of the existing fence to the roundabout on Mugga Way.

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This route could accommodate walkers and cyclists as it would almost all be on existing roads or fire trails.

Another option for walkers is to include the route initially proposed in the feasibility study or a route that incorporates all or parts of the Red Hill sign-posted interpretative walk (Red Walk).

As shown on the attached map, other options for cyclists include:

- The relatively flat and child/new rider-friendly trail that runs along the base of the Hill parallel with Mugga Way;
- The sealed golf course lane;
- The sealed summit road (currently a well utilised option);
- Doing a loop up to and along the main Red Hill ridge and then backtracking down to follow the trail along the base of the Hill.

Alternative entry to the Red Hill Reserve. Should the camp ground at the former Mugga Lane Zoo not eventuate, or perhaps in any case, it could be worthwhile reconsidering the section of the route through Red Hill suburb and perhaps leaving out the Mugga Lane site and approaching Red Hill from Isaacs Ridge and Mount Mugga directly to the informal underpass of Hindmarsh Drive. It may be worth examining possible improvement of this underpass, which is frequently used by both walkers and bike riders, but is not high enough for an adult to stand upright in.

We would like to see the Government mandate a review in say, four years, to assess the visitor numbers and the environmental impact of the Trail.

Signage

We understand that a variety of signs will be installed as part of the project. We would appreciate further advice on the design, information content and location of the Red Hill signs, which should be compatible with existing signs and trail markers on the Red Walk.

The Red Hill Regenerators would like all park carer groups to be consulted on all aspects of the proposed signage including location, content and design principles. This is important so that we can complement new signage with the existing and learn from past experience.

The Red Hill nature park conservation values

See attached document

Construction of the proposed 1.6 km multipurpose bare-earth track from the Lookout to the Melbourne Avenue Reserve boundary would fragment and significantly impact a woodland area of very high conservation value. It would destroy probably hundreds of plants including at least one nationally endangered, and nine other regionally rare, plant species that occur along the proposed route. The works and new tracks will be a significant conduit for

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weed invasion, will disrupt the local hydrology and cause erosion. Rare woodland birds will no longer breed within the track's vicinity, and it will destroy important woodland invertebrate habitat. A bare earth track constructed across Red Hill's sticky clay and rock substrate will also be difficult to maintain and will not be an attractive option for many bike riders or walkers, particularly when wet.

Other matters

While it is expected that the Centenary Trail will become popular with mountain bike riders, it is suggested that information material be provided to direct mountain bike riders to other approved mountain bike trails in Canberra where they can appropriately enjoy that form of recreation. This material should include a Code of Conduct consistent with that published on the Canberra Cycleways map. It is assumed that the Centenary Trail will also be shown on new editions of the Canberra Cycleways map.

We would also like to be assured that conservation management will be a high priority for the Centenary Trail Management Board and that this will be included in the Board's Terms of Reference.

Could you advise if the maintenance funding arrangements will be made publicly available? We would like to understand the Government's intentions for maintenance of the Trail on Red Hill

Summary

We look forward to reviewing the result of the current consultation. We would be delighted if we were then in a position to fully support the plans for the Centenary Trail. We hope that the Centenary Trail will be a celebration of Canberra's and in particular, Red Hill's beauty, wildlife and nature.

The suggested routes utilising existing tracks, trails and sealed roads will create significantly less damage to the environment, while offering a similar or better visual, woodland and interpretive experience.

Ross Kingsland
President
Red Hill Regenerators