

DOC RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES REVIEW

Submission By The Cycling Advocates Network (CAN)

31st January 2004

ABOUT CAN

The Cycling Advocates' Network of NZ (CAN) Inc is this country's national network of cycling advocate groups. It is a voice for all cyclists - recreational, commuter and touring. We work with central government and local authorities, on behalf of cyclists, for a better cycling environment. We have affiliated groups and individual members throughout the country, and links with overseas cycling organisations. In addition, several national/regional/local government authorities, transportation consultancies, and cycle industry businesses are supporting organisations.

INTRODUCTION

CAN is pleased to present this submission on DOC's Review. The national committee of the group has prepared this submission, with feedback from CAN members. CAN has based its submission on reviews of the relevant background material on DOC's website and our experiences with respect to cycling and cycle touring. Our submission covers both national policy issues of a general nature, as well as specific comments about local proposals. If you require any clarification of the points raised by us, please feel free to contact us as detailed at the end of our submission.

We would like the opportunity to discuss these issues with you in more detail at some stage and would be happy to arrange a meeting in the near future. In our library we also have extensive background material on cycle touring networks elsewhere in the world, and would be happy to provide you with what information we have.

GENERAL ISSUES

Our prime interest is in the potential for DOC to assist with cycle tourism throughout NZ, through the provision of suitable trails and associated facilities. We know that DOC has had some limited involvement to date, most notably in facilities like the Otago Central Rail Trail and Queen Charlotte Track. However we believe there is significant potential for more cycle touring in NZ (and all the economic benefits that this brings), if the right facilities are developed. Not only can these provide rewarding recreational opportunities in their own right, but they can also provide safe alternatives to roads for long-distance cycle travellers.

A distinction should be made between "mountain-biking" (where physical track challenges and high-speed cycling are generally desired by bikers) and "cycle touring" (where cyclists are motivated more by experiencing the local environment and travelling to particular destinations). In most cases, the latter does not involve a "mountain bike", but a specialised touring bike. Your Review only seems to acknowledge the existence of the former. Hence, while it is pleasing to see the number of new mountain-biking areas being proposed in the Review, these are generally unlikely to cater for cycle touring needs. The track standards for cycle touring vs mountain biking are quite distinct, probably similar to the differences between Day Visitors (DV) and Backcountry Adventurers (BCA) walking track standards. It is unclear whether DOC's existing track classifications/standards adequately cater for the provision of long-distance cycle routes.

We are heartened by the potential softening of DOC's stance regarding the use of bicycles in conservation areas, including national parks (according to the recent DOC general policy review). While such issues always require careful management to protect the conservation estate, we feel that increased access via designated cycle routes can only improve the ability for both New Zealand and overseas visitors to experience our unique backyard. We endorse the efforts of Mountainbike New Zealand to improve access for cyclists to our conservation areas.

It should be noted that many of our members are also keen partakers of walking/tramping, mountain-biking, camping, and other outdoor pursuits. Therefore we are fully supportive in general of the boost in funding for DOC to further develop and maintain the recreational opportunities in all of these areas.

SPECIFIC PROPOSED FACILITIES

We strongly support the development of the Motukarara to Little River Rail Trail in the Canterbury conservancy, and urge its prompt completion. In line with the discussion in the previous section, the reference to "mountain biking" should be changed to "cycle touring" to emphasise the primary role of such a route (particularly since there are no "mountains" or hills involved on this route).

We support the proposals to upgrade and possibly extend the Queen Charlotte Track in the Nelson conservancy.

Where not specifically mentioned in the Review, we assume that facilities like the Otago Central Rail Trail and Rimutaka Incline Track are to be maintained to an adequate standard.

We endorse DOC's stated support for the Te Araroa (The Long Pathway) project. As well as providing a long-distance walking network, this has the potential to also provide useful cycle route sections throughout the country as well.

NEW/UPGRADED CYCLE TRACKS

We would like to see DOC proactively take a lead in developing a number of new cycle touring routes throughout the country, where DOC land is significantly involved. It should be noted that one of the priority areas in the Govt's recent National Walking & Cycling Strategy (Priority 6) is to "Improve networks for long-distance cycling [and walking]". Ideally it needs a specific agency to be responsible for managing this process consistently nationwide, and DOC is certainly one possible contender.

Some of our suggested ideas for cycle routes are listed below for further investigation. Optimal routes often cross district, regional and property boundaries. Therefore further discussion will no doubt be needed with those responsible for road corridors, parks/reserves, rail/river corridors, other Crown land and private land.

Some possible ideas for development or upgrading:

- Christchurch to Greymouth via Waimakariri Gorge, Arthurs Pass, Lake Brunner
- Whangarei north via coastal route
- Nelson to Murchison via old rail route
- Wellington to Wairarapa via the Rimutaka Incline and Baring Head, bypassing SH2
- Golden Bay to Karamea through North-West Nelson (Kahurangi) National Park
- Nelson to Pelorus Bridge via the Maungatapu power pylon track, bypassing SH6
- Seddon to Hanmer via Molesworth station route
- Paeroa to Waihi via old Karangahake Gorge rail route
- St Arnaud (Nelson Lakes) to Hanmer Springs via Rainbow Valley route
- South of Kaikoura to Conway River via railway service track, bypassing SH1
- Haast to Hollyford through Fiordland National Park

You'll see that in many cases there is significant potential to make use of either existing or abandoned rail corridors, with the latter often already being under DOC management.

There are likely to be other potential routes that we have not identified. In some cases, it may be that a relatively short route through DOC land is needed to connect an ideal longer route. In many other instances, it may be that an existing or proposed walking track could also form part of a useful cycle route. We would ask that DOC proactively look for potential opportunities for such routes and if need be seek feedback from us or local cyclists.

TRACK MAINTENANCE

While existing facilities like the Otago Central Rail Trail are fantastic initiatives, we are a bit concerned about reports of sub-standard sections in terms of path and bridge surfaces, etc. Therefore we encourage DOC to ensure that adequate resources are provided for ongoing maintenance and improvement of such facilities. It may be that some of our local affiliated cycling groups are willing to help provide some volunteer labour to assist here, and we would be happy to liaise with you on this.

Glen Koorey
Policy & Technical Advisor
Phone: (03) 331-7504
E-mail: koorey@paradise.net.nz

for
Cycling Advocates Network (CAN)
PO Box 6491; Wellesley St; Auckland
E-mail: secretary@can.org.nz
Website: www.can.org.nz