

Is there truly light at the end of the tunnel? Perhaps so!

In a welcome turn around last week the East Otways Community Reference Group was provided the most recent DSE draft plans for the northern reaches of the Otways. Richard Wadsworth (DSE Statewide Recreation & Tourism Coordinator) and Simon White (Southwest Trail Bike Project Officer) presented the EOCRG the details of the latest departmental rethink after strong opposition from the Victorian Trail Riders Network and the supporting motorcycle organisations working with us on this issue.

The plans are only up for consultation and by no means is everything proposed assured, however this is a big step forward from the lock it up and lock us out policy we feared. Part of the proposal put forward by DSE includes a proper riding loop that serves both as an introductory route for those not knowing the area and a recognised link between to the legal tracks throughout the forest parks. A key issue for the Victorian Trail Riders Network has been the need for a proper link between riding areas and the Paddy's Swamp parking area, this too has been taken on-board. Many previously disputed tracks may be recognised as legitimate, and some crucial ones are likely to be upgraded and maintained to ensure the riding loop and access between areas can be achieved. This is the first time DSE has indicated they want to open the bush up for managed trail bike access, not close it down like we have seen west of Angelsea. Don't get me wrong there will still be track closures, but unlike the previous plans we have battled against this one has the interests of trail bike riders in mind, not only environmentalists.

DSE also expressed concern that many of the problems associated with trail bikes are a result of not including motorcycle recreation in management plans and not enough consultation with trail riders. VTRN agrees! We have been ignored, we have been excluded from planning processes. Why? Because we have never been united as a user group. Take a page out of the 4X4 guys' book or the mountain bikers', they have left us in their dust while we wallow in our own impending doom. The new draft plans DSE released this week should encourage everyone that rides a recreational motorcycle to look towards the future we can have rather than the one that is likely to be thrust upon us. The best way to achieve this is to become a supporter of VTRN and also a member of organisations like AMTRA

or DSMRA because we are the ones representing you and looking toward the future. The potential for a satisfactory outcome supported by riders in the Northern Otways is a clear signal we are making ground through unified representation.

Without doubt the key factor in the more promising DSE plans has been the shift in rider attitude and the willingness to respect the privilege we have of riding in public land. Many parts of the world are far less accepting of motorised recreation. You won't find many places in Europe where you can take your WR or Kato for a squirt less than an hour's travel from your home without paying a cent. We regularly hear the argument that USA, New Zealand and even Tasmania have better recreational use of public land and forests than us in Victoria. No argument from VTRN but we have to accept we are here and we have different laws and different people pulling the strings! Hard work and unity is the only way things are going to change.

The Victorian Trail Riders Network thanks the other groups and individuals who have been working with us in the Otways over the past months to get our message across. These include Con Thermos (Otway Off Road Tours), Barwon Recreational Motorcycling Council, Roger Northam (VMAC) and OTR. These partnerships are what VTRN is all about. We also acknowledge the commitment of Simon White, Roger Pitt and Richard Wadsworth who have shown DSE policy is not all one-sided and the government will respond to reasonable requests if put forward with a unified approach.



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Creek Crossing Etiquette



One of the major complaints people have about trail bikes is cut up creek crossings and erosion of stream banks. Once upon a time riders used to get a few logs and pieces of wood and make a solid path across smaller creeks. That doesn't seem to be as common a practice as it once was. Have we got too lazy to spend a few minutes reducing our impacts on the environment or is it just these days "O" rings chains can cope with more mud?

The problem is, anyone wanting to chop us off at knees only has to head to the nearest single track creek crossing with a camera and they have all the ammo they need. My local landcare group turned up to a DSE meeting with 56, 8 x 10 colour glossy photographs with circles and arrows and paragraph on the back of each one to be used as evidence against us (just like Alice's Restaurant). These weren't tracks shared with 4 x 4's

on a regular basis and the damage was almost 100% due to bikes, water erosion and the elements. DSE didn't bother looking at them simply saying we have seen it all before a thousand times. The problem is they have seen it all before, too many times!

Here are a few tips to help start improving our image

Take a few minutes to look for the best way through, don't just aim for an axle deep rut and gun it! Look around and see if your group can move a few pieces of dead timber and small logs to make a crossing. When you have finished take a few pics and post them on the web rather than the guy with a 20 foot roost of muddy water. If someone gets caught in a deep rut, go back and help lift or drag the bike through rather than laugh as he tries to get traction and dig an even deeper hole. Most importantly, don't just keep widening a crossing by taking a new route. If a better route is obvious then do some preparation where you cross the wet areas to stop it becoming just another rutted up widening of the track. The reason you are looking for a way past the deep holes is to keep your feet dry so why not do your bit to help the track stay dry. It can be just as much of a challenge riding a narrow log bridge as wrestling a 100kg bike from a mudhole! A special thanks to the guys who posted these pics on DBW in response to my question about bridges. If anyone else has some good photos of creek crossing options send them in to vtrnhq@gmail.com.



Congratulations to Our Winner

The winner of the **VTRN Holiday Give Away** who gets to share two nights at the Parla Gully Farm Stay with three other people is Adam Schroder from the Upper Yarra area. Adam won with this response to the question -

What riding a motorcycle in the bush means to you.

The winning response was -

"Riding in the aussie bush is what keeps me sane. I work long hard hours, then it's flat out at home with kids and house etc. When riding there's no thinking of what bills to pay or questions to answer. It's concentrate on what's in front of me or get hurt. Strangely, it's therapy for me. The physical work out is great, makes me feel like I've payed for the therapy session. And the social side. The best laughs are had spinning yarns about the days misadventures with like minded mates and the new mates met in the carpark. Must-always-have-a-dirtbike."

Thank you Adam for doing your bit to support trail riders across Victoria and we hope you enjoy your holiday! And thanks to Parla Gully Farm Stay for their continued support.

The **Victorian Trail Riders Network** is a supporter based organisation with the following aims,

- *Maintain Access to Public Land*
- *To be an Active rather than Re-Active Organisation*
- *Work with Rider Organisations*
- *Source and Disseminate Information*
- *Develop Co-operative Relationships with Public Land Managers*
- *Lobby Government*
- *Develop Action Plans*
- *Assist Trail Riders to become Environmentally Sustainable*

There is no membership fee to become a supporter of VTRN just log on to the website and go to the supporter's tab. Download the "Supporter Information Form" fill in the details and email to vtrnhq@gmail.com.

The Victorian Trail Riders Network website
www.vtrn.mototrials.com.au