

Cycling adventurers will soon be able to get off the beaten track and experience the natural delights of the south-west by cycle-touring along the Munda Biddi Trail—Western Australia's new long-distance, off-road cycling trail.

Munda Biddi

pathway through the forest

by Verna Costello and Therese Jones

In December 2002, the first 200 kilometres of the Munda Bidli Cycle Trail, from Mundaring in the Perth Hills to the old timber town of Dwellingup, was officially opened. Munda Bidli—an Aboriginal Nyoongar term meaning ‘path through the forest’—is an appropriate name for a ‘path’ that is destined to become one of the world’s greatest off-road cycling trails.

The trail is not just for serious mountain bike enthusiasts, but has also been designed for recreational cyclists seeking a safe and enjoyable bush cycling experience. They will be able to enjoy pleasantly healthy exercise while marvelling at the often-breathtaking scenery that typifies so much of our south-west bushland.

The construction of this 900-kilometre trail from Mundaring to Albany will be completed in three stages: Mundaring to Collie, Collie to Pemberton and Pemberton to Albany, and is expected to be finished by late 2004. The section from Dwellingup to Collie, which will complete Stage One, is currently under way and should be ready for use in Spring 2003.



Once completed, the Munda Bidli Cycle Trail will wind its way, off-road, through some of the State’s most beautiful national parks and State forest. On its way to Albany, the trail will use a network of bush tracks and old railway lines to transport cyclists through many towns and forest attractions. They include Jarrahdale, Dwellingup, Logue Brook Dam, Collie, Wellington Mills, Donnybrook, Nannup, Donnelly River, Manjimup, Pemberton, Northcliffe, Walpole and Denmark.

Previous page

Trail Coordinator Therese Jones putting one of the old forest tracks along the Munda Bidli to the test.

Left: Mountain bike enthusiasts taking on a downhill section in the Helena River area.

Below: Members of the Munda Bidli Trail Foundation preparing for a day’s ride along the trail.

Photos – Geoff Logue

Throughout the journey, cyclists may encounter an array of wildlife, and will experience changing landscapes such as the rugged Darling Range, winding river valleys, majestic native forests and the spectacular southern coastline.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The trail has been designed to appeal to people with a range of age groups and cycling abilities. They include recreational cyclists, families and members of outdoors clubs. As they pass through the many forest attractions, they will find picnic spots and existing forest campsites, where they can meet their support vehicles.



Cyclists will be able to make the journey as easy or as difficult as they wish—a peaceful day's ride on an old railway alignment or a challenging four-week overland adventure—all while exploring the natural sights and sounds of the south-west.

Touring cyclists who wish to enjoy a total bush tour will find the Munda Biddi Trail ideal. The wide forest tracks and gentle slopes will make carrying panniers relatively easy, and they will be able to choose from a variety of meal and accommodation services. For experienced cyclists, possible plans include a series of challenging single-track sections adjacent to the main trail and, where possible, direct links to a range of existing mountain bike circuits.

It is planned to create, wherever possible, loop and spur trails that link the Munda Biddi to other country towns and forest attractions. The first of these trails is the Waroona-Logue Brook Dam Loop. This will veer off the Munda Biddi at the old Nanga townsite (a popular camping spot along the Murray Valley), and head through the bush to Lake Navarino Forest Resort. After a short break or an overnight stay at the lakeside forest resort, cyclists can head south to Logue Brook Dam, where the trail loops back onto the Munda Biddi. Side-trails like this will provide even greater weekend cycling opportunities.

SLEEP UNDER THE STARS . . .

The trail will pass through a town at least every second or third day. This will make it easier to restock supplies, and provide cyclists with a range of accommodation choices.

Campsites have been located a comfortable day's ride apart (about every 35 to 40 kilometres). These campsites have been designed to accommodate the needs of cyclists, while blending into the natural landscape. Each site has a self-composting toilet, a camp shelter that sleeps around 20 people, two water tanks, picnic tables and a bike storage shelter. The three purpose-built campsites along the route between Mundaring and Dwellingup have been carefully tucked away in the forest to provide a true outdoor camping experience. Each camp shelter features an undercover repair area, where

cyclists can attend to minor mechanical emergencies out of the weather. Several tent sites within the tranquil bush surroundings have been provided for those seeking solitude.

The campsites have been designated 'fuel stoves only', largely to prevent the trampling and stripping of nearby forest areas and to protect the natural areas surrounding the campsites. For groups and individuals who are seeking the comfort of an open fire at night for warmth (and cooking, in most cases) a vehicle-based campsite is located five to seven kilometres away from most (but not all) of the campsites.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management consulted the Water Corporation and Water and Rivers Commission about the development of

Above: Three cyclists enjoying a leisurely ramble enroute to the Mundaring Weir.

Photo – Geoff Logue



the trail and the location of campsites in sensitive water catchment areas. All campsites are outside reservoir protection zones. In addition, all have self-composting 'enviro-loos', which are fully sealed to ensure no human waste can enter the water table.

. . . OR STAY IN TOWN

If you choose not to camp out under the stars, there are many other ways to experience the Munda Biddi and still have most of the basic creature comforts of home. Several outdoors companies will take you on guided day-



rides along the Munda Biddi, then drop you off at the nearest town for the night, where you can obtain a cold beer, a satisfying meal and a comfy bed to sooth tired muscles. Or you can simply stop off at one of the many towns through which the trail passes. Another alternative is to create your own

support vehicle service and have a driver meet you, bringing your camping gear and food supplies, at designated points along the trail.

A NORTHERN SNAPSHOT

The northernmost and first section to be opened, between Mundaring and

Dwellingup, introduces visitors to the rugged beauty of the Perth Hills. Through forests—predominantly jarrah—the trail winds through deep river valleys, such as the Helena and Serpentine, and across the edge of the scarp enroute to Dwellingup. Along the way, there are reminders of a former timber-cutting era, with old timber bridges and forest mill towns, such as Balmoral, Whittakers and Marrinup, that are now used as picnic areas or converted to forest campsites. The towns of Jarrahdale and Dwellingup are also steeped in forest history.

Many of the old rail formations, which the trail follows, were created to bring timber from the forest work camps into the big mill towns to be cut and sent to wharves for export. Both Jarrahdale and Dwellingup have also housed a bauxite mining industry. Areas south of Whittakers Mill and north-east of Jarrahdale have been mined for



Above: The first section of trail traverses the Perth Hills, from Mundaring to Dwellingup.
Photo – Len Stewart/Lochman Transparencies

Left: The Munda Biddi Trail appeals to people from a range of age groups and cycling abilities.
Photo – Geoff Logue

Below right: Relaxing after a hard day of riding.

Photo – Geoff Logue

bauxite, the mineral used to create aluminium. Mining has ceased in some of the areas and they are being rehabilitated with native species.

The Nyoongar people once inhabited these parts, creating their own 'munda biddis' as they searched for food, water and shelter. For Aboriginal people, the forest was home in the same way as it is for native animals such as the black-gloved wallaby, the western grey kangaroo and the emu.

Spring is a true delight in these parts, with wildflowers creating a carpet of colour as far as the eye can see. Serendipitous surprises, such as Oakley Dam, carved into the edge of the scarp, provide refreshing oases for cyclists during the warmer times of the year.

A guidebook and a set of three maps will be produced for each stage of the trail. The guidebooks will include a detailed index map and trail notes describing the terrain, forest features and facilities. They will also include practical tips on how to plan your trip and maintain your bike. The guidebooks and map series will be available from most Department of Conservation and Land Management offices, as well as selected retail outlets and the department's NatureBase website.

CYCLE TOURISM

Unlike bushwalking, cycle touring has not been a popular pastime in Western Australia because of the vast distances between towns, and the long stretches of bitumen roads and highways. However, with the creation of trails like the Munda Biddi and other similar cycling routes across Australia, off-road cycling is now emerging as a highly popular outdoor activity. As a result, many new ecotourism opportunities are expected to spring into existence because of the new trail. In other parts of Australia, a niche market in cycle tourism has formed, bringing with it a wealth of benefits. In the south-west of WA, the Munda Biddi has the potential to increase domestic and inbound tourism, create economic opportunities in regional areas—and of significant importance—they will be ecologically sustainable.

CREATING THE TRAIL TOGETHER

The Department of Conservation and Land Management has been designing and planning the trail in consultation with Munda Biddi Trail Foundation, the Department of Sport and Recreation, the Western Australian Mountain Bike Association and other representatives of the cycling community. The trail is a joint project between the community, industry and the Government of Western Australia. When completed, it will link people with many south-west regions, and provide exciting new opportunities for recreation, tourism and economic growth.

During the past two years, the department and the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation have joined forces to attract funding and generate community support for the trail. However, greater community support is needed to push this trail through to Albany.

Readers who wish to show their support by becoming a member of the Foundation, or volunteering their time to this growing trail organisation, should phone 0422 112 229 for further information, or download the membership application form from the department's NatureBase website (www.naturebase.net).

The first section, Mundaring to Dwellingup, has been funded by Alcoa Australia, The WA Lotteries Commission, the Department of Justice, Peel Development Commission, Southwest Development Commission, the Department of Conservation and Land Management, and a host of local government authorities along the route of the trail.

In particular, the Department of Justice has made a commitment to the project by providing on-ground support with the Karnet Prison's trail construction crew. The mobile crew is currently assisting the department's staff to build the trail to Collie.

Other supporters include the Western Australian Mountain Bike Association, the Department of Sport and Recreation, the Great Southern Development Commission, the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, the Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, the Water and Rivers Commission and the Water Corporation.



Verna Costello is a photo-journalist and editor with *LANDSCOPE* and can be contacted on 0419 967 988 or by email (vernac@calm.wa.gov.au).

For further information, please contact Therese Jones, The Munda Biddi Trail Project Coordinator, by phoning (08) 9334 0265 or emailing theresej@calm.wa.gov.au or you may contact the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation.

The *Munda Biddi Messenger* is the official Project and Munda Biddi Trail Foundation newsletter. It features current trail news, cycling tips, events, sponsors and much more. Comments, feedback or snapshots of cyclist's adventures are welcome, and can be emailed to the editor (foundation@mundabiddi.org.au). Copies of the Winter 2002 and Spring 2002 issues are still available from the NatureBase website, or by phoning the Tracks and Trails Unit on (08) 9334 0265.

059973

Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

LANDSCOPE



VOLUME EIGHTEEN, NUMBER 2, SUMMER 2002-2003



The first stage of a long-distance mountain bike trail, that will ultimately lead from Mundaring to Albany, is now open. See page 49.



Discover the underwater wilderness of the Geographe Bay, Leeuwin-Naturaliste, Hardy Inlet area, a potential marine conservation reserve, on page 18.



Little was known about the distribution of the dalgyte, or bilby, in the south-west forests until scientist Ian Abbott interviewed old timers. Turn to page 28.



Older piles of the Busselton Jetty are crowded with marine life, but it was not always so. How do marine animals gradually colonise the piles? See page 34.



The Stirling Range National Park experiences many extremes of weather, from snow falls to bushfires. Find out why on page 10.

FEATURES

A STIRLING CLIMATE: CLOUDS, SNOW AND FIRE
JOE COURTNEY.....10

THE CAPES COAST
CAROLYN THOMSON-DANS, KYLIE RYAN & ANDREW HILL.....18

REMEMBERING THE DALGYTE
RHIANNA MOONEY.....28

LAST IN, BEST DRESSED
PETER MORRISON.....34

BUSH AT THE BEACH: WOODMAN POINT REGIONAL PARK
CAROLYN THOMSON-DANS.....42

MUNDA BIDI: PATHWAY THROUGH THE FOREST
VERNA COSTELLO & THERESE JONES.....49

REGULARS

BUSH TELEGRAPH.....4

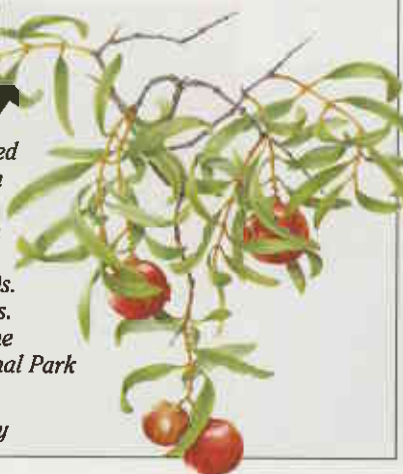
ENDANGERED
HERBACEOUS ASSEMBLAGES ON BENTONITE LAKES.....27

URBAN ANTICS
BOOBOOK OWL.....54

COVER

Quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*) is one of the most widespread plants in Australia. This small, upright tree is most easily recognised by its bright red fruits, which are edible and also contain a nutritious nut. It belongs to the same genus as the famous sandalwood, which was one of Western Australia's major exports in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Members of this genus are root parasites. *Quandong* grows in dense stands in some areas within the Woodman Point Regional Park (see story on page 42).

Cover illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky



Executive editor: Ron Kawalilak.
Editors: David Gough, Carolyn Thomson-Dans.
Bush Telegraph editor: Verna Costello.
Scientific/technical advice: Keith Morris, Kevin Kenneally, Paul Jones, Chris Simpson.
Design and production: Tiffany Aberin, Maria Duthie, Gooitzen van der Meer.
Illustration: Gooitzen van der Meer.
Cartography: Promaco Geodraft.
Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (08) 9334 0296 Fax: (08) 9334 0498.
Subscription enquiries: ☎ (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437.
Colour Separation by Colourbox Digital.
Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print.
© ISSN 0815-4465. All material copyright. No part of the contents of the publication may be reproduced without the consent of the publishers.
Please do not send unsolicited material to LANDSCOPE, but feel free to telephone the editors.
Visit NatureBase at www.naturebase.net
Published by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia.



DEPARTMENT OF
**Conservation
AND LAND MANAGEMENT**
Conserving the nature of WA