

BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES

by Lauren Cabrera



A campaign to provide people with disability access to adaptive mountain bikes is helping to get a range of users out onto Western Australian trails.

When one in four Australians has a disability, Andrew Liddawi found it difficult to conceive he was the only person in a wheelchair who wanted to race down a bush track with his mates for the sheer thrill of it. And his answer to anyone who asks why he enjoys it, is: “Freedom. Simple”.

GETTING OUT THERE

Andrew was involved in outdoor sports like running and mountain biking most of his adult life, but was left paralysed from the waist down after a mountain biking incident in 2008. Determined not to let his disability get in the way of being active, Andrew was keen to find new ways of spending time outdoors. But it wasn't long before he came up against a range of challenges.

“I hate using the word ‘confined’, but the truth is that’s how it can feel when you’re stuck using a chair. To be able to get away from that feeling, even just for a few hours, is a luxury. Especially outdoors in a country as beautiful as ours,” he said.

“Three years after my accident, when my friends asked if I wanted to go trail running at night with them, I thought – why not? I tied a couple of occy-straps around my legs and one around my waist to secure me to my chair and headed out onto the track. Annoyingly, I had to be pushed up and down the gravely hill climbs by my mates. When I returned home I couldn't help but think there must be a better way.”

MOVING MOUNTAINS

After discovering that off-road handcycles were not available in Australia, and those made overseas cost about \$12,000 each, his mission was clear. After a year of researching, collaborating, networking and learning, Andrew had enough information to create breaktheboundary.com.au – an information hub for adaptive mountain biking in Australia, designed to support people with disability to be able to go ‘beyond flat surfaces’.

Adaptive mountain bikes come in a variety of shapes and sizes to suit the rider's physical, intellectual, neurological and sensory abilities. Readily established adaptive equipment includes handcycles, leg cycles and tandem bikes.

Andrew sought donations through Rebound WA and was soon able to purchase an adaptive handcycle, then went on to become the first Australian with disability to cycle a hand-trike across a 57-kilometre section of the Cape to Cape Mountain Bike Race in WA's south-west in 2013.

“The momentum just kept building and I began to realise I had a growing collective of passionate, like-minded individuals around me, all dedicated to advocating for accessibility and inclusion of people with physical and neurological disability in mountain biking,” he said.

“In 2018 I decided it was time to turn the online presence into a formalised not-for-profit association and Australian charity.”

The trike that Andrew rode at the Cape to Cape event, along with a small collection of other adaptive mountain bikes and a Trailrider (see ‘Running on wheels’ on page 22) is now available for hire through the organisation, with guided tours, coaching clinics and a range of other services to suit individuals.

Break the Boundary runs an annual camp and assembles riding groups for adaptive mountain biking. The national association also manages guidelines to give direction to mountain bike event organisers trail builders, land managers and other groups on how they can be more inclusive.

Left Andrew Liddawi rides an adaptive handcycle on the Cape to Cape Track.
Photo – Travis Deane



Hear more about adaptive mountain biking

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.





“If you ask me what my goal for Break the Boundary is, I would say it is to become redundant,” Andrew said.

“I would love it if adaptive mountain biking is so commonplace and readily available that there is no need for us.

“Having an exhilarating experience in nature has the potential to really change your mindset and I believe everyone should have the opportunity to feel alive.”

RUNNING ON WHEELS

For people whose disability inhibits them from being able to go bushwalking or trail running, a Trailrider is an excellent option and is available for hire through Break the Boundary, generously donated by the Ability Centre. The Trailrider is a specially designed single-wheeled wheelchair that is carried by two ‘sherpas’, one at either end. It is ergonomically designed with the wheel in the centre under the passenger and has a lightweight aluminium frame so it can easily negotiate narrow trails.

Perth Trail Series is looking at ways to incorporate Trailriders into trail running events in national and regional parks near Perth (see ‘Running for the hills’, *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 2017–18).

Series director Melina Mellino was immediately on board when she heard about Break the Boundary.

“I was blown away when I heard about what Andrew was doing,” Melina said.

“We all know how amazing being in nature is and that’s what Perth Trail Series is all about; getting out onto the trails with a strong community of people and being inclusive so everyone can give it a go.”

Perth Trail Series is timing how long it takes two runners to carry someone around the trails on the Trailrider and is



looking to offer a less-demanding course to cater to Trailriders and runners with less experience, ability or confidence.

WHAT’S NEXT

When Parks and Wildlife Service’s assistant director of Parks and Visitor Services Rod Annear heard about Break the Boundary, he thought a partnership was a natural fit. Rod, an avid mountain biker and bushwalker, envisioned an opportunity to make adaptive mountain bikes to every national park (see all ‘Access to more, for more’ on page 12).

“Being outdoors in nature is good for the body, good for the mind and good for the soul,” Rod said.

“Having a disability shouldn’t be a barrier to getting outdoors and Andrew and his team provide that important link.”

The department is a principal sponsor of the Break the Boundary Adaptive Trail Hub at Kalamunda and Rod believes this is just the start of a strong partnership. The organisation and its community of volunteers provide feedback and advice to the department on trail design and features, to ensure they are suitably inclusive. As such, Break the Boundary has developed *Australian Adaptive Mountain Biking Guidelines* to assist trail planners and land managers.

“Recently, Jesse Donovan came out on the newly developed trail in Arklow Forest (see ‘Bush telegraph’, *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 2019–20) on his handcycle to give

his feedback and make sure the new trail designed for adaptive mountain bikes was fit for purpose,” Rod said.

“The plan is to continue to work closely with Break the Boundary and other partners to provide equipment and organise volunteers across the State so that people with disability can get out on the trails wherever they travel.”

Above left Riders using a variety of adaptive recumbent handcycles and trikes.

Above Rachel and Melina from Perth Trail Series test the timing of the Trailrider.

Below A cyclist rides a kneeling handcycle. Photos – Travis Deane



Do it yourself

For more information about Break the Boundary or to hire an adaptive mountain bike, visit breaktheboundary.com.au.

For more information about how Parks and Wildlife Service is working to improve accessibility for visitors to its lands and waters, visit exploreparcs.dbca.wa.gov.au.