





# Rover Task Force:

## improving riding and volunteering experiences on the Munda Biddi

story and photos by Oliver Laing

**Since 2020, the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation's Rover Task Force has been helping the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) to improve the much-loved long-distance off-road cycling trail. The task force, inspired by the Bibbulmun Track Foundation's Support Volunteers program, brings a more collaborative approach to the maintenance of the Munda Biddi Trail.**

**S**ince the inception of the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation's Rover Task Force in 2020, there have been 16 separate deployments along the Munda Biddi Trail, from flagging and building new singletrack around the Kalamunda Circuit, to widening the trail corridor with brush cutters and chainsaws north of Collie. The creation of the task force was inspired by the Bibbulmun Track's Support Volunteers program and brings together volunteers with dynamic skillsets to maintain the trail that stretches more than 1000 kilometres from Perth to Albany.

The team has been instrumental in several initiatives at the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation and has assisted with keeping on top of maintenance, rapidly pinpointing known issues and identifying future areas of the trail in need of some love.

The task force gives volunteers a sense of ownership and pride in the Munda Biddi Trail, at the same time as providing

an opportunity to learn new skills, meet new people, and spend time in parts of the south-west of Western Australia that they may not have been to—or may have zoomed through on a bike ride!

The Rover Task Force has logged more than 3000 hours of volunteer activity to improve the Munda Biddi Trail and delivered more than 15 kilometres of realignments. Working with DBCA's Recreation and Trails Unit and contractors, the task force adds value to the Foundation's volunteering experience and also gives added return on investment for the Foundation's stakeholders.

### LABOUR OF LOVE

The task force volunteers and Munda Biddi Trail Foundation staff spent more than a year engaged in a fine-grained trail audit to determine the ideal inspection frequency and maintenance requirements. With around 1060 kilometres of Munda



Biddi to survey, this was a detailed and time-consuming process. The team travelled along the Munda Biddi by foot, bike and in a convoy of cars, stopping frequently, taking photos, discussing problematic sections, and dreaming of an even better Munda Biddi Trail.

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**Main** The start of the day's trail building near Mundaring Weir Road.

*Photo – Pippa Engledow*

**Inset** The success of the task force is down to the hard work and dedication of volunteers. James (left) has been juggling tools since day one and was ably assisted by Paul prior to his return to France.

**Top** A 'before' photo of a problem section near Logue Brook Dam.

**Above** Near Logue Brook Dam after Rover Task Force improvements. Drainage channel to left of picture ensures water does not collect on, or run down the trail.

**Above right** Trail building techniques vary depending on the terrain and topography.

Just as the surveys help the Foundation to optimise trail maintenance volunteers efforts, they also give the Foundation a more accurate idea of what is required. The process involves planning projects such as upgrading, and realigning sections to modern trail building standards, minimising erosion and ensuring that water runs off the trail.

While a 'skunk stripe' of muddy water up the back of a Munda Biddi rider is a mark of pride, no one really wants to chance a deep, unavoidable puddle, except riders whose support team is waiting with dry clothes and shoes at the next stop!

Prior to the Rover Task Force taking shape, the Foundation had a 'one size fits all' model of trail maintenance. The Munda Biddi is divided into 108 sections in five roughly 200-kilometre-long areas. The backbone of the organisation's volunteer program is the sectional maintenance volunteer, someone who can travel to (or lives near) their allotted section every three or so months to check out the trail condition.

Historically, sectional volunteers often worked alone, and this continues

to occur today, but the Foundation's staff and board realised that to enhance the volunteer experience, different types of trail maintenance experiences would assist in diversifying the volunteer demographic, help with retention and visitation and allow for larger and more complex projects to be undertaken.

## TRAIL HISTORY

The history of the Munda Biddi is long and winding, just like the trail itself. The kernel of an idea came from the Western Australian Mountain Bike Association (WAMBA) and other community members in the mid-1990s, as a mountain bike equivalent of the Bibbulmun Track.

While the nascent 'Friends of the Hardwood Trail' were no doubt focused on what an epic adventure such a ride could be, the social, health and economic benefits of a long-distance off-road trail for cyclists garnered support from the local shire councils along the potential route, as well as from the State Government and the regional development commissions.

With a name change to reflect the connection to Country of the Noongar

people, the first section of the Munda Biddi (meaning 'path through the forest') from Mundaring to Dwellingup opened to the public on 2 December 2002, with maps going on sale concurrently.

Knowledge about trail building techniques was not as easy to come by twenty years ago and the standards that are now in place to construct robust and long-lasting trails catering to different levels of riding experience were a few years off. The first northern section of the Munda Biddi, between Mundaring and Dwellingup borrowed fire roads and other trails and linked it together with small sections of singletrack where necessary.

This strategy worked well for the most part but even the most ardent supporter of the Munda Biddi would admit that some sections of the trail were brutally steep and loose, often 'fall line' alignments that were memorable for all the wrong reasons!

The climb out of the Helena Valley to Mount Gungin, only 10 kilometres into the trail from Mundaring, was a case-in-point. After a cruisy downhill run to the Mundaring Weir hotel, followed by some relatively level riding alongside the Helena River, riders were faced with an off-camber 'wall' that only the fittest, lightest-laden cyclists could manage to ride up.

When you next ride that section out of Helena Valley, make sure you give thanks to the Rover Task Force and DBCA for the new singletrack switchbacks that take (most) of the sting out of the steep sections, and for the new alignment just south of the Weir Hotel that now avoids Mundaring Weir Road and has fantastic views across to the dam wall.

Realignments have also occurred around Pickering Brook, the Canning River and through the Murray Valley—all of which have improved the Munda Biddi ride experience significantly.

**Right** The Rover Task Force also clears fallen trees on the Munda Biddi Trail.





## MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

While such improvements garner the attention of and gratitude from the riding community, the task force's remediation and maintenance work is equally important. A recent deployment to Yarri campsite and surrounding areas took the pressure off DBCA's Wellington district staff, (not to mention the sectional volunteer) to clear a couple of kilometres of dead Acacia saplings from the trail corridor following a prescribed burn.

Such work can take multiple visits, as every strong wind brings more derailer-snapping sticks back into the ride line. Riders more than likely won't even know the task force has been there after a few days, but the memories of doing a great job with a like-minded team remain strong for the Rover Task Force volunteers.

## WHAT'S NEXT

The Foundation has plenty more task force deployments in the pipeline, which occur from March to November each year. The Foundation is looking for people with, or willing to learn, skills including trail building, landscaping, basic carpentry, and construction.

Deployments of task force teams have so far been limited to one day but, on more complicated, longer projects or those further from Perth, multiple-day deployments are likely. It's a great way to learn new skills and meet like-minded people. Projects are advertised to prospective task force members via email and social media, and you can tailor your volunteering experience to suit your schedule, plus have the satisfaction of riding an improved section or alignment that you contributed to!

**Above left** Trail remediation near One Tree Bridge; the ride line had ended up on the right of picture. The trail corridor was taken back to its original alignment.

**Above right** Near Yarri campsite—the end of the day, and the team is still smiling!

**Below** Ready to ride!  
Photo – Pippa Engledow



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To get involved with volunteering for the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation, visit [mundabiddi.org.au](http://mundabiddi.org.au)

## How to get involved

The Munda Biddi Trail Foundation is always keen to recruit volunteers for sectional trail maintenance, Rover Task Force deployments and office and administration duties.

Training and support are provided and both individual and group trail maintenance are accommodated. Adopt a section with friends or enjoy the solitude of the bush while improving the trail.

Scan the QR code or visit [mundabiddi.org.au](http://mundabiddi.org.au) for more information.

