


Viceroy's Wood – Penshurst Off-Road Cycling (PORC)

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To restore the woodland after the 1987 storm 2. To provide opportunities for informal mountain bike recreation 3. To encourage cycling as an alternative to the use of the car.
Background	<p>Viceroy's Wood is a 20ha woodland area on a steep escarpment, originally divided into two roughly equal areas – one planted with western hemlock and the other mainly of rhododendron and Turkey oak (from acorns planted by soldiers returning from the Crimean war). The woodland was devastated by the 1987 storm, with many of the conifers blown over and much damage done to the old stands of trees planted in the early 1800s by Viscount Hardinge, former Governor General of India.</p> <p>In order to restore the woodlands, the owner – Mike Westphal – cleared the conifer wood and planted with deciduous hardwoods with a long-term aim of producing wood for biomass/fuel under a WGS grant. Removal of rhododendrons from the other half exposed tracks and created spaces which were ideal for use by mountain bikers.</p> <p>The resulting mountain bike trails were developed at a time when few were available in the country. Penshurst opened to mountain biking in the early 1990s, and was the first dedicated mountain bike facility to be developed in private forestry. The current map of the site is reproduced below.</p>
Actions and achievements	<p>From the early days of mountain biking, Mike recognised that if mountain biking was to flourish, and then there was a need to provide trails and facilities. This was before the International Mountain Biking Association had worked with the Forestry Commission to provide the confidence to open the public forest estate to mountain bikers, so the only alternative facilities used Forestry Commission tracks and the</p>

	<p>poorly maintained and fragmented bridleway network.</p> <p>Mike worked with the mountain bike community and magazines through his club 'Penshurst Off-Road Cycling' (PORC) to develop Viceroy's Wood as an attractive destination with trails and café for mountain bikers.</p> <p>Since its establishment, Viceroy's Wood has been the training ground for 9 or 10 world champions (there have been so many, Mike can't remember the total!). Famous names who have trained and ridden here include Jamie Staff (world champion BMX rider, Olympic gold medal winner and holder of the world record for the fastest first lap in team sprint), world champions like Steve Peat, Tracey Moseley, the Athertons, the Beaumonts, Danny Hart and other stars including Rob Warner, first man to win a world cup downhill for Britain and now the mouth of the nation on two wheels. Mike adds that "there was a Californian mountain boarding dude that his film crew said was a world champ –and probably more?"</p> 
Quotes	<p>Cycling Weekly described the woods as "<i>off road heaven and mountain biking nirvana</i>"</p> <p>Everytrail.com describes it thus "<i>This fantastic facility is open all year in Viceroy's Wood. It offers mountain bike trails for all levels of ability, from very technical to family leisure</i>"</p>
Partners	<p>Kent County Council Sports Development Unit was hugely encouraging and helpful.</p> <p>Mike says "<i>I was full of admiration and appreciation of their support</i>".</p>

Funding	This proved to be the biggest challenge. The processing of 1987 windblown timber for local building projects provided vital funding .The only external funding came from Kent County Council (£11,000) and Sportsmatch (in which an £8k sponsorship deal with Giant was matched from government grants to buy bikes).
Lessons learnt	<p>Plan carefully and watch out for bureaucratic 'elephant traps' like (what Mike describes as) 'woodland TPOs'.</p> <p>Another area to watch is the need to protect against the risk of being sued – by having good insurance and well-documented risk management measures (e.g. photographs of safety features). Good sense in depth from NFU Mutual, the site's insurers, was a huge help, augmented by assistance from Forestry Commission staff.</p> <p>Mike says “back in the early 90s there was a lot of hostility over the development of mountain biking, and the residue of this sentiment continues with some who see this recreation as somehow less acceptable than other activities such as walking”. Effective consultation with other interested parties is therefore an important element of developing a cycling facility in the absence of opposition.</p> <p>Mike believes that making a profitable business out of recreational activities on a small site is difficult – more of an additional income stream than a real foundation to a business venture.</p>
Contact	For further information visit the website - http://www.porc.uk.com/ or contact Mike Westphal (Tel: 01892 870136; email : porcmike@aol.com)

