



Breaking Boundaries

While Cairns was hosting the Mountain Biking World Championships, an event, just as important, was being held right here at Cycletrek, Lowden. Barrie and Sherry Thomas opened up their beautiful bush property for the first ever Adaptive Mountain Biking Camp. This was an unprecedented opportunity for people with impaired mobility to experience mountain biking and camping in the bush.

The camp was organised by Mountain Bike Australia with the assistance of Westcycle, the South West MTB Club and Break the Boundary (breaktheboundary.com). The founder of Break the Boundary did an exceptional job in sourcing hand-cycles of differing types for each of the seven participants. As Andrew said, "It's not like you can go to bike shop and try a couple out for size and suitability." The bikes are manufactured abroad and need to be adjusted for the rider. Andrew, an experienced hand-cyclist himself, offered instruction and guidance to the new riders.

It all started on the Friday afternoon when the participants and their carers arrived and settled into the well-prepared camp. They were able to unload their gear straight into the tents and not worry about honky nuts and stones playing havoc with wheelchair wheels, all thanks to the efforts of the local community who had spent the morning raking the trails and putting up tents.

The next two days were filled with a whole lot of activity. The riders were taught the basic skills needed to control the bike. These included transferring from chair to bike, pedalling, changing gear and braking. Safety was, of course, paramount. Not only were the participants taught how to shift their balance while cornering but also how to recover after a fall. The skills were put into practice round the trails, though not so much of the falling! In the afternoon, there was a maintenance workshop in which the bikes were cleaned and the gears, chains, tyres and fittings were checked for safety. The day ended round the camp fire with toasted marshmallows.

If the first day was exciting, the second was exhilarating. Now the participants were ready to go round berms (corners with a banked outer edge allowing the rider to take the corner at speed), negotiate rock features and how to 'roll' over logs. And next, passing, climbing and descending.

Then it was ready, steady, go! And go they did! It was hard to pin anyone down long enough to interview. You could catch a glimpse of the participants through the bush, support riders in tow. When they did stop to get their breath, all you could see was miles of smiles.



The participants came from as far as Geraldton and Perth. Some were twenty something, others fifty-ish, but who's counting? Some had some experience in road hand cycling; others were champion basket ballers; for others, it was a first-time experience. Whichever category the participants fell into, the reactions were similar. All were loving it, all found it liberating.

"It's an awesome experience, getting out into the bush, being at one with nature," said Rhonda from Australind, a first-timer.

Chris from Geraldton, who goes road cycling with her husband, found herself squealing with delight. "It's awesome being in the bush with family and friends." She loved the fact that she was experiencing everything first hand rather than hearing about it from her friends. "There's no mountain biking like this up in Geraldton. It was certainly worth the trip down here." Chris is now looking to making adaptive MTB available in Geraldton.

For Shaun, who plays basketball for Australia, it was awesome fun, if hard work going up the hills. He loved the fact that he could explore the bush, go fast and get a good adrenalin rush!

In an email thanking the locals for helping out, Andrew shared some stories. "There was an older couple who have been riddled with severe medical complications. This was their first time cycling together. Despite the ongoing pain and seizures, their laughter could be heard echoing through the trees.

A young gentleman who sustained a spinal cord injury only a year ago in a car accident has now experienced riding on the trails with his two year-old son. For three days, he had the opportunity to forget that his life was a struggle and enjoy being a dad. He was also busy racing with one of his new mates and destroying Baz's newly groomed trails (sorry/not sorry)."

Denise Cox from Mountain Bike Australia is working hard for changes in policy procedure and educating clubs. "Making trails accessible to hand bikes will make mountain biking a truly inclusive sport." When asked about her thoughts about the camp, Denise's immediate reply was that it was the most rewarding experience in her time with MBA. Even more than the World Mountain Bike Championships? She considered a moment and then said, "Yes, it was."

Andrew achieved what he set out to do. He broke boundaries not only for the participants but for everyone who witnessed what is achievable. 'Chapeau!' to you and all your team.

If you'd like to see some more pictures, have a look on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BreakThe-BoundaryAU/>

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