



## Tracks pave way for world-class success in Lochaber

When a short downhill mountain bike track opened near Fort William in 1994 no-one could have dreamed the area would soon be hosting World Cup events.

Within a decade Fort William had appeared three times on the sport's World Cup circuit and beaten off competition from Canada and Australia to host the 2007 World Championships, mountain biking's most prestigious international event.

Local bikers, the West Highland Wheelers were first to recognise the area's potential as a mountain biking attraction. Nevis Range Development Company and Forest Enterprise (now the Forestry Commission) agreed that biking could be a popular draw outwith the ski season.

'We all looked at each other and thought: 'shouldn't we have a world cup event here then?'

**Lesley Beck,  
Rare Management**

It was a 1994 race attracted 700 downhill and cross-country competitors.

The next six years brought a sustained effort by the Wheelers and

Nevis Range to gain permission and funding to extend and improve the tracks.

With the help of Lochaber Enterprise the door was opened to EU funds and support from Forest Enterprise, local firm Off Beat Bikes and SportScotland.

That's when the trails' true potential became clear.

"We were there with Scotland's number one cyclist Crawford Carrick-Anderson and he remarked that the track was as good as ones he'd seen at world-class level," says Lesley Beck, of event organisers Rare Management, which has organised all three Fort William World Cup legs.

One thought sprang to everyone's mind: "world cup".

"Nevis Range were up for it and so we got in touch with the UCI, the International Cycle Union."

Since then, Fort William's mountain biking story has been as thrilling as the 2.66km downhill track, which experienced bikers hurtle down in just four minutes.

In 2002 Fort William joined the international circuit of UCI Mountain Bike World Cup venues, winning the award for best leg of the event.

A new short competitive track was added, along with an 8km cross-country course designed to top international standards and funded by the Forestry Commission.

The World Cup was back in 2003 and again in 2004, by which time the facilities had won so many awards that the resort was able to put in its successful bid to host the 2007 World Championships.



### Community impact checklist

- ✓ *World class facilities developed, with major tourism and economic spin-offs*
- ✓ *New trails channel young people's energy and enthusiasm*
- ✓ *Sporting and social outlet provided for disadvantaged groups*
- ✓ *Recreational assets in place for future generations*



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## Benefits are felt across the community

The growth of mountain biking in Fort William has been phenomenal.

The 2004 World Cup event attracted over 400 riders from more than 35 countries. The downhill event alone had 7,500 spectators. The weekend event pumped an estimated £864,000 into the local economy.

Fort William is now on the World Cup circuit with locations such as Schladming in Austria, Madrid and Calgary. Nevis Range has benefited. Marketing Manager Carrie Reid says that, although the track involves high maintenance costs to protect the highly fragile environment, it has helped secure jobs - creating the

highly unusual full-time post of downhill track supervisor - and enhanced business. The Nevis Range downhill tracks are drawing 3,000 bikers a year, with number rising - and many more using the cross-country tracks. Lochaber Enterprise and the EU LEADER programme for rural projects, contributed £14,015 and £3,000 to developing the downhill track, which also attracted SportsScotland Lottery Fund cash.

Lochaber Enterprise has also helped with attracting the World Cup events and the subsequent track developments, including part funding under the EU Highlands and Islands Special Transitional Programme.

## Trails put Moray tourism up a gear

A new network of mountain bike trails is helping put Moray's tourism potential into a higher gear.

The venture is also channelling the energy of young people and delivering benefits to disadvantaged groups.

Forestry Commission Scotland's Moray District set out in 2000 to gauge interest in developing a bike track. In response, a group of young people and adults volunteered to build a mountain bike trail in woods near Fochabers.

Equipped mainly with shovels and wheelbarrows, they were short on cash but big on enthusiasm. They founded the Moray Mountain Bike Club, which would go on to raise £100,000 to fund an extensive network of seven new biking trails through some of Moray's most scenic areas - from Ben Aigen, near Craigellachie, through Ordiequish and Whiteash woods, south and east of Fochabers.

They are also, says Phil Whitfield, one of the club's founders, designed to appeal to as many people as possible - from extreme bikers to families.

A key to the group's success has been its ability to attract teams of young people around a core of slightly older members.

The formula is simple but effective. Youngsters get involved for a year or two, but their circumstances change - they leave school perhaps, or go to college. But the project remains on track

because the group of older members provide continuity.

The approach means large numbers of local youngsters have the chance to get involved. And because they come along as volunteers, they develop a sense of ownership of the trails: a loyalty that's likely to deliver dividends for many years.

The club has also forged links with youth workers and funds a

scheme which allows youngsters who wouldn't otherwise have the chance to go mountain biking to do so. "This area relies on tourism and this project has an obvious tourism spin-off," says Franziska Smith, of Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise (MBSE). They've also involved children in building the trails. It also delivers health and fitness benefits and it provides safe places to go cycling."



### Project funding summary

#### Fort William:

- Grants of £14,015 from Lochaber Enterprise and £3,000 from LEADER II to develop downhill track at Nevis Range
- Other funding sources include SportsScotland; Forest Enterprise; Off Beat Bikes; Nevis Range; West Highland Wheelers; Specialised Bikes.

#### Moray:

- Moray, Badenoch & Strathspey Enterprise contributed £14,500 towards £95,000 cost of developing Moray mountain bike trails.
- Other funding sources include: National Lottery; Forestry Commission; Baxters Foundation; Moray Council; Moray Action for Communities.