



Rotorua Trails Trust Annual Report

September 2019

'There is never a dull moment' would be a good way to describe the past 12 months here at the Rotorua Trails Trust! We have now experienced the first 12 months of what is the new normal with a trail manager and paid staff. This was implemented in the past eighteen months to assist us to be sustainable and achieve our strategic goals.

As discussed last year the plan contains five key goals with the principal vision-

"Rotorua - A City of Trails".

The five key goals are:

- Maintaining Whakarewarewa as the top off-road trail network in the Southern Hemisphere.
- A new great ride.
- A new great walk.
- A new city loop.
- A new loop outside of Whakarewarewa based around Lake Rotorua.

Our key focus this year has been on the first two goals which have occupied a large portion of our energy and resources.

Within the Whakarewarewa park, with the support of the landowners, Timberlands, the Rotorua Lakes Council and our funding partners, we have completed four new trails. Upper Tumeke, Tūteata, New Baja and Te Kōtukutuku. We have also carried out four rebuilds including G Rock, Taura, Eagle vs Shark and Jeff's Link and helped the Rotorua MTB Club rebuild Te Rua. We have upgraded and improved the Dodzy's Skills Park plus added a pump track. Work is underway on a new Grade 2 and a new up-trail around the new Tarawera Hub carpark at Blackhouse with two further new trails approved at Tarawera Hub as well but still to be built.

In addition to all of this, we have been working with Council on a new great ride which will be a 40 km of Dipper grade loop around the forest that we believe will be a truly world-class one day ride. This trail is a significant piece of work that, once completed, we hope will replace Te Ara Ahi as this region's *Great Ride*. Work is well advanced, and funding has been secured through the Provincial Growth Fund. We have completed the New Baja line and Te Kōtukutuku and have been involved in maintenance work and upgrade work of other



sections of the trail. While it is fair to say progress is slower than we would have hoped, we are right now awaiting the letting of contracts for the three remaining large pieces of trail to be built. Once built and opened, hopefully in late-2020, we see this trail as being a huge attraction for another mountain bike user group. Currently, we now carry out monthly inspections of the current Te Ara Ahi Great Ride which, with the completion of the forest loop, is likely to be re-classified as a Heartland Ride. We have also assisted Erik Westra in supporting what we hope to be positive applications for the extension of the Heartland ride network to the Waikato River.

We have been employed by the Council to maintain the walking trails and have worked with them to further develop and improve the walking trails, although this is still work in progress. In conjunction with horse riding groups, we have also developed a new horse ride loop on the southwestern side of the forest.

These two key goals have occupied a fair chunk of our time this year and only limited progress has been made on the other goals which are all quite large long-term projects requiring considerable advocacy and stakeholder consultation.

There is also a considerable amount of business as usual work including a large increase in compliance work which is now common. With the excellent support of the Rotorua Lakes Council, we have moved to new offices at the Redwoods where we are more visible and able to respond to public enquiries. We have been constantly advocating on behalf of all the forest users for new and improved trails. Outside of the forest park, we have completed upgrades and maintenance work in the DOC estate particularly at Western Okataina, Rainbow Mountain and Blue Lake.

We now have two full-time trail staff and contract trail staff, plus the Trail Manager and the part-time administration communications role. This has placed significant pressure on our cash flow but is required due to the increased demand for our services, the amount of forward work likely, and the increased number of new builds. We have also been required to purchase considerable new equipment and recently with the support of NZ Community Trust and the Grassroots Trust purchased a new digger. Signage also continues to be a significant cost.

To our trail staff and contractors, this has been another challenging year with an increase in workload across all sectors. We thank you all for your hard work and dedication in keeping the network running so well and your imagination and skill in creating the new trails. Thanks to Casey who is now our Trail Leader. Casey continues to deliver beautiful and fun trails and in combination with Lance over the last year has delivered some of our key



projects. Thanks to Lance who has finished most of Casey's digger work to an incredibly high standard and is always thoughtful and easy to work with. Welcome to Jamie coming on as our new full-time trail builder. He's fitting in well and doing great work already. Big thanks to Mike the Moa for being super responsive to our requests for tree clearing and roadside clearing. He is also driving our vegetation spray program this spring, which will hopefully lessen the amount of scrub cutting we need to do in the summer heat! Thanks to Ash, who continues to be the most helpful man in the forest for stranded runners, walkers and bikers. Just last week he fixed a woman's derailleur while we were out trail marking. Welcome to Mike Gilbert who has come on board as our continuous maintenance person, working 16 hours a week maintaining our 300km or so of walking, MTB and equestrian trail network. Mike is passionate about the work and it is great to have someone proactive helping us with this work.

Special mention to Damian Clarke our Trail Manager. Damian has had a lot of things thrown at him this year and he has responded admirably. Damian is extremely passionate about the forest and his experience of having been in the role now for over one year will only help us be more systematic in our approach in the next 12 months. Also, a big thanks to Kris our comms person who has almost single-handedly significantly lifted the profile and communications of the Trust especially through social media channels and more regular newsletters.

The governance of the organisation is a small band of passionate people. This year we welcomed Andrew Wilson onto the Trust however, he unfortunately had to withdraw due to work commitments. A huge loss to the trust this year was Gregg Brown who retired as a trustee. Greg has been a huge influence and shown tremendous vision and leadership in bringing the Trust to where we are now. A special mention also to Mike Gray. Mike has worked tirelessly in the background keeping the finances under control. Financially, as evidenced by the attached financial report, we performed well given the increase in staff numbers, but this continues to be a big challenge to make the Trust financially sustainable. I would also like to thank our other trustees Toby Stovold, Catriona Gordon, Mat Hunt and Darren Ashmore, for their commitment, ideas and efforts.

We would also like to acknowledge all our supporters. To the landowners and Timberlands, we greatly appreciate your ongoing support and recognise the challenges that recreation in a working forest present. This year the Rotorua Lakes Council have provided a substantial increase in support financially in assisting and developing the Trails Manager role.

Our key partners include the Rotorua Lakes Council, Nicholson Nissan, Holiday Inn, Trek Bikes, Perma Pine, R & B Consultants, and Pak'n Save. This year, we welcomed new



sponsors Stolen Bike Catering and Speedy Signs. We also have a wide range of various local supporters who all actively assist us with various items and sponsorships. Without this generous support, the work we do would not be possible and it is greatly appreciated.

Finally, a big thanks to our members and the donations which help us to achieve our goals. One of the most significant advantages we have here in Rotorua is our people. Local trail builders developed the network, and a big band of volunteers extensively maintains it. The large amount of work by volunteers and the passion they all show is a prime reason why Rotorua is the leading mountain bike network in New Zealand. The Trust and all forest users greatly appreciate the efforts of all these volunteers who give up their time and expertise freely.

Moving forward, our main energy will be focussed on completing the Forest Loop, completing the new builds at Tarawera Hub, developing a long-term Forest User plan for all user groups and making more progress on all five strategic goals.

It is looking like another big year is ahead, and the principal goal is to get the new great ride finished and opened for the riding world to enjoy.

Thank you.

Grant Utteridge
Chairman

