

Notes for Cyclists

Mountain Bikes on the BNT

Please note: This information is for those intending to take mountain bikes out on the Bicentennial National Trail and offers suggestions for cyclists to avoid those sections of the Trail unsuitable for bikes. The information provided here is of a general nature and should be read in conjunction with the Guidebooks, Guidebook updates and road maps. Cyclists should always check back on the website for the most recent information on Trail conditions. A friendly reminder that all Trail users are self-reliant trekkers responsible for all your needs and the decisions you make. Just like the Trail, this information sheet is an ongoing work in progress - users of these notes, and the Trail, are invited to offer their own opinions and suggestions for updating this information.

The best parts of the National Trail for walkers and trekkers with animals are the rugged sections through wilderness. The Trail has been designed to provide a balance between these rugged remote areas and easier more accessible parts along quiet roads and tracks through the countryside. For cyclists, unless you are especially masochistic, you will find it necessary to detour around the particularly difficult sections.

Bypassing sections of the BNT unsuitable for bikes usually involves public roads, mostly quiet back roads, so landowner permission for access is not a problem. As the detours are generally close to the BNT, the spirit of the BNT concept is not lost. However, this has left some cyclists with the impression that the Bicentennial National Trail is much less challenging than it really is.

Unlike trekking with horses or donkeys, where pack animals are taken, on a bike all equipment and supplies, including adequate drinking water, must be carried on the bike. While this is possible, it is quite limiting and not practical or appealing for a large part of the cycling community.

However with vehicle support such as **tag-along** with trailer where a group shares and rotates the driving, **point to point** support, or **out and back** from a single point, a much greater part of the BNT becomes useable and appealing to a much greater part of the cycling community.

Through easy terrain, touring cyclists can travel about 50 to 60 kilometres per day so a trip from one end of the Bicentennial National Trail to the other (5,330km) will take about six months. The Guidebooks contain some information for cyclists, e.g. type of road surface, but this information is not always complete throughout all the guidebooks.

The tropical heat of central and northern Queensland makes cycling unpleasant between September and March (especially for those unaccustomed to hot, humid weather). Bike riding through these parts is best from April through to August. The alpine areas south of Canberra can be difficult through winter (May to September) and some National Parks in this area are locked up during the winter months. Outside of these extremes the climate is quite pleasant for bike riding.

Availability and range of equipment and spare parts may be limited in areas outside capital cities and major regional centres. Riders using non-Australian equipment have experienced breakages due to the roughness of the stony roads. When selecting equipment, choose the strongest you can find.

The following information provides suggestions for detours around the parts of the National Trail that are too difficult for most cyclists. The detours are as short as practicable to allow cyclists to experience most of the Trail. Place names referred to are taken from

- Hema Maps
- Sunmap's Tourist Maps of Queensland and South East Queensland
- UBD road map of New South Wales and Victoria

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- NRMA touring maps of NSW
- RACQ touring maps of QLD.

Cyclists should obtain these or similar maps to plan their route. Some of these maps show an outline of the BNT for reference. If your time is limited, these maps will show you longer detours along better roads so that you can travel faster.

There are several sections with some bypasses of over 100 kilometres of continuous sealed roads which are suitable for road and touring bikes, e.g.

- Gundy to Widden
- Gungahlin to the Namadgi NP Entrance (using the ACT cycleways)
- Olinda to Jenolan Caves via Rylstone and Capertee
- Hernani to Nowendoc via Armidale
- Uralla and Walcha

When travelling on the National Trail, Guidebooks are still necessary for detailed instructions and access permissions.

This information sheet is not comprehensive and is meant to stimulate you to explore the Trail.

Section 1 Cooktown to Gunnawarra

Cooktown to Ayton OK. Follow the road from Ayton to Mossman via Cape Tribulation. Leave Mossman along the Captain Cook Highway, turning right onto the Mossman-Mt Molloy Road (Rex Range Highway) and use this route up the range picking up the Trail again at the top of the range. Follow the National Trail into Mt Molloy. The next part of the National Trail is quite unsuitable for bike riding, so follow the road from Mt Molloy to Mareeba then west to Mutchilba. Follow the Trail now to Innot Hot Springs then follow the Kennedy Highway west to Mt Garnet and turn south on the Gunnawarra Road regaining the Trail just north of Gunnawarra.

Section 2 Gunnawarra to Collinsville

All traversable by mountain bike and recommended.

Section 3 Collinsville to Kabra

Just south of Collinsville the Trail crosses the Bowen River with a minor obstacle to bicycles when the water level is low. For an easier route follow the road just to the west of the National Trail route on the map. There is then another long section of pleasant riding along the Trail through to the top of Connors Range, west of St Lawrence, where cyclists should follow the road rather than the very rough track down the range. The rest of this section is again ideal for mountain bikes.

Section 4 Kabra to Biggenden

Cyclists using the Trail can access the Trail with public transport at Kabra and Bouldercombe.

From Bouldercombe take the main road for 10km towards Rockhampton and turn right towards Midgee on the Bruce Highway. Heading south, follow the dirt roads to the west of the Bruce Highway and north of the Dawson Highway, rejoining the Trail at the Calliope River on Duckholes Road. Following a major realignment this route will soon become the route of the BNT with the exception of the Bouldercombe sector where the Trail will go over the range to avoid the Bruce Highway.

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On Map No.7 at 10.3km follow the Dawson Highway to bypass rough terrain and rejoin the trail at 14.3km (top of the range). The trail then follows roads and fire trails all the way to Mungungo. Note that the whole of this route through Kroombit Tops National Park is not yet available in the books so please contact the BNT Trail Updates Coordinator Mal Keeley at mal.keeley@bigpond.com for current trail updates.

Kalpowa to Gaeta (Maps 16 to 18) is hilly, drinking water is minimal between Kalpowa and Gaeta Park, and logging trucks use the road between Kalpowa through to Gaeta and the Bruce Highway. However the scenery is great, the logging trucks courteous if you make the effort to give them the room, so this section is well worth attempting. Just allow time for the hills.

The balance of this section through to Biggenden is quite suitable for bikes with the exception of a very short part just outside of Mt Perry between R138 and Swindon Rd, which has a couple of creek crossings, so care is needed with loaded bikes.

Section 5 Biggenden to Blackbutt

Cyclists relying on public transport can access the Trail from Maryborough using rail or bus (Trail crosses Maryborough-Biggenden Road mid Map 4) or Tiaro on bus (Trail crosses Glenbar Rd Map 5).

Mostly excellent for mountain bikes. From Biggenden to Kilkivan the Trail mostly passes through farming land interspersed with Forestry portions so there are many access points at fairly frequent intervals.

There is a steep climb at 8.3km on Map 9 of Guidebook No.5 and again at 27.3km on Map 10 which are manageable on bikes but heavily loaded bikes may find it difficult. If required, through trekkers can avoid these by heading west from Kilkivan towards Goomeri then turning south along the first road signposted to Manumbar where you can rejoin the Trail. Alternatively if car support is available the car can meet the Trail at Shamrock Gold Mine (1.9 Map 10) at the head of Black Snake Road by heading west from Kilkivan towards Goomeri then turning south along Black Snake Road. Similarly cars can access the Trail at Map 11 by heading west from Kilkivan towards Goomeri then turning south along the first road signposted to Manumbar. These access points offers car supported (sagged) cycle Trekkers a range of opportunities to unload bikes for the hilly sections.

Section 6 Blackbutt to Killarney

All traversable by mountain bike and recommended.

Section 7 Killarney to Ebor

The Trail through this part traverses wild country half way between the New England Highway and the coast. It is clear from looking at a road map that there are no roads heading north-south through this part of the country and those with little time may prefer to avoid this whole section by following the New England Highway from Tenterfield through Glen Innes to Armidale on the western side of the Trail.

An off-highway route which is reasonably direct and fast goes from Killarney south to Legume, Taloom, Paddy Flat, Pretty Gully, Tabulum, Alice, Baryugil, Fine Flower, Copmanhurst into Grafton, then south-west from Grafton to Nymboida, Clouds Creek, Tyingham, Hernani, Ebor. Most of this is on dirt roads.

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The mountainous terrain, numerous river crossings and thick scrub makes almost all of Section 7 difficult for mountain bikes. If you are very determined and prepared for much carrying and pushing of your bike it is possible to follow it all but most will find the Timbarra (Rocky) River and the Guy Fawkes River far too difficult and time consuming. The alternative via Tenterfield to Glen Elgin, given in the Guidebook, is quite suitable for bikes and the Trail can be followed from Glen Elgin to the Gwydir Highway then down the old Grafton Road to Dalmorton where a forest road (not shown on the UBD map) links Dalmorton with Marengo and onto Ebor. The Guidebook alternative via Tenterfield may have vehicle problems in the Spirabo Forest area, especially in the wet, an alternative is via Sandy Flat.

Guy Fawkes River section bypass. On the east the Dalmorton to Marengo road is a good all-weather forest road but devoid of any human habitation for all of its 60km length. On the west another pleasant route goes from Glen Elgin via Red Range, Kookabookra, Wards Mistake, Aberfoyle and on to rejoin the BNT at Ebor or to continue south-west to Armidale, Uralla, Walcha and rejoin the BNT at Nowendoc to bypass the unsuitable Kunderang Brook area of Section 8.

Weeds may be a problem in this section and are sometimes in excess of two metres high, blocking all vision of the surroundings and Trail.

Section 8 Ebor to Aberdeen

The same comments apply as for Section 7. It is possible but very difficult. The recommended alternative route for cyclists is Ebor south-west to Wollomombi and Armidale, south to Gostwyck, Woodburn, Walcha south-west to Aberaldie, then south to Nyangla, Hanging Rock and Nundle, south-west to Crawney Pass, south to Timor, Gundy, Segenhoe, Aberdeen. The National Trail is rejoined at Aberdeen in Section 9. Another interesting route is to go from Walcha south through Nowendoc to Gloucester, then west to Scone.

The western bypass through Uralla and Walcha can continue on sealed road via Thunderbolts Way to Nowendoc and on towards Niangla, or to Nowendoc or the BNT on unsealed road via Brackendale. There is an eastern bypass which leaves the BNT at Georges Crossing on the Macleay River and continues towards Kempsey to Bellbrook where it crosses the river and goes by forest roads to Mooraback via Kookaburra.

Section 9 Aberdeen to Jenolan Caves

On Map 1 at 23.8km Bells Gap is difficult for bikes but easily gone around by a sealed bypass of Bells Gap from Castle Rock to rejoin the BNT at Brogheda. There are some steep challenges in the rest of Section 9 but these are well worth the effort. To avoid these challenges however, go west from Denman (Sandy Hollow) to Bylong then south-west through Rylstone, Kandos, Cullen Bullen to Wallerawang. Leave the Trail again at Hampton and follow the road directly towards Jenolan Caves where there is a campsite just near the Six Foot Track, before descending the hill to the caves. Continue towards Jenolan Caves and along the Oberon road to rejoin the Trail at the top of the mountain.

Section 10 Jenolan Caves to Kosciusko

This entire section has been enjoyed by many cyclists and is considered ideal for mountain bike touring.

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The Mt Werong to Wiaborough section is dry weather only for support vehicles but a good alternative is the unsealed Jerrong Road.

In the ACT from Gungahlin to Banks, cycleways are recommended. A route can be selected which closely follows the BNT around the outskirts of Canberra. A detailed map with street names is recommended because, with the maze of cycleways, a wrong turn somewhere is almost inevitable.

Due to fluctuating water levels in Lake Adaminaby, the crossing at Providence Portal could be a problem. An alternative is to continue along the Snowy Mountains Highway to Kiandra and then via Cabramurra to rejoin the BNT at Bradleys Hut (there are some BIG climbs in this section.)

Section 11 Kosciusko to Omeo and Section 12 Omeo to Healesville

If you are capable of covering any of the Trail in Victoria you are capable of covering all of it for it is nearly all a series of long, steep, stony climbs either up or down. After visiting the alpine areas of Kosciusko National Park take either the Barry Way south-west from Jindabyne through to Buchan or go to Corryong on the western side of Kosciusko National Park and follow the road south from there through Benambra to Omeo and on to Bruthen. It is probably acceptable to most cyclists to follow the Trail from Omeo over Mt Phipps and Mt Birregun to Dargo, then ride south from Dargo down to Maffra. From these towns on the southern coast, it is flat fast travelling west to Melbourne. The southern end of The Bicentennial National Trail is at Healesville, in the mountains about 60km north-east of Melbourne.