

Still only £5 to Join!



TIMBER



Expanding, Building & Maintaining Mountain Bike Trails and Routes in the Thetford Forest

Newsletter Issue 6

www.timbermtb.org

July-August 2008

Summer is dead, long live Autumn!

The trails will soon be at their best writes TIMBER chairman John Gould

If, as a group, we are old enough to have any traditions, they would revolve around wheeling barrows, wielding spades and having passionate “discussions” about trail construction – the passion being matched by searing heat and parched trail builders seeking shade in sun dappled openings within the forest. By the end of the day, we would chill out with a cold beer or two, feeling satisfied with a good days work behind us.

Well, that was last year... fast forward to the summer of 2008 and the trail building has been as absent as the sun. Instead of sweating over trails, the only exercise any of us have done that is vaguely related, is sweating over keyboards as the passion so evident last summer has resurfaced as frustration, anger and confusion. Here we are, a group of merry trail builders who are not allowed to build any trails... not only that but rumours of new rules being applied to “off-piste” trails have sparked arguments, accusations and conspiracy plots. Well, it is the silly season when nothing much ever happens, and we all have to vent our collective spleens somehow.

The rain has made riding less fun than it should be, bracken and nettles have covered most of the trail network and those rotten biting flies keep gnawing away leaving their telltale golf ball sized swellings behind. What is there to be happy about?

Well, look on the bright side – winter is on its way! This means autumn is even closer, when the trails are at their best. We can say goodbye to bracken and nettles and hello again to our old friends as they emerge from the vegetation...



Autumn in Thetford Forest by Mark Davies

TIMBER SUPPORTERS



This year, winter will also bring with it two major opportunities. Stuart and Paul will be attending a two day course with the Forestry to learn best practice for trail building and the contractors from Dalby Forest will be laying 2km of trail. By the end of October therefore, we should know how to plan any new work (so we avoid another debacle like the 39 Steps) and, by the end of the year, having had the chance to shadow the contractors, we will be able to see how the professionals do it and apply the lessons to our own projects.

So don't look upon winter as a time of dark, wet misery, this year it will be one of new beginnings, an early spring if you like, but without the daffodils!



TIMBER Affiliated to the CTC



As agreed at a recent meeting TIMBER has affiliated to the CTC which means extra benefits

We decided to join the CTC so we could get their help with fundraising and trail building. We've been in contact with their Off-Road Cycling Development Officer Ian Warby (who used to run Aston Hill) about this.

But being affiliated to the CTC gives us access to other benefits, including...

- ✚ Liability insurance for cycling and social events linked to cycling. This is in addition to our trail building insurance we already hold.
- ✚ Third party insurance for non-TIMBER members invited to a TIMBER cycling event.
- ✚ The possibility to advertise TIMBER events on CTC event lists and their website

For a small charge of £12* TIMBER members can also become an affiliate member of the CTC which gives access to more benefits...

- ✚ Third party insurance.
- ✚ CTC membership card giving access to discounts.
- ✚ Weekly CTC email newsletter.

CTC FACTS

Established in 1878 it's the oldest national tourism organisation in the world.

60,000 members support the work of the CTC charitable trust.

Their mission is to make cycling enjoyable, safe and welcoming for all.

Want to encompass all sectors including offroad and adventurous cycling, sport and leisure.

CTC stands for "Cyclists Touring Club" although "Coffee, Tea and Cakes" might be more appropriate as the quality of rides is often judged on the standard of the refreshments at the frequent café stops!



We get a copy of the CTC magazine "cycle" – so if you want a read then post something on the TIMBER forum and it should reach you eventually. In the latest edition read an interview with round the world record breaker Mark Beaumont. Find out how far you can go on 26 wine gums and get advice on how to travel light by drying your pants on a tea pot?!

* For a limited period the CTC are offering the opportunity for 5 members of TIMBER to **join up as an affiliate member for FREE**. If anyone wants to take advantage of this FREE offer get in contact with the treasurer now as the offer is only open till early September.

21st August TIMBER Meeting

TIMBER met to hear how discussions have been going with the FC – by Peter Harper

In June TIMBER representatives Stuart Head and Paul Jewby met with the FC for an open and frank discussion about the current situation with lack of progress to improve the trails in the forest. Stuart and Paul met with the rest of TIMBER to tell us all what they had to say. The official minutes are available to TIMBER members, but here are some extra notes taken at the meeting.

The FC is very short of money to invest in trails and this situation is likely to get worse. But they have reaffirmed their commitment to spend £20K before the end of the year to lay at least 2km of trail. This will be used to pay for contractors to do the work, but it's up to all stakeholders – including TIMBER to decide exactly where the improvements are made. We'll be part of a new trail improvement project development and delivery team which will make use of a clear reporting process to ensure there's a proper official paper trail. This should satisfy FC concerns and avoid problems like we've had with the 39 steps which took so much effort to build but still isn't open to the public. It's hard to see where further funds will come from in future years as we'll be reliant on grants and Thetford doesn't qualify for a lot of these.

The FC stated that as far as they're concerned they want us to do trail building. They were clear that they don't want us to just be a maintenance crew to make up for FC failings in this area. However there was some discussion about this and there was a feeling amongst the TIMBER membership that we should do more trail maintenance – especially in the short term – as this is where we can quickly make large improvements which significantly improve enjoyment of the trails.

We got some more details of the new planning regime we'll have to follow when building trails. We'll be using FC Ops 1 forms for any trail work. For new sections we can allocate 15m

corridors either side of the planned route. These "corridors", which don't need to be straight, allow us a bit of flexibility in case we need to make minor changes on the ground. We won't be restarting trail building until Paul and Stuart have been on the FC course in October – although we hope to have maintenance days and spend time getting the 39 steps open before then.

We all learnt a new acronym – TTF (Technical Trail Feature) which will be TIMBER's responsibility. The idea is that contractors will build the main parts of trails with us working on small technical sections off the main loop. This is a change from our original plans for rebuilding the red route to IMBA standards. The group didn't have a problem with this change of emphasis as our aims should still be achieved – the FC still see the trails being technical in nature. We do still have some concern about mixing experienced and inexperienced users on a trail – but it's up to us to resolve this conflict and express our opinions via the plans made by the trail improvement delivery team of which we will be part.

Regarding TTF's, the FC meeting in October will define the best practices for FC trails in England. It seems likely the FC will move away from red and black trail grading and new north shore may be frowned upon for maintenance reasons. This needs to be clarified as in our opinion it would be short sighted to rule out using wood completely for trails, e.g. for boardwalk to avoid the worst areas of mud. This would be a thorny issue for the skills area TIMBER wants to work on. We will be able to influence decisions like this along with other stakeholders.



Icy conditions in the Forest by Mark Davies

TIMBER still has some challenges to overcome in our dealings with the FC. We need to work to change their attitude towards unofficial off-piste trails. Their concerns may be understandable considering our increasingly litigious society, but we have to persuade them that they have to find a way to live with them.



Thetford Forest trail by Mark Davies

We need to get across to the FC that Thetford is a key area for mountain biking in the country. We need to persuade them that there's a large untapped potential market in the mountain bike community. They don't always take advantage of opportunities available to them – such as their lack of visibility at races and their reluctance to use High Lodge as a venue.

One of our complaints to the FC was poor communication recently and they have promised to improve in future and as part of this they'd like us to propose a TIMBER spokesperson to give us a stronger voice within the FC.

In summary – there was a lot of ill feeling from TIMBER going into the meeting with the FC, but afterwards there was a much more positive feeling given the commitment from the FC for TIMBER. As a group we decided to give the new procedures a go to see if we can make the system work.



Ten Reasons to Join TIMBER?

Thinking about joining TIMBER, or recruiting new members? The following might help...

1. It's the only way to influence the design of the trails in Thetford Forest and FC plans.
2. You can be proud that you're helping improve mountain biking in the Forest for everyone.
3. You'll be giving something back to the community by improving the free trails we all enjoy.
4. You'll get satisfaction from riding something you've helped to design, build and maintain
5. It will increase the chances that we will receive funding to invest in the trails.
6. You can participate in a range of organisational and FC activities, including trail building, volunteer events, group rides and socials.
7. You will be covered by our insurance on trail build days.
8. You will get discounts on products and services provided by our sponsors and affiliates.
9. Your membership and achievements will look great on your CV.
10. You will make new friends.

NOTICES

NEW MEMBERS

We are always on the lookout for new members. If you would like to find out what we get up to or would like to join us on our woody gardening trips make contact via the forum.

TIMBER COMMITTEE

Chairman – John Gould

Treasurer – Peter Harper

Chief Trail Pixie – Paul Jewby

PR – Adrian Hoyle

Secretary – Stuart Head

Fund Raising – Roger Powell & Richard Muchmore

Webmaster – Colin Herd

Membership secretary – Dave Reynolds

CONTACT DETAILS

Email – info@timbermtb.org

Forum – <http://timbermtb.org/forum>