

Visit to Scottish Lowlands FD, Carron Valley MTB trail - 26 Oct 05

Our comments are intended as constructive advice on what has been delivered for you, based on our experience of building these types of trails over the past 5 years. Or collectively for 12 years!

Overall the quality of the construction and build is high, and just right for the ground conditions at the majority of the site, but we have the following issues that need to be addressed.

Overall the **grade is quite clearly Red**, this was our independent assessment based on the trails we have either built or ridden and in the context of the Forestry Commissions current advice on grading.

It is clear that the designer and his funding group (CVDG) have moved beyond a blue grade trail, and have not clearly expressed to you the nature of the trail created. A blue graded trail is for those **with basic off road skills**.

Section 1

The entry to the section 1 is stone pitched and too steep for a blue graded trail. It descends into a section that clearly shows evidence of riders being unable to hold the line of the trail and cutting corners or being forced into the mud through very demanding tight turns.

Approximately 200 metres into the trail it descends another stone pitched section that in our opinion is **single black diamond** in its demands on the rider. It is steep, made from not particularly grippy rock, and demands that riders turn going down the slope to make the concrete slab bridge at the bottom. Riders getting it wrong could easily spill out to the right and crash into the ditch / burn. To bring it into the red grade, **straighten the entry line and widen the culverted area to provide a soil spill zone** if riders get it wrong. **Rider speed also needs to be controlled before this obstacle.**

The remainder of section 1 is not particularly successful, and despite the designer doing his best it remains fundamentally a fall-line trail descending alongside the burn with sudden changes in flow. Such trails can work with the use of wide sweeping reversals and grade dips, but in this case the corridor is very confined and it turns too sharply, forcing riders off trail. Little can be done now to improve matters other than **controlling the ride line with rocks or timber**, and to expect high maintenance. Felled trees remain to be tidied up, and views of the burn improved by finishing work. There are sprags protruding from trees, and felled-timber controls (which you assured will be picked up by the group) also need removing.

Section 2

The middle section was much more attractive and successful, working well with the forest environment. It would also be a lovely climb as the waterfall would be in front of the riders rather than them not seeing it as they whiz past downhill. The final large bermed exit onto the road also is more appropriate to a red graded route. Some **extra trailside controls** are required on this section as well.

Section 3

Our major concerns are the challenges posed by a significant section of stunt trail that finishes the route. The route **demand**s (and offers no alternative) that the rider takes the line over the features, and those features are significantly more challenging than might appear at first sight. Jumps, tabletops, doubles are technically significant

features that need to be built with considerable attention to design and materials. In a nutshell, the features are overly large, encourage massive air through aggressive faces on the doubles that are short and the landing areas are much too narrow and flat, as in their current state riders will overjump. It is questionable whether jump trails work well when they have had to be created and surfaced in quarried stone unless blinded with the right fine material. In this respect the jumps lower down which were won from as-dug material are much better.

The fact that you could, by feathering the brakes, roll the features does not mitigate the consequences of the inexperienced hitting them at speed, especially as the number of features is considerable.

The massive berm midway down the section has a poor entry and could be overshoot into the ditch beyond, and the very narrow exit is far too precise for average riders. There are mistakes here in the design of the jumps and berms as well as building the trail too narrow and if the trail is opened as a red grade route the likelihood of serious accident will be very high.

This trail seems to be trying to do everything and runs into difficulties because of the lack of a clear brief. It is important that the reason for a trail and its potential market are articulated to assist and manage the designer.

Andy, we really enjoyed your enthusiasm and support for the CVDG, things are right about the route, but the trail you have **cannot be recommended for opening** as a Blue route, and **only as a red grade route if remedial work on the trail is done**. We suggest you consider asking Andy Hopkins or David Tallontyre, both experienced jumpers and trail builders, to work on the lower trail section. Since the trail is now completed, such remedial work will be almost a complete rebuild as difficult ground conditions make going back in with machinery very difficult. Paul suggested that the contractors go in with powered barrows, but due to such steep faced jumps we consider this unsafe.

An alternative is to grade this section of trail as Black double diamond. Skilled riders can make their own assessment on how to ride the trail – the rider accepts a lot more of the risk at this grade and has the skill to cope with the unexpected. In this case you would need to build an alternative finish at a red grade to be consistent with the rest of the trail.

CVDG as funders obviously need to be informed and involved in solving the problems, a joint meeting with them, Paul, Andy and yourselves is probably the way forward.

We appreciate this is not what you wanted to hear, and we have tried not to nitpick or focus on differences of style or design – variety in trail design is good but only if it does not compromise rider safety or the durability of the trail.

If you would like any more help please ask.

Karl Bartlett, Chris Ross and Andy Hopkins

27/10/2005