

# Woodland mountain biking as part of core physical education

## Overview

Green environments are good for us, they facilitate physically active recreation, and help promote health and wellbeing and social interaction.

Schools are one of the main places that we are introduced to physical activity through physical education on a regular basis. These first experiences within physical education can set a pattern for the rest of our lives.

Forestry Commission Scotland is keen to explore the potential for activity to be delivered within local woodland settings and embarked upon a project to provide woodland mountain biking as part of core physical education.

## Background

The project aimed to encourage pupils to participate in mountain biking responsibly in a woodland setting as part of secondary school PE and after schools programme.

Cycling is the most popular activity for children out-with PE lessons, therefore it seemed logical to explore this and develop partnership links in order to combine cycling with access to woodlands and greenspace. Mountain biking is seen as a more exciting and 'cool' option within physical education offering pupils a different type of activity compared to, for example, more traditional team based sports.

In particular encouraging teenage girls to be active has become more of a challenge for PE teachers and the option of mountain biking has been shown to appeal to this demographic group.



This project provided an opportunity to engage with a hard to reach group, teenage boys and girls, using mountain biking as a mechanism of introducing them to forests and woodlands and highlighting the type of activity that can be undertaken in this environment.

## Objectives

- To offer mountain biking as an option within the secondary school physical education programme.
- To provide pupils with the skills, techniques and confidence to take part in mountain biking and cycling within and outwith school time.
- To encourage pupils to consider cycling as a potential transport option to get to and from school.
- To introduce pupils to a woodland environment, and the potential it offers for physical activity.
- To increase participation and promote responsible use of Scottish Wildlife Trust's "Glenmile" mountain bike trail within the Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve.
- To support education in the outdoors.
- To equip pupils with the skills and confidence to cycle throughout their adult lives.
- To develop and deliver bespoke mountain bike leader training for teaching staff.

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- To develop a model that could be adopted and used by other secondary schools and Local Authority Education Departments.

## Actions

- A partnership was set up including Scottish Wildlife Trust, Cycling Scotland, Abronhill High School, Cumbernauld High School and Forestry Commission Scotland.
- The development of Glen Mile urban mountain bike trail was identified as an excellent potential resource that could be utilised by local secondary schools to deliver part of their physical education programme.
- A working group was established to identify key challenges and resources required by the school to be able to offer the option of mountain biking.
- Two local secondary schools were identified due to their interest in the project and proximity to the Glen Mile trail.

## Achievements

- 24 bikes, relevant safety equipment and maintenance contract were purchased for each school by Forestry Commission Scotland.
- Storage containers for the bikes and bespoke training for PE teachers was delivered by Cycling Scotland.
- 5 local mountain bike volunteers completed the trail cycle leader course provided by Cycling Scotland.
- Mountain biking offered as an option within both secondary schools.
- The Glen Mile trail and skills loop used to deliver mountain biking by both schools and improved pupils bike handling skills and confidence in dealing with different terrain and environments.
- Poster presentation delivered at the 1st Health Enhancing Physical Activity Europe conference.
- A DVD was created to promote the project including contributions from all partners involved with the project.

## Quotes

"We are lucky to have Cumbernauld Glen so close to the school and this project is a great way to introduce the pupils to mountain biking and teach them the skills they need to be able to enjoy it."  
Bill Griffin, principal teacher of PE at Abronhill High School

"Cycling is the most popular activity for children out-with PE lessons, so it is encouraging to see mountain biking now being offered as part of PE lessons."  
Jim Riach, Education and Training Manager, Cycling Scotland

"We have now established a recreational facility which provides mountain bikers with a safe, designated area and protects wildlife."  
Duncan Clark, SWT Site Manager

"I used to have a bike when I was younger but haven't had one for a while. Since starting this though, I want one. There aren't really any downsides to it."  
Rachel Burns fifth year pupil.

## Partners

Abronhill High School  
Cumbernauld High School  
Forestry Commission Scotland  
Cycling Scotland  
Scottish Wildlife Trust  
North Lanarkshire Council

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