

**REVIEW OF OFF-ROAD CYCLING
STRATEGY
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**JANUARY 2003
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1 INTRODUCTION

This report follows a series of visits and inspections to sites listed within the Northern Ireland Cycling Strategy (Jan 2001) and to additional sites identified since publication of this report. These site visits took place in December 2002 and January 2003.

Each of the sites had previously been highlighted as sites for potential development with an emphasis on particular markets, in particular mountain biking and family cycling.

The sites were assessed as to their suitability for development in the context of the proposed market.

2 KEY MARKET SEGMENTS

Cycling can be broken down into several distinctive key market segments but with some overlap between segments.

The segmented nature of the market makes the development of specifically targeted facilities or products a very important feature of any development.

The wider cycling market can be broken down into the following groupings

- Leisure Cycling
- Cycle Touring
- Road Cycling
- Mountain Biking

The two key groupings in this context are

- Leisure Cycling (often referred to as Family Cycling)
- Mountain Biking

Each of these groupings is quite distinctive and mountain biking can be broken down into further segments.

2.1 LEISURE (FAMILY) CYCLING

Leisure cycling, in terms of participants, is by far the largest segment of the recreational cycling market.

Broadly speaking, leisure cycling is a very low-key activity that attracts a very wide range of people of all ages who use cycling as a means to either explore the countryside in a leisurely way and/or to get a bit of gentle exercise.

Many leisure cyclists are family groups with young children and a wide range of bike types may be used, from mountain bikes through to tourers and shopper bikes.

Typically, leisure cyclists will seek out easy riding on gentle gradients with a good surface that is mostly traffic free.

Leisure cyclists make use of quiet country lanes, forest roads and, increasingly, dedicated trails. Leisure cycling is a very significant recreational activity in that large numbers of people participate in it.

It is an activity that is easily accessible to most people and could be considered a very low-key form of countryside recreation.

Most leisure cyclists are unlikely to be particularly skilled in map reading or other outdoor skills and are not particularly adventurous.

Levels of fitness and bike handling skills are generally low with rides only being undertaken on a very infrequent basis, say a few times a year and most likely in the summer months.

Leisure cycling is most likely to take place within less than ten miles of home with the route often accessed by car.

Leisure cyclists are unlikely to make long journeys with the specific intention of using a particular route or facility.

They are most likely to use local facilities, or if on holiday in a particular area, a short ride may form part of the holiday's activities.

2.2 MOUNTAIN BIKING

Mountain biking is the fastest growing segment of recreational cycling. An estimated 22 million people in the UK own a mountain bike and, whilst only a small percentage of these will ever be ridden off-road, the number of people doing so is increasing.

Mountain biking can be broadly defined, as off-road cycling where a mountain bike is used and any other type of bike would be inappropriate. Mountain bikes allow cyclists to access virtually any type of terrain providing there is some sort of trail on the ground, though the way in which mountain bikes are used for recreation does vary considerably.

Mountain biking is a very diverse activity, which can split into several key activity groups.

- Family/leisure riders
- Trail riders
- Sport riders
- Enthusiasts
- Downhillers/Freeriders

2.2.1 Family/Leisure Riders

These are people who have not spent a great deal on their bikes and are most likely to use them either close to home, or whilst on holiday.

Whilst actively seeking to ride off-road, family or leisure riders are unlikely to possess either the technical skills, or the fitness required to undertake difficult trials.

Commonly used routes are disused railway lines, forest roads and rights of way such as byways or green lanes.

Family or leisure riders are more likely to use their mountain bikes to have a day out in the country, rather than as an activity in its own right.

There are obvious overlaps between this group and Leisure Cyclists. The main difference between the two groups is the use of mountain bikes off-road

2.2.2 Trail Riders

These are the "hard core" of mountain biking. They are people who ride off-road at least once a week and have a relatively higher level of fitness and bike handling skill.

Trail riders are often skilled outdoor enthusiasts with an understanding of navigation and rights of way issues and they often take part in other outdoor activities such as hill walking, climbing, orienteering or canoeing.

They are also likely to be either occasional cycle tourers or road cyclists. They have the skills necessary to plan their own rides, which are typically of between two and five hour's duration and between 25 and 60km in length.

Trail riders typically ride on a very wide variety of trails, ranging from forest roads and bridleways to green lanes.

The journeying or adventurous aspect of mountain biking is often of most importance to trail riders and the choice of routes reflects this.

Whilst trail riders appreciate technically challenging routes or trails, the aesthetic aspect of a ride is often of greater importance.

Trail riders are likely to make special journeys often staying in an area for two days or more to do a specific route or trail.

2.2.3 Sport Riders

Sport riders are fit and able mountain bikers who regularly ride off-road and are more often than not involved in racing. They are highly skilled at bike handling and technically challenging trails are actively sought out. Singletrack descents i.e. narrow trails that only one bike can pass along at any one time, are usually a feature of any ride, and they are usually ridden as fast as possible.

Routes taken can vary immensely but they are rarely more than 30 or less than 5 miles in length and they will always involve considerable climbing and descending.

Most sports riders are not proficient map-readers and often ride on routes that are not rights of way for cyclists such as public footpaths.

They often ride the same routes over and over again and increasingly they are creating new trails in areas where they ride regularly.

Many areas that sport riders regularly use, particularly on the urban fringe, are seeing a proliferation of what can be termed "social trails".

These are sections of singletrack that are not rights of way that have been created by local riders, mostly without consultation with landowners. Like trail riders Sport riders will travel to new areas to do specific routes or events.

2.2.4 Enthusiasts

This group is by far the largest amongst mountain bikers and forms a very important segment of the cycling market.

Enthusiasts are people who ride on average once a month but do not have a particularly high fitness level though they are competent bike handlers who relish singletrack and actively seek it out.

Rides will typically be of between one and four hour's duration and between 5 and 20 miles in length and, similarly to Sport riders; favourite routes will be used over and over again.

This group are not skilled outdoor people and they do not possess the ability to plan their own routes in new areas.

They are also just as likely to be female as male and the average age is between 25 and 40.

Of all the mountain biking market segments enthusiasts are the most likely to make relatively frequent weekend trips to different areas to go riding, often to do specific routes of trails.

2.2.5 Downhillers/Freeriders

This is a small, though very significant, group of cyclists that is growing rapidly. Downhillers and Freeriders (sometimes known as dirt jumpers) are very highly skilled though not particularly fit riders who are interested only in the technical aspects of mountain biking.

They are predominantly young males of between 14 and 25 and they are likely to be involved with similar activities such as snowboarding, skateboarding or surfing.

This is a very specialised activity where technical challenge and speed is everything and increasingly the bikes are becoming more and more specialised themselves.

Downhill specific bikes are now available that, because of their weight and high gearing, are virtually impossible to pedal uphill but that make it possible for a skilled rider to ride down virtually any terrain.

This has led to Downhillers developing their own trails that can pose a challenge to them and their bikes, but are causing serious problems to landowners and countryside managers.

Freeriding is slightly different to Downhill in that it involves riders riding within a small area where there are ramps, jumps and drops.

Where these do not exist naturally Freeriders will build their own, often creating elaborate networks of trails and jumps in a small area.

These are changed and modified on a regular basis with riders often spending as much time digging and building jumps as actually riding.

Both downhill and Freeriding are particularly prevalent in urban fringe areas.

This is most likely due to the fact that most participants are relatively young and therefore less able to travel to other areas.

The fact that both Downhillers and Freeriders are happy to concentrate their activities within a relatively small area indicates that there is also a social aspect to this sort of riding with groups of riders preferring to congregate.

This can cause problems for other countryside users in these areas, particularly where visitor pressure is high.

2.3 MAIN MOUNTAIN BIKE MARKET SEGMENTS

The key market segments in the context of the sites of inspected, in order of importance are

- Enthusiasts
- Sport Riders
- Trail riders

3 MOUNTAIN BIKE SITES

The assessment of the following sites is based on the following criteria:

- Access - How accessible is the site to the potential market both in terms of the local and tourism markets.
- Facilities - What level of visitor facilities are available on site including parking, toilets and refreshments.
- Strategic Value - Is this site an important component part of a Northern Ireland cycle tourism product.
- Constraints and conflicts - What factors might seriously constrain the development of a viable mountain bike product and what conflicts or potential conflicts exist between different user groups.
- Existing mountain bike activity - Is the site currently used by mountain bikers and in what way.
- Ground Conditions - What is the soil type and how might this effect the feasibility of trail construction.
- Elevation - How much elevation exists and is there sufficient to allow for the development of a viable trail product.
- Topography - What is the nature of the topography and does it allow for the development of a viable trail product and could it compliment any potential trail development.
- Estimated costs - What are the estimated costs of creating an effective mountain bike product including estimated trail construction costs per meter, estimated length of trail required and any other costs such as car parks, toilets and signage. Trail construction costs include, clearing the trail corridor, groundwork, and hand finishing, labour and materials.

3.1 TARDREE

A small area of plantation made up mostly of un-thinned Sitka Spruce, some small clear-felled areas. The forest is split into two blocks by a minor road.

3.1.1 Access

About 35 minutes drive from Belfast along minor roads. Car park about 10 minutes along very minor roads from main A road

3.1.2 Facilities

Small car park with no additional facilities, which is well used by local dog walkers and at weekends by family groups etc.

3.1.3 Strategic Value

None

3.1.4 Constraints and Conflicts

MTB activity currently restricted to the smaller northern block. Some waymarked walks radiating from car park in southern block.

3.1.5 Existing MTB activity

Small number of unsanctioned trails developed by a local club, who also have a web site. The club has also developed a small downhill and jump spot. Trail development has so far taken place without co-operation from the Forest Service and has largely involved the club clearing fall line sections through the trees.

3.1.6 Ground Conditions

Waterlogged peaty glays with many drains and plough ruts

3.1.7 Elevation

No more than 50m elevation

3.1.8 Topography

Gently rolling plateau with limited side slope.

3.1.9 Estimated Costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£20p/m
Estimated length of trail required	10km
Toilets, car parking, signage	£50k
Total	£250k

3.1.10 Comments

The local club is putting pressure on to CAAN and the forest service to develop mountain bike trails as part of the strategic development. Initial impressions are that the block is too small for the development of a significant facility, but there is a need to manage the existing mountain bike activity.

3.2 GRANGE PARK

Medium sized conifer plantation of un-thinned uniform age Sitka Spruce with an extensive road network and some large clear felled areas

3.2.1 Access

Very good access from main roads, 10 minutes from Coleraine and 30 minutes from Londonderry

3.2.2 Facilities

There are no visitor facilities, but there is a long distance waymarked walk through the block (The Ulster Way) on forest roads.

3.2.3 Strategic Value

In isolation of little strategic value however, if incorporated into a trail product centred on Binevenagh it has major strategic significance.

3.2.4 Constraints and Conflicts

No obvious constraints, other than timber harvesting which seems to be ongoing, though most felling looks to be programmed from 2015 onwards. The only potential area of conflict could be car rallying, which is a common occurrence.

3.2.5 Existing MTB activity

Anecdotal evidence from local riders suggests that the forest road and track network is used, though not extensively, by mountain bikers. There is no evidence of unsanctioned singletrack trail construction.

3.2.6 Ground Conditions

Peat soils with many drains and plough ruts on the plateau, Brown Earths (chalk till) on the extensive side slopes.

3.2.7 Elevation

Around 150m in places but generally between 50 and 100m

3.2.8 Topography

Gently rolling upland plateau with extensive side slope.

3.2.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 12p/m
Estimated length of trail required	£ 5km
Toilets, car parking, signage	(should be linked to facilities at Binevenagh)
Total	£ 60k

3.2.10 Comments

The block is in a superb setting at the edge of a plateau with a steep scarp slope leading down to the coast to the North. There is some scope for trail development, but most likely linked to a trailhead elsewhere.

3.3 BINEVENAGH

This is a large block of mixed woodland of great character with superb coastal views, areas of high ground and dramatic scenery.

3.3.1 Access

Very good access from main coastal road and around 30 minutes from Londonderry

3.3.2 Facilities

There are no visitor facilities at present, other than a small car park, but there is scope to develop some redundant Forest Service buildings

3.3.3 Strategic Value

Extremely high. Geographic location and unique landscape make it an important component of the Northern Ireland mountain bike product.

3.3.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint is likely to be the conservation interest and possibly the stability of the ground on the steeper slopes. Felling may be a constraint on development with some coups programmed for the period up to 2007.

3.3.5 Existing MTB activity

There are a number of unsanctioned trails in particular a downhill course, which appeared well used. Anecdotal evidence from local riders suggests that the area is already well used by mountain bikers.

3.3.6 Ground Conditions

Basalt Rankers for the most part, some Glay.

3.3.7 Elevation

Up to 400m

3.3.8 Topography

Steep scarp slope with large crags and cliffs and highly featured side slopes.

3.3.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£8p/m
Estimated length of trail required	£30km
Toilets, car parking, signage	£50
Total	£290k

3.3.10 Comments

This block has the potential for extensive trail development around spectacular PCP's. It would be a very important component part of any Northern Ireland MTB product.

3.4 BALLYPATRICK

This is a largish plantation of un-thinned conifers with extensive clear felled areas in an upland setting close to the coast.

3.4.1 Access

Very good access from main coastal road and the Antrim coastal resorts

3.4.2 Facilities

There is a largish car park, toilets and a well-maintained forest drive, also some forest walks.

3.4.3 Strategic Value

There is a need for a component of the mountain bike product to be located on the north east coast due to its position as an already popular tourist destination. However difficult ground conditions and other factors combine to reduce the strategic value of the site.

3.4.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint is likely to be the forest drive itself.

3.4.5 Existing MTB activity

There is no obvious evidence of current MTB use.

3.4.6 Ground Conditions

Peaty Glays with a deep duff layer. Some small areas of freer draining brown earth.

3.4.7 Elevation

Around up to 100m

3.4.8 Topography

Rolling terrain with several distinct summits and small river valleys

3.4.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£20p/m
Estimated length of trail required	10km
Toilets, car parking, signage	(excellent facilities on site some signage required £5k)
Total	£205k

3.4.10 Comments

This is a very well roaded forest with good visitor facilities and access. There is scope to develop a limited MTB product but probably only one trail and ground conditions would necessitate high build cost. It would be difficult to justify developing one isolated trail at a potentially high cost.

3.5 SLIEVEANORRA

This is a very extensive largely un-thinned conifer plantation with large areas of clear fell and very well roaded. It is in a very remote upland setting.

3.5.1 Access

Very poor access, along narrow mountain roads with very few passing places.

3.5.2 Facilities

No visitor facilities of any kind exist.

3.5.3 Strategic Value

Very low strategic value due to its remote setting; potentially high build costs and complete lack of visitor facilities.

3.5.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint is likely to be forest operations and conflict would centre on rallying.

3.5.5 Existing MTB activity

There is no obvious evidence of current MTB use, though anecdotal evidence suggests that some use is made of the forest roads.

3.5.6 Ground Conditions

Peaty Glays with a deep duff layer. Some areas of freer draining brown earths.

3.5.7 Elevation

Up to 300m

3.5.8 Topography

Dramatic high ground with some steep side slopes, but also extensive areas of flat ground.

3.5.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£25p/m
Estimated length of trail required	15km
Toilets, car parking, signage	£50k
Total	£425k

3.5.10 Comments

This is a very well roaded forest in a very dramatic and remote setting. There is scope to develop a MTB product but ground conditions would necessitate high build cost and the remote setting would limit the appeal of the forest to the trail rider market segment.

3.6 GLENARIFF

Forest Park of 1181 ha, which is split into three separate blocks by main roads.

3.6.1 Access

Good access from the main Antrim coast road and 15 minutes from the Motorway at Ballymena.

3.6.2 Facilities

Excellent visitor facilities including visitor centre, large car parks, caravan and camping site, café and numerous walking trails.

3.6.3 Strategic Value

Potentially high due to its location on the north Antrim coast though there are issues relating to potentially high build cost. If it is seen as strategically important to have a component of the mountain bike product located on the north Antrim coast, this site would be favourable to Ballypatrick.

3.6.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraints are likely to be the existing walking trails, conservation interests (NNR) and some potential visitor management issues around the visitor centre/car park area.

3.6.5 Existing MTB activity

There is no obvious evidence of current MTB use, though anecdotal evidence suggests that local riders make some use of the extensive walking trail network.

3.6.6 Ground Conditions

Mainly peat though with some Chalk and Basalt Rankers and Chalk Till Brown Earth on the side slopes at the head of the glen.

3.6.7 Elevation

Up to 200m in places but mostly less than 50m

3.6.8 Topography

Scarp slope at the head of a dramatic valley with an extensive rolling upland plateau stretching westwards.

3.6.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 15p/m
Estimated length of trail required	10km
Toilets, car parking, signage	(excellent facilities on site some signage £5k)
Total	£155k

3.6.10 Comments

A very dramatic setting with excellent visitor facilities and the forest is extensive enough to allow for significant trail development. However the predominance of peat and the mainly gently rolling topography would result in high build costs. Effective trail design, which would maximise the best use of the most favourable ground conditions could enable cost effective trail development for both the family cycling and mountain bike markets. The strengths of the site i.e. visitor facilities and good PCP's could outweigh negative aspects such as poor ground conditions and high build costs.

3.7 INISCAIRN

A relatively small area of woodland in a remote rural setting.

3.7.1 Access

Access is poor, 20 minutes from the towns of Magherafelt and Cookstown along a network of very narrow roads.

3.7.2 Facilities

None

3.7.3 Strategic Value

None

3.7.4 Constraints and Conflicts

Because of the size of the block access to the top of any downhill course would compromise the design of the downhill course itself.

3.7.5 Existing MTB activity

No evidence of any existing activity.

3.7.6 Ground Conditions

Pelosols and Rankers

3.7.7 Elevation

Approximately 300 m

3.7.8 Topography

One continuous relatively unfeathered side slope between 30 and 40%.

3.7.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 12p/m
Estimated length of trail required	4 - 5 km for downhill
Toilets, car parking, signage	£ 50k
Access to top of downhill	£ 20k
Total	£ 130k

3.7.10 Comments

The elevation and ground conditions could allow for the cost effective development of a downhill mountain bike product. However the remote location and the lack of any visitor facilities would mean that any downhill product is unlikely to be viable.

3.8 KILLETER

A large upland conifer plantation of virtually uniform age with large areas of clear fell in a remote setting.

3.8.1 Access

Very poor approximately 45 minutes from Enniskillen along minor country roads.

3.8.2 Facilities

None

3.8.3 Strategic Value

None

3.8.4 Constraints and Conflicts

Main conflict would appear to be the ongoing forestry operations and car rallying.

3.8.5 Existing MTB activity

No obvious use at present.

3.8.6 Ground Conditions

Waterlogged peat

3.8.7 Elevation

No more than 50m elevation

3.8.8 Topography

Gently rolling plateau with limited side slope.

3.8.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£20p/m
Estimated length of trail required	20km
Toilets, car parking, signage	£50k
Total	£450k

3.8.10 Comments

A very well roaded forest however, the very remote setting, the lack of any visitor facilities and the absence of strong PCP's coupled with extremely poor ground conditions mean that the development of a cost effective mountain bike product would be virtually impossible.

3.9 LOUGH NAVAR

An extensive conifer plantation with pockets of mixed woodland covering an area of rugged rolling terrain.

3.9.1 Access

About 20 minutes drive from Enniskillen along the A46 Lower Lough Erne shore road.

3.9.2 Facilities

Forest drive with numerous small car parks and isolated toilet block. Also view points and picnic sites. Numerous short way marked walks also long distance walk (Ulster Way).

3.9.3 Strategic Value

Of potentially high strategic importance due to its proximity to the Fermanagh lakes, the potential of a unique product with access to the ROI market. However, issues such as those highlighted below may compromise the feasibility of development here. Other developments in the west (Gortin Glen) should take priority with the possibility of this site being developed as part of a second phase.

3.9.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint is likely to be the forest drive and the existing walk trail network. In places the topography itself i.e. extensive bands of high cliffs and rocky knolls could constrain trail development.

3.9.5 Existing MTB activity

Anecdotal evidence of use of existing trails and forest roads by local mountain bike enthusiasts.

3.9.6 Ground Conditions

Mostly Peaty Glays away from side slope, possibly brown earths on the more extensive areas of side slope.

3.9.7 Elevation

Up to 300m elevation at its most extensive but averaging around 50m.

3.9.8 Topography

Very rugged upland plateau with areas of rocky knolls and outcrops and low ridges.

3.9.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 15p/m
Estimated length of trail required	£ 20km
Toilets, car parking, signage	£ 50k
Total	£ 350k

3.9.10 Comments

The nature of the terrain and some particularly powerful PCP's mean that a distinctive mountain bike product could be developed. However the ground conditions themselves and nature of the constraints need to be investigated further. Also the limited visitor facilities and their current location do not initially seem to lend themselves to this type of development. A huge investment in visitor facilities may be required to support a mountain bike product depending upon the macro design of the trails.

3.10 GORTIN GLEN

A large area of 1500 hectares planted mainly in Sitka Spruce with some areas of larch and

3.10.1 Access

About 15 minutes drive from Omagh along B48.

3.10.2 Facilities

Small visitor centre and tea room with ample parking. Also caravan and camping park and self-catering accommodation units. Extensive network of walking trails and a horse-riding trail.

3.10.3 Strategic Value

Very high. This site should be one of the first to be developed as part of the Northern Ireland mountain bike product.

3.10.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraints are likely to be the existing network and walking and horse riding trails. Forest operations may also be a factor with extensive felling programmed between 2003 and 2008. The forest is also bisected by the main road that may also serve as a constraint.

3.10.5 Existing MTB activity

Forest Service provides a limited mountain bike trail product in the northern section of the forest. This has been developed in partnership with Glenelly Development Group and some single-track construction has taken place. The trails themselves do not appear to be heavily used at present and little marketing or promotional work is carried out.

3.10.6 Ground Conditions

Mostly Pelosols with slightly impeded drainage but also areas of peat over 50cms deep.

3.10.7 Elevation

350m

3.10.8 Topography

Essentially a long side slope with some incised river valleys.

3.10.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 10p/m
Estimated length of trail required	20km
Toilets, car parking, signage	(excellent facilities on site some signage £ 5k)
Total	£ 205k

3.10.10 Comments

This is potentially an extremely important site. The size of the block, the nature of the topography and the extensive elevation mean that an extensive and very high quality mountain bike trail product could be developed here. However, development could not be restricted to the northern segment of the forest. For the product to be as effective as possible trail development would need to include the whole of the forest park.

3.11 BELVIOR

3.11.1 Access

Excellent location in the centre of Belfast.

3.11.2 Facilities

Relatively extensive car parking.

3.11.3 Strategic Value

Of little or no value as part of a tourism product however it would have high value as a local resource that would help in the growth of the domestic market.

3.11.4 Constraints and Conflicts

Waymarked walks and badger sets. The small size of the forest and the proximity to a large population mean that visitor pressure and conflicts between user groups are a major issue. Also Forest Service is opposed to any use of the area by mountain bikes.

3.11.5 Existing MTB activity

Local enthusiasts have developed a large number of unsanctioned trails. Some of which are eroding badly. Local riders also make use of the waymarked walks and other permissive routes within the block and seem to often access the forest by the National Cycle route network which runs parallel to the forest boundary. Local enthusiasts seem to ride here at all times of the day and night! A group of local riders who regularly use Belvoir for unsanctioned mountain biking have recently formed a club that is affiliated to IMBA.

3.11.6 Ground Conditions

Relatively free draining soil particularly on areas draining down to the river. Soil type unknown.

3.11.7 Elevation

No more than 20m elevation

3.11.8 Topography

Gently undulating slopes of between 5 and 25% leading to a break of slope above the river and a side slope of between 25 and 60%.

3.11.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£8p/m
Estimated length of trail required	5km
Toilets, car parking, signage	(signage only £5k)
Total	£45k

3.11.10 Comments

Belvoir seems to be a very important resource for mountain bikers living in and around Belfast. It is easily accessible along the National Cycle Network and the nature of the ground conditions and the forest itself make it very straightforward for the development of unsanctioned trails. Currently the network of trails used by mountain bikers cannot sustain heavy prolonged use but it would be possible to develop trails in Belvoir that would be both sustainable and could also, through effective design, minimise conflict. It is recommended that Forest Service engage with the local club to manage unsanctioned trail development.

3.12 ROSTREVOR

Extensive mixed woodland (1695 hectares) with large areas of high open ground.

3.12.1 Access

Excellent access from main east coast road. Rostrevor is located roughly half way between Dublin and Belfast making this accessible to the ROI market as well.

3.12.2 Facilities

Excellent and very extensive visitor facilities in Kilbroney Park that include café, children's play area, caravan and camping park and ample car parking.

3.12.3 Strategic Value

Extremely high and an essential component of the product which would have significance for the whole of Ireland.

3.12.4 Constraints and Conflicts

Visitor conflict may be an issue around the visitor centre and caravan and camping park. There is also a network of walking and pony trails. Conservation constraints are likely to centre on a PAWS site.

3.12.5 Existing MTB activity

Some unsanctioned trail construction has been carried out by local enthusiasts including several downhill routes. Mountain biking activities seems to be restricted to a few immediate locals using existing trails and developing a few of their own. However the site has been used in the past for organised events both downhill and cross-country.

3.12.6 Ground Conditions

Very rocky with extensive scree slopes with no soil profile or Shale Rankers.

3.12.7 Elevation

Up to 500m

3.12.8 Topography

Very extensive side slope forming the southwestern side of a valley with several large re-entrance gorges and hanging valleys. Also several isolated summits on open ground.

3.12.9 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 12p/m
Estimated length of trail required	10km
Toilets, car parking, signage	excellent facilities on site some signage (£5k)
Total	£ 125k

3.12.10 Comments

The elevation, topography and ground conditions alone make Rostrevor a very strong candidate for the development of a mountain bike product. Due particularly to the very rocky nature of the ground conditions and the dramatically steep side slopes any mountain bike product that would be developed at Rostrevor would be particularly distinctive and which would form an important component of any Northern Ireland mountain biking product. The viability of any mountain bike product at Rostrevor is dependent upon making use of as much of the forest as possible.

3.13 TOLLYMORE

A medium sized block consisting of mixed conifer species and broadleaves of around 600 ha, close to the coastal resort of Newcastle at the foot of the Mourne mountains.

3.13.1 Access

Excellent access from the main road less than two miles from the centre of Newcastle and around 45 minutes from Belfast.

3.13.2 Facilities

Very high quality visitor facilities consisting of ample car parking, Ranger station and a café, which is currently closed, two toilet blocks, large caravan site and a well-maintained network of waymarked walking and pony trails. The Ulster Way also traverses the whole block along the southern boundary.

3.13.3 Strategic Value

Extremely high and an essential component of the product which would have significance for the whole of Ireland.

3.13.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint on development would be visitor pressure and visitor management around any trailhead, the existing trails and limited river crossing points are also a constraint. Conflicts between local residents, walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers seem to be increasing.

3.13.5 Existing MTB activity

Very extensive use of existing trails and also considerable unsanctioned trail development by both cross country and downhill mountain bikers. The forest has played host to national downhill championship events. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Tollymore is in fact a day visit destination for mountain bikers from all parts of the region.

3.13.6 Ground Conditions

Brown Earths on Granite and Shale Till and Glay on Shale Till.

3.13.7 Elevation

Average 160 m

3.13.8 Topography

Narrow river valley with very extensive and highly featured side slope of up to 100%, but averaging between 25 - 50% to the south. Gentler and slightly less extensive side slope of around 20 - 30 % to the North, Two distinct summits are the main feature of the whole block.

3.13.9 Estimated cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£8p/m
Estimated length of trail required	£10km
Toilets, car parking, signage	Signage only (£5k)
Total	£85k

3.13.10 Comments

Very favourable ground conditions, coupled with excellent facilities and good access make Tollymore a very strong candidate for the development of a Mourne mountain bike product, as part of a larger Northern Ireland product. The area is already a tourist destination with a well-developed infrastructure and identity. There is also a need to manage current mountain biking activity in the forest and to address the developing conflict issues. Coupled with development at Rostrevor and Castlewellan the development of Tollymore would complete an extremely high quality Mourne mountain bike product, which would be a flagship for the whole of Ireland.

3.14 CASTLEWELLAN

A beautiful mixed woodland that has long been managed for its amenity value.

3.14.1 Access

Excellent access from the main A25 from the centre of Castlewellan.

3.14.2 Facilities

Extremely good visitor facilities that includes extensive car parking, toilets and small a café. Also a very high quality network of well maintained walking trails which appear to receive extensive use. There is also a very popular horse riding trail

3.14.3 Strategic Value

Extremely high and an essential component of the product which would have significance for the whole of Ireland.

3.14.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraints are the national arboretum and the existing walking and horse riding trails. Due to the layout of the site visitor management to avoid any potential conflicts between cyclists and other users are very easily addressed.

3.14.5 Existing MTB activity

Anecdotal evidence from both local riders and those further a field suggests that mountain bikers regularly use the existing trail network and are developing some unsanctioned trails. Similar to Tollymore, Castlewellan is used as a day destination for mountain bikers from all over the region. The site has also been used for cross-country racing competitions in the past.

3.14.6 Ground Conditions

Granite and Shale Rankers.

3.14.7 Elevation

Up to 200m on Slievenaslat and 100m elsewhere.

3.14.8 Topography

This site is essentially a valley with a lake in the bottom and two distinct summits. Very extensive and highly featured side slopes featuring numerous knolls re-entrants and rocky outcrops.

3.14.9 Estimated cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 10p/m
Estimated length of trail required	10km
Toilets, car parking, signage	Signage only (£5k)
Total	£ 105k

3.14.10 Comments

A stunningly beautiful location with very favourable ground conditions, interesting and varied topography coupled with excellent visitor facilities and access again make this site a very strong candidate for inclusion in the Mourne mountain biking product as part of the larger Northern Ireland product.

3.15 CAVE HILL

Urban fringe Country Park consisting of mixed woodland, parkland, farmland and open mountain.

3.15.1 Access

Excellent access from Belfast city centre.

3.15.2 Facilities

Limited car parking, high quality restaurant in Belfast castle, quality children's play area and a very extensive network of formal walks. There is also an orienteering area.

3.15.3 Strategic Value

Of little or no value as part of a tourism product however it would have high value as a local resource that would help in the growth of the domestic market.

3.15.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint is the actual network of existing trails. The topography in places may constrain trail development due to the high cliffs. There are also likely to be some conservation constraints. There are considerable existing conflicts relating to the unsanctioned use of walking trails by mountain bikers and motorcyclists.

3.15.5 Existing MTB activity

Very considerable use of walking trails and considerable unsanctioned trail development in particular by downhillers. Many of the walking trails that are used by mountain bikers are becoming seriously eroded.

3.15.6 Ground Conditions

The soils are likely to be Podsol or Brown Earths on basalt and limestone.

3.15.7 Elevation

Up to 300m.

3.15.8 Topography

Very extensive and highly featured side slopes in places featuring areas of complex terrain such as knolls, re-entrants, rock outcrops and old quarries. Gradients range from 20 through to 100 %.

3.15.9 Estimated cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£10 p/m
Estimated length of trail required	7km
Toilets, car parking, signage	Signage only (£5k)
Total	£75k

3.15.10 Comments

The nature of the existing trail network at Cavehill virtually acts as a magnet for local mountain bikers. The trails themselves are of high quality and usable in most weather.

conditions and link together some particularly strong PCP's such as Mc Arts Fort, caves and the crags. However, the design of the trails does not lend itself to them being shared use hence the development of the considerable conflict issues. The existing trail system should be reassessed and possibly redesigned to enable safe multi use by both walkers and cyclists. Although a suitable location, already well used by mountain bikers, the limited size would prevent development of this site as part of a strategic cycle tourism product. It seems clear from anecdotal evidence that there is a great deal of local demand for trails that can be accessed by mountain bikers who live in the immediate Belfast area. Some local provision needs to be considered to cater for this ever-increasing demand and also to manage the considerable conflict issues.

3.16 LOUGHRY

This site is divided into two sections with Desertcreat to the south. The northern section comprises farmland and a narrow strip of woodland along the riverbank. The southern section is essentially farmland with isolated patches of woodland with an existing though limited network of farm tracks.

3.16.1 Access

Excellent along main road between Cookstown and Dungannon.

3.16.2 Facilities

None at present. Site is due to be developed as a sporting centre of excellence in the next year

3.16.3 Strategic Value

None

3.16.4 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint on development is the proposed Mid Ulster Sports Academy and fears that trail development may lower the value of the agricultural land.

3.16.5 Existing MTB activity

None visible.

3.16.6 Ground Conditions

In the main high quality agricultural land on limestone.

3.16.7 Elevation

Up to no more than 40m.

3.16.8 Topography

Gently rolling hills with some very limited side slopes of no more than 30%. Slightly steeper and more extensive side slopes in the woodlands along the riverbank up to 70% in places.

3.16.9 Estimated Cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£25p/m
Estimated length of trail required	20km

Toilets, car parking, signage	£50k
Total	£550k

3.16.10 Comments

In the southern area at Desertcreat it would be possible to build trails suitable for mountain bike use however, the ground conditions within the corridors where trail development would be considered, would lead to extremely high build costs. Any trail product that could be developed here would be quite weak due to the lack of any particular PCP's and the very limited size of the site. All of these factors considered the southern area would not be a suitable site for the development of a mountain bike product. Any trail development proposed for the northern area should be done with shared use in mind. This would create a small local trails resource that would be accessible and usable to a variety of user groups.

TABLE 1: Scoring for proposed cross-country sites

SITE	ACCESS	FACILITIES	STRATEGIC VALUE	GROUND CONDITIONS	ELEVATION	TOPOGRAPHY	ESTIMATED COST (Based on lowest cost per meter)	SCORE	RANKING OVERALL
Tollymore	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	34	5
Rostrevor	5	5	5	4	5	4	3	31	5
Castlewellan	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	31	5
Gortin Glen	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	31	4
Binevenagh	4	3	5	5	5	4	4	30	4
Glenarrif	4	5	4	3	4	4	2	26	3
Cavehill	5	2	0	5	5	5	5	26	1
Lough Navar	3	2	3	3	5	4	3	23	3
Grange Park	3	0	4	3	4	4	4	22	4
Belvoir	5	3	2	2	2	2	5	21	1
Ballypatrick	4	3	2	2	3	2	1	17	2
Loughry	5	2	1	2	1	1	1	13	0
Iniscairn	1	0	0	3	4	3	3	14	1
Tardree	3	1	1	2	2	2	1	12	0
Slieveanora	1	0	2	1	5	2	1	12	0
Killeter	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	7	0

4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CROSS COUNTRY OFF-ROAD TRAILS

Following inspections of all the sites listed above and assessments made using the criteria previously outlined, it is recommended that five key sites be developed to create a mountain biking product for Northern Ireland.

Those five sites are as follows:

- Tollymore
- Rostrevor
- Castlewellan
- Bienevenagh
- Gortin Glen

These five sites each score highly on each of the assessment criteria. The key to the assessment has been whether it is possible to create a mountain bike product in a cost effective way, which can be successfully managed and marketed. The aim of the proposed developments would be to create three key short break destinations for the enthusiast market.

Tollymore, Rostrevor and Castlewellan would together constitute one destination with Bienevenagh (incorporating parts of Grange Park) and Gortin Glen each making destinations in their own rights. Each proposed destination is distinctly different to the others to reflect the diversity of terrain and landscape that Northern Ireland has to offer.

Distinctiveness between sites is essential to ensure as strong a product as possible and to ensure its long-term sustainability as a marketable product.

4.1 THE MOURNES

Tollymore, Rostrevor and Castlewellan (or the Mournes) are supported by a very strong tourism infrastructure, which is an attraction in its own right.

The trails at each of the Mournes venues would be quite different to the other.

Open flowing singletrack in open woodland and occasional views of the mountains and sea would predominate at Tollymore.

Rocky, narrow and technical trails across steep side slopes at Rostrevor and narrow trails in an intimate landscape with wonderful internal views at Castlewellan.

Visitor facilities are excellent at each of the Mourne sites and visitor management is straightforward, other than at Tollymore.

Visitor management at Tollymore requires careful consideration, but the strength of any potential trail product far outweighs any potential difficulties.

The most compelling feature of the Mournes though is the relative ease of access to markets.

The Mournes are roughly half way between Belfast and Dublin with access to NI and ROI markets, and also within easy reach of the mainland UK and further a field via airports and ports.

There is also an existing profile for the area among the domestic market, which would make the Mournes an ideal place to begin development.

4.2 BINEVENAGH

Bienevenagh has been selected as a potential site for development because there is an opportunity to create a very cost effective and powerful mountain bike product here.

Due to the outstanding topography and the coastal setting, there is scope here to develop a trail system, which could be second to none in the UK.

The diversity of terrain and landscape in the area make it possible to create a trail system, which would keep short break visitors more than happy for two to three days.

If linked to Grange Park a range of routes and trails could be developed here ranging from 10km to 40km.

The nature of the trails themselves can also vary here from open hillside with panoramic views out towards Scotland, tight technical woodland singletrack.

The area itself is also quite distinctly different, with very much more of a "wild" feeling, which again sets it apart from the other destinations.

If Bienevenagh is to succeed as a mountain biking destination it would need to be marketed as part of a larger Northern Ireland product.

This is due largely to its relatively poor access to markets, which would make it very much more a short break than a day visit destination.

4.3 GORTIN GLEN

Gortin Glen has been selected due to its distinctiveness.

A beautiful forest in a more rural rather than rugged setting, the trail product would reflect the terrain and landscape, which would create another very distinctive product.

The area is not widely known as a tourist destination, though a relatively well-developed infrastructure exists.

Gortin has the potential to develop an extensive trail network, which could be of very high quality, indeed the product would need to be of the highest quality possible to ensure its success.

The trails at Gortin would need to make maximum use of the available terrain and the whole forest block would need to be open to development if a viable short break destination is to be created.

A major factor in Gortin's favour is the excellent visitor facilities, which include on site accommodation. This is clearly a major advantage for the creation of a short break destination.

4.4 POTENTIAL OUTPUTS

The development of a mountain bike product in Northern Ireland is likely to create the following outputs:

- Increased visitor numbers to individual sites
- Increased tourism revenue
- Improved countryside access
- Increased participation in cycling/mountain biking
- Employment and training

- Positive press and PR.

4.4.1 INCREASED VISITOR NUMBERS

An example of how the development of a market focussed recreation product can increase visitor numbers can best be illustrated by the example of Coed y Brenin in North Wales.

Coed y Brenin has been developed as a destination for mountain bikers since 1995 by Forest Enterprise.

COED Y BRENIN VISITOR NUMBERS

1994	13980
1995	17835
1996	35590 (Red Bull Trail Opens)
1997	55726
1998	72806 (Karrimor Trail Opens)
1999	119437
2000	120378
2001	104506 (Foot & Mouth Disease)

At Coed y Brenin there has been an 857% increase in visitor numbers as a result of this development

Whilst it is unlikely that similar developments in NI will show such dramatic increases in visitor numbers, it is probable that there will be significant increases.

What the above figures suggest is that the development of mountain bike facilities, which are focussed on particular market segments, will draw visitors into an area in large numbers. At key locations such as Gortin there is likely to be some proportionally very significant increase in visitor numbers.

It does not seem unlikely that visitor numbers between all five locations could rise by 50% in the first three years. A target of 100,000 mountain bike visitors between the five sites would be a not unreasonable target within the first three years.

4.4.2 INCREASED TOURISM REVENUE

A primary aim of the proposed developments is to create a sustainable tourism resource.

The development of facilities aimed at creating a primary reason for visiting a particular location, area or region must be carried out with the needs of the market in mind. Focussing any development in this way can bring considerable benefits.

A successful example of this kind of development is again best illustrated by the example of Coed y Brenin.

Below is some data collected at Coed y Brenin during 1999:

- Number of Vehicles: 36,163 (Calibrated vehicle counter)
- Average vehicle occupancy: 3.3 (according to survey 1999)
- Visitor numbers: 119,437

- Percentage mountain bike visitors: 87%
- Number of mountain bikers: 103,910

Visitor surveys carried out at Coed y Brenin during 1999 also showed the following.

- Average distance travelled to Coed y Brenin: 50 miles
- % Mountain bikers staying in the area: 61%
- Number of mountain bikers staying in area: 63,385 (15mile radius the forest)
- Average length of stay: 2 days
- Average spend per head per day: £40.00
- Approximate local income: £5 million

What this example illustrates is that this particular market segment is both mobile and relatively high spending.

If the sites highlighted can be developed in the appropriate way there is no question that it would create a product of sufficiently high quality to attract this high spending market.

It would seem reasonable to expect that up to 40% or (40,000) of all mountain bike visitors to the selected sites would, in the first two to three years, be short break visitors

If similar spending patterns to Wales are experienced i.e. average stay two days and average spend per day £40, then the approximate tourism revenue would be in the region of £3.2million.

However the intention is to create a product with a very wide appeal to foreign markets, which are much higher spenders.

If this market is successfully tapped then the potential revenue is much higher.

4.4.3 IMPROVED COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Access to the countryside is currently very limited in Northern Ireland. The creation of a mountain bike product in Northern Ireland would require the construction of a high quality and very robust trail system.

The existing trail system (for all types of user) is very limited and the creation of the mountain bike product could serve as a very important step forward in improving countryside access.

It is anticipated that at up to 80km of new trails would be created and as much as 200km of other tracks, forest roads and trails would be opened to public use.

4.4.4 INCREASED PARTICIPATION

Anecdotal evidence from Wales suggests that the development of dedicated mountain bike facilities, which are both market focussed and accessible, has led to an increase in participation in mountain biking.

There is no evidence to suggest that, should similar facilities be developed in Northern Ireland that levels of participation would not increase.

4.4.5 EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

During the development of the mountain bike product in Wales the following employment and training outputs were generated.

- 40 jobs for one year
- 14 NPTC chainsaw certificates
- 11 Brush-cutter certificates
- 10 NVQ in dry stone walling
- 10 NVQ in fencing
- 14 Qualification in mini digger operation
- 14 qualifications in dumper driving
- 20 Rescue and emergency care certificates
- Mountain bike leader qualifications

In addition all of the individuals involved are now using the skills learned during the project in full time employment.

There are opportunities to replicate and improve on the outputs listed above during the development and delivery of any NI mountain bike product.

4.4.6 PRESS AND PR

During the development and delivery of the Welsh mountain bike product £480,000 worth of press and PR has been generated for Forest Enterprise.

In addition Wales has gained international recognition from the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) who have awarded Wales an 'A' grade as a mountain bike destination.

Only three other destinations in the world have received this accolade, Colorado, Idaho and South Dakota.

This has been achieved by strategic development of a market-focused product.

There is the potential to achieve the same in NI with a very distinctive identity all of its own.

There is the opportunity to create some very positive press for a region that needs it more than most.

5 LEISURE/FAMILY CYCLING SITES

The assessment criteria for these sites are as follows:

- Access - How accessible is the site to the potential market both in terms of the local and tourism markets.
- Facilities - What level of visitor facilities are available on site including parking, toilets, refreshments and bike hire.
- Trails - Is there an existing trail network that is appropriate for use by this market and is further trail development required.
- Safety - Does the existing trail network allow for their safe use by families with children?
- Strategic Value - Is this site an important component part of a Northern Ireland cycle tourism product.

- Positive Control Points (PCP's) - Are there features within the landscape that add value and strengthen the cycling product and which provide an incentive to use the trail.
- Estimated costs - what are the estimated costs for establishing a leisure/family cycling product, including trail construction or upgrading, visitor facilities, signage and interpretation.

5.1 GLENARIFF

Forest Park of 1181 ha, which is split into three separate blocks by main roads.

5.1.1 Access

Good access from the main Antrim coast road and 15 minutes from the Motorway at Ballymena.

5.1.2 Facilities

Excellent visitor facilities including visitor centre, large car parks, caravan and camping site, café and numerous walking trails. There are no bike hire facilities on site.

5.1.3 Trails

Existing forest roads are not suitable. Some modification of existing routes that are currently walking trails and the construction of new trails would be required.

5.1.4 Safety

Steep side slopes and high elevations and existing visitor pressure would require careful trail design to ensure the safety of all trail users.

5.1.5 Strategic Value

Potentially quite high due to Glenariffs popularity as a visitor attraction. However trail construction costs may effect feasibility.

5.1.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

Some extremely PCP's such as dramatic views down the glen to the sea and the distant Mull of Kintyre. Also several waterfalls, other viewpoints and the visitor centre itself.

5.1.7 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£20 p/m
Estimated length of trail required	4km
Toilets, car parking, signage	Signage only (£5k)
Total	£85k

5.1.8 Comments

A popular visitor attraction in a stunning location and a ready market for this type of facility. Any family cycle trail that would be developed here would be a valuable addition to the existing facilities and would contribute to the Northern Ireland family cycling product.

5.2 DERRYNOID

A small block of well managed mixed deciduous woodland located next to the Rural College.

5.2.1 Access

Good access from main road from Draperstown.

5.2.2 Facilities

Excellent visitor facilities including car park, restaurant and accommodation. There are no bike hire facilities.

5.2.3 Trails

The existing forest roads are perfectly suited for family cycling however, they are of very limited extent (2km maximum). Little or no work would be required.

5.2.4 Safety

No major safety issues though some additional signage would be required in and around the car park area.

5.2.5 Strategic Value

Of very little strategic value due to its limited size constraining the development of the trail product.

5.2.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

The only PCP is the restaurant that would probably provide the main incentive for visiting the site with any cycling facility probably being a secondary reason for visiting.

5.2.7 Estimated Costs

Estimated length of trail required	No trail construction is necessary
Signage/interpretation	£ 2k

5.2.8 Comments

The small size of the woodland itself and the limited extent of the actual trail network coupled with the lack of any particularly strong PCP's means that any cycling product at this location would not form a component of any strategic development.

5.3 CASTLE ARCHDALE

Mixed woodland bordering a Country Park in a beautiful setting on the shores of Lower Lough Erne.

5.3.1 Access

Excellent 10 minutes from Enniskillen on the B82.

5.3.2 Facilities

Limited visitor facilities on Forest Service property. However, there are extensive visitor facilities in Castle Archdale Country Park (EHS). This includes seasonal pony trekking and bike hire, caravan and campsite, youth hostel, boat trips to White Island, visitor centre and café.

5.3.3 Trails

The existing forest roads and trails are perfectly suited for family cycling being essentially flat with good lines of sight and uniform surface. A trail linking the woodland to the village of Lisnarrick has been proposed and this would require around 1km of new build.

5.3.4 Safety

No major safety issues though some additional signage would be required to highlight the fact that the trails are likely to be multi use.

5.3.5 Strategic Value

Of high strategic value due to its excellent accessibility and its location within a popular tourist destination.

5.3.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

The main PCP is the lakeshore itself but also other points of interest such as historic monuments and the attractive nature of the woodland itself. The facilities at the Country Park would also serve as powerful PCP's.

5.3.7 Cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 15 p/m
Estimated length of trail required	1.5km
Signage/interpretation	£ 2k
Total	£ 24.5k

5.3.8 Comments

Any family cycle facility would be best developed in conjunction with the Country Park because an essential component of any cycling product are visitor facilities such as car parking, toilets and refreshments.

5.4 CASTLE CALDWELL

This site was not actually visited but the topography is essentially flat and its position on the Lough shore seem to suggest that it could be a viable site for the development of family cycling. However an important consideration would be whether suitable visitor facilities exist at the site.

5.5 FLORENCE COURT

A very attractive mixed woodland that has long been managed for recreation close to the popular Marble Arch caves and a busy National Trust property.

5.5.1 Access

Excellent access from the A32

5.5.2 Facilities

Excellent visitor facilities including car park and toilets and an extensive network of well maintained walking and horse riding trails, though no bike hire. The local community group has developed self-catering cottages and a restaurant on the opposite side of the road at Killesher.

5.5.3 Trails

Only parts of the existing forest road network would be suitable as family cycle trails. Some of the walking trails are more suitable for this purpose but some minor work would be required to allow these trails to be used by bicycles, walkers and horse riders. Many of the walking trails are of a very high quality and have good well-drained consistent surface.

5.5.4 Safety

No major safety issues though some additional signage would be required in and around the car park areas and on the trails themselves.

5.5.5 Strategic Value

The woodland environment and the nature of the trails at Florencecourt would create a fairly unique cycling product with a distinctive character and it would be an important component of the family cycling product.

5.5.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

Excellent and varied PCP's which include viewpoints, rivers and water features, parkland and historic monuments and the National Trust property.

5.5.7 Cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 5 p/m
Estimated length of trail required	2km
Signage/interpretation	£ 2k)
Total	£ 12k

5.5.8 Comments

The family cycling product at Florencecourt would have a unique character due mostly to the fact that the trails themselves would provide trail users with quite a different cycling experience to other locations.

5.6 SPRINGWELL

A medium sized conifer plantation with an extensive forest road network.

5.6.1 Access

Excellent access from the main road and within easy reach of Colerane via the NCN

5.6.2 Facilities

There is adequate parking and a small caravan/camping site and toilets.

5.6.3 Trails

A network of very well maintained forest roads criss-cross the forest and almost all are very well suited to use as family cycle trails. They are of very moderate gradients, particularly in the area immediately around the car park and have consistently good surfaces.

5.6.4 Safety

There are no major safety issues here, due to the low gradients, good visibility and excellent trail surface.

5.6.5 Strategic Value

This site is of some limited strategic value, due to the very low cost of establishing routes.

5.6.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

The area lacks any significant PCP's though it is quiet and secluded.

5.6.7 Estimated Costs

Estimated length of trail required	No trail construction is necessary
Signage/interpretation	£ 2k

5.6.8 Comments

Because of the lack of significant PCP's it would be difficult to develop a very high quality family/leisure cycling product here. However it would be very straightforward to create a cycling product, which could be likened to the NCN and which would be of some appeal to patrons of the caravan site.

5.7 CASTLEWELLAN

A beautiful mixed woodland with a lake and the National Arboretum, which has long been managed for its amenity value.

5.7.1 Access

Excellent access from the main A25 from the centre of Castlewellan.

5.7.2 Facilities

Extremely good visitor facilities that includes extensive car parking, toilets and a small café. Also a very high quality network of well maintained walking trails which appear to receive extensive use and a very popular horse-riding trail. There are no bike hire facilities though suitable buildings may be available on site.

5.7.3 Trails

Effectively the family cycling trail already exists here in the shape of a very well surfaced and maintained road, which circumnavigates the lake. This is traffic free, the surface is of a consistently high standard and it is flat throughout its length. A short section of new trail (about 100m) would be required to address visitor management issues i.e. potential conflict between bikes, vehicles accessing the site and other users.

5.7.4 Safety

No major safety issues though some additional signage would be required in and around the car park area and at key locations around the trail.

5.7.5 Strategic Value

This site would be a crucial component of the Family Cycling product in Northern Ireland. Its location in the Mourne and within three miles of the busy coastal resort of Newcastle means that there is an opportunity to access a potentially very large market.

5.7.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

The lake forms a potent PCP throughout.

5.7.7 Cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 15 p/m
Estimated length of trail require	300m
Signage/interpretation	£2k)
Total	£6.2k

5.7.8 Comments

This site is unique in that it is possible to successfully develop very high quality products for both the mountain bike and family cycling markets. Any family cycling development should be centred on the lake and would be very straightforward. The site already has a range of quality attractions and the development of cycling products would be primary reason for visits to the site.

5.8 GOSFORD

A small area of mixed woodland (250 ha), which is already an important recreational resource.

5.8.1 Access

Excellent direct access from the main A28 Newry to Armagh. The forest is seven miles from the city of Armagh and ten miles from Craigavon.

5.8.2 Facilities

Excellent visitor facilities including ample car parking, toilets, restaurant and caravan park. There are no bike hire facilities.

5.8.3 Trails

The forest is criss-crossed with a very well maintained and very high quality forest road network. Most of the roads are either level or with only very slight inclines and they have consistently good surfaces. The area lends itself to the development of a family "Trailquest" style facility, where a network of trails are made available to cyclists, which are signed

5.8.4 Safety

No major safety issues though some additional signage would be required in and around the car park area.

5.8.5 Strategic Value

This site is of great strategic value since there is already a significant market associated with it. A 'trailquest' facility developed here would be a unique and very marketable product in its own right.

5.8.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

There are numerous PCP's including historic monuments, which could be greatly enhanced with interpretation.

5.8.7 Cost

No trail construction is required.

Signage/interpretation £5k

5.8.8 Comments

The topography of the site and the exceptional quality of the existing trail and forest road network, coupled with good PCP's and high quality visitor facilities, make it possible to create a unique cycling product as part of a larger strategic development. A "Trailquest" facility would create a high quality and very flexible cycling product, which would compliment strategic developments for the same market elsewhere.

5.9 LAGAN VALLEY REGIONAL PARK

An urban park running along the bank of the River Lagan between Belfast and Larne, linking into Forest Service land and several country parks via the NCN

5.9.1 Access

Very good access from main roads and via the NCN

5.9.2 Facilities

Several small car parks scattered along the length of the park with other visitor facilities such as toilets and tearooms at some of the country parks, which are linked to the park by the NCN.

5.9.3 Trails

The NCN follows the old towpath along the river and is of a consistently high standard, cycling of various types takes place within some of the other sites linked to the NCN in particular mountain biking in Belvoir Forest and on some of the parkland.

5.9.4 Safety

There are no major safety concerns relating to the NCN route, however some of the other cycling activity linked to the park is giving managers cause for concern, in particular the unsanctioned mountain biking.

5.9.5 Strategic Value

This site is of very little strategic value as a tourism product, but it is extremely valuable as a local transport and recreational resource. It is also of great significance to local mountain bikers who use it to access as yet unsanctioned riding in their local area.

5.9.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

Belvoir Forest and the other parks, which are linked to the Lagan valley are the key PCP's.

5.9.7 Comments

The NCN, which runs the length of the park, is an important cycling asset and is serving as conduit to encourage cyclists of all types to access the park itself and neighbouring facilities.

5.10 CASTLE WARD

A beautiful National Trust property on the shores of Strangford Lough set in an extensive area of woodland and parkland.

5.10.1 Access

Excellent access along a very popular tourist route (A25)

5.10.2 Facilities

Excellent visitor facilities including car park, restaurant and accommodation.

5.10.3 Trails

There is a very extensive network of trails within the property, most of which are in a very poor condition and some of which appear to be used by cyclists, though this is not encouraged.

5.10.4 Safety

Due to the topography of the area i.e. hills rising quite steeply from the Lough shore and the layout of the existing trails, there could be some serious safety concerns, particularly around the Farmyard and the car park

5.10.5 Strategic Value

At present this site is of little strategic significance.

5.10.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

There are numerous PCP's such as viewpoints and the Lough shore.

5.10.7 Cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£20 p/m
Estimated length of trail required	4km
Car parking, signage/interpretation	£15k)
Total	£100k

5.10.8 Comments

The condition of the existing trail network and the nature of the site would necessitate considerable investment in new trails or in the redesign of the existing trails. The limited size of the property would seriously restrict the scope and scale of any cycle trail development, which, for the potential cost involved, would be difficult to justify in a strategic sense.

5.11 CRAIGAVON LAKES

An urban park centred on two lakes and a watersport centre with an extensive area of woodland and scrubland.

5.11.1 Access

Outstanding access from local communities along the NCN and from further a field from the M1 motorway

5.11.2 Facilities

Superb visitor facilities including ample parking, café, watersport centre, BMX and Skateboard Park and numerous walking trails.

5.11.3 Trails

An excellent family cycle trail of a very high standard circumnavigates the lakes. Many if not all of the other trails are used by cyclists and an extensive network of "social trails" have developed over time.

5.11.4 Safety

There are no particular safety issues.

5.11.5 Strategic Value

This site could be of great strategic significance if the cycling product were to be developed to create a community resource, which would help expand the domestic market.

5.11.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

Many low key PCP's

5.11.7 Cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 10 p/m
Estimated length of trail required	4km
Signage/interpretation	£ 3k
Total	£43k

5.11.8 Comments

There is an opportunity at this site to create a cycling product, which would enable different groups of cyclists to access it directly from their homes/communities. This could only be done by considerable new trail development, which would need to be carried out with great care to avoid creating conflict, but also to ensure that they meet the needs of the market.

5.12 CROM

A stunning National Trust property set in nearly 2000 acres of woodland, parkland, wetland and farmland.

5.12.1 Access

Vary poor access along a maze of narrow country lanes.

5.12.2 Facilities

Excellent visitor facilities including car park, restaurant and accommodation, visitor centre, boat hire, fishing and walking trails.

5.12.3 Trails

The existing trail network is somewhat disjointed and of variable quality. Considerable investment would be required to create a viable cycling product.

5.12.4 Safety

No major safety issues though some additional signage would be required in and around the car park area.

5.12.5 Strategic Value

Of very little strategic value due to the very poor access and limited size of the park.

5.12.6 Positive Control Points (PCP's)

Numerous excellent PCP's include the Lough, visitor centre and various historic buildings.

5.12.7 Cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 10 p/m
Estimated length of trail required	2km
Signage/interpretation	£ 2k
Total	£22k

5.12.8 Comments

A beautiful property with the potential to develop some cycling trails that would cater for day visitors and also for visitors staying on site. However the scope for developing a strategic off road cycling product is limited.

TABLE2: Scoring for Proposed Leisure (family) Cycling Routes

SITE	ACCESS	FACILITIES	TRAILS	SAFETY	STRATEGIC VALUE	PCP'S	COST <i>(No cost =5)</i>	SCORE	OVERALL RANKING
Castlewellan	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	33	1
Craigavon Lakes	5	5	5	5	5	3	4	32	2
Gosford	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	32	3
Castle Archdale	4	4	4	3	5	5	3	28	4
Glenarrif	4	5	3	3	5	5	2	27	5
Florencecourt	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	26	6
Springwell	3	3	4	4	2	4	4	24	7
Ballypatrick	4	4	2	2	3	3	2	20	8
Derrynoid	3	4	2	4	1	1	5	20	9
Lagan Valley	5	2	2	4	1	2	5	21	10
Castle Ward	4	4	1	2	2	3	1	17	11
Crom	1	4	2	4	1	4	3	19	12
Loughry	5	2	0	0	1	2	1	11	13

* In the above table 5 is the best ranking and 1 the poorest. Therefore the higher the score the better the site.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY/LEISURE CYCLING FACILITIES

Following inspections of all the sites listed above and assessments made using the criteria previously outlined, it is recommended that six key sites be developed to create a Family/leisure cycling product for Northern Ireland.

The six key sites are as follows.

- Castlewellan
- Craigavon Lakes
- Gosford
- Castle Archdale
- Glenariff
- Florencecourt

Each site has been selected because it brings a certain distinctiveness to the overall product and introduces an element of diversity.

6.1 CASTLEWELLAN

This is a stunning site with all of the required elements for a high quality family/leisure cycling product.

Essentially the product already exists with the road around the lake providing a tailor made route and the lake providing a major PCP.

The rest of the product is already on site i.e. toilets, parking and refreshments and it is a simple matter of packaging and marketing an already superb facility.

The route around the lake and all the various activities that can be enjoyed on the lake itself, coupled with the existing visitor facilities constitute a family/leisure cycling facility of the highest calibre that is distinctive character.

There is though a need to develop a short section of trail to safely link the car park and the route itself.

6.2 CRAIGAVON LAKES

There is an opportunity here to develop a cycling product with a broad appeal across many market segments and which will be a distinctive and very high quality product.

The visitor facilities and access to Craigavon Lakes makes it an ideal location to encourage more use of bicycles for recreation for more people.

Here the product would involve the development of a trail network, which would be open to a variety of users and which would be a very important resource for the both the local and wider community.

Substantial trail development would be required but little or no development of support facilities is needed.

The leisure/family cycling product already exists here, what is proposed is that the product be expanded upon and its appeal broadened.

6.3 GOSFORD

What is proposed here is that the existing trail infrastructure simply be packaged to create an again very distinctive cycling product.

The very extensive network of trails, which are already of a very high standard, offers the opportunity to develop an extensive cycling product in a very accessible and already popular location.

It is proposed that rather than creating prescribed routes, a "Trailquest" facility be established which would open up the whole woodland to recreational cyclists.

A crucial component of the product at this site will be effective interpretation, which in itself would be part of the cycling product.

6.4 CASTLE ARCHDALE

Here part of the cycling product already exists in the shape of the high quality trail network, which can easily be tailored to create a market-focussed facility.

However any family/leisure cycling product developed here would need to be linked to the neighbouring country park and the associated facilities.

Were this to be done a superb family cycling product could be created at a very low cost, but the development of safe cycling links to neighbouring communities would be most desirable and this would require investment in new trails.

6.5 GLENARIFF

The development of a family/leisure cycling product at Glenariff would necessitate considerable trail construction, due largely to the absence of a suitable existing trail network.

The need to construct new trails gives an ideal opportunity to tailor make the trail product to the needs of the market, whilst giving the trails themselves a particular feel and distinctiveness.

The area contains some very powerful PCP's, particularly around the head of the glen and any cycling product would need to be designed around these, which would create a unique cycling experience, often not available to this market.

Excellent visitor facilities at the visitor centre would be a crucial component of the cycling product here but they should be expanded to include bike hire.

Bike hire is a very important part of the product here due largely to the forest parks location on the Antrim coast road and its popularity as a stopping off point.

6.6 FLORENCE COURT

The development of the cycling product here would centre on the modification of the existing trail network to allow use by cyclists.

This would allow the development of a superb facility, which again is very distinctive and which would be a very valuable part of the family cycling product.

Minor modifications to some of the trails coupled with effective signage and interpretation would create a very valuable community resource, which is open to a variety of users.

The trails themselves would be the main strength of the cycling product here.

Recreational/family cyclist would be able to access narrow trails through a beautiful woodland setting with the trail itself providing continual interest to the cyclists.

This sort of cycling experience is not normally available to this market segment and this in itself is a major factor in the inclusion of Florencecourt in the Family cycling product.

6.7 POTENTIAL OUTPUTS

Potential outputs from the development of a Family/leisure cycling product are as follows

- Increased visitor numbers
- Increased revenue
- Enhanced tourism product
- Improved countryside access

6.7.1 INCREASED VISITOR NUMBERS

Whilst there are no case studies available to demonstrate potential growth, there is some information available from FE (Wales) on cycling visits to sites similar to those listed above.

At Afan Argoed Forest Park in South Wales a visitor survey was carried out in 1999.

At this time the only cycling facility here was a family cycle trail of some 5km and it was found that 32% of all visitors to the forest park were primarily there to cycle, whilst another 17% would cycle as part of their visit.

49% of visitors to the forest park therefore included cycling as part or all of their reason for visiting.

21% of cycling visitors had hired bikes.

This suggests that appropriate cycling facilities supported by high quality visitor facilities provide a certain level of incentive to visit a site.

It seems reasonable to expect that, should appropriate facilities be in place, visitor numbers to the selected sites in NI would increase.

If similar trends to those experienced in Wales are experienced it could be that up to 30% of visitors to the selected sites will include cycling as part of their visit within three years.

6.7.2 INCREASED REVENUE

With increased visitor numbers opportunities to increase revenue from visitors improve.

There is no evidence to suggest that Leisure/Family cyclists are higher spenders than any other visitor, but key components of a Leisure/Family cycling product are parking, toilets, refreshment and bike hire.

All of these elements present opportunities for income at the sites identified.

6.7.3 ENHANCED TOURISM PRODUCT

The development of a diverse, high quality leisure/family cycling product, whilst not providing a primary reason for visiting an area or region, it does form an important component of a visit.

It can though be a very important factor in the reasons for visiting a particular site.

6.7.4 COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Access to the countryside is currently very limited in NI.

The creation of a leisure/family cycling product in NI would require the development of a high quality and very robust trail system.

The existing trail system (for all types of user) is very limited and the creation of leisure/family cycling product, which is both accessible to communities and visitors alike, could serve as a very important step forward in improving countryside access.

It is anticipated that at up to 14km of new trails would be created and 16km of other tracks, forest roads and trails would be opened to public use.

7 CONCLUSIONS

There is an opportunity to create a very strong cycling product in Northern Ireland, which is focussed on key markets.

As shown above the sites have been scored according to key criteria and those sites with the highest scores are deemed to be the ones, which will allow for the development of the strongest possible product in the most cost-effective way.

Further work will be required on each of the highest priority sites if they are to be included in any strategic development, in particular the mountain bike sites, to assess in detail the feasibility of trail development.

Also detailed consultation with landowners, key partners and stakeholders will be required to ensure that development takes place in the most appropriate way with an eye to the future management of the resource.

ADDENDUM TO MOUNTAIN BIKE SITE ASSESSMENTS

Produced by Dafydd Davis

February 2003

1 DOWNHILL SITES

During the initial study several sites were identified where dedicated downhill facilities could be developed.

These were as follows.

- Binevenagh
- Iniscairn
- Cave Hill
- Rostrevor

Tollymore was added to this list at a later stage and was visited as part of this study.

The assessment of the proposed sites was carried out in the context of the proposed market i.e. Downhillers/Freeriders

1.1 THE MARKET

This is a small, though very significant, group of cyclists that is growing rapidly. Downhillers and Freeriders are very highly skilled though not particularly fit riders who are interested only in the technical aspects of mountain biking.

They are predominantly young males of between 14 and 25 and they are likely to be involved with similar activities such as snowboarding, skateboarding or surfing.

This is a very specialised activity where technical challenge and speed is everything and increasingly the bikes are becoming more and more specialised themselves.

Downhill specific bikes are now available that, because of their weight and high gearing, are virtually impossible to pedal uphill but that make it possible for a skilled rider to ride down virtually any terrain.

Downhill specific bikes are now available that, because of their weight and high gearing, are virtually impossible to pedal uphill but that make it possible for a skilled rider to ride down virtually any terrain.

This has led to Downhillers developing their own trails that can pose a challenge to them and their bikes, but are causing serious problems to landowners and countryside managers.

Free riding is slightly different to Downhill in that it involves riders riding within a small area where there are ramps, jumps and drops.

Where these do not exist naturally Freeriders will build their own, often creating elaborate networks of trails and jumps in a small area.

These are changed and modified on a regular basis with riders often spending as much time digging and building jumps as actually riding.

Both downhill and Freeriding are particularly prevalent in urban fringe areas.

This is most likely due to the fact that most participants are relatively young and therefore less able to travel to other areas.

The fact that both Downhillers and Freeriders are happy to concentrate their activities within a relatively small area indicates that there is also a social aspect to this sort of riding with groups of riders preferring to congregate.

This can cause problems for other countryside users in these areas, particularly where visitor pressure is high.

The development of successful dedicated facilities for downhillers at Fort William and Innerleathen (both in Scotland) indicate that the market is also mobile and prepared to travel for a particular product.

Market profile

- Males 14 - 25
- High disposable income
- Involved in other "extreme" sports such as surfing, skateboarding and BMX
- Prepared to travel
- Small volume but high value

1.2 THE PRODUCT

The Downhill/Freeride product should meet the following criteria.

- Easy access to the top and the bottom
- Significant elevation (200m minimum)
- Challenging though not inherently unsafe riding
- Useable for events
- Flexible though consistent standard
- Uplift to the top
- Rideable in all weather at all times of the year
- Sustainable, both physically and financially
- Variety of downhill courses for different abilities

1.3 OUTPUTS

The development of dedicated facilities for this market is intended to produce the following outputs

- To provide a high quality recreational resource for both the wider and local community.
- To increase local tourism income.
- To create a facility which can be used for high profile events.
- To encourage more short break visitors in addition to increasing day visitor numbers
- To create income generation opportunities at the site.

1.4 MANAGEMENT

Land managers have particular considerations where the development of Downhill/Freeride facilities are concerned

These are

- Managing potential conflict with other recreational users both on the trails and around visitor facilities
- Sustainability of the trail
- The safety of trail users.
- Liability

All of the above issues must be addressed if a successful product, which produces the outputs outlined above, can be developed.

1.5 SITE ASSESSMENT

The assessment of the sites indicated above was carried out within the context of the market, the product, potential outputs and management.

The main criteria for assessment were as follows

- Access - How accessible is the site to the potential market both in terms of the local and tourism markets.
- Uplift - Does suitable uplift already exist and are there viable opportunities to develop it.
- Facilities - What level of visitor facilities are available on site including parking, toilets and refreshments.
- Visitor management - are there any potential visitor management issues at the site that might effect the viability of a downhill/freeride product.
- Constraints and conflicts - What factors might seriously constrain the development of a viable downhill/freeride product and what conflicts or potential conflicts exist between different user groups.
- Existing downhill/freeride activity - Is the site currently used by downhillers/freeriders and in what way.
- Ground Conditions - What is the soil type and how might this effect the feasibility of trail construction.
- Elevation - How much elevation exists and is there sufficient to allow for the development of a viable downhill/freeride product.
- Topography - What is the nature of the topography and does it allow for the development of a viable downhill/freeride product and could it compliment any potential development.
- Estimated costs - What are the estimated costs of creating an effective mountain bike product including estimated trail construction costs per meter, estimated length of trail required and any other costs such as car parks, toilets and signage. Trail construction costs include, clearing the trail corridor, groundwork, and hand finishing, labour and materials.

1.6 BINEVENAGH

This is a large block of mixed woodland of great character with superb coastal views, areas of high ground and dramatic scenery.

1.6.1 Uplift

There is access to the top of the site via a very long forest road, which is also part of the NCN. It is estimated that uplift time would be around 20 - 30 minutes each way

1.6.2 Access

Very good access from main coastal road and around 30 minutes from Londonderry, though access to the ROI markets may be limited by distance.

1.6.3 Facilities

There are no visitor facilities at present, other than a small car park, but there is scope to develop some redundant Forest Service buildings

1.6.4 Visitor Management

Apart from the NCN there appears to be very limited recreational use of the forest. Visitor management would be straightforward but substantial infrastructure development would be needed.

1.6.5 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint is likely to be the conservation interest and possibly the stability of the ground on the steeper slopes. Felling may be a constraint on development with some coups programmed for the period up to 2007.

1.6.6 Existing Downhill/Freeride activity

There are a number of unsanctioned downhill courses, which appeared well used. Anecdotal evidence from local riders suggests that the area is already well used by downhillers who would appear to be accessing the area via the NCN and pushing up the courses.

1.6.7 Ground Conditions

Basalt Rankers for the most part, some Glay.

1.6.8 Elevation

Up to 400m

1.6.9 Topography

Steep scarp slope with large crags and cliffs and highly featured side slopes.

1.6.10 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 10p/m
Estimated length of trail required	8km
Uplift	£ 20K
Toilets, car parking, signage	£ 50K

Total £150k

1.6.11 Comments

The site does show some potential for development, but uplift is not ideal in that it is narrow, steep and would require ongoing maintenance. The uplift route also constrains the development of a viable product in that it would constrain development to one course. Considerable investment would be required to develop appropriate visitor facilities at the site. However, the lack of visitor pressure and potential conflict is a positive factor.

1.7 INISCAIRN

This is a small block of mixed woodland on the side of an isolated hill in a relatively remote rural setting.

1.7.1 Uplift

There is access to the top of the site via a forest road, which is in good condition, but some work such as widening and re-grading would be required. It is estimated that uplift time would be around 10 - 15 minutes each way

1.7.2 Access

Very poor access to the site along a maze of narrow minor roads

1.7.3 Facilities

There are no visitor facilities at present.

1.7.4 Visitor Management

There appears to be little or no recreational use of the forest at present. However considerable investment in suitable infrastructure would be required to ensure successful visitor management here

1.7.5 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint here is likely to be the very small size of the forest block and the fact that the only available uplift goes straight through the middle of the block.

1.7.6 Existing Downhill/Freeride activity

There appears to be no activity of this kind at this site.

1.7.7 Ground Conditions

Pelosols and Rankers

1.7.8 Elevation

Approximately 300 m

1.7.9 Topography

One continuous relatively un-featured side slope between 30 and 40%.

1.7.10 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 12p/m
Estimated length of trail required	4 - 5 km for downhill
Toilets, car parking, signage	£50k
Uplift	£20k
Total	£ 130k

1.7.11 Comments

The elevation and ground conditions could allow for the cost-effective development of a downhill mountain bike product, though this would be of limited extent, due largely to the limited size of the site. The uniform topography would require the construction of challenging features to create a viable product and this would increase the cost. Some significant investment would be required to create workable uplift and further investment would be required to create dedicated visitor facilities. The remote setting of the site means that a facility could be created, which does not conflict with other recreational users. However it is debatable whether a facility of sufficiently high quality could be developed at such a small site, which could attract a large enough market to make it viable.

1.8 ROSTREVOR

Extensive mixed woodland (1695 hectares) with large areas of high open ground.

1.8.1 Uplift

Some opportunities do exist though the forest road network would conflict with any potential route development. It may be possible to make use of a tar road at the eastern end of the site, though some investment would be required to extend this westwards.

1.8.2 Access

Excellent access from main east coast road. Rostrevor is located roughly half way between Dublin and Belfast making this accessible to the ROI markets as well.

1.8.3 Facilities

Excellent and very extensive visitor facilities in Kilbroney Park that include café, children's play area, caravan and camping park and ample car parking.

1.8.4 Visitor Management

The site is well used by other recreational users who seem to confine their activities to the area around the visitor facilities. Great care and considerable investment would be required to ensure effective visitor management at this site.

1.8.5 Constraints and Conflicts

Visitor conflict may be an issue the visitor centre and caravan and camping park. There is also a network of walking and pony trails. Conservation constraints are likely to centre on a PAWS site.

1.8.6 Existing Downhill/Free ride activity

Some unsanctioned trail construction has been carried out by local enthusiasts including several downhill routes. Mountain biking activities seems to be restricted to a few immediate locals using existing trails and developing a few of their own. However the site has been used in the past for organised events both downhill and cross-country.

1.8.7 Ground Conditions

Very rocky with extensive scree slopes with no soil profile or Shale Rankers.

1.8.8 Elevation

Up to 500m

1.8.9 Topography

Very extensive and highly featured side slope forming the south western side of a valley with several large re-entrant gorges and hanging valleys. Also several isolated summits on open ground.

1.8.10 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 20p/m
Estimated length of trail required	6km
Uplift	£ 30k
Visitor management	£ 20k
Total	£ 170k

1.8.11 Comments

The elevation, topography and ground conditions at Rostrevor particularly the very rocky nature of the ground and the dramatically steep side slopes make the development of world class downhill courses and freeride opportunities more viable than elsewhere. The steep side slopes and the abundant rock make it possible to create a sustainable product, which meets the needs of the market. However very considerable investment would be required to create viable uplift and to address some particularly difficult visitor Management issues.

1.9 CAVE HILL

Urban fringe Country Park consisting of mixed woodland, parkland, farmland and open mountain.

1.9.1 Uplift

A main "A" road does provide access to a car park near the top of the hill on the eastern side of the park. Opportunities for other means of uplift are very limited, the only option being a track leading from a small car park on Upper Cavehill Road to the eastern car park.

1.9.2 Access

Excellent access from Belfast city centre

1.9.3 Facilities

Limited car parking, high quality restaurant in Belfast castle, quality children's play area and a very extensive network of formal walks. There is also an orienteering area.

1.9.4 Visitor Management

Visitor management is likely to be a major issue due to the constrained nature of the site and the vary high visitor pressure

1.9.5 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint is the actual network of existing trails. The topography in places may constrain trail development due to the high cliffs. There are also likely to be some conservation constraints. There are considerable existing conflicts relating to the unsanctioned use of walking trails by mountain bikers and motorcyclists. Other constraints are the limited scope for developing adequate car parking and visitor management systems.

1.9.6 Existing Downhill/Freeride Activity

Very considerable use of walking trails and considerable unsanctioned trail development in particular by downhillers. Many of the walking trails that are used by mountain bikers are becoming seriously eroded and there are serious safety and conflict concerns.

1.9.7 Ground Conditions

The soils are likely to be Podsolis or Brown Earths on basalt and limestone.

1.9.8 Elevation

Up to 300m.

1.9.9 Topography

Very extensive and highly featured side slopes in places featuring areas of complex terrain such as knolls, re-entrants, rock outcrops and old quarries. Gradients range from 20 through to 100 %.

1.9.10 Estimated cost

Estimated average cost per meter	£10 p/m
Estimated length of trail required	3km

Visitor management	£50k
Total	£80k

1.9.11 Comments

The nature of the existing trail network at Cavehill virtually acts as a magnet for local mountain bikers. The trails themselves are of high quality and usable in most weather conditions and link together some particularly strong PCP's such as McArts Fort, caves and the crags. However, the design of the trails does not lend itself to them being shared use hence the development of the considerable conflict issues. The existing trail system should be reassessed and possibly redesigned to enable safe multi use by both walkers and cyclists. Although a suitable location, already well used by mountain bikers, the limited size would prevent development of this site as part of a strategic cycle tourism product. It seems clear from anecdotal evidence that there is a great deal of local demand for trails that can be accessed by mountain bikers who live in the immediate Belfast area. Some local provision needs to be considered to cater for this ever-increasing demand and also to manage the considerable conflict issues.

1.10 TOLLYMORE

A medium sized block consisting of mixed conifer species and broadleaves of around 600 ha, close to the coastal resort of Newcastle at the foot of the Mourne Mountains.

1.10.1 Uplift

There are numerous opportunities for uplift using the extensive network of well-maintained forest roads

1.10.2 Access

Excellent access from the main road less than two miles from the centre of Newcastle and around 45 minutes from Belfast.

1.10.3 Facilities

Very high quality visitor facilities consisting of ample car parking, Ranger station and a café, which is currently closed, two toilet blocks, large caravan site and a well-maintained network of waymarked walking and pony trails. The Ulster Way also traverses the whole block along the southern boundary.

1.10.4 Visitor Management

There are major visitor management issues here, in particular areas of conflict around the car parks and the limited number of river crossings. There are also concerns about riders leaving the car parks downhill and moving at speed

1.10.5 Constraints and Conflicts

The main constraint on development would be visitor pressure and visitor management around any trailhead, the existing trails and limited river crossing points are also a constraint. Conflicts between local residents, walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers seem to be increasing. The

number of forest roads would also constrain the development of downhill courses in that high speed crossings of forest roads should be avoided.

1.10.6 Existing Downhill/Free ride activity

Very extensive use of existing trails and also considerable unsanctioned trail development by downhillers. The forest has played host to national downhill championship events. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Tollymore is in fact a day visit destination for mountain bikers from all parts of the region.

1.10.7 Ground Conditions

Brown Earths on Granite and Shale Till and Glay on Shale Till.

1.10.8 Elevation

Average 160 m

1.10.9 Topography

Narrow river valley with very extensive and highly featured side slope of up to 100%, but averaging between 25 - 50% to the south. Gentler and slightly less extensive side slope of around 20 - 30 % to the North, Two distinct summits are the main feature of the whole block.

1.10.10 Estimated costs

Estimated average cost per meter	£ 12p/m
Estimated length of trail required	5 km
Car parking, signage and visitor management	£30k
Uplift	£ 10k
Total	£ 100k

1.10.11 Comments

Excellent ground conditions and elevation could allow for the development of a downhill/freeride product, but development would be constrained by visitor pressure and management issues both in the development of downhill courses, but also in and around the visitor facilities. The relatively un-featured nature of the side slopes would require the construction of more challenging features into the courses, which would increase costs. The layout of the site would require that totally separate facilities such as parking and toilets would be required along with access from the main road in an area well away from the existing visitor facilities.

2 CONCLUSION

In the context of the market, the product required and some of the management issues, all of the sites that were assessed fall short of providing perfect sites for the development of a viable downhill/freeride product.

Binevenagh has good elevation and ground conditions, also very few visitor management issues, but uplift is far from ideal.

It is also a long way from the potential markets and the nature of the site would make it very difficult to create a product of sufficient quality to attract the market to that location.

Forest Service should address the existing downhill activity, by engaging with whoever is developing the unsanctioned trails and working with them.

It may well be that a local club could develop a local facility here, which could be managed in partnership.

Iniscairn has no visitor management issues but the site is very small and the only uplift option does constrain the development of downhill tracks.

It is more that possible to develop a good product here, but great care with design would be required and the ground conditions and topography mean that work would be needed to design in challenging features into tracks.

There is also a need to develop all new visitor facilities at the site.

Whilst this site is a blank canvas, so to speak, and that it is possible to develop a product, which would meet the needs of the market and would not cause undue management issues, access is so poor that this would affect the long-term viability.

Having said that if the facility developed here were to be of sufficiently high quality it may still draw the market in.

Tollymore is a very complex site with major conflict and liability issues.

The site is currently used by downhillers and the downhill tracks themselves do not cause the landowner undue concern in their present form.

But the landowner does have grave concerns about visitor management around the parking areas and the river crossings.

Whilst downhill activity here is confined to relatively few riders, it may be possible to manage the conflict issues by creating alternative access for downhillers.

If however a formal downhill product were to be developed here, very considerable investment would be needed to prevent conflicts with other users.

Any downhill product here would be fairly limited in scope and size, due to the limitations of the site, such as potential for conflict and safety concerns, but it would probably be very popular with the market.

If dedicated facilities were not developed here, there would still be a need to address the current situation of unsanctioned use.

It may be possible for a more low key local facility to be developed here, or for some element of downhill provision to be made as part of a cross-country product.

Rostrevor is the site with the greatest potential for the development of a viable downhill product.

The ground conditions and topography allow for the development of a sustainable, robust and very high quality riding product, which would meet the needs of the market.

However there are issues relating to the viability of uplift, which could be addressed, but only by considerable investment.

There are also major concerns relating to visitor management and conflict around the car parks, café and caravan park area.

These could be addressed, but again only after very considerable investment in additional car parking and other dedicated facilities.

The quality of any downhill/freeride product at Rostrevor could be such that potential outputs could justify the need for investment in visitor management systems.

It is likely that any product developed here would be very popular, due largely to easy access to the market.

Cavehill has major management issues, which must be addressed on a broad scale.

It would be almost impossible to develop a dedicated downhill product here without re-designing the wider trail network.

Any dedicated downhill facility here would conflict with current use if the existing trail network remains the same, but there is also a need to meet the obvious demand for downhill/freeride opportunities locally.

The unsanctioned downhill track towards the western end of the site seems to only be used by a fairly hard core local element, and this in itself does not cause a problem.

The issue for the land manager is riders conflicting with other users whilst accessing and leaving the site.

If the existing downhill route could be consolidated and some management systems introduced, in partnership with local rides, this may help resolve this issue.

This site though is not appropriate for the development of a dedicated downhill/freeride product.

PROPOSED DOWNHILL SITES SCORING

SITE	UPLIFT	ACCESS	FACILITIES	CONSTRAINTS/ CONFLICTS	VISITOR MANAGEMENT	GROUND CONDITIONS	TOPOGRAPHY	ELEVATION	COST	SCORE
Binevenagh	2	3	1	3	4	4	4	5	3	28
Iniscairn	3	1	0	4	4	4	3	4	2	25
Rostrevor	2	5	5	3	2	5	5	5	2	34
Cavehill	1	5	2	1	1	4	4	4	2	24
Tollymore	3	5	5	1	1	5	4	4	2	30