

Mountain Biking at Kingsford Forest Park



This case-study illustrates how levels of risk can be reduced to a more acceptable level. It is perhaps of particular interest to managers faced with activities on their land that, pragmatically, it would be impossible to eradicate even if it were desirable to do so.

Kingsford Forest Park lies about two miles north of Kidderminster and is within easy reach of the Black Country. It is managed by Worcestershire County Council's Countryside Service from Waseley Hills Country Park some ten miles away. Over the past two or three years it has increasingly been used by downhill mountain-bikers who had developed their own unofficial courses. Most of the courses crossed a busy path causing a number of problems including:

- Risks (perceived and genuine) to other visitors including horse-riders and walkers often with young children
- Risks to less experienced riders using the courses unsupervised
- Risks to even the more experienced riders
- Litter and a general air of poor management



It was decided that it would be both impractical and unnecessary to stop mountain-biking entirely. However, it was felt that the risks needed to be reduced. Because it was difficult to make contact with the participants and because the problems had become so great:

- Trees were felled across the courses making them impossible to use
- Signs were posted explaining why the action had been taken and asking participants to make contact with the Countryside Service

A group of mountain-bikers in their twenties soon made contact and discussions were held to agree a way forward:



- One official route has been agreed and waymarked in such a way that an inexperienced rider could not inadvertently stray onto it.
- No jumps are permitted to be constructed without the written consent of the Countryside Service
- The Countryside Service has provided bins and the mountain-bikers ensure that no litter is left in the area
- The mountain-bikers have been encouraged to focus activities on agreed days and to provide marshals at the point where the course crosses another path
- A code of conduct has been agreed to improve relationships with other visitors
- All participants are encouraged to wear helmets and to maintain their bikes properly

The approach described is endorsed by the County Council's Legal and Insurance departments; and whilst it is still possible for a rider or other visitor to be injured, the likelihood of this occurring has been reduced dramatically.



Extract from Visitor Safety in the Countryside website www.vscg.co.uk