

PRINCIPAL OFFICE:
8 Elizabeth Street, Maitland
Telephone (08) 8832 0000

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:
P.O. Box 88, MINLATON, SA 5575
Fax (08) 8853 2494
Email: admin@yorke.sa.gov.au
Website: www.yorke.sa.gov.au



RECREATIONAL TRAILS

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What is a recreational trail?

A trail can be a corridor, route or pathway with strong linkages with the natural environment, open space networks and cultural heritage.

Land based trails typically have a trail corridor that is distinguishable from the surrounding landscape. There is normally a visible trail surface, pathway or series of signs, trail markers or landmarks. Regular use of trails will often ensure the trail retains a visible difference from the adjacent environment e.g. walking trails, mountain bike trails, linear parks and coastal pathways.

Why have recreational trails?

The demand for recreational trails is growing. National physical activity trends indicate that participation in unstructured recreational activities is increasing. In addition, trail research undertaken by Market Equity in 2004 found that trails provide a strong incentive to exercise (up to 85% of users) and were used by many as a means to spend time with family and friends (up to 89%).

Both nationally and in South Australia, walking is the most popular and cycling the fourth most popular of fifty different recreational activities. 2006 data indicates that, in South Australia, there were over 120,000 cyclists and 476,000 walkers. Almost 54,000 South Australians specifically reported that they bush-walked for exercise or recreation in their leisure time.

Recreational trails offer a diverse range of benefits to our communities and the environment. Social health, physical fitness, environmental management and awareness, cultural preservation and the economy can all benefit from the effects and experiences offered by recreational trails. The main benefits can be summarised as follows:

Social and Physical Health Benefits:

- Participation in trail activities improves physical and mental health, assists with disease prevention and management, particularly cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, respiratory, nervous and endocrine systems, as well as reducing obesity, hypertension, depression and anxiety.
- Trail activities facilitate participation and interaction between a diverse range of community members, age groups, individuals and families and facilitate social interaction, e.g. community groups, voluntary trail maintenance and conservation work.
- Trails can offer a wide range of opportunities to a wide range of people. Depending upon design, trails can accommodate the elderly, people with mobility impairments or satisfy those seeking challenging adventures and a sense of achievement.
- Participation in trail activities is relatively low cost.
- Trails can introduce participants to other recreational and participation offerings in the community.
- Trails help to connect people and places and develop and grow community pride.

Environmental and Cultural Benefits:

- Trails provide opportunities for the community to experience natural and cultural environments.
- Trails help to protect the environment by localising impacts and managing visitation effects.
- Trails provide for educational and interpretive opportunities and increase environmental and cultural awareness and appreciation.
- Well-connected trail networks can decrease the use of motorised vehicles for transportation and recreation, therefore reducing the production of emissions that contribute to global warming and respiratory problems.
- Trail networks increase community ownership and assist to preserve natural and cultural values.
- Trails provide opportunities for community participation in conservation and revegetation work.

Economic Benefits:

- Trails may generate intrastate, interstate and overseas tourism spending.
- Trails support and enhance local business opportunities.
- Trail visitors spend money in towns and communities along or near trails.
- Trail users spend money preparing for their trail experience or recreation activities.
- Trail construction and maintenance can generate employment opportunities.
- Participation in trail activities improves community health and reduces health expenditure.

Information sourced from:

Government of South Australia, 2011, *Trails SA Sustainable Recreational Trails: Guidelines for the Planning, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Recreational Trails in South Australia*.