

## **Background**

The story of Mountain Bike trail development at CV has been ongoing for over 4 years however, the public have ridden Mountain Bikes around the forest roads at Carron Valley ever since the Mountain Bike was invented. Carron Valley Development Group was borne out of and reflected public demand for MTB development in the public forest at Carron Valley. Whilst many community driven projects can take years to germinate and blossom the CV project is unusual in terms of the strength and breadth of backing it now has from other public agencies notably CSFT, Stirling and North Lanarkshire Councils and Scottish Water.

Mountain Biking is the fastest growing sport in the UK and FCS Scotland has spearheaded development of sizeable purpose built trail centres on the Forest Estate - notably: The Borders (7 principal locations) Fort William, Laggan, The Black Isle and more recently Golspie (private forest – majority of funding through FCS Woodland Grants scheme) In addition FCS has “supported” community driven schemes in Moray, Lochgilphead, Bonar Bridge, Arran and Kyleakin. This list is not exhaustive but the sole driver for all these development has been Tourism. Without exception, these centres are all in fairly far flung rural locations and most cannot easily be accessed by public transport.

CVDG commends FCS for developing these centres but it has long stated the obvious - that there is a very large gap in the provision of such a facility near to where most people actually live (Central Scotland.) CVDG argues that this does not assist the sport at grass roots level because those visitors capable of traveling to such centres are by definition, finite. In other words, this “policy does not practicably allow participation by disadvantaged sections of society – the very people who could benefit most are least likely to be able to get there. This sentiment is largely echoed in two consultant’s reports and throughout the Mountain Bike Community in Scotland. It is also recognised that the small amount of MTB development at Carron has been exceptionally well attended and that it has become the driver and focus for a much wider recreational agenda. There is wide support for significant MTB development at Carron Valley - across the spectrum and across political divides.

CVDG committee comprises professional people who occupy senior roles in public bodies and in Industry and yet we have found it very difficult and at times impossible to “do business with FCS” This is a view now shared (but obviously not aired) by most of the signatories to the Carron Valley Partnership. The relationship has been characterised by a continual moving of goalposts. The other Partners have had to overcome one unforeseen hurdle after another: a Recreation Strategy, A Joint Council Workshop, Feasibility Studies, a National Strategy, Project Plans, the Concordat.

The Concordat was heralded as a new dawn, the Project Plan mechanism and approval was intended to be the means by which development could take place. No sooner was the concordat signed, a Project Plan submitted (and approved in writing) and the PID process was sprung from nowhere as another obstacle to be overcome. We now have a situation where FCS has agreed to a Project Plan, agreed to a funding bid based on that same plan (incl a Red trail) but submitted a PID with a completely different design (with the Red trail changed to a Blue trail) with absolutely no further reference to the Carron Valley Partnership. This action may appear minor – in point of fact it is not.

The process and the Partnership has gone into meltdown because FCS has reneged on it’s agreement to do what it said it would do or in plain words, breach of agreement. In addition they have refused to send either the Project Sponsor (Michael Wall) or the Project Champion (Alan Stevenson) to discuss the matter with the CVP and the latter has refused to detail what he wants to see changed and the reason he has performed a u-turn. The Partnership cannot function unless FCS plays by it’s own rules. Most disturbingly, FCS has actively discriminated against Carron Valley by denying a graded trail structure (they now appear to be insisting on a ridiculous “blue grade trail only” concept) whilst pursuing support of graded trail developments at other locations. There has also been some particularly unsavory tactics: refusing to comply with a FOI request, wrecking a Ministerial visit, doctoring of press releases.

## **Milestones**

### **2003**

#### **April**

- Mountain Bike enthusiasts form loose group and meet FCS Ranger at Carron Valley to discuss creation of a Trail Centre for Central Scotland.

#### **June**

- Carron Valley Development Group (CVDG) formalised, insured, constituted and affiliated to IMBA (International Mountain Biking Association)
- CVDG committee members meet with Michael Wall - Forest District Manager, FCS Scottish Lowlands. It is explained that an ongoing review is being undertaken by Alan Stevenson to inform impending National Strategy for Mountain Biking. Strategy cited as reason to delay meaningful development at Carron.

### **2004**

#### **July**

- Limited permission for trail development granted by FCS to CVDG
- FCS host drop in meeting at CV to inform Recreational Strategy (note: no strategy ever published)

#### **November**

- Stirling and North Lanarkshire Councils formally back CVDG ambition for MTB development at CV as part of wider recreational ambition for venue.

#### **December**

- CVDG becomes Charity No SC 036047 recognised by Inland Revenue Charities
- Stirling and North Lanarkshire Councils Chief Executives formally back plans

### **2005**

#### **January**

- **Jan 05** Joint Council workshop to discuss recreational development at CV funded and hosted by North Lanarkshire Council

#### **June**

- CVDG fund and build 3km of purpose built Singletrack at CV circa £70k

#### **October**

- CVDG formally request trail grading information from FCS under FOI. (note: FOI request remains unanswered)
- Tourism Resources Consultants submit West and Central Scotland and National Strategy Feasibility Studies to FCS. First report paid for by North Lan and Fife Councils. Significant development of Blue, Red and Black trails recommended for CV in both reports. CVDG singled out for particular praise as a "model for community development"

### **2006**

#### **March**

- Patricia Ferguson MSP - Sports Minister agrees to formally open trails. PF cancels at last minute (note: due to FCS intervention.) Cathie Craigie MSP opens CV also attended by Mark Ruskell MSP, Denis Canavan MSP

#### **June**

- FCS, CVDG, Stirling and North Lanarkshire Councils, Scottish Water and Clanranald sign Concordat and form the Carron Valley Partnership (CVP)

#### **October**

- CVDG submit Project Plan to CVP. Project Plan backed by Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT become de facto seventh member of CVP)

- CVDG awarded coveted Special Achievement Award.

#### **November**

- CVDG submit Project Plan to Michael Wall - FCS Forest District Manager and Alan Stevenson - FCS Head of Communities Recreation and Tourism. Both agree to back plan and submit to FES Board for approval.
- Michael Wall confirms backing subject to removal of 60% of Red trail. (note: will not discuss why)
- CVDG complete building previously agreed 2km of purpose built Singletrack at CV circa £50k - total investment now circa £125k (note: FCS contribution £6k)

#### **December**

- FCS inform CVP that it needs to convert Project Plan to a Project Initiation Document - PID (note: PID not mentioned during Concordat negotiations) FCS undertake to submit PID in January ( note: and Feb, Mar, Apr, May - PID submission refused by Alan Stevenson)

#### **2007**

#### **January**

- FCS appoint Project Manager for delivery of CV Recreational Development

#### **April**

- CSFT submit £500k funding bid for Phase 1 based on agreed Project Plan (note: all recorded in meeting minutes)

#### **May**

- CVDG open officially open enlarged trail network (note: FCS alter CVDG press release without permission)
- FCS submit altered PID to FES management with altered route grades ( note: unilateral action by FCS, no consultation with CVP) FES management reject PID but refuse to commit reasons for rejection in writing