

EMBARGO: 10am, Monday, 17 September 2007
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BIKERS ON TOP OF THE WORLD!

Mountain biking is set to take-off in one of the UK's great untapped wilderness areas with the unveiling of the highest purpose built off-road route in England.

Former athletics world record holder and now television broadcaster, Steve Cram, today (Monday, 17 September) swapped his spikes for two wheels in Kielder Water and Forest Park to open 17 kilometres of new trails, linking the 2,000 foot summit of Deadwater Fell with Kielder village.

The spectacular project has been undertaken by the Kielder Trail Reavers – a community based independent rider's group - working with the Forestry Commission and the Kielder Partnership.

Costing £300,000, the trails will not only give bikers a taste of off-road Nirvana, but also form a key part of ambitious developments in Kielder Water and Forest Park – based on a far reaching vision to turn Northumberland's Upper North Tyne Valley into one of Europe's top recreational destinations. A major boost to the local economy is predicted from a year-round influx of visitors.

Funding has come from One NorthEast, through the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (£151,000), Defra (£40,000), the Forestry Commission and Northumberland Sport.

Steve Cram, a keen biker and also Chairman of Northumberland Sport, said the bike trails were a great way to explore and keep fit:

“The opening of the trails provides a new sporting attraction for the area and I’m sure it will be immensely popular with both local residents and visitors. We are making a call for action with our *Get Active Northumberland* campaign, whatever your age. Thirty minutes of activity, three times a week is what we should all be aiming for to feel the benefit in our health. We’ve got the perfect backdrop for getting out and about. Northumberland boasts some stunning scenery and spectacular sporting opportunities and Kielder is a fantastic example of this.”

Alex MacLennan Recreation, Tourism and Communities Manager with the Forestry Commission, added:

“Our aim is a simple one - to create one of the nation’s premier off road venues in Kielder Water and Forest Park for bikers of all abilities. For decades, it has been a sleeping giant – Europe’s biggest man-made forest simply crying out to be explored by riders. Now working with local trailbuilders and our funding partners, we have made a fantastic start by creating a world class riding experience. Because these are all weather trails, that will mean more visitors to the area throughout the year, centred on Kielder village.”

The single track trails have taken 18 months to build and include a 15 kilometre “red route” suitable for bikers of moderate ability, but with a thirst for the great outdoors. It snakes through trees and open moorland to the Deadwater summit, which offers stunning views of the Northumberland fells, southern Scotland, the Solway Firth and the North Sea.

A technically demanding two kilometre detour – rated as a “black route” - has also been built, featuring hair-raising twists and turns, guaranteed to get the pulses racing for those seeking the ultimate challenge.

Martin Beasley, Secretary of the Kielder Trail Reavers, who gave up their weekends to complete the project, explained:

“The key thing about these trails is that they are exhilarating and sustainable. We’ve used 6,000 tonnes of local sandstone to make them pretty much weather proof, meaning riders don’t have to wade through mud, especially in the winter. They also steer clear of sensitive conservation areas. It’s been hard work, but a dash down from the Deadwater summit is an absolutely brilliant ride that’s set to put Kielder on the biking map.”

Louise Davis, Head of Tourism at One NorthEast, said:

“These fantastic new trails complete the mix of high quality cycling infrastructure already in place, such as the long distance cycle touring routes, the urban cycling infrastructure and the vast network of rural roads and bridleways that make up our cycle tourism product. With this quality and range of biking available in the region combined with the quantity and quality of tea shops, cafes, accommodation cycle hire and shop facilities, we are now firmly on the UK cycling map.”

The trailhead for the Deadwater routes is located alongside the car park at Kielder Castle, near to a training loop where riders can polish their technique. A one way climb leads up Deadwater Fell, before bikers embark on a thrilling descent. The red trail can be tackled in sections, depending on fitness and ability levels and includes timber planked sections, called “North Shore”. The black route – dubbed “Up and Over” – has been designed by World Cup downhiller Gary Forrest and is accessible from points along the red trail. It is for experienced bikers only and includes jumps, drop-offs and highly technical sections. A leaflet on both trails is available from Kielder Castle, Leaplish Waterside Park and Tower Knowe in Kielder Water and Forest Park.

NOTES TO EDITOR

Last year the first ever purpose built mountain bike routes were unveiled in Kielder Water and Forest Park. They included a training area near 18th century Kielder Castle Visitor Centre, complete with timber decked North Shore sections, along with the first nine mile phase of a family cycle trail which will eventually circumnavigate Europe's largest reservoir. Further information on Kielder Water and Forest Park from Paul Nichol on 01661 855537.

The Forestry Commission Active Wood's campaign is seeking to promote the vast range of health and fitness opportunities offered by Britain's woodlands, including waymarked mountain bike trails. Hundreds of events are being organised across the UK reflecting the campaign's three themes of naturally active, naturally stimulating and naturally relaxing. For more visit www.forestry.gov.uk/NorthEastEngland

The Kielder Partnership is a public, voluntary and private sector collaboration working to develop Kielder Water and Forest Park as an inspirational place for leisure, exploration and fun. The partnership aims to work with the community to benefit from these developments. Partners are the Calvert Trust, Forestry Commission, Northumberland County Council, Northumbrian Water, Tynedale Council. www.kielder.org

Since its inception in November 2005, the Kielder Trail Reavers has become one of the UK's most prolific trail building groups. Members come from across the North East of England, sharing a passion for biking and a vision to create high quality and sustainable trails in Kielder Water and Forest Park. Trail building sessions are held most weekends. www.kieldertrailreavers.com

Northumberland Sport is one of 49 County Sport Partnerships in England with a vision for Northumberland to develop and increase participation in sport, building healthy and successful communities. For further details and to gain access to a wealth of information about leading a healthy lifestyle in Northumberland visit www.northumberlandsport.co.uk or contact 01670 785020.

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