



Townsville's

INLAND BLISS

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There's more to Townsville than beautiful beaches and sunshine although, from a southerner's perspective, beaches and sunshine sound pretty damn good. Darren Eckford gives us the low down on the growing network of local trails.

If you are going out to the woods today, you're in for a big surprise.

The woods in this case are in Townsville, North Queensland, and the surprise is the exciting trail network that has sprung up of late. The trails are the home to the Townsville Rockwheelers, and they are many and varied.

In the past, the Rockwheelers have had a few different homes, but due to development and land ownership issues, were always forced to abandon the trails.

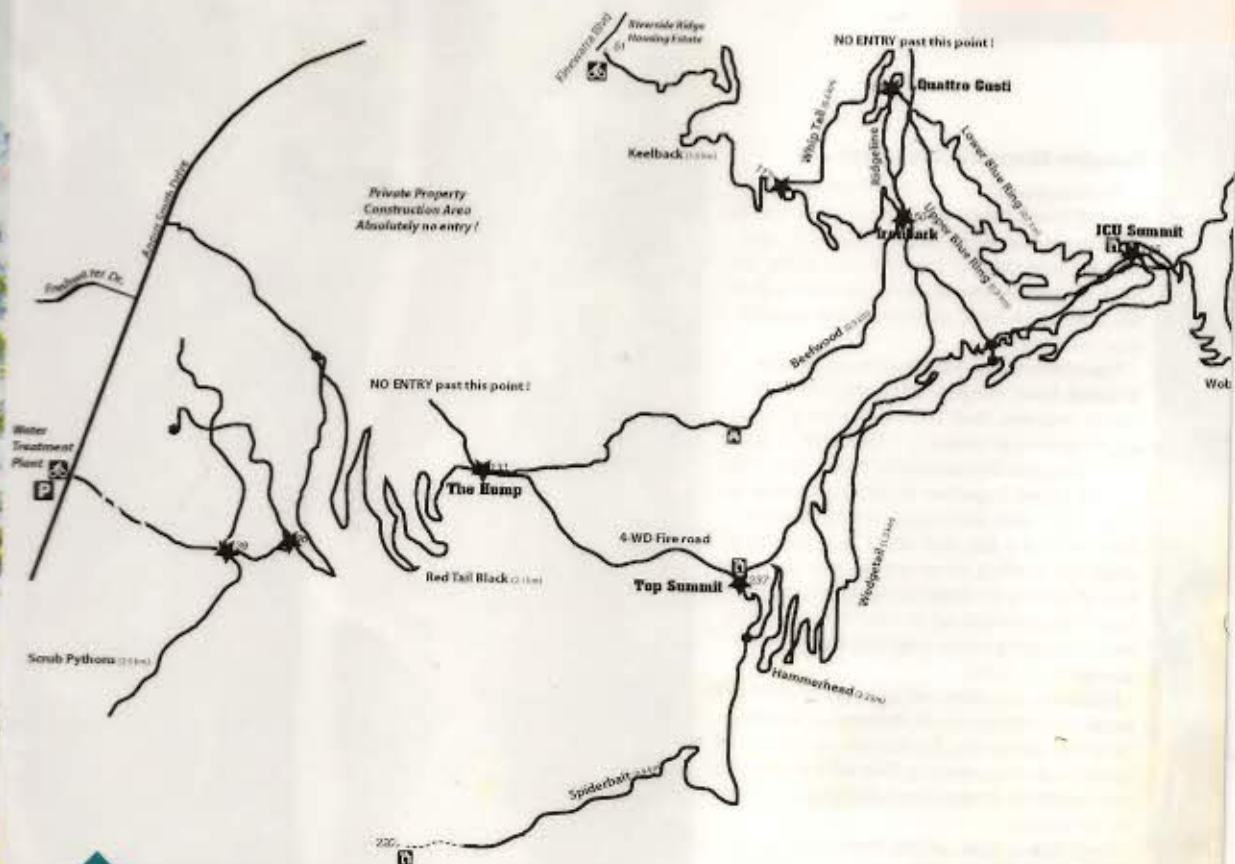
Fast forward to 2010, and things have never looked better. Thanks to the efforts of

a few key members, the Rockwheelers now hold long term permit agreements on three separate MTB precincts, all within a stone's throw of the city. All of the precincts are located on the foothills of Mt Stuart, which overlook the city.

Previously, all the trails were hand built, and when considering the terrain they are built in, it is nothing short of amazing what has been achieved. Recently, the club has employed the services of Adrian Marniner and his magic excavator to help create some of the most amazing trails seen in this area.

The Ross Dam Water Storage Facility

The Ross Dam Water Storage Facility is located approximately 10 kilometres from Douglas Park. The Rockwheelers are extremely privileged to have access to this facility, one of only a few in Australia with MTB access. This venue contains a recently extended XC loop of about 17 kilometres. This is the venue for the club's XC race series and the Hotrock 8 hr event, held in May. The club also held a very successful social 12 hr Dusk 'til Dawn recently, for which



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the venue was perfectly suited. The loop winds its way around the lake foreshore on smooth, flowing trail, with the occasional creek crossing and tight, wooded section to keep riders on their toes. It is essentially flat until riders reach the dreaded Misery hill, which, in reality, is a short pinch climb that sees most riders trying to hide their granny ring shame. Once on the hill, the trail turns technical, before a 2km rollercoaster ride down, finishing on more awesome, flowing machine built trail.

Access to this facility is restricted to Rockwheelers members and guests, and only during sanctioned club events. This is a minor inconvenience for the great riding on offer.

Mt Stuart Downhill Track

Gravity freaks are also well catered for with the recently extended Mt Stuart Downhill Track. This run is approximately 2.8 kilometres long and regularly sees riders hitting 60km/hr, taking approx six minutes to complete a run. Mt Stuart Downhill Track was used as a venue for a round of the Queensland State Titles this year. The course runs parallel with the bitumen road to the lookout, and because of this, is ideal for spectators. You would also be hard pressed to find a course with easier shuttling. There are plans in the pipeline to add Stage 3 in the near future. Stage 3 would run parallel to the existing track, on the opposite side of the road.



Douglas Mountain Bike Park

The Douglas Mountain Bike Park is a network of trails aimed at XC riders, but due to their rocky, technical nature, they are also popular with fans of longer travel bikes. The Park is located literally minutes from suburbia, and is the most accessible and popular trail network.

There are eleven individual trails at the present time, ranging from smooth, wide bench, machine built learner trails to rocky, super technical climbing trails. Most trails are only a few kilometres in length, but they can be joined together to form big loops. To ride all of them, both ways, would take the best part of a day, and would require lots of choc top muffins, or whatever your personal fuel of choice, to keep the engine running. All the trails are located on the hill, and afford riders amazing views over the city (if they are game to look!).

Experienced riders will enjoy all of the trails, especially Redtail Black, Wedgetail, and the recently completed Spiderbait loop, with the latter boasting amazing flow with big berms and banked corners, courtesy of Adrian and his excavator.

From the outset, all the trails lead uphill, challenging riders' skills with technical rock gardens, climbing switchbacks with steep sections, and even a few "heritage" bridges for good luck. The climb to the aptly named "Top Summit" will have the huff 'n' puff meter in the red and beyond.

Once the hard work has been done and you point your bike back down, buckle up and hang on! The trip down through the trail network will have you grinning like a madman, madwoman, or even madchild long after you have cracked your first cold one at the nearby tavern (lemon squash for the kids, or course).

Learners should restrict themselves to Scrub Pythons, Beefwood, and the new, yet to be named, machine built trail next to Redtail Black. Although designed as a learner's trail, it has turned out to be extremely popular with all riders, once again due to a big smooth bench and incredible flow, thanks again to some Adrian magic.



The Rockwheelers

The Rockwheelers also host the hugely popular Paluma Push, held in World Heritage rainforest about one hour north. It is held in July and its popularity has exploded in recent times, due to the magnificent beauty of the area and the awesome course.

Once again, the Rockwheelers are very fortunate to have access to this amazing area, thanks to their continued good relationship

with the land manager. Visitors to the area during this time would be crazy to miss it!

The Rockwheelers are very aware of their responsibilities to build sustainable trails, and follow the IMBA guidelines closely. The longevity of the trails at Douglas is testament to this, and to the skills of the trail builders. Many of the trails at Douglas have been there for many years, and it is this proof of sustainability that has assisted the club in gaining long term access permits

for their trails. While involving many hours (in this case years) of persistence by clubs to gain land access, the Rockwheelers have shown that it is possible, through persistence and good trail management, to secure parcels of land for riders of the future to enjoy.

So now you know: Travel to Townsville with your bike and you're guaranteed some awesome riding.

