Sustainable Trails Conference 2019

Wrap up and take outs

April 2019

TRC
TOURISM · RECREATION
CONSERVATION

Contents

Sustainable Trails Conference 2019 1

In summary 3

Creating experiences not trails 4

Market Data/market focussed development 4

Emerging trends 4

Delivering on trails experiences 4

Making trails count – how to attract investment 6

Social, economic and health benefits 6

Supporting the local economy 6

Supporting indigenous involvement 6

Governance, management and good planning 7

Funding for trails 7

Good management models 8

Building trails 8

Selling the experience – innovation in marketing 9

Branding and positioning trails in a destination 9

The use of digital and great content 10

Speaker take outs 11

In summary

The 2019 Sustainable Trails Conference held in Marlborough New Zealand was only the second of its kind, with the first being held in Thredbo in 2017. TRC is truly humbled by the support we have received from our delegates and are determined to make this event a regular one on our calendar.

As an Australian New Zealand company with a passion to develop, maintain and improve trails of all kinds the vision for the Sustainable Trails Conference is

To bring together trails people to learn, share and grow and achieve Sustainable Trails now and in the future

We had

- 105 delegates at our Thredbo conference – 75% Australian and 25% New Zealand
- 85 delegates at our Marlborough conference – 65% New Zealand and 35% Australian
- 18 repeat attendees, and more than 50% repeat organisation attendance

This is fantastic for the trails industry as not only are we reaching out to new delegates to learn from each conference, repeat attendees are building their knowledge and network base further

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The themes covered at the conference were

Creating experiences, not trails

Making trails count – how to attract investment

Effective governance, management and good planning

Selling the experience – innovation in marketing

This document outlines some of the main conference topics, discussions and takes outs.

Creating experiences not trails

Market Data/market focussed development

- The market will decide what is attractive/practical in terms of duration, direction on trail, segments walked/ridden/run (can't force a 3 day/2 night model driven by New Zealand central government agenda)
- Linking/connecting tracks that include different grades doesn't always work – is it a consumer driven decision?
- Building trails for locals – often leads to wider use (liveability a key objective for Wellington)

Emerging trends

- Increasing use of e-bikes (especially New Zealand, Australia, Europe)
- E-bikers are not replacing traditional mountain bikers, but are a new market segment
- Need better understanding of current growth/trends of trail users – trail runners, mountain bikers, walkers, horse riders, 4WD
- Accessibility (eg for wheelchairs – aging market)
- Changing demographic – eg shorter tracks for new New Zealanders/Australians, packaging for older solo travellers
- Climate change and other significant natural events – effects on tracks and infrastructure. Trail manages increasingly planning, and funding available, to make tracks more resilient (proactive vs reactive)

Delivering on trails experiences

- Visitor should be at the middle of the experience
- Changing methods of story telling/ interpretation to meet market segments (apps, oblique maps etc)
- Put work into your maps as they become your story
- Trail stories are place based; story becomes embedded in the landscape and the land becomes embedded in the story

Story telling: MAP | REFRAME | VOICE

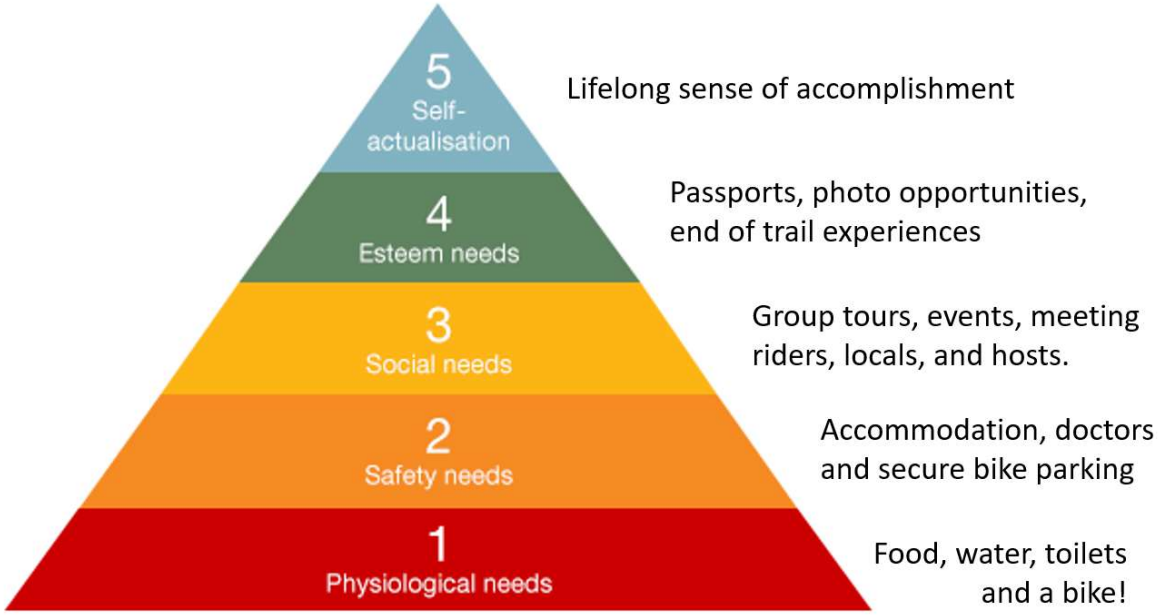
Transformational travel can be defined as any travel experience that empowers people to make meaningful, lasting changes in their lives, whether big or small

Source: Transformational Travel Council 2016

And that heart wrenching clip that says it all https://www.flysas.com/wearetravelers/

thankyou Charlotte Prouse - DMS

Delivering on hierarchy of needs – psychological as well as physiological



Maslow's hierarchy of cycle trail needs

Source: Jonathan Kennett presentation- The New Zealand Cycleway – Benefits and opportunities for communities

Recreation setting characteristics - Ask the questions

1. Is it functional
2. Is it multi functional
3. Is it durable
4. Does it fit the user
5. Is it simple
6. Is it beautiful
7. Does it chase fashion
8. Does it cause unnecessary harm
9. Is it well governed
10. Does it have a sense of place

Source: David Willcox presentation

Making trails count – how to attract investment

Social, economic and health benefits

- Importance of local community acceptance/ support
- Private sector operators range in their willingness to give back to the trail and communities (good examples include Cycle Journey's locals free e-bike day, volunteer planting days at Dune's trail Opotiki by groups from Auckland)
- The need to better measure the mental and physical health benefits from outdoor rec on trails – especially to obtain funding
- Studies show that the effect of activity on depression is 5 times greater than traditional medicine
- Revitalisation of small rural towns (jobs, infrastructure, visitor spend)
- Linking small rural communities
- Conservation - use of trails to transform areas (eg fencing off wetlands/ rivers, replanting, pest eradication)
- Everyone's notion of adventure is different and personal to them

Social licence to operate

Supporting the local economy

- Planning for world class **destinations** vs world class trails (eg Warburton)
- Community consultation and partnerships key

Supporting indigenous involvement

- Using trails to help drive improvements in social and economic well-being of the Aboriginal community
- Empowering aboriginals to invest in track related enterprises in addition to collecting fees for land use – Red Centre Adventure Ride
- Adapting planning schedule to meet their consultation methods
- Opportunity for increased Maori and Aboriginal input/ownership into all aspects of trail planning, development, experience delivery, services etc

Governance, management and good planning

It was great to hear so many innovative and effective ideas and solutions that have been adopted and implemented with outstanding partnerships as a result. It was said more than once

“If you fail to plan, you plan to fail”

And this could not be more true when creating sustainable trails. In planning for trails consultation with landowners and with Iwi is critical, it costs nothing to talk and it is important to work out areas that may be sacred and build trails around areas to respect these sites.

3 essential ingredients for the successful planning

- Partnerships
- Destination’ thinking
- Passion drive and commitment.

Funding for trails

Don’t build a trail until you have planned to fund the maintenance of it in the long term

- The difference between NZ and Aust in the ability to charge for use of Great Walks
- Disruptor in New Zealand is freedom of access to national parks – can only charge for added services/accommodation
- Models for charging – user pays, concessions
- Tap into local/state/federal government, including transport and health budgets
- Obtaining/using conservation funds for track maintenance
- Trails sponsorship from all types of business – advertising on the trails
- Mining the recently retired as trails trust members – active retirees

Conservation for trails and trails for conservation

Good management models

- Collaboration is the key to success. Wellington trails brings together 11 agencies and is a strong point for success so far.
- What, Who, Why: what do you want, who do you want, and why do you want them?
- Partnerships are important
- It is easy to build trails the challenge is maintaining them
- Many regions are doing their own thing and differently, but bringing them together in a coordinated fashion creates success management models
- Strategy v's framework – can be easier for government to use a framework as opposed to a strategy
- To implement a plan you need a champion who can sell it (for funding)
- Signage plays a key role in recognising governance across a region

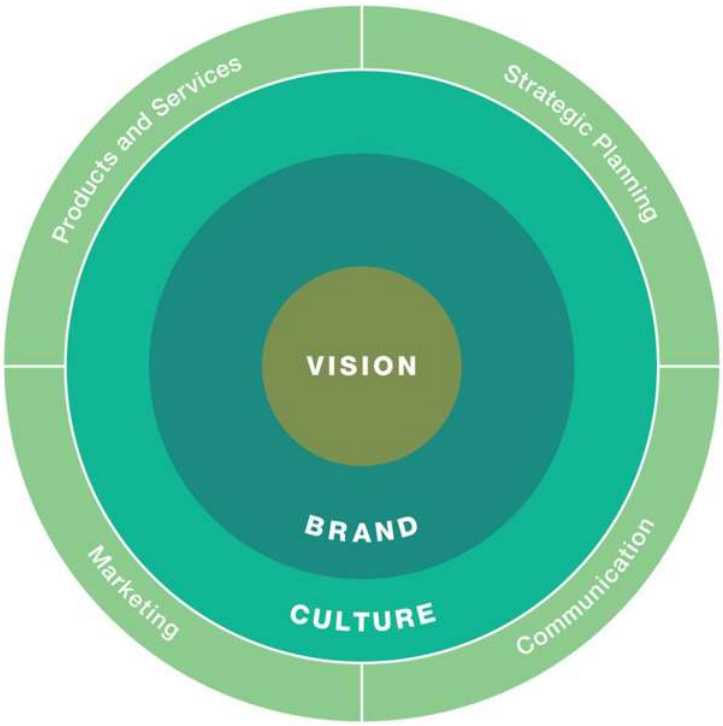
Building trails

- Build to the land and the land types
- Lower environmental impact track options (less maintenance, visually, culturally)
- Lock in your IP early
- Rather than new trails invest into existing ones – turn good into GREAT

Selling the experience – innovation in marketing

Branding and positioning trails in a destination

- Trail developers have their own brand and dedicated followers – further opportunity to include them in communications (especially social media) during track development
- Importance of a clear vision and brand
- Are you delivering on your destination brand promise – ie 100% pure New Zealand (does your product/trail deliver on the brand
- Point of difference needs to be well communicated
- Focus on the story for the visitor rather than attributes
- When selling, who is your market, not so much by age but by motivator
- Challenge the status quo = cut through marketing
- Focus on the story for the visitor rather than attributes



The use of digital and great content

- What is the element of desire for your product
- Use digital to get the user to promote what you want them to
- Influence the users to be advocates
- Social media – don't just post for the sake of it – have a purpose

Grab **attention**

Capture **imagination**

Nurture **engagement**

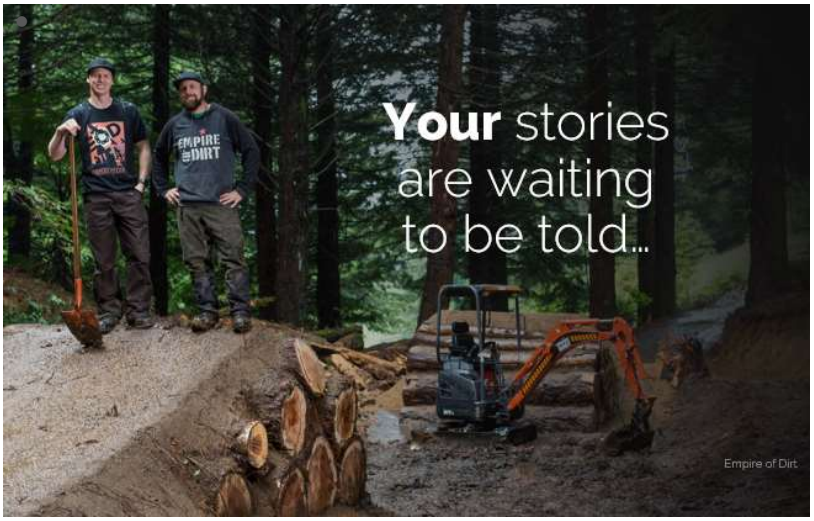
Build **desire**

Create an **actionable moment**

Landscape beautiful but no **desire**

Create the **desire** and the **actionable moment**

Tell the story of the trail being built – some of the best content is during the construction process



The trail begins well before the trail begins

Source: Jason Henry The Intrepid presentation

Speaker take outs

Lou Sanson – DoC Director General

- Moving forward, DoC will need to learn from other countries and build on the already positive change so far to manage increasing visitors. Tactics like differential pricing and operators contributing more may provide needed improvements.

Gina Woodward – Great Walks Australia

- Great Walks Australia are experiences built to accommodate diverse interests and culture. Successful products that continue to be dynamic.

Jonathan Kennett – The Kennett Brothers, New Zealand Cycle Trails

- Sees so many opportunities for growth on many fronts. Trails in New Zealand are already benefiting communities and there is potential for so much more.

Charlotte Prouse – Destination Marketing Store

- Be genuine; understand vision, purpose, values; make message credible; act responsibly (educate, savvy travellers); slow things down ("slow exploration"); limit choice.

Chris Ord – TRC Tourism Associate

- General trends in the outdoor active market are for growth in experiential over competitive, increase in health and wellbeing focus, personal challenge motivation increases and growth in desire for transformational experiences.

Matt Harrington – Warburton MTB Destination

- How an outdoor recreation project is really an economic and social project and can be successful with careful consideration and planning.

Mark Weatherall – Te Araroa

- TA is at a crossroads of how to sustainably manage the trail. Currently an example of a trail being built without long term sustainability and growth in mind. Struggling at the moment, but hopeful for the future.

Chris Day – NT Park and Wildlife Operations

- Importance of working with local communities and keeping perspective in planning.
- There is need for careful management for a trail to be sustainable and for such a changing demographic and interests

Anthony Burton

- Develop a true mass market tourism experience. Need to broaden the scope of MTB tourism experience.

Ian Balm Forgotten World Adventures

- Importance of telling stories and helping people connect with local community and area.

Phil Rossiter – The Old Ghost Road

- You can build a trail and experience with slow growth, small details and a main goal. Therefore, the balance is key

Janet Mackay – TRC Tourism

- need to invest and plan well for the sustainability of trails and experiences

Chris Hay – Locales

- Telling stories connects people to place and having multi-media involved allows for independent learning and continued connection post-trip.

Dave Wilcox – Common Ground

- Need for careful planning and consideration for trail development. Balancing community input and professional experience.

Leesa Carylon – Wellington Regional Trails Network

- Through collaboration Wellington is currently positioned in an exciting place with trail growth, organization and better management going forward.

Diane Drummond – Hauraki Rail Trail

- Hauraki Trail Trail has been a success story for governance models over the past two years and the keys are knowing the importance of sharing responsibility, respecting community and committing to the goal.

Richard Balm – Tongariro Crossing (A track in crisis)

- TC is at a challenging point because of crowding and pressures from all sides. Time for change in management scheme and structure of trail experience.

Rowan Sapsford – Roam Consulting and Bike Taupo

- Don’t underestimate the importance of trails for conservation and the opportunities for combined trail maintenance and conservation.

Geoff Gabites – Cycle Journeys

- Operators have to be profitable to be committed to social license investments and be responsible.

John Brown – BreakO Day Council

- Importance of starting branding early to maximize brand reach, success and "winning a place in people's hearts"

Matilda Reynolds – Specialized

- The HUGE e-bike market growth. Its benefits and how e-bikes can contribute to a growing sector and trail growth.

Ric Cullinane – Walking Access Commission

- Importance of all factors and inputs needed for trail building with specific need for securing access effectively.

Dave Bamford – Outdoor Enthusiast

- Need to be cognizant of the tendency to build trails because we can (and because of apparent market drive) rather than the importance of planning, considering private sector and sustainability of project.

Panel (Jonathan Kennett, Gina Woodward, Janet Mackay, Dave Bamford)

Difference between Australia & NZ:

Great Walks, Private sector roles, big distances in Australia, differences in bikers & bike-packing trends and expectations.

What trends to plan for:

Interactive experiences; e-bike; social license; be ready to evolve; widening demographics (solo, older); increased growth on all fronts.

How to build resilience (especially climate & political):

Adequate maintenance & disaster funding; plan for climate change; adopt to new conditions/harsher; being responsible - offsets; allow for leaders in sustainable tourism to lead and have access; connect people.

How to deal with planning for more diverse markets (China/India?):

Plan for mindsets, not nationalities; short outdoor experiences but understanding how many people you want in a place; work with Iwi; build for locals and it will be good for visitors.

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