Mountain Bike Trail Building Course
The Vat Run: South Queensferry
April – November 2012

This event is part of the CWA Knowledge and Skill Development Training Programme, funded by the Scottish Government Skills Development Scheme and the Robertson Trust.
The event

GreenFerry are currently constructing our own mountain bike facilities “The Vat Run” as a training ground for MTB skills. To help get things started GreenFerry organised six separate days’ training in mountain-bike trail-building through the CWA skills development training programme. This course offered participants training and experience in building mountain bike trails and features, including pump track planning and building. These took place on:

- 4th March 2012: Plan and manually construct a pump track
- 25th March 2012: Plan and manually construct a pump track
- 27th May 2012: Woodland single track building
- 24th June 2012: Woodland single track building
- 30th September: Building riding features
- 28th October: Building riding features

Course tutor:

Pete Laing, one of Scotland’s most experienced trail designers was employed as trainer. Since he had produced our original survey plans, it made sense to have him supervise the volunteers. He was also keen to ensure that the quality of the work met his standards.

Session breakdown:

Sessions 1 & 2: plan and manually construct a pump track

The aim was to provide delegates with the basic knowledge required to plan and manually construct a pump track. Classroom discussions covered the following topics:

- Site Constraints, Topography & Ground Conditions
- Track Layout and Site Plan
- Track Design, Target Users
- Construction Specifications and Materials
- Basic Construction Method
- Landscaping
- Rider Management

On-site work session. Delegates worked in pairs to construct a section of track or riding feature with guidance by practical demonstration. Topics covered:

- Site Safety
- Hand Tool basics
- Area Prep and Track Marking
- Track Drainage
- Forming the Basic Track Shapes
- Surfacing and Finishing
The training concluded with a classroom session for the final hour to discuss the following and re-cap:

- Track Tweaking
- Track Care
- Track Inspections. Record Keeping
- Rider Safety. Public Safety

**Sessions 3 & 4: building woodland Singletrack**

The aim was to provide delegates with the basic knowledge required to plan and manually construct durable woodland Singletrack. Classroom discussion prior to the building session and during lunch, covered the following topics.

- What makes a good Singletrack? Trail styles
- Basic trail forms suitable for manual building
- Manual Construction Methods and Materials
- Trail Drainage
- Access Permissions
- Site Topography & Ground Conditions
- Choosing a line. Do’s and Don’ts

On-site work session. Delegates worked in pairs to construct a section of track or riding feature with guidance by practical demonstration. Topics covered:

- Working in a Forest Environment
- Clearing the Line or ‘Trailway’
- Importing Materials
- Run-off points & piped drainage
- Trail Finishing

The training concluded with a classroom session for the final hour to discuss the following and re-cap:

- The Natural Line
- Maintenance Tasks
- Trail Inspections. Record Keeping
- Rider Safety; Public Safety

**Sessions 5 & 6: building riding features**

Delegates worked in pairs to construct a section of track or riding feature with guidance by practical demonstration. On-site discussion and construction topics covered:

- Trail Character. What kind of features (if any) are right for your trail.
- Construction methods
- Ramps, Steps and Chokes
- Skinnies and other timber sections
Work achieved

As we had hoped, the training days allowed our volunteers to lead or take part in additional trail-building days in between our CWA training days, so progress was made much faster. So, between CWA days, and our own volunteer days, we have completed the following work:

- Built a pump track (two sessions)
- Installed special features (two sessions)
- Laid 50 metres of MTB track (two sessions)

Participants

We aimed to attract a mixture of local volunteers, and CWA members for further afield. Initial interest was good, with 26 people signing up. In the event, 17 people took part as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iwan Thomas</td>
<td>VAT Run</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arnie Bark</td>
<td>VAT Run</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve Thomas</td>
<td>VAT Run</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Lupton</td>
<td>Glentress</td>
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<td>Paul Downie</td>
<td>Vat Run</td>
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<td>Ed Ibbetson</td>
<td>VAT Run</td>
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<td>James Bowler</td>
<td>VAT Run</td>
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<td>CS (Ian Hunter)</td>
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<td>David Willis</td>
<td>VAT Run</td>
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<td>Mike McCarthy</td>
<td>VAT Run</td>
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<td>Simon James</td>
<td>Wooplaw</td>
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<td>David Crosbie</td>
<td>Wooplaw and Dunbar</td>
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<td>Bob Ballantyne</td>
<td>Corstorphine Hill</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Hodgeson</td>
<td>Corstorphine Hill</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ralph Jessop</td>
<td>MTB FLO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sam Anderson</td>
<td>Lionthorn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joyce Faulkner</td>
<td>The VAT Run</td>
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Benefits

- This course has given us the confidence to continue building our mountain-bike trails on our own.
- We have also encouraged at least one other group to start to building their own track.
- Course activities also attracted some completely new volunteers to our group.
- We have established many new contacts as a result of our activities.
Photographs
Feedback

Only a few participants submitted feedback, but those who did were unreservedly positive in their comments:

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<th>Location</th>
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<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>V.Poor</th>
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<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Facilities</td>
<td>5</td>
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Do you feel this event delivered your expectations?

Yes: 5

Why did you want to take part in this event?

- I wanted to gain further experience of the construction of a pump track and at the same time provide some input into a community facility.
- As a user of mountain bike trails I wanted to gain a better understanding of the processes that go into building a sustainable trail. I also wanted to contribute positively to a local project that both myself and my family will benefit from in the long term.
- I felt it was important that I and the other volunteers were taught the correct techniques of trail building right from the outset to ensure safe and sustainable trails. The opportunity to learn from one of the leading trailbuilders in Scotland was one worth taking.
- I needed some practical experience of trail-building in order to be able to describe the activities and apply for further grants.
- To gain knowledge of trail building techniques to aid in the construction of a mountain bike trail.

What benefits do you feel you gained by attending this event?

- My knowledge of pump track construction was greatly enhanced by attending this course.
- Trail building skills that will be used to help complete the project here and hopefully will be used at other similar projects in the future.
- I now feel confident in my skills and ability to build quality trails and features sympathetically in the woodland. I am also aware of my limitations and elements of the project that are perhaps best left to an expert. The opportunity to meet people from other MTB projects elsewhere has also been extremely positive and useful.
- I appreciate what is involved in creating quality trails and features. I have a much better idea now, how long it takes to install a mountain-bike track, and the order that you have to go about things.
- Knowledge of trail building design and building techniques
• Being part of a community project
• Working as part of a team

What will you do with the skills & experience you have gained in attendance?

• I intend to continue to offer track building services as part of a business plan. I have since won a contract to construct a pump track.
• Trail building skills that will be used to help complete the project here and hopefully will be used at other similar projects in the future.
• I have already gone on to build many more metres of trail and also instructed other volunteer groups coming to work on our site. It has allowed me to create a clearer vision for the shape of the trails in the future.
• I am using this knowledge to apply for further grants to keep our work going.
• Use the building techniques to build and maintain the trails and pass this knowledge on to other volunteers

Would you recommend this event to a friend?

Yes: 5

Comments (from yes)

• Being part of a team involved in creating a community facility whilst learning new skills is always a good thing. It’s a win win situation.
• A very positive way to gain firsthand experience and guidance on a practical subject that is often surrounded by myth and mystery.
• Building your own mountain-bike track helps to bond the volunteers together. Working with others from other groups also helps us network and share ideas.
• The event overall was well organised with both classroom and practical sessions, which led to all the volunteers gaining an understanding in trail design and building techniques.
• There was a good sense of community spirit and everyone was keen to get on with the tasks

What other training / seminar opportunities would you like to see organised?

• I’d like to see a coppice skills course closer to the centre belt. Unfortunately the last one was too far away for me to attend.
• Plain English!

General Comments on this event:

• I would like to thank the hosts Joyce and Iwan for making us all so welcome and providing the great grub
• The benefits this event has brought to The Vat Run are many. The regular volunteers are now all singing from the same hymn sheet and it has enhanced the intuitive understanding of trail flow that many of them held already. It has also given them the confidence to work on the trails without direct supervision and make decisions on what needs to be done. It has also given the overall project a little kudos by being
directly identified with Pete Laing and his positive reputation. The project has taken a significant leap forward directly attributable to this series of events.

- Many benefits for the track, and the group.
- A big thank you to the organisers Iwan and Joyce and to the trail building guru Pete
- Many thanks to CWA for all their help and funding.