

Major mountainbiking resort for Rotorua

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By Alison Brown



A multimillion-dollar resort catering for the growing mountainbiking market is planned for Rotorua.

Phil Verry, owner of Red Stag timber mill, has announced plans to build a complex next to the Waipa mill carpark, on the edge of Rotorua featuring accommodation, a cafe, swimming pool and tennis courts.

To be called Trailblazers Resort, it would also provide free bikewashing facilities as well as toilets, showers and bike storage for casual Whakarewarewa forest's popular mountainbiking tracks.

The proposed single-story complex, just minutes south of Rotorua, would provide accommodation for all budget levels, with a focus on lucrative corporate market. Mr Verry envisages that a high-performance centre and gymnasium could also be built on the site, enabling international athletes to train in Rotorua during their off-season. Plans are in the early stages but it's hoped the resort will open its doors within three years.

The project has received support from the Rotorua District Council and the Rotorua Mountain Bike Club who say it can only strengthen reputation as New Zealand's top mountainbiking destination. Overall mountainbiking-related spending in Rotorua, by visitors and locals, is currently about \$4.3 million a year.

Mr Verry said a feasibility study was under way and an architect had been commissioned to draw up plans. The building would be low-rise and have a wooden exterior to fit with its environment. "We have to prove the concept will work and we're working on the numbers but if we get this right, it will be a very exciting project for Rotorua."

The resort would be situated on the doorstep of Rotorua's core mountainbiking trails network, providing access to beginner tracks and the main entry point for most casual riders. Popular mountainbiking events like the annual Cateye Moonride, are currently based at Waipa and Mr Verry said the resort would be the place to establish a base for event organisers. "We want to create an iconic destination and be to Rotorua what Ohakune is to North Island skiing." The project was not aiming to disadvantage any other mountainbiking or tourism operators but generate demand for business more people to visit Rotorua, he said. With the new Energy Events Centre attracting thousands of conference delegates, the resort could provide accommodation or a base corporate team-building activities.