

THE BRISBANE VALLEY RAIL TRAIL

A RAIL TRAIL IN TRANSITION



Australia's longest rail trail, the 161 km BVRT, began its formation when the first 9km of disused rail corridor between Lowood and Fernvale opened as a repurposed rail trail in 2003. It would take another 15 years of dedicated advocacy of successive State Governments and three Local Government Authorities to complete the final section, the missing link, between Toogoolawah and Moore, joining the northern and southern sections of the trail.

Yarraman, located at an elevation of 400m on the Great Dividing Range became the northern trailhead, and Wulkuraka, a western suburb of Ipswich, at only 61m elevation, became the southern trailhead.

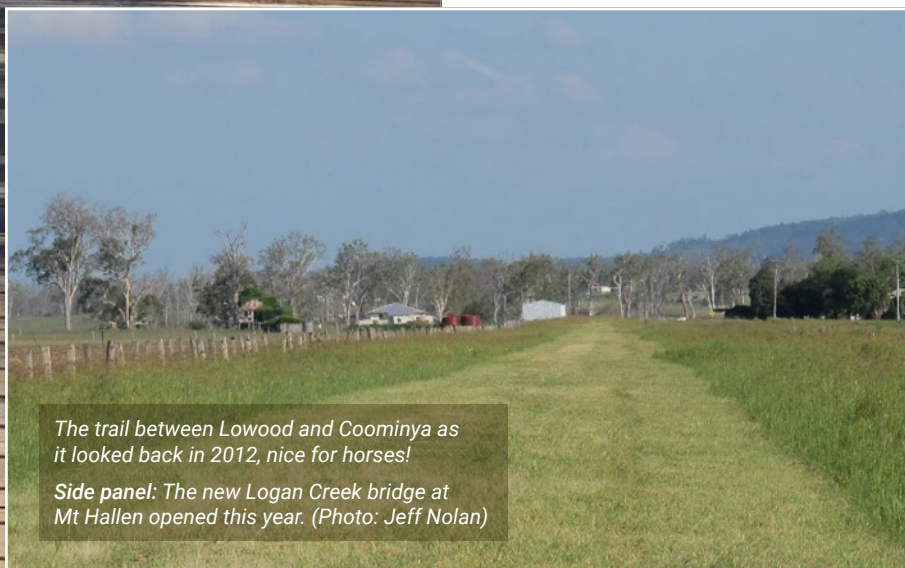
For much of its existence, the BVRT has been an 'adventure' trail, the domain of hardy and competent cyclists on mountain bikes, seasoned walkers and horse riders who all had to contend with innumerable gates, washed out gullies and, as some have described, a goat track. It was also a 'long paddock' for many adjoining landowners who grazed their stock, including the occasional bull with the cows, along the corridor. Some adjoining landowners had significant antipathy to the corridor being open and disliked the presence of trail users. Many sections of the trail, for many

kilometres, was rough surfaced and, in places, a mere single track with stiff, tufted grasses peppering the old cleared corridor. Both trailheads were undeveloped and unmarked. The trail simply stopped or began. Cafe and accommodation facilities along the trail were very limited. For many of those first intrepid trail users, it was a delight.

Any antagonism to the trail has evaporated, replaced with pride in this community asset

Today, trail users have a very different experience. Paul Heymans, President of the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Users Association, estimates that in the last ten years, the Queensland State Government has spent \$42 million on the trail with over 70%, or more than 110km of the trail, being resurfaced with compacted crushed rock to a high quality, all weather trail. Much of that resurfacing has occurred in the past few years. All the gates are long gone, replaced by ride or walk over stock grids. Bridges have been, and continue to be, rebuilt and decked for trail use. Detours directing trail users into watercourse gullies beside derelict or destroyed bridges have had significant culverts installed. Much of the trail corridor is now fenced to exclude stock. The first 5km of the trail from Wulkuraka is a wide concrete boulevard wending its way through outer suburbia. Both trailheads now have superb installations designating the start and the finish of the trail and the Wulkuraka trailhead has excellent facilities.

Concurrent with the spend by the State Government in that time period has been the investment by individuals in servicing the needs of the burgeoning numbers of trail users. Cafes have emerged in every village and town on the trail. Hotels have been rejuvenated and refurbished due to increased patronage for both refreshments and accommodation. Caravan parks have expanded and been marketed towards trail users. New accommodation



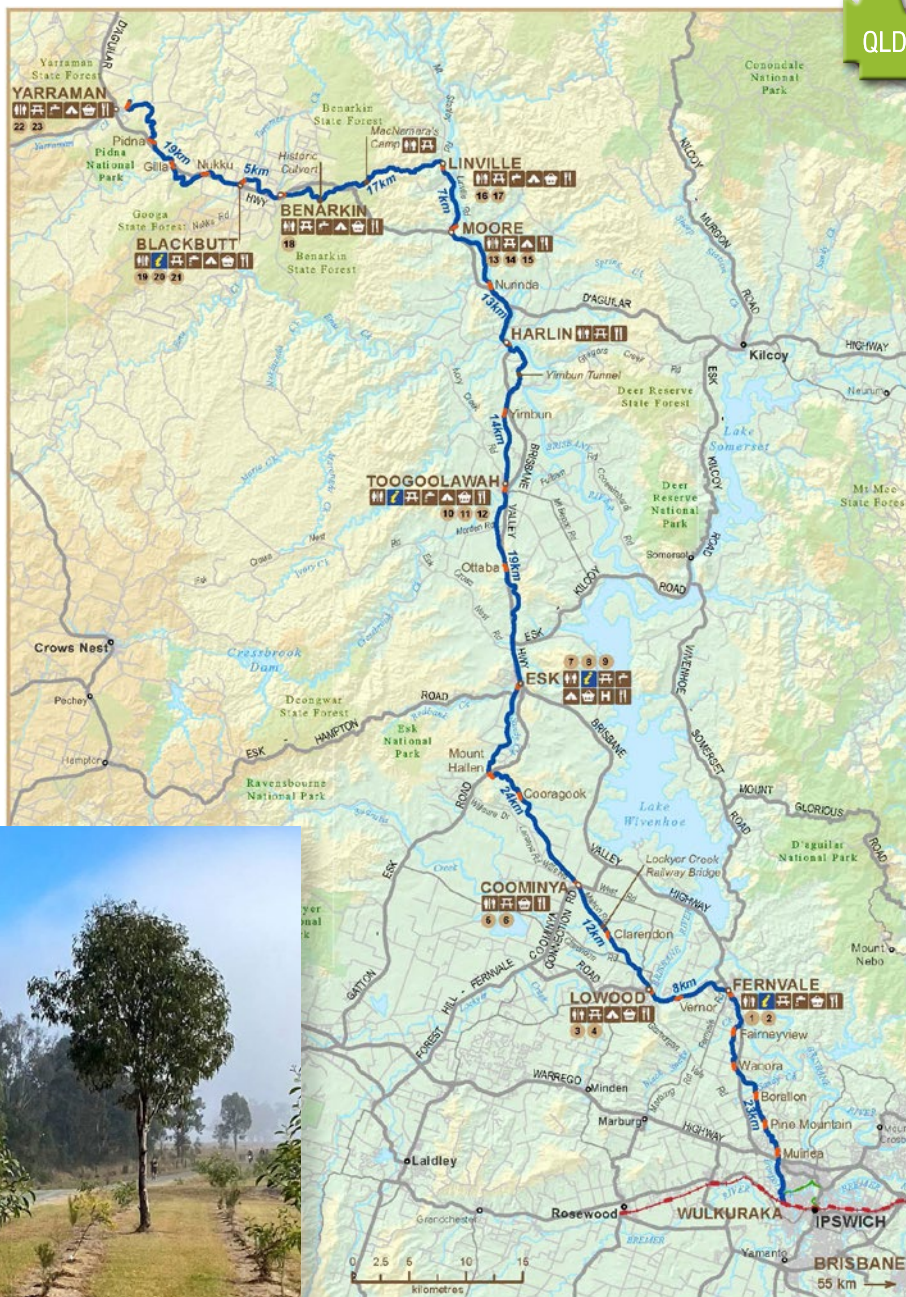
The trail between Lowood and Coominya as it looked back in 2012, nice for horses!

Side panel: The new Logan Creek bridge at Mt Hallen opened this year. (Photo: Jeff Nolan)

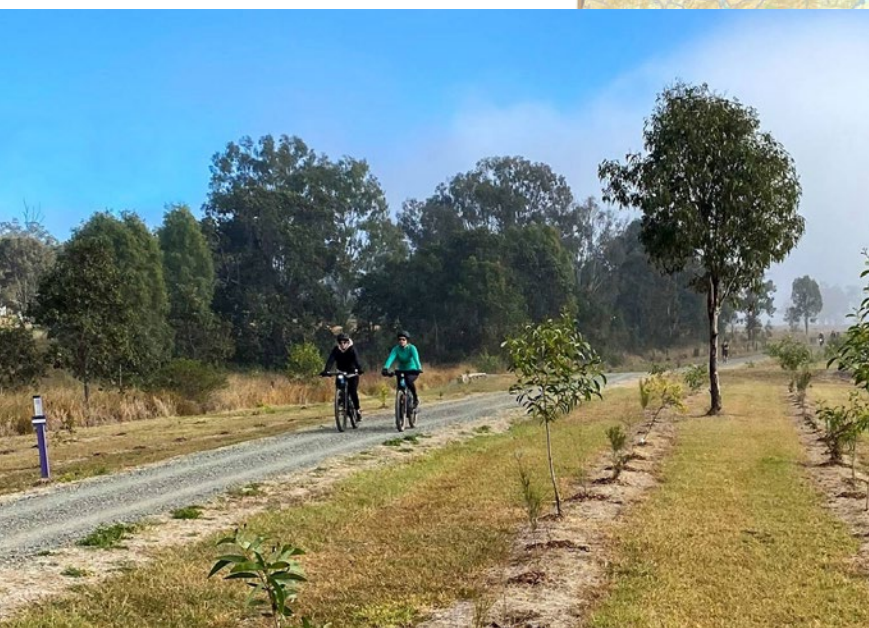


offerings are continually becoming available, both farm stays and renovated buildings in the towns and villages. Bike shops have opened. Bikes (including e-bikes) are available for hire and an efficient shuttle bus for cyclists and walkers services the full length of the trail. The rail trail is now recognised as a major economic driver along the valley. The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Association Facebook page now has over 21,000 followers and the Association conducts numerous events on the trail, funnelling profits back into mural artworks and other installations on the trail.

Any antagonism to the trail has evaporated, replaced with pride in this community asset. Nowhere is this more evident than in the town of Lowood. Some years ago local resident and nurseryman, Peter Bevan, began planting in the trail corridor entering Lowood from the north. What started as a simple hedging screen has expanded into a marvellous nature strip that extends for kilometres out from the town. Initially the Somerset Regional Council was



Above: Map courtesy Transport and Main Roads QLD.



Left: The trail now between Lowood and Coominya with upgraded surface and revegetation taking place. (Photo: Jeff Nolan)

alarmed at this endeavour but has become fully supportive of Peter and his fellow community members who now assist him. The greening of this corridor is quite remarkable providing shade in a hot climate, habitat for wildlife and a floriferous delight for trail users entering the village.

With its vastly improved surface and facilities in the towns and villages, the trail now attracts a huge variety of users, mostly cyclists, on a diverse range of bicycles. No longer is it just the robust mountain biker. Now there are families with young children on tag-a-longs or

their first small bikes. Gravel bike riders who are in their element on the smooth firm surfaces. E-bike riders, particularly 'mature' riders, who are rediscovering the joy of cycling or extending their cycling experience with the advantage of an e-bike. Female cyclists, either solo or in small groups, who feel safer riding on the trail than on the road. Bike packers laden with their camping gear, off on a multi-day ride. First-time rail trail riders on whatever bike they could manage, discovering what rail trails are all about. With this disparate variety of riders and increased numbers on the trail, conflict can arise. Smooth surfaces mean that

cyclists can ride faster. Fast cyclists and slow cyclists, fast cyclists and walkers; fast cyclists and horse riders; fast cyclists and children on bikes; riders riding fast when they are not skilled on gravel roads - all points of conflict. The Code of Conduct for riding on rail trails becomes ever more important with more people using a vastly improved trail. Everyone should stop and give way to horse riders and observe the appropriate protocol when approaching a horse. Cyclists should give way to walkers. As traffic increases on the trail, patience and consideration become admirable traits of all trail users. It is a shared public path.



This café on the rail trail in Esk is one of the businesses benefitting from trail users. (Photo: Jeff Nolan)

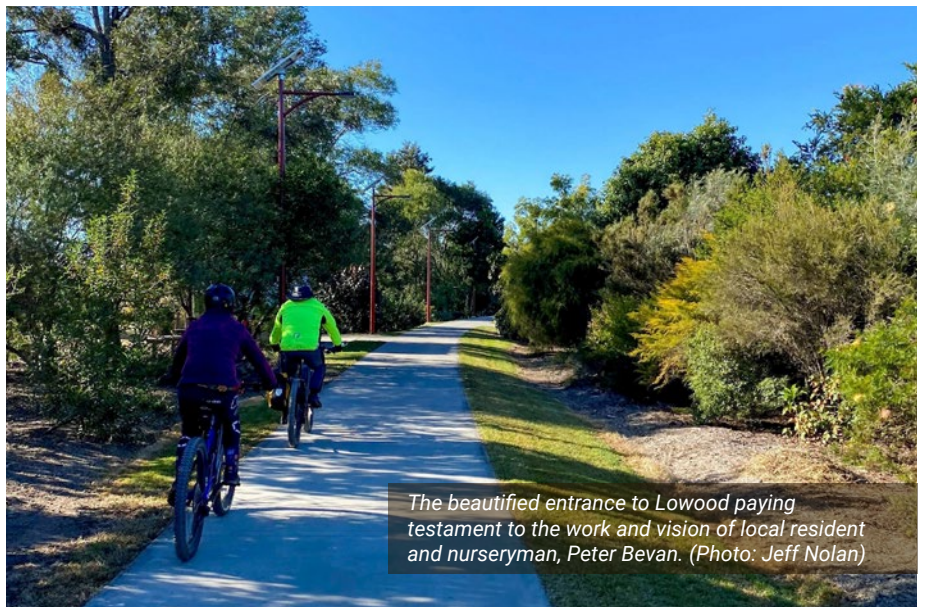
Despite the huge monetary investment in upgrades, the BVRT remains an adventure trail. It is a long trail and there remain plenty of elements of the old 'goat track'. There are still gnarly gullies to traverse and there are sections of trail still awaiting upgrades to the surface. There are creek crossings which become impassable after a significant rain event. There are still unfenced sections with cattle wandering on to the trail. And all unsealed sections are susceptible to heavy rain and heavy traffic usage damage. It is a trail that is mostly too hot to use in summer during the day. Riding the trail takes planning and preparation. Most of the trail is isolated; that is the joy of the BVRT. It intersects frequently with the many villages and towns, but rarely with any roads between the settlements. It is mostly out in the countryside surrounded by farmlands, bushland and forestry. For those seeking more adventure, there are many freely available GPS mapped loop rides that extend out into the surrounding country. Many of the new accommodation providers are extolling the opportunities to extend the cycling based around their facility with mapped routes out from the rail trail. The BVRT experience is ever changing, ever expanding. It is a rail trail that remains in an exciting transition.

Refer to the back cover for more photos of this transition.

Jeff Nolan
RTA Queensland Representative



Dozens of annoying gates have been replaced with stock grids to allow unimpeded riding and walking. (Photo: Damian McCrohan)



The beautified entrance to Lowood paying testament to the work and vision of local resident and nurseryman, Peter Bevan. (Photo: Jeff Nolan)

