



The trail developer

Paul Hawkins is the manager of the 1SW Off-Road Cycling Project, which aims to make SW England a world-class biking destination. CTC is a key project partner



The South West is England's most visited region, accounting for one in five domestic tourist trips. People come for its surf, stately homes and dramatic coastline. Fewer come with their mountain bikes, enthusiasts heading instead to the off-road honeypots of Wales and Scotland. The funding that 1SW has to develop off-road cycling in the region could change that.

The goal isn't to build a Fort William downhill or Coed y Brenin 'Beast' but to cater more for the middle ground. We'll be developing purpose-built off-road cycling trails with more 'adventure' thrown in than the popular Camel and Tarka Trails, creating routes that are accessible to casual cyclists yet with enough about them to appeal to existing local bikers. Getting bums on mountain bikes in the region like this is a perfect complement to the South West's existing 'family fun and surf tourism' attractions – particularly when we get a wet summer, which can dampen spirits at the beach but not when riding forest singletrack.

The 1SW Project was spawned by an independent feasibility study, commissioned in 2006 by a partnership including CTC. It is aiming to serve that family, fun, 'weekend warrior' market with off-road cycling trails and facilities, boosting existing tourism businesses and creating opportunities for new ones. It also leaves a nice gap in the

market for the private sector to fill for 'pay and ride' sites (club run or for profit), to cater for specialist sectors of mountain biking such as downhill.

You may notice that I have avoided the term 'mountain biking' when talking about the 1SW Project itself. That's because people have a preconceived idea of what mountain biking involves, picturing exhaustion, death-defying feats, and scars. If we are serious about getting more people

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into cycling then we have to break down these preconceptions.

Thanks to initial funding from Sport England, lots of practical and hosting support from the Forestry Commission, and now £4.6million from the Rural Development Programme for England, 1SW is enabling the development of off-road cycling 'hub' sites at six places from Cornwall to the Forest of Dean. This is 'new' money for cycling that would otherwise have gone elsewhere. All six sites are close to centres of population: Bodmin, Plymouth, Exeter, Bristol, Ringwood and Coleford. They will have purpose-built trails and skills areas geared more towards 'engaging, blue-grade trails' than highly technical black ones.

It's not just about traditional trailbuilding either. Four sites at recreational lakes in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset will also have specific trails built to encourage people to try off-road cycling as part of a multi-activity day out. Additionally, the protected landscape authorities (National Parks and AONBs) are working with 1SW to deliver a warmer welcome for off-road cycling in their areas, including graded cycle maps – available online – for their public rights

of way. All these different ways of appealing to off-road cyclists (and potential off-road cyclists!) will be promoted by 1SW through its website and promotional activities.

I know this is CTC's magazine so I'm bound to say nice things about the organisation. But I strongly believe CTC is doing sterling work in breaking down barriers and getting more people out there on two wheels. I see it already across the South West, and am delighted by the role played by volunteers as well as staff. CTC's Ian Warby has been instrumental in setting up and driving the 1SW Project from the start, providing a wealth of hard-won knowledge as well as boundless enthusiasm. Without such support, I don't think the project would have got started and we wouldn't have got to where we are now.

To find out more about the project, visit the website www.1sw.org.uk