



# Just Nail It!

The Albury-Wodonga area contains some of the country's best-kept mountain bike secrets. But not for much longer, as Albury local Craig Sheather lets the cat out of the bag.

If you live in New South Wales or Victoria, there's a fair chance that you've been to Albury. It's also a pretty safe bet that your visit lasted as long as it takes to fill up with fuel, grab a coffee and drive on through. Located right on the Hume Highway at the NSW/Victorian border, it's one of those places that everybody knows but few take the time to explore—most mountain bikers will drive straight on through, headed for other destinations

such as Bright, Mt Buller or Canberra.

Well we've got news for you; you're missing out! The Albury-Wodonga region mightn't have the half-hour long descents (and much longer climbs) of the neighbouring Great Dividing Range, but it is very much an underrated mountain bike destination. It's also situated alongside the mighty Murray; Australia's longest river and a great place to take a post-ride dip. Combine the trails of Albury, Wodonga and the nearby town of Beechworth, and there's plenty to keep you occupied over multiple days of riding and the variety of terrain ensures there's something for all abilities.

## NAIL CAN HILL

Rising above the city centre on the western side of Albury is Nail Can Hill. Over the past few years the reserve has undergone some impressive developments to its many mountain bike trails. The area also features a network of trails used for bushwalking and running.

Part of a regional crown reserve, Nail Can Hill is a sizable expanse of dry, undulating native bushland. The terrain is very steep in places so it's recommended that be-

ginners stick to the main fire trails and the green-rated singletracks that flow through the less lumpy parts of the hill. Most of the singletrack network is rated blue according to the IMBA standards system and is well suited to intermediate level riders.

Branching off the fire roads, there's a huge selection of MTB trails just waiting to be discovered—in total there's around 30km of singletrack in the area. The ridge trails have spectacular views and the area is a haven for some of the region's rare flora and fauna. There's a good chance you will spot kangaroos and wallabies at sunrise and sunset.

Trail maintenance at Nail Can Hill is coordinated through Albury Wodonga Mountain Bikers (AWMTB) and Albury City Council. Together they have also designed three routes that are worth checking out. The trails are adequately marked and you can download a map from the AWMTB website to follow the routes.

Route one is a classic 7km-long XC race loop that incorporates 120m of climbing. First you attack the climb up Intestine, which then continues up the fire trail. Once on the ridge (and the legs stop screaming), the real fun begins. Descend the initial sections of the intense No



The Albury Wodonga Mountain Bikers is a fast growing club and they hold regular events on the rocky Nail Can Hill trails.

Flying flat out—trails such as Shelob's Revenge and Dirt Luge are great fun.



More Secrets, barrel down the Dirt Luge and then confront the enthralling plunge down Shelob's Revenge. Shelob's is a lightning fast and smooth bit of single-track—one of my favourite runs.

Route two heads out towards Reedy Dam and Centaur Road. Combine it with route one and you'll cover about 20km. This is a relatively challenging circuit that can take two to three hours.

Route three provides an alternate descent to the more easterly Kalianna trails when joined with either route one or two. It then returns to Range Road via Schweppes and Easy Up. Watch out for Terminated and the black diamond rated Final Terms trails which can be very tricky.

On the eastern side of the range the easier green-rated trails include Lower Goat Track, Hard Up and Easy Up. Intermediate trails include Roxy's, Low Range, Intestine, Dirt Luge, Twister, Shelob's Revenge, Sunday Picnic, Terminated, Schweppes and Home Run. If you're an advanced rider and after a technical challenge, No More Secrets, Glock, The Castle and Final Terms are rated as black diamond under the IMBA trail guidelines.

There's also another dozen or so challenging trails at the northern section of Nail Can. This area is also fairly rocky so you'll quickly improve your technical climbing and descending skills as you negotiate demanding trails like Mine Your Line, Daybreak and Pointy Rock.

The best access point to the reserve is at the end of Range Road (off Logan Road) where there is sufficient parking and an information board. There are also a few car parks and another information board at the Gap Road access point. Stronger riders willing to tackle a steep incline can also access the ridge trail from the top of Pemberton Street.

The northern section of the reserve can be accessed via the small car park on Centaur Road where it intersects the Ridge Trail.

### TOURIST TRAIL

Want to explore the local sights? Here's a little post-ride jaunt that'll give you a look at some of Albury's better-known attractions.

From the eastern MTB trails, follow the Ridge Trail south. A steep decent will lead you past another water tank and the trail finishes a further 200 metres on at Pemberton Street. Cross the road and continue towards the big white tower that overlooks the town—this is the War Memorial on Monument Hill. Erected in 1924, the War Memorial offers impressive views of Albury-Wodonga and dominates the main street (Dean Street). Dedicated to the men and women who served in World War I, it is one of the best-known war memorials in Australia.

From the Monument Hill Lookout it's only a couple of kilometres to Noreuil Park, which is another great spot to take a break and recharge. Continue down Gulson Road at the back of the monument and then cross Padman Drive. Turn left down the track at Mates Park which then links up with the Murray River walking/bike path.

Hovell Tree Park is a short ride along the river. It's here you can retrace the steps of famous explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell. From here the Hume and

Hovell Walking Track stretches over 440km to Yass. Unfortunately, bike riding is limited to the fire trails and bikes must be carried on the singletracks.

After a few hundred metres the riverside path leads to Noreuil Park. Close to Albury's city centre, Noreuil Park is a popular hangout for locals during the summer months. Shade provided from

**Nail Can Hill has good signage with the trail difficulty indicated according to IMBA standards. Photo: Craig Sheather**



Beechworth has an excellent 10km trail loop that's packed with features; rollovers, berms and small drops.



The War Memorial on Monument Hill is one of the best-known in the country.



Photo: Craig Shether

the canopies of the magnificent Plane Trees makes for an ideal spot to chill. The seasonal River Deck Café provides a picturesque setting to enjoy a coffee or a bite to eat and you'd also be missing out if you didn't take a dip in the iconic Murray River.

### HUNCHBACK HILL

Across the river in Wodonga is the Hunchback Hill Mountain Bike Park. Access is at the western end of Felltimber Creek Road. These trails are relatively new but improving all the time. Recent additions include a jump track that offers alternate lines—either rollable B-lines or gap jumps. There's also two cross-country loops; one big, one smaller. The climb to the summit involves a few technical switchbacks and some tricky manoeuvring over rocky outcrops. There's only about 7km of trails at Hunchy (as locals call it) but if you have the time it's a nice alternative to Nail Can.

The AWMTB group do a great job in maintaining and improving the trails at both Nail Can and Hunchback Hill. They regularly organise working days with dedicated local volunteers to upgrade track conditions and build new lines and obstacles.

Visitors to the region are welcome to join in on the AWMTB events. The club holds frequent social rides, a monthly club XC event, women's rides and several DH races throughout the year. There are also 'dirt crits' held most Wednesday evenings over summer. A few bigger events are now coming to town, like the June 'Six Hour' which is part of the Victorian XC Enduro Series and there's also the long established Nail Can Hill race which begins with a gruelling climb for cash and finishes with exciting singletrack.

AWMTB membership is currently just over 250 and is constantly growing. Its president Scott Hanckel believes Nail Can's appeal lies in its location and trail variety; "The reserve is close to the heart of the city with great beginner loops and still offers enough for experienced riders to challenge themselves through the rock gardens." The club is always welcoming

new members and visiting riders, so get in touch via the AWMTB website if you want to hook up with them.

Next up the club is hoping to gain control of a parcel of land to use as an event centre for major cross-country races. With such a proactive and hard working club behind it, you're sure to be hearing more about Nail Can Hill in the coming years.

### HIGH COUNTRY RAIL TRAIL

Only 15km east of the twin cities is Lake Hume, popular for all kinds of water sports and sightseeing. Following the lake's shoreline, the High Country Rail Trail is an easy ride for beginners and families. Located on the old railway line between Wodonga and Cudgewa, the disused rail easement has been stripped of rails and sleepers. Stretching for nearly 45km along the lake's foreshore, it is regarded as one of the most spectacular rail trails in Australia.

The Rail Trail is a great way to explore Lake Hume and understand its significant history. Construction began in November 1919 and was completed in 1936. Horse power, steam engines and manual labour were used to complete the work. When the project was finished it was the biggest dam in the southern hemisphere and one of the largest in the world at the time. It was hailed alongside Sydney Harbour Bridge as one of the mightiest Australian structures of the inter-war years. When full, the dam holds a maximum of 3,005,000 mega-litres; about six times the capacity of Sydney Harbour.

The Sandy Creek Bridge offers a viewing platform at the Tallangatta end where riders can stop to take in the breathtaking panoramic views of the Lake Hume and surrounding countryside.

### BEECHWORTH

The historic town of Beechworth is about a 40-minute drive from Albury in the North East of Victoria. The region is geographically diverse, with soaring winter snow-capped mountains, tree-covered ranges, charming lakes, wild

rivers and tranquil rural farmlands. The well-preserved town is famous for its expansion during the gold rush days of the mid-1850s, when people flocked from far and wide to find their fortune.

Beechworth's many historical buildings are perfectly maintained and the community has evolved into a popular tourist destination and growing wine-producing hub.

Beechworth is also well known for its association with the famous bushranger Ned Kelly. Australia's most recognised outlaw, Ned spent time in the town prison and fought a legendary boxing bout with Isaiah 'Wild' Wright at the rear of a local hotel. Members of the Kelly Gang, Aaron Sherritt and Joe Byrne, came from the nearby Woolshed goldmining camp.

Located on Alma Road, just a few minutes out of town, is the Beechworth Mountain Bike Park. It offers a good mix of trails; you'll find a couple of cross-country loops (intermediate and easy), a jump course and a short downhill track.

The entire intermediate cross-country loop is just over 10km long and will keep you busy with plenty of trail variety and obstacles. A few laps of this circuit will certainly get your heart racing. Beginners will appreciate the 1.2km-long green loop; it starts off very gently and the obstacles increase in size and frequency as you progress around the track—it's great for skills development. The green loop also serves as an excellent warm up for more experienced riders.

### FLAME TREES

On the other side of Beechworth, the first part of the Flame Trees Trail has been constructed next to the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail. The initial 7km section was designed and built by World Trail with the support of Correctional Services Victoria and local trail builders. Classified as easy, the track runs off both sides of the rail trail to form an interesting loop. It begins about 500 metres south of the Diffey Road/Rail Trail junction where there's a small car park. From town it's a cruisy 5km ride along the rail trail to access the Flame Trees circuit.



There are plans to lengthen the trail and when finished, the entire Flame Trees Trail round trip will extend for 40km from Beechworth to Everton beside the rail trail. Additional sections will be constructed to change the start of the trail nearer to Beechworth and to expand the segments that presently cross back to the rail trail.

### FINE FOOD TRAIL

If you've got the time and appreciate good food, it's worth exploring more of the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail. It links Wangaratta, Beechworth, Rutherglen and Bright with over 100km of off-road trails, traveling through native bushland, tranquil farmland, hidden valleys and stunning mountain ranges. Along the way you'll have the opportunity to sample some of Australia's finest gourmet produce, renowned wines and handcrafted beer. It's an easy-going and relaxed ride with nothing overly challenging or difficult. However a nice cheese platter, a good drop of wine or a cold boutique beer

will make it well worth the effort.

Once you've had a shot at the Beechworth trails there's a few things you need to check out around town. Woolshed Falls is a great spot to cool off in the water that cascades from one rock pool to the next. The unforgettable lolly shop will leave you acting like an excited kid, and don't forget to indulge at the famous Beechworth Bakery. If you are keen for a drink there are plenty of old country pubs as well as some boutique restaurants and bars. However, my favourite drinking hole is the Bridge Road Brewery. Located in a 150-year-old coach house, the brewery is regarded as one of Australia's benchmark craft beer producers. They offer an excellent range of regular and seasonal beers and their gourmet pizzas are to die for. 

**Article by Craig Sheather  
Photography by Tony Pincan**

## General Information

### GETTING THERE

Albury is 550km from Sydney, 325km from Melbourne and 340km from Canberra.

Direct flights are available from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.

Trains travelling between Melbourne and Sydney stop at Albury and the Italianate style railway station, built in 1881, features Australia's longest covered platform!

Albury/Wodonga is a great base for trips to the snowfields and high country areas of Victoria and NSW. It's also close to the Rutherglen vineyards, the Upper Murray and historic gold mining towns.

### ACCOMMODATION

Albury and Wodonga both have a huge range of accommodation options to suit all tastes and budgets including hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, serviced apartments, and caravan parks. [www.alburywodongaaustralia.com.au](http://www.alburywodongaaustralia.com.au)

When deciding where to stay, keep in mind that Albury has a more interesting city centre with a lot more historical buildings and a livelier restaurant and pub scene. The historic Soden's Hotel and lively Paddy's (New Albury Hotel) both serve up a good meal and have a range of quality beers on tap.

Beechworth offers bed and breakfast cottages, boutique guesthouses, hotels, motels, old world pubs, cabins and caravan parks. The Lake Sambell Caravan Park is located close to the town centre and mountain bike park. [www.beechworth.com](http://www.beechworth.com).

### WHEN TO VISIT

Albury has a warm, temperate, four-season climate, with very warm to hot summers and cool to mild winters. In summer, the daytime temperature can soar to over 40 degrees so it's best to ride in the early mornings and evenings during these heat waves. It won't get

dark until about 9pm throughout daylight savings so you will have plenty of time to explore the trails.

Frosts are common in winter when overnight temperatures fall below zero. Rain can occur all year round, but most of it falls in the winter months. July receives the most rainfall.

### BIKE SHOPS & CLUBS

The Full Cycle (Macauley Street) and Pushy's Bike Warehouse (Young Street) are both conveniently located around the corner from each other in central Albury.

The Bicycle Superstore is situated on Urana Road in Lavington, a northern suburb of Albury.

Albury Wodonga Mountain Bikers (AWMTB) [www.alburywodongamb.org.au](http://www.alburywodongamb.org.au).  
Beechworth Chain Gang (BCG) [www.beechworthchaingang.com](http://www.beechworthchaingang.com).