



Media Release – A Hidden Gem Exposed for Off-Road Trail

What: Clearing the way for a Wallan to Kilmore Trail, by Community Action.

Photos: As attached

Adjacent to Hidden Valley and Wallan, there's a hidden natural gem that has only recently given up its secret to thirty-two community volunteers. Locked away for more than 50 years, a section of the former Heathcote Junction to Bendigo railway line was revealed when these volunteers came together for a working bee on Sunday 21 November to clear a pathway along a 1.2km section.



Clearing the former railway alignment for the new trail. Photo: Lindsay Clay

The working bee's aim was to uncover a section of former railway line, as a start to creating an off-road trail Wallan to Kilmore and the proposed Wallan to Heathcote Rail Trail. Members from the Mitchell Bicycle Users Group, the Wallan Environment Group, the Merri Creek Management Committee, the Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail, cycling associates of Wheelhouse Bikes, and a Rail Trails Australia representative from Melbourne all came together ready for action. The Mitchell Shire CEO and a South Ward Councillor also paid a visit.



This former railway easement is situated right at the top of the Great Dividing Range, and having been 'locked up' for more than half a century has allowed remnant native tree and plant species to survive. It is now a contrasting reminder of what the adjoining cleared farmland and urban developed area once was, but along with these important remnants are also many invasive plants and woody weeds.



Volunteers remove Briar Rose, Blackberry and Cape Broom. Photos: Chris Cobern

Some of the volunteers cleared fallen timber from the old railway alignment, as well as cleaning up weed and plant growth for the trail. Others used rakes and their hands to clear the trail of sticks, fallen timber and debris up to the cutting near where the former Leslie Railway Station was once sited. Members of the Wallan Environment Group and the Merri Creek Management Committee spent their time dealing with a



small portion of the woody weeds along the reserve, together with picking up litter blown into the reserve from adjacent areas.

“Wallan has a shortage of public open space, so working within this reserve is a chance to save it for public use” said Claudia James, Chair of the Wallan Environment Group. “This reserve of land offers the opportunity for locals to easily access an area which is completely surrounded by nature. The cleared track is both flat and has a solid base so making it a safe place for locals to cycle, especially children with limited cycling experience, as well as being suitable for organised wild flower walks in Spring”.

Upper Merri Landcare Facilitator Chris Cobern assisting at the working bee said “Cleaning up the Briar Rose, Blackberry and Cape Broom plus creating this trail section will hopefully lead to reduced invasive weeds and trail users’ pleasant experiences for improved walking/riding connections with the rest of Hidden Valley and central Wallan, even perhaps to an extended Merri Creek Trail in the future!”



Volunteers take time out to enjoy the cleared trail section. Photo: Gavin Gardiner

Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail group’s spokesperson Lindsay Clay said “The work has created a basic trail, which can be used by the local people along this section of VicTrack land. I understand that Mitchell Shire Council is negotiating a lease from VicTrack, so that this land can be permanently used for recreational purposes”.

“This is a fantastic development, but it’s only the start. If Mitchell Shire were to also lease a similar tract of land closer to Kilmore, it would enable the community minded people here today to very quickly create a basic trail all the way from Wallan to Kilmore without impacting on any privately owned land. Bearing in mind the lack of recreational facilities in this rapidly growing area, this can only be of great overall benefit to the local community” Mr Clay said.