

Freeminers Master Plan

2024 onwards



Freeminers Trail - background and purpose of this plan

Freeminers, originally known as the FoDCA (Forest of Dean Cycle Association) trail, has continued to develop over the years to provide a challenging and varied cross country trail. Currently made up of 3 loops, it provides riders with varied length options and alternative routes taking in different parts of the forest. The Adit loop was hand-built by the Dean Trail Volunteers (DTV) and opened in September 2022. Over approximately the past 10 years DTV have been largely responsible for the maintenance of the trail with very little contractor supported work. Parts of the trail have seen issues with water management and erosion leaving some sections almost unrideable during the winter months.

The purpose of this plan is to set out our aims and ambitions for the Freeminers trail. How and where improvements could be made and where changes to the route could resolve existing issues.

Overall vision

Our aim is to create an exciting red grade cross-country (XC) trail worthy of sitting alongside the award winning Verderers blue grade trail. Keeping the natural feel of the trail overall whilst including some manmade features to enhance those already present. We will address the issues with water management by re-assessing where the trail is located and how drainage can work better to provide a trail that can be ridden year round. The plan will provide areas for progression along the route and opportunity for riders to test their skills.

The other main focus of the project will be quality over quantity, to identify one core loop reducing the maintenance requirements. Some sections of trail may be retired, by removing signage, breaking up the trail surface and remove any built features allowing the forest to reclaim those areas.

Dates have not been given for completion of this project as progress will be dependent on many factors including but not limited to: Forestry England budgets, DTV fundraising, volunteer participation, contractor availability and planned forestry works. It is anticipated that this plan will be carried out in phases over several years.

A new route for Freeminers

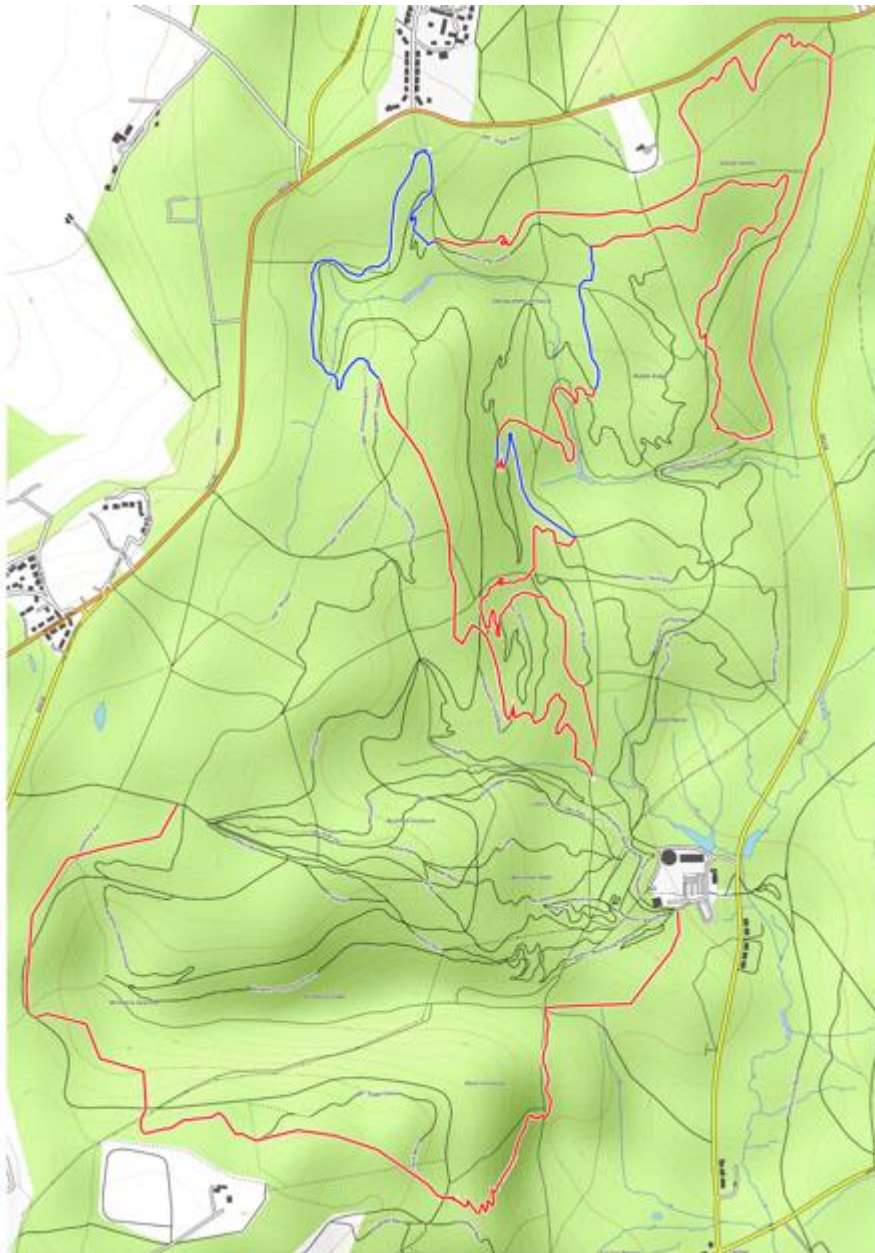
A focus group of riders brought together by DTV were consulted on 3 possible new route options:

Option 1: A classic loop taking in the best bits of the existing Freeminers, Freeminers extension and Adit trails. This would use sections of Verderers to avoid the poor quality sections of singletrack on the existing routes. It would initially mean that approximately 5km trail would be diverted onto Verderers or forest road, until new red grade sections could be built. TNT and Bear trap would become the final descent of the Freeminers trail with the Adit name removed as it would no longer be needed.



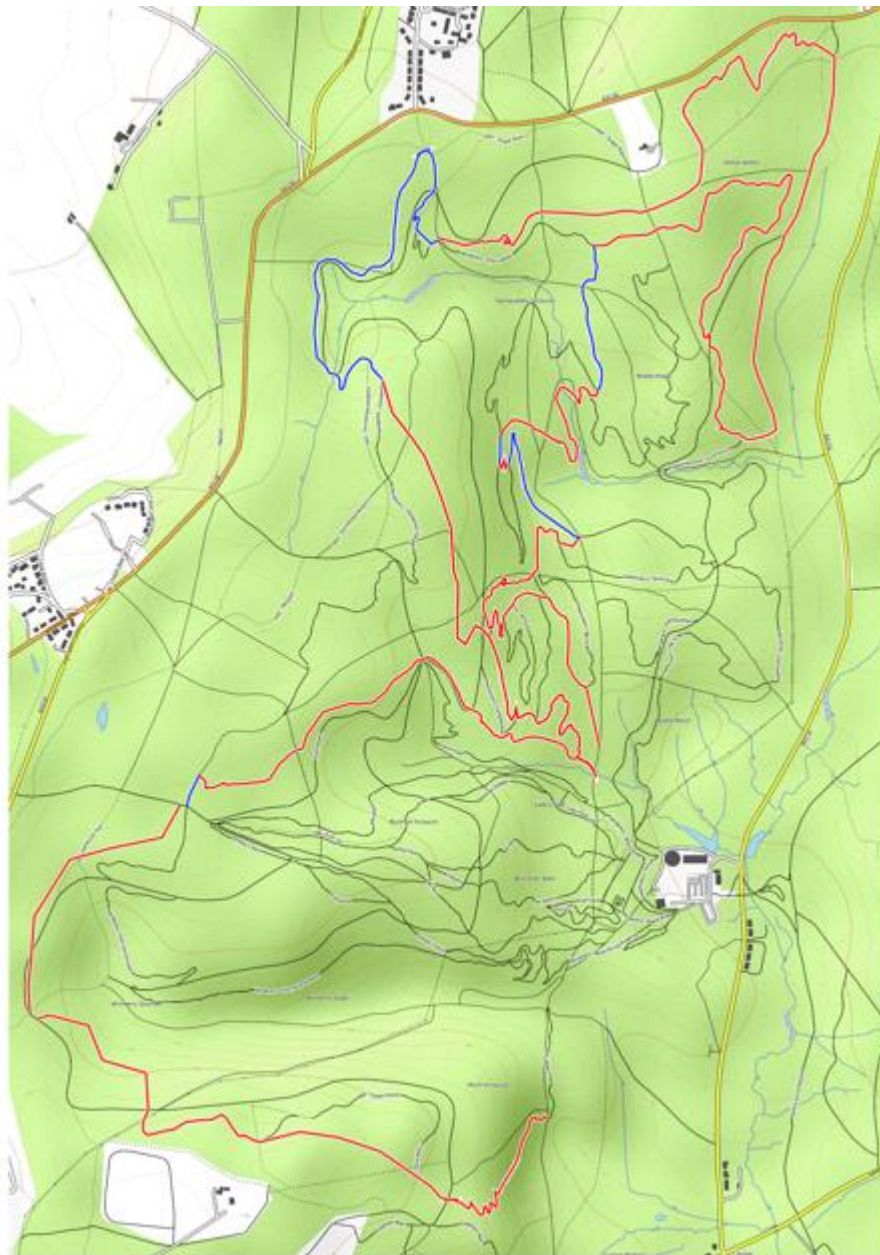
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Option 2: Bone Yard & Adit. This would be a shorter overall loop with an extension to the Bone yard section of Freeminers to create a new final descent. The option to turn off onto Adit would still be there but would only be signposted from the push up track to get riders over to the Howlers Hill area where the final descent of Adit (TNT & Bear trap) is. The poor quality parts of Freeminers with maintenance issues would be removed from the route.



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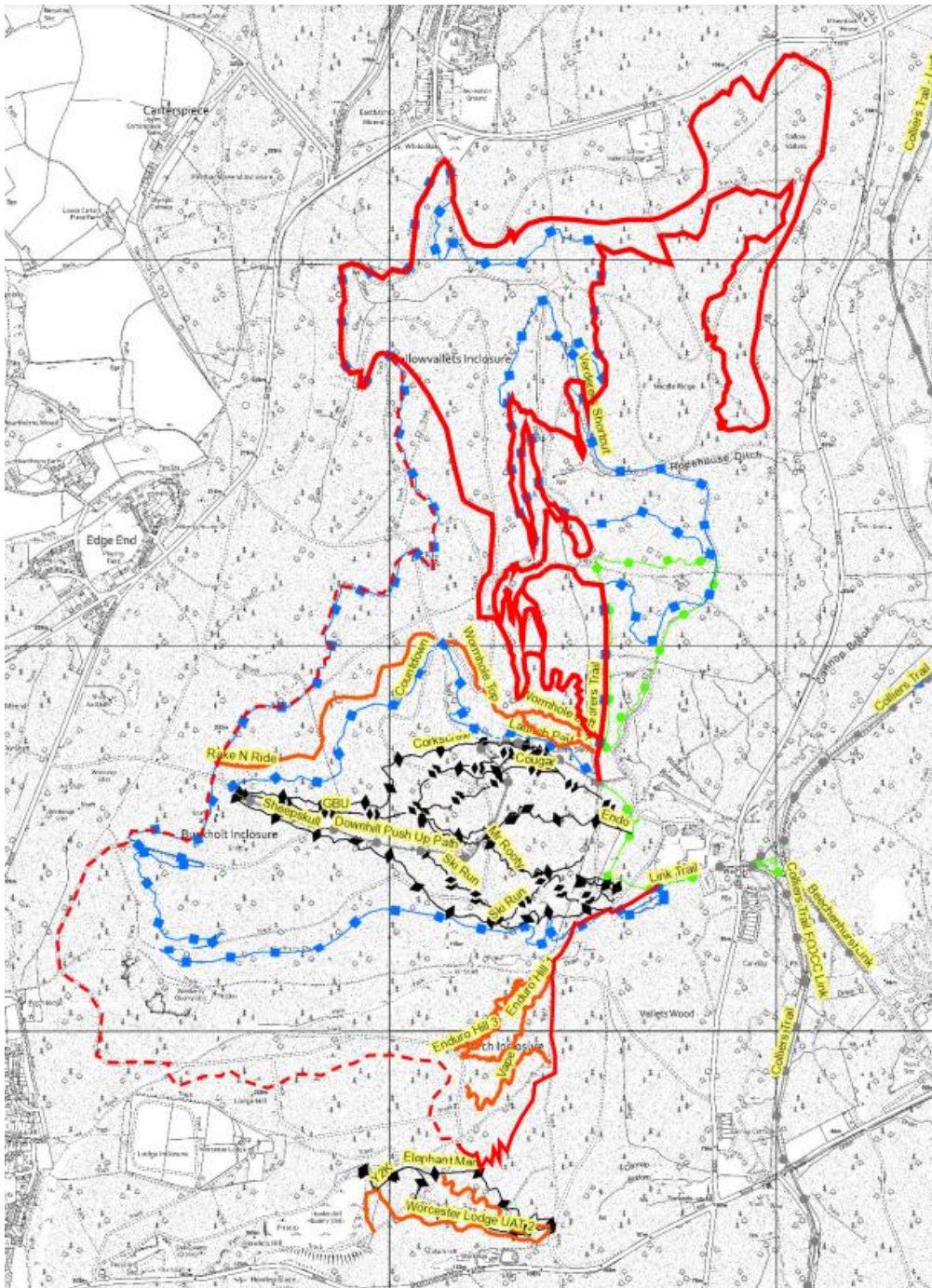
Option 3: Figure of 8 that would see Adit and TNT reversed and used as a climb for the first half of the route. The first descent would then use a currently un-waymarked trail to take riders back down and onto the existing start of Freeminers. It would still require a new final descent to be built at the end of Bone yard. This option would not reduce the maintenance responsibility by as much as the others.



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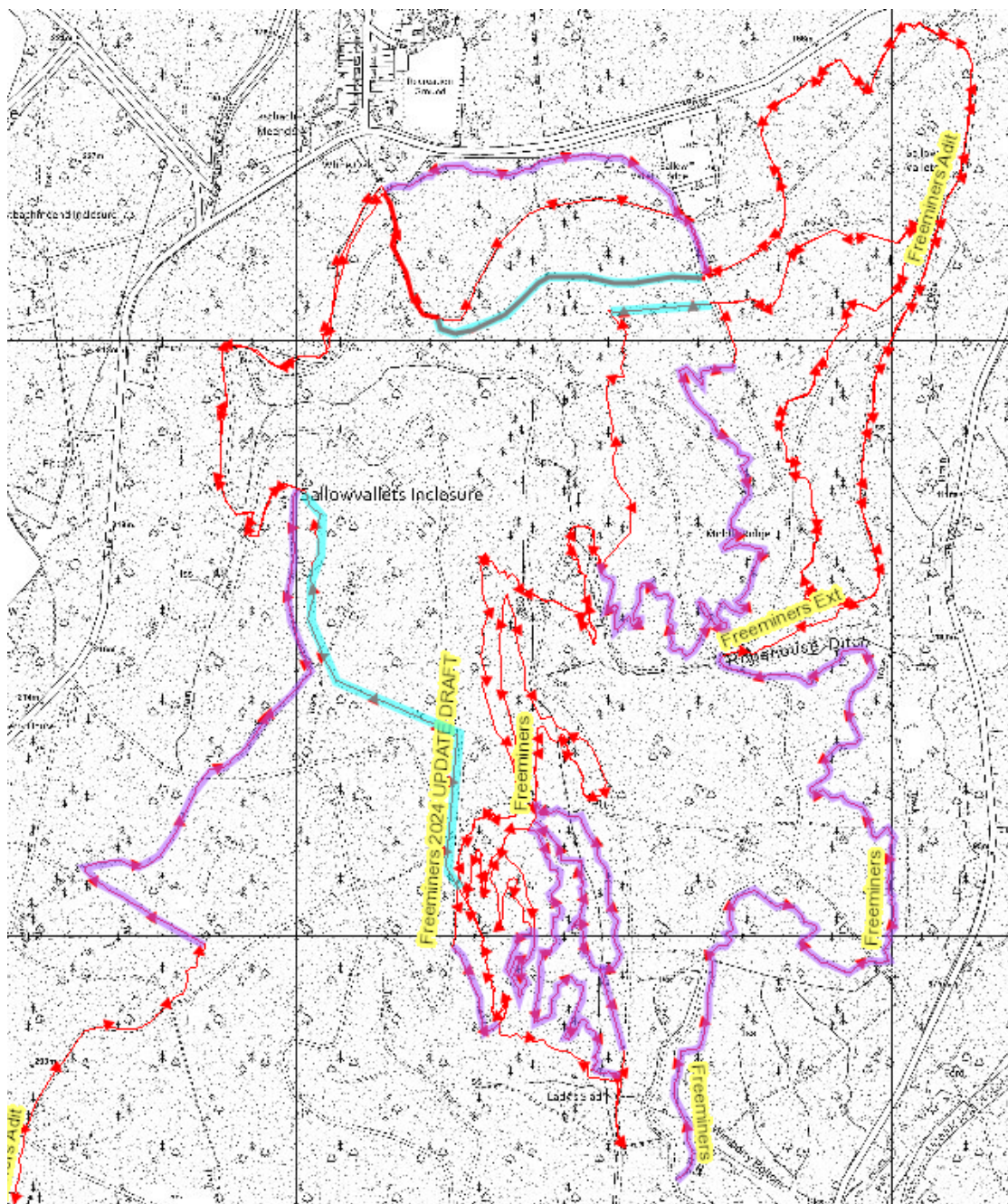
Decision

Following feedback from the group it was decided that Option 2 would provide the best experience for riders and significantly reduce the maintenance responsibilities for DTV and Forestry England. The poor quality and least sustainable sections would be removed. This option would also create an exciting opportunity for the volunteers to be involved in creating new sections of trail, working with Forestry England and trail contractors to complete the works and focus on quality not quantity.



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Everything past post 116 would no longer form part of the Freeminers trail. The trail section containing the wooden drops and “Nessie” features would also be removed from the route leaving a corridor to take a new green grade route through. 106-110 would also be re-routed as this section suffers from very poor drainage causing the trail to become waterlogged for large parts of the year. All of this would mean that the different length red grade only trail options would no longer be on offer, but with the use of a map and the option to turn on and off of the Verderers trail riders would still be able to make their own route and this would not be discouraged. The purple sections on the map below will be removed from the main route.



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The first area of Freeminers to be re-worked will be from the start of the trail to the end of the first descent from post 86. This will take in the line of table top jumps that are in need of rebuilding. The climb will be altered allowing riders to take a more direct route to the top of the hill past a new optional skills area. This will consist of a line of drops and jumps to replace the worn table tops. The descent from post 86 will be rebuilt putting shape back into the berms and adding features where appropriate leaving the lower half to retain a more natural feel until riders reach the turn onto the Forest road.

In altering the route of the climb this will allow us to separate out Bone yard ready to form this into the new final descent of the Freeminers trail.

The new route will share 3 sections with the Verderers trail. This will help to avoid areas where issues with drainage, trail quality or user conflict have been present in the past.

Each new and existing section of the trail will be looked at individually to see where improvements can be made, or features added. Stone features will be the preference as they will require little long term maintenance. Wood and other materials will be considered where the location or trail style dictates. Surfacing materials may also be used in areas of high wear or where erosion/drainage have been an issue. This will be done in such a way that the natural feel of the trail is retained as much as possible.