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Use of Black Mountain for orienteering and other competitive activities

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Abstract. Black Mountain has been popular for a range of competitive activities throughout the period of its gazettal as a Reserve. The open forest on the lower slopes has been popular for orienteering since 1971, with very detailed maps of the area prepared and parts of the reserve used for several events each year. The related sport of rogaining, which extends over longer periods, has used Black Mountain as part of the course on urban rogaines ('Metrogaines') every few years. Various running competitions, some going up the mountain or even up Black Mountain Tower, and some using the tracks on the lower slopes, have been popular over many years. Triathlons and duathlons have used some of the tracks for running or mountainbike riding as part of the course, and various adventure races have passed through the reserve. The pattern of use has changed over the years due to roadworks such as Parkes Way extension and upgrading of Caswell Drive affecting the assembly areas used for some events.

Introduction

The location and environment of Black Mountain have led to it becoming popular for a range of competitive activities since the 1960s. The open forest on the lower slopes makes it particularly attractive for orienteering and rogaining. The network of management tracks and walking tracks is well suited to cross-country running, while the management tracks are used also for mountain biking, generally as part of a longer course. The elevation of the mountain provides an additional challenge for those who enjoy running uphill, and even Black Mountain Tower has been used for stair-climbing races.

Orienteering

The Black Mountain area was first used for an informal orienteering activity organised for the Canberra Bushwalking Club in the mid-1960s, but it was not until 1971 that it began to be used for orienteering on a regular basis.

Orienteering as a community sport was introduced to Canberra in May 1971 by the President of the newly formed Orienteering Federation of Australia, David Hogg, who had moved from Melbourne to Canberra earlier that year. With the support of the Canberra College of Advanced Education Outdoors Club, he organised the first public orienteering event in Canberra on 16 May 1971 at Black Mountain. The choice of Black Mountain for the event was indirectly linked to the gazettal of Black Mountain Reserve, as the black-and-white map prepared for the event was based on one specially prepared to show the reserve around the time of its gazettal.

The courses set for that event started on Black Mountain Peninsula, crossed Lady Denman Drive where Parkes Way is now located, then climbed the steep southern side of the Mountain before meandering through more gentle forest terrain and returning along Lady Denman Drive. The event attracted 20 participants, including a group of Duntroon Royal Military College cadets.

Black Mountain was used for another orienteering event later that year, then in late 1972 for a non-competitive nature trail orienteering course which started and finished at the picnic area south of the summit. In 1973, a major change to Australian orienteering began, with very detailed and accurate coloured maps replacing the black-and-white versions that were generally redrawn from existing government maps and were limited in their accuracy and level of detail. Without one of these new coloured maps, orienteering on Black Mountain ceased temporarily. The situation changed again in 1981, when the first coloured orienteering map of the area was completed, and was used for the ACT

Schools Orienteering Championships. Since then, there have been five major revisions of the map, plus other minor updating, reflecting new developments, changes to vegetation, and the dynamic appearance and disappearance of termite mounds, most of which are individually mapped as navigational features.

In 2001, a special extended map was prepared as a training map for international orienteers who were accommodated at the Australian Institute of Sport during a World Cup series based in Canberra. The map covered Black Mountain, the forest in Aranda Bushland, Bruce Ridge and Gossan Hill, which together formed part of the continuous Black Mountain forest area prior to the development of Belconnen. This extended map was used also for local events over the next few years.

Orienteering in Black Mountain Reserve has been confined mainly to the gentler slopes in the northern and western parts of the reserve. The steep slopes around the summit and on the southern and eastern sides of the mountain have not been mapped in detail and are not used for orienteering.

Black Mountain Reserve has been used for orienteering on a fairly regular basis since 1981, initially for just one event per year on the regular Sunday program. As the local orienteering program was diversified to include Saturday, Wednesday lunchtime, summer twilight and occasional night events, the number of events using Black Mountain increased. These events were spread over various parts of the reserve, with each event having different courses, thus avoiding repetitive impacts.

Current use of Black Mountain by Orienteering ACT typically involves two events per year with 150 to 200 participants and two smaller events with 20 to 30 participants.

In addition to public orienteering events organised through Orienteering ACT (formerly ACT Orienteering Association), various schools, as well as Canberra-based members of the defence forces, have used the reserve for their own small orienteering events on occasions.

The special significance of Black Mountain in Canberra's orienteering history was recognised in May 1992, when it was the venue for an event to celebrate the 21st birthday of the establishment of orienteering locally. In May 2011, the 40th anniversary of orienteering in Canberra was celebrated with a rerun of sections of the original May 1971 course, although parts of the course were no longer accessible due to the presence of Parkes Way along the southern foot of the mountain.

Rogaining

The sport of rogaining, which evolved in Victoria in the 1970s from university 24-hour navigational competitions, spread to Canberra in 1984. While it employs similar map reading skills to orienteering, rogaining extends over longer periods (typically 6 to 24 hours) and over much larger areas. A popular event on the ACT rogaining calendar is the annual 6-hour Metrogaine, held in urban areas and usually including parts of the course in Canberra Nature Park reserves.

The first urban rogaine in Canberra, described as the 'Canbrogaine', was held in April 1985 and, while there were no control locations in Black Mountain Reserve, some competitors would have traversed the reserve en route to or from a control near one of the reservoirs on Bruce Ridge.

Black Mountain featured in the Three Peaks Metrogaine in 1998 and has been included in the course area every two or three years when the Metrogaine was based in North Canberra or Belconnen. Black Mountain and surrounding areas were used for a 4-hour night Rogaine in 2017, and for the occasional training exercise, but the reserve is too small to support a full-scale rogaine in its own right.

Running competitions

Running competitions in the Black Mountain area have been conducted by several organisations over the years, with one event held as early as 1968. Various courses starting on the lower western slopes were used for ACT Cross Country Club events from May 1976. Initially these started from an assembly area at the end of Wangara Street, Aranda, but later moved to Rani Road. In the 1970s, a small group from CSIRO, who trained regularly in Black Mountain Reserve, established the CSIRO

Black Mountain Run on the eastern side of the mountain, using a course which included 'Little Black Mountain'. That event is still held annually.

The most challenging runs on Black Mountain take runners to the summit. The most regular of these is the Black Mountain Run Up, held on the third Tuesday of each month since January 2006. It starts behind the Botanic Gardens then follows Frith Road and the Summit Track to the top of the mountain, typically attracting about 15 to 20 participants of various levels of fitness. From 1991 to 2013, the Woden Harriers Athletics Club conducted the Black Mountain Challenge as an annual fundraiser over a 5 km course to the summit. The course started at Black Mountain Peninsula, followed the cycle path to Clunies Ross Street, then went up Black Mountain Drive, which is outside the formal reserve boundary, to Telstra Tower. Black Mountain also featured in the 34 km Three Peaks Race held in the early 1990s, until this was abandoned due to problems with interference with direction signs. It was subsequently resurrected as a Two Peaks Race, featuring Mounts Ainslie and Majura.

In May 1999, steep fire trails on the western side of Black Mountain Reserve were used for the ACT Mountain Running Championships, with the longest course requiring runners to scale Black Mountain three times.

The greatest height achieved by runners on Black Mountain came during the annual Great Tower Race, a stair-climbing race first held up Telstra Tower in 1994 and continuing for several years. In 2010, Telstra Tower was used for the Camp Quality Verti-cool Challenge, a fundraising event for Camp Quality. The following year the race also included an option in which competitors ran up fire trails from the foot of the mountain before climbing the tower, the Ultimate Verti-cool Challenge.

Triathlons, duathlons and adventure races

Black Mountain Reserve has been included as part of the course for various other competitions involving elements of running, orienteering/rogaining or mountain bike riding (on management tracks). The annual Sri Chinmoy Off-road Duathlon, first held in 2005, includes a mountain bike leg on management tracks and a running leg which partly uses walking tracks. One mountain bike leg of the annual Sri Chinmoy Triple Triathlon, first held in November 1996, following a trial in late 1995, follows management tracks as it loops through the reserve en route from Lake Ginninderra to Watson. The Sri Chinmoy Canberra Trail Ultra, first held in 2013 as a 100 km race to celebrate the Centenary of Canberra and extended by 1 km each year, passes through Black Mountain Reserve on tracks.

Between 2004 and 2010, adventure races conducted most years by AROC Sport and occasionally by other organisations passed through Black Mountain Reserve.

Impacts of road construction on group competitions

During the 1970s when Black Mountain Reserve began to be used regularly for orienteering and running events, the reserve was bounded by Belconnen Way to the north and Caswell Drive to the west, and was readily accessible from Black Mountain Peninsula. Between 1977 and 1980, the construction of the Parkes Way extension (Molonglo Arterial), William Hovell Drive and the original Glenloch Interchange, which connected those roads with a realigned Caswell Drive, proved beneficial for the conduct of large competitions as the works left a stub of the former Caswell Drive, renamed Rani Road, as a high capacity parking area for use by orienteering and running events. The availability of that facility tended to focus such events on that area, although other locations such as Frith Road were also used.

When the Gungahlin Drive Extension project commenced in 2004, the upgrading of Caswell Drive and Glenloch Interchange saw Rani Road being replaced by the ramp from Caswell Drive to Parkes Way, and also severed the direct access between assembly areas in Aranda and Black Mountain Reserve. Use of Black Mountain Reserve from the west for large group activities then became focused on the new car park provided at the end of the former William Hovell Drive alignment, with access to the Reserve via the cycle path under Caswell Drive.

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