Restoring kunanyi / Mt Wellington's Great Short Walk, Hobart, Tasmania

Alister Clark. Project Manager, City of Hobart, Tasmania

Keywords: Organ Pipes Track, Pinnacle Track.

1 Introduction

Over the last 2 years the City of Hobart has restored the historic Organ Pipes and Pinnacle Tracks on kunanyi / Mount Wellington, Tasmania. As Tasmania's premier Great Short Walk within 30 mins of Hobarts CBD, the tracks are well used by the local community and visitors, providing spectacular views of Hobart, the Organ Pipes and the Derwent Estuary. Originally built in the early 1900s, the tracks provide a 2-3 hour walk suitable for people with some bushwalking experience and average fitness, along an historic track in a sub-alpine environment. Since original construction water, snow, and mass movement had eroded the track surface and collapsed embankment walls. Installation of a telecommunications cable in the 1960s caused extensive damage to the Pinnacle Track. Walkers were presented with a degraded asset that was difficult and at times unsafe to navigate. This presentation will focus on the project management challenges involved in the restoration project, which included balancing environmental, heritage, and safety issues, addressing multiple stakeholder perspectives, and construction in an alpine conservation environment across boulder fields using helicopters for materials transport.

2 Project Planning

In 2015, Mick Hawkins, a local bushwalking enthusiast, took influential Tasmanians, including the Governor, Lord Mayor and Director of Parks along the walks to secure funding for Great Short Walk rejuvenation project. Detailed planning for the Great Short Walk project was initiated in 2016 and construction undertaken from 2017 to 2019.

Planning meetings with multiple stakeholders established the desired outcome for restoration, articulated in a track vision and objectives. To honour the track's historic heritage values, works were designed using the same style, techniques and materials as the original works. Translation of the track vision and objectives into specific features that track workers could construct was achieved through design drawings and conceptual mock-ups. Design drawings detailed treatments for typical situations, not all situations. In the conceptual mock-ups, a before photo was placed next to a mock-up of the intended outcome, and a commentary highlighted the salient aspects. This communicated the look and feel of the intended outcome, very hard to capture in drawings. The pictures in the mock-up were used to identify typical situations on the track, and aspects such as track texture and width, boulder alignment and orientation.

Threatened species were mapped and avoided, disturbed areas rehabilitated and finished works carefully blended in with the surrounding environment. As Wellington Park is heavily used by visitors, helicopter operations required extensive planning and close management. Geo-technical assessments prior to works provided guidance on critical boulder hazards. Due to heritage and location constraints, the only machinery used on the tracks were power barrows.

3 Construction

Track restoration techniques included dry stone walling, massive boulder walling, rock paving, pitching and gravelling. Gravel surfaces were used below 12%, with some gravel won from local borrow pits. Borrow pits had to be out of sight from the track and with a zig zagged access to limit the visual impact. Vegetation was removed with top soil and surface organic matter saved for pit rehabilitation. After the pits were closed they were filled with rock or rubble and covered with the saved top soil and surface organic matter.

To armour steeper sections, the proportion of rock armouring was progressively increased. Rock paving was used on gradients up to 20%, and pitching on steeper slopes. Crossing boulder and talus fields involved hand winching of rocks up to 10 tonnes. Rock for pitching, paving and walling was won from the track surface and collected from the surrounding areas. To gain sufficient quantities some rock and gravel had to be bagged away from the track and then transported to the work site by helicopter. In 22 fly-days, helicopters transported 900 tonnes of rock and gravel onto the tracks at a cost of $190,000. The average delivery rate was four minutes per load, hence ensuring team members were prepared and ready was key to managing safe helicopter operations.

4 Conclusion

Throughout the project our systems for communication between track builders, supervisors, managers, planners and officers were refined. A project review undertaken after the first year resulted in re-organisation of the on-ground construction teams to deliver improved efficiencies and work quality. Works were completed in March 2019, with 4.15 kilometres of track restored through 35,000 hours of track labour and at an overall cost of $2.1 million.

Overall, the restoration works have improved the walking experience and provided a public asset that will endure for another 100 years. We have honoured the craftsmanship of the original track builders and ensured the tracks sit in, not on, the landscape. Successful delivery was achieved through effective collaboration between the many City of Hobart personnel, external contractors and consultants involved the project.