

Attention: Mr Howard Hendricks & Ms Nicky Schmidt
Mr Stephen Floyd

Subject: Submission to the TCMF Health and Wellbeing and Facilities workstreams

**Proposal by the Tokai District Riding Association (TDRA)
to the TCMF
Facilities and Health & Wellbeing workstreams
Horse riding facilities and trails**



The TDRA represents the horse riders who ride in the Tokai district. Most of the TDRA's members have horses that are stabled in or around the vicinity of the Park, and we rely on access to the Park for the space to ride and exercise our horses. The equestrian facilities and trails in the park also provide a platform for diverse equestrian communities from further afield to bring their horses to Tokai, providing a variety of experiences with horses for tourists, youth and other interested groups.

We hereby submit our proposal on behalf of our members for your consideration, in order to ensure that our members' interests and needs are protected and horse-riding takes its place alongside the interests and needs of all other interested groups, in the final framework.

1. There is a deep horse-riding heritage and an established constituency which depends on horse riding within the Table Mountain National Park for their recreation, health and wellbeing, and livelihood.

The ongoing daily care that horses require provides employment for a significant number of people associated with feeding, grooming, training, shoeing, treating, riding and exercising horses. In the challenging economic climate and current unemployment levels, it is critical that these jobs are not lost. The grooms, professionals and equine assistants who tend to horses are specialists, and do not generally have skills which could easily be adapted to other types of employment. As such it is critical that horse riding opportunities in the Park are enhanced, and more horses and horse riders are attracted to the district, and with them, employment for the diverse group of people associated with the care of horses. Any impairment to the access or ability to ride and exercise horses safely within the designated equestrian areas and facilities in the park, will have dire economic consequences for the broader equine community surrounding the park.

2. Horse riding and other recognized recreational activities in the park (such as walking, hiking and trail running) are mutually compatible / beneficial.

The experience of many walkers, hikers and families exploring the park is enhanced by the opportunity to interact with horse riders and their horses. Horse riders add to the safety of walkers, runners and hikers because they are regular users (due to the need to exercise their horses) and have a height advantage enabling them to see over and into the flora. Horse riders have proved their value on numerous occasions by reporting fires and evidence of illegal activities including arson and poaching.

The need to exercise horses regularly also ensures that horse riders are present in the less accessible areas of the park, which is valuable for monitoring and reporting unsafe activities.

The only user groups that pose a danger for horse riders are dog walkers (particularly where dogs are not on leads) and cyclists, particularly where cyclists are moving at speed or in close proximity to horses and/or there are blind corners. Horses that are startled, panic and bolt can

injure themselves, and if the rider falls, there is the danger of him/her being dragged and trampled under the horse's hooves. We therefore support the continued separation of equestrian areas and trails from the cycling areas/routes where possible, and the importance of education and signage. Where there are jeep tracks or trails which must be shared between cyclists and horse-riders in order to access different levels or areas of the park, we have tried (where-ever possible) to proposed alternative tracks or paths. Horse riders will generally prefer alternative paths where they can ride with confidence that they will not encounter cyclists. However, the shared trails (such as the jeep track (level 4 and 5) to Silvermine and the main cycle track in the upper park are important to maintain as shared tracks between cyclists and riders so that horse riding events (such as organized historic, cultural or commercial horse-riding events and trails) and the mounted police can access these routes and areas of the park.

3. Horse riders contribute to the maintenance of the Park

Apart from the funds generated by their "top tier" activity permit, horse riders (through the TDRA) fund and undertake continuous maintenance of the tracks used by horse riders and other user groups (including SANparks rangers) in the Park. This also benefits the authorized alien clearing, baboon monitoring and wood cutting industry whose vehicles and personnel utilize these tracks. Without the TDRA's tireless maintenance, the tracks in Upper Tokai would have become impassable for all users (including the SANParks vehicles). Horse riders have also undertaken and funded multiple alien clearing initiatives.

4. Horse riding is a healthy recreational activity in the Park.

Horse riding is a healthy way to enjoy nature, experience our beautiful park and have physical exercise, but for many of us, riding is so much more than a recreation or a sport - we live to ride. Horses are an essential part of our lives - riding is our reason for living.

Horse riding is one of very few recreational activities that can be enjoyed by all ages and genders. The benefits for physical, emotional and mental health have been well documented, and the contribution horse riding and a relationship with horses can make to the wellbeing of people from disadvantaged, rehabilitating and differently-abled communities is a subject of great interest and research. The South African Riding for the Disabled Association (SARDA) is an association run by volunteers, which provides therapeutic and recreational horse riding for people from previously disadvantaged communities living with disabilities. Horse-riding makes a profound difference to their mental, physical and social lives.

The appeal of horses and the opportunity to offer horse riding trails in the Park also represents an eco-tourism commercial opportunity as local and international tourists increasingly seek out unique experiences.

The equestrian trails in the lower, middle and upper park and a proposed arena are critical facilities for all these groups to be able to experience riding a horse.

4.1 The equestrian trails (as per the attached maps)

Over the years, horse riders have had the trails where we are allowed to ride, significantly reduced. We appreciate that we need to share the space and that there are spaces in the park that are now deemed inappropriate or dangerous for horse riding as the park has become more popular for other users. However, it is critical for the future of horses and riding in Tokai that the equestrian trails and the equestrian designated area (which we happily share with walkers, hikers and runners) is not further reduced.

The various trails and areas of the park are all important as they are suitable for different types of riding / horses, and different levels of competence of the rider.

The proposed equestrian maps indicate the tracks and trails that are already designated as equestrian, and we have proposed a small number of paths and trails (within the equestrian areas) in order to make them safer and to provide circular routes.

We take note that Tokai MTB have indicated their intention to propose a circular cycling route around the perimeter of the picnic site, which is currently a horse-riding transit route. This route provides horse riders with critical access between the middle and upper sections of the park and/or to stables in Sweet Valley and Zwaanswyk. The only other possible route that horse riders can use involves joining Tokai road and crossing the narrow bridge (just before the SANParks ticket office) – many riders try to avoid this due to the pressure of traffic and cyclists on the bridge. We are happy to support that the inside perimeter track of the picnic site is given over to cycling on condition that horse riders are permitted to have an equivalent track outside of the fence (thereby separating cyclists and horse riders with the fence). If we are not permitted to have an equivalent track outside of the picnic site fence then we propose that the horse-riding track alongside the picnic site fence remains as is, and the cycling track is shifted 20 meters or so towards the inside of the picnic site

As soon as these maps are approved, we will publish the various riding and walking trails, so that riders from the broader diverse equestrian community, walkers, hikers and tourists can utilize the facilities and enjoy the trails.

4.2 An equestrian arena (attached map for upper park and google earth photographs)

After the loss of the SHORA arena on Zwaanswyk road, junior or learner riders, or riders progressing in their equestrian discipline (dressage, jumping, eventing, endurance etc.) struggle to find a safe space to have lessons, practice and progress. Most equestrian properties do not have any space for an arena. We also anticipate that the South African Riding for the Disabled Association (SARDA) could be required to move from its current location in Constantia. If this occurs, a possible venue might be found adjacent to the park, in which case they will need access to a safe arena space.

We have identified the site of the old bowling green (behind the current TMNP finance dept and biodiversity social projects unit) that is not used at all currently, and would be an excellent venue to cater for horse boxes to turn and load/offload horses and to provide holding pens whilst horses are tacked up for a trail. The flat portion of the ground (60m x 60m) would be extremely suitable for a dressage arena (60m x 20m) and a jumping arena (60m x 40m) with a cross country track around the perimeter.

In order to achieve the vision of “A Park for all, forever” the Tokai Cecilia Management framework needs to provide for, protect and manage all activities and user groups in such a way that these activities can be safely and sustainably conducted to the benefit of the Park, the users of the Park and the communities that reside and work on the borders of the Park. Horses and horse-riding is an integral part of this vision. The attached maps and proposed arena will provide facilities for horse riding to continue and flourish in a sustainable way, alongside and compatible with the Park’s many other user groups and stakeholders.