



Australasian Parks and Leisure - Autumn 2014

SMALL PROJECT, GREAT OUTCOME: BARWON VALLEY DISC GOLF COURSE

The City of Greater Geelong, in partnership with the Geelong Disc Golf Club, recently installed the first disc golf course in the Greater Geelong region.

The course, located on the banks of Geelong's Barwon River, marks a further step to promote diversity and creative play within the city's parks and reserves.

What is disc golf?

"What a disc golf?"... accompanied by a puzzled expression, is the most common reaction received from first exposure to the sport. But it's really quite simple, in basic terms, the rules are much the same as regular golf except participants are aiming to throw a disc into a metal basket.

Each "hole" has a tee marker and set number of throws per hole. Experienced participants use discs with different characteristics as drivers, mid range and putters. A handicapping system much the same as regular golf is applied to competitive events.

While competition is fierce between experienced competitors, the focus is firmly on having fun and inclusive participation. Beginners are encouraged to bring an old frisbee and try the new course. The sport has been established to be as inclusive as possible, with very low equipment costs and no cost to use facilities. These characteristics make it ideal for incorporation into open space reserves.

Why Disc Golf?

Australia is a relative late-comer to disc golf, with most of the 30 existing courses built within the last 5 years. The sport was developed in the United States in 1970's, with more than 3000 courses established throughout the country. Disc Golf is a non-mainstream sport, but accessible to all independent of fitness, ability or age. And it's fun!!

As a non-mainstream sport, it provides a unique experience for participants and provides parks with a point of difference.

The Geelong Disc Golf Club provided the catalyst for the installation of the disc golf course at Barwon Valley Fun Park, but the benefits of the project extend beyond their existing participants.

The City of Greater Geelong's Play Strategy (2012) calls for a greater diversity of recreation opportunities within the city's parks and reserves. Basically, 1) don't make every park the same and 2) encourage visitation to different parks via unique attractors. The installation of the disc golf course meets this objective by providing a unique attractor to Barwon Valley Fun Park and supporting creative uses of open space.



Barwon Valley Fun Park is centrally located on the banks of the Barwon River. The Barwon River is Geelong's green zone, providing opportunities for play and informal recreation. The park attracts high visitation rates, and has recently benefited from a significant upgrade to its regional playgrounds, including the installation of a flying fox.

Barwon Valley Fun Park is also valued for its natural environment. The installation of the course was considered to have no impact on the natural aesthetics of the park and encourage activation of spaces with limited existing use.

Planning for Disc Golf

While the construction of a disc golf course is relatively simple, disc golf is like any other sport in having preferences for the physical attributes of the site and layout of the course. Disc golf courses are generally built in areas of established vegetation, as trees are used as obstacles within the course layout.

Barwon Valley Fun Park was selected based on an evaluation of sites within the municipality. The assessment was based on accessibility, course aesthetics, environmental value, visibility and benefit to the community.

Participants readily identify with Barwon Valley Fun Park, as the club have been running competitive events within the reserve for a number of years.

The course was designed over approximately six hectares of the reserve that received low amounts of use other than by walkers or cyclists. The course was designed to limit any impact on the space and it's current users. Spreading the course over a large area meant that the infrastructure does not impact on the natural landscape and has no impact on the existing use of the reserve. Disc

golf course design favours layouts that use the natural landscape rather than dominate it. The natural undulation and vegetation of the site were used as obstacles to provide a degree of challenge.

Club involvement

The Geelong Disc Golf Club was formed in 2006 by a small group of enthusiasts who were introduced to the sport while in New Zealand. The club has steadily built their membership and hosted a number of state and national championship events. The club committee has youth on its side, with committee members having high levels of skill in marketing, promotion and design.

The club was instrumental in ensuring that the small budget available for the project would provide a lasting legacy. The club sourced equipment from international suppliers and provided professional signage design services. The commitment from the club provided excellent value for the minor investment made by Council. The positive relationship between Council and club allowed for a great outcome for the reserve and wider community.

The club were also proactive in developing a dedicated website for the course that provides an overview of the sport, a course map, course rules and downloadable scorecard - www.barwonvalleydiscgolf.com

Delivering the project

In the scheme of recreation facility projects the delivery of a disc golf course is minor, within a local government capital works program. In the eyes of the club, this project marked an important step forward and an opportunity to find a home for their sport.

The club sourced a \$10,000 grant from Council to deliver the course. While it was originally thought that the

