2011 ASLA Design Awards

Valmont Bike Park
Merit Award
BHA Design

Design over $500,000 Construction Budget
Project Fact Sheet

Valmont Bike Park – Boulder, Colorado

Construction Budget - $4,300,000

Project Summary
Valmont Bike Park is the first public bike park of its kind, and is further defining Boulder as the nation’s leader in competitive cycling and as one of the country’s most bike-friendly cities. There is a perceptible buzz of excitement surrounding VBP. It has not only drawn significant local interest and pride, but on most days its parking lots have cars with license plates from several states. And this is exactly what the City of Boulder had hoped for – to attract local, national, even international interest. Since the park officially opened on June 11, 2011 it has hosted race clinics and world-class cyclo-cross events. The recent Boulder Cup Race drew close to 800 participants including almost 100 members of the International Cycling Union, more than 100 juniors, and an estimated 2000 spectators.

Purpose of the Project
As global and national economic woes continue, local governments are challenged to do more with less. Parks department staff and budgets are shrinking. Economic development leaders are searching for creative ways to bring renewed visibility to their cities and to establish new market niches. How can landscape architects play a role in the economic vitality of a city? Valmont Bike Park is the perfect example.

Valmont Bike Park is the result of a series of unlikely collaborations: tattooed X-Games style cyclo-cross designers and riders, creative and enthusiastic park planners, ardent bike advocacy groups, city attorneys with an eye on liability, historic preservationists, contractors, environmentalists, and race promoters. Valmont Bike Park is the first public bike park of its kind in the nation, and has set a standard for a new way of thinking about a community park as an international attraction. VBP has its own logo, facebook page, and website, and is the only park whose maintenance staff includes CPR certified bikers, passionate about the sport. Valmont Bike Park is a reflection of the forward thinking you can find in a city like Boulder and the passion of its biking community.

Role of the Landscape Architect
The landscape architect assembled and led a team of unique disciplines and experts needed for such an undertaking. While many Cyclo-cross trails and gravity/slopestyle features in the past have been created either as temporary features for specific events or within private venues, never had features to this extent been developed in a design/bid/build format required for a public community park. As the leader of the design team, the landscape architect bridged the gap from artistic, ‘in the field’ bike feature designs to definable, biddable construction drawings. They also were able to deliver these unusual program elements within the context of a successful and context-sensitive community park meeting the expectations and requirements of the surrounding neighborhoods and the City. The landscape architect’s role included master planning, public outreach, coordination of design documents, supervision of park structure architecture, coordination with the public artist, and the design of detailed grading, playgrounds, a dog park, and landscaping.

Special Factors
The story of Valmont Bike Park is one of grassroots efforts and wildly successful public-private partnerships. For nearly twenty years a group of dedicated biking enthusiasts lobbied the City of Boulder for a public city park offering comprehensive biking trails with advanced terrain, and the capacity to host professional biking events. After comprehensive public engagement, the City stepped up with a 132-acre parcel of land acquired with taxpayer approved funds. Boulder Mountainbike Alliance (BMA), a non-profit bike advocacy group responded with a massive fundraising effort resulting in over $500,000 towards the bike park’s construction. In fact, BMA built a formal partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department to share in the planning, design, construction and long-term stewardship of the park. Together with grants from GOCO and private foundations, donations from corporate sponsors, even $5 bills thrown in donation buckets; the transformation from vision to reality began.

The design plan is not your typical community park. VBP features an underlying “skill progression” design to serve all ages, abilities and riding styles. This design allows riders to improve their riding skills as they work their way up to advanced-level slopestyle, dirt jump and cyclo-cross elements throughout the park. The network of trails include features such as sandpits and staircase run-ups, a terrain park including dirt jumps, slope style runs and dual slalom,
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two pump parks along with learning loops, tot tracks for tricycles, a playground, and a permanent podium and event plaza – all within the 40-acre initial phase of a larger 132 acre park.

By walking the site, the park’s framework came into focus. The design team immediately identified different parts of the park – an existing hill with a spectacular view of the Flatirons would serve as a launching point for the most advanced trails or ‘slopes’. The hill would be shaped to create the slope style and dual slalom runs with a bird’s eye view of the dirt jumps below. Existing irrigation canals lined with mature cottonwoods created a setting for a quieter space dubbed ‘between the ditches’. Relatively flat and contained, this was the perfect area for beginners offering some technical features which are always accompanied by non-technical ‘go-arounds’. Finally the Glades with intermediate runs would serve as a training ground for riders with graduating loops and options for more technical or less technical trails. Safety features, called ‘Squirrel Catchers’ kick off each advanced run. If you aren’t comfortable on this first feature – you immediately know the rest of the run is too hard for you.

Once the highlighted features were captured in the plan, the landscape architects went to work to help guide the park through the public and design process. Coordinating with the design team, they began the arduous work of creating detailed construction drawings. Navigating the public process for any park can be tricky enough. But like a skate park, a public bike park also carries unique liability concerns. These issues were embraced continually through the design and construction process with adjustments made along the way. Detailed maps were created – and an ingenious set of signs were designed by the graphic artist with the flavor of a Colorado ski area. Each run is clearly marked for skill level from XS to XL. Each trail is color coded – green for beginners, blue for intermediate, and red for advanced runs.

This attention to detail and safety continued through construction. The project superintendent, also a cyclist, met weekly with the officials from the city, various members of the design team and the biking community to troubleshoot any problem areas that emerged. Trail soils were carefully amended, runs were tested and tweaked. In fact, they are still continually tweaked by the city’s maintenance staff. Each change is carefully reviewed by staff, and larger changes result in a new sign. As long as there is a clearly marked trail, and the trails are maintained as per the specified construction drawings, then the city has met its liability requirement. The result is a bike park, the first of its kind, that not only brings staff, bikers and the community pride – it is epic!

Sustainable Features

• Restoration and reuse of the historic Platt Farmhouse structure on the site as future retail/race headquarters
• Special trail surfacing was custom blended from onsite soils reducing need for offsite soil import
• Protection of existing established cottonwood groves
• Minimal use of supplemental irrigation
• Use of non-paved surfacing for parking lots
• As a biking hub connected to Boulder’s bike path system, the park design embraces alternative transportation modes and exemplifies car-free recreation in Boulder

Significance

Was the project successful? Check out the following impressions:

• The completion of the park and multi-use trails leading to it elevated Boulder’s League of American Bicyclists’ status from gold to one of only three Platinum-level bike friendly communities in the U.S.
• ‘This bike park is probably one of the finest in the country.’ - Scott Teitsel, Curve Custom Cycling at October 30, 2011 Boulder Cup Race day
• ‘Spectators said one of the big draws of cyclo-cross races is how much they can see. At Valmont, spectators could get up close views of many sections of the course, including the steep stairs the cyclists had to run up carrying their bikes. The top of the hill at the bike park also offered a view of much of the course. Steve Noel, who coaches the Fairview High School mountain bike team, said he liked that he could see more than the limited start and finish line views that are typical at mountain bike races.’ – from Boulder Daily Camera, Amy Bounds 10/30/2011
• The Colorado Parks and Recreation Association recently announced the 2011 class of award winners, and Valmont Bike Park was recognized with a Columbine Award in the Recreation Facility category.
• ‘What caught my eye at the Valmont Bike Park’s opening day on Saturday wasn’t the riders soaring through the air off the biggest terrain the park has to offer -- it was the scores of wee ones. Tots scooted Strider bikes alongside siblings and parents with pedals. One girl asked her dad to stay longer as he tried to coax her toward an exit.’ - from Colorado Daily, posted 6/12/2011