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UNIVERSITY

# BATTLE BACK

**MOUNTAIN BIKING COURSES  
FOR WOUNDED, INJURED  
AND SICK MILITARY  
PERSONNEL AND VETERANS**

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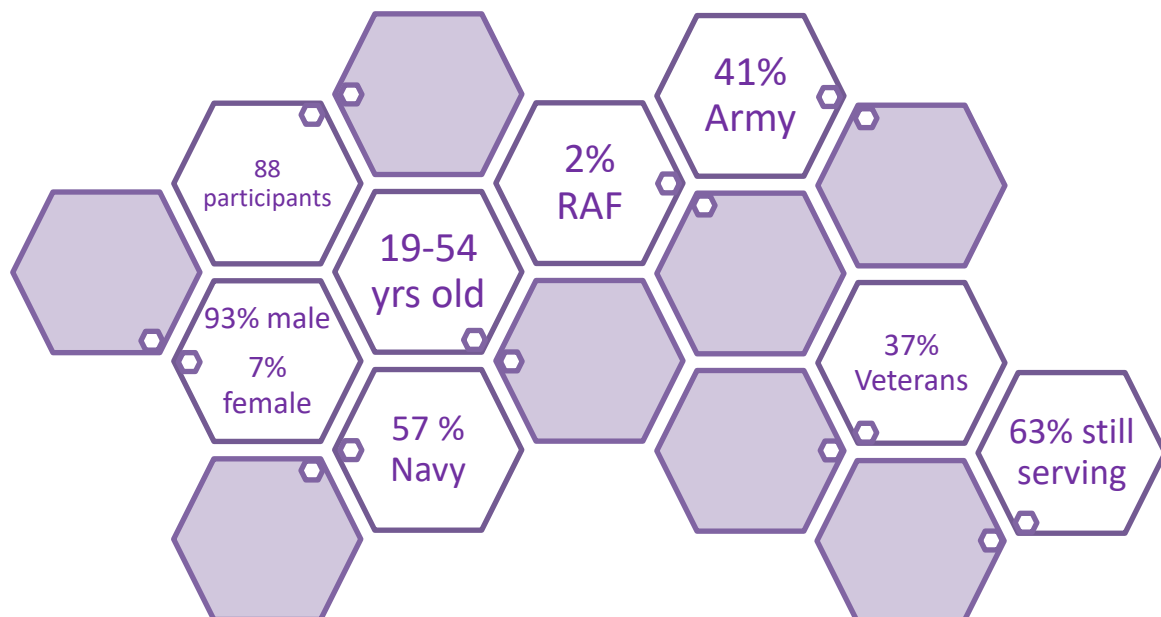
## The Courses

Cycling is often a familiar and engaging activity for Battle Back participants. Whether they are in recovery or are veterans. 42% of the population in England have access to a bicycle which makes it an ideal outdoor sport to encourage Battle Back participants to gain confidence in and continue after a course. For wounded, injured and sick (WIS) personnel mountain biking in addition to their other recovery treatment can aid their recovery from physical and mental injuries and illnesses.

Outdoor and adventurous activities such as mountain biking provide a rich opportunity for personal development and growth. The participants can be challenged in a safe environment and work closely with support staff at the Centre whilst being physically active outdoors. Exposure to well-managed challenges, which allow participants both to fail and succeed, is what helps to develop one's adaptability. When the passive benefits of cycling are combined with a pro-active approach to considering the participants physical and mental well-being, these courses can have very positive impacts on the lives of the participants.

The five-day Battle Back Mountain Biking courses are hosted at The Battle Back Centre, Lilleshall. Upon arrival, participants are shown around, briefed on the course schedule and invited to complete the first stage of participant research. They voluntarily provided information about their recovery process and their current state of well-being. Information was provided by participants every day throughout the courses regarding the influence that participation was having on their state of well-being and to identify if this would alter due to their involvement in the course. Compiled data from all previous course participants is presented in this report.

## The Participants



Of these 88 participants, 59% said they had been injured and sustained a non-operational related injury. Just 6% were wounded, having been injured on operations and 45% were living with a systemic illness or mental health problem. Of those WIS, the most recent someone had been become WIS was one month ago and the longest time was ten years, seven months ago. Within their recovery, 77% of participants felt “very supported or supported” by The Royal British Legion.

The first afternoon was a local off-road ride from the centre to the local monument. Throughout the rest of the week the group had the opportunity to ride at two manmade trail centres, Cannock Chase and Llandegla. As a contrast there was also a day on natural trails on the Long Mynd hills of Shropshire. The course provided opportunities to learn and practice new skills and be enthused to continue mountain biking. On the final day, the course concluded with a morning maintenance session enabling participants to leave the course with some useful knowledge. Following this, there was a course debrief; where the participants completed their final evaluations, shared their experiences, reviewed what they had learned and how they intended to transfer it to their lives in order to aid their recovery or personal progression.

Going forward  
I intend to...

To Start...  
To pursue mountain biking more in my spare time  
Getting out on my bike, more riding in groups  
Mountain bike more and with different people  
Using my bike more to help my recovery  
Believing in myself more  
I will buy a bike and start cycling

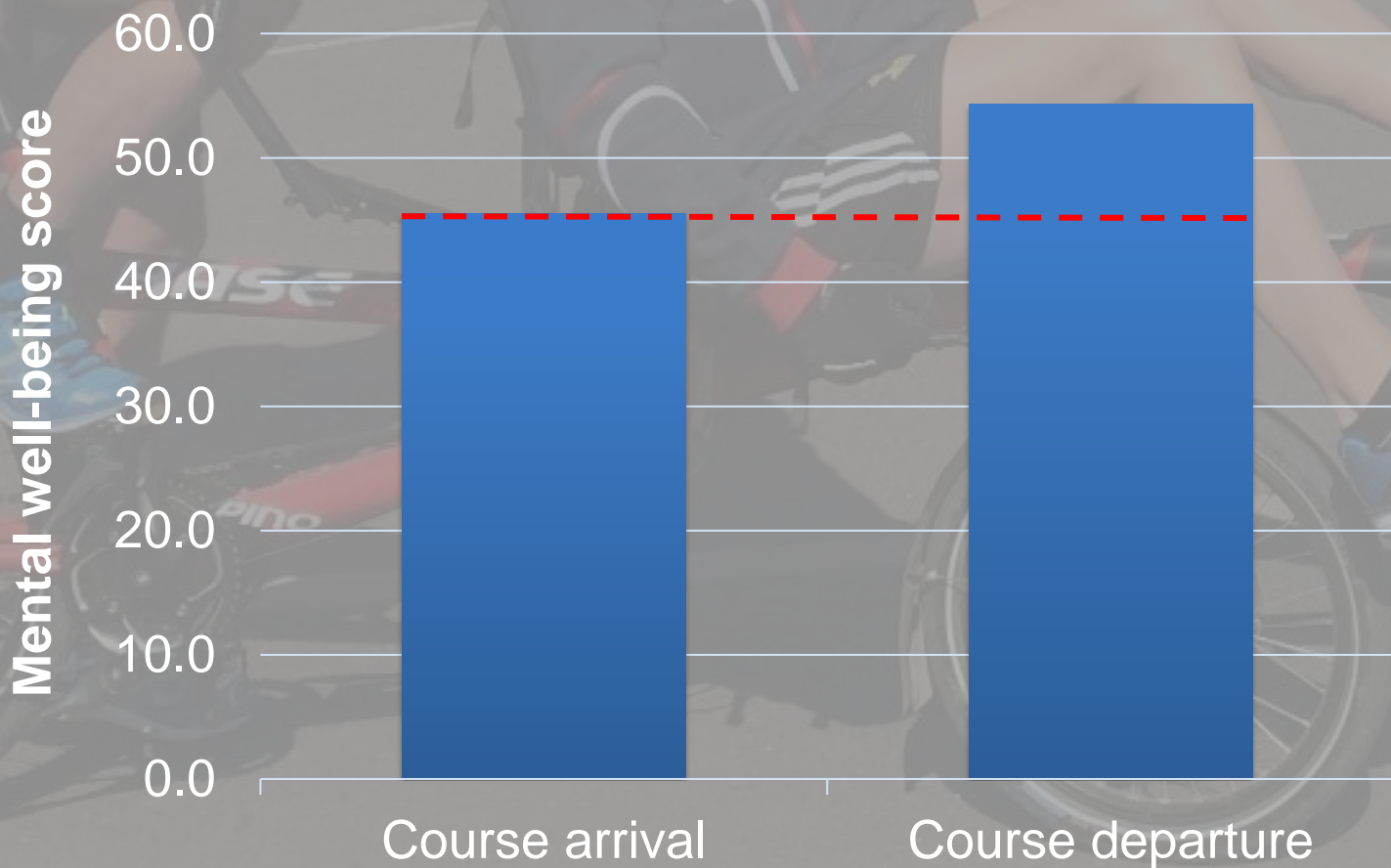
To Stop...  
Being negative  
Bad habits (smoking, eating badly, overthinking)  
Doubting my ability  
Isolating myself  
Making excuses  
Limiting myself due to injury

To Continue...  
Develop my technical skills  
Working on my riding and confidence  
To get fit  
To cut down on my smoking habits  
To try new things  
Push limits

# The Battle Back Centre



19% Improvement in participant well-being scores



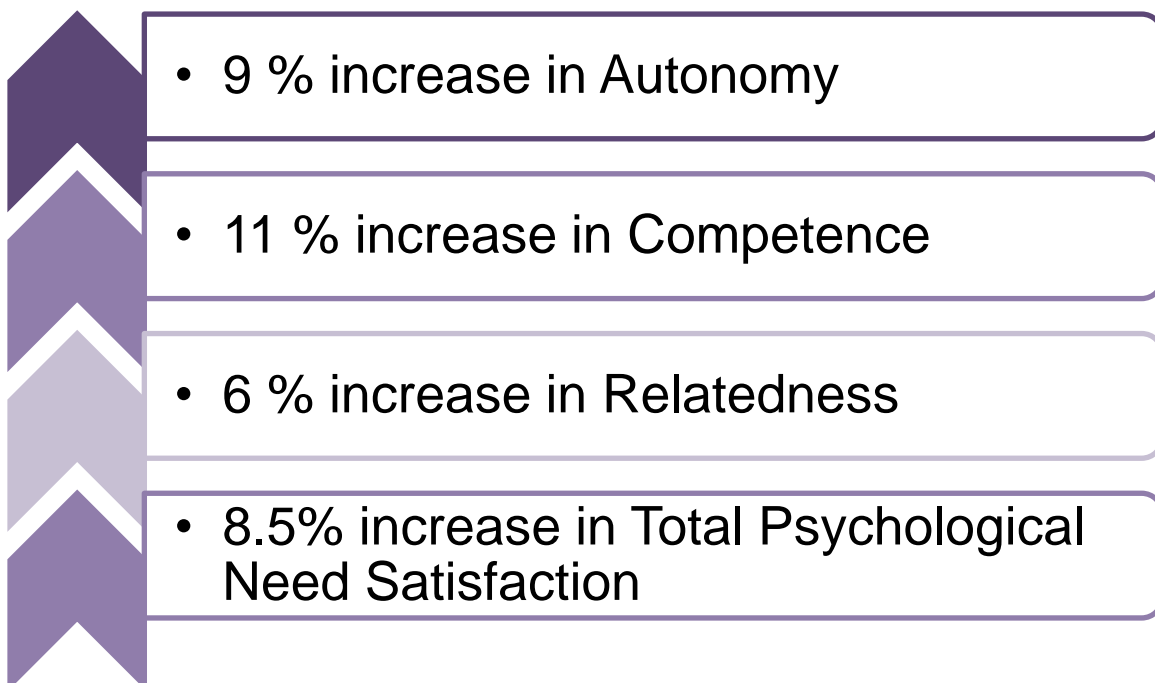
All Battle Back courses aim to improve three universal needs of the participants that should be continually satisfied for an individual to maintain optimal psychological health. These are the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness:

**Autonomy** is the need for individuals to feel in control of their lives and their future. Most importantly, this centres on participants making their own decisions and independently choosing from among many programme options. This is supported with the delivery of educational lessons for the participants about information processing in our brains and how this influences our behaviour which is contextualised in the day's outdoor and physical activities.

**Competence** concerns our achievements, knowledge, and skills; individuals have a need to build competence and develop mastery over tasks that are important to them. Sport offers a rich context for experiencing competence at a range of levels.

Given the human imperative for feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness with others, **Relatedness** is the third theme. A significant lack in any of one, or combination, of these three psychological needs will have a robust detrimental impact on an individual's well-being.

#### Improvements in participants Psychological Needs after the Mountain Biking Course



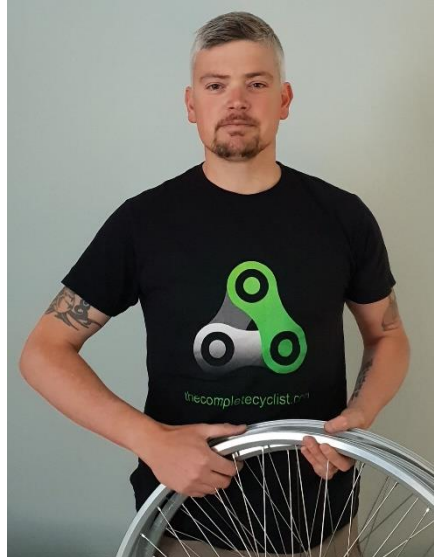
## Case study – Lee Hardy

“Attending the first Veterans course in 2017 and heading out cycling as one of the planned activities helped me reconnect with a sport that previously I had loved and had been heavily involved in.”

“As a former Army athlete, I have found mountain biking and cycling a great alternative to sprinting which is very high impact. Cycling is much more accessible, and I found it to be easier on the body and a great way to keep fit and healthy.”

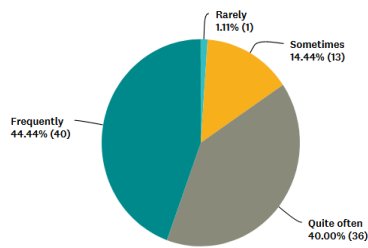
“I’ve used the bike to great effect to keep myself in good health and it gives me a great sense of well-being. When I’m riding my bike, I am in the moment and not thinking about other things. The sense of achievement it gives me is awesome, and I’ve learnt to cancel out negative self talk and develop a strong internal coach. This was also useful for my preparation as a member of the Battle Back Mission Himalaya team. I found doing long hill repetitions on the bike prepared me physically and mentally for the long ascent to the summit of Mera peak at 6476m.”

“As an ambassador for the Battle Back Centre I took part in the Poppy Ride, Pedal to Ypres and Pedal to Paris in 2019. The social aspects and benefits of taking part in these large group rides have helped me develop some great new friendships with other veterans and civilian fundraisers whom I now regularly meet for rides as well as family meals etc.”

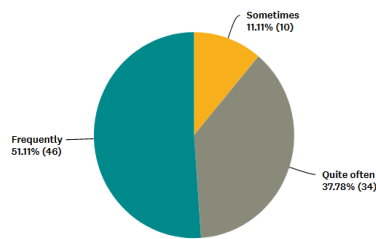


“I have had a great career in the cycling industry as a cycle mechanic and manager. Following the veterans course, I gained the confidence I had been lacking to start my own cycling business and also training as a National Standards Instructor. In 2019 I was awarded ‘Best Leisure and Lifestyle Business’ within my region. Had I not taken the opportunity to volunteer at the Battle Back Centre with coaching on the MTB and Road Cycling skills courses I would not have fallen back in love with my chosen profession.”

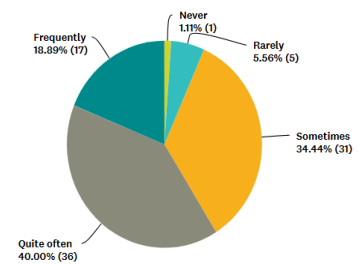
## Facilitating relatedness, competence and autonomy through mountain biking



How well participants made friends and connected with others



How often participants felt a sense of achievement



How often participants made their own decisions and make choices

## Participants' most valuable experiences with their coach

"Just learning skills and putting them into practice"

"When they sat down and explained the basics of how to ride"

"Getting taught how to position myself properly whilst riding rough terrain"

"One Talking through issues I have"

"one to one chat on the ride"

"Every chat we had whilst out riding could be considered the most valuable moment"

"Having coffee and cakes and having a chat"

"The entire weeks coaching was very useful"

"Getting tips on maintenance and keeping drivetrain and gears running smoothly"

"Being taught about the mechanics of the bike"









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