

Mountainbiking and forest usage conflicts in Austria

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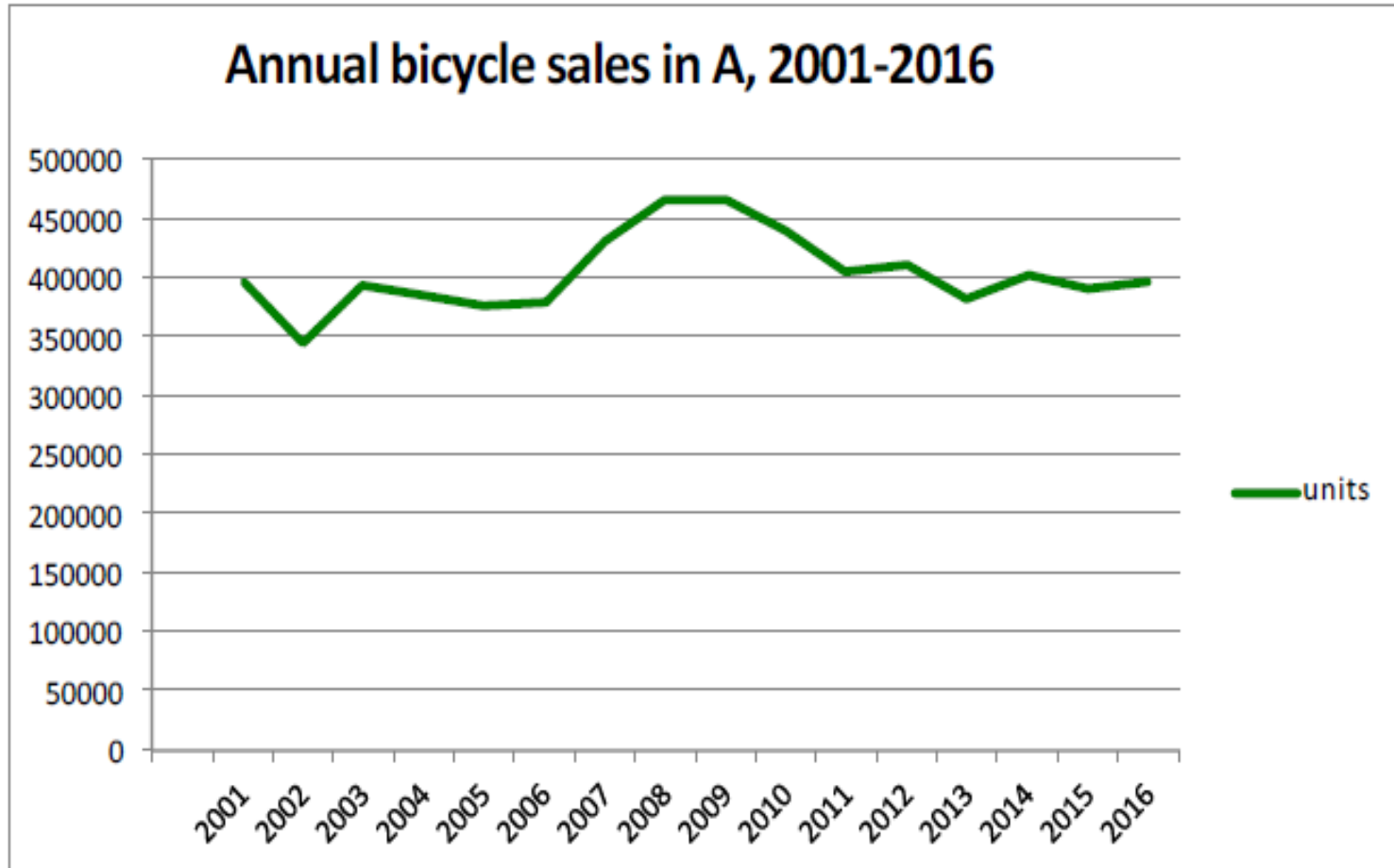
<https://geology.com/world/austria-satellite-image.shtml>

- **area size:** 83,827 km² (slightly larger than Scotland; South Carolina, or Tasmania; or half the size of Jiangxi or twice the size of Kyushu)
- located in **Central Europe**; bordering on (N→E) Germany, Czech Rep., Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein

- **population** size of 8.77 mill.; population density of 106/km²
- predominantly **mountainous** (72%; highest point Großglockner 3,797 m)
- **forests** cover 38.78 km² or 46.2% of land area (0.5 ha/head)
- **coastline**: 0 km



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Source: VSSÖ 2017

- **annual sales** of about 400,000 bikes
- **saturated market**; peaked out in late 2000s

	2016 (%)	2016	2015 (%)	2015
children bicycles	12.6	50,022	11.7	45,630
citybikes	4.4	17,468	7.1	27,690
trekking Bikes	10.4	41,288	11.8	46,020
crossbikes (offroad)	9.8	38,906	10.9	42,510
mountainbikes	33.6	133,392	34.3	133,770
racing bikes	3.7	14,689	3.6	14,040
E-Bikes	21.8	86,546	19.8	77,220
others (transport bikes, folding bikes, etc.)	3.7	14,689	0.8	3,900

Source: VSSÖ 2017 estimates, based on sales according to ARGE Fahrrad

- **MTB is most popular** bike variant with 33% of Austrians possessing one (39% in Germany)
- **Pedelecs** (ebikes) show strongest growth
- growth particularly strong for **offroad segment** (80% increase y/y for eMTB)

7% of Austrians say they regularly go mountainbiking (though only 1% use single trails; GfK 2015)

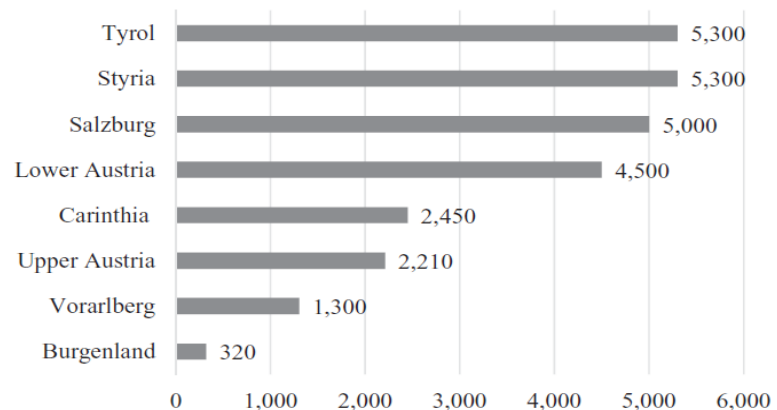
main motives among Austrian mountain bikers:

- nature/landscape (68%)
- sports/exercise (49%)
- fitness/cardio training (44%)
- fun, enjoyment (44%)
- recreation (39%)

(online survey, $N=600$, Beer 2013)

56% of **mountainbikers on holidays** in Austria are male, the average age is 41.3 years, main motive for holiday are the mountains (72%) and, besides mountain biking, hiking (70%) (ANTO 2014)

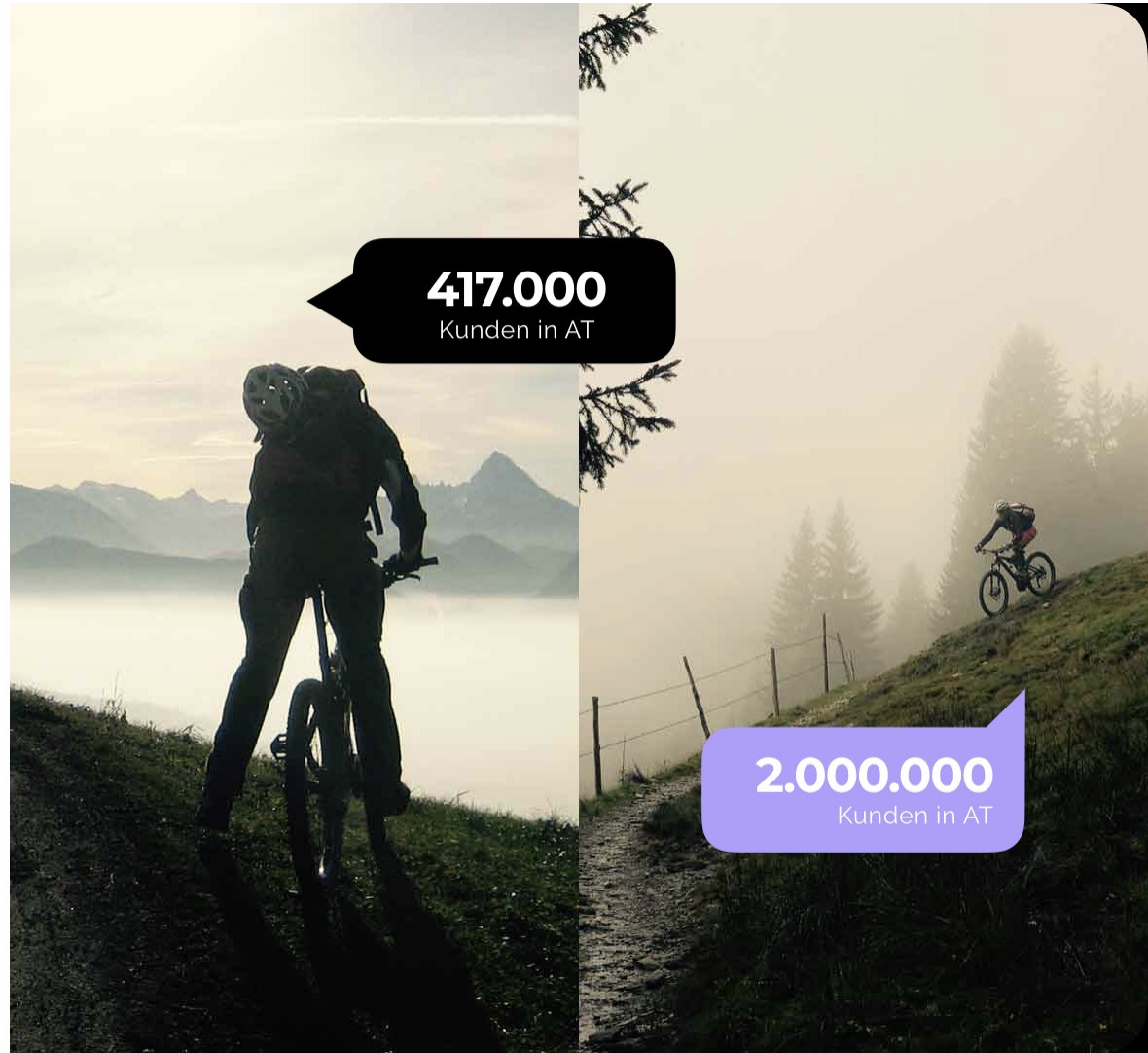
- nearly **26,400 kilometers** of publicly designated mountainbike routes
- majority on **paved roads**
- only **10-20% of 120,000 km forest roads** are accessible for mountain bikers
- **less than 1% are single trails** on natural ground
- significant **West-East gradient** (also for services and related infrastructure)





4% share of summer tourism in Austria
= 417,000 MTB visitors
average of 7 overnight stays; average daily expenditure of € 165

Leading in **Salzburgerland**:
20% of MTB market.
MTB in Salzburgerland gains **10% of entire tourism income**
even 20% in Saalbach-Hinterglemm („Home of Lässig“)



Quelle: <https://www.mountainbike-kongress.at/projekt20/>



- **leading mountain bike region** in Austria for many years
- route network with over **400 km of bike trails** for all levels of difficulty
- easily to explore on **marked routes** and with **interactive bike maps**
- convenient **transport services** (gondola lifts; bus services)
- all conventional **ebike charging systems** at ropeway stations and mountain huts
- **sport events** for pros and amateurs, e.g. Tauarista; BIG-5 Bike Challenge



- ambitious and innovative concept (**experiential tourism**), since 2015
- expanding network (2018: **850 km of bike routes** throughout the Oetztal region up to 2,666 m), incl. 15 enduro trails (33 km); 42 built trails, incl. 12 shaped lines; 2 pump tracks in the valley
- **Flow trails**: long lines of up to 7 km
- 11 **rental stations** and riding schools
- 6 **ropeways** free to use for Bike Republic passport holders
- **marked routes** and **3D bike maps**
- convenient **transport services** (gondola lifts; bus transportation; parking service)
- **events** (e.g. Bike Opening; Single Trail Paper Chase; Trail Master Challenge)

- Diversity and complexity of **legal conditions**; vary between regions.
- **Austrian Forest Act** (1975) §33 grants **free access to forests** for recreational purposes.
- AFA §33(3) also stipulates **general ban** on vehicles and cyclists riding on forest roads.
 - **Biking on forest roads** or paths requires approval of person in charge of road/path management and forest maintenance.
 - **Biking off-trail in forests** needs to be approved by landowner.
 - **Contracts** guarantee usage, maintenance, liabilities.
- **Hunting Law** (allows **seasonal closure** of roads and areas).
- **Property and Liability rights** (AGAB): ownership is basic human right inflicted by public responsibilities and liability issues.
- plus **others**: Environmental Protection Law; Water Protection Law; Agriculture Protection Law; National Park Law; Alpine Convention, etc.



- Diversity of **stake holders**, i.e. bikers, land owners, forest management, municipality,; hunters; conservationists, and other recreational users causes **varying conflicts** (most often hikers and mountainbikers themselves).
- Problems are especially likely to arise where **land-use pressure** and demand for forest recreation are high: 40% of hikers in Tyrol felt disturbed by mountain bikers and 30% even threatened (Lang 2013).
- Generally **less problems caused by tourists** than local riders (who open illegal trails or explore uncharted terrains)
- Mountainbikers are a **minority without powerful lobby**.
- **National associations for alpine sports** speak out for multiple interests. They demand universal right of way on forest roads - but not on forest paths (which leaves out issue of single trails for ambitious bikers).

- **Property spread:** 18% managed by National Forest Holding and other public entities; 82% in private hands (of 142,000 families).
- economical: **rentability** for owners often questionable: tourism boards or public bodies provide **compensation payments** to land owners (who might earn more from leases to hunters or forestry).
- **management of forest roads** and paths subject to the contract remains with the same person as before to build and maintain the infrastructure necessary for safe usage
- **Forest and forestroad maintenance** easier without taking multiple interests into consideration.
- **ecological:** deterioration of soil; negative impact on alpine plants and forest; expulsion of wildlife
- Increasing demand for **short-term access:** but after work-visitors and local riders bring no money in region.
- eMTB attract **new user groups** – and expand user reach into areas beyond own administrative boundaries (free-rider problem)

Mountainbiking for metropolitan citizens

Pay for Ride-system at **Trailcenter Hohe Wand Wiese** and **Wexl Trails** (10 or 80 km away from city center): private initiatives integrating public roads/path network with lift, trails and lines on private property

WienerWaldTrails: private association to maintain and expand legacy of 1,000 km of MTB routes that span across territories of Vienna, 4 neighboring municipalities within the biosphere park Vienna Forests; 20 years of experience with multi stakeholder alliances, **Fair Ride** rules, and conflict management

- **Climate change:** eMTB tourism is most promising option for tourist destinations to shift income from winter toward summer sport business
- But lurking danger of **repeating mistakes of winter sport tourism**, growing too fast and excessively: leading to overusage, natural degradation.
- **Sustainable tourism** requires **contractual guarantees**; environmental ethics; and **new business models and ideas**: pay for ride (parking fees, transportation support; repair and rental shops; MTB schools; guided tours by locals)
- **DIY and bottom-up initiatives** gradually formalize and yield new business opportunities for shapers, builders, and developers.



- **Change of Forest Act ?** is not desired, as universal right of access shifts attention away from more urgent demand for natural trails:
- Current laws allow expansion of natural trail networks and **strict user control** separating hikers from bikers
- **Comprehensive stakeholder alliances** are needed at all stages.
- Mountainbike Congress: semi-annual **platform** for showcasing and developing new models for MTB tourism; plus networking; creating awareness, empowerment and voice