



WILD ISLE

The Islands' Adventure Magazine

Issue #3 Summer 1998

Free

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El Nina Update

Vancouver Island Backbone



#3 Summer 1998

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**Next Deadline,
for Fall Issue, 14th August 1998**



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Cover: Chris Joseph, Horne Lake.
Photo: Suemi Chiba
Contents: Jody Simmons, Englishman River Falls.
Photo: Greg Shea

LETTERS

A letter to the Regional Directors, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District

We appreciate the opportunity to air our concerns at the Public meeting on May 27th. Hearing all the opinions expressed helped us to realize how difficult a job the Regional District has to produce by-laws that will satisfy everyone.

The major issue concerning the Mount Arrowsmith Regional Park is one of public access. The Arrowsmith Ski and Park Ltd.'s (the Company) interpretation of their rights to restrict access was what started the controversy.

The Regional District, to its credit, has attempted to address the public's concerns, as well as clean up some bureaucratic shortcomings. This effort has resulted in the three proposed by-laws dealing with a Park Plan, Rules and Regulations, and the Company's Development Plan. We realize the Regional District is under a strict mandate not to spend and funds, and that has undoubtedly hindered the District's ability to prepare a more comprehensive Park Plan. We are also aware that the Company requires some assurances from the District before it is prepared to make a more substantial investment on the Park facilities.

The idea of having both a ski hill and public access for other recreational activities is not incompatible. Contrary to some opinions, we are not opposed to a ski facility. You are reminded however, that the Regional District has a fiduciary duty under the terms of the deed from MacMillan Bloedel Ltd. to make sure that the land "shall be used for public use and enjoyment as a recreational park."

Concerns:

a) Liability: The Company, who has a "license to occupy", is concerned about liability. Recent amendments to the Occupiers Liability Act have significantly modified the duty of care to persons who enter certain premises for recreational purposes without charge. These persons are deemed to have willingly assumed all risks and the only duty of care owed to these persons is not to intentionally or recklessly create danger for these persons. Therefore, much of the original rationale for the proposed by-law and Park Plan is no longer valid. In fact, access to the Park through the use of user fees (as suggested in the Plan) will almost certainly increase, rather than limit liability.

b) Park Plan: The existing "vision statement" known as schedule D of the Park Plan is too vague, contradictory, does not clearly address the public access issue and implies "privatization." It also has the potential of giving the Company more control than the existing license. The Plan must clearly state that the Company is NOT the Park operator. That is the Regional District's role. The Company's role is that of a licensee to provide those services granted by the Regional District in the license.

c) Expansion: The "Preferred Concept" in the Company's Development Plan includes expansion of the Park Lands and construction of lifts D and E, effectively claiming the Cokely Ridge and obliterating a major portion of the historic Rousseau Trail. This is all part of the "Buildout" phase. WE oppose this phase until there is further review and consideration.

Recommendations:

1) The existing proposed Regional Park Plan (schedule D) must be completely re-worked into a far more comprehensive document. It should include the Park purpose, goals, policies, site analysis, environmental impact, and an implementation schedule. Copies of the Company's license and development plans should also form part of this Plan.

2) It must be clearly stated in the Park Plan that public access to and through the Park, without payment, is guaranteed and that activities that do not substantially impair the activities of the Company are allowed, without the requirement of approval from the Regional District.



Summer is here at last, time for some really serious playing

DON'T FORGET
Advertising and Submissions
Deadline for the Fall Issue is
August 14th

3) Establish an advisory committee to assist in the preparation of the Park Plan and advise the Park Administrator on an on-going basis.

4) Define in the Rules and Regulations by-law that the Park Administrator is an employee of the Regional District and that this role cannot be delegated to any licensee.

5) Defer any approval of the Development Plan until there has been both Ministry approval of the by-laws and a more extensive review by the proposed advisory committee and other stakeholders.

If these recommendations are not given serious consideration some of the actions that could be taken are extensive lobbying to the various Ministries and M.L.A's involved and/or a legal challenge of the validity of the existing "License to Occupy" and the District's authority to issue it and negative publicity with that approach.

Our committee has been in contact with many of the organizations that have made presentations both verbally at the public meeting, and by correspondence to the Regional District. We believe we can materially influence and actions they might take.

We would prefer to work with the District and the Company in a spirit of cooperation rather than this apparent adversarial role; however it requires the willingness of all to accept the reality that public must be assured in a public park.

P.A.R.C.

View Point

Andrew Smith

The view is not always clear

Kayaking along the many pristine shorelines surrounding Vancouver Island can provide an unlimited amount of unique experiences. Perhaps your adventure might begin by being transported to a remote location by a mothership. After being lifted with your boat gently into the water, you are on your own to experience solitude and the simple beauty of nature. Your day may include paddling by a nearby pod of killer whales then later on beaching your craft to climb a hillside for a closer look at a bird colony. Passing by one point, you stop off to admire some old totem poles before stopping for lunch in a quiet bay. There you are rewarded with fresh oysters and clams which you harvest and cook over a fire on the beach. As evening roles around you find a perfect spot for a camp. Closer observation indicates this is a more common camp than what you would expect. Remnants of a few campfires exist and in the bush you find some scattered toilet paper and a few pieces of garbage. During your stay, your solitude is only broken a couple of times, once by a helicopter landing on a nearby point and later on by a boat dropping off four campers on the next beach. With no rain as a bonus, this trip appears to be a success. From BC Parks point of view, there are some identifiable concerns.

Not too many years ago Strathcona District staff focused more of their attention on land based parks. Now in 1998, with the designation of new Parks and Ecological Reserves, 57 of the 115 protected areas in the district are marine oriented and present new management challenges. The above fictitious but very realistic kayaking trip, presents approximately 9 potential major management issues and numerous sub-issues to BC Parks staff. Were you able to identify the following concerns:

1) Park Use Permits - Mothership/Helicopter/Water Taxi. All commercial operators entering a protected area require a Park Use Permit. We must determine potential impacts to the natural resources as well as to other users. How frequent are the trips into protected areas, how many clients does this reflect, and what areas are being utilized.

2) Entering a closed area - often people enter areas oblivious to the fact that it may be a protected area and perhaps closed, i.e. Bird colony in an Ecological Reserve or a Killer Whale sanctuary.

3) Communication - If BC Parks is concerned about impacts, then information must be supplied as to where the protected areas are and the regulations/policies which may exist. This communication may come in the form of brochures, maps, articles and signage.

4) Facilities - what facilities should be provided, i.e. camp sites, drinking water, toilets, docks, shelters, food caches, trails, etc.

5) Backcountry Ethics - the less facilities, the more important it is to educate the public about backcountry ethics, i.e. campfires, toilets, garbage, camp sites, washing, etc.

6) Illegal Harvesting - Everyone requires a Federal Saltwater fishing license to collect shellfish. Areas within parks may be closed to harvesting at the request of BC Parks.

7) First Nation Sites - Many protected areas contain sites which are culturally significant to First Nations. These sites must be respected and in many cases avoided at a bands request.

8) Statistics - Who, what, when, where, why. Statistics are needed to help BC Parks manage areas appropriately. However collection of statistics at marine sites is difficult.

9) Costs - facilities, services and communication cost money and therefore not easy to provide or maintain. BC Parks needs assistance from the kayaking/boating community.

10) Patrols - Park Ranger patrols, for safety, maintenance, monitoring and communication are much more difficult for marine sites.

For those readers who do enjoy kayaking and boating, please try to assist BC Parks by learning more about the areas you travel in, practising proper backcountry ethics and letting staff know about what you see on your trips. If you have any suggestions or concerns we would like to hear from you.

Send your viewpoint to: Andy Smith, BC Parks, 1812 Miracle Beach Drive, Black Creek, B.C. V9J 1K1 Fax (250) 337-5695, email: asmith@galaxy.gov.bc.ca

Kayakers ashore at Jacobson Beach, Brooks Peninsula, Photo: © Philip Stone

COUCH POTATO ALERT!!! NOT!!!

If you are involved in the outdoors, check out VIOAN!

VIOAN (Vancouver Island Outdoor Adventure Network) is the newly formed network of local adventure tour operators and related businesses recently spawned in the Comox Valley, whose goal is to strengthen each business through co-operative marketing and bulk purchasing. Currently, a brochure marketing VIOAN members and their services is being completed and will be finalized by the end of June to be distributed in Victoria and elsewhere. Similarly, a web page containing the same information with links to its members is under construction.

Recognizing Vancouver Island as an unmatched destination rich in its bio-diversity and "natural capital", the network is also a strategic body acting for its members to promote and develop Vancouver Island as a premier ecological and recreation destination.

Recently, a seminar on liability insurance, hosted by VIOAN established, that members of the network could realize up to 40% savings on their liability insurance premiums. Besides these and other benefits, members of the network will have the opportunity to share resources, to liaise and meet with others in the industry, and to generally help determine the future of outdoor adventure on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia.

If you think this network might be make good business sense for you, call (250) 334-2106, or email vioan@island.net for a membership application form or more information

For 1998, the annual membership fee for Tour Operators and Bed & Breakfasts is only \$25.- and for Retailers and Hospitality Services it is only \$50.-. (Optional)

VANCOUVER ISLAND


Philip Stone

Weaving a crafty line along alpine ridges, across clear-cut valleys and down a mighty river the Vancouver Island Backbone (V.I.B.) links Port Alberni to Port McNeill in a gruelling 350 km, long distance hiking route. The Backbone travels through some of the most beautiful and some of the most devastated land on Vancouver Island. Although primarily a hiking route in concept the V.I.B. covers terrain suitable for mountain biking, ski-touring, whitewater paddling and alpine climbing. Completing the route in a single push would be an adventure of world-class calibre. However the route is dissected by roads and leads through several communities making it possible to complete the route in sections over any length of time.

These sections present a range of difficulties and require varying levels of experience to complete. The Forbidden Plateau section is a well established alpine traverse in its own right and follows well maintained trails through Paradise Meadows from Mt. Washington to Mt. Albert Edward from where the route becomes rougher but still well trodden to meet the Augerpoint trail down to Buttle Lake. It usually takes 3 to 6 days to complete. At the other extreme is the Tlupana Range section that links the upper Nimpkish Valley with the community of Tahsis. This part of the route might take from 6 to 10 days to complete and traverses a system of ridges through one of the largest and most remote areas of alpine on the Island. The Tlupana range section requires hikers to be completely self-sufficient and fit for the relentless climbs and descents encountered along the route.

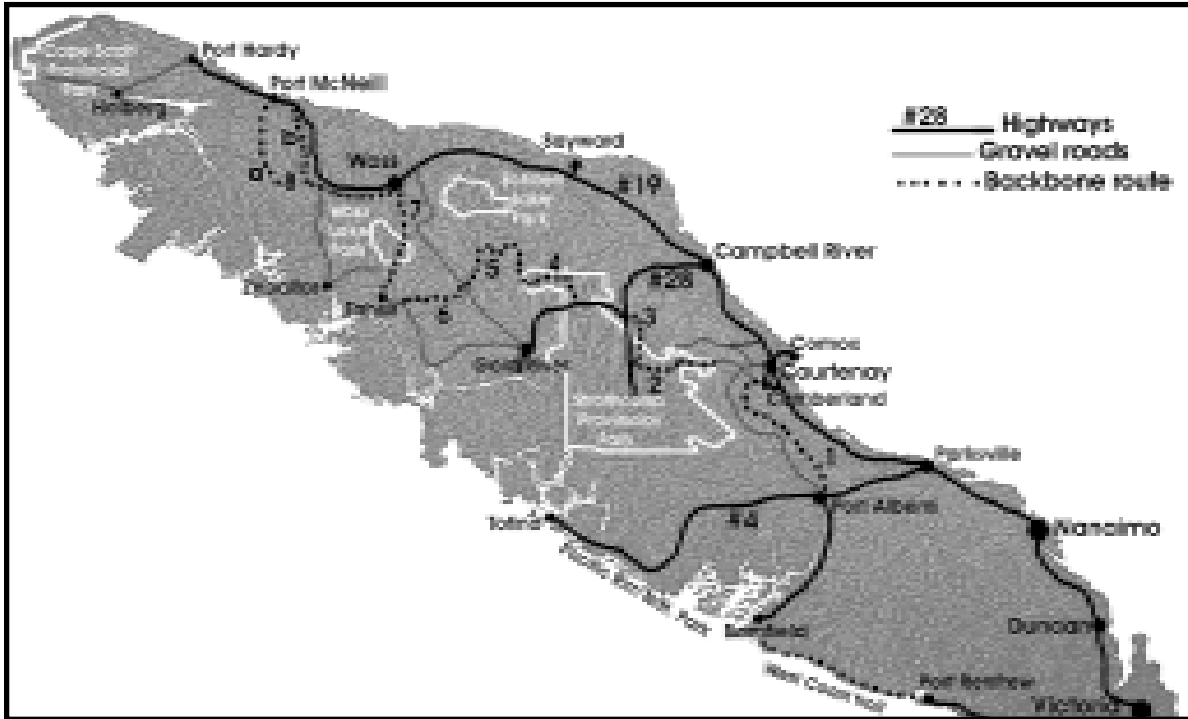
Planning for the Vancouver Island Backbone began in 1991 by the then executive of the Mid-Island Chapter of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC). An environmental grant was secured from the Mountain Equipment Co-op and in 1993 this writer was contracted to explore and map the route. The result of this work was the publication of guidebook giving an overview of the route section by section along with details and lists of additional resources required to follow the Backbone. The Hiking Guide to the Vancouver Island Backbone is undergoing revisions and a second edition should be in stores by late August.

With the world renowned West Coast Trail, trails of Strathcona Park, the North Coast Trail, and now the Vancouver Island Backbone we have some of the greatest hiking opportunities in the world right on our doorstep.



Craig Maxwell hiking near Augerpoint on the Buttle Lake section, Mt. Myra behind.
Photo: ©Philip Stone

BACKBONE



The Vancouver island Backbone should not be mistaken for a long-distance hiking *trail*, it is a route that at times makes use of trails but the idea is that of a wilderness experience. In order to maintain and preserve this concept travellers should refrain from marking the route in any way and practice no-trace techniques. This will ensure that the feeling of discovery and adventure is preserved for future generations of hikers and that the integrity of the land is preserved for its intrinsic value as wilderness.

The Route By Sections

- 1- **Beaufort Range**, Port Alberni to Cumberland ; 55km/32mi *B*
- 2- **Forbidden Plateau**, Cumberland to Buttle Lake; 36km/22mi *A*
- 3- **Buttle Lake**, Augerpoint to Buttle Narrows; 30km/20mi *B*
- 4- **Gold Lake**, Crest mountain to Gold Lake; 28km/18mi *C*
- 5- **Victoria Peak**, Gold Lake to Nimpkish Road; 31km/20mi *C*
- 6- **Tlupana Range**, Nimpkish Road to Tahsis; 40km/25mi *C*
- 7- **Woss Lake**, Tahsis to Woss; 35km/22mi *B*
- 8a- **Karmutzen Range**, Anutz Lake to Port McNeill; 50km/30mi *C*
- 8b- **Nimpkish River**, Woss to Port McNeill; 65km/40mi *P*

Route Grading

A For hikers with some backcountry experience. Section follows trails and unmarked routes

B Section may use trails but mostly unmarked routes in remote terrain.

Good navigation skills required.

C Travel through rugged and remote mountain terrain. For experienced hikers.

P Lake and grade 2-3 whitewater paddling.

Suitable for experienced kayakers & canoeists.



The Red Pillar, Argus & Comox Glacier as seen from the Beaufort Range
Photo: ©Philip Stone



using the route known as the outside passage. They are five women with unique but intertwined histories, with a love of the wilderness, a need to test their physical endurance, and a desire to explore their capabilities both to grow as individuals and to nurture each other. Alice Weber, Robyn Irvine, Buffy Lundine, Jody Simmons and Kristin Maddox have been described as the "fearless five" by the Campbell River media. As parents, we know that is not the reality. Happily we know each kayaker has a healthy fear of the power of the ocean and of the unpredictable obstacles Nature may toss in their way, to tease their youthful resolve. However, if the energy used in trip preparation and planning is a reflection of the energy they will bring to each decision along the way, then, we know they will succeed because the synergy of this all women team is continually growing. More than a year ago, when the trip planning started, their decision making could have been compared to five splashes of different coloured paints and textures on a canvas. When they left Port Simpson their style of consensus decision making was a unique art form of multiple textures and colours blended together with meticulous care, skill, and yes, love and respect for each other. Our first "ET PHONE HOME" message was received from Kitkatla Sunday May 24. Hi mom! Oh how hearing those words can make one's heart soar. Enthusiasm burst forth from the telephone receiver like a wellspring. We heard reports of good weather for the first five days and then rain for the last five, group dynamics that couldn't be better, paddling getting stronger and more confident, and in

Al and Karen Maddox

May 10, 1998, five young women stood with their backs to the land and surveyed the waters of Portland Inlet that separates the northern tip of BC coastline from Alaska. The previous night a magnificent sunset had aligned itself with a spectacular full moon rise. The moment had come. The smiling dawn beckoned their departure on Mothers' Day. Their excitement surfaced and was constrained by the reality of the challenges ahead. They wanted to be gone, to be finished with the final packing and the goodbyes which held them to this shore, and to us, their friends and families. They would soon head off to Father's Point. Why had the challenge of the Outside Passage drawn these five women together with such passion that the air was electric with their synergy? They are five young Canadians whose goal is to be the first women to navigate the rugged British Colombia coastline

the words of Aquarius "harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding". All was well with the world of El Niña! That was what we wanted, no, needed to hear. The next report came to us via Buffy's parents, Jeannie and Jim Lundine on Vancouver Island. They had received a radio call from the shores of Campania Island via the coast guard. El Niña was wind bound for a few days but enjoying the opportunity to explore the wonderful sandy beaches and highland hiking. They have used the time to gather 9 bags of garbage to be collected by the BC Forestry Service. The next known stop is Klemtu on Swindle Island where they will pick up mail and re-rations on June 10th. A month later on July 10th they should be arriving in Port Hardy where family and friends will greet them at their halfway point and share in a hearty feast. By then, as now, they will be different. Each woman will have changed and grown day by day with the lessons from the sea, other sages they meet along the way and through the incredible harmony of sisters at sea ... sisters at heart!

The El Niña web site is at <http://www.air.on.ca/users/maddoxa>

DISCOVERY COAST STARTS SUMMER JUNE 1

PORT HARDY — BC Ferries' Discovery Coast service between Port Hardy and Bella Coola is opening its third summer season June 1, Dan Miller, Deputy Premier and North Coast MLA, announced today.

"The added tourism dollars that this route brings to B.C. are crucial," said Miller. "Last year, nearly 16,000 customers enjoyed a scenic Discovery Coast voyage. In addition to creating a crucial new link to the world for a half dozen remote communities, the influx of tourists boosted the economy considerably-not just in the Mid-Coast, but also Vancouver Island, the Cariboo and Chilcotin."

"Discovery Coast has become an integral part of BC Ferries' coastal service," said Tom Ward, President & CEO. "Our Mid-Coast ports are fascinating destinations in themselves, or great stops along a circle tour around Vancouver Island, the Mid-Coast, Chilcotin-Cariboo, Whistler and the Lower Mainland."

"The first two years of the Discovery Coast service have been good for business in the North Island," said Glenn Robertson, North Island MLA. "North Islanders understand the importance of economic

diversification, and tourism is a growing industry that offers significant opportunities to small businesses throughout the north of Vancouver Island and the Mid-Coast. I'm delighted that the route has passed its trials, and is now a permanent part of the ferry system."

"The adventure cruise is like nothing else in the fleet," said Peter Hughes, Assistant Vice President, Northern Service. "It features a B.C. artists and speakers 'in-residence' program, bridge and engine room tours, a lending library, special stops for wildlife and historical artifacts, reclining seats, showers, a solarium, videos, cruise activities, and in my opinion the most scenic restaurant and lounge in North America."

"There are opportunities to get off the ship and explore another world - including First Nations villages and sites, uninhabited wilderness, the once-bustling community of Ocean Falls, fishing and logging villages, and more. The more adventurous can even set off in their own kayaks. As well, eagles, whales, hummingbirds, bears, dolphins, porpoises and many more wild creatures attract customers from all over the world to Discovery Coast," said Hughes.

The Queen of Chilliwack sails Discovery Coast between June 1 and September 30. To get more information, or to reserve your passage, call BC Ferries at 1-888-BCFERRY (1-888-223-3779), or send a fax to 1-250-381-5452. As well, a virtual Discovery Coast tour can be made by visiting BC Ferries' Web Site at <http://bcferries.bc.ca/>.

CANVASES



Victoria Peak as seen
from Sutton Peak
Photo: © Philip Stone/API



Runner at Long Beach
Photo: © Greg Shea



Carmanah
Photo: © Suemi Chiba



Kayaking at Solander Island
Photo: © Brent Henry



Megan Brown, Crest Creek
Photo: © Josie Boulding

ONE TRACK

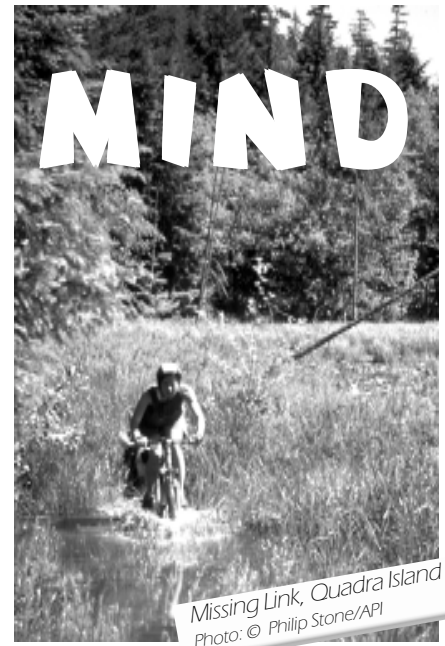
Dan Clements

BC and Vancouver Island are a hot bed for cycling. From our trails have come some of the fastest racers and most extreme riders. The likes of Andres Hestler, Roland Green, Bruce Spicer, and Alison Syder and many more developed their skill here. These riders cut their teeth on the roughest, wildest terrain hewn from the West Coast rain forest. It makes me wonder, whom or what is responsible for our area producing such a high level of rider. At first you may think it's our terrain, but our forests are not so different than those of Washington, Oregon and northern California. Maybe it's our weather? Perhaps all that rain creates a fungal growth on the brain that promotes aerobic capacity? Possible, but I have been to the beaches of Oregon and it rains plenty there. No, I think these riders success, at least in part, can be traced to those who give their time to create the trails we ride and race on. There is the difference.



Descending Warner Pass,
Chilcotin, Photo: © Brent Henry

Our trail builders possess the unique ability and desire to make riders suffer on the road to salvation. In many areas of the old US of A what is considered a trail bears a striking resemblance to some older sections of our Island Highway. Our trails possess the unique unmistakable signs of a bent mind. In Victoria in the early eighties Brian B. and crew were out there creating our sport. Using a little common sense and a few hand tools they created "The Highlands" riding area, one of the first and still one of the funniest areas on V.I. More importantly they spread their special illness, planted a seed in the minds of others that has allowed us to see the possibility in the forest. That seed has germinated and grown, turning Vancouver Island into trail Heaven. Today, here in Campbell River a small group of four or five are responsible for an explosion of trails. In only five years 150 km of trails have been built. Yes, many have helped, but a few have given much more. They are not unique, in every area a few build trails for the many. These are the people who create our sport at the most basic "grass roots" level. In the heat of summer, the fall rains, in the mud and dust pulling ferns, moving wind fall, scraping moss and digging slide hill, trail building is not glamorous it is hard work. Every one of us owe them, our gratitude, our support, a post ride beer and at least once a year, our sweat. I firmly believe if you ride you have an obligation, minimum one day a year trail construction or maintenance. Sort of a "user pay system". Try it, it may spark something inside, trail construction is very rewarding. Most trail builders I know think more of building trail than riding it! Hmmm, actually maybe there is a fungus, a fungus on the brain that drives one to build trail. If so, I'm hoping for more rain!



Trail Map For Snowden - In Progress

Divine single-track awaits, and beckons riders of all levels. The outlying area of Campbell River offers some of the best single-track and network of maintained trails on the island. You know the trails are there, well sort of. Perhaps you remember scenes of a past ride, but direction, trail junctions and names can easily become a blur when you are concentrating on a dab/crash/injury free ride. Lack of information may be the only obstacle preventing you from enjoying the numerous mountain bike trails of Campbell River. But alas, the future is now.

EPIC Productions, a Campbell River business, will be releasing a map of both the "Pumphouse" and Snowden Demonstration Forest trails. The map will include MOF created trails as well as trails that have been built and introduced over the past two years. In addition, routes incorporating such rider specific factors as: time, skill and fitness level will be suggested. Vignettes of trail descriptions, most by the trail builders themselves, will be incorporated into the suggested route details. As well, the 1998 Slug Slam Cross Country and Time Trial courses will be highlighted.

The audience will include both local riders who would like to discover and/or further explore more of their own backyard and travellers eager to sample Campbell River's trail offerings. Advertising will be discount oriented where frequenting the store will result in a percentage discount off your purchase. Finally, a percentage of map sales will sponsor employment projects in all mapped areas. The map will be available at local bike shops and supporting businesses.

The map is a pedal powered vision of Jeremy and Jordan Grasby. Having lived and worked in the city of Campbell River and becoming actively involved in the community, we both realized the potential that exists to diversify Campbell River's economic base and tourism opportunities. The present small business and current trail infrastructure has created a supportive environment conducive to our project. We feel that in creating this map, we can bring Campbell River one step closer to realizing the benefits of being a destination of mountain bikers from everywhere. The island, the province and globally.



BUSH TIME

by Suemi Chiba

It was the first time I had ever been alone. The more I thought about it the stranger it seemed. My whole life I had spent surrounded by other people, other commitments, other agendas. A knife, a lighter and the clothes I was wearing were my tools of choice. Again it seemed strange that I had never owned so little; only what seemed essential. I had to depend on myself wholly. Why had I never experienced this before? And why was I so calm?

I remember the first day clearly, the sun was low in the sky and very warm, it smelled of fall, dry forest decomposing, a crisp clear blue sky smell. The sounds of whiskey-jacks and crows hung in the still air. High above there were falcons circling and the sound of the river flowing held the background melody. It was the end of a week long course on wilderness survival, the group had made gradual divisions in member size from eight, to four and finally one. The course comprised of shelter building, fire-building (from sparks of our carbon-steel blades), bush-food, whittling and other heritage arts. In my pocket I had an avocado, a handful of nuts and an orange, for three days.

I set about my first task of preparing shelter. Dragging the long dead pines to my protective shade of overhanging spruce was exhausting after living off berries and plants for the past three days. I imagined the shelters I had seen in pictures at various museums. Temporary shelters with permanent details. These looked comfortable, while mine looked exactly like what it was; five old logs piled up beneath a big old spruce tree whose boughs offered some protection.

The night would be long and cold so I gathered as much dry wood as my body would allow and then drifted off into an evening slumber. When I woke the sky was almost dark and a few clouds seemed to dominate my attention. I set about building my fire and was soon warming myself as the flames licked upwards toward the stars.

The nights were the hardest for me. Peering into the darkness of the trees reminded me that I was surrounded by a universe that I could not see and did not fully understand. The fire cast playful shadows in the pine and spruce trees. Wind blew through the leaves of the poplars. The sound of rustling bushes and snapping sticks sent my pulse speeding while my heart froze as if it were trapped in a small glass box. I could hear coyotes singing as the cold and dark deepened until they were black. I spent most of the night staring into the fire or in a half-sleeping, restless state. I awoke with cold or sounds from the forest. Every few hours the fire died down and laying on more wood became habitual in my half-sleep; like the way I'd hit the snooze alarm on my clock at home.

Daylight was the perfect gift, it came sliding over the mountain tops melting the frost on the grass, warming the dirt and lighting the creaky forest floor. I discovered it was more peaceful to sleep in the sun so I napped in the afternoons and left the night to explore my life.

Being so close to the life in the forest gave me a great stillness. I could hear the sounds of my environment, I could hear my heartbeat as I worked; sometimes I felt I could hear my thoughts. During the day I often talked to myself. My thoughts were clearer than in the night when they were interrupted by short stints of panic. In the daylight I quickly lost any fears I had of being alone in the woods and was happy. By the third night my night-time fears had also subsided.

Over the four days I thought about many things; my values, the society I lived in, my love of the wilderness and the pace of my life. I began to see the forest working around me; the animals that came to drink by the river, the flights of the birds, the movement of the sun across the land. I thought about how peaceful everything seemed, how relaxed I was. With the added responsibility of my survival I had seldom felt freer and stress-free. I had time to evaluate who I am and how I could change my life to meet my own values. I realized how little we needed to actually survive. I thought a lot about the poor and how they are treated in our society run by economics and privilege. I didn't think about the way I looked or what others thought of me. I wasn't bound by any social obligations or demands. My time was my own, a time for reflection and evaluation.

By the end I was excited to see my peers and hear their stories but I was also sad to leave my solitary, thoughtful experience behind. I have returned often to the woods on my own since then. About once a year I yearn to be completely free of everything in my life and just to think and learn from the environment I encounter. This time renews my energy and allows me to explore who I am and who I want to become. It allows me to live for another year. Perhaps one day I'll just stay there; in the woods and watch the sun come down as I fall asleep.



A Cautionary Tale

by Chris Baikie

When you are seventeen the whole world is immense, inviting you with endless opportunity. As you age, you find that the world has shrunk and that doors once open have locked. That carefree feeling of youth, as exhilarating as it may be, can only be experienced once in a lifetime. And for good reason, it is dangerous. It is also one of the most important learning tools a person can have, if they are lucky enough to live through it. Looking back I can only wonder and somehow feel blessed that I ever made it through my troubling pre-adult years. Fundamental religion will never be a part of my life, yet more than once I have felt that perhaps a little divine intervention had prevented me from seriously injuring myself due to my incredibly poor judgment as a youth. Of course being young this only increased my sense of immortality. If I was truly blessed, I might as well take advantage of it. It took more than thirty stitches on my head from four different occasions, two knee operations, two serious bike accidents mixed with several not so serious car accidents, and one really wicked three day hangover before I began to shake that silly notion of my divinity. Hey, I was a slow learner. The self-mutilation was not wasted however, for deep down in my undeveloped psyche, the notion that I alone was responsible for myself and that my actions can influence others was beginning to take root. I had grown to accept the fact that my poor judgement had a tendency to lead me to serious injury, yet I had always believed that I would act responsibly when in charge of others. Action will always speak louder than words.

It was Aug. of '87 when I first put my responsible behaviour theory to the test. My brother and I were staying up at Strathcona Park Lodge for the weekend. Both the Lodge and Strathcona Park are situated in the middle of Vancouver Island approximately forty minutes from my hometown of Campbell River. I had spent several summers at or around Strathcona, and considered myself quite familiar with the park, if not an expert. This weekend I was going to use my vast knowledge of the mountains along with my brother's to take two of my cousin's friends up King's Peak. Now the mountain's regal name may be a bit misleading, but don't let it fool you. It is a strenuous four-hour hike with some snow and a fourth class rock scramble. It is a picturesque mountain worthy of climbing. It was also to be one of my first trips that I would climb without anyone more experienced than myself, my older brother excluded. In spite of the fact that he had more hikes and climbs under his belt, and has always been more careful than me, my will for independence mixed with sibling rivalry would not allow me to admit that my brother was in charge. In my mind, this weekend we would be a team responsible for not just ourselves but two others.

After meeting Rick and Dave for the first time Saturday afternoon, the four of us quickly developed a plan for the next day's climb. We awoke at six the next morning in order to be on the mountain-top by noon. With our brains swollen and our stomachs shrivelled, we diligently ate a hearty breakfast of gruel in an effort to ensure ourselves ample nourishment for the day's efforts. Despite the fact that it had taken me over half an hour to eat my bowl of cold gelatinous Scottish rot, we managed to arrive at the trailhead at eight as planned.

As we were gearing up I began to see the extent of the experience my brother and I had over Rick and Dave. While Mike and I were lacing up our hiking boots, our partners had slung on their

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packs and were ready to go, in their running shoes. "Don't you guys have hiking boots?" we asked.

"No, we won't need them will we?"

Mike and I turned to each other. "No, no, don't worry about it. You'll just get up the mountain faster!" It was somewhat true, hiking boots were not a necessity. My boots were just new that summer and most of my previous hikes and climbs I had done in hi-tecs or runners myself. The confidence in our voices helped put our less prepared partners at ease. They had every reason to trust us, for we had done this tons of times before. Well, maybe not this mountain, but others. And maybe not tons, but a few times. We knew what we were doing. Anyway, Rick and Dave weren't useless. They had hiked before, just never at Strathcona, or with hiking boots by the looks of it. Besides, we could always turn back if it got too hard. We started our ascent with this thought fresh in our heads. The thrill of the climb combined with the perfect weather turned the thought of retreating stale almost immediately. There would be no turning back today.

After an hour and a half of slogging up the steep heavily forested trail we finally broke through the trees into a majestic alpine meadow. It was here that we came upon our first encounter with route finding. Whether to take the couloir route up to the snowfield or the standard trail. Both would lead to the same col between the main summit and the lesser Queen's Peak. The standard trail is longer, as it follows a rock gully at the far end of the meadow and winds behind King's Peak's sister mountain before connecting with the col. We opted to take the longer gully route as my always level-headed brother brought to our attention the fact that none of us had ice axes. It's interesting how we overlooked the fact that there were also two in our group wearing running shoes. Even after taking the longer rock route we still managed to get to the top by noon. We were legends. After serious deliberation we were quite certain that we had set a record for the fastest ascent of Kings Peak. This imaginary first of ours helped offset our disappointment of having to eat our lunch on a helicopter platform beside the repeater station. There were no complaints when all four of us fell asleep on that same intrusive helipad we were forced to eat our lunch on. One two-hour nap later, we were refreshed and ready to head back. If we hurried, we could make it home for dinner.

Never wanting to take the same route twice I got the notion in my head that the snow route from the col leading to the couloir would be safer going down than up. It would also save us significant time as it would lead us directly to the bottom of the meadow. Rick, Dave and Mike were apprehensive. Running shoes were definitely not the best thing to be walking on snow with, especially Rick's size 13 Nike giant slalom sneakers. Even after convincing them I had walked on several snowfields without an axe or hiking boots and never had a problem, they were still tentative. My brother gave me his 'I don't know about that' look which only an older sibling is capable of, while Rick and Dave chose to remain pensive. I could see they would need further prodding. If Mike and I made big steps and Rick and Dave had sticks, which they could use for self-arrests, we should be able to get down safely. It would work, it had to. After my initial prodding we had all agreed, some easier than others, to take the quicker did snow-route. My rationalized vision of safety had won them over. It may have been a



King's Peak as seen from
Crest Mountain
Photo: © Philip Stone/API

sudden realization that my zealousness to take the quick route may be forcing the others to make a decision against their better judgement, or perhaps a premonition, which led me to do what I did next. Before we descended onto the snowfield I made everyone shake hands and agree that this was to be a unanimous decision and that no matter what happened, there would be no regrets.

Once we were on the snowfield, regrets were the farthest things from our minds. Boot-skiing down the gentle slope helped enforce our feeling that we had made the right choice. At this rate we would be home in time for a beer before dinner, especially Rick and Dave whose shoes made for highly efficient skis. As the snowfield narrowed into the top of the couloir they really began to cut time off their descent. In a mild state of panic brought on by their exponentially increasing speed, the two quickly fell to their knees and dug their pseudo picks of their pseudo ice axes into the snow bringing them to a halt. After Mike and I caught up to them we decided that it was time to kick steps. For despite their brilliant test run, the spruce twig ice axes could probably have used a little more R & D. Mike would go first as he had the biggest feet followed by me. Rick and Dave would go separately in case one of them slipped. Safety first. Mike was just nearing the top of the couloir and about twenty feet ahead of me when it happened. Rick had started to slide. After hearing a yell I turned around to see Rick sliding feet first down the slope on his stomach desperately trying to get a purchase with the point of his stick. Rick's spruce twig was failing this new R & D test miserably. Accelerating at an alarming rate and screaming in desperation as he watched himself head towards the edge of the snow, Rick began to frantically kick and jab his stick in the snow

in a futile attempt to arrest his fall. There would be no stopping him. All Rick could do was keep screaming and all I could do was watch in horror as he disappeared into the blackness bordering the rock. Being relatively late in the season the sun had plenty of time to warm the rock wall above the couloir creating a frighteningly deep moat between the snow and rock. It was impossible for me to visualize any chance of survival after seeing Rick vanish into the cold abyss and the empty silence that followed only helped to confirm my fears. I had just watched a person die because I may have pressured him into exceeding his level. No amount of stitches in my head, or my own personal brushes with mortality could have taught me what I had learned in that instant. Our actions, no matter how benign they may seem, have the ability to significantly affect others. In the mountains, listening to your ego can mean life

or death. If you're lucky it will be your own death, for living with the death of another on your conscience would be living in infinite torture.

As luck would have it however, Rick was miraculously turned around in the only concave part along the whole edge of the Couloir allowing him to hit the wall face first and take the brunt of the collision with his arms. He then fell ten feet down the moat and managed to stop somehow along the rock wall. None of us were able to come to a conclusion as to what had stopped him. Divine intervention? Luck? Quick reflexes? How has never been important for me, only that he did stop, for if our partner had continued falling he would have been swept away in the melt water creek running underneath the snowpack. After pulling Rick from his certain demise it was decided that I would stay with him on the cliff ledge we had managed to climb up to, and Mike would go for help. It was not a team decision; Mike when it was needed most had assumed leadership. I did not feel slighted for having lost my sense of authority, or even foolish for having played a major part in this preventable accident. All that mattered at that moment was that a fellow person needed our assistance, all matters of ego were rendered impertinent. This is true not just in emergencies, but at all times in the mountains. We go to the wild to escape our other lives, to live for brief moments without the illusionary pressures of ordinary life. We go to be reminded that sometimes it's just about living, not achieving success. It is hard to remember that, when everything but your gut tells you that it is safe to go ahead, when the shovel test fails but the slope looks stable. It is hard but necessary. Be safe, leave your ego at home.



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