

Friends of Strathcona Park Newsletter - Fall 2009

Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5 Tel. (250)337-1871
www.friendsofstrathcona.org

Since our last newsletter was published in May, many events have transpired, and the Friends have been very busy.

We held a very successful AGM at the group campground at Buttle Narrows on June 20th. There was a good turnout, a review of last year's activities and discussion of ideas for the following year, followed by a hike and a salmon barbeque. We plan to repeat the format next June, and will have details in our spring newsletter. Please plan to attend, if you are able.



**Kel and Bob install new anchor pins on the
Gayle McGee bridge.**

Following the Friends first application for a Freedom of Information disclosure as reported in the last newsletter, a second application was made. Results were less voluminous than before, but still contained some useful information. Since then, a third FOI application has gone in and an appeal on the deletions from the first. An FOI officer stated he had never seen so many deletions as there were in the first application, and we are hoping for some success in obtaining more information.

The Friends had a table at the Paradise Meadows trail head at BC Parks Day in mid July. Information sheets were given out, maps displayed and some new members signed up. There was a good turnout, and a positive response to our presentations.

On August 19th the Friends organized a meeting in Courtenay to try to gather public support for pressuring the Minister to decide against expanded horse use in the Park. About 3 hours before the meeting was to begin, it was

announced he had decided to amend the Master Plan to allow horses to possibly be allowed anywhere in the Park where an old road bed existed other than in Wilderness Conservation areas. This announcement derailed the agenda somewhat, but we did carry on before a large crowd. Again, we signed up a number of new members and received generous donations.

On phoning Kris Kissinger of BC Parks the next day, we found out no criteria had been established for the proposed horse use. As of this publication none have been announced. The Ministry tried to spin the approval as only covering a small percentage of the Park while ignoring the large impact of horse use.

The following day we met with the

Backcountry Horsemen of BC to try to maintain the support they have given us so far. Unfortunately, while agreeing the Master Plan and Level 2 Assessments processes were flawed, they decided to pursue opportunities to ride in the Park, specifically on the Della Falls trail. They were going to investigate the possibility of this, which is just what the Friends feared would happen. The “thin edge of the wedge” argument has turned out to be true.

In August 2009 the Friends established a new web site at www.friendsofstrathcona.org to better inform the public about us and what we are planning. A key feature is a web log of letters to the editor of regional newspapers written by us and by others on matters that concern the park. There are suggestions for letter writing by the public, and a convenient list of email addresses of politicians, papers, and radio stations. You will also find photo galleries, videos, reference material, details about the Freedom of Information results, and a brief history of the FOSP. We encourage you to send us your letters, comments, or photos to post to the site.

Many thanks are due to Bob St. John for bringing our presence on line, and creating this very useful and informative tool.

On October 2 a FOSP meeting was held in Courtenay to hear Ruth Masters speak of her early days in the Park and to preview a 15 minute video on Strathcona Park made by Rick Searle. This was the first showing anywhere of this film. It is the second in the series, the first being available on the Park Elders website at www.elderscouncilforparks.org

There will be more to come on other BC Parks. The Friends have a copy of

the Strathcona Park video, so if your group would like to see it, please contact us.

There was a large turnout at this meeting, more new members joined and more money was donated, half of which was turned over to Rick to help with his next project.

At the beginning of October a small crew visited the Gayle McGee Bridge over the Bedwell River to assess its condition. Word was that it was damaged by snow last winter, and was in danger of falling into the river. A work party went in a few weeks later, and successfully fixed the bridge. It still needs more work, and is not yet open to the public. Karl Stevenson’s detailed report on this follows.

The Bedwell Bridge repair by Karl Stevenson

On October 16 - 18, a team was sent to evaluate the condition of the foot bridge over the lower Bedwell River. Some time last winter, the snow load broke the 2 pins securing the bridge to rock on the east bank of the river, and the bridge was only prevented from disappearing completely by a small



Gayle McGee Bridge before repairs

diameter broken cable, wrapped around a cedar stump.

The bridge was originally built by FOSP in 1993 after the 1988 Strathcona Blockade forced the government to reverse their action of deleting the Bedwell Valley from the park. Ironically, the Friends built the Bedwell bridge and trail in an attempt to stave off future attempts by governments to further desecrate the Bedwell Valley. Unfortunately, it seems the trail is now being used by the current government as an excuse to butcher the Strathcona Park Master Plan to allow a wealthy resort owner to access the Bedwell for commercial operations.

FOSP decided to secure the bridge for several reasons:

- It cost over \$15,000 to build, and such a bridge is critical to access the Bedwell trail. It would be a shame for it to vanish into the river this winter.
- It has major sentimental and symbolic value. Although some members of FOSP and the public would be quite happy to leave the Bedwell to recover by itself, with no trail, thus allowing the elk and other wild life an area relatively free from human activity, that is a question for the future, when the valley is (hopefully) once again safe from government sanctioned commercial encroachment. After the 1988 blockade, the bridge was seen as a symbol of co-operation between the government and the people who love Strathcona Park, and it was in this spirit of co-operation that the Ministry of Forests accepted responsibility for the bridge when it



Karl with broken pins

was built, in 1993.

- If there is to be any sort of future public action in the valley, a method of safely crossing the river will likely become necessary. FOSP wanted to secure the bridge, so it will be there if needed.

Six people went in to repair the bridge. They were Bob St. John, Kel Kelly, and Karl Stevenson, from FOSP, Warrick Whitehead, who is a member of the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee (SPPAC), and his wife, Jan. Pal Horvath, a Comox District Mountaineering Club member from Quadra Island, completed the group.

We needed a massive amount of equipment, much of it rented. The weights involved in pulling the bridge back into place were estimated at 14,000 pounds or more. We had decided to drill 4 holes in the rock and use much larger pins, to replace the 2 smaller, original pins which snapped under snow load. Aside from using these 4 much larger pins to replace the 2 broken ones, (specified by the engineer) we made absolutely no changes to the structural



Penny Creek in flood

components of the bridge.

Clayoquot Wilderness Resort (the outfit we are supposedly fighting against) gave us a huge amount of help, totally unsolicited by us. We are extremely grateful for their assistance, in fact, we couldn't possibly have managed to accomplish what we did, in the time we had, without them. They supplied transportation to and from Tofino, and got us to our work site through a semi-flooded Bedwell Valley (the river had risen eight feet over night due to heavy rains) by pulling us and all our gear through flooded creeks with a skidder. For us, it was a thrilling ride, and it meant we reached the work site in time to be drilling our first hole in the rock by mid-afternoon.

We worked and slept under tarps, in mud, and heavy, intermittent rain. It was an intense, challenging three days, with lots of problems to solve, but nothing we couldn't deal with. Cooperation, in the spirit of Gayle McGee, whom the bridge was named for, was often in our minds. At the end, as we walked across the repaired bridge, now much stronger than before. We were all coated in slimy mud mixed with many gallons of sweat. It hadn't been easy, but

we'd accomplished what we'd come to do, and we all felt very good.

What does it mean, when you are helped toward your goal by the people from an outfit you are supposedly against? I think it means that most of us are basically good people, in the same way that the drillers we were supposedly fighting in 1988 were also good people. We had nothing against them, and they had nothing against us. They may have had their ideologies, and we had ours, but we were all just doing our best to be good human beings.

What was true then, is just as true now. Our fight has never been against the drillers, or the loggers, or the horse riders, or whoever. It's not their job to protect the park, any more than it's ours. That obligation belongs with the government, and our fight has always been to force the government to fulfill that obligation. When they butchered the Strathcona Park Master Plan to allow outfits like Clayoquot Wilderness Resort (CWR) into the park, they were not only ignoring their obligation, they were working against it.



Bridge repairs almost complete

After the 1988 blockade, the government was frightened into co-operation with the public in protecting Strathcona Park. We gained the Master Plan, SPPAC, and a system of public review before allowing significant changes to the park. On the bridge project, to repair a bridge which was born in a spirit of co-operation, we enjoyed incredible co-operation with CWR.

We are left with a question: What is wrong with government, when they seem to be willing to co-operate with the public on park issues only when they are forced into it by extreme measures?

Strathcona Park 100 Anniversary by Marlene Smith

In March 2011 Strathcona Park will celebrate its 100 birthday. Strathcona was the first provincial park established in BC and with it the BC Park system was born. Once the proud flagship of the BC Parks, it has suffered from flooding, mining, logging, road building and many other abuses.

To commemorate the 100 years of BC Parks, and the Canadian Park system, film maker Rick Searle was commissioned by the Parks Elders to make a series of films (15 minutes each) on BC Parks. The film on Strathcona was released recently in Courtenay sponsored by FOSEP.

This video shows the sad tragedy of the history of Strathcona over the last 100 years. It shows how our parks are impacted by the whims of governments of the day. If we have a government that is supportive of parks, and can see the (economic) benefits of parks, then visitor centres, interpretative programs, trail building and infrastructure thrive! These attractions bring many visitors to the park. With every dollar spent by government a \$10 economic benefit is

created!

When we have a government that puts business first and government restraint as a priority, we see damming, mining or logging in parks, public assets given away and services to parks and visitors cut, parks suffer, and visits to parks by the public drop.

Ministers and their bureaucrats tend to make these decisions behind closed doors without much regard to the public interest. The only significant change was in the late 1980's when the Friends of Strathcona Park, supported by many BC residents from all political parties, stood up for their park. They halted park abuse and stood guard, risking their freedom from arrest, and their financial future from SLAPP suits.

Watching this video, it has become clear to me that if we want to pass on the heritage of an unspoiled public Provincial park system, it is up to us, the Friends of Strathcona, and all who care for our parks, to stand up for them, and guarantee them a safe future for the next 100 years. Current government priority is to develop private partnerships to provide trails, bridges, interpretative programs and to accept legal liability. Contracts of 30 years or more could be handed out leaving the same long-term alienation of free public access to our parks for future generations to battle with, just as our generation has to suffer the consequences of granting timber/railway rights on the east coast of Vancouver Island.

We cannot wait for another election, and hope to get a more parks friendly government. If you care about our parks, rise up and take action. Make your gift for the next 100 years the protection of BC Provincial parks, and specifically Strathcona Park by actively getting involved in a parks friends group. You can volunteer to help restore bridges, build trails, provide parks visitor information, make a

financial donation, or leave a gift in your will! Future generations will appreciate your legacy.

Join the Friends of Strathcona Park and get involved!

Let's celebrate 100 years and guarantee the next 100 years of protection of Starthcona Park! Don't let our parks die!

Rick Searle's video for rent!

Would you like one of us to come and show the 100 year Strathcona video to your community, school, church group or friends? Contact FOSP and for any size donation, we will come and show the video and tell you how to contribute to a long-term donation to secure Strathcona future for the next 100 years!

Get Well

The Friends wish Andy Smith a speedy recovery. A few months ago, Andy suffered a heart attack, and had to have surgery. Andy is the BC Parks supervisor for Strathcona Park. We all hope to see him back to normal as soon as possible.

Tee Shirt Clearout Sale

The friends are clearing our current stock of the well known and very attractive sweatshirts and T shirts. The stock we have left is:

T-shirts: 3 small, 1 medium, 3 large, 1 Ex large. Price \$10-each marked down from \$21.50, Kids T shirts, 1 each, small, medium, large for \$5.- discounted from \$20.00
Long sleeved T-shirts - 2small, 2 medium, 1 large., 2 EX large \$20.00 each down from \$35.25, Hoody: 1 large \$21.00 down from \$37.50

Shipping and handling add \$9.00

What a deal! For the next season we would like to have a combined design with S.W.I celebrating the 100 year birthday of Strathcona Park. If you have any suggestions, please send your ideas to FOSP, attention Marlene Smith-Schalkwijk DVM

"Freedom of Information" - sounds very democratic

Friends of Strathcona Park has done three freedom of information requests in the last year and a half. Why three? A request produces information up to the date of the letter of request, so although it may take several months to get the information, a new request needs to be made for the months that have expired since the request was made. Our first request produced just over 1,300 pages, with many deletions, most being on the basis of "solicitor-client privilege" . While there are several reasons that a public body can give for excluding information, their decision to exclude is subject to review, and we are presently in a review process for the deleted material. Much less was excised from the second batch of pages; we have not yet received the third batch, which will take us up to the time of the announcement of the decision to amend the master plan.

The material produced has been helpful. It shows the confusion in Parks about the process that they could use to allow CWR's permit application for horse trips up the Bedwell and into the park. It also shows a corporate (parks/government) desire to increase private use opportunities within the park, and to enter into public/private partnerships for the government benefit of trail maintenance and insurance downloading. The material also shows that the government is not relying on its

advisory body, SPPAC, and is only keeping up a seeming transparency in its relationship with SPPAC.

We have used extracts from the disclosed FOI information in TV interviews, public talks, and in our discussions with SPPAC and Parks.

Strathcona Wilderness Committee and the Visitors Center

After 14 years of work spearheaded by Steve Smith, the new Visitors' Center at the Paradise Meadows trail head is complete at a total cost of about \$360,000. A new trail making a wheelchair accessible loop around the meadows is also finished.

Thanks not only go to Steve, Ted Foster of the Campbell River Rotary Club, and the directors of SWI, but also to Andy Smith of BC Parks who has worked tirelessly to assist fund raising efforts, make applications for funding from various sources and cut through the red tape. A job well done, everyone!!

Appeal

The Friends of Strathcona Park have spent a fair bit of money in the last year. We've donated another \$2000 to help complete the Visitors Center at Paradise Meadows, spent about \$4200 repairing the Gayle McGee Bridge, and \$1200 to date on our FOI searches, as well as the other usual expenses.

So, any donations towards these costs would be most appreciated. During this winter we are considering our activities for next year, and will most likely be spending even more, especially if we are following up on our bridge repair project

SPPAC Update

The most recent Strathcona Park Public

Advisory Committee meeting was held on November 20th.

Two members' terms are up, as they have served for the maximum time allowed, seven years. Many thanks go David Vincent and Gary Schaan for their years of dedication to the Park.

David is an engineer who worked on the Gayle McGee bridge when it was first constructed, and has done several jobs for BC Parks over the years, mostly designing bridges which don't wash out.

Gary has been the SPPAC chair through the last few difficult years, and guided the committee through the process of evaluating the CWR horse proposal.

As discussed at this meeting, the criteria for evaluating horse use applications is still being worked on by Parks staff.

Philip Stone of Quadra Island, who is also a SPPAC member, is organizing a re-creation of the Price Ellison expedition of 1910 which led to the creation of Strathcona Park in 1911. This expedition is to take place next summer, the 100th anniversary of this event.

There is a lot of interest in Phillip's project from Parks staff, the Minister's office and several media.

BC Parks have created a park enhancement fund to accept donations to finance various projects. Money can be allocated for specific projects, so if anyone is interested in helping Phillip out they can do so by contacting BC Parks office at Miracle Beach.

There has been a lot of discussion about the lack of resources available to BC Parks to do their job. SPPAC and others are supporting an increase of funding for Parks' operating and capital budgets. There have been numerous trail closures over the last year, and much difficulty in

reopening them in a timely manner.

The option of using volunteer labour to work on trails and infrastructure is not possible as there are no resources available to supervise volunteer projects.

A few weeks ago there was a press release from the provincial government that in two years licenses will be required on snowmobiles and ATV's. This will allow the identification of those damaging sensitive areas, and using their machines in

locations closed to them. The Friends enthusiastically support this new law, and encourage the authorities to enact this as soon as possible, and also to fund staff to enforce it.

There are plans within government to allow enforcement officers from different Ministries to enforce each other's regulations, for example, a forestry officer could enforce a regulation being broken in a Provincial Park. Of course, the problem is other staff besides Parks' staff have been cut as well.

**FOSP Membership Form
Thank you for renewing.**

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ **Fax** _____

e-mail _____

Membership (suggested \$10 per year) _____

Extra donation towards expenses (tax deductible over \$20) _____

Comments (tee shirt order, request for speakers, video, etc.)

send to: Friends of Strathcona Park, P.O. Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5