

Friends of Strathcona Park Newsletter - Fall 2011

Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5
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A First Hand Account of Last Summer's Trail Building by Ken Van de burgt

It was a dark and stormy night. I had commitments till Sunday afternoon and only started up the Bedwell Lakes trail at about 7PM with the intention of meeting up with the FOSP work party. It started raining as I made my way up the trail. I was glad to be making camp, soaking wet, in the dark, with blowing wind and rain, on the tent pad at Baby Bedwell Lake 3 hours later. The tent pads tend to get water flowing along the boards under the tent and it is a chore to get the tent tied down with limited string but camping on the flooded ground would have been worse.

My first experience with the Bedwell Valley was in the summer of 2004. I paddled my kayak from Tofino with all my hiking gear stuffed in the cockpit and strapped to the deck. My first big surprise was at the head of Bedwell Sound where my brand new edition of Hiking Trails III failed entirely to mention about the resort that had been built there. Leaving my kayak on the beach, I hiked on the old logging road as far as the ford on the Bedwell River just below Ashwood Creek. I wasn't able to find the route from there and I turned back. The hike had been a disappointment because it was in a dark dreary second growth scrub forest and an exercise in getting my face slapped by the brush that pretty much filled in the entire trail. Obviously, no trail maintenance had been done in years.

My second experience was in 2010 when I



Trail Builders on the dock at CWR

Those who traversed the entire trail from alpine to ocean.

participated with the Friends in building a new trail from near the only remaining logging bridge to Sam Craig creek. It was a much better experience because the new trail got above the gloomy recovering industrial forest on the valley floor and opened up to views of the mountains. The logging and mining have caused a lot of damage, but there are still natural treasures to be found here and the new trees are beginning to mask the worst of the scars left by industrial activity. I met a lot of like-minded people who are not happy about the direction BC Parks is taking in mismanaging our Park and found a positive expression of that frustration in the work of building a new trail.

I packed up quite late on Monday afternoon waiting for the weather to settle and had just about enough time to get to the Bedwell Lake campsite and set up in the light. Every creek was swollen with rain and melting snow from the huge late summer snow pack. Wet foot crossings were needed to ford the creeks that flow into Bedwell Lake. You could see water lapping at the remains of foundations of BC Parks poorly engineered bridges that had been washed away years ago.

Most of the work party had gone up Saturday and had worked all day Sunday. I encountered several people, who had been in the work party, on their way out. The stories were conflicting as to how far the work had been completed. The common theme was that people had gotten soaked in the wet weather. The information suggested that trail had been reopened to the landslide and that the party of 11 people below the landslide were nearly finished their work to reopen the trail to Ashwood Creek.

On Tuesday morning in doubtful looking weather I decided to hike at least as far as You Creek. I had never been on that section of trail and I wanted the experience.

The crossing at K2 Creek was a bit intimidating; the bridge consists of two logs (placed in mid 1990's) with no handrail and the water was roaring underneath. I noted the simple design seems to work a lot better than bridges built by BC Parks that tend to be poorly placed and incapable of managing the snow load. From there it was easy and pleasant walking down the newly brushed out trail.

I met two of the lower valley work party making their way out and so there were nine when I caught up with the work party at You Creek. As it turned out work was not as close to completion as I had been led to believe.

Clearing trail is heavy work. We used hand tools consisting of saws and garden clippers. Some of the deadfall was more than a foot in diameter. The saw tended to bind as weight shifted around, particularly when there were several trees piled on each other. Due to my late arrival I got only a part of the experience, working just Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning and I found it exhausting. The rest of the crew had been at work since Saturday.

On Wednesday afternoon we reached Ashwood Creek, the limit of the volunteer agreement worked out by FOSP with BC Parks. We had lunch, hoisted our packs and route bashed along the true left bank of the Bedwell

River to a beautiful camp on a gravel bar near Sam Craig Creek. The route was flagged during reconnaissance work done by FOSP this summer. There is a huge logjam here consisting of stumps and wood debris. The logjam is responsible for the river's course changing here.

Thursday we hiked along the trail that was cleared last year from Sam Craig Creek to the Gail McGee Bridge. My pack was heavy and I was quite happy to leave the route bashing and get onto the previously cleared route.

Friday we followed the road through Crown Forest and CWR land to the tidewater at Bedwell Sound. The water taxi showed up as arranged to bring us to Tofino. A chartered bus brought us back to Courtenay.

I hope BC Parks will allow volunteers to complete clearing the route from Ashwood Creek to Sam Craig Creek. The rain event that we encountered would have made it impossible to ford the Bedwell River at Ashwood Creek; the route along the true left bank eliminates that ford and the crossing of the condemned logging bridge. Walking the new route is a much more pleasant experience than walking that old logging road could ever be. And of course, we don't need commercial operators building trails, bridges, and other unwanted intrusive infrastructure in our parks.

Additional comments on the trail project by Karl Stevenson

From the FOSP standpoint, the Bedwell issue is (like all park issues) very complicated, but in one way it's also very simple: The government wants to open Strathcona Park up to high-impact commercial operations and we don't. We've been working very hard to prevent the government and a commercial resort from having their way in the Bedwell Valley for approximately seven years.

We don't want a high-impact commercial trail in the Bedwell Valley, or in any other area of Strathcona Park. This is why we've expended so much time, money, and energy in building a low-impact non-commercial trail in the Bedwell. This year we could easily have completed the remaining short section of the Bedwell Centennial Trail (we had the volunteers and we were ready) but the government refused to give us permission.

The Battle for the Bedwell is far from over. We are in

the process of preparing a Bedwell Centennial Trail guide, along with photographs, a list of volunteers, and other interesting information for the FOSP website. I'm more grateful than I can ever possibly say to all the volunteers who have given their time and energy in support of our wonderful park.

The Strathcona Wilderness Festival by Carol Hunter

On August 20th this summer I had the opportunity to be involved in and to enjoy The Strathcona Wilderness Festival, a Leave-no-Trace, low-impact Centennial Celebration held at the Price Creek Trailhead at the south end of Buttle Lake in Strathcona Park.

What began as an idea by the directors of the Friends of Strathcona Park (FOSP) to bring people into the park so they could experience it firsthand and learn a little about the threats it faces, both past and present, became an amazing collaboration of individuals, organizations and businesses, all of whom share a love of the park and had a desire to share that love with others; thereby creating future advocates for Strathcona. Although exact figures are not known it is estimated that 250 – 300 people came out and enjoyed the day, while those who shared their talents and expertise were grateful to have been a part of such an amazing event.

Shortly before 10am, while the sky threatened showers, people began gathering in the field at the Price Creek trailhead, many arriving by the free bus from Courtenay and Campbell river supplied by FOSP. Marlene Smith, Karl Stevenson, Kel Kelly and Wedlidi Speck opened the event speaking to the assembled crowd about the history and exploitation of Strathcona Park and its resources, about the 1988 blockade and the positive outcomes it generated in the form of future protection for the park and finally about how those protections are now being altered and ignored by a government that would like to allow private development and exploitation of the park. They also spoke about the trail builders who were heading out from the festival into the Bedwell



Part of the Crowd at the beginning of the Wilderness Festival

Valley to continue work on an ocean to alpine route, demonstrating to the government that deals with private commercial interests are not necessary to keep park trails open and maintained. After the talks, large birthday cakes were cut and enjoyed in recognition of Strathcona Park's



One of the groups at the Festival



Paddling the Canoe from Strathcona Park Lodge

Betty Brooks of SWI and Dave Routledge gave nature walks along the Price Creek and Shepherd Creek trails while Marianne Muir and Linda Cheu from the CDMC led a hike to Upper Myra Falls.

The threat of early morning rain changed to blue skies and sunshine and many people headed to the water to cool off. Some chose to swim in the frigid waters while others, thanks to Comox Valley Kayaks, and Strathcona Park Lodge, enjoyed a free kayak lesson, took a ride in a war canoe across Buttle Lake to Lower Myra falls, or just enjoyed a quiet paddle on Thelwood Creek.

A break from all the activity could be found by sitting in the shade and enjoying the quiet beauty of the mountains and lake or by grabbing a blanket and listening to some First Nations Story Telling by Wedlidi Speck or watching a tai chi demonstration given by the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Canada.

100th birthday.

Next the activities began and the selection was many and varied. Organizations including the Friends of Strathcona Park, Comox District Mountaineering Club (CDMC), Vancouver Island Alpine Club, Comox Valley Naturalist Society, Strathcona Wilderness Institute (SWI), Mountaineer Avian Rescue, Campbell River Search and Rescue, and Alpine Island Guides set up educational displays, answered questions and shared their passion and knowledge of the park.

Local artist Clive Powsey and photographer Dave Ingram gave people an opportunity to see the park through an artistic lens; they shared their talents and methods of capturing the beauty of the park through workshops at lower Myra Falls.

William Wright gave talks about backcountry travel, navigation basics and also the history and the evolution of gear while John Wilson took people on a walk and talked about the geology of the park.

I met one mother who was enjoying a massage, courtesy of Valley Healing Therapeutic Massage while her children were off learning about nature at the Kids in the Wilderness Program run by Sue Lidster. Her plan was to go next to the shady end of the field to do some yoga with Kathleen O'Reilly.

The choices were almost overwhelming. As William Wright put it, "It wasn't just that there were so many presenters but such an array of diverse and competent leaders from the arts to the outdoors!"

Vancouver Island Mines also supported the event by providing outhouses, first aid personnel, radios and even stopped their trucks for the day so the crowds could safely walk the roads and enjoy a silence not often experienced, even around Buttle Lake.

I will look fondly back on the Wilderness Festival and am thankful that I had the opportunity to meet and work with so many people who share a love and a passion for Strathcona. From locals we met while putting up posters to visitors from other countries who came to the festival, the stories were numerous. Whether people could attend or not, the event sparked conversations about the park. It aroused fond memories for some who hadn't been to the park in years and instilled an urge in them to return; for others who had never been to the park, who didn't even know where it was, it created a desire to learn more about it, to go visit and see this beautiful place we talked about and had pictures of. In all it was a celebration befitting BC's oldest park.

Update on Clayoquot Wilderness Resort Park Use Permit
by Kel Kelly

At the time of writing, we are waiting for the government of BC to sign a park use permit to confer exclusive rights to Clayoquot Wilderness Resort to bring horses into the Bedwell Valley. As most of you know, the struggle to prevent this privatization initiative has been going on for a number of years. We have counted each year that we have kept the permit from being signed as a victory.

The permit has now been reviewed by the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee (SPPAC) and their comments have been forwarded to the government. We do not know what the comments are, as the public advisory committee has been instructed not to reveal them to the public, and they are following those instructions.

BC Parks staff have advised us that the permit will be signed very soon. The moment that happens, the Friends of Strathcona will be initiating court action to have the permit declared illegal. We have had some financial support from West Coast Environmental Law; our lawyer is preparing a case that will challenge the permit on both procedural and substantive grounds. We will need to build up our financial resources for this legal battle, and we hope you can donate generously to the Friends to help us turn back this initiative to privatize BC's parks.

Peaceful Direct Action Coalition update
by Kel Kelly

As it appears that we may be headed, once again, into a civil disobedience campaign against the exploitation of the park by corporate interests (supported by our provincial government), we felt it was time to garner as much support as possible from our broader community.

The Friends of Starthcona Park are a founding member of the Comox Valley-based Peaceful Direct Action Coalition, whose goal is to educate hundreds of local residents on their legal rights to civil disobedience and other forms of peaceful direct action. In three short months the coalition has grown to a membership of 16 community groups.

The coalition has already organized a number of very successful community events to further this goal. At the end of September a community forum featured presentations by Leo McGrady, Q.C., the author of the Citizens Guide to Civil Disobedience in British Columbia and Maude Barlow, the national chairperson of the Council of Canadians. Leo's law firm contributed more than a week of free time to update the handbook especially for the Comox Valley event.

Maude flew to the Comox Valley from eastern Canada exclusively for this forum and left the next day for San Francisco. Three days later she was arrested for trespass at the White House, demonstrating against the Keystone XL Pipeline (check Google). We are very grateful to Leo and Maude for their very generous support. 450 people attended the forum.

The following day was spent in an all-day workshop where people learned more about their legal rights to protest and then planned a spontaneous Post-it parade to the offices of MLA Don McRae and MP John Duncan. 150 people marched down the streets of Courtenay, singing together and delivering hundreds of Post-it messages to the windows of our elected officials.

These events were followed by the Hallowe'en Spirit Parade, in which Raven (a member of Ravens Against Coal) led a march into Don and John's offices to deliver the Post-it notes personally. A follow-up meeting has taken place with Don McRae and an appointment to meet with John Duncan has been established.

The coalition continues to plan creative and fun ways to

mobilize more and more citizens to get off the couch and act up, always in a way that practices peace in our actions, among ourselves and towards others. If you would like more information, contact Kel Kelly at kelkelly55@yahoo.ca or 250 337 8348.

T shirt Sales

FOSP has a good selection of t shirts and other tops for sale. We have brand new bamboo organic cotton mix shirts with Mariner Mountain and "Friends of Strathcona Park" on the front for \$25. There are women's sizes of the Strathcona Park Centennial t shirt with Elk Mountain as the graphic \$20, and there are a selection of t shirts and sweatshirts in various colours for a variety of prices.



Latest Bamboo Organic Cotton FOSP T shirt

If you are interested in purchasing or even taking a look at these great shirts, please phone Jennifer Milne 250-337-8203. We will also be selling at the FIESTA CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR, DEC 3 at the Florence Filberg Center in Courtenay, 10 a.m to 4 p.m This is a great community event for all of us that are interested in FAIR TRADE, so come out and see your friends and shop for the good of our planet!

An Appeal

The Friends have been spending a lot of money lately. Many of our members have been generous in donating more than our minimal membership fee of \$10 and this has allowed us to maintain some of our bank balance.

This year we again achieved quite a bit in the trail building department. Some money was invested in tools which we can use in the future. Quite a bit was also spent on transportation, and if we are to continue with our trail building project we'll need to spend this amount again.

The Wilderness Festival was a huge success with several hundred people attending. Donations fell short of our expenses, so we'd like to make this up as well.

When the CWR permit is officially approved, we'll be launching a legal challenge. We have received some financial help from West Coast Environmental Law, but will still need funds for the legal battle.

So... if you can dig a bit deeper than usual and find your way to give us a bit extra, FOSP will really appreciate it.

We issue tax receipts for any amount \$25 or more, so you can deduct your donation for 2011 if you give before the end of the year. Thank you so much for whatever you can spare.

How can we get a higher profile for our parks? By Marlene Smith

On Tuesday September 20th 2011 a group of parks activists met in Vancouver to explore how we can give our parks a higher profile and persuade the government to increase funding for Parks. The meeting was set up by CPAWS (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society). Bob St John and Marlene Smith represented FOSP.

We met several well known park activists like Mel Turner (B.C. Park Elder & Parks planner during our blockade), Jeremy Mc Call (Outdoor recreation) Ric Careless (CPAWS & Park Elder) Chloe McLaughlin (CPAWS) and ex CPAWS executive director Bob Peart. From the Elders Council, Al Jenkins (Friends of Garibaldi), Colin Campbell and Alex Wallace (FMCBC). Gwen Barlee from WCWC, Chris Bradshaw BCGEU, Gail Ross (?), Sarah Ross (Sierra Club), Scott Webster (FMCBC), Ken Farquharson, Nancy Wilkin (Nature BC & ex ADM BC Parks) Nancy did not arrive until halfway through the morning. The new ADM; Lori Hall arrived just before lunch. The facilitator was Julie Gardner who did a great job! Funding for this meeting was provided by Vicky Husband.

The main focus was how to increase funding to BC Parks and should we change the governance? The funding for parks and costs were broken down into Operational and Maintenance (cost about 90 million), Infrastructure cost (nothing budgeted for that now, all infrastructures is slowly deteriorating). Estimated inventory is \$700 million, 4% of this or \$28 million annually is needed for maintenance, Land acquisition, Resource management/conservation (nothing now available). This adds up to a minimum requirement of \$160 million. The current budget is \$30 million!

For reference, several public documents were used, such as the Auditor Generals report 2010 , BC Parks Elders Strategy session Nov. 2007, New Vision for Parks, WWF 2006, BC Parks Future Sustainability Dialogue 2006, Recreation and Stewardship panel Nov 2002, CPAWS & BCEN report 2002, Park for the Future, CPAWS and Dovetail consulting, 2002, BC Parks Legacy panel.

Parks rangers have dwindled to 10 for the whole of BC with a handful of part time rangers added during the summer.

A definition or programs and services to be delivered needs to be made up with an attached budget so that funding can stay constant. Infrastructure has been allowed to run down and rebuilding it will take a lot of money. Sources of funding were discussed as being the Provincial Government, surrounding communities via businesses, taxes, partnerships, trust funds, selling items, user fees, green lotteries, parks licence plates for cars, the tourist industry, and volunteers.

At this point Bob and I became a little uncomfortable especially with our experience in Strathcona! To be able to move the government to increase their funding and persuade other potential funders the parks profile has to be raised.

We also discussed parks governance as it is clear that we need to improve on that.

FOSP has joined this powerful coalition, and we hope we will be able to keep a finger on the pulse what is happening in Victoria and closer watch the pro parks lobby groups.

Master plans were discussed and encouraged for all parks. This is where I had to pipe up and express my discomfort discussing these this topic while we were so badly shafted in Strathcona

Park. I mentioned that the Advisory Committee was presented with a draft plan while the real plan was already signed off, where parks managers were told to get on with it, while the public was over 90 % opposed to it, and where we have a Masterplan which the government changed without adequate public discussion, where FMCBC was denied a parks use permit to repair the trail and preference was given to a private operator in return for a trail repair with an investment likely close to ½ million dollars in return for the exclusive use of the trail for their guests. It went quiet and Nancy mumbled something like you have no idea what comes across our desks. We are overloaded and have to get on with things!

The current parks ADM seems to be enthusiastic about the parks and can see the health related function of outdoors recreation in the parks.

FOSP directors would appreciate your feedback on these issues!

FOSP and the OCCUPY MOVEMENT by Jack Welsh

CBC has been asking who the leaders of the "Occupy. . . " movement are, and what the protest is all about. At least that's how they started a few weeks ago. I'm not sure CBC found answers, but if they did, I clearly missed the reports of them.

As a member of the Friends of Strathcona Park (FOSP), I have attended meetings with Parks personnel, which I understood were being held to consider whether or not horses should be allowed to be run through the publically owned park, by a private enterprise. This for the profit of the very few, by the exploitation of the wilderness, we, the very many, have been fighting to preserve.

But no.

I learned from FOSP's Freedom of Information disclosure the true purpose of the meetings. It was not to consider whether Parks should allow horses into the wilderness, but rather how this could be accomplished with the least amount of damage. The purpose was to strengthen the applicant's position by collecting the fears of damage to the park, and imagining partial solutions, mitigations, for the various fears.

At the end of the process I felt duped, and was fully

convinced that the decision had been out of the public's hands, and removed from their influence, long before the public meetings were held.

I had to spend my time and energy helping to fight the very people charged with the duty of protecting the wilderness park. The people whose salaries are being paid by our tax dollars.

If you have questions about the Occupy . . . Movement's protests, locate and join an interest group working to preserve, or protect some public asset, or correct some wrong being done to a group within our society by any one or more of the three levels of government. The ideology of greed has permeated each one of them. The examples of our elected leaders acting contrary to Canadians' best interest and values are multiplied daily.

If you immerse yourself in just one problem area with a group of people actively dealing with government to correct it, you will receive an

education you may not be prepared for. You may well come to see the wisdom of setting up a tent outside an art gallery or a courthouse solely for the purpose of raising the public's awareness of the social evils being perpetrated by the ideologues in power.



From Valentine's Day 1988 and displayed at this summer's Wilderness Festival.

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **Postal Code** _____

Phone _____ **alternate phone (cell)** _____

e-mail _____

Membership (suggested \$10 per year) _____

**Donation to help with trail building, legal or Wilderness Festival expenses
(tax receipts for an amount of \$25 or more).**

Comments _____

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