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Hi Dave,

I was unsurprised to find the Ministry peddling the same old malarkey as I read the response you got from Andy Smith on January 28, 2017. I thought I'd better drop you a line. Somebody has to keep these scoundrels in check! I'm about to make a series of claims, all of which I can support with documents which I will happily show you upon request. By contrast, if you challenge Andy to verify the claims made in his response, he will be unable to because most of them are merely opinion or propaganda masquerading as fact.

1) The first thing I noticed was Andy's implication that there is ambiguity regarding the Heathen's status at Crest Creek that is preventing others from taking over the project. The response stated:

"unfortunately, while there is interest in forming another group to look after Crest Creek climbing area, people have been reluctant until it is confirmed that the Heathens are no longer involved..."

But Andy knows better than anybody that the Heathens are already finished at Crest and simply hopes to deflect criticism from the Ministry toward the club. Here's why I can say that he already knows:

- a) I warned Andy in the fall of 2013 that the club was **not interested in signing into another agreement with the Ministry** because we had been outraged by their behavior during a previous one
- b) The original minutes of the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee (SPPAC) meeting at Rath Trevor Beach on March 27, 2014 are very clear:

"Chris Barner spoke briefly about why the Heathens don't want to sign a new volunteer agreement...The new agreement...is onerous. **Chris announced their retirement from working with BC Parks.**"

There is certainly nothing ambiguous about that! But get this: before they were published on the SPPAC website, Andy selectively altered and omitted portions of the official minutes and fabricated entire passages which he later added, in an attempt to discredit the club!

Somehow, Andy was “blind sided” by our decision to withdraw our services even though I had already warned him that we would, and having no idea how to handle the crags without us, he called us to a meeting in July 2014 so the Ministry could bribe us with an info shelter, a trashcan and temporary permission to continue work pending a solution. However, past experience told us that Parks was unlikely to make any meaningful concessions so we resolved to complete as much of the “Lakeview” connector project as possible before they showed their true colours. In a titanic 39 day push from July to November of 2014, we refurbished the entire route. Ironically, we saw Andy out there one late November day just as we were finishing up the last of the work. **It was the first time in twenty years that I had ever had a chance meeting with a Parks Supervisor at Crest!**

c) Andy looked pretty spooked when he saw how much progress we’d made and called on December 5th demanding that we sign some form of agreement. After I refused, he made these statements in an email to Garner Bergeron that same day:

“I spoke to Chris Barner today and it didn’t go well...**Chris reiterated that he/Heathens have said continuously that they will not sign an M.O.U. (memorandum of understanding)** and that nothing had changed...I advised him again **that work cannot happen within Strathcona Park without authorization...**”

Nothing confusing there! But the adamance in Andy’s tone mattered little to us because by then we had already completed the work we wanted to do most. The club hasn’t done any maintenance at Crest Creek since, and despite Andy’s claims to the contrary, that’s over two years ago now and almost three since we first resigned. I chuckled as I continued reading where he went so far as to remind us that we had already quit!

d) At this point, we’d threatened to quit, quit, been reminded that we quit and ordered to stop work by Andy himself, yet BC Parks was still trying to coax us into signing. In February 2015, a second meeting was called but the Ministry still had nothing new to offer and we were getting impatient because they were wasting our time so I presented them with a list of grievances that concluded with the following summary:

“until our outstanding grievances are addressed and resolved, we find it impossible to enter into any new agreements. We do feel compelled to follow the directives in the Master Plan for Strathcona Park. That means continuing to maintain trails and managing the climbing facility at Crest Creek. **It does not seem unreasonable to allow the Heathens to upgrade ailing facilities there until due process-either a new agreement or mediation takes its course”**

That's pretty straightforward.

At the February meeting, tired of getting the “we’ll have to run that by the boss” story from Andy and Aaron, we finally requested a concise list of agreement conditions considered crucial to the Ministry which we could then compare to a concise list of conditions the club would not accept. However, it took Dan Cadden, the Regional Director, a full 6 ½ months to provide an anything but concise 35 page tome in which the only new language was added to intimidate us by making permission for our annual camps and access to new routing contingent on signing the proposal.

e) Determined to stick to our core principles, we refused again anyway. In a response I prepared for the Ministry that September I wrote:

“As the club strongly asserted back in March of 2014, there is little similarity between the Heathens and the Master Plan’s vision for Crest Creek and that of the Ministry, but at least we can agree on that. **Of course, it is extremely difficult for the club to walk away from a project that we have poured so much of our lives into...Nevertheless, in light of the fact that there is nothing in this proposal to distinguish it from previously rejected ones, the club concludes that the Ministry has no intention of actually negotiating an agreement in consultation with volunteers. Consequently, the club’s position remains that it is a liability to be involved with the Ministry that is worth avoiding at any cost”**

Nothing confusing there either!

f) Finally, remember “honest Andy” talking about how “patient” BC Parks was with us? Well, I drafted the above response in September/October of 2015, and could have mailed it to them in hand written form at that time, but of course the Ministry insists on corresponding via email so I gave it to Ahren to type and send. He didn’t get around to it until January 2016, (an interval of only 5 months-less than the 6 ½ months it took the paid professionals at the Ministry to “concisely” respond to our February request) but the patient Ministry just couldn’t wait so Don Cadden sent this to me that same month:

“I am advising you that if the Heathens Mountaineering Club, OR MEMBERS, conduct activities in Strathcona Provincial Park, including trail construction/maintenance, hosting/occupying free camps and storing equipment in the Park for which a signed volunteer agreement is required, these activities are not authorized and are

subject to remedies under the Park Act, which could include eviction from the Park, the issuance of tickets and/or court action.”

Also pretty clear, if a little long winded.

So, let's see...first (a, 2013) we warned them we were gonna quit if we had to sign on with them before (b, March 2014) we officially stepped down, then (c, December 2014) they ordered us to stop work (while reminding us that we had already quit). Next (d, February 2015) we reiterated our resignation and (e, January 2016) re-reiterated our resignation before they finally officially (f, also January 2016) terminated us for the second time.

How could Andy be confused about the club's status? The reality is that the Ministry is aware (X6) that the Heathens are no longer involved. They decreed it twice themselves! **I guess you have to ask yourself why Andy wants it to appear as though it is the club's fault that there is no movement on the Crest Creek file?**

2) I also noticed a dose of double-talk when it came to Strathcona Park Lodge. Andy's been singing that tune since our phone conversation of December 2014 and nothing has happened yet, but it's not because of the club.

The club has always been clear that any help from Strathcona Park Lodge (or anybody else) would be most welcome. Indeed, because large groups from the Lodge have traditionally had the greatest impacts on the area, I consider their participation crucial. Unfortunately, for several decades they have been unable to contribute in a meaningful way despite the noble efforts of Bill Phipps, who attempted to assemble maintenance crews last year. Predictably, their volunteers found the administration regime as prohibitive as we did, the result being that no work has been accomplished to date. Further, the club is convinced that without the Lodge's involvement, real support from government, the club and random volunteers, Crest Creek will devolve into an ever more convoluted problem. Nevertheless, the Lodge, government (and others) can only be a positive force if they "get with the program" but recent developments at the crags have demonstrated that, despite voicing reservations about interfering, the Lodge's climbers are not averse to getting involved without "being invited".

3) I was also amused by a few sentences where Andy was raving about the club and the failed volunteer agreement proposal:

"BC Parks was never opposed to the Heathens continuing maintaining the area...This issue stems from the fact (?) that the Heathens would not commit to signing...agreement...blah blah blah"

Ask yourself why Andy is still pushing propaganda years after the club has already resigned? It sounds to me like he's trying to download blame from the Ministry to the club after the fact. I think it's getting personal for him.

At any rate, nobody in the club ever said that the Ministry was opposed to the Heathens maintaining the crags. Why would they be? We made 'em look pretty good that way for decades. On the other hand, it was never ordained that the Heathens must volunteer forever either. The Heathens consider their contributions at Crest to be more like a gift.

I often have to remind Andy that it was the club, not the Ministry, that sought the original 1995 agreement and who prepared and updated the agreement proposal in 2005, which demonstrates that the club is not opposed to signing equitable agreements. **The problems are that the new proposals have been counter to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, involve more paperwork than trail work, and lack essential elements such as genuine support from the Ministry and a conflict resolution process.** In any case, given two decades of the Ministry's egregious mistreatment of the club, they had to be deluded if they ever thought the club would choose to collaborate with them again.

Andy and the rest of the Ministry should simply face the fact that they did a substandard job on this file and as a result they alienated their most dedicated group of volunteers.

4) As I continued reading, I was particularly amused by the following lines (obviously I added the bracketed content for a little reality):

"However, after several years (two meetings) of being patient and trying to gain compliance (bribe volunteers), trying to find ways to address and meet wording concerns (not just words!) with Heathens reps, work continued (no work was done at Crest after November 2014) while ignoring our requests (we were preparing the response they were requesting). As a result our Regional Director was finally forced (couldn't wait) to issue a letter advising that all work must cease without permission (and that we were gonna be sorry for resigning!). Only one season (well over two years) has gone by since the Heathens were advised to cease all work..."

Wait a minute! Weren't these guys just whining about how they weren't sure what the Heathen's status was a mere seven sentences before citing their own "all work must cease" letter? There's definitely something fishy going on there, but it's telling that BC Parks can't throw half a dozen sentences together without contradicting themselves.

5) As for the rest of that “Only one season” line:

“...and due to some “other issues” in the area last summer, BC Parks and others in the climbing community have been restricted in moving forward to improve the situation”

What? These phrases refer to the protesting last July, but nobody disrupted anything. We were simply hanging out at the camps, often in the rain, discussing the issues! No senior Parks officials were there so it’s not as if any of their time was lost. They sent the Conservation Officers (CO’s) to ask for me by name and issue \$500 “birthday” fines instead. They even made off with a few of our bumper stickers! **This all happened as other campers slept soundly in tents pitched 300 m away at an adjacent parking area!**

I don’t see how CO’s harassing the club at Crest equates to the club “restricting” the Ministry from “improving the situation” by organizing a maintenance program. Perhaps the real problem was that both Andy and Aaron tend to be out of the office or on holidays all summer long. For example, I tried to contact the office by phone on seven occasions between May 27th and July 14th 2016 with the news that there would be a protest, but they failed to return my calls until August 2nd! You’d think that if they were sincerely interested in “moving forward” that they would be answering voice messages related to the file.

Instead, we are asked to believe that the Crest Creek situation is at once urgent enough to justify issuing thousands of dollars worth of fines over, yet trivial enough not to bother answering the phone for!

6) Naturally, the club and its members are growing weary of the negligence, intimidation, harassment, and character assassination they have suffered at the hands of the Ministry. I assume their voice will ultimately be heard when they vote in May’s provincial election.

Personally, I’ve spent far too many extra hours on the phone with a counselor who’s helping me deal with the added stress of defending the club from the misinformation campaigns of the Ministry, even as I can no longer benefit from the outlet of volunteering at Crest.

7) From a public perspective, these unnecessary disputes will end up costing the taxpayer a bundle while one of Vancouver Island’s prime recreation areas becomes more of a liability each day due to the leadership vacuum resulting from the Ministry’s mismanagement. With regard to governance, BC Parks budgets fewer resources to making progress on the file than it does to blaming and harassing volunteers two years after their resignation.

Meanwhile, for the entire two year period I've been hearing plenty of lip service-lots of "discussing", "forming" and "facilitating" going on by lots of "caring", "interested", and "reluctant" people-but they have yet to organize a single day of action.

For the record, and in case you were wondering, if BC Parks weren't so lame and creepy, we would consider signing an agreement proposal that contained the following:

- an apology for the Ministry's past behaviors
- no confidentiality clause
- a narrower conflict of interest clause
- a lighter, more practical administration burden
- a reasonable conflict resolution process
- recognition that any new agreement would be long term and binding
- several guarantees from the Ministry, including
 - that Ministry employees learn at least a minimum amount about the Heathens project at Crest Creek
 - that the Ministry would provide some form of financial support and liaison with industry and other stakeholders
 - that the Ministry will never unilaterally terminate another volunteer agreement without consulting, and at the very least notifying, the volunteers
 - that the Ministry never attempts to make access to BC Parks, for any reason, contingent on signing any volunteer agreement

There might be a few more little things, but we never thought the above was too much to ask.

Don't forget, it was the Heathens that brought Crest Creek to the Ministry's attention in 1993 and who sought the original agreement, but frankly, with hindsight, I wish I'd left them clueless as they have become pretty much the only thing "wrong" with Crest Creek. I wouldn't have anything to do with these guys if I were you-you just can't trust 'em! My advice? Vote for someone other than the Liberals on May 9th!

8) And finally, I see the Branch suggests reforming the Crest Creek Steering Committee with a new name (gotta make it look like a fresh idea I guess) but in that case, why did BC Parks abandon the original Committee, just as "New Crest Creek" was developed and we really could have used it, only to resurrect the group and present it as the "grand solution" now, when no new expansion is planned at Crest for the next decade?

This type of nonsense is not only poor governance, but these clowns managed to piss off the universe's most dedicated volunteers into the bargain! Just imagine abusing a volunteer group to the point where they elect to walk away from a project that means far more to them than just the millions they've invested over thirty years rather than re-up with the dishonest and incompetent Ministry responsible (?) for parks?

Still, I have to admit that I'm looking forward to participating in this new committee. With more routes, workdays, and experience at the Craggs than anyone else I should be a shoe-in! But once the initial enthusiasm winds down, my doubts will be confirmed as, one by one, the committee diminishes until, for a second time, only the Heathens remain. You can sign all the agreements you want, but in the end any relationship with the Ministry will only be one-sided and they'll never honour whatever commitments you do get them to make.

Tragically, the precious heritage of our Provincial Park system is under threat from the unscrupulous intentions of the very agency to whom it is entrusted. Not good!

Yours,
Chris