

The Heathens Club
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Attn: Ministry of the Environment/Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee (SPPAC)
Re: Andy Smith's summary of the September 2016 SPPAC Meeting

Unfortunately, Andy Smith has chosen to ignore the facts once again and continues to masquerade his opinion as the truth on the SPPAC website. For example, let's examine the September summary:

Firstly, I must say that the club was shocked by the summary's initial sentence, which states, "Unfortunately, some members of the Heathens Mountaineering Club chose to ignore the Regional Director's decision to discontinue unauthorized activities within the park...". The club had no idea that Mr. Cadden had even visited the crags, much less involved himself in unauthorized activities there, but we'd like to express our support for his decision to turn over a new leaf!

More seriously, all Heathens take exception to the irresponsible behaviour of BC Parks, not just "some members" and not just last summer. Further, nothing was "ignored". Rather, a conscious decision was reached to protest this behavior by camping at Crest Creek during the usual camp dates. Indeed, it was primarily due to the Regional Director's regrettable decision to withhold permission for the camps, to deter us from rejecting the proposal, that we felt compelled to be there in the first place.

Secondly, the club challenges the statement "BC Parks has been 'trying' for years...". While admitting that this may be true in a figurative context, the reality is that BC Parks hasn't "tried" for decades, have certainly done nothing to accommodate the Heathens and don't seem to do much work of any description. Regardless of the Branch's output, the agreement proposal remains simply unworkable, and though the club has voiced multiple concerns with its content, the Ministry has never compromised. How could they have? Only one version of the agreement was ever proposed. Further, their claim that "many meetings" have occurred is laughable considering that between November 2013 (not 2012-nice try Andy) and January 2016 when the Regional Director issued his (I believe "order" would be a suitable term) only two brief meetings were actually convened. Wow! That's two whole meetings (July 2014, February 2015) in well over two years (26 months) of wasting the club's time with empty promises. The Ministry even failed to inform the club about public consultations associated with the new volunteer agreements even though they are the region's most active volunteers. In a nutshell, Parks did essentially nothing, and it's pathetic that now Andy is "trying" (much harder than he ever did on the file) to spin it like they worked diligently to negotiate an agreement.

Thirdly, all this pontificating about how “...the Heathens, or anyone else, cannot...camp in any unauthorized zone...” is a joke because there were campers all around us every day that club members were issued evictions and fines, as well as the days in between, but only Heathens were approached by authorities. I camped at Crest on many nights last year so I can tell you that the “summer of patrolling the area” lamented by “Mr. Exaggeration” amounted to perhaps a half dozen visits in total-and the RCMP told us that they think the Ministry is “nuts”. In any case, Andy fails to realize that club members wouldn’t have been present beyond the usual camp dates if Parks hadn’t escalated tensions by issuing heavy-handed fines to concerned citizens who were well within their rights, as guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to protest there. All together, this amounts to nothing more than the Ministry harassing club members over criticisms of the Ministry’s behavior made as part of their rejection of the proposal.

Therefore, the club is hopeful that when the Ministry states they are “...committed to increasing enforcement action in 2017...” they actually mean that in the future they will apply the no camping statute more fairly instead of targeting the Heathens for calling them out. Last summer’s civil disobedience was not intended to “provoke enforcement action” but rather to compel Parks to stop passing the buck and finally do something constructive at Crest Creek. Alas, we are left to assume that enforcement action was all the Ministry could muster.

Next, the club feels it is hypocritical that the Ministry cited a pressing need to “maintain control over what happens in the park...” after watching the Branch default on our previous agreement without informing us, abandon the Crest Creek Steering Committee and ignore the Crest Creek project for most of twenty years. Similarly, nothing BC Parks has done has “...ensure(d) the safety of volunteers and the public”, or anybody else, but if they genuinely cared about public safety then they would repair the dangerous Bedwell trail and fine BC Hydro’s shoddy contractor for leaving deadly leaners and ringed trees looming over the trails in a busy recreation area like the crags.

Now, regarding Andy’s implication that the club is confused about new routing at Crest, the supposed “misunderstanding” stems from nothing other than Ministry double-talk. For example, Aaron Miller’s “clarification” of August 2016 that “...individual members, as members of the public, are able to develop new climbing routes”, clearly contradicts the Regional Director’s order, which warns of consequences “...if the Heathens Mountaineering Club, **or members**, conduct activities...for which a signed volunteer agreement is required...”. To provide real clarity, the club has decided to make it simple for the Ministry. According to BC Parks the club hasn’t been involved at Crest Creek since 1995 so they must consider us to be ordinary “members of the public” by now, whether we identify as Heathens or not. In light of this, club members will develop new routes on the established crags as they please.

Aaron’s additional bullshit about “...incorporating all volunteer activities the club ‘indicated’ they wished to pursue”, is patently false. In fact, the club would be very interested to see Aaron prove that the club “indicated” they wished to include new routing or route

maintenance in the proposal because the club can produce documents ad nauseum that demonstrate the exact opposite.

It is crucial to point out that there is a fundamental reason why maintenance of the climbing routes at Crest has been left to the climbing community but it is definitely not, as Andy implies, related to any lenience on the part of the Ministry. Rather, it is because BC Parks lacks expertise in the field of climbing safety, making them unable to “assess” cragging safety concerns competently. Further, it is shocking that the Ministry would stoop to playing politics with something as important as climbing safety.

Aside from the amusingly incoherent opening to Andy’s summary, the club finds the Ministry’s dishonesty tiresome, but more importantly, the club’s position is that a conflict of interest situation arises when Andy spreads unchecked propaganda about a group he has been in conflict with using a taxpayer funded public forum like the SPPAC website. It is not the Heathens fault Don Cadden’s ill-advised gamble, that the club would finally sign the proposal if threatened with the loss of access to new routing and annual camps, didn’t pay off. Sadly, after observing Park’s behavior, it is now no mystery why the Ministry failed to anticipate the club’s commitment to its principles, but the appropriate action for honest public servants to take would be to “suck it up” and get on with the business of managing Crest Creek instead of wasting time and energy blaming the Heathens club for their apparent inability to do so.

Yours,

Chris Barner
The Heathens Club