

Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society



Fall 2020

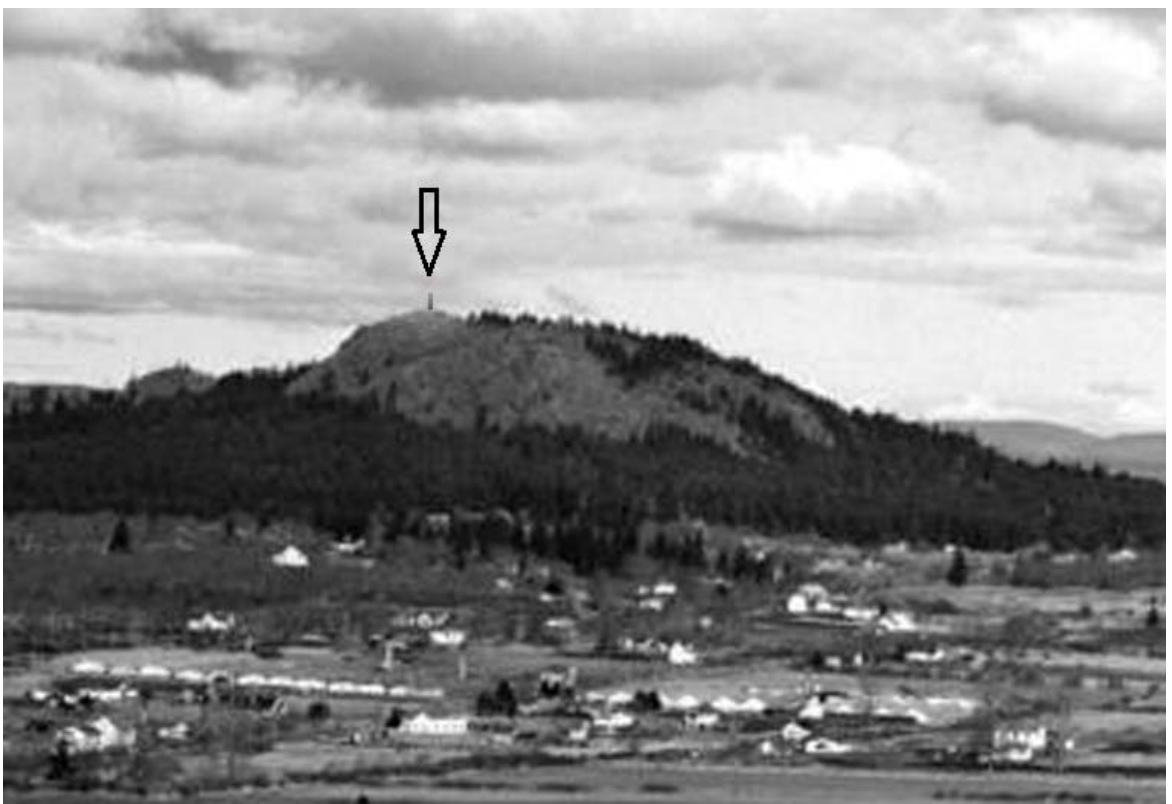
Rendition of WWII Secret Military Radio Direction Finding Silo on Mt Douglas

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Secret WWII Military Base at Mt Douglas Summit

Back in 2015 we visited both the Victoria and Saanich archives looking for any historical information. There was mention of a Huff-Duff military site at the Mt Douglas summit during WWII which was featured in a Fall 2015 newsletter article (<https://moundouglaspark.ca/web/Newsletters/2015-Fall.pdf>). Briefly, Huff-Duff is RCAF slang for a high frequency (Huff) direction finding (Duff) radio system. Several long time residents remembered a secret site at the summit and described it as a “silo” shaped building. This all seemed plausible, especially when internet searches turned up similar looking Huff-Duff submarine tracking sites in England, so called “Y-stations” connected to Bletchley Park. A commonality was the dimensions of the octagon foundation on Mt Douglas and an identical concrete octagon at Point No Point.



*WWII photo of Mt Douglas showing radio direction finding silo at summit.
BC Archive photo dated 1944 was taken from Mt. Tolmie.*

Despite the newsletter article and many other efforts, no additional information came forward until this year when contact was made with WWII radio historian Jerry Proc (http://jproc.ca/ve3fab/mount_douglas.html) in Ontario who also brought in Tom Brent, another radio historian from Texada Island and a new story unfolded.

Having never heard of such installations in B.C., they were initially skeptical until a photo from the BC archives taken from Mt Tolmie clearly showed a silo on the Mt Douglas summit.

Shortly after, an old article was found in the Sooke News Mirror that showed a photo of a similar silo at Point No Point. Although the silo is no longer there, the concrete base remains and has identical shape and measurements as the Mt Douglas octagon.

Then a postcard was found showing the same Point No Point silo from a different perspective and within days another photo of the Mt Douglas silo, this time taken from Cedar Hill Road appeared. We knew we were on to something, but didn't know the exact

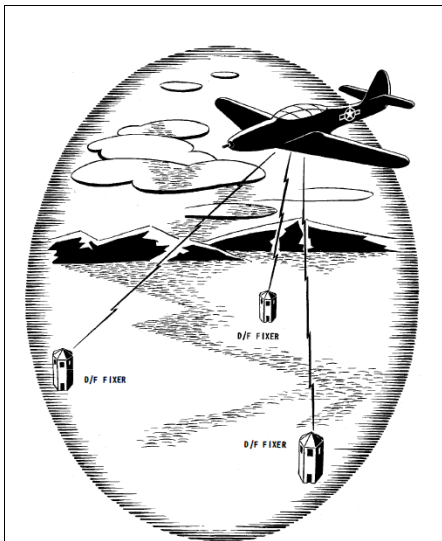


Radio Direction Finding Silo at Point No Point dated 1955, Sooke News Mirror

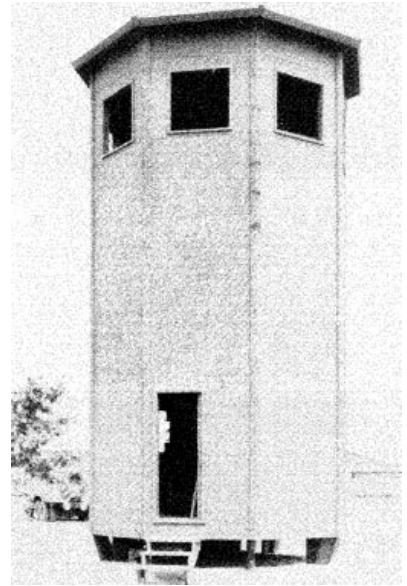
purpose until Tom Brent found a WWII VHF Fighter Control Equipment Handbook. This turned out to be a gold mine of information!

First, it described the silo, order number TR-17, with base dimensions identical to our octagon base! And order number SCR-565 gave you the silo with all the necessary radios, antennas, and even the operator desk.

Elsewhere in the manual, the purpose of the Mt Douglas site and the Point No Point site was described. Both sites were called "fixer D/F sites". They would determine a bearing to fighter planes called a "fix".



Several D/F Fixer stations would obtain a radio bearing (fix) to a plane. These fixes would be triangulated at a Filter Room and the resulting position sent to the plane. Remember no gps during WWII!

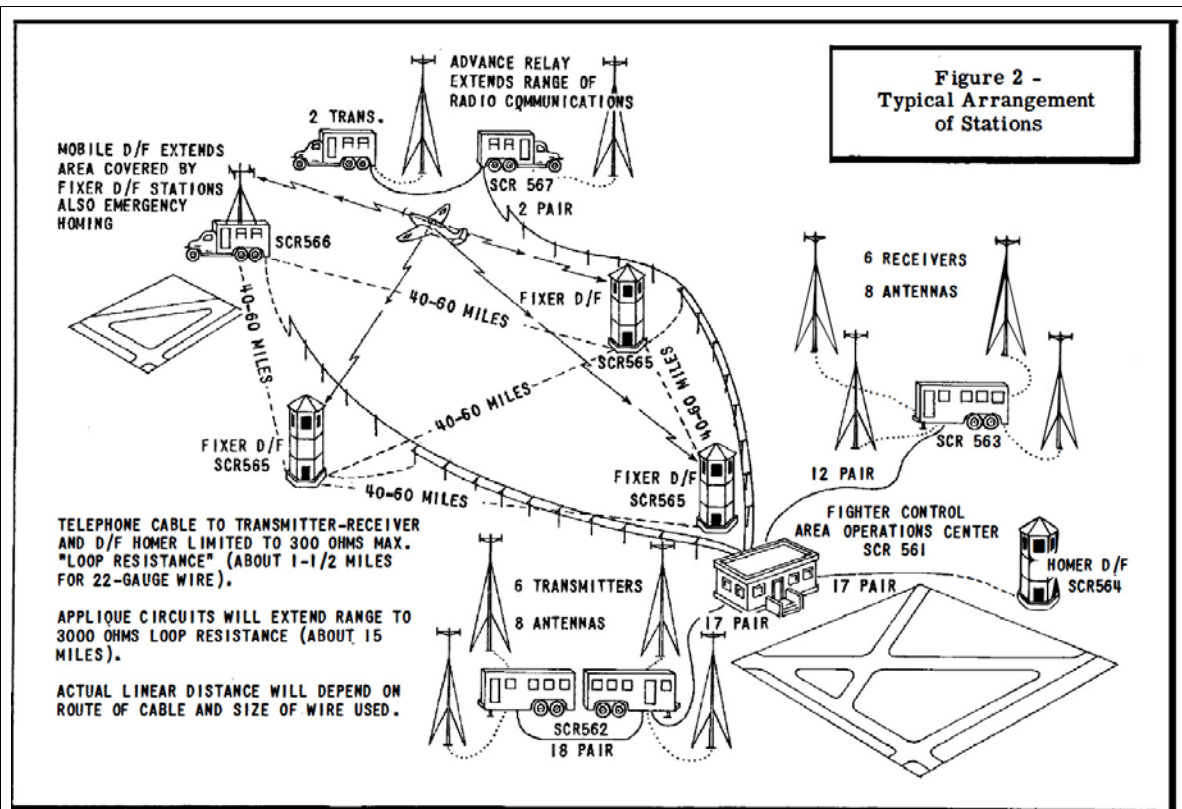


The silo was military order number TR-17 or SCR-565 was silo complete with radios, antennas and operator's table.

This fix would be relayed to a Filter Room that would triangulate the different fixes and relay this to the plane (remember, this is before gps!).

Doug Rollins, the librarian/historian at the BC Aviation Museum wrote about the Filter Room location in his article "Victoria's Secret" (http://jproc.ca/ve3fab/mount_douglas_victorias_secret.pdf). It turned out, one of the most strategically important Canadian defensive facilities of WWII, the No. 2 Filter Room for Western Air Command was in the basement of the Belmont House, right across the street from the Empress Hotel!

Also in the Fighter Control Handbook was an excellent overview of how the stations worked as a unit. We found two Fixer D/F stations and the Filter Room (Fighter Control Area Operations Center).



The Fixer stations and Fighter Control Centre (Filter Room at Belmont House) worked as a unit to provide location information for the planes, necessary at night or in fog years before gps.

Next time you are at the summit, notice the octagon concrete base of our Fixer station. The silo was dismantled shortly after the war. In 1960, Victoria, with a donation from Rotary, constructed the wall and seating on top of the military base. (Mt Douglas Park was a Victoria park until 1990.)

It's very likely there were additional Fixer stations, but where?

Hazard Trees

What is a Hazard Tree? The saying "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" comes to mind. If that same tree falls in a lonely forest, surrounded only by forest, was it a hazard tree? The answer to this is usually no. To be defined as a hazard tree, it needs to have the potential to cause harm to a target such as a

trail, road, structure, electrical lines, etc.

Hazard trees are given a risk rating after looking at some basic criteria, and then utilizing an industry developed matrix. The first item to consider is the likelihood of failure. This is primarily determined by items such as, tree health, tree species, load, site factors, etc. The second item considered is the likelihood of impact to a target. This is determined by considering occupancy rates, location within the target zone, direction of fall, etc. These previous two criteria then help determine the consequences of failure. Where the arborist takes into account the tree size or part, the fall distance, target value/damage to come up with a risk rating for the tree, anywhere from low to extreme.



This fir had intact outer bark but completely rotten core.



Tree has long vertical crack.

When a hazard tree is identified, Saanich Parks' arborists don't simply cut it down, but instead, assess it to see where it scores in the risk rating matrix. This matrix then determines if the tree can be made safe. Perhaps the hazard can be eliminated by cutting an overhanging branch, or cutting a tree in half to ensure that if it does fall, it won't strike a target. The goal is always to leave as much woody debris (or wildlife trees) in natural state parks such as Mt. Douglas Park. A healthy forest needs woody debris.

Douglas Creek Bridge Update

Is it *the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry* or simply Murphy's law? The location was selected, the bridge design agreed upon, the money secured, all for installation during

the 2020 summer. Then covid-19 arrived. Saanich purchasing was short of staff and at the same time swamped with essential covid orders. The bridge lost.

But we persevere. At the time of this writing, Saanich Parks is working on an installation timeline, a critical path of sorts. Because the purchasing department and the eventual bridge manufacturer timelines are not under direct Parks control, we are urging that the bridge be purchased soon and stored until the short “fisheries window” during summer 2021 when the actual installation is allowed to take place.

The project also includes an interpretive area for events such as our annual salmon carcass transplant and also salmon fry releases. Currently this area is not on any official trail and is not safe because of several hazard trees. Perhaps you saw the top of the Douglas fir tree that landed right in the creek at the bridge location last winter? Part of the installation process, always completed prior to any work in the Park, is to do a complete hazard tree assessment. For this site, some of the trees will be felled and because they likely will land in or near the creek, the arborists are waiting until the fisheries window to do their work. It is best to stay clear of this area because of the existing hazard trees. This is especially true when there is even the slightest wind. This is why it's important to stay on officially recognized trails.

Lamium

FAKE NEWS as reported in many gardening articles: “Lamium is one of the best choices for a tough yet showy perennial ground cover”. In reality, it is one of the worst invasive plants. Removing it is next to impossible because the smallest remaining root will simply regrow. It is a garden escapee growing in several areas of the Park.



Mechanical eradication doesn't work for this very invasive plant.

Annual Carcass Transplant January 2021

We are still planning on holding our annual carcass transplant, but in a slightly different format. The Howard English Hatchery at Goldstream is again saving frozen salmon for us and we give them a big thank you in advance. We have two wrinkles to our event. First, whatever covid-19 restrictions are in place next January must be followed. Second, the

bridge interpretive area where the event was held last year has hazard trees and is closed to any such event. We are looking for another location. Full details will be sent via email as the date approaches.

Taking Mushrooms

Sadly some folks still collect mushrooms, and not just one, but often bags full. Some attempt to justify this by saying that picking them is fine as they regenerate or picking them spreads the spores. But there's no question that picking them deprives everyone else from enjoying them. And it is illegal, the Parks management bylaw explicitly prohibits taking anything from the Park!



Before the Mushroom Pickers



After the Mushroom Pickers

Mt Douglas Park : How did it come into existence?

Mount Douglas Park was the creation of the provincial government led by Sir James Douglas. He had the vision to see the need for another park close to Victoria which would complement Beacon Hill Park in the heart of the city. He conceived it as an area *reserved in perpetuity for the protection and preservation of the natural environment and for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public*. The concept was refined, boundaries were established and a law passed creating Mount Douglas Park as a Crown Grant. Finally, when he dedicated the park over a hundred years ago, he entrusted the management of the park to the City of Victoria with explicit directions to manage the park in accordance with his original ideas which were captured in the wording of the Crown Grant; the operating manual, if you like, for the next hundred years. If he hadn't done that, it is very likely that the sides of Mt Douglas

would now be covered with houses. You just have to look at the south side of Mt Tolmie, Bear Hill and many other local hills to realize what a blessing that piece of legislation has been. And many of you remember around 1990, when Victoria decided to transfer the Park completely to Saanich, it had to be returned to the Province as part of the process. During the two years it was with the Province, it was not a park, it was not protected and there were two significant assaults against the cancelled park land. One was to build a large communications building on the top of the eastern summit. The other was Saanich's idea to extend Shelbourne Street through the park and connect to Royal Oak Avenue making a four lane ring road.

For our fledgling society, it was learning while under fire, but with the help of the public and press, thankfully we prevailed. We were able to show that better solutions existed for housing communications centres than just building enormous structures on mountain tops. Fortunately, our ideas fell on fertile ground when Saanich's Land Commissioner saw the merit of burying the building. He shepherded the radically different project incorporating our ideas through the administrative hoops and so today we have a magnificent viewing deck with a secure communications centre below it.



Snowberry

However, the most important point is that the building that was going to sit on top of the mountain was never built. As a result, every passing day we are spared the sight of a utilitarian concrete block spoiling our view of the summit.

And yes, the ring road idea was cancelled; in large part because of the cost and the environmental damage the project would cause. In both cases the words used in the Crown Grant were a major part of the defence against these assaults on the park.

Today the words are contained in the Mount Douglas Park Charter and they are etched in

the “Charter Rock” at the foot the mountain and cast in bronze at the summit.

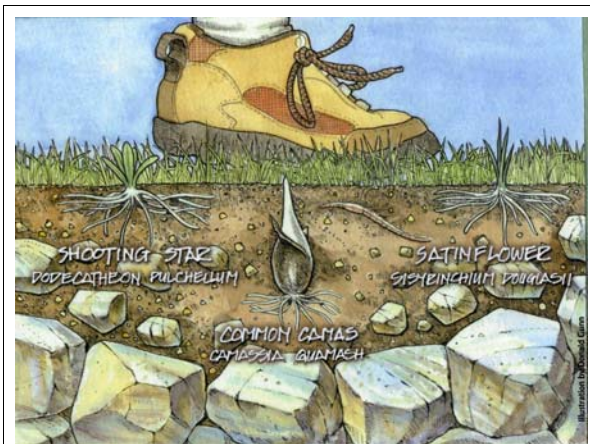
No doubt, without the foresight of Sir James Douglas, we would not have the beautiful park we have today. The name honours Sir James Douglas' foresight.

Compacting Soil

Long time Park users are observing that the expression *Don't take anything but photos, don't leave anything but footprints* is in need of an update! Perhaps it's because of concerns about covid-19 and physical distancing, but there has been a noticeable increase in walkers leaving the official trails and heading off on what we call rogue trails. Official trails all have names and are all on both the FMDPS map and the Saanich map. Coincident with covid-19, these rogue trails are seemingly appearing everywhere. It doesn't take many footprints to start a rogue trail by trampling the small plants and compacting the soil, guaranteeing nothing will regrow. In some areas, such as the south slope



Footprints kill small plants, they also compact the soil so nothing will regrow.



Not all plants are visible all year but they are still susceptible to trampling.

around the Glendenning or South Ridge Trail, the thin topsoil is quickly broken through to the underlying sand layer. The next rain starts the serious erosion, washing away the sand creating even more damage. Even stepping to the side of an official trail to pass others irreversibly widens the trail.

At one time there were articles about strengthening the aisle floors in airplanes because women's high heel shoes presented a vastly increased weight per square inch. Perhaps this weight per square inch is why the soil along dog trails is so compacted?

With the significant increase in popularity

of the Park, we all need to think about the values within the Park, what needs to be preserved and what we each need to do to preserve it for generations to come. It could be as simple as *Don't take anything but photos, don't leave anything but footprints on official trails.*

Halloween Pumpkins



Many pumpkins were smashed this year, leaving candle votives to litter the Park.



The number of pumpkins is increasing

Cartridges from WWII



Inscription:
DAC 1943 QIV
Blank Proof Centre-Fire Cartridge
Manufactured 1943
DAC: Dominion Arsenal Co.
Q: proof round
Mark IV .303 caliber

These were found on Mt Douglas summit area last year. Evidently these are not an uncommon find. Perhaps some target practice by the WWII radio site operators?

Tree Appreciation Day 2020

Thirty expert planters planted 90% of the almost 500 shrubs and trees in only two hours. Six Ventures finished the planting the following day. Thanks to Saanich Parks for the design of the restoration area and to Fanny Bay Salmonid Enhancement Society for donating 600 trees to Saanich with some for Mt Doug.



Planting one of 300 ferns



A new split rail fence for the planted area



Tenth Gary Oak Ventures Company planters



Large logs and rocks will line new trail



Empty pots after planting 300 sword ferns, 110 dull Oregon-grape, 20 ocean spray shrubs, 35 western cedars, five bigleaf maples and 10 grand firs



New trail with restored areas on either side.

Mt Douglas Park “Pulling Together” Award

Congratulations and sincere thanks to the many volunteers who, over the years, have freely given of their time and effort to restore and protect the health of native habitat in Mt Douglas Park. The Honourable Mention award for Long Term Achievement from the District of Saanich is well deserved.

Volunteerism in the Park is not a new phenomenon. Members of our Society have worked tirelessly for over 3 decades to care for and protect the integrity of this special natural area within our city. It's gratifying to have volunteer efforts appreciated and officially recognized by our local government.

The Pulling Together group, working as an extension of Saanich Parks, formed in 2007, evolving from a group of concerned and caring members of the Friends of Mt Douglas Park Society when the restoration activities of these volunteers were officially recognized. The District of Saanich then became a full working partner in this endeavour. Since then,



Mt Douglas Park Pulling Together Volunteers

Saanich's Pulling Together Program has grown and spread to over 50 parks within the municipality and has become a model for other jurisdictions on the Island and beyond.

Over many years this group has, through the efforts of hundreds of volunteers, removed mountains of invasive plant debris,(and human detritus), freeing thousands of native trees and shrubs from the damaging clutches of English Ivy, English Holly, Scotch Broom, Daphne Laureola, Himalayan Blackberry and other non-native, damaging plant species.

As an integral part of the restoration process, the planting of native species into areas previously infested by non-natives must be done. These plantings help to hold the soils, improve habitat for wildlife, and prevent the reintroduction of invasive plants that quickly move in to fill newly opened spaces. Successful restoration is not a simple task. After planting, extra efforts are needed to provide critical protection of vulnerable young plants from browsing, trampling, and sometimes, even theft. And in this age of rapid climate change regular watering of young plants is needed as we can no longer rely on summer rains. Even with all these safeguards in place not all plantings are successful and replanting is needed. Lots of work, indeed!

So, hats off and congratulations, once more, to all the wonderful people who care so much and have worked so hard to save and restore Mt Douglas Park over the past 3 decades!!

St Margaret's School Creek Survey

As a component of their Environmental Science 12 course, students from St Margaret's participated in a Douglas Creek stream survey. They measured the water temperature, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, pH and ammonia plus the creek physical dimensions and water flow.



Measuring stream width and depth



One measures while others record



It's rutting season, don't venture between me and my lady friend.



Two Love Birds

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Membership Renewal - Gift Membership

Join online: <https://moundouglaspark.square.site/>

Providing information via this newsletter about the Park is an important Society function. We want to reach more Park users and Park neighbours. Why not **give someone you know a gift subscription and include it with your renewal?** A one-year membership isn't much more than the price of a good cup of coffee! You provide the gift and we'll send notification to the recipient of your generosity. We hope you will continue to support the work of the Society for another year.

Gift From _____

New Member (or renewal) form:

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Membership **4 years \$20** 3 years \$15 2 years \$10 1 year \$5

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