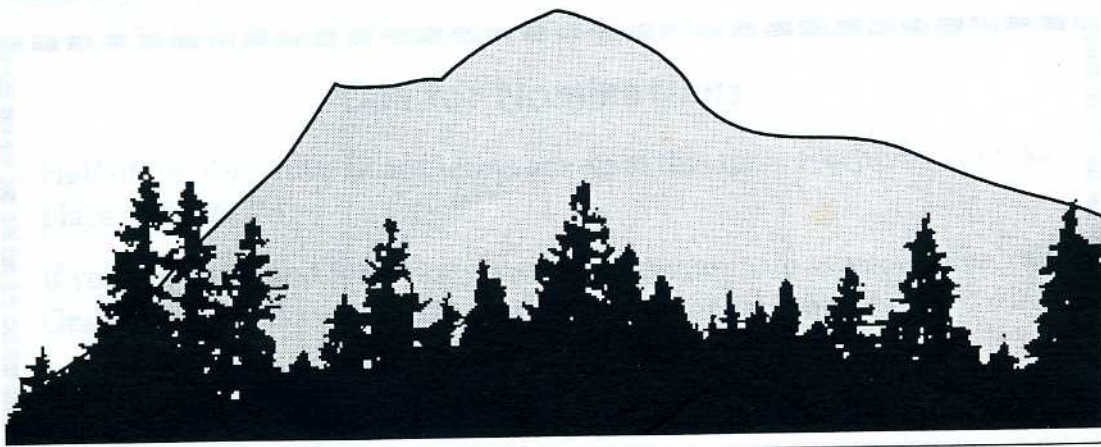


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The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

NEWSLETTER

January 1998



## Annual General Meeting

7:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 12, 1998

McMorran's All-purpose Room  
5109 Cordova Bay Road

President's report  
Reports on  
Roads, Planting, Trails,  
Acquisitions, and Mount Douglas Creek.  
Election of Officers

David Fraser will speak on  
"Native Plant Species, Mount Douglas and Environs"

### Call for Nominations

Half of the Executive Board terms are up at this time. Elections will take place at the AGM..

If you wish to stand for office yourself, or to nominate someone else, call Graham Shorthill at 658 -5873 before the 11th of February.

This is a working Board.

## President's Annual Report

1997 has been a year of progress. Practical support for our Sea-To-Summit and Summit-To-Valley Vision for the Park is gaining momentum.

- A drainage system for the section of Cordova Bay Road that runs through the Park has been completed. In design, this is to stabilize the bank along which that section of road runs.
- The decrepit old flume that directed drainage water from the road into Douglas Creek has been replaced by a rock channel designed to empty water into the creek more gently. With growth of vegetation, this channel will tone in visually with the bank it descends.
- Where the creek flows out of culverts just off Robinwood Drive, a weir is being constructed to trap the all-too-frequent oil spills that endanger fish habitat. Due to heavy rainfall just after the work began, completion has had to be postponed to spring or summer.
- Broom and blackberry overgrowth continues to be cleared in selected areas. Thanks to broom clearance, spring flowers bloom again on the mountain top in locations where they had been overwhelmed. The blackberry clearance allows room for recently planted Garry oak seedlings to develop.
- An amendment to the Blenkinsop Local Area Plan that designates the rear portions of 4465, 4525, 4573 and 4589 Blenkinsop Road as proposed future additions to Mount Douglas Park passed its first reading on December 8th. These additions will complement the recently acquired segment of forested land above Pierce Crescent (the former Achs property).
- The annual B.C. Rivers Day celebration was occasion once again for volunteers to converge on the Creek to clear out garbage.

- More tree seedlings have been planted, principally in the relatively denuded strip of park to the south of the Creek.
- 800 Coho fingerlings have been released into the Creek and, at time of writing, seem to be doing well.
- Under the Provincial Capital Commission's program for a system of greenways/blueways throughout the Peninsula, we have been given a grant of \$15,000 to upgrade the badly-eroded part of the Mercer Trail that leads down to Blenkinsop Road, and to ease the linkage between the Park and Lochside Trail via Lohbrunner Road. Saanich Parks is providing an equal amount in materials and labour. Conditions of the grant require Society volunteers to carry out certain tasks. Overall planning and supervision will be done by Board members, but we will be asking your help in the preliminary clearing of debris and the relocation of native plants.

Congratulations and thanks are due to many for this year's work—to the municipal Engineering and Parks departments for their part in bringing plans to fruition for the drainage system, the alternative to the flume, and the weir in its initial stage, as well as for being receptive to our suggestions during planning sessions; to Saanich Council for its willingness to acquire land to extend the park to its natural boundaries in the Blenkinsop Valley; and to our own members and volunteers, who have contributed time and labour to clearing, cleaning and planting activities.

One way of thanking this latter group would be to join them. At times, volunteers are all too few, and have had to expend Herculean efforts to make noticeable progress. It is particularly important that we muster enough volunteers in the spring, when work on the Mercer Trail will begin, in order to fulfill the commitment we made to the Provincial Capital Commission. In this case, the labour should not be arduous, much of it merely depending on ordinary gardening skills.

This may be the place to offer a word of caution. Anyone who wishes to work on some project in the Park of their own devising and at times of their own convenience would be well advised to check with somebody on our executive board and with Dave DeShane, the manager of Parks Operations. Otherwise problems may arise. For instance, persons unknown to us, probably with the best of intentions, have been removing woody debris (essential to good fish habitat) from the Creek. This may have set back our fish-stocking program.

Those of you who have raised your eyes unto the hills during December may have noticed a strange cocoon enfolding the radio mast at the top of the mountain. Its purpose has been to shield workers while they reinforce the mast prior to attaching additional antennae.

Before the work began, we were advised that it would be limited to certain relatively minor changes, and to this we could find no reason to object. As it turned out, however, these limits were exceeded in the course of the work. To stabilize the scaffolding, a system of radiating guy wires was bolted to the rock. Altogether, about 30 bolts were sunk, not all put to use. The guy wires, of course, were only temporary, but the bolts are not. They had the potential of permanently defacing a wide area of rock.

As a result of the alarm that we raised, it appears (on last inspection, at least) that the bolts have been successfully camouflaged. The incident may seem to have been minor, but it illustrates the need never to take stated construction specifications for the Park on absolute trust.

## Membership

*If you find these newsletters interesting and the work of the Society valuable, please continue to support the Society by mailing your \$5.00 membership to*

*Graham Shorthill ( Treasurer ) 4623 Cordova Bay Road, Victoria, B.C. V8X*

## Blackberry and Broom Clearance

Though not so widespread as broom, blackberries seem less repressible. The same patch, just up from the Cedar Hill Road fire gate, has been keeping us busy off and on over the spring and summer, and it looks as if that will be standard for several years to come. There may be more efficient tools that we should try out (e.g., a scythe or a gas weed-eater) but we are opposed to using weedkillers such as Round Up. Once the Garry oak seedlings in that patch gain sufficient height, we can leave them to the care of nature.

During the season when broom may be pulled rather than cut, we have come to rely on a labour-saving device known as a "weed-wrench." It incorporates a lever, and a claw that grips the stem of the plant when the lever is pulled. It comes in different sizes. Saanich Parks Department owns two of these tools, and has lent them out to us. We have also borrowed a couple from the Rithet's Bog broom bashers. We plan to get one of our own, and so do the Friends of Knockan Hill Park. Soon there will be enough to allow various groups to lend them out to each other. This should make the labour for volunteers far less arduous and more immediately rewarding.

Of course, some believe that broom should be pulled only by hand. Others, again, believe it shouldn't be pulled at all, but simply cut in the proper season. Both parties employ one or both of two arguments. One argument is that the consequent disturbance to the ground encourages the germination of broom seeds, of which there are always far too many around. The second is that it may also prevent spring flowers from reestablishing themselves.

Against this second argument, some cite aboriginal harvesting practices and the foraging habits of bears. Apparently both result in large-scale tearing up of meadows to extract plant bulbs, but without detriment to future crops. Perhaps, then, the first argument is the more impressive. However, our experience so far is that newly-sprouting broom is, without undue ground disturbance, quite easy to clear away. That suggests that labour-saving methods of dealing with the more

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mature broom achieve more in the balance, besides being better for volunteer morale than more laborious methods, even if as a side-effect they allow more new growth.

An increasing number of people have taken to pulling broom in the Park in their own time and leisure. The prospect of clearing broom from much of the Park should vastly improve if this trend continues. Some are making a point of piling the broom at places where it is accessible to the municipality's chipping equipment. However, the advice of Dave DeShane, the manager of Parks Operations, is that in remote areas of the Park broom should not be piled but simply left lying where it has been pulled. Piles of broom can create a fire hazard in the summertime.

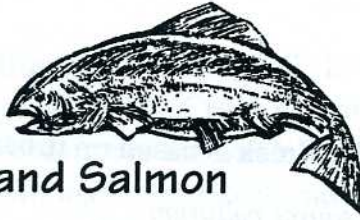
At least some of those to whom this advice applies may not be members of the Friends. If you encounter any of them, perhaps you could draw this advice to their attention.

## Grants

As the President's Report in this issue mentions, we have a grant from the Provincial Capital Commission, and assistance from Saanich Parks, to repair the Blenkinsop end of the Mercer Trail. This will enhance the linkage between Mount Douglas Park and the Lochside Trail. Later efforts will be to mark the linkage adequately in both places, and to provide off-road parking that will be effective for both.

We have had a discussion with Tracy Michalski of the Urban Salmonid grant program, and will be reapplying for a grant at the end of this month. Since great strides have been made in the restoration of Douglas Creek this year—the weir, the flume and the survival of Coho—we are hopeful that we will be given a grant to carry our efforts forward.

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## Douglas Creek and Salmon

In 1997, the Society's restoration of Douglas Creek moved strongly forward.

The four basic parameters of water quality—dissolved oxygen, water temperature, humidity and pH—all show the wet component of the Creek habitat to be more than adequate to support salmonid life.

This past summer, the starting point of the restoration was the DFO's fisheries' challenge that proved that salmonids could survive in the Creek. Releases of school-raised Coho fry this spring and summer moved us further forward yet.

In October, friends of the park and DFO officials released 800 Coho smolts into the Creek. These smolts, reared in Goldstream hatchery, were released on the stretch of creek from the Ash Road bridge upstream to just short of the fire road bridge.

Three school projects this coming summer will release about 600 more Coho fry into the Creek. The commitment of the schools is critical to the success of the restoration—not only do we need the Coho fry themselves, news of such releases has the potential to work wonders in terms of water quality. The value of word-of-mouth publicity about community efforts to restore salmonids to the Creek cannot be overemphasized.

However, to release Coho and hope for the best is not enough. A comprehensive monitoring program is required to prove that Coho can stay in the Creek year round. This program is in place, and I will discuss it a little further along.

There are two major barriers to Coho survival in this creek:

- pollution
  - high flow events.
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## Pollution

Pollution in the Creek is based on urban runoff and takes two forms:

- *Non-point source pollution*

Pollutants find a way into the Creek through the storm drain system. They range from hazardous household products (paint thinner, latex paint, bleach, garage floor cleaners and most cleaning products) through to automobile by-products such as oil, gas, antifreeze, particles of rubber tires, automobile rust and chemical de-icers. Garden pollutants—fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, moss killer and lime— are all toxic to fish.

It is clearly a matter of numbers: the accumulation of these pollutants multiplied by the number of households in the watershed creates a major problem. Every household that lives cleanly, keeps cars in good repair and uses garden chemicals wisely, reduces the pollutants going into the Creek.

It should be a matter for community pride that the last water analysis undertaken by the Capital Regional District showed that toxic-to-fish pollutants were under toxic thresholds.

Two sets of analyses were completed, one at the mouth of the Creek and the other at the culverts behind Robinwood. Interestingly, pollutant levels are higher at the top of the Creek than at the mouth. Many pollutants are particle-associated and may be deposited as sediment along the length of the Creek. High flow events may flush polluted sediment out onto the beach or into the ocean.

- *Transient pollution*

Each fall, after the summer dry period, the rains come, flushing out the storm drain system. Laboratory analysis is expensive, so we have no quantified data from these events, but we do have the firsthand evidence of our senses—the water is black and it stinks! Safe to assume that this water is not healthy for fish or anything else. If our Coho survive the first flushes, we can assume that these pollutants are below the toxic-to-fish threshold.

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The other well-known transient pollutant is heating oil. In September, construction of a weir to control oil spills into the Creek was started. Work had to be suspended in its early stages because of the wet fall: trying to push the work forward made for unsafe conditions for the Creek and for the workers at the site. Construction will carry on in July this year. Happy to report, no known-to-me oil spills so far this fall and winter.

Once transient pollution is under control, the Creek will be able to recover its natural state.

### **High Flow Events**

Since the Creek has become an extension of the Gordon Head storm-drain system, natural flow regimes have been supplanted by a regime of short duration high velocity flows. Such flows wreak havoc on the natural channel morphology. The extent of the problem has not been studied in the detail that it perhaps requires.

Some of the assumptions we have made have left this difficult bit of research on the back burner. These assumptions are based on the contribution of the high-quality riparian zone (preserved by natural park status) to the complexity of the channel morphology. The large old trees that periodically fall into the Creek, the accumulation of woody debris dams and eroded banks that are held together by root masses, all contribute to complexing the channel. This complexity provides high flow habitat for overwintering Coho. Whether the Creek channel is complex enough to provide high-quality Coho habitat in large flow regimes will be seen this winter. If our Coho stay in the Creek, then the habitat is adequate.

Unfortunately, I have some bad news about channel complexity. Just above the Ash Road bridge, two excellent dams of woody debris that were being used as trapsites (because proven to be good Coho habitat) have been destroyed by people tossing all the large woody debris onto the bank. This loss of complexity

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creates a pipe-like channel, and Coho cannot stay there in high flows. In addition, benthic invertebrates (part of the food web) were removed from the Creek along with the debris. The destruction of two more micro-habitats is a real setback.

We ask that, before affecting the Creek habitat in any way, people call the parks managers at Saanich Parks and Recreation Department: they are well aware of volunteer efforts in the Park. Volunteers are most welcome, and as long as their efforts can be coordinated, fewer mistakes like this will happen.

It is habitat and water quality problems such as these that combine to keep the Creek marginal in its ability to support year-round salmonid populations. Please help improve prospects, not make them worse.

### **Coho in the Creek**

To monitor the Coho now in the Creek, a live-trapping program was initiated, under the tutelage of the Community Advisor for Salmonid Enhancement, Tom Rutherford, and his assistant Jennifer Suthurst. Tom picked the trapsites and set the traps for the first time on October 24, 1997. Jennifer and I pulled the traps up next day. Site 1 was below the Ash Road bridge, as a control to monitor immigration down the Creek during high water flows. This site has not produced any fish to date. Sites 2 and 3, now destroyed, produced Coho each time the traps were set. The Coho averaged 85 mm in length, and were healthy-looking, and feisty in the extreme. These Coho smolts reinforce the perspective of Coho as consummate sport fish. They are lively and beautiful to behold. Trapsite 4, too, produces Coho each time the traps are set.

We are going to set the traps again in early January. Tom will come out and help with new site selection. This trapping program will continue through the winter, until the Coho leave for salt water. Our plan then is to repeat the cycle.

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## **Creek Cleanup**

Friends of the Park helped celebrate B.C. Rivers Day on Sunday, September 28, 1997, by cleaning garbage out of the Creek. It was mostly convenience-store rubbish, plastic, tins, glass, bundles of flyers and one syringe. Bagged, it filled the box of a small pickup truck.

Saanich Parks and Recreation picked up the tab for final disposal of the garbage. Many thanks to one and all.

## **Significant Tree Day**

Significant Tree Day was celebrated in Saanich on Sunday, November 2, 1997. Friends of the Park and the 10th Garry Oak Scout Troop planted 300 hemlock and western redcedar in a strip of the Park bordered by the Creek on one hand and Edgemont Road on the other.

It was a good day for tree-planting and, due to hard work by the Scouts, the job was done in a couple of hours. To date, we have planted something like 1500 trees in that area.

## **No Parks and Recreation Director**

Don Hunter, Director of Saanich Parks and Recreation Department, gave up the job in August last year. Since then, there has been no Director. Very recently, Saanich Council, in a three to five decision, voted not to employ a new Director. Dave DeShane will move over to Public Works and operate under the direction of the head of that department.

Although we are assured that parks management will continue, we are extremely uneasy over this decision. There appears to be no one, now, who will be directly responsible for initiating and protecting park philosophy and setting park priorities.

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## The New Park Road Plan

In the course of one year, there has been a major transformation in attitudes towards this unique park road. The catalyst for the change was contained in the directive newly elected Mayor, Frank Leonard gave to Saanich staff in his December '96 inaugural address. Subsequently, an interdepartmental committee under Hugh McKay, Director of Engineering, produced a report containing a series of recommendations to preserve the character of the park road and to make it safe and accessible to several distinct user groups.

Once the drainage work was completed and it was clear that we had enough black top for at least one bike lane, the initial momentum was maintained by Saanich staff who brought forward a detailed plan for the section between the motel and Ash Road. The design included many practical examples of the ideas contained in their report. Reviewed by representatives from the surrounding community associations, the significant tree committee, the cyclists and ourselves, there was a general consensus that here, at last, was a realistic plan of action which respected the concerns of all; it was completely different from the plan of two years ago which would have seen hundreds of trees cut down

As part of the discussion, the Executive, led by Darrell Wick, developed a set of goals against which to measure the changes, These changes must ensure that:

- All park users have equal rights to enjoy the park.
  - The investment in cliff stabilization is preserved.
  - All park assets are preserved.
  - Park users have a safe, convenient and scenic sea-to-summit walk.
  - Bicycle riders are able to pass along the road with safety and convenience.
  - Road approaches provide a visual buffer zone and a gradual transition from suburban surroundings to the distinctive park setting.
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Within the new plan there are two crossing points for pedestrians, one near the washroom and the other near the gravel pit. Novel features include a raised island which has the effect of narrowing the road and so slowing traffic down and a different colour to the surroundings so they stand out as restrictions. The one near the gravel pit will include a left turn lane for cyclists so they can use the old view road as an alternative route through the park. There is provision for lanes in both directions, but the problem of the left turn at Ash Road remains.

### **Trails**

The Parks Department has now completed a new trail which runs parallel to Cordova Bay Road and emerges by the bus stop at the motel. This means that walkers from the north and west of the Park can hike along the road and then get away from the traffic at the Park boundary. There they have a choice, either to follow the rugged trails to the summit or the gentle meandering ones which lead to the picnic area and the creek. Although there is walking space on the approaches to the Park, the surface is uneven and you still have to cross the road twice on the journey from Blenkinsop/ Royal Oak Drive to the motel. We hope that this will change as the concept of a unique park road is translated into a reality. Please take the time to walk along the approaches and the new trail and let us know what you think of them.

### **Horse Riders**

Before the Society was formed, one of the pleasures of living near the park was the constant stream of riders and horses passing through. In the early eighties, with the rapid rise in motor traffic along Cordova Bay Road, they disappeared. But now, suddenly, just as suddenly as the cyclists emerged about five years ago, they are back. At the moment their numbers are small but we would like to encourage local riders to use both the park and this park road in their travels. By doing so, they will help make it obvious to all that this is a unique park road.

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## Board of Directors 1997/98

President	Kenneth Rankin	4285 Cedar Hill Road	V8N 3C7	477-8007
Past President	Darrell Wick	1491 Edgemont Road	V8N 4P7	477-9291
Treasurer	Graham Shorthill	4623 Cordova Bay Road	V8X 3V6	658-5873
Secretary	Sheilagh Ogilvie	515 Carnation Place	V8Z6G6	479-4281
Acquisitions	Claude Maurice	2200 Lorne Terrace	V8S 2H8	598-7407
Streams	Robert Bridgeman	1481 Elnido Road	V8N 4Z7	477-7464
Trails	Lisa Evans	2590 MacDonald Drive	V8N 1X8	721-3910

## Membership

### The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

\$5.00/person

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postal code: \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill in this form and mail it to: Graham Shorthill  
4623 Cordova Bay Road  
Victoria, BC V8X 3V6