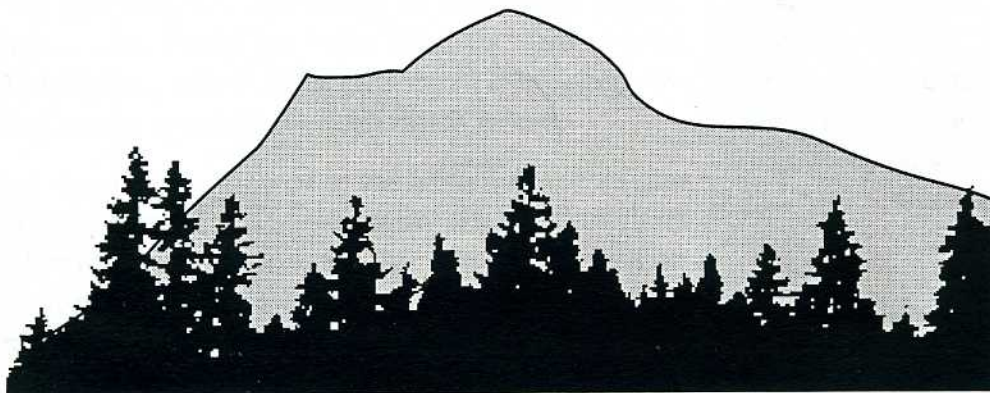


The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

NEWSLETTER

September 1999



Anniversary Issue

Two Anniversaries

President's Message

Reckoning from one date, Mount Douglas Park is now 141 years old. The rump of the present park was set aside by Sir James Douglas in 1858 as a Crown Reserve, According to one of our sources, church and military were the intended beneficiaries of this arrangement. Of how exactly they may have put it to use, if at all, we have no record.

Reckoning from another date, the 110th anniversary of the Park as such falls in the present year. In 1889 the original donation was re-established in the official form of a Crown Grant: this time around its use solely as parkland, and for the purpose of pleasure, was stipulated in unequivocal terms.

Since the 10th anniversary of our Society's foundation also falls in 1999, we hope that Sir James, wherever he is now, will not resent that we take the last of the two anniversaries as the occasion for the present retrospective view.

As in the original Eden, from quite early years our Park has been the scene of struggle between forces of good and evil. Extraction of gravel, tree felling, the straightening of Cordova Bay Road from the Ash Road junction to the gravel pit, the dumping of garbage and the grazing of goats have been among the workings of the latter of these two forces. Fortunately, the Park had its friends and active whistleblowers long before our society came into being, otherwise the damage would have been much worse.

Unlike our forerunners, however, we have had the advantage of the cooperation of a municipality whose councillors and staff have been environmentally more sensitive than many of their predecessors. We have also had invaluable help at the ministerial level from the province.

During our 10 years of activity, and as a result of this cooperation:

- plans for subdividing land out of the Park have been cancelled;
- alternatives to unsightly riprap to strengthen the foreshore banks have been implemented;

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Mount Douglas Park

Height: 222 metres

Extent: 435 acres (1992)

A survivor of the Ice Age, Mount Douglas a "monadnock," — that is, its material is harder than the surrounding ground.

When the natives paddled over to Vancouver Island from the San Juans, they pulled their canoes up on Mount Douglas beach. The beach was also a stop for the Songhees on their way from up-island to Fort Victoria. It was called the 'hill of the cedars.'

1843

When the Hudson Bay Company built Fort Victoria, uprights were needed for the palisade. The Songhees cut 22-foot cedar pickets from Mount Douglas, and carried them in to the site of the fort, travelling back and forth along present Cedar Hill Road. They were paid a blanket for every 600 cedar poles.

1845

Captain John Gordon, brother of the foreign secretary of the time, came to Fort Victoria for a visit. He was taken on a hunting trip to the "hill of cedars." He did not catch his deer. Subsequently, Gordon was said to have claimed that he "would not give the most barren hills in the Highlands of Scotland for all I see around me."

1852

The first settler in the Mount Douglas area was James Tod (son of the HBC chief trader, John Tod). He purchased land near the mountain in 1853 and called it Spring Farm. He built his first house in 1857, his second in 1869, and farmed there for 52 years after that.

1858

In 1858, James Douglas reserved the mountain and some surrounding land for military, school and church purposes.

1859

In March, 1859, Captain G.H. Richard's wrote the Hydrographer of the Royal Navy explaining how "Cedar Hill," though small and insignificant, came to be known as Mount Douglas. "...it has been much the fashion here to give the term *Mountain* to elevations which are by no means entitled to that description. I have taken the liberty of reducing all under 1000 feet to Hills, except for Mount Douglas, which I have retained as a mountain although only 690 feet, partly from not wishing to lower the Governor [James Douglas] and partly because Douglas *Hill* does not sound well...."

1862

E.B. Jackson, who had a farm on the mountain, wrote the Colonial Secretary asking that he might fence in and lease these acres

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- radio facilities at the summit have been made scenically less intrusive than originally planned;
- Garry oak seedlings have been planted in areas from which broom and blackberry vines have been cleared;
- cedar seedlings have been planted in areas of forest that have been levelled by wind due to exposure by boundary development;
- the decrepit old flume that channeled drainage water from Cordova Bay Road into the Creek has been replaced by a more efficient and less obtrusive system;
- the flow of water down the creek, and the quality of that water, have been brought under better control through the construction of a weir;
- the limits of the Park on the west side are in process of being extended to the valley treeline through the purchase by Saanich, piece-by-piece, of privately-owned land;
- a linkage to the Greenways system that passes through the Blenkinsop Valley has been improved by the upgrading of the Mercer Trail, thanks in part to a grant from the Provincial Capital Commission;
- through cost-sharing with Beautiful British Columbia Magazine, a helicopter lifted in Saanich's chipper, so that broom cut on the west (and more inaccessible) side of the Park has been disposed of;
- plans for the reintegration of the former gravel pit into the Park have been prepared and are about to be implemented.

Another activity of our Society that has involved such bodies as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and groups from various local schools as well as municipal staff has been the introduction of salmonids into the Creek. Work on this project is ongoing, and already there is promise that the Creek will turn into a fish-bearing stream.

This is also the place to pay tribute to the many volunteers who, over the past 10 years, have been involved in broom bashing, blackberry eradication, ivy clearing, and various of the activities already mentioned above.

