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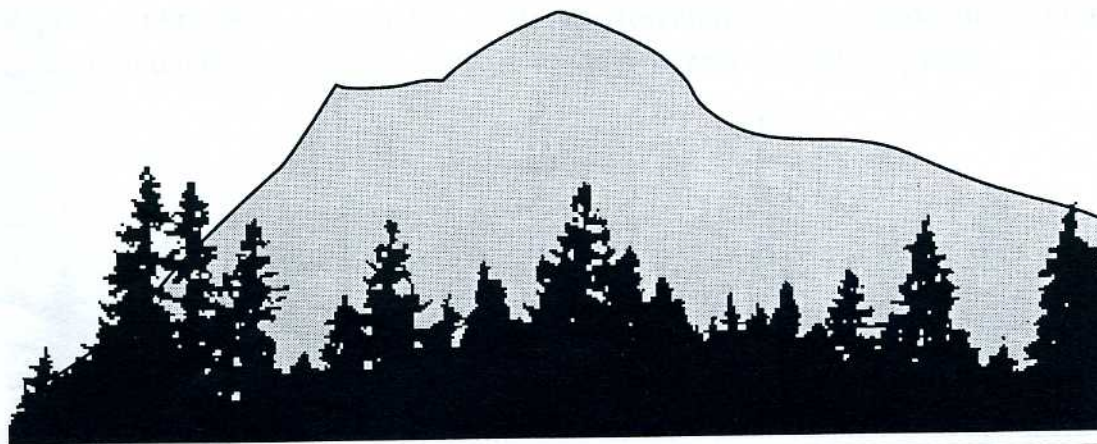
The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

# NEWSLETTER

September 1998

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## Fire In The Park

During the first week of August, eagle-eyed Jane Owen spotted and reported a fire within Mt. Douglas Park. The fire was along the creek, about 100 m downstream from the new weir.

The Saanich Fire Department responded and quickly doused it with shovel and water from the creek. They said that it appeared to be deliberately set!

Considering the very dry conditions, and the heavy vegetation in this area, Jane likely averted what could have been a very serious fire.

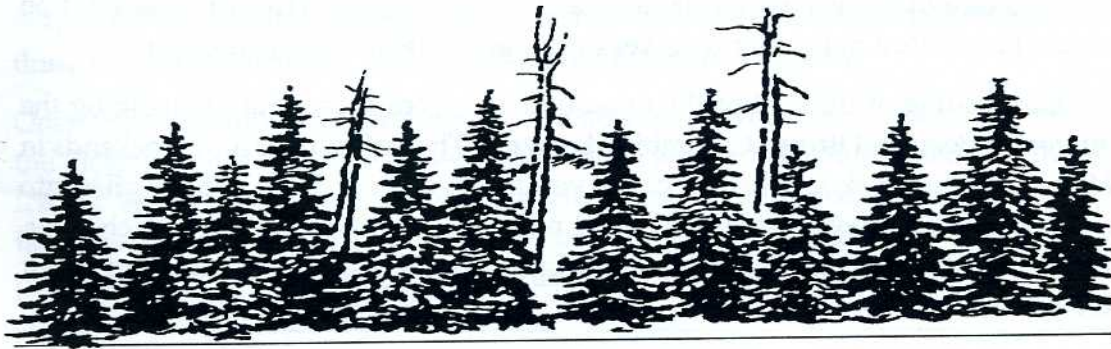
## Mount Douglas Bike Trail

Transportation Minister Harry Lali and MLA Andrew Petter have announced that Saanich will receive up to \$147,500 to develop 1.05 kilometres of bike lane along Cordova Bay Road through Mount Douglas Park.

The provincial grant comes from the Cycling Network Program, which helps fund community projects that support transportation cycling on a 50/50 cost-shared basis with local governments. Petter points out that there are now over 1000 cycle trips each day to UVic alone along this route.

## Recently...

Eagle-eyed Marsh Ney spotted an adult otter travelling up the Creek, through the culverts at the trail crossing, then up over the new weir and into the pond.



## **Mercer Trail Upgrade**

As you may know, the Mercer Trail leads from the Park down onto Blenkinsop Road. For that reason, it forms a key component of the greenways system that begins within the Park at the shoreline and extends beyond the Park along Lochside Trail via Lohbrunner Road.

Over time, portions of the trail had become deeply trenched, and some of its rock surfaces were a hazard for pedestrian and equestrian traffic.

In April, Parks Department crews began work on upgrading the trail to standards agreed between Saanich Parks management and your executive board. They rerouted the trail at one point to detour around a particularly hazardous rocky shelf, filled in depressions with granulated rock to allow for drainage, and spread a surface of gravel over the top. The work was completed on June 13.

A total budget of \$30,000 was allocated to the project. To this we contributed \$15,000, the amount of the grant we received from the Provincial Capital Commission. The remaining \$15,000 has been picked up by Saanich.

## **Broom on the Park's West Side**

Until now we have confined our broom-bashing efforts to selected areas accessible to the chipper. Over the past year, however, other enemies of broom have been working in an area on the west side of the Park, into which a chipper cannot be hauled. This posed a problem: the possibility that the piled cuttings might prove a temptation for some pyromaniac could not be lightly dismissed. In discussions between us and Saanich Parks management, it was suggested that the best solution would be to hire a helicopter to lower the chipper into a suitable position.

To defray some of the cost of the operation, we were successful in engaging the interest of Beautiful British Columbia Magazine. Thereafter, over four weekends in May and some weekdays between, our volunteers shifted about 35 to 40 piles into a semicircular array around a central position, in readiness for the chipper. Altogether 22 volunteers were involved, spending between them a total of about 130 hours on the job.

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At the time of writing, we are still waiting for the chipper to be dropped in. The helicopter has temporarily left the Island on forest-fighting duties.

In the meantime, we have already recently carried out a broom bash at the summit and a session removing blackberry vines by Cedar Hill firegate.

Broom-pu;ling events have been scheduled for Saturdays October 10 and 31st, on both occasions from 10:00 a.m. to 12 noon. Meet at the parking lot at the top of Mount Douglas. Bring gloves.

## Ivy Removal

When he walks his dog each morning in the Park, David Berger North takes along a pair of clippers to cut away the ivy that is ascending many of the Park trees. If enough of our members were to follow his example, it might very well halt, or at least diminish, the insidious progress of this environmentally- harmful species. It is on climbing a tree that, after differentiation, some of the leaves on the ivy vines produce the seeds that lead to further spreading of ivy in other locations.

## A New Future For An Old Gravel Pit

In the course of its long history, the gravel pit near the view road has always been a place apart from the natural parkland which surrounds it. As the name suggests, its original role was to provide gravel for the small population of Cordova Bay in the early days of this century. In this way, it acted as a forerunner for the present Trio and Municipal pits to the north. It is an interesting historical coincidence that all the gravel pits in this area are now in the process of transformation to something else. This particular pit has had many uses over the years.

Once the excavation of gravel ended, the deserted and isolated quarry provided the Victoria police with an excellent pistol range where they could practice without fear of accidents. However, as the surrounding population grew and better facilities became available, this use also ceased and the period of benign neglect, punctuated by deposits of household rubbish from passing motorists, began.

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Over the last ten years we have seen the site used first for municipal composting then for rock storage and finally as part of the surface-water control system which was built a couple of years ago. Since then a major trail (which runs parallel to the road with a trail crossing to the south of the pit) has been added. During the same period, we have had to endure the effective but hideous chain link fence which, at the cost of massive visual pollution, has reduced the number of incidents of unofficial garbage disposal there.

The lasting technical use of the site will be as part of the new drainage system. When it was constructed, a number of characteristics of the pit were permanently changed so that the surface water could be collected and discharged in an orderly way. The rock and rubble were removed and the area graded so that water would flow towards the road from the mountain across the floor of the pit. To prevent the water seeping into the natural sand and gravel, a cap of clay soil was added, causing the water to stay on the surface and to flow into the specially-created pond just before the road. Within the pond there is a discharge system linked to the drainage ditch which runs parallel to Cordova Bay Road, then under the road, then through the parking lot and finally into the Creek.

Under normal operations, only a trickle of water flows through the system, but during the winter storms the pond acts as a damper or control reservoir; providing a crucial delay in the discharge of the water into the Creek as well as reducing the peak flow rates considerably. For those of us with memories of the damage done by the torrential winter storms of the early nineties, this new system promises to prevent a repeat—provided the clay cap remains intact and water can flow freely in and out of the pond. So, any changes that are carried out within the gravel pit must not destroy the integrity of this drainage system.

Similarly, from earlier newsletters you know that the character of the road is scheduled to be changed significantly by the addition of bike lanes and specially designed crosswalks. One of the latter will be at the entrance to the gravel pit.

We concluded that this is the right time to develop a comprehensive or holistic plan for the pit and the other major features surrounding it. In broad terms we hope to achieve the successful integration of the following:

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- A major trail and trail crossing
- Integration of the view road into pedestrian and cycling routes
- A safe road crossing
- The removal of the chain link fence
- The exclusive access to the fire hydrant for the fire department
- Maintenance of the clay cap within the gravel pit
- Additional use of the pond
- Vegetation to screen the area from the road
- A haven for the deer
- Planting of native species

With this in mind, we applied to Saanich for a grant to support this work, and were successful. No one person within the Society had the expertise to oversee the project and so we approached those people at the University of Victoria who are in charge of the Restoration of Natural Systems Program. They agreed to coordinate the work. The candidates who applied to do the work were very impressive: it is heartening to see such a wealth of talent directed towards such desirable ends. It was a difficult choice to make, but we offered the position to Maria Grau Lopez.

Her first task is to prepare a comprehensive inventory of the site, drawing together the current information which is scattered throughout a number of government departments. Where she finds gaps, she will complete the data using her own observations and measurements. The second task calls for an analysis of the data and a series of recommendations about how we can achieve the goals listed earlier and, at the same time, satisfy the competing claims of various users. Finally, she will prepare a procedures manual or prescription for those aspects of the proposed changes which will be carried out by inexperienced, volunteer labour (e.g., planting of native species).

The overall document, when it is complete, should provide us with an excellent manual proposing environmentally-sound methods for carrying out the immediate changes, while also providing us with an excellent reference for any future work and development in this area. The whole process breaks new ground for the Society but it could become a major way of doing our work in the future.

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