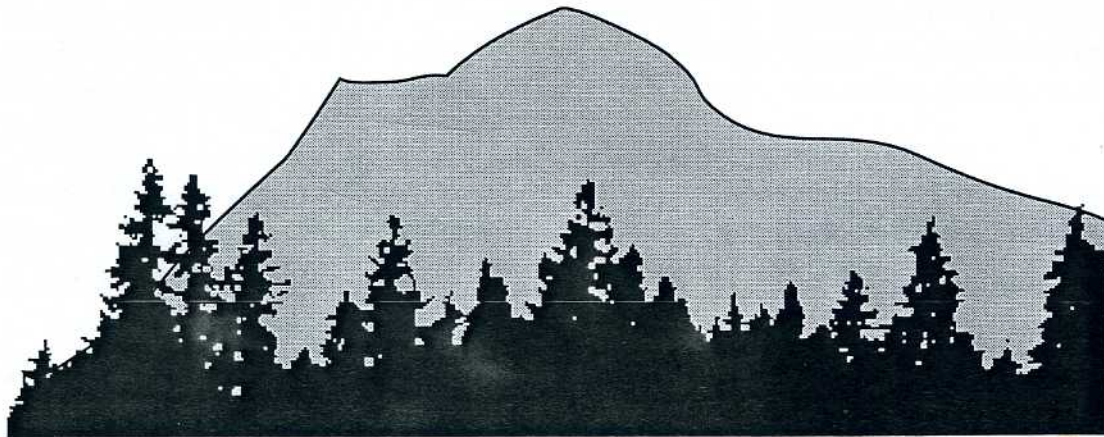

The Friends of Mount Douglas
Park Society

Newsletter

June 2001

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2001 Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting was held in McMorrans' Seaview Room at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 10. The business of the evening began with the presentation and approval of the minutes for the Annual General Meeting of the year 2000. The president, Kenneth Rankin, gave an overview of the Society's activities since that time. The treasurer, Graham Shorthill, reported on the healthy state of the Society's finances. Bob Bridgeman described the further steps taken, and the progress made, towards re-establishing Douglas Creek as a fish-bearing stream

Our guest speaker for the evening was well-known local historian Valerie Green, who proceeded to fascinate all present with her information on Pioneer Neighbours of Mount Douglas Park. This led to an animated question period.

A vital, but almost omitted, piece of business was transacted on the cusp of the meeting's ungathering. Celia Esmonde, on behalf of the Nomination Committee, nominated Sheilagh Ogilvie, Bob Bridgeman, and Kenneth Rankin to election for further 2-year terms on the Board of Directors. No other nominations coming from the floor, these three nominees were elected. The meeting then finally adjourned.

The Braefoot Action Plan

The potential development of certain Braefoot properties has been under discussion. The area in question is enclosed by Braefoot Road on the west, Simon Road to the south, Malton Avenue to the east, and a section of Mount Douglas Cross Road to the north. There are 34 parcels of land, and they lie just within the urban containment boundary.

Among 9 highly significant environmental features mentioned in the Draft Action Plan for that locality, the following three are of the greatest concern for our Society:

- 17 distinct vegetation communities, ranging from Garry oak-shrub forest to wetland, indicating high biodiversity for an area of this size..
 - Areas supporting bird nesting and foraging. Deer and small mammals are known to live and breed in the study area
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- Forest along Mount Douglas Cross Road connecting with the forest corridor leading to Mount Douglas Park.

To determine the fate of this block of land, Saanich Council laid out three assumptions:

1. that there will be development within the urban containment boundary;
2. that recovery of some of the cost of sewer development in the area is desirable; and
3. that there should be a balance between social and environmental issues.

To secure consultation with the public, Saanich set up a work party limited initially to property owners that would, or might, be affected by any decisions, with a representative from the Gordon Head Residents' Association thrown in. After some protest from the Quadra/Cedar Hill Residents' Association, the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society, and the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society, representatives from these three community groups were also admitted.

Our interest as a Society in the proposed development stems from the fact that collectively these parcels form part of a corridor linking Mount Douglas Park to natural habitats outside the Park boundaries. If the Park is to remain a healthy wilderness area with a beneficial balance between diverse species, it's desirable that wildlife be able to come and go in and out of the Park. It could be argued that this places unfair constraints on bordering properties. However, part of the charm of Victoria has been the extent, spotty and at times inadvertent, to which the city has been willing to adjust its original idea in favour of what is indigenous to the land that it has inherited.

Unfortunately, by the end of the work party's consultations there had been no meeting of minds between the majority of the property owners on one hand, and the representatives of the three last-mentioned community groups on the other. In the end, the Planning Department came up with a compromise leaning in favour of the former. At the Committee of the Whole on May 8 it was recommended that Council should support rezoning applications to RS-8 (minimum lot size 665 m²) for houses along Malton and RS-12 (minimum lot size 930 m²) for the main properties adjoining

Braefoot. Council accepted these recommendations with certain modifications for greater flexibility.

Our argument before Council was that (setting aside the strip along Malton as a lost cause) the RS-12 provision would segment the forested section at the north end, at the cost of choking off access for wildlife through it and of disrupting the plant communities that presently flourish there.

A preferable allocation (again setting aside the strip along Malton) would have been RS-14 (minimum lot size 2020 m²) for the northern half and RS-15 (minimum size 3000 m²) for the southerly. The latter allocation is needed to preserve the large stand of Garry Oak that is distinctive of that portion. This, in fact, was the Planning Department's earlier recommendation which Council turned down at a Public Hearing in November 1999.

Council preferred the Planning Department's latest recommendations, but there is one more step to come. The recommendations will go before a Public Hearing within the next few weeks, at which point we will express our concerns again and hope for a more positive response.

Three further comments.

- During the meeting (in 1992?) when Council approved the sewer line for these Braefoot properties, councillors who supported the installation declared that property development there was quite a separate issue. There is little reflection of this sentiment in the second of the three assumptions (see above) with which Council has furnished itself.
 - The cost of observing socio-environmental constraints does not come out of the pockets of the property owners, as they often like to allege—it merely prevents them from cashing in as much as they would like on land speculations which the rest of the community is under no obligation to render successful.
 - To their credit, one property-owning couple in the area under discussion is adamantly opposed to any rezoning.
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Ivy control

Since the last newsletter we have taken a major step forward in ivy control: Saanich Council has approved funding for people to work in the area between Durling Place and the Quarry over the summer.

This will mean that two separate projects will be under way in the area, since, for some time now, there has been an intense and controlled effort to remove ivy from the heavily-infested woods close to Durling Place. This work has been spearheaded by Angela Evans of Saanich Environmental Services, in collaboration with people from UVic and groups such as the Girl Guides. Their intent is to give the rare native species a chance to survive in their original habitat.

The latest project is designed to be more visible, so that the general public can see the effect the work can have on their local environment. As well, we will free one small area in the park from ivy. The outcome of this project will lead to the preparation of an information flyer advising people of the best way to control and contain ivy on their own property: with luck, the flyer should be ready by the fall. If we can make a dent in ivy traffic across the park boundaries we will have scored a major success.

For the long term, the key to success in controlling ivy is for many people to do a little bit on a regular basis.

Mountain Bikes and the Law

After the last newsletter, we were asked to write an expanded article about mountain bikes in the Park for the Saanich News. The reporter felt the result was too wordy and wanted to redo it with more photographs of the damage and a cryptic script.

As luck would have it when we arrived at the lookout to take the shots, there were four mountain bikers resting there. The reporter asked them directly: "Do you know that there's a bylaw against mountain biking in the park?" "Oh, yes, we know about it but we came up the road!" they replied.

We went in search of the damage. It didn't take long. Just down from the summit on the north east side was area of Camas in full bloom. Through the middle of it was etched a 30 cm (1foot) black strip carved by the back wheels of some pretty powerful mountain bikes, judging by the size of tire treads.

We walked back to the summit. The bikers had descended half way to the car park and were resting on a rocky knoll off the blacktop. When they saw us, they enacted a little pantomime in which they turned their bikes over and a started a detailed examination of the tires, chain and the gears—but not before the reporter had taken some good photographs with his telephoto lens.

Eventually, they moved off. By the time we arrived at the car park we had lost sight of them. Just as we thought our work was complete, we heard a laugh and shouts from the other side of the transmitter tower. We scrambled up the slope: down below we could see the distinctive shirts of the riders as they flashed through the trees—yellow really does stand out in that environment! They had ridden down from the summit, through the washed-out and eroded area leading to the trails for Cedar Hill Road and Glendenning.

They stopped in a clearing and the camera came out again. Seizing the moment, the reporter took off for the bottom of the mountain. When he phoned later, he said he waited for riders to appear and sure enough they did! When they saw him they tried to do a U-turn and get clean away. But he did get the photograph.

In less than thirty minutes, we had witnessed and photographed a graphic enactment of the problem, one we have only been able to describe, not show, up to now.

We have a bylaw that bikers know about and disregard. We have extensive fragile ecosystems that have taken thousands of years to mature but can be wiped out in an afternoon of concentrated effort by vandals. From this new perspective, the comments made in the last newsletter are still valid. There need to be challenging routes and sites for mountain bikers *away from* our natural parks so those shrieks of laughter and shouts of pleasure are not produced at the expense of the destruction of a fragile environment that has been set aside for the enjoyment of everyone.
