

Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

Spring 2021 Newsletter

“A natural park is dedicated to the preservation of indigenous wilderness while allowing access for the enjoyment of the natural conditions therein without appreciably detracting from them.”

“This definition reflects the consensus of a meeting between representatives of the Outdoor Club of Victoria, the Friends of Knockan Hill Society, the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society, and the Saanich Greenbelt Association, held on November 4, 1992.”

— Friends of Mount Douglas Park Newsletter, 1998.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society is typically held in the Spring. This year it has been deferred due to COVID-19 restrictions on public gatherings.

Our AGM will be rescheduled when conditions permit us to gather in a group again. If this doesn't happen in a timely (enough) manner, we'll consider other options.

Mount Douglas Park Charter

The lands known as Mount Douglas Park are hereby reserved in perpetuity to the protection and preservation of the natural environment for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public.

This land has been transferred by the Province of British Columbia to the Corporation of the District of Saanich on the condition that it be maintained and preserved as a public park.

With this charter, the spirit and intent of the original crown grant of 1889 is maintained while its scope is expanded to include within Mount Douglas Park all adjacent municipal parkland present and future, so that the whole will continue as a wilderness preserve for generations to come.

Proclaimed this 22nd. day of November 1992 by the council of the Corporation of the District of Saanich on behalf of the citizens of Saanich.



Remember the snow in February? Here's a view of a bend in the creek from February 15, 2021.



Moonset over firs, Glendenning Trail, and crows flying from their night roost.

Guess Who

This park visitor:

- was born in Victoria in 1871.
- travelled to and studied in San Francisco, London, and France, and along the British Columbia coast.
- taught in Victoria and Vancouver.
- struggled most of their life to make a life following their passion.
- has been described as eccentric, independent, vibrant, outrageous, talented and courageous.
- dressed in unusual fashions, and smoked cigars.
- operated a boarding house, raised dogs, owned a monkey named "Woo", many cats, white rats, myriad birds, squirrels, and even raccoons!
- sometimes brought an *Elephant* into the park.
- became a writer whose personal stories continue to touch readers.
- wrote, "go into the woods alone and look at the earth crowded with growth, new and old bursting from their strong roots hidden in the silent, live ground"
- said they felt compelled, in poor health, to return to Mount Douglas Park because the forest "had something to say to her".

Find the answer on the last page of this newsletter.

Invasives

Restoration Site – Whittaker Trail

In Fall and Winter 2019, at a site along the southeast corner of Whittaker Trail (at Cedar Hill Road) volunteers cut down and dug out a dense area of Himalayan Blackberries. To protect this cleared site Parks staff constructed attractive split rail fencing in December, 2019. The fencing is there to protect young native plants that were planted by volunteers early 2020. The immature plants do not survive trampling. They need time to grow strong and thrive. In the spring of 2021, volunteers will return to re-weed the site and add more native plants to increase site biodiversity.



Restoration Site – Whittaker Trail at Cedar Hill Road – June 2019



Restoration Site – Whittaker Trail at Cedar Hill Road - October 2020

Volunteer with Pulling Together in Saanich

<https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/natural-areas/volunteer-for-pulling-together.html>

Summer, Fall, and Winter, 2020

For many weeks in Spring 2020, volunteer work parties were not permitted due to Covid 19. Eventually, Saanich Parks allowed volunteer work to resume, on a limited basis, and with strict Covid rules in place. To ensure adequate social distancing, volunteers moved to a large area between Glendenning and Mercer trails, originally cleared in 2010–2011, to remove regrowth of Ivy, Holly, etc. Early April 2021, volunteers will move from this area as native, ground nesting birds are making their presence known. We must give them space and privacy to build nests and raise young with *as little disturbance as possible*. At this time, especially, *but all year long*, it's really important to control our dogs and prevent them from running free through the forest understory and vegetation. Standing on the trail edge watching them run in the woods may be fun but we have no idea what harm they may be doing to the plants and wildlife they travel over. We can't risk losing these precious park residents for a bit of a gambol.

Garlic Mustard – 15 Years On

It's hard to believe but true. Park volunteers have been manually removing this nasty plant every Spring for the past 14 years, with the ultimate aim of eradicating it from the Park. It is extremely persistent. If left unchecked, Garlic Mustard spreads quickly and successfully replaces (kills off) native plants and trees in the forest understory.

How it arrived on Vancouver Island is uncertain. Someone brought the seeds to the Island? Maybe it arrived in the tire of a tourist vehicle or the treads of a tourist boot? Only a few seeds create a huge problem. Unfortunately, back in 2005 when this benign looking plant was originally identified it was already a serious problem in a number of local parks. A single, healthy plant can produce 800–1000 seeds that remain in soil for years before sprouting. Concerted efforts to deal with this plant did not start until 2007 and by then we were in trouble.

There are now many websites providing full information on this invasive plant and well worth a read to understand the problem and why we persist in our efforts.

History of the Churchill Drive Closures

Before the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society was formed the park was administered by the City of Victoria via a joint Victoria and Saanich committee and in that era the road was closed completely in the winter months. Our efforts have been aimed at closing the road again but on a different schedule.

In the midst of the recent controversy surrounding the renovations at Clover Point in Victoria, the selective closure of Churchill Drive in Mount Douglas Park was cited as a successful way to manage access to an attractive site by different groups with different needs. In essence, this is the recreation centre principle of scheduling events so there are no clashes between competing groups.

How did this come about? Every park user recognizes the benefits of the peace and quiet the absence of cars produces throughout the park but it was the older hikers who climbed Churchill Drive because it gave them secure footing and wanted to do so without filling their lungs of carbon monoxide who suggested, in 1999 and 2000, that we lobby for the partial closure of the road.

To make anything happen, we needed data. So, we set up an observation post at the foot of the Drive and recorded the people who used the road over a five hour period on Sunday mornings. The broad groupings were:

Pedestrians without dogs

Cyclists

Pedestrians with dogs

Motorists

The first conclusion we drew was that the Sunday morning slot was very popular with everyone and the second was that motorists tended to spend only a short time in the park with 20 minutes being the average for a round trip to the summit and back. Once we had sufficient data, we took a proposal for a trial closure on Sunday mornings until noon to the various departments and committees and ultimately to Council. At each stage there was majority support for the proposal but there was also a vocal minority who objected to any curtailment on car access. The trial was approved and later converted into a permanent policy and that was the end of stage one.

Over time, more and more people took to the mountain on Sunday mornings and their enthusiasm overflowed into other days of the week to such an extent that there was a call for the closure to be in place every day. We went through the same process again but this time the opposition was much stronger. However, when we made the presentation to Council we invited the councillors to come and see how it was operating. Those who did were impressed and turned their skepticism into positive support.

In 2009 the Sunday morning road closure was extended to every day of the week for a six-month trial period. That was deemed a success and daily closure to noon has continued to this day.

With the addition of the Charter Rock, the information kiosk, and the new gates, Churchill Drive has been transformed and many visitors are introduced to the charms and delights of Mount Douglas Park by using this entrance.



Park gates on Churchill Drive, and the Charter Rock.

From the Archives

Auto Road on Mountain

As a suggestion for the rendering more attractive Mount Douglas Park, the beautifying of which the city Council recently discussed, the city engineer last night submitted to the streets committee an outline of the means by which the mountain could be made accessible for automobiles and other vehicles. His report which was laid over for further consideration was as follows:

I have made an examination with a view of obtaining the easiest method of reaching the summit of Mount Douglas, which is approximately 700 feet high, and find that an east automobile drive can be obtained by turning to the left from the main road opposite the property of Mr. Featherstone, following a private road a distance of approximately 1500 feet, then turning to the right towards the summit of the mountain, following a sand ridge for approximately three-quarters of a mile. This old road makes an ideal auto drive. An auto can be taken over this road approximately

within 600 feet of the summit and about 320 feet below the highest peak of the mountain. The first 100 feet from the mountain down is easy travelling. The next 100 feet could be improved by cutting steps in the rock and making the pathway somewhat winding. From the end of the auto drive there is a rise of 100 feet to where there is a natural bench which could easily be made into a suitable resting place. I believe that \$1000 would widen the auto drive sufficiently to let autos pass in comfort and would also build the necessary steps near the top and provide a resting place and an auto stand, which would make an auto ride to the top of Mount Douglas Park one of the principal attractions of Victoria. Sign boards should be placed where the driveway leaves the main roadway and where the roadway turns directly through the trees to the mountains.

AUTO ROAD ON MOUNTAIN

City Engineer Suggests Scheme of Beautifying Mount Douglas

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Victoria Daily Colonist, 1910-10-29



Tiny cup lichen and moss in the rain, Irvine Trail.



A salmonberry flower opening, on March 26, 2021.

Trail Damage

More and more visitors are passing through the park every year. During the ongoing pandemic the park is busier than ever. All of those feet result in a lot of wear and tear on trails. In the past year many people have found, with little that can be done indoors, that an outing in the park is a great relief for the stress and strain of life in a pandemic. Unfortunately, during the ongoing pandemic, we all have to pay attention to physical distancing requirements. When we pass each other on trails we, rightly, want to increase the space around ourselves. Unfortunately, this has resulted in considerable trail widening on many of the wilder, narrower paths in the park. There's not much we can do about this but it's important to keep in mind the following points. We should each seek to find the balance between our use and enjoyment of the park and its status as a protected natural area. With new development coming to the neighbourhood, think of the hundreds of new homes being planned for the Shelbourne and Mckenzie area, and with population expansion in general, our demand for natural space to visit, the park will only ever be more in demand. The Society recognizes the dual purpose of the park. Remember though that it's more difficult to restore damaged regions than it is to protect them.

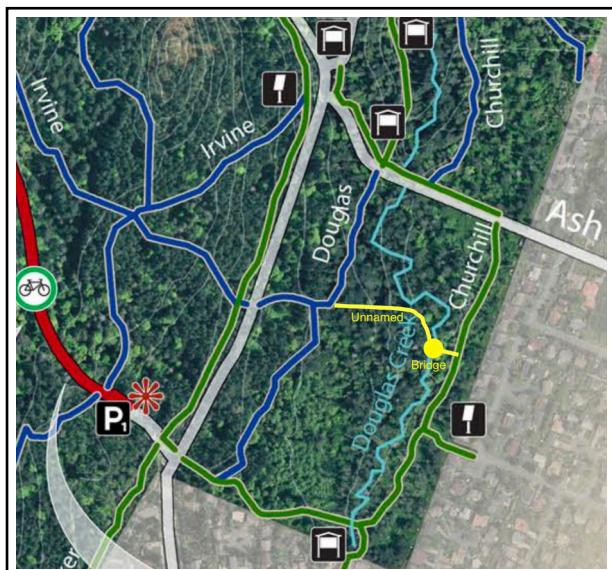
New Parking Bylaw and Officers

Saanich has made changes to Parking Bylaws and hired three full-time bylaw officers and a part-time clerk to enforce parking, traffic, and street-related bylaws in the District. Our society has been vocal in calling for changes in the ways parking rules in Mount Douglas Park are enforced. Parking along Churchill Dr. continues to be a problem. Parking is not allowed along the road at all, only in the limited number of spaces in the parking lot at the park entrance. Illegal parking along the road edge restricts the space for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and emergency vehicles, damages vegetation, and compromises soil stability on road edges. There is usually space available in the beach parking lot or on neighbourhood streets. As noted elsewhere in this newsletter, the number of visitors to the park is increasing. It's busier than ever. Parks staff can't enforce bylaws while in parks. *Please contact Saanich Bylaw officers or the police non-emergency number to report an active bylaw infraction.*

Bridge Trail and Bridge: Update

It's been a long three years of planning, but everything is lining up for the bridge installation to take place during this summer's fisheries window. Recall that the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society **will be donating \$25 000** for this bridge project. We'd like to give special thanks to the Pacific Salmon Foundation who have awarded our Society a \$15 000 grant for this work which is included in our donation.

The bridge will provide a connection between the Churchill Trail and the unnamed trail, perhaps soon to be called the Bridge Trail, that crosses Cedar Hill Road midway between Shelbourne and Ash Road as it leads into the upper park. Along with the bridge, interpretive signs are being designed. An area at the west end of the bridge will be developed into a creek and salmon interpretive centre. Here, visitors, school groups, families, and curious individuals can learn about riparian (creek side) ecology, the salmon cycle, and all of the forest life that makes use of or depends on the creek. It will include an area where future carcass transplants and the school classroom incubation programs can safely release their salmon fry into the creek. A goal of this project is to deliberately channel park visitors through this one route and reduce or eliminate random incursions, by people and dogs, into the creek and riparian zone elsewhere along the creek. As always, education is key in reducing future harm and future restoration work.



The contract to construct the bridge has been let. The bridge will be 1.2 m wide and 11 m long, and is being built from aluminum with a textured deck surface

for better grip. In March the necessary hazard tree work was completed prior to bird nesting season. Longer sections of the felled hazard trees will be used as part of the creek restoration while shorter pieces will contribute to the very important course woody debris in the riparian area. Also, native plants in the area of the new east side trail leading to the bridge have been transplanted. This summer's work will include additional bank protection, bridge foundation construction, trail construction on both sides of the bridge and construction of the salmon interpretative centre with safe creek access. Appropriately, the bridge will be transported down the Bridge Trail for installation. Likely it will arrive without decking, making it lighter. It will be a very busy week!

Donation to Howard English Hatchery

Restoration of Douglas Creek as a salmon spawning creek needs more than clean water, bank protection and a good riparian area, it needs salmon! And that's where we have been so fortunate to have the support of the *Goldstream Volunteer Salmonid Enhancement Association* who operates the *Howard English Hatchery at Goldstream*. Over the past two decades, they have supplied us with chum and Coho fry and Coho smolts. As well, they have brought salmon carcasses for what has become our annual carcass transplant, both biologically important as well as an educational opportunity. If you haven't attended one, don't miss next January.

Many don't realize that, "*On November 24th 2002, we made restoration history in British Columbia—some say in Canada—by the transplant of salmon carcasses from one system (Goldstream River) to another (Douglas Creek). Volunteers at the Howard English Hatchery had loaded 100 chum carcasses (averaging 5 kg each) into burlap sacks, two to a sack, and they were trucked in by our DFO Community Advisor to Mount Douglas Park where volunteers*"¹ *put them in the creek. Thanks to the great work of Bob Bridgeman (FMDPS), Peter McCully (Howard English Hatchery) and Tom Rutherford (DFO Community Advisor).*

¹ Excerpt from 2003 June Newsletter

In appreciation and thanks for the significant help from the hard working volunteers at the Howard English Hatchery, we are sending them \$2500 to help them set up new rearing tanks. We'll present the cheque when we meet later this Spring for our annual salmon fry release.

Links:

- <https://www.gvsea.com/>
- <https://www.hakaimagazine.com/features/throwing-dead-fish-fun-and-ecological-profit/>
- <https://www.psf.ca/learn/species-lifecycle>
- <https://www.psf.ca/save-salmon>



2021 Carcass Transplant

One of our favourite annual public outreach events, the salmon carcass transplant, took place a bit differently this year. Due to restrictions on public gatherings the salmon carcasses were dispersed along the creek in Mount Douglas Park by Saanich staff. They seemed quite enthusiastic about the work!

Dog Poo

A subject no one wants to talk about; maybe that's the problem. There's a plague of dog poo in our parks. This is not *just* the age old problem of people not picking up after their pets. That's bad enough and doesn't seem to be improving with time. No, we find more and more abandoned *bagged* poos. This issue is getting more and more attention in the Greater Victoria Region. Jack Knox recently wrote about it in his column in the Times-Colonist. It's beyond understanding. *If you bring it into the park you can bring it out again.* That includes what's inside your dog.

The poo is not hygienic. Children and volunteers and your pets encounter it unnecessarily. If you see someone's dog pooping in the park please ask if they have a bag and share if necessary. This really has to change.

“jeepers, something has to be done about all the abandoned baggies ... hiding in the foliage, like the worst Easter egg hunt ever.”

— Jack Knox, 2021-03-14. Times Colonist.

<https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/jack-knox-dog-dung-map-poses-puzzle-why-pick-up-after-a-pooch-then-abandon-the-bag-1.24294167>

Ground Nesting Birds and others

We often repeat the park protection mantra: please stay on the marked trails. There are a number of great reasons for this. The most obvious is that our feet treading on the ground compress the soil and trample plants. Then, where we tread others will follow: a new trail is born.

Another important reason to stay on marked (official) trails is that many of the natural residents of the park, all sorts of animals, make their homes in the undergrowth in the park. They can tolerate visitors to their neighbourhood but soon feel threatened when safe areas shrink. These understory residents include Garter snakes, native Banana Slugs, Pacific Chorus Frogs, native terrestrial snails, native Alligator lizards, and Western Red Backed Salamanders, Rough Skinned Newts, butterflies and moths in various pre-flight stages.

Keeping human and canine feet on marked trails is especially important for the ground nesting birds in the park. These ground nesters are busy right now, preparing nests and incubating their eggs and young. They don't want to leave their eggs but will do so if we or our dogs venture too close. Every bit of stress they feel reduces their chances for success. This makes the park poorer in the long run. Remember, Mount Douglas Park serves to preserve the natural area as well as provide a setting for our rest and recreation.



Clockwise from top left: Spotted Towhee, Fox sparrow, Pacific Wren (photos from Cornell Lab of Ornithology, birds.cornell.edu), and a near-ground nesting Anna's hummingbird, in an oak.

Using an online resource called *ebird*, a place for bird enthusiasts to record their observations, we can find observations of many birds in the park. Ground nesters among them include *Mallard*, *Canada Goose*, *California Quail*, *Sooty Grouse*, *Common Nighthawk*, *Killdeer*, *Pacific Wren*, *Dark-eyed Junco*, *Spotted Towhee*, *Orange-crowned Warbler*, *Fox Sparrow*, *Song Sparrow*, *Golden Crowned Sparrow*, and *Wilson's Warbler*. *Hummingbirds* nest low to the ground in the oaks near the summit. *Swallows* nest in the steep rocks on the south slope. These birds need and deserve a chance to incubate their eggs and rear their young with as little disruption as possible.

Woody Debris and Dead Wood in the Forest

Some people might think that dead woody debris has no value to the park. Really though, a healthy forest depends on coarse woody debris. This is dead and downed forest wood, such as logs, uprooted stumps, large branches and coarse roots, in all stages of decomposition. To some, the term debris has an unfortunate negative connotation, that of *rubbish*. In the forest debris means *broken and scattered remains*. Coarse woody debris should not be piled but is more beneficial when naturally spread out over the forest floor.

Why is coarse woody debris important for a healthy forest?

- Nutrients trapped in the wood provide food and habitat for a wide range of organisms such as fungi, lichens, mosses, insects.
- Slows evaporation of the soil during dry weather.
- Can protect young plants from browsing animals.
- Larger pieces hold more moisture, contribute more organic material to the soil and provide habitat for a greater number of species.
- Woodland birds live in the cavities of dead tree trunks. Examples are: woodpeckers, chickadees, owls.

Answer to Guess Who

People visiting Mount Douglas Park today continue to find inspiration and solace in this lovely natural area just as *Emily Carr*, one of Canada's great and beloved artists, did all those years ago.

Emily Carr wrote, “go into the woods alone and look at the earth crowded with growth, new and old bursting from their strong roots hidden in the silent, live ground, each seed according to its own kind expanding, bursting, pushing its way upward toward the light and air, each one knowing what to do, each one demanding its own rights on the earth. Feel this growth, the surging upward, the expansion, the pulsing life”



Emily Carr and her Elephant. Carr's painting Summer Mt Douglas, 1942.

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Membership, Renewal, Gift Membership Still just \$5/year

Becoming a member helps us advocate for the park.

Join online: <https://mountdouglaspark.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, 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. Do this online (above) or with this form.

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

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