

Friends of Strathcona Park Newsletter - Fall 2021

Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5
www.friendsofstrathconapark.org

FOSP Annual General Meeting: Tuesday, October 14th 7-9 pm

The AGM this year will be an on-line (Zoom) meeting in order to allow and encourage participation by the many park users who do not live in the Comox Valley. (email info@friendsofstrathconapark.org for the links)

The structure of FOSP needs to change. We noticed this summer as we did our access study and talked to the many walkers, day hikers and backpackers, that there are many people who use the park and care about the park who could benefit from an opportunity to be involved in its protection. While it may have seemed “doable” in the past to wait for an issue to emerge, nowadays with the rapidly increasing park use and the focus on only a few entrance points, the issues in relation to access are surfacing.

The park needs the guidance of its users to chart the path forward. We need to be an alert “watchdog” with more active members, and with more ability for focused action. It will only be possible to pounce on an issue if we are always watching and doing our own assessments of the changing landscape, and we need to be ready to do everything well from the start -- from trail work to effective use of social media.

So we propose the following committee structure and request that if you have skills or interest in a particular area, you please let us know before the AGM, so we can “populate” these platforms:

Draft Committees for FOSP:

1) the necessary “central structure” (chair,

AGM

**Thursday, October 14, 2021
via Zoom**

to attend please email Jennifer Pass at

info@friendsofstrathconapark.org

and she will send you the link to join the meeting.

Read the article in this newsletter to see what we hope to do and please consider joining us as a director or as a member of one of the sub committees we would like to form.

vice chair, treasurer, secretary)

2) trails: assessing need for and organizing trail work,

3) Advocacy committee:

4) SWI liaison committee

5) Social media/ communication

6) Elders (advisory) committee

7) Committee to build connections with other like-minded groups. (eg. Friends of (other parks), SPPAC etc.)

8) Marketing

Submitted by FOSP chair, Jennifer Pass

FOSP starts Park Access Study

The Friends started the Strathcona Park Access study this summer. How to study the level of access, what is needed, where to start? We did some grant applications, and received from the Comox Valley Regional District the generous provision of two students with a truck, for three full days. This focused our attention on Mt.

Washington, in particular the main access point for Forbidden Plateau and peaks like Albert Edward.

We spent a total of three full days (students and volunteers) and 3 half days (volunteers) at the Washington Park parking lot, talking to hikers as they started and/or ended their hikes. We also just recently received a \$3,000.00 grant from the Strathcona Regional District and hired a young woman to gather questionnaires and photo information from trailheads in that district – a program starting this fall and continuing into next summer. It is no secret that the vast majority of hikers in Strathcona Park will hike from the Mt. Washington access point before trying out the further points.

We have been hearing about (and seeing whenever we go to Mt. Washington in the summer) greatly increasing use every year for the last 4-5 years. Also we were aware that the pandemic itself was sparking the desire to get “away to the hills”. The population of Vancouver Island has also climbed dramatically in recent years, which translates again into more walkers and hikers. We found most of the users surveyed were from Vancouver Island.

Are we prepared for more and more use of these front country trails? FOSP decided to talk to hikers at this access point and ask them about their hiking and camping experiences. We developed a questionnaire, and counted those starting out on walks and hikes. We canvassed (with the questionnaire) returning backpackers.

While we have not collated the material yet, some interesting findings are emerging. Most surprising to us -- most hikers we spoke with did not feel their experience was in any way of

a lower quality just because there is a high level of use. Very few described feeling too crowded on the trails or in the camp areas, even on Saturday nights, when the sixty pads at Circelet were occupied and the overflow was full. Two young women when questioned further on this (after we heard of a pretty boisterous and loud young group of Saturday night partiers at Circelet) said, “Oh we always wear ear plugs”.

Of course, the satisfaction of the user is not our only concern. The horse users in the thirties and forties, probably really enjoyed the wildness of Forbidden Plateau, while their horses and their human overuse damaged the alpine environment.

Our concern is for both the park and the users. There will come a tipping point when the high level of use just becomes too much. Based on what’s happening on the mainland, and current level of use at Mt. Washington, it is likely B.C. Parks will address overuse concerns by some method of restricting numbers of users, and that is likely to happen in the foreseeable future.

The development of some of the more inaccessible points of access would be in the interests of the public and of the park itself. Good park access has to include other access points, well developed and well managed.

We have had members hiking some of the less accessible trails this summer and their feedback will also inform our study. So please do send us descriptions of your experience related to “level of use” in the areas you have been hiking. Photos are also much appreciated.

Submitted by Jennifer Pass

Access in the Gold Lake Area

by Ken Vanden Burgt

I made two attempts at Gold Lake this summer.

The first was from the Campbell River side. I drove on Menzies Main to South Fork Main. I was surprised to find Menzies Main is deactivated at that point; my reference material indicated the road was open to the crossing at Grilse Creek.

I drove across Grilse Creek on South Fork Main. I later found the bridge deck had protruding nail heads. I hiked on South Fork 10 to where it joins Menzies Main. Apparently this deactivated road is used as an ATV route including a section of Menzies Main that passes through Strathcona Park. I wasted time exploring an unmarked spur line on the mistaken perception that it was the start of Gold Lake trail. I camped on the road without reaching the Park boundary.

On my return hike, I visited the Menzies crossing at Grilse Creek. Someone has constructed a footbridge with rope handrails that are weathered and probably need replacing. Grilse Creek would be easily fordable in dry conditions.

I went out via Menzies Main. It's a toss-up whether Menzies Main or South Fork 10 is the best for walking. It's relatively flat walking. The roads are deactivated. The area has been logged but the young forest is pleasant to walk through. It would be worthwhile to have one or the other deactivated roads designated as a Recreation Corridor.

I drove out on Memekay Salmon Hookup and Big Bear Main to Hwy 19 as it meant less driving on logging roads.

My second attempt was from the Gold River side. I drove from Gold River on Gold Main and East Main into Strathcona Park. These roads were in better condition for driving than I encountered on Menzies Main and Memekay Salmon Hookup.

I used the description in Philip Stone's book 'Exploring Strathcona Park' to find the start of a route that goes from East Main in Strathcona Park to the West end of Gold Lake. Someone has done work in marking the route with flagging and

clearing some of the shrubbery. The route follows an unnamed tributary to the Gold River at the outlet of Gold Lake.

The unnamed tributary is crossed three times; relatively easy in dry conditions but become wet-foot crossings following a day of rain. The stony bottom is very slippery.

Its basically route bashing from the West end of Gold Lake to the campsite at the East end of Gold Lake. I made the mistake of staying close to the lake trying to walk on exposed shoreline. I spent a lot of time fighting through dense willow.

The campsite at the East end of Gold Lake is a large sand and gravel beach suited for a large number of tents. There is a slow flowing stream as a water source.

On my second day I tried walking the Gold Lake Trail hoping to make a day trip to the junction with Menzies Main. It took quite some time to find the trail; the shifting of the creek has washed the Gold Lake end away.

Once found, the trail was discernible but I got lost in the bushes in quite a few places. I followed the trail for about an hour before encountering bog where the trail disappeared.

On day three I hiked out, this time trying to stay away from the lakeshore. I found a maze of deer trails that invariably faded away that were easier traveling than thrashing through the willows. Even so the route was quite bushy, particularly at the West end of the lake. It had rained and I got thoroughly soaked from the contact with the shrubbery. Time to walk out was about 5 hours.

Gold Lake is a pretty spot. It would probably get a lot more visitors if the access via rough logging roads were better. The terrain is relatively modest; not much elevation change is involved. If the road access were improved and more people visited the area it would be practical to maintain an attractive

hiking trail from South Fork/Menzies Junction to East Main via Gold Lake.

for traveling on logging roads. The big fault is it does not indicate if the roads are deactivated. It indicates some hiking 'routes' as hiking 'trails'; so use with caution.

I used three references.

- a. Hiking Trails III 9th edition 2002 indicated a route along Gold River and a campsite at the West end of Gold Lake; neither of which did I find. I took this reference on the hike, as it has the best map I could find in a reference that wasn't too large to carry.
- b. Exploring Strathcona Park, Philip Stone. This book is an excellent source of information about access and routes. It is too heavy to carry on a hike.
- c. Backroad Mapbook Vancouver Island 9th edition. This reference is indispensable

Coordinates

East Main Parking
W 126 00 59 N49 57 42

Gold Lake Campsite
W125 58 19 N49 58 55

Grisle Creek Footbridge
W125 50 14 N50 02 16

Junction Menzies & South Fork Parking
W125 47 36 N50 02 55

FOSP Membership Form
Thank you for renewing!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **Postal Code** _____

Phone _____ **Alternate phone (cell)** _____

Email _____

Membership (suggested \$10 per year) _____

Donation (tax receipts for \$25 or more) _____

Comments _____

Send to: Friends of Strathcona Park, P.O. Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5