

# Trailblazer forges ahead

## One-man firm carves out successful path from wood, stone and earth

If you're hiking the Grouse Grind and come across some spiffy new rock stairs where a slippery gravel mess had impeded your progress before, give a thought to Jeremy Power.



Rare Earth Recreational Developments is responsible for many of the rock steps and boardwalks of the North Shore trails.

The 52-year-old master trail builder and North Vancouver resident counts the Grind among the many trails he's upgraded, built, repaired or rebuilt since starting up his one-man company, Rare Earth Recreational Developments Inc., in 2004.

Power, who honed his skills as a volunteer helping to build mountain-bike-specific trails following disputes with hikers, often hires contractors to get the job done.

He expects Rare Earth will grow, given the tremendous increases in trail users and corresponding soil erosion.

He added: "I'm one of the few people who actually enjoys going to work each day."

Rare Earth is a recreational development and landscape company that, among other things, consults, designs and builds low-impact long-term sustainable trails, public areas, campgrounds and recreational sites.

For private clients, Power also does masonry, cabin repair, tree forts and skateboard ramps.

The company specializes in remote properties and its natural stone work includes: retaining walls; stone stairs and pathways; cedar-cribbed stairs and pathways with stone inlay; and bridges. Mountain bike structures, kiosks, all aspects of environmentally sensitive mitigation and restoration, viewpoints, campsites, even outhouses, are done by Rare Earth.

Power has a small excavator, which he's using this week to build an access trail to North Vancouver's Mosquito Creek Park.

Power, who trains land managers, staff and volunteer organizations in the safe use of trail construction equipment, has worked on just about every trail on the North Shore and some nearby municipalities, including not only the Grouse Grind and the Baden-Powell Trail, but Bridal Path, Buntzen Lake, Empress, Gear Jammer, Haywood Park and the Howe Sound Crest Trail.

Focused primarily on the North Shore, Power is not involved in wilderness trail meccas Squamish and Whistler, which have their own local crews.

Power also decommissions poor trails, including the Upper Snake Project, an unwanted mountain bike trail in Burnaby.

"I'd always been in construction, landscaping, and it's easy to transform that knowledge over to (trail construction). I learned from my dad how to cut stone. As mountain biking became more popular, dirt got eaten away, so I started building big stone berms and putting stone into the ground.

Power said his first big project was when Metro Vancouver decided to do repair work on the Grouse Grind and the Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve. He put his name forward to do the work.

"From there it's been non-stop. B.C. Hydro called to do work on the Buntzen Lake Trail and then Burnaby called — it just started flowing and word spread."

Power credits his father with instilling in him the notion that whatever he builds should stand the test of time.

"It was an addiction and I just enjoyed it very much and liked working out in the forest."

He added: "With stone, it's forever. I use a lot of rock work. Once it's done like that, you won't come back to fix it short of an earthquake."

Power noted that in the early days everything had to be carried by hand, but he now often uses a mini-excavator. He's been working on the Howe Sound Crest Trail, which goes from Cypress Bowl to Lions Bay, for five years.

Power said budgets are tight — "cedar is really expensive" — but he stretches it as far as he can.

He noted that trail builders are hard to come by as it takes considerable skill to ensure the trail lasts a long time.

Rare Earth is a one-man company, but Power said he hires people for different jobs and had multiple projects last year.

"This job beats the crap out of you. It's hard physical work and you have to know how to come up with solutions.

"Take the Grouse Grind. We do a lot of stonework and stairs and it's a never-ending staircase."

Power declined to discuss his fees or finances, but expects demand for his skills will grow as more people head to the hills, further damaging existing trails.

He said a decade ago, there might be 10 or 15 people using a specific trail. "Now there's 200 people a day walking on the trail and if it's not built with a boardwalk or trail base, it's going to break down quickly and look messy."