

PHOTOS: A different track

Hard work and a greener mindset are revitalizing North Vancouver's bike trails

BY LAYNE CHRISTENSEN, NORTH SHORE NEWS AUGUST 14, 2011



Professional mountain biker Wade Simmons rides a section of the John Thompson trail in the Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve that Rocky Mountain Bicycles is maintaining under the North Shore Mountain Biking Association's new Trail Adoption Plan. The project seeks out sponsors to help breathe new life into North Vancouver's ailing trails.

Photograph by: Kevin Hill, North Shore News

BANK employees haul rocks and dig dirt in the shadow of old-growth cedar and fir.

On a recent Sunday on Mount Seymour, tellers and financial advisers are working hard on one of North Vancouver's most popular mountain bike trails. Thanks to their efforts, a new route through the forest is taking shape.

Corkscrew - a black-diamond classic lined with skinnies, drops and bridges - is getting a couple of reroutes and several repairs designed to improve the trail's sustainability.

Not all of the volunteers ride the trails. Among them are "guys who have never been on dirt before on a bike," says Mark Wood, of the North Shore Mountain Biking Association, who is there with Metro Vancouver staff to oversee the work. "It's great to see the team-building and the camaraderie. There's

so much positivity."

The volunteer effort by BMO Bank of Montreal employees is part of a growing movement that is reshaping the future of trail riding on the North Shore.

Corkscrew is one of nine North Vancouver trails undergoing maintenance and restoration this season as part of the NSMBA's new Trail Adoption Plan.

Under the direction of an NSMBA trail maintainer, the plan partners a route in need of revitalization with a local business or user group that supplies the workforce for a series of trail days through the fall.

In addition to BMO-adopted Corkscrew, work is underway on Boogieman by Steed Cycles; Bottletop and Ridge Runner by Different Bikes/NS Ride; Circuit 8 and John Thompson by Rocky Mountain Bicycles; Dale's Trail by NSMBA/Sram; TNT by Mountain Equipment Co-op; and Team Pangor by Muddbunnies Riding/Ryders Eyewear.

The plan, called TAP for short, has the support of land managers Metro Vancouver and the District of North Vancouver. It's also attracted the support of a few big names in the North Shore mountain biking community, including trail maintainer Todd "Digger" Fiander and professional rider Wade Simmons.

Simmons is one of the godfathers of freeride, a mountain biking discipline characterized by tricks, style and technical trail features that emerged on the North Shore in the early 1990s. A Lynn Valley resident who has been riding local trails for 20 years, Simmons recently co-authored the Locals' Guide To North Shore Rides, a \$25 guidebook, with fellow rider Sharon Bader. Part of the proceeds from its sale go back to trail maintenance.

Simmons supports TAP because it integrates trail builders like Digger, he explains.

"It's a thank you for them," he says. The NSMBA trail ambassador adds TAP also makes trails more accessible to a wider range of riders and riding abilities.

"It's making the trails smooth, and it's making it easier," says Simmons. "Some stodgy oldschoolers suggest that we're dumbing down the Shore. . . . That's a very linear way of thinking; they're not thinking about the big picture, which is: If you want mountain biking to grow, you gotta make trails for everybody."

It fits with the mission statement of the NSMBA: "Trails for all, trails forever."

But not everyone in the community is a fan of TAP.

Mount Fromme-area resident Monica Craver is an outspoken critic of the plan. In a letter to the editor, published May 4 in the North Shore News, Craver decries the District of North Vancouver's support of the plan, stating that "Mountain bike trails include the building of 'Disneyfied' amusement park-like structures for sole use by the mountain bikers." The partnership "doesn't help to ensure the ongoing ecological integrity of our flora and fauna," she writes.

Wood acknowledges Craver's concern but says TAP is different from "the old style of trail building, where we built tall, skinny structures."

"We're moving away from the era of building with wood," he says.

"Today's trail repairs use wood only where absolutely necessary," such as in riparian zones, where planks are used to elevate the trail over a creek bed.

Trail maintainers are decommissioning trail sections with heavy erosion and building what they say are sustainable lines. Decaying structures are being removed.

Mike Mayers is the supervisor of Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve and Public Programs for Metro Vancouver. There are 75 kilometres of trails in the former Seymour Demonstration Forest, he notes. All are considered multi-use, but many are in need of repair, he says.

With just two full-time staff and seven seasonal workers in Lower Seymour, trail maintenance is an enormous task. Mayers welcomes the volunteer support provided through TAP.

"It was an avenue for us to get some action out there to some of the trails (that were) in really poor shape," he says.

Trail maintainers must have a permit and are advised of standards, says Mayers.

"They have to walk the trail with someone from each of the organizations," he says. Metro Vancouver staff are present at all trail days.

"They're not out there building whatever they want," says Mayers. "We've actually found that more structures have been taken down (on TAP trail days) than we have with staff in the last couple of years."

The NSMBA's Mark Wood says the collaboration reflects a new era of conscientious trail building and expects the TAP program to expand in 2012.

"We're making up for lost time," says Wood. "(Past) struggles with the land managers have left the trail network, to a certain extent, neglected. Now, we're contributing to the upkeep of the trails. It's a growing sport, and we want to see it get better. We want to put the North Shore back on the map."

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NEWS photo Kevin Hill

AS trail maintainer for Corkscrew, the North Shore Mountain Biking Association's Mark Wood oversees the work of Team BMO volunteers on a trail day. See more photos at www.nsnews.com.



NEWS photo Kevin Hill

Metro Vancouver employees Brett Johnson and Carlos Feaver remove a log to encourage proper drainage on a section of the Corkscrew trail.



NEWS graphic Birgit Brunner

WITH the support of the District of North Vancouver and Metro Vancouver, NSMBA's Trail Adoption Plan is co-ordinating volunteer efforts to repair nine trails this summer.