

New Shuswap trail opens high above Scotch Creek

A Shuswap Passion column for the Shuswap Market News

By Jim Cooperman

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There was a sense of excitement in the air on Sunday, June 26th, as over 90 enthusiastic hikers waited for the ribbon to be cut to allow them to be the first public group to hike the new Lookout Trail on the bluff high above Scotch Creek. They appreciated the humour filled stories about how the trail came to be as told by Shuswap Trail Alliance executive director Phil McIntyre-Paul, who also thanked the many groups and individuals who helped with the project.

But it was North Shuswap Regional District Director Denis Delisle who drew the most laughs as he recounted his tale of discovering the lookouts while prospecting years ago, when he had hoped to turn the bluff into “an open pit mine.” After Denis cut the ribbon, the crowd began hiking up the old logging road in a large group, but very quickly dispersed into smaller groups, with some hikers moving faster than others up the hill.

It took a great deal of effort before this new CSRD parks hiking trail became a reality. It all began when an ad hoc group of hiking enthusiasts met in 2007 to determine potential hiking routes in the North Shuswap. Denis recommended the Hlina Road area and after the group made an exploratory hike they recommended this area to the North Shuswap Parks Commission, which eventually approved the funding needed for the trail construction. The next step was for the CSRD Parks staff under the leadership of now retired leader, Roger Beardmore, to seek the approvals needed from the provincial government.

The process slowed down when it became time to seek approval from the First Nations. At that point, the Trail Alliance provided invaluable assistance through the creation of a protocol agreement with the bands regarding all new Shuswap trail development. After an archaeological survey was done, all the local First Nations, including the Little Shuswap Lake Indian Band, provided approval for the trail.

The next step was to seek an agreement with the local rancher who has range license for the area, to ensure that the hiking trail would not jeopardize the health and safety of his cattle. The Ministry of Forests and Range helped design a series of gates to prevent the cattle from entering the trails and provided a much needed, expensive cattle guard. The provincial Recreation Sites and Trails office then provided funding to install the cattle guard.

It took until late last year for all the approvals to be in place to allow construction to begin. The CSRD contracted the Trail Alliance to construct the trail and build the

gates. Under the leadership of Kevin Pattison, a small crew built the first phase of the trail last November with the assistance of both the Talon work experience crew and local volunteers. Some snow had fallen by the time they finished. The finishing touches were added this spring, including the boulders strategically placed to deter motorized vehicles from entering the upper trail areas.

So far, 3.5 kilometres of trail has been constructed that includes a loop through a mature Douglas fir forest. The second 5 km phase has been brushed and minimally marked and at this point is rated most difficult for experienced hikers only. There are five lookouts that provide stupendous views of Shuswap Lake and the surrounding hills. From the fourth lookout, one can see as far as Salmon Arm and Chase.

When we returned to the parking lot after enjoying the views, we met Phil McIntyre-Paul who had come back earlier to greet the returning hikers. He was ecstatic, as a number of local hikers were interested in forming a trail stewardship group, which could help monitor the trails and may help complete the second phase sometime in the future.

Maps and directions for finding the Scotch Creek Lookout Trail will be posted to the website Shuswaptrails.com and will be added to the soon to be printed 2011 edition of the Shuswap Trails Guide. The Scotch Creek Lookout Trail is a welcome addition to the CSRD park system and will help boost the local economy by providing a healthy activity for visitors interested in nature appreciation.