

**Subject:** [Fwd: Is this the future?]

**Date:** Sun, 04 Jul 2004 17:28:54 -0700

**From:** Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>

**To:** Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>

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**Subject:** Is this the future?

**Date:** Sun, 04 Jul 2004 16:57:50 -0700

**From:** M E Craver <mecraver@shaw.ca>

**To:** Mayor and Council - DNV <Council@dnv.org>, Senior Management Committee <managecomm@dnv.org>, James Ridge <James\_Ridge@dnv.org>

**CC:** Liz James <Cagebc@yahoo.com>, "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>

Dear Mayor, Councillors and DNV Staff:

This article is about the Whistler Mountain Bike Park. Is DNV encouraging these numbers into our forests and parks? Are they encouraging this into our neighbourhoods and communities? Like snowboarding, mountain biking has to be contained to a specific place, controlled and enforced. If we cannot create real buffer zones separating neighbourhoods from this mtb extreme sport, we should not be encouraging it. Especially, we should not be encouraging it in Mountain View Park. Once you make it "legal" to mountain bike on Fromme, etc. you are encouraging these numbers into our parks, forests and neighbourhoods. This problem will not go away. Let Whistler have it. Convince Grouse Mountain Enterprises to carry it. We cannot carry the sport in our community or neighbourhoods. It doesn't belong here. Please read the attachment article about the "inevitable" future for the North Shore. This seems to be the direction DNV is headed. Is this really where you want to go?? DNV does not have the staff to handle this, let alone control it. Right now, by-law enforcement has practically become nil due to critical loss of staff, with no relief in sight. Community and neighbourhood livability comes first before mtb'er "outsider" rights ( of which over 60% come from outside the North Shore). Please reconsider before it is too late. Like I keep saying, there is a right place and a wrong place to ride. There is still time to change course. The ball's in your court! Do the right thing for this Upper Lynn Community and other affected DNV communities. Thank you.

Monica Craver (For a MORATORIUM on MOUNTAIN BIKES in MOUNTAIN VIEW PARK !!)

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Feature 2 - It's all downhill from here  
Once little more than a handful of goat trails, the Whistler Mountain Bike Park will open a \$250,000 Garbanzo expansion this week, knowing that the mountain biking world and other mountain resorts are watching

By Julie Lightfoot.

Rob McSkimming is standing at the edge of a busy highway – and the traffic is all bikes.

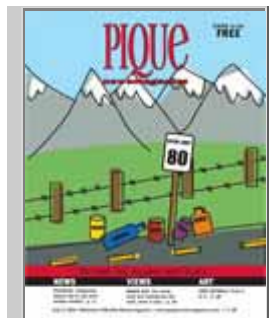
The route is called A-Line and not 24 hours earlier it was silent but for birds, essentially nothing more than a newly-dug-out dirt trail through the trees. Empty, untested, an experiment.

McSkimming watches mountain biker after mountain biker charge past and he knows they've done it now. Hit the jackpot.

"That was a pivotal moment," Whistler Mountain Bike Park's director says recalling the day A-Line opened a few of summers ago.

"Before that I didn't see it, but standing on the side of the trail that day I knew something was going on now. That's when I got a sense of how big this could be."

If lift-assisted downhill mountain



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biking had a timeline it would  
almost certainly be dated Before  
A-Line and After A-Line.

The four kilometres of natural  
rock challenges, machine-made  
berms and jumps merged BMX,  
motocross and downhill  
mountain biking in a manner not  
seen before and only now  
beginning to be replicated on  
many ski hills from North  
America to Europe.

Could mountain biking parks  
become big money-spinners in  
their own right?

That's the question  
Whistler-Blackcomb  
management is progressively  
assessing while park creators  
optimistically look south to  
Creekside and even north to  
Blackcomb.

No big announcements yet, or  
anytime soon according to a  
management team instead  
focusing on expansions in skiing  
for the Peak to Creek area,  
announced this month as part of  
a \$14.2 million "liftless"  
development for the mountain.

Creekside does nevertheless  
feature in the current five-year  
plan for Whistler Mountain Bike  
Park. Provided downhill  
mountain biker numbers continue  
to grow, summertime bike  
carriers would be added to the  
Creekside Gondola for trails  
running in and around the base,  
close to Franz's Trail and in the  
vicinity of Peak to Creek.

"The terrain there would be  
absolutely incredible – the old  
growth forest, the dry south-west  
facing aspect, the nice slope  
angle would make it great to ride  
and much less challenging than  
Garbanzo to build," mountain  
bike park developer and  
long-time trail builder Dave  
Kelly enthuses.

He's spent five-and-a-half  
months with a crew of 10 to 16  
workers creating the Garbanzo  
extension that will add another  
2,200 vertical feet to the park

when it opens this weekend and include trails blending old school riding with all the features that make A-Line such a favourite. The area's two spines will wind around Dave Murray, Pony Trail and Tokum, and further south close to Franz's Trail and Highway 86.

"There's a totally different feel – this is more technical single track but all of a sudden it'll bust into an A-Line style section and then back into tight single track," Kelly says.

The \$250,000 project came into being once park visits doubled over two years, from 2001 to 2003. Sixty-two thousand rider days were clocked up in the park last season, almost 20,000 more than the previous year, and more than five times above and beyond 1999 ridership.

On last season's busiest day 1,100 riders hit the park, and the need for more than one lift and a larger trail network had become obvious.

Directly above the park, Garbanzo seemed a natural progression but management would need to see a significant jump – from that 62,000 to 150,000 rider days on the mountain each year – for a move into neighbouring Creekside. Operators predict that could happen within three to five years, though they won't discount the possibility of numbers tapering off before the 150,000 rider mark.

Growth is definitely promising so far. The first day of the season brought 432 riders to Whistler Mountain Bike Park, followed by 326 riders the next day.

More than 10,000 rider days have already been notched up since the May 1 opening and management, while budgeting for a total of 70,000 riders this year, is hoping for 80,000 in all.

"Creekside could yet be in 10 years," McSkimming says.

"Beyond that we could go into Emerald and the Big Red Chair areas or move on to Blackcomb. That's way, way out from here but the good thing for us is if the demand is there we do have a huge ability to expand and meet it because we've got all the infrastructure, from lifts and parking lots to hotels and restaurants, already in place."

If McSkimming had it his way people would be arriving in Whistler with bike boxes in much the same way they do, en masse, with skis or snowboard bags. But there needs to be a dramatic increase in destination tourists, a market the park is only now beginning to break into.

Forty per cent of last year's Whistler Mountain Bike Park users came from Vancouver or Whistler, and the next biggest user group (15 per cent) was from elsewhere in British Columbia.

Washington State makes up 13 per cent, other parts of the United States 14 per cent, other parts of Canada eight per cent and a slender 10 per cent of riders are from other parts of the world.

The park is considered too young as a tourist draw for Tourism Whistler to have any figures yet on how many people it is bringing into town.

A survey completed in 2003 lumps all biking in the valley together, revealing only that 34 per cent of visitors to Whistler spent time on a bike, compared to general sightseeing (58 per cent), gondola rides (45 per cent) and golf (18 per cent).

Whistler Mountain Bike Park's reputation is largely spreading by word of mouth – Whistler-Blackcomb hasn't spent many advertising dollars outside of North America but the park and local free ride team members do feature on Web sites, major mountain bike videos and films.

Trail builder Kelly was delighted to meet a group of downhill mountain bikers from Wisconsin several weekends ago.

"They were here as part of a mountain biking tour – their ultimate goal was Whistler Mountain Bike Park," he says.

"People who haven't even skied or snowboarded here are coming now, and that's a good sign."

He believes the key to expansion is to keep the experts while also enticing every other ability of rider into the park by providing the same kind of experience on different levels in much the same vein as skiing and snowboarding.

"People want adventure, something that provides enjoyment right away and the majority don't want aerobic pain to get it," he says.

While the park's main users are still expert riders, operators are increasingly seeing a much broader user base, new riders attracted by lessons, beginner-level trails and the availability now of quality dual suspension downhill mountain bikes at a price that is a whole lot more affordable than several years ago.

The park's main users are now 26 to 35 year olds (39 per cent) rather than the 18 to 25 year olds (15 per cent) most would expect to be crowding the lift line. Under-18s make up 18 per cent of the park's users while 36 to 45-year-olds comprise 19 per cent and the over-45 years category has crept up to nine per cent.

One thousand children were signed up for park programs last season and women's-only camps are also becoming increasingly popular, helping to boost instructor numbers to 30 this season.

Trail builders are working on beginner routes running from the

top of Garbanzo all the way  
down the mountain.

From an outsider's perspective  
the all-embracing infrastructure  
is what's making Whistler  
Mountain a leader in ski hill  
mountain bike parks. Fernie  
Resort's Matt Mosteller says his  
town's trail creators are now  
focusing on building for entry  
level downhill mountain bikers  
as a priority.

"Broader use is critical for the  
industry – we're really well  
known for our hardcore trails but  
the challenge is to build on that  
niche market of downhillers," he  
says.

"Firstly you need the culture of  
mountain biking already in the  
community, and then the diverse  
trails. Some other resorts have  
tried but couldn't get bigger  
without having the mountain bike  
culture at their doorstep, but you  
also can't survive on experts  
alone."

Fernie's mountain bike park  
operators spent a week in  
Whistler last summer and will be  
back this season. Part of a  
significant expansion this year is  
"Mr. Berms", an A-Line-style  
trail begun last season and linked  
with a new dual slalom course on  
the lower mountain.

Mosteller says the tough West  
Coast style singletrack trails have  
been in Fernie for about six  
years, ever since a group of  
skiers and snowboarders built  
them in the off-season to  
incorporate tree-riding, natural  
rock drops and elevated ramps.

"We weren't a mainstream park  
back then but we're moving  
forward progressively. More  
people are riding the park here  
now than hiking through  
summer."

But he believes mountain biking  
will always be the off-season for  
Fernie, simply a way to add to a  
ski town's appeal.

Whistler's McSkimming

optimistically likens the downhill mountain biking movement to snowboarding, a sport that has now captured about 40 per cent of the snow-hill market locally.

"There's a reasonably close parallel – in the '90s it was just a handful of wild crazy snowboarders but it hits a certain point where the sport does become more appealing to the masses.

"The whole mountain bike travel thing is in its infancy and it would take longer than snowboarding but, being wildly optimistic, I can see it really exploding."

McSkimming counts at least six Canadian lift-assisted mountain bike parks off on his hands without hesitation.

There's more close at hand in the United States, and resorts in Alaska and Europe have contacted Whistler-Blackcomb seeking help with their own developments. The way he sees it, it's all good for an industry beginning to ride a second and bigger wave.

Trail builder Kelly uses Whistler's well-known B-Line route to explain the progression.

"It took from '95 to '99 to convince management we needed excavators to build an appropriate next trail. There was a time before that when a trail, Crabapple, was made by the local motocross club riding up and down between the flags all morning.

"B-Line took one summer and every manager imaginable would check on us almost every day. It was designed with banked turns and jumps as a smooth trail, and almost overnight our rider numbers doubled.

"It was made it for beginners – we figured the experts would stay off a slow trail, but it was so smooth and fun they were all on it.



"There were naturally big boulders we couldn't move so we built the track over them and people loved it.

"The day after it was finished we began planning A-Line because of the reaction. We needed bigger banks and jumps."

A-Line took two summers and 1,200 machine hours to build. Crews walked over and over large tracts of land before finalizing a path, bringing in tree fallers, labourers, excavators and more labourers. Any jumps were built to a formula used all over the park and based on correlating height and length.

"B-Line began the change but A-Line defined it," Kelly says.

"That trail alone had such a huge impact on our business and the whole industry of lift-assisted mountain biking."

Whistler-Blackcomb reports investing about \$750,000 so far into making downhill mountain biking a viable summertime business on the mountain. Garbanzo aside, trail builders are currently focusing on filling in the gaps, updating existing trails and planning more skills centres on the mountain including a jump pit where riders can land on foam.

Value-adding will also come through events. The park has played host to the National Junior Downhill team this month on several occasions and organizers of next month's Crankworx festival hope to gradually build the event into a summer celebration of similar status to Whistler's annual Ski and Snowboard Festival.

Crankworx has evolved from last year's Summer Gravity Festival and is four days of downhill mountain biking events, concerts and demonstrations with daily winners and an overall Tour de France style championship.

Organizers are expecting international competitors chasing a share of \$30,000 in prize money, and bigger evening crowds than the 7,000-9,000 that turned out for a Slopestyle event last year.

According to park management, it's all about building up the downhill mountain biking culture and awareness of Whistler's summertime potential.

"Compared to skiing this is a drop in the bucket," McSkimming concedes of the park's current money-making potential, its \$300,000-\$500,000 profit margin, most of which has been channelled straight back into the venue.

But former park operator Eric Wight needs to rewind the clock less than two decades to illustrate just how far the industry has come.

Back in the late 1980s he helped fight a movement to restrict biking in Garibaldi Provincial Park by helping form WORCA, the Whistler Off-Road Cycling Association.

"We wanted to lobby the municipality and show them mountain biking could be part of tourism – you look at it now, 15 years later, and they're embracing the sport," he said.

Wight, who runs a mountain bike guide business, Whistler Backroads, also founded the mountain bike park back in the mid-1990s after running guided trips on the mountain.

The first downhill route combined bike trails with ski runs and took riders in and out of the trees around Whisky Jack, Pony Trail and Bear Cub.

"Back then people thought it was a little crazy, it was essentially a new sport," he says.

"In the first year you had to have front suspension or you couldn't go and no one wore padding.

"It's come a long way since then."

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