

Subject: [Fwd: Vancouver Sun Article: The other warrior caste]

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From: Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>

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----- Original Message -----

Subject: Vancouver Sun Article: The other warrior caste

Date: Fri, 07 Oct 2005 16:36:14 -0700

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

To: Mayor and Council - DNV <Council@dnv.org>, Senior Management Committee <managecomm@dnv.org>, "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>, Liz James <Cagebc@yahoo.com>

Dear Mayor and Council:

As the date for the Final Report of the Alpine Rec Plan comes upon us -- a timely article from the Vancouver Sun Newspaper today. What an appropriate title to describe mountain bikers. Not a Sunday ride in the woods by far. This article captures the "soul" of the sport well.

Mountain biking, indeed, does not belong on Fromme. Mountain biking belongs in recreational ski resort areas, like Whistler, Cypress, Sun Peaks, Silverstar, etc. Please read this article carefully. This is where mountain biking works best. DNV does not have the staff, amenities nor the ability to enforce, contain and control this sport like private recreational ski resorts do. Doing anything less than that is doing a disservice to the sport, the DNV community-at-large, the forests and natural parks in the long term. Please do the right thing on October 17th and say **"NO" to mountain biking on Fromme**. There are plenty of places for mountain bikers to ride already, and seasonally... Thank you.

--Monica Craver--

North Vancouver, V7K 2R3

(photos not included in this electronic version, but the newsprint version photos complement the story very well)

canada.com News

Friday » October 7 » 2005

The other warrior caste

What the mountain's chairlifts did for skiing, they are now doing for free-riding cyclists -- it's a revolution

Doug Ward

Vancouver Sun

Friday, October 07, 2005

WHISTLER - You see them at the base of Whistler Mountain, flying off granite rock faces and down ladders, one after the other, mountain bikers oblivious to those little monsters in their brains that scream: You're going to crash! You're going to crash!

They are free-riders: members of the new warrior caste of fat-tire bikers who wear body armour, skate shoes on flat pedals and large full-face helmets while ripping downhill on 20-kilogram bikes that cost on average about \$3,000.

They are at play in the six-year-old Whistler Blackcomb Mountain Bike Park, which has become a key part of the ski resort's summer business and is helping revolutionize the sport of mountain biking.

These cyclists aren't riding to get fit -- what with the chairlift taking them up and gravity taking them down, they hardly ever pedal. And they aren't here to see the Coast Mountain vistas while spinning through the alpine wildflowers.

They're out for the buzz that comes from speeding down trails, flying along bermed switchbacks, launching into the air -- and doing it without eating dirt or seriously damaging

their flesh.

Mike Biddlecombe, looking more like a motocross rider than a cyclist, is coming off an experts-only, jump-riddled trail called A-Line. And he's heading straight over to the Fitzsimmons chair for an effortless ride up to mid-mountain and another rush down A-Line's 100 man-made jumps, berms and tricky rock drops.

"I call A-Line, All-Day Line. I just keep doing it. It's fast, smooth and safe," said Biddlecombe, about the trail often called the world's most popular mountain bike trail.

You can stand on many of the trails in the bike park here and wait minutes before seeing any riders. Not so on A-Line, where the bikes on a busy weekend roll by every few seconds. British biker-tourists refer to the A-Line as the M-25, in reference to the high-traffic motorway around London.

Biddlecombe, a North Vancouver 39-year-old who now works as a video-game programmer in Seattle, comes to Whistler twice a month in the summer.

"It's the world mecca for mountain biking essentially. You look at any mountain bike publication or video and Whistler is always mentioned. The [North] Shore was the start of it but once Whistler started lift access, we decided we would do the trek up here."

A key part of the Whistler bike park's allure, beyond the man-made table-tops, suspended ladder bridges, dirt jumps and technical root-strewn lines, are the chairlifts.

"You don't have to pedal uphill. These are huge bikes and you get tired pretty fast," said Biddlecombe. "It's so much easier to load up on a chair. You can get tonnes more runs. It allows you to practise. You just get better all the time."

Mountain biking used to be about riding cross-country on hardtails without rear suspension in search of sweet single-track downhill -- narrow trails with just enough room for one bike.

Technique was important but so was cardio. The unwritten credo was that you had to earn the downhill by climbing uphill first.

This purist philosophy lost much its grip on the sport with the emergence of free-riding -- a style of mountain biking that featured increasingly difficult stunts.

Free-riding largely developed in the late '90's in the gnarly terrain of the North Shore mountains and then spread around the world.

As the riding became more radical, bikes became heavier (so did the riders once climbing became less important) to withstand the punishment, with more travel in their front and rear suspension. Riders were less inclined to pedal these new tricked-out behemoths uphill.

Enter the Whistler bike park which has taken free-riding to a new level.

Rory Harmse, a veteran of the North Shore scene, said Whistler is boosting the growth of free-riding by providing lifts to terrain with varying degrees of difficulty.

"The North Shore will always be the place where it all started. It's really old-school and technical," said Harmse, a 25-year-old construction worker.

"But Whistler is having a huge impact because people can rent bikes, try them out. They can see what it's all about without being intimidated by the North Shore."

The Whistler park has borrowed the aggression and stunts of "Shore" riding and placed it in a lift-accessed controlled area.

"There are trails on the Shore that are as innovative and extreme as trails here but we've added lift access," said Whistler bike park manager Tom Prochazkas.

"We've added trails like A-Line. On the Shore, you don't have that because you need an

excavator to build it."

Whistler's other distinguishing factor is bigger air. Even more than the North Shore, Whistler is about launching off jumps, otherwise known as hucking.

Mike Johnstone, a Whistler bike park instructor, said the free-riding revolution is really about finding the smoothest line down the mountain. "And nine times out of 10, that's not on the ground. So air is definitely a major part of what we do.

"In a normal jump park, you might have four to six jumps in a row, but A-Line has about 30 jumps on it, during a 10-minute run. Then you jump on the lift and in 10 minutes, you hit it again."

The bike park bandwagon has been made possible by the new bikes with their front and back suspension and motorcycle-like geometry.

"Now with suspension and hydraulic disc brakes and big tires that stick really well, it takes a lower level of skill," said Johnstone.

The impact of these ski resort bike parks on mountain biking is similar to the new-school energy that terrain parks brought to skiing and snowboarding.

"Whistler is looked upon as the centre for mountain bike parks in the world," said Jake Heilbron, chief operating officer of Kona Mountain Bikes, the official bike sponsor of the Whistler park.

In B.C., many ski resorts have introduced bike parks with chairlifts that once sat idle throughout the summer. Among these are Sun Peaks near Kamloops, Silver Star near Vernon and Cypress Mountain.

"For years, the centre of the new style of mountain biking was the North Shore. But free-riding is now being transferred to the Whistler bike park and other parks around the world," said Heilbron.

"There are at least 100 or more ski resorts that are building or trying to build bike parks along the lines of Whistler with lift access."

Whistler was the first ski resort to seriously pursue bike park development, said Heilbron, because it had a large free-riding community in the Pacific Northwest to draw on.

To be sure, the number of mountain bikers at Whistler's park remains a fraction of the number of skiers and snowboarders who flock there in winter.

But the trajectory of the bike park's business has been steadily upward and the appeal of free-riding to a younger demographic worldwide shows no sign of diminishing.

Biker visits at the Whistler park jumped 33 per cent in 2004 over the previous year and a similar jump is expected for the season that ends this weekend. The 2005 budget was based on a projected 90,000 biker visits.

Among these new converts to the Whistler free-ride universe is Uri Lambert, a 31-year-old glass artist from Mount Vernon, Wash., who comes up every weekend.

"My wife and I used to ride cross-country and now we rarely do," said Lambert.

"There is a huge community that comes up here every weekend from Washington State because there are no resorts down there with stuff like this. All of our friends who we race with come up and we get a hotel or whatever."

Whistler Blackcomb has invested \$3 million into the park since it opened in 1999. The park has 25 trail crew members, 15 patrollers and 15 guides. Many of these staff people are also ski patrollers and instructors. They recall how another marginal, hardcore sport -- snowboarding -- became mainstream and think the same could happen to free-ride mountain biking.

Park manager Prochazkas said the visibility of the park from Whistler Village's plazas and patios has brought many newcomers to the sport.

"Normally, mountain biking is kind of invisible. It's off in the bushes. Here you can stand at the bottom, look up and go: 'Wow. This is interesting, I might try it.'

"And friends bring friends because you don't have to pedal a 50-pound bike up the hill."

Prochazkas said chairlifts made downhill skiing accessible generations ago and are now doing the same for free-ride mountain biking.

The lifts allow park officials to create trails that cater to the newbies and the hard core.

"It's kind of like going skiing for a day. It's like: Let's warm up on the Green or Emerald chair and then go up to the Peak and ski down East Cirque and at the end of the day we go sit on the patio and have a beer."

Mountain biking at Whistler originally began with a local company doing guided tours up top. There was no bike park.

Then Intrawest, owner of Whistler Blackcomb, decided to invest in the sport to buttress its summer traffic. Few resort officials anticipated the park's runaway growth when it opened in 1999.

"If someone said to me 10 years ago that there would be 100,000 people a year going up the bike park lifts and riding all over the place," said park manager Prochazkas, "I'd have said: 'No way.' I don't think anybody could really have foreseen what's going on here."

Prochazkas said the Garibaldi Lift Co. pub, which is adjacent to a number of mountain bike jumps, used to shut down during the summer. Not any more.

This summer the pub posted its busiest day to date during the annual Crankworx mountain bike festival.

Cypress Mountain opened its bike park this summer. "We attracted a lot of experienced local riders who wanted to get a lot of vertical time in a short time," said spokesman Kent Rideout.

The resort believes mountain biking will become a key part of its future.

"It really appeals to the youth market," said Rideout. "I have a 12-year-old son and he loves mountain biking as much as he loves skiing or snowboarding. It's really a summer sport for someone who loves mountain sports.

"And it's become part of mountain culture."

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