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SEND TO A FRIEND FEEDBACK

War of the Woods - New meaning to old growth

By Justin Beddall

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He's easily the oldest North Shore freerider with multiple sponsorship deals.

But he didn't start riding a mountain bike until he was 50. Not long after that, in 1992, Peter Morin started riding his new bike on the Shore.

One fateful day he'd planned on riding up the Grouse Mountain fire access road when his life took an unexpected turn down another path — or in this case, a steep mountain bike trail. He met up with a group of mountain bikers who were about to descend a trail called The Squeaky Elbow.

Morin, an old-school adventurer and skier, decided to join them and was immediately hooked on the adrenaline rush of navigating his knobby tires down mountain trails.

It wasn't long before Morin, a heavy duty mechanic by trade who currently works as a millwright for Pacific Centre, realized the North Shore mountain bike trails — some nearly a decade old — badly needed some TLC.

"We were going through a set of brake pads every two rides and rims lasted five weeks," recalled Morin, now 64. "So I started filling in mud holes, that's how I got started. Since then I've worked on a lot of different trails."

Morin figures he's spent close to 4,000 hours volunteering his time to work on fixing and mending trails on the North Shore. It's a labour of love, he says of the sweat equity that he's helped put into the world's most famous trails.

Morin's first trail upkeep project was on Upper Oil Can, an old-school trail. Since then he has filled, cobbled and patched dozens of other frequently biked down — and filmed — trails nestled in the North Shore mountains.

Since he began stashing his trail maintenance tools

Aldergrove Star

in the woods, Morin has started to get more and more help from passing bikers, who like to help him move boulders, rocks, etc. Since 1997, he started to get help from the North Shore Mountain Bike Association-sponsored “trail maintenance days,” which typically start at 9 a.m. and run until 4 p.m. once a month depending on the weather, and gather upwards of 60 people to participate.

Morin’s trail-maintenance philosophy is simple: “armouring” the trails with rocks. “If there’s a mud hole I drop a big rock in it,” he explained “just like a Roman road,” that is, a series of flat-faced rocks creating a pathway that is also environmentally friendly. “I do it so it lasts forever and also use lots of drainage.” He digs what he calls “water bars” to “make sure the water spreads and doesn’t cause a big channel and erosion.”

Even with the spate of rain in recent months he said the trails have remained in good condition because they have good drainage systems.

Morin’s latest project is the Griffin, a popular trial on Mt. Fromme.

Morin said he and others are working to make the trail more accessible to young riders who are just getting started. “It’s a good place to learn,” he said. “If we get the Griffin down to easy/intermediate we will have a good range of trails.”

Last summer, Morin and trail maintenance buddies worked on Seven Secret, another old-schooler. “We made it flow better and easier to ride,” he said.

During the countless hours he’s spent in the woods, Morin has accumulated some anecdotal data about the demographics of mountain bikers on the Shore.

“The ages range from 12 to 65. There’s a lot of riders in their 30s, 40s, and 50s — and they’re really good riders,” he said, noting that there’s also a lot of talented female bikers.

There’s also, he added, a lot of tourists dotting the trails: English, Israeli, American, Germans.

“Someone was telling me about 20 people from Boston. That kind of group comes here. People who’ve come [to the Shore] to ride.”

And many will ride on the trails lovingly tended by Morin, who has earned quite a reputation amongst local riders and trail builders for his heightened sense of trail consciousness.

“Peter’s dedication to trail maintenance on the Shore is pretty much unparalleled, and at 64 he’s one of the most inspiring riders I know,” said local trail builder/rider “Dangerous” Dan Cowan.

Morin’s trail handiwork has also been featured in countless biking publications, including Bike

magazine, community and daily newspapers and television news segments. That sort of notoriety has also led to an enviable list of sponsorships for Morin, who turns 65 next month.

He's currently got sponsorship deals inked with Brodie Bikes, Manitou Shocks, Race Face components, NRG, Cycle Dynamics, Troy Lee Helmets and Momentum Sports.

Still, he doesn't do it for the sponsorships or glossy magazine spreads.

"Being in the forest is amazing," he said when asked what he likes most about riding/building on the North Shore. "The adrenaline rush ... it's a challenge ... it's always a challenge.

"Some days I don't feel like going but by the end I'm so glad because I'm feeling so good. You get a high from riding, it's a lot like skiing," said Morin, who also works as a member of the Whistler ski patrol.

Of course, extreme sports are inherently dangerous — and he's had his fair share of over-the-handlebar wipeouts in the woods. "I guess the most painful was three broken ribs at once," he recalled. "Last year I broke my thumb and rib all in one ride. You get excited to go back. I don't like getting off my bike." Although Morin's two 20-something sons — Todd and Dean— have ventured into the trails of the North Shore to go for a ride with their dad, his wife, Frida, prefers riding on much flatter surfaces. "She likes riding in Steveston," he explained.

But that won't stop Morin from venturing from their home in Burnaby over to the North Shore, which he does, on average, three times per week.

"This year I'm going to be sure to get more riding in," said Morin who was busy last week working on Upper Oil Can.