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**War of the Woods — Pay to play is on the way**



Rob Newell

**GOING UP — Norco's Vancouver sales rep Pat Mulrooney demonstrates Cypress Mountain's newly installed bike carriers that will service the new bike park. Norco bikes, from mild to wild, will be available for rent at the park, a facility that represents the future of the sport on the North Shore.**

**By Jennifer Maloney (Rob Newell photo)**  
*Jun 02 2005*

The opening of Cypress Mountain's bike park next month, marks a new era for the sport, but riders and landowners agree it will not spell the end of free riding.

"There's a lot of parallels to skiing, putting in lifts," said Sharon Bader, president of the North Shore Mountain Bike Association. "People still go in the backcountry. I can't see it replacing mountain biking because it's a total different experience."

Cypress' 10-kilometre trail bike park is the first of the three North Shore mountains to offer chairlift access to bikers.

North Shore legend Todd "Digger" Fiander, who's spent more than half his life building trails in the wilderness for free, was hired to engineer the dirt for Cypress' new park. While he's confident his signature style that uses eight-inch cobble stone and non-organic soil will attract many riders, he agrees there will always be a niche for free riding.

"There's people who like the exercise to ride up," he said. "The world's best trails are here and they can ride them for free."

At this point both Grouse and Seymour mountains have not shown public

interest in capitalizing on the growing sport within their own resorts, however, a spokesperson for Grouse Mountain, which has hosted the World Mountain Bike Conference for three consecutive years, said the possibility has not been ruled out.

"We've proven we have the ability to host mountain biking on Grouse, but right now our focus is on other things," said Chris Dagenais, public relations manager for Grouse. "As far as the future of the sport, I can only imagine it growing. That's fairly widely recognized within the community. It's going to develop. The question of how is still on the table and that's where no firm plans have been made."

With the volume of guests who access Grouse by its tram, Dagenais said it would be impractical to have the same lift used by mountain bikers. While Grouse is the gateway to Mt. Fromme, which has some of the best trails on the North Shore, most of them end on Mountain Highway. In order for Grouse to open a bike park it would have to implement a way of transporting bikers back to the mountain.

"Practical elements are the biggest thing right now," he said. "As the sport develops it's fair to say Grouse will be part of it. It's the mecca for biking here on the North Shore. Once we move forward on that I have no doubt Grouse will be involved."

Like many who pioneered the sport, Bader believes in keeping free trails free, but she doesn't view the development of bike parks negatively.

"I think having lift riding will relieve a lot of the pressure [on the free trails], like it did in Whistler," she said, adding the riding community has to work to protect and preserve what it has. "People need to realize this is an important resource and it's up to all of us to ensure we have it for the future. If we take it for granted, it will go to waste. We need to work together to preserve it." Maintaining trails means working with the various landowners, most of whom agree they should stay free.

"I don't think the public would support access fees," said Larry Fyroishko, Vancouver supervisor for BC Parks. "Parking fees are looking after the day use areas, but when it comes to trails I don't think there'd ever be a time where it'd be profitable [to charge]. I don't even want to entertain the idea of charging for trails."

Laurie Fretz, supervisor of the Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve, said resource and management of the alpine area will have to be examined, however she doesn't see access fees as the way of the future.

"To this date we haven't discussed charging," she said, adding, "That's not one of our objectives."

Without user fees to pay for trail maintenance, it's becoming more important to build trails to last. By choosing trail sites that maximize drainage and by using hard surfaces to avoid erosion, David Diplock, an environmental engineer says damages can be mitigated: "One of the biggest changes happening now is trails are being built with biking and sustainability in mind, as opposed to ad hoc social trails with no real design to last."

Diplock, a former director of the NSMBA, led a hands-on workshop on trail construction yesterday at the North Shore Credit Union World Mountain Bike Festival and Conference.

"It's hard to say what level of users there's going to be," says Diplock. "It's kind of like playing the stock market. You don't know whether it's going to plateau or grow."

Even if the sport continues to attract more riders, Diplock said it would be difficult to collect user fees. Unlike a community centre where money can be collected over a counter, there are many entrances to the woods. But there are other ways to have users put back into the trails, he said.

"The traditional point of entry is too difficult. I think it will [stay free]. Given it's in a park-like setting, people feel it should be free. Supplying trail maintenance or charging for parking are common ways to have users put back."

The whole mountain bike phenomena was created on the North Shore because of its technical trails and Diplock says landowners should keep that in mind for future development.

"As a landowner you control them. You can shape the sport," he said. "We want to say, 'okay what do we envision mountain biking to be?' Decide on the perfect picture of sustainable trails, which are meeting the needs of the

**people and then come up with a strategy to get there.”**

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