

News

## **Power behind the Grouse Grind; Contractor keeps popular trail in shape**

Ian Bickis

Special to The Sun

770 words

5 January 2008

Vancouver Sun

Final

A3

English

Copyright © 2008 Vancouver Sun

If you've ever trudged up the Grouse Grind, head down and focused on not falling, you likely noticed that part way up the climb the uneven roots and protruding rebar are replaced with straight, strong, even steps.

You're stepping on the work of Jeremy Power, professional trail builder and the contractor helping to ensure the long-term stability of the popular trail.

And while the trail is now closed for the winter, the maintenance done this year will help ensure it opens again in the spring.

Attracting more than 100,000 visitors a year, the Grouse Grind takes a real beating from the many boots, shoes and the odd flip-flop that scramble up the punishing slope.

The steepness of the trail, which climbs 853 metres up Grouse Mountain in 2.9 kilometres, and North Vancouver's rainy climate add to the erosion threatening the trail.

Recognizing the importance of the Grind, however, Metro Vancouver has increased maintenance efforts in the past few years.

Two years ago, they brought in Power to lend his expertise to the watershed protection division, which is in charge of maintaining the trail.

"There's not too many people who do what I do," said Power, who's been building trails for about 15 years, and started his own trail-building company, Rare Earth Recreational Development, three years ago.

On the Grind, he's helping to repair the most washed-out sections by building wood and rock steps designed to withstand the daily assault of hikers. The team is using six-inch-thick timber for the steps, compared to two-inch boards in earlier Grind projects.

Cedar is the wood of choice, as it lasts a lot longer than the pressure-treated varieties used in earlier repairs.

Building the trail, however, is hard work. If you think walking up the Grind is hard, try doing it with a load of lumber.

"On a grade like this, you're fairly limited as to what you can do," Power said.

That means no machinery and a lot of grunt work. Even Power's dog, Jack, is roped into carrying food and batteries. A helicopter is used to bring in the timber, but there are only a few openings in the canopy that can accommodate the drop. The crew then carries the 31.5-kilogram beams to where they need to go.

Rocks are already plentiful on the hill, but moving a 225-kg boulder even a few metres takes

some ingenuity. The crew uses rigging attached to trees to move the boulders, which act as anchors, into place.

"It's not going to erode. It would take an earthquake to move those stones off the slope," Power said.

Smaller rocks for the path are easier to move, but they also need to be flat. So the team breaks out the hammer and chisel to smash a flat surface by hand. And then there are the hundreds of people walking, or running, up the trail as they work.

"It slows you down, slows down production," Power said of the crowds.

When the team is doing helicopter drops or scaling, which involves pushing any loose rock or debris down the mountain, the trail has to be shut down for safety reasons.

"There are some people who are pretty obsessed and generally don't want to take no for an answer," Power said.

The first time they closed the trail they put up signs announcing the temporary closure because of the dangers, but people kept coming up the trail as boulders were coming down.

They eventually had to bring in RCMP officers to enforce the closure. But most people are appreciative of Power's efforts. He's been given food, drinks and even tips. This is a long way from when he first started building mountain bike trails in 1992.

"Back in those days you were chased around the mountainside."

Looking to the future, the city has no definite plans for the trail.

Metro Vancouver spokes-man Bill Morrell said they're looking at all possibilities, including selling the trail to the Grouse Mountain Resort, since the city is "really not in the outdoor recreation business."

In the meantime, watershed protection will continue to manage the trail and keep it safe, including thorough daily sweeps of the trail and careful monitoring of its conditions.

Power hopes to be back next year.