

## Mayor's Minute - October 10, 2019

The Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys are blessed with natural landscapes and features that both residents and visitors from afar. Some of these splendours have been enhanced or have become parks to protect habitat from encroaching development.

Summerland is home to several unique geologic features including one that is virtually downtown: Giant's Head. According to *Okanagan Geology South* (2011), the mountain is a composite volcanic dome that has been molded several times by glacial ice. In addition to the profile, (best seen from the southern side of the mountain from which it gets its name), Giant's Head boasts another special bedrock feature: the perfectly formed columnar dacite at the southern base.

A climb to the top of Giant's Head is rewarded with an astounding 360° view, including Crater Mountain and Summerland's own Great Wall of China. The Great Wall is "a linear structure of massive vertical spires of volcanic rock" (p. 126).

Like elsewhere in the South Okanagan, Giant's Head's climatic conditions, soil type and sloped exposures make much of the mountain favourable to grasslands. This ecosystem provides habitat for a biodiverse biological community, some of which are species at risk.

Healthy grasslands on Giant's Head also provide socio-economic values including low-impact forms of recreation such as hiking and wildlife observation, a fact well-known by the thousands of annual visitors and locals. (In fact, according to [tripadvisor.ca](http://tripadvisor.ca), Giant's Head Mountain Park is in the top five of Things to Do in Summerland.)

Sadly, grassland areas are sensitive and vulnerable to a number of human-related disturbances, and over the years recreational activities have created some negative environmental impacts on Giant's Head.

This is one of the main reasons why Council, in partnership with the Summerland Rotary Club, elected to undertake the Giant's Head Mountain Trails Redevelopment Project in 2017.

Following several months of environmental assessment, a contract was awarded to design the redevelopment in a manner that would best promote rehabilitation of the mountain's ecosystems; address the needs of various trail users, including Giant's Head Grind participants; and update the existing amenities.

The associated costs for the four phases necessitated splitting the project into two periods of redevelopment. Phases 1 and 2 included trail improvements, trail decommissioning for erosion control and to restore environmentally sensitive areas, improved guard rails at the top of the mountain, a new trail on the east side, and park entrance improvements. Additional works (finalized at the October 15 Council meeting) include a guard rail along the new retaining wall in the lower parking area; additional fencing on East Trail, removal of a hazard tree, tie down posts for the gate at the entrance to the Park, half of the project signage, and reinstallation of the viewing tubes. (The metal, non-magnifying tubes, direct viewers on the mountaintop to viewpoints of interest. Low-tech to be sure, but fun and popular, nevertheless.)

The budget for these two phases, now nearing completion, was \$725,000. The District was successful in a grant application for \$435,000 to the (now curtailed) BC Rural Dividend Fund. The Summerland Rotary Club contributed \$100,000 and the District allocated \$190,000 from Gas Tax Community Works funding. The additional works noted above added \$37,000 to the costs and is being funded from the Recreation, Parks and Trails Reserve Account.

The District will look for future funding opportunities, such as grants and partnerships, to complete the final two phases of the Trails Redevelopment Project. This includes the upper portion of the Grind route,

remaining signage work, paving the circulation road and pedestrian trails at the upper parking lot, upgrading the washroom at the upper parking lot, and installing a washroom at the entrance to the park.

Although there appears to be some misunderstanding about why certain trails have been decommissioned and some are choosing to ignore or remove barriers, one can already see areas that are successfully recovering from degradation and erosion. The District hopes that signage installation will reduce or eliminate this behaviour and that all Park users—both the species that live there and the human visitors—can enjoy continued safe and shared use of Giant's Head Mountain Park.