

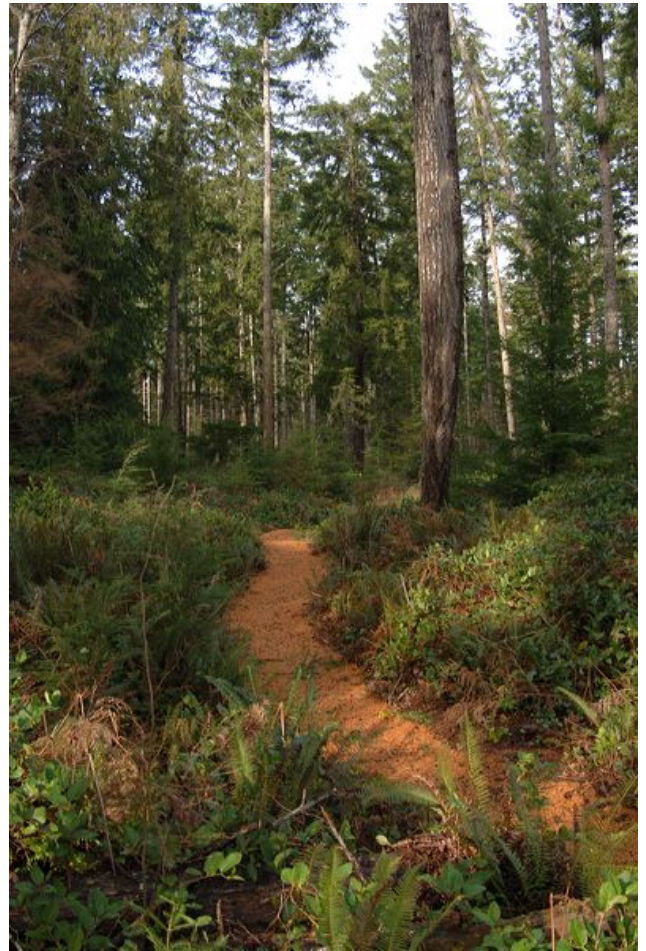
A Culture of Trails

A Brief History of Walking Everywhere

Not so long ago, an extensive trail network on Cortes served as direct routes for the everyday; going to school, picking up the mail, visiting, and even journeying from one end of the island to the other. Many of these historic trails are still in regular use, and new ones are being built, but the network as a living whole is at a critical juncture: where once it was contiguous, it is in danger of becoming sadly fragmented. The precision of these trails is predicated on access, and as more and more of Cortes is privately owned, the health of the public trail system depends on right of way on these lands. To construct a picture of the trail network and the surrounding culture as it was, several people who have lived on Cortes for generations graciously gave their time and stories.

Five generations of the Ellingsen family have lived on Cortes and walked the trails from Von Donop Inlet to Hague and Gunflint Lakes, to Sutil Point and Cortes Bay. For Eva Freeman, stepmother of May Ellingsen, the journey from Von Donop to Reef Point Farm on the southern tip of Cortes was a summer day's trip on foot. Having recently acquired the farm in 1938, but still living in a logging camp in Von Donop, it took roughly three and a half hours each way. Eva would walk down, do her chores and whatever visiting or business she might have on the south end, and be back in time for sundown. On that same summer day, kids in the area might be off on their own expeditions, navigating the interconnected network of trails, logging roads, deer trails and wagon roads with grass growing up the middle, ending up, perhaps, at Von Donop inlet. Doreen Guthrie, an avid walker from childhood, remembers Von Donop when the presence of killer whales and their calves inside the lagoon was commonplace. She thinks that perhaps they went into a protected inlet to give birth.

The trail network afforded children a great deal of freedom since parents could feel safe letting them loose on them (children and roads don't seem to mix the same way...) This freedom, however, did not come fast or furiously enough for Doreen, whose mother wanted to know where she was going. "I don't *know*", was her frustrated answer. "So I would tell her, 'I'm either going north of Seaford, or south of Seaford.' That was as close as I could get." Do-



reen hasn't stopped since. "I just go walking, I don't need a destiny. I find something interesting and follow it." On one such day she walked eighteen miles on the trail networks – a by no means exhaustive distance, just one memorable day on the trails. Over sixty years on Cortes, and talking to her, Cortes seems as much a place to be discovered, as it is a place she knows intimately and intricately.

There was only one vehicle on the road in Von Donop in those days; Rankin Robertson's model-A Ford. Among its many functions, it served as the school bus for a short time in 1946. Bruce and Andy Ellingsen remember climbing into the car with three other students and making the long, bumpy journey via Barret's (Bluejay) Lake and Carrington Lagoon to the Whaletown school, which sat where the Coulter Bay gravel pit is, on the Carrington Bay Road. (The same Carrington Bay Road that is used today). This arrangement did not last long, however, since in those days it was more logical to build a school within walking distance than transport kids back and forth each day. And so they did. In this way, the original communities were quite literally built to human scale, where nothing essential was further

Siskin Lane Public Trails are shown as dashed lines on this map. Members of the public area also free to use Siskin Lane (the road) itself as part of the trail network and can go anywhere in the Park area.



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than could reasonably be walked. Of course, what is 'reasonable' varies with the walker.

Brigid Weiler grew up on Cortes in the fifties and sixties, and recalls that for a long time after vehicles became commonplace she continued to use trails more often than roads. An exception might be when, as a young woman, she needed to refill her propane tank. She would walk from Whaletown to Manson's with the empty canister, and hitchhike home with the full, heavy tank. This could take much longer than walking! On at least one such journey not a single car passed that day, so she and the propane tank spent the night where they were, and resumed hitchhiking the next day.

Still an avid walker, Brig says of the intimacy of trails, 'they connect you to your route, to the land you are passing through. Maybe on the way you find a patch of mush-

rooms that you have for dinner that night, or maybe it is raining and you get soaking wet – whatever. You can't help but be part of the drama of nature when you are *inside* it, which you are when you're walking in the woods.'

Trails are like language: if they're not used they are lost, and they are tended by use. Currently, foot traffic on the existing trail network is growing recreationally as well as practically, even as car traffic is increasing on the roads. Cortes is abuzz. Drawing from tradition as well as innovation, the community is actively creating a lively and wise culture that is informed by the land itself. If old and new networks begin to link up via trail donation on private land, the culture of trails will be strengthened – which means that on the way to get the mail anything might happen. Owlets. *Woman on a Motorcycle* (that's a mushroom). A sweet, sweet nothing. Thought in the rhythm of walking.



Renewal Land Company has a long-standing commitment to public access, and we've worked hard to ensure that public trails form an integral part of the Siskin Lane development. Over the past three years Renewal has worked with community groups, individuals, The Land Conservancy of BC and the Regional District to build on existing trail networks and ensure there is a network of permanently protected public trails throughout the Siskin Lane lands and the adjacent, new public park.

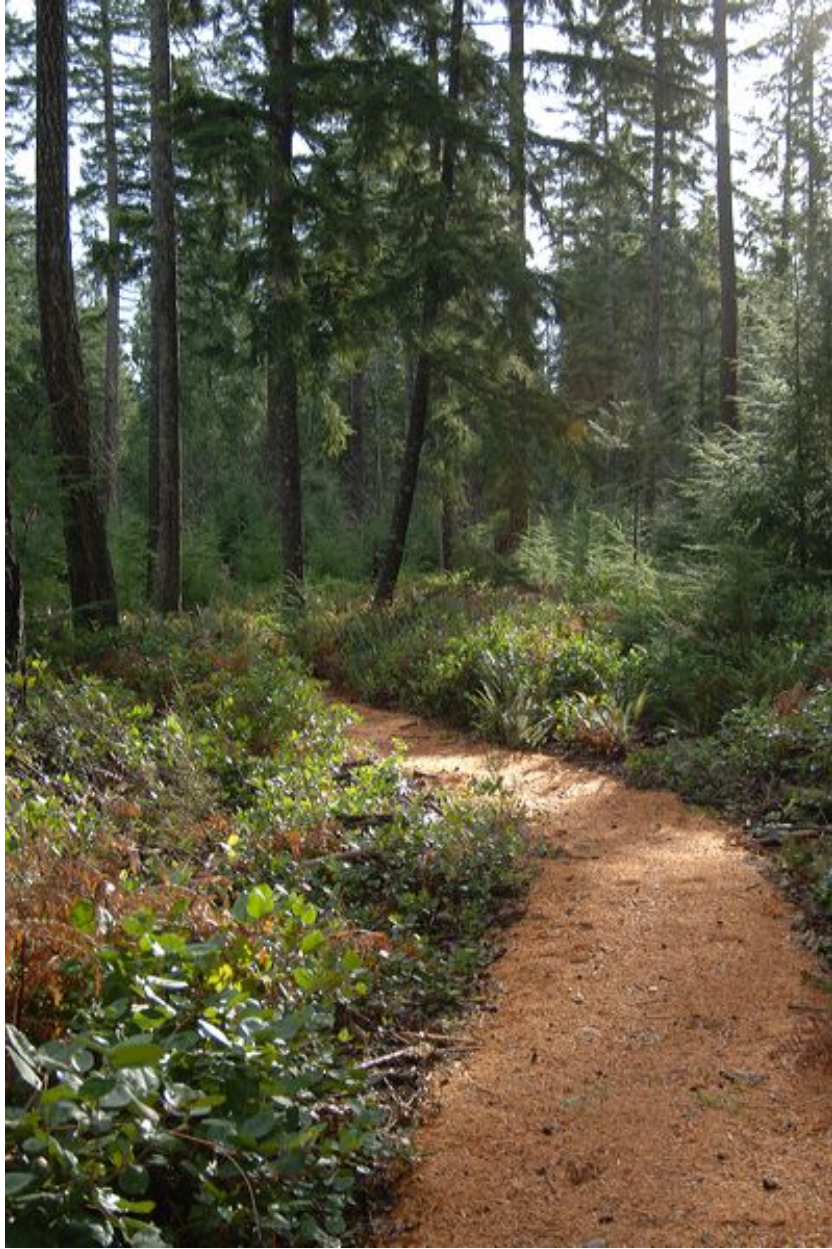
Many of the trails that are now permanently protected have been in use for many years and form part of a wide network of trails across the south end of Cortes. We've also built several kilometers of new trails to link in with existing trails, creating new pathways and routes for walker, joggers, strollers, cyclists, horses, dogs and others to enjoy. We hope that the trail network on these lands will be used by generations to come, for recreation, commuting to work, getting to school or just wandering around.

The Siskin Lane public trail network could not have been established (and new trails built) without the help and insight of many people. We're grateful to all of you for your help identifying key trails, designing and building new routes and creating a mechanism to guarantee permanent public access.

There are many different ways to ensure public access to trails on private lands. One approach is to legally designate public trails in such a way that access is permanently guaranteed, regardless of whether property ownership changes hands. In Renewal's case, we chose to register a statutory-right-of-way on all the Siskin Lane trails. The statutory right-of-way is a legally binding document that gives the Regional District a permanent right of access for public non-motorized use, as well as responsibility for trail maintenance and liability.

Visit Renewal's website at www.cortesisland.com/renewal to download a copy of the Statutory Right-of-Way used to dedicate public trails on Siskin Lane. We're happy to provide this as a template to anyone who wants to consider this approach to dedicating a public trail on their land. To learn more about other approaches to creating public access, check out a new article on our website – "As the CROW Flies: Establishing Right of Way on Private Lands". To talk more about public access and trails on Cortes, contact Frances Guthrie at frances@oberon.ark.com.

*Many thanks to Erin Robinsong for all her work researching and writing these articles,
and to all those who agreed to share their stories!*



Thanks to Richard Trueman for all the trail photos.