



# Riding the New Sooke Hills Wilderness Trail

This month's newsletter features another article by Gregg Strong (see May 2017) on the amazing back road routes criss-crossing Vancouver island. For more information go to his website <http://www.backroadsbiketouring.com>).

Also included in this edition is an update on the condition of long-time Coalition member Doug Warren who was involved in a bicycle/car collision on the connector near Piercy Rd on July 12. Doug was airlifted to Victoria, and is now out of ICU.

There's an amazing new trail that extends the Vancouver Island Trans Canada Trail (TCT - aka the Great Trail) south almost all the way to Victoria. You can now avoid having to ride the heavily trafficked 'Malahat' hill on the Big Island Highway. The Trail traverses rugged terrain, much of it natural wildlife habitat, spanning rivers, open areas and sheltered woodlands. You'll find yourself atop hills, with some sweeping vistas, particularly along the north portions.



*Looking east over Finlayson Arm & far beyond to the mainland*

The Sooke Hills Wilderness Trail is 13 unpaved kms. If you include a new trail section added at the north by the Malahat First Nation to connect to the Cowichan Valley Trail (CVT - local name for the TCT), then it's closer to ~22 kms. So, now riders can take the CVT from Duncan, up to Cowichan Lake, then SE past Shawnigan Lake to finally connect onto the Sooke Hills Trail at the Capital Regional District boundary. The mileage seems short, but this is a tough trail in places. Most of the track is level and wide enough to comfortably pass oncoming bikes. There's a southern section on an old, repurposed hard-pack back road. There are several short stretches on paved roads near the north. The route is clearly signed. There's parking at both ends, or you can easily connect onwards by bike.

In the south, the Sooke Hills Trailhead is near Humpback Reservoir just SW of [Goldstream Provincial Campground](#). To continue on to Victoria, you can follow signage for the Great Trail to Langford, and then connect onto Victoria's popular world class trail, the [Galloping Goose](#). If you're heading to Sooke and the SW Coast, then try riding the paved Humpback Road connector west - it's hilly but a fine, forested, winding ride: outside of peak hours there's little traffic. Most of the Cowichan Valley Trail to the north is relatively flat, accessible to all riders. But the new Sooke Hills Wilderness Trail is rated challenging, and is not for everyone. Coming from the south, there's a long steady upward climb near the start. From either direction, there are many short but very steep (up to 16 degree) hills. In places, particularly near the north, there is treacherous loose gravel topping, making climbing and descents a challenge. You should expect to push your bike up a few of the steeper parts. You'll pass through remote areas, so you may want to read up on how to react should you meet larger wildlife, particularly bears (here's a useful [Parks Canada](#) link). This is not a Trail for beginners or road bikes. If you're on a loaded touring bike, you should be well seasoned before tackling this ride.





On the left, a wooded section near the south end of the trail. Note the solid, built-up foundation. Trail designers invariably chose winding, twisting routes rather than straight lines, keeping the riding interesting. On the right, a steep little hill ahead on the north section. Riders need to be aware that the topping of loose stone in places can be treacherous.

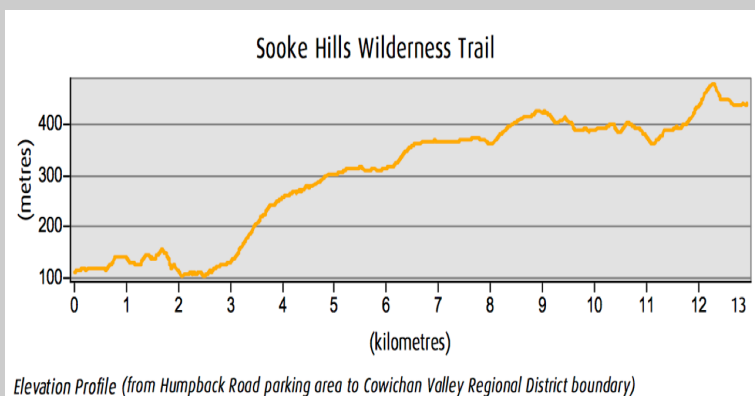


In very Canadian fashion, the Trail is set up for orderly riding. In the top left is a gate designed to accommodate bikes with loaded panniers (what a great idea!). Top right - a pretty solid looking washroom along the way - it's not going anywhere. Bottom left is a little hill up from the E&N railway. It's hard to see, but the sign directs cyclists to walk their bikes up the switchback. Finally, bottom right - rest assured you'll have good warning of most hills, blind corners or stretches of loose gravel.





Teaser here .... If you're cycle touring, you'll no doubt be roping in some riding on the [Cowichan Valley Trail](#) to the north. A short ride north of Shawnigan Lake and you'll reach the famous [Kinsol Trestle](#). Check out the picture to the left.



The chart to the left gives a distance vs elevation view for one starting from the south end of the Sooke Hills Wilderness Trail. The trailhead is about 100m up. As you head north, you'll climb up to close to 500m. If you continue north on the new 9 km Malahat 1st Nation segment, you'll gradually descend to ~200m elevation. That said, the easier direction is to ride north to south.

I rode the new trail south to north, loaded up with gear, on a hot summer day, and found it a tough go (not for everyone). But rewarding. The trail itself is well built, although I could do without some of the loose gravel. There's gorgeous terrain, and it was a joy not to have to contend with traffic on the big highway to make my way north. It was a weekday, about 2 weeks after the Trail opened, and I ran into a dozen or so other cyclists, including a hardy couple heading south with fully loaded touring bikes. I'm sure usage will pick up as word spreads - particularly on weekends.

The dream of being able to ride the Island from north to south on good trails is steadily inching closer, and this new trail closes a key gap. Well worth checking out.

Here's a good link (which I've borrowed from & paraphrased in a few spots here), to get more info on the [Sooke Hills Wilderness Trail](#).



### A Note from Cathy Bulger: Doug's first fresh air

Hello Family and Friends,

I am excited to be able to send you a great, positive update on Doug. In the past four days, he has amazed us and the staff at VGH here in Victoria.

Without too much detail his progress went something like this:

- late Sunday he was moved out of ICU and onto the neurological ward.
- Monday morning he pulled his feeding tube out even with restraints on his arm. This was earlier than the medical staff had planned but it meant he got an early assessment of his throat and was deemed well enough to try eating "real" minced hospital food. By that afternoon he gained some movement in his left side.
- Tuesday morning he had his first physiotherapy assessment session. They got Doug sitting up on the side of the bed with assistance. The physiotherapist asked him if he could find a clock. He looked at her like she was crazy as he pointed to it on the wall. She asked him if he knew what time it was and Doug answered correctly immediately. When asked to read something on the whiteboard above his bed, he told her the date. That brought tears to my eyes. YES, his thinking brain is working!!
- On Wednesday morning when my sister and I went in, Doug was answering our questions/conversations in full sentences and even initiated a few things. He spend most of the day trying to get out of the bed. He hates the restraints. Doug was able to shave himself with his new electric razor and now eats pretty well on his own with just a bit of assistance. His right limbs are fine and he is gaining more strength with his left limbs every day.

Friends from Comox stopped by and he spoke both English and French phrases to them. Doug must have remembered John is from Quebec - quite amazing I say. Today Doug told me was not in any pain but said, "My head feels woolly." Poor dear.

We got the okay to take Doug outside for a short period of time this afternoon. It was his first bit of fresh air in 16 days! Check out the picture.

So Doug is making progress each and every day. I keep getting told progress will be slow and to have patience. As with any brain trauma injury, no one can predict just how far Doug's recovery will be or what deficits he will have.

Doug is allowed visitors for short periods of time now - about 5 minutes is all he can handle at this point. He is usually able to answer questions and seems to enjoy talking to people. He tires easily if he has done something besides stay in bed. If any of you are visiting in Victoria and want to stop by for a short visit, I am sure Doug would enjoy it and I know I would love to see any of you any time. This ward is reasonably strict with visiting hours. The best time for Doug is between 3:00 - 7:30 but you are allowed in between 11:00 - 1:00 too. Mornings seem to be the time that blood work, ultrasounds, doctor rounds, and physiotherapy happen but give it a try as you never know what will be going on. Thanks for the continued support, good wishes and prayers. I am positive it is what has helped move Doug's progress along. ~Cathy

