

Alberni Inlet Trail

Completion Report to Island Coastal Economic Trust



Submitted by the Alberni Valley Enhancement Association

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Putting the Project in Context:

i) An Overall Trail Network for the Alberni Valley

To begin with the big picture: while the Alberni Inlet Trail is an exciting project in its own right, it is also part of a wider vision to develop a major trail network in the Alberni Valley.

In the aftermath of the down turn in the forestry sector, Port Alberni began a process of economic diversification. The Alberni Valley is fortunate in being only three hours' drive from Victoria and within easy weekend distance of Vancouver; it is also well placed to offer new recreational opportunities for the growing population on the east coast of Vancouver Island. Development of a trail system catering to the outdoor recreation and adventure tourism sector therefore seemed a "natural" – an idea supported by the *Alberni Valley Trails Planning Study* commissioned by the Friends of the Log Train Trail Society in 2006 for the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District. The concept was also endorsed by Macauley & Associates 2007 report *Review of the Port Alberni Forest Industry*.

The *AV Trails Planning Study* confirmed the viability of developing a trail network and also identified four major corridors of regional significance: one of these was the Alberni Inlet Trail.

ii) A Walk Through History

The Alberni Inlet Trail is one of the most scenic trails in the Alberni Valley, featuring a back-country hiking experience with spectacular views over the Alberni Inlet, Mount Arrowsmith and the City of Port Alberni.

But it is much more than that - it is also a walk through history. It passes through the traditional territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth people, an area inhabited for millennia by First Nations.

Evidence of more recent activity is here too. The trail passes mine sites dating back to the 19th century on Copper Mountain and areas where gold was panned on China Creek. For much of its length the route follows the grade of the historic CNPR railway which originated in Victoria on what is now the Galloping Goose Trail. Although it was never completed, extensive railroad construction took place

in the early 1900's. Remains of it are still visible today along the Alberni Inlet, particularly between Underwood Cove and Headquarters Bay. Hikers will pass by old culverts, large rock cuts and the remains of railway trestles and telegraph lines.

iii) An Integral Component of the Vancouver Island

While the Alberni Inlet Trail has the ability to stand alone as a destination, it also represents an important link in a central Vancouver Island trail system - the Vancouver Island Spine concept. At its south end, the Inlet Trail meets the recently completed Runners Trail which runs inland to Francis Lake. From there the potential exists for a further link through to the Cowichan Valley and an ultimate connection southward to Victoria.

The north end of the Inlet Trail connects into the City of Port Alberni's trail system which in turn links up with the Log Train Trail and thence to the north end of the Alberni Valley.

THE PROJECT

Trail Work Prior to ICET

In its entirety, the Alberni Inlet Trail follows a waterfront route of approximately 30 kilometres. It is a multi-access trail being developed in three major stages:

Stage 1 – Port Alberni to China Creek

Stage 2 – China Creek to Franklin River Estuary

Stage 3 – Franklin River Estuary to Headquarters Bay

Between 2004 and 2006 approximately 10 kilometres of stage 2 were built by volunteers from the Alberni Valley Outdoor Club and Katimavik. In December 2007, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and the Alberni Valley Enhancement Association applied to the Island Coastal Economic Trust for funding to assist in completion of the route. This was approved in the spring of 2008 and matching funding subsequently obtained.

PROJECT BUDGET

The overall budget approved by ICET was for \$152,280 with ICET providing \$76,000. Subsequently a contribution from the Federal Job Creation Program increased that total to \$169,993.

Island Timberlands, one of the primary landowners, has also provided in-kind assistance – most notably in construction of the parking lot at the north end of the trail.

As detailed invoicing has been provided to ICET throughout the project it is not duplicated here.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Construction of the Alberni Inlet Trail was made possible by a working partnership involving Island Timberlands, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, the City of Port Alberni, the Province of British Columbia and the Alberni Valley Enhancement Association.

All of Stage 1 of the trail and approximately fifty percent of stages 2 & 3 are on property owned by Island Timberlands. This project would not have taken place without the company's support and active assistance.

Island Coastal Economic Trust contributed fifty percent of the original budget. Major funding was also provided by the Federal Job Opportunities Program and the Provincial Community Tourism Fund. Additional contributions were made by TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, the Alberni Valley Enhancement Association, Mountain Equipment Co-op, the Alberni Valley Outdoor Club and Canada World Youth.

There are inherent difficulties in obtaining and managing funds from different sources with multiple terms of reference and deadlines. We are grateful to all financial sponsors for bearing with us and allowing funding extensions.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The proponents of the application to ICET were Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and the Alberni Valley Enhancement Association and these organizations dealt with all project management. Responsibilities were broken down as follows:

Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District

The Regional District advanced funds to get the project underway until reimbursement was received from sponsors. They also dealt with the complexities of invoicing ICET and provided mapping.

Alberni Valley Enhancement Association

The AVEA was responsible for fundraising and related reporting, management of trail crews on a day to day basis, payroll, purchase of supplies and signage.

Regular meetings were held between the Regional District, the AVEA and Island Timberlands as work progressed. Progress reports and liaison with ICET took place on an "as needed" basis.

With the exception of payroll, all administration provided by the AVEA was done on a volunteer basis and is in addition to other in-kind assistance reflected in the budget.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Objectives:

The overall objectives laid out in the ICET application of 2008 were:

- To complete a connector from the City of Port Alberni south to China Creek (Stage 1)
- To begin work on extending the route further beyond Franklin River to Headquarters Bay (Stage 3)

[Note: As indicated in the background section above, Stage 2 was substantially completed by volunteers prior to the ICET application.]

Implementation:

It was originally anticipated that the trail route would be finalized over the summer and fall of 2008 and that trail construction would begin in late 2008/early 2009 with completion expected by the fall of 2010. As it transpired, there were delays both in finalizing the route and in obtaining necessary permitting. As a result, construction did not begin until spring 2010. Because of high fire hazard, there was also a lengthy summer shut down between mid-July and September 2010. Stage 1 of the trail from Port Alberni to China Creek was formally opened on September 18th 2011.

In the original application, trail construction was to be done by a part-time crew assisted by volunteers; however in order to make up for delays, additional crew were hired in April 2010. The project ran with a four man full-time crew and a second part-time crew (2 days per week) of four or five. Volunteers from Canada World Youth and the Alberni Valley Outdoor Club also assisted.

Permitting:

Archaeological Impact Assessment:

In April 2009 an Archaeological Impact Assessment was carried out by a consultant and representatives of the Tseshaht and Hupacasath First Nations. No issues of concern were identified.

Land Tenure Approvals:

With the exception of two short sections (land owned by the City of Port Alberni at the north end of the trail and China Creek Regional Park) the trail passes through a combination of crown land and properties owned by Island Timberlands.

The City of Port Alberni granted approval for the section through their land in March 2010.

A permit pursuant to Section 57 of the Forest and Range Act for trail construction and maintenance through all crown land sections between China Creek and Headquarters Bay (Stages 2 and 3) was issued to the Regional District by the province in April 2009.

It was a requirement of Island Timberlands that construction agreements with the Regional District be entered into sequentially for the different stages of the trail – i.e. completion of stage 1 was required before permitting for stage 2 and stage 2 must be completed before stage 3 is permitted. There was a delay in obtaining final approval from Island Timberlands; a construction agreement for Stage 1 between the company and the Regional District was not signed until April 2010.

Trail Construction

Stage 1 – Port Alberni to China Creek

Stage 1 is the section of the trail which is beyond the terminus of the historic rail bed and is the most difficult section in terms of terrain. Finalizing a route proved more challenging than anticipated and the final trail ended up being longer and more circuitous than expected. A bonus, however, is the fact that the longer route provides spectacular panoramas towards Mount Arrowsmith and over the City of Port Alberni. A total of 14 kilometres of trail were constructed in Stage 1, plus two bridges.

Island Timberlands donated work and machine time to install the parking lot at the trailhead. Trailhead signs, directional signs and signage for emergency evacuation points have also been installed.

Stage 2 – China Creek to Franklin River

A 1.5 kilometre section of Stage 2 was constructed through China Creek Regional Park to a proposed pedestrian bridge crossing over China Creek. (Additional funds will have to be raised for the bridge itself.)

Stage 3 – Franklin River to Headquarters Bay

All work completed to date on Stage 3 has taken place on crown land at the south end of the route. 3.7 kilometres has been built so far by the Federal Job Opportunities crew and the AVEA full-time crew. This includes access to the remains of two of the more spectacular railway trestles.

Summary of Work Achieved

In total, the adjusted \$169,993 budget has achieved the following:

- Construction of over 19 kilometres of trail, some of it over difficult terrain
- Two bridges
- Trailhead parking lot
- Trailhead and directional signage for Stage 1

It is noted that actual construction has exceeded the 17 kilometres anticipated in the original application.

Publicity

A brochure has been produced for Stage 1 of the Inlet Trail and is also available to be downloaded on the internet from the Regional District's website. It is also featured on the Vancouver Island Spine website. News of the trail is also spreading fast by word of mouth both within the Alberni Valley and in other communities on the island.

Going Forward

We are proud of our hard-working crews and the amount of work that we have been able to achieve. However, although we have exceeded our construction targets, the trail remains unfinished and will require additional funding to complete. There are a number of reasons for this:

- This was always a relatively small budget for the scope of the project, particularly when compared to cost of similar trail systems, but there are logistical difficulties in managing funding from multiple sources with different timelines and terms of reference. Given the success of this phase, it is hoped that further funding will be forthcoming for completion, particularly as the most difficult section (Stage 1) has now been completed.
- Difficult terrain between Port Alberni and China Creek resulted in a longer route for this section of the trail than originally anticipated. Had that not been the case, it would have been possible to construct more of stage 3.

- The ICET application was also based on the expectation that trail users would be able to use the existing logging road bridge over China Creek between stages 1 and 2. This has now been ruled out for safety reasons and a suitable site for a pedestrian bridge has been identified with Island Timberlands. While trail access to the bridge approaches has been built, additional funding will be required for the bridge itself. This cost was not anticipated in the original application.
- In summary, we had anticipated constructing approximately 17 kilometres of trail and in fact we exceeded that – 19 kilometres were built. So in that sense we were more successful than anticipated. However, because of issues in finalising the route and difficult terrain in some areas we did not complete as much of the route “as the crow flies” between town and Headquarters Bay as we had originally hoped.
- Originally it was intended to route the trail such that it used the existing logging road bridge over China Creek. Island Timberlands subsequently indicated that they had safety concerns over potential conflicts between logging traffic and hikers and would require a separate bridge for the trail. This change occurred long after the ICET funding was applied for and approved. In addition to safety concerns, however, I think it has resulted in a better overall alignment for the trail and will also enhance use of China Creek Regional Park.

Impacts

Stage 1 of the Inlet Trail is entirely on land owned by Island Timberlands (IT). For safety reasons, IT was strongly of the view that use of the trail should not be encouraged until it was fully complete and all signage in place. The trail was only officially opened on September 18th 2011 – two months ago. It is consequently a little early to fully gauge its impact; however early signs are very positive:

- Within the community, formal hikes have already been organized by School District 70’s Outdoor Education class (twice), Parks and Recreation, the Alberni Valley Outdoor Club and the Tuesday Walkers. Anecdotally, there is very high use of the first section of the trail on a daily basis by families living on the south side of Port Alberni. It is rare to drive by without seeing several cars in the parking lot even on week days
- From outside the community, we are aware of formal outings by hiking groups from Qualicum, Bowser and Victoria. This is the second year that the Victoria group has spent a week in Port Alberni specifically to hike here. On both occasions, they have hiked portions of the Inlet Trail as well as the Stamp River Trail which was also partially funded by ICET.

- The trail is on websites for the Regional District and Island Timberlands. A brochure has also been produced and distributed. (Copies were forwarded to ICET with the completion report.)
- Additionally, The Vancouver Island Spine Association has asked to include the Inlet Trail map on their website and plan to hike stage 1 next year. Notification has gone out to the Alpine Club of Canada. An article has appeared in The Beacon magazine.
- The project created 54.50 months of employment.

We anticipate that there will be further publicity and much higher use by this time next year.

Conclusion

The Alberni Valley Enhancement Association would like to express its appreciation to all who worked on this trail and to the partnership which made it possible.



ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT
REGIONAL DISTRICT

FINANCIAL STATEMENT
Historic Alberni Inlet CNPR Trail
Period: June 1, 2008 to September 30, 2011

Project expenditures

Materials and tools	\$ 8,152
Labour and Transportation	151,267
Mapping and administration	<u>6,104</u>

Total expenditures \$ **165,523**

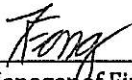
Project Income (Sources of Funding)

ICET	\$ 76,000
Tourism Fund Grant - ACRD	25,000
Federal Job Creation program	39,333
TD friends of the Environment Foundation donation	7,000
Ministry of tourism, Sports & the Arts	4,000
Mountain Equipment Co-op donation	3,000
BC Federation of Mountain Clubs	600
In kind donations	<u>5,963</u>

Total income (Sources of Funding) \$ **160,896**

Balance \$ **(4,627)**

I hereby certify that this statement accurately represents all project expenditures and all sources of project funding



Manager of Finance

October 20, 2011
Date

