



# VISTA

**VANCOUVER ISLAND SPINE TRAIL  
ASSOCIATION**



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# ***Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association***

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***Prepared by Scott Henley***

***Reviewed by Andrew Pape-Salmon and Gil Parker***

***September, 2011***

## **A Trail from Victoria to Cape Scott (The Concept):**

*The Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association (VISTA) aims to facilitate the development of a hiking trail from Victoria to Cape Scott.*

*The Vancouver Island "Spine" Trail is a proposed 700km trail from Victoria in the south to Cape Scott at the northern tip of the Island. The route follows both historical routes and existing trails in many sections. The path passes through or near several communities, yet retains its wilderness character.*

*The "Spine" is an adventure opportunity that will provide a recreational route for residents and tourists through the beautiful back country of Vancouver Island. Although it is primarily a hiking and snowshoe trail, some sections of the Spine are suitable for other non-motorized use, e.g. trail running, mountain bikes, horses, and skiers. The route traces mountain ridges, hugs ocean coastlines, passes through old growth and new forests and by numerous lakes. It is similar to other successful long-distance hiking routes that attract worldwide attention.*

*The "Spine" Trail will support local economies through increased recreational and cultural tourism with associated service sector jobs, along with trail building and maintenance jobs. Regional Districts, First Nations, mountaineering, hiking and trail running clubs and other outdoor clubs will be encouraged to monitor the trail. First Nations and businesses will have an exciting new opportunity to provide services to travelers in their region.*

*The project is being developed by the Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association (VISTA), in cooperation with "Hike BC", the BC wing of the National Hiking Trail (NHT) and Trails BC, the BC representative of the Trans Canada Trail. The NHT has incorporated such significant trails as the East Coast Trail in Newfoundland, the Bruce Trail in Ontario, the Alexander MacKenzie route, and the Nuxalk/Carrier "Grease Trail" from Bella Coola to Quesnel. The TCT, as Canada's primary National trail, stretches across all provinces and even some territories.*

## **Background:**

*Vancouver Island is a recreational paradise with activities for all seasons. It offers additional opportunities for those who seek wilderness, camping, scenery, fishing and cultural tourism.*

*Continuous, linear trails - like the Spine - provide recreation corridors for locals and tourists alike. However, where no access is provided, the terrain is unforgiving.*

*Those obstacles are minimized by building simple trails. For hikers, runners, climbers, mountain bikers, equestrians, snowshoers and skiers, the attractions become obvious. The evidence is in the success of several Island trails: Juan de Fuca Trail, West Coast Trail, Elk River Trail, Mount Albert Edwards Trail (Forbidden Plateau), Cape Scott and the North Coast Trail.*

*A single, continuous trail, the Vancouver Island Spine Trail will track through backcountry but near to villages and towns and will attract local recreational users and tourists. The Spine will follow existing trails wherever possible, and promises to open up new trails on the north Island.*

*The promotion of the Spine will bring tourism and local recreation dollars to communities that are currently searching for ways to diversify their economies. The Spine concept supports the Trails Strategy of BC, developed by the BC Government.*

### **Our Society:**

*The Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association (VISTA) is a registered non-profit society and as a CRA charity will issue tax deductible receipts. VISTA charity number (CRA)  
852516251RR0001*

### **Our Society's Board of Directors:**

- *Gilbert M Parker, President, Director*
- *Andrew Pape-Salmon, Vice-President, Director*
- *William J Feyrer, Treasurer, Director*
- *Kathleen Birney, Secretary, Director*
- *Peter G Berrang, Director*
- *Raymond E Parks, Director*
- *Robie W Macdonald, Director*
- *Dr. Charles N Burnett, Director*

## **Staff**

- *Scott Henley, Executive Director*
- *Ann Harwood, Membership Coordinator*

## **Mission Statement:**

*VISTA shall promote, work with, and coordinate the stakeholders to design, build and maintain the VI Spine Trail.*

## **Vision Statement:**

*A continuous wilderness trail linking communities on Vancouver Island from Victoria to Cape Scott.*

## **Features:**

*On Vancouver Island, from Victoria at the south end, the Spine will follow the same route as the non-motorized, multi-use Trans Canada Trail (TCT) as far as Lake Cowichan. The remaining incomplete section from Colwood to Shawnigan Lake is expected to be completed in 2015. From Lake Cowichan, the Spine will continue west to Alberni Inlet via Tuck Lake and Nadira Road via Nitinat and the newly completed 20km “Runner’s Trail” and north into the city of Port Alberni along the historic Canadian Northern Pacific Railway grade built in the 1913 era.*

*From Port Alberni, the trail will follow the existing “Log Train Trail”, ascend onto and along ridges of the Beaufort Mountain Range and then descend into the Town of Cumberland on their existing community mountain bike trails.*

*From Cumberland, existing trails climb to and along Forbidden Plateau section of Strathcona Provincial Park.*

*Much of the route north of Strathcona Provincial Park will be new trail or unused logging roads. The Spine will be routed near Victoria, Schoen and Cain peaks, and the Nimpkish Lake area to Port McNeil and near the coast to Port Hardy. West of Port Hardy, a trail will connect to the North Coast and Cape Scott trails to complete the 700km traverse of Vancouver Island along its new "VI Spine".*

*In all cases, the Spine will follow or connect to existing trails, including lateral connections, where possible. Vista estimates that about 225km of the trail is already completed, leaving about 475km to be completed.*

*The communities on or near the Spine are as follows:*

*Victoria, Saanich, View Royal, Langford, Colwood, Shawnigan Lake, Duncan, Lake Cowichan, Nitinat, Port Alberni, Cumberland, Courtenay, Mount Washington, Campbell River, Woss, Port McNeill, Port Hardy and Holberg.*

*Connector trails include:*

- *Lochside Trail to Sidney;*
- *Galloping Goose to Sooke;*
- *West Coast Trail to Port Renfrew or Bamfield through Nitinat;*
- *Trans Canada Trail to Nanaimo from Lake Cowichan/Duncan;*
- *Mount Arrowsmith trails near Port Alberni;*
- *Strathcona Park trails from Mount Washington and Buttle Lake;*
- *Port Hardy community trails.*

*The route will avoid public or working roads to preserve a wilderness experience. Since the Island can receive high snowfall, the trail will generally avoid high mountain terrain. This will permit a longer season for trail users. However, some parts of the trail may still attract cross-country or backcountry skiers.*

*In other long-distance trails in North America, communities along the way "buy into" the trails, providing material support and accommodation, which in turn can have a commercial benefit to the towns near the trails. Volunteer clubs and individuals assist with trail*

*maintenance and act as “trail angels”, becoming part of the mobile community formed by trail users. Some examples are:*

*Great Divide Trail, Canadian Rockies (Yosemite - Yukon, the Y2Y route)*

*Pennine Way in the United Kingdom*

*Appalachian Trail in eastern USA, extending into the Canadian Gaspé Peninsula*

*Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada (Manning Park)*

*Spanish “Camino” Trails*

*New Zealand “Te Ararua” Trail*

### **Implementation:**

*To have a major economic and social impact, VI Spine must pass within a reasonable distance of a number of communities where accommodation, restaurants, outdoor gear and re-supply facilities are located.*

*On private lands, a narrow corridor of land ownership or jurisdiction has to be established, and easements negotiated where applicable. Consideration must be made of Parks policy, timber leases, regional and municipal regulation, and environmental impacts. These considerations are the first priority of the Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association (VISTA).*

*The following organizations and communities are supportive of the VI Spine concept:*

- *Alpine Club of Canada, Vancouver Island Section*
- *Island Mountain Ramblers*
- *Alberni Valley Outdoor Club*
- *Kludahk Outdoors Club*
- *City of Courtenay*
- *Juan de Fuca; Parks and Recreation*
- *Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC*
- *City of Campbell River*
- *Comox Valley Regional District*

- *Outdoor Club of Victoria*
- *Capital Regional District Park Committee*
- *National Hiking Trail, via Hike BC*
- *Heathens Mountaineering Club (Campbell River)*
- *District of Port Hardy*
- *Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District*
- *Ditidaht First Nations*
- *Prairie Inn Harriers Running Club*
- *Town of Cumberland*
- *City of Port Alberni*
- *Kwakiutl Indian Band*
- *Garden City Horsemen*
- *Backcountry Horsemen of BC*
- *Comox Valley Mountain Bike Club*

### ***Vancouver Island Spine Series:***

*The VI Spine Series is a series of fun events held over the course of each year to raise awareness about the proposed Spine Trail. The Series is made up of more than a dozen events that are organized by local Vancouver Island outdoors groups.*

*The first Vancouver Island spine series was called the VI Spine “Relay”. Throughout June 2010, groups of people covered the various segments of the Spine from Cape Scott to Victoria by either running, hiking, snowshoeing, mountain biking or horseback riding. Where trail segments have yet to be built, participants cycled on the roads to get from one segment to the next. The purpose of the Relay was to increase community support for the development of the Spine.*

*The Vancouver Island Spine Series (Series) will support the development of a permanent, non-motorized recreational trail (the VI Spine Trail) along a wilderness route from Victoria to Cape Scott, spanning 700km, passing near several communities. The objectives of the Series are to:*

- *Build a relationship with private and public landowners along the proposed VI Spine Trail;*
- *Build a constituency of users through participation in Series events – people who will continue to use the VI Spine Trail once built;*
- *Establish a broader public profile through visibility, word of mouth and media coverage – translating to increased political will to construct the VI Spine Trail; and,*
- *Provide regular tourism investment in communities, as Series participants use accommodation, food, transportation and sport services in local communities*

*In 2011, we have recreated the success of the previous year's Relay and built on the support and participation of local sports enthusiasts with the renamed VI Spine "Series". Ultimately, the VI Spine Series will provide educational opportunities in building and using the Trail, and it will speed the completion of the actual route.*

### **Youth Education/Backcountry Experiences:**

*VISTA, along with the participating clubs and associations along the Spine will coordinate Island youth attending several annual programs and opportunities.*

*The 2011 VI Spine Series (see above) included a "Mountaineering With Kids" program that is being hosted by the Alpine Club of Canada, Vancouver Island section. This included opportunities for pre-teens and teens to safely trek up Mount Becher near Cumberland, develop skills and confidence, and have fun.*

*In 2012 and beyond, the "VI Spine Series" will continue to promote youth activities of partner organizations. A new partnership will be proposed to the Victoria-based organization, Power to Be Adventure Therapy Society, who provide dynamic outdoor education programs that enrich the health and quality of life of youth, adults and families facing significant life challenges. In the near term, VISTA envisions several programs of day or overnight hikes, but*

*ultimately this partnership could result in a “relay” that would see a group of 30-50 youth complete the full 700km distance over a one month period, escorted by celebrities and skilled backcountry travelers. This concept would be pitched to a feature magazine such as “Outside” or television show for widespread coverage. “Power to Be offers a 4 year Wilderness School for youth and also provides outdoor adaptive programs for people living with disabilities.”*

*As the construction of the VI Spine Trail progresses, VISTA will work with clubs and associations to encourage 15-18 year olds to participate in “Teen Trail work” crews. These crews camp out for a week near a work site, usually for the purpose of building or repairing a trail segment along the Spine. VISTA will seek leadership funding for these programs, similar to those operated by the Pacific Crest Trail Association.*

*Youth programs will foster sensitivity to and respect for the natural capital, beauty and ecological integrity of Vancouver Island’s wilderness, along with the importance of proper stewardship to ensure their continuance.*

*VISTA acknowledges the success of the American Hiking Association’s “Families on Foot” program, and will explore the feasibility of implementing a similar program as part of the VI Spine Series in 2012 and beyond. Vista’s vision for our “Families on Foot” Initiative sees the ‘family’ as all-inclusive and welcoming. “There’s a hiking trail near you, so get your trail family out on a trail and enjoy the adventures and the physical benefits the great outdoors has to offer today!”*

### **Work Plan:**

*Each year, host a VI Spine Series of events to engage local clubs to share ownership of trail concept, build a constituency of users, test possible routes and generate media interest and publish “Footprints” newsletter three or more times per year.*

*Communication and liaison programs from 2011 will be continued in subsequent years.*

*By late 2011, allocate people and financial resources to implement the following strategies:*

- *Propose 1-2 potential "macro route" options, and define the pros and cons of each option from a wilderness value, recreation, local economic and logistics perspective.*

- *Coordinate activities and communications among local governments and First Nation, private land owners and other key influencers such as philanthropists, other levels of government, the media and key non-governmental organizations (e.g., TC Trail, FMCBC).*
- *Maintain interactive website with activities, maps, and online VI Spine "passports" for Spine Series participants and users of current trail sections*
- *Let a contract for feasibility study of trail bypassing to the south of Cowichan Lake, coordinate input from ACRD and CVRD to the contractor, make report available to stakeholders, publicise findings to stakeholders and the public.*

*In 2012:*

- *Build a coalition of support among local clubs and businesses to approach regional districts.*
- *Propose endorsement of trail concept in all RD parks, BC Parks, and land-use plans and seek permission to consult on the route of choice.*
- *Launch a comprehensive youth program as part of the VI Spine Series, building upon success from "Mountaineering with Kids" in 2011. This program will educate through use of the VI Spine Trail, and through possible funding, will educate by trail building.*
- *Propose endorsement of trail concept by all First Nations whose traditional territory overlaps.*

*In 2013:*

- *Negotiate a single macro route with land owners, regional districts, BC Parks and First Nations based on input provided during consultation*
- *Revisit this strategic business plan, seek funding for further feasibility studies, micro-route selection and segment construction where possible.*

- *Support regional districts and BC Parks to complete engineering studies with route selection and bridge engineering, where required.*

*In 2014 and 2015:*

- *Support construction of major segments, identify of suitable contractors, standards for trail design and use of volunteers.*
- *Seek feature article about the VI Spine Trail in “Outdoor Magazine” based on construction of the VI Spine or involving a group of youth travelling the entire distance of the Spine with support from skilled backcountry travellers.*

*In 2016:*

- *Complete construction of major segments of the VI Spine.*
- *Fund raise for the provision of unified signage. Cooperate with regional districts, BC Parks, land owners and other coincidental trail agencies.*
- *Develop maps and facilitate completion of guidebook.*
- *Seek additional opportunities for feature length media stories in magazines, TV, YouTube, national radio, etc. to promote the Spine opening.*
- *When trail is complete, launch VI Spine opening ceremony to correspond with the 2016 Series.*



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