

# Another Stanley Park on Cape Roger Curtis? No Way!

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**L**ately we have heard and read a lot about a proposal to create a major public park on the Cape Roger Curtis lands on Bowen Island. The idea is not a new one and has been reviewed and discussed by various groups over the last 20-30 years. In the past, any sober analysis about this issue has come to the same conclusion, namely that it would not be in the best interests of Bowen Island and of very questionable value for the region or the province. That has not stopped the most recent proponent, Mr. Doug Hooper, to again raise expectations which he cannot deliver on and worse which would be a disaster for

Bowen Island if he could. To make it clear up front, this is not a conflict between a developer and the public, but a major difference in opinion about the future of this island. Why is that so?

Let us start with the most recent flyer which the Cape Roger Curtis Trust Society distributed, and in which they drew an analogy between a major park on Cape Roger Curtis and Stanley Park in Vancouver. Again the analogy is not new, and is as unrealistic as it ever was in the past. The Trust Society's letter suggested to the readers among other things that "we too should think of future generations." That suggestion is very timely indeed and we are happy to comply. As a matter of fact, we have thought about that very subject many times and long before we ever got involved in the Cape Roger Curtis lands. The only logical conclusion we come up with is very clear: "It does not make any sense." Or more precisely, "It does not make any sense for Bowen Islanders." Why do we say that? Because even at

the ultimate build-out of 7,000 to 8,000 people, the residents of Bowen Island will live on a land mass of 12,485 acres. Bowen Islanders already live in and are surrounded by a park-like environment in the form of Crown land (40%), GVRD Park, dedicated local parks, nature conservancy covenanted areas, greenbelts, and low density properties.

When it comes to parks and green space, not every community is as fortunate as Bowen Island. For that reason, *in urban areas with high density development and millions of residents like Vancouver, major public parks are an absolute necessity.* The founding fathers in Vancouver, therefore, were indeed farsighted 118 years ago to set aside what became Stanley Park. At that time those founding fathers already envisioned a major metropolis of several million residents, and the future has proved them correct. Now we have to ask: *How does that compare with Bowen Island's ultimate build-out of 7,000 to 8,000 people?* It does not compare at all. Therefore any such comparison does not make any sense, and can be considered misleading.

Except — and here we get to the crux of the matter — the major public park is NOT intended for the residents of Bowen Island, but for the many millions of future residents in the greater Vancouver region and beyond. Then in fact it could make sense. *Unfortunately it would spell disaster for the quality of life of the residents of Bowen Island.* Mr. Doug Hooper may not realize it, but if we allow his "passion" to succeed, it will open the floodgates for millions of visitors per year to Bowen Island. For that reason, we want to state here loud and clear: "Mr. Doug Hooper, we do not share your passion." Our vision for Bowen Island is quite different, and we are certain that our vision will be shared by 90-95% of all Bowen Islanders once they have an opportunity to compare and to learn all the facts. Time and space does not allow us to present "our vision" here and today, but we promise to follow up on a regular basis in the coming weeks and months. Until then let us deal only with the main points.

As all levels of government (federal, provincial, GVRD, and most municipalities) can attest, public parks are not economic generators, but make heavy drains on public finances. A park of the size promoted by Mr. Doug Hooper would not only destroy Bowen Island's quality of life, but also its financial wellbeing. The loss of property taxes alone (parks do not pay taxes) assuming only a modest build-out of the Cape Roger Curtis lands would amount to a loss of several million dollars per year. And that year after year after year....

*The costs for maintenance, management, provision of fire protection, police protection, park wardens, etc. would*

*demand a major increase in property taxes for every property owner on Bowen Island.* This would make it virtually impossible to afford any other public amenities for which Bowen Islanders have been waiting for years. Let us not forget that it is not Mr. Doug Hooper & company who will pay, but you and us who would have to foot the bill, a very heavy bill that is. Anybody who is interested in finding out about the costs associated with major public parks should study the budgets of our neighbouring municipalities in North and West Vancouver and the GVRD. We are sure it will open their eyes and they will understand why we are not willing to share Mr. Doug Hooper's "passion." Bowen Island does not have, and hopefully never will have, the number of households it takes to afford a major public park. If you are not convinced yet, read on. It gets worse.

According to Vancouver Parks Board, Stanley Park has about 8 million visitors per year. Following the suggestion of Cape Roger Curtis Trust Society that we "think of future generations," we can safely assume that over time "Stanley Park No. 2" will attract at least 1-2 million visitors per year to the Cape Roger Curtis lands. Since all those "future generation visitors" will have to come by boat, with no reasonable landing facilities on the south or west sides of the island, *we would have to be ready for a few million additional visitors coming to Bowen Island via Snug Cove.* Do you understand why we have a problem sharing Mr. Doug Hooper's "passion"? Apropos Snug Cove, we are not what Mr. Doug Hooper would call "passionate" about Snug Cove, but we have a very keen interest in the future form and character of this entrance to our island. *And the prospect of a few million additional transients every year passing through Snug Cove makes us wonder how many Bowen Islanders are willing to share Mr. Doug Hooper's passion at all.*

We can safely assume that for every contingent of  $\pm 10,000$  visitors there will be at least a few hooligans, drunks or otherwise behaviorally challenged individuals who will do their best to "enhance" the quality of life on Bowen Island. Instead of listening to the songs of birds, or waves slapping against the shore, *we will have to learn to live with the sirens of ambulances, fire trucks and police cars* which we are sure will provide the lovely, realistic background noise of Vancouver's west end to create a truly authentic replication of Stanley

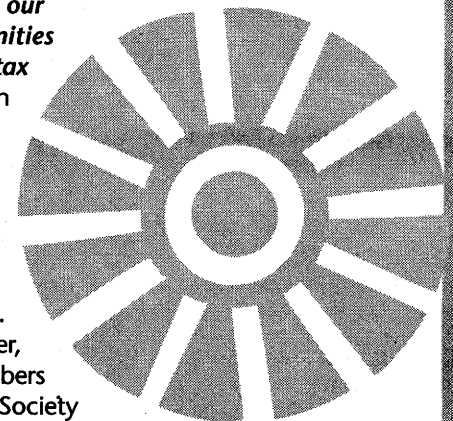
Park. Sorry, Mr. Doug Hooper. And sorry to all the well meaning members of the Cape Roger Curtis Trust Society. Your "thinking of future generations" is quite different than ours.

We envision a Bowen Island where people will love to live, enjoying a very special life style, where they can experience nature and quiet with room for contemplation and recreation. We hope to see in the near future a steadily growing network of trails and greenways for pedestrians, riders and bikers interwoven with manageable "local" parks on special view points and the sea shore. *We will do our best to ensure that those amenities remain affordable and our local tax base remains healthy.* Bowen Island is not a destitute coastal community fighting for its survival because of a decline in forestry and fishing. Bowen Island is not desperate to attract hordes of day visitors to sell them ice cream and hot dogs. That market is already looked after, and we wonder how many members of the Cape Roger Curtis Trust Society are keen to promote mass tourism on Bowen Island. For those who do not really understand our concerns, we would strongly suggest that you take a trip in the next while to Whistler, or Banff, or even closer to Stanley Park on a sunny Saturday afternoon. If such a trip does not prove our point, then we can say with perfect conviction that your vision for "future generations" is quite different from ours. More about that next time.

With best regards,

Wolfgang Duntz

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