

AT LAST! PORCUPINE RIDGE MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK

Re-opening Labour Day Weekend

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It's true! At last! After much toil, debate, deliberation, jumping and re-jumping through numerous legal hoops, heaps of determination, several votes, buckets of sweat, and yes...even tears, the Porcupine Ridge Mountain Bike Park located at Santa's Village will be re-opening to the applause of mountain bikers all across Canada. This coming Labour Day weekend the trails will re-open for riding.

In November of 2003 the popular advanced level mountain bike trails located on the Santa's Village property were closed to the public. Faced with substantial increases in insurance costs, the Board of Directors at the theme park were forced to make the only economically feasible decision available...to close the MTB trails.

While the Canadian mountain biking community was much saddened by this news, a small group of folks banded together to find alternative solutions to keep the MTB trails open. Headed by Ian Dawes (one of the founding trail designers, trail builders, and long time trail "chief" since the trails' inception in 1998), along with Jamie Hopkins manager of Santa's Village, and Rick Kauffman a local freeriding enthusiast, the small but committed group set about finding insurance and funding to keep the park alive.

After over a year of collecting impossibly high quotes for insurance, and being turned away by most insurance companies right across North America, the quest to re-open the trails seemed to be coming to an unfortunate end. In a society becoming ever more litigious, no insurance company would even touch the project, or priced their policies for the MTB park well out of reach for a small club comprised of volunteers.

When all seemed lost, a conversation in a hockey locker room between Ian Dawes and Bracebridge councillor Scott Young sparked a flame that ultimately led to Porcupine Ridge's salvation. From that moment onward the Town of Bracebridge Culture and Recreation department's Leo Broere, Jamie Hopkins, Scott Young, Andy Nelan (Bracebridge Town Treasurer), and Ian Dawes began pedalling towards a partnership that would see the mountain bike park re-open.

Very recently the Town of Bracebridge adopted an agreement in which the Town assumes the liability coverage for the trail system (adding little to no cost to the municipality's recreational facilities and trails insurance policy already in place), Santa's Village generously allows mountain bikers to enjoy their acreage, and Dawes' Ecclestone Cycle Club volunteer work crew maintains the mountain bike trails. Thus the trails will re-open Labour Day weekend, after the volunteer workers finish cleaning and clearing the trails, re-building man-made obstacles, and properly signing the mountain bike park.

The Porcupine Ridge Mountain Bike Park sits on approximately 80 acres of Santa's Village property, right across from the main theme park. The trail system traverses numerous ridges, and is rated as one of the most technically challenging MTB parks in Ontario. Mountain bikers travel from all corners of Ontario to pit their skills against local Muskoka granite and root blanketed terrain. Porcupine Ridge's reputation for gnarly, rugged, tonnes of skill required topography resounds right across the country, and all over the World Wide Web!

With approximately 13 kilometres of trail, building and maintaining the MTB park is no small feat. All the work is done by volunteers; and the majority of the funding to properly sign the park, buy building materials, procure tools and equipment, purchase gas to operate equipment, and all other associated operational costs come straight from the pocket book of Ecclestone Cycle owner's Ian and Allison Dawes. "We do it for the love of the terrain, there's just no other trail system like it in Muskoka, or Ontario for that matter. More places to ride, brings more riders and their families and friends to Muskoka. It's a win, win situation for everyone."

Re-opening Porcupine Ridge has been a truly joint effort between the philanthropy of Santa's Village, the foresight of the Town of Bracebridge, the determination of Ian Dawes of Ecclestone Cycle, the efforts of extraordinary volunteers, and the help of new corporate sponsor Kona Bicycles, a leading manufacturer and Canadian trail advocate.

Riding at Porcupine Ridge is absolutely unique, but not for the inexperienced cyclist. As the new entrance sign will state: "Mountain Biking is a wilderness activity that can be dangerous. This is an advanced trail system. Know your limitations. Even easy trails contain obstacles. These trails require both physical fitness and technical skill. Ride with caution and have fun!"

Porcupine Ridge Mountain Bike Park is definitely distinctive, with a "North Shore" flare and superb Muskoka character, the single track is unlike anything else you'll find in Ontario. Die hard mountain biking and freeriding fans will be flooding the entrance Labour Day weekend. Thank you so very much to everyone who has worked tirelessly and generously donated time and funds to saving the trails! And thank you Santa for allowing us to mountain bike in your backyard!

If you're looking for more information about the park, just stop by and visit your friends at Ecclestone Cycle, possibly the greatest purple cycling shop on the planet!