

THE EVOLUTION OF THE GROUSE GRIND

It's known as Mother Nature's stairmaster although more commonly known as the Grouse Grind. Ever heard of it? If you're from Vancouver, chances are that you've absolutely heard of it. You've probably not only heard of it but you've probably grinded it out at least once or twice in your life. I remember the first time someone told me about the Grouse Grind. They said it with this mix of excitement and worry.

The Grouse Grind is much more than just a difficult 2.5km hike, it's pretty much a legend in Vancouver. And like any good legend, it's got a story that makes you go, "Really? So that's how it started?"

So, here's the deal, the trail we know today as the Grouse Grind wasn't always this set path. Back in the day, we're talking like the late '70s here, there wasn't an official route. The people who wanted to go up Grouse Mountain pretty much made their own way up. Imagine just deciding, "hey, you know what, I'm gonna climb that" and hiking through the Grouse Mountain wilderness with no trail, no map, no signs, just straight nature. But that's the kind of determination we're dealing with here. It was mostly all determined mountaineers, nature lovers, and all-around thrill-seekers tackling Grouse mountain back in the day.

By the time the 1980's rolled around, word got around that people were going up the mountain and Don McPherson and Phil Severy heard about this and decided to build an established trail to go up grouse mountain. This trail is now known as the Grouse Grind. However, when McPherson and Severy built the trail, it was completely unauthorised by the Greater Vancouver Regional District or the Grouse Mountain Resort owners. That's pretty bold, right? As more and more people discovered the trail, the Grind quickly gained popularity. You try it, then you tell your friends about it, and then suddenly everyone wants to climb it. It quickly changed from a pretty rough path to a well-used trail.

Now like I said earlier, the trail at first was unauthorised by the Greater Vancouver Regional District or the Grouse Mountain Resort owners. Around 1987, a few dedicated people decided it was time to make the path a bit more official. They all got together to clear out the brush, smoothen out the rocks, and basically turned this random path into an actual professional hiking trail. And from that moment on, the Grouse Grind became what we know it as today.

What's funny though is that when the trail first originally opened, people just called it The Grouse Grind. A fitting name, right? Because that's what it kind of is right, a grind. The whole thing is just 2.5 kilometres long, but it's this nonstop, upward climb that gives it its infamous nickname, Mother Nature's StairMaster.

Oh, did I also mention that the trail is 2,800 feet, straight up. Yes, you heard that right, 2,800 feet, straight up. Imagine going on a StairMaster for about an hour or so but with rocks, tree roots, and sometimes mud under your feet. It's definitely not for the faint of heart to say the least.

Let's fast forward to the 1990's shall we. The Grouse Grind spread like wildfire. Vancouverites and just British Columbians in general loved it. They saw it as a physical challenge, a fitness test, and a way to get your workout in for the day. It started becoming somewhat of a flex to say that you've done the Grind. You couldn't really call yourself a Vancouverite if you hadn't taken on the Grind at least once.

In fact, I think it's around this time that it truly became a thing. People started timing themselves, trying to beat their own records, or better yet, someone else's. There's always that one person that's bragging about their time, isn't there? "Oh, you did it in an hour? I did it in 45 minutes." It's all in good fun though, but you can see how the competition aspect of the grind spread over the years.

And here's the thing, tackling the Grouse Grind isn't like going to the gym or even going for a jog for that matter. It's a whole different feeling. A feeling that no other ordinary hike can give you. The Grind has its own culture to it, a community even. You see people of all ages,

backgrounds, fitness levels, and everyone's got their own reason for climbing it. For some, it's purely about the fitness challenge, for others, it might be because they wanted to see what the hype surrounding the Grind was about. At least that's why I did it.

For those who've done the grind, like myself, you'll notice there's this unspoken mutual support. You might not know the person climbing ahead or behind you, but you're both huffing and puffing up the same brutal path. People will give each other nods of encouragement, maybe even a "You got this!" at the steepest parts. It's kind of special in a sweaty and exhausted way.

Over time, the Grouse Grind's popularity grew to the point where thousands of people tackle it each week in peak season. And with that many people doing the Grind, it needed a lot more maintenance than those early hikers ever imagined. Metro Vancouver Parks has been in charge of maintaining it, constantly updating sections to make sure it's safe.

It also had a few periods of closure for restoration. Each time they close it, people around Vancouver get a bit anxious. It's like taking away a big piece of the city. And whenever it reopens, it's almost like a mini celebration among the Grind enthusiasts.

Okay, let's talk about records here? There are some people who absolutely destroy the Grouse Grind in record times. The fastest recorded time is about 23 minutes. Twenty-three freakin minutes! That's barely enough time to stop and get a drink of water, let alone scale a mountain. And these record-holders? They're almost superhuman, training year-round just to shave off a few seconds from their previous records.

There are a few names that come up again and again in the Grouse Grind record books, like Sebastian Salas and Manon Lumb, who hold some of the fastest times recorded. Heck even professional NHL players have insane times. Take the Sedin twins for example. Yes, those Sedin twins, they did it in about 30 minutes. Sebastian Salas is actually the guy

who was able to achieve the 23 minute time like I said earlier. The fitness culture in Vancouver? It's intense. The Grind is a huge part of that, giving people a tough challenge to aim for.

Now there are a few people out there that have tried to beat some of those records and let's just say it did not end well for them. People have gotten injured up there, sprained ankles, dehydration, and even a few heart attacks. That's why you see a fair share of warning signs at the trail's entrance. Rescue crews have had to come in quite a few times over the years, and they're usually giving the safety first talk when the Grind reopens each year.

Nowadays, the Grouse Grind has hit an iconic status in the city of Vancouver. It's pretty much a must-do if you're a local or even a visitor looking to do something that you'll never forget. People from all over the world come to tackle the Grind, and it's become a bit of a tourist attraction.

But beyond that, it's also become this great way to unify each other in a way. You'll see people of all kinds of fitness levels, from serious athletes to casual hikers, all doing the exact same hike and aiming for the same goal. And that feeling when you reach the top of the mountain? Unbeatable. You step out at the Grouse Mountain Chalet, catch your breath, look down at the city below, and you feel just like a million bucks.

So why do we keep coming back to this insanely difficult climb? There's something about pushing yourself up that brutal mountain that brings a sense of accomplishment. You're sweaty, tired, maybe even questioning your sanity, but once you're done, you feel so alive.

And honestly? The Grind brings people together. It's this funny little Vancouver experience that reminds you that we're all just people pushing through something difficult, whether it's a steep mountain trail or just life itself. And each step, as brutal as it might be, brings you closer to something amazing.

So, next time someone brings up the Grouse Grind, you'll know it's not just a hike. It's a journey, a community, and a piece of Vancouver's history.