



The right medicine

Charlottetown pharmacist Paul Jenkins has created the multi-use 10-kilometre Beck Trail on the Commercial Road near Murray River for the health of all

By MARY MACKAY
THE GUARDIAN

One Charlotte-town pharmacist might just have the perfect prescription for good health.

Paul Jenkins has carved a 10-kilometre multi-use trail from his family's original 200-acre homestead land near Murray River that can be used for hiking, mountain biking and snowshoeing. The land is now also designated as a natural area.

"I think people need to get out and keep active. There's no reason, regardless of age or mobility, why you can't keep moving, and that will keep you fit. That's part of the pharmacist side of me," laughs Jenkins as he hikes the Beck Trail, which is located on the Commercial Road, Route 4.

The land was settled in the 1880s by Jenkins' great-grandparents, John and Annie Beck, and was passed down through the generations. Jenkins and his wife, Susan Colwill, inherited the farm from his parents, Jim and Flora Jenkins, who are still living. He didn't want to develop it but he also didn't want to let it lie fallow.

"I'd known from my mountain biking days that there was a lack of trails on P.E.I. so we said, 'Let's make one,'" Jenkins remembers of that idea three years ago.

The trail was laid out by forestry technician Lowell Stevenson according to the International Mountain Biking Association guidelines, with two stacked loops: a five-kilometre red loop and another five-kilometre blue loop at the back.

In August 2009, Jenkins and two people he hired for a three-month period began the arduous task of blazing the 10-kilometre-plus trail through thick brush and dense forest.

"It's one cut to take the tree down and about 20 cuts to take the branches off, so there's a lot of work," Jenkins says.

"I remember the first day

I went out after we had laid it all out. I didn't really understand, I don't think, how much cutting would be involved. The first day I spent nine hours cutting down branches and moving them and thought I'd done (amazingly well). But at the end of the day I paced off what I did and I had only done 125 metres of trail. So I figured out that it was probably going to be a little longer time than I had originally planned."

With the necessary permits from the Department of Environment, he also constructed one wooden bridge and two wooden

signs. Whoever helped lay it out, Luke MacDonald helped lay this loop out so this is Luke's Loop, they all get accolades," Jenkins says. "And you can't get lost. It's in a circle. As long as you

keep walking you'll be fine."

The front section of land was once farmed or was pastureland, but the back is primarily old forest with hemlock as old as 200 years. In fact, the parking and

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Left: Paul Jenkins created the Beck Trail, which is named in honour of his great-grandparents who settled on the land in the 1880s, to foster fitness in others. This free 10-kilometre trail is open to hiking, mountain biking and, in the winter, snowshoeing.

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WEB VIDEO

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picnic area at the trailhead was once a cabbage field.

What was once clear-cut farmland has grown up with white spruce, with sporadic stands of jack pine planted by the province, and balsam fir, and filled in with spongy layers of soft green moss.

"We raked all the moss off (the trail) by hand... you do that so you can get to the bare ground. The moss is hard to ride on because it's so spongy," Jenkins says.

The remnants of his family's past are still evident throughout: the Island stone foundation of the old family home; a rusty old-fashioned washer; even the kitchen woodstove.

As a child Jenkins used to visit his uncle, Elwood Beck, who was the last person to live on the farm. He had what is now called post-traumatic stress disorder, then known as shell shock, from the Second World War.

"There was a two-storey farmhouse here (at the time) and he ended up moving into the woodshed and burning the house stick by stick because he didn't want to hurt any trees," Jenkins remembers.

"He lived on 300 acres of trees, but he didn't want to do that so he burned the house and the barn and when he was done with that he'd go down to Beaver's

See The right, C2

Left: Old autos were often dragged to the back 40 and forgotten years ago. Now a number of them on the Beck Trail provide visual interest and a peek into P.E.I.'s past.

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Below: This discarded container of molasses is just some of the evidence indicating that a moonshine still was a popular spot decades ago.

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Luke MacDonald, left, and Emily Gasman competed in the first Downeaster Mountain Bike Race held on the Beck Trail in the fall of 2010. It is now an annual event. SUBMITTED PHOTO

walkways over wetland areas, the materials for which they lugged in on their backs.

"That's what an iPod and perseverance will do I guess," he grins.

Jenkins also teamed up with Cycling P.E.I., which advised him about the proper insurance route to take.

He also received support

pers to clear the trail way anytime he takes a walk-through.

This year another section of trail is being added as an extra route through the back of the trail. Once the new green trail section is cut, people will be able to choose between five-, 7.5- or 10-K distances.

"There are all kinds of

