

# Better than the daily grind

Have you heard of the hot, healthy activity that has 4,000 people heading for the upper reaches of North Vancouver on the weekends?

No? Well, you obviously haven't been hanging out at the right outdoors stores.

The popular pastime is a walk, run or — if you are like a lot of people, your reporter included — a crawl up

Grouse Mountain.

The 3.5-kilometre-

long trail begins in the Grouse parking lot and makes a vertical gain of 2,800 metres before finishing just below the front windows of the mountain's chalet. That's a good thing, too, because the people eating in the restaurant can alert a medic when you

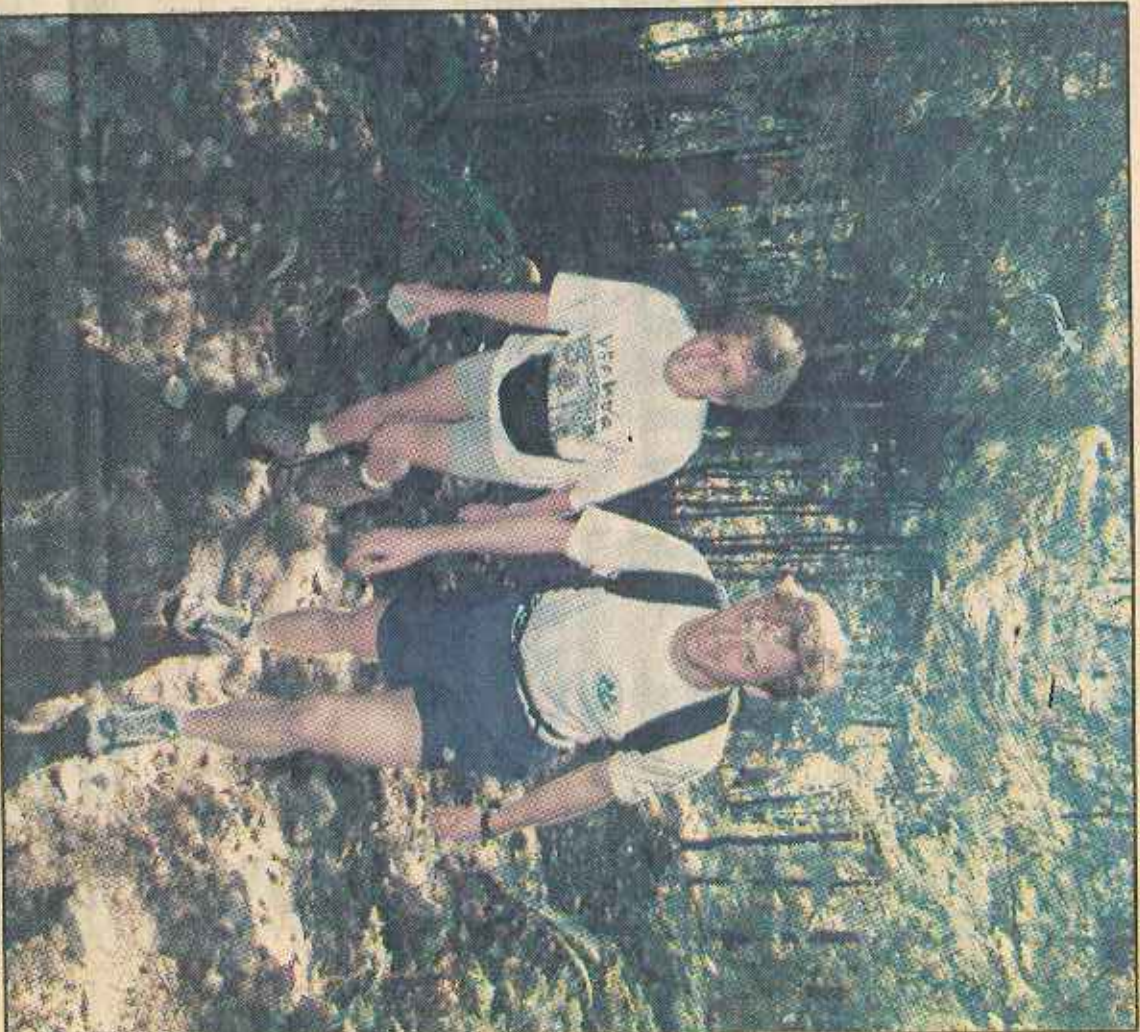
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Dana Gee

## TIPS:

- Carry water.
- Wear proper shoes. Runners are OK for dry summer conditions, but once it gets wet you will want to switch to a light hiking boot.
- First-timers should go with someone who knows the trail.
- Give yourself enough time to get up to the top of the mountain before darkness sets in.



Kevin Valley and Brenda Withers at the start of the gruelling Grouse Grind Trail.

hop on your face from pure exhaustion. Once a serene yet tough trip through the woods, the Grind has become the hottest workout since step classes and the Buns of Steel videotape.

"It has really exploded," says regular grinder Kevin Valley. "I pass 50 or 60 people on occasion."

If the Grind gets too busy, Valley travels east about 10 minutes and heads up the B.C. Mountain Club trail. It's pretty much the same thing, just not as groomed and certainly not as busy.

"I'm sure the hardcore won't like me saying that," Valley says, laughing. In reference to a group of long time Grouse-goers who have seen their sleepy little trail turn into a thoroughfare on the weekends.

Brenda Withers, who lives minutes from the base of the mountain, discovered the Grouse Grind experience after co-workers at the City of North Vancouver posted a challenge sheet on the wall.

It didn't take long for the 48-year-old transplanted New Zealander to enlist the mountain as her personal trainer.

"I was in New Zealand for a month and when I returned I decided I needed to lose weight and this seemed like a perfect thing," says Withers. "My girlfriend

and I have both lost weight, especially around our upper thighs. It's great."

Withers can be found on the wooded trail sometimes six times a week. Her husband Bob has also become a convert to the Grind experience.

Withers plans to put her Grouse Grind training to the test next Saturday when she joins the field of competitors for the Grouse Mountain Hill Climb.

Her personal best time up the steep trail is 48 minutes — a great improvement over her initial one hour and 20 minutes.

The field will be gunning for the record

time of 32 minutes and 16 seconds set last year by Valley.

"That time is a bit deceiving because it's actually three minutes longer than the actual climb," says Valley, a 32-year-old architect who travels the track once a week. "When you do it normally, you stop at the top of the trail, but for the race you run another three minutes."

Valley's time was no fluke. He is an avid exerciser who spent many years as a competitive cyclist.

"It's a very efficient workout. You can really get your heart rate up, and it's nice to get away from the streets and get out on trails," says Valley, who finished third in this year's mind-boggling Knee Knacker distance race, in which competitors run across the mountains from Lions Bay to Deep Cove.

## FITNESS RETREATS

The National Altitude Training Centre at Silver Star Mountain is gearing up to host another women's fitness retreat.

The retreats are week-long programs that give women a chance to improve their fitness levels, gain information and relax in a fabulous mountain environment. Call 1-800-663-4431 during the week of Sept. 15 to 21 for more information.

Staff photos  
by Colin Price



The Grind trail leads from the parking lot to the top of Grouse Mountain and gets steeper the higher you go.



Valley and Withers stretch carefully before tackling the tough Grouse Grind. — but rewarding —