

Skills park builders get down to work

DAVE WHITFIELD - REPORTER

Neither rain, nor snow, nor sleet, nor whatever else Mother Nature had in store this week could keep area mountain bike enthusiasts away from the Canmore Nordic Centre.

On Wednesday (Sept. 13), two groups braved rain, thunder and lightning, even a little wet snow, to lend a hand on construction of a new mountain bike skills park.

Announced Sept. 5 after a summer of cooperation between CNC staff, bike shop owners and riders and the Town of Canmore, the new facility now under construction will be located on one to two acres of land between the new wax test area and the shoulder of the Georgetown Trail access.

Vancouver's Jay Hoots, who designed the park and is overseeing construction, was in the mud along with the volunteers, doing his best to ensure the park is completed by Sunday (Sept. 17) by "going full throttle." Hoots is a pro rider with Norco, a bike park designer, coach and trainer, and clothing and safety equipment manufacturer.

"These guys are awesome," he said of the volunteers. "I was in Mackenzie, B.C. a couple of weeks ago and we had a lot of 13- and 16-year-olds out. We got a ton done, but it's another



Bike park builder Jay Hoots gives the thumbs up in approval of the semi-completed bike park at the Canmore Nordic Centre Wednesday (Sept. 13).

CRAIG DOUCE - PHOTO

thing to come out here with adults who have more skills and know what they're doing.

"It's really cool. Some of the men and women have built trails around here, so when I ask them to do something, they're all over it. They've been excellent."

The bike skills park will feature dirt jumps,

log obstacles, teeters, drops and jumps and, after Hoots had a look at the site, a short obstacle course trail not in the original plan.

Walking over the site, Hoots pointed out the dirt jumps — his signature — the mini trail area and spots where riders of all ages and skills will be able to test themselves. "We'll have ups and downs, drops, corners, stuff for someone just starting," he said. "Beginners will be on dimensional lumber elevated a foot, wider ladders for them.

"And the obstacle course has natural undulation. We needed more elements and features. We'll have very technical sections and we'll keep it natural. The overwhelming feeling of all the groups here was to have it natural."

The idea, said Hoots, is that a rider can tackle any individual area or component, "and ride the whole complex as a flowing unit."

Construction began with the dirt jumps; three sets of three of varying heights, with table tops. "They just need flow now," said Hoots. The jumps, he admitted, are a little larger than originally planned. "The idea was to keep it all manageable. The Nordic Centre doesn't want any incidents. This is the first legal skills park in Alberta, but in my mind, I wanted to go bigger. Dirt jumps are illegal most places in the world, but these will allow someone who hasn't

done jumps, or doesn't have a jump bike, to try them.

"You can start with the small ones and work up, or the big ones are for more experienced riders. With the tabletop, you can ride up, stop if you need and ride on down.

"These things are my way to legalize dirt jumps around the world."

The Nordic Centre park is the 14th Hoots has worked on and he gives the Centre a lot of credit in making the facility happen. "It's a great commitment and they're following through with it. I was in Edmonton last year and we got it to council, but the park didn't move forward.

"No two parks are the same. Every one has its challenges and that makes it super cool."

Along with pushing for acceptance of dirt jumps, Hoots is interested in ramping up levels of teaching and coaching. "Skiing and climbing; they don't screw around with training programs. Like them, we need to be working on better education and learn better skills at different levels.

"I looked around and saw there's often nowhere for a rider to learn better skills. Not every community has a park, so..."

Volunteers can get involved by showing up at the Nordic Centre Day Lodge, from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., seven days a week, by e-mailing canmore.nordiccentre@gov.ab.ca, or by calling 678-2400, ext. 0.