

INCOMAPPLEUX

Nature speaks, will people listen?

By DALE WEST
Daily News Staff

Sometime during the night of Nov. 15, the Incomappleux Valley growled. Patrick Pyrz hopes someone was listening.

That night a giant rockfall closed the road into the area described by Pyrz, operator of Mountain Hostel cross-country ski-in winter hostel, as a spectacular Selkirk valley.

The road starts at Highway 31 just north of Trout Lake, passes the former Beaton town site, up to the last logging cutblock. "It's not an all accessible road," says Pyrz. During the winter the road is only plowed to the point of the rockfall. Pyrz's visitors ski the rest of the way in.

Fortunately or unfortunately depending on your point of view, Pyrz has two vehicles trapped on the hostel-side of the slide. During a previous blockage, he clambered over the rocks with jerry cans to fuel his nature created shuttle service. He will do the same again.

From the talk he has heard, the road won't be reopened this year, perhaps not until next summer, perhaps never again the way it was. And that might not be a bad thing if it causes people to stop and consider.

'THE ROCKFALL IS A WARNING'

"Look at what's happened over the past few years. That area was slated to be logged and put off since 2002 for one reason or another, whether it was the science that's shown that the area is unique, then there was the blockade by Eloise Charet and Henry Hutter, now the rock fall," says Pyrz.

There is talk, too, that Parks Canada might be interested in making the area into a special environmental zone.

The third slide in five years to block the road, maintenance of the road must becoming a "money pit" for Pope and Talbot, figures Pyrz.

"Even if you are big corporation, you have to be looking at the big white board in the corporate room. 'How much will we put into this place? Is it worth going in after the small amount of timber that is back here?'" The straws are building on the camel's back.

"Listen," says Pyrz, "the rockfall is a warning."

He estimates Mother Nature's "warning" has bought at least a year for people to get their act together to bring awareness to how special the valley is.

Pyrz points to yet another sign of nature's magnificence that shouldn't go unnoticed. Massive runoff caused the crust at the bottom of a pool in the old growth forest to break away this year.

"It has exposed a churning white aggregate that looks like something out of the Lord of the Rings," says Pyrz. People who come through the forest to see it don't want to walk away.

"They stand staring at it. It looks like a boiling cauldron under this clear body of water."

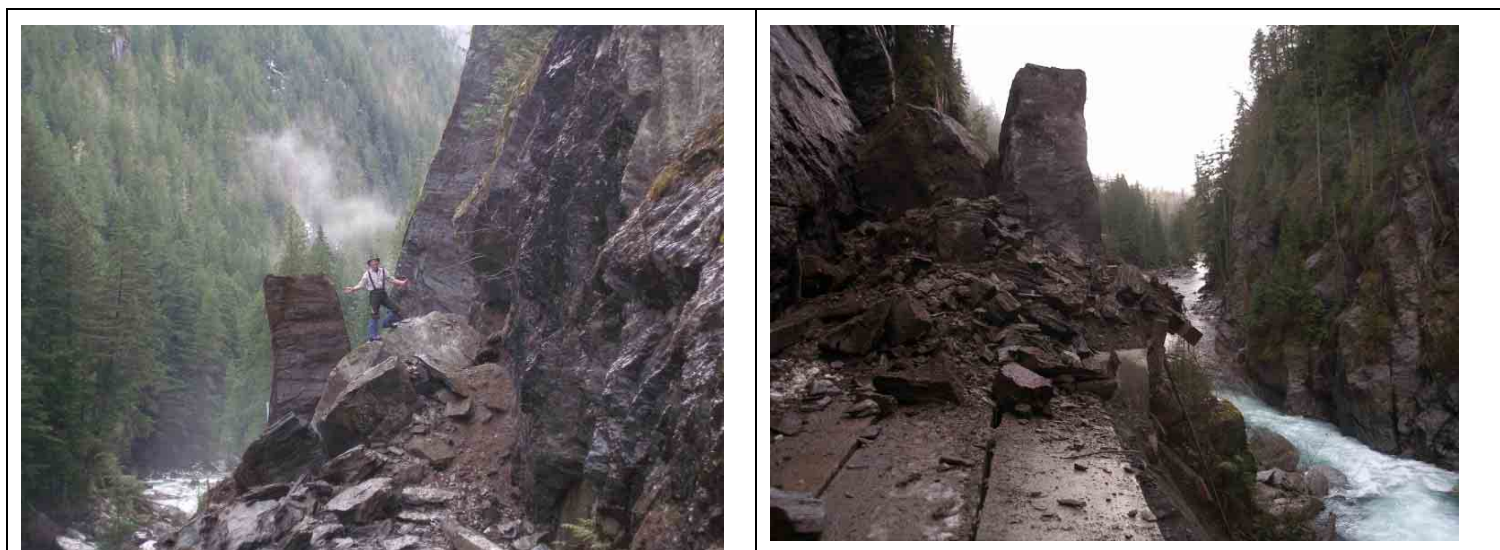
Pyrz has been asked in the past what he would do should the canyon completely collapse onto the road (much as it has now done).

"I said I wouldn't bat an eye."

With his building complete, he is more than happy to ski or mountain bike in from the rockfall.

"It's humbling without a 100 tons of rock sitting on die road.

"The Incomappleux has growled and maybe people will hear it this time and think if they really should be messing around up here."



A giant rockfall will truly make operator Patrick Pyrz's Mountain Hostel in the Incomappleux Valley a ski-in destination.