The story of BOUNCING BUNNY

[00:01:48] LUDOVIC GOUAILLIER: My name is Ludovic Gouaillier. We're right now riding, we're about we midway down the beautiful Bouncing Bunny trail on the Mount Mac trails. This trail is literally in my backyard because I live in a neighborhood that kind of backs onto those trails. So for me it's, you know, whenever I need some air, some exercise. It's common thing with the dogs. Just jump on your bike and go and do some of these nice, beautiful biking trails that we have here. It's often part of a loop.

Well, you hear a dog. I often leave with my dogs, try to loop it. And so we'll try various options. And you kind of go 10k and up Rebirth and down Calypso Canyon, up Reimer Reason and then keep on going and then somehow get to this trail here, down Bouncing Bunny and then back home. Bouncing Bunny kind of leads to close to where I live. So it's kind of part of every loop and it's kind of this end part where you kind of, you know, it's a fun part and you're, you're getting close to home. Bouncing Bunny is actually a good trail, I because of the terrain and, and I don't know if the way I was conceived, but, somehow you do a lot of riding on rock or on stuff that seems to be less rooty. So that's one of the things that's enjoyable about Bouncing Bunny. It's really good flow on that trail. Yeah. Nice riding experience.

[00:03:27] HOST: You're listening to Every Trail Tells a Story.

In this podcast, we explore the origins of our favorite Yukon trails, guided by the dreamers, planners, bushwhackers, builders, obsessive personalities, and, yes, the rogues who brought these trails to life.

In this episode, builder Thane Phillips tells the story of how he and some mystery man poached a Bouncing Bunny on our local ski trails.

This is the story of Bouncing Bunny.

[00:04:33] LUDOVIC: I met Thane not long after I first arrived in Whitehorse and we became friends, neighbors, played some music. Great guy, always full of energy and projects. Yeah, building Bouncing Bunny.... I know he didn't build it on his own and there were other people involved. I've heard rumors, but these people might be more shy about, you know, having their name leak out. So I'm afraid to get in trouble if I mention names.

[00:05:03] THANE PHILLIPS: What I was going to say is I made Bouncing Bunny with a friend of mine. If he wants to talk about it, that'd be up to him later. I know he's not really comfortable with that stuff. So, I always just say myself... and a good friend.

My name is Thane Phillips. So, my Yukon history started quite a long time ago in 1973. I was born here, youngest of three people, born and raised in Whitehorse and grew up in Riverdale. Quite an active family, lots of sports and all that stuff growing up. So I started mountain biking in the early 90s, actually went to the Canadian nationals for racing. Did a bunch of that with an individual named Sean Sheardown and was biking and racing quite a lot. Also cross country skiing in the winter. I was using mountain biking as a sort of off-season training and then sort of stopped doing all that kind of stuff and went to university and followed my career education path that way.

I remember my first bike that you would technically call a mountain bike was a Kuwhara 12 speed. And I had it in grade seven when I went to Jeckyll Junior High in Riverdale. And I remember we were jacked that it had 12 gears. Like this thing was incredible. Obviously fully rigid. There was no such thing as a shock at that point.

I do remember the very first ride I went on with a friend of mine, a guy named Mike Kelly, who had the very first Rockshox on his bike. So we were practicing trying to bounce it up and down off this log near Valleyview.And then it just sort of went from there. That's when you're riding the trails that were all just existing, like mostly double track road in Whitehorse. So I wouldn't really say there was much singletrack at all. It was all sort of dirt roads and we would sort of connect with trails if they were there. The first singletrack mountain bike trail that I can remember riding consistently would probably be the Grey Mountain trails like Mad to the Max.

In my life, trails are really important. For example, in the winter I do a lot of cross country skiing and now do a lot of fat biking. And then in the summer I do a lot of mountain biking. I have two kids now, and over the last few years I've been riding more and more with my son who's really got into mountain biking and it's great.

So Bouncing Bunny was built more or less by accident. I'm pretty sure it was a single season. Yeah, maybe the next year we buffed it up a little bit. But basically, top to bottom in one year, one season.

It started because I had moved back to Whitehorse after finishing my physiotherapy degree. So this would probably would have been summer of 2004. Spring, summer, fall of 2004, I moved into a place in Takhini North and my landlord was having the duplex wrapped and I knew the builder who was doing the wrapping. There was lots of excess wood just sort of lying around, and I was like, "Hey, would you mind if...?"  I wanted to build a mountain bike structure like a teeter totter or a skinny or whatever. And she didn't care because it was all scrap and it's going to get thrown out. So I built a few of them and then I was like, well, what am I going to do with them now? I had no plans, I had no ideas, I had no thoughts. I just built them because I thought it'd be cool to build them. And then I realized, well, I had to put them somewhere. And because I lived in Takhini North, I wanted to put them somewhere where I could bike to easily.

So the cross country ski trails were right across the highway. And so myself and another individual decided to build a trail from the 10K, the sort of lower part of the 10K, up to the Sarah Steele loops.

[00:09:22] BUGS BUNNY: Look Doc, are you looking for trouble?

[00:09:25] THANE: So, yeah, we were very much building this trail in the existing cross country ski trail network that is heavily used and not telling anybody about it and definitely trying to be, yeah, stealthy about it. Like the entry and exit points, we didn't finish until right at the very end. We would have to walk in, you know, 30ft or so off the trail. We had hide our mountain bikes and hide all our stuff and we didn't really tell anyone we were doing it. Um, we definitely didn't have any help doing it. We definitely didn't ask for any help. We didn't want any help because we kind of wanted it to keep it as under the radar as possible.

Yeah. So we just sort of did it our own way.

[00:10:07] BUGS: Did you ever have the feeling you're being watched?

[00:10:11] THANE: There was a few times we heard people on the ski trails nearby where we just decided to keep quiet and not really make a lot of noise.

[00:10:19] BUGS: Be very, very quiet.

[00:10:20] THANE: But I don't think we ever had anyone walk into it.

[00:10:23] BUGS: You know, my delicate inner sense of danger warns me that there's something faintly unhealthy in the atmosphere.

[00:10:29] THANE: I mean there was... The general manager of the cross country ski club at the time was fairly well known to be fairly... I don't know how to put it. He was quite well known to be... fairly close minded.

[00:10:46] BUGS: Whatever you say.

[00:10:47] THANE: So that's one of the reasons why we were doing our best not to advertise what we were doing. But it became well known who made the trail.

[00:10:57] BUGS: Hey, what's the big idea?

[00:11:01] THANE: I also always expected to have that conversation with him, but I never had that exact conversation with him. The conversation I had was a conversation where he insinuated he knew who built the trail and he was wondering how that person had come up with the name for the trail.

Very, very Simply, we were building the trail and we were probably three quarters of the way done. We had no idea about a name. And we saw a rabbit hop across the trail. And we're like, "We should call it Bouncing bunny. Okay, that's it."

[00:11:44] BUGS: I knew I should have taken that left turn at Albuquerque. Well, that's that.

[00:11:59] THANE: I don't think we had any clear vision other than we thought it'd be fun to have something up there that we wanted to ride. We definitely wanted it to be a singletrack trail. We definitely wanted it to have some interesting features. But as far as, like, a big picture of how the whole thing looked, or a sense of how the whole trail was, I don't think we were really thinking along those lines.

You can actually see on Bouncing Bunny there's distinctive parts to the trail. And in all honesty, those are reflective of how much time we had to make certain parts of the trail and what was there. And without the, you know, the technical trail building that's going on now, we kind of made it up as we went along. Near the top, there's this really big rock the trail went past. And then we wanted to build a ramp onto it and a ramp off of it. So that was some of the first uses of the structures I'd built. And we kind of found the trail line by accident because we were just sort of trying to go uphill and making it interesting as we went uphill, even though we were... This is sort of the accident part as well. We were building a trail we are planning on going down on. But as I've learned through the process of hopefully trying to get better at building trails, if you're building a downhill trail, you want to build it going down. If you're building uphill trail, you want to build it going up. So a lot of the things we thought would be really fun going down were actually too tight because we were walking uphill when we built it. So we just didn't have the visualization at that point to understand the speeds people are going to be using it at.

I don't think we ever put flagging up. I mean, I think we'd walk back and forth enough through the bush in that area that we had pretty good idea, as we were going along, where we wanted the trail to go. And there's a deep ravine on one side. That kind of was a natural border that kept us pointing in the right direction, more or less. But yeah, we didn't use any flagging or anything like that.

Once we knew vaguely where we wanted to go, we were okay with just sort of making it up as

we went along, you know, like using certain tools.The perfect example of something loud would be a chainsaw. I didn't even have the technical wherewithal to think of using a chainsaw, whether it was loud or not. You know, we just went with hand saws and shovels and rakes and kind of went from there.

It was a straightforward build until we got to the section... well, two sections. The very beginning, we made these, what we thought were beautiful banked corners. But again, I'm going back to a previous comment I made about we're making beautiful banked corners for descending when we were actually going up the hill. So they're way too tight. I mean, they don't work at all. But whatever, that's fine.

[00:15:09] BUGS: Too bad. Too bad.

[00:15:13] THANE: And then I would say the end of the trail, which is where it joins the Sarah Steele loop, if you ride it, you'll notice that it's a really different feel, the first 200 meters, to what the rest of the trail is. And that's what I put in in one night. Just because we were running out of time. The season was coming to an end, and it got to the point where we just wanted to finish it so then people could ride it and we could move on. And I just punched that line in really fast, really hard. And it is kind of awkward. It's really thick bush. There's weird rock in the area. There's sort of this weird kind of fall line, natural places the trail went. But it's all kind of weird and awkward, which actually lends itself to interesting riding when you go on to the start, because, again, it's different than all the other trails that are on Mount Mac, for sure. Especially at the beginning because it's kind of slow and janky a little bit.

I think for both of us, myself and the other individual who built the trail--

[00:16:11] BUGS: You look like a strong, healthy boy.

[00:16:13] THANE:  We were learning as we go and we were discovering as we go, like, what you even can do when you build a trail. We didn't even realize, like, we would be trying to figure out how to get across, like, this depression and climb up the other side and where should the line go? And then, you know, at some point, we just went for it and just built it. And then we were continually surprising ourselves what could be done by just hard work, As you well know, building mountain bike trails by hand is a lot of hard, physical work. And that was part of the enjoyment. Yeah, that's just what we learned, what's actually possible. And I think that's probably why for Bouncing Bunny, now that I know what I know, I would build a different trail at this point because I know how to do things differently.

The strengths, I think, I would say, of the build team is we are friends for a really long time. So it was important because you can get into really significant arguments about where the line should go and why the line should go this way and why I am right and you are wrong and da, da, da. And "That's dumb" and "How can you believe something so stupid?" And there was a lot of that going on, but we always had a good sense of humor about it. So that's, I think... one of the strengths is definitely having a sense of humor.

[00:17:33] BUGS: Yep, he's stubborn enough.

[00:17:37] THANE: One of us would have to capitulate. And I'm sure we sort of went back and forth about who decided exactly where the line would go and I'm sure both of us came up with really good ideas and both of us came up with really bad ideas.

[00:17:53] BUGS: Hmmm. Hmmm. Nice craftsmanship.

[00:17:54] THANE: When we finished it, I believe we went the route with telling the guys at the bike shop that there's a trail on the Mount Mac and here's the start and go find it. I don't have any memory of exactly how we told the people the bike shop of the new trail, but that does sound like wording I would definitely use: that we, you know, "discovered" a trail on Mount Mac that might be fun to go ride and send people in that direction, because every mountain bike trail gets better when people ride it. You gotta put rubber to the road, so to speak, and pack it in. So we wanted people to ride it as much as possible.

I don't remember any specific feedback other than people thought it was really fun.

BUGS: Big deal.

THANE: And I mean, that's all you want. That's why we made it. We wanted to have fun. I wanted to have something fun that was close to where I lived at the time. So, I don't remember anything specific. I remember a lot of questions like, "Oh, I wonder what's going to happen when the ski club finds out?" And I was like, "I don't know, I guess we'll find out." So, at the time when we were building it, there weren't many people building "rogue" mountain bike trails. There wasn't really the understanding of sort of the implications of it and that kind of stuff. So I don't know, I just go back to the fact that it's fun to ride, it was fun to build, and I hope people enjoy it.

My favorite part of the trail is probably halfway down the trail. You climb up onto this sort of rocky area. You come out of the forest, you're much more in the open, and then there's a slight downhill and there's this rock drop and then it takes you right into this weird janky right hand, left hand corner. And I really like the rock drop. I don't know why, but it's always, I always want to hit it and I always think it's fun.

I don't ride it a ton. I ride it sort of from where my house is. That would be if I have a little more time and I want to do a longer loop on the Mount Mac single track, I hit it for sure. I enjoy it, every time I ride it, for sure. I always sort of go back and forth between enjoying it for what it is and thinking of "Well, there's one place in the middle that I wish, I wish we had done it different;y." But it does make it kind of fun to ride. We tried to do our version of a banked corner, but again it's too tight and it was really awkward building cause it was really heavy, heavy blowdown and heavy dead fall. So we had to kind of manage it somehow and I think we did fine. But, you know, if I could go back in time and change one thing on the trail, it would be that one sort of left hand turn.

I think that trail was one of the... I would say personally, as a lifelong ski club member and at points in my life a die hard cross country skier, I think that trail contributed a lot to changing the culture of the ski club in a very positive way. I think it started this slow change in the mentality of a lot of the people in the cross country ski club, not everybody, that maybe the land and the area that we use for cross country skiing could also be used in a very positive way for other things. And in Whitehorse over the last 20 years, land has become more and more and more valuable and there's more and more and more pressures on it. And I personally believe like the cross country ski club has only benefited immensely by all the different user groups of that area. S,o that is one aspect of the trail that I'm very proud of; I do believe it contributed a lot to the culture change over time, slow change at the cross country ski club, because they started to realize that you can have positive use of the trails off season that contribute overall to the value of the club.

[00:22:22] HOST: Every Trail Tells a Story is made by Talking Mouths. The theme music is Blue Ska by Kevin McCleod. You can find detailed episode credits at talkingmouths.com. Thanks to builder Thane Phillips, cartoon character Bugs Bunny, and rider Ludovic Gouaillier. How's that for some French? If you enjoy the podcast, you can always leave a rating or comment on Apple podcasts. Or not. I'll keep doing this either way. Thanks for listening.

If it had been a skunk, we'd be talking a totally different....

[00:23:02] THANE: Yeah, Skunk. Skunk Works, maybe? Who knows?

[00:23:05] HOST: Okay, so good thing it was a Bouncing Bunny. If it had been a dead bunny that you'd come across, maybe the trail would be called Dead Bunny?

[00:23:12] THANE: No, that'd be Lucky Rabbit Foot, then.

[00:23:15] BUGS: And so exits our hero, stage right.