

The Story of REHAB

[00:00:00] From Talking Mouths.

[00:00:04] IAN PARKER: So my name is Ian Parker. We are just near the top of Rehab Trail, just about where it intersects with Downtown Boogaloo. The most notable thing about this particular spot is it's where Paul Burbidge's rigid neck brace, what's left of it, still hangs.

[00:00:22] STEPHANIE: I love squirrels.

[00:00:24] IAN PARKER: Any kind of rider can have fun on Rehab mostly going down it. But to really ride it well, you have to be a complete rider because there's some technical sections, there's some loose sections, there's some rhythm sections. There's some what I would describe as more pure downhill sections. I really like around the middle... there's a section where it's really all about trying to keep your momentum and keep your flow.

And some days you're feeling it, which are kind of rare, but on those days when you're feeling it, it's such a fun trail.

So, yeah, riding up it is a unique challenge because if you set your mind to "I'm going to ride as hard as I can from the bottom of Rehab to the top," the first thing is that it's always... You could ride it 30 times, and you will always underestimate how long it is. It's such a long trail, which is a testament to how much work Paul and others put into it.

So, you kind of just absolutely redline for five minutes, and then you start to climb, and you realize that you're in deep trouble and you're not even halfway up the thing, to the point that you get up to the last couple hundred meters, and it's the most technical, and it's the steepest section of it. And by then, you've just got lactic acid in your eyelids, like you're hurting so much. It makes it a really unique challenge, to the point that I haven't even tried to ride up it hard in years.

[00:01:52] MARK: 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, we head back to Whitehorse's Grey Mountain. Builder Paul Burbidge recounts how he got into and out of Rehab in record time.

This is the story of REHAB.

[00:03:03] PAUL BURBIDGE: First thing I remember is kind of sitting on the trail with my head in my hands, blood running all over the place.

[00:03:14] HEATHER BURBIDGE: I think it was his left side of his mouth. He had split it open pretty far. It kind of had a Joker look to him. And his helmet and stuff wasn't in the greatest shape. It was obvious he'd hit his head. He was talking, but he wasn't really making sense.

[00:03:32] PAUL BURBIDGE: *Why are you here? What are you doing here? Who are these people?*

[00:03:39] HEATHER BURBIDGE: So, it was two of my friends, a married couple, Jen and Carl, and my brother and I. We had finished the 24 hour daylight bike race. That's why we were up there—to visit my brother and participate in that race. After the race was done, we decided to go for another ride.

[00:04:01] PAUL BURBIDGE: The trail is called Hospital Ridge.

[00:04:03] HEATHER BURBIDGE: Yeah, it's either the Hospital Ridge or the one that's above it. The Long Lake Ridge, I think it's called. During the downhill sections, he would go way ahead of us. And so he was far ahead of us. We couldn't see him. Or hear.

[00:04:17] PAUL BURBIDGE: I'm not sure what happened causing me to crash. It's the low perceived risk, high actual risk when you're going that fast. I was probably tired because I'd been up all night. I probably just touched the side of the trail with my front wheel and just spun the front wheel. I didn't take my hands off the handlebar. I just went straight face to ground.

[00:04:38] HEATHER BURBIDGE: Jen was in front and she came around the turn and saw my brother's bike. And we kind of came to a stop. They were like, "Oh, where's Paul?" And that's when we saw him part way down a fairly steep embankment, partially wrapped around a tree. I think he actually walked up on his own.

[00:04:57] PAUL BURBIDGE: *Heather, why are you here? What are you doing here? Who are these people?*

I don't remember any of this.

[00:05:05] HEATHER BURBIDGE: He was concerned about his bike.

[00:05:07] PAUL BURBIDGE: I was pretty stunned.

Heather, why are you here? What are you doing here? Who are these people?

[00:05:17] HEATHER BURBIDGE: He was on about a 35 to 40 second loop. What he was saying pretty much was, "Heather, why are you here? What are you doing here?" And then he's like, "Who the fuck are these people?" I was like, "Paul, we came up to ride the 24 hour bike race. This is Jen and Carl. They've been staying at your house." "Oh, okay. Did we win the race?" Like, "No, we didn't win the race." "Heather, what are you doing here?" And he started over again. Definitely got a concussion at the very least.

My friend Jen, she's a physiotherapist. And so she kind of started taking over, like, assessing him while I talked to him. And she was concerned that he'd actually injured his back or his neck as well.

This is bad. We can't walk out with him. We didn't know what trail we were on. We were just blindly following him. We don't know where we are to call 911. I had a crappy old iPhone at the time, so I didn't have Gaia or anything like that.

[00:06:11] PAUL BURBIDGE: So, they called my friend Ben, who was a paramedic at the time, and—

[00:06:15] HEATHER BURBIDGE: He figured out, just by talking to us. Okay, we know we're on this ridge trail. This is what the trail was like down to our right. Below us is the hospital. We can see the river, and

he figured it out. He ended up trail-running to us. He was able to call back with exact coordinates where we were and coordinate it from there.

[00:06:31] PAUL BURBIDGE: No, it wasn't far, but it was not a great spot to get to.

[00:06:34] HEATHER BURBIDGE: They brought a four-wheeler up.

[00:06:38] PAUL BURBIDGE: Yeah, they got me out of there.

[00:06:40] HEATHER BURBIDGE: They were almost going to fly him to Vancouver. In the end, they didn't.

[00:06:48] PAUL BURBIDGE: So, there wasn't too much drama for *me* anyways. I knocked myself out pretty good.

[00:06:54] HEATHER BURBIDGE: He doesn't really remember very much about what happened that day. It's all secondhand information for him.

[00:06:58] PAUL BURBIDGE: I broke C2 and C6, but I didn't compromise the spine in any way. So, as far as broken necks go, it was not that bad. That took me out of action, off the bike for about eight weeks.

My name is Paul Burbidge. Came to Whitehorse from Canmore in 2005. I came partially because I wanted to build trails here. Yeah, yeah, that had some appeal. The Wild West aspect.

I built trails in Nova Scotia. It's pretty easy to do there. But in Canmore, it was virtually impossible. And the trails in Canmore weren't the kind of trails I wanted to ride generally. So, I was looking forward to being able to create the kind of stuff I wanted to ride here. The trails I really like in Whitehorse—Downtown, Boogaloo, on this side of the valley, the Riverdale side, and on the other side of the valley, I love Goat. Yeah, those are my favorites. I really like rough, fast trails.

Trails are super important in my life. I spend a lot of time on them, on my bike or otherwise. For me, that's a creative outlet. So, the work I do, I'm a land surveyor. From about 2005 to 2010, I was primarily in the field in the bush, doing land claims on Baffin Island, that kind of stuff. I do legal land surveys, which, if you're doing them right, are a really creative exercise. So when I moved into more office work, that creative piece and that bush piece kind of left. Trail building filled that in for me.

I believe it was 2015. I think I broke my neck at the end of June, and I started building in mid-July.

[00:08:39] ANTHONY DELORENZO: Two days after he broke his neck, he was out there hiking around in the woods, scouting his trail. Does that surprise me about Paul? Not in the slightest.

[00:08:46] HEATHER BURBIDGE: Oh, it didn't surprise me. I'm sure he didn't tell you, but he competed in a downhill race as well, while he still had his neck brace. He didn't win it, but he placed.

[00:08:56] PAUL BURBIDGE: There wasn't really risk to my neck. It looks bad when I'm out there with a collar on, but I knew it wasn't that bad.

I'd already been looking at the area where Rehab ended up being.

[00:09:07] ANTHONY DELORENZO: Paul's original thought was a better way to get up to Downtown Boogaloo, which is understandable. Downtown Boogaloo is so rad.

[00:09:13] PAUL BURBIDGE: I've been interested in that area for a long time because I love Downtown Boogaloo, and a lot of people at that time didn't enjoy climbing up Woodcutter's [Road] to get to it, including some people I really like to ride with. And they wouldn't want to ride Downtown because they didn't want to climb Woodcutter's.

[00:09:29] HEATHER BURBIDGE: Is that the one where there's that really steep pitch on it? Yeah, I've ridden that. Oh, I hate climbing.

[00:09:33] JESSE DEVOST: The climb to Downtown Boogaloo has never been a good one. So, if somebody can make the worst part of Downtown Boogaloo better, then that's just a lovely sentiment, obviously. It's very flattering to know that he loves riding the trail and wants to ride it more and wants other people to ride it more. My name is Jesse Devost. So, I was one of the people who built the Boogaloo trails, and Downtown Boogaloo was kind of the very top trail that we had made at the end.

[00:10:05] PAUL BURBIDGE: I've been hiking around there, and I'd also been looking higher at the mountain. I was trying to think ahead to the next trail after Rehab. What could then connect to Rehab? Which ended up being Gnarwhal. I think I had an application and I'd just received approval when I broke my neck. There was an approval process through the City. I'd already walked the trail with the city trail crew. At that time, you didn't have to pin it down super precisely. You need some creative freedom to build the thing. But generally, they had signed off on, you know, something within this corridor. Now, I had eight weeks where I couldn't ride my bike, and I wasn't going to be working as much. So, I had some time to go get my rehab.

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's the first trail I've ever built where I knew the name right from the start. Often, like the day I finish a trail, I still don't know. But that one I knew right from the start. It's a bit of a call back to Scott Keesey and Southpaw too, right?

[00:10:56] SCOTT KEESEY: I don't know if it's as much a callback as it is him stealing my schtick, you know? Getting injured, using the time to build a trail, and then giving it a name that salutes the injury or the rehabilitation in his case. But I'll take it. I think it shows that avid riders get injured, they want to stay connected to the scene, so they go out and do a bit of digging and work. And Paul's legendary for this. He's probably put more work into these trails than anybody in the last 10 years.

[00:11:24] PAUL BURBIDGE: My planning process.... As a surveyor, I have access to some pretty cool tools, but, I use a lot of stuff that most people can use, like georeferenced 1 to 50,000 topo maps, Google Earth. I don't find Google Earth useful in terms of topography, but ground cover, you can tell a lot. Are you in spruce or pine? I was really wanting to stay in pine as much as possible. It's good building. It's just a nice place to be. So, I use a lot of that and then a lot of on the ground time for figuring out the actual route, like the small details of the route, which make a huge difference. The route figuring out, I really like to do myself because I feel like that's the bones of the trail. And I've relinquished control over pieces of trail once or twice in the past, and once or twice it's turned out really well, and a few times it's turned out where I'd ride those sections of the trail and I'm just like, "Oh, I didn't want to do that and I don't like it." It's kind of the creative piece that I want. That's part of what I'm trying to get out of it. So, I like to control that piece as much as I can. Typically, I just walk around a lot and then at some point I just pull a saw out and I kick a little line in like 30 meters ahead of me. And then I clear the corridor and, you know, look around at it, take the side off, straighten the corner out a bit. It's amazing how many times I walk back and forth a

30-meter section looking at it and then trying to imagine trail speed too, which you always get parts of it wrong.

Most of Rehab follows like kind of like a little bit of a height of land or at least a hog's back a little bit. So, it's pretty dry, which leads to really easy building.

[00:12:59] ANTHONY DELORENZO: Yeah, a lot of it was easy. But let me tell you: there were some *not* easy parts, and I think I got to build all of those.

[00:13:05] PAUL BURBIDGE: And there's not much organics.

[00:13:07] ANTHONY DELORENZO: And I can remember just like going through the worst organics you've ever gone through. And I was knee-deep in it and just hacking away and I was like, "Paul, why did you send me way over here? What the hell is going on? Why am I not up *there*?" He was just laughing at me the whole time.

[00:13:26] PAUL BURBIDGE: So, yeah, for sure.

[00:13:30] ANTHONY DELORENZO: That's right before you get up onto that ridge. And then all of a sudden it's like, you know, you're like out of the... Can I swear on this podcast? Okay, so you get... So, it's right before you get up onto that ridge, you get out of this *shit* and all of a sudden you're on this nice open ridge again. Yeah, I let some curse words fly on that section of the trail.

[00:13:48] PAUL BURBIDGE: It wasn't that bad to build in terms of the ground. Having just finished Starbuck's Revenge, we learned a big lesson about choosing suitable ground. So, I was really careful to stay in pine forest. There was one spot, it kind of got forced through a wet area. And then, two years later, a spring came up and we ended up having to put a bridge in there. It was dry for the first two years of the trail.

That was the only really tough spot. And then right after that wet spot, there's a spot you have to gain an old esker, that was a bit tricky. But mostly it's pretty decent building through there. If you go much further east, it gets wetter and more difficult. I guess the thing that I was most excited to build—and I know one or two people who've had pretty significant crashes there—there's like this ephemeral draw. If you're coming down, you make a hard left and then a hard right. And then you go through this ephemeral draw. And if you go really, really fast, you can kind of skip over top of it. Jump it.

I got some feedback when it was first completed. Two friends of mine crashed there. I don't know what they were doing, but they didn't ride it well and they crashed it. And they had some feedback on how that could be changed. I said, "Oh, yeah, well, you could just ride it correctly. That's another option."

Most of the time, I would build by myself because I would be up there during work hours a lot, because I wasn't working full-time or I wasn't working at all for a little while. So, I would be up there by myself most of the time. I'd usually drive into The Buckway and then just ride up from there. I'd leave my chainsaw on site. I also had a brand-new bike and it arrived right after I broke my neck. It was questionable, but I could ride up to build trail and then ride back on the new bike with my stupid collar on. But it was a form of riding bikes, at least. My "safety meetings" were probably shorter than they should have been. Most of the chainsaw work and stuff, I would always do by myself. I wouldn't be swinging a saw around when other people were out there.

[00:15:30] SCOTT KEESEY: Paul was actually the one who called me and encouraged me to take on the role of trail director with CMBC, succeeding him in that role. And he taught me a lot in that transition period about coordinating trail activities with groups of volunteers. But clearly, safety protocols were not one of the things he taught me. He's building a trail by himself with a chainsaw. Reckless. Hope you had a cell phone at least.

[00:15:54] PAUL BURBIDGE: I'm sure I had a cell phone. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And my neck brace.

When I was looking for some help, I had a small group of people that I built with in the past or who had expressed a lot of interest. Anthony DeLorenzo's probably the person who came and helped the most. I would say, yeah, well, definitely Anthony. We built Starbuck's together, along with another person.

[00:16:18] ANTHONY DELORENZO: Paul and I have built trails together. But Rehab was Paul's trail. Paul laid it out. He did the whole design. And the way Paul laid out the trail was like, just make it the right line right from the start.

You always tend to end up building the path of least resistance. And then you go back and realize it's wrong and you fix it. This trail, I think Paul had the vision right from the start, and he just knew where it had to go. And if you had to deal with some shit to get there, then that's what you did.

I spent a fair bit of time up there. Paul spent hours and hours and hours up there. I was just out there moving dirt and pulling trees.

[00:16:56] PAUL BURBIDGE: Yeah, I know an anecdote that really stands out in Tony's mind is we'd—

[00:17:00] ANTHONY DELORENZO: Cut a bunch of trees off at four-foot height, so you could pull them out of the ground properly.

[00:17:04] PAUL BURBIDGE: I was trying to rip a stump out of the ground. It was a pretty manual process. Anything that's really terrible to remove just gets called a "nug." Yeah, "There's a 'nug.'" It's not a good thing. It sounds like it's a good thing. It's not a good thing. Generally, it's good when it's *out*.

[00:17:18] ANTHONY DELORENZO: And I looked over and Paul was reefing so hard on one of these trees that he actually popped his neck brace open.

[00:17:27] PAUL BURBIDGE: That scared the crap out of Tony.

[00:17:29] ANTHONY DELORENZO: Then he goes like, "Oh, geez, I probably shouldn't have done that." And I'm like, "Well, yeah, you got a broken neck, man. Like, you probably should not have done that." So, I think that just kind of encapsulates who Paul is. Nothing really slows him down too much.

[00:17:44] PAUL BURBIDGE: The build took six weeks, I'm pretty sure. Which is fast. If I hadn't been injured, I probably would have built that trail over two years, or at least the whole summer.

Time on the trail, I would say—personally, in the woods—I had like three or four hundred hours maybe. There are probably at least 200 volunteer hours on it as well. Maybe more. No child labour. Towards the end, when I was getting panicky about time, and I knew that once I hit my eight weeks, I'd want to just ride my bike, I remember the Dirt Girls came out and they helped a lot in one night.

It's amazing to see the power of multiplication. You go out there for one day, one night, and you build like 40 meters of trail by yourself. And then you have 30 people show up... a lot gets done.

[00:18:32] ANTHONY DELORENZO: So, when the trail was complete and Paul was allowed to take it off, Paul installed his neck brace on a tree, which I thought was a super cool idea, and really kind of tied the trail together. It also proved to be delicious to the local wildlife.

[00:18:47] PAUL BURBIDGE: The squirrels have eaten off anything that had salt on it already. They took care of that in the first six months. I don't think that's my official neck brace. I think that's the one they slap on you when they put you on the gurney, and then they put something more substantial on you when you're actually in the hospital. So that's the one that I wore for just a few hours.

[00:19:03] ANTHONY DELORENZO: So, Paul's a surveyor, and one of his old surveyor tricks is when you—

[00:19:08] PAUL BURBIDGE: Survey on land claims, you would create these things called bearing trees. You would face a tree with a chainsaw and then you would scribe in the distance to the survey post. So, I faced the tree at the top of Rehab with my chainsaw, then carved "Rehab" into it. And then a bunch of sap comes over and protects it. It's really cool and it'll be there forever.

[00:19:25] ANTHONY DELORENZO: We did that on Kid Vicious and Starbuck's as well. So, that's kind of one of Paul's signature moves. So, yeah, right at the top of Downtown Boogaloo, you can see that tree that's been marked with "Rehab."

[00:19:36] PAUL BURBIDGE: There wasn't a lot of fanfare when it opened. I mean, I think we did some sort of public announcement on Facebook. I know there were people all over it. Even while it was getting built, you could see that people were riding it. They'd ride up and see how far it was. It was pretty well-known that it was going in.

I was also kind of done with being up there for a while, so I wasn't around to do a kickoff or anything like that. I think as soon as the trail was done, I went on a pack raft trip.

[00:20:01] ANTHONY DELORENZO: Paul and I did the Donjek route, which is known to be a fairly rugged backcountry route. And he hauled a 50-pound pack over these rugged mountain passes in a neck brace.

[00:20:10] PAUL BURBIDGE: I talked to my doctor before I went. He said, "Yeah, you'll be fine, but if you see anyone out there, maybe don't tell them I'm your doctor."

[00:20:19] ANTHONY DELORENZO: I can still remember to this very day we're in the middle of this glacial river. So, he'd want to see where I was, and he couldn't look around. So, every time, he had to spin his entire boat to look behind him. I don't know what to say. That's who Paul Burbidge is in a nutshell.

[00:20:36] HEATHER BURBIDGE: That's his personality, right? He's not reckless. He knows what he can and can't get away with, and he obviously has that deep drive to do things at a high level. It's always interesting riding a trail that someone you know has built, and to see how they've used the natural features. It's interesting, as well, thinking about the fact that he built that while he was recovering from two broken discs in his neck.

[00:20:57] PAUL BURBIDGE: It's not the type of trail I really want to ride. It's a trail I ride to get to something. Pretty mellow. I really wanted Rehab to ride well in both directions. It's definitely got more flow going down. Gravity helps with flow, of course, but I think it gets used a lot more going up. Most people are going to go up there to ride down Downtown Boogaloo. It's such a good trail. It's a bit tricky, too, because you think you're climbing the whole time, but really, the first half of it is pretty much flat, and then it kicks up at the end. The profile is not what I thought as I was building it.

I was riding up towards it, and I ran into a guy who I only quasi-knew, and we were just chatting for a minute. He said, "Where are you heading? I'm gonna go up Woodcutters and go down Downtown." I was like, "Oh, yeah, me too. I'm gonna head up Rehab." He goes, "I hate that trail." I was like, "Okay, cool. I built it." You know, that's fine. Everyone has their opinion.

Geez, Mark, would I do it again? That's an interesting question. I'm not sure if I would build that trail again, actually. I've got a lot more satisfaction out of building the trails that are more what I want to ride. Although that allowed Gnarwhal to be built. So, in that way, I'm really happy to have it there. And, you know, actually... I'm glad I built it at that time in my life. That was kind of right when I was not going to be out of the Yukon as much. I spent a lot of time out of the Yukon. I kind of wanted to contribute to the community and be involved. And so that was a good way to do it because my other trails are a little more selfish, probably. This is a trail that basically anyone can ride and enjoy, I think.

So, riding a trail that you've built is much different experience than riding something someone else built. There's a way tighter connection. I mean, up or down that trail, because I spent so much time and I know it so well, it's just really enjoyable for me. Much more enjoyable than a comparable trail that I know is as good. Just because I know it so well. Yes, it's a blast to ride and it's just fun to be out there. I go up there in the winter on skis or snowshoes a lot, too.

So... glad to have built it.

[00:23:09] MARK: Every trail tells a story is made in Yukon. The theme music is Blue Ska by Kevin McLeod. Additional music and sound effects from Blue Dot Sessions and free sound. You can find detailed credits at talkingmouths.com. A big shout out to everyone who contributed to this oral history.

Thanks for listening.

[00:23:45] PAUL BURBIDGE: My first memory was waking up on the trail. I'd rolled down off the embankment and my sister had gone by. But at some point, they thought it was weird that they hadn't caught me. So, they came back and found me.

[00:23:57] MARK: Okay. He remembered it as you guys rode past him and then you thought, "Oh, we should have caught up to him by now," and then turned around.

[00:24:05] HEATHER BURBIDGE: Absolutely not.

[00:24:06] MARK: No?

[00:24:06] PAUL BURBIDGE: But my sunglasses were broken in the middle of the trail. They didn't know they were mine.

[00:24:09] MARK: Do you remember a pair of sunglasses?

[00:24:11] HEATHER BURBIDGE: In the middle of the trail? No.

[00:24:13] MARK: No.

[00:24:14] HEATHER BURBIDGE: It is amazing how our memories sometimes play tricks on us, right? For the longest time, he didn't remember anything from 24 hours before till like 48 hours afterwards. Didn't remember a thing. So, obviously his brain has slowly pieced it back together a little bit.

[00:24:29] MARK: Thank you so much.

[00:24:30] HEATHER BURBIDGE: Yeah, no worries.

[00:24:32] PAUL BURBIDGE: Awesome trip down memory lane.