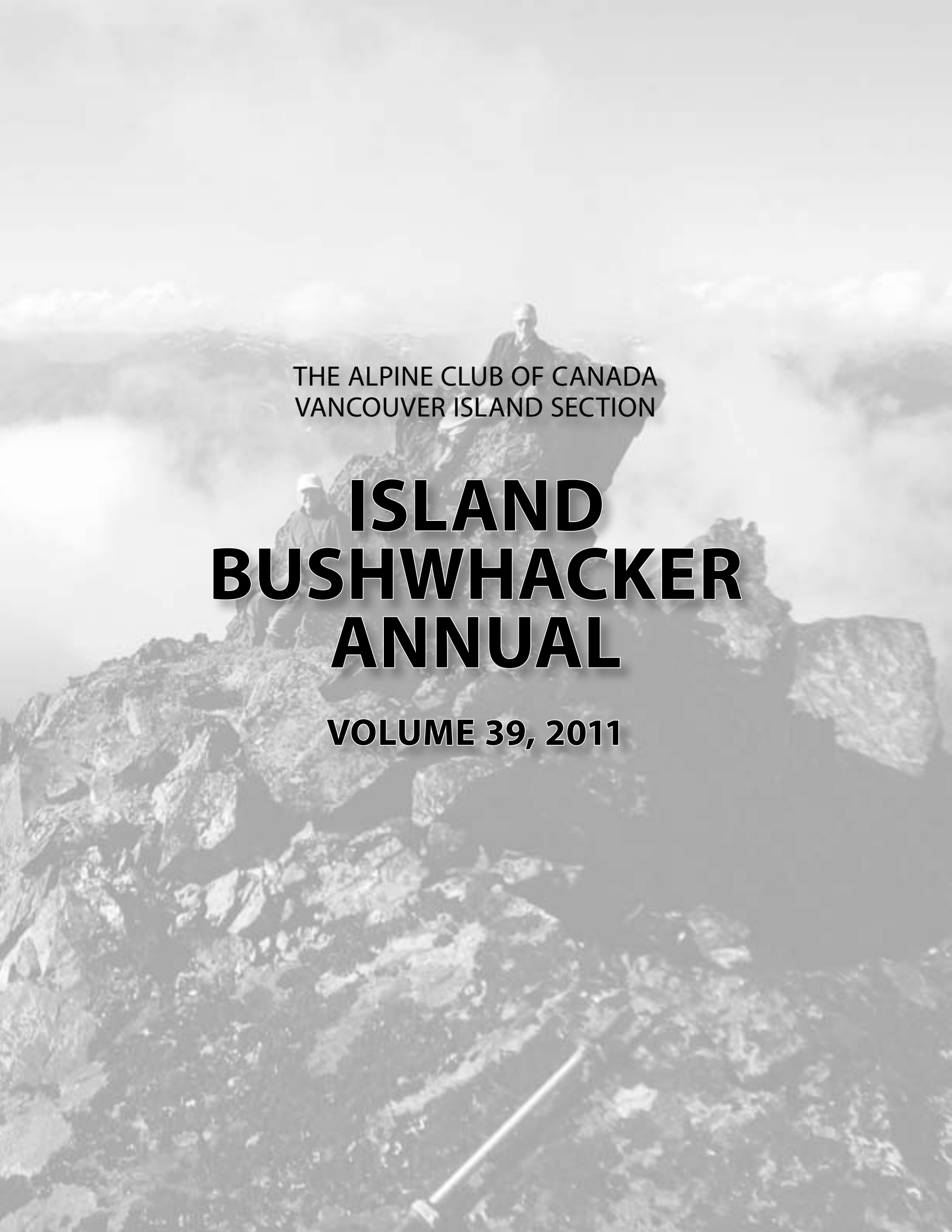
ISLAND BUSHWHACKER

THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA • VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

2011 ANNUAL



THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA
VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

ISLAND BUSHWHACKER ANNUAL

VOLUME 39, 2011

VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION
of
THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA

SECTION EXECUTIVE – 2011

Chair	Cedric Zala
Secretary	Rick Hudson
Treasurer	Geoff Bennett
Banff Mountain Film Festival Coordinator	Kari Frazer
Bushwhacker Committee	Sandy Briggs Lindsay Elms Rob Macdonald Russ Moir Martin Smith
Bushwhacker Design & Layout	Sandy Stewart
Education	Dave Campbell
Equipment	Mike Hubbard
FMCBC Rep	Andrew Pape-Salmon
Library/Archives	Tom Hall
History	Lindsay Elms
Membership	Christine Fordham
Members-at-Large	Dave Campbell Phee Hudson Russ Moir Martin Smith
National Rep	Rick Hudson
Newsletter	Cedric Zala
Safety	Selena Swets
Schedule	Catrin Brown Russ Moir
Webmaster	Martin Hofmann

ACC VI Section website:
www.accvi.ca

ACC National website:
www.alpineclubofcanada.ca

ISSN 0822 - 9473

Cover: Nine Peaks in all its glory PHOTO: AHREN RANKIN

Printed on forestry-certified paper

Contents

Message from the Chair

Cedric Zala

Report from the Chair – 2011

Cedric Zala

2011 was yet another banner year for the ACCVI, with the continuation of our ongoing programs and activities and the initiation of some new directions as well. As I look back on the year I would like to remember some of its highlights:

- We had three weeks of summer camps in the coast range. These camps, ably organized by Rick Hudson, continued our new tent-based helicopter-accessed summer camp program initiated in 2010. We joined with the Vancouver Section to spend three one-week periods (14 people in each week) at the remote and spectacular Athelney Pass in the Coast Mountains.
- We organized a one-week summer camp at Lake O'Hara. This provided a more comfortable way for 20 club members to spend a week in an unsurpassed Rocky Mountain setting. From easy hiking to the successful ascents of Mts Lefroy and Huber (and near ascents of Mts Victoria and Hungabee) the camp provided an opportunity for everyone to exercise as much ambition and activity as they wanted.
- We expanded our outreach activities. ACCVI set up booths and met the public at Parks Day in Gowland-Tod Park; at the Strathcona Wilderness Festival at Buttle Lake; at the MEC Snow Festival; and at the Banff Mountain Film Festival (BMFF). We dealt with lots of questions from interested lovers of the outdoors and likely attracted some new members in the process.
- We had our best BMFF ever, with a sold-out house and a record net income, which will be largely applied to supporting our education subsidy program. We also collaborated with local vendors by arranging for a 10%-off day for all BMFF attendees.
- We arranged for a wilderness first aid course for our members through Slipstream.
- Our members put on lots of trips and climbed lots of mountains, and we hope to encourage even more trips by making changes in our subsidy policy that would require people to lead a trip in order to obtain a subsidy for a course. To further encourage this, we increased the subsidy to a full 75% of the cost of instruction, and broadened the interpretation of "trips" to include clinics and special events.
- We collaborated with a number of other outdoors and conservation groups to oppose a developer's proposal to build a 250-cabin resort beside 16 km of the Juan de Fuca Trail. Through the efforts of the alliance, the rezoning was ultimately refused and the Juan de Fuca trail was saved from massive adjacent development, at least for the immediate future.

Our slideshow evenings continue to be very popular, and we were particularly fortunate in having legendary climber Fred Beckey speak to us in November. With about 90 people in the audience, the 88-year old mountaineer talked about his life and passion for climbing and held the house spellbound for more than two hours.

Next year is our section's centennial and we have set up several projects, both fun and serious, to celebrate this milestone in grand style. Our projects here include:

- The *Climb the Island* challenge. The idea is to challenge members to climb as many significant/historic Island peaks as they can in 2012. Can we reach 100? Who can get the maximum vertical during the year? We have also set up a web page with interactive map so members can update and keep track of progress as it evolves.
- We are having two weeks (at least!) of tent-based helicopter-access summer camps on the Island, at a beautiful but seldom-visited basin north of Tahsis.
- Judith Holm is developing a comprehensive index for our Island Bushwhackers.
- Lindsay Elms is organizing a climb of Elkhorn to coincide with the centenary of the original event.

- Lindsay is also publishing a book on the climbing history of Vancouver Island mountains.

On another note, although our current education offerings are broad and expertly taught, we could still use more volunteers to put on courses we have not offered for a while, including:

- Navigating with map and compass
- Wilderness navigation
- Winter camping

We would really encourage those members who have the skills (or want to acquire or hone them) to give serious thought to taking on one of these courses.

And on the theme of volunteering, we should continue to recognize and support our leaders and volunteers. These dedicated people put a great of time and effort into the courses and trips they lead, and deserve our sincere appreciation and thanks. And the best way of showing that what they do really matters and has a long-term cascading effect is to do some leading yourself! You can do it, and any member of the executive, and most longer-term club members, will be happy to help you to develop the necessary skills. Support your club and its aims – become an ACCVI leader!

Now, after seven years on the executive, and four as chair, I'm standing down (but staying on as newsletter editor). Our club is blessed with many exceptional people who volunteer on the executive, and one of our strengths is a long-term commitment from a core group of dedicated volunteers who work together effectively and harmoniously. I want to say how much I have enjoyed working with them all and thank them for their support and the great times we have had. And finally, I want to thank the executive and the entire club for giving me the life-changing opportunity to serve as chair.

Vancouver Island

West Face of Dwarvish

Chris Ruttan
January 23

This story will tell the tale of a dark and gloomy time when a froovey Dwarvish wrung his knotted, knuckly hands in dismay at the thought of spending yet another weekend in the mucky wet boredom of coastavish winter. But wait, a glimmer of hope as the prophets of constant rain spoke of clearing and the possibility of a ball of fire appearing in the sky for at least a short burn. And so it was our brave Dwarvish set off alone in solitary solitude for who, I ask you, would choose to be seen with such a despicable character, not me! Out past the forests of feeble regeneration to the great cut-blocks of greedy loggerheads until the main of Cottonwood stood at last assailable with its gate open and so on to the place where the bridge is gone. Oh woe unto him who is not prepared to balance on the tree felled across the creek for he shall get his socks wet, yea and perhaps izzy asper. Now with the gleaming steel coffin on wheels is left behind and so he must with all speed make his chuffing, gaggly way along until surprising a hoovey beast of cloven beastliness with a rack like Pamela Anderson but out of its head, whoa, thanks for that image.

On he climbed to the start of the trail to the Mountain Landale. For many years his travels had brought him here to this rocky playground and many were the ways he had gained its height but ever and always he had cast his blooded, evil binoculus upon the west face and a route more directly to the crown. Today, in this icy crustiness with the steep slippery ground buried in the kick-inable icy granulations he would at last search for a way. At the base of the cliffy wall there washed and wattled a fall of water crashing down from a rocky crack that cleaved the face in an up and right rising fault, this would be the weakness he would hope to ravage

In the ascent couloir on the West Face PHOTO: CHRIS RUTTAN

but first he must sneak around the wattling wetness. Upon his savage and poorly manicured feet he placed pointed grip-ralaces of angry steel the better to clutch and claw at the frozen snowfish. In his hands axes of ice that chilled the heart and often poked nasty holes in his Dwarfishly stylish new

pants and so it was thus he began the gruelling task of dragging his sorry hump up, first into the forest to avoid the falls then up higher and higher until the couloir could be gained. Everywhere around the ice covered rock loomed yearning to trounce his arrogant helmet head but our intrepid intrepidist cleverly wafted and wavered, hacking and kicking slowly up the narrow notch until it finally began to lay back and he could see the very place where the south slope trail could be reached. In the lower places a dense fog steamed and boiled but here light layers of high cloud just softened the fire of Sol and for the first time our grizzled hero stopped to whine about his calves killing him, poor boy. But not long did he linger for it was the top he wanted with its branching greenliness crusted in wind scoured ice sparkling in the sun. So picking up the old route buried deep he trudged to the top and made a cup of hot chocolate, oh such is the depravity of Dwarfish Dwarfs. But even with the warming sun how could he stay, even with the entire land below but for one or two other peaks wrapped in fog how could he stay, he'd freeze for pity sake!

After a three and a half hour climb and another half hour snacking he turned back down to retrace his steps, more or less, and to glory in the joy of a new-to-him way up a lovely winter mountain. On the way back down our boy was surprised to find he had an urge to stay longer in the couloir and see how it would be to descend to the top of the falls for he carried a string to dangle from if need be but after a while he could see the foolishness of his plan because he wasn't totally stupid and so he got out and back into the forest as quick as he could, good Dwarf. The rest of his trip was an uneventful trudge but our boy vowed to return one day perhaps when it was much colder and he could climb the entire route from the base of the falls. (Hmmm… perhaps he was totally stupid after all.)

Solo participant: Chris Ruttan.

Pogo Mountain Northeast Gully

Lindsay Elms
May 24

Climbing a big snow gully in perfect conditions gets my endorphins surging! The high I experience lasts for a couple of days and anyone listening to the re-telling of the story can hear the excitement in my voice. However, there needs to be several ingredients to help make the climb a success. These ingredients, which we mortals have no control over, are: there has to be enough snow to fill the gully, the snow has to be firm and stable, the objective danger from avalanches has to be ZERO and nice weather helps. I have found that late May is when the big gullies have usually been in perfect conditions. I have skied the gully between the lower and upper basins on Kings Peak several times in May and the North Gully on Mount Mitchell was in excellent condition in May 2002 (see IBA 2002 p.7). Another beautiful gully is the Northeast Gully on Pogo Mountain. This is the huge prominent gully seen from Highway 4 between Port Alberni and the West Coast after crossing Sutton Pass.

Looking up the Northeast Gully PHOTO: LINDSAY ELMS

At 1000m (from the logging road to the north shoulder) this has to be one of the longest snow gullies on the island. I have lost count of how many times I have said I must climb that gully one day and this year I was finally able to cross that climb off my bucket list. Two years ago (2009) Craig (Quagger) Wagnell and Tawney Lem made the first recorded ascent of the gully, including the summit of Pogo Mountain, and a week or two later Val and I made an attempt but got foiled by rain just 70m from the shoulder. I know, after climbing 930m you would think 70m more was nothing but the skis we were carrying were getting heavy, we were soaked to the skin and the gully was melted out leaving a gnarly looking rock step to negotiate just shy of the shoulder. In late April

2011, Quagger and Tawney returned to the gully and reached the shoulder but soft snow thwarted their summit bid. They then descended via the Northeast Ridge. After talking with Quagger, Val and I decided to have another go at the gully.

Driving back to Port Alberni from Bamfield on Victoria Day the weather forecast appeared favourable for the next day so we continued on to Sutton Pass. Eight hundred metres down the highway from the pass we turned onto a logging road and parked in a clearing a few hundred metres off the highway. The next morning we were packed and ready to leave at 7 p.m.

We walked crossed the old bridge over the Kennedy River and continued down the logging road for one kilometre until we reached the creek which flows out from the bottom of the gully. A month earlier Quagger and Tawney had snow all the way up the creek but we found the creek free of snow until we reached the bottom of the gully. Here we took our wet running shoes off and put on our climbing boots. While hiking up the creek we had to cross the river 4 or 5 times, and each time the water appeared to get colder forcing us to dance with more gusto to get some circulation back (watch us on "dancing with the stars" next year).

Avalanche debris from the steep slopes above still festooned the bottom of the gully after the long winter, but the recent warm weather had melted and consolidated the snow so that we didn't break through very often. Although the ascent felt gradual, when I looked back over my shoulder I realized how much elevation we had gained. Ahead the gully slowly increased in angle and when it got to the point where we were climbing in runnels caused by snow slides we stopped and put our crampons on. The runnels were hard packed and we were able to front point up to an exposed rock step. To the left of the rock step was a steep lead of snow which we climbed and then cut back into the gully. A month earlier Quagger and Tawney didn't see any rock but instead found a vertical ice pitch. Once above the step the angle slowly decreased and we soon popped out on the north shoulder.

Here we stopped and took on much needed fluids, wiped the sweat off our brows (and other body parts) and while we ate lunch looked at the route ahead. I had skied the Northeast Ridge to the summit in January 1997 with Doug Goodman and Charles Turner (see IBA 1997 p.24) and although it was now May there was still a sh** load of snow on the slopes above including huge cornices on the summit ridge.

The temperature had warmed up and was quite balmy causing snow to slough off the steeper slopes below the summit. We decided to leave our packs and go light to the summit. Taking turns we slowly plodded up the easy slopes to the final headwall where it steepened (55-60 degrees) just before gaining the summit ridge. We left a deep furrow as we ploughed up to the ridge. Now we just had to stay off the ridge crest to avoid the cornices and make our way to the snowed–under summit rocks. At 12:45 we reached the high point. In fact it wasn't quite the highest point as the peak of the cornice was still 3 metres out over the ridge and 1 metre higher. I was reminded of the first ascent of Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas when the British climbers were asked not to go the last 5 feet to the summit to respect the mountain gods who lived on the summit. It wasn't the gods we were worried about but the huge drop if the cornice broke while we were standing on it. Where we stood was good enough for me as I was pretty sure we were higher than the cairn on the summit rocks.

We spent 15 minutes on top then scooted back along the ridge. Just as we were about to drop off the ridge two heads popped up and Randy Church and Mike Taylor came into view. Once they arrived on the ridge we chatted and they thanked us for the steps they had to follow. The two said when they saw our packs and the tracks leading up they thought there must be a couple of young bucks going light. With a Cheshire-like grin I said there was! As they continued to the summit, we jumped off the ridge and slid down to the lower angled snow. Back to our packs and then we had the pleasure of being able to follow their snow-shoe tracks down the Northeast Ridge.

In Port Alberni we stopped for dinner and took note of the UV damage on our faces. That didn't matter as the endorphins flowing through our veins acted like soothing aloe vera on our skin.

Participants: Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Canoe Peak

Lindsay Elms
June 10

As a mountaineer I am always looking for new access points to the mountains. Quite often on Vancouver Island that is usually found when one of the logging companies has built a new road into a previously un-logged valley. Since they don't just build roads in the valley bottom but up on the higher slopes of the mountains, these new roads sometimes make for quicker access than the old established climbing routes to the summits. In recent years small mini-hydro projects have been cropping up on steep creeks and their access roads have created new opportunities to some of the mountains especially around the Port Alberni area off Highway 4. One that has become popular with the local Alberni Valley Outdoor Club is the access road to Louise Goet-

ting Lake. This has given quick access to an area they refer to as Grizzly Meadows and Jack's Peak.

This past winter Quagger and I had talked about checking out the hydro road up Canoe Creek to access Canoe Peak. This rarely climbed peak is located between The Cats Ears and the MacKenzie Range. On June 8, I phoned Quagger and left a message saying that we were going into Canoe Peak via Canoe Creek and was he interested in joining us. An email reply the next morning said that he had been up the peak via the creek last Monday (June 6) and attached was a photo of the route in the upper basin. The email confirmed that this route was a winner!

Friday morning Val and I left the vehicle near the gate and began hiking up the access road. After an hour and several hundred metres of elevation we arrived at the dam on Canoe Creek. Here we stopped for a bite to eat. Tacked high on one of the trees was a video surveillance camera but it never moved so it obviously wasn't following us around. Still we smiled and waved at it. After getting out of our runners and into our boots we deeked into the old growth to the left of the creek staying well back from the creek itself. The closer to the creek the more blowdowns we had to climb over so we attempted to stay back about 50m. Progress wasn't too fast but after 40 minutes we came across a slide path that came down from the left. After crossing the accumulated snow at the bottom we dropped down to the creek and crossed logs to the other side. The forest was a little more open and progress was a bit faster. After another 30 minutes we again crossed the creek only this time we traversed out into the open basin below the ridge between Canoe Peak and the Mac Range. There was still a lot of snow covering the vegetation but once this accumulation was gone it would be more difficult to travel through. For now we had plenty of snow to move over.

In the basin we hiked out to the left and up to an obvious draw which headed up toward the ridge to the base of a black buttress. From the base of the buttress I was familiar with the route as I had climbed Canoe Peak via the Mackenzie Range Climbers Trail back in 1996. Bisecting the buttress was a steep gully which had been snow-free on my previous ascent but was now a steep snow gully. We stopped to put on our crampons and then Val decided to lighten her pack by leaving her running shoes on the snow. I continued to carry my runners as I am afraid of forgetting to pick them up on the way back down.

At the top of the buttress visibility had decreased dramatically but I was confident of finding the route. All we had to do was to continue along the ridge and then when it appeared to head up towards the summit, we then had to traverse around the peak and climb the short North Ridge to the top. Around us the soft snow was sloughing off the steep places but after a few metres it slowly came to a halt. We continued to angle around an up and soon the summit rocks came into sight. A short scramble over the rock and we were on the summit.

We didn't get any views but there was no wind so we were able to enjoy our lunch in peace. After half an hour we began to retrace our route back around the peak and down to the buttress. We down-climbed the steep snow then dropped into the snow draw which we had climbed. Just as we reached the basin below Val realised she had forgotten her runners at the base of the black buttress. There was no way either of us were going to slog back up the snow so after a few choice words she resigned herself to the fact that she would have to buy another pair of runners. Of course I didn't say anything about the folly of not carrying ones shoes in ones pack.

Back down at the dam we stopped for another break before striking down the access road. This road has opened up a whole new area and has the potential for quick access to Redwall Peak and the other towers of the MacKenzie range.

Participants: Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Postscript: A week later Sasha Kubicek, Tawney Lem and Quagger were on the peak and found Val's shoes.

Mount Curran and Mount Joan

Pam Olson
June 25 – 27

It must be about fifteen years since we have gone to the Beauforts by way of Roaring Creek. In the 1990's we used to drive in to the area on the Horne Lake forest service road, car camp at Roaring Creek then go exploring around the area on foot or on our mountain bikes. This was one of our favourite early season training areas. Then things went bad for us. One weekend in the late 1990's when we got to the camping area at Roaring Creek, we found a motor home parked next to the creek. An overweight looking guy was sitting in a lawn chair next to the vehicle, a blasting boom box at his feet and a beer in his hand. We decided we didn't want to be there.

For the last couple of decades or so we have gone to the Beauforts by way of Comox Main forest service road and Branch 91 (formerly Branch 112). However, the branch road has deteriorated quite a lot over the years. Snowmobilers using the area have done some maintenance but they couldn't deal with all the washouts. Earlier in June, we had made an attempt to get to Joan by this route but there was too much snow. We couldn't even drive as far as the usual parking place and had to stop about a couple of kilometers lower

Between Mount Curran and the Squarehead, Mount Joan in the background. PHOTO: PAM OLSON

down the road. Along the road, we noticed a lot of fresh flagging tape marking the location of old culverts and other features and decided that the logging company is getting ready to rehabilitate the road and re-log the area.

The snow conditions were soft and mushy and we changed our destination to Mount Apps. We could have done Apps as a day trip and car camped but we like to take our time and camp out in the mountains. The first night we had to camp on snow but the second night we found a melted out rocky outcrop where we could set up the stove and eat our meals. There was no sign of running water and we used a black plastic garbage bag hung in a tree to melt snow for drinking water.

Now, back to Roaring Creek. In the years since we've been to that area, a bridge has been replaced on the Bowser-Horne Lake forest service road, making the area accessible from Cook Creek Road, a much shorter drive than via Horne Lake. Sometime in the early 2000s, the CDMC (Comox and District Mountaineering Club) put a lot of effort into clearing and marking routes to Squarehead, Joan and to Curran.

The routes are described well in the most recent revision of Hiking Trails 3 and on at least two websites: summitpost.org and islandhikes.com. The latter site provides a detailed map.

The spring 2011 weather had been unseasonably cold and wet so when the forecast finally predicted three days of reasonably warm and dry-weather, we were off to do the Curran-Squarehead-Joan loop. The spur line off the Bowser-Horne Lake road was in good condition and we drove all the way to the trail head. The log filled tank trap mentioned with caution in one of the access route descriptions was easily handled by our not so tough SUV.

From the parking area, the trail followed an old logging road then ascended an easy ridge toward Curran. The snow level was quite low but the snow was a bit more consolidated than it had been a couple of weeks previous. Getting to Mount Curran involved a short detour off the route to Joan.

Between Curran and Squarehead, we found a snow free rocky outcrop big enough to accommodate our tent with room for setting up the stove, cooking and eating. We carry a small radio with us to get weather reports but we didn't turn it on because we didn't really want to know about the Canucks and Bruins game. As the Bruins had beaten up the Canucks in the two previous games, we had a bad feeling about game seven and didn't want to be depressed in such a beautiful area as the Beaufort's. There was a full moon overnight.

The next day, we continued on towards Joan. There was one steep section getting to Squarehead but otherwise everything was an easy ridge walk. At Joan, we had a snack and checked the phone to see if we could get a signal. No signal. The only dry place to sit was the base of the transmitter cone.

Dropping off Joan, we followed some half melted out tracks left by previous hikers for a while but then lost them when we got into the bigger trees. We figured that by the time we got to the old logging road, we'd find a melted out place to set up camp as we didn't really want to get to the car and drive home that day. However, the logging road was covered in deep snow and we continued to slog along, finally finding a dry camping spot near a stream.

Friday morning, it took us about an hour to get back to the car. We barely recognized the old washed out bridge crossing at Roaring Creek. There has been a lot of erosion in the past fifteen or so years since we were last there.

When we got home, I looked through my old summit photos of Mount Joan and found one I had taken on June 19, 2004. There was no snow at all on the summit.

Participants: PO, ACC member since the mid 1970's and DF who wishes to be anonymous.

Mount Sir John

Sandy Briggs
July 23

Imagine a camel, a camel of the two-humped kind. Imagine that the summit of Mount Sir John is the top of the Camel's head. This may be useful in understanding the embarrassment that occurred later.

It happened again. Lindsay Elms phoned me and asked if I wanted to join him and Val on a trip to another obscure mountain on northern Vancouver Island. Little did I know that it is almost an illegal mountain.

Mount Sir John is the highest point in the Franklin Range, but I had never heard of the mountain nor the range before Lindsay's call. According to GeoBC, it is named "in association with the surrounding Franklin Range, in turn after Sir John Franklin, celebrated Arctic explorer." Apart from this rather tangential arctic connection, one significance of this mighty peak is that it is the most northerly one in the *Island Alpine* guidebook (listed at 1429 m, though 1453 in bivouac.com). Another is as follows: (http://www.vancouverisland.com/parks/?id=349) "Robson Bight (Michael Bigg) Ecological Reserve is located 25 miles (40 km) southeast of Port McNeill, on the northeastern shore of Vancouver Island, and incorporates Mount Derby, Mount Sir John and the Tsitika Mountain. Access to Robson Bight Provincial Park is prohibited. …" Fortunately, as I discovered rather *post facto*, the boundary of the ecological reserve runs over the summit of Mount Sir John, so that access via the large clearcuts in the Kokish River drainage likely carries few legal ramifications.

Having driven up from Comox that morning, we set off walking up the last rough portion of the logging road at a none-too-early hour, and we soon found our way easily into the old growth forest at the end of an upper spur. Soon we reached a point which may be described as the right side of the previously-mentioned camel, and just below the saddle between its humps. With small distances and small elevations to deal with, we decided on the option of hiking over the top of the false summit – the front camel-hump – just for the heck of it. This decision took us up a long and moderately steep gully of little bush and big trees, along and down some late-season snow patches, and soon, without any fuss whatsoever, onto the very summit of Mount Sir John a mere two hours after having left the vehicle. It seems that the installers of the summit radio phallus had had few compunctious visitings concerning the ecological reserve, for they had cut down a number of trees, apparently in order to facilitate a helicopter landing zone.

While the site itself was therefore a little tainted by the hand of man, the prospect of Johnstone Strait and the Coast Mountains was fulfillingly fine. By stepping a few paces into the Reserve one was afforded a fine view, seemingly directly down into Robson Bight. We were disappointed only by the complete absence of orcas.

Lindsay and Val look down to Robson Bight from Mount Sir John.
PHOTO: SANDY BRIGGS

After a leisurely lunch we descended quickly to the nape of the camel's neck, and there made the decision to omit a reascent of the front hump. Instead we would do a descending leftward traverse around the front hump, pick up our logging road spur, and be back in camp in time for afternoon tea. That is not exactly how things unfolded. It is somewhat sheepishly – risking too many animal metaphors – that I admit that I was the one in front and picking the route here. We had a map, and in fact a gps, but did not bother to consult either, since the game seemed so simple.

With a concern that we might descend too far and have to regain altitude to regain the road, and with the idea that we would cross our own upward route and recognize it, I led us on a traverse that did not actually descend very much. After a while someone commented that this little traverse seemed to be taking longer than expected. Some while later we spied an unexpectedly large lake in the distance. This Lindsay soon declared to be Johnstone Strait. Hmmm, not good. To make a tedious story shorter, we had not recognized the point where we had crossed our morning ascent route. Instead, my too high traverse had led us high through the saddle between the two camel humps and far out onto the left side of the camel, far also from afternoon tea. (At least I think that's what happened. It still doesn't fully make sense.)

I have a feeling that more frustrations were felt than were expressed as we reversed our route in an attempt to correct this navigational infelicity. One feature of the metaphorical camel of Mount Sir John is that the rear hump is much shorter and

flatter than the front one, so that the saddle is indistinct. Add to that the fact that the spur road on which we were parked was much further toward the camel's nether region than I had remembered, and you have the result that correcting my mistake took rather longer than it should have, even with frequent map-gazing, triangulation, gps-ing, and general muttering of incantations – if not actual imprecations.

We did eventually get back to the same road spur, move the truck to a better place from which to begin the next day's adventure, and have dinner. But it was a late dinner, and it involved way less 'lounging on the patio' than we had envisioned on our scenic summit. There is an old advertising slogan "I'd walk a mile for a camel." I can assure you that we walked a few extra side-hilly forested miles for the camel that is Mount Sir John.

Participants: Lindsay Elms, Val Wotton and Sandy Briggs

Wosscairn

Lindsay Elms
July 24

For the last few years Sandy has been lamenting about his need to climb an unnamed peak somewhere up island and call it Wosscairn (at times he has confused it with Huascaran – the highest mountain in Peru which is pronounced Wosscaran, but it is usually after a tipple of the malt with the elegant note of fresh pears and subtle oak called Glenfiddich); however, he always has some other named peak on his agenda which came first. This was about to change when he decided to come on a weekend trip with Val and me to another obscure peak on the North Island. Knowing Sandy's love for the "lure of the obscure" I suggested Mount Sir John on the coast above Johnstone Strait between Telegraph Cove and the Tsitika River. Sandy admitted that he had never heard of it but after checking *Island Alpine* he read that it was the highest peak on the north end of the island. That was enough for Sandy to say the trip was on. At a height that meant it could be day tripped it left one more day after that for another climb. In the adjacent valley between Mount Sir John and Tsitika Mountain was an unnamed 1567m peak that on the map appeared to have a lot of alpine.

Friday night Sandy drove up to Comox and on Saturday morning we got an alpine start and arrived in Telegraph Cove at 8:30. Being a tourist resort/destination we had a preconceived notion that Telegraph Cove would have a gas station and a café that would be open at this, not ungodly, time of the morning. There was a café but it wasn't open yet but there was

Sandy Briggs on the Wosscairn Summit PHOTO: LINDSAY ELMS

no gas station. We decided we had better fill up the tank so we back-tracked out to the highway then drove north a few kilometres to the nearest station and filled up (we also picked up a java, killing two birds with one stone). We then drove back into Telegraph Cove (well almost all the way). Unfortunately the logging road that we spent half an hour driving was the wrong one (it was misty!) so we had to back-track and find the correct main-line. Once on the Kokish Main it was obvious by the highway-like condition that this was the correct road but it also helped that the mist was lifting.

Anyway, we eventually found the end of the logging road (BR 256) we were looking for! To cut the story short I'll leave the ascent of Mount Sir John for Sandy, I will move on to Sunday and our ascent of the unnamed peak.

Another beautiful day dawned and the peak above beckoned. We hiked the 1.5km up to the end of the road and deeked into the old growth. Within a few minutes we were on snow and at the bottom of a gully that ascended towards a saddle on the North Ridge. The snow was firm (north facing) and we enjoyed the beauty of the early morning rays of light as they filtered through the upper canopy illuminating the

forest floor. Just below the saddle we scrambled up through a small bluff and topped out onto easy slopes. At first a look of bewilderment appeared on our brows and then a chuckle was snorted when someone called out "what's heather doing up here?"

We weaved through the heather on the tongues of snow until it became continuous. Above us to our right was the summit and on it loomed what we thought was either a large rock or a magnificent summit cairn. After 1 hour 45 minutes we were on the summit ridge and had a 15 minute scramble to the top. By now we could see that it wasn't one rock but indeed a large cairn made up of hundreds of rocks. There was irony in the fact that the peak Sandy got to climb and call Wosscairn, in reality had a cairn on it that he didn't have to build.

The summit ridge was free of snow and we hiked through the occasional beautiful little meadow locked in by impenetrable krumholtz's no taller than 2 metres. As Sandy wove up through the last shrubs to the summit he had this overwhelming sensation to stand on top of the cairn. This was no ordinary cairn with a base diameter of 1 metre and a height of 2 metres. He tenuously tested each rock before committing his weight as he didn't want to dislodge any rock and destroy the cairn. Thirty seconds later he was standing on the top, arms stretched out, like a resurrected Jesus Christ. I finally took a breath when I saw the cairn wasn't going to collapse but I was waiting for some ~~angelic~~, no, celestial apparition to appear above his head. It didn't! Sandy is human after all.

We sat on the summit for nearly 2 hours taking in our surroundings and picking out all the mountains we had climbed – some of them we struggled to name at first but we eventually sorted them out.

To the north, yesterday's little adventure, Mount Sir John, stood isolated and beguiling. Beyond shimmered the Coast Mountains with Mount Waddington - the crown jewel - standing tall and proud above everything else. We got our money's-worth out of the binoculars!

Leaving the summit we wandered over to another knoll overlooking the Tsitika River and Robson Bight. It was too early in the day for the cruise ships to be tackling Johnstone Strait but there were numerous pleasure boats and working barges navigating the inside passage.

Before heading back down to the vehicle we stopped to look at a cluster of several hundred ladybug's who were crawling in, around, and over a patch of dry lichen. In the spring, an overwintering female ladybug usually lays her tiny, pale yellow eggs in clusters of 10 to 50 on the underside of plant leaves near colonies of aphids. Why they were up here we had no idea but it was one of those 'neat-O' sights.

The descent was fun – bum sliding and boot skiing down to the gully. Once back at the vehicle, instead of driving back to Telegraph Cove, we decided to drive around Bonanza Lake where I could show Sandy the logging roads that give access to the peaks of the Bonanza Range - from Whiltilla Mountain in the north to Mount Ashwood in the south.

It had been another beautiful weekend on the island and we had climbed another couple of peaks rarely sought after. Although the bigger peaks have the lure and offer the challenges associated with climbing, these smaller, lesser peaks offer unique views and have hidden secrets to explore by those interested in the obscure. To cap it off, Sandy had climbed his unnamed north island peak and got to call it Wosscairn.

Participants: Sandy Briggs, Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Postscript: The large cairn was probably built by the surveyor George J. Jackson and his crew in 1931. These cairns could be seen from other peaks in the area when they were taking their triangulations.

The Trifecta: Nine Peaks, Big Interior Mountain and Mount Septimus

Ahren Rankin
August 6

I climb down from the summit of Mount Septimus as the sun's evening light bathes us in its glow. The rock is golden as I travel along the ridge to the hand traverse, the added weight of every story I've ever heard of this infamous obstacle pulling at my heels as I negotiate my way across. "How was that?" James asks when I'm through, but I have no words, my only answer is a dumb grin. Somehow, he still had the energy to hurry across and film me as I descended. Turning to take one final look at the summit, we wearily head down the gully to our packs. Eighteen hours earlier…

It's 1:30 a.m. and we sit in the truck in the Bedwell Lake parking lot, trying desperately to prepare or make sense of what we're about to do. As we get ready to leave, I see lights coming up the road. I'm thinking it's a security guard from the mine come to see who is up here so late, as not many people hike at 2 o'clock. Turns out it was some guys from Victoria up to traverse Septimus the next day after they'd slept for a few hours. I'm in awe of their determination to drive all the way out into the Park after a week's work like that. After a few laughs about our plan to leave that very moment we parted ways hoping to see them again later in the day.

Descending towards Cream Lake late in the evening PHOTO: AHREN RANKIN

With our full agenda, we set a brisk pace, all the usual landmarks seeming to fly by as if in a dream, the thick darkness consuming all sense of time and distance. Baby Bedwell Lake comes and goes so fast we need to take a longer than anticipated break between the lakes, waiting for the new dawn to tint the sky. Shortly after 4:20 we push on, hoping the faint light can prevent us from becoming geographically embarrassed. No such luck! We miss our turnoff to head down to the meadow below Big Interior. Undaunted, we continue on to Little Jim Lake knowing we can approach the mountain at that point.

We push up the Big Interior Glacier as the early morning light paints the summit in nature's most brilliant hues. As we near the top, the sun projects a Brocken spectre on the clouds filling the Bedwell valley below, a full spectrum rainbow appearing to encircle our ghostly shadows. This elusive and remarkable natural wonder inspires me to even newer levels of confidence and excitement! We sit down to a well deserved rest on the summit, not having stopped since the lakes far below. The already warm sun, sure to be one of our major obstacles later, reveals Nine Peaks in all its splendor against a backdrop of the South Island and Pacific Ocean obscured by clouds. Our breakfast and usual summit rituals are far too brief as we leave after no more than 30 minutes on top, but Nine Peaks beckons.

Unbelievable amounts of perfect snow allow us to travel at normally unheard of speeds. We reach the Nine Peaks/Big Interior Col [ed: Bear Pass] in no more than 45 minutes and after a water break, the summit gully an hour after that. A towering wall of clouds boils just south of us as we ascend the final rocks to the summit and drop our packs, the huge shifting mass looking like it will collapse on us any minute. Settling down to our longest break of the day, I revel in the sense of grandeur and isolation you feel on the remote peaks of Strathcona Park. The music from our ipod drifts on the wind, I'm happy and my mind is at peace….

As I look across the sea of clouds my gaze lingers on the peaks - Tom Taylor, Mariner, Vellela, Ursus and the Mackenzie Range just barely visible. I turn to inspect our final objective of the day, but James says, "Don't even look at it!" We laugh, as Septimus seems hopelessly far away at this point, with a rather inconveniently placed Big Interior along the way. I cut our hour-long break short at 45 minutes as I felt the pressure to keep moving, it didn't even seem like we were half-way yet. After dodging a ptarmigan living right below the summit, we descend the very full and surprisingly steep gully. Easy hiking and quality boot skiing sees us down the Nine Peaks Glacier and back at the col in no time. I have to say that hiking back up Big Interior was hands down the biggest challenge of the day. It was 1 o'clock, the sun was blistering and there was hardly a breath of wind. The heat was oppressive and each step a true battle. It was the only time thoughts of failure went through my mind all day, as I was stretched to my physical limit. After endless snow trudging and some delicate choss hopping, a last few pathetic steps deposit me in a puddle of sweat once again atop Big Interior.

After much water, food and refreshments I start feeling better, the sun having taken a heavy toll earlier. We sense that our timing is right and our objective totally realistic. So it was with renewed energy and enthusiasm that we left the summit. We blast down and then across the glacier so we can gain the ridge that leads up from Little Jim Lake as high as possible. We descend the ridge, trending right so we're on the Septimus end of the lake. All of a sudden I trip and go flying down a snow slope just above the lake, disappearing from James' view until I shoot out lower down the slope and come to a stop. I jump up and shake snow out of my shorts as James, who opted for a more regular method of descent finds his way down. We quickly pass Little Jim ice cube, still in the grips of winter, and head towards Septimus. As we approach the peak we marvel at Cream Lake which is entirely snow and ice but for a brilliant blue ring around its edge. Down at

Leaving the final summit of the day PHOTO: AHREN RANKIN

lake level I spot a bivy sack below the boulder, but no one is to be seen. Septimus looms large over us as our final climb begins.

Slowly tiring legs propel us up the glacier, the slope getting steadily steeper. We see the boot prints of the guys from Victoria heading up the X-Gully and off into their own adventure. I hope they're having as much fun as we are. Then as we gain the shoulder above the glacier we hear voices and there they are standing on the ridge, silhouetted against the evening sky above us. We wave and yell things back and forth at each other, not understanding what is said but amazed at meeting again in such a place. With a last shout we continue and traverse below the West Face, making our way over to the gully. Halfway up the gully we drop our packs, have a drink and with just the bare essentials, head to the top.

As I step onto the ridge it's as if I am transported into a great painting of nature, dark earthy tones and incredible pastels vying for my attention, all awash in the beautiful light of the evening sun. I have to pull my gaze from the amazing spectacle and focus now on climbing, as James is getting ahead of me. I'm totally immersed in the movement of the climbing, losing myself in a timeless and completely focused frame of mind. First on one side of the ridge, then the other side, the hand traverse, the eggshell traverse and then the final steep rock! I briefly wonder how a dog ever made it up here as I climb this final obstacle. I step between the boulders at the top and make the last moves… James shakes my hand once I've arranged a seat. It's 7 o'clock. We made it! I am absolutely blissed out by this crystalline moment; it will forever be etched upon my mind. We celebrate as best we can, having left our packs down below. After a half an hour we decide with no small amount of regret that it's time to go and with a last glance around, we shake hands a final time and start down.

Back on the ledge with our packs, we gather our things after a snack and a drink, and then set off on our long trek back to the vehicle. Back across the West Face and over the shoulder, we stand poised over some of the finest boot skiing I've ever had, dropping several hundred feet on our first push. It was absolutely spectacular! The sun graced us with its last rays of the day as we reached Cream Lake. We take a short rest, and then set off in haste. Chasing the dwindling light, we hope to reach Bedwell Lake before nightfall. Our need sets a swift pace. We appeared buoyed by our success and our reserves seemed endless. Sure enough the dark came, but with our extra energy and the footsteps of our Victorian friends we make it past Bedwell Lake in time.

In the dark and with mostly trail walking to go we charge on, wanting to get out as fast as possible now. The rest of the trip, although we travelled quickly, I didn't feel was rushed or hurried at all. But now we hurry. It was time to get out! Once again we cross the suspension bridge in complete darkness, the unseen water rushing by beneath us. The last switchback passes under out feet and we step out onto the road. Smiling, we shake hands one more time and make our way to the truck. My ipod had played 305 songs for us over 22½ hours, we climbed 3 peaks (1 twice) and had such a good time that it's probably illegal.

I couldn't possibly explain in words the strange, surreal quality of this trip, it was truly like no other I've ever been on, but I hope you've enjoyed reading about it even half as much as we did doing it. Now there are a few people I would like to recognize:

I have to thank Chris Barner and Paul Rydeen for the idea and the inspiration for the trip - it only took nineteen years for somebody to repeat, and my sister Alanna, for getting me into climbing all those years ago. Thank you so much. You're the best! But mostly I have to thank James, without whom I never would have had all these awesome adventures. If only the next fifteen years can be as good as the last.

I should clear up that what I have called Mount Septimus is referred to in Island Alpine as Mount Rosseau. In my mind that whole massif is Mount Septimus and that being its highest point should be referred to as such. I hope I haven't caused too much confusion.

Participants: James Rode and Ahren Rankin (Heathens)

1.99 Times up Mount Spencer

Martin Smith
August 17 - 18

My friend Tony Vaughn is an alpine purist. I could swear that Lindsay told me last season that I'd like Mount Spencer, off the Alberni/Bamfield road, as a pleasant and easy objective via the southern approach and further, that Walter Moar had said the same thing on his Facebook page. Not for Tony though, such protestations of foreknowledge. The topo showed road access and a possible route to a long-ish East Ridge that, once reached, had nary a contour to worry about. It was Tony's choice of objective this time so away we went early on August 17 bound for a quick ascent of the East Ridge with Mount Olsen the day after as "nachspeise".

Museum Main, a scant half hour from Port Alberni offered excellent access to a likely spur that headed in the right direction. Although in great shape initially the spur soon hit bush and a large washout at the same time at about 600 metres elevation. It still looked the best bet, however, so off we went up the remains of it at about 11 a.m.

As these things often do, the road became eminently open and drivable again no more than 5 minutes walk above our start point. Too late for second guesses, however, and it was even more eminently walkable, so on we went.

Looking all the while for a take-off point we contoured around the mountain above until it began to look like we might end up trying the South Ridge anyway. Just in time, however, another spur option presented itself that looked like an East Ridge candidate, so we turned off on that and up briefly to the usual slash pile/road end and some nasty looking new growth. The old growth didn't look too far away, so we duly launched into the usual fireweed/slash/new growth cocktail.

The initial phase was as unpleasant as anticipated and, unhappily, the old growth, once reached, didn't spell relief. The forest hereabouts has quite a bit of southern exposure and the going was often in tangled bush and deadfall and unremittingly steep. Amazingly enough, we came across a few flags here and there but they soon petered out and we concluded the obvious; that someone had tried the route and didn't like it too much. The Alpine Purist, however, pushed on with yours truly in tow.

The sub-alpine eventually appeared as it inevitably does and we stepped gratefully out onto the first snow with a steep but open scramble as the last barrier to the ridge crest above and the easy walk to the summit beyond.

Ha. The ridge walk was indeed delightful and led directly to a vertical step with another, worse looking, step beyond.

Mt. Spencer south aspect PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

Both narrowly qualified as justifiable omissions from a map with 40 metres contours. The summit cairn was perfectly visible only 134 metres away according to the GPS. However, no gear, so no go! But the situation was delightful and we reveled in it, all the while telling each other that the summit didn't matter and that the game was the thing. We'd barely started on the return however, before Olsen was shelved and impure thoughts of the south approach had entered the Purist's perspective.

Grateful for the GPS up track as well as lots of green belays to hang off, we descended the steep forest back to the truck and headed off to find a campsite for the night that would be convenient for the south route on the morrow. Lots of possibilities off Corrigan Main presented themselves before we settled on a high, logged saddle offering nice views of Spencer with the south route in profile albeit through clouds of mosquitoes. The ridge was not reachable from our present location however.

The next morning we were up early and off on the second pursuit of our objective. As Walter later revealed, the correct approach to Spencer from the Corrigan River valley goes off the road we were on but lower down. Not knowing this, we drove back down to and along Corrigan Main until roughly due south of the mountain before heading up a likely looking spur. This took us quite high but still a fair way from the well characterized contours of the south ridge before coming to an end. Above us was a higher road upon which soon appeared a truck! Someone obviously knew the way and making contact with them seemed like a good plan, so we geared up and tackled the 250 vertical metres of slash that separated us.

As expected, the slash led to the higher road and we strolled up this to meet the forest company surveyors who were there to ensure even easier to access to Spencer in future and, as a secondary objective, to plan a bit of resource

Tony Vaughn descending East Ridge of Mt. Spencer PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

extraction. As Alpine Purists, we tend to eschew contact with such folk but these were likeable and helpful chaps just doing what they were paid to do, including pointing out the line of flagging that led off in the desired direction. Up we went, steeply at times, until the flags led off to the left across exposed frozen snow. This route bypasses a high alpine knoll that bars access to the South Ridge but, with axes back at the truck, this was not an option for us. Climbing up and over the knoll was – so we did.

Giving up the elevation was as chastening as it always is but the good news was that it was over quickly. The route down to the col below the South Ridge was very steep but happily with lots of stuff to hang off.

At only a little over 1400 metres the col was still choked with snow and the tarns there still frozen over but this provided easy going up to the ridge itself where we found not only flagging but a well traveled path. This led up the easy ridge and weaved a nice scrambly line through some small bluffs to the flat summit where we found a cairn and a geocache which proclaimed itself the hardest of its kind to reach on Vancouver Island!

The weather had held together nicely and we enjoyed great views of the surrounding area – new to both of us. Readily apparent too was the East Ridge upon which we had stood only 134 metres away yesterday. The gaps that had barred progress looked even more fearsome from the summit.

After the usual pleasant summit lunch we turned for home with no Mount Olsen but with 1.99 trips up Mount Spencer in the bag.

Participants: Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn.

To Elk or not to Elk, that is the Question of Mount Cobb

Ken Wong
August 26 - 28

After completing the Island Qualifiers, George B, Jamie and I looked for new challenges once again. Lindsay Elms has a list of 52 Vancouver Island peaks over 6000ft. We'd love to climb those, but some of us have heavy family responsibilities so, instead, I purposed that we pursue the mountains over 2000m. There are only 16 of those on the Island and we have about half a dozen left to do - a much more achievable goal!

From the east side of Cervus Creek in Strathcona Park, Mount Cobb (2030m) and Mount Filberg (2035m) are only 2 kilometres apart. For preparation, I flew over them using Google Earth; consulted Quagger's blog on his failed attempt of Mount Filberg because he didn't have a rope; watched a comical YouTube video of a successful Filberg expedition; and read and re-read the brief route descriptions in *Island Alpine*. In early July 2010, Brian, Simon, Jamie, George B, George U and I stopped to admire Lady Falls five minutes from the trailhead before marching up into the bush. Several hundred metres later we stumbled upon a trail as wide as the Elk River Trail. We didn't expect so many people to travel along Cervus Creek. Were they going fishing at some lakes? We charged along in high speed. A couple kilometres later we left the trail and bushwhacked up towards the ridge. The next day we climbed Mount Filberg, but the cornice separating Mount Cobb was too far and dangerous to be approached from the north. We would have to wait for another sunny weekend.

A year passed. I planned for the attempt of Mount Cobb. The trail that we saw along Cervus Creek heading south seems to be a direct way to reach the west side of Cobb. I asked George Urban, who climbed Cobb during his ERT to Cervus Creek traverse 2 months after our Filberg trip in 2010, what he thought. He stated: "Cervus Creek is very bushy with lots of blow downs. It was nasty!" I brought a 670g bivy sack for the trip. Have to go light to keep up with the boys.

Last weekend of August, George B, Brian and I revisited the thundering Lady Falls. A few hundred metres beyond the spot we left for Filberg the year before, the trail petered out. We fanned out and searched several times before we realized that the trail was not made by humans; rather it was cleared by elk through millennia. Soon we came upon the fast and deep creek draining the lake below Filberg. George latched onto a fallen tree spanning the creek. He almost reached the

View of Mount Cobb and the North Gully PHOTO: KEN WONG

other end but slipped back with the tree trunk between his legs. Brian and I were quite concerned! We passed our packs along before gingerly crawling over. Then the elk led us to a bog. We stayed higher up the slope. Four kilometres later we angled up to southeast, aiming blindly in the forest for the col south of Cobb. The going was tough and the bugs feasted on us mercilessly. Hours later we came out of the forest into a network of avalanche gullies under a formidable cliff. Where the heck were we? George charged ahead and vanished. Brian was falling behind. I shouted uplifting words to motivate him. The fading light urged me onward over rock piles and through walls of vegetation. Brian cursed from far below and no encouragement could move him anymore. He opted to camp there by a trickle of snow melt. I went on and emerged onto an open slope below the Mount Cobb summit block. We were 500m north of where we wanted to be. I screamed for George who then popped up a hundred metres above among the rocks. Yikes, there was no water where he was and the ground was not level! I used my last bit of water from my water bottle to cook a noodle soup in the dark to replenish the energy spent in the 10 hour march. Unlike the previous night by Buttle Lake, I had a drier sleep as there was no condensation formed inside my bivy sack. I was dehydrated!

Next morning, Brian appeared while we were melting snow for breakfast. We went to the col to drop the packs off and then bounced up 300m to Mount Cobb's summit. The view from the top was one of finest on the Island. The scale of the 1500m deep Cervus Creek Valley flanked by El Piveto Mountain with Ptarmigan Pinnacles in front, Rambler Peak, Elkhorn South with Mount Colonel Foster behind, Elkhorn and Kings Peak, was jaw dropping. Our old friend Filberg with its repeater tower blocked the northeast. Two kilometres to the south stood the hulk of Mount Haig-Brown at 1948m. A mostly frozen turquoise lake laid 500m below.

The day was young and we decided to give a go at Haig-Brown because it's so tough to get in here. We went back to the col, hid our stuff and set off for our next goal. The ridge route did not go far before we were forced to drop to the southwest. Brian opted out and went back to camp while George and I zigzagged down a sequence of rock ledges and avalanche chutes, then over and through gnarly bushes to reach the valley floor west of Haig-Brown. Lovely cool pools and streams fed by the deep snow pack were everywhere and the bugs were not biting, a perfect camp site. We ascended a soft snow slope onto a snowy bowl and came upon the summit dome with two tall spires to its left. George rushed forward and vanished among the rocks. After stopping to take photos, I followed a steep mixed snow and scree slope to the left and then a long tiring scramble to the right. The summit plateau was big enough for a soccer game. This was such a stunning place but only a handful of entries were in the summit registries of both mountains.

On the way back we tried to drop further down and around to by-pass the cliff that we came down from the col, but we ended up just retracing our route. I was exhausted back at the camp and cooked up a huge meal to celebrate. The sunset was memorable – yellow light followed by orange became red and then, turned blue before finally morphing into purple. The same gorgeous sequence reversed at sunrise.

At 6 a.m. we dropped one at a time through a narrow loose gully directly west from the col to the valley 200m below. We went down and down into the deep forest until we were squeezed into a waterfall gully. An argument ensued contemplating the wisdom of going down any further. George went to investigate, but it was no go. We climbed back out of the gully to continue our traverse to the right. Eventually we were back to the flat Cervus Creek bottom and stumbled into the bog. Only 6 kilometres left to go! George was bush-weary and obsessed with finding the elk trail. We would follow a nice trail for a while which then led us into a jumble field of fallen alders armed with salmon berries and devils clubs. We climbed onto the logs and searched for signs of another trail. An hour later we got tired of walking among skunk cabbages and mud pools so we headed for the drier bushy ground on the side. The game of elk trail chasing went on and on, at times driving us in circle or lulling us down

steep drops ending on the bank of Cervus Creek. I concluded that foraging elks do NOT make a beeline. It did not save time by following them! Brian was in foul mood in the bush above Lady Falls because we were so close, but were lost. His blistered feet were complaining and he fell off a log back at the bog. Twelve hours after leaving the col, with 6 hours wandering on the flat looking for elk trails, we toasted our victory at the parking lot for another 2000m peak checked off! It's too bad that Jamie missed the trip.

Participants: Brian Adam, George Butcher and Ken Wong

Mount Alston and Alston Fin

Martin Smith
August 30

Alston Fin from the cirque. PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

Tony Vaughn and I have spent a few recent seasons exploring the Sutton Range and its near neighbours. We had climbed Sutton Peak itself in extremely hot conditions in 2009 and hadn't left much energy in the tank for Mount Alston on the following day. We got up it alright but passed on the satellite Fin: a) because I was knackered and b) because it looked hard.

A couple of our local hiking group, the "Thursday Thrashers" had been wanting to get into the alpine for a while and, with its high access roads and an easy route up to and above tree line, Alston offers a wonderful example of all that is quintessentially Vancouver Island (but without the bush). Remote, seldom visited and pristine. Of course, we couldn't go back to Alston and not tackle the Fin this time, so it was duly added to the itinerary. Four retirees have no need of hurry, so we decided to drive up the day before, have a full day exploring the whole Alston mini-massif and camp again that evening before driving home.

After the usual Ridgeline dinner in Gold River we drove up the Nimpkish Valley and arrived in the vicinity of Alston (or Lonesome as some maps call it) Road about 6 p.m. Four wheel drive proved unnecessary. For some reason Western Forest Products had filled in all the cross ditches and a normal sedan could likely have made it all the way to the top of the highest road at nearly 1,200 metres without too much grief. A large ditch just before our highest drive point of 2009 blocked the road and so we camped there for the night.

After a peaceful night we got up at 6:30 and were into the brief logging slash phase by 8. This was something new for Jack and John, the guest "Thrashers", but they're well acquainted with dense Sooke Hills manzanita and salal and dove in like they'd been born to it.

Once into the old growth it's an easy 45 - 60 minutes up to the wonderful alpine cirque between Alston and the Fin and a scant 20 - 30 minutes beyond that to the col between the two. We were in no hurry and ambled along drinking in the beauty of surroundings that see few visitors in spite of the relatively easy access.

In 2009 an ice cave had set up on the col – generated by water erosion of a cornice formed by winter winds whipping over from one valley to the next. Tony had entered his photo of the phenomenon in the annual photo contest, convinced that he had a winner. No such luck of course. However, it had been a heavy snow year and our hopeful hero was convinced that the cave would be in even more spectacular array this year. Indeed, walking across the cirque we were almost entirely on snow, whereas in 2009 we had baked in 30 degree temperatures and lounged in flower filled meadows. Excitement mounted on the climb up out of the cirque and reached fever pitch as we crested the last rise to reveal – nothing!

Crestfallen but undeterred, however, we put on a layer or two against the cold wind whipping across from Sutton Peak, left the packs and set off up the Fin. It certainly looked a bit fearsome as we approached but, once noses were properly rubbed up against it, proved to be a brief and pleasant scramble on good rock. We topped out at 10:20, less than 2.5 hours from the cars. The summit was satisfyingly airy with room for one only and offered wonderful views across the Nimpkish to the Sanctuary and the Haihte Range as well as east to the main summit.

After half an hour on top we scrambled down to the col, retrieved the packs and were on top of Alston via the Northwest Ridge for lunch at 11:45. Unfortunately clouds blew in to the south at this point and obscured the views of the peaks of northern Strathcona that we'd been promising Jack and John all morning. On previous visits we were struck by the

Martin Smith and John Truran on the summit of Alston Fin.
PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN

absence of summit registers on everything we'd climbed, so this time Tony had added one to his pack and now Alston is properly dressed to receive visitors.

After lunch we walked across to the only slightly lower south summit – where the CGS monument is to be found – before retracing our steps down to the col and finally the cars at 4 p.m. A short day but still involving 1,100 metres of total elevation gain.

After a pleasant evening of beer and chat, we turned in early in preparation for the long drive home the next day. A layer of ice over everything the next morning reminded us that winter comes early to the high alpine.

Participants: Jack Morrison, Martin Smith, John Truran and Tony Vaughn

Mount George V, …Ticked off at last!

Peter Rothermel
September 3 – 5

Tom Carter had put this trip on the ACC club schedule and while I didn't think it would get much of a response, since this peak lacks the luster of its more regal neighbours, seven people finally got on board.

Years ago, in about 1991, Tom had passed by the mountain on a week long traverse along Rees Ridge and later regretted not touching it's summit. For myself, I mistakenly checked off Mount George V, in red ink, in the back of my draft edition copy of *Island Alpine* list of peaks, when I was ticking off summits I had done. Since I couldn't erase the inked check, I needed to climb the peak someday.

Mount George V is "one of those bumps" past Mount Albert Edward and doesn't command much interest except for those ticking off lists of obscure peaks over 6000 feet. From any aspect it doesn't look like much, but like its name sake, it has more to it than meets the eye. Mount George V is named after the British King that was known to be reclusive, due to his speech impediment. This mountain, much like King George, had much more to it than expected.

Seven of us started out from the Park boundary at Raven Lodge. Just past Lake Helen Mackenzie, Don's ankle was bothering him and he decided to drop out of the general plan and do his own thing. After about eight hours of hiking with full packs, we reached Mount Frink and set up camp. Luckily the lingering snow-pack left us a source for water. From camp, George V looked like a stone's throw away - it's not!

The next morning we were up and off early. Finding the way off Frink takes a bit of sleuthing, but the route down to the col was not too hard to find. What's not easy is the 500 metre descent to the col and the 500 metre ascent to George V. The descent route gets sketchy and brushy and bluffy in places. On our way down we came across a young man camping by himself and struck up a conversation. As we were talking he said, "Aren't you Peter Rothermel? You taught my mother how to pack a backpack". Well, small world.

Our ascent to George V crossed melt/freeze hardened snow fields and we donned crampons and pulled out our ice axes for that. Beyond the snow, we found dry rock and easier going. From our Frink Camp to George V summit took about four hours and we lazed in the sun and had lunch on the summit. There was no summit register so we placed a tube and waterproof book.

After lunch, we decided to also bag nearby Peak 1920, as it is also over the magical 6000 foot mark and only 500 metres away, as the crow flies. Jeff decided to stay back and search out a traverse route around George V. It took only about 30 minutes for us to reach Peak 1920 from George V and from there we had a fine view of Rees Ridge and many other summits to aim for at a later date. We placed another register on Peak 1920. On the way back down, I came across a flowering plant called Sky Pilot, a plant considered rare on the island, but one I've found on several remote peaks over the years.

Jeff's sleuthing paid off and we didn't have to go back over George V. Still, the trip back to our Frink camp required the 500 metre drop to the col and the same gain ascending to our camp. Round trip from Frink to George V and Peak 1920 and back took about 9 hours, but they were pretty tough hours. I've had summit days of 12 and 14 hours that seemed easier than this 500 metre elevation loss and gain, twice in 9 hours is pretty harsh.

Mt. George V PHOTO: PETER ROTHERMEL

Our last evening on Frink, the wind picked up and maybe we were in some kind of natural rock venturi [tube], but it was intense. In the morning it didn't let up and we packed up in a confused state with me almost losing my tent. Thanks to Kent and Rob for grabbing my tent before it took off like a kite. The hike out took about 6 - 7 hours, depending on who was in front (Tom) and who was in back (me).

On our hike out, we ran into Don and he had camped high on Mount Albert Edward and had a successful trip exploring on his own.

The weather was good and I had my shameful tick exonerated and added yet one more to the 6000 foot list. And Tom finally made his peak after 20 years.

Participants: Tom Carter, Rob Ramsay, Kent Krauza, Dave Suttill, Jeff Ainge, Don Morton and Peter Rothermel.

Rock n' Roll from Sea to Sky

Nadja Steiner, Martha Boon, Silas Boon, Iain Sou, Cees Dirks and Evelyn Sou

As usual we started our "Mountaineering with Kids"-summer with a hike, or rather swim up Mount Finlayson in May. Facing a continuous Saturday morning downpour, I sincerely regretted my earlier we-will-go-rain-or-shine email. Finn was sick, so I convinced Anna-Lena to brave the rain by telling her that nobody would show up and we could just walk to the nature house and have hot chocolate. But no such luck! Including us, we had no less than 4 families join in. One family decided to head back as soon as we reached the open rocks, another late arrival caught up with us just then and despite the downpour and the lack of visibility, we had a great time. Everybody had good rain gear and Raven inspired a sing-along through the current Pop-hit-list. Shoes were not all that waterproof and Evelyn's question if she could walk through the creek on the way down was met with no resistance. Wet but in good spirits, we were looking forward to some nice-weather hiking in the near future. The rain, in fact, held back for the rest of our summer trips! It actually rained so little that we had to cancel the Mount Arrowsmith ascent in August due to fire closure.

Next up was Mystic Beach in June, replacing the scheduled Father and Son Lake, which was still covered in snow at the time. With a small group, we started on Saturday morning from China Beach trailhead to the ocean. After hiking this trail so many times, it has become rather familiar territory, but I still enjoy the sound and the smell of the ocean announcing the proximity of the beach. The originally rather rough tree bridge has by now turned into a formidable staircase and some of the steps on the steep descent had been replaced just recently. Blue sky and warm sun greeted us at the beach and we spent a wonderful relaxing afternoon hanging just out. Harry joined in later that night, while we were roasting sausages and marshmallows. The next morning I head out early to pick up Anna-Lena from a nearby guide camp and return with her just in time for late breakfast. Meanwhile, Finn, Iain and Evelyn had built a nice dam and Finn deemed the resulting pond good enough for a bath. Luckily there is waterfall nearby to wash off the sand. At low tide, Finn followed Charlie White's advice and collected sea lettuce, which we washed and sun dried. It tasted yummy (If you like nori, you will like it, too) and actually makes great light weight hiking food. With regrets we left the beach in the late afternoon to return to the next work/school week.

Since our climbing camps in the last two years had been so popular, we decided to put two on the schedule for this year; one at Comox Lake from where we can hike up Mount Becher, climb the Comox Cliffs and cool down in the lake (August) and one on Saltspring island with base camp in Ruckle Park and climbing at Mount Maxwell (October). Both camps were extremely well attended, in fact for the first time since we started the "Mountaineering with kids" series, I had to put a limit on the group size. For the hike up Mount Becher, we split the group in two about 30 minutes into the trip, but rejoined for the summit picture. I was a hot day and more than one head was cooling down in a stream and certainly every snowfield was immediately tackled by a horde of kids. We returned in time for a swim in Comox Lake. For the climbing day we again split into two groups, one went swimming, one went climbing and we switched in the early afternoon, which turned out really well. A much more detailed account of the Comox Lake camp is given by Martha and Silas:

Mt. Becher summit: Zoé, Cees, Evelyn, Iain, Summer, Raven, Anna-Lena with dog Amy, Soul, Gwaiidon, Martha, Nanook, Finn, Silas, Elliot, dog 2 PHOTO: N. STEINER

Silas (12): "My first kid's alpine club meeting this year was at Comox Lake, where we would be hiking Mount Becher and climbing some crags close to the camp site. I brought my unicycle and rode it around the camp site the evening we arrived. We woke up fairly early and drove to the base of Mount Becher and began our hike up one of the old ski runs. We saw the old chairlift and climbed inside the old chairlift stations. Then we merged into a forested area and hiked for another few hours. The wildlife was amazing and we found some patches of snow. We had a giant snowball fight and got really cold. At the top we stopped for lunch with the amazing panoramic view below us. On the way back down my legs started to ache but just then the parking lot came into view. We found berry bushes packed with berries and our tongues turned purple and mahogany. When we arrived back at the camp site many of us went swimming (me being one of them). That night all the kids danced around the fire where we practised knots on liquorice strings and if we got it right we could eat it. The next day after a good night's sleep we took our climbing gear to some crags just past the camp site gates. I climbed some high routes, but me and my dad (my dad and I) left early because we had heard there were some good mountain biking trails nearby... Because it was mid summer the ground was dusty and landing jumps was tricky but we made it. "

Martha (8): "We got to the camp site in the dark and put up the tent. The next morning we had bacon for breakfast and packed for the hike. It was a really hot, sunny day. We drove to the old ski hill and set off up the old runs. We could see the old chair lifts, then we split into two groups, one was faster than the other. We had to share out the gummy bears fairly between the two groups. After a couple of hours we got to the summit. We could see the lake, the campsite and Mount Washington and Comox Glacier in the distance. Just below the summit we found a big snow patch and had a snowball fight. Afterwards we found a hill with lots of snow and slid down on our butts. I got really wet but the sun dried me off. Back at the campsite we went for a swim to cool down. We swam under the dock where it was all yellow and there were chains hanging down which we swung back and forth on. After supper we learnt how to tie knots with red liquorice and if we got it right we ate the rope! We also got to swing in the hammocks. There was a dip next to mine and I fell into it in the dark. On Sunday morning we had pancakes and then we went rock climbing, I climbed 5 different routes. Afterwards we went back to go swimming and I went under the dock with my 2 friends again. I LOVED the whole weekend so, so, so much."

The Comox Lake camp really turned out to be a great choice and I am sure the amazing weather took a bit (big?) part in it. Finn and Anna-Lena voted this as their number one camp as well, so we are planning to put it back on the schedule. Although next time, we'll skip Mount Becher and do some juggling instead....

Our only real backpacking mountain on the schedule was Mount Arrowsmith. Harry and myself checked out the Nose and Judges routes the week before in fantastic weather. Unfortunately the area was closed right after due to fire hazard. That was certainly disappointing, especially since we didn't have a chance to reschedule. It will be back on next season, but meanwhile I will let Iain, Martha, Cees and Silas tell their stories of the Saltspring climbing camp:

Silas (12) "My next adventure was Salt spring Island. We caught the ferry from Crofton on Saturday morning and then drove up a steep logging road to the top of Mount Maxwell. It was kinda freaky because when we climbed behind us was a huge drop to an inlet. I didn't climb that much because I was really tired and worn out. It was nice to just relax and look at the scenery. That night we camped down by the ocean and built a fire because it was so cold. At Ruckle Park

Zoé sliding down the snowfield PHOTO: N. STEINER

the next day a bunch of men dressed in skirts and other odd forms of clothing arrived and stopped to chat with some of the adults. We tried some prussiking and pulley systems. We managed to lift one of the adults half way up a tree just by pulling on a rope! We also made a little zip-line going from one tree to another. We experimented with different angles and pulleys for the ultimate ride. I had a lot of fun with the Alpine Club and I am looking forward to future trips."

Martha (8) "We got to the car park at the top of the mountain just after the others arrived. I said hello to all my friends especially Amy, the dog. We gathered up our climbing stuff and set off to look for the cliff. We had to scramble down some rocks to get to the ledges where we could climb. We had a great view of the Gulf Islands and from the top we could see Mount Baker. There were 3 ropes set up and I did 6 different climbs. The funniest part was getting right to the very top where I could see the volcano and I met Harry, he is funny. On the last climb I had to collect all the slings and biners on my harness but I didn't quite get to the top so my dad got the last one. We drove to Ruckle Park and set up our tent just before it started to rain. After supper we climbed the trees and had smores round the campfire. The next morning the rain had stopped. We went for a hike along the beach and scrambled along the rocks until we got into the woods. One of my friends was stung by wasps. We came out at the old farm and found a field full of turkeys. A man shouted at us, perhaps he thought we were going to steal one for our Thanksgiving meal! We returned to the camp site and shared some chocolate. While we were on the hike Harry had set up ropes in the trees. We learnt how to prussik up a rope and we found that all of us children could easily lift my friend's dad by using pulleys. We also had a zipline/rope swing set up which had a butt slide at the end. While we were playing with the ropes we had some strange visitors. A group of men in dresses, wigs and hats! We let them have a go at prussiking up the ropes then they carried on with their walk. I learnt lots of new things and not just about ropes and climbing! Once again it was the funniest camp ever with my friends in the Alpine Club kids group, I will be back next year."

Iain (12): "This summer was amazing mostly because we went to Salt Spring Island and Comox Lake with the Alpine Club kids. They were both awesome but I'll just explain Salt Spring as it would take too long to do both. My sister, my dad and I drove to the ferries. It wasn't that big of a ferry and the ride pretty boring. We walked around with wind in our faces and sat in the car listening to music. When we got off the ferry we started to drive to Mount Maxwell. We drove a bit and turned on the road where our map told us to, but instead of going up it went down and then the ground was level so we drove for a couple minutes and it wasn't going anywhere so we turned around and asked some people walking their dog. They said you get to the top but it would be a two hour hike. We weren't hiking so they gave us better instructions. We thanked them and found it easily enough. We thought we were going to be last and were surprised to be the second ones there. After everybody had arrived, we walked for ten

Evelyn climbing ILLUSTRATION: EVELYN SOU, 7

minutes, then got to the climbing wall and started getting ready to climb. I did one run, but then didn't feel so well and stopped. The wall was harder than the other walls I had climbed before on different mountains. I got bored of bird watching after an hour so I asked my dad if we could go to Ruckle Park, our camp site by the ocean. Finn came with us because he had cut his hand and couldn't climb. Finn had already arrived the night before and pulled out his fishing rod. After we set up a tent I fished with Finn for a bit. Then we made a fire from scratch with dry grass and flint. When the rest of the group got back, we all ate dinner and hung out around the fire roasting hot dogs and marshmallows. The next morning the sun on the ocean was beautiful. We had breakfast. Then everyone went for a walk except me and Anna-Lena because we weren't feeling well. I helped Harry set up ropes for us to prussik on. When they all got back, the kids made a pulley system to haul an adult up a tree! It didn't turn out so good because it took 10 kids to lift the adult up the tree just a bit. Then we prussiked up a rope, it was a lot of fun and hard at the same time. After that Harry made a zip line from one tree to another which was a lot of fun. Then we had to go home."

Building a pulley system, victim: Arno, rescuers: Cees, Finn, Anna-Lena, Silas, Iain, Zoe, Nanook, Martha PHOTO: N. STEINER

Cees (8): "I liked the climbing a lot. I had one tough part on the 5.7. There were not many hand and foot holds on the lower section. People went on the left, including me, because that is where the nice foot and hand holds were. In the evening, at Ruckle Park, we saw a barred owl. It had a mouse, but it could also have been a rat because it was pretty big for a mouse. The next day, the little hike was very nice. I was eating the pine needles, the old ones tasted like Christmas trees, and the young needles tasted like grapefruit. The boy turkeys were showing off their feathers to the girl turkeys. Some had escaped from the fenced area, because maybe they knew that it was Thanksgiving Day. That day it was really fun with the pulley system. I do not know if it was fun for my dad, but I think it was. We were practising for when a person fell down a crevasse on how to pull him up. All the kids were pulling my dad up the tree. And we were all making jokes about cutting the rope so he would come down again. Harry and Nadja showed us how to do the prussik ascending of a rope. It was very hard to get your leg up and push yourself higher, and sliding the prussik knot was tough, too. Thank you Nadja and Harry for getting this organized."

When I received four kid-stories for the Saltspring camp, I thought it would be too much, but curiously everyone remembers something else and adds a bit of the story. I guess now I really have nothing to add to their accounts, but I do wonder if such an odd combination of weird men walking around in dresses on a private parade trying to get a picture with the park ranger while a number of kids in helmets is hanging in trees along the beach can be found anywhere else but on Saltspring Island???

Participants (in one or more events): Derek, Tessa, Iain and Evelyn Sou, Su and Raven Castle, Summer Golmuchuk, Peter, Alison, Silas and Martha Boon, Florence Daurelle, Olivier, Zoé and Nanook Lardière, Mireille Faure-Brac, Arno and Cees Dirks, Valerie and Jules Kier, Len and Elliot Wells, Chris, Melissa, Gwaiidon and Soul White, Harry, Nadja, Anna-Lena and Finn Steiner.

Coast Range and the Rockies

Lake O'Hara Summer Camp – ACC Vancouver Island Section

Cedric Zala
July 23 - 31

Lake O'Hara is a region of breathtaking beauty in the Canadian Rockies, just on the BC side of the renowned Lake Louise. In contrast to Lake Louise, however, access is strictly limited, with the result that instead of the many thousands of people you may find milling about in Lake Louise, there may be a couple of hundred in the entire Lake O'Hara area. With the availability of a well-equipped mountain hut (named after ACC founder Elizabeth Parker), a stay at this mountain paradise combines opportunities for hiking, scrambling, and serious climbing with cozy and congenial hut accommodation.

You have to get there first, though. At our last camp at O'Hara in 2008, a mudslide on the highway near Field on the Saturday night had forced most of us to take a huge detour via Radium to get to the meeting place. And the exact same thing happened this year, too! An even larger slide near the Spiral Tunnels blocked the road for several days, forcing the same detour.

Despite this early setback, all 20 of us managed to meet up in Lake Louise late on Saturday, then bussed in to O'Hara on the Sunday morning, all ready to spend a highly active week there. It had been a heavy snow winter, and up to a week before our stay there were still avalanche warnings posted for some of the ledge routes. We soon got busy exploring the area and racking up the vertical meters.

Some of the highlights of the week were:

- A snow school day
- Many traverses of the classic ledge routes (Huber, Yukness and All Souls Ledges).
- Ascents of Mount Huber and Mount Lefroy.
- Near-ascents of Mount Victoria and Mount Hungabee.
- Ascents of Yukness Mountain and Mount Schaeffer.
- Many hikes to the Opabin Plateau, Cathedral Lakes, Lake MacArthur, Lake Oesa,and Odaray Prospect.

Several groups also went up to Abbot Pass. The heavy snow year turned out to be a real blessing here, as there were great continuous snow fields much of the way up. So the typical ascent experience of struggling against some of the loosest, nastiest scree in the Rockies was transformed instead into straightforward kick-stepping on the way up and gung-ho plunge-stepping down.

Despite the mix of weather – three of the seven days were wet – pretty well everyone got out every day. And the first and last days were fabulous – clear and warm. Marmots and ground squirrels were plentiful, and pikas peeped unseen from the rock piles. One group even saw mountain goats on the slopes below Odaray Prospect.

And as always, there was the camaraderie. One of the pleasures of these camps is that people get to know their fellow members, both on the day trips and during the evening meals and socializing times. Several of the evenings were musical too, with accordion and guitar and even singing.

Another great ACC summer camp in the mountains!

Participants: Vivian Addison, David Anderson, Annette Barclay, Graham Bennett, Richard Butler-Smythe, Doug Cliff, Nancy Dyer, Charles He, Jan Heath, Maureen Hoole, Hunter Lee, Kim Maddin, Ann Mais, Brian Money, Mary O'Shea, Roger Painter, Claire Shaw, Amy Smirl, Lyle Young and Cedric Zala.

Glacier Peak, Ringrose, Hungabee and Yukness Mountains from Huber Ledges. PHOTO: CEDRIC ZALA

Lake O'Hara Alpine Camp

Lyle Young
July 23 - 31

Returning to the mountains was a special treat for me, as I had worked as a student at Lake Louise thirty years ago. Many of the local landmarks held invested memories of my youth and self discovery, and the sheer mass of the magnificent backdrop of crumbling peaks provided contrast to the ethereal memories they evoked for me.

Our first tourist stop on the way to the Lake O'Hara parking lot for a week in the mountains at ACCVI Summer Camp, was to Moraine Lake and it was a sparkly clean morning. Viv took a quick trip to the lodge as David and I stood by the lake soaking up the wall of peaks in The Valley of the Ten. I noticed that after a few minutes of conversation we turned our backs to those peaks and continued talking. We had come a long way to be in the mountains, so I found our simultaneous turning away interesting. A few minutes later, we both turned back towards the peaks again. And then away again! I observed the behaviour of other newcomers to the scenery and found that they acted similarly.

The power of rock and ice pushed precipitously up against the sky seemed to capture our attention, but then overwhelmed us, and so had to be appreciated for moments at a time. I remained aware of this through our week in the Rockies and found the longer we were in the place the more we could drink from its beauty without becoming dizzy drunk by it.

I had found these phenomena to be true of other natural places before - travels in Africa and the West Coast Trail in particular. Each day on the West Coast Trail the invisible walls that shielded my personal self from the natural environment dissolved a little more and the natural surrounding beauty permeated my skin and soul a little more. By day three hiking I was finding tremendous peace and by day six I felt a deep meaningful connection with my surroundings. I had transitioned from being in it, to being of it. Every day of immersion brought a deeper sense of belonging and being a part of the beauty around me. I began to realize the obvious - we are a part of nature, not apart from nature. Sometimes I need to be reminded of this, and I have found that a very long walk is pretty helpful in this regard. And so it was here, too.

There is tremendous power in massive amounts of rock thrust out of the earth - a power that seems to be able to trivialize personal concerns and revitalize the senses. The daily concerns of life at home cannot hold court in my head for more than fleeting moments as in the mountains my senses are filled with the incredibleness around me. As a hiker from Calgary whom we met at All Souls Prospect stated, "too much awesome!"

There is an artist named Richard Nonas who has been known to cause great blocks of solid steel to inhabit gallery spaces for the sheer power the mass radiates into the room. His work resonates at some subliminal level and although we know it is not living, it is somehow alive. Nonas' tons of solid steel seem a microcosm of the rock forms around us at the Elizabeth Parker hut - now add a million parts of natural and diverse beauty and look around.

This, I made a point of doing each morning and evening as my bare feet sucked up the cool of the earth outside the hut, and I tipped my head back to face the amphitheatre of grandeur, first glow of morning or last glow of evening splashing colour on the highest slopes.

"It all begins here" is the mantra that sings in my head as the tree-line gives way to the alpine and the crumbling rock to ice and snow. Life is a spiral and we rise up on the hot air of life's experience, tracking back above old ground again, sometimes, but with an altered view as seen through the gos-

samer veil of time. The earth, compressed to rock, the sea, tipped on edge and wedged into the clouds, salt long gone but water still clinging to the old ocean floor 6000 feet up.

"It all begins here" the voice in my head says, as I tread on millions of years old mudslate before we cross the bergschrund. "It all begins here" the ear worm continues, as we push past the upper reaches of the glacier, crunching through fresh snow on top, next year's drinking water in Calgary or Golden or Radium.

Now I can hear on the rush of the wind around me, the marvellous paraphrasing of words of my eighty-three year old farmer friend Eric, "isn't it incredible that we can store water on steep slopes, high in the mountains, out of the way of machinery and farm animals, and valuable farm land, in a compact highly efficient solid state, and access the life force of that water in a form more readily useable to us, delivered almost to our door, when we need it?" "You would normally think of water storage as being puddles or ponds, but not this, - this is amazing."

It all begins here. In the mountains, the clouds hanging up on these celestial speed bumps, warm air cooling, condensing, and crystallizing into flakes, each one its own. Falling, accumulating, compacting with the weight of so many others just like it but different every one. Locking together, consolidating - or not. Sliding and tumbling. Later warming, melting, and beginning that long journey to the sea, nourishing a million things along the way, only to begin the spiral journey again.

It is humbling and comforting to realize that the sun and the rock and the flowers and streams care not for me and my small mistakes. It's not that I am not forgiven - I am not even considered. Gravity is the stream's master and the bees bring life to the small flowers. I am an intruder but not unwelcome. The mountains have no soul, nor morals. There is no judgement but there are consequences. The things that live here respond to their environment the way that nature guides them, and somehow the myriad of stuff before me manifests itself into incredible beauty for the human eye. Sublime! The heather, the scree, the wind, a bird. I pass through like a ghost and promise myself to honour beauty everywhere.

I am privileged to be part of this place for a week, to have the opportunity to experience "what it is that is" and to park glimpses of that in my memory for some of the difficult moments in life when perspective seems lost.

I want to thank, sincerely, Cedric and everyone else in the Alpine Club who made this experience available to us. To our cabin mates, for their kindness and the sharing of their special life moments; to the senior hikers for their enthusiasm and inspiration; and to the younger climbers for the same thing, but in a different way.

The North Face Summer Leadership Training

Nadja Steiner (participant)
July 30 – August 6

Mt. Tsar from Mt. Ellis with Mt. Odell behind. Paul Geddis and Matt Mueller completed a first ascent of Mt. Odell's North Ridge one day later (August 3).
PHOTO: N. STEINER

We are called the "North Face" Team,
we are going through the week full steam.
The weather is with us all the time.
a wonderful scenery with loads of sunshine.
Leadership training is what we seek,
to help our club members climb a peak.

Listen to the guides and be on the spot,
they teach us much and swear a lot.
They might throw rocks to clean the routes
and ski down the hill just on their boots.
Anchors, rescues and multiple belays
is what we do on our skills days.
If you don't think that this is nice,
do it again, just on the ice.

Short rope, knots and stacked rappels
until our brain for rescue yells.
Meanwhile and that's what the stories will tell
Via a narrow and exposed North ridge
approaching the summit pitch by pitch
Paul and Matt first ascent Mt. Odell.
We hear the news over the radio
And join in a cheer holaraidilio.

We climb our peaks in record time, come on,
nobody else ever takes that long!
We plan our routes and figure out the time,
if we are lucky, it turns out fine.
Remember a snow plug covers a crevasse
and after a death slog you will have enough.

You might explore a brand new ridge,
just keep on going pitch by pitch.
If the rock is good, all is hail,
very good news, no anchor will fail.
If the rock is crap, it's probably shale,
just go ahead and beach a whale.

Thanks to North Face and the ACC
for excellent training (and of course the hot tea).
Thanks to Cyril, Deryl and Mat, all right,
make sure you hold that muffin tight.
Thanks for instructions laughs and stories,
We will think of them in search of our own glories
and practice, practice, practice.....

The Bugaboos

Kent Krauza
August 1 – 5

George horsing around on Pigeon's West Ridge, Howser Spire in the background. PHOTO: KENT KRAUZA

For as long as George Milosevich and I have climbed together, we have talked about making a pilgrimage to the climbing Mecca known as The Bugaboos. A firm commitment from both of us to not let anything interfere finally led to our trip on the August long weekend.

With a full week set aside, we arrived at the parking lot of Bugaboo Provincial Park surprised to see it full past capacity, with overflow cars lining the edge of the already narrow single lane entrance road. We were fortunate to see a group readying to leave and landed a primo parking spot. We rolled out our brand new chicken wire and armored the vehicle against marauding porcupines, known to eat radiator hose, brake lines and electrical cable if they can gain access to the underside of any vehicle. There were dozens of people preparing for the hike in to the park, mostly climbers but many were there for the hiking opportunities. We were shocked at the size of some of the packs, as people were lugging decadent luxury items up to the Kain Hut and Applebee Camp that weight conscious minimalists like George and me thought were extremely decadent. With our light alpine packs, we passed several people on the trail, reaching the hut in less than two hours, while the guide books allotted 3 - 4 hours. In our delusion we patted each other on the back as we passed each successive group, congratulating each other on our alpine savvy. After a few days in the hut however, our judgment transformed to envy, as we watched others enjoy fine wine, fresh fruit and other treats, while we choked down the standard freeze dried fare of an alpine backpacking trip. Given the several days that would be spent in the same location, it is highly recommended to load up and suffer for the relatively brief approach hike in order to increase your enjoyment for the several days spent at the Kain Hut.

Once at the hut we settled in to our bunks and met the hut custodian and many fellow climbers. Climbers from around the world were gathered at the Kain Hut – Japan, Italy, Spain and the U.S. were all represented, as well as large ACC contingents from Winnipeg and Ottawa. The facilities are fantastic – power, lights, running hot and cold water, propane and electric stoves, all cooking and eating dishes and utensils, and super comfy sleeping pads. The hut is truly off the grid, with all power supplied by a small turbine which is driven by the ample glacial melt water. We settled in to the hut routine quickly. By 9 p.m. most people have begun their preparations and by 10 p.m. virtually everyone is in bed.

Our objective on the first climbing day was the classic West Ridge of Pigeon Spire, deemed by many to be the best alpine 5.4 route in the world. It is also one of the more distant day trip objectives from the hut, so we woke early and were away by 5 a.m. We had learned in the hut that the route had just come into condition the previous day when the first ascent of the season occurred. A guide had pushed his way through the snow to break a trail along some parts of the steep, exposed ridge. We were warned that the ramp leading down to the first notch was still icy and treacherous. As early as our start was, there were two groups ahead of us as we

2011 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Vancouver Island Mountains
Golden Hinde at Dusk from Augerpoint traverse
Photo: Robin Sutmoller

Mountain Scenery
Lake O Hara at Sunset
Photo: Charles He

Summer Mountain Activity
Roaring River Rising Rock
Photo: Nicole Barrette

Winter Mountain Activity
Rest on Mt. Shasta
Photo: Rory O'Connell

Humour
Kissing Cousins
Photo: Charles Turner

Nature
Ski Bunny
Photo: Christine Fordham

approached the base of the Snowpatch Bugaboo col. Much has been written about how the majority of all accidents in the Bugaboos occur ascending to or descending from this col. Fortunately for us, the col was in perfect condition – the moat was non existent, great snow for crampons, and the rappel anchors had just come into use as the snow pack had melted enough to expose them the previous week. There were no signs of the deadly rockfalls that tumble down onto the snow from the chossy East Face of Bugaboo Spire later in the season. We arrived at the top of the col at 6:30 a.m. to a bluebird sky and a stunning view of Pigeon Spire and the Howsers. It always seems surreal when you finally lay your own eyes on an iconic mountain that you have been studying in pictures for decades. The view across the upper Vowell Glacier of Pigeon and Howser Spires will be etched in my mind for a long time.

It took a full hour to cross the glacier to get to the base of the West Ridge. As we approached the toe of the ridge the wind picked up considerably. Despite the full force of the sun beating down on us from a cloudless sky, it took every stitch of clothing we packed to stay warm. Prior to starting the climb, I used one of the new alpine toilets that had been set up in strategic locations around Bugaboo Provincial Park. This has been done in an attempt to reduce the impact of heavy climbing use in this pristine area. It was tucked under a large overhang protecting it from the elements somewhat, but despite the weather screen the wind still posed quite a challenge. The view from the loo, as they say, was phenomenal.

We began scrambling up the ridge on easy and fun 4th class friction slabs. The granite in the Bugaboos is very crystalline and grippy, a welcome change from our mostly loose island rock. Even as the angle of the slabs went beyond 45 degrees, our Vibrams stuck like glue, keeping us safe in the absence of any hand holds. We had to pull the rope out for a short 5th class crack that was not mentioned in any guide books. This translates to "we were off route". We then continued to scramble up the ridge, encountering two gentlemen from Washington State, with whom we would later become good friends. We were at the first summit, looking down the long friction slab that terminates at the first notch in the ridge. This friction slab is an amazing feature, consisting of a large table top that has been tilted about 20 degrees in both axes. At first it was quite disconcerting as you had the sensation the mountain was trying throw you down onto the glacier below, but once again the quality of the rock allowed us to confidently friction all the way down to the ridge notch. This was the location we had been warned would have treacherous sheet ice, but the sun had eliminated the hazard in the past 24 hours. We began the scramble up the narrow ridge above the notch. This section looks very intimidating but once you begin to scramble it, a fun but exposed solution presents itself. The most photographed part of the climb, likely even more than the summit itself, is along this section, the famed À(?) Cheval. I actually climbed past it before I recognized it. Both George and I confidently remained on our feet along the knife edge, but on the descent took a more cautious approach – it is amazing how things can look trickier on the way down! A chimney and a few ledges dropped us into the second notch, just below the summit tower. Here we encountered the hard frozen snow that the guide had pushed a route through the previous day. We deployed our crampons and picked our way along the left side of the tower until reaching the final chimney that leads to the crux of the route. There was a group rapping off the summit as we roped up, allowing us to easily locate the rap stations for future reference. The crux is a short pitch of easy (5.4) climbing but in difficult conditions on our day, with a thin, nearly invisible coating of ice over sections of the pitch. Two or three moves along a finger ledge lead to a short headwall, followed by an easy scramble to the summit. We knew we were the third party of the season to reach the summit, but there would be a few more today – we could see the groups sprinkled along the ridge – and a half dozen groups per day thereafter. The summit itself is very exposed and the high wind made it even more uncomfortable, so we took photos and rapped out. The descent was routine, as we crossed paths with group after group on our way down. We ate lunch back at the base of the West Ridge, rapped our way down from the Bugaboo-Snowpatch col, and were back to the comfort of the Hut 11 hours after departure. I certainly cannot judge the quality of the West Ridge of Pigeon Spire on a global level, but it was without a doubt the best climb of my life (so far).

The following day we tackled the very popular Lion's Way on Central Crescent Tower. A moderate (5.7) multi pitch route in the Crescent Glacier area, this route sees a lot of traffic, so another early start had us at the base of the route by 7 a.m. We were once again behind another group however – a group of four climbers of Ukrainian descent, who spoke mostly Russian and lived in California. We watched some of our new friends from the hut tackle the Bugaboo classic 5.10a McTech Arete while we waited in the sunshine for our turn. The Lion's Way is exactly what it is billed to be – fun and easy, but within context of the unique Bugaboo atmosphere. After two short and blocky low 5th class pitches, the 5.7 hand crack crux pitch lands you on a nice, wide ledge. As with Pigeon the previous day, the rock here was of immeasurable quality. A hundred metres of low 5th slabs lead to 4th class ridge scrambling to the summit. We chatted with the very nice Ukrainian/Russian/Californian team for awhile, but as they started their descent, one of them kicked a large rock loose, which careened directly down the route. One of them began to yell, but he instinctively yelled in Russian. Knowing the context, we deduced he was yelling Rock! Rock! But to anyone down below it may have sounded like Baryshnikov! Baryshnikov! The urgency and danger in his tone transcended language however, and

Kent topped out on Lion's Way, Bugaboo Spire in the background. PHOTO: GEORGE MILOSEVICH

fortunately no one was hurt. We later discussed the merits of an international language translation sheet at the hut for key climbing terms. Our own descent was uneventful, and we were back to the comfort of the hut 7 hours after departure – a leisurely day indeed!

With our overall plan of alternating hard and easy days, our third day of climbing was reserved for the most difficult route we had planned – the Kain Route on Bugaboo Spire. With headlamps showing the way, we made our way up the now familiar scree trail between the Kain Hut and Applebee camp and on to the base of the Bugaboo-Snowpatch col. With far less anxiety this time, we made our way up to the col and were at the base of the ridge at 5:30 a.m. We came upon our Russian speaking friends again, as they had chosen the same route as we had two days in a row. After asking them what we would all be climbing tomorrow, we began the scramble up the very loose ridge that would lead us to the Kain Route. After two hours of rock and snow scrambling we arrived at the obvious belay ledge where climbers traditionally remove boots and don rock shoes. Some groups actually leave their mountain boots on the ledge, but we conservatively chose to pack ours with us. The first pitch is a full rope length of easy 5th class. George had topped out and I was about 10 metres up the route myself when a group who had already climbed the famed NE Ridge route asked if they could rappel through first. I paused to wait for them and their rope jammed deep in a crack about two feet from where I stood, well off the direct rappel line. I reached down and dislodged it, prompting the climber to admonish me for touching his rope and said I was inviting bad Karma. After telling him he needed to look up the definition of Karma, I joined George at the top. The next two pitches were very exposed scrambles along a narrow ridge, so we pitched them out for security. We arrived at the first challenging climbing of the day, an interesting pitch involving the left hand and foot working up a crack, and the right hand and foot smearing a slab. After getting some excellent beta from a descending guide leading a Canadian Mountain Holidays party down the nearby rap route, George led this pitch up to the tenuous belay station at the base of the famed Gendarme, just a few hundred feet below the summit. The famous crux pitch on the Gendarme involves a finger crack and smearing left along this vertical feature, wrapping around a 90 degree blind corner to the next belay. It is rated at 5.6, but the wild exposure and atmosphere made it feel much harder. To compound things, two groups were now behind us and another rapping above us, all waiting for their turn. George attempted it a few times but got off route, encountering very difficult climbing. With time pressing and my health not up to par that day, we decided to let the waiting teams past us. But to do this we needed to rappel off a fixed piton on the gendarme over a block and behind a large flake on the rappel route. This would end our summit attempt today, but given the circumstances we agreed it was the right thing to do. Several rappels had us back on the loose 4th class section near the bottom of the ridge, where we almost made the classic mistake of wandering out onto the loose East Face. We caught ourselves and got back on route. Once back at the col, we married our 60 m rope with that of another team, cutting our rappels down the steep snow in half, and were back at the hut after a 12 hour grind.

Many groups in the hut coincidentally all elected the following day as a rest day, but given that the posted forecast showed deteriorating weather beginning soon, we decided to climb for the fourth consecutive day. Needing to regain our mojo after getting shut down on the Kain Route, we selected a scramble route on the easiest objective, the Northeast Ridge to Northwest Ridge traverse on Eastpost Spire. Eastpost towers over camp, and only took a half hour hike to the base of the route. We quickly gained the Crescent-Eastpost Col, crossed a large snow field high above the Cobalt Lake Basin under the shadow of the summit tower, then up a steep snow gulley to a notch in the Northeast Ridge, the latter involving some tricky mixed climbing. From here George and I took different scramble routes along the ridge – rock for me, snow for George. We met up just before the final 4th class scramble to the summit, arriving about an hour and a

half after leaving the hut. We were 1200 feet directly above Applebee Camp, with tiny colourful tents dotted all over the rock slabs. The Kain Hut could be made out as a small green spot just beyond. We enjoyed a fantastic half hour at an aesthetic summit before heading down. Ironically this easiest of summits was the least crowded in the time we spent here. Scrambling back down the Northwest Ridge took less than a half hour and we spent the remainder of the afternoon by a gorgeous glacial blue tarn, napping and soaking in the sun.

The weather forecast took a turn for the worse, so the following day we decided to cut our trip one day short and head out. The drive home involved plotting the objectives for our next trip to the Bugs, including another run at the Kain Route, McTech Arete, and Buckingham on Snowpatch Spire. The latter two would require us to refine our alpine rock skills for 5.10 – that remains our challenge for the winter!

Participants: George Milosevich and Kent Krauza.

Ethelweard the Unclimbable

Ken Wong
July 30 - August 6

Below the NE ridge of Ethelweard PHOTO: KEN WONG

After completing the easy objectives surrounding our camp, we set our eyes on the biggest mountain at Athelney Pass – Ethelweard – 2819m and guarded by glaciers, steep snow fields and vertical walls on all side. Someone told Russ that isn't too difficult a climb, but provided no detail of the route. We consulted the map and would attempt from its Southeast Ridge.

On the cold dark morning of Wednesday August 3rd, I was awakened by the call of nature. Head lamps were moving past the dome base tents and I could hear the clinging sound of ice axes plunging into the frozen ground. The Squamish Five minus the feverish Angela were getting the first crack at the nut. Our lazy ACCVI group followed suit two hours later.

We donned on crampons at the edge of the glacier above the tongue-shaped lower icefall. The sun had risen from behind the Ethelweard Ridge, turning the glacier purple, blue and pink. We monitored the progress of the gung-ho Squamish 5-1 just coming out of the shadow onto the upper glacier, 300m above and 1.5km away. We snapped a few pics, split into 2 ropes and crossed the glacier gingerly. The bitter cold in the shadow at the other side of the glacier did not last long once we edged up that 45 degree icy ramp. Don't slip guys and gal! We would all go down! What a relief it was when we reached the gentle upper glacier. Icemaker, 2739m in height, was 2km across the glacier to our right. To our left the summit block of Ethelweard rose up 400m with several snow ramps looking promising. What a surprise it was to see four dots coming down towards us in the blinding sun! Had they climbed the peak already?! No, they had gone for a couple snow ramps further up which had become too steep and scary so they had decided to change paths and risk their fortune lower down. We marched on while watching two of them going up a very steep ramp probing at the moat while the other two rested below.

The Southeast Ridge had several pinnacles 100 to 150m high. We walked below them looking for weakness, further and further away from the summit block. At last we got onto the rock, unroped and scrambled up to the second pinnacle from the end of the ridge. The summit was now 1.5km away but there were several pinnacles barring the way. We knew this was the end of the game so stopped there for our lunch. The view was splendid, mountains and glaciers stretching all around. However, it was quite a different feeling. When we were on an Island summit, we would point to the surrounding peaks and talk about past ventures and plan future targets. However, having never climbed in the Coast Range, I couldn't appreciate the view in the same way.

On the way down, the snow had softened up. The Squamish Four caught up with us at the top of the steep ramp. Careful plunging steps and a bit down climbing got us back to the lower glacier. Instead of retracing our steps across the glacier, we chose on the hard blue ice of the icefall, jumping over bottomless crevasse and tip toeing over sheets of rushing water, global warming in earnest.

On Thursday we had a pleasant day up on the ridge north west of camp taking in the glorious vista under a brilliant sun. On the way down, a couple black hoses appeared among alpine flowers. This led us to a mining camp filled

Glacier crossing below Ethelweard PHOTO: KEN WONG

with rusty cans and equipments, poles, doors and window frames. I guess the industry doesn't believe in cleaning up after itself. Back at camp a few of us looked at Graham's photos of the Northeast Ridge of Ethelweard from the below. As we had nothing else to do, Charles, Kelly and I decided to give another go at Ethelweard, the unclimbable, from the northeast. We would go light with only ice axe and the rope Russ convinced us to take. I packed my crampons and went to bed.

We had a leisurely start. We went below the icefall crossing a couple of ponds and rushing streams. We then angled up below the Northeast Ridge getting further and further away from the summit tower. The going soon got tough. We found ourselves in a never ending band of lose boulders with several icy spots. At last we reached the snow field below the start of the Northeast Ridge. There was a continuous tongue of snow leading up high to the middle of the Northeast Ridge. The snow was rock solid. I took out my crampons and to my amazement that was the only pair among three of us! Because it was to be a lightweight assault, the others didn't bring theirs. I would have to make steps for our group alone! I abandoned the idea of the high route and kicked steps to the bottom of the ridge. Charles took the lead. Once we reached the crest, there was 400m of air below us on the other side. We scrambled for a bit and then roped up for the first vertical pitch but only made a half-hearted attempt at it as we knew summit bid was not possible. We wisely retreated. And so Ethelweard remains the sole "unclimbable" in the three weeks of 2011 ACCVI summit camp.

I would like to thank Russ our leader for starting a bonfire to drive the grizzlies away; Louise for keeping the cooking tent well organized; Fara for sharing his stories on war and revolution; the resident family of marmots for entertainment; and everyone for their comradeship.

Week 2 ACC Summer Camp Participants:
ACCVI: Graham Maddocks, Russ Moir (leader), Kelly Osbourne, Charles Turner, Frank Willie and Ken Wong.

ACCVanc/ACCWhistler: Eduard Fischer, Helen Habgood, Mary Henderson, Lorrie Lech and Angela Mueller (the Squamish Five); Robert Denvir, Louise Hooley and Fara Sepanlou.

The Tantalus Range

Lyle Young
August 26

Up at 4 a.m., an hour to ferry, across the sea, then by way of winding highway past the Chief, to the Squamish Airport. We wait till cloud break, climbing hangar trusses with prussiks. Some trepidation - can I do this? The Tantalus is a big step up from Yukness Mountain at O'Hara a week before.

Ninety minutes later, clouds clear and rotors spin. The alpine beckons and draws us across a river and up a valley. Climbing. Climbing. Lake Lovely Water slides beneath us and ramparts in front fade away as we ascend past rock and snow. A wall of white flanked by rock sentinels bars our pass, and I wonder about the wisdom of putting our lives and faith in heavier than air machines. The Alpha/Serratus col, our next objective, slowly becomes a less daunting barrier as we struggle to gain altitude and then suddenly vault over the wall of snow, the view instantly becoming expansive below us, cracks and crevasses in the Rumbling Glacier a reminder of things mortal.

Our pilot, digging the freedom of the skies on this now sunny day, loops around Tantalus peak and Dione, giving our guide, Jan, a chance to scope out conditions for various possible ascent routes. The views are stunning and I cannot imagine fifteens anywhere that could be more fantastic. Dropping low after scudding around Dione, we pick out the A.C.C. Haberl Hut perched above us on another col at the crest of a broad snowfield with weather furrows fanning out from the hut like a folded linen napkin.

Sucking lungs full of mountain lite air, we bale from the chopper and hump our gear to the nearby hut. The hut is an impressive surprise. Bright, clean, warm, well appointed with magazine cover alpine views out every window, in every direction.

After digging steps five feet through the snow to access the outhouse, carving a fridge out of the snow-pack adjacent to the hut, and collecting snow for drinking water, the after-

noon is spent in snow school, reviewing glacier travel, ice axe use, and crevasse rescue rigging and technique. Dinner is duck confit washed down with Australian Merlot, fresh veges and barbeque salmon, served up with symphonic sunset and chocolate. Relaxing into the evening, I joked that I am glad we don't have another 4 a.m. start, and am informed that indeed tomorrow is to be a long day and we should be up before the birds.

Like the evening before, the pre dawn sun pushes colour into the sky - a Crayola sunrise over a rugged horizon. We are fed and watered and have stumbled to the outhouse via slippery steps with only half opened eyes, and so are ready to begin our day, adorned with loaded packs, and ropes and crampons, clad in Goretex to expedite our demise should we misstep and fail to self arrest - were it not for the rope.

The snow slope is crisp and slick, but our spikes bite into the hill like no-foolin' around. The cost for such surety is dancing on ankles, recalling the stories of "Side Hill Gougers" as told to me as a lad by my grandfather. My dance step is flawed, though, as with each 16th bar my attention flags and my crampon slashes and catches at my gaiter, causing me to curse and stumble and waste precious energy.

Eventually I find my rhythm and step and aim each footfall with deliberate precision at crisp snow cup edges to mitigate the torsion on ankles and ensure a solid foot. Breathing becomes predictable and measured and the rope extending forward to my hike mate in the early morning murk, holds, more or less, the same desired down-swoop from step to step to step.

Like the drop from Grinch house to Who-ville, the snow field falls away underfoot at an impressive angle to a frozen lake, rimmed with neon blue far below. Way down there the landscape changes from snow to green, the transition marked only by the sound of a cascade accompanied by genie mist, folding and writhing at the falaise rim. As the day brightens with each passing hour, we climb to the base of the rock spires that form the ridge leading to the summit of Dione, the lesser mate of Tantalus.

We have gained some altitude and even now, respectable peaks all around us lay like rumpled blue grey carpet extending to the horizon. A few serious peaks still push through clouds of their own making, though, and reach heights beyond those we have attained so far this day.

Our objective is up, and the day is now fully on us. Jackets are doffed, lip balm and sunnies are donned. We embrace the rock, feeling for folds, and footholds. With each pitch accomplished the sky becomes bigger, the adjacent peaks smaller, and there are fewer choices in the rock in front of us.

It seems the higher we go, the less assured our step can be as the rock is no longer a consolidated mass with bits of crumbling debris, but a compilation of talus and discarded stone block piled and heaped in an unlikely and haphazard fashion, as high as will hold, for the benefit of altitude and theological whimsy.

With a few brave steps, carefully placed and some unintended yoga, we summit. Viv and Jan dance on the peakstones, daring the exposure and trusting in the rock's continued balance and inertia over the possibility of the laws of entropy and gravity making themselves known in an untimely fashion.

Viv is clearly ecstatic, and radiates excitement. Jan seems proud of his protégé's today and congratulates us on our climb. Me, I am quietly happy and simply reflect on being.

There was much more in the way of experiences that day on the descent, another night at the Jim Haberl Hut and the next day's very interesting climb up Serratus, before our heli ride back down to the world as we know it. Suffice it to say that the Tantalus is incredibly beautiful, the hut is readily accessible by short heli ride and judging by the guest book, very underutilized. The place and facility are an absolute gem with fantastic alpine opportunities to stretch your legs, pretty much at the hut's back door. I am imagining even now, how I can find my way back.

Thanks to Jan of Island Alpine Guides for an interesting and enjoyable alpine experience.

Participants: Vivian Addison and Lyle Young

Summer Camp 2011
Athelney Pass in the Coast Range, BC

Rick Hudson
July 23 – 30, July 30 – August 6, August 6 – 13

The section's 2010 trip to the Alava-Bate basin near Gold River on the Island showed we could enjoy most of the benefits of a week-long camp at a hut, without the necessity of going to a hut. Owning a Space Station (a 6m diameter dome tent) meant we were liberated to go where the wind blew. Well, perhaps not, but certainly the benefits of no fixed address far outweighed the convenience of going to an established cabin.

Over the winter, ACMG guide Brad Harrison, who had sold us the dome tent (slightly used), acquired a second one (new) at a price so low we couldn't resist adding it to the accumulating pile that was now the Summer Camp official gear heap. And besides, the Hon Chair had a large garage with plenty of capacity. So the second tent was added, bringing redundancy and extra safety, should things go pear-shaped during a future camp. Two tents were definitely better than one, especially if we had rain (a not uncommon event on the West Coast) and needed some drying space.

Base camp with Mt. Guthrum behind. Grassy meadows were a big improvment on last year's 2m of snow. PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

So the question for 2011 was where to go? The Coast Range is wide, long and mostly empty, plus it has the added bonus of not requiring a full day's drive in either direction (like the Rockies or Selkirks), so we focused our attention there. There was also the opportunity to share the event with the Vancouver section of the ACC, thereby building bridges, networking – all the usual clichés about broadening our horizons. After several months of discussions with those more familiar with the Coast Range, and much time swooping over virtual valleys on Google Earth, we honed in on Athelney Pass, a 1,900m elevation valley that connected the dry east side of the range with the mostly dry Pemberton Valley. 'Dry' was key here. After 2010's two metres of snow to camp on, we wanted a bare valley, and dry weather.

Despite phoning several pilots on the run-up to camp, we still didn't really know the ground conditions as the first helicopter skimmed over Ethelweard's shoulder and dropped into the valley on July 23rd. There was immediate relief as the machine touched down, grass and flowers bobbing in the rotor wash. It was going to be a dry camp! A hasty offload of the chopper, and then a quick conversation with the pilot, to tell everyone back at the staging ground (next to the upper Lillooet River) to bring sandals for camp, not rubber boots.

Sometime earlier, most of the 14 people making up Week 1 had met in Victoria to allocate set-up tasks, and practice, in case there would be wind, rain or, perish the thought, even snow. That preparedness paid dividends after the rest of the team and gear arrived over subsequent helicopter loads. The sun was out, there was no wind, and by evening, the camp was fully functional. Two large dome tents erected and anchored firmly (remembering last year's near fiasco!), two deep biffy holes dug and Moir Memorial Biffs placed atop them, and a food hanger set up (this being a grizzly corridor). Tables, stools and kitchen gear were in place, and the first evening of appies, beer, fine wine and hearty supper appeared, as if by magic.

Athelney Pass lies just above tree line and was carpeted in flowers in late July. There were nearby snow patches that served as handy fridges for the buried freezer food. As the three weeks of the camp progressed, it was interesting how the snow patches diminished, meaning longer walks to the 'fridge'. And the flowers that covered everything and everywhere changed just as quickly. On our arrival, the gold of glacier lilies blanketed the side slopes, but these gave way to white pasque flowers, and later blue lupins.

The great pleasure in camp was sitting out on the stools in the sunshine, surrounded by snow capped peaks, overlooking a spectacular glacier, savouring the evening and discussing the details of the day's climbing. What more could we ask? Indeed. And the peaks on either side of the valley provided some fine days in the alps, with views from their tops of snowfields and summits stretching away in every direction. Most of the high summits were climbed a number of times – Icemaker (2,745m), Guthrum (2,695m) and Ochre (2,543m), but the rugged Ethelweard (2,819m) repelled all attempts, despite being described in the guide book as "a class 4 scramble". Perhaps the earthquake that triggered the massive Meagher Creek mudslide of 2010 also changed the route. Certainly, despite exploration trips from several angles, the summit remained untrampled.

In Week 3, some brought skis which extended their range and provided fine runs on late spring snow in the upper regions, but it was the valley walking that provided much of the interest to many participants. Level slopes, few trees, and a sea of flowers meant constant photo stops. The log book noted sightings of a lone wolf, marmot (there was a family right next to camp), pikas, ground squirrel, white-tailed ptarmigan, sandpipers, yellowlegs, pipits, savannah sparrows, rough-legged hawks, sharp-shinned hawks, and Clarke's nutcrackers.

There was one accident: on the final day of Week 1, Brenda Moysey fell on a steep grass slope directly above camp in the late afternoon, and was unable to put weight on her right ankle. The leg was immobilized and she was carried 300m down to camp, where she was kept warm until a helicopter could medevac her to the Pemberton Clinic. X-rays revealed

On the East Ridge of Guthrum nearing the summit. PHOTO: STAN MARCUS

she had multiple fractures of both tibia and fibula. Her courage under fire and stoic endurance of pain were an example to us all.

Thanks to all participants (without whom none of this would have happened), but special thanks to Weeks 1 and 3 for setting up and breaking down the camp, to the leaders who volunteered their time to take less experienced people into areas they would not otherwise have visited, to those who taught climbing skills, those who assisted in the rescue on Week 1, and the camp managers Russ, Martin and Christine for making it all work so smoothly.

Participants (all VI section members, unless noted as VA = Vancouver section):

Week 1
Catrin Brown, Terry Gagne, Albert Hestler, Phee Hudson, Rick Hudson, Stan Marcus, Brenda Moysey, Ronan O'Sullivan, Brenda O'Sullivan, Sandy Stewart, Jules Thomson, Karen van Dieran, Roger White and Liz Williams.

Week 2
Neil Bennett (VA), Robert Denvir (VA), Eduard Fischer (VA), Helen Habgood (VA), Mary Henderson (VA), Lorrie Lech (VA), Graham Maddocks, Russ Moir, Angela Muellers (VA), Kelly Osbourne, Fara Sepanlou (VA), Frank Wille and Ken Wong.

Week 3
Christine Beers, Erna Burda (VA), Maria Burda (VA), Claire Ebendinger, Christine Fordham, Charles He, Martin Hoffman, Eryck Moskven (VA), Tom Moskven (VA), Mary O'Donovan (VA), Andrew Pape-Salmon, Brendan Saunders (VA), Wayne Saunders (VA) and Mike Young (VA).

Mount Robson Circuit (via Berg Lake and Moose River)

Albert Hestler
August 26 – September 6

I first met Roger at the 2009 summer camp of the Alpine Club at Lake O'Hara when we were assigned as cooking partners. Some time later I discovered that his partner Maureen is the granddaughter of the Reverend George Kinney who in 1909 was the first to scale the heights of Mount Robson, together with a young man named Donald "Curly" Phillips (whom he had met by chance along the way). However, the Alpine Club of Canada later ascribed the "first ascent" to Albert MacCarthy and William Foster who, led by Austrian guide Conrad Kain, climbed Mount Robson in 1913. (Details regarding what actually happened are still controversial and make for fascinating reading.)

Roger and Maureen had been in the Mount Robson area on several occasions previously, mainly to identify places which had been mentioned in articles written by Maureen's grandfather and members of other expeditions, and to duplicate photos which had been taken at that time. Maureen had also organized a gathering of the descendants of the two families (i.e. Kinney and Phillips) in 2009 in order to celebrate the centenary of the 1909 climb. However, they had never walked the historic route following the Moose River and over Moose Pass, nor visited the Arctomys Cave near Trio Mountain, discovered in 1911 by Reverend Kinney as a member of an expedition by the Canadian Alpine Club and the Smithsonian Institute.

When Roger and Maureen mentioned that they planned to hike this route and connect with a group of spelunkers from Edmonton at that cave on Labour Day weekend 2011 (the centenary of its discovery) I expressed my interest in joining them, as this area had been on my list of "places to see" for a very long time. What made it especially interesting for me and added an element of historic relevance was the fact that Maureen brought along copies of those early accounts. Roger, who had studied the maps and descriptions from a climber's perspective, pointed out the route which Kinney and Phillips chose to climb Mount Robson. Because they only had one ice axe between them, they picked a route which allowed them to climb as high up on rock as possible, rather than the snow/ice routes preferred by today's climbers. Also, considering the kind of equipment they had (or lacked) it was easier to camp overnight on rock than on snow. It is hard to believe that they had to carry 50 lbs of wood up the mountain to build fires for cooking. They must have been pretty hardy souls.

Roger and Albert on trail, Robson Pass to Calumet Creek
PHOTO: MAUREEN HOOLE

We had it easy by comparison. After a soft night in Kelowna at the home of Roger's daughter Amy and another night camping at the Mount Robson Lodge, we started our adventure on Friday, August 26th, at the Visitor Centre in Mount Robson Provincial Park. Maureen had arranged to fly by helicopter to the Robson Pass Camp near Berg Lake, taking along all our heavy packs. That meant that Roger and I could hike the standard route along the Robson River via Kinney Lake to Berg Lake with only day packs, and all in one day (22km – 9-3/4 hours). I was quite happy about this arrangement, as I hadn't hiked in the mountains in full battle gear for several years and was somewhat concerned about the weight. Maureen set up the tents, which was very much appreciated. The weather was simply glorious with clear views all around. It was an auspicious start to a venture with many unknowns, but great promises.

We spent three nights at Robson Pass Camp, which proved a good base for daytrips. On the first day we headed up the Snowbird Pass Trail, largely upon my insistence because I wanted to take advantage of the continuing good weather to see the other side of Mount Robson, especially the Kain face, which is the most popular route nowadays. The next day we climbed up the Toboggan Falls Trail and returned via Mumm Basin. We had the first frost overnight.

On Monday, August 29, we started on the second segment of our trip, retracing the route of Reverend Kinney and other expeditions of long ago. It had started to rain and there was no sign that it would diminish anytime soon. We put on our rain gear (rain pants and poncho in my case, rain pants and umbrella for Roger) and headed across the British Columbia/Alberta border into Jasper National Park. We passed Adolphus Lake and then headed down the Smoky River to the junction with the Yates Torrent, where we crossed on a newly constructed log bridge. As a matter of fact, this bridge proved to be the crux of the whole trip, as travelers in previous year's often risked life and limb when forced to cross the raging waters because this bridge had been washed away by flood surges. It was pretty miserable as one got wet just brushing through the dripping grass and bushes on either side. The trail was squishy in the meadows and often covered by water on the gravel flats. We were truly concerned what the situation would be like on the other side of the mountain range. Fortunately, this proved to be the worst day of the whole trip weather-wise.

From the Yates Torrent the trail started to climb over a shoulder to the Calumet Creek. Higher up, the ground leveled into a flat swampy area (the Calumet Flats) where it was impossible to see any trail. One guide book mentioned a bridge across the river, but we couldn't find it (if it even still exists). After an hour or so of looking for a way to get across, we decided to wade it, with our boots on, as it was getting rather late in the day. Shortly after, we found the Calumet Horse Camp and settled in for the night (12km – 8-1/4 hours). The conditions experienced this day became pretty much the pattern for the rest of our trip: outdated or inexact information, poor and often invisible trails, lack of trail markers, and no more bridges (we had another ten river crossings – eight of them in one day). It required experience and expertise in route finding and wilderness travel – fortunately, Roger was very good at that.

The next day we just hiked up to Moose Pass as a day trip and explored the area at leisure. (Moose Pass, 2025m, is on the Continental Divide and one of only a few where the Alberta side of the pass is west of the BC side.) Thank goodness, it had stopped raining. It was here that we met the only other hiker on the Moose River Route. We were as surprised to see a single woman with heavy pack at the pass as she was to see three old geezers without packs wandering nonchalantly in the beautiful alpine meadows. One day later we crossed Moose Pass again and from there followed the Moose River for seven days practically all the way to the highway. To give a flavour of this route, I quote here comments provided by BC Parks:

"The Moose River Route is just that, a route, not specifically a trail. This is not to imply that there is no visible trail but that there are a number of sections that cross braided gravel flats, or avoid marsh areas and may not be discernible. Development on the route is limited to primitive backcountry sites with open toilet bar, bear pole and rustic fire circles. The route is not regularly patrolled by ranger staff, so hikers must be completely self-contained and able to contend with any eventuality one may encounter in a wilderness environment. Depending on weather and melt-off, the numerous non-bridged river crossings can present a legitimate hazard. The

Moose Pass, looking North toward Calumet Peak PHOTO: ALBERT HESTLER

entire route and in particular the section from Steppe Creek to the Smoky River/Calumet Creek confluence includes some of the best grizzly bear habitat in the park."

The wilderness campsites listed along the route, starting at Berg Lake, are Calumet Creek Camp (11.6km), Slide Lake Camp (7.6km), Steppe Creek Camp (5.5km), Trio Mountain Camp (12.3km), Resplendent Creek Camp (10.7km), and to the trailhead at Highway #16 (15.3km) – or a total of 63km.

We followed this route staying at all the camp sites except Resplendent. We stopped somewhat earlier on the banks of the Moose River at a point which allowed Roger and Maureen to climb to Arctomys Cave, where they met with the cavers, as planned. I had a rest day in camp. It turned out to be especially noteworthy inasmuch as several moose were seen in the evening and early next morning, galumphing past the tents to a nearby mineral lick. Unfortunately (or fortunately) we didn't see any grizzly bears, or any other bears, though we did see lots of scat and tracks. The only other encounter was with a pair of riders on horseback who passed by with a packtrain of additional four horses. These beasts chewed up the trail something fierce and their hoof prints became sloppy mud holes, which made for difficult hiking. On the other hand, they were forging a trail in places where no track was discernible. The last few days were also marked by large areas which had been ravaged by forest fires in recent years. The trail was often littered with a tangle of fallen trees which forced us to step over or find a way around them – a slow and tedious process. In one stretch where we missed the trail, it took us five hours to cover 2-1/2km.

After one more night of wilderness camping we finally reached the trailhead – 85km (not including side trips) and twelve days later. When reading this report, one may get the impression that this route must have been simply awful. Truth is, that all three of us thought it was the most wonderful trip. Yes, it was a challenge and certainly not a walk in the park, but it was a great wilderness experience – considering the beautiful scenery, the weather (which was largely fine), few mosquitoes (the dreaded bane of this area), and the good company. What more can one ask for?

Participants: Roger Painter, Maureen Hoole, and Albert Hestler.

South of the Border and Distant Places

Nevada Scrambles 2011

Martin Smith
May 20 - 27

In the 2010 IBWA, I described my experiences in several desert regions in southeast Oregon and Nevada. Chief amongst the areas I visited was the Red Rocks area close to Las Vegas. I had previously believed that Red Rocks was the exclusive domain of the rock jock set and that I had no place being there. Instead I found a beautiful, empty place with abundant hiking and scrambling opportunities for even the most discerning of wimps such as myself. Close by are the Spring Mountains which rise to over 3600 metres and, therefore, offer the unique opportunity for excursions involving desert hiking one day and a snow climb the next. I was so impressed by my first visit to the area that I put on an official ACC trip in 2011 for which Peggy and Roger Taylor and Cedric Zala duly signed up.

The timing of the trip was critical. Late enough to allow access to the high summits of the Springs whilst not being too late and thereby having to deal with scorching desert temperatures for the lower peaks. I settled eventually on the week beginning May 20 but was only partly successful in beating the temperature odds.

If there's anything good about Sin City it's the fact that gambling subsidizes a lot of the service industries there – especially hotels. This happy folly allowed us to snag luxury hotel rooms in Summerlin, 15 minutes drive from the entrance gates to Red Rocks for the average price of $55/night. Considering that the Red Rocks NCA requires $25/night for a dry campsite our choice of the Suncoast Resort and Casino seemed eminently sensible. Running the gauntlet of smoking gamblers each evening to the safety of our rooms appeared daunting to the others at first until they saw the quality of the accommodation. Thereafter everyone seemed well content with my choice and even got a chuckle or two at the madness of the myriads of folk who chose to hand over their hard earned cash for no return whatsoever. Everyone I know who's gambled in Vegas claims to have come out ahead. I wonder, therefore, how all those casinos manage to stay in business?

Windy Peak from start point PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

Many of the objectives I'd penciled in in the area involved very rough approach roads, so I opted to drive down in my 4Runner – as did Cedric separately in his VW campervan. Roger and Peggy took a direct gambler's flight from Victoria and we all got together on May 20th.

My route down was deliberately planned to take me through the Alford Desert of southeast Oregon, an area I discovered in 2010 and where I had several items of unfinished business due to bad weather at that time. I hoped that the later start date in 2011 would work in my favour, but the weather turned out, in fact, to be worse. It rained or snowed all the way east from Bend, the laterite approach roads were nothing but quagmires and progress beyond pavement was all but impossible without getting stuck. I did manage to

Bridge Mountain – Peggy, Cedric and Martin on the arch PHOTO: ROGER TAYLOR

get up Alvord Peak (2174 metres) directly from pavement via Long Hollow Pass but this was mostly accomplished in heavy, wet snow and was a pretty miserable excursion. Limited views of Steens Mountain from the summit provided some compensation. It was, therefore, a relief to find good weather on arrival in Vegas and the promise of an excellent week with good friends.

As with all trips, our endeavours met with success and not-quite success on our chosen objectives. I'd set up a menu to choose from based on actual experience and from extensive reading of the SummitPost website and Courtney Purcell's "Scrambles around Las Vegas". The group settled on one each evening by mutual agreement.

First up was Windy Peak in the extreme southeastern sector of the NRA reached by a rough road off Highway 160. Two minutes from the car Cedric decided to use the local flora for an assist as he would at home and ended up with a lacerated hand. This species became known immediately and forever as "handrail cactus". In fact it didn't take long before we accepted cuts and scratches as the desert norm and just got on with it.

The key to Windy is a long intimidating looking sandstone ramp that gives access to the easier upper mountain. This huge feature is hard to miss and lay at the top of some steep, loose ground liberally equipped with pretty but badly behaved cactus. The ramp looked a bit scary but once Roger and Cedric had discovered the correct entry point was very straightforward on a lovely, grippy surface. After a brief break at the top of the ramp we carried on up the wash above, deeked off right at a convenient spot and, under 3 hours from the car, were soon on the flat summit with stunning views.

After an hour on top and after some serious snoozing we set off down. With the benefit of knowledge of the route we were at the car only 90 minutes later, all well pleased with our first day.

Bridge Mountain in the north part of the NRA is one of, if not THE, must-do peak in Red Rocks. Approached by the normal route from "Rocky Gap Road" and via limestone North Peak, Bridge features a beautiful arch, a hidden conifer forest near the summit and several "tinajas" – rain water or seepage tanks that remain full even in the hottest desert summer. The route to the true summit looks like a hard technical climb until right up against the final summit block – but that's part of the mountain's charm.

Rocky Gap Road proved just about all my 4Runner could handle before we reached the "gap" at about 10 am on a cool morning. Excellent trail led from there east around the north side of North Peak until, after about 30 minutes, we could look down on our objective. It was then a 400-500 metres elevation loss to the sandstone shelf below Bridge and the key Class 3 crack that gives access to the summit. About halfway down, the trail petered out and we were soon into Class 3 down climbing, on occasion with some moderate exposure.

The summit block soon loomed directly overhead and even from only a 100 metres or so away, none of us could see any way up that didn't require gear and a lot of nerve. Luckily, we'd been chatting to a couple of local lads along the way who seemed quite intrigued by how I'd got my truck up to Rocky Gap (they were driving a very high clearance vehicle with monster tyres), and they showed us the brief rightwards traverse, then back left to the base of the key crack. If you don't know it's there, you have to be right at the base of the crack before you see the route. It still looked steep and exposed but quite do-able.

As is his wont, Roger launched straight up following our local friends. I followed, then Peggy and Cedric, who isn't too fond of exposure. You can stay in the crack to minimize the sense of exposure but we all found the holds better outside on the right, Roger taking hero shots of everyone as we carefully edged up this bit.

After the crack, the route ran along a shelf immediately below the final summit block and led directly to the arch that gives Bridge its name. This was the perfect place for lunch

and a chance to explore our immediate surroundings, hidden forest, tinajas and all. Walking across the arch was, of course, obligatory.

There are two ways to proceed beyond the arch. Across the top (Roger) or under it and up a steep friction ramp on the left (the rest of us). Unfortunately Cedric got a bit stuck and unnerved on this bit and called it his high point. The rest of us were also perfectly satisfied with our day and the beauty of our surroundings and joined him in this decision.

As these things often are, the crack proved far easier to down climb than anticipated and we were soon at the base and starting the scramble back to the shoulder of North Peak. It was a long way back up in the heat of the afternoon but none of us were winded enough to forego the 15 minute detour to bag the summit of North Peak (2148 metres) and the best views of the day of Bridge itself with Las Vegas in the background. I wonder how many even notice the reverse view from Vegas?

By about 5 p.m. we were back at the truck in a cool breeze and with the day's crux still to come. Roger and Cedric spotted me through the worst of the rough going but Rocky Gap still ate one of my running boards and left us all a bit scrambled. At the bottom of the rough section our new friends were waiting to make sure my little truck made it out OK and, with a roar and a wave were off, as were we, to the nearest source of beer.

After the exertions of the previous two days an easy day was called for and there can be fewer better choices in the area than Northshore Peak to the east of Vegas and reached via Lake Mead Boulevard and Northshore Road. It's an easy hour or so directly up from the paved highway (so even my truck got a rest) yet involves a little basic scrambling along the summit ridge. The views from the summit are exceptional for such a modest effort and include the north shore of Lake Mead (hence the name) and the Muddy Mountains to the northwest. I was pleased to see that the little summit puppet from 2010 was still in the summit register.

On the way up we'd crossed a couple of gullies that looked like they might give access to the desert floor to the south of the mountain. The lower of these looked less intimidating so, of course, we avoided that and scrambled down the steep and loose option closer to the summit and then walked across the desert and around to the mountain's north side and my truck. Our choice of gully turned out to be a good one. From below it was soon obvious that the "easy" gully went from a gentle slope to vertical to overhanging rather quickly below the summit ridge.

Our easy day left us all re-invigorated and refreshed and the forecast for the Spring Mountains for the 24th was excellent, so we were up early for the 45 minute drive to Mount Charleston and whatever fate had in store for us in the high alpine.

Griffith Peak from the connecting ridge to Charleston Peak
PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

There is normally good trail from Mount Charleston village up Echo Canyon to the high ridge system that gives access to Charleston Peak, at 3633 metres the highest peak in southern Nevada. At this time of the year, however, most of the route was expected to be still under snow and although we set off at 7.45 on clear trail, we knew that axes and crampons wouldn't remain in the packs for long.

In fact 30 minutes was about it. The switchback trail disappeared immediately on entering Echo Canyon proper and it was then a straight shot of 1000 metres elevation gain to the ridge above. Snow conditions were perfect for crampons but it was still an effortful business getting ourselves up to the low point on the ridge between Griffith Peak and Charleston Peak.

From the saddle progress along the snow packed ridge towards Charleston proved slow and it was soon apparent that we didn't have time for the latter, so we ate lunch and then backtracked to the saddle and called Griffith Peak our objective for the day. At 3370 metres it's a very deserving second prize and was, in fact, a summit altitude record for Cedric. High mountains shimmered all around and way below to the west was the arid expanse of Death Valley, 3370 metres plus another 86 metres below us in fact!

Echo Canyon now became our best friend as we ran down the 1000 metres of snow to the bit of clear trail and the truck and the end of yet another perfect day.

At 1972 metres, Moapa Peak is the highest summit in the Muddy Mountains, about an hour north of Vegas via I15 and a further 45 minutes on a rough road west from there. The South Face is an intimidating prospect viewed from the desert floor and even without advance knowledge of the exposed knife edge that leads to the summit, the mountain deserves its local sobriquet "The Black Beast of the Muddy

Mountains". Nevertheless, there we were, foregathered below our objective bright and early on a hot morning and after a day off sampling the "delights" of Sin City.

There is no marked route up Moapa. It's basically a question of finding the right wash from the desert floor to the base of the face, then some steep Class 3 to the summit ridge, turn right and make your way up the ridge to the knife-edge and the top beyond. After some false starts and lots of brushes with the local flora, we found a viable wash and thereafter the steep route to the ridge. This took almost 5 hours by which time we were well cooked not to mention knackered. So we found a nice ledge and basked in the sun and the views of endless desert far, far below.

Three hours later saw us safely back at the truck, dehydrated, scratched and tired. I for one felt suitably chastened. These desert peaks look straightforward enough at the start but there's a lot of devilment in the details. Moapa had plenty of these and is a mountain where local knowledge of the route would have saved us a whole lot of the energy we wasted in mistakes on the approach.

As Monty Python so famously said "and now for something completely different" - so our last day was spent on a canyon hike – Oak Creek Canyon to be precise. Don't be fooled by envisaging a stroll on a path along a burbling stream. After an initial hour or so across flat and open desert, this was mostly Class 3-4 scrambling up a dry river bed choked with house sized sandstone boulders. The day was simply a question of going until we'd had enough then finding enough shade for lunch and an extended snooze.

Oak Creek was our last day all together, although Cedric and I did do an extended hike up to the west rim of Zion Canyon on the way home. It had been a wonderful week of adventure in the company of great friends, of sun and rock and snow and of hard days but with a return to luxurious digs and great meals. Now it was time to return to the reality of big packs, freeze dried food and tents – in short Island climbing!!!

Participants: Martin Smith, Peggy Taylor, Roger Taylor and Cedric Zala.

A Winter Ascent of Jebel Toubkal - 4167m, Morocco

Graham Maddocks
January 24-26

I had decided to spend the winter visiting the ruins of the ancient civilizations of Egypt and the North African coast and some of the battlefields of the World War 2 North African campaign. I had been asked to look for the grave of a relative of an ACCVI member in the many Commonwealth war cemeteries in the area.

Given that it was winter in the Northern Hemisphere I had given no thought to mountaineering and had no equipment. I had intended to do some desert trekking around the battlefields and ruins.

I took in the much visited monuments of Egypt from Abu Simbel in the south on the Sudan border, and up the Nile valley to the pyramids, and then turned my attention to the western desert where I took a eight day off road tour of some of the remote oases where the Long Range Desert Group, forerunners of Britain's SAS had operated behind the German and Italian lines. Sleeping on the ground in the desert the Bedouin guide had warned not to leave your shoes out a fox might steal them. I thought that this was just tourist talk as we had seen nothing but sand for hours. I slept with a bag of fruit beside me and in the morning it was gone, I traced where the fox had dragged it and dug a hole to bury what was left for later.

This remote corner of the Egyptian desert is where the scene of prehistoric rock art, the Cave of the Swimmers, in the movie "The English Patient" is located. In the western desert there is rock art of giraffes and hippopotamus and other jungle animals as well many fossils of sea shells in what is now the Great Sand Sea.

After visiting El Alemain's battlefields, cemeteries and museums I crossed into Libya, visiting the forlorn little harbour of Tobruk, the site of much fierce fighting and Benghazi, both of which changed hands several times between the Allied and Axis forces and are the sites of well kept war cemeteries. I visited Kasserine Pass in Tunisia where untested American troops were defeated by the battle hardened Afrika Korps. I saw that in Tunisia and Libya water is being drawn from desert aquifers hundreds of kilometres from the coast and up to 1700 metres deep. These aquifers were filled when the Sahara was a tropical swamp which explains the great deal of early rock art depicting tropical animals. This water is being consumed by a growing population and for agriculture all funded by petrodollars. The water drawn out of these aquifers is not being replaced and is an environ-

Jebel Toubkal 4167 metres PHOTO: GRAHAM MADDOCKS

mental disaster waiting to happen. This desertification and disregard for water conservation is a feature all throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

In Tunis I saw what was left of Carthage after the Romans put the city to the sword, levelled the buildings and sowed the ground with salt, in retaliation for their defeat by Hannibal's elephants. Tunis seemed stable enough, but when I was photographing the old British Consulate building where scenes from "The English Patient" were filmed, crowds started gathering on the streets and truckloads of riot police with fixed bayonets blocked the intersections. I gathered that the population were in open revolt against President Ben Ali and his repressive 24 year rule and that the security forces were shooting into the crowd and there had been several deaths. In situations like this the airport becomes a bottleneck and my initial reaction was to charter a taxi and head for the border, but when your choices are Algeria or back to Libya that isn't much of a choice. By the time I had decided things were not going to blow over and had left for the airport to take the next flight to anywhere a large angry crowd had gathered on the main boulevard in front of my hotel and tanks were on the streets blocking intersections. Gunfire was echoing around the city. At the airport an official examined my passport and spoke to me at length in French, I responded, "Je ne comprends pas, Je ne parle pas francais", he waved my passport in my face and said that I was Canadian and should speak French, I replied that I was a professional tourist not a professional Canadian. The airport was closed by the military shortly afterwards.

So I found myself in Morocco visiting all the usual Kasbah's, Medina's and associated exotica. The weather pattern had been very stable for months with clear, hot sunny days and cold clear nights. In Marrakesh my attention was drawn away from the exotic Medina to the distant High Atlas mountain range where the sun sparkled on a historically low snowfall. I ventured up into the range to the small bucolic Berber village of Imlil where little stone houses climb the steep mountain slopes and tiny terraced plots grow apples, walnuts and barley. The Berber people speak their own language unrelated to Arabic and are of unknown origin but thought to be descended from the Tuareg of the Sahara. They are an agrarian people who have fiercely resisted any attempts at outside control from the Romans to the French.

Imlil is at 1740 metres, and after securing a room with a Berber family in an unheated stone house, I spent a week rambling and acclimatizing and gazing at the massive bulk of Jebel (Mountain) Toubkal at 4167 metres, the highest mountain in North Africa.

On my rambles I found that nowhere was remote. Heavily laden mules would magically appear driven by smiling handlers, themselves loaded down with firewood. Herds of goats grazed impossibly steep terrain with singing shepherds, impervious to the cold in traditional floor length, hooded woollen cloaks. Finally, I could not resist the stable weather pattern any longer. I rented a pair of boots that would have been an embarrassment to give away in Victoria, gloves, first generation crampons and an ice axe. With a sturdy young Berber guide who lived in the next village Arnoumd, we took a mule and loaded him with sardines and local apples and set off with his handler.

On the approach route we passed the Marabout (Saint's mausoleum) of Sidi Chamharouch at 2310 metres. The origins of Sidi Chamharouch may be pre-Islamic, but the Marabout is now a place of pilgrimage for Muslims (but closed to non Muslims). There is a stone refuge at 3207 metres and the snowfield extended below it. After a six hour approach trek, despite being pushed, shoved, cursed in Berber and English the support mule refused to put a hoof in the deep snow and dug in anticipating a beating. Now I understand the origin of the phrase, stubborn as a .... We were forced to unload the mule and pack the rest of the way to the refuge, he was sent back to the village with his handler.

On the morning of the next day the weather had changed, an icy wind was blowing light snow and dark clouds were gathering. Bearing in mind the motto of the SAS (Who dares wins) I decided to go for it. On the five hour summit approach things went steadily worse and we reached the summit in freezing conditions at 4167 metres, howling wind and low visibility. The route is not technical but does contain some uneasy exposures on narrow ledges cut into steep ice fields. A quick mandatory summit photo was taken before we started the descent. The wind increased to such force that several times we were bowled over and I started to wonder about the possibility of being blown off the mountain, not just down it. In totally inadequate clothing, hypothermic and feeling somewhat elated we reached the refuge. A bottle

of water in my back pack was frozen almost solid.

During the night it snowed heavily, but by noon the next day there was a break in the weather and after digging ourselves out of the refuge we started our descent to the village, post holing with fresh snow filling my rented boots. The tough young guide was cheerful throughout the ascent, which was an unplanned, under equipped enterprise and met all the criteria for an adventure.

Participant: Graham Maddocks

Hiking New Zealand's South Island: observations on vegetation and terrain

Pam Olson

February 6 - March 16

Matukituki valley pasture land PHOTO: PAM OLSON

New Zealand friends invited us to joint them down under and do some hiking - they call it tramping. We had been bicycle touring in New Zealand a few times and the idea of going hiking with locals who were familiar with the area was appealing. By e-mail we negotiated dates back and forth and finally they could not commit. We got some mountain route suggestions from them and went on our own. New Zealand's most popular and premier tracks are known as the Great Walks and include the Heaphy, Milford and Routeburn Tracks. We chose to avoid those due to their popularity; many of them limit the number of trampers and have to be booked in advance. We were more interested in mountain routes.

Robert Ridge area PHOTO: PAM OLSON

We were pleased to learn that the equipment we use to hike in BC is the same as is used in New Zealand. Once in the country and on the tramping routes, we found that ice axes were very useful in measuring the depth of a mud hole before either stepping in, over or around it and that gaiters were very useful when dashing through unbridged streams that had no conveniently placed stepping stones. The terrain and vegetation differ quite sharply from that of BC. The accompanying photos were taken during hikes in Nelson Lakes National Park, Mount Aspiring National Park, St. James Walkway and other areas on the South Island.

Some of the hikes started out with a long walk through sheep or cow pastures. Usually there were streams to cross, some had bridges but most were crossed by rock hopping. The early British settlers to New Zealand cut down all the trees and planted native and non native grasses to turn the land into pasture. In some areas, settlers were paid by the tree to clear the land for pasture. Walking for a few hours or so through a pastureland got us up close and personal with farm animals, could have been exciting if we'd never seen a cow or sheep or their droppings before. Another thing about walking through pastureland was that the scenery was unchanging grass and more grass. Once out of the pastureland areas, the scenery was more interesting.

After the pastureland zone, trails climbed through manuka (Leptospermum scoparium) and beech (Nothofagus sp.) forests. There are several species of beech trees which grow at various elevations. A New Zealander can easily describe the difference between a red beech, black beech and a silver beech. However, to a foreigner, all beeches might look the same. For example, Nothofagus solandri var. solandri, the New Zealand black beech grows at low altitudes up to the mountains, and var. cliffortioides, the New Zealand mountain beech grows up to the treeline. The lower altitude variety is shorter.

Streams flowed down the steep slopes, most of which were easy to cross. However, water levels can change quickly especially after a rain storm. The Dept. of Conservation (DoC) advises hiker's to take care crossing streams and never to attempt to cross a stream in flood. Impressive swing bridges have been constructed over some of the wider streams and rivers.

The forest ended abruptly. The treeline was a visible mark along the upper slopes. Looking up from valley floors, we could see the change in vegetation colours where the trees stopped abruptly and the grasslands began. Two of the more common grasses are speargrass and tussock grass. I won't even attempt to try to classify the grasses we saw. Tussock grass grows in clumps which can be a bit dangerous in that one can slip off the clump and sprain an ankle. We talked to NZ hikers who had experienced that misfortune.

Mount Aspiring area PHOTO: PAM OLSON

As we climbed to the ridge tops, the grass became more sparse. Generally, the ridge tops were rocky with clumps of wild flowers and ground hugging shrubs.

Higher peaks featured hanging glaciers. Wide, braided rivers flowed through the valleys between the peaks.

Finding flat tent spots was a bit challenging as the terrain was very steep and frequently the good tent spot was not near the easy to get water. We had to reject a few tent sized flat spots because they were covered in wet moss. The DoC manages a network of several hundred huts which are very popular, with fees varying as to the size and type of hut. We did not stay in any of the huts as we prefer to camp when we are in the mountains.

One observation we made concerning some of the hut users, mainly foreigners, was that many of them were poorly equipped for the mountainous terrain. Some were carrying only day packs and a water bottle. Some were picking their way along the muddy trails and rough rocky ridges wearing running shoes or Teva sandals. For example, when I asked one young man if he had any better footwear than sandals, he replied that he had socks. None of the foreign hikers seemed to have navigational instruments or maps. They were walking from hut to hut using a DoC brochure as a guide. In contrast to the foreign hikers, the New Zealand hikers we met were well equipped and wearing boots. Many of the trails are well marked by orange arrows nailed to trees and with orange poles in the alpine areas. In good weather conditions, it would be difficult to wander off route. However, New Zealand weather changes suddenly and a route could quickly become fogged in, decreasing visibility.

Information signs pointed out historical, geographical or other features. We liked the one at Cannibal Gorge, so named by the British explorers because it was the site of an ancient battle between two rival Maori tribes. The winners ate the losers.

While we did not see any wild animals in the forest, we saw a lot of interesting bird life, from the tiny insect eating fantails (Rhipidura fuliginosa) and inquisitive south island robins (Petroica australis australis) to the impressive kea (Nestor notabilis). The kea is a large parrot, dull green in colour with bright red splashes on the under wings. Signs in the parks advised hikers not to feed the keas as the birds could become dependent on hand-outs and may not survive once the number of people visiting the area decreased with the coming of winter. While these birds usually feed on insects and larvae that they find in rotting wood, keas are known to carry off small pieces of hiking equipment and are attracted to shiny objects. A kea attacked the collapsible water container we left overnight by our stove, puncturing the plastic with its sharp bill. Another tried to drag away a cooking pot but we caught it in the act and rescued the pot before the bird got it to the stream. We left our rental car at a trail head for a few days and returned to find that keas had pecked holes in the seal around the windshield. Such damage must be so common that the rental car agent seemed unconcerned about it when we returned the car.

The tiny, vicious sand flies, a member of the black fly family, were deterred by application of Deet while walking and by a ring of mosquito coils around our tent site.

We had made several trips to New Zealand previously, exploring areas by mountain bike and hybrid bike and getting a feeling for the terrain by road. We rode some long, lonely gravel roads through the Molesworth and took our chances with the aggressive drivers when we could not find quiet roads to ride. At the top of the Coromandel Peninsula, we had to drag our bikes over the walking track because there was no road. Walking in the mountains was more peaceful and gave us a different perspective of the land.

Participants: PO, ACC member for over 30 years and DF who wishes to be anonymous.

Zillertal Days
Hiking the Austrian Höhenweg

Rick Hudson
August 27 – September 6

Phee Hudson and Brian de Villiers scrambling the steep but easy track to the top of the Gigalitz (3,001m) that is reached from the Greizer Hutte. PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

Aldous Huxley, that strange blend of mystic and poet, once wrote about his father Leonard, "(he) considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of churchgoing." Solitude and silence are certainly two of the fundamentals on which I've based my enjoyment of the hills.

So, why we are going to Austria? Everyone knows the Alps are a zoo, and the possibility of quiet about as likely as finding smokers at the ACC banquet. But we are old friends (the best kind), and the agreement is that this year Bernhard is playing host. With his promise of fluent German and good beer in the huts, we are swayed from the more usual far-flung ranges.

The hut-to-hut trails cross impressive terrain. Here Phee Hudson uses the klettersteig between the Berliner Hutte and Furtschagelhaus. Behind, the Grosser Mosseler (3,510m) awaits an ascent the next day.
PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

The route lies along the Austrian-Italian border, and starts and finishes in Mayrhofen, a picturesque town in the Austrian Zillertal where the window boxes are ablaze with flowers, even this late in the season. The hike is all within the Hochgebirgs Naturpark, and is known locally as the *Höhenweg* or Berlin High Trail (because several of the earliest huts in the region were built by the Berlin Section of the Deutscher Alpenverein, or DAV).

There's an excellent guide book in English by Allan Hartley, *Trekking in the Zillertal Alps* (Cicerone Press, 2003) that calls it the Rucksack Route, but it's not known by that name locally. Alas, our only copy is in Stuttgart, and none are available in the many outdoor stores in Mayrhofen. No matter, the plan is to spend 9 or 10 days on a circuit, hiking hut to hut, and taking the occasional spare day to knock off peaks along the way.

The second day promises to be the longest – a 10 hour epic – but we are saved by bad weather, and choose instead to hike into the park (free entrance) along the Stillup Valley, rather than battling steep wet slopes between the Edel and Kasseler Hüttes. Good move; at midday it starts to sleet, so we spend a dry afternoon and night in the Grüne Wand Hütte while hail bounces off the lush meadows outside.

Although not a very promising start to our trek, the following morning offers blue sky as we climb to the Kasseler Hütte at 2,200m in glorious sunshine. You have to love Austrian huts – there's hot food and cold beer, the service is friendly and very efficient, and the prices reasonable (see notes below). In fact, the beer is the same price as in Mayrhofen (and cheaper than Canada). Each hut has a mini cableway that

brings food up from the valley – hence the competitive prices. Being a member of a UIAA club (like the ACC) means 50% off the accommodation – usually bunks in a private room. Bring your own inner sheet – everything else is included.

The big unknown is the trail to the Greizer Hütte. We can see where it goes, but can't really believe there's a pass over that skyline. There is. These routes were laid out in the late 19th century, when trails were real trails, and trail builders were men of iron. Actually, on the tricky bits there's plenty of iron – steel pins in the rocks, cables for the hands, even the occasional aluminum ladder – known collectively as *klettersteig* (or *via ferrata* in Italy). The route is a marvel, and as day follows day we are constantly amazed at how the builders found a line across intervening cliff faces, or over saddles, where no sane route should logically go. It's a treat.

Each hut has its own charm and ambience. Often there are horses close by, goats (that provide fresh milk for those mid-morning hot chocolate drinks) and chickens (fresh eggs). We usually choose "half pension" which includes a 3- or 4-course hearty dinner, and breakfast. "Full pension" includes a packed lunch.

Most huts are owned by a mountain club section (usually of the DAV), and the room fee goes to that section. The board fee goes to the custodian. The huts are generally run by a family who work long hours for the 4 months they are open. They know it's the food that attracts hikers, and make a big effort to ensure everyone goes away happy. Mind you, witnessing the amount of alcohol consumed each night, bar sales must be an important factor too!

On the non hut-to-hut days, we climb a number of fine summits, most in the 3,000-3,500m range. Generally scrambling, we have axes, crampons, harnesses and hard hats. A light 30m length of 7mm rope gets us across the glaciers.

The trails are well marked, with Austria's national colours of red-white-red (like Canada) painted prominently on rocks along the way. All junctions are prodigiously signposted. And, to our surprise, none of the huts were full, or even busy. The Berliner Hűtte, the oldest in the region (first building was in 1879, the same year construction started on the CPR) has accommodation for 160, but was decidedly quiet. We didn't book ahead via cell phone, although in the high season (July-August) it might be wise. However, we were told no one is ever turned away, even when a hut is full. There's always a table somewhere you can sleep under.

On the trails, we seldom met anyone, except at the mid-point, where we'd encounter the group from the next hut heading east, as we headed west. The locals take their *klettersteig* seriously, likely because many were novices being guided, and had full body harnesses and double cable clips, where we climbed with just an occasional touch of the iron hardware. On the peaks, we met even fewer folk, or none at all. On popular peaks like the Grosser Mössler above the Furtschagelhaus hut, there were barely a dozen summiteers the day we climbed it.

Nobody's going to lose weight on this trip. Cold beer after a long day in the hills. How come Bow Hut doesn't offer this? PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

One thing that became obvious was local content. Only once in 10 days did we hear English spoken. When paging through the visitor books at each hut, the furthest names I saw were from Sweden and the Netherlands. This is not a well-known region outside Austria and Germany. Yet its scenic beauty, fine summits, hospitable huts and reasonable prices make it a no-brainer for those who enjoy hiking and climbing without a heavy pack. And I think Leonard Huxley would have approved.

Logistics:

Air Transat flies directly to Munich, from where you can catch a train to Mayrhofen. There, within the town, the Ahornbahn whisks you up to 2,000m (or be a purist and hike the trail) followed by a walk to the Edelhűtte and the start of the tour. If the 10-hour trek from the Edelhűtte to Kasseler Hűtte doesn't charm you, catch a taxi (€10/head) up the Stillup Valley past the reservoir to the Grűne Wand Hűtte, and hike to the Kasseler from there. Then link the Kasseler – Greiser – Berliner – Furtschagelhaus – Olperer – Freisenberg – Gams huts. Accommodation was about €12 per person per night. Half pension was about €23 per day. Beer was €3.50/half litre. Cash only, no credit cards. We averaged €40 per person per day in 2011.

2011 Summit Climb
Baruntse (7152m) Expedition
Makalu Barun National Park Nepal

Tak Ogasawara
October 14 - November 10

At the Hoongu Pass PHOTO: TAK OGASAWARA

In the beginning

In 1956 the Japanese successfully climbed Manasulu, the 8th highest mountain in the world. On the front page of the newspaper there was a picture of the mountain and a story of adventure. At the time I was 12 years old and did not know much about the Himalayas or mountaineering. I didn't realize it but it was the beginning of Japan's golden age of Himalayan Mountaineering. After Manasulu, every year there were stories of successful Himalayan climbs and I started to wonder what it was all about. I joined a mountaineering club when I moved to Osaka and was immediately hooked. I started to dream that someday I would also climb the Himalayas. In the Fall of 2011, after some 40 years that dream finally came true.

October 9 - 13

After a long flight from Vancouver, the plane touched down at Kathmandu Airport. It was the beginning of my 40 year old dream. When we disembarked from the plane we transferred to a bus. I thought that perhaps the terminal building was far away but to my surprise, the building was less than a minute from plane. I didn't know why we had to take a bus and it was then I realized that this indeed a different place and that my way of thinking no longer applied.

Everything went well at Immigration and I found a staff of the Summit Climb which was my guiding agent waiting for me in the dark parking lot. I woke up around noon the next day and went down to the restaurant to have a bite. At the restaurant I met a group that were leaving for Ama Dablam the next day. Kathmandu was truly was a climbers hub.

The next three days I was busy organizing, checking and buying equipment as well as doing paper work. The Summit Climb Office was very helpful and informed me where the best place to buy equipment would be, which turned out to be in Thamel, which is Kathmandu's shopping district. There was such a maze of small streets criss-crossing the area that I almost got lost, but luckily made it back to my hotel before dark.

Members of our group started to arrive in Kathmandu from Europe, South Africa and the U.S.A. Some of them were staying in the same hotel as I was. There was a pre-trip briefing where all members of the trip attended and we introduced ourselves. Arnold, the trip leader, talked about the schedule and "does and don'ts" while in the mountains.

October 14

Today we flew to Lukla our starting point. I was so excited I could not sleep and I woke up at 3 o'clock in the morning and tossed and turned until 5 o'clock. A bus came to pick us up at 5:30 and took us to the airport. Our flight was scheduled for 8 o'clock but was delayed due to fog in Lukla.

Finally, at 11 o'clock our flight was announced and we boarded a small plane to Lukla at noon. A scant 45 minutes later we landed at the Lukla Airport, which was built into the hillside with a very short runway. I heard that it is reputedly one of the most dangerous airports in the world.

We had lunch at Namaste Lodge and had a final permission paper check. Our sirdar, Kaji, had already organized porters, sherpas and cooking staff. At 2 o'clock we started walking to our first campsite at Chutanga at 3200m. It only took us a couple hours to get there from Lukla. That night was my first night of camping on Himalayan soil.

The next day from Chutanga, we followed a steep trail that zigzagged upwards to Yak Kaharka at 4000m, just below Zetra La (Pass). When we crossed Zetra La at 4610m on October 16th it was my new height record.

Our porters labored upwards with big loads, some of them were carrying nearly 50kg. It was an amazing sight to see. At Zetra La, there was a stunning panoramic view of big Himalayan Mountains: Cho Oyu, Gyachungkang, Everest

Baruntse 7152m PHOTO: TAK OGASAWARA

and Lhotse to name a few. From the Zetra campsite we walked along the hillside, crossed a small pass then followed the trail that descended though rhododendron forests to the Hinku Khola Valley. After a short walk along the river we reached the village of Kote where we camped for our 4th night.

The next day we hiked up to Tagnag. The trail gradually ascended along the river and at the end of the valley, Tangtse and Kusum Khangkaru dominated our view. We had already walked for 4 days so the following day was a rest day. We also were able to do a short acclimatization hike as well as cleaning and resting.

After a day's rest, we were woken up as usual at 6:30 by the rattling sound of mugs and our sherpas serving the morning tea. At 8 o'clock we started walking the trail that went up along the river then to the top of a moraine. Above the moraine, there was a small lake and nice resting place. The trail gradually went up to Khare at 5000m.

When we arrived in Khare there was no snow on the ground, however, when we woke up the next morning there was quite a bit of snow on the ground and it was still snowing. We decided to stay for one more day to give time for the weather to clear up because our porters didn't have great footwear making it risky to cross Mera La.

The next day, the snow had stopped so we crossed Mera La to the Mera Peak base camp. From Khare the trail went up steeply for 200m to the ridge above. We followed this ridge to a snowfield just below the Mera La where we had to put crampons on. To our right we had clear view of our first objective - Mera Peak.

Most of other parties chose to place Base Camp on Mera La but we descended 200m from Mera La and set up Base Camp beside a beautiful lake. The following day the plan was to go up the glacier to have some rope training before we progressed higher up the mountain.

After the rope training day, we climbed to Mera High Camp. Sherpas and porters started early in the morning and rest of us started at 8:30. Climbing back up to Mera La we then crossed over the snowfield and glacier. It took us about 4 hours to reach High Camp. At High Camp, tents were placed on small ledges mostly on different levels. You wouldn't want to walk around camp without caution. We had an early supper in our tents and tried to get some sleep until wake up time at midnight. The sherpas woke us up at midnight and had a small breakfast. At 1:45 a.m. we left high camp for the Mera Peak summit. Everybody climbed at their own speed so soon our group was separated into many smaller groups. Most of us reached the summit right after sunrise and enjoyed the grand view of big Himalayan Mountains.

We got back to High Camp 8:45 a.m., repacked our belonging and headed back to Base Camp. We had a good sleep at Base Camp that night and were woken up by the morning tea call at 6:30 a.m. with most of us hitting the trail at 8:30 a.m. We hiked down a small valley then crossed a small pass to then descend in the next valley, the Hongu Khola Valley. Unlike the Hinku Valley, the Hongu Khola Valley doesn't have any teahouses. I saw only 2 small stone building when we entered the valley. We camped beside the river that night and hopefully we were to reach Baruntse Base Camp the following day.

After a bit of up and down we reached Base Camp at 5400m on October 28. Base Camp was located at the end of the valley with Baruntse in front Hongku Chull and Chamlang to the left and Hinku and Peak 41, to the right.

October 29

Over the next 3 days at Base Camp we rested and began preparation for the summit push. There was a Puja Ceremony at Base Camp without which no one would be allowed to go up the mountain. We also waited as sherpas prepared the route to the West Col and set up Camp 1. After they finished we climbed to Camp 1, deposited our equipments and went back to Base Camp and rested for one more day.

We started our summit push by hiking up the glacier to the bottom of the West Col and follow fixed ropes at 45 degrees for 200m up the ice couloir to the West Col. Camp 1 was

Summit of Baruntse from Tak's high point PHOTO: TAK OGASAWARA

15 minutes from the col on flat spot of the glacier with nice views of the southwest side of Makalu. We stayed at Camp 1 for the night and pushed up to Camp 2 the following day. Camp 2 was located at 6400m and was the last flat spot on the glacier, from there the route climbed steeply toward summit.

At midnight we woke up and at 2 o'clock we were off to the summit. It was very dark and I couldn't tell how steep the slope was. After climbing for about 4 hours we reached the bottom of the summit ridge. The ridge was very steep with fixed ropes dangling down from above. Route was mostly on the southwest side of the ridge on the other side was a 1000m drop to the Barun Glacier.

We put jumars to fixed rope and started climbing. It was very hard work. I had to stop and rest every 10 steps. We climbed like this for almost 5 hours until we reached the central summit of Baruntse at 7050m. At this time it was about 11:30 a.m. and the main summit was at the far end of the ridge. I figured it would take me about 1.5 hours to get there and so I sat there debating if I should try to go for the summit or not.

My heart wanted to try but it was late in the day and my hands were very cold so I decided not to risk it. It was a difficult decision to make. Going down was very slow with only one mishap. I was rapping down a knife ridge when something happened and the rope swung to the steep side of ridge and minutes later I was dangling down the rope looking at the bottom almost 2000m below. Luckily, one sherpa saw what happened and pulled me back on the ridge. After that I was much more careful and got back to Camp 2 at around 4 p.m. It was definitely a hard day. Lakpa, my sherpa, was already at Camp and he put me in the tent and started to make a tea. After tea we had an early supper. Inside the tent it was toasty warm! I almost forgot that we were camping high up on a Himalayan peak.

The next day we went straight to Base Camp bypassing Camp 1. We carefully rapped down the couloir to the gentle snow slope below then hiked down. It took about 7 hours to get back to Base Camp from Camp 2. The following day we broke down Base Camp and moved to Ambulapcha High Camp. We hiked up the scree slope to Panch Pokhari (lake) a sacred place for local people. After the lake, the next 300m scree slope to High Camp was the hardest hike for the whole trip.

After a good night's rest we crossed Ambulapcha La to other side. First we had to go up a 100m ice fall then over a

gentle glacier to the pass. At the pass we had very nice view of Lhotse and Island peak to the north, and Panch Phokari, Chamlang and peaks of the Hongku Valley to the south.

We waited for sherpas to fix rope to the ice wall on other side then rapped down to the snow slope then traversed about 200m to a wide snow slope that was gentle enough to bum slide to the screed slope at the bottom. We were on the other side of mountain now and hiked down towards the main lmja Khola trekking route. One more night of camping and we will be back to civilization and the main trekking route.

Our trip was nearing the end, we were walking longer hours but nobody complained, the views were great and the air was thicker. It was much warmer and the surrounding environment was getting more lush and green. We passed through Chukkung, Dingboche (the junction of the Everest Base camp trail) then Pangboche where we stayed the night in a lodge. We left Pangboche to Namche early in the morning. The skies were clear and we could see Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse to the north and on the opposite side of the river Ama Dablam, Kantega and Thamserku stood high above the valley. It was such an amazing sight we had to stop so often to look around.

The trail went down steeply to the river and on the other side of the river we could see the famous Tengboche monastery on skyline. I visited the monastery for about 1.5 hours and talked to monks and children who stayed and studied there. From Tengboche, the trail went down, then up quite steeply. The trail became quite level two thirds of way from Tengboche but quite winding. Around every bend we hoped to see Namche. Finally, we saw Namche at the far end of the trail. Half and hour later a large Mani Stone greeted us into Namche.

Namche is the biggest town in the Khumbu. There were so many gift shops, internet cafés and bakeries unlike 40 years ago, now you could find almost anything there. From Namche to Lukla there were so many people on the trail. It was like walking down a Vancouver street.

We had heard at Namche that there had been bad weather in Lukla for the past 3 days, so the airport had been closed and over 2000 people were stuck there. We decided to stay in Phakding for a night. The following day we trekked and walked over so many suspension bridges and stop quite often at teahouses for drinks. A short walk from Phakding, we were greeting by the welcome gate at Lukla at 2 o'clock. We were back at the same spot that we had started at 30 days ago. We stayed there for the night and flew back to Kathmandu the next day.

Afterwards

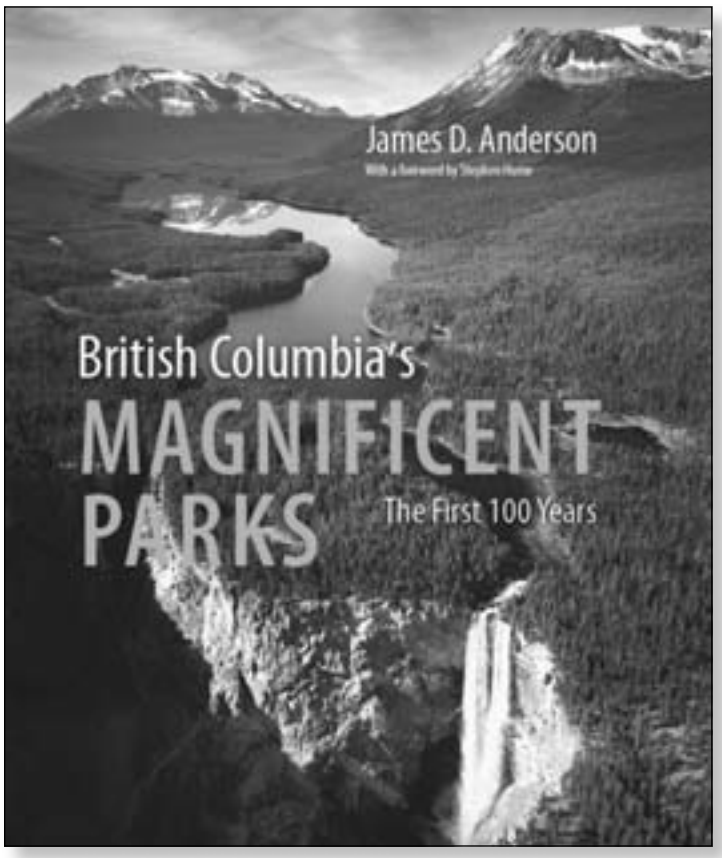
Many people have asked me if I had any problems with the high altitude. Despite my previous health problems, I ate well, slept well and had no problems with high altitude, not even a single headache. Of course at the beginning at over 4000m I couldn't move fast but I did adapt quite well for the environment on the whole trip.

It was an amazing 30 days in the heart of the Himalayan Mountains which I enjoyed immensely. So much so, that I have already started planning another trip there. This time I am hoping not only to climb but to do some volunteering work and learn more about Nepal and the people.

Mountain Air

British Columbia's Magnificent Parks: The First 100 Years

By James D. Anderson
Harbour Publishing 2011



This historical story details the tumultuous events that shaped the history of British Columbia's, world-renowned parks and protected areas. The book chronicles how over 14% of British Columbia has become protected over the last century. The word protection takes on a whole new meaning, when the reader is shown that land is preserved, not only for human use and enjoyment, but for the protection of unique ecology, land formations, animal habitats, swamps, bogs etc. The fruition of Canada's largest park system involves a large and varied cast, all struggling, both within and outside the system, for their own distinctive political and cultural perspectives. The fascinating story is easily readable in everyday language, yet is a thorough interpretation of the chronological and factual accumulation of statutes and acts, political climates, environmental considerations and cultural struggles. A striking photographic collection is well placed in the text, and showcases BC's wild and magnificent 996 parks and protected areas, of which British Columbians are fiercely proud.

The saga celebrates the centennial of our parkland and honours the vision and persistence of the players, from the initial surveyors and explorers to BC Parks administrators and politicians and the staggering challenges they faced. James D. Anderson, the author, humbly shares his unique perspective of a now retired long-term parks administrator. He leaves the reader in thought for the ongoing process of growth and long-term preservation of BC's park system.

Book Reviewed by Christine Fordham

Praise Morpheus
The four fundamentals of a good night's sleep

Rick Hudson

Exhaustion is the best sleeping aid. Brian de Villiers after a long day on the Grosser Moseler (3,480m), Austria. PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

It's something we all need and practise. It's forty winks, or Senate aerobics, or a kip, or the Land of Nod. Whatever it's called, it's so much part of our lives that we don't even think about it most of the time. It's like breathing. Now this is a mountaineering magazine, so there has to be a reason why I'm mentioning sleep, and it's this: sleeping in the back country is something that I have done for over half a century, and during those years there have been experiences that have taught me a few things about what does, and does not, constitute a good night's rest. And while sleeping at home, or in a hotel, or even on the chesterfield in a friend's basement is pretty much all the same – just shake out the pillow, get comfortable, and close your eyes – sleeping in the wild requires four very important components.

First and foremost, you need to be comfortable. This may seem obvious, but in fact, it often isn't. There's a tendency to arrive late at a camp site, sweep the tent space half heartedly with a boot in the gathering gloom, pitch the tent rapidly, crawl in, and then curse that pebble/stick/hole that's exactly where it shouldn't be. Old timers know this, and spend an inordinate time carefully raking away any potential bumps before moving the tent over the spot.

In the days before Therm-a-rests, or closed-cell foam, or foam of any kind, we would grab bunches of soft undergrowth and build a pad on which to lay the weary bod. Inevitably, at about 2 in the morning, a branch would move in such a way as to skewer your hip, and you would be forced, cursing roundly, to sit up and re-arrange the mattress. One way round this was to find sand – not uncommon where I lived in Africa. We'd scrape two small dents in its surface – one for the shoulders, and the other for the hips. It's quite amazing how comfortable this was, at times, if we'd had a long day and were consequently bagged.

The second requirement for a good night's sleep is to be warm. Your body has three sources of heat – warmth is generated as a by-product of muscular effort, through digestion, and there's metabolic heat generated by individual cells. When asleep, only the latter is active, and it's not enough to raise the body temperature by much – it's more of a maintenance mechanism.

It's a no-brainer then that a good sleeping bag is worth every penny you pay for it. Many's the time I've been camping with novices who proudly told me on the way out that they'd bought their bag at K-Mart for a bargain, and how could anyone spend so much at MEC? Those same folk tended to be pretty quiet on the way home, after a night or two of teeth chattering.

But a warm bag isn't enough to ensure a good eight hours. The third criterion for a decent kip is to stay dry. Is there anything sadder than waking up in the early hours, without a tent, looking up at a sky without stars, and hearing the first pitter-patter of rain on your (still) dry sleeping bag? And with the cheerful knowledge that the dawn is a long way off, and in an hour you are going to be cold and wet, and there's nothing you can do about it!

In that vein, I remember waking up one morning in my mummy bag, stretched out in Tierra del Fuego, and feeling something tickle my nose – the only exposed surface. Sitting up, I stared in disbelief at where my red sleeping bag should have been, because it wasn't there. Instead, a smooth layer of fluffy white snow blanketed everything to a depth of 10cm. Ah, the joys of a well-insulated bag, and dry snow.

On another occasion, this time on a beach in Kenya, I again awoke to a tickling on my nose. This time, on sitting up, although my bag was invisible under a blanket of white, it wasn't snow, but thousands of tiny white sand crabs. What they were nibbling on was unclear, but the moment I moved, they scattered in every direction, many of them pouring over my buddy, asleep close by. The sudden scuttling woke him, and like me, he rose, phoenix-like, from a sea of scurrying critters. Within a minute we were alone on the beach, uncertain of quite what had happened.

On another memorable trip in the Hex River Mountains of South Africa, we were a party of 8 who found a shallow cave after a very long day of climbing, and gratefully tucked under its cover as clouds built on the ridges around us. No matter, there was an adequate overhang above, and the cave was located right on the edge of a great cliff that plunged far

A weatherproof tent is worth its price. Despite gales and hard icing, it stayed warm and dry at 4,800m on Mt. Kenya. PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

down into a canyon below, offering superb views.

We made supper and then settled on the conveniently sandy floor, sure of a cold but dry night. Not so. The building clouds turned to rain, and then a storm. We remained unconcerned, safe under our overhang. But as the night progressed, a powerful wind developed, sending great blasts of air roaring up the canyon walls. Heavy rain, defying the laws of gravity, reversed direction in a bizarre upward waterfall that struck the overhang, and then sprayed into the cave in waves. Within minutes we were soaked. In the subsequent confusion, we tried to stay above the rising water table as the sand flooded and we were left balanced on stones, holding our damp and sagging sleeping bags out of the water. Once again, dawn was a long time in coming.

So, you need to be warm, dry and comfortable – all obvious and admirable in their own right. But there's another factor that has to be present, and it's something we take so much for granted it's often forgotten. Until it isn't there. And then suddenly, its absence becomes critical.

You need to feel safe. That may seem self evident, but when security is missing, it's hard for the head to hit the pillow with any confidence. And there are various forms of threat to safety. There's the fear of wild animals. I recall first camping in Canada with friends from France, and the inevitable question of "What do you do if there's a bear?" question arose. Christine laughed, and with Gallic logic replied, "But darling, we have bear pills!" It turned out that they took a 'bear pill' before going to bed, and never had a problem! Voila!

The Africa of my youth offered other challenges. On a trip down a 4-day canyon, where sleeping spots were few and far between, the three of us arrived at dusk at a tiny beach that offered the only flat camp site for hours in any direction. Our delight in finding this ideal sleeping spot was quickly tempered by the sight of a large snake that slid across the white sand and disappeared under a rock at one end of the beach. We approached uncertainly, and pushed a stick under the ledge where it had vanished. There was no response. We lit a fire, tried ineffectively to get the smoke to blow under the rock, but eventually set to the more important business of making supper in the dark.

The beach was small – barely wide enough to sleep three. Each person carefully laid out his sleeping bag at the opposite end of the sand from the rock, with the result that when I came to look for my bag later in the evening, it had mysteriously moved to the end closest to the snake! No matter, in the dark I simply relocated to the further end, and in due course the die was cast and Johnny got the snake spot. We settled down and at least two of the party enjoyed a fair amount of sleep. Around midnight there was a piercing yell that woke us all in an instant. Frantic fumbling for headlamps, confusion, and then disbelief followed by laughter. Johnny had rolled over in a fitful sleep. His arm had landed on a crooked stick. As that end depressed, the other had sprung into the air, and he, half asleep, saw a pale brown 'thing' rear above him – snake!

On another occasion, I was hitchhiking through an East African game reserve, and ended up sleeping on a sofa on the veranda in a tourist camp. "No worries," said my host cheerfully, "it's perfectly safe." Some hours later, in total darkness, I rolled over. There was a sudden clattering of claws on the veranda deck. Groping quickly for a flashlight, its beam revealed a dozen eyes, now at the bottom of the steps, where moments before they had been at the top (and a metre from me)! I stood up and the eyes scattered, the spotted rumps of hyenas briefly visible in the light. Needless to say, I slept the rest of the night indoors!

It's not only large animals that can be a challenge. Small critters can be as bad, or even worse. On a trip through Mozambique, where ants are ubiquitous, and sleeping on the ground impossible – you'd be eaten alive by midnight – we perfected a method of sleeping that required all the cunning we could muster to outwit the seemingly simple ant. First, we'd park on a dwala – a large flat rock – where no overhanging trees could touch the Land Rover and allow easy access. Next, we'd spray a ring of poison on the rock around each tire, effectively blocking land access. Then we'd carefully climb onto the roof rack and sleep there, as far from the ground as possible. Even so, by morning, it was always surprising how many smart ants had somehow found their way onto the vehicle and approached the 6 posts supporting the roof rack. Before heading out we'd hunt down the stowaways, and provided we kept moving most of the day, didn't have problems until the next evening!

Dealing with animals can be challenging at night, but natural events can be even more so. On a trip in the Drak-

ensberg in South Africa, we were camped above 3,000m in an grassy valley, and were subject to a fantastic lightning storm that raged for over an hour, the flash and thunderclap so close that we were certain we were about to be fried. Yet, the closeness of the strikes was only part of the terror – as each flash momentarily turned the entire valley into day, we, quaking in our yellow tent, were treated to sudden, frozen images of each other, our normally pink faces transformed through some strange trick of filtering into ash-grey skin, looking like zombies criss-crossed with black lines from the tent pole shadows.

Conventional lightning is impressive stuff, but one of the strangest experiences I've experienced was fireball lightning. Reading other people's accounts later, it turns out it's not as uncommon as I thought, but when I witnessed it one dry winter's night in the northern Transvaal, it was an extraordinary phenomenon. I was going climbing with buddies in a remote range, but my plan to connect with someone in the city who knew the route had failed. So, several hours late, and without a guide, I arrived at the dusty roadhead to the reassuring sight of the other cars. Well, so far, so good. But the trail wasn't obvious, and I was alone, without any clear idea of where the mountain was. Setting off anyway, darkness caught me somewhere in the African bush. Given the lack of obvious features around, I built two small stone cairns on the trail to remind me in the morning where I'd come from and where I was going, and then curled up between the large roots of a baobab tree.

Sometime during the night I awoke to the sound of thunder and, looking up the valley, saw a truly amazing sight. A series of fireballs were drifting down the valley, as though fired from a distant cannon. Unlike conventional lightning that's over in a second, these fell slowly. Each, as it descended at an oblique angle, looked like a giant sparkler. I couldn't begin to guess the diameter of the 'ball', but certainly tens of metres across. Each one as it fell, sparkled and glowed, so there was a glare visible on the treetops below it, and each one sailed past at some height, and struck further down the valley with an impact that shook the ground.

I watched fascinated, mindful that I was under one of the largest trees in the area. But the baobab's height gave me a sense of confidence. If it had grown so tall, it must be very old. And if it was old, it must be safe. Well, that's what passed through my mind as I watched these strange electrical events crackle and drift down the valley. Later I fell asleep again, waking in the morning to wonder if what I'd seen was a dream or reality. The little stone cairns convinced me – both had fallen over during the night, although there had been no rain, and there were no animal tracks in the surrounding sand. The shaking of the earth had been real.

While weather and hungry animals instil night time dread, nothing can match the fear of the ultimate predator

Snow can be formed to any shape, almost guaranteeing a good night's sleep. Taken on the Pebble Glacier near Pemberton, BC.
PHOTO: PHEE HUDSON

– man. In an event that will stay with me all my life, I was camped with a buddy in the Bolivian mountains during the height of the Che Guevara scare in South America, We were, we thought, a long way from any habitation. Alan was in the tent, ostensibly asleep. I was writing up my diary by the light of the fire when I became aware that I was not alone. First one, and then several men appeared from the dark that surrounded the tent, and all carried machine guns. My initial shock was tempered when I realized they all wore uniform. That meant they were carabinieri and not guerrillas. An officer appeared (he had a pistol) and came towards me. I stood up slowly, careful to keep my hands in clear view, but as he approached I did something which, in retrospect, was extremely stupid. Concerned that Alan might make some sudden movement, and the police interpret this as an attack, and so shoot first and ask questions later, I called out (in English – second mistake), "Alan, don't do anything sudden. We have company!"

The officer, not understanding, jumped forward and roughly pushed the barrel of the pistol into my stomach. They do say that at times like that, your whole life flashes in front of you. I can't say that happened. What did happen was my knees went to water, and I fell to the ground. It was some minutes before I had the breath to explain (in Spanish) that we were 'gringos' and not 'comunistas'. The incident ended happily enough, with the officer sharing the last of our cheap rum, but neither of us slept well for the rest of that expedition.

If the military (and their opponents) can give you troubled sleep, friends can do so in unintended ways too. Camped in a valley in Patagonia with two climbers I'd only met some days earlier, two of us set out to explore the approach to a peak we planned to climb over the ensuing week.

The only thing worse than camping in the rain, is camping in the rain in a leaky tent. Tony Vaughn on his 5th (unsuccessful) attempt on Warden Peak.
PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

On our return a day later we discovered the main tent had burned to a blob of molten nylon, with the sole occupant living under a fly sheet. The ensuing conversation went something like this:

"What happened?"

"Sorry guys. The tent caught fire."

"How did it happen?"

"I knocked over the stove."

"So? Why didn't you smother the flames, or throw it out of the tent?"

"Couldn't."

"Why not?"

"I was having an attack."

Thoughts of Patagonian parrots attacking camp, or possibly a herd of rogue vincuña flashed across our minds.

"A what?"

"An epilepsy attack. But don't worry, I found my meds. It won't happen again."

We had what is described in the media as a 'full and frank exchange of ideas', and cut the trip short. And no one slept well for the remaining few nights!

Looking at all this, I've may have dwelt too much on the negative aspects of trying to get a good rest. There have been many positive experiences too. Of waking on a narrow ledge in the wee hours before dawn and watching the first light spread slowly over a sleeping world of darkness, shadows shortening and the eastern sky changing, imperceptibly, from black to dark blue, then pearl and finally gold. Those have been magical hours, and far outweigh the bad nights.

And in that vein, let me close by remembering a traverse of Mount Colonel Foster with Sandy, Rick and Don. The hike to Landslide Lake had been a disaster. Rain had poured down as we'd plodded up the Elk River. The clouds had hung low the next dawn as we'd scrambled to the foot of the couloir on the Northwest Buttress. Then the rain had drifted down, off and on, all day as we tried to find the way across the grand north-to-south traverse in almost no visibility. It had barely eased when we stopped to bivouac on top of the south summit in the evening.

Before leaving camp that morning, we'd planned the traverse as a day trip. We'd all agreed not to bring extra gear. Yet, here we were, soaked and miserable, and Sandy and Rick hauled dry sleeping bags out of their sacks! I pulled mine out too, only to look at Don, who had been injured earlier in the day, but had stoically continued without complaint. Now it appeared he was the only one who'd stuck to our original agreement. He had no bag. And he was injured. I offered him mine, and the callous S.O.B. accepted it! I hunkered down in a wet Gortex and waited for dawn. It was a long time coming, and I dozed fitfully as the mist drifted down, coating everything with a fine sheen of droplets.

Around 3 a.m. I awoke with a start. The clouds had gone and a brilliant moon was shining down out of a star-filled sky. Despite being July, it was very cold at 2,000m elevation. I climbed stiffly to my feet, stepped over the comfortable, warm, dry and safe bodies around me, and shuffled to the edge. The valley below was filled with cloud that glowed silver in the moonlight, a magic sea of phosphorescence that shone upwards. Even the cliffs were bright with surreal lighting, banishing the dark so completely I could have read a book. I must have stood there, transfixed, for over an hour. Nor did I wake the others from their sleep. This was mine, all mine, and I wasn't going to share it with anyone.

Qualicum Beach Alpine Club

Lindsay Elms

Harry Dougan and Jamie Robertson on the summit of Mt. Arrowsmith 1945 PHOTO: HARRY DOUGAN COLLECTION

In January 1946, several families in Qualicum Beach decided to form a local mountaineering club. Their goal was to encourage and expand local interest in mountain hiking, but also to get money to restore the historical CPR trail up Mount Cokely which had fallen into disrepair. To get government funding they needed to be a registered club so they became known as the Qualicum Beach Alpine Club. That summer they applied for government grants and in 1947 and in 1948 they received grants for $500. Harry Dougan and Roger Whitmee Jr (who were both in their teens) worked on the trial for the two summers. In 1948 Henry "Dick" Dougan contacted Muriel Aylard, the Secretary Treasurer of the Victoria Section of the Alpine Club of Canada, who at the ACC Summer Camp passed the letter on to Syd Vallance, the President of the ACC. In responding Vallance wrote:

"I was most interested to learn of your young club and shall be most interested to hear from time to time of its progress and activities, if you can conveniently let us know of them. We would like you to feel assured that any advice or guidance which we can give and which it is possible to give by correspondence is yours for the asking. We are bound by the constitution as to the age at which new members may be admitted to our Club, but in creating a love of the outdoors and of the Mountains in your young members you are doing a splendid work, and when they are old enough to join our own Club we shall give them a warm welcome. I know that they will find, as they perhaps have already found in your own Club, that their lives will be enriched by their associations and happiness which the Mountains bring them.

"I asked the Secretary to tell you just what should be necessary to form a section of our own Club, and doubtless he has done so. We have sections at present in Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Montreal and New York. New Sections will shortly be formed in Portland Ore., and Ottawa. Even though you feel that the time is not ripe to form a Section we shall be most interested to hear of your expeditions and would love to help you in any way we can."

The Qualicum Beach Alpine Club thrived with regular club trips up Mount Cokely, Mount Arrowsmith, Mount Mark, Mount Wesley, Mount Horne and Little Mountain near Parksville, and every Easter weekend, for many years, they skied at Forbidden Plateau.

The teenagers grew up and unfortunately moved to different parts of the country to pursue higher education and careers. In the mid 1950's the Qualicum Beach Alpine Club slowly faded away. Eventually, several of the young club members returned to the island. Harry Dougan, who now lives in Comox, kept many of the letters, photos and documents belonging to the fledgling club and offered to share a brief glimpse into the history of this little known alpine club.

Summit of Mount Cokely 1945 PHOTO: HARRY DOUGAN COLLECTION

Qualicum Beach Alpine Club Historical Photos

Harry Dougan and Oscar Frederickson Golden Hinde trip 1954
PHOTO: HARRY DOUGAN COLLECTION

Qualicum Beach Alpine Club trip to Forbidden Plateau Lodge 1948
PHOTO: HARRY DOUGAN COLLECTION
















The Alpine Club of Canada
Vancouver Island Section
www.accvi.ca