

The Alpine Club of Canada • Vancouver Island Section



***ISLAND
BUSHWHACKER***

2013 ANNUAL

THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA
VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

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BUSHWHACKER
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Report from the Chair

Rick Hudson

As we roll into the section's second century after celebrating our centenary in 2012 with a suite of special activities, you might expect the section's momentum would slow, to catch our collective breaths, so to speak. Instead, the pace seems to have been maintained, even picking up a bit. Much was achieved in 2013.

Our membership has grown slightly, to 300 from 293 in December 2012 (this does not include partners in family memberships). There were also important anniversaries in the year. Two of our senior members turned 80, with the bonus that both are still very active within the section. Don Morton joined in 1961, Albert Hestler in 1980. To crown a good year for Don, he also received the ACC's Silver Rope Award for climbing skills manifest over many decades at the highest level. And on the subject of honours, both Catrin Brown and Tak Ogasawara received Don Forest Awards for longstanding service to the section, in the backcountry and on the executive committee.

On a sadder note, we lost two mountaineering icons in 2013. Sid Watts (1927 - 2013) was an Island pioneer whose younger days were dedicated to climbing what were then very remote summits. In later years he became a vocal advocate for wilderness protection. It's a fitting legacy that he had a peak named after him while still alive, as well as a hut. He was an ACC member for 61 years.

In August we lost long-time member Charles Turner (1950 - 2013) too early, while returning from an ACC trip on the west coast. Tributes are included elsewhere in this publication. Suffice it to say that the section lost a tireless leader still in his prime, who will be greatly missed. In that same

aircraft incident, fellow member John Young was injured, but has since recovered.

If a section's measure is taken by the amount of training it provides to its members, then 2013 was a bumper year thanks to the energy of Nadja & Harry Steiner, who together and separately arranged or personally led a staggering 19 courses ranging from *Introduction to Back Country Skiing*, through running a week-long *Youth Mountaineering Camp*, to avi transceiver practices. There was also outside training by Brad Harrison, who ran a Leadership Workshop in the spring, and a pre-winter safety workshop in the fall, both provided free to members. Thanks also to Rick Johnson, Sandy Briggs, Krista Zala, Alois Schonenberger, Dave McDowell and others who delivered courses/workshops as part of the ongoing goal to get members confident in their skills, so they will take on the role of leading others in the future. Up-Island members also coordinated a presentation by the Avalanche Association of Canada on preparing for safe winter backcountry travel.

At the top end of the education scale, Stefan Gessinger attended The North Face-ACC winter training week in January, an intense and high level program, and since then has been putting back into the section. There also was a well attended Wilderness First Aid course, and another one planned.

On the boring subject of money and finance, the section is in good heart and has reserves of 'fat' to stave off the inevitable downturns that periodically sweep most non-profit organizations. We made charitable donations to the VI Avalanche Centre, the Climbers Access Society, the VI Spine Trail Assoc., the Canadian Alpine Journal, the Spearhead Hut Project in Whistler, the Strathcona Wilderness Institute and the VI Mountain Centre at Mt Washington. All small amounts, but appreciated by those who value the ACC's support.

The year's income supplement was in large part thanks to Krista Zala's organization of the Banff Mountain Film Festival, an evening held at UVic, which contributes a substantial sum to our annual revenue. And this year for the first time there was no paid publicity. Social media filled the one thousand seat auditorium. Outside in the lobby there were commercial booths, and who can forget the bags of free coffee donated?

What we often forget is that as well as being our biggest source of revenue, the BMFF is our biggest exposure to the general public, and Krista leveraged that with a follow-up of potential new members at a pub night and, later, two day hikes. As a result, our monthly numbers of joining or re-joining members more than doubled in December.

While the social, training and financing of the section are all very well, the core of our existence is what we do when we get out there. There were many activities to choose from, and at every level. The website is getting more use, and thanks go to Martin Hofmann, Dave McDowell and Greg

Lawrance who make it hum.

There were spring ski weeks to the Esplanade Range near Golden (thanks Catrin Brown) and the Selkirks near Kaslo (thanks George Butcher). There were 3 summer hiking camps at Griswold Pass (thanks Liz Williams, Colleen Kastling, Brenda O'Sullivan, Peggy Taylor & Russ Moir), and a climbing week in Roger's Pass from the A.O.Wheeler Hut (thanks Cedric Zala). There was a week-long youth climbing camp held at Mt Sutton on VI (sponsored in part by the section's Memorial Fund), and a bushy ascent of a peak in the BC's Central Coast by another youth team, again sponsored by the Memorial Fund.

The Trailrider program continued, assisting people with disabilities to get out into local parks. Members also helped with trail maintenance at Tod Inlet near Victoria, and with the VI Spine Trail Association's construction of a trail from Victoria to Cape Scott, this year focusing on the Tuck Lake section between Lake Cowichan and Port Alberni.

On the social scene, there were 10 well-attended monthly evenings held in Victoria (thank you Brenda O'Sullivan and Peggy Taylor), the annual photo competition (thanks Roger Taylor), a well-attended summer BBQ (thanks Catrin Brown), and a fine Christmas party (thanks Tom & Pam Hall).

As we roll into 2014 and I step down from the Chair, I see a section that is in good heart. There were varied trips both local and far afield, easy and difficult, winter & summer. There were events for kids to octogenarians in everything from ice-axe workshops, first aid training, AST1, rope workshop, avi practice, and more. Of particular note, there are now many different trip leaders compared to a few years ago.

Last year in this Report I wrote about two new ideas that had been supported at the 2013 AGM. Our section's proposal to manage the Ranger Cabin at Hairtrigger Lake in Strathcona Provincial Park moved too slowly and had too many cost unknowns, and at time of writing this, the 2014 executive has taken the difficult decision to go no further with it. Elsewhere, our initiative to add roughly 1,400 hectares of alpine land (where we held Summer Camp 2012 north of Mt McKelvie near Tahsis) to the existing 6,600 hectare Woss Lake PP adjacent to it, is on hold pending a change of heart by the local First Nations, who do not see the proposal as being in their interest.

On a positive note, we are in the process of following other ACC sections by forming a Leadership Committee to standardize our skills and certifications with those elsewhere. There are undertones of liability here, but the big picture is that we live in a shrinking world where we need to be aware of what other sections and clubs are doing, and match those leadership and safety standards where appropriate. Dave McDowell has put a lot of energy into this initiative, and I hope that in the coming year his efforts will start to bear fruit.

My thanks to all who participated in the many activities of the past year, whether it was drinking beer at the BBQ or pushing new routes on winter faces. You are the grist to the mill we call the ACC-VI. Finally, my particular thanks to all who served on the various committees or volunteered for special projects, for their dedication and enthusiasm to get it done. Things don't just happen – someone is always behind the scenes (you know who you are) making the effort. Thank you.



Ski into the Sky – Mount Albert Edward on an Ordinary January Saturday

Nadja Steiner
January 12

I am stressed! Teenagers are challenging in their own right, work is piling up way too far over my head, I don't even want to talk about the height of my laundry pile, and it's raining ALL the time. The last ski trip ended up with the car pirouetting into the ditch and now I am trying to squeeze in a mum's ski trip beside Harry's busy AGM schedule, two kids, a dog and a hockey game, argh! It's early January and I already feel like I am done with skiing. Relax, think... what do I really need? A bit of time on my own! Something really physically strenuous and a big – no, a huge dose of sun!

And as things tend to happen with the clouds parting the barriers, things suddenly seemed to resolve as well: Sean's Mount Albert Edward trip ended up being on the Saturday rather than Sunday, where my blocked brain had put it, Harry offered me his bed in the lodge, all potential transportation issues were solved, and the rain had stopped three days ago. On top of things, the snow had a chance to settle and stabilize; avalanche conditions were low or moderate in the alpine, and the weather forecast was not too bad. Hence, Friday night I found myself in the lodge with all these wonderful people I had almost forgotten about, a comfy bed and a plan to get up at 5 a.m. the next morning, Yeahhh!!!

Early Saturday morning it wasn't even too cold as the fellowship of seven left the parking lot after brief introductions. Heading out on the dark cross country trail, we made our way speedily towards Lake Helen Mackenzie; four on telemark gear, two AT skiers and one somewhat older set of



Mt. Albert Edward ridge. (Photo: Nadja Steiner)

nordic skis. Part of the group set off in race mode and I was wondering if they were seriously able to keep up this pace for 12-14 hours. Since the snowcat, resetting the tracks at this early hour, was not inclined to plow us a path to Circlet Lake, we had to do so ourselves. However, it turned out not too bad.

Going off the trail, Sean took over the lead and Sonia the tail, which helped to keep the group together, and before first light we reached the lake. There we found a wide skidoo track, possibly from the Strata Mountain rescue a few days prior, while the first rays of light crawled over the horizon. The way up between Mount Elma and Mount Allan Brooks was still well trodden, but nonetheless steep, and we soon lost sight of Jeff and Sonia. It turned out that Jeff hadn't put on his skins yet and was walking the steep stretches. However, he seemed incredibly fit, and it didn't take too long for them to catch up.

By the time we passed the ranger cabin the sun had slowly made its way over the horizon, and my camera made its way out of the bag more and more frequently. We still had a ski trail to follow and moved on swiftly. Jeff had tried to put on his skins, but they weren't sticky enough, so he tried to warm them up. Still, I was amazed with what ease he moved on his cross country set-up, all the while admiring the beautiful surroundings.

Passing by Strata Mountain we had to leave the tracks, but the snow was light and Dan easily broke trail. By then the sun was up and our world filled with white and silver sparkles, the sky was blue and promising, and more pictures wanted to be taken. Time for sun screen and sun glasses! By now we had lost Jeff and Sonia again. Unfortunately, after Jeff's skins had quit their service, so did one of his poles, which broke. This finally convinced Jeff that it was time to retire his old gear and look for replacements. He turned around assuring Sonia that he knew his way very well and felt comfortable to make his way back on his own. He had in fact been up Mount Albert Edward several times before. Hence, while his gear failed, his spirit never faltered, and I look forward to see him on a trip again.

Meanwhile, we had decided to avoid the steep summer ascent route and take the skiers' route via Circlet Lake to the Mount Jutland ridge. About half way up, Dan finally handed over the trail breaking and Sean lead on, followed by Sonia. Here the wind had worked hard and several switchbacks had to be cut short because it was too icy. Nonetheless it didn't take too long before we reached the ridge. By then I was feeling starved, and half a chocolate bar was just not going to do it. We had a rest stop and I devoured some crackers, cheese and a bar. My water bottle was frozen and I had to break up the ice to drink. I decided to keep one in the pack to keep it warmer.

We were up and going again before I had finished chewing. It was still a long way to go, but then this is the dream part of the trip. The ski-in so far had already been a treat, but skiing along the ridge in the glistening sunlight, blue sky and calming quiet was even more amazing. Backcountry skiing is actually quite solitary; most of the talking happens when you stop occasionally to switch leads, have a drink or simply make sure everybody is still there. Otherwise you kind of ski on your own, letting your thoughts go out and take in the surroundings. And those were simply stunning. By then we had full view of Mount Albert Edward and the mountain scenery in all other directions. The wind had created artistic sculptures and the rock outcrops were decorated with ice crystals.

Everybody moved steadily along although the pace had slowed somewhat. The wind blew quite hard for a bit and I had to get my balaclava out to keep my skin from freezing, while Sonia played the continuous "jacket on, jacket off game." Finally, up on the ridge we took another rest - the view was truly spectacular. Sean was lagging behind, as he had lost his GPS, so we decided to look for it on the way back down. By this point we had almost reached our turnaround time. We agreed that the summit was not going to happen, but that we could follow the ridge for a little longer.

Interestingly, it didn't really matter. The summit was secondary. Moving along the ridge was just so stunningly beautiful that it didn't matter where we went, or how far we went, as long as we just went. It was like moving along in a trance. Just beneath the final ascent Sean signaled to turn around. We knew it to be a long way back and the moving would get harder, with everybody being tired and the sun disappearing - it was time. We took off the skins and started the significantly faster descent, careful to stay close to our upward tracks, both to avoid the big cornice as well as to hopefully find Sean's GPS. I couldn't quite believe we would not find it. It's black on white and it wouldn't sink in far with the crunchy top layer, however, nothing appeared. I had almost given up hope when Sean loudly acknowledged his find. We continued a relaxed and well deserved easy ski, but eventually all hills end.

While trying to keep up the momentum as long as possible the next bump eventually called for a stop. This last rise to the Jutland Ridge was too steep to ski-walk up, and some

started to take off their skis. I was standing across the trail facing toward Gem Lake (which you might know is the little lake at the end of the steep slopes between Albert Edward and Mount Jutland) and did the stupidest thing of the day! Fact is that unattached skis without skins actually do slide... downhill... faaaasst! A face plant following my ridiculous try to run after it pointed out the idiocy of my attempt. The accompanying scream alerted the rest of the group, all but two already off their skis.

While my brain in brief succession flashed back to a similar situation with Harry's never-to-be-seen-again-ski a few years back, and contemplated the monetary loss, the thought of my challenging ski down on one ski and the long, long haul out were beyond comprehension at that point. Sean then took up the hunt. He quickly realized that a lone ski moves so much faster than a skier. The ski gained more air at each bump while Sean lost more and more hope of ever finding it. However the trip back home had definitely slipped into his comprehension, and he skied down yet one more bump... The following scream contained both relief and excitement at the sight of the ski, which had gained too much air and plummeted front first into the snow. While the relief flooded through the group, especially myself, Sean earned himself the missing meters of elevation to the Mt Edward summit, retracing his way back up to the group, Thank you, Sean (and Dan for joining the hunt as well)!!!

The ski down the ridge was a bit challenging at places even with two skis. While the snow allowed beautiful turns at the beginning, the appearance of patches of a rather crunchy surface made it somewhat less enjoyable further down. While Dan made it look super easy, descending with beautiful telemark turns, several snow plunges and somersaults by his followers told another story. Greg, the only other AT skier besides me, still managed some elegant turns, while all elegance was lost when I tried to follow a similar pattern. Nonetheless, with more or less snow interaction we all made it back down to Circler Lake.

One more of our 5-minute-max breaks, inhaling some chocolate, nuts or protein bars and putting the skins back on, and we were on our way back. Luc seemed to feel a sudden urge of haste and switched back into race pace, which only Dan felt comfortable enough to maintain. While we retraced our tracks, the sun went down. A few more pictures documenting the end of a stunningly beautiful day, and we reached our last real descent, back down to Lake Helen Mackenzie. While most of the group took their skins off, I decided that with reduced visibility, a fairly low energy level and improvable skiing skills, the slower descent with skins would be more appropriate for my taste. However, skins also sometimes lead to more sudden stops and one of those might have caused Sonia to fall. Since I was



*Left to right: Dan, Luc, Sonia, Sean, Greg below Albert Edward summit.
(Photo: Nadja Steiner)*

already on my way down and saw Sean right behind her, I continued to the bottom where I caught up with the other three at the lake.

By then not only darkness but also the cold was creeping in, and we saw no sign of Sean and Sonia. We waited... still no sign... after too much time than could be accounted for a simple recovery of a fall, Dan and Greg started to make their way back up. Luckily, they didn't have to go too far before seeing our missing skiers. Sonia's binding had popped out and had taken some effort to get back in. Glad that nothing worse had happened, we made our way back to the lodge. By then my feet had gotten into a serious state of complaint, which I had tried to ignore for quite a while now. I felt several, likely open, blisters and could kick myself for the bad choice of socks and for not bringing the usual extra pair because it was "just a day trip." Well, the last 1 - 2 hours definitely turned into type 2 or even type 3 fun (meaning I wouldn't have minded cutting them out), but nonetheless happy and exhausted we all made it back to a well-filled cabin with lots of yummy potluck items.

So, in summary: After 13 hours with less than one hour break and about 20 minutes of sitting down time, the trip was definitely strenuous. I did get a huge dose of sun and plenty of time to myself. This means: Mission accomplished... beautifully...!

Participants: Sean McIntyre, Sonia Langer, Luc Lachance, Greg Rowe, Dan Perrakis, Nadja Steiner and Jeff Beddoes.

Alexandra Peak Ski

Chris Ruttan
March 22 – 24

At 7:20 a.m. on March 22, I left my place in Shawnigan on my way to Mill Bay to pick up the first two passengers to join me on my trip up-Island to ski Alexandra Peak. I was towing my sweet little 4x6 covered trailer to carry our gear and keep the car free of flotsam. I picked up Brett Classen and Sven Larson at the Pioneer Mall and we loaded all their stuff into the trailer and headed north for Cumberland where Bill “Billy the Rickshaw” Rickson waited. Bill and I had skied together before, once on a trip into Baby Bedwell Lake, and later into Kings Peak, both of which had been serious trials. Our last passenger was a young fellow named Colin Olsen who I came to call “Olie” for reasons I can’t recall. We picked him up in Campbell River and now our journey out to Buttle Lake was the last leg.

The gate on the logging road off Westmin Mine road was open. I wasn’t at all sure it would stay that way but we could at least drive up and deposit the gear and most of the bodies as high as we could get. I couldn’t drag the trailer up due to the steepness of the first section of road and the cross ditching so we dropped the trailer and filled the car with the gear. I then drove up while most of the others walked. We only got about 1 ½ km due to a large fir tree across the road, but it was at the top of the steepest hill on the road, so a good start. Once we had dropped the gear and I got turned around I had to drive the car back down to park outside the gate with the trailer, then hump all the way back up to where the rest were waiting and having lunch. We still had another 1 ½ km to go in our boots before we could drop the skis and that was still some pretty steep going.

We had a good day for travel with sun and clouds mixed and it was fairly warm, but it was a long way up that road, with a fairly stiff grade the whole way. I was pretty sure it was going to be worth the effort and the conditions seemed to get better all the way up. We had a break at a big waterfall around 5 ½ km, and several smaller stops just waiting for stragglers to catch up, until we came to the spot in the road where it turns to enter the big hanging valley where most of the logging has taken place. I knew from a previous trip that following the road into that valley would take us down a long drop to where the road forks and then we would have to climb back up to where I had planned to camp and I wasn’t doing a single metre of uphill with a 55 lb pack if I could avoid it. Instead I led off the road up over a shoulder to another road that the logger heads had used to reach some timber on the high slopes and which we could now use to ski back down to the main road and save a whole lot of round-about travel. We reached our campsite at about 6 p.m., some 5 hours from our start and with



Alexandra Peak skiers.

plenty of light left to get set up and fed up. The conditions seemed really good and we could only hope for continued clear weather. I don’t remember when exactly I went to bed, but I do recall I had my water bottle full of very hot water and when it was rolled down to the bottom of my sleeping bag it was glorious for a couple hours. I slept well!

March 23: It was about 7:30 a.m. when I got up and everyone seemed to be stirring as well, except for Olie as he was a little slower to emerge. He had slept in a hole in the snow just wrapped in a tarp - curious. We had clear skies again as we got our breakfast done and got ready to go out and find some really good terrain. We were about one kilometre from the end of the main road, and we wanted to get down that road to near the end, because that was the best place to get up onto the ridge that would take us around to the base of the mountain’s West Face. In the summer I had found a route up very near the end of the road, but this time as we skied in, I could see what looked like a bit of a ramp up into the timber that appeared to be easier. I swung up to the base of the steep canyon wall and sure enough there was a good route that angled up and took us up to the ridge spine more easily, so we were soon standing and gazing out onto the steep slopes coming down from the north end of the main massif.

Here we had some really serious ski slopes with excellent snow. We skinned up to the top of the ridge to where it topped out in a cove of wind-tortured trees before it turned the corner and became the West Face. We stopped there and stripped our skins off, getting ready for a run down. There was a weakness in the snow pack at about 12 inches, and this slope was huge with a serious drop-off near the end, so we resolved to handrail the ridge we had just climbed up, staying close into the big trees and see how it held up. We went one at a time and the conditions were blue ribbon. We skied all the way down to near a drop-off, coming at respectable intervals and keeping an eye on each skier to the end. It all seemed really good until we climbed back up to the skin-up trail, and then I saw a fairly significant release scar on a roll-over that had obviously been set off by Billy as he came down. Only he and



RICKSHAW RUN

Sven were on snowboards, and Sven had taken another path. We talked it over up on top and decided to do another run, but this time we would stay off the more open slopes and ski the ridge proper to our skin-up track, then head for the West Face. It was top-shelf skiing and everyone got through safe and sound, so then we headed for the West Face to check out the conditions from that aspect.

We skied to some open rocks and there we had a late lunch break; it was about 2:30 p.m. and we looked about for some further fun slopes. By now the sun was pretty well gone and snow was falling, but it wasn't a problem. Just south of us you could see a rise that looked good for a run down into a fault line, where a creek ran back into the valley where we were camped. This fault line was a possible way down off the mountain, but we had a better route that Bill had spied from camp the day before, which meant we had to ski down the ridge, heading out to the northwest until we reached a col; then a hard right turn would put us on our run, but first we had more skiing to do up here. We skinned across the huge plateau below the mountain's main ridge until we got up on a nice bump where we could get a good run down towards our ridge. Still good skiing up there, and we were soon putting our skins back on to climb up out of the fault and onto the ridge, where we had a short ways to skin before we could take off the skins again and ski down the ridge spine to our drop-in point.

Once we had all gathered together, we chose a likely sacrifice, and off went good old Sven down the incredible slope to a selected safe spot, where he waited for the rest of us to pile up. Off again on the next leg, a little longer this time because the slope was holding up fine and the skiing was out of this world. At this point we had to traverse left to avoid some rocky steps, and that gave us another excellent run track down to the bottom of the really steep slopes, and into the trees, as seen on the photo. We still had good skiing for a nice stretch until the trees got too thick and we had to wind down through thick timber until we could

escape out into an open logging slash a short way from our tents. What a great end to a great day and out of respect, and perhaps even reverence, for the mountain and Billy, we named the run "Rickshaw Run" and it was good. Not even 15 minutes back to camp and we were soon stuffing our faces and exaggerating the crap out of how good it was. It was snowing fairly steadily when we finally hit the sack, and it snowed all night.

March 24: The new snow was lovely but there was a problem - it was really foggy. "You can't see anything except fog." So we had a meeting of the executive and resolved just to pack up and head out. The trip out doesn't really deserve an accounting because it sucked; suffice to say it took three hours, it was wet, shitty skiing and one hell of a long ways but we eventually got back to the truck, and for those of us with dry clothes the trailer provided a great place for changing out of the rain. We stopped in Campbell River for a late lunch and a final gab with Colin before he headed back north for Port Alice and we started south. A great trip after all and I plan to ski Rickshaw Run again one day.

Participants: Chris Ruttan, Bill Rickson, Brett Classen, Sven Larson and Colin Olsen.

Peak 4325 (at the Head of the Nomash Main)

Lindsay Elms April 21-22

Brandon Hopkins was asking on the VI Mountaineering Facebook page for people to help brush out the trail to the Nomash Slabs. Val and I had never been up to the slabs, but we had looked at them several times and they were on our "to-do" list, so we thought we might as well join him. I wasn't expecting to climb them this time as I thought they would be running with water, but at least I could get an idea of the access. Brandon arranged to meet us at our place in Comox after I got off work in the morning, and then we would drive up to the end of the Nomash Main together. Three hours later we parked at the end of the road by the old bridge across Nathan Creek, had a quick lunch, and then grabbed the loppers and handsaw and headed off up the old overgrown road. That afternoon we cleared just over half of the trail, but the remaining half was under snow. That evening we discussed what to do the next day and came up with a couple of options; however, the final decision would depend on what we saw after hiking the Nomash Main to the head of the valley. The first option was Peak 4400 (see [Island Alpine p.438](#)) which was on the right of the valley and the second option was Peak 4325 (1318m) at the very head of the valley (I am using feet because my map is old and in imperial measurement).



The upper basin on Peak 4325. (Photo: Valerie Wootton)

Sunday morning we started up the road under a clear blue sky. Half way up we got a good view of Peak 4400 and it didn't look all that easy from the road, so we quickly decided to climb Peak 4325. In the distance on its summit we could see a radio repeater tower (green priapism), but it looked a long way off. However, I also knew from the map that its summit would offer a spectacular view of the west coast. After an hour, we cut off the road and followed the hydro lines until a bit higher up we came across the road again. By now we were on snow that had firmed up from the low night-time temperatures. Continuing up the road we saw a steep snow-filled gully that would take us up to the ridge overlooking the Tahsis River. Being a west-facing gully, it remained in the shade so we put our crampons on and climbed up the hard snow. When we topped out, beautiful snow-filled basins rolled out in front of us, with the summit appearing a lot closer. Although the sun was focusing its rays on the snow in the basin, we were rarely breaking through, except for Brandon who kept finding soft snow. We couldn't help but think of the fun we could have had if we had brought our skis with us!

Just before noon we crested the final slope and stepped onto the summit. The views were amazing! Below us we could see the town of Tahsis, and Tahsis Inlet winding its way down beside Nootka Island. To the east reared Mount McKelvie and all the peaks that we had climbed last summer on the alpine camp. However, behind us was the Haihte Range with Rugged Mountain and the South Blade, both in full profile. While sitting on the summit having lunch I realized here was another summit that had not been on my radar, but now that I was sitting there it was just as special as any other mountain. It just re-emphasized that fact that we have so many special places here on Vancouver Island.

On the hike back down the road I saw several more trips that I would have to make. Two of them from the head of the Nomash River; one I hoped to do in the next few weeks and the other would wait until the spring next year.

Participants: Valerie Wootton, Brandon Hopkins and Lindsay Elms.

Cowichan Circuit

Roxanne Stedman

Mount Sutton – 1172m

April 22

Our usual Monday day hike routine changed when I picked up Dave Suttill and he asked "Where do you want to go?" I replied "Anywhere but the Sooke Hills." "What about Mount Sutton?" Dave asked. We turned the car around and drove back to Dave's to pick up the Backroad Mapbook. He quickly ran into his house grabbed the Mapbook and downloaded his Mount Whympers GPS file which also happened to have a way point for the Mount Sutton cable crossing over the Gordon River.

Sort of prepared – off we went via Honeymoon Bay, up the Gordon River main logging road along Sutton Creek, over Sutton Pass and into the Gordon River watershed. With the GPS on, and keeping a watch for the trail head, we headed up the logging road and drove right by Dave's waypoint for the cable car. There was nothing to indicate that the crossing was where it was.

The cable car was in good condition and we had a fun ride over the spectacular Gordon River. Once across, the flagged route through the slash petered out and we were on our own. We elected to follow the hiking route shown on the Backroad Mapbook which seemed to coincide with an old logging road to the head of the valley, but we were now in deep snow, covering any cairns that might have been there, and there was no flagging in sight. It was a steep snow climb along the creek gully and the tree-wells were huge.

We decided if we could make it to the ridge that that would be good enough as we were running out of time due to our late start. While I got comfortable relaxing on the ridge, Dave calculated that we were only 400m horizontal and 40m vertical from the summit – so gear was quickly repacked and after 10 minutes along the easy snowy ridge we were on the summit! It was a beautiful sunny day with patchy views through the trees over Lake Cowichan. We retraced our steps back along the ridge, through the snow and past very steep bluffs. We were amazed at dog Schooner's effective self arresting technique and he hasn't even been to snow school!

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman.

Mount Landale – 1537m

May 6

We left Victoria on a hot, record-breaking morning. The previous spring, Dave and Brian Pinch found a very direct and alternate route up Mount Landale via Widow Main from the Cowichan Lake side. We decided to retrace that route, but without bikes as it required expending too much energy to get bikes up the steep and loose gravel logging road with little or no payback. It was 28°C out when we left the car at the Widow Main gate. Up the Widow Main logging road along the roaring river we went. We hit snow really quickly at the upper clear cuts. We spotted a bear, or was it a bear print, on the way up. We headed to the base of Landale and up the shoulder along the elk trail route followed the year before. Once on the shoulder we connected with the logging roads coming up from the Chemainus side and headed straight up through the trees and snowfield and more trees to the top. Hard slog up to the top and very, very hot! Beautiful views all around and down to still-frozen Lomas Lake. We were impressed with Mount Hooper's prominent position on the skyline to the north and decided to put it on our list of future objectives.

We took a few shortcuts on the way down through the snow-covered slash with only a little bit of breakthrough! By the time we reached the Widow and Cottonwood Creek, the evening low light through the trees made for glorious colours in the mossy woods. It was 26°C out when we reached the car at 7 p.m. A quick stop at the DQ in Duncan was the perfect ending to a sweet day.

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman.

El Capitan Mountain – 1493m

May 19

Another bike and hike trip! We headed off in great weather. As the bridge was out over the river, we could only ride for about 40 minutes before we had to stash the bikes. A make-shift log crossing with a slack hand line made for a tricky crossing. We turned right on the east Cottonwood Main to the flagged "short cut" trail to join the upper logging road and then on to the Lomas Lake trail. We arrived at cold and snowy Lomas Lake at 1:00 p.m. With ice axes in hand, we went up the steep snow gully arriving on the ridge at 2:15. Dave flagged where we reached the ridge to mark the way back. We arrived at the summit at 2:45. It was quite steep where we left the ridge to head back to the lake so Dave put in a hand line. We were back at the bikes at 6:00 p.m. We didn't seem to save much time by riding but it was sure fun cruising down the logging road at top speed.

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman.

Mount Hooper – 1491m

June 3 and 10

We decided late on Sunday night to go to Mount Hooper for our Monday hike. With bikes on the car, we headed to Youbou, parked at the Shaw Main logging road gate and started riding at 10:45. At first the Shaw Main was in great condition, but it soon deteriorated. Lots of pushing the bikes up and through washouts. We stashed the bikes at noon and we were on our way. It was a total bushwhack and really hard going up steep terrain. We barely made it to Balmer Lake at 3:30. The meadow and the lake were completely frozen and snow covered. Since the weather was deteriorating with big, dark clouds rolling in, we decided we didn't have enough time to make it to the summit so we headed down.

Second try

Learning from our mistakes the previous week, we left Victoria a lot earlier to arrive at Shaw Main at 9:00 a.m. Bushwhacking attire and bug spray made for a much more enjoyable hike this time! We stashed the bikes after 1 hour of riding at an elevation of 465m, much sooner than our previous attempt. Dave had placed some flagging at strategic points the week before, making navigating up to the lake a bit easier. We hit snow again at the meadow before the lake and arrived at Balmer Lake, elevation 1055m, after 2 hours. The lake was beautiful with its shoreline outlined in melted blue water. The climb up and down along the ridge took longer than expected and we were glad we had decided to turn back at the lake the week before. We skirted to the left below the cliffs under the summit, but should have kept left a little longer. Instead we headed up a steep chimney with good green belays. We were on the top just before 3:00 p.m. as large grey clouds rolled in, which they tend to do in the afternoon in the Cowichan valley. We headed down farther west through a meadow of heather and yellow avalanche lilies with lots of stops for photos and to enjoy the views of Barkley Sound. We were back at the bikes at 7:30 p.m. Saw 3 herds of elk on the ride out – one of which was running parallel to the road through the woods as they tried to get away from us.

Distance to the top one way - 19.8km

Hike portion one way - 8.3km

Bike portion one way - 11.4km

Cumulative vertical gain - 1650m

Total time - 11 hours and 48 minutes

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman.

Heather Mountain – 1345m

July 15

With the beautiful July weather continuing, we turned to Heather Mountain. We arrived at the logging road just past Heather campsite to find the gate open! Off we drove as far as we could.

We were very tempted to cut some walking time out but were worried that the gate might not be open on our return, this led to some debate about what to do. Roxanne stashed



Dave Suttill, Roxanne Stedman, Mike Whitney and Schooner on Mount Service.



*Razorback from the head of Canoe Creek.
(Photo: Valerie Wootton)*

her gear at the trailhead then we drove back down to the gate and parked. Bit of a slog up the logging road to the clearcut/blowdown, then we went through the trees and up into the meadows. The ponds in the meadows were crystal clear and, surprisingly, there were no bugs. We spent 1.5 hours enjoying the views from the top before heading down.

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman.

Mount Service – 1490m October 28

Mike Whitney decided to join us on our last hike on the Cowichan Circuit. The weather was clear and cool. We left Victoria early, as sunset was around 6:00 p.m. Although the hiking trails book said there was no defined trail to Service via Cottonwood Main and described a direct and steep route, we had no trouble finding a route and it was easier than expected. The understory was clear of bush, making for a speedy ascent. The summit was surprisingly rocky and free of trees, allowing unobstructed views as far away as the Golden Hinde and what we thought was Rainier. The rocky meadows with partially frozen ponds were beautiful. It was cold and breezy on top so we didn't stay too long.

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman, with Mike Whitney.

Razorback – The Mackenzie Range

Lindsay Elms May 10

East of the group of spires that collectively make up the Mackenzie Range are 3 or 4 other peaks that, as far as I know, have not had any ascents. All of them are around 1300m and I have imagined their ascent to be more like

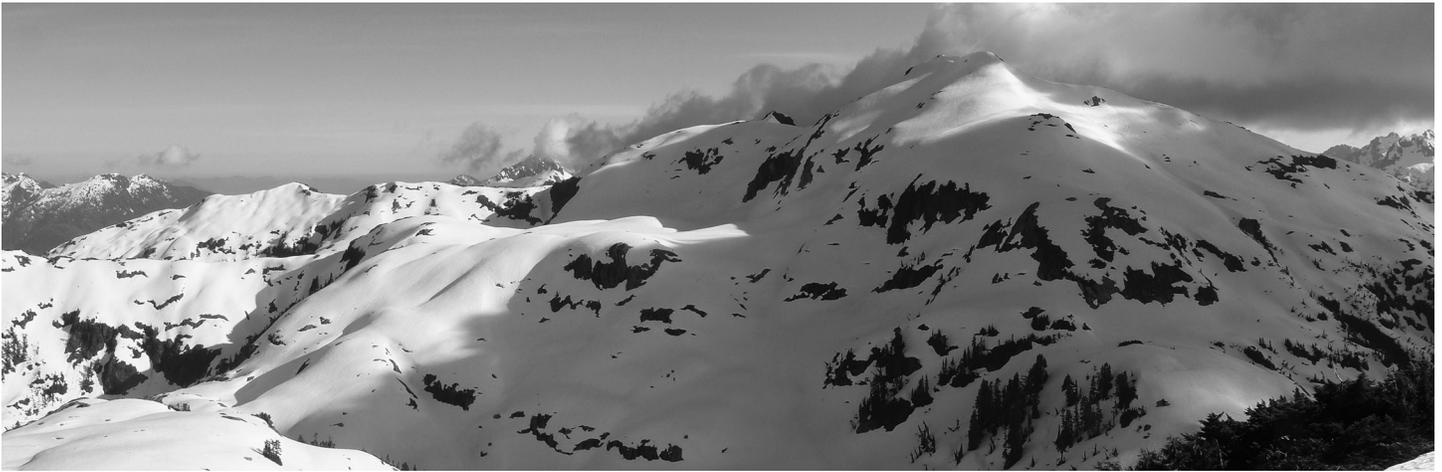
that of the main Mackenzie Summit then any of the other rock spires in the range. Having been into the basin at the head of Canoe Creek in both the spring and summer, I knew that if we wanted to go back in, it would have to be in the spring, as the bush and the bugs are just too bad in the summer. It is much easier to travel over snow than to thrash through thick bush.

We parked just below the gate at the bottom of the hydro road, and then hiked for an hour to the dam, where we took our running shoes off and put our boots on. Because we had been there several times before, we knew the quickest route up to the head of the valley, avoiding the bushy sections that can be time-consuming. Once we crossed the creek in the upper valley, we were on the snow and were able to stay on that to the saddle on the ridge between Canoe Peak and the Mac' Range. We then traversed west under the unclimbed/unnamed peaks until we came to a snow gully that took us up to the ridge between the middle summit and the one to the east.

The ridge up to the middle summit was a series of knife-edged serrations, but we stayed off the ridge most of the way, climbing most of the route on the north side. After 20 minutes we were on summit, where we watched the clouds begin to swirl in around us. Although we could have continued down the ridge and across to the next summit to the northwest, we decided to save the other peaks for another trip. (I just want an excuse to come back again.)

On the way down, we talked about coming back next year a little earlier in the spring, when there would be more snow covering everything. We also talked about what we would call the peak and came up with the name Razorback. For some reason the serrated ridge reminded me of the ridged-back of the wild or feral Razorback Hog. It seemed to fit in with the general theme of the range, but because we hadn't climbed the other peaks, they have remained unnamed for the time being.

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms.



5040 Peak.

Crater Ridge Traverse

Chris Ruttan
June 3 – 5

You could spend a lot of time searching on Google Earth or other such “high tech” forms of our new-age info banks, but you won’t find this name (Crater Ridge) on any of them, for the simple reason that I just made that up ‘cause it seems to work and I don’t think it has any other name. Certainly my good friend Martin hadn’t heard of it when I talked him into going up there for a three-day traverse in a big loop that would take us car-to-car from Crater Ridge past Peak 5040 then over to Nahmint Mountain and finally back to the car. The place is a high ridge route starting in the upper reaches of the gorgeous Nahmint River Valley. I had been eyeing up this route for the last three years as I spent weekend after weekend skiing Nahmint, Adder, and Klitsa as well as the nearby mountain I call Half-Pipe [locally referred to in Alberni as ‘Jacks Peak’ – ed] due to the awesome half-pipe that forms naturally between the double summits. This mountain is due south of Louise Goetting Lake. I had already gone up by myself for a weekend to scout a trail and check out the skiing (May 19/20) and I had a ball up there.

Martin and I set out from my place in Shawnigan Lake on June 3 and drove up-Island to Port Alberni, then through to the Nahmint Main, which we followed to Kilometre 30. We then turned left onto what I understand to be N71, which we followed for about one kilometre or so, to an overgrown spur road that goes off to the right for only about 40 or 50m to an obvious old landing. I had cut some of the alder off the road on my first trip, so we again spent some time removing a bit more so we could drive in to our launch site. We then suited up for the steep hike up onto the ridge spine. We pretty well followed my original route up; however, I will not describe it in case Martin reads this and the memory of it is as traumatic as the actual experience - I

have a heart after all. Let’s just say that we did eventually reach skiable snow and were able to get those monsters off our backs.

I can’t say for sure how long it took us to finally reach the actual lip of Crater Ridge, but we stopped for lunch at the repeater tower just above the col where Viggo Holm’s ashes were spread. It was wonderful to get out from under the packs for awhile and the weather was great. The next section was a ski down into a dip in the connecting ridge off towards Peak 5040. This is rather a deep notch. A few limestone cliffs had melted out so that it was somewhat more complicated than necessary as far as I could tell. It was also rather steep up the other side, but we soldiered on and soon discovered yet another dip in the ridge to slow us down. All of these features had been visible from the ridge as we approached so it was just to be endured as we headed for our first night’s goal of the last high point before reaching Peak 5040 (49° 12’ 15.35”N, 125° 16’ 34.43”). It was 6 p.m. when we finally reached a suitable camp site and the views were outstanding of Peak 5040 and Nahmint Mountain, as well as all the surrounding snow covered mountains. After eating I took a short ski down the north slopes of our wee perch then slogged back up and went to bed. We had a great night and slept in a bit, but woke to another awesome day.

After a leisurely breakfast we began the task of finding a way down to the col between our camp and Peak 5040. Below us was a cliff band that wrapped all the way around below us until it faded a bit to the west and we could just wiggle down through a few trees to a nice rolling face and ski down to the col. We had to skin up again for the trip across the col to where we could then ski down to a spot below the northeast slopes then back up onto the huge plateau east of the main massif of Peak 5040. It was here we decided to drop our packs and spend a couple of hours skiing what is truly the one of the finest ski destinations west of all the other ski destinations. At any rate you get what I mean. We skinned up to the summit of Peak 5040, took a bit of a rest, then set off on a glorious long run starting from the top down the north slope. Trending east to just the right spot, we then went down the face to the plateau where a hard left turn put us on the next steep face. This took us all

the way down to the bottom of a cirque and the end of the run, just slightly less than a kilometre - what a gas! We had to do that again!

Back up to the top with a brief rest then off down the mountain again, but this time we swung right at the bottom of the first section and shuffled back to our packs, where we had a lovely long lunch break in the sun and glory of a June day. We loaded up again and set off for the start of the ridge running off to Beverly Lake and the base of the approach to Nahmint Mountain. It took us an hour to reach the ridge just above Beverly Lake then another half hour or so to reach a suitable campsite just below the first steep slopes leading up onto the climb towards Nahmint Mountain. We got our tent set up, then we resolved to ski back on our approach tracks around Beverly Lake to the very south of the lake, which is a high point with a nice slope leading right down to the south shore of the lake.

Many years ago, when I first hiked past this area on my way up Nahmint Mountain for the first time, I looked at these slopes and thought how wonderful it would be one day to ski them. Well here I was at last! We worked ourselves all the way around to the very farthest high point where we stopped and took a rest and had a conversation about all the terrain spread out to the south. We finally jumped back on our skis and cruised down the beautiful untracked slopes to the lake shore. It was a long slog back up to the ridge, but I wasn't done yet. As Martin skinned back to camp I slowly climbed back up to the top for one more run. This time I trended a little more to the east with the intention of returning to camp that way, because it was obvious that it was a much shorter route than the way we had approached. The only trick was I didn't know if I would be able to get across the outfall creek. I had a pleasant run down, then shuffled along the east shoreline until I reached the creek and found, to my delight, it was no problem to cross. I packed my skis across and from there to camp was an easy skin up. Along the way I discovered we had been too hasty in our choice for our camp as there was a much better spot not far away, but it was too late now. We had a late dinner, then got into the tent for the night. We had a little light rain overnight, but woke up to yet another fine day.

After a quick breakfast we prepared to head off to Nahmint Mountain to take a run at the summit before we skied out back to the truck. We started off at 9:10 a.m. without skis and hiked over to the base of the first pile of rock, then broke climber's right until we found a nice rock ramp at the top of a snow slope that we used to get around the steeper bits. We then wound up the south slopes of the west peak until we reached a point where we had to drop down into the col between the peaks. From here we began the climb up the ledges to the gravel couloir leading to the exposed route skirting the steep upper cliffs until we could hike up onto the summit, arriving at 12:15 p.m. It was pretty foggy up there for the first while, but it was clearing and we did eventually get some views.

After snooping around for a bit we retraced our steps and



Beverly Lake.

finally got back to camp where we packed up our gear and prepared for the long drop down into the valley below, where the car waited. We had more or less scouted out a route down from across the valley, but it was not anywhere near as good as it had looked. Below were deep creek canyons and large areas without enough snow cover to ski. We got down into a high valley where a creek drained into the main valley, but we soon ran out of snow. We had a truly epic hike through brush and creek gullies, which eventually led into a forest that was steep beyond reason, and where we fought a seemingly endless battle with blowdown, brush and impossibly steep terrain. At last we made it to the top of the slash. Not too far below us we could see a road, but we had to get through the slash first and it was just beyond words how thick it was. We had to negotiate the most onerous, spiky, tangled, obstinate barrier imaginable to man or beast.

Eventually we straggled back along the road to the car - cut, bruised, beyond tired and aching to get out from under those monster packs. It was 6:40 p.m. We got changed into dry clothes and began the drive out to Port Alberni. As we arrived into the big valley, where the views opened up, Martin pointed out the most incredible scene in the sky above - a Sun Dog - which I had heard of before, but never seen. It was a really great example of the phenomenon and we stopped to take some photos before we ducked into a restaurant for a late dinner. It was 11:30 p.m. when we got back to my place and of course Martin still had some ways to go. It took some time before he was speaking to me again; I wasn't really sure why 'cause it was a pretty good trip for the most part.

Participants: Martin Hofmann and Chris Ruttan.

Desperately Seeking Eliza

Plot:

Three unfulfilled suburban climbers living on Vancouver Island are fascinated with a peak they have only seen on a map. Their fascination reaches a peak [sic] when they email each other with the headline “Desperately Seeking Eliza” and propose to rendezvous in Comox. In a series of events involving backpacking, bushwhacking, and other farcical climbing techniques, they participate in an *Alice in Wonderland*-style plot, ostensibly motivated by the goal to be the first to reach the summit of the Eliza Ears.

Cast:

Valerie Wootton, Sandy Briggs and Lindsay Elms.

Awards and Reviews:

No BAFTA's or Oscar's were received, and no one was nominated for a Golden Globe or Piolet d'Or as best climber.

Soundtrack:

You don't want to listen to us, but the original musical score for “Desperately Seeking Eliza” features Madonna and Rosanna Arquette - great background music while reading this trip account.

Eliza Ears Mountain

Lindsay Elms

June 5 – 7

The remote twin peaks of Eliza Ears are located at the headwaters of three watersheds: Amai Creek, which drains into Amai Inlet; Narrowgut Creek, which drains into Cachalot Inlet; and Chum Creek, which drains into Espinosa Inlet. Like many other west coast mountains, and I mean west coast Vancouver Island, this peak had no climbing history that I was aware of before we set off on the climb. The peak consists of two summits which appear to be about the same height, but by the end of the trip we could only confirm the height of the west summit (1102m).

Eliza Ears is named after Lieutenant Francisco de Eliza (1759-1825) an officer in the Spanish Navy and the first Governor of Nootka (the Spanish fort on Nootka Island). Eliza was sent from the Spanish base in San Blas, Mexico, to establish a Spanish colony at Nootka, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. He arrived in April 1790 commanding three ships: *Concepción*, *San Carlos* and the *Princesa Real*. Eliza departed Nootka in 1791 and headed north towards Alaska, searching for the fabled Northwest Pas-



Eliza Ears – The Elms step. (Photo: Sandy Briggs)

sage, but bad weather forced him to turn south, where he explored the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

In the spring of 2008, Val, Sandy and I had driven out on a reconnaissance to Eliza Ears, but bad weather stymied us. However, we eventually came to the conclusion that the Amai Main logging road, off Harbour Road (Zeballos/Fair Harbour Forestry Service Road), would give us the closest point of access (without using a boat), but it appeared as though the last 8km of this road to the base of the twin peaks was going to be heavily overgrown.

In 2013, after a series of emails, Sandy said he had a few days off coming up, but because of a late night engagement he wasn't able to leave Victoria until Wednesday morning. Once Sandy arrived at our place in Comox we re-arranged the back of his Subaru to accommodate our packs, then we headed north on the highway to Woss where we stopped for a coffee break. After Woss it was through to Zeballos and then on towards Fair Harbour. About half way to Fair Harbour we turned left onto the Amai Main, which runs parallel to the Harbour Road, and followed that out for about 7-8km, putting Sandy's Subaru through the paint-scratch test as we negotiated alder thickets along the road. We then started looking for where the Amai Main turned left and eventually followed the creek south, but it was difficult to find because of the thick bush. Fortunately, luck was on our side as we found the right spot! It was time to put our packs on our backs.

After thrashing through an alder/salmonberry thicket the road opened up and became obvious, but it was still quite overgrown with lots of bent-over branches that we had to climb either under or over. This went on for the next 8km, taking us 4.5 hours to negotiate (including the occasional halt where we could at least have a break from cursing at the bush for a few minutes). When we reached our destination for the day we looked around for a level site for the tent, but there wasn't too much about. A little farther on we came across a small clearing in the middle of the road big enough for the tent. Home for the next two nights!

The next morning we were up early and headed off the road and into the bush. Visibility was poor because of the thick bush, but basically we stayed to the west of a creek that angled up to the saddle between the two summits. About half way, a draw to the right lured us off our route and up to a small saddle on the North Ridge of a small subsidiary summit. The bush then opened up a little as we reached the top of the sub peak. About 1km southwest of our location we could see the west summit and the final ascent to the top looked interesting; however, first we had to find a way down off this peak and onto a ridge about 250m below us. It took a little bit of searching to find a route, but we soon found a way down by literally hanging off some tree roots. Now we just had to follow a steep, narrow ridge to the final headwall.

At the top of the ridge a small rock bluff appeared and directly in front of it was a tree. I managed to bridge up between the tree and the bluff to reach the top and then I dropped the rope down to assist Val and Sandy up. From the top of the bluff a sloping bench then led across to a series of steep vegetated gullies that angled up through the summit headwall slightly to the south of the summit. All three of us were thankful that the small shrubs and heather were well anchored as we defied gravity by grasping our way upwards using them as handholds. Sandy whimpered about the extra weight he was carrying that created additional stress on the vegetation as he pulled himself up. Just as well he is not religiously inclined as there was no way he was going to let go of the heather to bring his hands together for a little prayer in the hope that a higher power would make sure that the vegetation would hold. Fortunately, from his years of experience in the mountains he knows what will hold and what won't. But wait, I am assuming it is his years of mountain experience! Perhaps it is because he is a chemist. As a chemist he is quickly able to calculate whether the chemical bond that is required to form a stable/sure grip between the atoms in his hands and those of the heather as they share electrons is sufficient. This is a form of bonding Sandy might call the co-existence bonding, but in fact it is known as covalent bonding!

Once out of the gullies a steep little rock wall had to be climbed and then it was an easy scramble along the ridge to the rocky summit. Taking into account the exposure, the nature of the climbing, the peak's remoteness and the lack of interest by climbers, we were thinking that this summit was probably unclimbed and ours would be a 1st ascent. No cairn could be seen on the highest point, but wait – what was that glued to the rock? A brass survey bolt with the date of 1948 stamped on it! I knew that Alfred Slocomb was surveying the west coast in 1947 and '48 and had climbed other peaks such as Conuma Peak so this bolt had to have been glued in place by him. So much for us 'touching' this virgin for the very first time! We had made it through the wilderness but we'd been had and were feeling sad and blue.



Eliza Ears – View to East Peak. (Photo: Sandy Briggs)

*I made it through the wilderness
Somehow I made it through
Didn't know how lost I was
Until I found you*

*I was beat incomplete
I'd been had, I was sad and blue
But you made me feel
Yeah, you made me feel
Shiny and new*

*Like a virgin
Touched for the very first time*

Without reading Slocomb's diaries I have no idea of the route he took to get to the top or the actual date, but all three of us were impressed and a little jealous of his 1st ascent. Really, it didn't matter that we weren't the first to climb Eliza Ears. We were happy to get to the summit of this remote and "rarely" climbed peak; however, we were also happy to be in the mountains with each other and enjoying this new perspective of all the peaks that we had become familiar with over the years.

On the descent we rappelled the vegetated gullies and then continued back along the ridge to the saddle between the two peaks. The line back down to camp was relatively straightforward, but the climb had taken longer than we had anticipated. Also the drizzle that we encountered during the descent did cause us to grumble a little, but when the tent came into view all we could think of was a nice hot cup of tea in a few minutes. Ah, the little pleasures in life!

The walk back out to the car the next day was not the most pleasant, with the bush being a little damp, but once we got into dry clothes it was just another mountain experience. Later that afternoon we stopped at the Royal Coachman Pub in Campbell River for dinner and had a pleasant surprise when some friends arrived after having completed the West Buttress on Rambler Peak. Over a few beers we swapped stories about each of our trips, but eventually we had to empty our glasses and finish the drive back to Comox; unfortunately Sandy had to add another 2.5 hours



Sawtooth Pk from near Triple Pk. (Photo: Lindsay Elms)

onto the trip to get back to Victoria. Obviously this is not too much of an issue as he has been doing this for many years. At least he would be home before midnight!

Participants: Valerie Wootton, Sandy Briggs and Lindsay Elms.

Sawtooth Peak

Lindsay Elms
June 22

There was one major summit along the Highway 4 corridor that I hadn't climbed and that was Sawtooth Peak. This is not an official name, but it was bestowed upon the peak on September 26, 2003, when Craig (Quagger) Wagnell made the 1st ascent. He had climbed it from the Toquart Main and I too began eyeing it up from the Toquart Main after several trips into some of the other peaks in the area. The West Ridge was looking promising, but after spending some time perusing the map I eventually decided on a different route. This new route would require less driving but necessitated more vertical and horizontal distance to be covered. Walter Moar and I had planned to climb it in 2012 after climbing Handsome Mountain, but unfortunately we found the gate at Toquart Lake locked so instead we climbed Black Peaks.

By 2013, there were only a few peaks left along Highway 4 that Walter also hadn't climbed and Sawtooth was one of them. Walter jumped at the opportunity when I renewed his interest in climbing the peak, but he wanted to know how I planned to climb it. My plan was to drive up the Marion Main to the end of the road and hike the trail up towards Triple Peak. From the lake the plan was to hike up to a low saddle on the ridge above, then find a route down the other side before angling up to the summit of Sawtooth Peak. It would be the descent off the back of the ridge that would be the critical factor on the whole route, but I had looked at it a month earlier when climbing Razorback in the Mackenzie Range and thought that it looked feasible.

On Friday night I met Walter at the beginning of the Marion Main and then we drove together to the end of the road, where we camped. The next morning we were up early and began following the trail up beside the cascades towards Triple Peak. It took about an hour and a quarter to get up to the lake and then another 45 minutes to get up to the saddle. We now had to scout around until we found a route down through the bluffs to the valley below. Initially the route we chose bluffed out so we retraced our steps and then searched around until we found a route down. The route down was steep and we found ourselves hanging off some of the tree roots, but we were determined to make it go. Once at the bottom we angled towards the head of the valley then continued up leads of snow towards Sawtooth Peak.

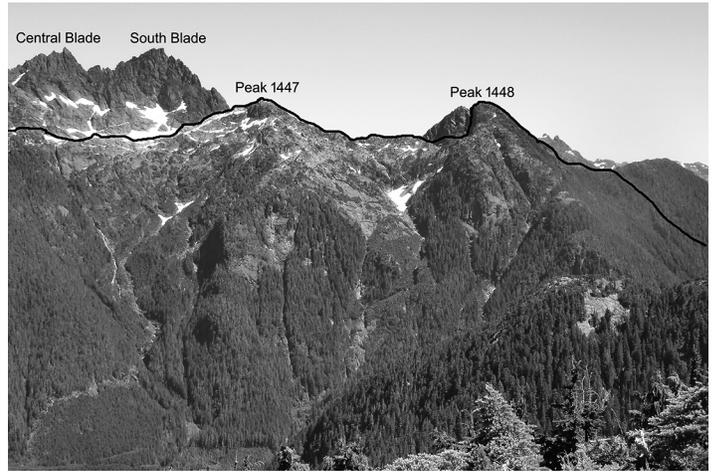
The snow was good to walk on and within an hour we gained the small saddle between the summit and the Fang, an impressive rock horn that is still unclimbed. From the saddle a steep snow-slope led up to the summit ridge. Once on the ridge Walter and I went out to the two summits to the east, where we found a cairn on the highest point; however, we could see that the highest summit was farther to the west but it looked tricky to get to. Although I had scanned through Quagger's trip report (actually I only looked at his photos and the route on his map) on his website, I had failed to read his report, because if I had have, I would have noted "I first tried to climb the higher of the two but was turned back from exposure; I backed off and gingerly down climbed to the base of the Fang, dropping down a bit further to make it easier, crossing a steep scree slope then climbing rock which headed up and around the corner to a steep ramp covered in heather. From here I could definitely see it was possible, but not a walk in the park, to reach the top." Without a rope he wasn't willing to crawl up and along to the summit via the ridge crest.

I pulled the rope out and Walter belayed me as I led up to the top of the first bump. The rock was solid and foot and hand holds were all there so I managed to get to the top (5.6) and then bring Walter up. It wasn't very far across to the main summit, but the ridge ahead looked narrow, loose (chossy) and would probably take longer than it appeared. After a couple of long leads and a couple of short leads we finally reached the highest point. With time running out we took a few quick photos, then reversed the route along the ridge to where we had left our packs. Another rappel down the snow and we were at the saddle beside the base of the Fang, where we had a late lunch. The Fang definitely looked alluring but we didn't have the gear or the time to attempt the crack that split the face.

We continued the descent down into the valley and then began the ascent up to the saddle beside Triple Peak, only this time we were pulling ourselves up by the tree roots. Once on the saddle it didn't take long to glissade down to the frozen lake which we were able to walk across. We took a few minutes to eat and have something to drink before descending the trail back down to the vehicle.



The North Blade. (Photo: Valerie Wootton)



View of the route from the head of the Nomash Valley. (Photo: Valerie Wootton)

It had been a longish day, but we could both now cross Sawtooth Peak off our to-do list. However, the Fang still needs to be addressed.

Participants: Walter Moar and Lindsay Elms.

The North Blade: A Traverse from the Head of the Nomash Valley to Nathan Creek via the Blade Glacier

Lindsay Elms
July 1 – 2

I could handle walking down the N20 road from the head of Nathan Creek, but I didn't want to try thrashing my way up it again to access the gully up to the Blade Glacier. Last year Val and I had climbed the South Blade as a day trip via N20 so this year I wanted to climb the North Blade. A couple of months earlier when climbing Peak 1318 (4325) at the head of the Nomash River I had looked at a possible route towards the South and North Blade via a ridge from the south that would take me over a couple of probably unclimbed peaks. It would be a bushwhack but, *c'est la vie!*

The forecast was good so we planned on a three-day trip: the first day onto the south shoulder of Peak 1448; day two over the two summits (Peak 1448 and Peak 1447) and onto the Blade Glacier; and day three climb the North Blade and then descend the N20 to the vehicle.

After crossing the de-activated bridge over Nathan Creek we hiked the Nomash Main to the head of the valley and then cut back on another road which angled up to the saddle (GR664393 92 E/15). Although the road went farther up into the saddle we didn't need to go that far. To get into the old growth we had to cross a recent slash area which although not too wide it took a bit of time due to thick bush. Once on the other side there was a narrow gully to climb down and out of and then it was just a matter of

gradually angling around and up (400m) to a high saddle (GR669400) on the ridge. No difficulties were encountered but it was steep in places. By 1:40 p.m. we were on the saddle. It was a nice warm afternoon to take the boots off and lounge in the sun (and to admire the views). By 3 p.m. we were itching to move again (enough lounging)!

Above us was the ridge up to Peak 1448 (GR666404). Although it appeared steep and bluffy in places it didn't appear to present any problems. We gradually zig-zagged our way up onto the summit, arriving about an hour after leaving the saddle. Obviously we were committed to keep going, but how far we needed to go would depend on whether we found any campsites along the way. We started down the ridge to the northeast and encountered a couple of tricky moves, where we lowered the packs; however, halfway down the ridge was a large notch. A quick look around to the left and to the right showed no options so we rappelled into the notch (after lowering the packs first). Once in the notch I looked at the wall on the other side and that also didn't look feasible so our only option was to rappel the rotten gully to our left. We made one long rappel from the notch and then were able to scramble down to the snow at the bottom. Being a shaded gully the rock was damp and slippery in places and to get onto the snow we had to crawl across a rock slab with only a few holds. Although not very far, the moat under the snow was a little unnerving. Once across the slab we climbed up onto the snow and traversed back around onto the ridge. It was now just after 6 p.m. We had two options: camp on this ridge where there were tent sites and water, or keep going for another hour and a half (maximum) which would put us over the top of the next peak and on the Blade Glacier. Val's call - keep going she said.

We walked along the ridge and then began scrambling up to Peak 1447 (GR666412 92 L/2). This route was straightforward and took 50 minutes. From the summit I knew the descent would be easy as we had looked at the peak last year from the glacier. The easy rock gave way to snow and we were able to glissade the last little bit down onto the glacier. Just 5 minutes away I could see a nice flat spot to

camp for the evening, where there was running water. After getting the tent up we began cooking dinner, but got distracted by a beautiful sunset. No we didn't burn the meal! We went to bed knowing that the three-day trip had turned into a two-day trip.

The next morning we waited until the sun lit up the tent and then had a leisurely morning (relatively). After packing up we hiked across the glacier for 500m and then put on our crampons, helmet and harness, dropped the packs and then I put the rope over my shoulders. We wouldn't need much because the ascent was probably only 250m. Most of the route was climbed on snow and it was only near the top that we were scrambling on rock. There was no cairn on the summit but I knew it had been climbed a couple of times, once by Darren Wilman when he had traversed all three summits: South, Central and North Blade.

Once back down at the packs we traversed across the glacier and then descended the long snow ramp that empties into the upper Nathan Creek basin. However, there was one scary moment when a couple of rocks came whistling down from above and landed in the snow with a thomp just a few feet away from Val. Needless to say we didn't linger. We traversed around the scree slopes of the upper basin and then followed the creek down to where the overgrown N20 crossed. Then began the thrash down the road, which was no more pleasant than last year. Once down at the vehicle I vowed that I would organize a work party to come and brush out the trail. This was successfully completed on the August 23/24/25 weekend with the help of Mike Morris, Robert Ramsey, Josh Overdijk, Gord Johnson, Deb Nikula, Lawrence Philipson and Jules Benson.

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms.

Nine Peaks Plus Big Interior Makes Two

Dave Suttill July 5 – 7

The idea for this trip began back in May when Roxy Ahmed was thinking of putting together a Nine Peaks trip. She happened to mentioned this to me and naturally I was keen. Before long she had Stefan, Peggy, Roger and Roxanne on board. And so the trip came together for early July. With a fine weekend weather forecast to look forward to, things were looking good. We headed up in two vehicles from Victoria on the Friday evening. We were originally going to overnight at the Price Creek parking lot. We passed by Price Creek, which was full of mosquitoes, and ended up at the Bedwell Trailhead. There we found the Introduction to Mountaineering Course group set up for the night, intent on the same early start the next morning that we were. So we joined the makeshift overnight tent camp.



On the approach to Nine Peaks.

We managed to be the first group to hit the trail the next morning. We made pretty good time over the excellent steep trail, arriving at Bedwell Lake about 10:45 a.m. Here we got our first view of Big Interior Mountain looming some 1000m above. Our plan was to set up our base camp somewhere on the other side of its summit. The trail was pretty bare of snow until we neared Little Jim Lake, which was still frozen. We skirted south above the outflow of Little Jim. There we had a brief view of Mount Septimus, which Roxanne and I would climb later in the season with Ian Kilpatrick. We had a GPS track that Roxy had made using a virtual flyover in Google Earth to keep us approximately on course. This was helpful through the series of snow covered connecting benches taking us up and over the ridge and down to the big basin at the base of Big Interior's main north cirque. The basin would be our last source of running water.

From here it was a steady 600m climb with crampons up snow to the ridge top. As we neared the summit a few wisps of cloud rolled in, giving a distinct feel of remoteness to the terrain. We dropped our packs just short of the summit and walked up the last few metres to the top. After some time on top and a summit photo we continued south along the ridge, still in the clouds, with no clear idea of where we would camp. We knew the ridge would level out soon and we could always level a spot in the snow if need be. After ½km down the ridge we found some exposed rocky soil with enough almost level ground to accommodate our three tents. This would be our home for the next two nights. By now the skies had cleared and we had our first view of Nine Peaks.

We were up at 6 a.m. melting snow and getting ready the day ahead. In another hour we were on our way. We started out by dropping down onto the east side of our ridge traversing southeast below Marjorie's Load. We continued along following the ridge down to Bear Pass, losing some 450m elevation in the process. It seemed like we were dropping incredibly far just to get to the base of Nine Peaks. Below us Della Lake was completely ice free. We were now faced with a 550m slog up the snow covered slope skirting the edge of the glacier to the base of the

rocky summit crest. It was a good thing we weren't a week or so later as the snow bridge across the bergschrund leading to the final snow gully was only just passable. We belayed Roxy across and up the steep part. The circumstances of the belay weren't the best, but at least she wasn't going to disappear into the moat should she fall. Once she got to a safe position she set up a solid belay and brought the rest of us up. From there it was a quick scramble to the actual summit.

The view from the summit was incredible. We could see from Mount Arrowsmith to the McKenzie Range way off in the south. To the north, the Golden Hinde, which four of us would climb in August, appeared directly above the main summit of Big Interior Mountain. The summit photo was taken as soon as all had arrived. We then spent a good 45 minutes eating, taking more pictures and generally enjoying the view. I found time for a quick jaunt to a secondary summit before heading down. At the snow gully and bergschrund the belay process was reversed with Roger being the last person down. We got back to camp a little before 6 p.m.

After dinner we noticed people silhouetted along the right skyline ridge of Big Interior. It had to be the Introduction to Mountaineering class making their ascent. Someone, maybe Peggy, decided we should all let out a big cheer when the first person reached the summit. From the reaction we got it was obvious they heard us. That led to a cheer for each person as they got there and an extra loud cheer when the last person made it. It turned out this was really appreciated, especially for a few who were near exhaustion and had never climbed a major peak before.

The next morning we weren't in quite such a rush to get away early. We hauled ourselves back over the top of Big Interior Mountain and down the other side. All of us except Roxy took our crampons off on the way down. We kept an eye out for the Introduction to Mountaineering Camp. We figured it was in the north basin, but didn't see it until we got really close, as it was out of our line-of-sight for most of the way. We found them in the process of having "class time" so we didn't really have a visit. We made this a snack break and had time for some quick exploring of the mostly frozen ponds and flower-covered openings around the nearby rocky knoll. We debated following Harry's bushwhack route back to Bedwell Lake, but sensibly opted to retrace our steps up and over the known route to Little Jim Lake. On the way down there was much talk about everyone going for a swim when we got to Bedwell Lake. So of course it had to happen. I was to find out later that Roger swims at every opportunity. He went for another swim near the end of the trail where it crosses Thelwood Creek. We topped our trip off with a dinner stop at the Royal Coachman in Campbell River where Stefan had one of their 14 oz. "Go big or go home" burgers.

Participants: Roxy Ahmed, Stefan Kaban, Peggy Taylor, Roger Taylor, Roxanne Stedman and Dave Suttill.

Queen Peak and a Small Mystery

Martin Smith

July 16 and September 18

Queen Peak lies 3km due east of the summit of Victoria Peak with nothing much in between. According to Phil Stone's guide, the view of Victoria and Warden from the summit rates as one of the top ten alpine views on the Island. It's long been on Tony Vaughn's and my wish list, not only for the view, but also since it fits our seldom climbed/obscure criteria. For Tony an additional bonus was that it would be one more to knock off in the Sutton Range, which he's now getting pretty close to completing.

Armed only with the usual maps and Sandy Briggs' 2002 beta, we arrived in the Stewart Lake area off the White River approach on the evening of July 15 and soon found Sandy's spur that took us to about 700m elevation and directly below the Southeast Ridge route of our objective. The road extended a bit farther than indicated on Sandy's map but not by much.

After dinner we took the usual stroll to scope out the morning's route and were surprised to find a couple of flags right at the road end marked with the word "trail". There even looked to be a boot path through the slash in places. Sandy, as well as Stone's guide, describe the approach to the upper mountain as "steep slash, leading to steep forest" so, naturally, we thought we'd have a look at any option that might ease our passage to the fun stuff above. The "trail" did indeed prove to be a boot path and soon got even better with benching evident as it left the slash and began to side-hill northeast through old growth. This was not quite the way we wanted to go, but we reasoned that no-one was going to go to such an effort for nothing and decided to give the route a try the next day.



*Tony Vaughn and Martin Smith on the summit of Queen Peak. Victoria and Warden in the murk behind.
(Photo: Martin Smith)*



Tony Vaughn descending the Southeast Ridge.
(Photo: Martin Smith)

The sun went down as we had a last mug-up before bed and as it did so, cast a brilliant shadow of Queen's Southeast Ridge above on the mountainside on the opposite side of the valley. The col shown on the map at the east end of the ridge stood out quite clearly with what looked like a vertical wall coming off its west side. There was nothing to indicate anything like that on the map, so we put it down as an aberration.

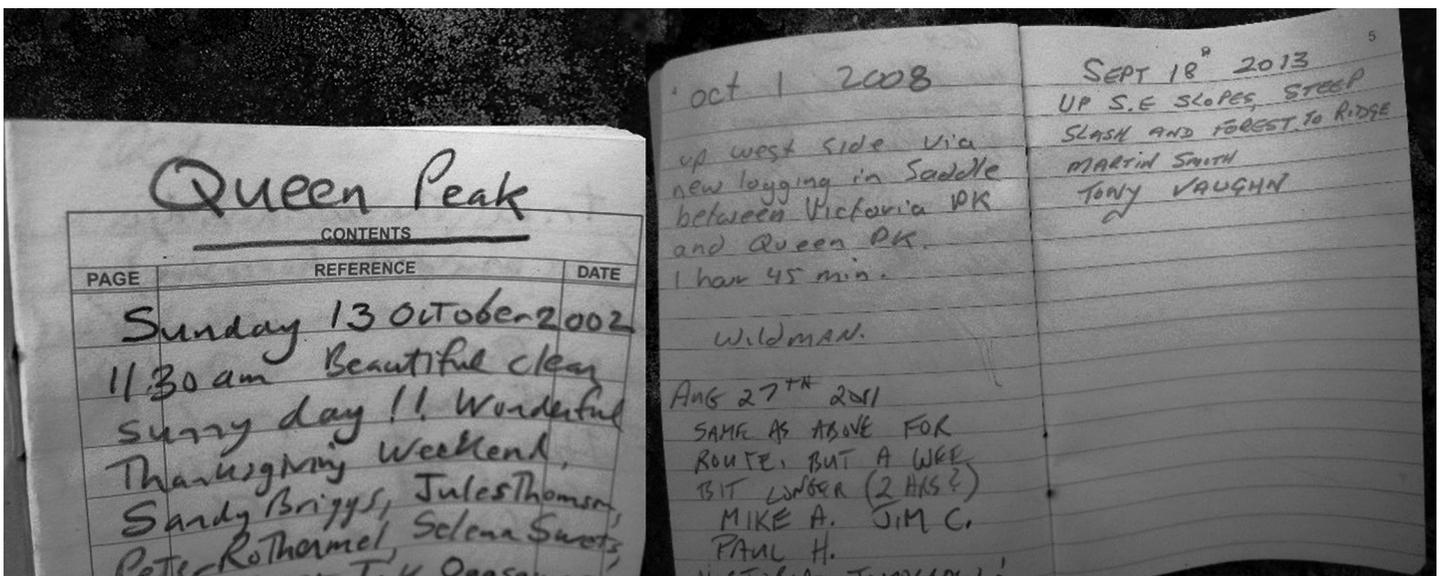
The following day promised to be a hot one, so we were up early and off just after 7 a.m. We were soon beyond our exploratory point of the previous evening but continued to be pleasantly surprised by what we found. This was no cursory job. Logs notched out or cross hatched with smiley faces cut in them, saplings and other debris removed and a clear line of flagging. The route continued northeast, down into and across the deep gully that leads up to the col on the Southeast Ridge. On the opposite side, hand lines were available to help get up the steep bank and, half way up, a safety net protected any fall when returning. Beyond the gully, the trail continued northeast for another 200m or

so, emerged into a clear cut and vanished! At this point, of course, it was "in for a penny, in for a pound" time and into the slash we went, headed for the old growth above.

The big gully on our left never looked tempting enough to enter, so an hour or so of splintered wood and dense bush later, we found ourselves slightly above and east of the col. The problem was that there was no obvious line down into the col, nor did the opposite wall look anything less than vertical. It was then that we remembered that shadow from the previous evening. Somewhat chastened, we tucked tails between legs and prepared to reverse the route back to the truck. By the time we hit the slash the hillside was in full sun and by the time we reached the truck, I'd had enough for the day. Tony went to explore a route through the slash directly off our camp spot for next time, while I hid from the sun and swore at phantom trail builders. After a late lunch and since we wanted to be sure of getting up something this trip, we packed up and headed off across the White to Kokummi Mountain. Tony takes up that story in his report.

Fast forward 2 months and we were back at our camp spot again. No one had been there and the rocks with which we'd anchored our tents were exactly where we'd left them.

Off again early on the morning of September 18, we dived straight into the slash heading in the correct northwest direction and straight for a big pine on the edge of the old growth that Tony had way-marked in July. Two hundred and fifty vertical metres of fairly horrible going took us up to the old growth in about 45 minutes. The forest above was very steep, but almost free of bush and what there was, was useful to hang off. We made our way up, continuing northwest with the occasional detour to end run around bluffs, and reached the ridge at an elevation of just over 1300m at a point 600m due west of that troublesome col. We had travelled just 850 horizontal metres from the truck to gain 600 to the ridge, an average slope angle of just under 65°!



Queen Peak summit register. Total of 4 entries. (Photo: Tony Vaughn)



Martin on the summit of Kokummi, Victoria and Warden in the background. (Photo: Tony Vaughn)



Martin looking down the long east ridge descending Kokummi. (Photo: Tony Vaughn)

Once on the open ridge the trip to the summit was exactly the “nice ramble” described by Sandy and we were on top in under an hour in time for lunch. The predicted weather front moved in just as we reached the ridge and did a great job in obscuring the main reason for climbing Queen, the view of Victoria and Warden. Oh well...

Sandy’s 2002 party placed a summit register and we dug this out to find that we were only the 4th group up there in the intervening 11 years – although I’m sure Lindsay Elms told me he’d been too. The other two groups had climbed from new logging spurs in the valley between Victoria and Queen and indicated that this was a quicker route.

Once the sun had disappeared it got quite cold so after a quick lunch we headed straight back down our up route wanting, in particular, to avoid any nastiness in potentially wet bush. Route finding was minimal thanks to the flags we’d placed on the way up so it was barely 3 hours later that we stepped gratefully onto the road. About 8 hours round trip.

Pity about the view, but it’s another tick on the Sutton Range list.

As for the mystery trail, Tony thinks hunters. What do you think?

Participants: Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn.

Kokummi Mountain

Tony Vaughn
July 17

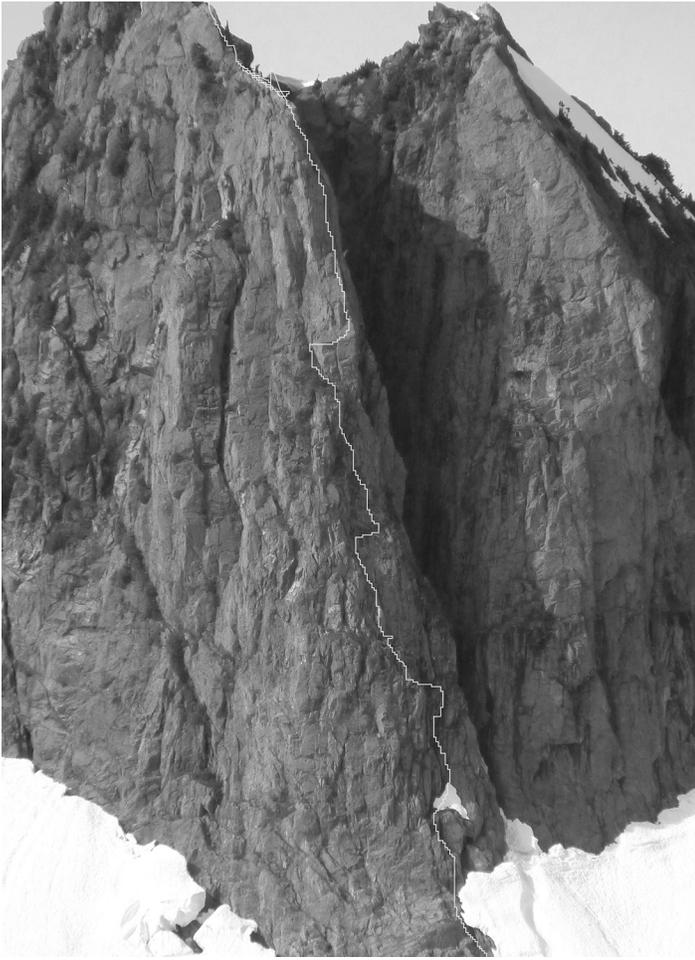
Kokummi is a 1615m (5300ft) mountain located north of the Victoria/Warden massif and between the White and Moakwa river valleys. Kokummi is a rarely climbed mountain, most likely due to its proximity to Victoria and Warden, which offer more interesting climbing. However, like all

mountains, it has several attributes such as superb views of Victoria and Warden Peaks and a fine long heather ridge. The north side has steep cliffs dropping down into the Moakwa Valley but in the south side there are reasonable slopes with logging roads reaching high up.

To reach our campsite at 1036m (3400ft), we drove up branch MC12 off the Moakwa main, the logging road that joins the White and Adam river valleys. MC12 meanders up and around the East Ridge until it terminates at around 1036m (3400ft) on the south side, below a fairly recent cut block.

We decided to approach the ridge at a point a little farther back down the road as we wanted to hike the full length of the ridge. Also there is a saddle between the main part of the ridge and a subsidiary peak which, according to the topo map, has a road leading right to it. We were curious to see if it was still there.

July 17 dawned with an overcast sky, quite a contrast to the previous day’s 32 degrees with sunny skies. We broke camp and packed everything away in the truck as a precaution against rain and at 6:45 a.m. we started off, stumbling and cursing up through steep old logging slash toward the saddle. On reaching the saddle we were met with a rather daunting sight: the saddle was choked with blowdown. The only way to reach the end of the ridge was to navigate under and over this mess. We discovered that there was no road into the saddle and if there ever had been, it had disappeared under the bush long ago. Away we went over and under blowdowns and through head-high bush, becoming steep bushy forest before we broke out and reached the heather covered ridge top at 1128m. Two hours of steady bushwhacking for an elevation gain of only ninety-two metres. It soon changed once we were on the ridge top and it was a beautiful easy walk for 1.5km to the summit block followed by an easy ramble up heather benches to the summit (1615m). We arrived at 10:15 a.m. There was a thinly populated summit register showing a first entry in 1994 and a last entry in July 2012, although there may have been other visitors who, like us, did not have pen or



North Buttress of Triple Peak from 5040.

pencil with which to record a visit. The register is a logging company time sheet, so presumably the summit was visited during logging operations in the area.

At 10:45 a.m. we left the summit, by which time it had started raining in earnest, probably the only place on the island it rained that day. We retraced our steps along the ridge and down through the steep forest, slipping and sliding through the bush (you've got to love those green belays), once more across the saddle with its blowdowns, through the logging slash, finally arriving back at the vehicle like a pair of drowned rats at 1:45 p.m. Another tick on the list of mountains to be climbed, the discomfort soon forgotten and we'll be back for more Vancouver Island bush.

Participants: Tony Vaughn and Martin Smith.

North Peak of Triple Peak

Chris Ruttan
July 19

Kurtis Relke and I drove up to Triple Peak for another attempt on Francis Bruhwhiler's 5.7 route up the North Buttress of Triple Peak. Our first run at it had been foiled

by our getting off route and wasting too much time trying to figure out the way up. We had been stomped a bit by how scanty the placements were for any protection and even getting in a piton was a real challenge. We were back now with a bag of iron, a big hammer and the determination only having your butt kicked once can supply. Since we had driven up the night before and slept in the car, we were on our way up the trail by 6:45 a.m. and at the lake by 8; however, we didn't stop there for long. An hour later we were stepping across the moat onto the rock at the base of the climb.

As is described in the initial accounts, you can scramble up pretty high, at least to a rock ledge where you will find a couple of pitons left as a rappel. This is the spot for a hard left turn dropping down across a vegetated gully/crack and out around an exposed corner. Now, apparently, Francis climbed all of this stretch and that much again without being roped up. I found myself wishing I was as young and bold, but that just wasn't going to happen so we anchored off the pitons. I got a solid piece in at the gully before I went out into the unknown, but I can tell you, look though I might, I couldn't find another placement as I climbed on. This isn't butt-clenching, fingernail-bleeding, screamer ground, but a slip on it would have the same consequences, so I note it here for those to follow. Every person has a different tolerance for risk and the younger folks, it may be, could look at the original description and find themselves up on that face blithely expecting a fun day in the sun only to discover they are in way over their collective heads. Enough said I suppose!

Anyway, I finally found an awesome crack which took some serious digging to bring into full flowering, but from there I could belay Kurt up and then let him pass as he took the next lead. Again another pitch with very little in the way of gear, but fairly easy ground - low 5th and 4th class - so when he got a good stance he belayed me up and I passed once more. I climbed to the base of the more difficult section, found a good anchor and brought him up to what we have been calling "Marvin Gardens," which is the last piece of major vegetation on a fairly big down-sloping ledge just at the start of the two 5.7 pitches. It was late by then so we paused for a quick lunch then Kurt got ready for the first of the more difficult pitches.

Kurt moved up a little left and got in a piece of gear, but then he had to climb out to the right to get onto the face directly above me. From there he was out of my sight and I simply responded to the rope as best I could as it slowly crept away. It got slower and slower, and time dragged on and on. I imagined that by now the rope drag must be getting serious and wished I could see how he was doing, when finally he called to me. He said he was secure on a piece of gear with a solid hold, but it wasn't suitable as a belay anchor and could I move up and take out that first piece to reduce the drag. "No problem, just don't fall" I thought.

Once that was done he moved on and finally found a



Mount McBride.

passable stance where he built an anchor; however, he still wasn't crazy about it. It's a good thing I didn't know this as he belayed me up. I still had my hiking boots on and it was so damned late by now that I couldn't bring myself to put on my climbing shoes. One more time I passed Kurt and began leading the next pitch which was the last roped section. At the top I belayed him up from a tree. I've got to say those two upper pitches seemed really scant for protection. From there we were able to scramble to the top - it was 6 p.m.

We still had a long way to go to get down off the rock, but two rappels helped speed the descent to the snowfield. We raced down the trail and dragged ourselves up that last nasty dirt slope to the car, arriving at 9:30 p.m. We changed into clean clothes then drove to Port Alberni for a very late dinner. We finally arrived home at 1:30 a.m., yowzer!

Participants: Chris Ruttan and Kurtis Relke.

A 'Peak' at Mount McBride, Morrison Spire and Marble Peak, ... and through the Looking-Glass

Janelle Curtis
July 26 – 29

The joys of ACCVI include connecting with people who share a love of alpine adventure and wilderness, and meeting them on occasion in the most unlikely places. In 2012, I had the joy of meeting Kate Gigiel in Campbell River, where we slyly sized each other up and wondered how we would get along for a few days of powder skiing in Marble Meadows. But within minutes of pitching our tent, we became friends and gained a fair reputation for what Harry Steiner calls "extreme laughter". We have since met in some of the most unlikely places... but let's get back to Marble Meadows.

In July 2013 I returned with a different group to explore the geology and fossils, and to have a closer 'peak' at Mount McBride, Morrison Spire, and Marble Peak. I knew Dave Suttill from a centennial trip to Elkhorn Mountain, Vivian Addison from a memorable day on Mount Klitsa, and Rowan Laver and Sarah Davies were friends and climbing partners in Nanaimo. I hadn't yet met Dave's daughter Sheila, Kevin Bartlett or Roxanne Stedman, and I wondered how everyone would get along. But, as Rowan later said, "there were some great group dynamics!"

Day 1 was marked by eight hours of effort, but also by beauty and friendship. We met



The Marble Meadows group in a less-than-serious moment.



In the Meadows



Nomash Slab and Grayback Peak from the North Blade.
(Photo: Valerie Wootton)

at the Augerpoint Day Use area where we signed waivers, discussed our trip plan, and launched canoes into the mid-morning sun. Vivid memories of our hike from the outflow of Phillips Creek to the plateau included lush understories of mosses, salal and ferns, avalanches of golden tiger lilies, the spectre of wasps, glimpses of 360 million year old limestone, tiny vestiges of shady refuge from the blazing sun, and of course, the classic lines on Dave's backpack. On the plateau, we followed a well-trodden trail that parted meadows awash in colourful blossoms all the way to Wheaton Hut, where we set up camp and enjoyed a cool dip into Wheaton Lake and the sunset over Morrison Spire. As the rest of us drifted off to sleep, Vivian and Roxanne were gaining their own reputation for extreme laughter and apparently Sarah, who had pitched her tent next to theirs, "learned a *lot*" that night!

Guided by delicate cairns and worn paths, the approaches to Mount McBride and Morrison Spire are straightforward, albeit subject to some rock fall hazard in places. Along the ridge, we stopped to admire the Golden Hinde, glinting fossils, and showy clusters of *Phacelia sericea* (sky-pilot). We then gained the summit of Mount McBride by approaching it from just above the northwest glacier, but not before Sheila nimbly dodged a careening rock dislodged from above. After waving to Dave and Rowan who had climbed a subpeak ("because it's there, and just in case ..."), we retraced our steps and carried on to Morrison Spire. From there, we admired the sinewy ridges and considered the option of exploring Limestone Cap. Instead, Rowan climbed and named a new bouldering route, *Strawberry Lips*, as we turned our boots back toward Wheaton Hut. We arrived in camp after eleven hours of hiking and scrambling, and just in time for a visit from Chris Ruttan and Karen van Dieren who described their own day's adventure.

As Chris and Karen had mentioned, climbing Marble Peak on Day 3 would involve some slightly more challenging route finding. I guessed it would take us two hours return from where we dropped packs, but we were gone four hours. Gaining the summit cairn involved scrambling up a chimney and three exposed gullies, which we did one at a time. We lingered on the summit and drew in the awe-in-

spiring *pa-no-ra-mas* of Buttle Lake and Mount McBride's beckoning east face. After a fly-swatting lunch break, we decided to head back to Phillips Creek earlier than planned to attempt a late afternoon crossing of Buttle Lake.

While Rowan and I assessed lake conditions, Kevin dove into the cool waters of Phillips Creek and his rimless glasses settled inconspicuously onto the cobbles below. We took turns wading and searching and huddling by the shore, some in brightly coloured unmentionables, but the turbulent surface made it hard to see the creek bottom. The campsite was largely occupied by tipsy teenagers offering up all manner of creative solution, but there, in the most unlikely place, I came upon my extreme laughing friend Kate who just so happened to have a glass bowl! Peering through Kate's looking-glass, we found Kevin's glasses just as the wind on Buttle Lake quieted down. We bid Kate goodbye and soon found ourselves warm, dry, happy, and settled around a fire at Ralph River for an evening of storytelling, trip planning, and more contagious laughter.

Participants: Vivian Addison, Kevin Bartlett, Janelle Curtis, Sarah Davies, Rowan Laver, Roxanne Stedman, David Suttill, and Sheila Suttill.

The Nomash Slab and Grayback Peak

Lindsay Elms
July 27

At the bottom of the slab (referred to as Dale Earnhardt dome) we put our rock shoes on and roped up. Above us was a route called Wapiti Mainline: 12 to 13 pitches of granite which starts at 5.7 and tops out at 5.11. All 13 pitches are bolted and it is best climbed when the route has dried out. It took us the first pitch (which is the steepest of the first six) to get used to the friction required to climb the slab. After that the angle eased off slightly, it became a FUN climb. From the website [Climbing in the Wapiti Valley](#)

Ed Seedhouse wrote: "At the top of pitch six a sloping ledge leads east to the descent slabs. This makes a handy escape and these six pitches are becoming known as "mainline lite". If you are new to slab climbing the moderate standard of these pitches makes a nice warm up. At this point, you've climbed as much rock as most full routes on the Squamish Apron, but you are not even half way up!"

We had no intention of climbing any of the last 7 pitches. We used the escape route to walk off to the left-hand side of the slab and stashed our rock shoes and some of the hardware. Our goal now was the summit of Grayback Peak. If we had climbed to the top of the 13th pitch we could have walked up to the top of "The Dome," but the main summit of Grayback is higher and further back.

From the side of the slab we angled up and around to an unnamed alpine lake. Here we filled our water bottles and then began traversing around the north side over large granite boulders which had broken off the wall above. All the time we were gradually ascending until we reached a narrow gully that angled steeply up to a small saddle on the west side of the summit block. Once on the saddle the route to the summit was quite bushy (typical for this area) and involved zig-zagging around small bluffs. By 1:30 p.m. we were on the summit (1150m) enjoying the views. How many others had been to the top is unknown as there was no cairn and I had not heard of anyone climbing to the summit. Most people are only interested in climbing the slabs.

Anyway, after an hour on top we descended to the side of the slab where we had left our shoes and gear. Before leaving Comox I had printed off a copy of the descent route from the climbing website because Ed talked about others being either caught out over night or some not getting down until late. Not wanting an epic, we followed his directions and found them to be very helpful: therefore I have printed them below.

"The descent slabs are the low angled bushy slabs to the west of the top of pitch six. The best plan here is to walk straight down the middle of these slabs to a large tree above the overhang at the bottom. If you like, you can angle even further west and use the bush as handholds, but it will just slow you down and really isn't worth it. Those of you who are used to taking the shortcut down the slabs from Broadway ledge at Squamish will find this descent much less intimidating. You'll recognize the rappel tree by the slings around it. This is a nasty brutish rappel over the overhang which, so far, seems unavoidable (there's a rumor of a party trying to avoid this by deeking into the bush and making it out long past midnight). So steel yourself and rappel around 40 feet into the bush. There is a rope eating crack that splits the lip - be sure your rope doesn't get hung up in it or you'll have an epic ahead of you. [Val left her gloves at the rappel tree above so I had to climb the overhang to retrieve them - a little grunty, but it wasn't that bad!] Make it easier on yourself by continuing the rappel to the end of the rope even though you could bushwhack down this bit if you were a masochistic idiot. Now have fun

retrieving your rope. From here, half scramble and half bushwhack down the line between the trees and the slabs for a few hundred feet until the trail shoots east across an exposed step above a small waterfall. Now you head generally east, but there's one point where the trail simply seems to disappear. When you find that spot, thrash through the bush to the base of the slab there and scramble up to a ledge. This ledge goes back to the top of the ascent slabs, with one discontinuity that involves around six feet of down climbing."

From the first time I had looked over at the Nomash Slabs from Rugged Mountain I had wanted to check them out and climb one of the routes; however, any routes 5.10 and above I am not interested in. I know my limitations! However, I couldn't believe how much fun those 6 pitches of 5.7 were. In the last couple of years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of climbers visiting the slabs and hopefully this will continue to increase. The one thing that will improve access, is for everyone to help brush-out the trail up the old logging road whenever hiking in to the base of the slabs.

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms.

H'kusam Mountain

Martin Smith
August 4

Ann is a four-time Kusam Klimber but had never been to the summit so H'kusam was an easy choice for a sunny weekend in early August.

We left Victoria quite late, had dinner at the Cypress Tree in Sayward and then headed up Timber Road to the Stowe Creek trailhead to camp for the night. Since I was there last in 2009 new logging has got underway at the bottom end of Timber Road and the roadbed is now much wider. It was well churned up though and we needed 4WD to get up the first steep section just past the log house with the paved driveway only a few hundred metres from pavement.

It was head net time at the trailhead as the mosquitoes swarmed around us and it wasn't long before we bedded down in the back of our truck for the night.

The next day dawned bright and sunny and since H'kusam Mountain isn't that much of a long day we weren't exactly up with the lark and only got underway after 8 a.m. It was the usual hour or thereabouts to the top of the old roads where Bill's Trail enters the forest at the Klimb shelter. Here we took a few minutes out to admire the skookum new cabin in the trees just above the shelter before continuing up the trail to the junction with the summit route. This is not well signed but thanks to my GPS track and after a bit of



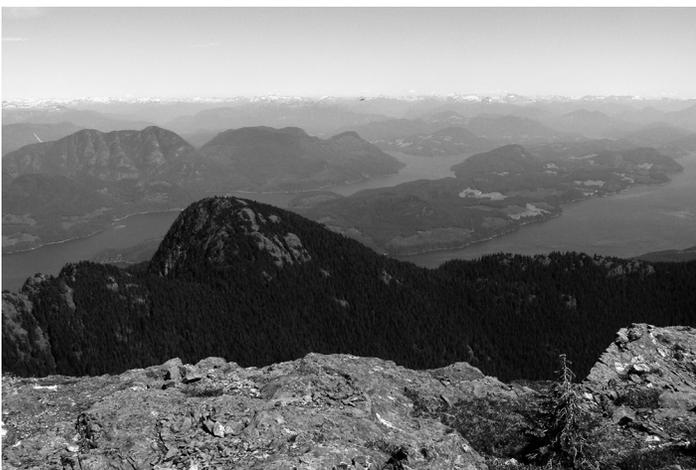
H'kusam Summit Ridge and Routes. (Photo: Ann Harwood)

bushy scrambling around we found a way up, across the stream, up the steep heathery gully to the lower bowl and on to the upper bowl below the summit cirque.

The summit should be only a half hour from here. However, and in spite of the hot summer, the usual access gully was full of rotten snow remnants. I didn't like the look of it all and decided to look for an alternate. In fact, the only other viable option is to gain the ridge crest 400-500m west of the summit up some steep and nasty scree. Having got this behind us we then encountered two substantial gully crossings before finally reaching the top of the usual gully with the summit only 10 minutes away. The detour added well over an hour to the route.

The last time I was here views to the west had been obscured by cloud. Not so today. Vancouver Island's mountains, Johnstone Strait and the Coast Range were revealed in all their considerable splendour while Mount Waddington shimmered off in the distance to the north. We took all of this in while enjoying lunch and a lounge and finally set off down at about 1.30 p.m.

At the top of the usual gully I thought I'd have a look and see if we couldn't find a safe way down and thereby save all that time on the ridge. I dropped down 30m to the first



Johnstone Strait and the Coast Range from H'kusam Mountain. (Photo: Martin Smith)

snow and found that the moat looked travelable for at least another 30m. I called Ann to come down and then went on to the next corner in the moat to find that it remained viable for another stretch. By this time we were committed of course. Long story short, it went alright but got looser and looser and, without helmets (and even with them) was a dangerous place to be. It was a bad decision to try this and I wouldn't recommend this route in these conditions. The ridge route to the west is a chore but safe.

Once down the gully and into the upper bowl we breathed a sigh of relief and headed down to the truck feeling quite drained. We reached the truck about 4 p.m. for an eight-hour day rather than the six hours I'd been

expecting. Just shows how even familiar mountains can spring surprises on you!

After a brew and packing up we were off home at 5 p.m. Dinner at Painters Lodge in Campbell River completed a stellar weekend.

Participants: Ann Harwood and Martin Smith.

Mount Con Reid

Lindsay Elms August 4 – 7

On the west shore of Buttle Lake during the 1930's the Tituses operated a lodge near the mouth of the Wolf River, which was used for several years by parties who were surveying Strathcona Provincial Park. Nearby Mount Titus was named after the Washington DC lawyer and his wife; however, farther up the Wolf River on the north side is the remote Mount Con Reid. This peak is named after Con Reid (surprise, surprise) who was the caretaker of the lodge when the Tituses weren't around. Mount Con Reid has received only a few ascents, the most notable being that in September 1942 by two well-known Canadian mountaineers, "Alex" McCoubrey and Ferris Neave. "Alex" was the son of a former President of the Alpine Club of Canada Alexander "Mac" McCoubrey while Ferris was a noted freshwater biologist who eventually moved to Nanaimo.

Neave and McCoubrey, after driving to Upper Campbell Lake, hiked the surveyors trail through to Buttle Lake. They then paddled a dilapidated rowboat down to the mouth of the Wolf River and over the next two days traveled nine miles up the valley. Neave wrote:

"Our final camp was made at a point where the river bends



*Mount Con Reid (left) from the upper Wolf River.
(Photo: Valerie Wootton)*

in a sharp elbow under Mt. Con Reid. This peak, rising from the valley floor in impressive tiers of yellow cliffs, was an irresistible challenge and next morning (September 15) we made a direct attack on its eastern face. The climbing became steep at no great height above the river, our route following in the main a succession of gullies, clefts and chimneys, which conducted us in about four hours to a high look-out just under the northern (lowest) of the three peaks of Mt. Con Reid. Traversing around the west side of this eminence we reached the middle peak, the upper seven hundred feet of which is precipitous on the sides within our view. A vigorous rock climb, which became gymnastic on several pitches, brought us to the spacious and untrodden summit in mid-afternoon.”

I knew Chris Barner had been into the mountain in 1977, when he was still a teenager, via a side valley (he called Cathedral Creek) off the Wolf River. The only other ascent I knew of was by Randy Davies and his brother in the 1990's as part of a 9 – 10 day traverse. The two had gone up the Wolf River to just beyond the main upper confluence where they set up camp. The next day they climbed up onto the ridge between Con Reid and El Piveto and then quickly scrambled up to Con Reid's summit before continuing over El Piveto.

The time had finally come for me to visit Mount Con Reid as there were only a handful of peaks left in Strathcona Park for me to climb. The weather outlook was good for the next 4 days so after I got off work on the morning of August 4, we drove up to Buttle Lake and at a little pull-out launched the canoe. The lake was dead-calm and in about 25 minutes we were across pulling the canoe up onto the shore a little north of the mouth of the Wolf River. From earlier conversations with Syd Watts I knew he had built a trail up the Wolf River back in the 70's or 80's so we were hoping to find that; however, we weren't sure what effect the fires over the last several summers had on the trail or what the Wolf River valley looked like. We were about to find out!

After stashing the canoe we hiked through the lake-shore alder and immediately entered the burn from the fire last

year on Mount Titus. The duff on the ground was gone, as was the underbrush, but the old growth Douglas Firs had survived because of their thick bark. I remember Syd Watts saying to stay high on a bench above the Wolf River for the first 4km so we did this and found the travel easy through the burn although in places our boots did punch through where underground roots had burnt away. The burn area gradually disappeared as we descended for another 1.5km back down to the river and as we did the underbrush got thicker becoming the usual Island bushwhack.

We crossed onto the south side of the river and a kilometre further on we crossed back onto the north side. Another 1.5km on was a large bend in the river, which we couldn't stay low around so we climbed up into the burn area from the Wolf River fire 3 years ago. This was a mistake as the trees were cedars which had burnt and fallen, making for a jumbled mess. It took us about an hour to hike the 500m. Once around the corner we hiked for another 1km and found a nice gravel-flat beside the river and set up camp.

The next morning we crossed back onto the south side and followed that for about 2.5km to the major confluence where the south branch of the river heads up towards Schjelderup Lake and the north branch towards Mount De Voe. We knew that another party had hiked up the Wolf River 2 days before us and from the confluence they were heading up towards the limestone plateau below The Comb and Golden Hinde NW, but we never saw any sign of their passing - not even a boot print (not until we were coming out). Anyway, we continued for another 1km up the north branch and found a nice gravel beach to camp on. As it was still early in the day we decided to have a leisurely day (something I rarely do). The temperature had to be above 30 degrees, but the river was too cold to have a dip so we had to hang out in the shade for the afternoon and read.

The next morning we were up early and started up the creekbed that angled up towards the summit of Mount Con Reid. (The lounging around the day before got the better of me and I did scout out the route for a couple of hundred metres in the afternoon.) After about 300m we climbed out of the creekbed on the left and then angled up towards another gully that was thick with alder. We had to get through this to gain the open forest that would lead us up to the ridge. Fortunately there was a fallen Douglas Fir (a huge one) that we were able to scramble across to get beyond the worst of the alder. From there we continued up the steepening forest to the ridge, but not before we both received several bee stings. (By the end of the trip we had 12 between us.)

Once on the ridge it was a fairly easy scramble to the summit, where we had an early lunch. Because we were on the summit at 10:30 a.m. we had managed to climb before the heat really built up as we were predicting another scorcher! The views of all the peaks: El Piveto Mountain, Rambler Peak, the East Face of Mount Colonel Foster, Elkhorn South and the East Face of Elkhorn, and the ridge from El Piveto north to Mount Cobb, as well as those on



Val walking down the trail Syd Watts built in the Wolf River valley.
(Photo: Lindsay Elms)

the east side of the valley – Mount McBride, Morrison Spire and Limestone Cap, were all in stark contrast. The great thing about digital cameras is that you are no longer limited by the number of photos on the film roll so you can take as many photos as you want and then when you pass the camera on, they can also take all the same photos over again. So we got our fair share of summit photos!

The descent was straightforward and we were back down at camp around 2:30 p.m. We had originally considered packing up camp and hiking down the Wolf River for a few hours, but we decided to hang out instead and leave early in the morning. It had been a hot, dry day and we needed to rehydrate!

We were up at 5 a.m. the next morning and hiking just after 6. Knowing the route, I thought we could easily get down to Buttle Lake in 9 - 10 hours. For the most part we followed our ascent route, but for some reason we seemed to find more elk trails to follow, speeding up the descent. We had lunch at the last river crossing about 5.5km from the lake. Again we found a lot more of the sparsely-flagged route to the top of the bench above the river, but once up there we ended up dropping too soon and had to climb back up to

bypass the last bluff above the river. On the last 20 minutes down to the lake we found the trail that Syd Watts had built and it was just as he said – BC Parks grade trail. Unfortunately, because of last year's fire it was difficult to follow. We arrived back at the canoe at 2:30 and by 3:30 we were loading the canoe onto the roof of our vehicle.

It had been a wonderful trip and the Wolf River valley is beautiful. There is sign of elk everywhere and we had seen one herd of about six. It is rugged and apart from the odd piece of flagging over the first 5.5km, there is no other sign of traffic. I will be back to climb The Comb and Golden Hinde NW next year.

Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

From Blueberries to Snow Ascents – The Youth Summer Mountaineering Camp

Nadja Steiner with contributions and extracts from the camp journal by Finn Steiner, Raven Castle-Griffey, Iain Sou, Piper Battersby, Anna-Lena Steiner, Evelyn Sou and Lindsay Richards
August 17

This year our section kids and youth mountaineering group had turned an astonishing five years, which had to be commemorated with a special event. Hence, after successfully applying for the memorial youth fund, nine youths aged 9 - 17, with their parents, started to prepare for a one-week mountaineering camp, location to be determined, on Vancouver Island. Some of the youth had been part of the group since its initiation. Five of the youths also recently completed their AST1 to enhance their winter skill set. The section had agreed to provide the group with the two large dome tents and base camp equipment. Since a fly-in camp for all members was financially not feasible, we decided to find a location which can be hiked into, and use the grant support to have the large gear flown in by helicopter. Finding the right place; however turned out to be rather challenging. After lots of consultation with Jan Neuspel of Island Alpine Guides, choice one fell on Matchlee Mountain, which had to be discarded since a twelve-hour hike in through bush and snow for the explorer group of experienced parents was not deemed suitable. Choice two: Alexandra Peak fell through at the last minute due to fire closure. With just two weeks left, Harry and I ventured out to explore the Sutton Peak area. Many steep cliffs, which are quite common for the Sutton Range, ruled out some anticipated day trips, but nonetheless we found the area suitable. A col with enough running water, a little waterfall and a couple of close-by snowfields offered enough space for the two large group tents and personal tents. The base of Sutton Peak, about two hours away, with another 2-3



Snow school. (Photo: N. Steiner)



Cees practicing snow ascents. (Photo: H. Steiner)

hours to the summit, allowed for a good day trip. An easily manageable 4 - 5 hour hike in from the logging road gave it the final approval stamp.

Two weeks later an excited group of youth with their parents found themselves with camp co-lead Nadja (myself) stranded on the logging road, while the other camp lead, Harry, camp manager Mike and set-up helper Finn were stuck in the helicopter hangar waiting out the thick cloud cover creeping in from Tahsis Inlet. Luckily the blueberries were plenty and the spirit high on the logging road, while the trout were plenty in Gold River to keep the boredom in the hangar at bay:

Flying and Fly Fishing – by Finn (14)

We arrived early (1:52) in Gold River and spent a bit of time looking for the hangar. We found it behind an old logging camp where we met Fred, from E&B helicopters. We had to weigh the gear because the Eurocopter Astar AS-350 has a max load of 1400 lbs, so 1000 lbs with the fuel, pilot etc. However, it turned out that the scales had been left behind in Campbell River and we had to do it by hand using 30-lb tables as a guide. We ended up with 956lbs or so when finished. Lindsay, EJ and Mike joined us with the \$500 worth of veggies and stuff we had gotten donated by Thrifty's. We finished quickly, loaded up the cars and EJ, Derek and Lindsay left for the staging area where we would pick up the gear with a sling. We were left behind and Fred offered that we could stay in the hangar overnight. We gratefully accepted. Then there was only one thing left: Fly fishing on the Gold. I found a riffle, with a deep narrow run behind it. I selected a white beadhead leech. Third or fourth drift it was seized by a decent rainbow which, as I was about to land, spat the hook out. Harry caught the whole thing on video. I then had several more takes in the crystal clear water and decided to head back, just as it started to rain. We spent the rest of the evening getting to know Kirk (our pilot) and Fred at a nice restaurant. We discovered that my mom had bought her motorbike from his wife. Small world, huh! Thereafter they talked about motorbikes late into the night over a glass of beer.

After a day of waiting we decided to take basic camping supplies and limited food out of the helicopter gear-pile and make our way to the base camp rain or shine. Ascending to the ridge, we found the blueberries became less and the clouds thicker. As would become the rule in this camp, one of the youth was the designated leader and had to find a way for the group on the non-existing trail based on interrupted GPS tracks and very limited flagging. In time for lunch a glimpse of sun came out, but disappeared again as soon as we started moving, quenching our hope for helicopter sounds. However, the glimpse of sun did in fact attract the helicopter and to our huge relief the helicopter dropped its gear and camp crew just twenty minutes before our arrival. The hurray's were plenty and well supported by the excited tail wagging of the white shepherd, Amy, who could be reunited with its master. Not much tiredness was to be seen when everybody was setting up tents and at least one toilet before dinner. The youth (and parents) were well prepared for the camp. Signing up for the summer youth mountaineering camp had included several pre-meetings designated for rope work, climbing and rappelling practices, leadership skills, an ice axe workshop and a relaxed weekend camping at Mystic Beach with discussions of expectations and the working out of a group agreement.

The tents were up and standing not a minute too soon. The night brought in a storm, which required ever more lines to be added and heavy bags to keep the tents from lifting off. Some of the sleeping tents got water logged. Luckily, storms tend to blow away the worst and over the course of the next morning the clouds disappeared and the sun came out. The day was filled with final set ups, another toilet, the shower and the bear cache which certainly required proper testing by some rope-swinging kids, a bridge over the creek, a grey water hole.... And finally it was time to get out to do what we were here for. Helmets, harnesses, ice axes and crampons were distributed and we headed out to the closest snowfield. Secured by an ice anchor, the kids one by one started sliding down the snow field to practice self arrests, first without crampons and then whoever felt comfortable could add the crampons as an additional challenge.



Finn, Iain and Derek on their way to the Sutton summit – Snow Route. (Photo: H. Steiner)

After three hours the cooks of the day called for dinner. Properly roped up for a glacier walk the group returned to camp. Food was welcomed and our daily pattern with post-dinner meetings to plan the next day's activities commenced. Trip planning was in fact rather challenging. We had a rule that youth needed to be accompanied by their own parent in more technical terrain and could stay with another adult in a 2:1 ratio around camp and on easier trips. However, not all parents had the experience to lead and some trips only allowed for a limited number of participants. However, it all worked out and many exciting trips were done by the varied groups. The following trip accounts by our youth participants provide a glimpse of some of those adventures:

The Unnamed – by Anna-Lena (16)

After our trip organization last night we determined that Malachite, Lindsay, EJ, my mum and myself would get up at 8:00, eat, and get ready to leave (still way too early for me, but the best I could wrangle). Finally (!!!) waking up to CLEAR sky, we bundled up, slowly thawing from the freezing night (there was frost on the tents...), ate and gathered in the gear tent to check our packs and get moving. Nadja promptly ripped a hole in the tent (thankfully the already ripped one), making use of Mike's emergency duct-tape skills. Up the Elephant's Trunk we went, with Malachite in the lead, on, up the scramble (though we kind of had to drag him back to slow him down) to the top of the first bump, where we scoped out our next path down a short scramble to the first snow col. There we put our helmets on and began the scramble up the next bump (the highest today) with huge quartz deposits on the top. We found a rock that my mom took home later on.

The ridge continued on past a very narrow bit, on to yet another bump, where we saw three ptarmigans and took an apparently waaaay too long break (I really don't see what's wrong with enjoying a hike), and then, after much deliberation, picked a (at times precarious) path down, with a heavenly blueberry field, much brush and a bit of scree (a rather fast descent). We stumbled down and dumped our

ice axes, switched leaders and ran up the unnamed peak in twenty minutes. At the top we radioed Mike, who thought we were at the edge of a cliff from his point of view, and then had lunch. The way back was much faster, with a different path along the "paved road" and up a crack, a really nice shortcut. We picked up our quartz (seriously, like 4 kg) and went to snow school. We had crampon practice and some interesting sliding down huge snowfields. Lindsay drank 5 liters of water.

Sutton Range Ridge Hike and Snow School – by Raven (13)

We were the last group to set off from base camp around 11 a.m., far later than we had originally planned (9:30). As we left with myself in the lead later switching to Cees, we hiked up the ridge, joking about invisible butterflies and Harry testing us on how to be safe on hikes. When we reached the ridge we took a snack break, which extended into a 45 minute stop. With Finn and myself once again leading, we continued along the ridge until we reached the peak and ate lunch. After lunch Cees lead us back across the ridge to the snow fields where our snow school began, including the group who had just finished climbing the unnamed peak. The snow school consisted of ascending and descending the steep part of the snow field with ice axes and then a descent down to base camp.

Sutton Peak Snow Ascent #1 – by Piper (15)

After an early breakfast of oatmeal, the four of us (Harry, Malachite, Keith and Piper) left the mostly asleep base camp with backpacks loaded up with ice axes, harnesses, helmets, rope and other gear. We began our hike by ascending the Elephant's Trunk, waving at Amy. In roughly half an hour we had reached the main ridge that would lead us to the base of Sutton Peak, our destination. For most of the rocky, heather strewn ridge I (Piper) led, stopping a couple of times for water and de-layering, as it was already warm and sunny. An hour or so of hiking later, we descended to the Whale's tail, Malachite having led the last downhill section. We put on helmets and harnesses, had a small snack and continued clambering up the right hand side of the ice field to a flat dip of rocks, where we strapped on crampons and Harry informed us that there would be no need for any of our safety gear. Fortunately, we passed the test and told him that that wouldn't be safe! Although Harry actually didn't have a helmet, having given it to Malachite who had left his at base camp. The snowfield was still hard when we began to traverse in zigzags towards a horizontal crack, but the crampons and ice axes obviously worked well, as none of us had any need to exercise our self-arrest skills. I had a lot of fun on the ice and was really excited to have the chance to go on the snow ascent, something I had never done before.

Just after 11:20 we scrambled off the snow and up a wet rocky slope where I decided that hiking on snow with crampons is much more fun than hiking on rock with crampons.



Snow fun returning from the unnamed Peak- frontline performers: Raven, Piper and Lindsay. (Photo: K. Battersby)

After the crampons were once again safely stored in our packs we climbed up the short ridge to the summit, which we reached just one minute within our 11:45 goal. Our lunch break was spent relaxing in the sun, radioing base camp, enjoying the clear view of the surrounding mountains, (we managed to spot Matchlee Mountain among the others) and, of course munching on food. At around 12:30, Keith led us down from Sutton Peak and along the loose rock, where we had spotted a large rock which may have made a good anchor to rappel down to the snow from. Unfortunately, our 60m rope wasn't long enough, so instead we scrambled to the crack in the snow using an anchored rope and prusiks.

When Harry and Keith had finished their descent to the snowfield without the rope, we began zigzagging our way back down the steep upper section of snow. While Malachite and I carefully dug our feet in horizontally, Keith and Harry confidently headed straight down, using the heels of their crampons. As the sharply angled snowfield leveled out I attempted the 'heel technique' which I found to be much easier and quicker. Then we had fun doing a bit of bum-sliding and practiced self arrests. At one point, dad held me by my feet, head first on my back to do a self arrest, which was fun and more challenging, because you get confused about which way to spin. Eventually we got to the bottom of the Whale's Tail and I took over the lead, scrambling up the heather slope on a different route than before and reaching the top of the ridge mid-afternoon.

Continuing to hike at a steady pace along the ridge, we radioed base camp and discovered that a group was just setting out to go rappelling. So instead of turning down the Elephant's trunk, Malachite slid down the ice field to our camp. Dad and I slid part way down and then crossed a scree slope to the top of the rappelling cliff. Harry stayed at the top to prepare for snow school. After a fun rappel back to the snow, I gave my crampons to Cees, and Keith, Cees and I caught up with the rest of the snow school in the middle of the steep section. Without the crampons, ascending the snow was a lot more challenging and you really had to be sure of every step. But I did make it to the top, practicing

with the others traversing in zigzags and staying out of the fall line, as well as learning how to turn sharply by digging the ice ax in. Once at the top, we all enjoyed a very speedy slide down to base camp, where warm Mr. Noodles was waiting.

Sutton Peak Snow Ascent #2 – by Iain (14)

My Dad and I woke at six fifteen (more like my dad woke up then shook me awake) trying hard not to wake my sister. We got dressed and snuck out of the tent. It was cold, as the sky was clear; it was a perfect day to tackle the Sutton snowfield. I ran and got the food and met my dad in the mess tent. While the water was heating up, I made lunch. After our hearty breakfast of instant oatmeal, we made our way over to the gear tent and started to pack our day packs. We were ready to go before our planned departure time of eight o'clock. The team consisted of four guys: Harry, Finn, Derek (dad) and Iain (me). We were told by Harry what to expect and at about eight thirty we left up the Elephant's Trunk, a wearisome part of the trip. After we accomplished that, it was a cakewalk all the way along the ridge to the Whale's tail (bottom of the snow field). We had a snack and kept on going up to a little bump (about twenty minutes up).

There we put on crampons and took out our ice axes and replenished our water when Harry said he would do something stupid in the next forty-five minutes. Then we made our way on to the snowfield. We started zigzagging up the slope for about ten minutes then I realized that Harry wasn't wearing a helmet and that was his test. It kept on getting steeper and steeper, until we came to some cracks where Finn and I decided it was steep enough. We were anchored and put on a belay and used THE MUNTER HITCH. When we all got up to a secure spot we took off our crampons.

As we were doing the snow ascent there was another group (Anna-Lena and Nadja) going up the scramble route. We started the final stretch to the summit. As we came up over the bend, there was Anna-Lena running for the summit and all I see is Finn sprint off and when I can see what's happening I realize that Finn just beat her to the top by a couple steps. All of us ate lunch and hung out for an hour. Then we began the descent on the gully route for about half an hour. When the snowfield wasn't as steep, we started to do a controlled descent; I was skating, Finn was glissading and Harry was boot skiing while my dad was taking videos. Then we hiked back along the ridge and down the Elephant's Trunk. Near the bottom of the trunk I said "screw walking" and ran the rest of the way to base camp where the other people had made food for us.

One of the responsibilities of the youth was to maintain regular radio contact with our base camp manager. Sometimes that required relaying via another group or more inventive engineering solutions like extending the Antenna with a hiking pole. Lindsay used the latter method successfully to make connection with Piper and Keith at the other side of the ridge. We did, however, also see the occasional neces-



Evelyn on the Sutton Scramble route. (Photo: E. Sou)

sity to point out that these radio conversations should be brief and to the point in order to get the important message over in a possible interrupted connection. Lindsay obviously took that to his heart and provided the following trip report for the last Sutton Peak ascent of the week:

Sutton Peak Snow/Gully Route – by (Lindsay, 15)

*08 20: departed for Sutton Peak via Elephant's trunk
 10 40: started ascending snowfield
 11 00: started scramble ascent
 11 29: reached summit ridge
 11 38: reached summit
 12 20: departed summit
 12 50: reached snowfield again
 13 05: glissaded down snowfield
 13 50: reached ridge
 14 05: contacted base camp, group split
 14 30: reached base camp*

As requested brief and to the point! I would like to add, though, that the weather had deteriorated quite a bit from the day before and most of the ascent was made in clouds or fog. The beautiful tarns stayed hidden, but we had a two-minute cloud lift at the summit for a picture. Lindsay found a small chewed-up container with a receipt from some store in Victoria, a potential summit log, which inspired us to create just that. Su donated her water bottle and the only paper we had was our dinner menu and cooking list for the week. That, with a short account of our youth camp Sutton Peak summit mountaineers, can now be found in the summit cairn of Sutton.

The only other group leaving camp in this weather were Piper and Keith to finally explore a potential trail to the lake. Evelyn, who had originally wanted to join and enjoy a swim in the sun, was deterred by the weather and decided to join the camp crowd instead for knot classes and take-down activities.

Lake Exploration – by Piper (15)

Leaving camp at 8:30 on a cloudy Friday, we headed down

the unexplored scree slopes. We crossed the loose rock, trying to find our way down. Unsuccessful, we alder-belayed down a steep gully to the large snowfield. After crossing the snowfield, we slid a short way down the last scree and into the forest. I led for a ways, through blueberry brush, marshy ground and bushwhacking sections. Then my dad (Keith) took over along the elk's trail up a steam bed and back to the forest, where we encountered a steep wooded slope. Swinging, slipping and sliding our way down through cedar trees, we came out at the meandering river. I hopped ahead on large stepping stones until we emerged on the bank of a beautiful lake. We ate lunch, went for a swim and continued.

After lunch (and a wasp sting), we decided to try going up the back side of the ridge. We alder/blueberry belayed for 45 minutes up a slippery gully in the rain before appearing on "top" in the fog. However, on top was in fact not "on top". We had only come to the top of a nose leading up the back of the ridge. Dad took over the lead, up some scrambly, rocky bit, until we became socked in in by fog and radioed for GPS coordinates and assistance. I was not very happy with scrambling up a steep slope with cliffs on either side, but we couldn't go down the cliffs, nor back the way we came. By cautiously peeking around the narrow pass, we found a "safer" route up. We rock scrambled for another 45 minutes over many false "tops", keeping radio contact, until we spotted Nadja and Su, who guided us up the last steep bit to the top. The last part of our exploration was heading home on the familiar ridge, with Su and Nadja, down the Elephant's Trunk to base camp, where there was hot food and a warm tent.

I have to add that within Piper's original writing is inserted a very nice map drawing illustrating the path of her adventure, which I was unfortunately not able to transfer. But we'll keep the camp journal and will just keep adding wonderful stories. While some of the group were out adventuring, the group in camp had already taken down one of the toilets, the bear cache and whatever else was possible. Mike and Harry had a good knot session in the gear tent and despite the weather there was lots of interest in crevasse rescue practice and pulley building. It was late when we finally managed to do our camp debrief. One criticism for us was that the evening planning sessions were too late, but the general consensus was that the camp had been too short. While a lot of work and planning went into the camp, it was surely worth it. All participants came out enriched with many new and refined skills and enhanced friendships. Many of the youth for the first time summited a mountain via a snow ascent using crampons and ice axes.

Of course an endeavor like this is only possible with a great team and lots of support. I can't express more, how fantastic the team of parents has been on the trip and what a wonderful and inspiring group of youth. I am confident that some of them will be our future volunteer leaders.

We also would like to acknowledge financial support by the Youth Memorial Fund, the Vancouver Island Section, Thrifty

Foods and Peninsula Coop. We would like to thank Chris and Bruce from Western Forest Products and Bill from Holbrook Dyson Logging Ltd. for logistical support, weather/fire updates, and our pilot Kirk and the crew from E&B helicopters in Gold River for their help and support. It has been a fantastic camp!!!

Participants: Cees and Arno Dirks, Su Castle and Raven Castle-Griffey, Iain, Evelyn and Derek Sou, Lindsay and Mike Richards, EJ Hurst, Piper and Keith Battersby, Malachite Miller, Finn, Anna-Lena, Nadja and Harry Steiner.

Golden Hinde Adventure

Dave Suttill

August 24 – 28

I'd let it be known to a few people over the previous year or so that I was interested in going to the Golden Hinde. Who wouldn't be? I knew Roxanne would be. It is only the Island's highest mountain and a relatively easy climb, even if it is protected by a rather lengthy approach. In early June, with summer fast approaching, Peggy wanted to know if I was really serious about doing it as she would need to schedule it into her work calendar. That got me off my butt and I started to do some planning. Roger would be coming too, so that made four of us, a good number for speed and safety. Mid August seemed the best time, as we should be faced with the least amount of snow and have the best weather. And so it all came together.

We piled into Roxanne's Subaru and headed for the Ralph River campground the night before with the necessities for a four-night backpack along with 30m of rope, slings, rappelling gear and ice axes. I didn't really think we'd need the ice axes, but I didn't want to risk being turned back because we didn't have them. At eight o'clock Saturday morning we arrived at the Phillips Ridge trailhead, posed for a before picture and off we went. The weather was low cloud and threatening drizzle, but good weather was forecast for Sunday and it was supposed to last until Monday afternoon.

Our first obstacle was the switchback trail up to Arnica Lake with its many wasp nests, several of which had been disturbed by bears or disgruntled hikers. The wasps were particularly belligerent and made their presence known by stinging a few of us, including Roxanne. She was concerned that she might react to more stings so we moved her to the safest position, the front of the line. Two and a half hours later we arrived at Arnica Lake, well above the wasp zone. The terrain was starting to open up a little, but we were still below the tree line.

A little past Arnica Lake we met a group of hikers going the other way. They had been turned back by high winds

and rain quite high on the Hinde. It was something like the sixth time one of the party had attempted the Hinde without success. He advised us that the best place for a base camp was at the north end of Schjelderup Lake as the summit was well within reach from there and backpacking past there would require major additional effort. It took another hour before we hit the open part of Phillips Ridge. After several ups and downs, though trending up, we came to a low point that was sheltered. Time for lunch! The wind wasn't bad, but combined with the occasional light rain it made for cool traveling. While reviving ourselves with energy food, we had some more visitors. It was Tomas Torres-Bonet who we had met at the 2012 Intro to Mountaineering Camp and friend. They had used Carter Lake as their base camp, which was a long day from the Hinde, but still doable. They, too, had to turn back short of the summit.

Back on the trail again for another couple of hours and Roger informed us that his knees were giving him trouble. He assured us that this was out of character and a rest was probably all he needed. As it was nearing 3 o'clock, we needed to think about finding a good camping spot anyway. It turned out that just ahead, where the main spine of Phillips Ridge starts heading north, there is a good-sized bench about 100m lower down at the start of a secondary ridge that heads down to the west. We could see several tarns there making it an attractive camping area. It would also prove to be free of the annoying wind that plagued the ridge top. Camp 1 was set up by 3:30 and the remainder of the day was spent exploring and taking photos of the extensive areas of yellow and pink monkey flower among other things.

The next morning we woke to cold clear skies and beautiful views of the mountains to the south and west. We saw a bear rambling off at the far end of our little bench. We set off at 8:00 a.m. Roger's knees had completely recovered. We continued around to the north regaining elevation to rejoin the ridge-top trail, which we had on GPS from Roxy Ahmed's trip in July. Here we had our first view of the Golden Hinde, which at this point is reflected in Carter Lake. After few more major ups and downs we left the ridge to drop down to the valley bottom, then up to Carter Lake. This would be a lunch stop for all and a swim stop for Roger. We were getting really close now. Another 1¼ hours took us past a really scenic little lake tucked into the base of Mount Burman and on to the south end of Schjelderup Lake. Here we came upon a spectacular viewpoint of the lake with the Hinde behind. So we had another lunch stop and Roger had another swim. The sun was hot so why not. Peggy soaked her feet and Roxanne soaked her arms which were still a little swollen from the wasp stings of the previous day. We could easily have camped right there. However we decided that the closer we were to the mountain the easier tomorrow would be. With the north end of lake only another kilometre or so away, Roxanne and I got a little ahead of Peggy and Roger. The lake shore was a little difficult to follow in a few spots, necessitating minor detours up the slope to the left. Well one of these detours was a false trail leading to some rather treacherous terrain. Peggy was not



Golden Hinde Summit Photo: (Left to right) Dave Suttill, Roger Taylor, Peggy Taylor and Roxanne Stedman.



The Golden Hinde from the south end of Schjelderup Lake.

amused. We finally all arrived at the good-sized meadow at the far end of the lake. Base Camp was set up around 3:00 p.m.

In a little while, after we had thoroughly explored the immediate vicinity, two young backpackers came by looking for a place to camp. We pointed them to one of several nice sites nearby. They were traveling light and had come through from the Elk River. They had a successful climb of the Hinde earlier in the day. We asked about their route, and they said they took the gully with the snow in it. They had scrambled up the loose rock between the snow and the sidewall. They assured us that the entire route was well cairned and easy to follow. It was soon 5:00 p.m. and I was getting a little antsy hanging around camp and thought I'd give Mount Burman a try. I checked to see if Roxanne was interested, but her wasp stings were still giving her trouble. So I headed off by myself with GPS in hand knowing I had two hours of daylight left with maybe just enough time to complete my mission. My turn around time would be 6:00. A fast scramble up through the bluffs over on the northwest side saw me at the summit in an hour. I barely had time for a few quick photos before heading back. It was a good thing I had my GPS on as there were a few confusing spots navigating the bluffs on the way back, and I didn't have time for any false leads. I made it back to camp at 7:15 and all was well.

As bad weather was due to move in, an early start was in order, which for us meant 7:00 a.m. So off we went, up the North Ridge of Mount Burman and way down to Burman Lake, then back up on the lower slopes of the Hinde. We arrived at the fairly large tarn on the flat below the main south scree slope at 9:40. From here on we found only limited degrees of trail makings and cairns so we had to essentially pick our own route. Roxy's track from July wasn't so helpful now because she and Chris were on snow at this point. We headed straight up to the upper limit of the scree then turned to the right and found a nice sloping grassy ledge to get us around to the east side of the mountain. The weather was still holding. We soon came upon a way up the rocks that we recognized from one of the photos on

the Island Hikes website. Then there were some obvious scree gullies and we soon found the one partially filled with snow. In retrospect it probably didn't matter which gully we followed but we knew the snow gully would get us there so up we went. Once above the snow gully, we found ourselves in a narrowing gully with rather smooth hand holds, which we only just managed to pull ourselves up on. I ended up going first and fixed a hand line for safety. Above this we had a choice and found ourselves at the crest of the main ridge where a huge car-sized chock stone was perched at the head of our gully with a breathtaking view directly under it down the other side. Treading lightly, we continued over it and back to friendlier scree gullies arriving on the summit at 1:00 p.m.

By now we had lost the sun, and a cloud ceiling at about the same height we were was rapidly approaching from the south. After half an hour of enjoying the view and taking photos we decided we'd better get going. We soon put the gullies behind with a short rappel down the smooth hand-hold section. Luckily we got past the serious route finding sections before clouds closed in and light rain began. While we didn't use the ice axes for snow, they were quite useful in chopping steps for crossing some of the steeper fine grained scree runs we had to negotiate. Once back on our grassy ledge we were home free.

However, with the coming storm we didn't have much time to spare for getting back to camp before dark. By the time we got there our nice meadow had turned into a wind tunnel as it was completely exposed to the gusts of wind roaring across the lake. Roxanne and I wasted no time in moving our tent to a nearby site sheltered by trees bordering a slight rise between us and the lake. Then I brought out my secret weapon against the rain, a 3 X 4 metre light weight tarp. We just got it set up by dark and were able to provide a dry spot for all to have dinner. Roxanne and I passed the night in relative comfort as the wind-driven rain howled above us and the odd rock slide echoed in the distance. Peggy and Roger stuck it out in the open meadow exposed to the full force of the elements.

The storm more or less blew itself out by morning. We

didn't get underway until 10:00 and were in no rush to face the wet bush along the first part of the trail. Some drizzle and fog persisted until we regained Phillips Ridge at around 2:00 where we met a family group on their way in. Before long we arrived at our original Camp 1 where we enjoyed a rather pleasant evening. It drizzled occasionally throughout the night.

While tidying up our camp next morning, Roxanne noted that an avalanche tree that I had scrounged for a tarp pole was the spitting image of an alpenhorn. The prize-winning photo of me playing the alpenhorn was snapped and then we were on our way by 8:00, right on schedule. We continued on with one minor route-finding delay where the ridge widened out and the cairns were few and far between. We arrived at Arnica Lake by lunch, where we saw our second bear of the trip. We managed to avoid any wasp encounters on our way down and amused ourselves by making up a rhyme for each switchback we counted. There were 83 "and no more to be" by our count. And did I mention, the blueberries and huckleberries were superb throughout the trip. So ended a great adventure!

Participants: Roxanne Stedman, Dave Suttill, Peggy and Roger Taylor.

Victoria Peak – 2163m

Roxanne Stedman September 7

It was an early departure from Victoria with the plan to meet Dave, Angus and Anthony in Gold River at 10:30 a.m. Low fog from Campbell River to Gold River obscured the views. Everybody was there by 10 so off we went. Driving north from Gold River towards Tsaxana – we made some wrong turns on the logging roads. The Backroad map was not detailed enough, but the directions in the Hiking Trails III book were decent. After Nimpkish Road, go over the two bridges onto East Road through Muchalat Park then back onto West Road via Waring Mainline. After about an hour on the logging road, Angus' truck got a flat and the guys decided to fix it then rather than later. The spare was over 20 years old! They used a mishmash of equipment from all the vehicles and the woods, along with lots of brute force, to hoist the truck up and fix the flat. I contributed by taking on the role of official photographer. Angus decided to leave the truck where it was, as the logging road was getting seriously steep and rough and he wanted to save his spare tire for the drive home. The truck tires were secured with rocks and all the gear was moved to the 4-Runner and the Sidekick. There was evidence of active logging in the area, but the machinery was off to the side, not blocking the road. A big boulder marked the end of the drivable logging road and there was a pink flag where the trail began (elev. 1158m). It was a beautiful day and with no wind and great



Victoria Peak - the group at the trailhead.

views of Sutton, Victoria, Waring and Alston.

It was a short steep hike up through the blueberries and the logging slash to the South Ridge where a distinct trail led through the heather. At 3:00 p.m., we arrived at the first large tarn where we planned to camp. As the weather was spectacular and the day still young, we thought of bagging Victoria Peak that day. After much discussion and a group vote, we decided to go for it. Dave opted to stay at camp as camp manager.

Ian, Anthony, Angus and I set off at 4 p.m. at high speed along the South Ridge. We stopped part way to fill up with water and unload some of my gear onto the guys. Checking the ground on leaving, I spied Ian's GPS, without which navigating back to camp from the summit in the dark would have been interesting. We reached the snowfield below the South Face of the massif in one hour. Options were discussed, as I was fading and it was likely that we would be returning from the summit in the dark. Option 2 was chosen – Ian and Angus would try to summit and Anthony kindly would return to camp with me.

After stashing our crampons, ice axes and summit gear, we sat and watched Ian and Angus make their way across the snowfield until they were almost out of sight. It was a leisurely walk back to camp to find Dave had set up the tents and had the stove ready for lighting. That night we had a beautiful evening and sunset. It was a relief when Ian and Angus arrived back at camp at 9:45 after successfully summiting. Now I could go to sleep. Dave had set up a beacon to help guide them back to camp and had the stove going so they could cook up dinner.

The original plan was to get up at 5:00 a.m. Sunday, but since Anthony and I enjoy our sleep and Ian got back too late to object, we delayed our start to 5:30 a.m. Dave decided to stay behind while Angus was going to head home – something about a girlfriend and truck woes. We were moving at 6:30 and there was enough light that we didn't need our headlamps. We made it to the snowfield in one hour and retrieved our stashed gear. With crampons on, we traversed across the snowfields to reach the base of



Victoria Peak summit group.

a ramp system that leads far to the right, across the lower part of the face.

Since the snowfield faced east it was not icy, but it was a bit steep at first. We stashed our crampons and ice axes once over the two snowfields. Up the hidden gully and along the ledges we climbed to reach the steep step - a small pitch of 5th class climbing where there was a sling in place. Ian climbed up and set up an anchor for Anthony to belay from below. Once over this tricky obstacle, we headed back across the face, treading very lightly so as not to dislodge any rocks on our way to the top. We arrived at the summit at 9:50. The third IQ for me on the 3rd highest mountain on Vancouver Island and the second summit of Victoria Peak in 15 hours for Ian. We could see our camp and Dave and Angus' tents. I guess they had slept in! The views were spectacular especially with the fog lying in the valleys. Partway down the face we met Brandon Hopkins' team heading up. They had camped at the trailhead and had an early start, as they were planning on bagging Victoria as a day hike. This was their third attempt to get up the mountain. We were very grateful to be off the face and across the snowfield, out of the rockfall area as they made their way to the summit. We were back at camp at 2:00 p.m. and packed up our gear. Dave was patiently waiting for us when we arrived back at the car at 3:30.

After some wrong turns heading out, we finally made it to sunny and warm Gold River (31°C). We left Gold River and saw a bull elk crossing the highway as we passed the King's Peak viewpoint. Ian drove to Campbell River where I took over so Ian could sleep the rest of the way. An email received from Angus said he had a slow trip back to Victoria, but he made it. And as Angus summed it up, "I'm almost weeping thinking about how nice that trip was compared to my current coffee and grind reality. Another day awaits!"

Participants: Ian Kilpatrick, Angus Smith, Anthony Bergson, Dave McDowell and Roxanne Stedman.

Merlon SW Face –The Embrasure

Chris Jensen
September 13 – 15

Some alpine trips happen at the spur of moment; others are a long time in the making. This particular trip took 10 years to come together and it started with a few simple words.....

"Big granite on Vancouver Island!?"

"Ya, some guy said there is a large wall of clean granite near Zeballos. He didn't know where. Want to go look for it?"

I'd heard this teaser of information before I had joined the ACC or had resources like *Island Alpine* guide, Google Earth or other online beta. To learn more about this alleged granite, we thought it best to actually visit the area and talk to people to find out whether it really existed. The Village's 125 residents meant that we had about 125 chances to find someone that could point us in the right direction. Once we arrived in Zeballos we asked several folks about this granite but we didn't find any leads. Things were looking grim, until someone suggested we talk to the cook at the pub. Success! He knew exactly where this plug of dioritic rock was hiding.

Soon we were staring up at a massive granite monolith, a geologic anomaly for Vancouver Island. We had found Nomash Dome (AKA Grayback Peak)! Camped out near the base were the trio who had bolted much of it. They welcomed us to join their camp and once the wet weather subsided, my friend Ryan Bresser and I headed for Wapiti Mainline, the only completed route at the time, and the bolting party went on to continue adding more pitches to their new route, Talladega Highbanks. About halfway up the climb the clouds lifted revealing the impressive Haihte Range. The Southwest Face of Rugged Mountain immediately got my attention, but then my eyes were drawn to another impressive face tucked in the next valley over. It looked almost as tall as Rugged's face and appeared steeper and cleaner.

After seeing that view from Nomash Dome all I knew was that I wanted to climb Rugged and its neighbour. On that initial trip we explored about 12 pitches on the left side of Rugged's Southwest Face. We didn't have enough time to finish the route so we rapped down knowing that the summit would have to wait for another day. By the time I eventually stood on the top of Rugged nine years had passed by. I didn't think the wait was going to be that long! However, now that I had seen the vista from Rugged's summit, I could finally turn my attention to that tempting wall to the Northwest.

For a brief moment the peak I was interested in had been referred to as Jagged Mountain South (See *Island Bush-*

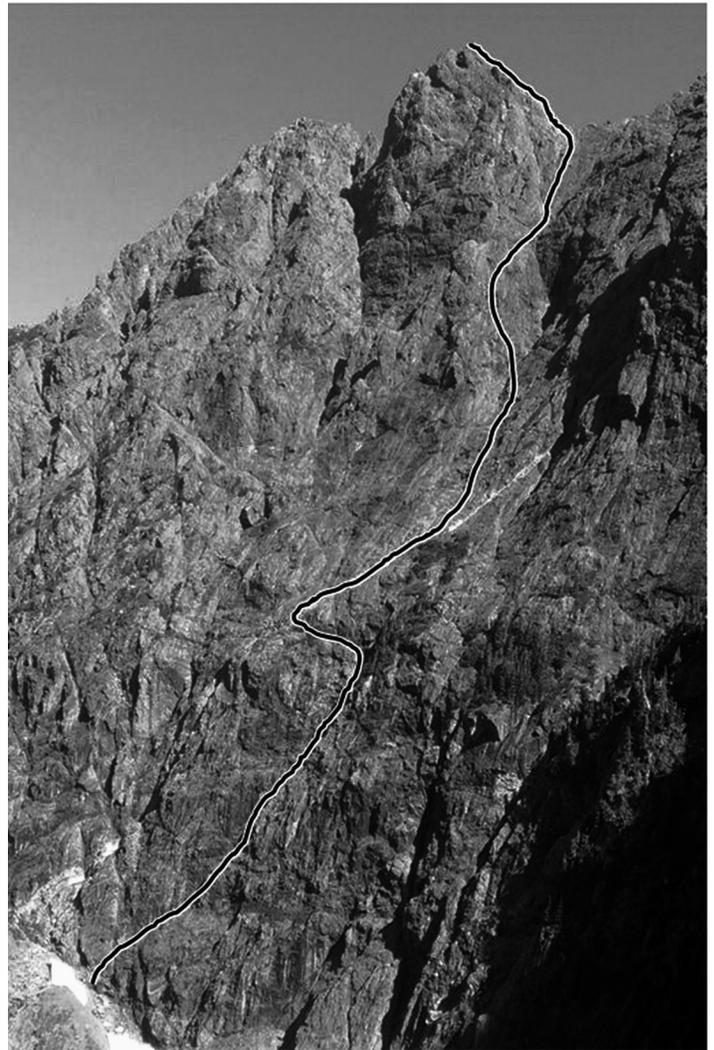
whacker Annual 1990, pg 20). It is now commonly referred to as some variation of “Merlon”. A merlon is the vertical solid part of a battlement or fortified wall. Therefore, each one of the prominent peaks along this ridge represents a merlon. The exact name and which of the twin summits is the highest hasn’t been nailed down yet. * The peak that I had my eye on was called the South Peak by the first ascent party (Central Spire in IA).

The Southwest Face was alluring not only because it looked like great climbing, but apparently it had also never been climbed before. An ACC party had aimed to climb the face in 1990, but the team ended up getting their first ascents via the Rugged Glacier (Northeast side). The only known action that the sunny side of the mountain has seen was done by Darren Wilman and Paul Rydeen. On June 3, 2004 they climbed the West Ridge below the North Merlon.

I had seen Merlon’s Southwest Face on a few trips to the area and every time I saw it there was a sizable snow patch at mid level. This snow produces several small waterfalls that soak the rock below. Wanting a dry climb, I aimed to try this route in September when most of the snow should be gone. As soon as a weather window opened up, Mike Shives and I took off from Victoria and we started the 5 1/2 hour drive to the trail head. The usually overgrown N20 trail was like an open highway thanks to a recent trail clearing party organized by Lindsay Elms. We used the same approach for Rugged, but at the point where the ridge kicks up steeply (~1200m elevation) and the flagged route for Rugged turns up right into the bluffs, we cut off left and descended down open chutes. This provided direct access into the basin below.

Once at the base we immediately started to inspect the face. Unfortunately, one of the potential lines that looked good from afar was in fact far from good. The dihedral we considered climbing turned out to be overhanging and dripping wet. We continued moving left to examine the 2nd obvious option: a right trending feature that runs almost halfway up the face. It wasn’t until we were almost in it that we found out this weakness was actually a deep chimney. It looked fantastic. Except for the very bottom, it was almost totally devoid of the usual island vegetation. This chimney is a large drainage feature so for much of the year it would likely be filled with a waterfall. Fortunately in the middle of this hot and dry September we found no gushing water. Instead we were greeted by clean dry rock that looked like it had been blasted by a power washer. It begged to be climbed.

We bivied beside Migh Creek near the start of the route. Early the next morning I woke up filled with the same feeling as a kid on Christmas. What surprises waited for us above? We eagerly scrambled up the chimney and made quick progress because it was just the right width where we could plaster our hands and feet on opposing walls and easily work our way up. We drifted up the chimney until we came to a bulge that we bypassed by climbing out right onto the face. Mike belayed me as I swung out of the secu-



The route up Merlon.

rity of the chimney and onto the exposed face. A few moves in I realized that I was no longer on scrambling terrain. The 5.8 traverse turned out to be short lived and before long we were back to low 5th class terrain. There are likely easier options that would avoid this section.

We were aiming for a white diagonal dyke that starts ~300m up the face. To get to the base of it we traversed left at the end of the gully and clambered along a bushy ledge. (Note: the only level bivy spot we saw was located where the ledge intersects the dyke. At other times of the year this gravel bed may be filled with water). The dyke was high-quality limestone; almost marble-like. This aesthetic feature was low angle and we walked up most of it. I felt diminutive standing in the centre of the face, surrounded by acres of rock in all directions.

Once we got to the halfway spot on the dyke we got our first good look at a section of the face that looked like it could be a bit tricky. On closer inspection it was clear that there were a few options to get by it. We scurried up near a right-facing dihedral and then cut left back onto the face. Climbing difficulties started to increase so Mike belayed me as I moved over a delicate section of ground. The next pitch Mike took the sharp end and worked his way up a

nearly vertical rock face for a full rope length. From below, this pitch didn't look much different, but once I got on it, I realized....WOW....that ground is a long ways down! The exposure brought renewed focus to each move. I looked up at the space between pieces and I wondered how Mike enjoyed the run outs. Thankfully we could climb with some assurance because the rock was quite solid for an alpine climb. This 5.7 pitch was certainly a highlight of the climb. With dilated pupils and a grin on my face, I met Mike at the belay, grabbed some gear and continued up into open ground. At the end of the pitch the rock kicked back into a huge slab. The featured rock made for fun scrambling to the ridge top.

It was a sizzling hot day out and for the last couple of hours we'd been baking in the sun. We never encountered any water on route so now we were high and feeling very dry. The Rugged Glacier wasn't far below us. Instead of figuring out our route up the final summit pyramid, we found ourselves licking our lips as we looked down towards the snow. From our position on the ridge the next section of rock looked like very stiff climbing. The two obvious options were an overhanging off width or steep crimp looking face that offered no protection. After all the moderate climbing it looked like this route was saving something hard for the end. It was early afternoon so we decided we had time to get water and then return to figure out the last few pieces of this puzzle. We set up a rappel and I had just started off down the lines when I peered up and saw what looked like a third option; a much easier option. It turns out an obelisk along the ridge was blocking the view of the path of least resistance. Water could wait. I racked up and started climbing up a section of green-coloured rock. This was the only rotten stone we encountered on the route. Crumbling hand and foot holds and gave me a quick jolt of energy which I used to high tail it off the patch of green rock. After that pitch it was just a short ramble to the summit. Whoo-hoo!

Not finding a summit register, I added a small waterproof book inside the cairn and wrote "*The Embrasure*" as its first entry. Along a fortified wall, merlons are sometimes pierced by vertical "embrasure" slits to view and fire arrows through. Below this Merlon, it was a narrow embrasure feature (the deep chimney) that we used to climb the lower part of the Southwest Face. When we started out that morning we didn't know what we'd find. What we found was one of the most enjoyable alpine climbs I've done on Vancouver Island. Climbing a 650m moderate route in the sun with great company, how could that not put a smile on someone's face?

We lingered on the summit for as long as our thirst would allow. Water was only a short distance away so we shouldered our packs and rappelled down into the tight col between the North and South Merlons. Here we melted snow and drank and drank and drank. Filled with feelings of contentment and bellies full of water, we decided to stay put. We set up our bivy bags on the thin apex of ground in the col. This atmospheric perch combined with a meteor shower made for a memorable night.

The next morning we brought out our ice axes, strapped on our crampons and hopped onto the upper Rugged Glacier. We bypassed a few open crevasses on our way to Nathan Creek col, but other than that it was a straightforward hike back to this familiar spot. From there it was just a matter of following the flagged route down to the van.

This trip marked one of the longest periods I've waited to do an island climb. But all that anticipation certainly made the experience more enjoyable. In this age where instant information and gratification are so predominant, it's easy to forget that not knowing and patience can be essential ingredients for some of life's most satisfying moments. This trip was a good reminder of how valuable these qualities can be. But no one needs to wait a decade to go out and have a great time on this climb. Check it out before N20 grows back!

Participants: Chris Jensen and Mike Shives.

** These peaks don't have official gazetted names so there is some variation in what they are called. For example, Island Alpine uses Merlon Mountain; the ACC website has it listed as Mount Merlon and Google Earth uses Merlon Peak. The FA party have used both Mountain and Peak. So which one is it? Merlon Mountain is formally recognized as the name of a peak in BC's Coast Range and "Mount" is usually reserved for honorary names. Therefore, since "Mountain" is already used and these summits weren't named on behalf of someone, perhaps the highest summit should be called Merlon Peak.*

There is also uncertainty about which of the twin summits is the highest. Many climbing references identify the North summit as the highest. For example Island Alpine lists the North as 1813m and the South at 1800m. However, BC TRIM map 092L007 indicates that the South maybe the highest (1814m). Elevations from Google Earth show the South Peak is 1810m and the North Peak is 1808m. If anyone is heading up the Merlons then please consider taking a GPS or sight level and tell us what you find.

Triple Peak

Dave Suttill September 21

Triple Peak has to be a contender for one of the most picturesque mountains anywhere, especially when viewed from the far side of Cobalt Lake across the valley. When it appeared on this year's schedule, I reluctantly paid no attention as I had signed up for the Tour de Victoria bike ride that weekend. However, as summer progressed with more time spent in the mountains and less riding the bike, I started to question my level of cycling fitness. With less



Triple Peak summit group.

than a week to go, Roxanne informed me that she had deferred her Tour de Victoria entry to the following year and was signed up for Triple. With the seven-day weather outlook not the best, I decided I'd rather have another day in the mountains than a day biking. So I deferred my Tour entry and got on the trip's wait list.

A few days before the trip, the weather forecast was still not looking good, and several people had dropped out, leaving an opening for me. So trip leader Stefan and the two of us hung in the balance, checking the local forecasts every couple of hours. At the last minute, Stefan wrote an email asking "What's a weekend warrior to do?" With low expectations we finally decided early Friday morning to give things a go. After all there was a slight chance Saturday might clear up for a few hours. We left Victoria at 5 p.m. that afternoon in Roxanne's Subaru. We picked Stefan up at the Crofton ferry turn-off where we got some food for the drive up. It rained most of the way. It was well after dark by the time we got to the end of Marion Main, which was looking slightly the worse for wear since the previous summer. Here we hastily set up the big car camping tent in what was now only light drizzle and hunkered down for the night. After a while the drizzle turned into periods of heavy rain, to the point we had to put an extra fly over the tent to keep the drips out. Sometime after midnight the clouds parted and the waning full moon lit up the valley.

Our planned 7 a.m. start got off without a hitch. We could just see our objective above the valley fog. The trail was well marked and had seen considerable recent brushing out. This was good because the bush was soaking wet. Parts of the trail up beside the series of cascading waterfalls were a solid Class 3 scramble in their own right. After about 1.5 hours we were basking in sunshine on the rocks above the hanging lake. Here we got our first close up look at Triple Peak, appearing very mysterious with wisps of cloud still hanging around. Visibility was quite good for a time and we could see Nine Peaks, Big Interior and Septimus/Rosseau way off to the north. Feeling quite pleased with ourselves we continued on past a huge bivvy rock and picked our way up toward the snow field, negotiating various rock ledges wet from the night's rain. We needed

our ice axes and crampons for the brief snow traverse to get above and left of the snowfield. This put us just below the south end of the ridge leading up the main middle peak. Crampons and ice axes were stashed and climbing harnesses put on. Stefan would be leading, trailing the rope for Roxanne and me to use as a hand line in places. We went up a short gully leading to the ridge crest. At the top it was blocked by a huge chockstone, which you could squeeze under or crawl around. From there we made our way up the west side of the ridge crest over what was probably Class 4 or low Class 5 material. The first part was a little awkward in spots but there were plenty of safe vegetation assists. We then came to a fifteen metre or so open-book section of rock with scrubby vegetation on the lower part, which diminished to small bits of heather as it got steeper further up. At the top there was a short metre or so of vertical to get over. Stefan managed to find one bit of sketchy protection half way up and belayed the two of us when he got above the final lip. From then on it was back to Class 3 and we were soon on the summit. By this time the clouds had rolled in again and we had to content ourselves with the occasional glimpse of other parts of the nearby ridges. The register was signed and photos taken.

We started down at 12:30, rappelling the steeper sections. Visibility improved slightly as we got lower but was still restricted to the immediate area of the valley. There was occasional light drizzle, but we didn't care. We had conquered Triple Peak and had scored a perfect weather window. We got back to the car around 5 p.m., and treated ourselves to dinner at the Bare Bones restaurant, Port Alberni's premier fish and chips establishment, before driving home that night. Stefan just made the last ferry.

Participants: Stefan Gessinger, Roxanne Stedman and Dave Suttill.

Mt. Albert Edward: An All-Women Climb to Raise Funds for Educating Girls

Janelle Curtis
20 – 22 September 2013

Learning is for you and me, but
For many girls, it isn't free.
Plan a climb to raise money?
Propose a trip for ACC...
Count me in! And me! And me!
Campaign page and Twitter feed,
Facebook, Comment, Share, and Like,
Wow! Donations have just spiked!
Interviews and blogger's page,
Pack and plan for three long days.
Torrential rain, hail, snow, and sleet,
Fog, and mud, and soggy feet.
Summit tears and summit cheers!



The all-women group to raise funds for girls' education.

Sense of joy and assuaged fears.
Potluck dinner shared with friends,
And retreat to warm dry tents.
Turn our boots back down the hill,
So much change is needed still.
Pink champagne to celebrate,
It's "the start of something great!"

We wish to thank all those who supported our campaign through words of encouragement, help with logistics and social media, and contributions to the BIAAG's scholarship fund for girls. Together we helped keep 146 girls in school this year. To learn more about our fundraising climb, visit: <http://acc.uberflip.com/i/204621>.

Participants: Vivian Addison, Jennifer Boldt, Barb Campbell, Janelle Curtis, Madelene Daniel, Patricia Elliott, Robyn Forrest, Vanessa Hodes, Karen Hunter, Amelia Mahony, Mary Thiess, Valeria Vergara, Lenka Visnovska.

Mount Septimus

Roxanne Stedman
October 19 – 20

Our hope was to climb Mount Septimus in the summer of 2013. With some great trips behind us (Nine Peaks, Big Interior Mountain, Marble Meadows, Golden Hinde and Triple Peak) time was running out. September turned out to be the wettest month on record, limiting outdoor pursuits to the local wet/west hills. Cool September weather resulted in early snow at the higher elevations with some hikers finding themselves caught in extreme weather for the time, requiring rescue.

The weather started improving around Thanksgiving weekend. With the hope of doing something farther and bigger, and working around Thanksgiving with family and friends, we headed up to Mount Arrowsmith with Russ Moir and his gang. It was a beautiful day except for the logging just start-

ing at the base of Arrowsmith.

The weather was holding. With numerous checks of the forecast in the mountains and for Gold River it looked like we finally had our weather window. A quick email to Ian Kilpatrick, who led the Victoria Peak climb in early September, confirmed that he was interested. So we had a team!

We had some worries that the snow bridges over the crevasses wouldn't be very substantial and that the moats to get on and off the north glacier might not be crossable. Ian had also heard the North Glacier described as "gnarly" at this time of year. The X-gully was also a concern as it is described as nasty loose scree when dry. With pickets, screws, pulleys and rusty crevasse rescue skills we headed off.

We headed up early Saturday morning and made really good time, arriving at the Bedwell Trailhead at 10:00. Three and a half hours driving time from Victoria. (Holy crap!!) Cool and foggy at the trail head.

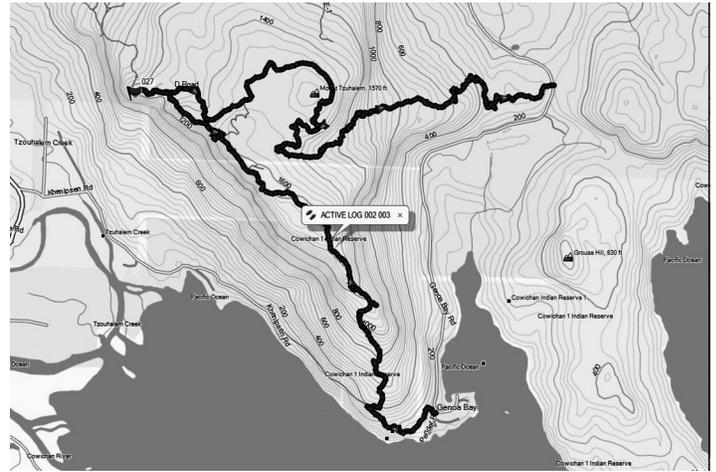
Sunny lunch break at Bedwell Lake at 12:40 then off to Cream Lake via Little Jim Lake with its spectacular reflection of Septimus in its waters. We arrived at Cream Lake at ~3:00 p.m. Ian wanted to check the snow conditions in the X-gully and see how big the moat was beneath the North Col onto the North Glacier. So off we went. Dave followed part way up the Septimus Glacier. Roxanne lounged at camp.

Ian was back before sunset with a report on snow conditions, photos and a video of the gully and moat! Looked like it was doable!

Up at 6:30 a.m., off at 7:45! We quickly arrived at the snowfield, put on our crampons and headed up to the bottom of the X. The snow was soft, but not too soft. Up the gully we went. The snow was deep in places with some breakthrough. Bit of scrambling around some boulders and one more snow chute to the col. The steep gully down to the North Glacier ended at the moat. Dave's sixty metre rope was just a little too short to make it by the snow bridge so we carefully made our way onto the glacier. Dave cau-



Septimus summit.



Mount Tzouhalem route.

tiously snaked his way around huge open crevasses with Roxanne and Ian roped behind him. We unroped when we reached the upper snowfield at 11:00 a.m. The upper snow slope was quite steep with a nasty run out. We were on the top of Mount Septimus at 11:40 (4 hours up). Beautiful views all around. A very happy summit team!

Ian set up a picket anchor in the snow and belayed Roxanne and Dave down to the glacier. We retraced our footsteps back to the base of the North Gully and we were back at the North Col at 2:20. Cold and breezy at the North Col! Beautifully warm in the X-gully! We were back at camp at 3:45 p.m. It took us 3.5 hours to get back to camp.

Dave boiled up some water for afternoon coffee, broth and scrambled eggs with bacon. We were feeling reenergized. Ian had a sweet bivvy set up under pride rock. We were ready to go at 5 p.m. Our goal was to make it back to Bedwell Lake before dark as the trail would be easy to follow in the dark with headlamps after Bedwell. We arrived back at the car at 8:45. Ian drove us into Campbell River with a sort of quick stop at the Golden Arches for power fries.

Very foggy, but a speedy drive home as we made all the lights through Nanaimo, and Red Light Roxanne only broke one or maybe two laws. Home at 1:30 a.m!

Participants: Ian Kilpatrick, Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman.

Mount Tzouhalem

Murrough O'Brien
October 19

Plan A, the scheduled Mount Arrowsmith climb, collapsed because of the forecast. Mount Tzouhalem was B and October 19th was a go. A nice size group met at Bird's Eye Cove; we then dropped Russ's car off where we thought we would end up at the end of the hike on the Genoa Bay

Road, and drove to Genoa Bay then parked three cars at the trail head very close to the B. C. Hydro electrical box and properly off the road.

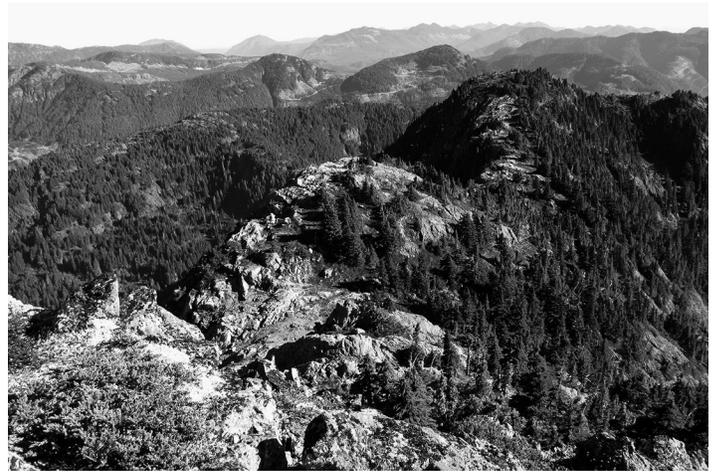
By some opinions, the South Ridge leading to the cross on the bluffs overlooking Cowichan Bay and the Cowichan Valley is one of the prettiest hikes on the South Island and the mountain didn't disappoint us this time either; the weather was sparkling and the views superb from the outer Gulf Islands around to the south and over to most of the Cowichan Valley. Meandering through oak, arbutus and Douglas fir, the hike is a trip in itself. However, some revelations unfolded as we proceeded. I was very pleased to find myself hiking alongside our friend and very much appreciated house sitter who was commenting on how she enjoyed staying at our place when we were away, then from behind a voice popped up saying that she too had enjoyed our house the last time we were gone. Then lo and behold, another voice said, he did too. The things we learn while hiking! Made a mental note to hike more often!

We ate lunch at the top of the faces by the cross where all appreciated the view. As a youth, friends and I heard the local legend that Chief Tzouhalem pushed some of his wives off this same summit area and some of us wandered under these bluffs looking for any remaining bones from a hundred and some odd years ago. On this trip Russ confirmed that this supposed story was in fact a Cowichan legend. Chief Tzouhalem was supposed to have ended up with 16 wives, but I have no idea how many were pushed from here. We followed guide Scott as he led us along the old logging roads in a circuitous, but best route eastward towards Bird's Eye Cove. Note: without prior knowledge or a GPS track to follow this could be a time-consuming leg for the unwary as there are numerous trail choices to be made.

Hiking along the eastern bluffs we passed an area designated by bikers as The Field of Dreams; all we could see were tree tops. Not only was it deadly steep and perhaps a dream for some, but surely a nightmare for hikers if they considered descending that conglomerate. The route winds above and around several ravines, more



Inspecting the wallow.



View from McQuillan. (Photo: Catrin Brown)

interesting conglomerate shapes, some green walls of moss, then there is mostly a gentle descent back to the first car for a total time of 6.5 hours including lunch. I would like to thank Scott for developing the eastern section of this oddly-configured route which resulted in a very enjoyable hike (see attached track).

Participants: Russ Moir, Scott Collins, Roger Painter, Maureen Hooley, Lenka Visnovska, Andrea Kosorinova, Roxanne Stedman, Karun Thanjavar and Murrough O'Brien (guest whose penance was this write-up, for not renewing his membership!).

Mount McQuillan: What's an "Elk Wallow?"

Barb Baker
October 20

On a gorgeous morning, October 20, we headed up China Creek Main searching for the new logging road leading high on the North Ridge of Mount McQuillan. This route is more direct than the traditional route through King Solomon's Basin on the much over grown mule trails. On the new North Ridge approach we gained a lot of elevation on wheels before heading up through old growth to the first bump. Lots of logging flags seen. From here short work to Iron Mountain [not an official name, but found on an old map – ed], a more major bump on the ridge, which requires a little scramble to gain the height and from which are very inviting views of the north side of McQuillan.

Heading down into forest again, we came on a sunny clearing with a shallow mud tarn. Lots of big elk tracks were seen and odd smears in the black mud. None of us had ever seen this even though there has been an elk herd resident in this area for years. (Since this date, some terrible poaching in neighbouring valleys has been reported and is being investigated by BC Conservation Service.) Heading along the ridge we then came on a collapsed crate of old core samples and other debris from some forgotten explo-

ration! These additions did not detract from the beauty of the climb, gaining elevation until the trees gave way to the rocky shoulders of our objective. A short scramble had most of the party on the big peak plateau at 1548m.

From the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: Wallow Sites - Probably the most easily identified elk sign is the mud wallow scented with urine and droppings. Bull elk roll in wallows to cover their bodies with scent, creating bathtub-size depressions with low walls of displaced mud ringing their perimeters. Receptive cow elk, drawn by the odour, will also roll and urinate in the wallow, indicating their willingness to mate. Elk also roll in mud wallows to loosen their dead winter coats and help dislodge parasites. A coating of mud also provides some degree of protection from bloodsucking insects. Wallows are found where the ground is wet and muddy, usually near water and almost always in a secluded area.

Participants: Barb Baker, Catrin Brown, Judy and Harold Carlson, Christine Fordham, Colleen Kasting and Erich Schellhammer.

The "Northenders"

Chris Barner

When I decided to attempt putting part of the story of what is not known of North Island mountaineering to paper, I certainly had an incomplete idea of what an exhaustive task it might turn out to be... it probably would have been simpler to pen a manifesto for exploring the Cosmos!

Before we begin, it must be acknowledged that this essay could never masquerade as the whole story. Much has taken place in the even lesser known climbing eddies of Campbell River and the Discovery Islands, the "in between" communities like Zeballos, Woss and Sointula and among the Island's mysterious loners that dwell in the northern hin-



*Environmental Studies' students on Mount Myra, 1975.
(Photo: Dave Brown)*



Student rappelling at Elk Falls, 1975. (Photo: Dave Brown)

terlands. The following is, at best, a brief glimpse into forty years of intense action, and I hope I have succeeded in my humble efforts to render 25 pages of notes and interviews into something informative, yet concise enough to grace the pages of the Island Bushwhacker Annual without burdening them.

Here goes...

The Origin of the Heathens

For me personally, the story began on the sculpted sea cliffs of Galiano Island where my family lived in the sixties, top roping from curtseying Arbutus and traversing for hours or kilometres (whichever came first) above the perfect, clear warm waters of the Straits. I passed the timeless summer days refining rescue systems by hauling driftwood logs up off the beach, reaping my reward huddled before the fire during the gales of late fall. My teenage years saw me transplanted to Campbell River to live with my mother and her outdoorsman, Frank Somner. He kept a rack of taperlocks, a handful of pitons and a chunk of old goldline in the trunk of his beat-up blue Mustang, and introduced me to alpinism with them on Kings Peak in February 1973. I was a very lucky boy – privileged enough to discover the mountain arts with my family – but the bulk of the folk that comprised the ‘scene’ of the time were acquainted with climbing at school.

A handful of visionary educators founded programs based on experiential learning at several Campbell River schools in the seventies. These ‘builders’ included John Levering and Bob Mills at the old Junior High, Karl Klein at Southgate and Dale Kelly, David Brown and Jim Allen at Carihi. These three came up with the ‘real McCoy’ – “Environmental Studies” – a fascinating semester exploring the personal, social, urban, cultural and natural environments. During these years students visited places like Cape Scott and the West Coast Trail, camped at Cream and Landslide lakes, and spent an entire week at Long Beach studying, singing... really living.

The end result was a generation of young outdoor enthusiasts numbering perhaps 50 who were looking for ways to continue their pursuits post-graduation. Many of these individuals became the core of the ‘original’ Heathens about 1977. A complete list of these people and their accomplishments would be a tad tedious, but Jeff and Steve Hilberry, Bruno Tancon, Rick McKinnon, Peter Marshall – and their unconventional antics stand out. There was the time (September 1976) that Rick somehow eluded the nervous supervision of several teachers long enough to solo the “Walsh foray” on Mount Colonel Foster (9 hours return from the gravel flat)... and I remember when Lorna Maximick and Deanne

Lealess elected to scale

Please note that when I refer to Mount Septimus in this article, I mean the main summit of the massif [Mount Rosseau – ed] or the entire mountain rather than the second peak of the group or the imposing tooth that watches sternly over Cream Lake (what Doug Lee and I used to call ‘the Sentinel’, and whose West Ridge we ascended in 1974).

Tsitika Mountain with me the following year (September ‘77) rather than complete the trek to the beach at Robson Bight because, as they flatly told our dumbfounded leaders, they were, “kinda more into getting high on some mountain than hanging around at the beach pissing off a bunch of whales”. These experiences expanded us in ways that sent ripples through all of our lives and far into our futures, and produced two of the most important mountaineers of the era, Doug Wale and Doug Lee.

Doug Wale is a unique character and super-strong climber – one of those guys who is ridiculously backcountry comfortable in any season. He’s been rambling and skiing around for decades, visiting remote peaks like Moyeha Mountain, Splendor Mountain and Mount McKelvie, often alone and in winter. No stranger to other ranges, Doug has made expeditions to Alaska and the Territories, the Coast Range, Rockies and Cascades, and he trudged up the big Mexican volcanoes with Scott Isbister, Paul Rydeen and me in the spring of ‘88. He’s largely stoic, but if he’s really having a good time one night, you might coax out a few vague references to winter ascents on Rambler Peak, Victoria Peak or Mount Colonel Foster... and I could probably



*The well-travelled Doug Wale having a good time.
(Photo: Paul Rydeen)*

compose an entire article on Dougie's shenanigans alone, but that is his story to tell – or not to tell.

Doug Lee was a very close friend of mine, one of the most gifted rock climbers I've seen, and he floated up steep cliffs like a light mist, but he fell to bone marrow cancer while he was still a young man. We had a good run though, and at our peak (June '79) we travelled from 'Westmin', climbed the Hinde, and exited down the Elk River Valley in 29 hours.

In the summer of '74, not yet fifteen, we climbed the Northwest Ridge of Mount Septimus and the West Ridge of 'the Sentinel'. In '75 we did the Southeast Ridge and North-east Face of Mount Tom Taylor with Bruno, and Mount Alston from Vernon camp in '76. It was Trio Mountain and the 'great couloir' on Mount Haig Brown in '77; followed by the South Ridge of Kings Peak, the 'flying buttress' on Mount Haig Brown and the Lee/Barner on The Red Pillar in '78. In the late Seventies, when my family owned a cabin at Alta Lake, we climbed at Mount Garibaldi, the Spearhead and Fitzsimmons Ranges, around Wedgemount Lake and on the Lillooet Icecap. The last two trips we did together were both to Rugged Mountain – first the Southeast Ridge and buttresses from the Tahsis Valley (1982), then the East Face and the Walsh route on Ya'ai Peak from Woss Lake (1983).

A very sombre troop of Doug Lee's close friends, many of whom had no mountain experience, honoured our tentin' by placing his ashes and a lasting token of their love on Elkhorn's summit in the summer of '86. Some nights at the summer camp when the dimming candle-lantern strains my weary eyes, I imagine I see his unruly blonde mop catching whatever light remains as he sways to the guitars, and adds his baritone laughter to the chorus of hails. He would love to be here now.

I made climbs with Frank around this time as well, including a traverse of 'Uncle Fester' in '76, the 'east lakes' route to the North Ridge of Sutton Peak, and the East Buttress of Victoria Peak in '77. There was also the Northwest Pillar of Mount Albert Edward with Bruno and Jeff in '76, and



*Chris Barner on Eaglebeak Peak during a 1997 trip to the Waddington range. Tellot spire in the background.
(Photo: Paul Rydeen)*

Conuma Peak with Bruno in '82. I scaled the frozen North-east Ridge and East Face of Alexandra Peak with Steve Haigh and Brian Clayton in February '86. In '85, I soloed three wild routes on the West Face of Mount Septimus in 10 hours, waiting for Doug Wale and Kathy Wykes to arrive at Cream; and circumnavigated the Moyeha valley on a 22-day starvation fest (rice and peanuts) in July '77.

I was an energetic kid.

Jim Boulding and Strathcona Park Lodge

About a half hour to the west, Jim's concept of an outdoor education center in the middle of the Island wilderness had come of age as young counter-culturalists returned to the land in droves. We troublemakers from town would soak up the heady atmosphere and stress Myrna out by hanging around all summer seducing beautiful hippy girls. Over time, as the initial grass roots outings morphed into more formal programs like C.O.L.T., more experienced instructors started working and living at the Lodge and enhancing the scene 'out at the lake'.

It began with Rob Wood (who climbed the East Face of 'the Colonel' with Doug Scott and Greg Child in January '85) and Tim Rippel (who I did the East Couloir on Kings Peak with around '78), and continued with Lyle Fast, Philip Stone, Cory Wright, Chris Lawrence, Lindsay Elms, and others. This crew, who we affectionately nicknamed the 'lodgepoles', put up several routes at Crest Creek, completed many fine new alpine routes (including Elkhorn North-east Face, 'Into the Mystic' and 'Northeast Gully' on 'the Colonel' and 'Indian Summer' on Mount Tom Taylor), and made most of the technical water-ice routes on the north Island.



Cory Wright and Chris Lawrence bivying during the First ascent of 'Into the Mystic' on Mount Colonel Foster, 1989.

Phil went on to a career in writing, authoring the excellent 'Island Alpine' and publishing the local adventure magazine 'Wild Isle'; while Lindsay, who has penned 'Above the Bush' (a book that we originally mistook for an examination of 1970's belly buttons) and 'Beyond Nootka', has become the Island's climbing historian. Some of this group collaborated in 'Island Sauvage', Campbell River's own backcountry adventure guiding company, during the mid-nineties, and they all still pursue careers and lifestyles within the mountain community.

From its perfect location on Campbell Lake, the Lodge continues its programs under the able management of James Boulding, and each spring a fresh gaggle of new adventurers begin a life-changing journey in the 'Misty Mountains'.

The Put Brothers and Gold River

The most serendipitous convergence in north Island climbing history was beginning to take place as early as 1973 even further west in Gold River. Riverites Bill Coyne and Paul Zimmerman had been active building access trails at Matchlee Mountain and exploring the limitless possibilities there. A few years later they would be joined by John and Fred Put, two powerful alpinists I knew from my time in Squamish, who were soon exploring the nearby peaks and crags. They climbed all the highest peaks, and put up the awesome 'Lost Boys' on 'the Colonel's' North Tower. They were all over Matchlee Mountain, Big Baldy Mountain, the limestone slabs on White Ridge, Puzzle Mountain, the Gold Lake area, the Upana and Tlupana Ranges, the Pamela Creek peaks and the Sutton Range. They were building crags, aid and ice climbing in the river canyons and cramponing up steep, frozen gullies hidden in the shady western vales.

These two were no slouches when it came to technical know-how either, and they disseminated it freely and expertly to anyone who asked, inspiring a cadre of talented young Gold River climbers. Further, the Puts influenced a huge number of activists, providing sound advice about everything from aesthetic route development to solid anchor placement, exciting the local crowd and creating a fresh and fertile environment.



John (Foreground) and Fred Put doing trailwork at Crest Creek, 1998. (Photo: Donna Hartford)

Where Did All These Darn Heathens Come From?

One of the most magical things I've ever seen climbing do was transform itself into a mainstream activity. At first I didn't notice because I was too busy being an obliviously happy vagabond dirt-bag, but it was soon inescapable – the Canadian Everest expeditions, Outside magazine, Reinhold Messner, Rock and Ice, Climbing gyms, ads featuring climbing on television, and the ultimate distraction – Lynn Hill in lycra! Suddenly, ten times as many people were asking me to take them out, and the Puts were similarly overwhelmed in Gold River as the trend reached its apex around 1990.

It's a good thing something had already happened in 'Campbell'; Paul Rydeen had returned in the spring of '87 from a trip across Canada with Jackie Rankin [Jackie sadly lost her fight with ALS in 2013 – ed] and decided to take up mountaineering. So keen that he never missed a trip, he soon graduated to the harder climbs (like the time he attempted a new ice route on Elkhorn's North Face with a cast on his wrist). We formed a fast bond travelling around North America climbing everything in sight and having a blast living in Paul's VW van, "Jacko," doling out cucumber sandwiches from the back. Over the years we introduced

New members were arriving from all directions. Jim Tansky came north from the Comox Valley to 'new route' at Crest, climbed a host of routes in the alpine, and joined Paul and me on our Mount Queen Bess climb in 2001. Heidi Muhlbacher, originally from Austria, has climbed at Crest for twenty years, more recently establishing routes at Horne Lake. Gerald Cobbold arrived courtesy of a 'Hoods in the Woods' type program, fresh from earning a recreation degree in Washington State, just as Paul Kendrick and friends arrived from the mainland. Local climbing thrived as the Heathens and the new tribe of instructors at Strathcona Park Lodge cultivated a warm camaraderie. Watching it all happen was an eye opening demonstration of the power of synchronicity.

hundreds of new people to the mountains using Kings Peak as an alpine training ground. In July of '87, I took a dozen newcomers up there on 5 different day trips in a single week. To date, I've climbed Kings well over a hundred times (including a 2 hour 10 minute ascent and a 1 hour 20 minute descent), spent another hundred days planning and building the trail, rescued half a dozen lost hikers, and said goodbye forever to my brave Aunt Rosemary on my sacred mountain.

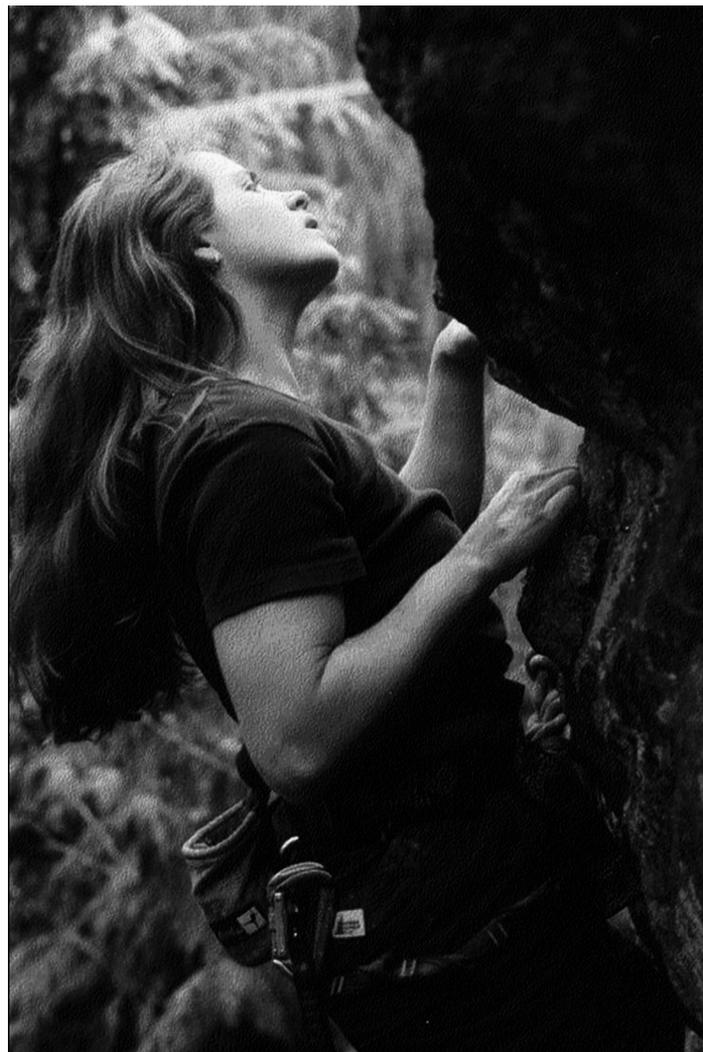
Eventually, it just had to happen... we formed the 'official' Heathens and joined the Federation of Mountain Clubs. Our

involvement resulted in closer relationships with the established Island clubs, and we acquired enough wisdom from them to take a vigilant stance in defence of wilderness. A poster protesting the Cream Silver Mines proposal, featuring a superb Doug Wale photo of the full moon setting over Nine Peaks with fog lapping at the toe of the glacier, was our first political initiative.

From Gold River, along with the Puts came Gary and Donna Hartford, Chris and Rickie Fawbert, Richard Coyne and others, but Donna and Chris deserve special mention here.

Donna, a graceful free climber, made 25 free and aid routes at Crest Creek, and would take the time to replant ferns to beautify recent trailwork projects. Chris is the most talented and agile rock climber the north Island has ever produced, and he is responsible for the vast majority of the hardest free climbs at the crags such as 'Genital Hospital' (5.12b) and 'Lee Harvey Oz Wall' (5.13+).

The new arrivals added their mass to an increasing number of active locals including Jeff Flohr (who once caught several falling climbers on an ice-axe belay), Dave Warkentin, Kathy Wykes, Terry Stewart (who liked to parapent from Victoria Peak), Brent Arnold (known to get up early, traverse Kings Peak to the North Face of Elkhorn, then telemark it a half dozen times before re-traversing Kings... in town by dinner), John Roberts, Scott Isbister, Bill Nelson (who climbed Mount Waddington in only his second season), Heather McDonald, Steve Koch, Fred Stanley, Christine Portman, Willy Pakosz, Jackie Rankin, and the absolutely unstoppable Tak Ogasawara.



Donna Hartford, Gold River goddess, on her route 'Stairway to Heathen' at Crest Creek, 1998.

The Heathens were now a very large group of proficient mountaineers, turning out dozens of new climbers each season with limitless enthusiasm. Members were off to Yosemite or the Bugaboos all the time, and putting more

and more energy into education and trail and crag development, but some cool stuff was getting done in the home ranges anyway... like a 3 hour 20 minute winter ascent of Kings Peak (Barner, Wykes, Pakosz, Isbister - January '87), Mount Harmston West Couloir and Face (Rydeen, Barner - August '87), Mount Septimus West Face gullies (Rydeen, Stanley, Pakosz,

An interesting side note regarding the day we climbed the Golden Hinde in winter: Paul, who'd been tied up earlier in the week when we left, was so jealous that he simply had to climb Elkhorn Mountain with Tim Breukers (12 hours return from the highway)! Go figure - the Island's two highest peaks get winter ascents on the same day! I wonder when that will happen next?

Barner - August '87), Mount Myra North Ridge (Barner, Flohr, Wykes, Rydeen, Pakosz, Warkentin, Isbister - February '88), Big Den Mountain Southeast Rib (Barner, Rydeen - April '88), Mount Harmston West Ridge (Rydeen, Barner - August '88), Rambler Peak West Buttress (Barner, Rydeen - July '90), the Golden Hinde in winter (Stone, Sliker,



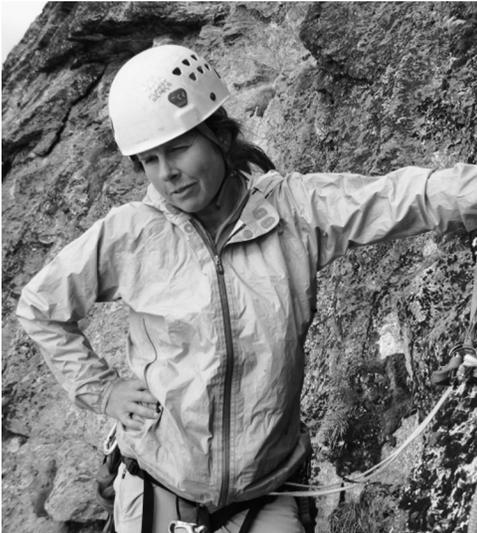
*The lovely Jackie Rankin at Elk Falls, 1990.
(Paul Rydeen photo)*



*Gerrald Cobbold resting during the hike out from Ya'ai Peak,
2008. (Paul Rydeen photo)*



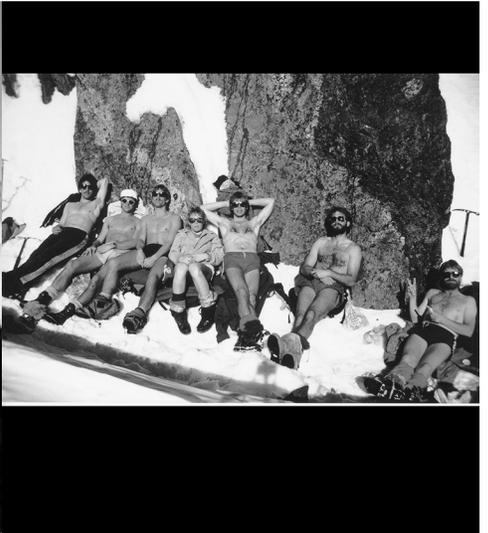
*Ahren Rankin on the Northwest Ridge of Mount Myra, January
2007. (Paul Rydeen photo)*



*Alanna Theoret on Mount Asgard in the Valhallas, 2011.
(Paul Rydeen photo)*



*Chris Barner and Paul Rydeen on Unicorn Peak during a 2004 trip
to the Radiant glacier; Mount Asperity, Mount Tiedemann and the
Radiant Icefall behind. (Darren Wilman photo)*



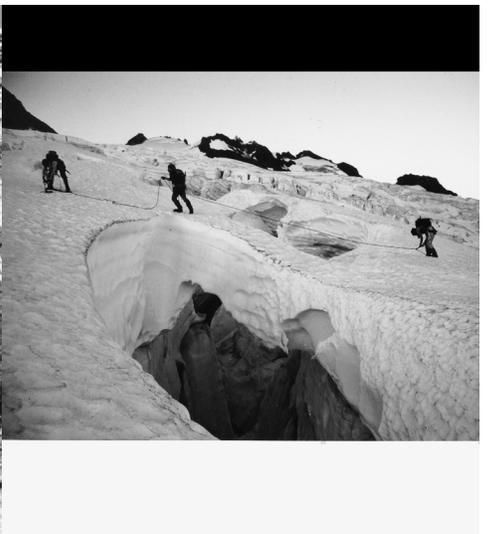
*Dave Warkentin, Scott Isbister, Willy Pakosz, Kathy Wykes, Paul
Rydeen, Chris Barner and Jeff Flohr 'marmoting' on Mount Myra,
February 1988. (Paul Rydeen photo)*



*Doug Wale, Fred Stanley, Kathy Wykes, Steve Haigh and Chris
Barner on Kings Peak, March 1986. (Courier/Islander Newspaper)*



*James Rode pulling through an overhang on the Southwest Face
of Mount Tom Taylor, 2012. (Paul Rydeen photo)*



*Steve Koch, Jeff Flohr and Jackie Rankin negotiating a dainty
looking snow bridge on Mount Baker's North Face, 1988.
(Paul Rydeen photo)*

Barner - February '93), the Golden Hinde Northwest Ridge (John Roberts - October '93), Maquilla Peak (First ACC/Heathens joint trip - September '93), Jagged Mountain (Elms, Barner, Hartford, Isbister, Rydeen, Garrow - January '95), Peak 5800 East Ridge (Donna Hartford, Thomas, Isbister, Rydeen, Barner - May '95), and Moyeha Mountain South Face gullies (Warkentin, Isbister, Rydeen, Barner - August '96).

*Further North by Northwest
Port McNeil*

Up at the north end an avid caver and mountaineer by the name of Peter Curtis has been exploring the nearby ranges with an assortment of colourful characters including Stu Crabbe and Darren Wilman. Peter recalls making an ascent of Mount Elliott way back in June '93 with Stu, and they've been at it ever since, making subsequent climbs on Mount Schoen, Kaouk Mountain, Zeballos Peak, Mount Ashwood, Bonanza Peak, and several of the 'nameless' Tsitika valley peaks, as well as all the peaks in the Karmutzen and Province ranges. In 2004, Peter climbed Snowsaddle Mountain, and he scaled the East Face of Mount Bate from the Conuma valley in 2008. He also summited Sutton Peak via the astounding 'east lakes' route - the only other party to unlock this most unique of Island secrets that I have heard of.

As we talked last fall, Peter recalled another climb involving a young buck he remembers as Blair Cole, this time on Mook Peak. It seems the lad had an affection for hard liquor, which he swilled throughout the entire day – all the while packing a bicycle in an ill advised scheme to reduce the descent's impact on his knees. Peter advises, should you ever come to climb Mook, it might be worth a chuckle to investigate a few rock crevices not far from the top where the old frame lies stashed (beside a couple of empty bottles, no doubt!).

Sayward

Paul Kendrick is an experienced alpinist from the mainland who struck up a partnership with Timo Saukko after settling in the Sayward valley. They often climbed at Mount Cain where they established numerous excellent routes on the plethora of fine rock pinnacles, but they also frequented the Prince of Wales range and many other north Island locations. Paul joined a Heathens leadership development expedition to the Tellot Glacier area in 2000 and then returned

Mike Preston, a teacher who completed the C.O.L.T. program at the Lodge in '93, started an outdoor program at Sayward School, developing small crags and leading excursions in '95 and '96. From '99 on, teaching at Phoenix School in Campbell River, he became a pivotal figure in north Island alpinism by helping to organize community youth development initiatives that enabled dozens of talented youngsters to discover the backcountry.

with Timo to face the wintery summer of 2001. He has climbed in the Alps, the Rockies and the Interior ranges, where he was instrumental in the rescue of severely injured Dave Jones on Mount Sorcerer in July of 1994. Lyle Fast and Lorraine Redpath also settled in the valley and are active working and playing at Mount Cain, which has become an important



Main: Paul Kendrick marmoting in the Waddington Range, 2000. (Photo: Paul Rydeen). Inset Left: Stu Crabbe on the first ascent of 'the pitchfork' in the Haihte Range, August 2005. (Photo: Paul Rydeen). Inset Right: Peter Curtis at Mount Cain, 2008. (Photo: Paul Rydeen)

center for North Island alpine culture.

Even in Tahsis...

Al Turkington moved to this tiny west coast community and started climbing in the surrounding ranges with a few other locals circa 1983. As noted by Lindsay Elms, it was he, advised and equipped by the Puts, who was responsible for the arrival of the summit register containing ten miniature bottles of liquor at the summit of the Blades. As luck would have it, about the same time as I commenced this project, I started a new job alongside a fellow who had once lived in Tahsis and knew Al's crowd, describing how they were off to the hills at every opportunity, to Malaspina Peak (1986), Mount McKelvie (1981), and to the high ridges that connect McKelvie to the Tlupana mountains farther south.

So there were active mountaineering tribes in most of the

Noteworthy ascents from the 'Y2K' era include... Mount Myra Northwest Ridge (Barner, Rydeen January '98), Mount Myra Northeast Gullies (Barner, Rydeen February '98), Mount Bate Northeast Ridge (Barner, Cobbold, Dwinnell, Perreault June '98), Ya'ai Peak West Ridge (Rydeen, Barner June '98), Trio Mountain South Ridge (Rydeen, Barner June '99), Wolf Mountain North Buttress (Rydeen, L. Hartford, Cobbold, Barner July '99), Mount Septimus traverse (Tansky, Rydeen, Wilman '99), Rambler Peak West Buttress in a day (Pakosz, Barner August '99), Nine Peaks traverse (Barner, Elson, Wilman, Rydeen July 2001), and Canoe Peak west slopes (Briggs, Theoret, Rydeen, Barner June 2002).

small communities at the north end by the end of the eighties. They were accomplishing interesting climbs, even though the climbers were all operating in a vacuum where no one suspected that they had done anything noteworthy.

The Heathens Again – A Mountain Club On Steroids

It was pretty crazy... in '88 we had to drive to Vancouver to buy gear and had 25 members, but by '95 we had 300 members and our choice of two local gear shops. At



Paul Rydeen on the 'Piss and Crawl Wall', Silent Towers, Coast Range, 2009. (Photo: Chris Barner)

the '95 summer camp, we climbed 40 peaks in 11 days. By '96 we had 400 members and were signing trail adoption agreements with the Government. By the '99 camp 460 members and guests attended and 25 members were on concurrent learning plans. (This year we are training our 2000th climber!)

Out of this ocean of neophytes emerged another generation of 'true' climbers, including Ahren and Mike Rankin, Alanna Theoret, James Rode, Sean Sears, Gene Berkey, Shauna Schmitke, Mike Dwinell and John Elliott – all of whom contributed mightily to Crest Creek – especially Ahren and Sean, who have overseen fundraising, tool acquisition and information updating. Many of this group are responsible for the significant expansion of the crags over the last decade, and they have combined with the journeymen to make some fine forays 'above the bush' as well.

Paul Rydeen

Paul doesn't record his climbs, and has pulled the following details 'out of his hat' – strong voodoo when you consider what he's been up to for the last quarter century! His most fondly remembered outings include his first technical backcountry climb (the West Ridge of Mount Harmston),

Yes, he loves his traverses, and has done 'the Colonel' on several occasions, including a trip with Darren when, after a brief 'celebration ritual' on the Northeast Summit, the bag of 'goodies' was abandoned as they continued the descent. Consequently, he returned with James the following week, intending to reverse the traverse and rescue the forgotten contraband. Fortunately, although the two were nearly engulfed by 'dark rumbles' that boiled above Gold River, they returned unharmed the following day - rescue mission 'highly successful'.

the West Buttress of Rambler Peak, 'Into the Mystic' on Mount Colonel Foster's East Face (with Bill Nelson in '92), and his solo traverse of the massif in '94. He has traversed both Mount Septimus and Nine Peaks, and completed, what James Rode calls "the Trifecta" (Big Interior Mountain, Nine Peaks, Big Interior Mountain again and then Mount Septimus – all in a single day – 23 hours or so) with me in '92 while we were training for our Mount Waddington attempt.



Darren Wilman: this guy has a list of North Island first ascents that is longer than Avatar. (Photo: Paul Rydeen)

Paul has made hundreds of ascents on the Island and another hundred or so in the 'Go Strange', including successful climbs of Mount Waddington and Mount Queen Bess and first ascents and new routes in several areas. Tatshenshini, Cascades, Wind Rivers, Yosemite, Baja and the desert – you'll find his lop-sided boot prints all over the west.

His photographs are legendary for their quality and humour and on several occasions he has wowed audiences on the Island and the mainland with spectacular slide presentations. He is the only vice-president the Heathens have ever needed, putting in countless hours on the chainsaw or scrubbing at Crest Creek and building trail at Kings Peak or Rugged Mountain. He can even mill up a killer backcountry bacon-cheeseburger using nothing but a regular camp stove – quite a guy.

Darren Wilman

Like Paul, Darren has also made hundreds of climbs, including the lion's share of all the points on the Island above 5000'. He's topped 123 peaks in the last 3 years, climbed 18 mountains in a single month with the amazing Alanna Theoret, and has visited the Haihte Range 22 times.

He once soloed the complete South Ridge of Rugged Mountain (including Peak 1779 and all the spires except the Lama de Lepore) – what he refers to as the ‘pink ribbon tour’ after the chunks of survey tape that remain to mark his passage. Finally, during August 24, 25 and 26th of last summer (2012), he and Paul traversed the entire range north to south.

Darren’s mind-boggling list of ascents in the Haihte Range includes the West Ridge of Merlon Mountain (Wilman, Rydeen – June ‘04), the ‘4’, ‘5’, and ‘5½’ Northwest Outliers (Wilman, Theoret – August 12, 13, ‘04), the ‘Z6’ outlier’s North Buttress from Zeballos Lake (August 19, ‘04), the ‘Pitchfork’ (Wilman, Crabbe, Rydeen – September 10, ‘05), a new route on Rugged Mountain between the ‘Southwest Face’ and the ‘Johnson Newman’ (Wilman, Theoret – 4 hours base to summit – September 25, ‘05), Nathan Col gendarme (Wilman, Theoret – August 6, ‘07), and the South Spire of Merlon Mountain (Wilman, Rydeen – August 28, ‘08).

He has summited every spire of the Mount Cain group and is no stranger to cold climbs, often with a similar posse of partners. During our interview he raved to me about finding one of his favourite climbs on Mount Titus – a 4000 foot snow ribbon [the Throat of Titus – ed.] that snakes its way wildly through a deep zawn where the cliffs on either side are only twenty feet apart, but two hundred feet high! ... exclaiming, “It’s just the coolest climb ever!”

Darren, Alanna and Stu took a trip to the west coast in 2007, where they

ascended Lone Wolf Mountain and ‘Wolf Den’ on July 6th, and Mitla Peak (Peak 5108) on the 7th. Then, on July 8th Darren and Alanna climbed both Mitla Spire (Peak 5000) and the South Ridge of Mount Scimitar. He and Alanna have also made several trips to the Coast Range, skiing the Homathko Icefield, and joining Paul and me on expeditions to the Pantheons, the Waddington Range, the Dent Rouge Glacier and the Reliance group. More recently, he and Paul have explored the Joffre, Tantalus and Chehalis Ranges and the Chilliwack Lake area.

Young Guns?

Paul, Darren and most of the rest of us are members of an aging generation of ‘North-enderthals’, but Alanna (who is as strong as they come) and James and Ahren (who repeated ‘the Trifecta’ reported in the 2011 Bushwhacker annual – those are James’s photos by the way, Ahren wrote Photo: the text) are pretty much at the peak of their powers. Reassuringly, there are still some builders about and the club is still firmly in support of youth outdoor education, so the kids are alright.

Winter climbs to Darren’s credit include Stevens Peak (Wilman, Theoret, Rydeen, Barner, ? – February ‘03), Mount Ashwood (Wilman, Rydeen – February 22, ‘04), Mount Hapush (Wilman, Crabbe – ‘96), Mount Sid Williams (February ‘05), a traverse of Mount Alava to the East Ridge of Mount Grattan (Wilman, Rydeen - from Canton Creek – March 13, ‘05), and Zeballos Peak (Theoret, Wilman – February ‘09).



*Darren nearing the summit of Mount Donner, 2002.
(Photo: Paul Rydeen)*

Our programs germinated when I met Alex Ratson, a skinny 8 year old reminiscent of the bespectacled hatchling genius in the old ‘Foghorn Leghorn’ cartoons. When he told me that his dream was to be a ‘Mountaineer’ I thought to myself ‘no way’; but with Herculean support from his dad, Dave, he completed his learning plan and grew into the young gentleman who is climbing 5.11 and doing photo shoots for Arcteryx and making us all so proud today. The learning plan is a blueprint we have employed to positive effect on our youths, several of whom have achieved similar successes, such as Ian Garber, Sonia Nichol, Elise Cote, Kelsey Booth and Ryan Arruda – but it is the cases of a few young lions that bear a closer look...

Hannah Preston has already honed her granite skills in Squamish as she enters her early twenties, and she is currently ripping it up down in ‘the valley’ on routes like Zodiac and the Salathe Wall, recently climbing the Nose in a day. She’s been travelling the North American rock circuit and checking out Patagonia, as well as earning a guiding certification, and beginning what I’m sure will be a long and distinguished career. Only in his mid-twenties, Nick Elson is already a veteran of walls, Alaskan expeditions, (South Face of Mount Denali, Burkett Needle), and new and difficult ascents in the Coast Range (FA of North Couplet Tower, the South Ridge of Mount Asperity). During a journey to the Alps, Nick made an impressive ascent of the Eiger nordwand, returning to the hotel a mere 26 hours after setting out.

You’re gonna hear lots about these two in the future. Presently they’re measuring themselves against climbing’s classic challenges, but they’ll be back to scale the aesthetic lines that await them on the compelling ridges and buttresses of our misty mountains. Case in point: Alik Berg, a talented and knowledgeable young bloke who had been hanging with Hannah for some years and mentoring her on the ways of the ‘big stones’, put up an impressive 5.10 route in 2006 with his partner Fred McGuinness on the ‘Super arete’ that soars directly to the main summit of Mount Colonel Foster. It’s a futuristic line, and along with routes like the John and Mike Waters ‘Expressway’ and ‘Double



Crest Creek crags staging area. (Photo: Paul Rydeen)

Shot', it provides an example of what I think we can expect from tomorrow's young guns.

The Role of the Crest Creek Crags

I wonder if John and Fred knew that they had made perhaps their most important contribution to Island climbing way back in 1983 when they started sleuthing around the granite and basalt bluffs near the western edge of Strathcona Provincial Park for potential rock climbs! They were soon focusing on the fantastic rock quality at Crest Creek, paying special attention to detail and providing sturdy hardware. The Put brothers' vision of safe, fastidiously clean climbing routes, carefully planned and flawlessly bolted, with aesthetic approaches and staging areas, is their legacy.

There are now 250 climbing routes at Crest, featuring areas specifically for groups or children, including over 40

The individuals that build and maintain these crags have invested some \$800,000 of their own funds into the project over the last 25 years or so, and they have carted 3000 cedar logs and hundreds of tons of rock surfacing up to the climbs on their backs. They spend about a month doing trailwork out of every year, remove bagfuls of rubbish each summer, and spend weeks hanging in harnesses covered with dirt, scrubbing and re-scrubbing the routes. They are a skilled, committed and determined force, full of humour and innovation and tough as a two dollar steak. The crags, once described by Jim Sanford as 'a climbing garden', are their divine gift to us... a worthy proving ground for aspiring rock climbers and an effective catalyst for maturing alpinists.

aid climbs that lurk under sheltering overhangs and provide worthwhile climbing during bouts of foul weather and convenient year-round venues for instruction. During unusually frigid weather, smears and icicles form on some of the cliffs creating ice-climbing opportunities. For hikers, the crags serve as trailheads for routes to the surrounding backcountry, and walkers of all ages enjoy strolling the attractive network of trails.

Closing the Circle

Whether at the crags or in the mountains it must be acknowledged that none of this could happen without the builders; from Dave Brown, Jim Boulding and Peter Curtis, to the Put



Stairway, looking down. (Photo: Paul Rydeen)

brothers and the Heathens, to Mike Preston, who is closing the circle by nurturing yet another youth outdoor group. Consider the permissive attitude toward Crest Creek by the Ministries responsible for Parks, and the folks who run the clubs, and open the shops and gyms. What of the nervous parents, on tenterhooks late into the evening, waiting for headlights and telephone calls – could climbing be where you are without them? In the end, the simplest way to make climbing history is to introduce a newcomer to this sport that is a way of life and put your back into supporting them. The climber you build might be the next Sandy Briggs, Alanna Theoret or Hannah Preston.

You gotta ask yourself, "What is there of real value in mountain life other than the power of sharing it – passing on this gift?" But here in the reticent north, sharing information voluntarily seems to be a rather different matter; and there is something delicious about that, to not know whether or not something has already been done. On occasion I've been known to snub the register, if there is one, and I have made many climbs that even my closest friends don't know about. I wonder if it might be best if nobody ever told, so that every climb would be like a first ascent for everybody... but then what would become of all the precious legends?



The TNF group enjoys a lunch break.



Back on the route.

The Mistaya Lodge is set in a horseshoe-shaped bowl at 2045m, with an access to terrain of all aspects and grades. For more than 20 years it has been lovingly refined to shuffle hordes of hungry and stoked skiers, hikers and mountaineers in and out of the door, tricked out with ingenious details such as a boot dryer exhausting air from the warmest upstairs room through our ski boot liners - with an automated timer making this happen between 3-5 p.m. to even out the draw on the micro-hydro system.

Jumping into the snow in a swim suit off the sauna deck and back into the sauna cleaned us up and provided us with cheap thrills. The third member of the staff was a Four Seasons-trained chef who can probably cook better than your mom. Four-course breakfasts and warm after-ski snacks have made the transition back to everyday life a bit anti-climactic.

My favourite outing was a route we had planned the night before, complete with a plan A and a plan B. There was a decision point for either of them where we would need to negotiate complex terrain (no way of avoiding potential avalanche paths) in questionable conditions. Low, moderate or high avalanche danger make for fairly easy terrain choices, but the dangerous gray zone – considerable danger – is tricky. After much debating and conflicting inner dialogues we came up with plan C – by consensus no less. It turned out to be a day of many lessons!

Our guides put out a very impressive amount of energy, passionately sharing knowledge and experiences before and after full days in the mountains. The group of 10 strangers came together as a fun, safe and trusting unit and I gained a lot of knowledge, observations and ideas from my teammates. Inspired, full of ideas and pumped, I aspired to find the path of least resistance like the snake, with the light foot of a coyote and the navigation sense of the albatross.

Hone your rescue skills – one practice session a year is not enough. If you have a Tracker DTS – ditch it and get a 3 antenna beacon. Electronics like GoPro cameras, cell phones, spots, etc., can interfere with your beacons – keep them turned off when traveling in avalanche terrain. As-

sessing the snowpack is an incredibly complex and mysterious task – keep expanding your knowledge but focus on becoming an expert in assessing the avalanche terrain. Approach your trip objectives with an open mind and be willing to adapt the mountain mission to the conditions you encounter. Make decisions as if you were not carrying a beacon, shovel and probe and remember that we are the most dangerous element in avalanche terrain.

Thank you to the ACCVI, the ACC and The North Face for making this experience possible for me.

Participants:

Cyril Shokoples – lead guide
Matt Reynold – guide

Lida Frydrychova
Mary Ann Rombach
Holly Goulding
Brian Hamilton
Charlie Adams
Andrew Williams
Stefan Gessinger
Jason Guptil
Mike Blaroski
Steven Boorne

Sigurd Creek Notes

Chris Ruttan
February – September

February 2

After some reading in some local guide books in the previous weeks, I decided I wanted to try a trip into Sigurd Creek valley in the Tantalus Range. First because of the recommendations for it as a ski area; second because the “sno-moes” couldn’t get anywhere near the place; third because



Sigurd Lake from Mt Ossa

I'd been to Red Heather Hut so many times before, people were asking me if I rented it out in the summer. My daughter lives in Squamish you see, so I spend as much time there each winter as I can afford, and I love to backcountry ski. It just made sense to find another place to explore and in addition to the wild and almost endless ski terrain there were two excellent peaks back there in Mounts Ossa and Pelion, not to mention Sigurd Peak itself. This is also a good access point for longer trips into either Mount Jimmy Jimmy or even Mount Tantalus. First, though, I had to get to know the area and see what the trail was like.

I set out from Sarah's place probably around 7:30 a.m. and drove for an hour out the Squamish Valley road until I hit the gravel. In less than a kilometre I turned and crossed the huge bridge over the Squamish River then another kilometre or so to where you cross the bridges over Ashlu Creek and there I found, as predicted, a rough spur road leaving the main line on the left. I parked the car and, packing my ski gear, started up the road, walking for less than a kilometre until I came to a switchback where there was a sign nailed to a tree announcing that here indeed was the Sigurd Creek Trail – you had but to follow an old overgrown road that took off from the switchback corner and carry on until an obvious trail turned steeply up off the road just before the end of said road.

This trail leads into a lovely bench with a creek running down and the original forest still intact so that there are some very impressive fir trees and cedars standing in a mossy elven home. Once again the trail starts to climb and soon you're picking your way up through boulders and cliffs in a steep, forested mountain slope. The trail traverses across the slope (climber's left) heading for the hanging valley that Sigurd Creek flows out of to reach the Ashlu Valley but, before you actually reach the wonderful waterfall at the headwall, the trail into the valley above climbs an easier route to a junction. This junction is the point where the trail goes either up the steep ridge to Sigurd Peak or you take the left fork and start your travels in the Sigurd Creek Valley. I, unfortunately, did not know this at the time and because there was a tree blown down across the sign at a lower fork I continued to traverse on the marked trail all the way to the falls where the trail abruptly ended. Search though I might, I could not find anything to indicate a trail

so I just headed up the cliffs above; I'm still packing my skis, and once I was well into the valley there was enough snow to finally be able to get onto my skis. I soon hooked up with the trail again and began the long slog through the forest following the creek where I could.

I was really impressed with the forest in that valley, huge cedar, amabilis fir and hemlock trees growing in the well-protected environment, and not too bad for travel now that I was in the upper valley. Because of my missing the one turn, I had been going for quite a while now, but it was a great place on a great day so I pushed on. Within another

hour I was finally able to see a bit of the surrounding area through openings in the forest and really good views in the avalanche paths that I crossed, both of which were seriously packed with debris. I could see some of Mount Pelion, and while it was impressive, it wasn't inviting me up any of the slopes I could see. I stopped for lunch at the side of the bigger avalanche chute and then turned around because I was out of time, but I knew that I was coming back here. On the way back I discovered where I had missed the turn and why, and I cleaned up some of the branches so you could see the signs again. I was back at the car by 4:50 p.m. completely wiped out but encouraged by what I had seen. I would be back.

March 29

This time I drove my car up the short spur road to the trail head and saved at least 20 minutes walking, leaving the car at about 8:30 a.m. again. Once more I had a long boot pack but now I knew the trail and made no wrong turns, so I was soon dropping my skis not too far from where I got on them the last trip. As I was sorting out my gear and putting on skins, etc., I heard voices of some fellow travellers so I waited a bit to see who they could be. A couple of younger men caught up to me and stopped to get in their skis so I chatted for a bit, then continued. They were waiting for three others who were a bit farther back. I got up the valley a couple of kilometres and took a chance on finding a way around a rock rib but it didn't work so the others got past me for a bit until I caught up with them near the first avalanche path. Imagine my surprise to find my favourite kind of people in the group, pretty girls.

I decided I may as well travel with them for a while and we got to talking and be damned if they weren't friends of Dave Campbell. Small world. By the next avalanche path the pace was beginning to get me down so I just kept going when they stopped for a snack or lunch. I was really hoping to make it to Sigurd Lake and I knew that was one hell of a long way off. Sigurd Lake is a gigantic alpine lake west of Sigurd Peak and from the Google Earth views I'd had, it looked like a fantastic place. I pushed as hard as I could and skied up under Mt Ossa into the huge meadowland above the really big slide area below Pelion and Ossa. It



looked really steep across the valley where I knew the lake was high on the ridge, so I began a long climbing traverse through the thinning trees until at last I made it up onto the plateau where the lake is. It had taken me five hours to get there and I was ready for lunch. What a truly gorgeous spot.

I had a ball skiing down from the lake into the meadows then I had to put the skins back on again because it's almost as much work to get out of there as it is to get in, but what a beautiful place. I didn't see the others on my way out nor did I see any sign they had already left ahead of me but I was going to be late anyway so I had to move. This trip took eleven hours plus the drive back once I had reached the car.

May 11

My skis are strapped on and I'm boot packing yet again into Sigurd Creek but this time my goal is to summit Sigurd Peak, so at the second junction on the trail I take the right fork and start up the ridge. I had been hiking for 2.5 hours before I could drop the skis and I was a long way up but still in thick forest. By this time I had lost the trail markers but it wasn't all that great a trail anyway so I just stuck to the ridge line as much as I could and worked my way up. I had my ski crampons, which was a good thing because under the trees it was icy and hard and it was really steep in places. I finally came out on the ridge in a spot where I could see the summit and it wasn't far at all any more. The weather was beginning to come apart a bit and I could see a storm coming at me across Clowhom Lake so I pushed on to the top and found a place with a bit of shelter from the wind and had lunch.

I had a plan to drop off the west face and ski down to Sigurd Lake but there was no way I had time for that now, and it had begun to rain lightly. My other option was to ski the giant avalanche run all the way down into the valley then pick up the trail and walk out. Other than go back the way I had come, this was my only real choice so I packed up and began the run from the summit. The top was glorious as I swung down and then looped around on a ledge to avoid a nasty drop. I pulled around under the cliff band I had just dodged to see a massive wet slough from my turns

above falling over the edge and hissing farther down the slopes until it lost momentum. I could now see all the way to the ledge I knew was above the creek and that, I was pretty sure, I wasn't going to be skiing down. I had over a kilometre to ski and it was not bad at all, a huge slope and good turns all the way down to where the snow just wasn't consistent enough any more. I moved into the forest hoping I could get a few more turns there but it was just packed ice so onto my back went the skis and I began to climb down into the valley bottom and the trail. It was a long walk back to the car and the first bit into the valley was beyond words, but I was pleased with myself as I loaded the last of the gear into the car and drove off.

July 7

There would be no skis on my back today as I started up the Sigurd Creek trail. It was my plan to hike in to the giant slide path between Pelion and Ossa and then to work my way up Mount Pelion. On this trip I discovered just how good a trail there is into the valley; it had been covered with snow previously and there is even a nice new cable bridge over Sigurd Creek high up in the valley. I had a beautiful day for the trip and made good time as I powered up the valley until I got to where the trail turns steeply up to avoid the enormous boulder field that has accumulated in the valley bottom over time. In the winter I had skied over this without trouble but now it was obvious moving through it would be serious work if possible at all. The route works its way up along the edge of the slide path, staying just in the old growth until you run into a bit of a cliff band that forces you out onto the open slopes, which by this time are easy to hike on. You are now just climber's left of and just below an impressive icefall that is the base of the Pelion/Ossa glacier; to avoid it and any exposure the route stays well to the left, working up through steep rock steps until you reach the snow and it's time for crampons.

Not too much farther and I was on easier ground for a short way; then I was faced with a wall of rock barring further approach to the summit block still some distance away. There was a rather nasty, exposed and steep snow slope around climber's right or I could hike off to the left and try to find another way around in that direction, but that was going to eat up a lot of time so I went right. The start of this bit was not too bad, as is so often the case, but I was soon on treacherously steep, hard snow with a run out to a long drop over a cliff as an incentive to hang on, and that's when one of my crampons came off.

It's important to understand here that I was front pointing with my crampons and using the pick of my ice axe just like any full-on ice climb, so losing a crampon was disconcerting to the point that I was seriously thinking about praying to a god I have no faith exists. I was able to slowly work my way over to the rock at the side of the snow I was on, then I had to cut a platform big enough to stand on at the edge of the snow and then step off of to gain the rock. This, all the while hanging over a moat deep enough to jam a guy up for good. Once on the rock I was able to find a ledge to sit on

and put my crampon back on.

Then it was a mixed climb using the crampons and ice axe until the slope of the snow mitigated and I could get back on. There was still another kilometre of snowfield to cross from there with yet another butt-clenching, steep slope up to a knife-edge ridge that finally led to the summit block and a short class 4 up. I was a nervous wreck by then so I didn't linger long on top but headed right back across the upper snow field to a high col I had spotted that might have a better way back down than the route of certain death that I had used to get up. Sure enough I had found the usual route up in that col: there was a rock chimney that was steep and wet but short and sweet, so I used that to get onto a milder, softer snow slope on the east side and was soon sitting on a pile of nice dry rock having a very late lunch.

I was back to the car in eleven hours, very tired but super cranked about what a great climb it was. I find climbing to be much like having a baby must be, you squeal and cry and shout while it's happening and swear you'll never do it again, but before you know it you're all smiles and sunshine remembering only how great it was and planning your next trip, which was...

September 13

Mount Ossa. Up bright and early again to get away from the car at the trail head by 7:40 a.m., once again packing as light as I could go. It was another gorgeous day and all along the trail there was the most incredible crop of mushrooms I have ever seen: they were everywhere. In places the entire forest stunk like a slaughter house from the Fetid Russula. I made great time and reached the cable bridge over the creek by 10:05 a.m. and then on to a spot about half way across the open avalanche path below the ice-fall, where I had a break at 11:05a.m. and took some time to look for a route up onto the North Ridge. I had read an account of a route up from a small group of lakes on the ridge but I was hoping to start up from where I was and cut off some distance so I just headed off up a scree run just above me and worked my way up it until it got so steep I had to scramble out climber's right to a series of ledges where I found a way up and at last gained the ridge.

The route up from there was still very steep and involved a bit of imaginative route finding until I was up onto a big snowfield below a long cliff wall that cuts you off from the next ridge and final access to the summit. The normal route was much farther to the west and avoided the steep rock above me by skirting it completely, but it was a long way away so I examined the cliff for a weakness and came up with a couple of possibilities, and then chose one and worked my way up. There were a couple of places where I had some fairly stiff climbing to do but nothing over 5.7 and only just short bits. Once on the next ridge I found a nice wide "whale's back" that took me ever closer to the top but I knew there was a deep notch hidden along the route with another very exposed climb back to the ridge. It was hidden well but eventually you reach a point where you have to

clamber down into a scree gulley, then climb back out with a butt-tightening drop below you the whole time.

When I got past that it was a very short walk to the top where I was finally able to rest and have a late lunch at 2:05 p.m. I spent a few minutes making a call to my wife at my daughter's place, lucky to have cell service, then I lay around in the sun and rested for about 45 minutes. The view from up there is wonderful with Tantalus, so close you feel you could touch it, and miles of achingly beautiful scenery. I began the descent at 2:52 p.m. and moved as fast as I could until I stepped on a rock that rolled out from under me and I face planted; that slowed me down a tad but I was back at the car by 8:00 p.m., 12 hours and 20 minutes round trip.

I can say without any hesitation that I really love this area, and I also am sure that it would make a fantastic summer camp destination with the excellent climbing opportunities from Pelion and Ossa, as well as lots of pretty lakes to explore in endless meadows. In addition to the near objectives, there is also Mount Jimmy Jimmy within a day's travel if you were willing to spend a night, and you could also reach Tantalus from there as an overnight destination, I'm just sayin'.

Participant: Chris Ruttan.

North Needle Peak Ridgeline, Princess Royal Island

**Christina Service and Laura Grant
(Recipients of ACC VI Memorial Youth Grant
2013)
June**

Admittedly, we are a rag tag motley crew of coastal mountaineers. Laura, a mountain lady of the Kootenays, courted by the beauty of BC's coastline; Christina a coastal gal, balancing her affair between the mountains and the sea; and Vern a local of Klemtu, who calls the wild open oceans and towering fjords of the central coast his backyard. We all worked on the Central Coast for research, monitoring black, grizzly and spirit bear populations in collaboration with the Kitasoo/Xai'xais First Nation, Raincoast Conservation Foundation and Spirit Bear Research Foundation. An insatiable sense of adventure has tied us together on many coastal forays. From a plan hatched last year, with the support of ACC-VI we aimed to undertake a four-day trip across the Laredo ridgeline on Princess Royal Island in the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest to summit North Needle Peak.

A boat dropped us in a small bay about 7km SSW of Fifer Cove on Laredo Inlet. Energy levels were high as we began our moss-ridden journey the first morning. The group's te-



A stunning view of the inlet from our campsite.

nacity would be tested from the get go, as we had approximately 1000ft of coastal rainforest bushwhacking ahead of us before we would reach the ridgeline. This bushwhacking adventure was not filled with as much poise and grace as we would like to imagine.

Needless to say, reaching the ridge took us longer than expected, and was the most arduous part of our trip. After most of the day on the move, we finally reached the ridgeline. Our first view of Laredo Inlet was worth every “cedar-branch-to-the face”, “handful-of-Devil’s-Club”, “slimy-log-slip” and “bites-from-opportunistic-mosquitos-who-tactfully-recognize-when-handholds-are-not-optional” acquired along the way.

The weather was kind this first day of backpacking, with the sun beaming down on us as we began our traverse south to North Needle Peak, estimated to be about 7.5km away. Given our taxing ascent to the ridgeline, we didn’t make it far before setting up camp amongst the shore pine. We have all spent enough time on the Central Coast to grasp the rarity of bluebird skies, sunshine and great visibility, so we reveled in our impending sunburns and planned out our route to the summit from this higher vantage point. With our elevation gain, we had a stunning view of neighbouring islands, the open ocean and snow-covered mainland peaks. We spent the evening marveling at hidden lakes, rivers and waterfalls we never knew existed on this inlet we had all frequently traveled at sea level.

The next morning we woke to a dense fog engulfing our camp. We knew our navigational skills would be put to the test that day as we prepared to make our way across a cliff-ridden saddle in the middle of the ridgeline. Although it took most of the morning, we were victorious in navigating the saddle and free to continue towards North Needle Peak. As we did so, the environment quickly evolved from a treed bog to a puzzle of granite slope and subalpine bog. Concurrent with our change of surroundings, was a shift in weather for the worse. The thick and resilient fog was joined by a cacophony of heavy rain. Happy that we had built in ample time for the trip and hesitant to continue scaling granite into the unknown, we set up camp in a small



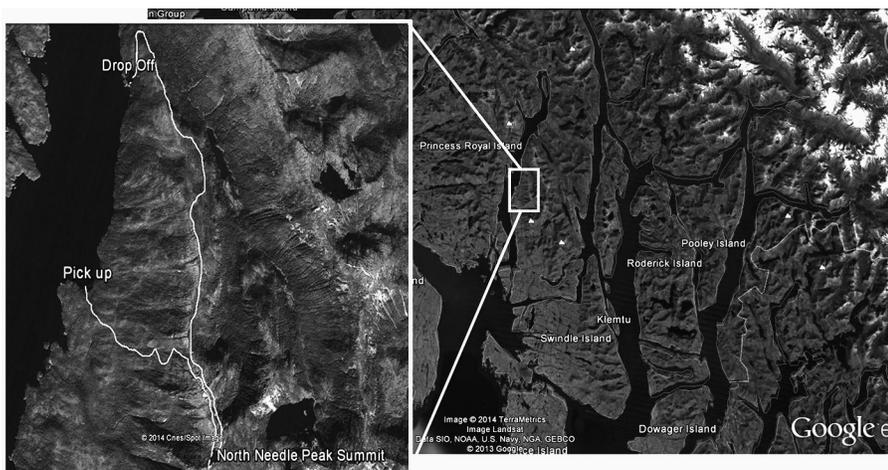
At the summit of North Needle Peak.

patch of bog in the mid-afternoon and took shelter for a few hours.

Eventually the storm calmed and Vern had the courage to exit the comfort of the tent. Upon doing so, there were sounds of glee and soon after all three of us were perched on a rock taking in dynamic views of the central coast. Keen to see what lay ahead, we went on a short evening hike along the ridgeline, delighting in our new-found nimbleness accompanying our backpack-less state. After being cooped up in our soggy, saturated tents we were overjoyed to be afforded some sunshine and views. In fact, dare I say it, we pranced (sorry Vern... not the most masculine of adjectives to describe our state) along the ridgeline as we were doused by rays of sunshine. The stark juxtaposition to our soggy, grey morning made this foray all the more enjoyable. To our great satisfaction, we caught our first glimpse of North Needle Peak amidst an uplifting fog at 2,970ft, which we tastefully paired with some jubilant high fives. After enjoying our newfound views, plans were made to set up camp at the base of North Needle the following day, and ascend the peak with minimal weight.

The dense fog had returned and we were forced to hold off on the summit of North Needle the following morning. We took our time disassembling our camp and reassembling it at the base of North Needle. By the time we had done so, the fog had lifted enough for us to begin our summit trip. Though it was higher in elevation and looked more daunting than the rest of the ridgeline, as anticipated, North Needle was not overly technical to summit. One had to choose one’s route carefully, but done correctly, the path to the summit was an engaging yet enjoyable scramble. As we neared the top and excitement was at an all-time high, we recognized our triumphant moment was going to be a foggy one. Despite our somewhat disappointing, viewless summit, we were overjoyed to have accomplished our goal that we had set almost a year ago. We had successfully traversed North Needle Peak ridgeline and summited North Needle itself.

Though our main objective was accomplished, our trip was not complete. We still had to make tracks down from our



Our route to and from North Needle Peak.

base camp on the ridgeline, an elevation loss of approx. 2,600ft. This called for an extremely early morning the last day of our trip. By the time the sun peeked above the horizon, we were already navigating our way down rocky gullies. We arrived at sea level in time to meet our boat in a bay about 4km NNE of Alston Cove, with no shortage of bug bites, bruises, and scrapes. We estimated the whole trip to be about 14km, although the deadfall and bush made it feel much farther.

As we pulled away from the shoreline with an immense sense of satisfaction, we couldn't help but mentally route-find a summit attempt at North Needle Peak's sister mountain, South Needle Peak, for next year.

Participants: Christina Service, Laura Grant and Vernon Brown.

What Could Possibly Go Wrong? Summer Camp 2013 at Griswold Pass

Rick Hudson
July

In the post mortem of Summer Camp 2012 a number of issues were raised – you know, the usual complaints about the raspberries not being fresh, and the Globe & Mail delivered late a few times, and so on. By and large, people were happy with how things had gone (apart from Week 3, who lost a whole day getting in, due to bad weather). If there was an overriding gripe, it was how bushed the McKelvie Valley had been. It was time to look to the Coast Range again for more open country.

In October of that year I picked the 2013 site, received quotes from the two helicopter companies that serviced the area, threw together a budget (and hence a cost per head), and basically came to the conclusion that everything was covered. Then, in a cunning manoeuvre that I thought would sidestep any complaints, I asked if one or two souls

would like to form a Summer Camp Committee (or SCC for short) to handle 2013. I mean, what could possibly go wrong?

Indeed. Happily freed from the onerous task of running Summer Camp 2013, I disappeared for much of the winter, and only occasionally needed to reply to a random email, asking about minor details. Returning to Victoria as spring tiptoed into the region in a blast of seasonal blossom, I was delighted to hear that everything was going “swimmingly”, and that the earnest endeavours of the SCC were being manifest on all sides, with much pre-camp effort and initiative underway.

There is, of course, a certain satisfaction in starting something that generates enough interest that others are willing to carry it on, so you can step back and watch from the sidelines as the thing gathers momentum. I'm sure Gerta Smythe felt that way after she started the hut camps a decade ago. Bill Gates probably sees Microsoft in a similar vein.

After three moderately successful tent camps, it may have been a bit premature to assume this, but we were on our way. I mean, there were 40 folk signed up, which suggested a fair degree of participation from the section and, as the Roman emperors of old knew, to keep the riots in the streets to a minimum, give the *populus vulgaris* what they wanted – viz.: bread and circuses. In our case, it was new territory and good hiking.

The area I'd selected was Griswold Pass, a spread of alpine terrain at about 1900m elevation in the south Chilcotin Mountains. I'd spoken to a number of people who'd visited the region, looked at their photos, swooped over the place using Google Earth, and decided that although it was a long way from any helicopter base in Lillooet or Pemberton, the open landscape and lack of other visitors made it an attractive proposition for a camp.

Talking of logistics (and we will, later in this story), it's worth mentioning that the SCC comprised five people, and had allocated a task to each of those worthy volunteers. It was Liz Williams who had taken on the role of logistics coordinator, which early on seemed to involve just keeping in touch with the helicopter company. Nothing too serious about that, but about two weeks before the start of camp, a knuckle ball was thrown when Liz learned, through some clever sleuthing, that the road along the Upper Bridge River to the staging ground (about 45 kilometres in length) had been closed because a micro hydro plant was being built 14 kilometres up it.

Oops. A series of calls back and forth revealed that the construction company MIGHT allow us through, provided we had millions of dollars of liability insurance, special radios with which to contact up and down construction traffic, and

provided we travelled in convoy with an escort. Oh, and by the way, the road beyond the penstock was in very bad shape.

Large resource companies do not take kindly to sport clubs asking for permission to cross their operations. However, Liz was a bit perturbed that our access to Crown land might be curtailed, and shortly discovered from the BC Forest Service that, with delays in the penstock installation, the company had exceeded their authorized road-closure period. After further establishing just who knew what about the project in hand, it transpired there actually was no road, with none expected for some months, as the construction of the penstock meant the road no longer existed. Would we mind having our vehicles swung across the chasm by crane? That offer went down like a lead balloon.

After a day of bouncing options around, we realized there was a Plan B. To the north of the Upper Bridge River FSR (now effectively closed), and ending somewhat further back from Griswold Pass, was a second road that followed Slim Creek. It meant the helicopter would have to fly farther from Pemberton to this more remote staging ground (\$) and the transfers from there to camp would be longer (\$\$), but it could be done.

Liz then did her best to guilt the construction company to our plight, and the Forest Service also rose to the occasion and likely made some useful suggestions to them on how to accommodate us. After confirming additional costs with the helicopter company, we were pleasantly surprised when Hazelwood Construction stepped up and offered to pay the difference. They wrote a cheque for \$5,280. (Note to self: Find more sympathetic construction companies.)

Things seemed to be back on track with Plan B now the official strategy. Everyone attending camp was advised of the change, a new staging ground was selected, the road was confirmed to be all right for 2WD vehicles, there was fuel for the helicopter at the staging area, and we had sufficient range in typical cars to drive from Pemberton to the staging area and back without a fill up (there being no gas in Gold Bridge).

Everything seemed fine, until just three days before we were due to fly. At 8:30 a.m., the Forest Service rather apologetically contacted Liz, advising that this was the only time they could schedule a contract to replace not one, but two bridges along Slim Creek, and that work would start almost immediately. "You'll be able to drive up there the first weekend," said a cheerful official, "but the bridge will be gone by the second weekend." Well, thanks a LOT. What if we drove over the temporary bridges? There were no temporary bridges. When they removed a bridge for replacement, there was no way of crossing until the new span went into place.

The first bridge to be swapped out was 12km up the road. That meant an even longer flight in and out (\$\$\$). What about compensation from the Forest Service? Alas, they



The final step: Graham, Peggy and Liz at basecamp after the first two helicopter trips. (Photo: Rick Hudson)

had no obligation to help us. Nor could they delay. The bridges needed to be in for the hunting season and before the snow flew.

Looking at the situation (referred to as Plan C, for those of you who are still counting), it seemed the new staging site on Slim Creek was as far from Griswold Pass as it was from the end of the Pemberton Valley, from where we had flown in 2011. Why not just skip the whole Hurley River FSR dust bowl, and fly from the Pemberton Valley for the same cost?

I put this to the helicopter pilot late on the Friday night before Sunday's start. He spent time going over the map coordinates with me (for the first time, I suspect, despite both Liz and I having sent them to the helicopter company many times before). He then advised against Plan C. True, it was the same distance to camp from the Pemberton Valley as it was from the soon-to-be-replaced bridge on Slim Creek, but the Pemberton Valley was 500m lower, and that would add time and fuel to the shuttle. It would be better to stage not from the bridge, but from Gun Lake airport.

Gun Lake had an airport? Yes, the pilot advised. The company had fuel there, and we could park cars next to their building. On the flip side, we'd have to fly a bit farther. Some quick math suggested we might have to fly \$90 per person farther. Liz and I chewed it over for a night, and settled on Plan D, while asking everyone for another \$90. We felt like a major airline, but people were OK with it. Or so they said. And, as Liz astutely pointed out, if we were having this much trouble getting to Griswold Pass with a helicopter, the chances of anyone else getting there this year without one (by hiking an extra 25km in each direction) was just about zero.

And so it was that on Saturday evening, the Week 1 team watched a nearly full moon rise over the Shulaps Range, viewed from the salubrious comfort of the Gun Lake airport porch, with the prospect of good flying weather on Sunday morning.

There were, however, one or two logistical glitches waiting in the wings. Sunday dawned clear. The helicopter was expected at 9 o'clock, but at 8:00 a.m. the familiar sound of incoming rotors could be heard. "Must be someone else's chopper," somebody said. It wasn't. Our cheerful pilot had come early because he was unaware that we'd asked for a 9:00 a.m. start. It turned out that wasn't the only thing of which he was unaware. We'd asked for the ski basket. That message also hadn't reached the pilot. We'd asked for ground-to-air radio on a specific VHF channel. The pilot knew nothing about it.

But the ultimate oops occurred as we took off on the first flight. As we lifted from the pad, the pilot casually asked, "So, where are we going today?" Consternation! It seemed the camp coordinates hadn't reached him either. We were several minutes into the flight before we established we didn't have those key numbers at our fingertips. "No problem," said our man with the stick, "let's put down over there and sort it out."

We settled onto a gravel road in a valley the pilot called "El-dorado" – not a name any of us recognized - while Liz and Peggy searched madly through their folders for the elusive coordinates. When that failed, they thrust two 1:50,000 maps into the front of the helicopter. I'd never seen either and wasn't sure where we were, or where Griswold Pass was. (It turned out later we weren't on either of the two maps). Where had we landed? And where did we go from here? As Graham Maddocks dryly noted from the back seat, it was a situation worthy of Monty Python.

You see, in all the time I'd been planning this trip, I'd never studied the area near Gun Lake. We'd never intended to go in that way. Sure, I knew the staging ground on the Upper Bridge River by heart, and I knew the Griswold Pass area like the back of my hand. But here? I was lost.

After several tense minutes, with the rotors swishing above our heads, I finally pulled out my GPS. It showed we were at the confluence of three valleys, with the left hand one leading west. The text font was too small to read on the tiny screen, but I knew Slim Creek was the one we had to follow, and it was the only valley that ran west. "Take the left hand river," I said with more confidence than I felt. The chopper lifted off and I held my breath. As the view broadened, we saw there was a road up the valley (good), and it ran due west (even better). After a few minutes, the road ended at a fuel tank (best). We were on course.

Ten minutes later we soared over a large upland meadow and Griswold Pass, familiar (from Google Earth) and beautiful, swept into view. Now, wasn't that easy?

As a nice sequel, we never had to cash those extra \$90 cheques. Blackcomb Aviation hadn't increased their helicopter rates by 5% from 2012 (as they had warned us last October they might do), and the 12% HST having reverted to 5% GST again. It all meant we had a 12% reduction in expenses – a big saving on a \$24,000 budget.

Acknowledgements: If this account makes it sound like Liz and I were doing the heavy lifting, that wasn't the case at all. A very big thank you to the other members of the SCC – Brenda O'Sullivan, Colleen Kasting, Russ Moir and Peggy Taylor – for all their work in other fields that also required some adroit last-minute contortions! Go SCC!

The Southeast Ridge of Baryon Peak – Griswold Pass Summer Camp 2013

Rick Hudson
July 26

A baryon is a composite subatomic particle made up of three quarks (as distinct from mesons, which comprise one quark and one antiquark). – Wikipedia.

The idea started harmlessly enough. Sandy and I were sitting in two of those luxurious camp chairs that I'd said earlier I'd never use (because they were a waste of weight on the helicopter) drinking beer that I'd sworn not to bring (because beer, too, was a waste of weight on a helicopter), and we were looking at Baryon Peak above camp, as the shadows reached towards us and the sun filled the evening sky with colour behind the summit. One of us said something to the effect that the ridge facing camp looked like a nice pitch of rock. Clean. Almost classic! Further beer followed. We looked at it again. Still, it was a long slog up the slope for one pitch of rock, no matter how classic and clean it looked.

A couple of days later, there we were slogging up the slope. It wasn't too bad lower down. There were flowers to distract you from the moose flies, and an occasional patch of snow gave us respite from the steep talus. Once on the ridge proper, we could see Baryon Glacier, a patch of ice now much diminished, tucked into the cwm on the south side of the peak. It looked like we could descend that later, when we came off the summit. No surprises there.

What was surprising was the rock above. The closer we got under it, the bigger it became. We revised our initial 'single pitch' to 'maybe two' to 'definitely several'. Scrambling the last section on steep slabs and melting snow patches kept our heads down, until we landed on a ledge where it was clear the scrambling was over and the rope work began.

Both looked up in mild disbelief. A great wall of pale granite, warm in the morning sun, rose up and out of sight. "Hmm, bigger than we thought." "D'you think we've enough gear?" "Can't see an obvious spot for the end of the first pitch." "Oh well, let's just have a look."

We roped up and I led up an open book. The rock, so well cracked from a distance, had flared chutes that would have



Rick Hudson on the sweet granite of the SE Ridge of Baryon Peak. (Photo: Sandy Stewart)

taken Friends, if I'd had any, but wasn't easy to protect using hexes and cowbells. It was also pretty steep. In fact, there was a small overhang that was making things awkward. I avoided it by dodging to the right. Minutes later I breathed more easily as a well-fractured face appeared in the nick of time, offering an easier way up. "Y'got five metres!" floated up from below.

I found an anchor or two and started bringing up Sandy. The view was superb. Wide meadows sprinkled with lakes stretched in every direction, ringed by glaciated peaks in the distance. Camp was two orange blobs far below, barely visible in the breadth of the view. Above, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Just the lightest breeze drifted across the face. We were both in shirtsleeves. It didn't get better than that.

Sandy was sorting gear. I peered upwards. Our so-called "one pitch" disappeared into the azure sky. Still, there was a fairly obvious line on a face full of flakes and cracks, and the rock was splitter quality. We re-arranged the rack, and I led again, this time going straight up. There were open faces, vertical crack systems, and some delicate footwork to bypass small overhangs. At one stance, a dome of moss champions, purple and green, provided vivid colour in a world otherwise comprising pale and dark granite. The grade stayed consistently 5.5 or less, but the view just got better and better as the ground slowly fell away, and the summits around us lowered, pitch by pitch.

Yes, there were more pitches. Six full thirty metre run-outs by the time we un-roped. Ahead, there was scrambling up a knife edge for 200m to the summit. It comprised easy blocks, and we enjoyed the pleasure of being able to move, each at our own pace, unhampered by the rope. At the top, in hot sunshine, we idled away a pleasant hour, eating, admiring the surrounding peaks, trying to remember their names, and checking in for the noon radio call.

"What'll we call it?" "How about Klingon Ridge?" "On Baryon Peak." A great silence hung over the area, unbroken by even the call of crows, the rumble of ice, or the hum of wind. The entire Coast Range seemed visible, cloudless,



Sandy Stewart scrambling the upper ridge, with Sorcerer Mountain to SE behind. (Photo: Rick Hudson)

from southwest to northwest, a great range of snow-clad summits stretching away to both horizons. To the east, the dry colourful summits of the South Chilcotin Range presented a maze of browns and blues.

We both settled into rock nooks and closed our eyes.

Party: Sandy Stewart, Rick Hudson.

Griswold Pass Summer Camp Week 2

Cedric Zala August 4 – 11

Compared to the high anxiety of Plans A, B, C, and finally D, as experienced by Week 1 (and described above by Rick Hudson) the Week 2 group had a kinder, gentler run-up to the camp. All we had to do was get to the Gun Lake airstrip on Saturday evening and be whisked up to Griswold Pass in the morning. Most of us met up in Pemberton and headed off in convoy around 2:30, making for "The Hurley," a legendary summer-only forest service road going from the Pemberton valley over to Gold Bridge. The dusty drive takes about two hours and, when graded, is accessible to (carefully-driven) 2WD vehicles. En route, we detoured via Bralorne for dinner in the Mineshaft Pub, via a rutted road less welcoming to 2WDs, and on which they can be expected to bottom out from time to time (as Russ will attest). En route to the airstrip I'm glad we had a GPS to guide us through the maze of dirt roads (and even then we made a couple of wrong turns). But we eventually arrived there, safe and happy, just before sunset.



Mike Hubbard and Big White. (Photo: Cedric Zala)

*On the way to Big White it was hotter
Than blazes – we drank lots of water.
We all had in our packs
Harness, crampons and axe – BUT
What would have been nice was a swatter!*

*Once there at the top, at their ease,
Alcina and Ronan and Lise,
With spirits enraptured,
Their feelings were captured
In a chorus of loud OMG's!*

*Descending to camp from the crest,
We finished our glacial quest.
Good fun was the snow,
Better still ice below,
But a dip in the tarn was the best!*

The helicopter, expected at 9:00, arrived before 8:00, so we packed up quickly and started the shuttling, flying over the gorgeous deep valley of Slim Creek in beautiful, clear weather, and soon seeing the two bright orange dome tents that were to be our home for the next week.

Once we had all arrived and set up, the whole group decided to get a feel for the area by taking an afternoon hike up Gentian Dome, a local gentle peak about 3km to the south-east – about two hours up, with great views of the valleys to the east and south, as well as the so-called Valley of the Tarns to the southeast of Griswold Peak. No sign of bear, but we did spot a weasel.

The whole area was spectacular – a hiker/scrambler's dream. Above treeline, we had unimpeded views in every direction, and route-finding was easy. The valley floor was wide and carpeted with alpine shrubs and abundant wildflowers. The mountain terrain was moderately steep but manageable, and the glaciers near to camp were quite benign, with gentle slopes, few visible crevasses, and riddled with surface meltwater streams.

All the local peaks were climbed during the week, but there was some confusion about which was which. Naming peaks was an issue – Baryon was clear, also Lepton and Muon, but we weren't sure exactly which was Griswold, and which peaks were which in Week 1's journal entries. We adopted their naming as best we could, and were soon referring to Gentian Dome, Spa Peak, Big White Mountain (later dubbed "Positron"), Sorcerer's Apprentice, and Valley of the Tarns like old friends.

One of the nice things about these weeks is bringing together keen people of wide range of abilities and experience levels. One of our participants had had a knee replacement that year, and partook in many of the trips over gentler terrain. Another was a newcomer to mountaineering, and after a session of snow school was an eager member of a rope team that summited Big White via the glacier.

Ah, yes, the flies, the flies – hosts and hosts of big, black, loud, persistent, ravenous horseflies, deerflies, mooseflies, whatever you want to call them, afflicting the body and soul. But only when the sun was out. Which made us thankful for the several cloudy and occasionally wet days in Week 2 – it provided a respite from the noxious hordes, and an opportunity to sit and chat outside rather than huddle apprehensively in the group tent, as we were sometimes forced to do when the sun was out.

Early in the camp, Russ mentioned that he and his family had attended a seaside camp in the UK, with large numbers of cabins, which were all wired for speakers. One of the dubious aspects of that arrangement was that every morning at 7:00, the camp managers played Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah as a wake-up call, which Russ came to loathe. Notwithstanding, singing Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah became a part of our morning ritual in the cooking tent, with Geoff taking particular glee in needling Russ with the song. However, revenge was waiting: at 5:30 a.m. on the last day, Geoff and Cedric, sleeping peacefully in the "Blue Palace," had the startling experience of being woken by Russ and another misguided miscreant bellowing out the camp song. Just wait until next year, guys – we'll get even!

The suppers were invariably excellent, with enticing appies, filling main courses and creative desserts. And in the evenings, Roger and Cedric often alternated playing guitar and singing, and we sang through the usual favourites (Stan Rogers) and some new ones (Click Go the Shears).

Perhaps the best day for me was when Roger, Ronan, Brenda and I decided to climb Spa Peak, a distinctive long-ridged peak about 5 km to the east. Crossing the stream from the Valley of the Tarns, we worked our way up to the first ridge summit, rested for a bit, and then started to tackle the route to the true summit. This quickly evolved into passing over a steep jumble of large black boulders. Waymarking where Brenda had decided to wait, we scrambled to the top, drank in the view, then descended. Picking up Brenda again, we then contoured around the side of Gentian Dome, which we had climbed on the first day.

The Griswold Pass area does not lack for wildflowers, and this region was the most profuse of all, with lush verdure everywhere. As we rounded the hill and reached its southern side, patches of scarified earth started to appear on the hillside, and we knew it was time to bump up our vigilance level a notch or two. Sure enough, as Brenda and Ronan crested one of the rises in the route, they spotted a grizzly foraging way down in the valley below. It had moved out of sight before the rest of us had a chance to see it, but you can be sure that we kept a frequent watch behind as we made our way back to the camp.

That night, preceded by an eerie orange glow around sunset, a thunderstorm roared in, and the tent was buffeted as never before, while the rain pounded it relentlessly. To our relief, the storm abated overnight, and the air was clear as we waited for the sound of heli blades at 8:30. And waited... and waited some more... until 9:30, when I made a satellite phone call to Blackcomb Aviation to see if they were in fact going to arrive. They assured me that the 'copter was now in the air, the pilot apparently having overslept, and sure enough in a few minutes the whack-whack-whack of the rotors filled the pass as the chopper circled and touched down.

Participants:

Cedric Zala (camp manager), Mike Hubbard, Colleen Kastling, Pat Javorski, David Lemon, Brenda O'Sullivan, Ronan O'Sullivan, Russ Moir, Catrin Brown, Lise Gagnon, Alcina deOliveira, Judith Holm, Roger White, Jeff Beddoes, Geoff Bennett.

Mountaineering with Eyes Also Open to the Natural History of the Alpine

Judith Holm
August 4 – 11

In recent perusing of journals and newsletters of the BC Mountaineering Club I have been discovering many interesting records of plants, animals and geology observed on club trips, right from the club's beginning in 1907 to the present. In BCMC's Centennial issue is a wonderful article by geologist and mountaineer Karl Ricker outlining a century of scientific contributions by the BCMC and the ACC. (See Lindsay Elms' *Beyond Nootka* website - "biographies" at bottom of left toolbar - for Lindsay's biography of Karl, who began his climbing career on the Island.) Perhaps these few words help to provide some context for the following list, it being the third year of recording alpine plants during our summer camps. Pojar & MacKinnon's new field guide, *Alpine Plants of British Columbia, Alberta & Northwest North America*, is a great resource.

The plant that most puzzled me the whole week also baffled



Boechera lyallii infected by a *Puccinia* fungus.
 (Photo: Judith Holm)

several botanists before it was recognized. Everyone at camp walked right beside this plant every day *en route* to the "loo". In brief, I learned that the little plant in this photo has been infected with a fungus. This fungus has the amazing ability to force the plant to produce flower-like leaves, on the back of which fungal spores are laid. These pseudo-flowers attract insects which help the fungus to sexually reproduce!

GRISWOLD PASS AREA VASCULAR PLANTS

10U 0473263 5650280 and surrounding alpine observed during ACC VI summer camp, July 28 to August 4, 2013

Judith Holm Critical identifications confirmed by **Hans Roemer** from collections and photos.

<i>Abies lasiocarpa</i>	subalpine fir
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	yarrow
<i>Agoseris aurantiaca</i> var. <i>aurantiaca</i>	orange agoseris
<i>Agoseris glauca</i> var. <i>dasycephala</i>	short-beaked mountain-dandelion
<i>Agrostis</i> sp (<i>Podagrostis humilis</i> ?)	bentgrass
<i>Anemone occidentalis</i>	mop top, tow-headed baby, western pasqueflower
<i>Antennaria umbrinella</i>	umber pussytoes
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	kinnikinnik
<i>Arnica latifolia</i>	broadleaf arnica
<i>Arnica mollis</i>	hairy arnica
<i>Artemisia norvegica</i> ssp. <i>saxatilis</i>	mountain sagewort
<i>Athyrium alpestre</i> var. <i>americanum</i>	alpine lady fern
<i>Boechera lyallii</i>	rising suncrest, jewelled suncrest

<i>Boechera stricta</i>	uptight suncrest			red-stemmed saxifrage,
<i>Caltha leptosepala</i>	mountain marsh-marigold	<i>Micranthes lyallii</i>		Lyall's saxifrage
<i>Carex lenticularis</i> var. <i>dolia</i>	tarn sedge	<i>Micranthes nelsonii</i>		Nelson's saxifrage
<i>Carex micropoda</i>	Pyrenean sedge	<i>Micranthes tolmiei</i>		Tolmie's saxifrage
<i>Carex nigricans</i>	black alpine sedge	<i>Mimulus lewisii</i>		pink monkeyflower
<i>Carex phaeocephala</i>	dunhead sedge	<i>Mimulus tilingii</i>		mountain monkeyflower
<i>Carex spectabilis</i>	showy sedge			rayless alpine packera, egg
<i>Cassiope mertensiana</i>	white mountain-heather	<i>Packera pauciflora</i>		yolk packera
<i>Castilleja miniata</i>	common red paintbrush	<i>Parnassia fimbriata</i>		fringed grass-of-Parnassus
<i>Castilleja parviflora</i>	small-flowered paintbrush			towering lousewort, bracted
	alpine paintbrush, rosy	<i>Pedicularis bracteosa</i>		lousewort, wood-betony
	paintbrush	<i>Pedicularis ornithorhyncha</i>		bird's-beak lousewort
<i>Castilleja rhexifolia</i>		<i>Penstemon procerus</i>		small-flowered penstemon
<i>Castilleja rhexifolia</i> x <i>C. miniata</i>	common and alpine paintbrush hybrid	<i>Petasites frigidus</i>		Arctic sweet coltsfoot
<i>Chamerion angustifolium/Epilobium angustifolium</i>	fireweed, rosebay willow-herb	<i>Phacelia sericea</i>		silky phacelia
<i>Chamerion latifolium/Epilobium latifolium</i>	river beauty, broad-leaved willowherb	<i>Phleum alpinum</i>		alpine timothy
<i>Cirsium edule</i> var. <i>macounii</i>	edible thistle	<i>Phyllodoce empetriformis</i>		pink mountain-heather
<i>Diphasiastrum alpinum</i>	alpine clubmoss	<i>Phyllodoce glanduliflora</i>		yellow mountain-heather
<i>Epilobium anagallidifolium</i>	alpine willowherb			pink and yellow mountain
<i>Epilobium angustifolium/Chamerion angustifolium</i>	fireweed, rosebay willow-herb	<i>Phyllodoce X intermedia</i>		heather hybrid
<i>Epilobium latifolium/Chamerion latifolium</i>	river beauty, broad-leaved willowherb	<i>Pinus contorta</i> var. <i>latifolia</i>		lodgepole pine
<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	common horsetail	<i>Platanthera dilatata</i>		fragrant white bog orchid
<i>Equisetum variegatum</i>	northern scouring-rush	<i>Poa arctica</i>		arctic bluegrass
<i>Erigeron compositus</i>	cut-leaf daisy	<i>Poa cusickii</i>		Cusick's bluegrass
<i>Erigeron glacialis</i> var. <i>glacialis</i>	subalpine daisy			elegant sky pilot, elegant
<i>Erigeron humilis</i>	Arctic-alpine fleabane	<i>Polemonium elegans</i>		Jacob's-ladder
<i>Erigeron peregrinus</i>	wandering daisy	<i>Polystichum lonchitis</i>		mountain holly fern
<i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i> var. <i>majus</i>	subalpine wild-buckwheat	<i>Potentilla drummondii?</i>		Drummond's cinquefoil?
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	narrow-leaved cotton-grass			blue-leaved cinquefoil, vari-
	yellow glacier-lily, yellow	<i>Potentilla glaucophylla</i>		leaved cinquefoil
	avalanche-lily	<i>Ranunculus eschscholtzii</i>		subalpine buttercup
<i>Erythronium grandiflorum</i>		<i>Ranunculus pygmaeus</i>		pygmy buttercup
<i>Festuca</i> sp. (<i>F. saximontana</i> or <i>F. brachyphylla</i>)	fescue species (Rocky Mt. or alpine fescue)			grey-leaf willow, blue-green
<i>Gentianella propinqua</i>	four-parted gentian	<i>Salix glauca</i>		willow
<i>Hieracium triste</i>	woolly hawkweed	<i>Salix nivalis</i>		dwarf snow willow
<i>Juncus drummondii</i>	Drummond's rush	<i>Saxifraga bronchialis</i> ssp. <i>austromontana</i>		spotted saxifrage
<i>Juncus mertensianus</i>	Mertens' rush	<i>Sedum divergens</i>		spreading stonecrop
<i>Juniperus communis</i>	common juniper	<i>Sedum lanceolatum</i>		lance-leaved stonecrop
<i>Leptarrhena pyrolifolia</i>	leatherleaf saxifrage	<i>Senecio fremontii</i> var. <i>fremontii</i>		dwarf mountain groundsel
<i>Lupinus nootkatensis</i>	Nootka lupine			arrow-leaved groundsel,
<i>Luzula hitchcockii?</i>	Hitchcock's woodrush?	<i>Senecio triangularis</i>		arrow-leaved ragwort
<i>Luzula parviflora</i>	small-flowered woodrush	<i>Sibbaldia procumbens</i>		sibbaldia
		<i>Silene acaulis</i>		moss campion
		<i>Silene parryi</i>		Parry's campion, Parry's
		<i>Solidago multiradiata</i>		catchfly
		<i>Symphotrichum foliaceum</i>		northern goldenrod
				leafybract aster

<i>Tonestus lyallii</i>	Lyall's serpentweed
<i>Triantha occidentalis</i>	western false asphodel
	spike trisetum, downy
<i>Trisetum spicatum</i>	oatgrass
<i>Trollius albiflorus</i>	white globeflower
<i>Vahlodea atropurpurea</i>	mountain hairgrass
<i>Valeriana sitchensis</i>	Sitka valerian
<i>Veratrum viride var. eschscholtzii</i>	Indian hellebore, green false hellebore
<i>Veronica wormskjoldii</i>	alpine speedwell



Dave Campbell, Krista Zala, Martin Hofmann, Ken Wong and Frank Wille in front of the Wheeler Hut at the start of the day's adventure. (Photo: Cedric Zala)

Rogers Pass Summer Camp

Cedric Zala

August 17 – 24

Blast! – the stupid oven won't light and I've got to feed 20 hungry people in just over an hour! Arrrrggghhh!

It seemed like such a good idea to buy a couple of frozen lasagnas to be the main course on our cooking night – the first (Sunday) night of the section's Wheeler Hut camp. Just arrive in mid-afternoon, fire up the gas oven in the hut, pop in the lasagnas, and wait, smiling seraphically, as they baked and filled the hut with tantalizing aromas.

Not so! The top burners lit OK, but the oven pilot stubbornly refused to stay on and ignite the burner when the button was released. After half an hour of increasing frustration, it was on to a hastily-made-up Plan B: get a couple of huge roasting pans, put some water in them and place them on the burners, with the lasagnas squeezed in and makeshift covers on top, and let them steam to readiness. And it worked! Everyone was happy with the dinner, and my personal crux for the trip was successfully overcome. Nothing to do now but enjoy the camp!

Rogers Pass is often called the birthplace of Canadian mountaineering, and it has a stellar place in Canadian railway history as well as being home to some of the most spectacular mountains in North America. The hut where we stayed is named after the ACC's first president, Arthur O. Wheeler, and is vehicle-accessible, located just behind the Illecillewaet Campsite adjoining Highway 1, and about 4km from the summit of the pass itself. From the hut it's about a 5-minute walk to the remains of Glacier House, a CPR hotel built in 1887, and demolished in 1929. The Wheeler Hut is large and roomy, if a bit dark, and it's a great place to use as a base for exploring the nearby mountains and trails.

Everyone had the same idea for the Monday – hike up to Abbott Ridge, a gain of 1030m and about an 8-hour return trip. The rain held off for most of the day, and once on the ridge we were rewarded with prime views of nearby Mount

Bonney on the right, and Avalanche, Eagle and Uto Peaks on the left, along with the majestic and daunting Mount Sir Donald. On the way down we were graced with a double rainbow in the other side of the valley, and everyone was in good spirits for dinner.

During the next few days, parties set out to explore the great network of trails and routes. One group tried to approach Uto but was turned back by bad weather. Another group successfully reached Balu pass and marveled at the openness of the valley, the result of innumerable winter avalanches. Their reward was a horizontal torrent of ice pellets at the col. Other groups also explored the Hermit Valley, and the Sir Donald trail to where the stream comes off the Vaux Glacier.

But the most ambitious trip was the ascent of Sir Donald itself by Erich and his friend and climbing partner Matthias (who came over from Germany to attend the camp). They set out for the campsite near the Uto-Sir Donald col, bivouacked there for the night, got an early start, and, as Erich put it, "climbed and climbed and climbed and climbed" until they eventually reached the summit. They found that the descent also had its challenges, as it was by no means obvious where the route was and where the rappel stations were. But they arrived safe and hungry, in time for dinner.

Toward the end of the camp, a group of five of us decided that we didn't need to do yet another 800-1000m day and so drove over to Mt Revelstoke Park, where you can start off hiking at about 1900m, the elevation gains are modest, and the views are wonderful from the get-go. Not to mention the swimming opportunities at Miller Lake and Eva Lake.

Unfortunately, a number of us needed to leave the camp early in order to attend the Celebration of Life for Charles Turner, who had tragically lost his life in a plane crash the week before the camp. Some of those who stayed behind enjoyed a fine overnight trip to the Asulkan Hut, which is a beautiful panabode-style building that sleeps 10, about a 4-hour hike up the Asulkan Valley.

pack wasn't exactly certified for alpine use. Don't drop the sleeping baby.

At the foot of the rappel we reconsidered the route description. We were committed, with no chance of turning back. If we were in the wrong canyon and met a drop we couldn't handle, our only option would be to climb out one of the sides. So far, however, the sculptured walls on either side, though superbly photogenic, had offered little chance of escape.

We carried on. Around another bend, with the canyon now tens of metres high, yet barely a metre wide, we reached another waterfall. Happily, there were two bolts, but as each of us eased down the rope, we had a double surprise. First, jammed sideways in the back of the slot was a truck, compressed to a mere metre in thickness, of uncertain manufacture, no doubt rammed there by pounding water during some flash flood. Then, at the rappel landing spot, a deep pool of mud awaited the unhappy descender! No amount of twisting on the rope allowed us to avoid it. Each in turn sank to above the knees in gooey muck, followed by a gloopy walk before the bottom shelved and we could gain dry sand again. Only the granddaughter exited unscathed!

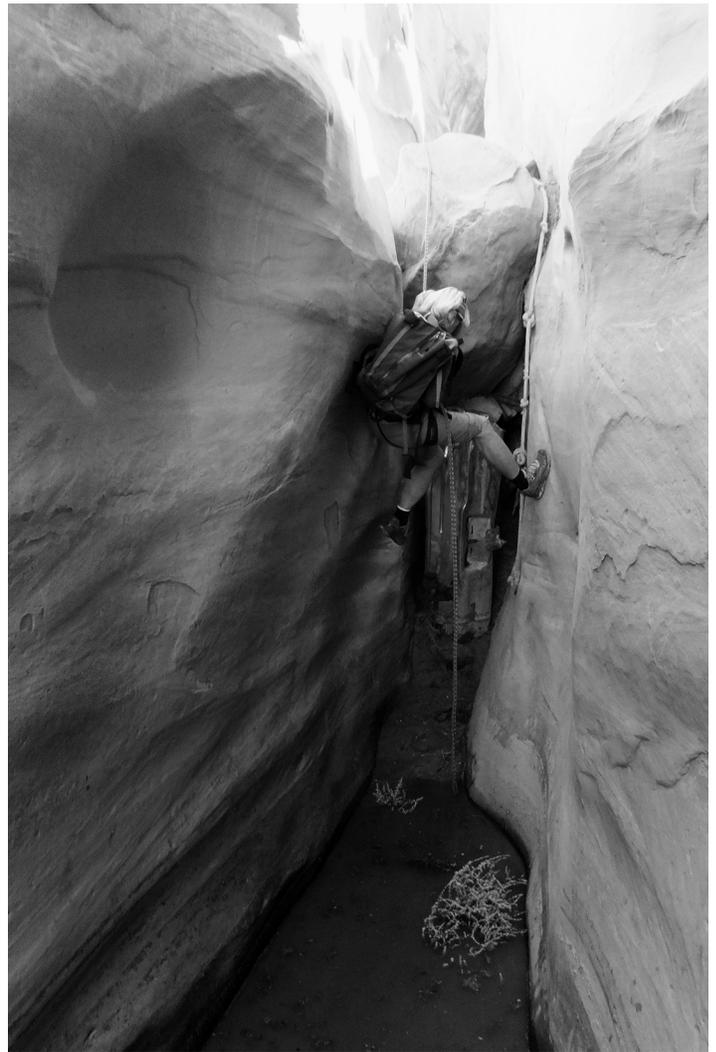
After some mutual mud removal, we continued. The canyon's walls were now over 40m high on either side, and the patterns and curves of the rock, combined with the subtle changes in colour tones, from white through grey, yellow, orange, red and purple, offered brilliant photo ops.

Further down, the canyon widened where several trees grew, casting shade patches. There we found a rusted engine block. Had it come from the truck upstream? By what titanic forces of water could it have been separated from the chassis and then rolled downstream? We looked up at the polished walls with new respect.

Ahead, the slot narrowed again, and suddenly dropped, this time into darkness. The rope, fed through the rappel bolt's eye, was not going to be long enough. There were mutterings about bringing proper gear, and why were we saving a few pounds with 30m of 7mm rope, when our vehicle had several 60m long 9mm ropes available?

While this was in play, son-in-law Rick noted there was a ledge below, just within reach of our short rope. In the gloom below that, it wasn't clear how much further it was to the bottom. He offered to take a look, and disappeared. Moments later, a disconnected voice floated up from below, "It's OK. Come on down."

This was something of a Rubicon. There'd been few side escapes out of the canyon, and now we were committing to a 50m vertical rappel, with who knew what beyond. We followed each other down into the dark, ending on a progressively more crowded sandstone ledge with no cracks or other anchor points. Before I could ask the obvious question, Rick pulled down the line, jammed himself into the back of the slot, planted a foot firmly on each side wall, and



*Phee Hudson on the rappel into the mud pool. Behind her, a truck is visible, jammed sideways in the slot.
(Photo: Rick Hudson.)*

provided a body belay. The remaining 3½ of us slithered down the rope on a steep slab, which Rick then descended as though on a slide, landing on the sand at the base.

But always there was the unspoken question – what if there's another 50m drop, and no ledge midway? We had obviously taken the wrong canyon, and anything could lie ahead. I coiled the rope as the others walked off along the narrow passage, flat and sandy underfoot. It wound out of sight around a bend marked by sheer walls on each side. But it looked brighter out there. Then came a shout, "We've done it!"

Each in turn exited the shadow into a narrow arroyo that gradually widened. Some distance ahead we saw that it met the broad main valley. The rappelling was over. Now it was just a case of finding a route back up the escarpment, while avoiding rattlesnakes. (As an interesting sequel, it turned out we did have the right description for the right canyon. It was just a poor description!)

Participants: Rick Boden, Jacqui Hudson, Nevé Boden (3 months), Phee Hudson, Rick Hudson.

2013 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS



Alpine Summer Activity Winner

Evac Gully

Photo: Chris Jensen

Alpine Winter Activity Winner

*Wapta Traverse Skiers
by Mount Nilis*

Photo: Martin Hofmann



Humour Winner

Alpenhorn Music

Photo: Roxanne Stedman



Mountain Scenery Winner
Sentry Lodge
Photo: Martin Hofmann

Nature Winner
Twins to a Great Horned Owl
Photo: Christine Fordham



**Vancouver Island
Mountain Scenery Winner**
Sunset Below the Blades
Photo: Valerie Wootton

DISTANT PLACES

How We Didn't Cycle the Australian Bicentennial National Trail but Had a Different Adventure and an Elvis Sighting

Pam Olson

December 19, 2012 – 30 January, 2013

We spend our summers walking up and down mountains on Vancouver Island. In the winter, we go to Australia or New Zealand and bicycle tour for four to eight weeks in the antipodean summer. When we started this holiday regime some two decades ago, we were riding mountain bikes and a few years ago switched to hybrids with wide tires (700 x 48mm). We load up our panniers and racks with most of the usual items necessary for a multi-day trip in the mountains, pretty well everything except ice axes and ropes. When we are in the bush, we camp out, and when we are in civilization, we stay in modest accommodations.

Whenever possible, we avoided main roads because of the terrifying traffic. Australian traffic lanes are narrower than those in Canada, the speed limits are higher and often there is no shoulder. We've explored a number of back roads in all states of Australia except the Northern Territory. We've also cycled on several established bush walking routes, although bicycles weren't really allowed on them. We figured no one was going to get too upset about a couple of old farts plodding along on loaded mtbs or hybrids. Bush walking is the Aussie term for hiking.

For this year's holiday, we decided to try cycling part of the Bicentennial National Trail, a 5300 km route from Healesville in the southern state of Victoria to Cooktown at the northern end of Queensland. Originally conceived of as a long distance route for horse riders, it is now enjoyed also by walkers and mountain bikers. It follows the eastern seaboard and the Great Dividing Range of mountains.

During previous trips to Australia, we had cycled sections of the BNT and figured we would start in Victoria, cycle as far as we could through the Great Dividing Range, then take a bus to civilization. Our plan was to fly into Melbourne (MEL) and out of Brisbane (BNE). Exploring the BNT's website (www.bicentennialnationaltrail.com.au/about/), we discovered that guide books for the various sections were available and managed to lay our hands on a set.

About a month before we were scheduled to fly from Victoria (YYJ) to MEL, we took our matching Rocky Mountain hybrids into our usual bike shop to have them serviced: the



Lazarini.

standard maintenance procedures, new cables throughout, new brake pads, adjust derailleurs, true tires. Unfortunately, one of the bikes had a cracked frame. The bike technician did not recommend welding the aluminum frame. We realized we'd have to buy new bikes and got matching specialized hybrids with front suspension and disc brakes, an upgrade from our old Rocky Mountains. Then we had the technician customize them by adding lower gears, front and rear pannier racks and fenders.

Finally, our new bikes packed in our old bike transport bags and two MEC duffel bags crammed full of panniers, gear and clothing, we headed to YYJ. After the 13 hour flight from Vancouver (YVR) to Sydney, Australia (SYD), we collected our luggage, cleared Customs and Immigration, and caught our connecting flight to MEL.

The next day at our Melbourne motel, we reassembled the bikes. We've been flying with bikes for years and have learned a number of tricks about packing bicycles so that they arrive relatively intact. In spite of our careful packing, one of the rear carrier racks was bent beyond repair. We pedaled to a bike store and bought a new one, which the technician installed at no extra charge. Next we shipped our extra luggage to Brisbane. We had made a reservation to stay two nights prior to our departure at a motel we have stayed at previously that is near BNE. The motel owners had confirmed that they would be happy to receive our extra luggage and hold it until our arrival. We rolled up our bike carrier bags, crammed them into the large size MEC duffel bag, snapped the zipper pulls together with a tiny padlock and trundled off to the closest Australia Post outlet. The next errand was the purchase of a SIM card for our unlocked phone.

The following day, we rode to the railway station and purchased tickets to Traralgon, the commuter train being the easiest way to get out of a big city. Our intention was to follow the East Gippsland Rail Trail through to Heyfield and from there, connect with the BNT near Licola. Unfortunately the section of the rail trail from Traralgon to Glengarry was not complete and we had a scary ride on a secondary highway with a narrow shoulder. We stayed in

a cabin behind the pub in Glengarry and the next morning began riding toward Heyfield on the rail trail. Suddenly, one of my front panniers fell off. When I stopped to put it back on, I discovered that the clamp holding the pannier to the front fork had snapped. Checking the pannier on the other side, I found that clamp was broken also. I had been a bit skeptical of the strength of the clamps the bike mechanic had used but he had said U-bolts were over-kill. With wire and cable ties from our tool kit, we reattached the racks, replaced the panniers and rode off. The riding was easy along a gravel track. At Heyfield we sought a hardware store to buy U-bolts, more wire and cable ties. As it was Saturday, the hardware store had closed at noon, typical in rural Australia. Finding accommodation in the little town of Heyfield proved to be a bit of a problem but eventually we found a farm that had converted all its out buildings to self-contained B&B cottages. It was about three km out of town and the cabin was well supplied with breakfast food.

The following morning we headed off toward Licola along the Heyfield-Jamieson road. The road climbed steadily and past Lake Glenmaggie the grade became more steep. By early afternoon the temperature had risen into the low 30's Celsius. We were not used to the heat yet, were getting tired and began looking for a place to camp. The road was following the MacAlister River but was separated from it by barbed wire fences. Obviously the land along the river was private property and from past experience we know that farmers do not appreciate people camping on their property, no matter how remote the area. Being sneaky, we located a place where we could get through the fence without too much trouble and followed a cattle track toward the river.

Suddenly, DF hit a patch of loose sand and his front wheel went sideways. He let the bike go and jumped clear. Hearing him yelling and swearing, I thought his bike had gotten damaged in the fall but when I got closer to him, I saw blood pouring from a wound in his left calf. The bike technician had installed fenders with stays even though I had asked for stayless ones. A protective cap on the end of one stay had fallen off, leaving the piece of stay wire sticking out. When the wheel turned as DF jumped clear of the falling bike, the wire had gouged his calf. Such a wound should require sutures but we were nowhere near a hospital. Using supplies from our first aid kit, we cleaned and bandaged the wound. Then we proceeded toward the river, found a place to camp, set up the tent fly as a sun shade and lay down with wet bandannas over our heads to cool ourselves. The blood on DF's sock and shoe were attracting a number of flies so we rinsed them out in the river. We spent a quiet afternoon watching some cows who were watching us.

The next morning, we continued onward and upward. The gravel road was in fairly good condition. There was virtually no traffic and the only delays we encountered were due to cattle on the road. By late afternoon, we reached Licola, a tiny hamlet. We had intended to stay in a cabin in the caravan park and replenish our supplies at the grocery



Skene.

store but both establishments were closed because the owners had decided to go away for the Christmas holidays. Across the road was a holiday camp and we went there to inquire about accommodations. The caretaker told us that a religious group had booked the entire camp. After chatting a while, he offered us the use of his house overnight as he and his family had moved to Heyfield. We walked over to the house and were hit by a big surprise. The power had been off for several days and all the food in the refrigerator had gone bad. The owner apologized, got a mop, pail and garbage can from the camp and cleaned up the mess. Once he had left, we unpacked our bikes and spread our sleeping pads on the lounge room floor for a rest. Later I found some all-purpose cleaner and a sponge and gave the kitchen floor another going over to remove the rest of the sticky overflow from the fridge.

As we had intended to replenish our meager food supplies at the Licola store, we were a bit short of food and knew we would have to get to Jamieson in a few days. Christmas morning, we started out early along the Licola-Jamieson road. We rode uphill steadily with a few downhill sections for relief. For the first 15km or so the road was paved, then it was packed gravel. The free-range cattle grazing near the road had splattered some sections with manure making for slippery conditions. Late in the day, we finally found a pool of water and a flat area just off the road that was suitable for camping.

The next day, we continued along the gravel road, riding down and up. Sometime in the afternoon, we reached the junction with the Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT) and Middle Ridge Road. Finally, we were on the BNT. Turning left we came to the Lazarini spur and found the BNT horse campsite. The pool of murky looking water did not look appealing for drinking although the tadpoles seemed to be happy. The guide book said there was a stream a little farther down the spur. Finding the stream, we filled all our water containers and backtracked a short distance to a lovely campsite among a grove of eucalyptus. The elevation was about 1200m.

After refilling our water containers the next morning, we continued along the Lazarini Spur track through the forest.

Since we never knew where we would find water, we carry a lot with us. We pedalled up and down hills for several hours then came to a very steep downhill section. Four wheel and ATV drivers had been up and down the track many times, tearing up the road surface so that it was bare rock. The grade was so steep that we could not ride the bikes down it but had to walk them. Part way down the hill we met a 4x4, the driver of which stopped to talk to us. It was a group of four young locals out for a drive who told us it was not far to the river. From the bottom of the hill, the terrain levelled out for a while and we came to Snake Creek. We found a camping spot near it and settled in for the evening. We had descended to about 400m.

An early breakfast of cheese crackers and dried apricots the next morning pretty well depleted our food supply and we hoped we would be able to get to Jamieson that day. We loaded up the bikes, rode for 10 minutes to Snake Creek, unloaded the bikes, carried all our stuff across the river and reloaded the bikes. Then there was the Goldburn River where we repeated the procedure. Neither stream was deep nor fast flowing. The terrain was relatively level and we made good time to the Mansfield-Woods Point Road which unfortunately was the only road to Jamieson. The road was dusty and there was enough traffic to make us nervous. We stopped briefly to have a look at the historic Kelvington Hotel. After Kelvington, the road was paved the rest of the way to Jamieson. Our old Hema "Victoria High Country" map informed us that there was a well-stocked general store in the village. Since that map had been published, the store had undergone a transformation and was now well stocked with ice cream, candy and only a few basic food items. However, the store owners also had a cottage for rent which was available at a discount if booked for two nights or more. What a deal! Cleaned up and refreshed, we walked over to the service station to inquire about hardware to reattach our front carrier racks to the forks, as all clamps on both bikes had broken. The mechanic was a bit testy but when he realized that we would do the work, he became more helpful. He sold us some clamps that are used to hold tailpipes to cars, loaned us a file and a hacksaw and we got the job done. Not pretty, but more solid than the original clamps.

Since we had a nice clean place to stay, we checked DF's leg wound and replaced the bandage. After two nights in Jamieson we were back on the bikes and heading for the BNT. Our plan was to follow the Jamieson-Licola Road up to the point where it crossed the BNT, then follow the BNT toward Omeo. In Jamieson, we had made inquiries about the road and the location of water along it. The road was steep and dusty and the weather was hot. The first day after leaving Jamieson we rode steadily up hill. After about five hours of steady uphill riding, we found a spur road and a fire water supply dam. The water was a bit dubious looking but after running it through the MSR filter, it looked all right. We set up camp and rested in the shade.

Early the next day we set out, still climbing uphill. As described, there was a water tank by the side of the road near



Licola.

Snake Edwards Divide Track. A PVC pipe was bringing water to the tank from Edwards Creek, somewhere up the hillside. We filled our containers and continued riding uphill. Finally we reached the alpine and meadows filled with colourful wild flowers. This area of the Wonnongata-Moroka National Park had been ravaged by bush fires about a decade previously and ghostly grey trunks of the burned snow gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) covered the hillsides. Unlike some other eucalyptus species, which regenerate from the branches and trunks, snow gums regenerate from the roots and the new green foliage was only a few metres tall. The road continued to climb, finally reaching the highest point, 1570m, at Mount Skene. Soon after reaching the summit, we found the Barkley River Jeep Track and followed the rough track to where it began to descend sharply to Rumpoff's Saddle. Below us, the track looked like a rock staircase. Likely it was the 4x4s and ATVs that had ground off all the soil down to the bare rock. Since we had filled our water containers back at the roadside tank in the morning, we still had plenty to camp and think about our options. We found a pleasant site in a small meadow and listened to the wind rattling the dead branches of the snow gums.

In the morning, we decided that we would be foolhardy to continue. In the plus column, we were well equipped for biking and camping, had experience travelling in the Australian bush, and had the usual navigation equipment as well as a personal locator beacon which we didn't really want to have to activate. In the minus column we did not have much food, water sources were uncertain and variable, the route was rough and slow going, and the bush fire hazard was high. We had managed to tune in a station on our little radio and heard a news bulletin about bush fires at Mount Terrible, Lake Eildon and Woods Point, areas not far from our location.

It was New Year's Day and we started back toward Jamieson. At the Mount Sunday Road junction, we took a detour to have a look at Wren's Flat to determine if we could get to Mansfield by way of Merrijig and Mitchell's Track. We descended a long way down to the Jamieson River Valley. There were quite a number of campers in large tents with music blasting out of them but we managed to find a camping place away from the noise where we could also have a

swim in the river. We talked to a friendly guy in a 4x4 who said he had driven Mitchell's Track a few years ago. It was very steep, he said, a feet on the dashboard experience. Maybe we better go back to Jamieson.

It took us less than three hours to climb the steep hill back to the Jamieson-Licola Road where we retraced our route to Jamieson, camping overnight on a spur line after once again filling our water containers at the Snake-Edwards water tank.

Back in Jamieson, we perused the notice boards for phone numbers for accommodations. After a few calls, I reached a person who said she had a cabin, gave me the price and said we could go there directly as the key was in the door. She said that she might be over later to collect the money but if she didn't we could leave the money in the microwave the next morning when we departed. The cabin was clean and comfortable. We walked back to the shop and pub to purchase a few food items, some beer and wine.

From Jamieson, we pedaled 38km to Mansfield, along a fairly busy road which included a half-hour hill climb out of Howqua. By the time we reached Mansfield, it had been about two weeks since DF's leg injury had occurred. The wound was looking red and infected. Mansfield was the largest town we had been to and the first one where we found a hospital. We booked into a cabin in the caravan park and went to the hospital. After examining the wound, the triage nurse sent us to the clinic next door where a doctor examined the wound, said he would arrange for a nurse to clean and dress it. He asked DF if he'd had a tetanus shot recently. We figured it might have about eight years previously. The doctor looked at the scrapes on DF's legs and arms and said, well it is too late for a tetanus shot for this wound but I'll give you one for your next accident. A friendly nurse administered the tetanus shot, examined the wound, applied some salve to hydrate the skin and said to return the next day to have the wound cleaned and dressed. The doctor had also written a prescription for an antibiotic which we filled at a pharmacy. The cost for the medical treatment and medication was less than AUD100. Since we had to make another visit to the clinic to have the nurse attend to DF's wound, we were happy to have a rest day. We did laundry and bike maintenance.

We were on the road again early Sunday morning. The temperatures were high, in the low 30s Celsius, a bit warm for bike touring. We pedaled uphill on a paved road out of Mansfield, stopping to fill our water containers at the public toilets at Tolmie, an abandoned village. We had been told that there were nice camping areas at Stringybark Creek and turned up that road. Soon after starting up the road, a couple of vehicles passed us, kicking up huge clouds of dust, which hung in the still air. Not wishing to breathe dust for the rest of the day, we turned around and rejoined the main road. A little farther along, we came to a disused road. It appeared to be a driveway but it led to a cleared area occupied by the remains of some camping equipment and a shed. Fortunately there was a dam filled with water. In a



Border.

shady spot, we put up the tent to get away from the flies. The temperature went to almost 40 Celsius. We lay on our sleeping pads with wet cloths on our heads and necks to keep cool and read our novels. Later we had a pot shower at the dam.

We continued on the next day to Whitfield, the last 12km or so were all downhill. It was early afternoon when we reached the village but we decided to stop at the caravan park because of the extremely hot weather. The village had a shop but the pub was closed that day. Out the back of the pub, we found an unlocked room containing a number of unlabelled bottles of red wine, cleanskins probably. We helped ourselves to a bottle, leaving a couple of bank notes in payment. Starting out early the next day to try to avoid the heat and traffic, we pedaled into Wangaratta around 10:00 a.m. From Wangaratta, we followed a bicycle route along Byawatha Road. Just before Chiltern, we crossed the busy Hume Highway and followed a back road into the historic town. The town had a few shops and a very nice caravan park with cabins near a small lake.

By then our plan was to get to Albury-Wodonga to catch a bus or train north to Queensland to visit some friends who were either at their home in Toowoomba or their summer place near Stanthorpe. We assumed that as soon as we got to Albury in New South Wales we could catch a bus going north. At Wodonga, VIC, the woman in the tourist information office didn't know anything about bus routes in NSW. We pedaled across the bridge into Albury, NSW and inquired at the Country Link train and coach station about getting to Toowoomba. The clerk said the trains were not running because of a problem with the tracks and that we'd have to take a bus to Sydney, stay overnight, take a bus to Brisbane, then another bus to Toowoomba. The bikes would have to be boxed. We didn't want to go to Sydney.

It was time to throw some money at the situation. We crossed the street to the tourist information office and the clerk there was a bit more helpful. She suggested that if we rented a car one way to Parkes, we could go by Greyhound to Toowoomba. This was the long distance coach service from Melbourne to Brisbane. The catch was, the bus ran only on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, stopping in

Parkes at 5:20 a.m. Today was Wednesday. Greyhound had no problem with bikes; they could be wheeled into the large luggage compartment. The clerk made the bus reservations and arranged the car rental. We pedaled to the Thrifty rental office, unpacked our bikes, disassembled them and loaded them into the car. The agent had given us some cardboard boxes, which we used to cover the seats to keep them clean of bike grease. Assuring us that there would be an after-hours key drop box at the Parkes Thrifty office, the agent wrote down the address on a slip of paper for us and off we drove.

The distance from Albury to Parkes was about 400km. We left Albury around 1:30 p.m., drove for hours through dry, arid countryside, making a couple of stops for fast food and coffee, and arrived in Parkes around 7:00 p.m. Our first stop was the BP service, to confirm that it was the place where the bus stopped, and to refill the gas tank. We asked the staff if they knew anything about accommodations and they said all rooms in the town had been booked out for months because of the Elvis Festival. Elvis Festival?? Undeterred, we continued looking and found a Best Western that had a cancellation. We unloaded our bikes and luggage. The motel was near the address where we were to drop off the car. We drove to the address but there was no Thrifty car-rental place, just an empty building. Hertz was across the road but there was no Thriftys. We drove back to the motel and asked the owner/manager if the Thrifty office had moved recently. He replied, yes, it was now at the foot of the street at the old Toyota dealership across from Cooke Park. When we got to the address, it was the Thrifty office and there was a tall metal fence around it with a locked gate. The key drop-off box was open at the back and therefore not secure. We called the number listed on the sign board, connecting with a recorded announcement giving office hours but no emergency or after-hours number. There was also an option to leave a message. We had found a parking place directly in front of the office and after some discussion, we left the car there with the keys locked in the trunk, called the number and left a detailed message.

Across the street, Cooke Park was the scene of several stages, each featuring Elvis, singing and gyrating. Walking back to the motel, we passed several pubs and in each one "The King" was belting out his most popular songs. As many of the people wandering around the town were sporting colourful tropical print shirts and paper leis, we deduced that the festival's theme was Blue Hawaii. We learned that the annual Parkes Elvis Festival, coinciding with his birthday, has been going on for over 20 years. I had been unaware that Elvis's birth date was January 8, 1935, but I was aware that his death date was August 16, 1977, the same day I fell on Bugaboo Spire, fracturing my pelvis.

We walked back to the motel, stopping to pick up some sandwich ingredients. By this time it was about 8:30 p.m. and we still had to put our bikes together, get some sleep and be at the service station very early to catch the bus. Pedaling in darkness the next morning, we arrived at the service station around 4:45 a.m. We helped the bus driver

load our bikes, got onto the bus and settled down for the long ride to Toowoomba. The bus route followed the Newell Highway through some very desolate and dry countryside, not the kind of place one would really want to travel by bicycle. At rest stops, I checked the phone and found several messages from Thrifty Car Rental. I decided I'd call back when we got to Toowoomba. Enroute from Albury to Parkes, we had phoned our friends and told them of our plans and since they were in Toowoomba, they said they would pick us up at the bus station.

When we finally called Thrifty back a day later, they were upset about where we had left the car. It was a weekend, the Parkes agent complained, and he did not have extra keys to the car and could not retrieve the car until Monday. We tried to explain that we had not been advised that the office had been moved, we had an early bus to catch and there was no key drop or after hours number. The agent in Albury did not believe me that the Parkes office had been moved. Out of curiosity, we checked Google Maps street view which showed a Thrifty office at 325 Clarinda Street in Parkes, where the Thrifty agent in Albury had said it was located and a Toyota dealership at 131 Clarinda Street where we had located the Thrifty office. To confirm our findings, we called the Hertz office in Parkes which was located at 358 Clarinda and asked if the Thrifty office was still across the street from them. No, was the reply, it moved to the foot of Clarinda, the old Toyota dealer. After a few heated telephone conversations with various people at Thrifty, during one of which my prepaid SIM card ran out of money, we got the matter settled and there were no extra charges on subsequent credit card statements. In retrospect, maybe we should have left the rental car at the motel, the keys with the owners and told Thrifty to collect it there.

As it was a weekend, our friends were on their way to their summer place near Stanthorpe and since they were taking both of their vehicles, there was room in the ute for our bikes and luggage. After a few days of visiting and relaxing, we were ready to get on our bikes and ride off again. Our friends, experienced bush walkers, had a large collection of maps of the local area. They suggested a route through Bald Rock National Park. From Eukey, we headed up Parrish Lane, past the remains of a small bush fire that had been subdued a few days earlier, a few wisps of smoke still rising from the ashes. We rode along for a while until we found the side road we had identified from our friends' map. Quickly unpacking the bikes, lifting them and the luggage over a gate, then repacking, we were on our way where bikes weren't really supposed to be. It was an old forest access road which was partially overgrown in places. As we rode, we checked all water sources along the route and found them to be dry. We realized that the only places we were likely to find water was at the Park headquarters and organized camp grounds. Finally, we came to the Border Walk which follows the QLD/NSW border. A sign indicated that the Bald Rock Campground was 7km away. At the campground we filled our water containers from the water tank and located a walk-in site away from the main campground.

The following morning, we considered exploring the Park further but decided the lack of water sources was a factor. By following Bald Rock Road out to the Mount Lindesay Road, we were back on the BNT. Shortly after joining that road, the road surface turned from paved to gravel. Traffic was light and we just kept riding. A short distance past the small community of Liston, we saw a sign for accommodation at the Aloomba Lavender Farm. We stopped at the gate and phoned the number. Soon a ute appeared coming down the driveway and when it stopped the driver told us that the accommodation was operated by his parents who were away for the day. We asked if there were any places to camp along the road and he told us about the common area near the TSR (travelling stock route) at Wylie Creek. We were aware of this place as it was mentioned in the BNT guidebook. We continued riding up and down hills for a few hours, stopping to check out one or two potential camping spots. But it began to look like Wylie Creek was the only place around. Late in the afternoon, we found the place, set up camp, had a quick pot shower in the creek and were enjoying our Earl Grey tea and Arnotts Scotch Fingers when the man from the lavender farm showed up. He lived nearby and said he was checking to see how we were.

The next morning, well rested, we continued on the Mount Lindesay Road then turned at Cullendore Road and pedaled up to the old tick station and rabbit proof fence. There we saw the first official looking BNT sign. Pleased that we were back on the BNT, we followed the NSW/QLD border fence for a while until we came to a locked gate. Checking the guidebook confused us as the instructions no longer matched the geography possibly because a new road had been built. We headed off down a track in the direction of a road we identified using the GPS. Suddenly we heard the sound of ATVs and two farmers loomed into sight. Stopping in front of us, the older one asked "May I enquire as to what the f___ is going on here?" In unison, we said "We're lost." He instructed us to follow the track for 2 or 3 km until we came to a cottage and a pen with some cattle. We should wait for him there and should not go into the cottage. Ten or fifteen minutes after we reached the cottage, the two farmers showed up. The older one said he would draw us a mud map and proceeded to scrape some lines in the dirt with his shoe, explaining which roads we should take. The other fellow said we should follow their vehicle tracks back to Barlow's Gate Road, then go right to the Barlow's Gate-Killarney Road. Off we rode along a rough track, the surface of which got progressively worse with deep ruts and loose sand patches. Finally we got to the rabbit-proof border fence where we saw a farm house. Unfortunately no one was at home except for a couple of Jack Russells and some chickens. We refilled our water containers from a hose, filtering the water just in case. From there, the road improved and we finally came to a paved section. A friendly farmer driving a ute stopped to talk to us, telling us we could avoid two hills into Killarney by going another way. By this time, the temperature was into the low 30s Celsius and we had been riding a couple of hours longer than we had anticipated. About eight hours after leaving Wylie's Creek,



Condimine.

we reached Killarney and found a motel. The cheerful owner said she would be happy to take us to the shop later for groceries.

Revived after a good sleep, we set off the next day for Queen Mary Falls via the Warwick-Killarney Road and Spring Creek Road. Although the distance was less than 20km, Spring Creek Road was steep and the weather was very hot. Along the way, we stopped to have a look at Dagg Falls, an impressive double cascade into a narrow gorge. About 11:30 a.m. we arrived at the caravan park which, since we had been there in about 1990, had transformed itself into a pretentious resort/retreat. We were told we could not check in until 1:00 p.m. With some negotiation and the payment of an early check-in fee, we were in a cabin with a fan to cool the air.

After discussing the area with some locals, we decided to take the Condimine River Gorge Road back to Killarney. We would be back on the BNT for a while. From Queen Mary Falls we continued along Spring Creek Road, riding uphill on a paved road, then coasted down to the turn off for the Condimine River Road. A very large sign warned that the road was rough with fourteen river crossings and should not be undertaken in wet weather. As the weather

was hot, we rode until we found a place to camp near the river, set up the tent, had a swim, then read novels on our Kindles for the rest of the afternoon. The entertainment was watching vehicles drive through the ford on the river, most of the drivers and passengers staring straight ahead, not interested in the scenery or wildlife. As well as grazing cattle, we saw a lot of kangaroos, wallabies and colourful birds as well as a few snakes.

The next day, we tried to keep our feet dry at the first river crossing but gave up after that. There were just too many fords, most of which were not very deep and we could ride or walk the bikes across all of them without unloading the panniers. The gravel road was undulating and we arrived in Killarney around noon to discover that, since it was Sunday, the store was closed. We called the motel and found that they had a room available and spent an hour or so wandering around the town locating the other small shops that had a few grocery items. Finding beer and wine on a Sunday in Australia is never a problem; there is at least one pub that is open.

By this time in our trip, we were beginning to head toward Brisbane even though it was still more than a week until we were to fly home. We were not too enthusiastic about continuing along the Mount Lindesay Highway toward Woodenbong, but there were only a few roads we could take and that one might have less traffic. The big trucks were considerate but the passenger vehicles did not give us much room. The weather was changing, and after a few hours we had to stop and put on the pannier covers as there were intermittent showers. We rode through forest which gave way to farms and fields near Woodenbong. About a decade ago, we had ridden through that village and stayed at the hotel which was the only accommodation. We were pleased to see that the hotel had changed ownership and the rooms had been upgraded. Many of the rooms had en-suites meaning we did not have to walk down the hall to use the toilet and shower.

The next morning, my rear bike tire developed a problem, the tire and tube blew off the rim. Likely the tire had been damaged. Unfortunately in changing the tube, I managed to destroy the valve. Now we were down to our last spare tube as we had experienced other tire problems earlier in the trip. The publican of the hotel where we had stayed the night saw us working on the upside down bike and asked if we wanted a lift to Beaudesert. As he was driving there for supplies, he had a trailer attached to his ute. We accepted. At Beaudesert, we found a sporting goods store that had some bike parts. The first thing we did was to ask the shop's proprietor if we could use their floor pump, then we bought a spare tube. After pumping up our tires, we set off to find accommodations. A few minutes later, my rear tire exploded. I walked the bike back to the shop, bought another tube and replaced the ruined tire for the folding bead spare we had with us. It was a bit narrower than the Schwalbe Big Apple but would do the job. The widest 700mm tire the shop had was only 35mm wide but any spare would be better than no spare if we had another

blowout.

By the next day, the weather forecast was for clouds and showers. We declared a rest day, hoping the weather would be better the following day. However, that was not the case. A big storm was building off the east coast of Australia. Instead of heading toward the mountains, we spent seven hours the next day riding to Ipswich, a sprawling bedroom community of Brisbane. Overnight, the rain did not let up so we caught the commuter train to Brisbane. From there we caught another commuter train to Caboolture, hoping to be able to ride around in the Glasshouse Mountains. No such luck. Tropical storm Oswald was stalled off the east coast and heavy rain was predicted. From past experience in Australia, we knew that heavy rain meant flooding and possible road and railway closures. We called the motel in Brisbane and asked if they had room for us if we arrived two days earlier than our booked date. The answer was positive and we spent the next two days reading novels in our room, opening the door from time to time to watch the downpour and wind blown branches, as well as following the Australian Open Tennis Tournament on the TV.

By Monday, January 28, the worst of the storm had blown through. Later in the day, we ventured out to buy some food and wine, and to dumpster-dive behind the liquor store for cardboard boxes with which to line our bike transporting bags. The following day, our last day in Australia for this trip, we went for a ride along the bike path system. Brisbane is quite a lovely city for cycling as there are numerous multi-use paths running along the Brisbane River and through parks. Back at the motel, we packed up our bikes. We've packed and unpacked our bikes so many times that we have become very efficient at it.

Over the more than two decades we have flown with bikes, the fees charged by the various airlines for bikes and other sports equipment have changed. Some times we've paid nothing. On this trip, the fees charged were inconsistent and it cost us about double the amount to fly the bikes home as it had cost to fly them to Australia.

Participants: Pam Olson, DF (who wishes to be anonymous and wouldn't belong to any club that would have him as a member).

On the Elephant River Dome – South Africa

Rick Hudson
February 24 – 26

We've collected Ferdi directly off the plane from England, en route to the mountains, so he has no recovery time. We are Carl, Brian, Martin, Denis and yours truly, and we all go back a long way. To university for most, to kindergarten for some! We know each other inside out, our lives intertwined over many trips and other questionable activities these past six decades.

The temperature must be 30° when we park under the welcome shade of oak trees in the middle of nowhere, and prepare ourselves for a fast, three-day dash to the Elephant River Dome. The peak has a certain reputation because of its long, complicated approach that involves crossing a number of other summits and valleys first. But I'm not worried – Brian, Ferdi and Martin have done it before.

Out in the full heat of the afternoon African sun, we slog up through tussock grass and low prickly bush on no path. It's February, and the last of the *fynbos* flowers are in bloom, but I have scant interest. The temperature, my thirst, and this being the first exercise in a month, are making the three-hour approach to the campsite somewhat tiring. Arriving in a dehydrated state, we collapse into deliciously cold pools in the only stream that hasn't dried up over the summer.

A full moon rises over a low ridge as we finish supper. The stars above, unfazed by city lights in any direction, shine with a brilliance that's almost dazzling. We lie out under them and talk about adventures past, and what tomorrow will bring. One thing we know for sure is, it will be hot. We'll need to start early.

Sunrise catches us on our way, crossing flat ground, the morning still cool and the air fresh. After an hour we reach an escarpment edge, and the games begin. The whole range is sandstone, quartzite really, hard and vertical, with multiple terraces that can lead you across surprising faces in safety. You just need to know which terrace. Many of them bluff out.

No worries – our guides are confident as we traverse along narrow grass slopes that pinch occasionally, necessitating a step across an airy drop. But always the terraces lead gently upwards, although where exactly is unclear. Our destination is hidden behind at least one intermediary range. We hope. No one can quite remember.

At 10 o'clock we pause for a well deserved break, and gulp water. Such is the heat here that even I, who never carry more than a litre of water, am carrying two. Some have more. These mountains are thirsty work as the sun reflects off the white and golden stone already warm to the touch, and it parches the throat.

We are off again, the overseas visitors wilting as the southern sun attacks from above. Crossing a narrow saddle we look down, way down, to a valley far below and then the even worse prospect of climbing the opposite wall. It looks like a sheer rock face, but Martin cheerfully points out a faint line that threads its way through the cliffs to another unlikely ledge, which in turn leads off around the next range and out of sight.

We descend what turns out to be a nearly vertical face (thankfully in shade) on this side of the valley. At the bottom, I look back up what we've just managed to get down,



Weathered sandstone columns, towers and cliffs are typical of the area. Note the figure for scale. (Photo: Rick Hudson)

and make a careful note of how we did it. It's not obvious among the soaring cliffs. Whoever discovered this line through the ranges must have had a gift for navigation on a par with Magellan.

But there's no time to lose. We're back in the sun, scrambling up a steep slope to that small ledge, followed by another long traverse that meanders away around a series of false summits. Well, that's a good sign. If they're false, that suggests there's a real summit not far beyond.

As noon comes around, we've been hard at it for five hours, and the heat pounds down. In the valleys, images shimmer in the baking air. Finally, as we pull up the ultimate slope, there's a welcome breeze that cools the brow. The top is a grassy dome that offers wonderful views in many directions. The local lads immediately start to play the same game we all do – arguing about peak names on the horizon.

An examination of the summit register reveals a surprising thing. The peak was last climbed in 2009 – why am I not surprised? – and the party comprised just three people – the same Martin, Brian and Ferdi who are here today. This appears to be their personal summit. With no shade in which to hide, I ignore much of the discussion and try to catch my breath before the inevitable descent in the afternoon heat, which will be a great deal more intense than the morning's.

The sun's at its zenith and it's a very long way home. We're tired, the day's a scorcher, and we're running low on water. Fortunately, one or two of the more astute have brought three or more litres. Unfortunately, it is by no means downhill all the way home. We have those multiple intermediary ridges to cross again, and they involve as much up as down.

By 2 o'clock the heat just knocks us out, and we withdraw into the shade of a cliff to drink, yarn away half an hour, and try to rebalance the salt levels. Then it's back into the blast furnace for another hour, before repeating the process in another shaded nook. We're drained, dehydrated, and acutely aware there's still a way to go.



*After many hours of narrow ledges, we sight the Elephant River Dome (left centre) for the first time.
(Photo: Rick Hudson)*

Late in the afternoon a breeze freshens and the heat ebbs, although the rock is still hot to the hand. At the end of the final terrace we stumble onto the grassy plain as the sun draws long shadows across the ground. I just try to put one sore foot in front of the other, knowing it's almost over. Finally, the pool appears – the first running water we've seen all day – and one by one we strip off and slide into its delicious coolness, our skins absorbing water like sponges, heads cold for the first time in twelve hours.

Back in camp, the moon rises to light our supper preparations. An hour later I roll into my sleeping bag and drop into the kind of sleep that's only experienced after a great day.

Participants: Martin Hutton-Squire, Brian deVilliers, Ferdi Fischer, Carl Fatti, Denis Brown and Rick Hudson.

Cedarberg Revisited – South Africa

Rick Hudson
February 27 – March 3

We were bound for the legendary Cedarberg Wilderness Area. Here are three things I bet you didn't know about the Cedarberg. It is home to one of the great bouldering sites in the world – Rocklands. Second, during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, it was an area of fierce skirmishes between the lightly armed but mobile Boers, and the heavily armed but plodding Brits. Those tales were ably documented in Deney's Reitz's classic book *Kommando*. A young war correspondent named Winston Churchill was so impressed by the Boer's abilities that, as British Prime Minister in WWII, he ordered the formation of an elite mobile corps called the Commandos. Third, the Cedarberg is where red bush tea (*rooibos*) comes from. When I was a kid it was drunk by the locals only. Now it's available world wide. I should have bought shares.

We left from the curiously named Algeria Forest Station early one summer morning. Curious, because there appeared to be no connection to the country of that name, nor were there trees of any kind, anywhere, to be seen. What wasn't questionable was the promise of a hot day, but we planned to be at the top of the pass by the time the sun reached the valley bottom. Along the way, the trail switch-backed up steep slopes of low bush and orange cliff bands, the grade easy but relentless. Near the top, the angle finally eased and we hiked into a blaze of sun. Even at 8 o'clock in the morning the heat was palpable and, as we stopped for a breather, SPF was generously smeared on pale northern skin.

Down the other side, the trail meandered across broad flats, a few lone cedars providing vertical contrast, together with small bluffs. Midway across the level ground a shallow stream trickled clear water, and we filled water bottles, already nearly depleted. At the far end of the easy ground a long traverse across a steep side slope brought us under a crag, and Martin advised cheerfully the next section of the trail was called "Heart Sore". The reason became apparent as we hauled our 5-day packs up many zigzags before entering another world of sandstone crags and balancing rocks.

After some four hours we turned into a shallow valley where a stream had leveled a broad area of sand and grass, and here at last among giant boulders we stopped to camp. Off to one side, hidden by a line of bushes, lay Crystal Pool. It was as good as its name suggested. We gratefully sank into it, swimming slowly past boulders that overhung the water, with sandy beaches providing easy pullouts.

Clean and dry, we turned to the business of making camp. No one had brought a tent – this was summer, after all – so the task was quickly done. The rest of the afternoon was spent dangling off small cliffs and swimming again, before the sudden chill of losing the sun behind a ridge brought us back to camp for a supper cooked on stoves. Above, our blue sky had mysteriously filled with dark clouds, and Brian commented absent-mindedly that there'd been talk in the forecast of "cloudy with a 50% chance of rain". The weight-saving plan of no tents suddenly didn't seem such a great idea.

At about 1 a.m., I awoke to the sound of soft rain – mist really – drifting down onto my sleeping bag. There were mutters in the dark. We were all awake. Turning on a headlamp revealed only a halo of white where the beam reflected back off fine droplets. Two of the party disappeared into the dark, heading for a previously identified overhang. The other two did the same in another direction, leaving me alone next to the camp boulder.

I stubbornly rolled under my groundsheet and tried to ignore the soft pitter-patter. Was it getting louder? Hard to tell, but the groundsheet was large and tightly woven. Then



Giant sandstone boulders in brilliant colours dot the landscape in the Cedarberg Reserve. (Photo: Rick Hudson)

a drop of water trickled down my face. Wait a minute – how did that happen? I lay still, but another followed it. Not a good sign. I withdrew a warm arm from my sleeping bag and felt the underside of the groundsheet. It was soaking, and in contact with the bag.

I lay for a minute, planning the moves. This had to be done with the least exposure to the rain (it was rain now), and I needed it to go off efficiently. Plan in place, I stood up, wriggled out of the bag, grabbed all my gear (very wet to the touch) and set off across the knee-deep dripping grass. Within ten paces I was lost. The boulder behind me was already out of view in the rain, the headlamp's beam barely penetrating the falling water. Ahead lay numerous boulders in some pattern I hadn't memorized too well. It might take five minutes to find an overhang, and by then everything would be soaked.

Turning, I ran back to the original boulder. As I arrived I noticed a curious thing. Up close to the five metre high rock wall, the ground was dry. Some quirk of wind and rain kept that small patch protected, although there was no appreciable overhang above. It wasn't large, but it was a port in a storm. I snuggled up against the wall, rolled out the wet groundsheet and wetter sleeping bag and climbed in. It was still dry inside. Cuddling close to the rock, I switched off the headlamp and hoped like heck I was doing the right thing.

Waking some time later, I wasn't sure where I was for a moment then struggled out of the damp gear. The rain had let up, and I was still warm. In the pale dawn I saw the others under low overhangs some distance away. A quick conversation revealed they had, surprisingly, fared no better than me. No matter, it was action time. The wettest of us hastily packed gear and set off for the hut, a twenty minute hike away. The rain had turned to mist, and we arrived just as the clouds began to break. Inside the hut, the smell of sweet dry grass on the floor was a treat after the outside damp. We hung sodden gear over rafters and waited for the others.

Breakfast was taken outside in a drying world, and by

8 o'clock we were ready for another day. Heading north along a meandering trail that led through a strange world of balancing rocks the size of small buildings, set about with twisted cedar trees, we came, after an hour, to another pool in the dry landscape, known as 'the Swimming Hole', which we did despite the morning chill in the water.

Refreshed, three hours later we reached an unnamed pass from which the rather unattractively named Scorpion Mountain was scrambled, through complicated chimneys and narrow gullies of steep sandstone, the sunny faces already warm to the touch, the shade still deliciously cool. We popped out suddenly onto the summit that was as flat and as vast as several playing fields – not at all what I was expecting – where shallow pools of water lay from last night's rain. An idle lunch in the sun followed, before we followed our twisting trail back down to the pass, the heat rising in the still air of the gullies, the rocks becoming hotter by the hour.

The afternoon was a long retreat in full sun, before a repeated soak in the Swimming Hole, the water deliciously cool on overheated bodies. We sat in the sun with a light breeze afterwards, like drying cormorants, enjoying the nakedness, before the final trek back to the hut, where we found everything dry. A glance at the sky convinced us to chance it, and we returned to the Crystal Pool camp for a night out under the stars.

Old friends, Cape brandy, the Milky Way overhead, and tall tales. All we lacked was a fire (no longer allowed in the reserve). We rolled into our dry bags with a feeling of satisfaction on several fronts, although I discovered my Therm-a-Rest (borrowed for the week) was flat. Still, as I gazed up at the dark sky filled with stars, rimmed by dark rock silhouettes, there was a feeling of great peace.

It was another dawn start to get as much of the day's travel over before the heat intensified. We crossed rolling terrain interspersed with strangely shaped rock formations, whimsical in their colours of red and orange and yellow and white and grey. Passing through a grove of cedars planted as an experiment by the forest service decades ago and now abandoned, like so many government projects, we descended gently to Middleberg Hut where, the sky still being cloud-free, we chose to sleep under three tall oaks that stood alone by the stream, the only trees in any direction.

In their cool shade we passed away the noon's heat, but by 2 p.m. were restless, and set off for a peak on the skyline called Middleberg North. To our delight, an unexpected path through the tussock grass led us directly to its south shoulder, making the approach much shorter than we had anticipated. There followed a gain of just 200m on steepening rough ground, the upper sections involving another tortuous route to find the true summit amid a nest of gullies, cliffs and blind passages.

Near the top we passed under a massive chockstone, wedged between two walls, that provided a fine photo



Playing it cool under the chockstone on North Middleberg. (Photo: Rick Hudson)

opportunity for us to stand below, each secretly hoping for no earthquake.

The evening was our last together. The dregs of the wine and contents of the final brandy bottle vanished, before another night under the stars, the oak leaves rustling above us softly in the moonlit dark. Despite grass fires further down the range (common in late summer) the air was clean and no hint of acrid smoke drifted this far north.

Another early start was called for, as we would be descending a long and winding trail to Algeria, after first crossing an intermediary range. At the lip of the slope, the early sun on our backs, we dropped into shadow and began the descent of many switchbacks. Half way down, a sign pointed to 'The Waterfall'. It transpired none of us had ever actually visited it. We downed packs and wandered across, and a good thing too.

Coming round a rock bluff, we entered a narrow canyon that cut a tall cliff. The trail led in some distance below the cliff's top. Above us, a perfect waterfall, wonderful in this hot world, cascaded down a thirty metre wall, draped in green plants, even orchids. On either side, trees crammed

inward to draw from this source of life. Where we traversed into the canyon, the stream bed leveled into a perfect wading pool under the falls. Then, just below, it plunged 200m into the depths of unseen shadows, the cascade barely reaching the bottom as it dissolved into a fine spray that rained on the distant canyon floor.

We sat for some time taking it all in. This was followed by the inevitable skinny dip, even this early in the day. Refreshed, we ambled back to the down-track, shouldered our not-so-heavy packs, and set a course for Algeria and the *vie normale* beyond.

Participants: Martin Hutton-Squire, Brian deVilliers, Ferdi Fischer, Denis Brown and Rick Hudson.

Trekking in Uttarakhand, India

Ken Wong
March 31 – April 10

In late March 2013, I attended my niece's wedding in Chennai, India. Having grown up in Hong Kong, I do not enjoy masses of humanity. India with over a billion people is just as stressful as China! Oh well, it was a once in a lifetime experience so what the hell. Uncle Ken paid the \$100 for an Indian tourist visa. One of my life goals was to go see the flowering rhododendrons in the Himalayas. To achieve this goal, I spent many days googling and selected the 80km long Pindari Glacier trek that could be done independently and without camping gear. This trek is in Kumaon, the lesser visited eastern part of the state of Uttarakhand bordering Nepal and Tibet, at the south end of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. I was hopeful that I might even catch a glimpse of Nanda Devi at 7816m, the highest mountain in India, explored by the Brits Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman in the 1930s.

After the wedding, my family and friends toured the Golden Triangle - Delhi, Taj Mahal in Agra and the Jaipur forts in Rajasthan. The heat of the Indian plains had become unbearable so I took a 16 hour train ride from Jaipur heading north east to the end of the rail line at Kathgodam. I then shared a taxi with a couple young Israeli hippies to the hippyland of Kasar Devi above the town of Almora at 1646m. The cooler air and the distant view of snowy summits was such a relief to this weary traveller. The next day I caught a torturous 8 hour long bus ride to Bageshwar at 975m. As the trekking season had not started, upon arrival I found myself to be the lone guest at the government operated Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) hotel.

At 7 a.m. the next morning I rented a jeep for 1800 rupees (about \$35) and bumped up a very bad road for 3 hours along the Saryu River to Loharket at 1720m. A man showed me the start of the trail for 200 rupees and wanted to be my

guide, which I declined. A few minutes into my trek I was rewarded with a spectacular sight. Red and pink flowering rhododendron trees towered over the stone path that was covered with fallen petals. Wow! I had hit the prime of the flowering season. The 1200m hike up to the pass of Dhakuri Top at 2940m was a blur as I was beside myself photographing and smelling the blossoms.

By the time I reached the top, the rain had started and the Himalayas were invisible. I hurried down the other side of the pass to the KMVN Dhakuri rest house set on a lovely meadow at 2680m. The custodians told me that a Polish couple stayed there last night. I was not the only trekker after all. It was still early so I continued onward to the village of Khati at 2210m. About half an hour before getting to Khati I met the Polish couple and a French couple who were staying at the Hotel Anpona guest house with a commanding view of two river valleys, the Pindari to the right and Sunderdhunga to the left. It is easy to make friends on the road and I was invited to stay there too. We shared chocolates and exchanged travelling stories until the stars were bright and the temperature plummeted.

The next day the sky was clear. Bands of red and pink were visible on the flanks of snow-capped mountains far away. Yup, that entire colour is flowering rhodos! Anna and Aleksander, the Polish couple, were on their way to Pindari as well so we decided to team up. Two playful dogs also joined us. The big strong spoiled male dog, Ari, was imported by a Ukrainian. The timid skinny female mutt we named Blondie. We found the cook, Prim Singh, who had the key to the Dwali KMVN guest house, among 60 workers repairing the trail at the long bridge after Khati. Their budget was one million rupees, about \$18,000. The bridges were being rebuilt (they do this every four or five years) so we had some anxious moments balancing on rotten beams without planks a dozen metres above the raging river. The dogs and one of us needed repeated encouragement to cross because of their fear of height.

Soon we crossed a second large bridge under repair to Dwali at 2575m, where we saw a few of the trail repair crew and found several locked buildings. One of the workers kindly started a wood fire to make chapatis for us. The cook arrived some hours later to let us into one room of a ruined English house built during the British Raj. I picked the big wooden table as my bed and the couple claimed the mattresses on the floor in front of the fireplace. By late afternoon the winds howled and it was hailing. Under the shelter of the veranda I sat awkwardly on one of the two beautifully crafted high back chairs with broken lace while the dogs frolicked among the pellets of ice, play wrestling. What a peculiar mountain scene! At night my Polish friends were cold (what? Polish mountaineers were famous for making first winter ascents in the Himalayas) so they kept a horribly smoky fire going. To pass time we watched a video of Glenn Gould playing Bach in his Uptergrove cottage on my Blackberry Playbook. Initially the dogs were very polite, staying outside the front door but after a while they moved inside as well. The locals would have kicked them out.



Resting before Kafni Glacier. (Photo: Ken Wong)

That's why they followed us tourists, for love, cookies, and adventure.

The next morning we had chapatis and potato pancakes with lots of hot chai before heading up north to the Pindari Glacier gorge. A couple of kilometres on, the trail was covered with hard morning ice. Since I was the experienced ACC member, I used my metal umbrella tip to cut steps for the group. This ice was nasty business. At one point I had to self-arrest by grabbing onto some shrubs while watching one of my bamboo hiking poles skid down the icy slope to the raging creek a couple hundred metres below. The umbrella tip broke not long after. The cook was right. We would not make it to the glacier without an ice axe. Finally we reached the shuttered Phurkia KMVN guest house at 3260m. The tired dogs flopped down to the ground. There were still several icy kilometers left to go before reaching Zero Point at 3660m, the end of the trek. The afternoon clouds rolled in and we could see our breath in the chilling wind. If it were May we could have stayed at the guest house to have chai and dal baht but we were a month early. We fed the dogs and ourselves and retreated back to Dwali, taking photos of lovely rhodos, blue globe primulas and cascading waterfalls along the way. There were also indigenous ivies, blackberries and hollies – plants that I know back home as invasives that I battle in the parks across Victoria.

We had a smoky fire and wet dogs that night but were rewarded the next day with another clear morning. This time we went east to the *easy* (or at least that is what the cook promised) Kafni Glacier. A couple kilometres into the trek my friends fell back. I charged on with the dogs that happily chased a family of langurs up the opposite slope across the creek. I passed the locked Zila Panchayat Guest House at 3020m. The landscape opened up with patches of snow amongst bunch grass. The jagged white mountains dwarfed me. I was in the Himalayas, just me and the two dogs. The air was crisp and had a bite to it. In this silence a strange alertness heightened my senses. Ari marched far ahead while Blondie was right on my heels, limping a little. I examined her paws. Finding no obvious injury I gave her several cookies to forestall any problems.



View from Pangu top. (Photo: Ken Wong)

At last we reached a huge snow-covered cirque at 3600m that had house-size boulders scattered about. I sat down on the last grassy patch to have lunch as the excited dogs darted several hundred meters forward playing in the snow. I fed them with my remaining food when they came back. I gave extra food to the skinny one as I worried that I might have to carry her back in my pack. The dogs promptly went to sleep, with Ari on the snow and Blondie on the grass. I could go no further without risking their lives. They were my responsibility now. Afternoon clouds converged overhead as I gathered the troops to head down. We ran swiftly from snow patch to snow patch. We reached Dwali at 3 p.m. and discovered my friends had departed an hour earlier. I quickly packed up my things and left with the cook and the dogs to Khati. We took a shortcut and arrived before my friends. It had been over a 30km day! Blondie vanished among the local mutts barking about her exploits. Ari found us just after dinner: turns out his keeper had been looking for him for the last three days.

The following day we were joined by Connor, an American, who was forced back from Dwali because he could not find lodging. We spent the next few days exploring the surrounding hills above Khati, catching glimpses through the clouds of Nanda Khat at 6540m, Nanda Kot at 6860m, Nanda Devi East at 7430m and the distant mountains in Nepal to the east. We harvested chickweeds and rape-seeds to supplement our vegetable-starved diet. My flight back home was imminent so we took a different path, ascending up to Pangu Top then descending via the village of Supi to Song where we took a shared jeep to Bageshwar for 100 rupees each. Conner spoke Hindi which was great as he was able to ask for directions and negotiate cheap fares. Two buses and a couple of days later I was back in Delhi, the hot and teeming capital of India. Oh, how I would prefer to be back in the mountains!

To see a photo presentation of the trip, click on the link: [Trekking_in_Uttarakhand_India](https://sites.google.com/site/kkwsite) found at <https://sites.google.com/site/kkwsite>.

Participant: Ken Wong.

Mount Kinabalu – Sabah

Don Morton
September

During the spring of 2013, while I prepared a paper for a conference in Singapore, I began looking for a mountain to climb in the region. The adjacent Malay Peninsula and Indonesia lack any major peaks but I was delighted to find a 4100m peak only 6° north of the equator in North Borneo in the Malaysian state of Sabah. At 4095m, Mount Kinabalu is the highest in southeast Asia if one counts Irian Jaya with Carstensz Pyramid (4884m) and Papua New Guinea with Mount Wilhelm (4510m) as part of the Australian continent. Mount Kinabalu is so special in Sabah that its profile is a large part of the state flag.

I soon learned that Mount Kinabalu was not a do-it-yourself mountain. It is in Kinabalu Park where the authorities carefully regulate climbing by requiring a local guide for each party and assured accommodation at one of the high huts. With only 160 beds in the huts, an early reservation is necessary for this popular climb. On searching the web for a travel agent to organize a trip I first tried a company that had an office in Vancouver. However, when I provided the requested personal information including my age of 80 years, all emails from the company ceased without explanation! Fortunately, I found a local company, Amazing Borneo Tours, <http://www.amazing-borneo.com/>, which is a major operator on Kinabalu. They provided excellent service.

Since I was acclimatized to sea level, I followed the usual pattern of a bus trip from the Sabah capital of Kota Kinabalu to the park entrance on the afternoon of September 1 for a night in a hostel at 1564m. There are many trails here to explore before dark and a cafeteria for meals.

The next morning the Amazing Borneo representative arranged for my climbing permit and introduced me to my guide, a capable young woman named Masnani. Then a vehicle took the guide and me the 4.6km up the road to the Timpohon Gate at 1866m and the start of the 6km trail to the huts. There is an alternate Mesilau Gate to the east at 2000m with a slightly longer trek to the junction about 2700m altitude. It is a good trail from the Timpohon Gate but the thick jungle rain forest prevents any views. The route is steep in many places with high steps in the dirt or sections of wooden stairs. About every kilometre there is a rain shelter with seats and a toilet. I had good weather up and down but I heard that often these shelters can be very welcome. The authorities close the summit route on rainy days because the upper rock could be slippery.

In due course we reached the Laban Rata Hut at 3272m. It has seventy of the beds, the restaurant for all four of the



The granite slabs of Mt Kinabalu with St John's Peak (4019m) on the left and the summit, Low's Peak (4095m) on the right. (Photo: Don Morton)



View down to Kinabalu South (3914m) and the long white rope leading to the summit! (Photo: Don Morton)

huts at this level and quarters for the guides. The hut fee includes an evening meal, breakfast at 2:00 in the morning and another meal on the way back down. Everyone returns to the park entrance and the bus to Kota Kinabalu on the summit day to make room for the next 160 climbers.

When we left for the summit about 2:30 in the morning, the temperature was 3° C so I used the pile jacket, warm toque and gloves I had brought. The route above the hut continues in jungle in the dark up another 270m to the beginning of the granite and the white rope. The rope runs all the way to the summit providing a useful route marker in the dark and a hand line on steep sections for the many inexperienced climbers on the route. Except for two short sections near the start, there is no exposure. In two places I pulled myself up using the rope rather than hunt for rock holds with my headlamp. Part way up the rock, the route passes the Sayat-Sayat Hut where an official checks all the climbing badges. This hut can accommodate a few additional climbers such as those arriving from the east via the lengthy Kotal route over the eastern plateau.

Beyond Sayat-Sayat is more wonderful granite. Climbing here is delightful because one can ascend with just the friction of the boots. Yet, if a handhold is needed, the rock is not unduly rough on the fingers. To our left we passed the beautifully curved rock spire Kinabalu South (3927m) that often appears in advertisements for the trip. On reaching the upper western plateau, the summit pyramid called Low's Peak (4095m), was ahead with an easy scramble to the top.

Within about a kilometer were several other pinnacles. Clockwise from the summit starting from the south are St. John's (4091m), Oyayubi Iwu (3969m), Victoria (4088m), St. Andrew's (4046m), Ugly Sister (4026m) and Donkey's Ears (4048m). All of them appeared to be feasible rock climbs and some as possible scrambles so I asked my guide about a detour, but she said we had permission for only Low's Peak. However, according to the *American Alpine Journal* for 2013, three Americans from North Face

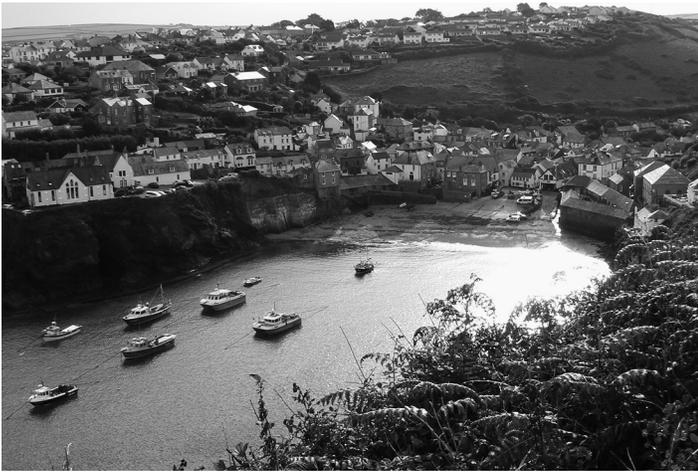
Inc. and a French woman, at the invitation of local climbers, established twenty new routes, some graded 5.13 to 5.15 and others easier, to make the mountain attractive to a wider range of visitors. Unfortunately, an official guide still will be necessary. The mountain already has what is advertised as the world's highest via ferrata, in which tourists can clip into a steel rod bolted to the rock every few meters and do spectacular traverses.

There are many other things to see in Sabah. From Sandakan, forty minutes to the east from Kota Kinabalu by plane, one can take an overnight trip to Turtle Islands Park where metre-sized green sea turtles come ashore to dig holes in the sand and lay their eggs. Rangers retrieve the eggs and incubate them protected from predators. Also near Sandakan is the Sepilok Orang Utan Rehabilitation Centre, which cares for orphans and reintroduces them into the wild. Visitors can go along a boardwalk to a feeding site in the jungle where the orang utans begin to arrive hand-over-hand along ropes between the trees five to ten minutes before the scheduled appearance of the ranger. Further from Sandakan one can visit the huge Gomantong Cave, where local climbers collect the nests of swiftlet birds to sell to China for bird-nest soup or take a boat ride on the Kinabatangan River to see monkeys and crocodiles.

Out of Kota Kinabalu there is a train trip 38km south to Papar in proper colonial style pulled by an old wood-burning locomotive. Also there is a zoo that includes some of the endangered animals of the region - the Malayan sun bear, Malayan tiger, clouded leopard, orang utan and proboscis monkey as well as birds of paradise from New Guinea.

My return from Borneo through Singapore fortunately coincided with one of the times Geoff Bennett was there. This city-state has extensive parks and areas of tropical wilderness. He took me on an evening hike 6km through the adjoining parks of the Southern Ridges on trails, on high-level walkways above the jungle, and over three modest summits, nicely complementing my visit to Sabah.

Participant: Don Morton.



Leaving Port Isaac on Day 1. (Photo: Martin Smith)



Spectacular sea stacks around Lands End on Day 10. (Photo: Martin Smith)

The Southwest Coast Path – England

Martin Smith

September 28 – October 12

The foundations of public right-of-way in the UK date from Magna Carta and probably earlier, and a thousand years has achieved nothing if not the cementing, consolidation and expansion of the rights of the citizens of this small island to enjoy all parts of it without undue let or hindrance. At the beginning of the 21st century, the UK is crisscrossed with thousands of miles of public footpaths, bridleways and tracks that are available to all for the price of a pair of good boots, raingear (don't forget that!) and a decent degree of fitness. The long-distance routes, in particular, offer superb amenities, not just in terms of the quality of the paths but also the infrastructure that has grown up around them. No leaky tents, communal showers and bad food need be endured if you don't feel that way inclined. Prepare instead to endure the rigours of privacy not privation, comfy beds not Therm-a-Rests, good not dehydrated food, and daypacks.

The Southwest Coast Path National Trail is just such a long distance route and winds around the toe of England and along the English Channel from Minehead on the Bristol Channel in Somerset, through Devon, Cornwall and Dorset to South Haven Point just south of Bournemouth; a walking distance of just over 1000 kilometres. Few tackle the route in one go. Many split it into 3, 4 or more trips over a few years. Most walk sections of it as day trips. As our inaugural foray into UK long distance hiking, we chose a 300km section of the SWCP starting in Port Isaac, facing the Atlantic and running right around the toe of the country to the vicinity of Helford on the English Channel, all within Cornwall. Hiking south, sunrise would be on our left each morning at first and on our right as we approached our finish point.

Since we'd had our fair share of big packs, bush and bad food on summer trips on the Island, we determined that a

bit of luxury was well deserved and therefore organised the pampered option. We wanted to have our gear moved for us and since this required that we knew where we'd be each night, we started off by using the SWCP's superb website (<http://www.southwestcoastpath.com/>) to split our chosen section into manageable days. We then arranged all accommodations in advance using the usual spectrum of sources. These ranged from B & B's to small hotels to pubs depending upon price, availability and gut feeling. At the time of year we were hiking, availability wasn't a problem although sometimes – weekends in particular – we had limited choice. In summer, when far more visitors are around, I would imagine that accommodation reservations would be essential and should be made months in advance rather than the couple of weeks that sufficed in our case. Our average nightly cost over 14 nights, including breakfast (as always in the UK) was £78 and included 1 "treat night" at a fancy hotel with an even fancier dinner. Having got all the accommodations sorted out, we sent our itinerary to "Luggage Transfers" (<http://www.luggagetransfers.co.uk/>) who responded almost immediately with a quote, which we subsequently haggled down to about £200 for two bags and fourteen transfers. Friends in Cornwall and Devon looked after delivering us to and picking us up from the start and end points and, apart from booking flights and trains, that was about it.

Our first day, from Port Isaac to Padstow, set the pattern for the rest of the trip. I entered "overcast, windy and occasional rain" in my journal and then stopped bothering since, apart from two days of more or less torrential rain and two more of clear skies, it was always like that. The path was beautifully made, well signed, easy to follow and seldom flat. The SWCP Trust has ensured that the route stays as close to the water as they could manage such that my GPS track at the end was an almost perfect trace of the coastline. This means lots of ups and downs such that we climbed 830m of relief on that first day and over 9,300m over the whole fifteen days – more than Everest from sea level but without exceeding 80m as our highest point. After some fairly rough going from Port Isaac to Port Quin, the path mellowed out and took us around the sea cliffs at Pen-



*Leaving Porthleven under the rainbow on Day 13.
(Photo: Ann Harwood)*



*The Lizard from Housel Bay on Day 14.
(Photo: Martin Smith)*

tire Point before descending the long stretch along Hayle Bay to Polzeath and afternoon tea. Sand dunes appeared as we entered the Camel estuary and extended all the way to Rock and the ferry across to Padstow, at most 10km by road from Port Isaac but over 22km along the coast. Our B & B was right on the town harbour and our luggage awaited us there as it did flawlessly every night.

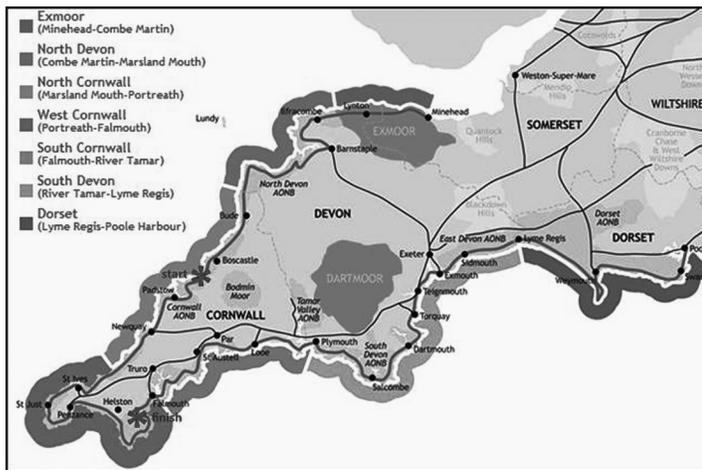
Thereafter we swung into the simple but delightful routine of the typical UK long distance hike. Day followed day and mile followed mile of incredible coastal scenery. After breakfast, packing our bags for pick up and checking out, the first order of business was to find a cafe that would charge my thermos with a latté for elevenses. Then it was time to pick up the path on the way out of wherever we were and spend the next 6 - 8 hours enjoying a never ending succession of stunning vistas of coves, sea caves, cliffs, moorland and more. The beauty of visiting a place this way is the gradualness with which everything unfolds in front of you and recedes behind you. Every day required a minimum of 500m climbing and sometimes much more. We took no rest days but did enjoy a couple of easy 10 - 15km days in the Land's End area. On average we walked just over 20km per day. Over the fifteen days we met no other through hikers but quite a few who would base at a particular point and hike a day in each direction, taking the bus back each evening. The only time we resorted to anything other than shanks' pony was between Hayle and St Ives on the north coast when we took the train 10km into St Ives to avoid what otherwise is strictly an urban road walk.

Amenities available to the hiker are quite superb. Yet another idyllic fishing village, pub or cafe always seemed to pop up at the right time for coffee, tea, lunch or just the toilet. And the accommodation standards are simply outstanding. Competition ensures that rooms are comfortable and well equipped, showers work and the food is wonderful. Gone, it seems, are the terrifying seaside landladies of my youth immortalised forever by Bill Bryson in the horrifying persona of "Mrs Smegma" in "Notes from a Small Island" – although our B & B in Newquay ran pretty close when I received a death stare after daring to ask for butter with my toast.

A day by day account of our travels is certainly too much to report here. And I must confess that even at the time, absorbing so much sensory input became difficult. Day merged with day and stunning view with stunning view. There was lots of work involved in crossing innumerable river valleys but also, particularly on the north coast, long miles of mostly flat cliff top or completely flat beach to enjoy. Lighthouses and daymarks came and went, as did military areas and, once south of Perranporth, the ruins of the old Cornish mines that have been worked since before Roman times. In between all the coastal splendour were several large towns; notably Newquay, St Ives and Penzance, as well as many smaller ones. It felt funny but oddly satisfying to walk into and out of a major urban centre.

An hour or two into our second day we passed the lovely Trevoze Head lighthouse. Five days later, from a point just south of St Ives, we could quite clearly see Trevoze Head if not the light itself. Another day on, at Pendeen Watch, the route finally began to turn due south for the first time as it heads round into the Channel. From this point we would finally lose our views of the north coast. There is a lighthouse at Pendeen Watch too, and the light keepers there will tell you that the light at Trevoze can be seen from Pendeen but only at low tide since, respective to each other, the two lights are otherwise obscured by the curvature of the Earth. What a wonderfully satisfying feeling to know that we had walked over the horizon with still half of our trip before us!

Eventually the golden granite cliffs of Land's End gave way to the urban sprawl of Mount's Bay with the windswept Lizard Peninsula beyond and the beginning of the end of our journey. Our last day involved the only time when access issues have meant that the path diverted substantially from the coast. It meant, at least, that we got to hike at least a few of those famous sunken Cornish lanes. Finally, as the Helford estuary came into view, we left the official path at the Gillan River crossing and walked up to the pub at Manaccan where our friends were waiting, pints in hand.



Map of the SWCP and the part of route we covered.

This trip was about as far removed as it can get from our usual Island activities. Yet it made a wonderful change and certainly offered lots of challenge to go along with all those creature comforts. I cannot recommend it highly enough. We'll certainly be going back for the remaining 700km.

Participants: Ann Harwood and Martin Smith.

Aconcagua – Argentina

Kevin Gourlay and Clarke Gourlay
December 1 – 26

Actually, it took the whole year to climb Aconcagua. While we were only twelve days on the mountain itself, it seems the summit was the culmination of a year's focus and determination. Let me explain.

It began, of course, with research. Lots and lots of reading! Even some limited first-hand interviews with previous climbers (most notably, and very encouraging, with Charles Turner). There is a lot of material out there and lots of alternatives on the mountain itself, so research is a really important phase.

Planning comes next and flows pretty much seamlessly from research. Given the options and the ultimate summit goal, how are we going to climb the mountain? Fairly early on we began to focus on two guiding ideas: traverse and unsupported. If there are ~4,000 people who attempt the mountain every year and ~2,000 who summit, how can we make our trip somewhat unique? We grabbed hold of these two ideas and while of course not altogether unique, they added a certain amount of edge to an already challenging climb.

While perhaps self-explanatory, let me describe some of the implications of these two decisions:

1. Traverse meant that we got to experience two sides of

the mountain and two different routes. I strongly recommend a traverse to other aspiring climbers. Each of the main routes is beautiful, interesting and different, and each is definitely worth seeing. We went in through the Vacas Valley (longer, a bit harder, much less busy and better/longer for acclimatization) and came out through the Horcones Valley (faster on our way down and no longer needed to acclimatize). The down side of a traverse of course is that you need to carry all your food/gear all the way to high camp rather than caching stuff along the way. It's worth it.

2. Unsupported takes more explaining. There is a wonderful list of support options on Aconcagua so that it's possible to tailor a climb to almost any energetic perspective.

a. Most basic is mule support to base camps. We didn't meet a single other party who did not take advantage of this service and indeed we often looked longingly at the mules as we slugged it in for 47km over three days with very heavy packs. We were partly inspired by our reading on alpinism to try a light and fast approach, but it is hard to even use the word alpinism when your packs start off at over 65lbs each! The sheer size/height/remoteness of the mountain requires the gear and food/gas. We sure tried hard to minimize.

One of the most significant things we did to minimize weight on Aconcagua was to spend seven days acclimatizing on and climbing Vellecitos (pronounced "Bazasito") immediately beforehand. A 5475m peak that is quite a popular Argentine destination, Bazasito is a wonderful trekking area in its own right. This was a great hike, much more interesting than doing double carries on Aconcagua and allowed us to test out all our stuff in a real world high altitude blizzard before arriving on our main goal. It also meant that we had 5 - 6 days less stuff to carry on Aconcagua and actually got to shower in between mountains!

b. Guide services are another "support" we chose to eschew. Available in a wide range from independent private guides to international guide companies with large groups, they really do offer a good variety of friendly support as well as often a nice international group with whom to share the experience. Of course our own "unsupported" trip included many visits with such groups. We even bounced our ideas and schedule off of more experienced local guides, porters, park wardens, base camp doctors, etc. So while we stuck pretty much to our well-researched plan, we certainly made space for and appreciated not just the social interaction of the bigger groups, but also the timely advice that they shared.

With these large groups moving through, was the mountain crowded? Well yes and no. We were on our own most of every day, as well as three nights alone (including our high camp) and had only one night at a camp that was unpleasantly crowded (Confluencia, the last camp before the trailhead on the busy side of the mountain). Mind you, we started our trek in the shoulder season and went in on the quiet side of the mountain – it is possible to avoid the



Kevin and Clarke from Camp Canada with Aconcagua North Face behind.

crowds with a bit of planning.

The two base camps we visited were another thing, especially Plaza de Mulass on the “Normal Route” (our way out). These are set up as luxury acclimatization stops for the larger groups and were bigger and more crowded than we cared to deal with. So a quick check in with the doctor and park ranger and one overnight in both directions and we were done with base camps. Oh, we did get a restaurant meal in each direction, which does not sound very much “unsupported” and was truthfully a delightful exception to our otherwise Spartan ways. And we actually did carry the replacement meals with us all the way through the hike and back out at the end. Again it was worth it. The temptation of standing upright in a warm tent and enjoying a real meal (vs. something out of a bag) prepared by someone else, at a proper table and chair, was simply more than we could withstand at the time!

c. Did I mention porter support? Mostly Argentine college students training to be mountain guides, these young people raced all over the mountain. And maybe it was because we were there early in the season, but they actually looked like they were having fun. While we were carrying every bit as much as they were, they certainly moved much faster over much longer distances than we did. The only other people to summit the day we did were a group of three young Argentine porters who had left base camp with light packs on their day off and hiked easily twice as far (vertically and horizontally) as we did to meet us at the top. They do provide a nice support for those who choose, and they were certainly kept busy.

The net result of all of the above for us was a somewhat-more-rapid ascent. In the end we did no cache-and-carries (standard practice for Aconcagua), and had only one rest day on the mountain. Our seventh-day-rest seemed not only appropriate from a biblical perspective, but by that time our bodies were starting to complain and we were ideally situated at high camp minus 1 (5500m). We spent the day lying in the sun wearing parkas reading a novel to each other. Glorious!

I say a somewhat-more-rapid ascent because that’s counting reduced days on the mountain. Our daily slog up the hill was almost always slower than anticipated and seemed painfully slow as we were doing it. But then why rush, we asked ourselves. It’s not like we had a full agenda at that night’s camp. Most days we ended up hiking for 4 - 6 hours and climbing anywhere from 500 – 1000m. Slow and trying to be steady. Every day was sunny and warmish (hot at lower altitudes). As long as we had our camp established before the sun disappeared behind the surrounding peaks, we were good inside our tent until it reappeared the next morning.

Summit day was long and tough. We awoke at 4:30 a.m. and were off at the crack of 5:15. Despite the multiple layers on all parts of our bodies, it was cold! My wife, watching the weather reports at home, reports a -30°C start to the day. Three hours later as the sun came up we were finally warmed and even enjoyed a few hours of unzipped jackets. Sadly it clouded over about an hour before the top and so our summit views were slightly myopic, but considering the horror stories we have heard about high altitude weather in the Andes we still consider ourselves fortunate. From high camp (Camp Colera) to the summit took 8.5 hours up and 4.5 back down again to a very welcome rest. Sadly somehow on the way back down we lost our camera. Argh! We have our digital tracks (both SPOT and GPS) to the summit, but for the summit photos all we have is great memories. Too bad!

Father and son to 6962m (the highest point outside the Himalayas). It was a worthwhile adventure. It was fun. They are good memories! What next?

Anyone contemplating attempting Aconcagua is most welcome to contact us with questions or simply to chat about the mountain and all the many options available: 250-954-3941 or clarke@cheeseworks.ca.

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Participants: Kevin Gourlay (age 17), Clarke Gourlay (old enough to know better).

The Kokoda Track – Papua New Guinea

Graham Maddocks
October 21 – 31, 2012

The Kokoda Track runs from Kokoda, a bush airstrip in the Owen Stanley Range, crossing the spine of Papua New Guinea to Owens Corner, the end of the road from and within sight of, the capital Port Moresby. It is a tough jungle trek, either steeply climbing or descending in liquid mud; heavy rain can cause flooded rivers and mosquito laden swamps, making 9 days of hard going. Why would you do it? The purpose is not to enjoy a jungle trek. There are plenty of those, the purpose is to pit yourself against the elements and terrain, and this has become something of a ritual for Australians.

The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941, and were at war with the Allies, including Australia, almost immediately thereafter. The Japanese army swept through South East Asia attacking country after country, including Hong Kong and Singapore. The attempted invasion of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea was prevented by the US Navy aircraft carriers in the battle of the Coral Sea. By late July 1942, the initial wave of 13,000 Japanese soldiers landed on the north coast of Papua New Guinea and set off south along a jungle track that passed through the tiny outpost of Kokoda before coming out near Port Moresby, which it was their intention to occupy. The Australian military and political leadership was alarmed at the possibility that, if successful, the Japanese would be able to use Port Moresby as a base from which to launch south, landing in Queensland, Australia. However, in the first instance only 400 inexperienced militia soldiers could be mustered to stop the Japanese invaders, or at least hold them up long enough that the more experienced Australians, veterans of the Australian Imperial Force who had seen action in North Africa, could get there.

The legend of the Kokoda Track, concerns first the story of what happened when these two forces met in the middle at a place called Isurava, and then the subsequent actions up and down the length of the track. The fighting at Isurava was savage, and through sheer weight of numbers and suicidal courage, the Japanese finally prevailed. In doing so, they used up much of their fighting force. The Japanese soldiers pressed on down the track, being ambushed all the way by the Australians who set out to weaken them further. It was at Ioribaiwa ridge, within sight of Port Moresby, that the Australians made their final stand and the exhausted Japanese retreated back down the Kokoda Track. The Australians were able to pursue them all the way to where they had first landed. More bitter fighting ensued as the Japanese dug in with fresh reinforcements, but with the help of newly arrived American forces, it was over on 22nd January 1943. That was the day the last Japanese resistance was wiped out at the head of the track, and the Australian flag

was raised.

In the course of the previous six months in New Guinea, Australia lost 2165 troops. The United States, which had come into the action late in the fighting, lost 671 troops. It was the Japanese, with military officers indifferent to their soldiers' lives, who suffered the most. Some 20,000 Japanese troops landed on the north coast of Papua New Guinea to advance down the Kokoda Track to Port Moresby, of which it is estimated 13,000 were lost. The formal surrender of all Japanese forces in Papua New Guinea took place at Wewak on the north coast on 13th September 1945. Of 100,000 men landed only 13,000 survived to surrender.

In recent times, interest in Kokoda has surged, as Australians have learnt more about what occurred. It is a compelling, extraordinary story and it makes Australians proud. Paul Keating, the Australian Prime Minister, visited Kokoda in 1992 to pay tribute. It was a symbol of the fact that Australia was finally recognizing what had been achieved at this place. Mr Keating said, "here the Australian soldiers were not fighting for Empire, they were fighting not in defence of the Old World but the New World, their world, they fought for their own values." Which is why, he explained, "for Australians, the battles in Papua New Guinea were the most important ever fought."

For Australians, walking in the Diggers' footsteps is part pilgrimage, part opportunity to pay homage to the soldiers of WW2 and part extraordinary challenge. It is not for the faint-hearted. The steep slippery terrain has more mud than you have seen in the rest of your life put together. The environment is extremely humid with plenty of heavy tropical rain, malarial and potentially dangerous. Local guides are needed, and porters to carry food.

The trekking company who had contracted out to an Australian marketing company was completely local from the villages along the track. These people are the descendants of the carriers who the Australian troops called "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels". They were genuinely proud of their families' role in the battle for the track. My porter's father was also a porter for our group; he was 58 years old and built like a fireplug. In Manari village, I was introduced to his father who said he was 97 years old and was obviously very aged. He told me he was a "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel" who had carried ammunition forward to the Australian positions and the casualties back, and had been given a medal by the Australian Government. He showed me several cap badges of Australian wartime regiments that he had been given after the war. The evacuation of the Australian wounded was a nightmare. They had to be carried back down the track to Port Moresby's harbour, where transport ships to Australia had been sunk by Japanese bombing. On the track a large flat rock was pointed out as an operating table used by Australian medics. This was supported by plaques attached to surrounding rocks by the families of soldiers who had died of their wounds on this rock. This wartime bond, forged between the Papuans and the Australians, has been repaid by the Australian government who have invested in

economic development, education and health care in New Guinea.

The track is still strewn with the debris of the battle, and every year villagers clearing the jungle for their garden plots find more. Every village had a pile of live artillery rounds, live mortar bombs, grenades, rusted out Japanese machine guns and mortars. Rusted Australian Bren light machine guns, rifles, ammunition and bayonets were displayed along the way. A villager showed me several loaded 50 round drum magazines for a Thompson sub-machine gun. After climbing Mount Bellamy at 2200m, we went to several lookouts where the Japanese had set up mountain artillery guns to shell the Australian positions. There were piles of spent and live artillery rounds and I photographed the Japanese markings on these live shells that had been lying in the jungle for 70 years. In the bunkers and trenches, dug by the Japanese, were rusted-out helmets and even the remains of leather boots. Given the conditions on the track, the weight of the mountain artillery guns and heavy machine guns defied belief that they were carried in by human power. Both sides used native porters to carry munitions forward, but the brutality displayed by the Japanese toward their slave labour caused them to desert when they were most needed, and the retreating Japanese were weakened by starvation. The Australians paid their native carriers, fed them and were heavily reliant on them at all stages of the battle. Malaria took a toll of both sides.

After flying in to Kokoda village, we started trekking back to Port Moresby. At Isurava there is an Australian war memorial consisting of four large stone pillars, cut in Australia and flown in by helicopter. On each pillar is carved one word, the four pillars are carved with COURAGE-ENDURANCE-MATESHIP-SACRIFICE. One of the group of nine Australians had these words tattooed on his forearms for the trek. Also at Isurava is a memorial to Private Kingsbury, a 24 year old real estate agent from Victoria, New South Wales, awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his courage in holding off the onslaught of invading Japanese with his Bren gun to give the retreating Australian troops enough time to escape from total annihilation.

The food supplied by the trekking company was pretty bad, nutrient-free pasta, rice and noodles with Spam every day. I expect this on an Arctic trek, but we were passing the villagers' gardens out in the middle of nowhere. The people are expert gardeners and site their plots where the sun strikes and growing conditions are best. They produce sweet potatoes, yams, pumpkin, taro, sago, cassava, beans and superb pineapples and bananas, in gardens surrounded by strong flexible fences to keep out rooting wild pigs. I pointed out to the local head guide the absurdity of paying air freight and hiring food porters to carry what can be purchased on the track, giving the villagers some income and the trekkers some nutrition. He told me that the Australian marketing company insist they provide sterile supermarket food so no one gets sick from eating local produce. This ludicrous attitude towards nutrition in the developed world is probably the source of our many ills.



*Mountain village on the Kokoda Track.
(Photo: Graham Maddocks)*

The pineapples and bananas I purchased along the route were the best I had ever eaten, organically grown and ripened in the hot tropical sun. I gave my Spam ration to the porters who wolfed it down with relish. I have an interest in anthropology and I believe the Papuans love of Spam may be related to the long history of cannibalism in New Guinea, Spam does taste kind of corpsey, like long pig.

Our evening camps were spent in the villages along the route - situated on high ridges, which are windswept and free of the malarial mosquitoes in the valley bottoms. It was a pleasant end to every day to wash off the mud in the mountain rivers. My Australian companions often refused to go in saying the water was too cold, but given the normal water temperature at an ACC camp, it seemed tepid to me, and I sat in for a long time to get my core body temperature down before sleeping on the bamboo hut floor. But every day we would have to descend and face the swampy lowlands. After a night of heavy rain, the Brown River was a swollen raging torrent and seemed impassable. A powerful young Australian said he would swim the river with a rope, which he did, starting high up the stream and being swept downstream before reaching the other bank. We then swam and waded in the warm raging river with the support of the rope.

The local trekking company called themselves Brigade Hill Tours, and we had a silent, thoughtful climb up the steep slippery slope of Brigade Hill, passing Australian foxholes still visible on either side of the track. On the hilltop is a memorial marker to the 75 Australian soldiers who were killed in the battle for the hill. We crossed Iora Creek at Templeton's crossing, the site of fierce fighting during the Japanese advance and retreat, and slept on a raised bamboo platform with a pile of live mortar bombs and grenades outside. I poked around in the dense surrounding bush and found the tripod for a Japanese heavy machine gun. Australian soldiers killed in the battles were buried here and the iron rods marking their graves remain. After the war the bodies were removed to Bomana War Cemetery outside Port Moresby, which I later visited.

among church members, since the numbers of that day also identify the son of Satan, the "Beast" from the book of Revelation. On that Tuesday, many people around the world believed they would wake up to a calendar number date that had been one of dread and apocalyptic connotation since it first appeared in the beginning centuries of the Common Era. Written as a visionary message in the Christian biblical text known as the Book of Revelation, the number 666 was originally meant to refer to Satan and the dark side, or underworld.

Those superstitious types who freaked out when the calendar read 06/06/06 had something to smile about on July 7, 2007 (07/07/07). Believing the triple appearance of the number 7 would bring luck, many people were planning important events for that first Saturday in July. Brides and grooms, especially, looking for a little extra dose of marital fortune, flocked to the altar in droves.

September 9, 2009 (09/09/09) was also believed to be particularly lucky by many. It represented the last set of repeating, single-digit dates. The number nine holds a special rank in some cultures. It is associated with forgiveness, compassion and success on the positive side, as well as arrogance and self-righteousness on the negative. The date of October 10, 2010 (10/10/10) became a widely popular date to get married because it only consists of the number ten. It was even more significant that the date 10/10/10 at 10:10 a.m. or 10:10 p.m. to be a very lucky time. One reason for this comes from the story of George Inmad, who had been deaf since birth. On 10/10/1910 at 10:10 p.m. he suddenly was able to hear with no explanation from the doctors. It was a medical mystery and the only conclusion they had was that he was very lucky. From then on, it was believed that you would have good luck if you touched your ears at 10:10 a.m. or p.m.

The year 2011 was interesting because it had the three repeating dates: January 11, 2011 (1/11/11), November 1, 2011 (11/1/11) and November 11, 2011 (11/11/11). These dates only consist of the number one.

Unlike other unusual sequence number dates, December 12, 2012 (12/12/12) was replete with historical references indicating that something bad would happen. The number 12 has many times been interpreted as a warning from our past to our future. Between those who studied the Mayan calendar and the astronomical events of this time period, doomsday predictions abounded and many believed the world would come to an end. There was no scientific basis for these beliefs and there were presumably no known logical premises either. Fortunately, we now know that the world didn't end and I for one breathed a huge sigh of relief. However, this year the date 13/13/13 would appear. Don't mock me! There are several calendars which actually DO have 13 months, among them the Muslim, Jewish and Chinese calendars, each of which are lunar-solar calendars. The ancient Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar in which a 13th month occurs every few years. Even secularists can count 13 new moons every 365-day year. This is why new

moons are never at the same time of the "month," and why Jewish holidays never fall on the same day of the week.

I am not of the Muslim, Chinese or Jewish faith and therefore have not lived by their calendars; however, when I saw that the number 13 would be repeating this year, I was both excited and apprehensive. I thought, here is my chance to prove that the number 13 is not unlucky. I wanted to attempt one more time, an unnamed, unclimbed pinnacle on a ridge just north of a peak I had soloed several times. I was going to do it without the help of prognosticators such as Paul the Octopus, Miss Cleo, Nostradamus and Punxutawney Phil.

My first attempt was on July 7, 2007. I was seeking my own good luck from that date. It was early in the wee hours of the morning; it was dark out, the stars were twinkling overhead and the vermilion dawn was still a few hours away. The local neighborhood roads were quiet, but as I turned the corner onto the highway connector, the lights of another vehicle temporarily blinded me. My foot came off the accelerator and I could feel the car slow. Without any warning, the car advancing towards me braked and went into a sideways skid. I panicked and slammed on my brakes and just as I did so I saw a cat, a black cat, sprint across the road in front of me. As I came to a stop, the other vehicle straightened out and continued by me. In the blink of an eye my nerves were shattered and I couldn't believe that I had narrowly missed death. The sight of the black cat running across the road in front of me was a warning, a harbinger of things to come. I didn't need any further convincing; I turned around and drove straight home. Thus ended my first attempt, if that is what you want to call it.

My second attempt was on another auspicious date October 10, 2010. I left my vehicle at the end of an old logging road and began ascending the slash into the old growth forest which I needed to climb through to get to a hanging valley below the peak. Gently cascading down the middle of the hanging valley was a beautiful stream which gradually became a jumbled rock garden as the walls of the valley narrowed. The rocks were slippery, but I was totally focused on not falling or injuring myself. Safety first, not first aid!

Threatening clouds overhead were beginning to darken the sky, and I began to wonder if I would have time to get to the top and down before it changed. A few minutes passed, then all of a sudden there was a loud crash of thunder, which startled the bejesus out of me, and a bright flash of light. I felt like I was standing on the filament of a light-bulb that was about to explode! What had I done to cause this? Then out of the corner of my eye I saw a tree begin to move, slowly at first then faster. It was not a big tree, but it wasn't a sapling either. I turned to run and as I did I heard Bruce Coburn's song playing in my head "If a tree falls in a forest does anybody hear." The last thing I remember was "yes someone does" and then I blacked out.

It was not long before I came to and I found myself lying next to a tree, the very tree that I had seen falling. As I

lay there I tried to figure out where I hurt and what was broken, as I must have been hit by the falling tree. I felt surprisingly fine, but when I looked at my pack I saw it had been torn from my back and was lying crushed under the arboreal victim. The tree had torn the pack off my shoulders and all I had received was a small bump on my head as I'd gone down and hit one of the limbs. I picked myself up and did a quick assessment for any other injuries, but couldn't find any. I extracted what was left of my pack and its belongings from under the tree, put it on, curled my tail between my legs and bee-lined it back down to my vehicle. As I reflected on what had happened I became upset and started cursing everyone who had something to do with this trip: the automobile industry for my car, the outdoor manufactures of the equipment I was carrying, the logging company that built the road, and God, Buddha, Muhammad or whoever was responsible for creating this planet. What happened to my Karmic debt? I was angry! I wanted this first ascent, before someone beat me to it.

December 12, 2012 wasn't going to be a good date to attempt the peak, with all the soothsayers predicting doom and gloom. Besides, what would be the point if the world was coming to an end? If I wanted to climb this peak on an auspicious date, I had one chance left – 13/13/13. My pessimism turned to optimism and I could feel a smile returning to my face. As the day approached, I carefully packed my gear and checked the weather forecast. I saw that the high pressure system appeared stable for a while longer. The stars were aligning!

Just after midnight on the morning of the 13th I brewed a heavenly demitasse of java and then carried my pack out to the car using only my headlamp - I didn't want to turn on the outside lights, as I felt this might invoke some unknown form of bad luck. The noir sky was illuminated by billions and billions of effervescing stars that hypnotized my senses as I drove out of town and on towards the mountains.

At the trailhead, dawn was still just a glimmer in Mother Earth's eye, but with the track on my GPS from the last attempt I was able to reach my previous highpoint just as the sun nosed over the horizon; white light converging through prisms of dew hanging off the bushes, flashing rays of crimson, orange and violet. What a beautiful world! How could anyone ever believe that there was something sinister about the number 13?

At the end of the hanging valley there was a short overhanging wall with a whispering waterfall billowing in the breeze. A fallen tree had wedged between a fin of rock and the wall, and I was able to shimmy up it to a crack that I could hand-jam to the top. I was now above the tree-line, where I could see the vast talus slope I had to traverse to reach the base of the hidden pinnacle that was the focus of my attention. I had caught a fleeting glimpse of the fingerling pinnacle when I had descended the wrong route off the main summit many years ago. Although it was probably no more than 80m from the base to the top, I was smitten by the kitten.

As I gamboled across the talus slopes I could feel my pulse quicken, a sure sign the endorphins were flowing through my veins. This was a feeling I often experienced in the mountains, and one that carried over into the pub at the end of the day, but not to the bottom of my glass. The complex bulk of the main peak was above me, with the rock echoing the calls of past climbers; the history of whom I had recorded.

Crossing the talus slope was time consuming! The old proverb says take two steps forward and fall one back. But perseverance is the stubborn tenacity of a climber. Eventually I rounded the buttress that was hiding the pinnacle. In another 15 minutes I would glimpse the rock, and then a sequence of moves up a narrow gully would put me in the notch below the final wall. The rock was warm and the feeling in my fingers was exquisite as my hands moved over the nubbins and nodules of the granite.

Sitting in the notch I looked up at the final 80 metres. All of a sudden, reality set in as I took in the situation: I was alone on a rock wall, I had no beta, and I didn't know if the route was feasible or not. At home I had laid out all my gear on the living room floor and carefully scrutinized everything, making sure all the slings were good, that there was no fraying of the rope, and there were no cracks or faults in the carabiners. The cams and nuts were all new - they had been a Christmas present from my last girlfriend. (She eventually left me because she thought I had OCD.)

I closed my eyes for a few minutes to focus my energy, and then took a deep breath. When I opened my eyes, the crack in front of me was in sharp relief. I found the mid-point of the rope and tied it to the back of my harness – it was there in case I couldn't move forward any further and needed to rappel off a piece of pro. I started moving up, caressing the rock as though it was a virgin. I didn't want to scare her! I could feel confidence skulking through my veins.

The first 30 metres were easy and I was able to hand-jam up the crack, but then the crack narrowed and swung around to the left – the exposure became such that I wanted the security of a piece of protection. I reached up as high as I could and slipped in a cam, then clipped the long sling into the carabiner on my harness. This gave me the confidence to move out over the gaping void. As the cam became level with my harness, I reached up with another cam and placed it as high as I could and unclipped the one below. Using this technique I gradually moved up the steepening wall. There appeared to be about 10 metres left to the top.

I began making the final moves! I reached up as high as I could and placed a #3 cam into the crack. I gave it a couple of tugs and it appeared solid. I then weighted it and reached down to take the cam below me out. I was hanging almost up-side-down when the cam above released and I took a winger. As I came onto the cam below I was whipped

around and my face whacked into the rock. Then I came to a stop. My helmet had obviously protected my head from any serious injury, but it just happened that there was a nubbin of rock sticking out just where my cheek landed. My hand automatically went to my cheek and I could feel a gash and blood trickling down. I had the wherewithal to know that I didn't need to worry about gripping the rock, as the lower cam had held; however. I did a quick visual check of the cam before I focused on trying to arrest the bleeding and patch myself up – well, as best I could in the situation I was in.

It took about 10 minutes to patch up the damage, but I could still taste the blood in my mouth from the puncture wound. My pulse had also returned to normal, but I could still feel adrenaline as I began the move up over the spot where I had taken the fall. I looked again at the crack and placed the cam a little higher – it held this time. I made a couple of easy moves and then my hand curled over the top. I couldn't feel anything above it. As my eyes moved up level with the summit I could see there was room for me to sit on top. The nervousness I was feeling disappeared as I realized I had done it. I looked around and all I could see was space. My space! I sucked in a deep breath of air. My air! There was nothing here that wasn't mine! This was the most wonderful feeling I had ever experienced. I looked at my watch and saw it was 1:13 p.m. (13:13 in military hours). How auspicious was that!

I sat up there for – you guessed it, 13 minutes. Thirteen minutes of pure bliss, before it was time to descend. A climb isn't over once you get to the top, as you still have to get down. Ed Viesters put it succinctly: "Getting to the top is optional, but getting down is mandatory." I looked over the edge and saw how far around the tower I had traversed from the notch. The rappels wouldn't be straight down as I had hoped. I found a horn of rock and draped a sling over it making sure that the water knot was secure, then clipped on a carabiner. The sling was long enough to hang over the edge so that when I began the rappel, I could see the rope passing through the 'biner. I tied a knot in the end of the rope, threw it over the edge and clipped my figure 8 device onto the rope. I again checked that the 'biner gate had been locked!

I climbed over the edge and placed my foot in the crack and then weighted the figure 8. Suddenly I hear a buzzing sound. I look down and see a couple of bees come out of the crack where my foot is placed. Panic rises inside of me. I don't need this. I am allergic to bees and I don't have my EpiPen with me. In my head I hear the scream – go! Get the hell out of here! I release my grip on the rope and begin the descent. Slow at first but then my speed increases. I want to get away from the bees as fast as I can. My mind doesn't register that the crack I climbed has angled off to my right until I finally come to a stop at the knot after rappelling 30 metres. The wall is blank and there is no crack or fissure to put in a piece of pro. Shit! Shit! Shit! I had freaked-out above when I should have stayed focused. Below me, the vertical rock-wall falls away farther than I would

like it to. My anxiety goes up a couple of notches, and the elation I felt on top has gone! I look at the taut rope in front of me and see I had forgotten to attach any prusiks, in case I needed to arrest the rappel. I then looked up to see if I could pendulum across to the crack, but see a sharp edge on the rock over which the rope is passing. Shit! Shit! Shit! Again! Anxiety level – heightens further! What happened to the bliss I was experiencing a few minutes ago?

I look at the knot at the end of the rope that the figure 8 has come to rest against. At least that is not going to come undone, and the figure 8 isn't going to pass over it. I did something right! Okay, so I have to take my pack off and get a couple of slings out to make a prusik to ascend the rope until I can at least reach the crack. I pass one of the straps off my shoulder and carefully transfer the pack around to the other shoulder. I bring it around in front of me and rest it on a knee between the rock and myself. Just then one of the bees comes buzzing around my head. I let go of the pack, thinking it is balanced on my knee and swat at the bee. Got it! Then the unthinkable happens – the pack topples off my knee and drops into the abyss below with the dead bee pirouetting down behind it. I close my eyes and want to cry. Thirteen, f**ken thirteen! I'm sure that's how many seconds the packs free falls before it hits the talus slope below. I want to scream and yell for help, but who is going to hear me? My head drops and I lean against the rock. It feels warm and smooth, a false comfort! Time goes by and numbness permeates my body. I shake my head without opening my eyes. Overhead a raven is calling to me, he knows my predicament, as he has been watching: "Let go. Fly like me!" I see the same evil glint in this raven's eye as I did in E.A. Poe's raven as it perched on a bust of Pallas above the door. I reach down and open the cargo pocket of my pants. I feel the Swiss army knife and roll it around in my fingers. I know the blade is sharp, as I honed it to a razor's edge just before the trip.

I let it go and take hold of something else. I pull it out and with reluctance push the SOS button!

as new editions were printed.

In the 1970's Syd met John Gibson, a like-minded explorer, and together they climbed many north Island peaks, including several first ascents such as Mount Abel, Watchtower Peak, Mount Ashwood and Bonanza Peak.

On one of their week-long mountain trips Syd and Emily, along with Jack Shark, first climbed a mountain on the east side of Buttle Lake that became known as Syd Watts Peak. In 2010, Syd was fortunate to see this mountain officially recognized by that name and fittingly it is just above a lake named for his long-time environmental friend Ruth Masters.

However, mountaineering was just one of Syd's passions; he was a keen birder, a long time member of the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, the Somenos Marsh Society and the Friends of Strathcona Park, and an advocate for wilderness and ecological reserves. In 1984, Syd and Emily were instrumental in having part of Mount Tzouhalem's Garry Oak ecosystem set aside as an Ecological Reserve. Since then Syd has been the warden, or as some say the "eyes" of the reserve, visiting it at least twice a week. In 2007, Environment Minister Barry Penner recognized Syd Watts' devotion and presented him with the Volunteer of the Year Award for his long-term contributions to Strathcona Provincial Park and the Mount Tzouhalem Ecological Reserve. Sadly, Emily was not alive to share Syd's recognition, but her name is forever linked with Syd's in the preservation of the Mount Tzouhalem Ecological Reserve.

Syd made many presentations at public meetings to save his beloved special areas, and was always willing to share his wide naturalist knowledge. In 2008, a board walk at Somenos Marsh was named Watts Walk to commemorate Syd and Emily's work in preserving the Marsh.

Syd's last (physical) smile was when he heard the news that some of the reintroduced bluebird eggs were hatching in the bird-boxes on Mount Tzouhalem. On the evening of May 25, 2013, surrounded by a few close friends, Syd got up and walked down the trail for the last time. He left behind his trapper-nelson pack, his wooden ice-axes, leather boots and old binoculars, but also many wonderful memories. As he walked down the trail towards Emily (probably with a smile as wide as the island) one of his favourite songs - the Happy Wanderer - could be heard playing in the breeze.

Lindsay Elms



Charles Henry Turner **May 20, 1950 – August 16, 2013**

It is with great sadness that the section learned of the untimely passing of Charles, when the floatplane he was in struck a tree and crashed on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. The five-person party, which included other ACC VI members, was returning from a multi-day hiking trip of the Hesquiat Peninsula. The pilot, a very experienced flyer, also died in the accident.

Charles was born in the UK, and moved to Canada after much travelling in Europe and Africa. As a young immigrant he put his hand at many things, and living the life of a happy-go-lucky lad, with so much freedom and so many opportunities presented by his newly adopted country. From Toronto to Whitehorse he worked and experienced the vastness of his new home.

After he joined the ACC VI section in 1991, it was a measure of his energy level that it took him just two short years to knock off all nine of the section's "Island Qualifier" (IQ) summits on Vancouver Island. Since the start of the IQ award program in 1987, only six people had achieved that before him. In similar manner, as a member of the Island

Mountain Ramblers, he swiftly demolished their twenty peaks, the “Lifetime Climbing Objectives”. Searching for new goals, he then ticked off all forty-six peaks over 6,000ft on Vancouver Island.

That level of passion for the outdoors, combined with a willingness to endure bad bush, non-existent trails, and sometimes questionable rock, allowed him to rack up a long list of Island summits over the ensuing decades. His alpine interests also spread to more distant ranges, in Nepal, Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Patagonia, Kenya, Uganda, and beyond. He was always planning another adventure and he instilled that love of the outdoors in his two children Joe and Maddy as they grew up.

On a rope, he was always dependable. On snow he had great skills, and on skis he was a dream to watch. Charles kept his humour when vehicles broke down, when the wind snapped tent poles, and when the promised powder turned to crud. And when the clouds parted, he revelled in sunshine and never missed a chance to bare his bronzed chest to the blue sky.

As an ACC member, he also gave back – he led many trips, assisted in numerous workshops, and for many years taught the telemark ski clinic at Mount Washington, where his graceful style was the envy of all. He served on Mount Washington’s Nordic Ski Patrol for twenty years.

Recently he spent five months in Uganda working under difficult conditions on a project at the Mengo Hospital, Kampala. His patience with the local craftsmen, and his realization that it was not enough merely to complete the construction but also to teach the locals how to do it, was a lesson to all who worked alongside him. He was highly regarded by the Ugandan trades. There were long, laughing chats held with young locals who came to seek his company. They soaked up his skills with timber and tools, as they toiled together under a blazing sun or the frequent drenching rains. He was a source of new ways of thinking for them.

Being so active in the mountains, he climbed with almost everyone in the section. The turnout at his memorial in Co-mox was a testament to the many, many trips he had done, and the companions from those trips who had become friends. His quiet voice and solid experience, and his rope and axe skills, were highly regarded. As Catrin Brown said at his memorial, “Few people said more than Charles, in so few words.” He was an anchor when things were going badly, and he seldom lost his cool, or showed fear. He will be greatly missed by many, and leaves a big gap in the energy and experience of the ACC.

So let us remember him for all of the talents that were his. Remember him for those flashy gold fleeces and shells that he wore, that looked so good in photos. Remember him for his grace on skis, cutting perfect Ss down steep slopes. Where others cut Zs or fell, he swooped with ease. Re-

member him for his gentleness, his softly spoken words, his kindness to others with a gentle reassurance when things weren’t going well. Remember him for his silver spandex tights, worn weekly to his yoga class. Remember him for his drive and passion to get into the wild places of this world, where his soul was truly free. Remember Charles Henry Turner.

Rick Hudson

