

*The Alpine Club of Canada • Vancouver Island Section*

# *ISLAND BUSHWHACKER*

## *2014 ANNUAL*



THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA  
VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

**ISLAND  
BUSHWHACKER  
ANNUAL**

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**VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION  
OF  
THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA**



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## Contents

<b>Report from the Chair</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>VANCOUVER ISLAND</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Trek to the Snows, Bedwell and Back.....	3
Nomash Peak, aka Peak 4400.....	3
Beano Mountain.....	4
Fools Peak and Fools Peak NW.....	5
Choose Your Own Adventure.....	6
Salt Spring Cragging: Mt. Maxwell, Salt Spring Island.....	9
To Bivouac.com with Love from Mount Hoy.....	10
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly up Rambler Peak's West Buttress.....	11
Introduction into Rock Climbing, Crest Creek Crags.....	13
El Piveto (6460'/1969 m) and Rambler Peak (6906'/2105 m) aka 10 <sup>th</sup> IQ.....	14
Rambler Junior Solo.....	16
Jagged Mountain.....	17
Mount Harmston – Argus Mountain – The Red Pillar.....	19
Elkhorn Mountain and Kings Peak.....	21
The Comb and The Golden Hinde NW.....	23
A Hinde or a Helicopter: The Strathcona Traverse from Westmin to the Elk Valley.....	24
Passing the Towel – Youth Leadership.....	27
Augerpoint Traverse “Fun”draiser.....	31
A Project Completed and an Unplanned Strathcona Park Classic Traverse.....	32
McKelvie from Mclvor Creek.....	34
Southwest Strathcona Park: Mitla Peak, Mitla Spire, Sabre Peaks, Sabretooth Peak and Scimitar Peak.....	36
Cowichan Circuit Continued – Marmot Mountain 4541' (1384 m) via Balmer Lake.....	37
“Lest We Forget” – Remembrance Day Hike with Scott Collins.....	38
Sutton Peak.....	39
<b>MAINLAND</b> .....	<b>40</b>
Go Slow – The North Face Winter Leadership Course 2014.....	40
ACCVI Summer Camp Week Two.....	42
Mount Assiniboine: A Dream Come True.....	44
Exploring the Coast Range via Chilko Lake.....	44
<b>2014 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>SOUTH OF THE BORDER</b> .....	<b>50</b>
Picacho Peak (3374 ft).....	50
Mount Baker: Coleman Glacier Route.....	50

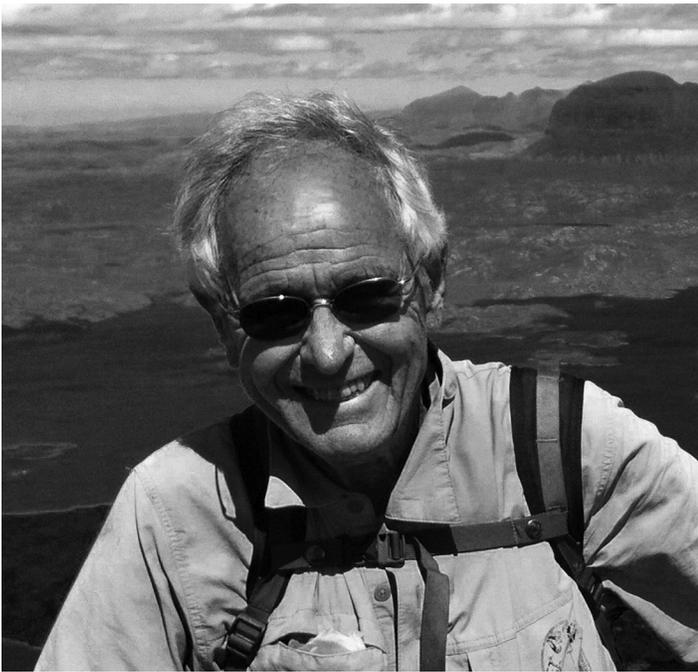
Washington Pass Multi-Pitch Alpine Climbing: World Cup Climbing, and a Win for Germany!.....	51
Buckskin Gulch: A Slot Canyon Adventure.....	55
The Warner Mountains, South Sister and Mt. Bailey .....	58
Gamboling through the Granary.....	59

***DISTANT PLACES* ..... 61**

New Zealand.....	61
Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi, Argentina.....	66
Sierra Nevada, Spain.....	67
An “Old Farts” Return to the Glens.....	69
Suilven and Stac Polly, Western Highlands, Scotland.....	71
Getting High.....	73
Schnidejoch, Climate Change and Archaeology.....	74
Nepal 2014: Aborted Himlung Himal Expedition.....	77
Chaos in Shangri-La: A Trek on the Manaslu Circuit and the Tsum Valley.....	79

***MOUNTAIN AIR* ..... 81**

Trailrider Program Alive and Well.....	81
ACCVI Trailrider Program.....	81
A History of the Ranger’s Cabin at Hairtrigger Lake, Strathcona Provincial Park.....	82



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## ***Report from the Chair***

**Mike Hubbard**

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It is now a year since I took over from Rick Hudson as your Chair. The ACC has been very good to and for me since I joined the Vancouver Section in 1963 and I felt that it was time for me to attempt to contribute something in return for all the good times that I have had over the years. As I was retiring from my day job on January 31, 2014 I felt that the timing was right and that it would be a breeze compared with my work. Cedric warned me that it was like having a half time job but I ignored him and took it on. Well, Cedric was right and the job has not been as easy as I expected; however, it has kept me busy and I am very pleased to have been elected by acclamation for a second term at the AGM on January 17, 2015.

The first issue your Executive had to deal with last January was the future of the Ranger Cabin on Forbidden Plateau. As you will remember Rick had spearheaded this initiative and on January 31, 2014 we received a letter from BC Parks indicating they were prepared to proceed further with our application. They were however asking for a level 2 environmental impact assessment and indicated that if our application was successful we would not have any priority in using the cabin and that it would have to be available to all users on a first come first served basis. Bearing in mind the location of the cabin and the considerable expense of restoring and running it, the Executive decided to withdraw our application. Considerable interest in a hut of some sort was shown in the discussion at the 2015 AGM and a committee led by Chris Jensen will be exploring other options and reporting back to the Executive and the membership.

In March we had a very successful ski camp at Amisqui Lodge in the Rockies – apart, that is, from losing a number of bags and boxes of food on our flight in, which was a rather expensive lesson on the importance of colour-coding all ingoing and outgoing bags prior to a flight. This was followed by an excellent banquet at the Embassy Inn here in Victoria with John Baldwin as our Guest speaker. Thanks to Catrin Brown for organizing both these events.

At the end of May, Colleen and I attended the Vancouver Island Spine conference in Courtenay, ably chaired by Andrew Pape-Salmon, and the Section has made a \$500 donation to the Association to assist with the development of the 700 km tip-to-tip Island trail.

The summer camp committee is to be congratulated on the efficient organization of 3 consecutive weeks of summer camp for 44 of us in the south Chilcotin. The Ursus area was a superb location and, especially after the flies died down on my arrival for week 2, it was very pleasurable experience for all of us who attended. Congratulations, too, to Albert Hestler on summiting Poacher's Peak at the age of 81. Albert, you are an inspiration to us all. The camp this year was under budget and we are pleased to have been able to offer a small refund to those members who attended in accordance with the policy which we adopted of refunding if excess funds allowed a refund of 5% or greater of the original fee. Thanks to the committee for all their work in ensuring the smooth functioning of this camp. To facilitate camp planning in the future the nominations committee has added a new executive position of Summer Camp Liaison Officer and I am very pleased that Liz Williams has been elected to that position in addition to continuing to sit on the summer camp committee.

The Zala family has continued to be a tower of strength within the Section. Thank you, Cedric and Lissa, for hosting the summer BBQ and thank you, Cedric, for taking over the editing of the Bushwhacker Annual. The Banff Film Festival was again organized by Krista and was not only a sellout but had one of the best selection of films that we have had. Thank you too to all the Zalas for your assistance in arranging the food at our Christmas party at Tom Hall's home and thank you, Tom and Pam, for hosting the party in your home. It was made very special by the attendance of the St. Andrews school choir who gave us a wonderful carol concert, thanks to the efforts of our members Andrew and Susan Cripps.

Throughout the year Harry Steiner has put on a considerable number of educational courses. Thank you, Harry, and all those others who have assisted him, especially Nadja. Peggy Taylor and Brenda O'Sullivan have also run our Thursday slide evenings and put a considerable amount of energy into finding good presenters and dealing with the challenges of Swan Lake. Thank you both.

The executive has met 6 times over the year. Geoff Bennett, Barb Baker, Dave McDowell and Brenda O'Sullivan have now stood down and we will miss their input and efforts. We welcome our new executive members Caroline

Tansley, Karun Thanjavur and Liz Williams. I thank all the executive for their work over the past year and especially Martin Hofmann for his work on the new website and Colleen Kasting for the enormous number of hours she has put in as Treasurer. We are now posting the minutes of the executive on our website once they have been approved, and we will also be posting the date of the next executive meeting once it has been set.

Our Bushwhacker Newsletter editor Mary Sanseverino has put out informative and interesting monthly newsletters throughout the year. Thank you, Mary. I am delighted that you are continuing as editor in 2015.

A number of awards have been received from National recognizing past efforts by members and I congratulate Dave Campbell, and Harry and Nadja Steiner on their Eric Brooks Leadership awards and Lindsay Elms on his Don Forest Service Award.

Two of our Members, Krista Zala and Nic Scott, have been selected for and have now attended the North Face winter course in the Rockies this January. Congratulations to you both.

The essence of our club is good trips and I don't mean drug induced ones! This requires leadership and we have struck a leadership committee to encourage and facilitate this. We are also revising the course subsidy program guidelines to make it clearer exactly what we are offering and the revised guidelines will be published on our website. This subsidy is designed to encourage leadership, and we will continue to offer members a refund of up to 75% of course costs provided they lead a posted club trip or organize a significant event, subject to availability of funds in the budget and compliance with the guidelines. We also have available funds for youth grants in the Memorial Fund. Presently there is approximately \$1500 available, and if you are interested in applying in future years read the information on the website and file your application. It provides for grants for mountain activities for young people under the age of 30 and can go to help finance an expedition, first ascents or exploration subject to close scrutiny by Geoff Bennett and approval of the executive. I am very pleased that Geoff is going to continue with his administration of the Memorial Fund, despite having stood down from the Executive. I thank all members who have led trips and urge you to continue the good work; to all those who have not I say give it a try, it can be fun and also qualify you for a subsidy.

Membership is up slightly from last year at 393 members (including family members) and Janelle Curtis has done an outstanding job keeping track of members and distributing information. Our new National Representative, Christine Fordham, has put a lot of her wonderful energy into her position including attending the Fall Sections meeting in Canmore and joining Colleen and me at the Guides Ball at the Rimrock Hotel. Thank you both.

Over the years we have been honouring members who have climbed the Island Qualifiers: these are challenging

mountains on the Island which were originally chosen to replace the main club's requirement that applicants for membership have climbed at least three peaks over 10,000 feet – there being no such mountains on the Island. The idea was originated by our former member and outstanding mountaineer, Rick Eppler, who is sadly no longer with us. The mountains are: The Golden Hinde, Mt. Colonel Foster, Mt. Elkhorn, Victoria Peak, Warden Peak, Nine Peaks, Mt. Septimus, Rugged Mountain and Mt. Harmston. At the AGM, thanks to an excellent presentation by Robie MacDonald, a motion was unanimously passed naming the Island Qualifiers Award "The Rick Eppler Island Qualifiers Award" in memory of Rick.

I am pleased to also report that the Trail Rider program is alive and well assisting people who are not able to get out into local parks and trails on their own steam. Thanks are due to Caroline Tansley for coordinating this and I am also delighted that she is now our new Secretary. If you are interested in helping as a "Sherpa," contact Caroline.

On a final note, we have made charitable donations out of Section funds to the Canadian Alpine Journal, the Arrowsmith Search and Rescue Society, St. Andrew's School, the Times Colonist Christmas Fund, the Vancouver Island Avalanche Centre and the Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association.

We are all looking forward to another year in the mountains. May it be a safe and happy one.





*Nomash Peak (aka Peak 4400) as seen from the Nomash Valley – note the twin summits. Photo - Valerie Wootton*

discussed the plan with the others. Brandon and Angelica were happy where they were, but Val and I wanted the main summit. I pulled the rope out and set up a rappel onto the ledge from a solid tree limb. Val went down first and then I followed. I decided to leave the rope in place while we scrambled up to the summit. Five minutes later we were on top and found, according to the GPS, we were two metres higher than the first summit.

With the weather changing, clouds rushing in and a hint of moisture in the air, we didn't spend too long on top. We down-climbed into the col and scrambled up to the hanging rope. Val tied on and Brandon pulled the rope in while Val climbed up the wet rock. A few grunts and groans, and some choice words about the slippery rock, but she managed to get up. I went back into the col and saw a steep line of snow climbing up out of the col towards the first summit. I decided to save time and climb the snow. About twenty feet above the col there was a short almost vertical section of snow that I managed to climb with one ice axe and plunging my arm into the snow as the other lever. I arrived just as Val topped out. I quickly coiled the rope and then began the straightforward descent to the saddle under the hydro line. By now Brandon realised that an ascent of Peak 4325 was out of the question today so we then followed our tracks back down under the hydro lines and into the forest. We finally came out into the second growth at almost the same point we entered it. All we had to do now was follow the road back down to our vehicles for the next hour.

If the weather had of been more cooperative, it would have been nice to bag Peak 4325 again. Brandon wasn't too upset and was already talking about coming back next year, a little earlier in the season, with skis to tour around the beautiful basin at the head of the Nomash Valley. Yes, there is always a next year.

Participants: Angelica Lauzon, Brandon Hopkins, Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

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## Beano Mountain

Lindsay Elms  
May 6

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I love looking at topo maps and planning trips into the mountains, especially remote and obscure peaks! I had climbed most of the peaks found on the map on the south side of the Nomash River (Zeballos), but there was one more mountain at the head of nearby Spud Creek that piqued my interest – Beano Mountain (1236 m). This was another of those obscure peaks that even Sandy Briggs had never heard of before, however, I am sure he has seen it on the map, but it just never registered because he was always looking across the valley at the Haihte Range. The first question I had to ask myself when I saw the name was why Beano?

As I kid back in New Zealand I grew up with the comic book *The Beano* which first appeared in 1938 (before you get too cheeky this was before my time) and continues to be published to this day. Its iconic characters, such as Dennis the Menace, Minnie the Minx, The Bash Street Kids, The Numbskulls, Roger the Dodger, Billy Whizz and Ball Boy, have become known to generations of children throughout England and its colonies. Yes, they were sent by sea mail before mail was flown around the world, and before the internet. Earlier generations will remember other notable characters who have been phased out, such as Ivy the Terrible, Calamity James, The Three Bears and Pansy Potter. Some old characters, like Biffo the Bear, Lord Snooty, Baby Face Finlayson and Little Plum, have more recently made a return to the strip. However, the style of Beano humour has shifted noticeably over the years, though the longstanding tradition of anarchic humour has remained. For decades strips have appeared to glorify immoral behaviour, e.g. bullying (Dennis the Menace), dishonesty (Roger the Dodger) and even robbery (Baby Face Finlayson and The Three Bears). Although the readers' sympathies are assumed to be with the miscreants, the latter are very often shown punished for their actions. Recent years have seen a rise in humour involving gross bodily functions, especially flatulence (which would have been taboo in children's comics prior to the 1990s), while depictions of corporal punishment have declined. How many of you from this British colony are saying: "Gee whiz, I have forgotten all about these cartoon characters." Everyone knows Batman, Prince Valiant and Superman, but they are all goody-two-shoes!

The reality is the mountain more than likely wasn't named after the comic book *The Beano*, but it was sure fun when I googled *The Beano* and all those characters came back to life again for me. So where does it come from? The mountain is probably named after the Beano group of mineral claims on Bingo Creek which flows south from the mountain into Zeballos Inlet. Why did they name the claim



*Beano Mountain with Kaouk Peak behind to the right from the ridge at the head of Spud Creek. Photo - Valerie Wootton*

Beano? I don't know but, hold on – I do know the Beano group was staked in 1944, 6 years after *The Beano* comic book first appeared. Maybe, just maybe, these colonials subscribed to the comic book and they thought it a great name for the mineral claim. Umm! Okay, maybe I am a dreamer, but it's free!

Val and I had four days in the Zeballos area, so after climbing Nomash Peak (aka Peak 4400) with Brandon Hopkins and Angelica Lauzon, we still had a couple of days left, but first we had to dry out our gear. By mid-afternoon everything was dry so we drove back down the Nomash and headed towards Zeballos. Six kilometres before Zeballos we turned off and headed up the road into Spud Creek. At the end of the road where the bridge has been taken out we set up camp. That afternoon I crossed the creek and then followed the old road up the valley to see if I could find any sign of the gold workings that occurred in the valley back in the 1930's and 40's. About 1 kilometre in I found some old railway tracks and a collapsed adit and a little further on a number of sheds containing core samples. Exploring around I found more evidence of the mining activity, but there was nothing compared to the old photos I had seen of the valley. I decided that I would have to come back another day and spend more time exploring the valley.

The next morning Val and I started up the old road. The further on we got the more overgrown the road became. About 2 kilometres in, the road forked and we took the lower of the two. This road got worse and eventually it became too overgrown so we deeked into the second growth. I knew from Google Earth and maps that a road did cut around the upper valley, but obviously we were not on it. After half an hour of thrashing about we came across another overgrown road and followed it up. This time we lucked out and arrived at the bottom of the gully that I had spied on Google Earth that would take us up to a saddle on the ridge above. A little more snow in the gully would have been nice but for now it would do.

Once in the saddle we stopped for a break and looked at the map again. Beano Mountain appeared to be about 1.5

kilometres to the west, but first we had to climb the first summit on the ridge. At just over 1000m we came across snow which had softened up and we were sinking in to the top of our boots. On the first summit we could see the repeater tower on the summit of Beano Mountain and saw that there were a couple of further bumps we had to climb over. We continued to punch through the snow, but we always looked for the shaded areas where the snow would be firmer. Eventually we reached the summit and could now take the time to look around. The views were stunning: to the west we could see the Eliza Ears which we had climbed with Sandy Briggs last year and Kaouk Mountain which I had climbed with Rick Hudson and Sandy about 10 years ago. However, it was the Haihte Range which really drew our attention. It was a spectacular day, no clouds and all the peaks stood out in sharp relief. This area has so much to offer with its rich mining history in the valleys and the impressive mountains above. My only wish was that I had a Beano comic to pull out and get a photo taken with it on the summit.

We spent an hour on the summit before heading back; however, before descending to the saddle we stopped and looked at the unnamed, probably unclimbed peak, 1 kilometre to the southeast of the saddle. I will be back next spring to climb it.

When we reached the old roads in the valley below, we followed the most obvious, which eventually brought us to the fork where we had taken the lower of the two roads earlier in the morning. All good information to remember for next year!

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

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## Fools Peak and Fools Peak NW

**Lindsay Elms**  
**May 16 and June 10**

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In August 2009, we first went up Fools Creek (off the Gold Creek Main near Woss) to climb a series of peaks to the south of the Bonanza Range. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't the best and Val and I only managed to climb what we dubbed Fools Peak SW (1475 m). On the ridge further to the west were two more summits which I still wanted to climb, but because of other commitments it took another 5 years before we got back into the area.

### **May 16**

Driving back up-Island to Woss I was wondering if the Fools Main would still be driveable. To my relief I found the road much the same as it was 5 years ago and we could drive it almost to the end. The next morning we hiked the short distance to the end of the road then cut up through the slash

to the old growth forest. The hike through the bush was easy and within 40 minutes we were up at a couple of small lakes on a plateau. We traversed around on the north side then took a spur up to a saddle between the main summit of Fools Peak and Fools Peak SW. Across the valley to the north were Mount Ashwood and Bonanza Peak, the highest points on the Bonanza Range, and to their left (west) another 5 or 6 peaks on the ridge and all over 1600 m. At the far end of the ridge was Whiltilla Mountain.

From the saddle we could see the ridge heading towards the summit of Fools Peak. In places we were unable to stay on the ridge crest and found ourselves zig-zagging up through bluffs, but there was nothing difficult about the route. Eventually we reached the summit (1495 m) and looked across at the northwest summit. It was hard to tell whether the one we were on was higher, or the northwest peak, so I knew we would have to return shortly and find out. Below the northwest peak there appeared to be relatively recent logging so it would be a matter of figuring out which roads to access the valley.

Although there was time to traverse across to the northwest peak, the weather wasn't looking too good so we chose to head back down, which we managed to do before the drizzle set in.

### **June 9 – 10**

After climbing Mount Hoy (June 9) near Nimpkish Lake, Val and I decided we had to visit Fools Peak NW. The weather was holding and we had the rest of the day to find the logging roads leading to the valley to the south of the peak. By late afternoon, and after a few false leads, we found the road we wanted which eventually took us to 1100 m.

The next morning we walked up the road a few hundred metres, then climbed 300 metres directly to the saddle below the Southeast Ridge. The forest was open and made for easy travel. From the saddle, another 30 minutes along the ridge and we were on the summit. The GPS said 1493 m, two metres lower than the main peak. The mist was swirling and every now and then we would get a view of the



*Fools Peak NW as seen from the main summit of Fools Peak.  
Photo - Valerie Wootton*



*Over Val's shoulder is the main summit of Fools Peak and Fools Peak SW as seen from the slopes of Fools Peak NW.  
Photo - Lindsay Elms*

surrounding mountains; however, there wasn't much incentive to stay on the summit so after half an hour we returned to the vehicle and drove home.

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

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## **Choose Your Own Adventure**

### **Shanda Lembcke**

**May 31 – June 1**

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Get up high and stay there as long as possible. This is the seed of inspiration that motivates me at 3 a.m. to unfurl myself from the cozy double sleeping bag and get set to head up the hydro dam road through the Canoe Creek Valley and up towards the Mackenzie Range. In true weekend warrior style we arrived at this spot off of Hwy 4 only hours ago after driving up after work from Victoria. Stefan Gessinger, Ian Kilpatrick and I have chosen a challenging adventure this time to be sure and as my body warms up I am full of anticipation for what the weekend has in store. The Mackenzie Range is synonymous with adventure for me and also effort, a lot of effort!

The forecast is perfect for our weekend plans to try to traverse 10 summits of this range of stunning spire peaks. With luck we will enjoy clear skies and the views we are after — some of the most spectacular to be found on Vancouver Island. This is not my first time heading up this road, but it's the first time I've agreed to enter the jungle forest at night. The pre-dawn early Summer sky offers up a gentle less intimidating darkness though and the emerging birdsong is a welcome sound to soften some of my apprehensive thoughts of cougars and bears and bugs. (Oh the bugs! After our first trip here I skipped my 20-year high school reunion due to over 50 welts bug bites on my arms, face and neck. My vanity got the best of me.) I'm



*Heading out down the ridge. Photo - Stefan Gessinger*

anticipating emerging from this Canoe Creek Valley to see our objective, and the prospect of a full weekend up in the alpine puts an easy smile on my face.

Stefan leads us, as he will the entire weekend, through the densely forested trail-less Canoe Creek Valley out to our first sight of the dramatic spires. The sky is pale pink and blue and there is a perfect cool breeze. We take a break to fuel and hydrate. I turn to Stef to ask the time and he replies “just about 6.” I love it — it took a bit of effort to get to this point but the feeling of sitting on an old fallen fir looking up at the mountains at 6 a.m. on a Saturday is one of contentment and satisfaction.

Soon we are on our way again, preparing ourselves to get through the challenging slide alder and prickly bush section that seems to be endless and is definitely one of the least fun parts of the trip. Stefan in his ever-optimistic way prompts us along remarking “just hold onto the ones with no prickles.” Ian and I get a kick out this and we grunt our way through, heads down, trying to avoid getting whipped in the face. Finally we reach the snow cover. It’s always such a nice feeling getting onto the supportive snow pack after a few hours of a classic Island bushwhack approach and it’s easy going from here.

Before long we are at the base of the rock and looking forward to some climbing. I decide to stay back and rest while Stefan and Ian make their way up Ravenhorn. They are quick and back in less than 45 minutes and so we head up Poncho Peak. The majority of this traverse will be 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class scrambling with a few opportunities to rope up on

some more technical terrain. We pitch out a short section in order to avoid a very bushy gully. The three of us had been up here earlier in the year to try for this summit but the conditions weren’t right. On that trip we had decided to outfit ourselves in cheap ponchos in an attempt to stay dry through the bushy approach, but by the end we looked like tattered ghosts walking back to the car quite soaked, with our shredded ponchos hanging off us. Today is very different though and we get to the top without ripping our clothing. High fives all around.

We spend a bit of time on top to enjoy some lunch but are on our way soon. Razorback welcomes us with some more tree/bush/rock climbing. I’m feeling like I did as a kid when I would get right into the belly of the forest playing under, over and through everything I could. This is a full sensory experience. It’s only just after 3 p.m. as we arrive at the top; we have a long way to go to complete the traverse but are tempted to set up camp on the summit of Razorback. The next good camp spot is probably two peaks away and we’ve been going for 12 hours. I am completely content to set up here; Stefan could keep going and also likes the looks of this spot, but Ian takes a little more convincing. He is focused on our objective and it seems so luxurious to spend hours on a summit. We are so often aware of time and the need to get back down. There are still six summits ahead but we all agree that this awesome campsite is too good to pass up. Boots and socks come off and before too long we are passing around the whiskey and lounging against the warm rock overlooking the Broken Islands, Long Beach and beyond.

These are what Stefan and I like to call “moments for the bank” — good investments for later times when we need something to daydream about. So I soak it in and savour the stillness, the light, and the sound of the wind. Dinner prep ends up being a leisurely affair as we discover we



*Our route. Photo - Walter Moar*



*Shanda and Ian emerging from slide alder.  
Photo - Stefan Gessinger*

have not brought enough fuel to heat water to rehydrate our homemade meal. We strategically angle the bag on the warm rock so as to catch the late afternoon sun rays. This is true slow food and it tastes delicious! We stay up and watch the sunset and as the stars appear and the sky gets dark we crawl back into our cozy sleeping bags. Although I am ready for sleep I find it hard to close my eyes to the splendorous view of the night sky above but I do close my eyes and next thing I know Stefan is stirring next to me in his familiar gentle way, coaxing me to get my stoke on for the day which actually isn't so hard to do on this kind of day!

With pack and harness on I say good bye with gratitude to our lovely and safe home for the night and feel ready and excited for what the day will bring. And this day will bring a diversity of moments — a very well rounded physical, mental and emotional journey. The kind of day that is so full there is no room to squeeze anything more in — either hours, thoughts or effort. As the sky becomes light we can see the classic West Coast fog down below wrapping around hills and creeping through the valleys and inlets until they appear to be islands in the mist of a billowy white sea.

Soon we are on the top of Sunrise Peak and enjoy a light snack and drink. The Mackenzie Range is beyond beautiful and it is clear in the smiles on my companions' faces that we are all feeling good to be where we have put ourselves. We spend the day climbing and rappelling, climbing and rappelling — each peak a little different from the other. Sometimes we are savouring sections of bare warm rock, sometimes we are on top of the bush and trees 6 feet from the ground climbing and pulling ourselves up, and other times we are crawling underneath the snags and trunks searching for space to emerge from: the earth practically birthing us out from the tight spots. My pants have torn in a few places, my hair has been pulled from out of my helmet, and my wool shirt is getting fuzzy from the full body contact on the abrasive rock and rough tree bark. I am disheveled but my spirits are high. Stefan and Ian appear to be in their happy place too.

We go on. Top of The Centaur, Witch's Hat, Flat Top and then to Shadowblade, where we are met with the most airy part of the traverse yet. Stefan leads the way, placing some protection. I'm going to need some nudging and pep talking to get up this for sure. I watch him make his moves and wonder how I will gather up the gusto to do the same. With a nice tight rope I get myself up to the very exposed last little bit and resort to the classic and very technical "straddle" move. I can see far down both sides clearly and my stomach flutters as I state to Stefan, who appears to be entertained by this show, that I feel a bit nauseated and he responds with "well don't get sick there, get over here if you're going to puke," which is just the pep talk I need and I scuttle to meet him on the nice flat ledge.

With a deep breath I gather up my slightly frayed composure and enjoy watching Ian cruise his way across the same part I struggled on. The rappel from here feels dramatic with a bit of a free hang which is always good for cheap thrills. Once we are all down it is time to take stock of the day. Mackenzie Summit and Redwall Peak are waiting but the day is getting away from us and we still have to get down and onto the West Ridge that Stefan descended on a few weeks ago in daylight. Work on Monday morning isn't far away and so with a bit of hesitation we decide that this is as far as we will get. Maybe that leisurely camp out made the difference between completing the traverse or not, but I wouldn't trade that time up there — it is what it is and I am better for it. The day has been incredible.

The rappel turns out to have its challenges, with the ropes tangling and more pitches than we anticipate. We spend close to 3 hours getting down to the lower snowfield which taunts us in the full sun as we shiver in the shady gully. Once down Stefan is eager to get to the ridge while there is still light to navigate. Walking away relieved to be done with the rappel and on our way, I turn often to catch my last glimpses of this magnificent range of peaks. In the light of the setting sun the spires glow a fiery orange against the stark white snow and early twilight sky. I am enchanted once again by this place. Stef waits ahead for Ian and me and down we walk into the forest, which is easy going at first and I'm thinking this is great, we'll be down in no time



*Sunset on Razorback. Photo - Stefan Gessinger*



*Views of fog in the valley from Sunrise Peak.  
Photo - Stefan Gessinger*

and Stefan seems sure of the direction and maybe we'll even get 6 hours sleep.

It changes though and Stef starts to verbalize doubts about our location and now it is dark and even the fancy new headlamp can only light up so much of the featureless and non-distinctive forest ridge as the bush closes in. We spend another hour or so descending, listening for the sound of the creek that will lead us back towards the dam but it is disorienting in the dark and the forest becomes very steep. Ian had twisted his ankle earlier and we stop to lighten his load. We are all tired now and have resorted to roping up and rappelling parts of this bluff. Rappelling in this forest is almost as good as the time we put our crampons on in the wet steep forest coming down from Mt. Ashwood! It is approaching midnight and we start to consider spending the night, but Stefan asks for 10 more minutes, and then I recognize some features from another time we were not really lost in this forest and a moment later I hear an exuberant "Here we are" from Stefan up ahead. With that our pace quickens and we arrive at the hydro dam 10 minutes later.

It's after midnight now, and Ian with his sore ankle makes a break for the car 45 minutes down the steep gravel road and I go find my stashed comfy shoes. Stefan and I share some knowing looks — we are happier than we probably should be considering how late it is and tired we are, but we feel great. We rose to the challenge we gave ourselves and have been in a very beautiful place together. This trip will definitely go into the bank for later — a very smart investment. I feel a bit giddy in my fatigued state and hobble down the road next to Stef in comfortable silence occasionally sharing a laugh or a thought.

It is close to 1:30 a.m. by the time we've changed into fresh clothes and are ready for the over 4 hour drive back to Victoria. We have agreed to take shifts driving and have resolved to only go as far as we safely can if sleepiness takes over — we know this is the most dangerous part of the weekend. The shifts work out well but I catch little sleep wanting to stay awake with Stef as he drives the last

leg home. The Island Highway is clear of traffic in these peaceful pre-dawn hours and the sky is getting lighter as the sun slowly emerges. My mind weaves in and out of thoughts, contemplating what I've just experienced. All in all, we were on the move climbing, walking, rappelling, up and down, over and around, under and through for about 30 hours over two very full days. We came hoping to climb all the peaks of the Mackenzie Range, and even though we didn't finish it I feel as though I succeeded — I am happy and exhausted, I pushed myself physically and mentally, I got myself into an amazing place and enjoyed it with two people I respect and admire. Above all I feel immense gratitude for just being able to go to and be in such wild and pristine wilderness for a few days.

As we approach Ian's parked car I rouse from my day-dream mind to say goodbye and get back home with just enough time to make it to work. So, not quite so bright-eyed and bushy-tailed but in good spirits and tamed hair, I head off to the office and Stefan makes the first ferry to Salt Spring, where he'll get a full day's work in. And when people ask "How was your weekend?" I will say with a smile that it was great, very full and lots of fun. I am very happy with the adventure I chose.

Participants: Stefan Gessinger, Ian Kilpatrick and Shanda Lembcke

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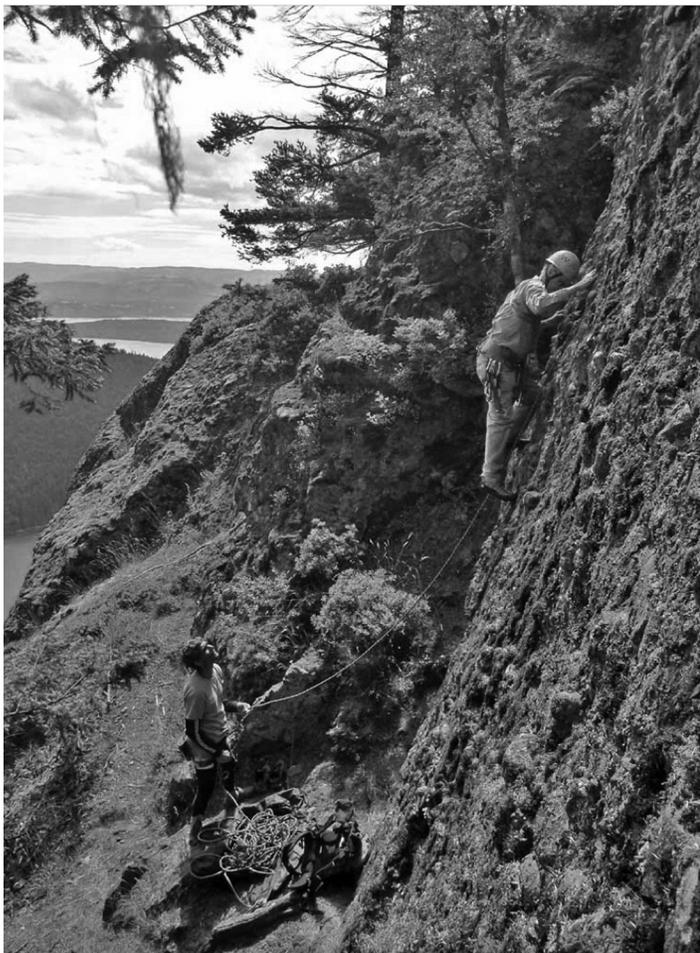
## **Salt Spring Cragging: Mt. Maxwell, Salt Spring Island**

**Sonia Langer**  
**June 8**

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For once I didn't need to take the ferry: the ACC came to me! It was a wonderful sunny day of short sport climbs atop Baynes Peak, in Mt. Maxwell Provincial Park. After driving up to the park, and a short tour of the various bluffs and rock faces in climbing area, with its spectacular views and conglomerate rock, we warmed up on the 'Baby Shoe Wall' with climbs rated 5.8, 5.7 and 5.10b.

We then went around to climb "The 5.9 Route", "A Walk in the Park" (5.7) and "Sunny Sunday" (5.10b). Overall, it was a day spent high atop Mt. Maxwell/Baynes Peak overlooking the rural Fulford Valley and Burgoyne Bay. From those bluffs, a person can see Mt. Baker, Mt. Rainier, Mt. St. Helens and Mt. Adams on a clear day! A guidebook written by one of my neighbours, Gus Oliveira, is available at MEC online and lists more than 21 bolted sport routes up at the mountain's summit, as well the bolted crag with its various 5.8-5.12 routes down at the foot of the Maxwell massif. Also described is the bouldering area near Burgoyne Bay. I look forward to the next ACC VI subsidiary ACC-SSI outing. Next time: the two-pitch Bio-Cankers link-up that I love so much.



*Karun belaying Reinhard up 5.9 face. Photo - Sandy Briggs*

Participants: Sandy Briggs, Karun Thanjavur, Knut von Salzen, Reinhard Illner and Sonia Langer

Note: This crag was featured in the 2014 issue of Gripped Magazine with an article by ACC member Sean McIntyre.



*Sonia speaking with Knut and Karun at the bolt station atop the two-pitch route. We left this for another day. Looking out over the Burgoyne and Fulford Valleys with the San Juan Islands in the background. Photo - Sandy Briggs*

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## To Bivouac.com with Love from Mount Hoy

Lindsay Elms

June 9

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Very rarely does anyone go on a trip to the mountains nowadays without first googling the mountain on your home computer or, heaven forbid, secretly on the work computer. After googling the name and maybe coming up with a few hits that may or may not shed any information, you might then type the name into Google Earth. You can then look at the satellite image of the mountain and surrounding area (usually a couple of years old) with particular interest in logging activity and road access. Then you visit Facebook and ask if anyone has been to the mountain or even go onto a forum site operated by a mountain club or mountain sage. As a last resort you might then pick up a guide book (yes, a real physical paper book, with pages, printed with ink – this is where the ‘SarcMark’\* would go if I had one) and see if the mountain is mentioned and if any routes are described.

I am no different! When I googled Mount Hoy the first hit was Bivouac.com. It was the only one with any ... I’ll call it information, but I want to call it ‘disinformation’. This is what the site had to say: “This relatively uninspiring summit between Nimpkish Lake and Bonanza Lake is not even listed in ‘Island Alpine’ testifying to its unattractiveness to mountaineers.” Because it is not in Island Alpine that testifies to its unattractiveness – the gall! If I was on Facebook I would give Bivouac.com ... not a ‘poke’ with a finger, but a ‘jab’ with my elbow!

When Val and I arrived on the summit of Mount Hoy (1422 m) we found a well maintained summit register. The first entry was dated November 11, 1997, and by the time we finished reading through the ascent list, we were the 14<sup>th</sup> party to sign in. So, to wrap up my case before the jury I am going to refute Bivouac.com’s comment and conclude by saying there is something inspiring and attractive about this mountain! Hell, there are island mountains in Strathcona Provincial Park (and other places) that are higher and more challenging that have had fewer ascents in the last 100 years and are not in Island Alpine. There, I have had my rant.

I actually wasn’t expecting to find much information on any of the websites (it was just curiosity), however, I was more interested in what new logging roads Google Earth would show. I always look at the Backroad Mapbooks first but it didn’t show too many logging roads on the mountain so I was hoping the satellite images would show more. As luck would have it, there were a whole lot of new roads that went quite high on the mountain. It would be a matter of driving up the right ones once in the area. So, armed with



*The summit of Mount Hoy. The steel tank is the largest summit register container on the island. Photo - Lindsay Elms*

our new information we headed up the Island Highway after dinner on Sunday evening.

After crossing the Noomas River (along the east shore of Nimpkish Lake) we took the first right off the highway and headed up the road on the north side of the river. After 17 kilometres (and several decisions about which road to take) we eventually came to the end of the road at 1100m in a new logging slash on the south side of the mountain. Tomorrow would be a short/easy ascent!

Monday morning dawned fine! The weather forecast for the North Island was what they had been predicting: showers on Sunday afternoon/evening, clearing Monday morning with increasing sunshine. We had a leisurely breakfast and finally headed up the slopes at 10 a.m. It took us 10 minutes to get through the slash and then we were in the old growth. For 35 minutes we climbed through the forest and then we broke out onto heather slopes which went on for another 15 minutes to the summit. That's all it took! One easy hour! I hear some of you saying that it wouldn't be worth it as more time was spent driving than actually hiking. I don't care! I got to the summit of another mountain – one I had never been up before. I got to see all the familiar mountains from a new perspective and I was enjoying the whole process and experience. Who said every mountain had to be a long climb, had to involve technical climbing and require intricate navigation to get to the top. I also love driving the North Island highway because there are so many mountains to distract me while driving. Climbing Mount Hoy is like going to do a one-pitch route at some crag somewhere instead of a multi-pitch route.

There was no cairn on the summit, but there was a large steel barrel-shaped tank with doors at either end. When we opened one end it was full of large batteries connected together in series while the other end had a plastic bottle with a note pad and pencil in it. Beside the tank, lying on the ground, were some old solar panels that had seen better ... rays. Any electronic equipment had been removed long

ago. What it was for and when it last operated I don't know, but the steel tank is definitely the largest summit register on the island. We signed our names noting that the first party called the peak Noomas Mountain. We then went for a wander along the North Ridge, meandering across beautiful heather slopes to another slightly lower summit before we made our way back down to the vehicle.

Mount Hoy is not going to be on everyone's to-do list, but if you are up-Island with some time to kill and you want an easy climb with great views across Nimpkish Lake to Kar-mutzen Mountain, east to Tsitika Mountain and Mount Sir John, and Johnstone Strait to the north ... check it out.

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

\*The SarcMark is a punctuation mark specifically designed to indicate sarcasm or irony. It can be downloaded for a fee, but is not currently found on every keyboard, however, IMHO it should be.

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## **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly up Rambler Peak's West Buttress**

**Karun Thanjavur**  
**June 28 – July 1**

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"If the weather is not good, wait five minutes" is an oft-heard adage on the Island, and this memorable trip up the West Buttress of Rambler Peak over the July long weekend was a classic example of Island weather turning on a dime. Our original plans for a four-day, double-header in Strathcona Park had to be scaled back by a day as yet another moisture-laden Pacific system refused to vacate the skies in time for the weekend, pushing our planned departure back by a day. However, when the skies cleared up, they cleared up to glorious sunshine on summit day, more than making up for the second peak we had to scratch off our original plans. Be as it may, there's just more peak for us for next time. So for now here's our abbreviated but no less memorable adventure up the alluring face of the West Buttress of Rambler, which holds a commanding presence over the Elk River pass for all who journey by to admire.

In order to make up for this delayed departure, we decided to head up-Island late that Saturday evening (28 June) to camp at Kings Peak trailhead for the night, then use the following full day for the long march up Elk River Valley. It was still foggy and wet when Chris came to pick me up that evening, and this greyness followed us as we made our way up-Island after having picked Kevin up at Nanaimo. The three of us had not done any trips together earlier, so the long drive gave us time to swap stories and get to know each other a bit. Moreover, in preparation for this climbing trip and to get comfortable with each other's rock skills, the previous week we had spent an evening on Mt. Wells



*A view of our objective, the West Buttress of Rambler.  
Photo - Kevin Mayer*



*Stunning views of the surrounding mountains. Here, the ridge  
connecting Rambler to Elk Horn. Photo - Kevin Mayer*

polishing off a few routes.

Sunday's start was relaxed but not too tardy since we had quite the long valley ahead of us with full packs, ropes, racks and such to lug in. The skies were still overcast and ominous, but except for a few occasional spits left us relatively dry. We made good time past the Gravel Flats. Given the July long weekend, there was traffic on the trailheaded to the Gravel Flats and Landslide Lake.

After crossing the wood bridge across the raging stream draining Landslide Lake, the turnoff toward the Elk River pass is quite well marked (rock cairn and flagging, though without the wooden trail sign that the Landslide section has). Distracted by something or other, we missed that turnoff, and walked on right past to spend the better part of a half hour trying to figure out where the entry point to the onward trail to the Elk River Pass was! Once we backtracked and got on it however, we found the route well marked (compared to my memory from the Strathcona Traverse we did as part of the ACC centennial year). There were even some signs of maintenance, our thanks to whichever outdoors group is putting in the time and energy to brush out the trail!

Once into the last section of the valley leading to the pass, we were on snow for the last leg up to the camp. However, the summer melt had already set in, and we had to scramble up the slippery heather and loose rocks back into the trees for one section, before being able to drop back on to a comfortable plod on the snow. In order to keep the approach short the next morning on our summit attempt, Chris decided to push on as far up the valley as we could, so it was well into the late evening when we set up camp by the tarns under the watchful gaze of our objective for the next morning. Even though the forecast had been for a sunny Monday, a cold fog was still rolling down the valley and the skies had not cleared when we finally hit our sleeping bags for the night.

Sometime that night the weather magic happened, so when we rolled out for our alpine start the next morn, we were under a clear sky promising a wonderfully sunny day to warm up the rock faces for us! Yay!! We were on snow even leaving the camp, so the approach to the base of the climb was relatively comfortable. None of us had been up this West Buttress route on Rambler before, so our route decisions were guided by one useful trip report plus a hand-drawn route map from some years back which we had unearthed on the web. Given the limited visibility with headlamps, the path up the lower, heather-covered section was not obvious but seemed to go without major obstacles.

The cold meltwater streaming down the rocks and the heather made for very slippery conditions, so we opted for the safety of the belay even from these lower sections. Given the 'odd' situation for the rope work, Chris led the climbs with one of us belaying him, and then Kevin and I simul-climbed after him; perhaps nowhere as efficient as two person rope teams, but it worked quite well for us. By the way, we'll leave tagging who's who in this the Good, the Bad and the Ugly trio in the photos to the discretion of the reader!

The skies were already lighting up with the early summer dawn, so we could stash our headlamps as the visibility improved. There was one moderately steep, but very supportively firm snow section for crampons and ice axe, but pitch after pitch of rope-work was the order of the day once we left the snow and got on the climb proper. Even though the climbing grade is quite modest and perhaps can be done unroped, the rock is loose with quite some exposure below. And although the belays made for slow going, it also gave us lots of time to look around and cherish the stunning views of the Strathcona snow peaks that surrounded us.

It was well into the mid-afternoon by the time we made it toward the top of the buttress, even with just a brief lunch stop. On the final stretch of the buttress, the rock quality improved dramatically, with firm, clean sections and no loose



*Climber seconding the 'one move wonder' on the last pitch to the summit. Photo - Kevin Mayer*

stuff to contend with. In addition, the bright summer sunshine was warming up the rocks for us, so we soaked up this joy like lizards as we crawled up the slope. Except for the exposure, there are no technically challenging pitches, so we were able to continue the climb with just our mountaineering boots without any need for rock shoes.

Sandy had mentioned that the only section where the rope and a size 6+ cam or a mega-nut would be handy was the last two meters on the summit bluff ("where you'll have to take your hands out of your pocket"), and so it was. There is an off-width crack to mount on a smooth rock face without any features for protection placement, but Chris shimmied up comfortably and Kevin and I followed with the safety of the rope above us.

We summited around 4 p.m., a full eight hours after leaving camp that morning. The beauty of Strathcona stretched off in all directions and the visibility was spectacular. It was bliss to lie on the rocks to soak in the warmth and enjoy the views.

We opted for the climbers route for our descent, rappelling down for most of the upper sections, with either steep loose rocks to contend with, or broken, rapidly thinning snow bridges and steep snow sections. The sun was definitely dipping toward the horizon by the time we were at Rambler Junior, for more rappelling down the snow gully. Except for the additional time to set up rappel stations, the safety of the rope made for a smooth and fun descent. Once past the snow gully, we could finally stash the well-used ropes in our packs and continue down the sun-softened snow slopes leading to the valley below us. We made it back to camp at midnight, twenty hours after we had set out that morning. That morning we had stepped on snow even as we left camp, but with the warmth of the full summer's day, the snow had receded noticeably even in the span of one day.

Along with the load of all the gear, Kevin had thoughtfully lugged in three cans of some delightful brew for us to



*From left to right: Kevin Mayer, Chris Jensen, and Karun Thanjavur excited to be on the summit. Photo - Chris Jensen*

celebrate! As you can well imagine, it went down like sweet honey after our long, memorable day on the West Buttress. Thanks to my climbing buddies, Chris and Kevin for having shared that wonderful day together.

Participants: Chris Jensen (Leader), Kevin Mayer and Karun Thanjavur

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## **Introduction into Rock Climbing, Crest Creek Crags**

### **Waltraud and Thomas Radetzki July**

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It was time for a new challenge and to revive some of the old rope skills, so we signed up for the Intro Rock course with Alois and Wendy. We met them and the other participants for an evening at the Swan Lake Nature Centre to learn about the physics of the fall factor, the static force, the impact force and the benefits of a dynamic rope. Our homework was to practise the essential knots until we could tie them behind our backs.

For the outdoor event we drove up to Crest Creek, a perfect setting for our course. We camped overnight along a beautiful creek, its water cold and clear. The days were extremely hot and after hours facing the hot rock and practicing anchor building, belaying and rappelling, we were ready to jump into Crest Lake for a swim. We were lucky to meet one of the Heathens, the driving force behind this fantastic facility who built and maintain the climbing area as volunteers.

A big thank you to Alois and Wendy for sharing their experience and spending a weekend of their time with us. A course taught with great knowledge and always with safety



Alois and Wendy. Photo - Thomas Radetzky

as the main focal point. When they let us rappel with the Munter we felt young again.

Participants: Waltraud and Thomas Radetzki

## El Piveto (6460'/1969 m) and Rambler Peak (6906'/2105 m) aka 10<sup>th</sup> IQ

**Roxanne Stedman**  
July 12 – 16

### July 12 – Day 1

We met at noon on July 12th at the Elk River trailhead. Tak and Bill were already there when we arrived, while Lenka and her crew planned to catch up to us either along the route or at camp. This excellent trail starts with a climb then a descent to the Elk River. We arrived at the bridge crossing the outlet stream for Landslide Lake around 4 p.m. After crossing to the east side of the creek, we relaxed in the sun, UV-purified our water, and waited to see if Lenka would catch up. With no sign of Lenka, we went on, with the plan being to reach the Big Tree camp, 12 km from the parking lot, along the east side of the east branch of the Elk River. We arrived at camp at 6:30 and were soon joined by Lenka and crew.



Welcome sign at the campsite. Photo - Thomas Radetzky

### July 13 – Day 2

At 8:30 we headed out through much bushier terrain than we had encountered the day before. The trail climbs through an avalanche path, then underneath the huge walls of Rambler Peak to Elk Pass. We recrossed the Elk River and continued, on and off snow, under the west flanks of Rambler. After crossing several side gullies, we arrived at some beautiful small lakes in the basin. It was very hot and sunny, perfect for a dip or two as we moved from tarn to tarn. From the lakes it was a short hike up the snow ramp to our camp at Elk Pass. Our early arrival at 2 p.m. allowed lots of time for exploring, or snoring in the case of the heat exhaustion victim. Peggy and Ken took a side trip up Slocomb Peak (6036'/1840 m) after we arrived at camp. The bugs were fierce and as Lenka said even Peggy donned her mosquito attire for dinner. We discussed the plan for tomorrow as we had originally planned to climb Rambler first then El Piveto Mountain the next day. Since we were all well rested, we decided to try for the longer El Piveto first and to do the half day climb of Rambler the day after.

### July 14 – Day 3: El Piveto (6460'/1969 m)

Andrea stayed behind to go skinny dipping, but the rest of us were up at 4:30 and ready to go at 5:30. El Piveto as per Island Alpine "is a rounded dome of basalt ...and it is a relatively inaccessible peak and is infrequently climbed." Ken was motivated to get up El Piveto and he managed to keep the breaks short and sweet as it was going to be a long day. Up the rapidly melting snowfield on the flank of Rambler to the saddle we went, followed by a downward traverse over the snow and steep vegetated (no trees) rocky slope where we passed two waterfalls, then onto to open bedrock. Using GPS coordinates, we had a quick look for Dave Campbell's ice axe that he had left behind when his party were helicoptered out in 2012. We had no luck.



*Crossing Cervus snowfield on our way to El Piveto with the Golden Hinde in the background. Photo - Roxanne Stedman*



*Rambler Junior from the Rambler Glacier. Photo - Dave Suttill*

We continued to traverse under the sheer part of Rambler to a hellebore slope and into the pass to Cervus. Angling up the ridge onto a diagonal ledge to the left, we grabbed heathers and clawed our way up to gentler slopes on the Cervus ridge. At the top of Cervus Peak North we followed a gentle climbing ridge to Cervus Peak South, where Ken and Dave took a short side trip to the higher point, which was marked with a cairn. Following the snow slopes down to where the snow ended, we continued on to the vegetation (on the tree side) to the left and on to the bench. We then negotiated our way around to the open pass between El Piveto and Cervus. It was a wide pass – about 100 m wide and 600 m long – the size of a football field, with a small trickling stream. We climbed up the right side until we could see the open slopes leading to the cirque. At the cirque on El Piveto's west face, there was a big rock that provided some respite from the sun and a good place to wait for the group.

We decided to head up the left ridge to what looked like the highest point on the skyline, but just short of the ridge summit we were faced with an abyss on one side and a really steep scree gully with a nasty outrun on the other. Unable to continue up, we turned around and headed back down to the rock to discuss our options. The standard route was described as straightforward but this was not. Ken looked at Dave to see if he was game to try another approach to the summit and soon Lenka, Tak and I were following along. Peggy, Bill and Svetlana decided to have a break at the rock and then make their way back to the pass between El Piveto and Cervus. We left the rock at 1:20 with a planned turnaround time of 2:00. We headed across the snowy cirque to the South Ridge and followed it to where it met the rock. It was an easy scramble with a short chimney to the summit, which had been hidden from view from our rock rest stop. We were on top at 2 p.m. and were the first to summit El Piveto this year. We returned to the rock where we had stashed some of our gear and retraced our steps to the football field where Bill, Peggy and Svetlana were waiting. The only traces of animal life were elk tracks in the dirt of the "football field" and deer tracks in the snow

on the upper part of El Piveto.

We headed up the steep vegetated slope. To save time, Tak suggested we head left up the vegetated slope to the avalanche slope and directly on to the snow. The sun was very intense especially on the snow. We cut right to avoid the summit of Cervus North, and regrouped. We circumnavigated Cervus North to avoid the cliffy terrain and bushwhacked back to our incoming trail. We hiked back along the snow slope below Rambler with a few stops for some beautiful photos. Andrea came up to meet us on the upper snow field and some of the girls went for a dip while the rest of us headed into camp at 7 p.m. It seemed like we had covered a lot of distance that day but according to the GPS it was only 12.7 km.

#### **July 15 – Day 4: Rambler Peak – the 10<sup>th</sup> IQ**

As it was only going to be a half-day jaunt from our Elk Pass camp, we had a late 10 a.m. start. Peggy, Andrea and Svetlana decided to spend a leisurely day around camp seeking out swimming holes. Ken's goal for the day was climbing Rambler Junior and retrieving Dave Campbell's ice axe while Bill, Dave, Tak, Lenka and I just wanted to bag Rambler.

Up the snow slope to the snowfield we went on another beautiful day. At a rock island on the shoulder of Rambler Junior, Ken headed off and we made plans to meet up on the way back. Tak was a bit concerned about the lack of snow in the lower east gully of the "spiral staircase" route, which could make the route more risky. We followed the ridge to the left and onto the snowfield to reach the lower east gully and started up the gully at 11:40. We climbed up some steep snow and then onto some steep rock which was a bit exposed, but with Lenka's simple and precise directions from below (move left hand up 10 cm, then right leg across 20 cm, etc.), I was able to make it up to the Rambler Glacier with the rest of the team. With the summit tower on our left, we ascended to the base of the narrow upper north gully at the base of the staircase at 1:30. The rumbling of rocks drew our attention to Rambler Junior,



*Rambler Summit: Dave Suttill, Lenka Visnovska, Roxanne Stedman, Tak Ogasawara and Bill Bryson. Photo - Dave Suttill*

where we spied Ken making his way to the summit. We reached the top at 2:10 to find glorious views. Lenka didn't want to leave so we lazed around for over an hour on the top and debated if Rambler was an IQ.

We retraced our route down the staircase. The large amount of loose rock in the gully required a lot of ducking and waiting as the group made its way down. Dave managed to catch a fair size rock in his hands before it could do any damage as it careened down the gully. The steep snow gully slowed us down quite a bit. We started back across the glacier at 5 p.m. and reached the top of the lower gully at 5:25. With rope assist from Tak, we made it safely down and out of the gully. We met Ken, who had scored a double win that day – bagging Rambler Junior and finding Dave Campbell's rusty ice axe – and made our way along the snowfield to be met by Peggy, Andrea and Svetlana, who accompanied us back to camp at 8 p.m.

### **July 16 – Day 5**

It was another beautiful day on the pass, and the snow was quickly melting due to the heat. After packing up camp, we made our way to the Big Tree camp for a quick hot lunch (for some) and a splash in the river. Then we hiked down to the bridge over the Elk River to the trail to Landslide Lake. Tak and Peggy continued out on the Elk River Trail while the rest of the group detoured to Landslide Lake, which was spectacular with Mount Colonel Foster as its backdrop. After a swim and drying off on the warm rocks it was tough to leave. Bill, however, left right after his swim as he had family at home that he wanted to see.

Back at the cars, Ken headed off on foot with beer and sodas to Drum Lake while I waited for the rest of the group to arrive. Lenka and her crew had to head off to the ferries but Tak, Peggy, Dave and I drove the short distance up the road to Drum Lake for a leisurely swim and cold drinks with chips. After a quick stop for supper in Campbell River, we were on our way home. Thanks Tak!

Total distance hiked 53 km with overall elevation of 4200 m (13,800'). Not bad!

Participants: Tak Ogasawara (trip leader), Lenka Visnovska, Peggy Taylor, Dave Suttill, Ken Wong, Andrea Kosorinova, Svetlana Tkacova, Bill Bryson and Roxanne Stedman.

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## **Rambler Junior Solo**

**Ken Wong**  
**July 15**

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Damn! I awkwardly held onto the side of one of Rambler Junior's summit spikes as my right boot was stuck in a crack. I yanked and yanked my foot, then tried twisting and wiggling it for a few more minutes, but to no avail. A quiet anxiety began to build up in me. Yikes, why did I leave the personal locator beacon, a.k.a. my helicopter ticket, in my pack back at the slot? It should have been hanging around my neck for when I needed it...

I had been on a quest to climb the last of the sixteen 2000+ m peaks on Vancouver Island since I completed the Island Qualifiers in 2007. When Tak Ogasawara posted a trip to El Piveto Mountain and Rambler Peak, I signed up but my main goal was Rambler Junior, one of the three remaining peaks needed for me to complete the project.

After climbing Slocomb Peak and El Piveto during the previous two days, we were once again on the South Col of Rambler surveying Rambler Junior which had a spikey ridge like the back of a Stegosaurus. Tak and Lenka Visnovska described the route they took last year: climb up the middle gully to reach the saddle; stay on the west side until coming to a window to get back to the east face; climb up a wall to gain the final summit ridge. Lenka added that the climb was very exposed and they roped up. We wished each other a safe journey. Tak and his group of five took off to the Spiral Staircase for Rambler while I struggled up the scree slope toward the Rambler Junior's saddle.

From the saddle I hopped over many big boulders and scaled some vertical blocks, looking for that aforementioned window and leaving breadcrumb cairns along the way. I reached an airy end but still no window. Better turn my tail before an accident happens... I started collecting my breadcrumbs when I looked up. "Hey, what is that narrow opening up there?" I scrambled up and was able to stare down the East Face of Rambler Junior. Ah, it was a slot, not a four-sided window which is what I had been looking for. I fueled up, stashed the backpack, and squeezed through the slot with only the camera around my shoulder. The adventure began.

I followed a ledge to a wall with a steep loose gully in which I crawled up to the final jagged summit ridge. Tak and company were resting on the rock before the Rambler Glacier a few hundred metres below. I yelled at them but it was too far to make meaningful communication. They



*L2R: Rambler Junior, Rambler, Elkhorn South, with Dave Suttill, Ken Wong and Elkhorn on our way to climb El Piveto.  
Photo - Ken Wong*

continued their push while I traversed some easier pinnacles. The fantastic sight ahead stopped me in my track. The highest point of the ridge was a dinosaur fang leaning over the West Face with a row of merciless knife-edged spikes blocking the way. An old piece of webbing crowned one of the spikes. I would use a rope there if I had one as falling off on either side guaranteed several hundred metres of air time.

My hair stood up on end. I surveyed the situation for several minutes contemplating whether to advance or retreat. This was my first solo. There was no George Butcher or Jamie Duncan, my climbing buddies, to fix a line for me. I dug deep into my experience to search for my limit. I went for it. Crawling downward head first on the knife-edge was unnerving and required my full concentration to be put towards hand and knee coordination. I crushed many black lichens in the process. Fortunately for me the lichens were crisply dry and so were not slippery. I dared not look either left or right into the abyss. It seemed like an eternity had gone by before I reached the prize, the leaning fang, which harboured neither a cairn nor an ACC summit registry. I took a long break to wear off the adrenaline rush and to appreciate the wild surroundings. This solo climb was a totally entertaining experience. To satisfy my curiosity I crossed two more spikes and stopped at the large gap before the final gendarme. With no desire to play hero I retraced my steps.

And now we are back at the start of this story, where I am stuck in the crack near the old webbing. Well, as you must have guessed, I did eventually free myself. After taking a few telephoto shoots of Tak's group sunning themselves on the summit of Rambler, I hurried down the mountain for my next quest, Dave Campbell's ice axe, which had been left behind during their evacuation by helicopter two years

before. By the way Dave, you still owe me a beer for finding that rusty thing in the bush!

Participant: Ken Wong

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## Jagged Mountain

**Tony Vaughn**  
**July 25 – 27**

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Overlooking Highway 19, west of Sayward and east of Woss, sit the rugged rocky pinnacles of Jagged Mountain at 1708 m (5604 feet). Although clearly visible from the highway, it is not an often visited summit. In fact the summit register indicated a last visit in 2011 and before that 2009 (Sandy Briggs, Lindsay Elms, Val Wootton and Andy Arts).

Our attempt to climb Jagged began with a reconnaissance trip in October 2013 to investigate the logging road access. The most likely candidate was a decommissioned branch road of S35, but it looked a long walk to the mountain. An email to Lindsay Elms later confirmed that it was in fact the correct road.

On July 25, with a route description provided by Sandy Briggs and photos from Google Earth, we drove up-Island, arriving at our selected branch at 7 p.m. in light rain, only to find the one flat spot for camping was denied us by a large earth mover, perfectly parked in the middle of the road. Back along the road we went until after 4.5 km we found a suitable spot to spend the night.



*Jagged Mountain from the highway. Photo - Tony Vaughn*



*Summit gully on Jagged. Photo - Tony Vaughn*

Next morning at first light we broke camp and drove back to the start of our chosen road, leaving the vehicle at 6:55 a.m. and climbing into and out of the first of many huge water bars. These were no little channels across the road, these were designed to prevent access to Jagged Mountain by Sherman tanks. They were roughly 10 feet deep and 12 feet across, located every 100 feet or so on the steep roadway.

Following the first switchback, the next obstacles to deal with were stretches of debuilt road, consisting of piled-up logs, rocks and earth. These continued intermittently all along the roadway. So onwards we continued through creeks, under and over downed trees, through tank traps over rock piles and occasionally on good stretches of road surface, until after 4.7 km we reached the end of a branch road that led into an old clearcut. From here we could identify the wide shallow gully we needed to get into, it did not look like a pleasant crossing. Referring to our Google Earth photo we realized that the big brown clearcut in the photo was no longer fresh, it was a several year old logging slash with its attendant shrubs, downed trees, fireweed and general logging detritus. Worse still, we had walked 1.5 km further along the road than we needed to.

Back we went to a low point in the road, where a small creek ran across the road. This would be the shortest distance to the gully from the road. Off we went into the head high logging slash, following elk trail where possible until we reached the edge of the old growth forest above us. We continued angling upward in the old growth at the edge of the clearcut till we could drop into the gully. We scrambled up for roughly 570 m, keeping to right trending branches before we broke out into a large open bowl at 1250 m with an seasonal pond in the middle. Immediately on our left heading northeast was a steep, wide, shallow, talus-filled gully, leading up to a narrow col on the skyline. It did not look very inviting, but our route description indicated that it was the way to go, so up we went with the loose talus gradually giving way to heather slopes ending in the col at 1585 m.

From the col a short hike across steep heather slopes brought us to the bottom of the summit gully, a fairly low angled gully with the odd step in it. It became steep at the top, probably class 3, and it was about 165 m long. The biggest difficulty was that it was very, very loose. Staying close together, we climbed as gently as possible upwards, till we reached the top. With the aid of the krumholtz growing there, we pulled ourselves out of the gully onto heather slopes with rocky outcroppings, over which we hiked to the summit, reaching the cairn at 3 p.m. The weather had been overcast all day and it looked like we were going to get a bit of a soaking, but fortunately the rain did not materialize.

The trip back down the summit gully was, to say the least, memorable, with a lot of sliding and removal of what seemed at the time like several tons of loose broken rock. The remaining hike down was uneventful until just above the bottom of the lower gully we were greeted by a lot of huffing, grunting and crashing from the bush on the far side of the gully. As nothing came charging out of the bush at us we assumed it was a bear trying to get at a meal, either in the ground or up a tree. There was an awful lot of bear scat in the old growth, along the clearcut edge. We finally cleared the bush, arriving at the



*The road to Jagged. Photo - Tony Vaughn*

road at 7:05 p.m. and reaching the vehicle at 8:25 p.m.

It had been a long day, but very satisfying to know that at our ages we could still put in a 13.5-hour day in the mountains. (Unfortunately I could barely walk the next day.)

Participants: Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn

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## Mount Harmston – Argus Mountain – The Red Pillar

**Dave Suttill**  
**July 27 – 29**

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The Oshinow Lake – Red Pillar Trail is an excellent access to the Cliffe Glacier group of mountains in southeastern Strathcona Park. I had been in this way before in 2013 on a trip led by Sean McIntyre. Unfortunately we did not have time on that trip to include Argus Mountain on our Mount Harmston day, but we did do The Red Pillar the next day on the way out. I was keen to make a return trip to grab all three, and Roxanne was game especially since Harmston is one of the IQ's.

The plan was to have a base camp just above tree line on the lower south ridge of The Red Pillar. Working backwards on my timeline from the previous trip, I knew we should be on the lake and paddling by 12 noon of the first day. Allowing for ample time along the way, we decided to leave Victoria at 7:30 a.m. So off we went in Roxanne's Subaru with her 17-foot canoe on top. Using the Backroads Mapbook we had no trouble finding our way from the Great Central Lake turn up the Ash River Main to Oshinow Lake. We arrived at the rustic campsite/put-in on the lake a little after 11 a.m.

We were organized with our gear stowed and under way right on time at noon. It was a pleasant paddle up the glass-calm Oshinow Lake under cloudless skies with reflections of the mountains in the Flower Ridge area as a backdrop. The six kilometre paddle up the lake took an hour. There is a trail parallel to the lake, but what an aesthetic way to start a mountain trip ours was. At the end of the lake we continued up the river for another hundred metres or so, almost touching bottom in a few places. We took out on the right side (river's left) just below the first rapid, where the trail starts on a small rocky bluff. We pulled the canoe high up and out of sight into what was probably an old river channel.

The first part of the trail is well defined as it follows the north (left bank) of the river. We appreciated that most of the windfall had long been cut. After half an hour on the trail (1.7 km) we reached a junction. A faint trail continued on marked by a sign to Homasum Lake. The right fork headed up the increasingly steep ground to the foot of the ridge



*Argus Mountain (left) and The Red Pillar (right) from Mt. Harmston. Photo: Roxanne Stedman*

above. After about an hour it started to get really steep, becoming what is best described as a climber's trail. After another hour of hard going the ground eased up and we came upon a small pond. This was the first water since the bottom. From here on, the trail became much less distinct and we had to rely on the occasional ribbon to stay on track. As we neared the ridge crest, the trail all but disappeared but the trees also thinned out, making navigation less of an issue. By 4:45 we gained the alpine ridge at a point immediately south of Esther Lake and had our first view of The Red Pillar. The next task was to find a good campsite, one with a view and water. This we did another 15 minutes further up the heather covered ridge. The shore of Esther Lake might have been a choice spot, but it was a good stiff 100 metre drop down the north side of the ridge. However there were several small tarns on the ridge near camp. The snow cover and water sources were considerably down from what they were this time the previous year.

We started out for Mount Harmston at 6:30 the following morning, skirting the right hand edge of the lower South Ridge of The Red Pillar. The ridge first climbs 200 metres before dropping 60 metres to the col at the base of The Red Pillar proper. Here we angled up and left across the South Face of The Red Pillar. We crossed a number of steep snow patches and stream filled gullies as we aimed for its high west shoulder. There we got our first view of Cliffe Glacier and Mount Harmston. The route now took us down a moderately steep gravel ledge through the cliffs marking the upper edge of the cirque just south of the Cliffe Glacier. The previous year the steep snow reached right against the cliffs making for an initially steep snow descent. This in my mind would be the crux of the whole trip. However, the snow had melted back from the rock enough that we could scramble down between the rock and snow on gravel so we didn't need the rope. So off we went across the snow, down the upper Cliffe Glacier and down beside the melt-water creek through the gap to the lower Cliffe Glacier. The first part of the lower glacier was peppered with small rock-fall coming off the north side of the lower West Ridge of Argus Mountain. Since there was no sign of active rock fall we elected to cut across this on a direct line to the start

of the Mount Harmston climb. The Cliffe Glacier is for the most part one huge basin about one kilometre in diameter with no sign of crevasses of any size. The old ice was completely exposed and the numerous melt-water channels easily crossed.

The starting point for Mount Harmston proper was at the northeast edge of the glacier directly below the low point on the ridge between Mount Harmston and Argus Mountain. Here we left crampons, ice axe and extra gear. The initial climb up to the col above the glacier was maybe 50 metres up somewhat loose scree. From there the hike up the Southwest Ridge of Mount Harmston was relatively straightforward. The final 100 metres up to the summit steepened to a class 3 gully where some care was needed to avoid dislodging rocks. The gully broke out into the middle of the relatively level summit ridge. The actual summit (elevation 2009 m) was a short walk to the right (east). Although it was only 11 a.m., we limited ourselves to half an hour on top, as Argus Mountain was also on the day's agenda. Visibility was easily 100 km. Summit registers are always interesting to look through. The last entry was from my August 4 trip with Sean McIntyre and Rob Ramsay in 2013. The one before that was Phil Stone's July 18, 2013 entry with Renee Blouin, her third IQ and Phil's final IQ (although he had climbed Mount Harmston's South Peak 23 years earlier). This was Roxanne's fifth IQ. We went down the same way we came up and were soon across the lower Cliffe Glacier and filling our water bottles at the outflow of the upper Cliffe Glacier.

The starting point for Mount Argus was up around the corner to the left on the south side of its west ridge. Once again we did a gear stash and headed up to the ridge crest. Staying on the crest at this point seemed a little difficult so we dropped down a little onto its north side and continued on. We were soon able to follow an easy series of upward trending ledges and gullies to regain the ridge crest. From then on we pretty well followed the crest of the ridge, or close to it, until we reached what looked like the final summit block. There the going got a little steep so we traversed out to the right where an easy gully lead back to a notch on the ridge crest. From where we stood it looked like continuing on via the notch would be difficult so we skirted around a little further on the south side of the ridge to some obvious solid rock gullies that would lead back to the summit. Halfway up we switched gullies to one on the left when the original one got a little steeper than we counted on. Rounding the rock rib to that gully was somewhat committing.

Once in the new gully, the terrain gradually eased up and soon we were walking up the final slopes to the summit of Argus Mountain (elevation 1994 m), a mere 3 hours after leaving the summit of Mount Harmston. The summit register was full so we added a page of our own. We were pleased with our time and allowed 45 minutes before heading down. The views across to The Red Pillar and Comox Glacier were stupendous. Mount Harmston and Milla Lake were pretty good too. We decided to check out the ridge crest proper going down from the summit. We discovered



*Mt Harmston and Milla Lake from Argus Mountain.  
Photo - Dave Suttill*

the route did indeed come up from the notch but did so on the exposed north side of the ridge, but nothing too scary.

At the notch we went down the scree gully we had seen on the way up. From there on we found retracing our steps was the best way. About halfway along the ridge we heard the drone of an aircraft. Soon a CC-115 Buffalo aircraft, presumably from CFB Comox, came into view. It did one pass directly between our ridge and Mount Harmston, and then returned for two passes more in the general area before disappearing to the north. I checked for SAR incident reports when I got home but saw none in our general area, so I presume it was on a training run.

At 4:15 we were back at the base of the ridge, all loaded up with our gear once more and heading out across the upper Cliffe Glacier back the way we came. We thought about grabbing The Red Pillar on our way but figured it was getting a little late. We knew there would be lots of time for that the next morning. We were back in camp by 6:30.

The next day we got up at first light and were on our way at 6 a.m. It took an hour to get to the base of The Red Pillar and another half hour to get up to the east col (elevation 1830 m). There we stashed our ice axes and crampons, which were needed lower down on the iced up snow. The route I had taken up the previous year with Sean McIntyre and Sonia Langer was still etched in my mind and unfolded without a hitch. The first part goes up a moderately steep left trending scree and scrub ledge for about 100 metres. This topped out at a generally level scree and rock ledge system at 1920 m elevation which we followed to the left for another 100 metres. The easy going abruptly ended with nowhere to go but down a short drop on the uphill side and across into a good sized gully that didn't necessarily look promising from our vantage point, but was our only option.

Once around and in the gully, it continued up and slightly left to join another gully which was blocked part way up by a three metre boulder. We scrambled up the vertical side-wall on the right (facing up) before traversing back to the left to pull ourselves over the boulder with a hand jam.

From then on it was up the gully, first one way then the other until we topped out on the large summit plateau covered in reddish rock. The summit cairn proper (elevation 2034 m) was a short 50 metre walk ahead of us. The summit register was damp so we had to let it dry out before adding our names. Nearby on the slightly north-facing slope was a good-size permanent-looking snow cap. To the northwest about 150 metres across the summit plateau stood another cairn, this one constructed with great care, being made of squared-off rocks. We spent a good hour on top taking in the view and identifying distant peaks. I half-hoped to spot Mount Rainier, but had to settle for Mount Olympus which was clearly visible 225 km away to the southeast.

We started down at 9 a.m., looking for the little cairns I had placed on the way up to ensure we stayed on route. I rigged a short rappel to get past the chockstone boulder for Roxanne. After looking things over carefully, I elected to slither down between the rock and the sidewall on the opposite side from the way we climbed up. The rest of the way out was fast and easy over the now familiar route. We stayed on the crest of the lower south ridge, going over its 1712 m high point. This deviation took us past a number of good sized tarns which probably would remain a reliable source of water even late in the season. We were back in camp an hour and a half after leaving the summit.

We took a leisurely hour packing up camp and heating up a hot lunch to sustain us the rest of the way back. By 3 p.m. we had the canoe in the water ready for the paddle back. The return paddle required a little more concentration than the paddle out. A steady breeze had blown up from the other end of the lake, with the occasional gust of up to 25 km/hr. We hugged the north shore, seeking what shelter we could find from the wind and waves. About one third of the way along the lake we rounded a small headland and came abruptly upon a boat campsite at one of the few really nice beaches. As we drew close (and we were only about 10 metres off shore) it became apparent that the completely naked lone male occupant was enjoying himself sitting in a chair facing the afternoon sun (and us). After an awkward moment we passed him by and continued battling the occasional wind gust to reach the boat launch at 4:45 p.m. Our arrival was announced by the Pomeranian that belonged to the couple that we saw camped on the way in. After a pleasant chat we were headed back to Victoria with a stop in Port Alberni for a fish and chips dinner at the Bare Bones restaurant in what was once a church.

Participants: Roxanne Stedman and Dave Suttill.

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## Elkhorn Mountain and Kings Peak

Roxanne Stedman

August 6 – 9

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### August 6

We left Victoria at 7:15 a.m. with a stop in Campbell River for gas, and arrived at the Elk River trailhead (ERT) at 11:00 a.m. It was warm and sunny with some cloud, perfect for hiking, but I thought that we may have to cancel the trip when we discovered that Dave had forgotten his helmet! However, he decided that he would live on the edge and go without since we had already driven so far and the weather was great, so we headed out, leaving the car at 11:30. After crossing the Elk River we encountered some steep terrain (but luckily no wasps!) and we took our first break at a creek a short way away from the main trail at 1:30. The creek was the last source of good water until we reached our camp.

We reached the ridge (1500 m elevation) around 4:00. After some looking around, we decided to camp at the same spot where Dave had camped 2 years before with Lindsay Elms' group. We had trouble finding water as the tarns were mostly dry or muddy. Luckily, Dave found a deeper and larger tarn on the ridge above camp which became our water source. It was a beautiful evening with some high cloud and spectacular views of Victoria Peak, Warden Peak and The Colonel.

### August 7

We got up early at 5:20 and we were moving around 6:20. It was a clear morning and we reached the wind break/ bivy spot at 7:30. Conditions looked good so we decided to stash our crampons and my ice axe to save some weight. We were unsure about what route to take from the wind break, so Dave went ahead and scouted out the west couloir while I waited. Although we had considered trying to retrace the somewhat exposed route that Dave had taken with Lindsay 2 years ago, we decided that the west couloir was the better and safer choice.

We followed the top of the scree slope around to the right and went up a gully marked with a cairn at the top of a finger of snow above the snowfield. The gully got steeper until it narrowed to a 10 foot vertical chimney which could only be reached by going underneath the chockstone. We climbed up, and then Dave hauled up our backpacks on a rope as it was too tight of a squeeze to keep our packs on as we climbed.

After the chimney we climbed up the sidewall on the left. It was very steep with small step-sized ledges covered in very loose rock. Dave suggested roping up but we decided not to. We continued climbing very carefully up more loose rock. One hand hold came completely out in my hand.



*High on Elkhorn. Photo - Dave Suttill*

There were quite a few slings in strategic spots along the way that other climbers had left behind. As the route leveled off we veered left and headed towards the summit.

We arrived at the summit at 10:00 and staged a summit photo of us taking a quick smoke from our “Round Up” bubble-gum cigarettes which even puffed out fake smoke! Someone had left two joints in the summit register – one of which had been partially smoked – but who needs weed when you are on the second highest spot on the Island! We enjoyed the great views of Mount Colonel Foster, Landslide Lake and Iceberg Lake from the summit, which we shared with an inverted spider that had set up shop in the cairn. Dave was particularly happy since on his previous visit the summit had been completely socked in.

We left the top at 10:30 a.m. and rappelled down the side-wall and vertical chimney using the slings that were already in place backed up in triple. We saw two ptarmigan just past the windbreak on the scree approach to the gully and later spied two backpackers on the ridge above our camp, but we did not see them again until we were back in the parking lot the next day.

We arrived back at camp at 2:15 p.m. and cooked up some hashbrowns and bacon for afternoon tea and left at 3:45 with full packs, intending to cross the valley to Kings Peak part way up. After 40 minutes of hiking along the ridge we arrived at the place where we thought we could get across the waterfall valley and over to Kings Peak. Dave had placed a GPS mark from his trip two years before where he thought Tak or Lindsay said that it was possible to get across to Kings. We dropped our packs to check out the route possibilities but had no luck. It would not be doable since there was no way to get down the steep cliffs to the waterfall. The only option was to go to the Elkhorn Glacier and along the ridge to Kings Peak or back to the Elkhorn trailhead. As it was getting late and we had had a long day, we decided to head back to our campsite, which we reached at about 6:10. Dave hiked up to the upper tarn on the valley side to see if it would be a better camp site but we decided our original site was the best choice and made camp there.

## **August 8**

We woke up at 6 a.m. to another clear morning. Dave wanted to scout out a route from camp down to the valley and perhaps up the side of Kings Peak to see if there was a possible route to the summit. He left at 6:15 without breakfast and didn't take any water and returned around 7. Dave reported that it might be possible to get to the bottom but with a full pack it would be very difficult and risky, so we decided to head back to the Elkhorn trailhead. We left at 8:30 a.m. and soon hit the cliff with the rope assist, which was quite slick. Our first and only break was at the creek where we had stopped on our way up. We arrived there at 10:15 and shared the spot with a spider patiently waiting for a snack to hit his web. We reached the Elk River at 11:30 and met three people on the ERT heading to Rambler Peak. We got back to the parking lot at 12:30, where we ran into the guys we had spied above our camp the day before. It turned out they were from Squamish and had attempted Elkhorn Mountain via the West Couloir but had turned around since they did not have the right gear, so instead, they explored around the Northwest Ridge.

At the parking lot we ate, drank and repacked our gear, and cleaned up the car, as something had managed to get into it while it was parked and had snacked on the food that we left behind. We drove down the road to the Kings Peak trailhead and started up the meticulously maintained trail at 1:50. After crossing a bridge supported by a huge boulder, we reached a spectacular waterfall in just over an hour. Past the waterfall the trail was not nearly as well maintained. We followed the creek and crossed to the left side where we came across a man (Jeff) intently wandering around in the shallow pool below the crossing trying to find his glasses. We helped him search for a few minutes before moving on.

Beyond the crossing the trail was very steep but obvious with lots of loose rock. It leveled off in an avalanche meadow where we entered a chasm where the eroded cutbanks were very loose and steep, although luckily at one spot there was a handline to help. Afterwards, the route leveled off and crossed to a beautiful heather meadow which could serve as a potential camp site. Dave loaded up his water jug, since there would likely be no water on the ridge. Up we went through a second rocky meadow, then a very steep gully which topped off onto a wonderful flat spot on the ridge, a little below 1500 m elevation. Dave had hoped to camp further on at a site closer to the summit where his friend Brian had camped on a previous trip, but since it was already 5:40 we decided to camp on the ridge instead, much to my relief. It was a perfect spot for camp, except for the lack of water, and we enjoyed a beautiful evening.

## **August 9**

With only one pack and a ptarmigan feather in Dave's cap, we left camp just before 7:00 a.m. and headed up the ridge, formed of cubed rocks that looked like something out of *The Jungle Book*. We had incredible views and an easy, speedy hike through Heidi-land to the summit which we reached at 8:50 a.m. We took photos again, this time

with crampon crowns for Kings Peak, and had another fake smoke. As Dave noted in the register "Visibility 100 km. This has to be the best easy-to-get-to peak on the whole Island."

After an hour at the top, we returned via Queens Ridge and arrived at camp at 11:30 a.m. for lunch, where we met a couple heading up to the top and a lone hiker fellow who stopped to chat before heading on. The hike out was easier than the one coming in and we enjoyed a leisurely stop at the waterfall on our way down. There was a note on the Subaru from Jeff saying thanks and that he was able to retrieve his glasses!

There was a bad accident on the Gold River Highway on our way out but luckily we had a safe drive home. While driving along the Campbell River we happened to spy Harry Steiner and his family by the side of the road with a canoe full of salmon. Finn kindly offered us a fish, which we split between us.

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman

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## The Comb and The Golden Hinde NW

**Lindsay Elms**  
**August 7 – 11**

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In August 2013, Val and I hiked up the Wolf River to the upper fork and then climbed Mount Con Reid to the west. At the end of the trip I decided that I would need to return to the Wolf River in 2014 to climb two more peaks in the area: The Comb and The Golden Hinde NW. At the same time we were up the Wolf River, Hans Roemer, Paul Spriggs and Ryan Batten also hiked in. They spent 2 days on the large plateau north of The Golden Hinde, exploring and botanizing. They also checked out some of the big trees in the valley bottom that they had viewed on Google Earth. They too had a successful trip! A few weeks after us Darren Wilman followed our route up Mount Con Reid as one of his many solo trips. For a valley that doesn't see much traffic, other than elk, August was a busy month up the Wolf River!

Late afternoon on August 7, 2014, Val and I paddled our canoe across Buttle Lake to the mouth of the Wolf River where we stashed the canoe. We entered the old burn and again we stayed high above the river following the same route we took last year. In

places we were able to follow the trail Syd Watts had built many years ago. By 9 p.m. we were half way up the valley looking for a place to camp.

The next day we continued up to the fork (3 hours) and then took the dividing spur directly up to the plateau. This took about 4 hours. Once in the alpine we traversed across to a large tarn where we found a nice spot to pitch the tent. Last year when Roemer *et al.* were up there, they found two tarns. At that time both were completely full (about 10 m deep), but now one of them was dry and the other half empty. We realised that because of the poor winter snow pack this year in the mountains there was not the usual run-off to keep the tarns full.

Anyway, we were up early the next morning hiking up over the first small bump and then down to a beautiful limestone plateau below The Golden Hinde's north snowfield/glacier. There were only a couple of small crevasses high up and we could easily get around them. By midmorning we were in a high saddle between The Comb and The Golden Hinde NW. The Comb is the high point about 1 kilometre north of The Golden Hinde while The Golden Hinde NW is another 1 kilometre north of the Comb. From the saddle it was a straightforward climb (4<sup>th</sup>/low 5<sup>th</sup>) to the top of The Comb (2069 m). This was the last of the 16 x 2000 metre peaks on the Island for me to climb. We returned to the saddle and then scrambled around a small rock tower to another saddle a couple of hundred metres further to the north. Here we stopped for lunch.

While Val was finishing her lunch I went and scouted the route ahead. This time the rock wasn't so nice and there was an airy little traverse to reach a loose gully that looked like it would top out near the summit. I returned to Val satis-



*The mountains immediately north of The Golden Hinde from the north plateau.*  
Photo - Val Wootton

fied that this route would go.

After finishing lunch we both traversed around into the gully and then climbed up to a large chockstone. There was no getting over or under this so we had to climb out onto an exposed ledge and then traverse back into the gully above the chockstone. Once this was completed the rest of the gully was a breeze and we reached the summit of The Golden Hinde NW (1922 m) 20 minutes later. This summit was the last of my 52 x 6000 foot peaks on the Island. Val had completed 40 of them and decided that she should try and finish the list next year. From the high point we traversed the ridge to another sub-summit (1910 m) 100 metres further to the north. Satisfied with the day we both returned to the saddle and then descended the snowfield/ glacier and made our way back to camp. Along the way I found what appeared to be a marmot den and later reported the find to the marmot recovery team.

The next morning we packed up, but before we descended in the bush I was hoping to find a cairn that Roemer et al had found last year that was built by Syd Watts and Jack Ware. They were leading an Island Mountain Ramblers trip into the area and had left a note in an aluminum tube in the cairn in May 1962. I had almost given up finding the cairn as it was not on any of the high points, but then just before we dropped into the bush I found it. It was like going back in time when I opened up the tube and found the note left 52 years ago. A real treat! The note was slightly damp so I dried it out in the sun and put it back in the tube. Hopefully someone else will find it again in the future.

We continued with the descent down the spur to the fork in the river and then hiked down the valley, in many places following elk trails, until we arrived at our campsite from 3 nights ago. The next day was a short hike out to the canoe and then the paddle across the lake.

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

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## A Hinde or a Helicopter: The Strathcona Traverse from Westmin to the Elk Valley

**Sonia Langer**  
**August 13 – 20**

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After shuttling a car to the Elk River trailhead parking lot for the finish of the trip, we were off with eight good friends, eight days, and good weather! We were to follow a very well known route from the Westmin parking lot, up to Arnica Lake for the first night, along Phillips Ridge for the second night, and then to drop down to Schjelderup Lake for the third night. We planned to make our way to the Elk River trail via the summit of The Golden Hinde. For the most part, this is indeed what happened, with only one major diversion for Erich and Catrin in the middle of the trip. Thus,



*The women with the Golden Hinde. Photo - Sonia Langer*

participants experienced a Hinde or a Helicopter, but not both.

The route from Arnica Lake along Phillips Ridge afforded wonderful views of the heart of Strathcona's terrain, and eventually, offered glimpses of The Golden Hinde itself. There was very little water during this dry summer, but ample and stunning camping. Once the route descended off Phillips Ridge, there was a decision point. There are three routes to Schjelderup Lake: take your pick! Two routes drop from the high ridge to the east of Schjelderup, but the more common route begins at the col after Phillips Ridge. This common route is a steep bushy descent towards and below Carter Lake with a spirit-breaking ascent back up to Carter Lake. This route is very well flagged, and well trodden now, a well-used Strathcona trade route.

Catrin and I had horrible memories of this steep and extremely bushy slope from previous trips, so we urged our group to ascend the ridge with the intention of dropping in between Schjelderup and Carter Lakes. We ascended



*The men with the Golden Hinde (missing: Peter Smith). Photo - Sonia Langer*



*View from Phillips Ridge – the goal is in sight!  
Photo - Sonia Langer*

the ridge on a clear trail, but searched in the fog and rain for the descent to Schjelderup. Though we did find the two routes, it was difficult to convince the group to follow either of these routes in the rain and poor visibility. After much discussion we retraced our steps to the northern flank of Phillips Ridge. This lost a valuable day, but made for a safe descent.

Those two descents to Schjelderup Lake from atop the high ridge are an interesting alternative to the trade route. The first drop is a steep scree slope that looks terrible from above. With a cliff face on the left, it drops steeply to the strip of land between Carter and Schjelderup Lakes. A 3-foot cairn marks this descent very clearly as the trail down to Schjelderup Lake: N49 37.81 W125 42.35. The next day, we looked at this route from the west shore of Schjelderup: we could see the route clearly, and I would suggest this as the best route; however, we did not actually take the route, so this is merely visual observation. This 3-foot cairn indicates a 90-degree turn from the ridge walk.

The second route, another 90-degree turn from the ridge walk, about one kilometre farther northwards, was the faint trail through forest that I had taken on the 2007 ACC Trip lead by Tak Ogasawara and Peter Rothermel. I had remembered this as a very quick descent with very little bush. I do hate bush bashing.

So, in the rain, we had lost a day, we were exhausted from the climbing, but back-tracked to take the trade route's descent to Carter Lake from the col at N48 36.94 W125 41.83; we were frustrated with the steep descent, followed by a ridiculous steep ascent to our camp at the south end of Carter Lake. Wet and cranky, we were relieved when one of us lit a fire. (In the park!) Don't tell anyone: it was necessary for our spirits and wellbeing, and dried our socks.

The route around Carter and Schjelderup Lakes was delightfully improved from my previous trip, and quite straightforward, as was the snow-less climb to the Burman Ridge. The incredible number of large, juicy blueberries and low-

bush huckleberries enhanced the deep descent to Burman Lake and also the ascent out of the Burman Valley.

After arranging our camp in the lunar setting beneath The Golden Hinde near the trail to The Behinde, rather than the beautiful green lakefront campsite one kilometre to the east, we settled into a lovely evening. Peter sped off to climb The Behinde with a 45-minute approach and a 45-minute scramble. The lunar nature, however lacking in aesthetics, would prove useful the following day! Our supper preparation was interrupted when Erich threw his tent poles into the air as he tripped over a sharp one-foot rock. Just like that: a strong, fit, skilled, honed mountaineer simply tripped! To our shock, he landed on his spine atop that pointy one-foot rock, then bounced, then landed again on his belly. He lay still for a little while; we all realized the gravity of the situation. After Catrin and others gave him a quick once-over check, he began moving on his own, and made his way to his cooking station. We made him as comfortable as possible. Watching him chat and converse, and eat a full meal was a relief. At bedtime, his pain was acute; we dragged him into the tent. Catrin reported only a small red mark on his spine with no swelling or bruising. His situation was stable, but very serious. We made detailed notes in a first aid report. And went to sleep: nothing could be done until the morning.

With Erich's situation still stable in the morning, he urged us to continue our summit goal. Wishing to split up our large group because of rockfall on the Hinde, Peter and Matthias left camp to summit the mountain in an impressive 1 hour and 40 minutes: a 3 hour return trip. (Though none of this has any clout with Rumon Carter and Jamie Sparling's record of 16 hours 18 minutes car-to-car earlier in the summer. According to Sparling's Strava post, they did 60.9 km, 4,858 m elevation, with 7,952 calories burned, and they took the same bushy trade route descent to Carter Lake.) Back at camp, Erich, a good sport, rehearsed a short hike with an empty pack. After about ten metres, he felt dizzy, confirming he was unable to hike out. At 9:30 a.m. we pushed the button on my Spot device. Placing it on a rock



*The scree slope leading to Schjelderup Lake. At the top is the 3-foot cairn at: N49 37.81; W125 42.35. Photo - Sonia Langer*



*Dropping down to Burman Lake. Photo - Sonia Langer*

in full view of the sky, the device proceeded to call out more than 50 emergency signals to Houston, Texas. I am embarrassed to write that the second summit team then left Catrin to manage our patient. Knowing that Peter and Matthias would soon return, and that Catrin had things under control, Martin, Josh, Alcina, and myself had a glorious summit experience.

Our summit journey was full of sunshine and manky loose rock. And, once atop the mountain, we had full view of both SAR helicopters that flew that day. Despite our years of carrying the Spot, none of us had ever pushed the SOS button, and we were all interested to know what happens. The records on my Spot account indicate that signals were sent at varying intervals of 3 to 9 minutes from our camp at the base of The Golden Hinde to GEOS International Emergency Coordination Centre in Houston, Texas. GEOS contacted the Nootka RCMP, who in turn attempted to reach my two emergency contacts. Since one of those contacts was on the trip with me (another lesson), a good friend on Salt Spring was contacted by the Nootka RCMP, who were able to confirm some basic information. My contacts phoned Harry Steiner, who knew more about the participants and nature of the trip. With some brief information from



*A summit view – helicopters heard in the distance!  
Photo - Matthias Hoefle*

Harry, the Campbell River Search and Rescue was able to triage two emergencies in the park that Sunday. From the summit of The Golden Hinde we watched a helicopter fly past our camp; apparently Erich received the second helicopter that day!

Three members of Campbell River SAR flew in and landed. At this point, Erich could not sit upright. This required a re-configuration of the helicopter so he could ride lying down which resulted in the SAR personnel remaining in camp, and Erich

and Catrin flying out to Campbell River Hospital where the doctors considered, then decided against surgery for internal injuries. Erich's spleen was torn, and his pancreas was bruised. The helicopter returned for the SAR personnel.

In the end, the SOS call and resultant helicopter rescue had been absolutely necessary! Thank goodness for the Spot! We were all thankful for lots of daylight, sunshine and clear weather for the rescue, as well as a flat, good-sized landing spot right in our lunar camp. Peter and Matthias had collapsed all the tents in anticipation of rotor wash, which was considerable! The rocky ground was perfect for a heli-pad with barely enough room. (Our plan B was to send Peter and Matthias on a sprint to Westmin to make a phone call: this would have taken days!)

After the Helicopter-Hinde day, we were now six intrepid mountaineers hiking onwards around the southern base of The Behinde's massif, and for some reason, took the ridge that simply dropped down southwards towards Burman Lake. We then contoured to the west to reach the high point of land to gain the next ridge. Following this ridge to the south of Mount Devoe was stunning!



*Erich gets rescued by Campbell River Search and Rescue.  
Photo - Matthias Hoefle.*

At first Matthias was feeling out-of-sorts with his longtime friend Erich's absence, and a language barrier to overcome, but he began to enjoy the Canadian wilderness. No restaurants or buildings in each of the many valleys we saw! Matthias loved it, giggling and humming with each fat juicy huckleberry! I do hate bush bashing, and my gut reaction in the situation is to put myself into the lead and navigate the absolute shortest distance through it. I know that I am a bush-lightweight, perhaps a Phillip Stone B3 or B4 rating, but somehow my skills in bee-line bushwhacking are getting so solid! Suggestion: descend via the scree slope on the west shoulder of the ridge to the south of The Behinde to avoid the 6-hour journey in the bush. It is an obvious route, which looks threatening from above, and quick and straightforward when looking at it from below across the valley. The nine-summit ridge south of Mount Devoe is stunning, with views that were new to most of us. Hiking near Mount Devoe, and then upwards to the pass between Rambler Peak and Mount Colonel Foster offered some interesting route finding, and splendid mountain terrain. A fantastic hike! The Elk River trail was straightforward and beautiful. Once back at the car, we found four beers tucked away behind the wheels of the remaining vehicle: Catrin's tip of the hat for our traverse completion.

Conclusions to pass along: descend by BOTH scree slopes, carry a Spot or InReach device, and be sure to have your contacts correct!

Thanks to these amazing people with whom I have shared so much type II and type I fun!

Participants: Erich Schellhammer, Catrin Brown, Martin Hofmann, Alcina Oliviera, Josh Slatkoff, Peter Smith, Matthias Hoefle and Sonia Langer

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## Passing the Towel – Youth Leadership

### Nadja Steiner with contributions from Iain Sou, Evelyn Sou, Finn Steiner and Anna-Lena Steiner August

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Somewhat drained by the amount of work and effort required for the youth mountaineering camp and faced with Harry's decision to back out of the youth program, I was ready to drop the towel. But noooooo mum! Resistance came from the least expected side, my own daughter Anna-Lena. Her interest in building up leadership skills to support the program, echoed by an e-mail from longest standing participant, Iain, led me to think more about passing rather than dropping the towel. I decided to offer a soft skill training for aspiring youth leaders. Participants were Anna-Lena, Iain, Malachite, Finn and Lindsay from afar with training by EJ and Mike. All youth had participated in the Youth Mountaineering camp in 2013 and taken AST1,

crevasse rescue and ice axe training.

Based on what I learned in my TNF summer leadership course, my own experiences and John Graham's book "Outdoor Leadership" we set up two afternoons of theory, including team exercises addressing problem solving and decision making, and practical exercises with compass and maps, creating a route map and time planning ahead of the trip. We had one "scenario outing", climbing up the back side of Mt. Finlayson. Pretend signs of dehydration, ignorance and anxiety had to be acted out and dealt with, followed by discussion. The route finding turned more challenging once deteriorating weather rendered the planned gully access too risky. Faced with this real-life scenario, the trip became even more interesting and with suggestions, discussions, some bushwhacking and even rope work, everyone made it safely to the summit.

Based on this introduction, all youth leaders picked a trip which they would co-lead, and made their preparations. This included time planning, potential scouting, e-mail correspondence with participants and creation of a kit-list. Some of this they did on their own and some in collaboration with myself. While Malachite scouted out the best location for a weekend on the Kludahk Trail and Lindsay some locations for bouldering and rock climbing on Gabriola Island, those two trips turned out to be inconveniently timed and received low interest. Nonetheless, we had a fabulous time on both, even though they felt more like family outings. Hiking, camping at Meadow Cabin, and swimming and canoeing (in a leaky canoe) at Wye Lake made for a fabulous short weekend outing. And jumping off Malaspina Galleries into the ocean while a wedding party visited the fabulous place for pictures made for a perfect finish of a bouldering day on Gabriola. (I was intrigued by the arranged footwear of the wedding party: dark red flipflops for the ladies and white sneakers for the men, very cool....) I actually do hope to convince both Malachite and Lindsay to put their trips back on next summer.

Meanwhile planning continues: Finn and Anna-Lena were on for Mt. Albert Edward and Mt. Jutland. The plan was for a 4 day trip with Cirplet Lake as base camp, and the two mountains to be ascended in two consecutive days dependent on interest. Finn, an avid fly fisher, had identified nearby Amphitheater Lake as a hidden gem for fly fishing and provided in his e-mail communication sufficient info on what rods and flies to pack. The fishing trip was planned as a rest day option, however the weather influence caused some adjustments to the plans:

***Mt. Jutland (Amphitheater Lake) by Finn (15)***  
There we were, five dust-splattered, ragtag cars in the Raven Lodge overnight parking lot. The drive up from Victoria, which started at a bleary-eyed 5:30 a.m., had been a blur of coffee shops mixed with the occasional nap. Four families had made the drive, completed by one mother whose son had deigned to come with us, the cause of course being the girlfriend. The plan was, weather permitting, to do a four-day overnight trip of Mt. Albert Edward (led by my sister,



*Fly fishing at Amphi theatre Lake: Jim, Cedric and Finn.  
Photo - Nadja Steiner*

Anna-Lena) and a summer ascent of the winter route up to Mount Jutland (my trip) consisting of a traverse of three shale-filled gullies above Amphi theatre Lake. Easy in principle, not too easy in reality.

The first day consisted of a light, 12-kilometre hike into what was affectionately dubbed as “base camp” at Circler Lake. The hike went well, complete with lunch, and a few practice casts of the 5-weight fly rod that accompanies me everywhere in the mountains. Arriving at Circler at around 5 in the afternoon, with smiles on everyone’s faces, we set up camp, and even I was too busy to celebrate my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. The next morning dawned, and [most] of us had had a dry sleep, but the rain will find its way into an untreated tent sooner or later. Having been up at 6:30 to assess the conditions for the slippery ascent up Mt. Jutland, I concluded that climbing nearly 1,200 vertical feet in a torrential downpour with 10 feet of visibility would not be beneficial to the safety of our group. Everyone contented themselves with this and slept in to a leisurely 9 a.m. for a breakfast and a meeting at our camp to discuss the day.

While some (Anna-Lena and Marlene) were up for lounging around all day, I figured most people wanted to go do something. Having thought of this eventuality beforehand, I had sent out an email mentioning the possibility of fishing Amphi theatre Lake, a hidden gem at the bottom of the Jutland ridge. This lake also happened to be filled with 12- to 25-inch rainbows that, in principle, had never seen a fly. Most of us being in agreement (my disgruntled sister and her friend stayed behind) we packed our daypacks and followed the 45-minute deer trail up to the lake. The day went quietly, with the mothers sitting in the fog and laughing, and the fathers and sons (and one daughter) fishing the shallow margins of the lake. While the 25-inch fish eluded us, Cedric and I both managed to hook into three or four medium-sized fish, all on dry flies in the rain. It was a fantastic experience. Having caught our dinner supplement, we made our way through the fog back to base camp, where there was still plenty of time left for some games and, of course, more fishing. Thus, having had our share of blueberry-baked trout, we proceeded to turn our thoughts

towards the jagged peak to our south....

### **Albert Edward by Anna-Lena (18)**

Starting off, we gave our introductions and everyone who didn’t know each other got to meet. The first day we hiked up to Circler Lake, stopping at Lake Helen Mackenzie for a swim, and on the small plateau to eat (though perhaps feeding the whiskey jacks is a better description) before taking a another quick dip in Little Hairtrigger Lake just before the descent to Circler. Tents were set up and everyone pretty much jumped into the lake after the hike – it had been a long, hot, day.

Day 2 was the original planned hike to Jutland for those who wanted to go, but we woke up to the very West Coast sound of rain, and certain unfortunates discovered leaky tents with minor puddling issues. Finn, the leader that day, decided to wait a bit before making the decision to cancel the Jutland trip, which would’ve been quite the muddy, foggy trek, and decided to offer a fly fishing excursion to Amphi theatre Lake instead. I was told it was good fun and probably a much better idea than marching up to Jutland. The puddle victims (Marlene, visiting from Switzerland, and I) stayed behind and had a nice day making bracelets and hanging out under the tarp, catching up after many years of not having seen one another. The fishing crew came back later in the afternoon, wet, but happy, with their prize catches in hand, and we had a nice bit of fish to go with dinner.

Day 3 dawned sunnier than expected, so I decided to go ahead with the planned trip up Albert Edward. The evening before, I had done a route plan (as much as can be done on a fairly cut-and-dry trail like Albert Edward) and had decided when we would get up and how long it would take. I decided it would be about nine hours, factoring in kids, weather, breaks, and everyone’s varying speeds. I had some incredulous looks from the faster members of our group but stuck with my estimate and made everyone get up at the ungodly hour of 6:30 a.m. (Hey, teenagers were involved; 6:30 is early for us). We set off after grabbing some water from the lake, and were on the first stretch up to the first ridge. After a short water and snack break with a visit from a ptarmigan or two, we started the ant march (two by two, hurrah) up to the upper ridge, behind which we were hoping to catch a glimpse of the wedge-like peak we were headed towards.

It was pretty smooth sailing, with only a few water breaks here and there and the occasional snack break. Then we were on the ridge, where we could see the limestone staircase and the summit around the bend. With the summit in sight, everyone redoubled their speed and ran right up to the summit. Nah, ... just kidding, we had lunch, sitting on the top of the limestone staircase. Everyone put on jackets because it was actually fairly chilly and windy up there, but the sun was still bright and the sky still clear, so it wasn’t long before we started up again. After a while it becomes like herding cats because the summit is right there and those with a faster pace just want to run up. Well, I can’t force them to stay with the group, so the last push was

spread out with everyone going at their own pace, the more leisurely being cheered on by the eager beavers from the summit.

The sun was out at the summit, and we took the opportunity to have some snacks, take some pictures, and a nap or two. We also had to disappoint some excited hikers by letting them know that this was not in fact the second highest peak on the island, but congratulations they'd reached the 6<sup>th</sup> highest, have a gummy bear for your trouble. Then it was time to get moving again as the clouds started rolling up the mountain. The trip down was a bit more of a struggle, with some of us having knee issues or feeling uncomfortable with the terrain on the descent. One part of the group got progressively slower as the other half got progressively faster (and pushier). Eventually, after discussion with my mum, I decided to split the group, something I rarely like to do. Nadja stayed with the smaller group in the back while I led the faster group (with EJ as my new responsible adult). This proved to be a good decision because the slower group actually sped up as soon as we split up.

It became a little foggy on the way down, and leading became a bit of a challenge with a certain impatient and slightly cranky sibling challenging my leadership, but it was a good test and I learned from it. The last bit got a little dragged out, because we had two sick people on the trip, and we needed to take a break for a while, hoping for EJ and Cedric to feel a little better, while the not-actually-that-slow group caught up to us. The last bit we finished more or less together, making it back to camp, dumping bags, fixing sick people, and debriefing with a mug of hot

chocolate.

Day 4 was a pretty standard pack-up-and-go sort of day, although we stopped for a quick swim and wasp-bite cooling again. We were faster than I expected considering I was leading, and were at the bottom in good time, debriefing and sending everyone on their way.

It was a good leadership experience for me, I was able to learn a lot about my abilities as a leader, and gain some confidence about my leadership. Making decisions and deciding on routes, assessing people's moods and energy levels, knowing when to turn around and when to push, knowing my limits when it comes to experience and ability, and being a good participant are all things you have to learn in practice. And while classroom sessions are great, actually getting out there and gaining experience is the best way to learn. I had a lot of fun, and I hope everyone else did too.

There is not much to add to their stories. EJ did in fact get very sick, but luckily she kept it in her family and no-one else was knocked off their feet for two weeks. On the way out we heard the sound of a rescue helicopter. Wondering what it was about, we only heard afterward that one of our fellow ACCers was flown out from the Golden Hinde. Apart from that, it actually was a great weekend with good exercise, good rest and good fun.

The most challenging trip of this season was led by Iain, who has an aptitude for the technical side of mountaineering, ropes and knots. He could not remember that the last time he climbed Kings Peak he wrote me a Bushwhacker contribution ending in "I will never climb Kings Peak again". You can find details on that snow-touched trip 5 years ago in one of the old Bushwhacker Annuals. But with much more experience and improved equipment it was for sure a go this year. The weather was predicted to be great; however, the participants had been shuffled around a bit more than I liked in the last few days before the trip, and I had agreed to include some newcomers, after some convincing discussions with the dad of the one and the mum of the other, that both new youth were experienced. After a little shock seeing both boys in runners, I was relieved to see them stepping safely and pacing rather well. With one talking rather little and the other rather a lot, they reminded me of another pair of boys (now a bit older and in leadership roles; hmmm, who might



*Mt. Albert Edward summit: left: Katrina, Evelyn, Cedric, middle: Marlene, Anna-Lena, right: Finn, Iain. Photo - Nadja Steiner*



*Kings Peak descent, Elkhorn in the back. From left to right: Su, Sanchia, Evelyn, Raven, Iain, Gabriel, William, Derek, and David. Photo - Nadja Steiner.*

that be..?). Both Gabriel and Will, as well as their attached parental units, made an excellent addition to the group.

The ascent through the gully was a bit more worn out than I remembered and required extra caution. We found base camp deserted and were happy to spread out. Not much was left from the snow field between Kings and Queens, a sour reminder of the climate change impacts on this island. Unfortunately this time Anna-Lena was not feeling well and stayed behind, while the rest of the group went on their way the next morning. The weather was fabulous and we made good speed. Well spread out and armed with helmets, Iain lead us safely up through the gully, no rope required. Passed only by a guy in webbed shoes (or was he bare-foot?) and with only a water bottle, we made it up to the summit. A comfortable rest on the Kings' most comfortable summit plateau.

The kids let out a bit of a shriek when all of a sudden two heads appeared behind them, right where they, with bellies on the ground and facing the other direction, had just peeked over the edge, down into the ~200 m abyss. An interesting situation in fact. While I am aware that hikers in the mountains have vastly different comfort zones, and some are in fact quite safe and comfortable on a 2-cm ledge on top of a 200 m wall, I am wondering if it was wise to apply this sense of safety behind the backs of a bunch of kids who are at an age known for erratic movements. Anyway, we radioed our sick basecamp supervisor who asked if we had seen the man with the frog shoes who had seemingly lost his path and asked her for directions. We confirmed he'd been safely back on his way down. We were getting ready as well; however the combination of drinking snow water, heat and exercise lead one of our youngsters to show some well-known signs of dehydration. It took a bit of convincing to get him to drink some electrolytes and make them move through his body, but not long after he was his usual self again and made his way down in good spirits.

Since Iain and I had decided to do some rope safety on the way down, remembering the deteriorating gully, Iain had taken some of the spare time to go over knots with everyone who wanted to join in. Evelyn, his younger sister (and quite proficient already thanks to the rope practices into the attic at home), was quite happy to play the assistant instructor. In the end our way down became the long way down, since, both for safety as well as for practice, we decided to put in a fixed rope at one place and a rappel station at another. Iain had gone ahead with Su to ensure the safety at the bottom, and Anna-Lena supervised the access at the top, giving a hand with prusik and rappel device if

needed, while I mostly just watched. While appreciated by all, especially the new parents, this stuff takes a long time in a large group. No wonder you might start questioning yourself, wondering if you are overdoing it, when suddenly a fairly large group of people aged between our two generations appeared in sandals, runners, jeans and plenty of colourful clothes, one small backpack for the group and



*Evelyn rappelling the gully of King's Peak. Photo - Evelyn Sou*

mostly carrying water bottles in hands or jeans pockets (we found two lost ones on the way down)... but nah...better safe than sorry. ..Here is what Iain summarized:

### **Kings Peak by Iain Sou (15)**

Kings Peak stood out from all the mountains I had climbed this summer. Maybe because it was my first trip as a leader, or it was one of the only trips where it wasn't raining. This trip provided a positive and safe environment to learn to be a leader. It was too slow for my liking at some points such as when we had to rappel down a steepish dusty slope and had some people who hadn't rappelled before.

My favourite part of the trip was when I taught other kids on the trip some knots. It was cool to see how fast some people pick up the knots and how long it takes for others. I learned how to set a good pace and how to share my thoughts more frequently. I felt that by the end of this trip that I had gotten better (improved or gained new skills) and maybe after a couple more trips I will be able to do this with ease. Overall I think this youth leadership course was a fun and educational part of my year and I would love to improve in the area of leadership even more.

A good set of summer trips for sure, and I am really proud of this group of young people who, I trust, will keep packing the towel.

Participants in one or more trips: Iain, Evelyn, Derek Sou, Malachite Miller, Lindsay and Mike Richards, EJ Hurst, Nadja, Finn, Anna-Lena and Harry Steiner, Luc and Cedric Lachance, David and Gabriel Gledhill, Sanchia and William James, Su and Raven Castle, Marlene Jolisant, Jim and Katrina Basnett

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## **Augerpoint Traverse "Fun"draiser**

### **Janelle Curtis August 21 – 24**

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Extraordinary things can happen when we take risks, step outside of our comfort zone and learn what we are capable of achieving. Arno Ilgner calls this gaining personal power, and every bit of it gained is something worth celebrating! So when Lesley and Lesley – with no previous backcountry



*On the airy high point between Ruth Masters and Buttle Lakes. From left to right: Robyn, Dee, Madelene, Mary, Amelia, Lesley, Lesley, Vanessa, Jennifer and Lenka.*

experience – asked about joining our 2014 “fun”draising team, everyone was thrilled. While Robyn coordinated our fundraising strategy, Lenka and I planned an alpine adventure that would be both challenging and accessible to women with a range of mountaineering experiences.

Our goal was to traverse from Mt. Washington to Buttle Lake in four days, and if possible, spend two nights at breathtaking Ruth Master's Lake. We left the morning of 21 August, this time under a crystal clear blue sky, and arrived at Circler Lake in time to enjoy a blueberry feast and a synchronized ballet leg skinny dip in McPhee Lake. The evening was capped with yoga led by Dee, a shared meal, and peals of laughter as we recounted memories of our previous rain-soaked visit to Circler Lake (Mt. Albert Edward, 20-22 September 2013).

Anticipating a long day, we were back on the trail just after 7 a.m. and retraced our steps to Mt. Albert Edward, this time in the warm glow of a pink sunrise. On the way, Mary and Jennifer found clusters of dazzling crystals and Amelia reconnected with the whiskeyjacks. After high-fives, a lunch break, and rounds of group photos, we started down Mt. Albert Edward's other sweeping ridge to the pass below Ruth Masters Lake. This leg of the traverse involved a “wee bit of treach” and some firsts for many, including first slabs, first ledges, first scree, first scrambly bits, first bushwhacking, first tarn-side naps, and first backcountry “rest stops”! Route finding was straightforward, and although everyone was very tired, the promise of a boot-free day propelled us past the ‘low point’. We arrived at Ruth Masters Lake by 7 p.m. in time to set up camp before the sun set on another wonderful day in the alpine.

While Vanessa, Madelene and others spent part of our rest day at the spa and exploring the falls, Lenka, Barb and I

hiked to the top of Augerpoint Mountain where we enjoyed views of “the swimming lounge” below, the Golden Hinde and Elkhorn Mountain to the northwest, Mt. Albert Edward to the east, and Mt. Mitchell to the north. Then I headed south to Syd Watts Peak and enjoyed some summit solitude. As mothers and nurses and teachers and scientists and community leaders and athletes and students, this was the first day of rest many of us had had in as long as we could remember. I expect these few hours of peaceful contemplation shared with such extraordinary women will be treasured for many years to come.

The following morning, we were on the trail, boots and all, by 7 a.m. and within a few hours we gained the ridge adjoining Augerpoint Mountain and Syd Watts Peak, where we had the airy sensation of exposure with the security of solid ground beneath our feet. Inspiring views of Marble Meadows and the Golden Hinde fuelled ideas about future adventures and kept our momentum going as we wound our way down the equivalent of “two Mt. Bensons” to Buttle Lake. Upon arrival around 3 p.m. at the Augerpoint Day Use Area, we were warmly greeted by family and friends who had prepared a surprise BBQ and brought us fresh clothes and a delicious assortment of treats! We celebrated our achievement with another swim and some pink champagne!

Our experience on the Augerpoint Traverse underscored the challenges that girls in many countries must face to meet basic needs and gain an education, including limited access to clean water, healthy foods, safe shelter, and transportation to and from school. This year, we raised \$14,000 for Because I Am a Girl’s scholarship program. With matching funds from Plan Canada’s partners, that is enough to support 140 girls in their pursuit of education, in places where it is both risky and extraordinary for girls to learn to read and write. To read more and view photos, visit: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Educated-Women-for-Educating-Girls-Augerpoint-Traverse-2014/284773581691630>.

Participants: Jennifer Boldt, Barb Campbell, Janelle Curtis, Madelene Daniel, Vanessa Hodes, Robyn Forrest, Lesley France, Lesley MacDougall, Amelia Mahoney, Dee Montie, Mary Thiess, and Lenka Visnovska

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## A Project Completed and an Unplanned Strathcona Park Classic Traverse

**Ken Wong**  
**September 2 – 8**

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By late summer, George Butcher was mostly recovered from his sailing excursion to Hawaii. It was time for him and me to complete our project of climbing the sixteen 2000+ meter mountains on Vancouver Island. We planned



*George on the Stegosaurus’s back – Rambler Junior with Rambler at the left. Photo - Ken Wong*

a trip starting at the Elk River Trail (ERT), then going into the heart of Strathcona Park to climb Rambler Junior, the Behinde, and the Comb. I invited Dave Suttill to join us, to increase our chance of success.

We left Victoria in late afternoon and slept near the ERT trailhead. The next day we hiked to Elk River Pass with a bit of mushrooming along the way. We found blue chanterelle (*Polyozellus multiplex*), bear’s head (*Hericium abietis*), and golden chanterelle mushrooms. The landscape of the upper ERT had changed dramatically from two months ago when I climbed Rambler Junior. There was an absence of snow, the river was greatly diminished and the tarns dried up. It was now more difficult to find water but, on the upside, we had a bug free environment. The bugs were terrible in July.

Early the next morning I led the way up Rambler Junior. Soon we arrived at the Stegosaurus’ back and were facing the row of spikes guarding the summit pinnacle about a hundred meters away. Dave carried a 30-meter rope but decided that the summit was not worth the exposure. He would bring a full rope and plenty of protection next time. I had no interest in getting my foot stuck in that crack on the ridge again so I stayed put, and instead shouted encouragement to George while he gingerly inched across. He sat on the summit for a couple minutes and then scrambled back with a few pauses along the way. We were back at the Elk River Pass camp three hours after we left.

George stashed a few bulky items behind a tree to be picked up on our return and we dropped down the south side of the Pass. The descent was very steep but it was still much easier going down than it was up, even though we did get lost in the bushes and ran into bluffs a few times. I dreaded this stretch of the route. During my Marble Meadow to ERT traverse in 1999, the nasty bushes and deadfalls almost finished me off as I had climbed to the Pass.

We hiked past some unnamed but beautiful pristine lakes. However, the fight against the bushes above and around the shore of the circular lake while hiking was epic. There



*The Comb, Golden Hinde and the Behinde from Mt. Devoe.. Photo - Ken Wong*

was a consensus to not return the same way we came. Dave and I climbed Mt. Devoe, while George went ahead to the twin tarns below us to set up camp. When we arrived at camp a welcoming fire awaited us.

The next day we were on the bumpy ridge west of the Golden Hinde group. Using my monocular we inspected the slide gully that we had to take to reach the south shoulder of the Behinde. The gully looked difficult and its top seemed narrow and vertical. We descended 400 meters to the bushy col and went up the gully. Oh boy! It was long, steep and loose. George and I laboured behind while Dave took off like a mountain goat. Its top was indeed capped by two 10 metre tall blocks and a small waterfall, just as its name implied! Luckily, George found a tunnel in the middle of the obstacle to crawl through. We camped under the full moon, at the col between the Golden Hinde and the Behinde. We were ready for our final assault.

The next morning we hiked up the heather-covered south ridge of the Behinde. I vaguely remembered going this way in 1999 with Jamie Duncan, high on the ridge until an exposed gully with no run-out drove us back. We reached a narrow and exposed section. George climbed up but was stuck after a few moves. He yelled for assistance and I lent him my shoulders to help him get down. It was good for me that he had lost a lot of weight during his sailing trip. I scouted around to the right and found a loose gully to climb up. It was possible that it would turn out to be the same one which stopped me before. But I was relatively green back then. Dave and George came up using the rope from a different route. We left the rope fixed there as a hand line for our return. The remaining scramble up the twin summit bumps of the Behinde was straightforward. We took our summit shots and then spent some time studying the ramp below the Golden Hinde up to the Comb. The ramp looked simple and had four patches of snow, but the north glacier looked pretty cracked up. We hurried down for our next adventure – the Comb.

We strapped on crampons and descended onto the north glacier. It was white at first, then turned into blue ice with cracks and running streams. The sparkling reflection of the sun from the patterned ice and the water running around my feet distracted me. I need to concentrate, though, as a slip here would send me into the crevasses below. An ice axe arrest would be impossible on this steep blue ice. What a relief it was when I reached the ramp. We followed the ramp up, all the while being constantly worried about rock falling from the Golden Hinde directly above us. At the top of the ramp we climbed a loose class 4 gully before reaching easier ground.

We spent a long time on the summit of the Comb under the big blue sky. The view was fantastic: Golden Hinde looming to the south; the Behinde to the west; Colonel Foster, Rambler, Victoria, Warden, Elkhorn, Kings, Cobb and Filberg dotted the north; McBride to the east. It had been twenty years since I climbed my first 2000+ meter Island summit – Mt. Albert Edward. The good and the bad, yet somehow all wonderful, climbing memories flashed through my head.

On the way back to camp we dodged one rock fall. There was no time to revisit the Golden Hinde! We packed up and headed down towards Burman Lake. When we were about halfway down we heard a “bang” and saw smoke rising from the summit of Golden Hinde. Someone had fired a flare. It was already pretty late, about 6:30 p.m. We wondered if they were signalling for help. We scanned for signs of a climber with my monocular but saw nothing. We continued down and later saw a tent by the tarn below the south face. We guessed that the flare was just some yahoos celebrating their successful climb of the Hinde. It was almost dark before we found a nice campsite with many tarns. The full moon arose east of Mt. Burman. The wind died and the land turned silver.

The next day we came across five parties, a dozen people in total, with one woman and two men going solo. The Philips Ridge route had become a highway. It was so different from the times I went in the 1990s when I did not meet anyone. From Mt. Burman we could see a group of intriguing mountains to the southwest – Splendour, Scimitar and Scissors. We talked about making them our next project. That evening we camped somewhere on the Philips Ridge. The alpenglow on Tom Taylor and Mariner to our south after sunset and before sunrise was glorious. The next day we descended the switchbacks to Boliden Westin Mine and walked to the bridge at Buttle Lake. George caught a ride to retrieve his car at ERT while we skinny-dipped in Price Creek. When George returned we found the bag of chips

which I had left in the car was chewed up, while the watermelon was untouched. We had a toast to celebrate our completion of the project and the unplanned ERT to Philips Ridge traverse. We headed home satisfied!

As we were driving home along Buttle Lake, I had a glimpse of a head with whiskers that popped up from below the windshield wiper. It was a mouse! The guys did not believe me. We all saw it when it appeared again during a traffic stop. Elkie the little mouse went to Sooke with George, but the poor thing was deported to the mouse heaven a couple of days later. Peanut butter or chips is not good for Elkie's health...

BTW, George's bag of stuff is still at Elk River Pass.

Participants: George Butcher, Dave Suttill and Ken Wong



*McKelvie's crumbling summit. Photo - Tony Vaughn*

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## McKelvie from Mclvor Creek

**Tony Vaughn**  
**September 4 – 6**

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It all came about as a result of Martin Smith studying Google Earth. While doing so he observed new logging roads going close to Mt. McKelvie from the east. His next step was to lay out a theoretical route that appeared viable on both the topo map and Google Earth. Then came the time to put theory into practice or in other words, to see what lies between the contour lines.

On August 31, 2010, having just completed an ascent of Waring Peak, Rick Eppler, Martin Smith and I drove from the Waring branch road onto the Nimpkish main and proceeded north to Vernon camp. From there we turned onto Vernon Lake Road, then on to Sebalhall Road and after 4.3 km kept right at a junction where upper Sebalhall branched left. Now on Mclvor Creek Road, we continued up the valley, reaching a right branching spur road just before a bridge over a creek at 18.5 km from the Nimpkish main. We drove as far as we could up this right spur and set up camp.



*McKelvie bush. Photo - Tony Vaughn*

We were up and away early next morning and started on the route up the gully down which the main stream flowed. A short walk from camp we entered into an area of logging debris. To avoid the downed trees etc., Rick went to the left of the stream while Martin and I disappeared into the bush on the right in search of a passable route up the gully. Following about a half hour's struggle through dense bush and getting nowhere, we heard Rick's voice over on the other side of the creek. As we were not aware of there being anyone else in the area we figured he must be chatting away to a squirrel or some other small critter, so we decided to join him across the creek and see if he was making better progress than we were. Well he certainly had, in fact he had found an elk trail heading in just the direction we wanted to go. The problem was that there was a large black bear using the same trail and he wanted to come down the trail that we wished to go up; he also figured that as he was bigger than Rick then he had the right of way, hence the conversation we had heard with Rick talking and the bear huffing. By the time we arrived, the bear had left by climbing up a tree, leaving a slightly shaken Rick in its wake.

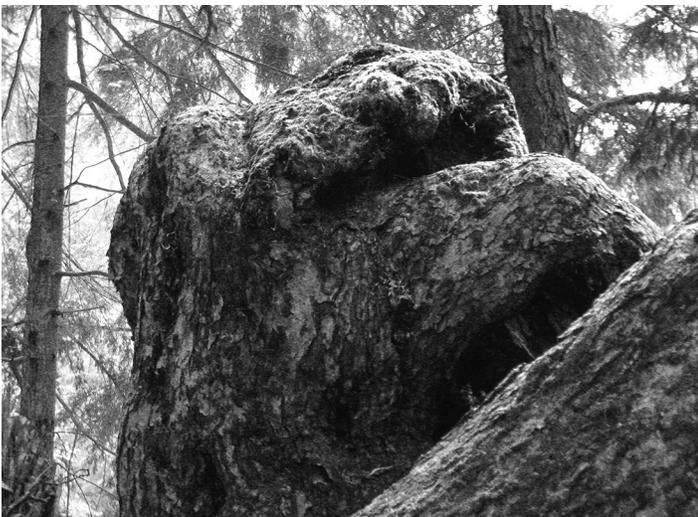
Now we were all together, we started working our way upwards following an intermittent elk trail, through slide alder, currant bushes and devil's club, keeping to the left of the creek. At one point the elk trail led us out into a sun-soaked gully, making for easier travel. Unfortunately it soon became obvious that the gully wouldn't go, so it was back into the bush and a traverse back across towards the creek, hoping to tie back into the upward-leading elk track. Following a little careful down-climbing we entered a small downward-sloping meadow with an obvious trail coming in from the bottom left hand corner and exiting back into the bush about halfway up the meadow. From here the myriad elk trails consolidated into one track which was much easier to follow, coming out on level ground at a beautiful rocky stream. We followed it until it disappeared underground, leaving a wide flat gravel highway stretching ahead of us into a fantastic cirque of high towering cliffs, with a waterfall cascading down into this high valley at its far end: A valley which we could easily have been the first people to have ever stepped into.



*The Cirque and high valley en route to McKelvie.  
Photo - Tony Vaughn*

The next phase of the journey was to find a way through the surrounding cliffs and reach the high bowl above this valley; no other visible animal trail seemed to leave the valley going higher up. By now, time had moved on and the rain clouds had moved in, so we bid our farewells to this beautiful remote valley and in increasing rainfall we retraced our steps, finding that it was much easier to follow the main elk trail going down. About halfway down we came across an old downed tree with a distinctive burl growing on it that was reminiscent of a gorilla head; being a distinctive landmark we named it the gorilla tree. Having the rain move in with its attendant lack of visibility put an end to our exploration for that year.

On July 2012 with the sad news of Rick Eppler's passing behind us, we once more continued exploring our route to McKelvie. Due to trees blocking the road, we had to camp on the Mclvor main and walk to the spur road. We found that the spur had been ditched and blocked with a large log about 300 metres up from the main road. It being earlier in the year this time, the start of the route required a lot of creek crossings and not much of an elk trail to follow. We reached continuous snow at around



*The Gorilla tree en route to McKelvie. Photo - Tony Vaughn*

800 m, making for a completely different scene in the upper valley. Passing our last high point, we attempted to reach the upper bowl by climbing a gully branching towards the ridge on our right; it didn't go, due to slippery exposed rock, so we backed off and tried a line to the right of the waterfall. This way lead first through trees, then up a snow slope and along ledges above the waterfall to a short rock wall about 6 to 7 metres high which was easily climbed, getting us into the upper bowl and reaching, once more, our turn-around time. On reaching the spur road on our return, we found that all the blow-downs had been cleared away by a very considerate crew who had kindly relocated our camp to the side of the road.

It was September 4 2014 before we returned again, this time determined to complete the route to the summit. In preparation we took bivy gear and extra food so we would not be limited by time. At first light on September 5 we left camp, following our original route, and later stashed our bivy gear in the upper valley by 10:45 a.m. We arrived at the upper bowl following our route of 2012. As there was no snow this year we thought the route we had used might not go as easily, but there was no problem, and we reached our previous high point by 11:45 a.m. From here on we were on new ground, but we were well into the alpine, with a few scrubby pines and heather underfoot. Visibility was great and we could easily see our route ahead passing between two large tarns and up a heather-filled gully to the saddle on the ridge at 1311 metres.

On reaching the saddle we could see McKelvie clearly in the distance and still looking a long way off. Following our lunch break we traversed high across the shoulder of peak 1524 and dropped down below a small ice field into the snow-filled col between 1524 and McKelvie. Scrambling up scree gullies and heather benches, we soon reached the summit tower, which we easily climbed up a horrible loose scree-filled gully, reaching the top at 3:15 p.m. Just below the summit block we came across signs of old mining activity. What was mined and how the miners accessed the area I have no idea, but it must have been hard getting ore out of this location. Retracing our footsteps, we reached our bivy site by 7:15 p.m.

Tired, sore and lacking the energy to slog down through the bush, we decided to spend the night out under the stars. There was not a flat, stone-free spot close to water in this part of the valley; nevertheless it was a fantastic night, with not a cloud in the sky. We lay watching the constellations move across the sky, the flash of shooting stars and the blinking of satellites drifting overhead. The valley we lay in was bright with the light of a full moon but it never became visible from where we rested. Sleep was intermittent throughout the night and by 6 a.m. we were up, away by 7:15 a.m., and back at the vehicle by 9:45 a.m. A very successful conclusion and a new route to McKelvie that can be completed in a day. For us it was 14.5 hours total time, car to car. A younger party could likely do the route in 12 hours.

Participants: Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn

## Sabre Peaks



Sabre Peaks. Photo - Valerie Wootton

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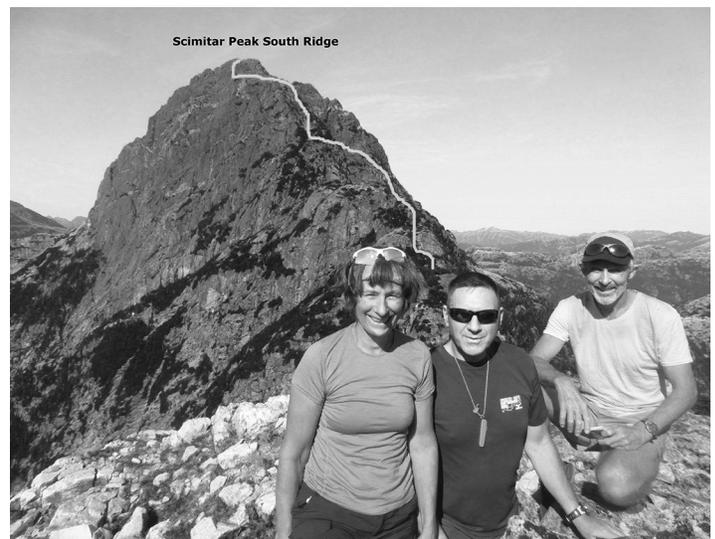
## Southwest Strathcona Park: Mitla Peak, Mitla Spire, Sabre Peaks, Sabretooth Peak and Scimitar Peak

Lindsay Elms  
September 5 – 10

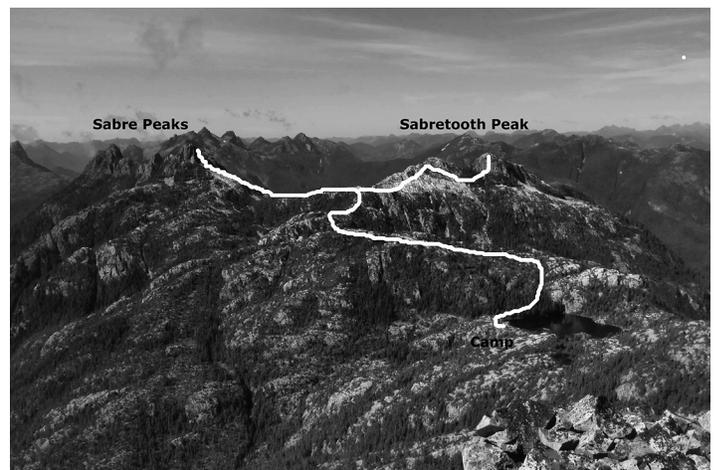
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To the west of our camp was a series of four peaks that piqued our interest. With no known ascents, we decided to head over to them and climbed all four summits. The highest peak – Sabre 1 (1455 m) had a nice airy little block at the summit that didn't require the use of a rope. We traversed across to Sabre 2 (1423 m) and then dropped down onto the scree slopes below. We then traversed under Sabre 3 and Sabre 4 and scrambled up the peak from the west. There was one nasty exposed section where we used the rope, and then it was a scramble to the summit of Sabre 4 (1451 m). From the peak there was a steep gully that descended to the east and then it was a walk up to Sabre 3 (1435 m). We called the peaks Sabre because of the other peaks in the area named for sharp objects: Scimitar Peak and The Scissors.

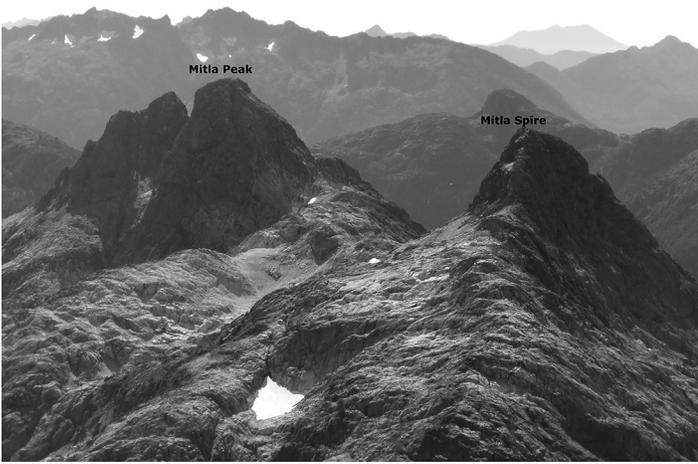
The highest peak in the area is Scimitar Peak (1701 m). It was first climbed by Sandy Briggs and Dave Whitehead on September 1, 1993. Rick Eppler, Rob Macdonald, Rick Hudson and Graham Maddocks climbed it in July 2005, and Darren Wilman and Alana Theoret climbed the South Ridge after ascending the Mitlas in 2007. From our camp on the lake we traversed under Centre Peak (1401 m), a high point in the centre of all the peaks in the area that we wanted to climb, to the base of the South Ridge. Most of



Scimitar Peak South Ridge. Photo - Valerie Wootton



Sabretooth Peak. Photo - Valerie Wootton



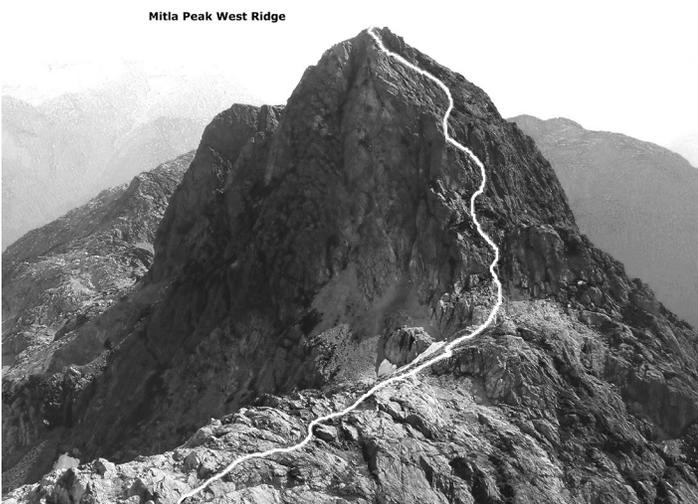
Mitla Spire. Photo - Valerie Wootton

the route was a 4<sup>th</sup> class scramble but near the top were a few exposed 5<sup>th</sup> class sections. From the top we saw more peaks to the west that we wanted to climb in the future as well as a number of summits around Lone Wolf Mountain that are waiting for ascents.

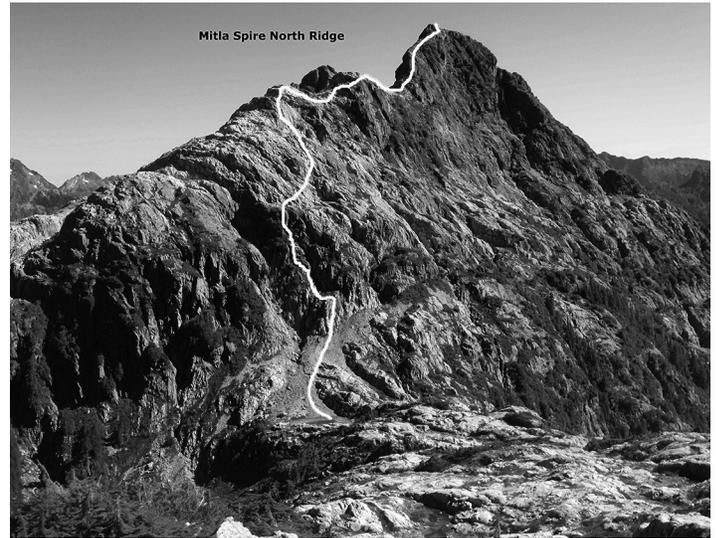
North of the Sabre Peaks was a twin summit we decided to call Sabretooth Peak (1404 m). It was a beautiful, easy, three-hour ridge walk from our camp to the top. Below the twin peaks to the east was a gorgeous little valley where we hung out for a couple of hours. This would have made a wonderful location for an alpine club camp if BC Parks allowed helicopter access.

From the summit of Scimitar Peak we had a spectacular view of both Mitla Peak and Mitla Spire. Beyond Mitla Peak in the distance is the bulky summit of Abco Mountain.

Mitla Peak (1544 m) was first climbed by Darren and Alana in early July 2007 after traversing from Lone Wolf Mountain. Rod, Val and I also climbed Mitla Peak on September 9 via the West Ridge that Darren and Alana had previously climbed the peak by. The route was mostly 4<sup>th</sup> class climb-



Mitla Peak. Photo - Valerie Wootton



Mitla Spire route. Photo - Valerie Wootton

ing with a couple of 5<sup>th</sup> class sections. The descent involved one rappel low down on the route.

After climbing Mitla Peak, Darren and Alana went on and made the first ascent of neighbouring Mitla Spire (1522 m). Their route involved climbing a route up the East Face, but when we looked at the face, we decided the North Ridge looked more appealing. The route was 4<sup>th</sup> class and was the nicest climb on the trip because of the rock. Val Wootton photo.

Participants: Rod Szasz, Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

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## Cowichan Circuit Continued – Marmot Mountain 4541' (1384 m) via Balmer Lake

### Roxanne Stedman October 9

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I picked up Dave at 6 a.m. and loaded his bike on the car to head out for Marmot Mountain. The weather was foggy in Victoria but luckily there was no fog on the Malahat, which made for a quick trip to the north shore road which we followed along Lake Cowichan to the Shaw Creek Main logging road located just before the bridge over Shaw Creek. We parked at the top of the short hill before the gate – which was open!

After consolidating the gear so we weren't lugging up extra pumps, tubes, tools etc., we were ready to leave at 8:00 a.m. It was a beautiful morning with some high fog obscuring the mountain tops, which helped keep us cool. It was a long bike ride up the logging roads with some pushing required to get up one steep hill before keeping left onto West Shaw Main. We covered the 11 km ride in about an



*Marmot Mountain, Roxanne Stedman. Photo - Dave Suttill*

hour, arriving at the spot where we stashed our bikes at 9:15. We saw three elk cows on our way up.

After repacking our gear and a quick coffee break, we were on our way at 9:30, wearing long sleeves in preparation for the usual bushwhack. We arrived at the “trail” at 10:00 after walking along the bushwhack “road”, marked by numerous trees showing scratches made by bears or cougars as well as rubs from elk antlers. We made it to the meadow below the lake at 11:10, a bit later than expected, since on the previous trips we had travelled with snow assist, which helped speed us along. We took a few photos of the meadow with a backdrop of Little Hooper and then were off to Balmer Lake.

We arrived at Balmer Lake at 11:20 and had our first lunch at the same spot as when we climbed Hooper, but without the snow. Balmer is a pristine alpine lake with no sign of logging. It was warm and beautiful with lovely reflections of the sky and trees in the water. I didn’t want to leave, but Marmot was the objective so we headed out again at noon. We made our way around some beautiful tarns with rocky shorelines, causing us to slow down to take advantage of a number of must-have photo shots. Up the ridge east of Balmer we headed, following the trail, which was well defined at first but which soon petered out, although this didn’t seem to hinder Dave’s route finding. The fall colours of the red-leaved blueberries and the mountain ash with the backdrop of evergreens and grey, purple and green conglomerate rocks and boulders, along with the view back to peanut shaped Hooper, made for a sweet ridge walk. We arrived on the summit at 1:25 to glorious views from sea to sea. The last couple of trips in the Cowichan had only afforded small glimpses of the surrounding hills but today we could see forever, including as per usual faraway Rainier (haha)!

After a second lunch we debated about our options for the return trip which included:

1. Continuing heading east along the ridge to the meadow below and then going down (although we weren’t sure what we would be going down: possibly a cliff),

2. Continuing east along the ridge to the clear cut and then heading out on the logging road,
3. Returning the way we came via Balmer Lake, and
4. Returning back along the ridge and trying to find the marked route down from the Hiking Trails II book that would intersect our up trail.

We left the summit at 2:15 and decided to try option 4, with option 3 as a back-up.

By comparing our position on his GPS and the contour lines with the Hiking Trails route, Dave managed to find the spot where the route left the ridge and we headed down about 45 minutes after leaving the summit. We wove through a meadow with lots of low-lying blackberry runners that tried to trip us up unsuccessfully, then down a rock slope and back into the forest to intersect with our up-trail. Dave figured we saved about two hours going out this way, which was good as the sun set at 6:30. We spied one small snake enjoying the sun on the rock bluffs on the way down. We rejoined the trail just before the bushwhack road where the bear/cougar scratchings were and we were pretty proud of ourselves for finding the route!

After arriving back at the bikes at 4:30, we stopped for a spot of coffee, loaded the bikes and were off. It was a fast ride down the logging road with no animals in sight except for two Lucky beers! The alder trees were stunning with their mossy bark against a backdrop of maples and evergreens. The gate was locked when we arrived at 5:40 so we crawled under to get back to the car. We had an easy drive home with no fog, animals or cops/tickets; although the next morning, I discovered I had a flat tire on my bike; at least it wasn’t until after the trip!

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman

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## “Lest We Forget” – Remembrance Day Hike with Scott Collins

**Mike Hubbard**  
**November 11**

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A novel idea but a good one. We, that is, Debbie Leach, Colleen Kasting, Scott Collins and I, went up Mt. Tzouhalem from the Maple Bay side with a view to lunch on the summit and visit a memorial at the Cross. The day was brilliantly clear but cold and windy. However, on the summit it was warm enough to relax over lunch. On the way up Colleen and Debbie were rehearsing and trying to pull together the words of “In Flanders Fields”. We never did hear the full version because when we finally arrived at the cross it was gone, and we found that it had blown away in the wind-storm the week before. We did spend a few moments thinking of all those from the Cowichan Valley



*Colleen with poppies. Photo - Mike Hubbard*

who had lost their lives in the 1914-18 war, and the tragic and almost accidental causes of that war. There were some poppies just below the site where the cross used to stand and we later found that these had been placed there earlier that day by David Anderson. They were a brilliant patch of colour and a fitting tribute to all those who had lost their lives in that war and other wars that have followed. In our minds the words echoed:

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly,  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

Fortunately for all of us, the only guns we heard were those of some deer hunters in the estuary below us and whilst there were no larks, several bald eagles were soaring up and down the cliffs. We are lucky to live in such a peaceful part of the world.

Following our descent we had tea and warmed ourselves up at the Shipyard Restaurant in Maple Bay.

The good news is that later that day a group of young people from the Cowichan Valley recovered the cross, carried it back to its original site and plans are being made to restore it.

Thanks, Scott, for leading this trip.



*Summit group on Mt. Tzouhalem.*

Participants: Mike Hubbard, Scott Collins, Debbie Leach and Colleen Kasting

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## Sutton Peak

**Janelle Curtis**  
**November 15 – 16**

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With little snow in the alpine and a sunny weekend in the forecast, Rowan and I set out to scramble up Sutton Peak during the typically wet and miserable shoulder season that is mid-November. Drawing on Vancouver Islander's excellent description in SummitPost (<http://www.summitpost.org/sutton-peak/537536>), we found our way to the trailhead via logging roads from the Mount Cain turnoff and were on the route by noon. By 4 p.m. we had reached a high point on the ridge leading to Sutton Peak and set up camp by a small group of frozen pools. As we boiled water from chipped ice, we discovered that Rowan's mat would not inflate and my freeze-dried dinner had spoiled! Fortunately Rowan is a sharer, and we had the solace of spectacular views of Victoria and Warden Peaks to the east, the Elk River Valley to the south, and a colourful sunset over the Haihte Range to the west.

The following morning we picked out our route as we approached the base of Sutton Peak. The ascent route described in SummitPost seemed challenging (scary) with some exposed ice-covered ledges, so we opted to climb via what was described as a descent route. This took us across the icy snowfield above a somewhat exposed gully to gain the hiker's route on the west face. Crossing the snowfield, I wished I had brought my crampons. But scrambling from there to the summit was relatively easy (fun) with the exception of a couple of tricky (hair-raising) moves to get around/over more icy snow. We were on the summit in time for an early lunch. Given the easy route-finding, straightforward scrambling, and breathtaking views, it's surprising that Sutton Peak doesn't appear to receive many





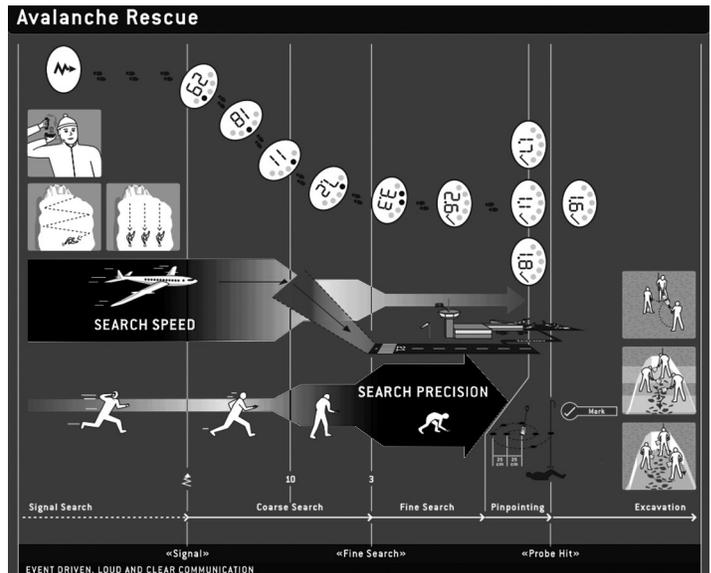
Twin Cairns near Sunshine ski resort. From left to right, Stefan Kloppenborg, Dave Henwood, Patrick Donker, Chris Clack, Nathalie Roulin, Eric Coulthard, Matt Reynolds, Martin Hofmann, Ross McEwen, Cyril Shokoples

levels, one should not go blindly into the mountains. The coverage areas for avalanche forecasts can be extensive and the snowpack can be very variable. The forecast is only one resource that must be combined with field observations.

The weather is the primary determining factor in the condition of the snowpack. An expert who knows the weather history of an area can tell almost without looking what the snow layers will be. Publicly-available weather forecasts are the primary source of weather information and they get better every year, but they must be supplemented by local observations; this is especially true for extended tours in the backcountry.

Of course we don't always have the complete weather history and we are not all experts, so direct examination of the snowpack is another useful tool. The main features we are interested in are "weak layers;" these are layers in the snowpack that may not be able to support the overlying snow and can produce avalanches. While digging a snow pit provides the most complete information about the snow, it is time consuming and localized; simply probing with a ski pole as you are travelling gives a simple but more extensive feel for the upper snow levels. We use all the information available to us the day before the trip to plan routes but also continuously during the trip to evaluate the risks in the terrain we are travelling through. Being aware of all these factors helps make for a safe and enjoyable tour in the mountains.

An important part of any avalanche course is companion rescue practice. The surprising part of that exercise to me was how fast and accurately modern transceivers can home in on a buried transceiver. The technique we used was an analogy to an aircraft landing consisting of five stages:



The Companion Rescue avalanche card. Image courtesy of The Avalanche Review Vol. 30, No. 3, February 2012

Companion rescue (From avalanche.org)

1. Before a signal is detected. Hold the transceiver to your ear and look for external signs, skis, poles, arms, etc. Travel as fast as possible.
2. Signal detected. Coarse search. Follow transceiver arrows and distances. Move quickly until
3. Distance is 10 metres or less. Keep following transceiver signal. Slow down and concentrate on accuracy in following signal lines.
4. Distance is 3 metres. Bring transceiver down close to snow surface and move very slowly until distance starts to increase, then back up and do one side-to-side search to find minimum distance.
5. Start probing.

The hardest part, but the most important, is to move slowly as you approach the victim. Using this technique properly one can often locate the victim in a few probe strikes for burials that are not too deep (less than 2 metres). Do try this at home!

It's hard to say what the best part of the week was: improving my mountain skills, skiing new terrain or meeting new people. Most of the group were from Alberta but BC and even Ontario had representatives there. It was interesting to compare how the different sections view leadership and to use that to look at improving how we help our leaders develop and grow. My thanks to the Alpine Club of Canada, our VI Section and The North Face.

Participant: Martin Hofmann

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## ACCVI Summer Camp Week Two

**Shaun Peck**  
**August 2 – 10**

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This is a novice alpinist's account of week two. I have always led an active life, having downhill skied since the age of 14 – initially in Switzerland, Austria and France. I attended an Outward Bound school at Eskdale in Cumberland, England at the age of 18. During that few weeks we learned rock-climbing, bivouacking and many outdoor skills. Since coming to Canada 45 years ago I have done a fair amount of hiking including overnight tenting. More recently I have been keeping fit not only by weekly hiking but also road biking. However on the ACCVI Summer Camp I was a novice alpinist having no experience with crampons, roping or using an ice axe.

For this week we were fourteen – Ian and Margaret Brown, Cedric Zala, Mike Hubbard (Camp Manager), Colleen Kastling, Scott Collins, Albert Hestler, Claire Ebendinger, Yves Parizeau, Lyle Young, Vivian Addison, Catrin Brown, Alcina De Oliveira and myself. David Anderson had to cancel at the last minute due to a bruised back following a fall off a log on a hike with the Wednesday Wonderers four days previously. Our age range was 52-81 and I was the third eldest. Amazingly we found that among the group we had bred a total of 16 grandchildren!

In our car we took the 9 a.m. ferry from Swartz Bay and then proceeded to Pemberton via the Knight Street Bridge thanks to Cedric and Albert's navigation. This route is highly recommended and going home by the same route enabled us to catch the 6 p.m. ferry from Tsawwassen avoiding an advertised 40 minute wait at the Lions Gate Bridge.

Four cars rendezvoused at the Petro-Can gas station at Pemberton after some high volume traffic delays on the Sea-to-Sky highway. The Hurley was traversed without incident and was said to be in better condition than the previous year. We ate supper at the Gold Bridge Hotel – a fulsome meal – I had hamburger and chips “smothered” (as advertised in the menu) in mushrooms and onions. At about 5 p.m. we set up tents at the Gun Lake aAir strip adjacent to the helicopter landing pad.

Blackcomb Helicopters arrived only 20 minutes after expected. After a safety briefing and instructions on how to load the gear into the basket of the Bell 407 Helicopter, pilot Brian Douglas flew us in three groups to the camp site at 2042 metres (just less than 7000 feet). The previous week's campers were flown back with each flight. It was impressive what the first week had accomplished in setting up the camp with the two dome tents (for cooking and for eating and socialising) as well as cooling bins in the alpine stream, two biffies, a food-suspending contraption and a shower. We all pitched our individual tents and soon got used to the



*Albert Hestler at the summit of Poacher's Peak.  
Photo - Shaun Peck*

horse flies and their annoying bites. Albert and I made the first dinner. (As is usual at ACCVI summer camps, each night a team of two prepared the evening meal of hors d'oeuvres, main course and dessert but each of us only had to do it for one night).

For the first day Mike led a group of us up to a col to the north and then to a peak at 2394 metres (7854 feet). There were black clouds, lightning and thunder to the east but estimated to be about 20 km away. However, when we put our hiking poles in the air there were impressive crackles and sparks. This resulted in a decision for a rapid descent down a steep rockfall and scree and we named the summit Lightning Peak.

On day two I decided to go with a “contour group” – Albert and Scott – and we contoured up the valley towards Marrow Mountain and then up the valley towards a lake between Coons and Tilworth Mountains. We swam twice in tarns on the way back to the camp site.

David was influential in me signing up for the camp and I was expecting to do relatively easier contour hikes; however Mike had arranged for me to take alpine gear – ice axe, crampons, harness, carabiners and prusik ropes. I said I had never used an ice axe so on day 3 Mike and Scott conducted a snow school to learn “self-arrest” and walking on crampons. Following this we hiked over to where Colleen and Vivian were conducting a “rock school” where the group were ascending a fairly easy rock face while being belayed, and then at another rock face were practicing abseiling (rappelling) using modern descender devices including the Munter Hitch (recommended by Scott). We were also using the prusik knot and line as a backup during the rappel descents. This day we covered 5.1 km and ascended 256 metres.

Day four was a day to test out the crampons and Mike led seven of us up to the top of Rubble Mountain via the crossing of an ice field. It was not steep enough to require roping but the final climb (after taking off crampons) was large steep rocks. The peak was at 2586 metres and the GPS recorded total height climbed 612 metres and 9.7 km

for the day. We descended the ice field using crampons on the way down. For me this was my first peak! Magnificent views.

Day five was the longest day – Cedric, Scott and I set off NW up the valley and reached “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” at 2585 metres (8481 feet) with a recorded 704 metre climb. The first part up the valley was a steady, slow ascent but the last part required some tricky hiking over large rocks. The views at the top were fantastic and we could see the site of last year’s ACCVI Griswold camp site. The GPS recorded 14.7 km for that day.

On day six, Albert, Cedric, Scott and I ascended the second col to the north and crossed over Lightning Peak for 7.6 km to a height of 2464 metres and total ascent of 468 metres. Cedric and Scott descended early as they were on supper patrol but Albert and I spent a very pleasant one-and-a-half hours at the peak resting and chatting, with no bugs to bother us.

That same day, Ian, Margaret, Alcina and Catrin aimed to ascend Marrow and then Ipoos. This turned into a long and adventurous day and included naming a new peak “Ipee”. They arrived back at the camp at 9 p.m. just as it was getting dark. Supper needed reheating and the wash-up was done by candlelight.

On day seven Cedric, Colleen and I climbed up the closest col again and headed south along Slim Ridge. We reached the summit at 2512 metres and then descended via a fairly steep scree but continued south among pine trees before heading home via a welcome swim in the tarn nearest the camp. 9.9 km and total ascent of 689 metres. This day Scott did a long and successful solo climb up Ipoos.

On the last day we all contributed to leaving the camp clean and tidy for the third and final ACCVI group and the arrival of the Blackcomb Helicopter (Astar 350 B3 – a different plane from the first, requiring new instructions for loading the basket and the luggage compartments while the helicopter blades are still turning). Pilot Paul Winiecki flew us back to the Gun Lake air strip.

### **Birding**

Claire and Yves are avid birders and provided the following list of birds they identified during the week: American pipit, junco, golden-crowned sparrow, chestnut-backed chickadee, robin, horned lark, osprey, Clark’s nutcracker, pine siskin, yellow-rumped warbler, raven, bald eagle, rufous hummingbird, western sandpiper, rosy finch, dipper, white-tailed ptarmigan, rock ptarmigan, willow ptarmigan and goldeneye duck.



*The Poacher/Rubble Peak massif. Poacher’s Peak is the one with the sickle-like snowfield just to the right of centre. Photo - Cedric Zala*

### **Mammals**

The prize for the sighting of the week goes to the group that ascended, I think it was, Marrow, where they saw 19 alpine goats together and then another seven. We saw grizzly bear tracks and Albert saw the rear end of a deer. There were also mice, many marmots and also chipmunks.

### **Radio Communications**

For 20 years I have had a HAM (Amateur Radio) license and have owned a two-metre radio (the same frequency ranges as the Marine Radios that some members and ACCVI have). The regular radios used daily are, I think, Citizens Band (or equivalent) and are powered by AA batteries. I was interested to test my HAM radio and obtained the frequencies for Blackcomb Helicopters and one repeater station. On the first day when the Helicopter was ten minutes late I called and got an immediate reply from the pilot that he would be arriving in 5 minutes. Today the ACCVI’s satellite phone is the most useful for emergencies and is kept at the camp site. If the helicopter had not arrived at the base camp the group would have had no way of contacting Blackcomb Helicopters so at least the HAM radio was useful for that. Most of the places where ACCVI members will be backcountry hiking or skiing will not have cell phone coverage.

One thing that is clear, though, is that all of the three radios (HAM, Marine and Citizens Band) are “line-of-sight”. They may potentially have a range advertised up to 48 km on web sites but as was demonstrated during the week several times they will not work if there is not “line-of-sight” and, incidentally, if the batteries are not charged! There is a potential for HAM radios to be used in remote areas because in many places there are repeater stations on mountain tops within “line-of-sight” and are used by helicopter companies, logging and mining companies. A HAM radio can use these repeaters if the frequencies are obtained ahead of time and programmed into the radios. It is necessary to obtain a HAM radio license which involves a fair amount of study. For anyone interested you can get much information from the West Coast Amateur Radio Association at <http://www.ve7vic.ca/>. Marine radios and

CB radios are not programmable and can only use the channels that are permanently installed in them.

### **Thanks**

It was a fantastic week and we were lucky to have excellent weather. There was a light sprinkling of rain on day one and on day two some haze from forest fires. Thanks especially to Mike and Scott for snow school. Most thanks though to the organising committee for all the preparation for the camp. Thanks also to the second week group for their companionship and for sharing many stories – particularly of previous alpine activities.

Participants: Shaun Peck, Mike Hubbard, Colleen Kasting, Cedric Zala, Alcina de Oliveira, Catrin Brown, Scott Collins, Ian and Margaret Brown, Vivian Addison, Lyle Young, Claire Ebendinger, Yves Parizeau, Albert Hestler



*Rappelling the Red Band. Photo - Thomas Radetsky*

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## **Mount Assiniboine: A Dream Come True**

**Thomas Radetzki**

**August 6**

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For 25 years the “Canadian Matterhorn” seemed to me a central point our family mountain life revolved around. We explored the Rockies and the BC mountains and many times we stood on the shores of Magog Lake looking up at Assiniboine. It seemed out of reach and snow surprised us at any of the summer months.

This August 2014, my now grown-up son and I took on the challenge. First was a 30-km hike to get to the Hind Hut at the base of the banded and multicoloured Pyramid. We met Claude Duchesne, who runs the Lodge, and his son coming off the mountain in the afternoon – what a good omen. Starting at 4 a.m., a window of near perfect weather allowed us the climb along the North Ridge. Standing on top of the summit at 3618 m, 8:30 a.m. on August 6, 2014, was an amazing place to give my son a big hug. After a summit hour, he took the lead and we decided to rappel four of the pitches we had free-climbed on the way up. To put another crown on the occasion, we had the Hind Hut to ourselves for the night.

The next morning, after the tricky descent down the Gmoser Highway, we treated ourselves to a well-deserved beer on the porch of the old historic Lodge. Sepp Renner, the proprietor of the Lodge for many years, has retired now. He climbed “his mountain” more than 50 times and Sara Renner, the daughter I knew as a school kid, has won a silver medal for Canada in the Winter Olympics of 2006 in Turin, Italy. What a wonderful moment to close this circle with my son by my side. Thank you, Mount Assiniboine, for allowing us to climb to the top, to fulfill one of our dreams.

Participants: Thomas Radetzki and Jens Radetzki

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## **Exploring the Coast Range via Chilko Lake**

**Chris Jensen**

**August 10 – 20**

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Accessing BC’s Coast Range is either difficult or expensive or both. I wanted to find a relatively easy and affordable way to get climbing among the granite and glaciers that I often stare at from Vancouver Island. I considered boating up Knight or Bute inlets and then bushwhacking up. I also looked into fixed-wing flights onto the Homathko or Hailtjuk icefields, but skis are removed from planes in late spring and businesses were reluctant to put them back on. I’ve previously flown with White Saddle Air into Mt. Waddington, but the Bell 407 was expensive. In the end Chilko Lake looked to provide the type of access I was looking for.

Chilko Lake is the largest, natural, high-elevation freshwater lake in Canada (1,172 m elevation). The south end of the lake is home to steep glaciated peaks and is typically accessed by boat. There are two boat launches on the 65 km-long lake: a concrete one at the north end and a natural pebble launch at Nu Chugh Beniz, which is approximately 25 km further south. Wanting to limit boating time on the often stormy lake, I aimed to launch at Nu Chugh Beniz.

However, as I was planning this trip I didn’t have anything to launch. So I went looking for the biggest piece of ‘climbing equipment’ that I’ve had to buy or borrow: a boat that could handle Chilko’s large waves (I wanted a fishing boat anyhow). After searching for a used boat over the spring, I finally found a 16-foot aluminum boat with a 45 hp and 9.9 hp kicker that would do the trick. Stefan Gessinger gave the thumbs up for joining the trip and we were set.

Our launch point was out of Nemaiah Valley, about 260 km by road southeast from Williams Lake. From Hwy 20, we turned at Lees Corner onto Hanceville Canoe Creek Road and after a couple of hours on the gravel road we pulled in

the Xení Gwet'in settlement, where we topped up our fuel. The road was in great condition, with only a short stretch that was slow going right before reaching the lake. The views from the lake shore were awesome! Chilko Lake is a spectacular emerald green colour rimmed by snow-capped peaks. My spine tingled with giddiness just staring out across this special place.

We couldn't wait to launch, but we were running out of daylight so we slept in the campground and talked with the long-term camp host who was a wealth of helpful information. He couldn't recall climbers coming through there for about 10 years. He advised that the glaciers at the south end send katabatic winds down Chilko Lake which means that by afternoon the lake is usually frothing in white caps with waves typically at least 1 metre high.

As hoped for, the lake was glass calm first thing in the morning. We piled in all our gear and took off down the lake, but it quickly became apparent that we were sinking! Water was filling the boat up fast as we motored back to shore. We made it back okay and pulled the boat out. The leak was caused by gravel hitting the front of the boat on the long drive in. A bonus of having Stefan on the trip is that he has worked in the boat building business and he had us watertight again in no time. Our second launch was far more successful and we cruised down the lake, aiming for Ts'il'os (pronounced "sigh-loss") Provincial Park and the Farrow Creek delta where we'd make our main camp.

After a few hours we pulled ashore and couldn't believe that we were in BC's coast range. The turquoise water and the delta's tropical white sand beach made it feel like we were in Costa Rica. But one look up at the looming glaciers and grizzly claw marks on the trees reminded us that we were deep in BC's backcountry.

We had no real route information. We mostly relied on 1:50,000 topo maps and our eyes to figure out what we wanted to climb. The heavily crevassed Farrow Glacier and its ring of serrated peaks seemed like an obvious place to begin. We packed up with thoughts of climbing a watershed route counter-clockwise around the glacier. This would entail climbing 14 named summits, the highest of which is Mount Farrow at 2890 m.

The leaking boat fiasco put us behind schedule, so early the next morning we began our hike into the bush. The glacier's toe is only 2 km from camp, but we woefully underestimated how long the bushwhack would take. The forest floor was a complicated lattice of fallen trees. It was like trying to walk through a giant matchstick maze. After four tiring hours of slinking through the cellulose we broke out onto moraine and eyed-up the right (north) ridge as a place to start climbing. Due to steep waterfalls we weren't able to cross on rock below the glacier. So we climbed sapphire-blue seracs to gain the top and then hiked over to the start of the rock ridge that would lead us up to the Seven Dwarfs.

We weren't sure what type of rock to expect because

this area is the mixing ground for a diverse range of rock terrains. We were climbing in the contact zone between the Coast Range's granitic rocks and the Interior Plateau's volcanic rocks. Add in some metamorphic rocks for kicks and you have a geologic buffet of potential rock types that we might encounter.

Getting off the glacier was steep and loose so out came the rope and up Stefan went, delicately avoiding the wobbly rocks that were barely winning against gravity. Once on the ridge the rock quality improved, and though a bit fractured in places, the ridge was excellent 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class terrain which took us to the top of the first Dwarf. We scrambled together, quickly gaining 600 m in elevation. The views were fantastic: huge crevasses yawned below us; across the valley Mt. Merriam's south face filled much of the horizon; and behind us, Chilko Lake's blue waters stretched over the landscape.

Once atop the Seven Dwarf's ridge the rock quality deteriorated. Every handhold and foothold was precarious, and the 1200 m of exposure down to Farrow Creek became very noticeable. Any rock we dislodged on the Farrow Creek side of the ridge had a cascading effect causing thunderous waves of boulders to tumble down the face. It would take several minutes for everything to settle down, and as we breathed in the acrid smell of rock flour, we considered the other routes we could have taken up and were glad to have chosen the ridge. We gently climbed over three of the Dwarfs and as shadows grew, we made camp on top of a narrow jetty that protruded out over the Farrow Creek valley. Out came the Bushmills and we toasted to a stellar, sunny day in the mountains.

As we made dinner, we listened to a continuous concert of rocks coming down from steep pocket icefields that flanked the ridge. These could have presented some fun climbing opportunities for the next day, but unfortunately, the top of the icefields acted like a dam against large reservoirs of stones. As ice melted it would frequently spit out boulders that would careen down to the valley below. Accordingly, we planned not to climb below these active features.

The next day we rappelled into a notch and did a bit of route finding to get into the col between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Dwarf. Because of the unreliable rock, I decided to take the rope to lead an easy pitch up and out of the col. We topped out on the 4<sup>th</sup> Dwarf which could also be known as Bashful because it is the tallest of the Dwarfs (2,538 m according to TRIM 092N020). There was no summit cairn and all along the Dwarfs traverse there had been no sign of any party having passed by. From this summit we could see along the ridge up to Mt. Farrow, the apex of the watershed. The ridge heading up Mt. Farrow looked like similar terrain to what we had been climbing, but it was caked with far more of the rock-spitting icefields that we wanted to avoid. Though the climbing looked moderate we were concerned about exposure to rock fall so we abandoned our idea of climbing the watershed route and opted to rappel down onto the glacier and use it to gain the top of Mt. Farrow.

From the col between Bashful and the 5<sup>th</sup> Dwarf (AKA Sleepy because it's the 2<sup>nd</sup> tallest Dwarf, 2,528 m), we did two 60-m rappels and some down-climbing to get onto the Farrow Glacier. Once down it felt like we had lowered ourselves all the way to the equator. It was so hot! The surrounding walls now seemed like a cauldron in which we were being cooked. We strolled around to the south side of Farrow's summit and spied a low notch that we could use to get from the glacier back onto the rock ridge. Getting out of the notch required some 5.8 moves; thankfully, the rock here was better so I trusted the holds as I pulled myself up and looked for gear placements.

Once on the ridge it was a straightforward hike and scramble to the summit of Mt. Farrow. You could sure feel the history in the summit register. Only six parties had recorded ascents, the first of which was from the 1960s (FA was 1957) and the last of which was in 1987! Clearly not too many people come up this way.

We reversed our route, rapped back into the notch, grabbed our packs and continued south along the ridge that would eventually connect to Snow White Mountain. Unlike the Dwarfs traverse, the high points along this stretch of ridge had established cairns. This made us wonder if we might have been the first people to climb along the Dwarfs. All we knew was that the most prominent peak in the area had very few ascents so the Dwarfs, being lower and more technical, would likely have even fewer visitors. There was no sign of any previous parties, and we couldn't find a recorded FA for the Dwarfs. Based on this, it could be possible that we were the first people to climb over these summits.

But now we were on a ridge that clearly had had visitors. We scrambled up and down, up and down, etc., until the sun started to get low and then we made camp. This site had unbelievable views: to the west we looked into the centre of the Coast Range, the Homathko Icefield; east was the Farrow Glacier; north, Mt. Waddington cast its lengthy shadow; and way to the south was the Pemberton Icefield. I just about spun my head off from constantly staring out in every direction. It was hard to take it all in. For hundreds of kilometers, the landscape was stuffed full of peaks, tumbling glaciers and roaring white water. There was no sign of any human development. It was raw, wild and spectacular. We smiled deeply, both inside and out.

The serenity of the evening was quickly erased when we were woken up in the middle of the night to a fierce lightning storm. Here we were perched on an isolated narrow ridgetop with a bunch of metal gear like ice axes that were now acting like lightning rods inviting the storm's next strike. Heavy winds lashed at our small tent and quickly forced the monsoon rains through any porous hole. In no time it was raining inside the tent as well.

All I could think about was getting away from our metal gear. We were stuck up near a high point (~2,700 m) with no easy way to get to lower ground. That meant our gear would have to be moved away from us. I dove out of the



*Stefan Gessinger working through the Farrow Glacier.  
Photo - Chris Jensen*

tent into the deluge of rain and hail, quickly rounded up our metal gear and ran for it, trying to fight the storm force winds as I bolted away from our tent. Lightning zapped all around with such frequency and intensity that I felt like I was in the middle of a war. I was freaked. It felt like every second that I held this pile of metal could be a second too long. But how far away from a lightning strike do you need to be in order to be safe? I ditched the gear in a rock slot away from camp and sprinted for it. Back in the soggy tent I pondered if the air in our mattresses would help insulate us if a strike did hit the nearby peak or gear stash. I didn't like being in that position and I certainly don't want to play Russian Roulette with lightning again.

The next day we woke to foggy, damp weather. We had already passed the halfway mark around the watershed route and debated about continuing. Ahead of us there were still several peaks to climb, including Snow White Mountain and the Five Brothers which looked similar in nature to the Colonel Foster traverse, but likely on worse rock. We had already dropped off the true watershed route so that objective was shot. We decided that we had climbed the highest peak in the area so we headed off down the glacier towards our main camp.

The glacier descent ended up being the crux of our trip. It was mid-August and snow bridges were few and far between. The north side of the glacier was a steep active icefall; the south side offered waves of Alaskan sized crevasses. We slowly weaved our way among teetering walls of ice, only tenuously connected by the odd thin sagging snow bridge. At times we came to dead ends in the maze, so we set anchors and belayed as we ran and hurdled ourselves across gaps. Our long jumping abilities were certainly put to the test. Adrenaline flowed as we flew over black holes and landed on ice walls that looked like they would collapse under our weight. We weren't in the worst of the icefall, but we weren't far away from it. I wished it were early July when this descent would have been relatively straightforward.



*Stefan near the summit of Snow White Mountain. Photo - Chris Jensen*

After some tense moments, the glacier turned to blue ice and crevasses became more manageable. There was still some route finding to do and steep ice to contend with, but we were through the worst of it. From the glacier's toe we followed rock slabs into the forest and this time aimed to stay closer to Farrow Creek. The bushwhack was still slow going, but part way back we came across a faint trail along the creek. It was covered in blowdown and hard to follow in places, but it was slightly better than pure bush.

Back at camp we relished in the luxuries that a boat approach allows for, such as tasty fish tacos. The next day we explored around the lake, fished, swam and checked out a nearby cabin.

After our day at the lake, we had two more days to climb. Our slow progress in the bush made us re-evaluate some of our potential peak objectives. If we averaged 500 m per hour, then we wouldn't have time to climb some of the nice looking peaks further away from the lakeshore. Even though we had just been right near it, we decided to take the southeast ridge up Snow White Mountain (2,739 m). After climbing among the Seven Dwarfs, summing Snow White just seemed fitting.

We accessed the SE ridge directly from the lake by Norrington Creek. Not knowing what we'd encounter, we packed overnight gear and a light rack. The ridge was very pleasant hiking with some scrambly sections. We gained 1,300 meters in elevation faster than planned and were soon nearing the top. Walls steepened for the last 250 m of climbing and luckily the rock was much better than expected. We even found a nice long finger crack that Stefan led up. After some more 4<sup>th</sup> class climbing we soon pulled onto the summit around noon.

There was a summit cairn, but no register so I added a waterproof book and scribbled down its first entry. We had hoped to encounter more 5<sup>th</sup> class rock climbing, but it was short lived and we were well ahead of schedule. After exploring Snow White's western ridge, we decided to head back down to the lake.

Back in camp we debated about trying for another day trip summit such as Chilko Mountain or Good Hope Mountain. We really wanted to climb granite, but this rock type generally lay further to the west – too far for a day trip. Satisfied with the taste we got for this part of the Coast Range, we decided to depart a day early and take a leisurely journey home. All in all this was a great trip and a relatively easy way to access a

wild and remote part of BC's Coast Range.

Participants: Chris Jensen and Stefan Gessinger

## 2014 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS



### **Alpine Summer Activity Winner**

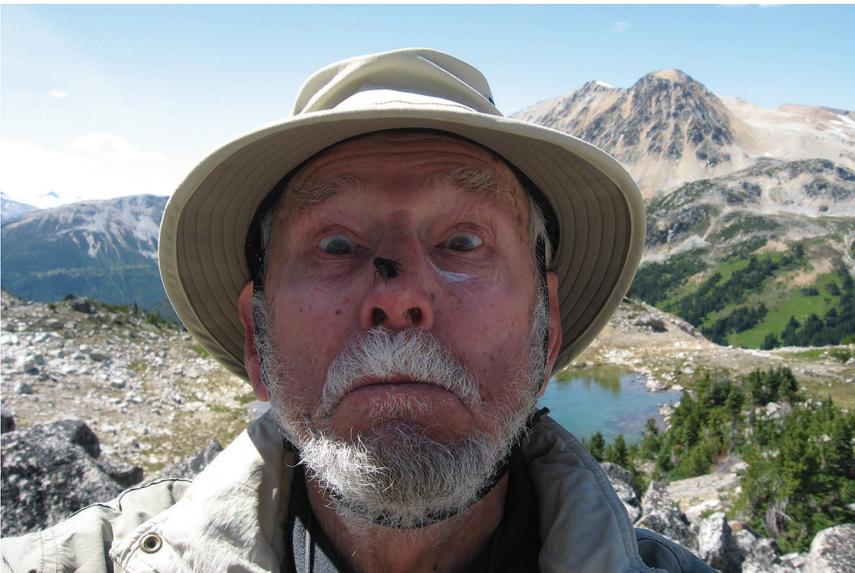
*High above Chilco Lake on  
Snow White Mountain*

Photo: Chris Jensen

### **Alpine Winter Activity Winner**

*Skiing off the Midi*

Photo: Phee Hudson



### **Humour Winner**

*Oh, the flies!*

Photo: Albert Hestler



**Mountain Scenery Winner**  
*Fall calm on the Grand Teton*  
Photo: Roxanne Stedman

**Nature Winner**  
*Goat love on Liberty Bell*  
Photo: Chris Jensen



**Vancouver Island  
Mountain Scenery Winner**  
*Mount Colonel Foster,  
October, 10 p.m.*  
Photo: Andrew Pape-Salmon





*Mount Baker Summit: Andrew Pape-Salmon, Janelle Curtis, Rowan Laver, Roxanne Stedman, John Catterall and Larry Nylen. Photo - Andrew Pape-Salmon*

then we were off to the Heliotrope trailhead. Did I mention the torrential rain? Should have bought a pack cover at MEC.

The creek was super high with the combination of rain, melting snow, with flow peaking in the afternoon. It was a tricky crossing, but we all made it across, some more nimbly and quickly than others.

We ended up setting up camp on the gravel moraine, with its excellent drainage. This way we got to meet and greet all those heading up and down Baker! The wind and rain made getting the tents up challenging. Rowan, Janelle and I squeezed into one tent with one vestibule, longingly glancing over at Larry in his Big Agnes tent with two vestibules. This is when John discovered he was missing his thermarest and made do with a seat pad and rope for his sleeping pad.

It poured all night and into the next day so we had breakfast and lunch in bed. Andrew announced that snow school would be at 1:30, rain or shine, and miraculously the rain stopped as we got ourselves organized. Andrew reviewed snow school and rope travel basics and then we went out for a trial run. Note – when breaking trail through snow, keep the stride short and always belay the leader when they head off onto a crevasse field.

We woke early to star-filled skies and big smiles all around. Andrew Morgan wasn't feeling very good and opted to remain at camp. The snow was perfect. A few mishaps on the way up – Janelle's pink water bottle got loose and somehow was returned to her on the way down the mountain by some climbers. Another loose water bottle ended up in the crevasse field – never to be seen again and then there was Andrew's wag bag! As it careened down the mountain, we heard the team below us gleefully announce that they successfully nabbed the wag bag!

The top layer of the snow was crusted over on the way up the Roman Wall, with some thin sheets of snow letting

loose. Large ice overhangs on the cliffs were a bit disconcerting, especially as the day warmed up. We didn't linger on top. The snow was getting softer and heavier and was balling up underneath our crampons on the way down. Some opted to remove their crampons on the lower slopes.

A super-fit group, we made it quickly back to camp and we weren't slowed down at all by John and his ill-fitting rental boots. We packed up and hiked out. Janelle and Rowan made their way home to Nanaimo. Larry and his truckload enjoyed the buffet and Baker views on the last ferry to Victoria.

Participants: Andrew Pape-Salmon (leader), Larry Nylen, Janelle Curtis, Andrew Morgan, Rowan Laver, John Catterall, Roxanne Stedman

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## **Washington Pass Multi-Pitch Alpine Climbing: World Cup Climbing, and a Win for Germany!**

### **Sonia Langer and Knut Von Salzen July 9 – 13**

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We were four intrepid climbers in search of multi-pitch Alpine climbing: Knut von Salzen, Reinhard Illner, Martin Hofmann and I, headed off with great enthusiasm. The trip was organized and well researched by Knut.

Crossing at the Peace Arch was no obstacle, and was followed by a post-border fresh-fruit-and-beer stop and an awesome Mexican restaurant for lunch and a peek at the start of the World Cup match: Holland against Argentina. A four hour drive took us up to Washington Pass to its scenic tourist 'overlook' lookout spot, which afforded clear, exciting views of the whole spectacular area, a recommended start to the trip. This view included the Liberty Bell group, Poster Peak, the hairpin bend in the highway, and the Wine Spires allegedly named by Fred Beckey after the favourite



*Meadow approach to Cutthroat Peak. Photo - Martin Hofmann*



*The Liberty Bell group in Washington Pass.  
Photo - Sonia Langer*

drinks of a woman in whom he was interested. (Rumour had it she was not impressed enough with this gesture. My suggestion to Beckey: climb with her, don't name rocks after her!!)

Camping at the Lone Fir Campground, a 10-minute drive east of the pass, offered us the luxury of car camping, free firewood and the most spectacularly clean toilets we'd ever seen. After counting and sorting our gear over and over again, we were set!

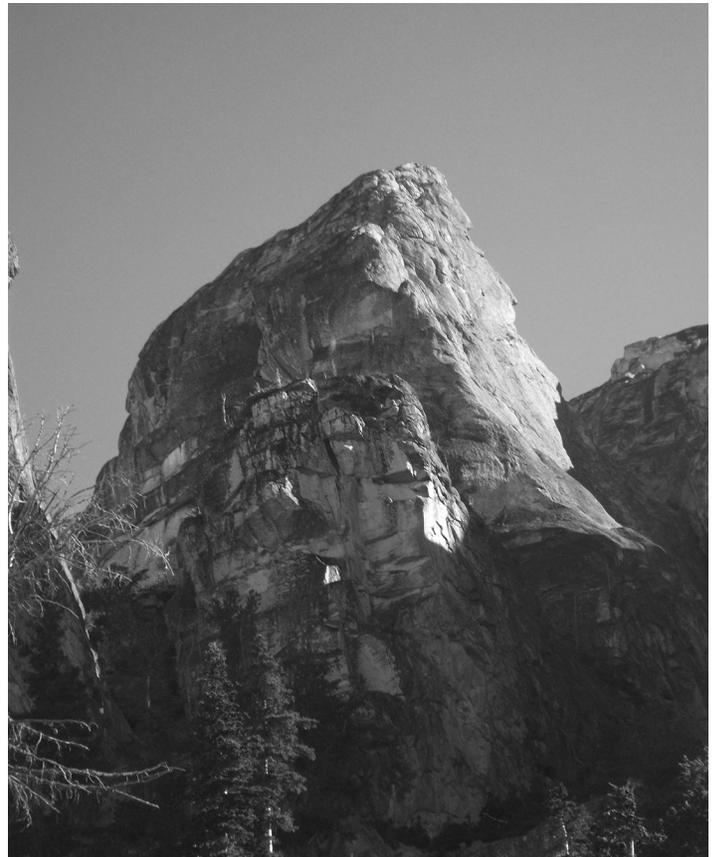
First on the agenda was the impressive granite spire, Liberty Bell. After a thirty-minute drive west of Lone Fir, we found the parking lot, and began the two-hour approach. Hiking through forest on a well-trodden path we easily made our way to the col between Liberty Bell spire and Concord Tower. Our choice was the classic line, the "South West Face", also known as the Beckey route: 5.7, three pitches of spectacular, clean, solid granite. World Cup climbing, surpassed only by the Bugaboos in my opinion!

After asking momma mountain goat and baby mountain goat to kindly move off the belay station, Reinhard began boldly leading the pitch with Martin on the belay. In fine form, Reinhard and Martin graced up their three pitches, with only a few grunts and second guesses, and waited for us at the summit. Meanwhile, right behind them, Knut was keen to jump on the lead with me at the belay. Knut appeared careful and skilled, despite his feeling new and green: things were going well. Swapping leads, it was my turn to climb the infamous chimney pitch. Feeling a bit rusty on the leading, I was excited to feel in fine form for the first few moments. I remembered how thrilling the feeling of alpine leading was, my head clearing and focussing, mind and body becoming one. Just like dance, only with a lot more exposure. Then I reached the three chockstones I had heard so much about, and wondered why I was not flexible enough for the instructed "left foot on the ledge". Trying to maintain some kind of grace and dignity, I made it past this obstacle, and wedged my way up the chimney. It was then Knut's turn on our third pitch, with the infamous "finger traverse": spectacular climbing! This pitch reminded me of

Joshua Tree in its movements and holds, but of Squamish's granitic solidity. What more can one ask for in a climb?!?

Stunning views were afforded at the summit of Liberty Bell spire. Knut noted the difference in the wet, snowy western peaks and the very dry eastern slopes! Two clean rappel pitches off bolted, chained rap stations and we were back at the col. The rap route follows the climb entitled "Over Exposure". During the hot, sunny descent hike, we were thrilled to be ambushed by the whole herd of fifteen goats ambling by, with one very vocal young'un complaining the whole way.

On our second day, a designated rest day, we headed to Mazama for some sport climbs in the Methow Valley. Braving the searing, draining, dry, hot sun, we easily approached the "Nugget Wall" at the "Prospector Wall" for bolted climbs. The heat was stifling, but Martin and Sonia, so stoked for more climbing, pulled out the rope and went up a nice but ordinary 5.8 pitch (either "Crakajack" or "Buck Shot"). Martin, buoyed by the draw of the "Instaclassic" route "Karmic Relief", climbed an interesting 5.10a with 6 bolts. Faltering in the desert sun, feeling dizzy and ready to succumb to the heat, I decided to forgo the climb, despite its reputation as an "Instaclassic", and we began stumbling down to the car. Oh man, it was hot! A nice swim in the Pearrygin Lake and a rest in the shade thereafter helped us all cool down. The town of Mazama offers a funky general store, though Winthrop, the bizarre, Disney-like, West-ern-themed town, has many more stores.



*Liberty Bell Spire, with the Fred Beckey (Southwest Face) route to the right of the prow at centre. Photo- Sonia Langer*

The fourth day offered a wonderful adventure up the west ridge of Cutthroat Peak. The approach took us momentarily through the bush and stream near the highway, into a lush green meadow of alpine wildflowers, and up some loose scree to the col at the start of the climb. It was a loose, sandy approach with TV-set sized boulders rumbling into the valley, as Knut has so aptly reminded me. The first pitch seemed loose, scrabbly steep choss, but Reinhard and I were keen to try the first two pitches. Of course, way leads upon way, as we climbed easy, exposed, loose pitches of 5.4 or so. It was loose choss. I must repeat that. Loose choss. As we got higher, the rock quality improved. Atop the first two pitches, we used the bolted, chained rap stations as our anchors. Spectacular exposure at the knife edge section made for great alpine climbing! Due to hunger, heat, and time, we turned around two pitches short of the blocky summit. Descending quickly, we used slings for protection, and made it well below the rap anchors. The rap anchors would have brought us to a different slope than our backpacks, so instead we built a rap station.

While Reinhard and I were on the ridge, Knut and Martin found a different kind of adventure on the Southeast But-tress of Cutthroat Peak. They climbed a cone-like feature of the South Ridge of Cutthroat between the two access gullies to the South Ridge. The climb started at the base of the second gully that gains the standard route up the South Ridge. The first pitch was easy but slightly run out. It topped out at a strangely twisted small tree. A short scramble (about 1 pitch in length) brought them to the base of the second pitch. There, a funny-looking shallow cave accepted a few pieces of gear. The crux of the climb was a beautiful, albeit somewhat short, dihedral, which protected very well, which probably comes in at about 5.8. Following that, the climb went straight up and then traversed left along a narrow foot traverse. The next crux was a steep face climb in the centre of a wide gap on the face behind a dead tree. A big tree at the top of this pitch provided a solid anchor that was used to rap as descent. Two rappels took them back down to the small cave, from where they decided to scramble down, following the established "South Ridge route" of Cutthroat, which starts at the first gully. There were no signs of any previous ascents. A 60-m rope and a standard set of gear worked well for this climb. There were good trees for anchors and the solid and surprisingly clean granite allowed good gear placements. The route felt exposed, with a rather scenic view of the bowl between Cutthroat and Whistler Mountain and valley beyond. One slight disadvantage

was the south-western exposure in the hot afternoon sun.

Meeting at the car after our respective 12-hour days was a fun swap of stories, as was the final car-camping night, and fun trip through the foreign-feeling USA. The line-up at the border allowed us to listen to the final moments of the World Cup championship match; with a Von Salzen, an Illner, a Hofmann and a Langer in the car, we cheered as Germany captured the world title seconds before we handed over our passports.

Washington Pass, with its spectacular climbing, and stunning views with short approaches, is a place you must go! Highly recommended!!

Participants: Knut von Salzen, Reinhard Illner, Martin Hofmann and Sonia Langer

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## Mt. Olympus via Hoh River

**Shaun Hedges**  
**August 8 – 11**

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With increasing frequency it seems the pressures of my professional and family life coupled with the vagaries of weather and the odd injury conspire to make it harder each year for me to get away to the alpine to nourish my soul. This summer would have been no different was it not for a successful climb of Mt. Olympus (7,980 feet elevation) with some old friends (and a new one) from the Vancouver Island Section (VIS).

Chris Jensen, Andrew Pape-Salmon and I had first tried to



*Mount Olympus group shot at the trailhead.*

climb Olympus back in May, 2010 but had turned around at the edge of the Blue Glacier under blue-bird skies, but deeply isothermic and highly active snow conditions that suggested we'd best come back another day. I tried to lead another small VIS group again the following summer, but cancelled the trip at the last minute as a prolonged spell of fantastic weather unravelled before my eyes. With Chris having managed to get back and tag the summit in 2013, I was determined to do the same in 2014 if at all possible.

So, with lessons learned from that 2010 trip, Tak Ogasawara, Russ Moir, Karun Thanjavur, Shawn Daniels, Lenka Visnovska, Jacqueline Howard and I caught the ~6:30 a.m. sailing of the Coho from Victoria to Port Angeles, Washington. After fueling up with gas, coffee and food at the Save-On-Foods state-side we made the short two-hour drive to the trailhead where we obtained our permits, made last-minute gear adjustments and then shouldered our packs to begin the hike in.

Within a short distance of leaving the visitors centre, all but a handful of tourists had faded away and we were quickly swallowed up by the West Coast wilderness and began encountering some magnificent spruce and cedar trees and some peek-a-boo views of the surrounding mountains.

By the time we'd made it to the Happy Four shelter at 8 km, where Andrew, Chris and I had camped on the way out last time, I was glad I decided to wear my shorts and light runners and limit my kit to a 40-litre pack. A light pack and comfortable footwear count a lot on this trip, and while I wouldn't say I had a large/heavy pack the last time in 2010, I'd keenly remembered the long approach and departure and what would make for a pleasant and successful return trip.

Soon enough, we arrived at the Olympus Guard Station 14.5 km in and set up our first camp in a spacious and scenic site adjacent the Hoh River. Tired legs and the prospect of another 13 km to go the next day made for an early night, at least for some of us.

Saturday morning dawned and we broke camp and put down the final miles to our next camp at Glacier Meadows, 28 km in from the trailhead. The trail is pretty gentle up to the 19 km point but steepens quickly after that.

After setting up our second camp in Glacier Meadows with an excellent source of running water nearby, we ambled up the trail to the lateral moraine overlooking the Blue Glacier for a better view of the next day's objective and what a sight it was. A gobsmackingly gorgeous and grand sweep of mountains, glaciers and sky.

With the prior day's motivational view in mind, we left camp at 2:30 a.m. Sunday morning under a full moon. Travel across the Blue Glacier and up onto the Snow Dome was straightforward, with some hopping required over some deep moulins, and selecting the optimal line coming off the glacier being the only tricky part in any technical sense.



*Shaun overlooking Blue Glacier.*

Once on top of the Snow Dome our two rope teams of three (Jacqueline had decided to take her chances with the wildlife back at camp) joined up for a short rest as the moon set and the sun began to dawn. From there it was up through Crystal Pass and then onwards to the summit block by 8 a.m. or so. After gearing up with a very small alpine rack and with the confidence of knowing Karun was belaying me, I climbed a classic and very enjoyable short 30-m 5.4 alpine pitch to the summit, placing a single nut and 2" cam for protection. With a grin from ear to ear I set up a station on a block just shy of the summit festooned with webbing and then belayed the remainder of the team up. By 9 a.m. we were all safely on top this magnificent ~8,000-foot peak and after the mandatory summit photos and some rest we started down for an uneventful trip back to our Glacier Meadows camp. After a short break to rest and eat, we broke camp and at ~2:30 p.m. began heading back down to set up camp at the Olympus Guard Station 14.5 km.

If I had to call any part of the trip at all unpleasant, I would



*Group summit shot.*

save that to describe the final plod out to the trailhead Monday morning. With the summit in the bag and nothing but miles to tick off, the final hike out became mentally arduous at times despite having tunes on the iPhone. However, the feeling didn't last long as I pondered how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to have climbed yet another beautiful peak with such an inspirational and experienced group of folks.

With the hike out complete, it was back to Port Angeles for beers, burgers and the Coho Ferry ride home to Victoria.

Gear list: Small alpine rack with a few nuts, cams to 2" and a piton. 60-m rope, ice screw and picket per rope team.

Participants: Tak Ogasawara, Russ Moir, Karun Thanjavur, Shawn Daniels, Lenka Visnovska, Jacqueline Howard

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## Buckskin Gulch: A Slot Canyon Adventure

**Roxy Ahmed**  
**September 24 – 25**

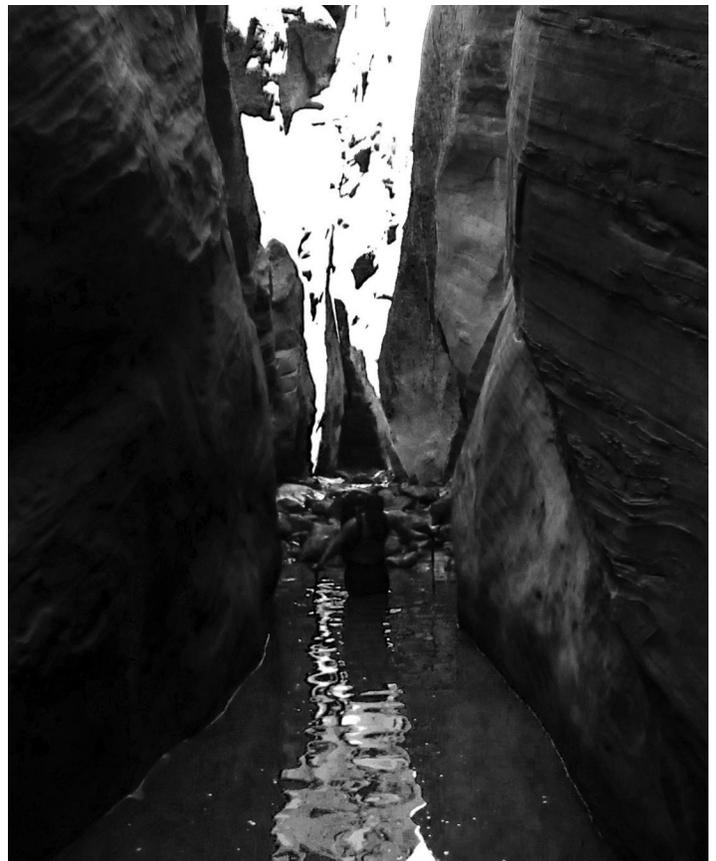
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For the third time in two days, I opened up the weather forecast for Kanab, Utah, and Bryce Canyon. We were leaving for our southern Utah road trip in less than a week, and the recent heavy rains had us concerned about our ability to safely explore the endless narrow slot canyons and gulches that gash the desert landscape. Worse, the extended forecast was peppered with angry-looking dark cloud and lightning-bolt symbols. We had randomly chosen our permit for the two-day hike through Buckskin Gulch and Paria Canyon to occur about six days into our trip, giving us time to explore Zion beforehand. Since the majority of the hike winds its way through an inescapable slot canyon, a forecast completely void of precipitation, especially at the Bryce Canyon headwaters, was essential. Our hike seemed to fortuitously land on the only two-day period of clear weather, bookended on either side by thunderstorms. The week prior, I had called a shuttle operator to inquire about a drop-off at our trailhead. The lady exclaimed, "You're planning on hiking Buckskin Gulch? You know that we've just had the remnants of Hurricane Norbert come through, right? It'll be miserable and wet; an extreme adventure. Nobody is going through." Turns out, she was right about the wet part. But miserable? Not quite. An adventure? You bet!

As we pulled Dusty the Delica into the blistering hot late-September heat of St. George, we realized the locals were not exaggerating the severity of the recent weather. A fellow at the Bureau of Land Management told us that just a few days prior, the streets of St. George had flooded, a fact which was confirmed by the flows of red dirt still visible on city streets. A few hours south, Arizona had just experienced a 1-in-1000-year rainfall event. The canyons would have been swept with exceptional flash floods, and there

was no telling if Buckskin Gulch would even be passable. Moreover, it would be wet, muddy, and dotted with quicksand. Despite this being an extremely popular hike (who wouldn't want to hike North America's longest and deepest slot canyon?) with permits filling up months in advance, none of the 20 overnight visitors allowed per day had kept their bookings, so the post-flood condition of the canyon was unknown. No problem though, because we're Island mountaineers, well accustomed to the misery of the bush and the mystery of the untrodden path. Surely we could waltz through a 34-km hike with no elevation gain in two days? Happily, we nodded at this information and took our permit tag and wag bags.

Two days later, we arose at dawn and shouldered our light packs, which were wonderfully devoid of the usual climbing equipment. The night prior, Chris had convinced someone to give us a ride from the White House campground to the highway, where we'd try to thumb another ride to the Wire Pass trailhead. This didn't take too long, and we soon found ourselves looking up at the towering enclosures, in awe of the very different landscape and with an ominous anticipation of what was to come. The adventure didn't take long to start. The sandy bottom of Wire Pass gave way to a pool of undeterminable depth barring further progress. I went first, packing my camera tightly into its drybag and then carefully probing the bottom of the murky pool with my poles while Chris and a couple of dayhikers watched (the dayhikers' trek going no further than this point). Luckily for me, who has a swimming ability approximately equivalent



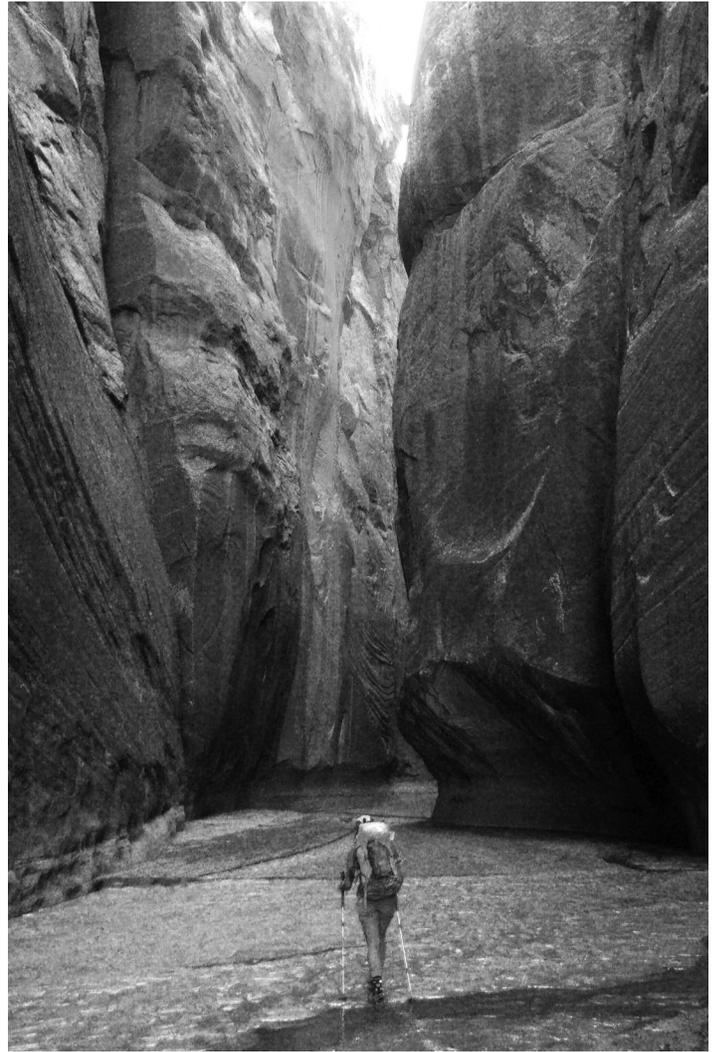
*Chris Jensen entering one of many pools in Buckskin Gulch.  
Photo - Roxy Ahmed*

to a rock, this pool went no deeper than mid-thigh, and the murky water was an agreeable temperature. From this point on, there were no more footprints in the sand and mud spanning the canyon walls.

Shortly after this first pool, the landscape widened to reveal gigantic arches and direct sunlight. We stumbled forward, craning our necks skyward, shutters snapping in wild succession. We didn't make any effort to hike fast, instead choosing to savour the alien landscape. We were planning on hiking 21 km to the first viable camp spot on high ground at the confluence of the Buckskin and Paria rivers. Not exactly a short distance, but definitely reasonable given that there was zero elevation gain (in fact, we were hiking down the river) – or so we thought. Soon we were enclosed deep within the maw of the canyon, each twist and turn revealing another mystery and another pool. Despite the sun just beginning to reach its zenith, the canyon was dark and silent. Silent, that was, until a roaring, booming sound echoed its way through the walls and stopped Chris and me dead in our tracks. I glanced at Chris and we exchanged a look of terror. Flash flood! We gazed up at the overhanging, smooth walls enclosing us. We were trapped as surely as flies in an upturned glass. Fear was shortly turned to relief and the afterglow of an adrenaline buzz. A jet plane, of course! We must have been on a flight path. This sound soon became a regular occurrence, a reminder that we were still on planet Earth.

The pools were a different matter. Normally rated a dry canyon, Buckskin had been transformed into a series of successive pools, linked up with patches of slick, wet mud. At first, we crossed each pool carefully and slowly, using our poles for stability and to test the depth. Between these pools, the poles were even more critical, as the sloping, flood-scrubbed mud was extremely slick and had our sandaled feet sliding out from beneath us with relative frequency. And then there was the quicksand. Oh, the quicksand. Chris reasoned that having me hike first was a safety measure, since he was more likely able to pull me out of the quagmire than me, him. Luckily this was necessitated on only one occasion. After stepping through a few small quicksand puddles, we learned to move quickly before one's foot sunk any deeper. At the edge of one puddle, however, I stepped forward and quickly found myself sinking past my knees to mid-thigh. Trying unsuccessfully not to panic, I held my poles out horizontally in front of me to try and increase my surface area, as Chris instructed. "You're not going anywhere" he said calmly as I yelled back "it's not working!" whilst watching my hands, poles and waist sink below the murk. Trying to struggle out only caused me to sink in farther. Finally, Chris threw me a piece of cord which I used to belly-shim up onto the safety of harder sand. Phew!

As the day wore on and each twist and turn blended into the next, we lost all sense of distance and began to wonder where our intended camp spot lay. For landmarks, we knew there was a rock jam, which needs careful navigation and a possible rappel or hand-line to get around. A notorious



*Beautiful Paria Canyon. Photo - Roxy Ahmed*

"cesspool" requiring swimming or wading through stagnant water was known to form from time to time, although given that we had already waded through numerous pools, we could have already passed this obstacle. We also knew there was only one feasible exit point along the entire 21-km stretch, a subtle Class 3/4 scramble around the 14.5-km mark that was reputedly easy to miss. Since we had encountered none of these yet, we began to wonder. "Did the recent floods clear out the rock jam?" "Maybe that ramp is the exit point?" "It's beginning to get dark." We felt fairly confident that we had seen the escape route, and that we were surely closing in on the confluence.

As we neared a sandy clearing, I looked up and saw a distinctive petroglyph of two sheep emblazoned on the wall. I started digging through my trail notes. Crap! The escape was supposedly marked by this very petroglyph. That meant we were only at the 14.5 km point, with the major rock jam obstacle still ahead of us, and just over an hour of daylight left. We snapped one hurried picture of the petroglyphs and carried on at an increasingly rapid pace, unbelieving that we still had 6.5 km left to hike after what already felt like a very long day.

It didn't take long to reach the notorious rock jam, appar-

ently undisturbed by the recent floods. Chris found a subtle rabbit hole that our bodies could just barely fit through, thus avoiding the 20-foot rappel. As he rigged up a line to lower our packs down the other side of the boulder, he gave me very clear directions on how to find the rabbit hole so that I could receive the bags on the other side. I got to the spot where he said to look left for the opening. "I don't see it! I'm looking left!" I complained. "Look further left, way left!" he called back. I still couldn't see it. After several repeated commands to look left, I finally saw it; a miniscule little opening just large enough to fit a body through. Good eye, Chris!

A short distance after the rock jam and with daylight now in short supply, we arrived at a floating mat of logs and branches followed by what appeared to be a deep debris-filled pool spanning the width of the canyon, which at this point was no more than 1.5 m wide. Was this the infamous Cesspool? Would we have to swim? Moreover, would the floating mat hold our weight, or would we plunge into the abyss, never to emerge again? Earlier in the day I had encountered both a rattlesnake and a tarantula, and shuddered at the thought of what creepy crawlies may have been hidden in the muck. On top of that, the air had begun to chill and thoughts of a swim were most unwelcome. This time, I was unwilling to be the scapegoat and convinced Chris to go first, providing assurance that I would save him should he plunge below the debris. With breath held tight I watched him carefully step onto the mat, and let out a sigh of relief when it held his weight. I waited as he reached over the edge to probe the pool's depth with his pole, and then watched with dismay as his pole reached its full length without hitting bottom. Hesitatingly he slipped in, ready to swim, only to pleasantly find his feet touching bottom when he was no more than chest-deep. Enlivened by his apparent survival, I followed suit, wading through an eerie, deep pool of muck in a dark, dank canyon and feeling very much like a character in an Indiana Jones movie.

We reached the confluence just in time for dusk. We took out our headlamps and found a good tent spot on high ground, safely above reach from all but the most extreme of flash floods. I left in search of water. Somewhere in the flurry of preparing for this trip, we had neglected to read that you must carry enough water for your entire hike. Even in the "wet" state of the canyon, Buckskin only offered trickling pools of grey sediment-laden water while the Paria's thick, soup-like stew of red mud was far worse. Fortunately, I had brought along a recently purchased mini squeeze filter, somewhat of a novelty since we never filter our crystal-clear Island water. The disadvantage of the squeeze filter was that it needed a sufficiently deep pool to fill the container. On Chris' suggestion, I dug holes in the mud that filled with sludge which could then be squeezed through the filter. This worked; however, the water was so turbid that I had to clean the filter on every round. After a trying hour of work, I had just over a litre of clear water. Better than nothing. We cooked our boil-a-bag meals and headed to bed. Despite our safe and relatively open camp spot, we couldn't shake the slightly claustrophobic feeling of knowing we

were still miles away from any escape out of the canyon.

The next morning, I awoke hours before Chris and went to repeat the laborious process of extracting water. When he awoke he reported a tumultuous sleep, having been kept up thanks to thoughts of our vulnerable camp spot perched below friable cliffs above. This was clearly a well-used camp spot, and I hadn't heard any horror stories of hikers being crushed by falling stones, but our boulder-laden surroundings demonstrated that the canyon walls surely did exfoliate from time to time.

After breakfast we embarked on the final 13-km stretch of our hike, leaving the claustrophobic confines of the Buckskin to turn upstream into the silty Paria. It was hard to get moving, as we were sore in places that we didn't know existed from the constant engagement of stabilizer muscles on the slippery mud. The canyon remained steep and inescapable, but gradually opened up into a wider but still inescapable hallway of striking red beauty. The muddy banks had been replaced by a pebbly canyon floor, and I began to curse my decision to wear sandals on this hike. Our feet were constantly wet so sandals provided us with no advantage over hiking boots. I had to stop every few minutes to dig out pebbles, and had soon pulled my sandals on and off with such frequency that the seams began to deteriorate.

As we continued upstream, the widening canyon brought with it the blistering heat of the mid-day sun. We hiked as close to the walls as possible to get relief in their narrow strips of shade. Suddenly, Chris heard me yelp and watched with amusement as I darted around. I had just about stepped on what appeared to be a rabid bat, or perhaps some sort of miniature demon. I didn't see it until I heard it, and it was the most awful, ear-piercing squeal I'd ever heard in my life. As it shrieked at us, we briefly considered putting it out of its misery. The thing was so haggard it appeared to be rotting whilst still alive. Shuddering, we decided to let nature run its course and continued on. After what seemed like an eternity, we emerged at the White House trailhead and the welcomed sight of Dusty, dutifully waiting for us in the heat. Best of all, some of our ice survived, and we even had cold drinks!

On our drive out, we stopped by the ranger station to give them our trail report. The rangers and some prospective hikers were thankful for the information. As forecasted, the following day brought another torrential wave of rain; upstream from our hike, the saturated ground would give way under the pavement and send a car into the Paria River. Luckily no one was hurt. Another hiker in Zion was not so fortunate, succumbing to a flash flood in the same storm. News of this fatality solidified the committing feel of the hike we had just completed, and we thanked our lucky stars for this chance to walk amongst the ancients.

Participants: Chris Jensen and Roxy Ahmed

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## The Warner Mountains, South Sister and Mt. Bailey

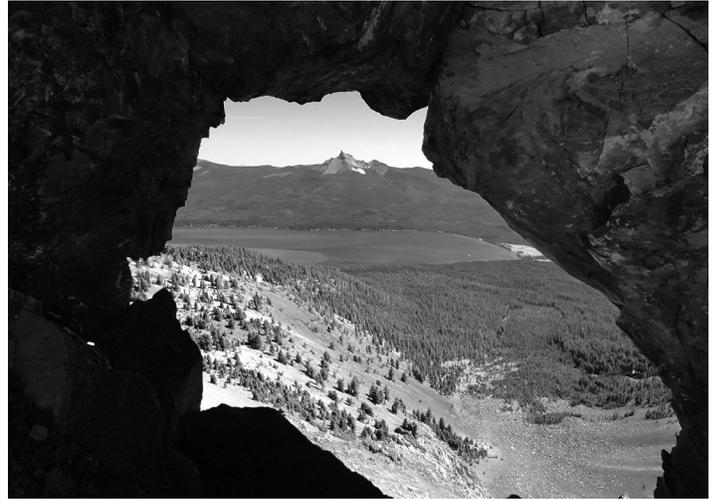
Tony Vaughn  
September 12 – 22

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Once again the old reliable MV Coho hauled us across the straits and deposited us in Port Angeles for the start of another Smith-inspired hiking trip into Oregon and Northern California. Our final destination was to be the South Warner Wilderness. A small mountain range in North California up close to the Nevada border, with several mountains over 8000 feet, the South Warners is an 18-mile long by 8-mile wide range running North to South. The highest peak in the range is Eagle at 9892 feet (3015 m). The eastern escarpment overlooks the Surprise valley, an area of large alkali lakes and ranch land. The eastern side drops steeply down into this valley while the western side slopes more gently down to the Modoc Plateau.

Our first destination, however, was to be a hike up South Sister, a 10358-foot volcano west of Bend in Oregon. Timing for this hike was not the best as it was a Sunday with beautiful weather. Hence dozens of people of all ages also had South Sister as a destination. Nevertheless at 7:05 a.m. we left our campsite at Devil's Lake and joined the masses on the steep meandering trail through Hemlock forest for 1.5 miles, emerging onto a sandy plain and passing above Moraine Lake. After another mile we reached the bottom of South Sister and started up the switched back trail towards the Lewis Glacier, which has a small lake at its base. Here we had a break before climbing up the final mile on a very loose and powdery cinder path, topping out on the edge of the caldera. The caldera is filled with a glacier. From this point we hiked around the edge of the caldera to the true summit on the far side. The weather was clear, which gave us terrific views of the surrounding volcanoes, far better views than I had when I had been here in June '98. That time we had thick fog and deep snow. The advantage on that trip was that there were no people, and it was far, far nicer to travel on snow than this loose cindery rock. We returned back to camp at 5:30 p.m. having completed a round trip of 22 km with 4892 feet elevation change.

We travelled south the next day to Diamond Lake and our next hike, which was Mt. Bailey, another cascade volcano overlooking Diamond Lake and Mt. Thielsen. Once again there was a trail to the top, but the mountain is not nearly as frequently visited as South Sister. In fact, we had the mountain to ourselves when we climbed it the next day. We left the trailhead at 9 a.m. and hiked up a gentle switch-backed trail through forest, before breaking out below the false summit, with fine views over Diamond Lake and Mt. Thielsen. From this point the trail became steeper, leading upwards to a rock wall which we followed, on a steep,



*Diamond Lake and Mt. Thielsen from Mt. Bailey.  
Photo - Tony Vaughn*

exposed cinder path, passing a window in the rock wall through which great views of Mt. Thielsen were visible. The path then led downward to a short rock step in the wall, allowing access onto a steep scree path which led to the summit ridge. The summit at 8330 feet was a short walk from here along a cinder path. After lunch out of the wind we returned back down the trail to the trailhead, reaching it at 4:30 p.m. and camping there for the night.

Now was the time to venture further south and explore the Warner Mountains. After a night in Alturas, California, we drove east up into the hills. We wound through ranching country with neatly well kept farms, onto gravel roads until we reached the campsite at Pepperdine, located at an altitude of 6940 feet. That afternoon at 12:45 we left camp and started along the summit trail that runs along the height of land through the Southern Warner Wilderness. The trail started in forest but soon broke out onto open grassland with views of the Surprise Valley with its large alkali lakes to the east and to the west, distant views of Mt. Shasta beyond the Modoc Plateau. After about 1.5 hours hiking south on the trail we reached a treed ridge leading east up towards our destination of Squaw Peak (now officially an unnamed peak due to political correctness). We turned off the trail here and followed the ridge up through the trees then out onto rocks and through sagebrush until we reached the summit at 8646 feet. Following a lazy lunch basking in the sunshine we scrambled down through the sage and rock back to the trail and returned to camp arriving at 5:00 p.m. in time for cocktails before dinner.

The next morning we once more joined the summit trail going south towards our day's objective. Today it was to be Warren Peak, the second highest in the Warners at 9710 feet and about 12 km away from our camp. The trail meandered gently up and down along the height of land, passing by lakes and valleys, until after 3.5 hours we reached Patterson Lake, the jewel in the Warners. Patterson Lake is a crystal clear body of water below the sheer cliffs of Warren Peak, stocked with trout that could be easily



*Patterson Lake from Warren Peak . Photo - Tony Vaughn*

seen swimming right up to the shoreline. It was a perfect spot for a break before climbing up over the pass to the east of the peak in search of a route to the summit. Anticipating a quick trip from here to the top, we stashed our packs and with only water and cameras we ambled on, only to find the scramble up the ridge to the summit was a little more demanding than expected, with some rocky exposed scrambling at the top and taking much longer than we had anticipated. However, we were back for lunch at the lake by 2:30 p.m., soaking our feet in the clear cold water and basking in the sunshine for half an hour before hiking back to our camp. We arrived at 5:30 p.m., having covered a total of 23 km.

The following day we left Pepperdine and drove around to Mill Creek Falls campground with the intention of hiking to Eagle Peak, the highest mountain in the range at 9892 feet. As it turned out we decided not to climb Eagle due to the long approach, which made it a bit too long for a comfortable day trip. We spent two nights at Mill Creek hiking to the falls and around Clear Lake. Then on September 22 we left Ann and Martin to continue their travels to Lassen Park and the coast while we returned home.

Participants: Ann and Martin Smith, Anita and Tony Vaughn

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## **Gamboling through the Granary**

**Roxy Ahmed**  
**October 3**

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Climbers like to categorize their hobbies into “fun” types: Type I fun, which means the activity is fun whilst you are engaged in it (think 5.8 hand crack); Type II fun, which is fun only in hindsight (mountaineering); and Type III fun, which is never looked back upon as something that was fun no matter how much time passes. Ice climbing is often placed into this category, although most ice climbers might

disagree. I would argue that canyoneers could also use this classification system for their hobby, which involves entering a canyon from its upstream entrance and using a combination of downclimbing, stemming and rappelling to navigate the many drops and pools located along its descent.

While vacationing in Moab, Chris and I decided to test our climbing skills by descending a technical, yet still relatively beginner-friendly canyon. After some internet searches we settled upon Granary Canyon, which is rated 3A-III on the American Canyoneering Association (ACA) scale. The ‘3’ refers to a Class 3, or intermediate, canyon requiring rappels and technical downclimbing, while the ‘A’ rates its wetness; in this case, the canyon is normally dry or has very little water. The description further states that there are “normally one or two small pools, usually avoidable. No wetsuit needed.” Finally, the ‘III’ refers to length of the trip. Granary Canyon is expected to take most of a day to descend and return back to the car.

Admittedly, our options were limited. We had just one day left on this road trip before beginning the return drive home to the drudgery of our normal lives. We had hoped to spend the previous day cragging at the famous sandstone splitter cracks of Indian Creek, but rain had put a kibosh on those plans. Luckily the weather allowed us one day to climb our first desert tower, South Six Shooter Spire. After this short taste of Type I fun, we were keen to bring out the ropes again.

Along with the rain came a substantial drop in temperature. It seemed as though the desert transitioned from summer to winter literally overnight. We went from dragging our feet in 35°C daily high temperatures in Page, Arizona, to sleeping in -2°C temperatures near the North Rim of the Grand Canyon that very same night. Our bodies shivered with the drastic change in temperatures. Upon arriving in Moab, we observed that fresh snow had fallen in the La Sal Mountains only a few hundred metres in elevation above us.

So, what did this mean for our canyon descent? For starters, we expected to find more water than the “one or two small pools” stated in the description. Since nighttime temperatures were not far above freezing, any water would be very cold. Neither of us had a wetsuit, but given that we never had to swim in Buckskin Gulch (another normally-dry canyon that we hiked through shortly after heavy rain) we reasoned that the odd bit of wading would be manageable. I leaned heavily on this hope, since despite having grown up in Victoria surrounded by water, I’ve never really learned how to swim properly. In fact, I’m terrified whenever I find myself in water deeper than I can touch bottom in.

By the time we drove to the end of Long Canyon Road and geared up, it was mid-morning and we were off to a later-than-desired start. Some route-finding was required to locate the shallow drainage marking the start of Upper Granary Canyon. In no time, the canyon floor dropped off and we made our first mandatory rappel. Despite its short length (6 m), it was fairly exciting. The features in this can-



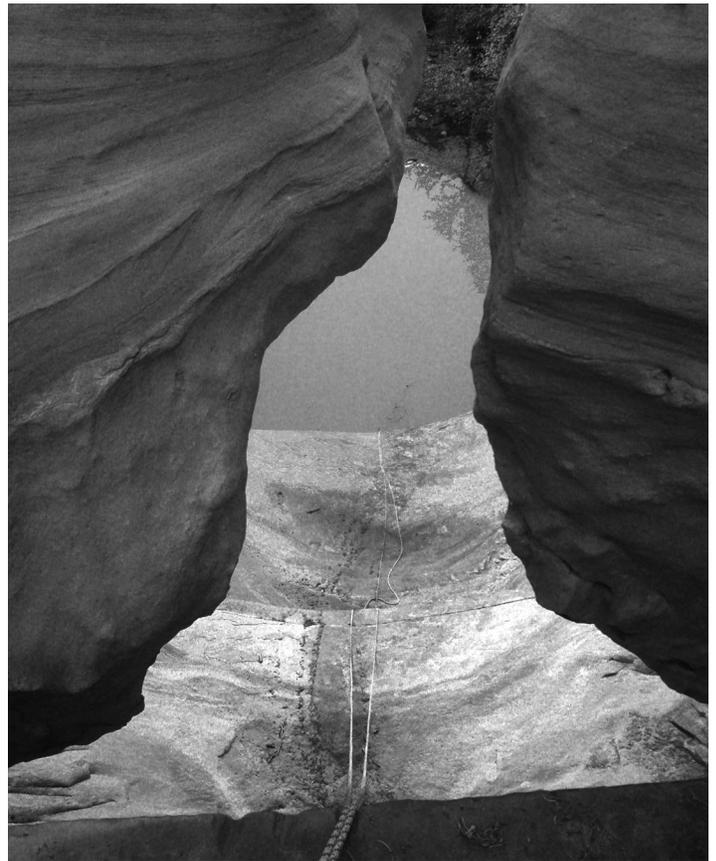
*A fantastic long overhanging rappel. Photo - Roxy Ahmed.*

yon were formed by water carving numerous deep potholes in the slickrock, many of which form deep undercuts. As a result, most of the rappels in Granary free-hang over a rounded lip which only adds to the exhilaration.

Shortly after this first rappel was another small drop. Unable to find a suitable natural anchor, we did some stimulating 4<sup>th</sup> class friction climbing up the exposed slickrock until we met a chimney that could be downclimbed back onto the canyon floor. This was followed a deep pool requiring a 1.5 m drop to enter, or a tenuous traverse around the rim of the pothole to avoid entering it. I was faced with the first of many dilemmas. My ankle was recovering poorly from a February fracture, and just prior to this trip a doctor had observed my X-ray and gave me the grim news that it appeared to be a delayed union. Because of this, I was hesitant to try any tricky climbing moves to bypass the pothole. I worried that if I slipped, even a short drop would re-fracture the marginally healed bone. Regretfully I packed the contents of my pack into a drybag, took off my shoes and slipped in. The water was so cold I gasped, and worse, it was deep. I frantically doggy-paddled across and met Chris, who successfully traversed the pothole and avoided getting wet.

After getting out, my body temperature began to drop and I changed out of my wet clothing and into a dry set. The description mentioned only two pools requiring a bypass or swim, this being one of them, so I figured that I would be able to stay dry for some time. Of course, that was not the case!

Continuing down the canyon, we navigated through a few more drops and potholes. Chris' surefootedness kept him out of all of these, while I was not so fortunate, having to stop and take off my clothing numerous times. Eventually we came to the end of Upper Granary. From here we hiked along the plateau to the entrance of Lower Granary. Some route-finding was required to locate the "narrow crack" that provides access to the first rappel of Lower Granary, which also happens to be the highlight of the entire route: a 22-m,



*When rappelling, this is not where you want to see your rope landing. Photo - Roxy Ahmed.*

completely free-hanging rappel into a gorgeous alcove which then drops another 27 m to a pool. Again feeling conscious about downclimbing on my weak ankle, I had Chris lower me down the crack until we reached the pothole at the lip of the alcove. Wow, what a sight. From here the canyon dropped off dramatically and the exposure made my stomach churn. Chris rigged the rappel off a sturdy tree and was soon teetering over the edge, struggling only slightly to turn the lip without catching his rappel device once his feet swung under the overhang. After coming off the rope, he got into position to film me sliding down, this being the longest and most exhilarating free rappel I'd ever done. There were more than a few expletives announced, but despite the buzz this was some genuine Type I fun.

We immediately came to the next, longer rappel, which had a bolted anchor. Throwing the rope over the edge, we were greeted by a splashing sound, which is not something you typically want to hear when you throw your rope over an edge. Leaning on the rope, Chris saw that the rappel did indeed end in a large pool. A few more curse words were released. Up until this point, he had successfully managed to avoid getting even his toes wet, while I already looked like a drowned cat. This time, there would be no escaping. The thought of coming off my rappel device and dropping directly into a swim in cold and deep water was about as appealing as bittermelon stew, but we survived.

A short distance after this, we encountered another 15 m



production! Gone were the millions and millions of sheep (it used to be roughly 300 sheep per person). No matter where we went we couldn't get away from tourism, even in the mountains.

In the first week we caught up with many of my high school friends (and a high school teacher who had introduced me to mountain climbing) and drove around Christchurch and saw some of the devastation from the earthquake. It is going to take many years for it to recover. On a road trip around Banks Peninsula we saw one of the best museums documenting Maori culture at Okains Bay and we got to flip a vehicle on the sand dunes at Le Bons Bay. None of us received any injuries and once the vehicle was put back on its wheels, we continued on to Akaroa for dinner and then back into Christchurch. The only damage was a cracked windscreen.

### **Mount Somers – Te Kiekie 1688 m (December 11/12)**

Since we had arrived in the South Island the infamous nor'wester (a wind from the northwest that brings strong winds and heavy rain to the mountains, but a dry searing wind over the Canterbury Plains to the east) had been blowing, so we had to wait for it to abate before we could consider a climb. A week later, with the weather improving, we drove down to the sleepy little town of Staveley where I had the first of many meat pies. The New Zealand meat pie is a hand-sized pastry pie containing largely diced or minced meat and gravy, sometimes with onion, mushrooms, or cheese, and often consumed as a takeaway food snack. It is considered a New Zealand cuisine and it forms part of the country's national identity. As well, I can happily say for those suffering from celiac disease, there are gluten-free pies! The meat pie was the staple – no, essential – post-trip food when I was growing up. That and beer!

From Staveley we drove the few kilometres to Sharplin Falls at the end of Flynn Road where the trail around Mount Somers begins. The first visitors to the area are believed to have been moa-hunters in Māori times, 500 – 800 years ago. Although no permanent sites of occupancy are doc-



*Mount Somers from near Staveley. Photo - Valerie Wootton*

umented, primitive drawings in rock shelters on Mount Somers are evidence of these early visitors. The Māori name for Mount Somers is Te Kiekie and means 'climber'. I had undertaken this tramp (the New Zealand term for hiking) and climb several times when I was younger, but was now surprised by how the DoC (Department of Conservation) had developed the area and the trails.

From the carpark, which we left at lunchtime, it took us 2.5 hours to get to the Pinnacle Hut on the north side of the mountain. There were two others staying at the hut, but they were out climbing on the pinnacles above the hut. In the hut book I read the two names and noted one was a C. O'Dowd from Andorra. Immediately I thought of Cathy O'Dowd who was with the South African Everest expedition in 1996 and who has since become one of the strongest female Himalayan climbers. Later when the two walked into the hut, and after some chatter, I asked her if she was the same Cathy O'Dowd. Sheepishly she admitted yes and was surprised at how I knew. Obviously Cathy was aware that I knew the controversial story of the South African expedition as she didn't want to talk much about her Everest experiences. She was the first female to climb Everest from both sides. We chatted the rest of the evening about other climbs and trail running.

The next day Val and I made a quick climb of the North Face of Mount Somers to the summit and then descended the Southeast Ridge back to the car. However, from the summit Val got her first view of Mount Cook (Aoraki) the highest mountain in New Zealand. Two days later we arrived at the Kennedy Hut in Arthur's Pass, an area where I had spent my early mountaineering days as a youth.

### **Otira Face Mount Rolleston 2271 m (December 14)**

The town of Arthur's Pass is about three hours west of Christchurch on the main divide of the Southern Alps and is the heart of the National Park of the same name. It is the main route between Christchurch and the West Coast and is the only route for trains to bring the West Coast coal back to the east coast via the Otira Tunnel between Arthur's Pass and Otira. Construction of this 8.5-kilometre tunnel commenced in 1907 and was opened in 1923; at the time of its construction it was one of the longest tunnels in the world. Because of its length and gradient (1 in 33), gases such as carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide could easily build up, potentially making the tunnel both unhealthy for the train's occupants and unworkable with steam engines. Thus, the tunnel was electrified with a 1500V DC overhead system. A small coal-fired power station was built near Otira to provide electricity until 1941, when it was replaced by a connection to the national grid. Because of the increasing age of the electrification and the availability of upgraded DX Class diesel locomotives, the electrification was decommissioned in 1997 and the equipment removed. To overcome the fume problem, a combination of a door and fans is used, similar to that used in the Cascade Tunnel in the USA, which was also once electrified. After a train enters the tunnel from the Otira end, the door closes off the entrance and a large fan extracts the fumes behind the train.



*The Otira Face of Mount Rolleston. Photo - Valerie Wootton*

Once the fumes have been extracted, the door is reopened. Because of the fumes, today's TranzAlpine's observation cars are closed for the trip through the tunnel.

When I was a teenager, Arthur's Pass was a popular destination for many of us young trampers/climbers as we could catch the Trampler's Special (railcar) Friday evening and return on Sunday night. This railcar would drop trampers off anywhere along the tracks, and pick you up, as long as you gave the conductor advance notice. A bonus from having joined the Canterbury Mountaineering Club (CMC) was I could use the club's Kennedy Hut in Arthur's Pass as a climbing base. It also turned out to be a weekend party hut for some mates from other high schools who had also just joined the CMC. There were many weekends when no climbing was done. Here is what would happen! At midday on Saturday several of us would go down to the station and catch a ride with the conductor on the goods train to Otira (where the nearest pub was located) and then an hour later, with a couple of cases of beer, we would return to Arthur's Pass again with the conductor. This was one pub where even though we were underage, the publican never turned us away except when the police gave them the warning call saying they were coming down. The pub was also a great place after a tramping trip to hang out before catching the Sunday evening railcar home (technically speaking, being a Sunday, the pub should have been closed, but then Otira is on the West Coast and the West Coast had its own rules). Alas, because of the door at Otira (and there being no conductors on the goods train anymore) those days of free rides through the tunnel are gone. Anyway, I am digressing here as I reminisce on my happy days of youth!

With the weather forecast for Sunday looking good, we decided to climb the high peak route on the Otira Face of Mount Rolleston – the most famous climb in the area. I had done this climb several times before and I had fond memories of it. We went off to bed early that evening, but about midnight were awoken by a group arriving back from a climb. It wasn't until we got up at 4 a.m. and disturbed one of the climbers who was sleeping in the living room that we



*Val descending the Crow Neve from the high peak of Mount Rolleston. Photo - Lindsay Elms*

found out they had just done the Mount Philistine/Rolleston traverse, taking longer than anticipated; however, we found out conditions were perfect on the mountain.

By 5 a.m. we were tramping up the Otira Valley with our headlamps. For the first hour we followed the well-used trail, but then after crossing the Otira Stream the trail became a lightly-used route, but still obvious. Finally, after 2 hours and 45 minutes we were at the base of the climb. We roped up and I began the first pitch which I recalled was the crux for the route. I led out and looked to place the first piece of pro, but there wasn't much available. I put a dubious piece in and continued on, but again there still wasn't much around. At a big flake I put a sling over it knowing that in the event of a fall it wasn't going to hold, but it might slow me down. I didn't say anything to Val, but continued on to the top of the pitch where I was able to get a couple of good pieces in and bring her up to me. When Val arrived at the flake she took the sling off then went to pull up on the flake and let out a, not exactly a scream, but a loud startled whimper, as the flake moved slightly under her weight. She quickly let it go and moved up around it to where I was belaying her. She wasn't impressed with the quality of the rock and I have to say I had forgotten what a load of choss the rock was on the face. From then on we simul-climbed to the summit, arriving around 1 p.m.

To get off the summit we followed the tracks of the climbers from the previous day down the ridge towards the middle peak. One rappel got us onto the Crow nevé. We traversed around under the middle peak and gained the low peak where several routes topped out. Our intention was to climb down to the Goldney Ridge and then descend the Otira Slide back into the upper Otira Valley. Again we were fortunate to have tracks to follow to speed the descent. We arrived down in the valley around 4:30 a.m. and made a speedy retreat down the valley arriving back into Arthur's Pass 2.5 hours later where a nice cold beer was waiting for me.

The next morning we drove over the pass to Otira and stopped for a beer at my old haunt. Although both the pub

and I were older, it still had the same feel about it and many memories flooded back. I recalled trips, climbs and mates whom I had spent time in the mountains with and at the bar. We continued to the historical gold mining town of Hokitika on the West Coast, where we caught up with an old climbing mate, Dave Waugh, who had come with me to Peru back in 1988. He took us sailing on Lake Mahinapua and then drove us out to the beautiful Hokitika Gorge. The next day Val and I drove up to Punakaiki (Pancake Rocks) and on to Westport, where we stayed with another climbing mate. A couple of days later we were at St Arnaud – the small town at the northern end of Nelson Lakes National Park.

### **Hopeless Creek, Mount Angelus 2075 m, Roberts Ridge (December 17-20)**

In the morning we went into the DoC office to check on a boat to take us up Lake Rotoiti, and to ask about the huts. The Angelus Hut that I had stayed in years ago was now a major tramping destination and to stay in the hut you have to book in advance. It is a 36-bunk hut (with a separate room for the warden) that we found out had been fully booked for the last week and was fully booked for the next few days; however, tent sites were available. We made bookings for the Lakehead Hut at the head of Lake Rotoiti (NZ\$15/person/night), then the Hopeless Hut (\$10/person/night) for the second night, and a tent site at Angelus Hut (\$10/person/night) for the third night. For \$25 each the water taxi ran us up the lake to Lakehead Hut.

The next day we tramped up the Travis River to the confluence of Hopeless Creek. Here we met a British guy who, after chatting with him for a while, we found we had a mutual acquaintance in Comox. We then continued up to the small 6-bunk Hopeless Hut where there was a young Israeli girl staying for her second night and a South African couple who were trail runners and had just run up to the hut from St. Arnaud. Once you would never, or rarely, have encountered anybody at these huts; now you meet people from all over the world. We spent the evening swapping stories and talking about the many bush nasties found in New Zealand. One nasty plant found everywhere is the Bush Lawyer. The colloquial English name is often said to have been given because once this thorny plant becomes attached to you it will not let you go until it has drawn blood. Eccleston Du Faur, a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society of New South Wales, a public servant and patron of exploration and arts in Sydney, Australia, once said: “...its sting is more cruel than any advocate’s tongue and sharper than his wit.”

In the morning the two South Africans were off running towards Sunset Saddle (beside Mount Angelus) and were planning to run all the way out past Angelus Hut and down Roberts Ridge to St. Arnaud. Not being familiar with the area or the terrain, I gave them some directions for getting to the saddle and wished them luck. As we were making our way up towards the saddle I was surprised that we couldn’t see them further up the route, but I put it down to them being fast, as she was South Africa’s top ultra-run-



*The Angelus hut and the Mount Roberts Ridge from the summit of Mount Angelus. Photo - Valerie Wootton*

ner. About two thirds of the way to the saddle we stopped beside a tarn for a bite to eat and a drink when we heard a call, or as we say in New Zealand, a coowee. Above us on the ridge was the South African couple. Obviously they had taken the wrong route. I managed to direct them down through some bluffs onto the scree slope that came down to the tarn. They had lost the trail and scrambled up some steep slopes to the ridge, where they realised they had got off trail when they saw us below. They were thankful for seeing us and happy to be back on the main trail. From the saddle we were able to watch them as they ran down towards Angelus Hut and eventually out to Roberts Ridge.

That afternoon we arrived at Angelus Hut. We walked down to the tent sites and were immediately engulfed by a gazillion mosquitoes; however, they weren’t biting, just buzzing. We were informed that these ‘squeetas were males. It is only the females that bite (it is not really a bite, but a suck) as they need blood to feed their young. After a while a breeze came up and the mozzies disappeared. I couldn’t understand where that many mosquitoes could hide without being seen. That night the wind really started to blow and we found out in the morning that one of the tents nearby had been destroyed.

By 9 a.m. most of the trampers staying at the Angelus Hut had left and were making their way up and out Roberts Ridge. We started a little later, but not because we had slept in. As we topped out on the ridge we could see the trail winding along the ridge for several kilometres and could see several small groups making their way down. It is 12.2 kilometres from the hut to the carpark. We moved down the ridge at a good pace, but then the wind rose and became quite blustery. In fact, in many places along the ridge we could hear the wind coming towards us like a train; then we knew we had to stop, brace ourselves for the gust and hope we wouldn’t get blown away. There was no way that you could keep walking! Further along the ridge we could see others literally sitting down and waiting for the blast to pass. I had experienced this several times before in New Zealand (years ago) while climbing, but never any-

where else in the world! Eventually we reached a shelter (a bunkless hut) along the ridge where we stopped for lunch. As this was at a lower elevation we weren't getting the wind gusts, but we could still hear it blowing higher up. Now the trail zig-zagged down what is called the Pinchgut trail to the car park! It didn't take long for us to descend to the car park, but unfortunately we still had another 2-3 kilometre walk down the road to where we had left the car.

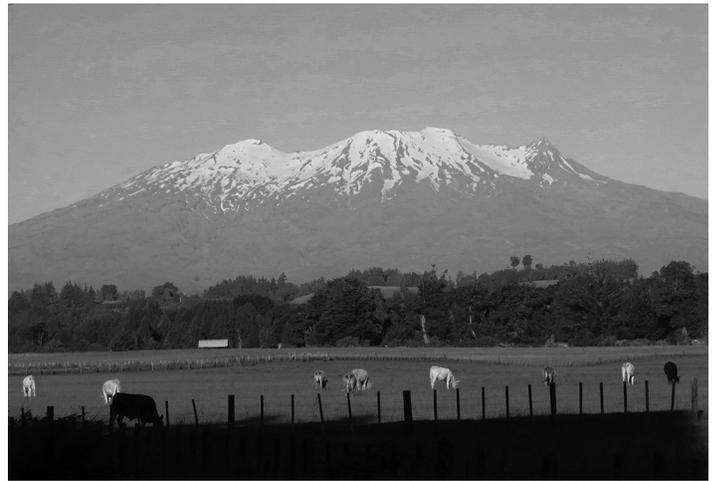
After this tramp we spent the next few weeks driving around the South Island, before we flew up to Wellington, New Zealand's capital at the southern tip of the North Island. Here we rented a car and arranged to drop it off at Auckland Airport ten days later.

### **Mount Ruapehu – Paretaitonga 2751 m (January 8, 2014)**

After a quick drive up the east coast to Whanganui, we then turned inland to National Park, the small town on the northwest corner of Tongariro National Park. With the weather forecast for the next day looking good, we decided to climb Mount Ruapehu. We found a campsite at the DoC campground at Mangahaia just a few kilometres from the Whakapapa Village turnoff. In Māori the Wh is pronounced Fa so the villages is Fakapapa.

The next morning we were up early and started the drive just as dawn was breaking. We drove through Whakapapa Village and continued to the end of the road at Iwikau Village, the base of the ski-field known as Whakapapa (1630 m). If we had waited another two hours (9 a.m.) we could have paid \$30 each for a ride on the chairlift (to 2020 m), but we were cheapskates. Since it was summer there was no snow on the slopes as far as the top chairlift at 2320 m (not the same chairlift that was open), but a summit plateau where we encountered a cold wind. We stopped and put on our overpants, down jacket, goretex jacket, gloves and hat and descended onto the frozen plateau. Across the other side was a short rise and then we were looking down onto the mud-coloured geothermal waters of Ruapehu Crater Lake. Although I have climbed many volcanoes around the world, this has to be one of the most spectacular views of a crater lake.

From Crater Lake we put on our crampons and climbed up snow slopes towards the Paretaitonga summit. Half an hour later we were on the summit. Surrounding us was the North Island's Central Volcanic Plateau, sometimes called Waimarino Plateau. This dry volcanic plateau includes the three active peaks of Mount Tongariro, Mount Ngauruhoe, and Mount Ruapehu, and extends beyond Rotorua (the world famous geothermal city is sometimes known as Roto-Vegas) in the north. To the east, the plateau runs up to the foot of the Ahimanawa, Kaweka and the fertile Kaimanawa mountain ranges. Finally, west of the plateau stands the volcano Mount Taranaki or Mount Egmont as it used to be called before it reverted to its Māori name. Although Taranaki is a dormant volcano, the other three stratovolcanos are extremely active and regularly erupt, closing down the mountains to climbers and skiers.



*Mount Ruapehu: The highest volcano in new Zealand.  
Photo - Valerie Wootton*

On the descent from the summit, the wind started to pick up and by the time we made it to the Dome Shelter (a seismic research hut that is locked but has a small emergency shelter that can be accessed), the wind was howling and again we had to stop and brace ourselves when the gusts whistled through. We sat in the shelter for half an hour and had lunch before tackling the wind again. Back down on the Summit Plateau we met a couple of parties who had decided not to go on to the summit because of the wind. Once over the crest we were in the lee and stripped off all our cold weather gear. By the time we reached the top of the lift there were hundreds of tourists walking around taking in the views. We continued walking down the trail while the tourists all looked at us from the chairlift as they rode up and down.

The last eight days in New Zealand we drove all the way to the northern tip at Cape Reinga; dune-boarded on the sand of Ninety Mile Beach; visited the ancient Kauri forests near Dargaville; had a beer at the Horeke Tavern which is the oldest pub in NZ and has been serving beer since 1826; snorkeled in the marine reserve around the Poor Knights Islands 22 kilometres off the East Coast; explored the Waitomo Caves, and dug our own hot pool at Hot Water Beach on the East Coast of the Coromandel Peninsula. Oh, and we saw a real live kiwi bird in the wild one night while searching in a forest. However, we did do a lot more while we were in the South Island; river rafting in Skippers Canyon; paragliding off Coronet Peak near Queenstown; we flew into Siberia in a small Cessna, then hiked up to Crucible Lake and got helicoptered out when the rivers became too high for us to cross to get back out; spent a day mustering sheep on a friend's high country station near Mount Cook; ate Paua patties, whitebait fritters, garlic scallops, crayfish fritters, grilled fish and mussels at the world-famous Kaikoura Seafood BBQ; and fished for Kowhai with my father, drank beer with him while we ate the Kowhai, and rode with him in his jet boat up the Rakaia River.

There is so much to do in New Zealand and I am not going to wait another 20 years before I return.



*Val high on Mount Ruapehu with Crater Lake below.  
Photo - Lindsay Elms*



*Cerro Tronador (3427 m) from the ridge above Refugio Lopez.  
The route to Refugio Italia descended the snow and scree to the forest and meadows 500 m below before ascending to the next ridge out of sight on the left.  
Photo - Don Morton*

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Postscript: We flew out of Auckland to Sydney (Australia) where we had one day visiting with my cousin before flying back to Canada. We had stayed a week with him on the way down to New Zealand and he spent the time driving us around so that I could catch up with my relatives and visit old haunts (I was born in Oz), but on this day he took us to his cabin in the lower Burratorang Valley south of Katoomba in the Blue Mountain. It was a rough 4X4 track to the cabin. At the cabin we had a lunch of meat pies and beer. While walking down to the river I saw a small black object about fifty centimetres long swimming in the river, but we were too far away to see what it was. I suspected a platypus, but cousin Ken had never seen one here in all the years he had been coming down the valley. Later while lounging in the river with a beer in our hands (I rarely swim but it was 40°C outside) the black paddler came by again and this time we were able to confirm that it was a platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*). In fact there were two on them! This was an unexpected treat as I had never seen one before and it was a great way to finish our holidays down under.

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## Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi, Argentina

**Don Morton**

**January 19 – February 6**

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I have trekked and climbed in many parts of Argentina, but never around Bariloche, so I flew there from Buenos Aires during the southern summer of 2014. This town is on the south shore of Lago Nahuel Huapi (765 m), the largest of the many lakes in the National Park of the same name. Like Chamonix in France, the town is full of skiers in winter and tourists in summer. With the incentive to escape to higher places as quickly as possible, I consulted with the National Park Office and Club Andino Bariloche (C. A. B.) about the

huts and trails. The Park requires a permit for everyone planning an overnight trip. There is no charge and the stated route must be followed unless changed by telephone or email contact. There are good campsites near the huts and in some of the pleasant meadows between, but campfires are discouraged so I carried my stove. The C. A. B. owns many of the huts and can arrange transport to remote trailheads such as the valley route to Refugio Jakob or to Pampa Linda for climbing Volcan Tronador or trekking over to Chile. For most other routes the local 3 de Mayo buses reach the trailheads several times each day. The fare typically is 11 pesos each way, but be sure to purchase your ticket before boarding because the driver cannot accept cash.

My first hike was to Refugio Frey, 8 km and up 800 m from the Villa Catedral ski village. Initially I traversed south through low bushes and past many wildflowers beneath the Cerro Catedral ridge with Lago Gutierrez below. Then the trail turned northwest into Arroyo Van Titter through a bamboo forest and then substantial trees. When I reached the hut at 1759 m at the east end of Lago Toncek just above the tree line, there was a strong gusty wind and many rock walls around tent sites indicating such winds must be a common occurrence there. By going to the far side of a ridge I found a site with a little less wind to pitch my new Fly Creek UL1 single-person tent that weighs only 0.94 kg including poles and pegs.

This hut is the main base for rock climbing around Bariloche with many challenging routes on the surrounding pinnacles. The highest point is Torre Principal at 2409 m. Like all the huts I visited, Refugio Frey provides accommodation and meals at reasonable prices. For climbers living in their own tents there also is an annex with two simple tables and benches, a water tap, a sink and a gas stove. There is no charge for camping or using the annex, but you must cook outside if you use your own stove. This can be difficult in

the wind and rain, so paying 20 pesos a day to use the hut stove can be worthwhile.

One also can reach Refugio Frey by taking the ski lift from Villa Catedral to Refugio Lynch and traversing the appropriately named Catedral Ridge at 2000 m with some spectacular exposure before descending to the hut, though travelling alone with a full pack and one unstable ankle I preferred the Van Titter valley route. My plan had been to trek from Frey to Refugio Jakob up past little Lago Schmolli and over ridges at 2000 m and 1900 m, camping in the deep valley between. However, the wind brought rain the next day turning to snow during my second night. My new tent survived all these tests very well, but the route to Jakob would be risky for a few days. I retreated to Bariloche and looked at other routes on my map.

After a night of rain my altimeter was falling and the weather looked promising so I took a bus to the northwest end of the range and hiked up a short steep trail and a less steep road to Refugio Lopez at 1667 m. The many day trippers eventually departed leaving one large party staying the night and preparing a pizza dinner in the kitchen. I also cooked there for 30 pesos. As I was pitching my tent in the late afternoon, a half-dozen trekkers came down the rock wall directly above and exclaimed, "At last." This was the route I planned for the next day to reach Refugio Italia.

In the morning I found the scramble 300 m up the rock wall pleasant, even with snow on the rocks higher up. At the ridge there was a spectacular view to glacier-flanked Volcan Tronador (3427 m). However, the 400 m descent of the steep scree gully on the other side was not easy. The soft new snow from two nights ago hid all the rocks but did not provide any firm footing. Very fortunately two Argentinian trekkers had caught up to me and were very helpful in finding the trail at the bottom of the scree. The route descended into low trees with campsites near a stream. Part way up the far side I stopped for the night while my stronger companions continued to the hut.

The next day by myself was equally interesting. After reaching a col the route traversed below 1927 m Cerro Bailey Willis on huge blocks of shattered rock and climbed over a minor peak at 1869 m from which I could see Refugio Italia and Lago Negra far below. The first part of the descent steeply down very loose rock was the most difficult part of the day. There was a good trail for the rest of the descent, but a rock buttress that blocks the route to the hut along the north side of the lake required some careful scrambling and the help of hand lines. The hut is at 1642 m with good tent sites nearby. The sky was cloudless so the lake appeared blue in spite of its name.

For my fourth day the route out was a 14-km trail initially steeply down the rock cliffs and then through forest in Arroyo Negro, which becomes Arroyo Goye (pronounced Gossha in Argentina) and ends in the village of Colonia Suiza above Lago Moreno Este. In 1895 the Swiss families Goye and Mermaud crossed over from Chile and settled here. There are four campgrounds, a small shop for gro-



*Torre Principal (2409 m) with Refugio Italia (1642 m) and blue Lago Negra in the foreground. The campsites were on the rocks and in the bushes on the left.  
Photo - Don Morton*

ceries and many artisan shops and eateries for the daily tourists from Bariloche. The location is convenient for other routes so I made Camping SER my base for the rest of my stay.

Having missed Refugio Jakob on my first attempt, I was grateful to Anna, the campground proprietor, for a 7 km drive in part along the dirt road above the lake to the trailhead. From there it is an 18-km hike up Arroyo Casa de Piedra to the hut at 1583 m. The next morning I had time for a pleasant scramble over glacier-smoothed rock to the higher Lago Tempanos. Then the rain returned so I retreated back to Colonial Suiza the next day.

Also accessible about half a kilometer from the tailhead towards Jakob is a trail to Cerro Bella Vista directly above Lago Moreno Este. At 1774 m this peak is significantly higher than the more distant Refugio Jakob. The park offers many more trails, mostly with a day's trek between huts so one has the choice of carrying everything or using on the huts for meals and/or shelter.

Participant: Don Morton

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## Sierra Nevada, Spain

**Don Morton**  
**April 9 – 20**

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Within sight of the popular Costa del Sol on the Mediterranean Sea are the mountains of the original Sierra Nevada in Spain's Andalucia. At 3482 m Mulhacén is the highest point on the country's mainland, slightly higher than 3404-m Pico Aneto in the Pyrenees. (Spain's highest summit actually is the 3718-m volcano Pico de Teide on Tenerife, which I had climbed some years ago on a trip to the Canary



*Pico Veleta (3394 m) from Hoya de la Mora in Spain's Sierra Nevada. Photo - Don Morton*



*Mulhacén (3482 m) from Laguna Hondera. The route curves along the east ridge from the left to the highest point. Photo - Don Morton*

Islands.). Mulhacén (pronounced with a silent h) is named after Abu-I-Hasan Ali (Muley Hacén to Spaniards), the second last Muslim Sultan of nearby Granada from 1464 to 1485.

During my visit in April 2014 there still was plenty of snow on the highest peaks even though the past winter was considered a poor one. On the north the ski lifts were busy and even on the south side a pair of dedicated skiers were skinning up slopes at 2700 m. A good road from Granada leads to the north side ski village Estación de Esqui Sierra Nevada and a higher parking area called Hoya de la Mora at 2500 m. From the latter I saw the attractive 3394 m Pico Veleta five km to the south on the skyline. There was steep rock on the east side and snow access by the west ridge.

At the edge of the parking area I found the snow crusty enough for crampons so I set off to explore the route. With only a couple of short bare spots I went high enough to set a plan for the next day. From passing climbers I learned there was a small hut on the far side of Veleta where I could spend a night if I wanted to traverse the peak. I returned to my rented car and found a room in the inexpensive hotel Albergue Universitario adjacent to Hoya de la Mora.

I set off early the next morning for a wonderful day in crampons all the way to the summit of Veleta. This was the week between Palm Sunday and Easter so there were many climbers on the route as well as crowds of skiers enjoying the slopes below. As I had planned, I descended the southwest ridge of Veleta to the simple stone Refugio Vivac de la Carihuella at 3205 m. Inside were two levels of bunks for at least 20 people and a large table with benches. It was so buried in snow that only the upper half of a Dutch door was usable. I had brought along my new lightweight Fly Creek tent in case the hut was crowded. Although only six other climbers appeared that night, I pitched my tent outside to test it on snow. I found it entirely satisfactory, though not quite as warm as a regular tent because the upper half under the fly is just mosquito netting to minimize weight.

The next morning I traversed below the west face of Veleta and returned to Hoya de la Mora for another night at the hotel there. The following day I drove around to the south side of the Sierra Nevada called Las Alpujarras to explore that part of the range. I obtained some useful information in the tourist office in Lanjaron and continued past Orgiva to the whitewashed towns of Pampaneira, Pitres, Pórtugos, Busquistar and finally Trevélez at 1475 m. I figured that if I carried a camp from there for two nights, I could hike the 9 km at my slow pace to the 3482 m summit of Mulhacén.

With all my driving that day I did not leave Travélez until almost 4:00 pm so spent my first night around 2400 m at La Campinuela where there is an old stone hut with gaps in the walls and ceiling. The next morning I continued on the well-marked trail with yellow and white stripes painted on rocks. Soon there were snow patches and a line of steps up a steep section to snow-covered Laguna Hondera at 2900 m. Beyond was the area known as Siete Lagunas. I cached my camping gear under a large boulder and climbed a short steep slope of snow and scree to attain the east ridge of Mulhacén. This was free of snow until I reached a few sections that brought me to the summit.

I spent the night back at Laguna Hondera where I had left my gear and returned to Travélez the next day. So in just six days I had a good sample of Spain's Sierra Nevada, climbing the two highest peaks. By going in the spring I avoided the summer crowds and hotter temperatures at the lower altitudes.

Equally interesting in this area is the Alhambra, an extensive fortress with formal gardens on a hill overlooking Granada, the last city for the Moors in Spain. The Muslim ruler Muhammad I al-Ahmar began the Nasrid dynasty and started the present set of buildings in 1238. His successors added fortifications and elegant palaces until the Sultanate fell to the Christian monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1492. Their grandson, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V erected another large palace, square on the outside with an open circular court on the

inside. The grounds of the Alhambra are open without charge, but a ticket is needed to visit most of the buildings and gardens. Purchase your ticket for the Alhambra from web site because often the ones available at the entrance gate are sold out early.

This also was an opportunity to visit Gibraltar, a 290-km drive to the west of Granada. I stopped at a hotel in the adjoining Spanish town of La Linea from where it was an easy walk across the border along with the many people who work in Gibraltar but live in Spain. I quickly found my way south through the city to Jews' Gate and access to the upper rock for 13 euros. I followed a trail up the limestone cliff past old bunkers to the highest point (425 m) and O'Hara's battery. Preserved there is the 9.2-inch gun in a turret with a range 4 km beyond the African shore 22 km away. I turned back north along the crest passing more old fortifications, many of the Barbary apes and tourists who arrived by bus or the cable car to the lower central peak. At the north end of Gibraltar are the extensive tunnels and cannon ports used for defence during the Spanish siege of 1779 to 1783 and more tunnels used for stores during the Second World War.

Gibraltar, at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea, was one of the classical Pillars of Hercules so I took the ferry ride from Algeciras across the strait to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta on the African coast. The southern Pillar, also attached to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, is the rounded Monte Hacho with an extensive fortress but only 204 m above the sea. More interesting is an impressive fort with the extensive Royal Walls and a moat on the western side of the city.

Participant: Don Morton

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## An "Old Farts" Return to the Glens

### Russ Moir May 13 – 24

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This trip for three of us was a return to the ancestral hills, or just a good excuse to re-test the ales therein. In 2008 Sandy, Rick and I had joined up with two of my old climbing mates from the Dark Ages and had a glorious traverse of the rocks of NW Scotland and the English Lakes in idyllic weather. Now with the welcome addition of Robie, we set out to find if our aging limbs were again up to the call.

I picked the trio up at Glasgow Airport, where I gaped at the mound of bags they had, set against the size of the rental. Somehow it all went in, as well as four pairs of contorted legs. Immediately over the Clyde we entered the Highlands at Loch Lomond, driving the tight road along its "bonnie banks" against trucks and coaches filling the miniscule road.

Our first port of call was the legendary Glencoe, where we met up with John in his camper. Same as ever, he cheerfully guided us to a fine hostelry for an indulgence, where we discussed climbing plans as well. Having Robie along was of historical significance of sorts, the glen being the infamous scene of some murderous clash three centuries gone, from which Campbells now risk their scalps and MacDonalds get the royal welcome. We set off onto our set plan of a warm-up ascent of Bidean Nam Bian, half way up the tight pass. This year our weather was not too clear, and as we headed up the well-worn track, mist enveloped us in damp folds, so that the towering ridges above were hidden. Sandy and Robie, in their eagerness, bounded (not really) up a disappearing snow slope without axes. Rick and I chewed over the options and selected a chossy scree slope instead. Groping along our way led to a summit of sorts, Stob Coire nan Lochan, where we could hear voices in the distance. On descent we discovered our mates booting down their snow slope, having summited already, with two young hikers trying to follow. 'Nuf said about lessons in taking axes with you. We did tenderly chip down the slope, above some ugly looking rock spikes, but the boys above froze on a steep patch. From below we could see they needed succour, so with some pity for their position, we returned up-slope to talk them down. British hills abound with such sucker traps, especially in spring, when hard snows can make normal descents tricky. Scottish hills are not to be taken lightly.

Leaving Fort William, on our way north to our main target, the rugged, barren hills of the NW Coast, the sunny outlook was tainted by the sight of a beautiful but ominous lenticular cloud rising over Ben Nevis. "The Ben" gave us a glorious climb on our last visit here, on its renowned northern corrie. At 1357 m, it is Britain's highest summit. Now its sunlit profile was capped with this portent of bad weather to come. By the time we drove into the coastal village of Shiel-daig to meet up again with John, the threatening rain was close by. For the remainder of our stay we chased gaps in that stormy weather.

Torridon is a throwback to some primordial time. The rocks are some of the planet's oldest. Rocky, barren hills, strewn with lochans set between deep fiords, evoke a feeling that prehistoric giants might lumber out of the mists. The tiny hamlets huddle by its shores, their roofs set to fend off the frequent western storms.

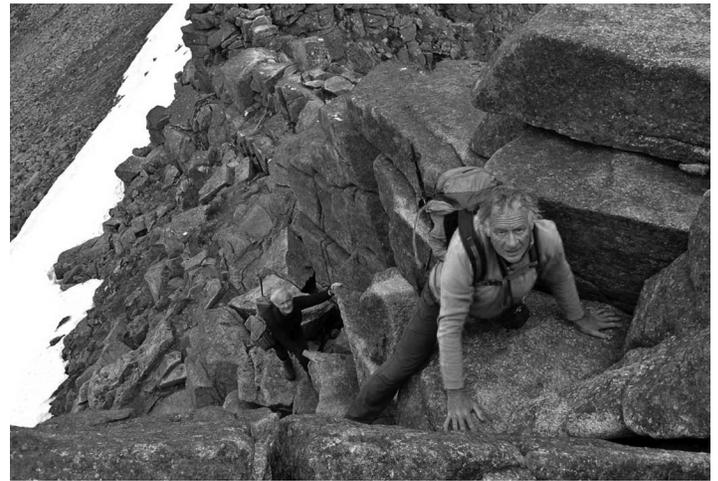
Heavy rain at Torridon village made us want to forego any camping, so having drawn a blank at the youth hostel, good fortune shone down on us. We were directed to Mrs. Ross' B&B at the fishing village of Diabeg, out towards the open sea. The late evening drive along the shore put this driver on high alert. Visitors to the Highlands need to adapt techniques to suit the single track roads with passing places every 100 m or so. With limited vision ahead you take each rise or bend with bated breath. After a gripping 30-minute drive we dropped down into the most idyllic looking cove you could imagine. Here we found the tiny croft of Mrs. Ross, into which she welcomed these four largish aliens.



*Rick and Rob on Liathach Ridge. Photo - Sandy Briggs*

Her life and location gave us an insight into a bygone era, when these isolated crofting/fishing communities were regularly supplied by coastal steamers coming up from the Clyde. Slowly between her busy work cooking, this charming, shy Gaelic speaker told us something of her younger lifestyle here in a tight knit community of fishers and hill farmers. Now on her own, she took a nonchalant attitude to her weekly drive for groceries over THAT road! Her hospitality was made all the more poignant by our evening stroll along the shore in a glowing red sunset.

Next day we set off under gathering cloud to ascend Liathach, a gaunt, crenellated peak rising above the village. Over the years this popular Munro (a peak over 3000 feet) has needed much repair work done on the main access trail. All over Britain the hordes of hikers/climbers have gouged grooves in the tender areas, which have become erosion channels under heavy rains. In many places volunteers have completed extensive rock steps, switchbacks and water diversions. This is just the program some of our own Island mountains need before any more erosion damages the scene beyond repair (rant, rant).



*Russ and Rob on Fiacaille Ridge. Photo - Sandy Briggs*

When we came out onto the rocky col between the two tops, the vista spread out below was of rock-strewn monoliths, interspersed with watery passes and distant wild seascapes. We sat and mused how other-worldly it all seemed, a form of mystic backdrop to our present journey up the crags.

With mist scudding in, we scrambled quickly up the rocks to try getting a view from the summit before it would be lost. By the time we were at the top the clouds had obscured any views down the western ridges. Reluctantly, we turned our backs and reversed steps under increasing rain. Too bad, the ridge over to Mullach an Rathain is a classic Scottish traverse, but in mist it would have been an iffy selection.

With some resignation, having viewed the forecasts, we plumped for an exit towards Eastern Scotland, to the Cairngorms. In amongst these lumbering, open fells we managed two more ascents, Cairngorm itself and Ben MacDui. These are not difficult ascents, though we did enjoy some exhilarating scrambling up the Fiacaille Ridge to Coire an Lochan, accompanied by marauding ptarmigan. These normally elusive birds seemed annoyed at our intrusion and



*[Left] Russ on Coire nan Lochan in 1966. [Right] Rick and Robie from same spot in 2014. Photo - Sandy Briggs*



*The "Old Farts" Group on MacDui Summit. Photo - Sandy Briggs*

refused to run off, which gave us lots of Kodak moments. This terrain is challenging to incautious wanderers, Coire an Lochan is a notorious 'sucker trap'. The featureless, high plateau slowly edges without warning to the lip of a significant cliff band. In my youth I well remember a winter ascent in a white-out along crusted ice ribs. Anyone aimlessly tramping along can suddenly find themselves atop the drop with poor footing. The results are often in the news.

Under compass bearing we traversed, in mist, the featureless heather slopes up to Ben Macdui, where we huddled behind the cairn shelter. These seemingly intrusive rock walls can be lifesavers in this essentially arctic environment. When we did eventually descend out of mist to the bustle at the top of the ski lift, to one member's delight, we discovered ..... "Haggis Flavoured Chips", ..... such a cultural enigma!

Again chasing the elusive British sun, we scooted down the motorways to the English Lake District. I wanted to start off with my favourite hostel, in Keswick. Reaching the desk we were told, "No room at the inn", so when I enquired if they could help four tired Canucks find another hostel, a young lady across the desk came forward to ask where in Canada we hailed from. A few stilted questions elicited that she had attended UVic a few years before and when Rick in his usual brusque manner said we had brought along a chemistry prof, her jaw dropped. "Sandy Briggs?????", she exclaimed. We told her we'd kept him outside for social reasons. When we did entice him in, the two greeted each other with hugs and laughter. Turns out she, as part of UVic's Outdoor Group, had followed Sandy over our Island peaks some while back. Surprises like this can make travel something special.

A few days later, now under blue skies, we set out from Langdale to find and climb Napes Needle on Great Gable. After some hesitant route diversions the elusive target was found. By then my lethargy and mood led me to find a sunny nook and drift off into dreams. Our dynamic trio roped up and enjoyed an entertaining climb on one of Britain's

first rock routes, one of especial historical significance. I won't confess to the saga of my lone exit from there out to Wasdale, save to say that it resulted in Rick, with no UK driving experience, having to negotiate the two most steep and exposed mountain roads in Britain, Wrynose and Hardknott, in the dark! When the three of them found me at The Woolpack Inn, after a hairy drive, they seemed friendly enough, until I was hit over the head with a rolled up paper. We then proceeded to enjoy the company of the motorcyclist who had escorted them over the passes, along with his chatty pub friends. No meat, being so late, only beer and peanuts. As the only sober one left, I took on the task of a fast, scary drive over the hills to meet our hostel deadline of 11pm. We made it with minutes to spare.

There followed a few more blustery sorties including the hallowed Wordsworthian heights of Helvellyn, the third most 'gigantic' mountain in all England, to wrap up the convivial expedition. We had fun – good ales, "sort-of-good-jokes" and a fine camaraderie. We now plan our return in 2016. Hope Scotland will be ready for us!

Participants: Robie MacDonald, Sandy Briggs, Rick Johnson, Russ Moir

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## **Suilven and Stac Polly, Western Highlands, Scotland**

### **Mike Hubbard June**

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After a bucolic family wedding at an organic farm in Somerset, I accepted my brother Charles' and nephew James' invitation to join them for a few days in Scotland. June is my favourite month for the UK, with long hours of daylight and a reasonable chance of good weather. Somerset was gorgeous, with a wedding on a hill by some old Stones overlooking the Bristol Channel, but after an early morning train to Liverpool and a long drive to Inverness we were hit by the equivalent of a bad day in November here on the West Coast: driving rain, poor visibility and cold. What am I doing here, I thought; I should have gone to Sicily with my daughter!

The next morning was not much better and on top of the weather we were driven from our Best Western Hotel by a fire in the kitchen, which forced evacuation of the dining room, as a result of which we decided to drive the one and a half hours to Ullapool, the port for the Outer Hebrides on Loch Broom, for breakfast. To our delight and surprise the weather improved and by the time we had finished breakfast it was promising a fair day for Suilven. We drove north to Loch Inver and the trailhead through some gorgeous and relatively uninhabited country. Although only 2399 feet in height and not therefore a Munro, Suilven is an impressive peak rising in splendid isolation from the sea and the



*Stac Polly from the sea. Photo - Mike Hubbard*



*The approach to Suilven. Photo - Mike Hubbard*

lochan strewn moors of Sutherland. It is also known by its popular pseudonym "The Sugar Loaf".

The approach is long over a trail that skirts a fine-looking but privately owned salmon river and it took us a good two hours to reach the foot of the mountain. About another hour of slow grind up a very steep trail led us to the col between the higher western summit, Caisteal Liath, and Meall Mheadhonach (2300 feet) to the east. By the time I reached the col, James had already been to the top of Caisteal Liath, which is an easy hike, and after a rest and some food I went with him, or rather behind him, along the skyline ridge towards Meall Mheadhonach. It requires a short descent before the final scramble and I saw James already half way up on terrain that I could possibly have scrambled up but on which, without a rope, I might have killed myself coming down, so I decided to be satisfied with the high ridge which must be only a hundred feet or so below the summit. The views were spectacular, west over the Minch to the Isle of Lewis and south into the Highlands. Rare to have such views in this part of the world. We descended by a gully to the north and back over stalkers' trails to Loch Inver, reaching the road some 10 hours after our start. Fortunately for my brother and me, James had gone on ahead and

hitched a ride with some fishermen to the trailhead, and he arrived in the car within moments of our slumping on a wall wondering whether or not we had the energy to make the 400 yards to the pub!

The next day I was all for taking the ferry to Stornoway on Lewis and sampling some of their single Malts; however it was not to be. James had a second ten-hour day in mind, but we compromised and went instead to Stac Polly which has easy access from the road without the long moorland trudge of Suilven. The weather was even better than the day before with hardly a cloud in the sky. This little peak with its bristling summit ridge of sandstone pinnacles is a favourite of mountaineers visiting the area; it is fourteen miles from Ullapool and rises above the narrow road skirting Loch Lurgain, from which we climbed it in about an hour. Bold and steep buttresses rise at each end of the mountain and those at the western extremity are the higher. The ridge is airy in places but at least in dry conditions can be easily scrambled without a rope. To the north we had tremendous views of Suilven and again out to the west the shining waters of the Minch.

On descending we could not resist going down to the sea for a swim. About the temperature of Long Beach in the summer here on the Island, and very refreshing after such a great day in the hills.

The next day we drove back to Liverpool with a minor excursion for a short hike up by the ski hill in the Cairngorms, where we were surprised to find a herd of reindeer. The variety of country available in what is still thankfully the United Kingdom never ceases to astonish me, and perhaps if the weather was always as good as we had, I would have been happy merely emigrating to Scotland!

Participants: Mike Hubbard, Charles Hubbard, James Hubbard



*Suilven from Stac Polly. Photo - James Hubbard*

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## Getting High

Liz Williams  
November

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One way to honour my family name\* and reconcile acrophobia with a love of mountains was to hike up a 'real' mountain where I could enjoy the view without the fear of falling off. In November 2014, I sat in the Q'Wine hotel in Moshi with four motley Canadian men. Each of the floors below the dining room was named after a large animal sculpture at the top of the stairs: Twiga, Simba, Temba, and Punda.\*\* We nursed our Tusker beers, and looked out to a looming land mass that in the evening sun changed shape and definition by the minute: the proverbial Snows of Kilimanjaro. This ain't Mount Braden I thought. What have I let myself in for? I was already getting altitude sickness up there on the fifth floor, so I had another beer.

Next morning, at the Machame Gate, along with a support staff of 16 porters, three guides and two cooks (yes, we provided some local employment), we did a lot of packing, weighing and waiting, challenging the rains to start before we did. Eventually we headed through the gate, up a broad, red earth track. It felt wonderful to be hiking again after a week in the UK and then the tumult of Nairobi. We walked up through the steaming rain forest, taking pictures of tree ferns – a throwback to the Eocene epoch – and the endemic elephant trunk impatiens flowers. By lunch time we were all well soaked, and huddling under a large buttressed tree, even the saran-wrapped cold chips tasted good.

Later that evening, on a slope of black volcanic mud, with the heavens split open, I retrieved my duffel bag from the porters only to wonder who might have run a garden hose in it. But nothing worse than our youngest member, who'd been unaware he needed to bring a thermarest. This early transition from budget travel comfort to cold wet tent life



*Kili from Moshi. Photo - Liz Williams*



*Shira Plateau. Photo - Liz Williams*

was one of the darker moments of the trip. But then our porters set up a shaky little mess tent with a fine red Maa-sai shuka for a table cloth, and once we'd been graciously served hot leek soup and tea we were all in quite fine spirits.

Day Two started, as each day did, with an hour or so of bright sun, and our introduction to the local runny pink porridge – quite palatable with an equal portion of honey (although the novelty soon wore off). For the next couple of days, we were to hike up and across the Shira Plateau, which formed when the original Shira Peak collapsed into a caldera half a million years ago. We left the lushness of the rain forest (and mercifully its mud), and trekked fairly steeply through a landscape of heathers and grasses and everlasting flowers, silvery in the misty light. The floor was littered with shiny black obsidian, the result of lava cooling a hundred thousand years ago, and much as I wanted to fill my pockets, common sense prevailed. The heathers were 30 feet tall, and with Kibo looming above, I felt like Alice in Wonderland after she'd drunk from the 'Drink Me' bottle.

By now we were camping at 3,660 m and had side-tracked a further 1000 m up to the Lava Tower to acclimatize. In the clear morning light we had spectacular views of Mt. Meru, 4,600 m, a still active volcano in Tanzania's Arusha National Park, 40 miles away. But two of our party were succumbing to altitude sickness and evacuation plans were underway (thankfully they were never needed). A white-necked raven stole the small cross bar linking my tent poles – I guess he mistook it for a bone – and we saw Kili's four-striped mouse, *Rhabdomys pumilio*, but other than a few LBBs (little brown birds) not much wildlife appears to want to share the rocky landscape with thousands of human hikers each year.

A barranco is a deep gorge, carved into the soft rock and volcanic ash, the most impressive being the Great Barranco below Kili's Western Breach. Descending from the Lava Tower to Barranco Camp was a surreal experience. We've all heard of Kili's five vegetation zones but nothing quite prepared me for the extraordinary size and magical design



*Dendrosenescio. Photo - Liz Williams*

of the giant lobelias and groundsel.

The infamous Barranco Wall, rising to the east of the camp en route to Karanga, had caused me just a little trepidation, but it turned out to be less onerous than I had imagined. There were two or three spots where I appreciated others guiding my steps and handholds, but the pain was only about 15-20 minutes duration and we were up on the plateau in under 90 minutes. Once we got to Karanga camp the weather had cleared, and we had a sunny, frosty day's lay-over before heading over to Barafu, our resting place prior to an overnight push for the summit. I should add here that we were very impressed all along with the strength and agility of the Kili porters. Not only did they transport enormous loads on their heads, they carried all our water needs from a creek west of Karanga to Barafu.

By the time we got to Barafu, three of our party were quite sick but determined to carry on, while the youngest breezed through everything. I was fortunate as the only female and oldest of the pack to suffer nothing worse than a loss of appetite on the last day, due perhaps to that elixir of life, Vitamin I. We rested in the early evening, tried to eat something, and prepared our packs for the summit hike. Up at 10.30 p.m. for a final check and pep-talk, we left Barafu at 11.30 p.m. sharp, egged on by our excellent guides, Hamisi, Daniel, and Mishek. I wore seven layers on top and four below, but my thumbs froze and I was surprised what mental and physical effort it took to figure out some warming strategies (switch pole to other hand; pull off gloves; put gloves back on with thumb against palm; keep moving; repeat with other side; keep moving; hold poles with fat mitts and no opposable thumbs. Phew!).

What a sheer, brutal effort it took to hike from 4,600 m an additional 1,300 m overnight in the freezing cold to 5895 m after what had already been a long day. But we made it. We watched the sunrise over the (supposed) curvature of the Earth! Over the rolling cloud cover way below us, over the plains of Africa! We cried! We hugged! The entire continent of Africa was bathed in gold beneath us. Above us were striated walls of glacial ice, hundreds of feet high,



*Liz and companions.*

shimmering against the dawn sky. What a heart-breakingly beautiful mountain! What a spectacular hike!

The rest of it was a blur. We took photos of course, and descended over 3,000 m that day, boot-skiing down the scree overshadowed by Mawenzi, Kili's jagged third peak. The next day, after an 11-hour sleep, we made it out, singing our way through forests lush with protea flowers and sunbirds. That first cold beer went down very well once we were back in Arusha, as did a very long shower once we hit the hotel.

\*Lest the matrilineal name be lost, my mother's maiden name was 'Mountain'

\*\*Swahili for giraffe, lion, elephant and zebra

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## Schnidejoch, Climate Change and Archaeology

**Don Morton**  
**July 2 – 15**

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Glaciers advance and retreat with changing climate. Although these changes often are taken as indicators of changing air temperatures, the amount of snowfall is another important factor. During the Little Ice Age from approximately 1430 to 1850 A. D. glaciers advanced in the European Alps, canals froze frequently in Holland and the Thames in London froze occasionally. We know from the radiocarbon dating of trees felled by advancing glaciers that this was a worldwide event with variations in the start and end dates. Since then the world has been warming due to both natural and recent human causes. In fact, their relative contribution is the central scientific issue in the attribution of current climate change.

Our present climate has left many retreating glaciers with



Looking west across Iffigsee to the route up the valley on the left and the low point on the skyline where one turns left to Schnidejoch. Photo - Don Morton

miles of ugly moraines that we must struggle across to reach the ice and snow. However, this melting in the Alps has resulted in interesting archeological discoveries at four locations. Between 1934 and 1944 on Lötschenpass (2690 m) in the Bernese Alps the changing climate revealed several bows dated between 2400 and 1800 BC and some Roman coins. Then in 1992 and 1994 in the Italian Tyrol near Gembichl/Rieserferner at 2841 m hikers found pieces of woolen and leather clothing dated in the range 800 to 500 BC.

The most famous archeological find is Ötzi the Iceman, an ancient traveler from about 3300 BC who died at 3210 m near Tisenjoch in the Ötztal Alps close to the border between Austria and Italy. This 1991 discovery actually was in a hollow containing stagnant ice surrounded by steep ridges rather than exposed directly from a retreating glacier. Ötzi, along with his clothing and tools, are displayed now at the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology in Bolzano, Italy.

Although there were no human remains at Schnidejoch, artifacts and clothing found there have provided further insights into ancient people and their travels. At 2756 m in the Bernese Alps of Switzerland, Schnidejoch is a pass between Lenk on the Simme River to the north and Sion in the Rhone Valley to the south. The area is popular with climbers heading up the Chilchli Glacier on the north side for 3245 m Wildhorn. However, until recently this was not considered a route for hikers crossing the range because of crevasses near the pass. Then in 2003, following a significant retreat of the ice, hikers found some artifacts and wisely notified archeologists. Albert Hafner, has described the resulting search of the area from 2004 to 2011 in the Canadian journal *Arctic* v. 65, Supplement 1, p. 189, [http://www.academia.edu/5639974/2012\\_Archeological\\_Discoveries\\_on\\_Schnidejoch\\_and\\_at\\_Other\\_Ice\\_Sites\\_in\\_the\\_European\\_Alps](http://www.academia.edu/5639974/2012_Archeological_Discoveries_on_Schnidejoch_and_at_Other_Ice_Sites_in_the_European_Alps).

Archeologists found more than 800 items mainly on the shadier north side of the pass at the edges of an isolated



Bronze clasp with a tin coating 4 cm long from Schnidejoch dated in the first century AD. Image courtesy of Dr. Armand Baeriswyl of Bern, Switzerland

section of ice. There were pieces of leather, wood, bark and plant fibers all preserved for millennia by the ice, as well as metallic ornaments and about 150 Roman hobnails. Many of these items now are displayed at the Historical Museum in Berne.

The carbon-14 radioisotope permitted dating of the organic material. The oldest 8 dated items ranged from about 5300 to 4300 BC, 52 more from about 3700 to 1500 BC and 13 from about 200 BC to 1000 AD. There are significant gaps with no artifacts around 4000 BC, between 1300 and 400 BC and after 1200 AD, presumably because the advancing glaciers prevented safe travel. Some of these intervals roughly coincide with known major changes in climate. The last group of artifacts indicates travel across Schnidejoch beginning early in the Roman Warm period (250 BC to 400 AD) and continued through to the first part of the Medieval Warm Period (950 to 1250 AD), though it is surprising there were no finds for a century or two after 1000 AD because the temperature drop associated with the Little Ice Age is thought to have begun after 1200 AD in the Alps.

One of the oldest objects is part of a bowl of elm wood with a carved handle, dated between 4500 and 4300 BC. Then representing 2900 to 2700 BC is a nearly complete bow kit consisting of a 1.6 m long bow of yew wood, a bow string, several complete arrow shafts, two arrow heads, and a bow case of birch bark. Part of a leather legging from the same era had seams and leather patches stitched with plant fibers. DNA analysis showed that the leather came from a domesticated goat of a genetic group that now lives in Southeast Asia but no longer in Europe. From the early Bronze Age there is a decorated disc-headed pin 23 cm long and from Roman times is a 4 cm brooch and a coin, as well as the hobnails. This evidence of Roman travel over



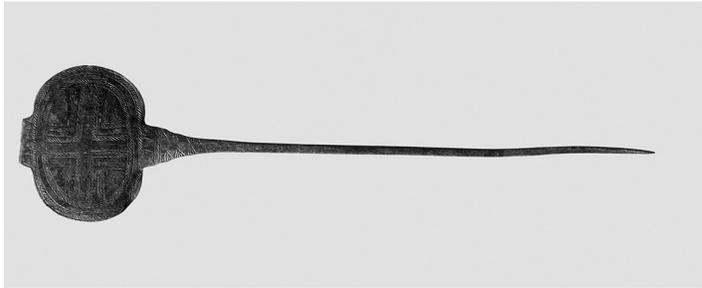
Part of a wooden bowl found at Schnidejoch dated between 4500 and 4300 BC. The handle is about 4 cm across. Image courtesy of Dr. Armand Baeriswyl of Bern, Switzerland.

Schnidejoch explains the puzzling earlier finds of a coin and tile fragments indicating some sort of a hostel at Lake Iffig, 690 m below the pass. Another Roman coin had been found near the present Wildhorn Hut about 360 m below the pass.

With so much evidence of travel across Schnidejoch, I wanted to see what the route is like during a warm climate like the present. I explored the south side in August 2013 and both the north and south sides in July 2014, all on solo excursions. I did this in my usual way, carrying my stove, food, sleeping bag and my new one-kilogram tent. This way I could wander about as I wished without having to find a hut each night, though I did use huts a couple of times. Overnight bivouacs are permitted in most remote places in the Alps but not multi-day camping.

The approach from the north through the Simme Valley and the town of Lenk was an obvious route to Schnidejoch. Above the impressive Iffigfall there is much grazing land near the village of Iffigenalp at 1584 m that would have been attractive to ancient herders. They certainly would have continued to the higher grasslands to the west surrounding Iffigsee at 2065 m, where they would have seen a low point on the western horizon leading to Schnidejoch. Now the Wildhorn Hut is on the route at 2303 m. Another trail arrives from Lauenensee on the north through another high grazing area. Beyond the hut a trail goes up the steep moraine that once was on the north side of the Chilchli Glacier and traverses left over the now bare irregular boulders to the pass. On the right is a small lake on the edge of the remaining Chilchli Glacier with the Wildhorn above.

While on the north side in 2014 I also explored a modern trekking route across the range. Directly above Iffigenalp is a diagonal path carved out of a wall of rock by Swiss trail makers. It is a spectacular route through the spray of a high waterfall and past an emergency shelter to reach the upper grazing areas and a small lake. Farther along I crossed Raroil Pass or Rawilpass at 2429 m, where there is another shelter and a trail to the east up to the Wildstrubelhütte



Bronze pin about 23 cm long found at Schnidejoch dated between 1800 and 1600 BC. Image courtesy of Dr. Armand Baeriswyl of Bern, Switzerland.

at 2789 m. Continuing southwest I passed a pretty tarn and crossed ridges of white limestone heading towards Schnidejoch.

I found a pleasant grassy spot for my tent and ate dinner with a view south over the Rhone Valley to the 4000 m peaks of the Pennine Alps. There are no more bears in the Alps so I did not take the usual precautions with my food when I left my tent to collect some snow for water. On returning I found that my food bag was missing! Then I saw it and some of the chewed contents down a slope to a boulder field. I suspect a fox. With my food gone I had to retreat but did not miss much because there was intermittent rain for the next 7 days!

From the south the ancient route is less obvious. During both 2013 and 2014 I drove up the mountain road from Sion and through four tunnels to the large Tseuzier Reservoir at 1777 m. Paths along either side lead to a restaurant at Laurantse and a choice of two trails out of a wide cirque. The route on the west side ascends towards Lac de Ténéhet at 2440 m and then turns northwest traversing a steep scree slope to reach Schnidejoch. The other route from Laurantse is up a road cut out of the rock face on the east side of the cirque, presumably as part of the engineering work to redirect the streams above. There is a short tunnel just below the upper alp, confirming this would not have been an ancient route. Above the tunnel a left branch in the trail goes over limestone blocks to join the trail from Rawilpass and climbs a rock wall with some handlines to join the one up from Lac de Ténéhet. The limestone provides excellent friction for boots but is rather rough on the fingers.

An alternative route goes west from a ski lift above the first tunnel on the road to the reservoir. Beyond a dairy farm the trail divides, providing alternate ways into the rocky Combe des Andines. After merging, the trail climbs over limestone ridges to the present Cabane des Audannes at 2508 m on the south side of the Wildhorn. I stopped at the hut in threatening weather but could see the trail descending a little to Lac des Audannes and going northeast over Col des Eaux Froides at 2648 m. From there the trail descends to join the route around Lac de Ténéhet and continues to Schnidejoch. Trails from Anzère above Sion also lead to Cabane des Audannes. An old map on the wall of the hut confirmed that the Chilchli Glacier once covered the north-

ern side of the pass. Outside the hut is a display of spent munitions from Swiss army exercises!

Unlike the grassy alps on the north side, I did not see any high grazing areas on direct routes from the south, nor an obvious route to the pass that would have attracted ancient herders or hunters. Unless the grazing conditions have changed significantly from previous warm periods, the earliest travelers from that south must have been determined explorers or learned about the route from people coming over from the north.

If ever you are in Sion, a hike up to the old buildings on the prominent hill east of the town centre is very worthwhile to see Tourbillon Castle, the old church and especially the adjacent Valère History Museum. There were many displays of early life in the Rhone Valley, including bronze disc-headed pins and a Roman clasp like the ones found at Schnidejoch.

Participant: Don Morton

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## Nepal 2014: Aborted Himlung Himal Expedition

### Tak Ogasawara October 6 – November 28

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In 2014 I would be turning 70 years old, and I wanted to do something special for my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. I started thinking right after the 2011 Nepal trip. I thought it would be nice to celebrate my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on a 7000 m high peak. This was how the 2014 Himlung Himal trip started.

On October 6, I left my home feeling good and had high hopes for a successful climb. Dawa Sherpa picked me up at the Kathmandu airport late at night and took me to a hotel in Boudhanath, which was on the opposite side of downtown Thamel, where most people stay. The hotel was in front of a big stupa and turned out to have quite a different atmosphere from Thamel. Dawa came to see me the next afternoon and we discussed our exact departure date and what I had to do before departure. He told me that there were two more people joining this trip: Marisa from Hong Kong, and Kees from the Netherlands. I met them the next day and we decided to depart from Kathmandu on October 13.

I had time before the departure, so I wanted to do a little bit of exercise and decided to go to Kakani by bicycle for 2 days. Dawa's son came with me on his motorbike. Kakani is a special place for Japanese Mountaineering. In 1956 the first Japanese 8000-m Manaslu Expedition camped here. Looking at Manaslu from that Kakani hill and imagining the feelings of that expedition, I felt chills.

On October 13 we loaded our provisions onto a big bus



*Summit of Chulu Far East (6038m) with Dawa, Marisa and Khauma.*

and departed in quite nice weather. We crossed the dusty, congested downtown and over the hills of the western edge of Kathmandu Valley. The ride was uneventful and we reached Besi Sahar around 4 p.m. We stayed the night there and the next day transferred from the bus to a four-wheel Jeep to Chamje, where we started walking. The road was quite rough and often we had to clear big rocks away along the way up. The rain fell steadily all day and little did we know what was happening higher up the valley. We reached Chamje, where the road was no longer passable by vehicle.

When we woke up the next morning, the rain had stopped, and on the trail I felt good after two days of a rough bus ride. Two hours in on the trail we met near-disaster. A big rock came down from above and almost hit Marisa, and a small rock hit one of the Sherpas; luckily we escaped from more damage. After two more days on the trail, we reached Koto where the trail branched out to the Phu Valley. On the way up we noticed that large numbers of helicopters were heading up the valley and we later heard from people coming down the valley that there had been accidents at Thorung La and the trail was closed beyond Manang.

When we arrived at Koto, it was confirmed by the local people that in fact there had been accidents at Thorung La and Phu Valley, and a number of people died there, including two Canadians. At that time we were told that the Phu trail was impassable due to heavy snow and avalanches. Nobody knew when the trail would reopen. Later that day we heard a party already at Himlung Base Camp had been evacuated by helicopter. We discussed the situation with Dawa and made the wise choice to abandon Himlung and try to get a permit for some other peaks. Dawa called the agent in Kathmandu and asked if any peaks were available around Manang.

The next day we got a permit for Chulu Far East. We felt lucky that we were able to go climbing at all. On October 18 we departed Koto and headed towards Chulu. On our way we camped at Lower Pisang and Ghyaru. We stopped



*Nearing summit.*

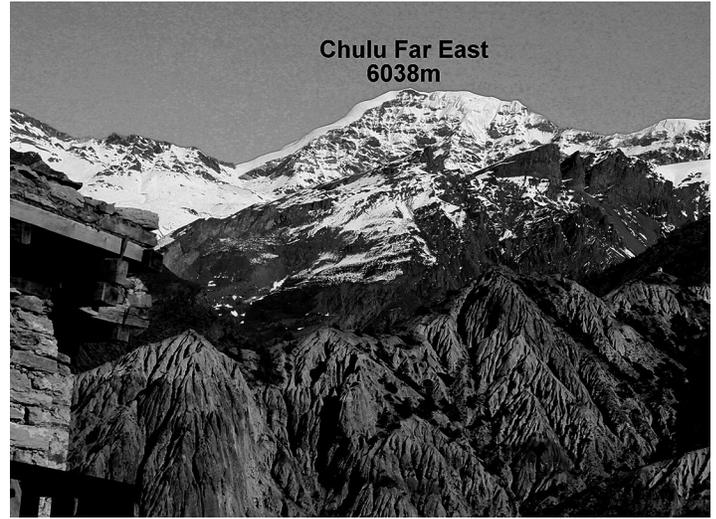
for 2 days at Ghyaru and did an acclimatization hike to a 4000 m peak above camp. Then from Ghyaru, we walked through pine forests and camped one more night before we reached the base camp at 4800 m on October 23. The weather was good, but deep snow made it very difficult for mules to get through, but they made it to base camp before dark. Camp was set up on the nose of a rocky outcrop and had a great view of the Annapurna range.

On October 24 we moved up to high camp at 5200 m without much difficulty. October 25 was our summit day: we woke up at 3:00 a.m., ate a bit of breakfast and left camp at 3:30 a.m. The weather was great, with no wind, and the temperature was minus 18°C. We crossed a snow field towards a ridge and put on our crampons at the bottom of a gully that went up to the ridge line. The slope was not that steep, maybe 30 degrees, and we followed a fixed line that three Sherpas had set the day before.

The sky brightened up a bit by 6:00 a.m. and we reached the summit at 7:30 a.m. in bright sunlight. A great view from the summit showed the Annapurna range from the south to the south-west, and we saw Himlung Himal very clearly to the east. We stayed at the summit for about one hour and enjoyed the scenery all around then we started down.

We reached high camp before lunch, and since we still had a lot of daylight left we decided to dismantle camp and head down to base camp. We were back at base camp around three. The next day we dismantled camp and continued down to the valley below. Snow started falling a bit when we began to descend and, half way down, I looked back at the mountain, to see it was covered by thick clouds.

We reached the bottom of the valley at Humde around 4 and settled in to celebrate our safe return. We dissolved the Himlung (Chulu Far East) expedition the next day. Marisa decided to go home, and Kees and I decided to go up around Annapurna with Dawa and two porters. The rest of the Sherpas and porters went back to Kathmandu with Marisa.



*Chulu Far East from Humde.*

We said goodbye to Marisa on October 27 and headed up to Manang. Our plan was to stay in Manang, Thorung La high camp, Muktinath, Lomson, then Pokhara. We went over the Thorung La on a gloriously sunny day. It was hard to believe that such unthinkable things had happened there just 10 days earlier. We have to remember how quickly a beautiful pass like this can become a dangerous and unbearable place.

I stayed in Pokhara for three days and then went back to Kathmandu on November 2. After cleaning up and resting for 4 days, Dawa and I did a 10-day trek to Langtang, a 5-day retreat in a monastery, and visited the World Heritage sites of Bhaktapur, Changunarayan, Pashupatinatr (Hindu Temple) and Swayambhu (Monkey Temple). I stayed at Dawa's place between trips and met many Sherpas who climb 8000-m peaks quite often, and listened to their fascinating stories.

I am little disappointed that I could not make a 7000m peak, but under the circumstances I am happy that I summited at least one peak, saw many other things, and met so many people whom I would not have been able to meet on a climbing trip. On November 28 I said goodbye to my friends while thinking that I will be back to make another try for some unclimbed peaks or high peaks in the future.

### ***Addendum by Tak's Family***

When we realised that the horrible accidents were happening right in the area that Dad was about to go to, we were at a loss at how to contact him. Luckily in this age of Facebook and other social media we were able to get more information relatively quickly, and it only took about 4 days before we finally located him. Dawa was able to get Dad to somewhere where he could phone us, and we are grateful to him for that. We as a family send out condolences to all who were affected and to all families who have gone through the same situation.

Participant: Tak Ogasawara



*The view at Birendra Tal, L2R: Manaslu (8163 m far left), Manaslu North (7157 m) showing just above the col, Naika Peak (6211 m) in the middle and Kyonggma Kharka (5326 m) on the right. Photo - Ken Wong*

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## **Chaos in Shangri-La: A Trek on the Manaslu Circuit and the Tsum Valley**

**Ken Wong**  
**October 12 – 31**

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The rain started at 6 p.m. in Machhakhola, the fish river, on October 13, 2014. This was the second day into our 21-day Manaslu Circuit and Tsum Valley trek. The French group had just finished their birthday celebration on the second floor. We played cards on the ground-floor dinner table while waiting for our supper to be served. The wind blew. The power went out. The lodge staff pulled down the metal shutters. We dined by candle light.

The rain continued the next morning. The guides unfurled their umbrellas. The porters covered the packs with plastic sheets. The trekkers put on their raincoats. The multi-colored and multinational convoy departed into the storm. An hour later, the tall young French woman in a yellow poncho ran back along the high river bank, frantically scanning – a Frenchman had walked off the narrow path and tumbled over the cliff into the boiling Budhi Gandaki river. We looked, but there was no miracle. The death unnerved some. The rain pounded. The wind raged and destroyed my umbrella.

We ascended beside the roaring waterfall of Budhi Gandaki into a wide valley that was flanked by a thousand-meter-high wall that was lined with numerous waterfalls that crashed down into the river, which twisted and coiled among sandbars like a raging serpent. The scene had a primeval beauty that really moved me. By dusk we had reached Jagat at 1400 m. The rain quadrupled in intensity and pounded on the metal roof of the dining room. I saw

my breath in the flickering candle light. I nibbled hot chilli to chase away the chill. At two thousand meters higher, this rain would be coming down as snow. I sensed trouble.

The next morning was sunny. We laid our gear on the roof to dry and I charged the camera battery with my solar panel. I would later be known as Solarman because I always wore the panel hanging across my shoulders to charge my camera, GPS and headlamp batteries while I was on the road. We departed later, not until 10 a.m., because we needed an easier day after the misery we had had the day before. We arrived at Philim, at 1600 m, later in the afternoon, to hear that four trekkers had died in avalanches higher up. Using the intermittent Wi-Fi at the lodge we learned that Cyclone Hudhud had hit us. It was big international news, as there were people from many nations that were missing or trapped in the deep snow at high altitude. I received emails from friends and relatives, Alpine Club, mycological society, and workmates asking if I was okay. I was touched. I fired off a few replies before the Wi-Fi went dead. At 10 p.m. a dozen or so Belgians and their guides and porters charged into the lodge. They had descended two thousand meters in one day to escape from Samagaon, which had just received 50 cm of snow. The chaos began.

The next day we left the main Manaslu circuit and went into the Tsum Valley. The valley is surrounded by Tibet on three sides and was recently opened to tourism. Because of its unspoiled culture and scenery, it has become a very popular destination. Its inhabitants were ethnically Tibetan Buddhists, so I greeted them with the Tibetan “tashi delek”, instead of the Nepali “nemaste”. The handsome women with pink cheeks responded with some of the most beautiful smiles that I have ever seen. However, exposed landslides and icy avalanche chutes quickly brought me back to earth. There were dangers in Shangri-La. We turned around after visiting the snowbound monastery Mu Gompa, our highest point, at 3800 m, in the Tsum Valley.



*Mu Gompa. Photo - Ken Wong*

We rejoined the main Manaslu Circuit after six days in the Tsum Valley. We had hoped that the chaotic situation would have settled down by then, but we were wrong. We met one group after another of trekkers turning back. Some of them were big camping groups with loads of equipment. Some were fellow trekkers that we had met a few days before. We exchanged stories and wished each other luck. Finding a place to stay had become problematic because the people traffic had essentially doubled. We decided to send one porter ahead to reserve the rooms. Doubt that we would ever complete the Circuit started to build in our minds. We pushed on as the scenery became more and more grand. Manaslu, the eighth highest mountain in the world, dominated the vista at Lho. The breathtaking views of the majestic snow-capped summits around the mountain village of Shyala made everyone animated with excitement. The scale of the stunning glacial lake, Birendra Tal, was out of this world – the lake was capped by Manaslu on one side, a 4600 m vertical rise!

We reached Samdo at 3875 m on October 24. The air was cold and there was snow on the ground left by the cyclone from ten days earlier. The clouds pushed up from the valley below as it did every afternoon. The group retired to their bare concrete rooms within a half-finished lodge that had been built on the edge of the cliff. There had been a building boom of guest houses on the Manaslu Circuit as more and more tourists had started to come here, instead of the adjacent Annapurna Circuit, where new roads had tarnished some of its charm. I hiked up the steep hill overlooking Samdo. My progress was slow and my breathing was laboured because of the elevation. Three hundred meters up I interrupted four grazing tahrs. They gracefully bounced away along the cliff face. The clouds gathered around me. The snow fell heavily. Samdo disappeared from below. I hurried down. Fresh snow covered old snow. I slipped a few times. Where was Samdo in this monochrome world? I turned on my GPS and let the satellites guide me home. I now understood what had happened to the under-equipped trekkers at Throng La on the Annapurna Circuit.



*Group photo at Samdo. Photo - Ken Wong*

In good conditions the crossing of the 5160 m Larkya La from the next village of Dharamsala at 4470 m to Bimthang at 3590 m took 7-9 hours. We found out that it apparently took the first group after the storm 21 hours to cross because of the two meters of snow. The crossing was now rumoured to take 15 hours, but no one knew how many people were actually getting across. Our Sherpa guide told us that the other side of the pass was steep and treacherous if it was icy. Because of this he arranged with another group that, for 4000 Rupees, about US\$40, we could follow behind to use their rope if necessary. I had been told by some ACC folks before going on this trip that the Pass was class 4 scrambling. Only two of us out of the group had MICROspikes. The rest of our group followed the advice of our guide to purchase big wool socks to put over their boots to improve traction. This trek became a mountaineering expedition!

It snowed and snowed. It was wet snow. Everyone panicked. Conferences were held around the dining tables. Groups were deciding whether to go or not to go. We decided to defer our decision until the next morning dependent on the weather conditions. There was 5 cm of snow on the roof when I got up, but not a cloud in the deep blue sky! The fresh snow made the land so brilliant and beautiful. The path to Dharamsala looked so inviting. I packed my bag and went for breakfast.

It was chaos in the dinner room. Some groups were heading down now while others were continuing on and were going to make their final choice at Dharamsala. We had many reasons to turn around – two people in our group had been hacking badly since Kathmandu; not all of us had the ice tools nor the mountaineering experience that might be needed; the new snow and the unpredictable weather worried some; the dead and the missing during the cyclone unnerved many; with the worst of all being that we had no clear information about the condition of the pass, only rumours. I went and said good-bye to the Canadian guide who had decided a few days ago that he would not take his clients over the Pass. His group had all the mountaineering gear and even oxygen. We looked at the line of trekkers

that were snaking up the valley towards Dharamsala. He said that it reminded him of the scene of climbers lining up to go up Mt. Everest. With that sentence lingering in my mind, I went back to take a group photo and then headed down, down, down for the next six days.

### **Postscript**

My original plan was to do the Manaslu Circuit and then continue onto the Annapurna Circuit counter clockwise from Dharapani. Not being able to cross the Larkya La changed all that. I went to Pokhara for a break where I bumped into Tak Ogasawara who was in Nepal to climb a 7000-m peak. The cyclone changed his whole plan too. We hung out for a day sightseeing and ate Fewa Lake fishes at the friendly Sweet Memories. I then went on a self-guided six-day trek from Annapurna Sanctuary to Poon Hill, spending an extra exploration day at Annapurna Base Camp. It was wonderful to go solo for a while, stopping and starting whenever I pleased. My goal of seeing three more eight-thousanders was fulfilled – #8 Manaslu 8163 m, #10 Annapurna I 8091 m, and #7 Dhaulagiri I 8167 m. I returned home without regret.

Participant: Ken Wong



*The Trailrider group on an excursion to Royal Roads University.  
Photo - Mike Hubbard.*

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## **ACCVI Trailrider Program**

### **Caroline Tansley February 1, 2015**

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I just wanted to send out an update on the program as we near the end of 2014 and also a BIG THANK YOU to our volunteers.

This fall we had four successful outings: one to McKenzie Bight, two to Elk Lake and Bear Hill, and one to Royal Roads. Each trip was filled with camaraderie, laughter and adventure. Each was also epic in its own way! Our most recent trip was to Royal Roads where we spent several hours exploring on a cool but glorious November day. Royal Roads grounds have a lot to offer: a winding trail next to a bubbling creek, ocean views and eagles fishing, Douglas firs and cedars hundreds of years old.

Over the past year, students at Pearson College have included volunteer service with the Trailrider as part of an outdoor education program. They are currently planning outings for the New Year. As well as being a great opportunity for them, it also expands our volunteer capacity.

Currently we have 23 people interested in volunteering at various levels of equally valuable commitment. The average per volunteer has been one trip per six months. We have five clients actively on the list. We do most of our client recruitment through word of mouth. As I hope to offer our clients at least three trips per year, at our current level I believe we have a capacity for two or three more clients. In order to expand, I hope to find volunteers interested in leading trips. As we grow our volunteer and leader base, we will be able to offer more trips. If you are interested in leading, let me know!!

Recreation Integration Victoria also has a Trailrider that can



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## **Trailrider Program Alive and Well**

### **Mike Hubbard**

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On November 15, 2014, our Trailrider coordinator, Caroline Tansley, organized a ride for our client Roy around the grounds of Royal Roads University. The day was brilliant and Roy seemed to very much enjoy being out in the woods and along the water. On his way back in the car with Caroline he apparently said how it reminded him of the times when he was a trail runner before he lost the use of his legs. Many thanks to Caroline for keeping this program going. It is one way in which we can give back a little to those who are not able to be out under their own power. Many thanks also to the Sherpas and Assistant Sherpas who came out to help.

Participants: Sarah Coupe, Madeleine Tremblay, Simon Zukowski, Peter Lushpay, Gerald Graham, Harriet Graham, John Kerr, Eryn Haig, Caroline Tansley and yours truly.



*The Trailrider group on Christmas Hill, January 25, 2015.  
Photo - Caroline Tansley*

be borrowed and the Alpine Club's trailrider can also be borrowed by Alpine Club members on days we don't have trips planned.

Thank you again for your involvement and I am happy to receive feedback.

Finally, I'd like to share my story how I became involved in the program.

I grew up in an outdoorsy family. My father was an active Alpine Club member and we went on many trips including mountains and the West Coast trail from a very young age. But there was always one person missing from these adventures – my mother. Diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in her mid-twenties, by age 30 my mother had to stop hiking altogether. People sometimes ask “what was it like to grow up with a disabled parent?”. My answer is always that it was the only reality I ever knew. I never questioned it, it was normal. My dad, my sister and I went for hikes and mom stayed home.

I first heard of the Trailrider through Sam Sullivan, who was the “designer” of the first trailrider. When I moved back to Victoria I saw the Trailrider program at the Alpine Club's booth at the Banff Mountain Film Fest and I signed up. That year my sister and I went on our first hike with our mother. After a “test drive” with the Trailrider, our first outing was to Swan Lake and Christmas Hill. On this trip my sister and I sat on a peak with our mother for the first time.

Each outing big or small is special. Thank you to those who are a part of it!

I look forward to seeing you on the trails soon.

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## A History of the Ranger's Cabin at Hairtrigger Lake, Strathcona Provincial Park

**Rick Hudson**

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In August 2011 Andy Smith, Area Supervisor of Strathcona Provincial Park (SPP), spoke with Jan Neuspiel of Island Alpine Guides (IAG) while they were both attending an outdoor festival in Strathcona. Andy said SPP had a hut they seldom used, and he would like to see it handed over to some agency to “enhance the park”. However, he didn't want it to go to a private business (like Jan's IAG) but rather to a consortium of non-profit groups for maximum benefit. Jan talked to then-ACCVI Chair Cedric Zala, who shared the idea with me, then-ACCVI Secretary, who had some experience building mountain huts.

On October 31, 2011 Cedric sent a proposal to Andy Smith. We expected a reasonably rapid response, given that SPP had proactively asked for the proposal, plus the Strathcona Park Amendment Plan 2001, section 6.6.4. Backcountry Hiking specifically stated:

Maintain Wheaton Hut, Sid's cabin, the Douglas Lake cabin, and the Divers Lake cabin for public use. Explore partnerships to maintain and/or improve the cabins. As outlined in the 1993 master plan, construct a cabin at Circlet Lake for overnight use by groups of skiers and hikers.

Andy Smith acknowledged receiving Cedric's proposal the same day and commented that one of the more important issues was that “the cabin would have to be on a “no-cost to government” arrangement and even potentially, a financial return to Crown for the cabin's use unless the amount of free public benefit balanced off any other use.”

Here's a bit of background: (1) The ACC has over 20 huts operating on national and provincial lands, and is by far the largest operator of back country lodges/huts in Canada. (2) There is a significant difference between dealing with National Parks (NP) and BC Parks (BCP). All NP projects are determined in Ottawa alone. BC Parks, on the other hand, have devolved management of provincial parks to each individual Area Supervisor, so when dealing with BCP, there is no “one size fits all” land use permitting. Supervisors each have their own autonomy.

The ACC National office, which employs 4 full-time employees to maintain their suite of huts (plus an unpaid VP Director for Facilities) were advised of the Ranger's Cabin opportunity right from the start. In my capacity as the section's National rep, I met twice a year with them. I was advised early on that getting a land use agreement with BCP would take time and patience. ACC National also offered the services of the Backcountry Energy Environmental Solutions (BEES), an ACC spin-off employing 4 people in



*The Ranger's Cabin near Hairtrigger Lake on the way to Mt. Albert Edward, seen in January. This is a 2-story structure that would sleep about 12. The ground floor door can just be seen above the level of the snow at lower right. Photo - Rick Hudson.*

backcountry research in such fields as waste management, minimizing environmental degradation around huts, etc.

After a number of delays to arrange a meeting between the ACCVI and BCP, I (now as Chair) met Andy Smith in Courtenay in September 2012. At the meeting, I tried to lower Andy's expectations of what a non-profit society with an annual budget of one tenth of one BCP employee's salary could actually achieve. Andy was understanding, and asked that we throw the net as wide as possible to include any and all outdoor clubs on the Island in the project.

I spent the following two months meeting and discussing via phone/email with potential stakeholders, including:

- CDMC: Courtenay District Mountaineering Club
- HMC: Heathens Mountaineering Club
- IAG: Island Alpine Guides
- IMR: Island Mountain Ramblers

The problems that all of these groups pointed out were that (a) the BC Legislature sets the backcountry hut use fee throughout the province (not the local BCP, or the operator), so there is no financial benefit to being a member of any club/society getting a discount, and (b) the operators would be taking on an unspecified liability in upgrades and maintenance. In the end, each of the four groups declined to participate.

The Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (FMCBC) approached the section via Peter Rothermel (an ACC member in Qualicum Beach) in November 2012 asking if they could be involved, but after it was explained that we were already dealing directly with the other Island clubs, they acknowledged they would be using the same people anyway. Plus, at that time the FMCBC, after several years of uncertain

direction, was going back to its core activities – strengthening access, and lobbying for the non-motorized citizens of BC – and would not be involved with huts.

In November 2012, on the request of Andy Smith, we submitted our proposal to the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee (SPPAC) who were scheduled to meet in mid-November. Due to numerous delays, they only met February 27, 2013. In our proposal, ACCVI explained that we had contacted all potential partners, that they had all declined to participate, and that the ACCVI (with the backing of ACC National) was willing to proceed alone.

Over that same period, in mid-January 2013, at the ACCVI annual general meeting held at Mt. Washington, the section endorsed the idea of trying to acquire the cabin as an ACC hut, subject to cost constraints.

The February SPPAC meeting in Comox was attended by two up-Island members, Christine Fordham (who was on the Executive Committee) and Jan Neuspiel (in his capacity as an ACC member). They answered the Committee's questions, and reported back that the proposal had been well received.

The minutes of the SPPAC meeting did not come out until after the next SPPAC meeting on May 22, 2013, and when they did, they deferred any decision until their next meeting in November 2013. At that meeting the SPPAC recommended verbally that the ACCVI should partner with other outdoor societies/clubs. The ACCVI asked who else they should approach? Andy Smith advised us that they would canvass for outside interest, but the BCP had no budget to advertise in the media, so requests for other participants were sent out via social media. In October, the Friends of Strathcona Park (FOSP) advised their membership about the proposal and asked for feedback to be sent to Andy Smith directly.

By January 2014 SPPAC had not issued minutes of the November meeting. This would have included their final recommendations. We, the ACCVI, were unwilling to go further until all the cards were on the table. There was no feedback from Andy Smith with regard to other potential partners for the project, despite phone calls and emails.

Within the Executive, I had been pushing the project for a number of reasons, while the balance of the committee had adopted a more wait-and-see attitude. My willingness to promote the project can be summarized thus:

- First, the cabin existed already. There would be no major construction costs and issues, for an inexperienced hut management team.
- Second, having a cabin would provide a focus for social events in the backcountry. Only people who have never visited a private hut will fail to understand the camaraderie and team building that occurs at overnight hut weekends (with or without alcohol).

- Third, there was no shortage of up-Island members who had expressed a willingness to get involved with the re-building and on-going maintenance of the cabin. Some people like to climb rock. Some people like to hike trails. Some people like to maintain remote huts. It would simply be another reason to belong to a great section like the ACCVI.
- Fourth, although the cabin was not in an ideal location, being a little too close to the trailhead and too far from the summit of Mt. Albert Edward, it had economic viability. Huts cost money to maintain, so if we were getting into the hut business, the first one had to pay for itself (after the first couple of years). We knew that in the winter it would be used as a staging ground for ski trips up Mounts Jutland, Albert Edward, and Regan, and in the late spring it would be popular with the large number of high school students on their way to climb Vancouver Island's most favourite (by far) 2,000 m summit. We estimated over a hundred try it every year, as 'Wilderness Experience' becomes a mainstream activity at Island schools.
- Fifth, it was a foot in the door. If the section could prove to BCP that we provided reliable services for backcountry hikers and skiers, there was a strong possibility BCP would consider allowing us to build other huts in more strategic SPP locations (I leave it to you to know where those are), and the benefits those would provide to countless future climbers and skiers.

With the project seemingly going nowhere, I stepped down as section Chair in mid-January 2014. Two weeks later I received a letter from Andy Smith advising that the proposal had been accepted subject to conditions. A follow-up email included six government forms detailing the required environmental and other requirements that would need to be addressed. Since BCP had itself built and operated the cabin for many years and was therefore in a good position to know what the environmental issues were, this added to our costs. We had earlier stated in our proposal that we would spend between \$20K-30K to bring the cabin up to the safety standards of other modern ACC huts. This included the construction of state-of-the-art technologies (from BEES) to deal with grey and black water.

On February 4, 2014 the new ACCVI executive met and discussed the situation. Given the delay in getting to what many would consider just the start of the project, the uncertainty of what BCP's future expectations were likely to be, the substantial costs both in environmental assessment and safety upgrades without there being any cost benefit to ACC users, and that the cabin was not in an ideal location, the executive decided not to proceed. The new Chair, Mike Hubbard, advised Andy Smith on February 7, 2014 of that decision.

