

A high-altitude mountain landscape featuring a large, white snowfield on a dark, rocky mountain slope. A small figure of a climber is visible on the snowfield, providing a sense of scale. The background shows more rugged mountain peaks under a clear blue sky.

ISLAND BUSHWHACKER

THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA • VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

2008 ANNUAL

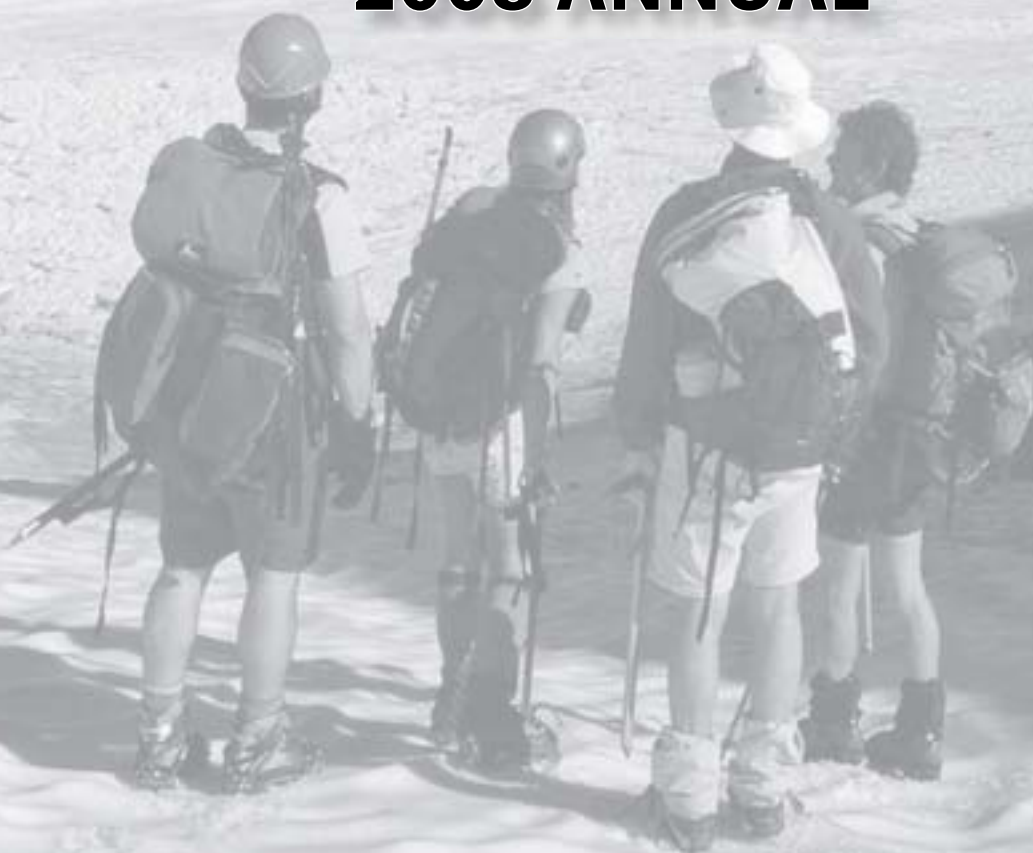
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VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

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VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION
of
THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA



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Cover: *Charles Turner crossing the snow couloir
on Warden Peak* PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN



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Message from the Chair

Cedric Zala



It was a good year for the club and for my involvement with it, too. Being new to the Chair position, I had all sorts of initial concerns about what might arise and need to be dealt with. But with a great team of very willing and experienced people both on and outside the Executive providing ideas and support, it all worked out fine. One of the things I'm happiest about is the number of initiatives undertaken during the last year, of which the highlights include:

Communication

We've put new communication avenues in place to reflect the near-universal use of email and the Web. Some of the changes you'll likely have noticed are:

- **A totally redesigned ACCVI website.** Our www.accvi.ca website now has a more modern look-and-feel, but perhaps more importantly, extensive back-end changes. The new site uses a Content Management System to deliver web content. Basically, this system serves to separate content and presentation, which in turn means that all web pages will have the same look, and that this look can be changed independently of the content. Another feature of the new system is that it allows people to change the content of web pages without knowing html, the language of the web. Most pages can be edited by those responsible for their content, using a simple online editor, accessed from the web page itself. This greatly streamlines the process of keeping the information current. Thanks to Martin Hofmann for all his efforts here.
- **A monthly newsletter.** This helps notify you about our social events and other happenings and topics that are of potential interest. It includes an updated schedule in each issue to reflect the inevitable changes that occur as the weeks and months go by. And it's a good way for

Section authors such as Lindsay Elms to provide interesting historical articles.

- **Electronic Executive meetings.** We've started using Skype to make it easier for out-of-town members (as far away as the Beaufort Sea, on occasion) to participate in our Executive meetings. While this has sometimes been a bit iffy because of poor connections, it has included people who might otherwise not have been able to participate and has certainly saved a lot of gas!

Memorial Fund

We've initiated a Memorial Fund in memory of Viggo Holm and Gerta Smythe, two well-loved Section members who recently passed away. This Fund has been dedicated to the support of young people in mountain initiatives and activities. The Fund accepts donations in memoriam and bequests, and income from the fund will be disbursed to applicants on an annual basis. Also, the Section will aim to match donations from individuals and groups (subject to certain conditions). We hope that the creation of this Fund will encourage our younger members to challenge themselves and embark on some ambitious alpine quests and adventures. Thanks to Geoff Bennett and Judith Holm for organizing the set-up of the Fund and to the many Section Members who have made donations.

Slideshows

We've initiated monthly social evenings open to the public, with slideshows presented by speakers from both within and outside the Section. This has been a real treat, and it's a good way for Club members, and particularly new members, to get to know each other a little better. It also lets potential members see what we're about and size us up before joining. Topics have ranged from Vancouver Island to the tropics to the arctic, and the evenings have been well-attended. Our annual social evenings (winter social, banquet, summer BBQ, photo contest) also continue to be very popular. Many thanks to Rick and Phee Hudson for initiating and organizing these evenings.

Trailrider

Our TrailRider program now has its very own TrailRider, thanks to the initiative and support of Gerry Graham and other Section members. We can now schedule outings without having to arrange to borrow a vehicle, and ensure that it is always in top shape. This program provides a fine community service, and is a great outreach for the Club.

VI Spine Trail

The Section is supporting a Vancouver Island “Spine” Trail initiative headed by Gil Parker. The aim is to create a trail from Victoria in the south to Cape Scott at the northern tip of the Island. The proposed 700 kilometre long route would be an inland route that passes near many communities, yet retains its wilderness character, following historic routes and completed trails where they exist. Primarily a hiking trail (but permitting non-motorized, multi-use where appropriate) the route traces mountain ridges, through forests and past lakes, similar to many successful long-distance routes in North America.

Park Status for Mount Arrowsmith

Perhaps the highlight of the year for many members was the realization of an initiative undertaken a decade ago by Peter Rothermel – the attainment of park status for Mount Arrowsmith. The new Mount Arrowsmith Regional Park was created by the Regional District of Nanaimo on November

25, 2008. Many Section members have been involved in this process, and our Section adopted it as a National Centennial project in 2006. Congratulations to Peter on the culmination of his efforts, and thanks to all those Club members who helped in the realization of this dream.

So the Club is really going places! Our membership continues to grow at a healthy rate, and we are up nearly fifty members from last year. Our educational program is very popular and our trips are usually well supported. Our financial health is also excellent, largely due to continuing success with the BMFF (thanks to Lissa Zala). In summary, the Section is healthy, active and involved in many fronts. This is all made possible by the dedicated efforts of many, many volunteers, who not only do excellent work but who also are a pleasure to be around and work with. So thank you to everyone who helps make the ACCVI such a great club!

Finally, our Section’s Centennial is only three years away (2012), and it’s not too early to start thinking about Centennial projects. If you have any ideas, contact me or any of the Executive. Have a great year in the mountains!



Vancouver Island

Mount Brenton

Albert Hestler

April 12

Mike and I explored the approaches to Mount Brenton for the first time in 1986 and I dutifully wrote an article, complete with sketch map, for the *Bushwhacker*. This outing has since become an annual tradition for us, i.e. Mike has put it on the trip schedule most every year and I have accompanied him most every time – unless detained by reason of health or other commitments (usually travels in warmer climates).

I was, therefore, disappointed when Mike had to cancel the original date in February, but was the more pleased when he rescheduled it for April. Because I had missed the last few years, I was especially interested to compare my observations of 1986 with the conditions of today. The approach is still the same, so are the turning points and the distances between them. However, some of the landmarks have changed, i.e. the water tower is long gone, the main parking lot is now before the bridge over Humbird Creek and the second growth has matured enough to obscure the view until one reaches Hollyoak Lake. And there now is a gate at the entrance to the Chemainus Valley where one has to sign in before continuing.

In the above sketch map I had marked a road as circumnavigating Mount Brenton on the west side. I had taken this information from a topographical map which, in turn, was based on aerial photographs taken in 1976. It was only later, mostly during exploratory trips in the summer, when I realized that this road had completely overgrown. It was startling indeed to bushwhack one's way through dense alder only to suddenly see a sign nailed to a tree warning: "Caution, trucks crossing".

But back to this year's trip. We met at the Home Depot parking lot on Millstream Road at 9:00 a.m., organized cars



Mt Brenton rest stop PHOTO: ALBERT HESTLER COLLECTION

and drove off in convoy to the Chemainus turn-off on Highway #1. There was some delay waiting for all the cars to show up and to sign in at the gate at the beginning of the logging road. The road was free of snow right up to the parking lot and thankfully had been cleared of fallen trees by snowmobilers (they also have permission to access Mount Brenton via this road).

We were off at about 11:45 a.m., a bit later than planned. We encountered snow immediately on the other side of the bridge and could don our snow gear right away. Most participants were on skis but a sizeable number did the trip on snowshoes. The weather was just great: blue sky, sunshine and temperatures hitting twenty degrees. Some were stripping down to T-shirts or rolled up their sleeves; it was definitely a time for sunblock and wide-brimmed hats. The snow was spring-like, i.e. soft and wet, but not sticky – altogether great touring conditions. We made it to the top in various times, myself being last in just under three hours. The air was clear allowing spectacular views all around, notably the coast range to the east and the Whymper/Landale/ElCapitan group to the west.

After a brief snack break enroute and a slightly longer rest break on the summit, we headed down again, making it back to the cars around 4:45 p.m. (i.e. one to one and a half hours for me). Some drove straight back to Victoria, others succumbed to the temptation of a cool refreshing beverage and headed for the pub in Chemainus. Either way, a good ending to a glorious day in the outdoors.

Participants: Mike Hubbard, Colleen Kasting, Albert Hestler, Maureen Hoole, Kelly Osborne, Murrough and Pat O'Brien, Roger Painter, Rick and Phee Hudson, Judith Holm, Leona Winstone, Tony and Anita Vaughan, Claire Ebendinger, Yves Parizeau, Julia and Jennifer Nichol, and Catrin Brown.

Plans B and C: Skiing around Louise Goetting Lake

Dave Campbell
April 19-20

The original plan for this trip was to do a traverse from 5040 Peak to Nahmint Mountain and back. As the date approached, it looked like Marion Creek Main was snowed in to the road, which added an extra 6 kilometres of logging road each way. I decided to change the trip a bit and try to traverse the divide between Marion Creek and Nahmint from Adder Mountain down to 5040 Peak. The idea is briefly described in Philip Stone's *Island Turns and Tours* but I had not heard of anyone doing this traverse before and was unclear of the difficulties. I checked out maps and air photos for the area and it looked like it should go but there were a few tricky bits that were questions marks. This way we could traverse out to 5040 Peak and then have a quick ski back along the logging road to the car.

Originally five people had signed up for the trip and by the time the weekend came round we were down to Olivier and me. Olivier was ever-keen and took the bus up to Nanaimo from Victoria on Friday evening. On Saturday morning we woke up to a foot of snow in Nanaimo, and I thought that we would have to pack it in. Checking the highway web cams around the Island it looked like the snow storm was pretty localized so we decided to give it a go. It took over an hour to get out of Nanaimo! The ride was a bit of a white-knuckle affair and I almost put the car in the ditch once. By the time we hit the turn off to Alberni the road was clear.

There was still snow on the Marion Creek Mainline



Olivier on Adder PHOTO: DAVE CAMPBELL

down to Highway 4 so we parked the car at the road and skied our way up Marion Creek. On recent air photos I saw what looked like an extension to old logging roads to near Louise Goetting Lake. However, the road only showed up on one photo and wasn't visible on Google Earth so I thought it might just be the base of a cliff rather than a new road (the terrain was quite steep). So instead of taking the first spur road we followed the second road up since this got us to a higher elevation which was closer to the lake and on the less steep side of the creek coming out of Louise Goetting Lake.

After some bushwhacking and creative route finding to manage some very steep micro-terrain we made our way out of the old clearcuts and up the main creek. At the fork in the creek below the lake and a small waterfall, we saw a small hut on the side of the creek and a road that followed up from the first spur road (a mental note was made as a good route down if need be).

We followed the south branch of the creek to a knoll above Louise Goetting Lake. From here we worked our way through steep forest to the west side of Jack's Peak (unofficial name given to a 1,480m peak south of Adder Mountain - named on old forest development maps). We skirted up the sub-peak on Jack's Peak and then started out along the divide towards 5040 Peak. We were getting near where we wanted to camp for the evening and started getting the first views of our intended traverse. Conditions were pretty icy and it looked like we had a steep slope to get over to reach the next bump along the divide (at a radio tower). Another unknown steep slope along the route could not be seen and the slopes below 5040 Peak which we needed to get up also looked steep. So we decided that the route might be a little more than we could chew for this trip.

We skied back down and camped on the ridge below Jack's Peak. The weather had been fairly marginal all day but it opened up in the evening and we were treated to an amaz-

ing sunset with superb views of 5040, Triple Peak, The Cat's Ears and the Mackenzie Range to the south and west, and Steamboat and Pogo Peak to the north.

The next morning we skied back down to the lake and dropped gear and went for a tour up the south ridge of Adder Mountain. Given the icy conditions I decided to leave the skis at the base and boot packed my way up, while Olivier kept the skis on (better decision). The ridge was great touring terrain. We stopped about 60 metres from the top of Adder because of a steep slope and cornice that needed to be negotiated.

We made our way back down to the lake and then did the short (~700m) leg through steep forest down to the micro-hydro intake. From here we hopped on the road and followed it out for about 4 kilometres back to the car. The snow was fairly patchy and we had to take skis on and off a dozen or more times.

Great spot! It would definitely be a good place to go for a weekend in the mid-winter to get some nice turns. This could also be a good way to approach a climb up Adder Mountain (mid-winter or later is the best time of year when the lake is still frozen and there is snow in the forest). There is a gate lower on the road up to the micro-hydro site so you would probably have to hike 2 to 3 kilometres of road.

Participants: Dave Campbell and Olivier Lardière.

Towincut and Heather Mountain

Lindsay Elms

May 17 - 18

As a mountaineer we all know how weather and mountain conditions dictate where we are going to climb. In several climbing reports in the Island Bushwhacker we have read about parties resorting to plan B when certain situations arise and that usually happens at the last minute, however, what I am talking about is having a number of climbing options available when trying to plan a weekend trip. With the Victoria Day long weekend approaching I had been watching the weather forecast and it was calling for hot weather for the start of the summer camping season – about 28°C for the Saturday and Sunday. This was about 10° higher than what we had been experiencing recently and with the amount of snow in the backcountry forecasters were predicting high avalanche conditions and increased water runoff which would increase the volume of water in the rivers. Probably good news for white-water kayakers! To me the hot weather would mean soft snow which meant if I was going to

climb one of the bigger island mountains it could turn into a huge slog up some turbo-whipped vanilla ice cream on a cone that runs down your chin when licked. I know some say that this is character building but I really don't think I... maybe I won't go there! Anyway, I therefore decided to be a little more modest with my objective and chose two lower mountains around Lake Cowichan that were on my "to-do" list. One was Heather Mountain at the western end of the north side of the lake and the other was Towincut Mountain which is northwest of Gordon River. Although only 1,249 metres in height it has the "grand" distinction of being the highest mountain on Vancouver Island... wait for it... south of Lake Cowichan. Wow! Remember, several years ago I had written about how some climbers choose what they are going to climb and the eccentric nature of their decision!

Saturday morning we picked up Val's daughter Caitlin in Duncan at 10 a.m. and drove out to the lake. The logging roads were dry and dusty and a huge rooster's comb of dust spewed up from behind the vehicle as we headed in towards the Gordon River camp. Just after crossing Hawk Creek we turned northwest and followed the logging road up to the Hawk/Hinne Creek junction. We then turned west and followed Hinne Creek as far as we could drive until the snow became too deep on the road forcing us to park just over a kilometre short of where we had anticipated driving too. It was noon and I thought it would be about two and a half hours to the top via the southwest aspect.

We began hiking and just before the road crosses Hinne Creek and makes a sharp turn, we took a side road and hiked up into a large open area. With everything covered in snow we decided to angle straight up the slopes toward a creek coming from the saddle to the south of the peak. Taking turns out front we reached the saddle just two hundred metres below the summit. Twenty minutes later (just after 2 p.m.) we were standing on the bald spot of Towincut Mountain. It wasn't obvious that this mountain was the highest south of the lake but I trusted my map. Looking to the north we could see Lake Cowichan and all the peaks from Mount Whymper to Mount Landale, El Capitan Mountain, Mount Service, Mount Buttle and Heather Mountain, and all the peaks behind them. It was a great vantage point and it felt good to get up a new mountain!

After half an hour on top we made a quick descent down the mountain and back to the vehicle. We even got to watch a mama bear and her young cub snack on the shrubs by the road. That night we found an overgrown logging road near the end of Lake Cowichan and camped knowing we wouldn't have any rowdies disturbing us.

Sunday morning started out a little foggy but it quickly burnt off as we had breakfast and packed. We parked at the locked gate at the end of the lake where the route up Heather Mountain begins. It wasn't long after we started hiking up

the logging road that we soon began to feel the heat from the sun as our skin was already a little crisp from yesterday. Ahead of us a couple of guys on quads were roaring up the road but they soon found the snow on the road too much and turned around. Although we could hear others on some of the other roads we didn't see anyone else until we got back down. Once on the snow we put our plastic boots on so as to keep our runners dry for the drive home. The road switch-backed several times and in one spot we cut the corner to save time. By noon we were at the base of the big, open slope that would take us up to the summit ridge, however, instead of following the road we took a direct line up to the ridge which put us about one and a half kilometres from the summit. Here we stopped for lunch and to re-hydrate - and to slather on more sunscreen! To the south we could see Mount Sutton and the cleared summit of Towincut Mountain which reminded me of the bald spot on a tonsured monk! By 2 p.m. we were on the summit taking in the views and soaking up more summer sun! I couldn't be more contented! Over the back we could see down onto Heather Lake, however, there was to be no cooling dip as the lake was still frozen. We spent a leisurely hour enjoying the summit.

The descent was fast and the snow was soft and forgiving allowing us to be back at the vehicle in one and a half hours. As for avalanches, there was no sign of the slopes releasing even with the hot temperatures. Conditions felt quite stable!

Participants: Valerie Wootton, Caitlin O'Neill and Lindsay Elms

Name origins:

Heather Mountain was labeled on topo maps drawn by the BCLS Alan Campbell in 1937/38 and it is suggested that a person is the namesake, rather than the plant, however, the rare yellow heather can be found there. The name was officially adopted in December 1952. Route descriptions can be found in the [Hiking Trails II](#) book.

Towincut Mountain is an Indian name and was passed by the Geographic Board of Canada in March 1910. No known route description is available on the web or in a book.

Pogo Peak

Tony Vaughn

May 24

My first attempt to climb Pogo Peak was back in 2002 via the East Ridge. It was attempted as a day trip from Victoria. We turned around at about 2:30 p.m., a result of lack of visibility, pouring rain, and slick wet rock. This time the weather forecast was greatly improved, with the chance of a full day of sunshine. I planned a route up the North Ridge in the mistaken belief that we could drive to the toe of the ridge.

I met Charles and his brother Gordon in Port Alberni on the Friday evening. Following dinner we drove out to camp at the rest area near Sutton Pass which would allow us an early start the next day. We left the next morning at 6:45 only to find that at 2.7 kilometres along the north side of the Kennedy River the road was washed out. We had a description of another route from Rick Eppler which was the Northeast Ridge to the North Ridge; this was also a route Charles had skied a few years earlier. So we decided to give this route a go.

At 8:20 we left the vehicles and hiked over the Kennedy River Bridge, following the old road for about 820 metres before turning up an old branch road just before a creek. Just after this road curved around to the north we left the road and headed into the bush, aiming for the Northeast Ridge and keeping to the north side of a creek which came down from the North Ridge. The going at first was pretty unpleasant bushwhacking but, as we gained height, we reached the snowline and travel became much easier and faster. Once clear of the trees we could pick out the notch in the ridge that we needed to get to so that we could get onto the North Ridge proper. It seemed the only way to get onto the ridge, as everywhere else the ridge was heavily corniced over steep rock. As Charles had been this way before he was able to confirm that this was the best way to go. Our next concern was if the snow ramp up to the notch was continuous. If not, could we still get up on to the ridge? We climbed up the steep snow slope to the ramp and found it was not continuous; there was a gap of about fifteen feet of steep wet rock. It was not impossible to climb up but a bit dicey to climb down, particularly as the snow was undercut for quite a way where it met the rock. It was fortunate that we had along a 10 metre length of 9mm rope, which Charles set up as a safety line. This enabled us to get up onto the North Ridge, which we followed up to the summit, keeping well away from the heavily corniced east side. It was 1:50 p.m. when we reached the summit, a total of five and a half hours since leaving the vehicles, and a total elevation gain of 1,276 metres. We basked in the sunshine on the summit for a while before heading back down. Our big



The North Ridge of Pogo Peak PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN

delay on the trip down was at the notch coming off the north ridge. We used the rope for safety but when pulling it back down it jammed, try as we might we couldn't get it loose. We even considered abandoning it but Charles climbed back up, repositioned it, came down and tried again. No luck, it was still determined to stay behind. Finally, after several more attempts from different angles, it came free and so we were able to carry on back down with the rope firmly stored back in the pack. The rest of the way down was fast going until we reached the end of the snow and it was back to slipping, sliding and bashing through the bush until we reached the road. We were tired and weary after nine and a half hours of climbing but very contented from our successful climb.

Participants: Charles Turner, Gordon Turner and Tony Vaughn.

Late spring skiing – Climbing Big Interior Mountain and Nine Peaks in June

Rick Hudson

Big Interior Mountain June 1-3, 2007

Nine Peaks June 6-8, 2008

2007:

The weather, for a wonder, has been sunny all week, and promises to continue for the weekend. Hot diggity snow dog. It's just three weeks to the summer solstice, and we get queer looks at the gas station in Duncan, with a roof rack full of skis. Who cares? Let's just call it the last of the late spring skiing.

Russ' old Princess manages to get three of us to the Price Creek campsite as dusk is falling – got to love those late evenings. The other 4 are already pitched. It's full moon, but after 5 hours in the car, we decide to skip the headlamp approach to Bedwell Lake that night, in favour of the morning's light.

Saturday, and we drive the final bit of gravel to find a massive washout a few hundred metres before the trailhead. All that remains of the road is the giant water pipe (balanced on temporary chocks), and some mangled culverts. The repair crew has conveniently left a wooden beam that almost reaches across the river, and we balance across on it, backs groaning under packs that are piled high with skis, boots and poles.

Snow patches are met above the second set of bridges, after an hour of hiking the Bedwell Trail. The path disappears, and we lose time struggling up steep snow through awkward bush, skis catching in branches above, and rock bluffs appearing where no bluffs should be. Finally, there's familiar ground as the first steel ladder appears, except it's completely buried, and only the terrain fits the summer memory of where it should be.

An awkward move past the ladder, and we are at the pass, where we gratefully change into plastic boots, step into skis, and relish the pleasure of losing 10 kg from everyone's pack. The area seems different, swathed in blankets of snow. A short distance, and Baby Bedwell Lake appears. We cross it's flat surface quickly, climb a short rise, and then drop to Bedwell Lake, where Selena almost runs into a bear, and Olivier, who is fresh out from France, is ecstatic at *le pays sauvage*. The rest of us shrug, secretly pleased that he is so excited.

2008:

The washout has been repaired, so we are quickly into the forest from the car park, but there our delight peters out, as does the trail. There's lots of snow everywhere, and blow-downs strew the trail. With awkward packs and protruding skis, we battle around, over and under deadfall for

what seems like hours, losing the trail shortly after the first bridges. Charles leads us up a steep, slippery rock face, clinging to thinly rooted bush, cursing and sweating. Where is the trail? Where are we? Where's the river?

Finally, at the second bridges, we re-connect, and the upper sections, which had given so much trouble the year before, are now easy. Go figure, eh? The ladders are buried, but the slope is familiar, and we are soon at Baby Bedwell Lake.

2007:

Unlike the summer approach to Bedwell Lake campsite, the winter one is fast – straight across the lake – and in a matter of minutes we see a tent. Its occupants are glimpsed high on the upper flank of Big Interior, descending in a series of delicious S-turns, under a cloudless sky. Hey, maybe all that load-carrying and bushwhacking is going to be worth it.

In the afternoon, Rudy Brugger and Doug Hurrell arrive back to report the snow is in excellent shape. We all decide to skin up to Little Jimmy Lake, just to see what it's like. On the way, Rudy points out a spot some 500m from the camp where he and Doug scrambled 50m down south into the valley. "From there, it's easy to get into the bowl under Big Interior," he says. It will avoid following the summer ridge and then losing all that height to get to the glacier.

Above Little Jimmy Lake, the sun pours down onto softening snow. When resting, we cluster in the shadows of trees, grateful for any shelter. Out in the open, bare shoulders, arms and knees are the norm. It's spring skiing at its best.

Later, we descend to Bedwell Lake again, swooping down between clusters of trees, back to camp, where we sit around outside in the late sun and cook suppers. Russ, I notice, is still wearing shorts, but at 9:00pm, with the sun on the skyline, he announces he's turning in for the night. In short order, the tents go quiet. Later, I look out to see stars. Tomorrow looks good.

2008:

This year, we don't stop at the lake campsite, but keep going, finding Rudy's Gully and heading up to where the trees thin out in the lower bowl below Big Interior. We debate about going further, but we're all tired – the steep bush-covered climb early in the day took its toll, and besides, if a wind gets up, it's nice to have some tree cover. We camp by a river that has a few open pools in the snow.

Tents are pitched, a kitchen quickly dug, and we settle down for an early evening and an even earlier start on the morrow. The sky is clear, the weather calm. We have a long way to go. Will it hold?

2007:

Dawn comes early, and so does Selena. "It's six o'clock! Get up!" An early start is easy when it's light and warm. By 7:30 we are scrambling down Rudy's Gully, where we pick up their tracks from yesterday. The trail threads through the trees, gaining height slowly and heading SE towards the



Perfect snow conditions and the telemarkers genuflect. Selena in full cry on Big Interior in 2007. PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

open bowl. At the edge of the forest we move out of the cool shadows into the heat of the morning sun. The sun, in fact, is becoming a hazard. The snow is wet, and skins aren't sticking to skis. Many hues of duct tape are produced, as folks struggle to hold skin and ski together.

There follow slow zigzags up the bowl's flank into the upper cirque, where the glacier is vaguely discernable under the snowpack. The sun is hot, and everyone is sweating. We climb towards the summit ridge which has a small cornice along it, but we cross where it's open, popping out onto a roof crest – the S side drops away steeply. A few hundred metres more, then we take off our skis and scramble the short section to the top. It's 11 o'clock.

2008:

Last year, the snow was perfect, the slopes up to Big Interior easy and very skiable. Not this year – the whole slope is hard and icy in the cold early morning. We edge cautiously upwards, but finally two of the four choose to crampon up, while the others fit ski crampons. A slip here wouldn't be pretty, and we are sweating as much from nerves as effort by the time we break out onto the summit ridge, and catch a glimpse of our goal today. Nine Peaks looks tantalizingly close, but is still far off, with a long descent and climb ahead.

2007:

Around us, the peaks of Strathcona Park stretch away in bright sunshine. A breeze blows, but it's warm and refreshing. In the lee of the summit cairn we eat lunch, identify summits, and talk about other trips to other places. Sonia remarks, "Climbers are always talking about the past or the future. You gotta live in the now!"

2008:

Descending the south ridge on Big Interior, we're hesitant to put on skis – the slope is steep and icy. We can only hope that the sun will warm these slopes by the time we get back hours later.

We clatter along the ridge before turning a gendarme. At a steep drop-off, we examine the cornice. It looks OK if you take it at an angle and turn quickly. Go straight, and there's a big drop. Martin shows us how to do it, and once he is down, it's easier, somehow. The slope below is softer and offers a long, sweet descent to the pass. Clouds wander up from the valley and confuse us near the low point, but we hit the saddle right on target.

In front, there is nothing but white, and no idea where to go up. I suggest to the right, and I'm just leading off when a momentary gap in the clouds reveals cliffs and hanging seracs in that direction. We veer left and feel our way up onto Nine Peaks Glacier, where we break out into the sun and can see again. Now it's just a series of zigzags up to the snow couloir under the third peak from the right (the true summit).

The couloir turns out to be cut by bergschrunds, but Dave threads a way through. It's steep, but as long as you don't fall over during the kick turns, it's just in balance. At the top, I look uncertainly down at what we'll have to retrace. It's going to be exciting.

A short scramble in boots, and the summit is ours. The sky is still mostly blue, but there are stratus to the west and a light wind tugging at our collars. We don't linger long, but clamber back down to the skis. I watch the others dart down between the slots. Sometimes it's better to see how it's done. Other times it's better to be first, and benefit from the uncut snow. Procrastination wins.

Moments later we are all safe below the bergschrunds, and there follows a delirious ride down the slope to the saddle, covering in half an hour what had taken almost two to gain. But then the climbing begins, all the way back up to Big Interior. As we inch our way up our down-tracks, the clouds gather and the wind increases, and when we top out at the ridge above the cornice, it's howling.

We feel our way back towards Big Interior, battered by gusts, just putting one foot in front of the next, hoping that soon it will end and we can duck into the lee of the summit.

2007:

Back at the skis from Big Interior's summit, duct tape and wet skins are gratefully stripped off. There follows a superb



Still a long way to go - Dave Campbell and Martin Hoffman view Nine Peaks from the south ridge of Big Interior in 2008. PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

descent down the 700m slope, falling barely in control, thighs burning, bowwaves of snow and slush spraying away from turning skis. My GPS later registers a top speed of 34 kph. The telemarkers genuflect piously, the AT-ers swagger. Martin, sporting a brand new ski jacket (\$5 from the Sally-Ann in Duncan, after he'd left his in Victoria) cuts a colourful figure.

2008:

What encouraged us all the way back up the south ridge of Big Interior was the promise of that wonderful descent the year before. But this time, when we finally strip off skins and prepare to descend the same bowl, the snow is still as hard as marble, and the visibility less than 20 metres. The prospect of a glorious descent vanishes. Instead, we feel our way down the slope, grateful for the faint up-tracks. Otherwise, there'd be no way of guessing where we were, or where we should be going. Trying to follow a GPS track is impossible – we are nearly blinded by flying ice particles. I later check the log. Our top speed was 8 kph.

2007:

In the bowl we collect ourselves, tape on skins, languish in the shade for a while to cool down, and then skin along our up-track to Rudy's Gully. We're back in camp by 2:00, pack up and are away across the lake by 3:00. Already there are places where just 24 hours of heat have turned white snow into turquoise pools of water. We proceed with caution.

2008:

It's late in the day, and we have been going hard for ten hours. Back at camp in the trees, we decide not to move down to Bedwell Lake. Out of the wind we linger over supper, then

turn in early. The air is mild, despite the storm raging on the ridges above. It's better to sleep, Hamlet.

2007:

Further caution is required getting down the lowest of the steel ladders (now partially visible). Although short, it has melted out, and we are forced to scramble down a mud gully, lowering packs through cedar limbs. Finally, we can heel-boot down-slope, the snow gradually giving way to muddy pools and then a dry path.

But the day isn't over. Within sight of the cars, the wash-out is now a torrent of meltwater, and the flimsy beam that served as a bridge a day before is submerged. Phil wades across, the water up to his thighs, and proclaims it "iffy". The rest of us, teetering under awkward packs, choose to thrash downstream through entangling bush to a wider, shallower crossing.

Finally, we're back at the cars. On the Buttle Lake road, a white-tail deer prunks beside the road for what seems like an age, and once again Olivier is delighted at Canadian wilderness. Thereafter, there's only the prospect of five delicious hours of inactivity to Victoria, and a hot bath at midnight.

2008:

Dawn, and it's calm. We pack up camp leisurely and follow our tracks on crusty snow down to Bedwell Lake. No melt pools this year – just hard snow. In short order we are at the ladders, and the fearless among us manage to ski tight turns all the way down to the upper bridges – an impressive feat on hard snow and patchy sections.

There follows a battle back over all the deadfall, but this time we are rigorous in keeping to the track when it disappears under the snow. As a result, we avoid wet vertical cliff faces, and manage to get down relatively easily, although the number of fallen trees is hard to believe. Still, as the mathematician among us points out, "If most trees live to be 300 years old, then every year, every 300th tree must fall." There are lots of 300th trees about, but we finally reach the car park. And there are no river crossings to follow.

Participants:

Big Interior Mountain June 1-3, 2007

Selena Swets (*überfuhrer*), Martin Hofmann, Phil Benoit, Olivier Lardiere, Rick Hudson, Russ Moir, Sonia Langer, with Rudy Brugger, Doug Hurrell.

Nine Peaks June 6-8, 2008

Dave Campbell (*leader*), Martin Hoffman, Charles Turner, Rick Hudson.

Mariner Mountain

John Young

June 28-30

Big! Expansive! Convoluted!

Those are words I'd use to describe Mariner Mountain. It's not so much that it's high, because, after all, it's slightly lower than Mount Arrowsmith, nor that the approach is so long, but we seemed to have to travel on the snow forever. We broke out of the trees into the moraine boulder field only an hour after leaving the Bedwell River Trail and it seemed that we'd be summiting in less than four hours but it was more than seven hours before we reached the top.

We were a group of seven with vastly different experience levels from Linda, a neophyte backpacker, to Tom a veteran of hundreds of days on the trail with the rest of us falling somewhere in between. As leader, there were times when I wondered whether or not I should've even put this trip on the schedule - whether it was suitable for inexperienced mountaineers.

Mariner Mountain, a forty-five minute boat ride from Tofino, soars to 1,788 metres above Bedwell Sound. We started hiking at 10 a.m., and for the first two hours were on the Clayoquot Wilderness Resort roads. We had just waded barefoot across a creek when a snorting startled us. It turned out to be a horse from a party from the resort. They greeted us amiably. We stopped for lunch at the suspension bridge and then continued on our way. From there it became a trail and shortly after leaving the suspension bridge the trail forked. Since the right one was better travelled we followed it but after about ten minutes it was obvious that it had looped around and was now going downstream. We retraced our footsteps and took the left fork. Shortly after, we came to the park boundary 6 kilometres from the Sound. The Bedwell River Trail (BRT) from there became increasingly bushy with some exciting crossings over the river on "condemned" bridges. One, a living bridge with a forest of trees sprouting out of the old logs, afforded wonderful views of the rapids in the canyon below.

About 2:30 p.m. we arrived at the confluence of Noble Creek and the Bedwell and after replenishing our water supplies we set out to find the trail up to Mariner. Tom had set out ahead. We started up what we thought was the trail but there was no sign of Tom. We called and whistled and Dean went back down to the BRT calling out for Tom. Dean returned saying there was no sign of him. Then I went with him to look but on the way back down I stepped on a log and the top half gave way and I slammed down hard on the corner of the log on my ribs. I felt an acute pain and was breathless for seconds.



Tom Carter guides Linda Berube across one of the many creek crossings on the way to Mariner PHOTO: JOHN YOUNG

Dean asked if I was okay and I managed to wheeze “I think so.” I thought I’d probably cracked my ribs but from previous experience I knew that I could continue on the trip.

We went back down the BRT and after a couple of minutes we found blue flagging that Peter Rothermel had left on his party’s 2003 trip. Dean and I thought that Tom had probably gone up this trail and for whatever reason hadn’t waited for the rest of us so we went back and got the others and set off up the trail. Peter had said in his trip report that it had taken them four hours to get to their camp in the moraine field boulders from the Bedwell River and by then it was already 3:30 so we knew we didn’t have much time to wander around. We followed the blue flagging for a short distance over and around a lot of deadfall making little progress. Then when Gesine said she doubted the wisdom in us continuing when we didn’t know what happened to Tom and we didn’t know where we were going, I decided we’d better head back to the river and set up camp for the night. On the way back Dean and Mike saw some orange Clayoquot Wilderness Resort tape and followed that for a ways saying that it was a highway compared to what we’d been on.

I was dejected setting up the tent as I didn’t see how we’d ever make it up Mariner in one day from the Bedwell River. After all we were camped only one hundred and ninety metres above sea level and Mariner peaks out at 1,778 metres, almost 1,600 metres above us! One of my goals for this trip was for everyone in the group to summit so I didn’t want it to turn into a blitz for the top that would leave some behind. I felt better though after “swimming” in the river and basking in the still hot late afternoon sun.

I had no problem getting up at first light on Sunday morning as the ache in my ribs made sleep next to impossible and we set off up the trail at 6 o’clock. Once we whacked through the salmon berries at the bottom we made good progress up the trail and had little difficulty following it as there was both Peter’s blue tape and the resort’s orange tape to follow. Beautiful going with great views of Noble Creek cascading below and gnarly old cedars and huge boulders lining the trail. We were just nearing the tree line when we came across Tom’s tent. He’d left a note saying that yesterday he’d set off up the trail and was surprised when after about one hundred metres he’d turned around and found no one there. He’d gone back down to the BRT but hadn’t found us so he’d assumed we were somehow ahead of him. He’d camped here and had left for higher ground at 6:30 this morning.

We had become spread out on the way up and I’d stayed back with Linda and Olivier. Linda seemed intimidated by the prospect of reaching the summit as she asked me if it would be “this steep all the way.” I didn’t want to tell her that she “ain’t seen nothin’ yet!” We caught up to Gesine and Mike and they told me that Dean had kept going hoping that he could catch Tom. I was elated now as I reasoned that we were now only about an hour behind what we would’ve been if we’d come up here the day before.

We caught up to Tom and Dean near the top of the boulder field and donned harnesses, helmets, and crampons. Peter had told me they hadn’t used a rope but we thought it better to be prepared just in case. The snow hadn’t frozen overnight but was firm; perfect for quick travel. We made good progress and by 1 p.m. were less than a kilometre from the main summit as the GPS measures it. I figured we’d be sumitting by one and had set a turn-around time of two.

As we approached the main summit from the south glacier the South Face looked like it would go but since the North Face was supposed to be easier we headed through the col between the east peak and the main summit. From there the main summit looked awful! After traversing around to the North Face we could see a snow gully that looked promising, as far as we could see. We had less than one hundred metres to the summit and Dean let me take over the lead so that I could kick steps in the wet snow with my big boots. Plunging my axe was painful though due to my sore ribs. At the top of this gully we crossed a short stretch of rock and

then some more snow. After crossing another short stretch of snow I came to a bergschrund. The crack to the right was 2 or 3 metres deep but the snow bridged it firmly in the middle of the next gully. This gully steepened to about forty degrees, and with the 'schrund below was somewhat intimidating. It was only about 7 metres up to the next patch of rock and it looked like I should be able to step off quite easily. I started up and was nearing the top but it didn't look as easy to get off onto the rock as I'd thought. I looked back and Tom was a couple metres below me stepping off onto the rock on the side. He had just said "it's icy here" when I took a step down and my feet went out from under me. My first thought was that I didn't want to get stuck in the crack below and so I put my feet out in front of me hoping that I'd shoot right across it. I did just that, but when my feet hit the far side of the hole I fell onto my back and the impact sent a jolt of pain shooting into my ribs. Nobody said a thing. I managed to wheeze "I'm okay" and after a minute climbed out of the hole and got behind Gesine. I was mad at myself for having fallen as I thought I'd scared the others. Dean and Gesine, in fact, said they weren't going any farther but after some encouragement they did.

Tom then belayed us all up that gully and after we'd climbed the next little patch of rock I climbed the five metres across the next patch of snow and set up an anchor. "The summit's right there!" I yelled to the others. Tom joined me and belayed the others across. By the time everyone made it to the summit, it was after two, so we didn't spend as much time enjoying the glorious view of Bedwell Sound and the surrounding mountains as we would've liked.

After two rappels over the worst sections below we quickly down climbed the lower snow gully and set out for our camp. We had to wind our way around some crevasses that were opening up as we headed down into the hot afternoon sun. In the sublimating snow it was just like a sauna. Some beautiful waterfalls cascaded off the cliffs above the moraine field and the melting snow had uncovered avalanche debris. We made great progress reaching our camp shortly after 7 p.m..

On Monday we still had nice weather and had a leisurely hike back down to the ocean reaching it in four hours. Our water taxi was early and we arrived in Tofino about 1:30 p.m.. Although my ribs were throbbing, the elation of the climb overshadowed the pain. Another great trip on Vancouver Island!

Participants: Linda Berube, Tom Carter, Michael Davison, Gesine Haink, Olivier Lardiere, Dean Williams, and John Young

Augerpoint Mountain

Dave Campbell

July 5-6

Augerpoint Mountain seemed like a good club destination. It is a bit of a grunt elevation-wise, but offers some nice alpine rambling without too many technical difficulties. I figured we might be able to sneak in climbs of both Augerpoint and Syd Watts Peak within a weekend.

The trail up to Augerpoint is fairly well marked. Look for a faint blue spray-painted arrow on the road, about 18 kilometres south of the park headquarters, or half a kilometre north of the Augerpoint day-use area. Once you duck into the forest, the trail is fairly obvious and there is the typical box with monitoring cards in it for reporting ptarmigan sightings.

The trail rises steeply through some lovely forest. The trail goes more or less straight up. We made it up to a small lake after about two hours (800m), and then a potential campsite at a lake in the sub-alpine (1,400m) in about five hours. From where the trail levelled off in the sub-alpine it traverses southeast and rises gently to go over a rounded bump (mapped as 1,585m).

The weather was okay for most of the way up and we found ourselves in the midst of a cloud by the time we hit the alpine. We hit snow at about 1,400m and made our way through the fog to a campsite at a pass. Overall it took us about seven hours up.

We had a cold evening cooking up dinner and huddling for warmth. I had brought along my summer "lightweight" stove (a homemade pop-can alcohol stove). I made the rookie mistake of vestibule cooking and when I went to refuel the stove I didn't notice that the stove was still burning! In the ensuing chaos my fuel bottle and vestibule caught fire. My tent burned with shocking efficiency and by the time I got the fire out I had lost a good chunk of the front door on the tent fly. It was a bit sobering to realize that it could really be quite dangerous getting out of a tent in a hurry if you had to. I guess when they say "no open flames in the tent" they mean it!

We turned in early after the tiring hike in and cold evening weather. We were up in the morning to clearer skies and headed off from camp for a ramble after breakfast. We debated the merits of climbing either Augerpoint Mountain or Syd Watts Peak. We wanted to start back down from our camp by noon so we only had time for one of the peaks. When we got to the top of a bump between the two peaks we decided that Augerpoint it would be. The route dropped down off the north side of the bump to a pass above Ruth Masters Lake.



A break in the clouds reveals Augerpoint Mountain PHOTO: DAVE CAMPBELL

From the pass, it was an easy scramble up to the summit of Augerpoint.

Fantastic views on top, though there was some cloud which obscured the more distant peaks, including Albert Edward. We did get some nice views of Mount Mitchell and Syd Watts Peak. I counted fifty-seven ascents in the summit register since 1997, which seems like pretty good traffic for the Island and probably attests to the popularity of the “Augerpoint Traverse”. The most impressive ascent being from Lindsay Elms who had climbed Augerpoint from Paradise Meadows in five hours!

We made our way back to camp and had a quick lunch and packed up. It took about four hours of knee-knacking to get our way back to the car.

Participants: Linda Berube, Dave Campbell, Louise England and Gesine Haink.

Frustration on Conuma Peak

Martin Smith
July 10-11

The first time I became aware of Conuma Peak was whilst climbing Victoria Peak in August 2004. From the summit the views of the snow capped mountains of Strathcona Park and the north Island were as breathtaking as ever but what really intrigued me was a distinctive, sharp little needle well over to the west, almost as far west as the ocean in fact. My climbing partner was as mystified as I was, so bearings

and photos were taken, notes made and we headed down and back to civilisation. Until we got too low, our mystery peak was in view all the way down the South Face of Victoria.

A few days later and after a bit of research and a few phone calls, I’d identified the mountain as both a historically important navigation aid for ancient and modern mariners alike and as a cultural icon of the Mowachaht First Nations. They called it “Konoomah”. Nowadays we know it as “Conuma Peak”. Its distinctive shape from some aspects and its proximity to the Sound of the same name, led some, apparently, to give it the local nickname “The Nootka Matterhorn”.

With a CV as distinguished as that, it went down instantly on my tick-list.

Fast forward to September 2007. After a successful day on Pinder Peak, Tony Vaughn and I headed over to the west coast in beautiful weather for a shot at Conuma.

In the intervening three years I’d read all there was to read about the mountain. Its history, the tales of the natural arch on the west face and, in particular, all the approach and climbing beta. There’s not a lot of the latter since the mountain receives few visits. On average, probably one ascent every three years or so. However, what information there was seemed straightforward enough. Locate logging spur H-60 off Head Bay Road, drive up it on the east flanks of the mountain until it hits a patch of old growth, climb up through the forest to the north end of the south ridge and then just a hop, skip and jump up the south face to the top.

We found H-60 with no problem, slipped the truck into 4WD and bounced happily up the spur in search of a spot to camp. After a kilometre or so, “H-60D” branched off to the right. The main line, however, kept straight on. Up we went, grinding the bumpers on the ditches and bashing down young alders by the dozen before finally finding a nice flat spot to camp right where the mature forest comes down to the road as described. Perfect!

The next morning we got up to clouds, rain and low visibility. That fickle bird “motivation” was not long flying the coop. Before it did, however, we had plenty of time to recognise that something wasn’t right. Tony’s GPS had us over 3 kilometre from the summit, not about 1 kilometre as we had expected. Exploratory forays up logging slash as well as old growth forest led to impassable bluffs. Walking up the rest of the road took us further away from, not towards our objective. Mystifying stuff until we finally got it into our thick skulls that we were not, in fact, on H-60. There it was



View of the south ridge of Conuma from Tlumpuna PHOTO: LINDSAY ELMS

below us snaking up the valley to our east and towards Conuma. Yes, you guessed it; “H-60D” was the spur we wanted.

By this time it was too late to do anything anyway but at least we’d go and have a look at the right approach for next time. That didn’t help either. Just 100 metres down H-60D and the road had been deliberately de-commissioned by removing a bridge. So that looked like that for Conuma. We invested a few expletives on the logging company’s selfish and antisocial practices (forgetting for the moment that they hadn’t actually built the road for the convenience of the handful of folk on the planet who one day might want to climb Conuma) and retreated to Gold River and coffee.

A couple of days later Lindsay climbed an unnamed peak in the area and presented us with a nice photo of Conuma’s eastern aspect. From this we could see where we were, where H-60D would have taken us, had it been navigable, and revealed the simple fact that climbing the slash at the end of our approach would have led to the south end of the South Ridge from which it should be possible to approach the summit block. A route essentially parallel to and above the no-longer-viable H-60D. Given the road closure, approaching Conuma was going to be a lengthier proposition than previously but since I’d rather walk a ridge than a logging road, this looked like a perfectly acceptable alternate way to get at the mountain. Lindsay also supplied photos taken from the summit of Conuma which showed the South Ridge approach, as well as a road “C-15” that went high on the west side from the Conuma River valley. Almost as high, in fact, as the crest of the South Ridge at its south end.

Fast-forward once again to July 2008. This time, we drove up in plenty of time to explore both avenues of approach.

The west side approach was uppermost in our minds. Spur C-15 off Conuma Main was easy to find and in great shape. The problem was that its excellent condition was due to the fact that it was being actively logged. New roads were in the process of being built all up the valley. A rope barrier across the road after a kilometre or so forbade progress, even for company personnel. However, it was after-hours and no-one was around, so we ducked the rope and drove on. After another kilometre the road deteriorated and then became impassable at another removed bridge.

By this time we were above active logging so we discussed whether we might camp in a secluded spot and walk up the rest of the road to where we could

access the south ridge the next day. However, the legal – not to mention safety – aspects of this concerned us and so we drove down, round to the east side of Conuma, up our old friend H-60 (past H-60D of course) and back to our camp site of the previous year. Nothing had been disturbed. There were no tyre-tracks. We were obviously the only human visitors to have come this way in the intervening period.

The next morning we were up before 5 a.m. and off just after 6:15 in peerless weather, confident of lunch on a sunny summit.

Well before 8 we’d walked to the end of the road that approached closest to the South Ridge on this side of Conuma, climbed very reasonable logging slash and thought we were looking at nice friendly old growth forest. Our initial course took us almost due west up to the top of the slash, the aim being to do an end-run around the top of a deep undergrowth-choked gully that splits the east side of the ridge at this point. Once in the old growth, we turned northwest around the top of the gully. That was the theory and what the GPS told us we did. The reality was rather different.

This is south facing terrain, so dense huckleberry bush greeted us almost as soon as we were above the slash and clasped us warmly and permanently in its loving embrace. The big gully could have been 5 metres away and we wouldn’t have seen it! This wasn’t intermittent bush. There were no more than a couple of all-too-brief isolated clear spots – from which we could glimpse C-15 below to the west – as, for the next three hours or more we battled our way north along the ridge, up and down over several high points, before finally

emerging, battered and scratched, onto a flat section of the ridge and easy going on snow. The steep summit tower was just a few minutes away and looked quite intimidating.

Conference time! The bush along the ridge had sapped energy and time. Almost every step of forward progress had been a fight with the thick undergrowth. With an eye on the need to reverse all this we had been navigating carefully and this had also used up the hours. Quite obviously, the time needed to descend would be no less than that needed to climb the mountain. With almost five hours required to reach this point, we set 1 p.m. as a turn round time, prepared to endure a fourteen hour day and scarfed down an early lunch.

The route onto the summit block took us north via a brief descent and around the top of the last gully that comes up the east face. This is the approximate point where the route up from H-60D strikes the south ridge – or so I'm told.

Once onto the South Face proper, we were able to climb the first 50 or so vertical metres on snow fields interspaced with more huckleberry. Thereafter, we swapped the huckleberry for krumholtz and made progress by hauling ourselves up rock difficulties with the undergrowth. It was apparent that we were not going to escape from bush in some form or other today! Twice we were forced into long traverses to the left (west) in order to find weaknesses through or a way around the big bluffs above us. Finally and almost at the west edge of the face, we found a long ramp that finally took us out of the vegetation, back to the right and deposited us at the top of an almost vertical gully coming up the West Face. All this took time, however, and, at this point, we were already fifteen minutes past our turn-round time.

Above us was a striking shark-fin shaped pinnacle right on the ridge edge with a series of steep slabs to its east. Above the slabs and to the right was the summit. My altimeter put us 60 vertical metres shy of the summit and that looked about right.

I thought I could see a line through the slabs with an exit up a flower filled groove. Tony elected to stay put while I went for a look-see. If we were to maintain even a semblance of the self-discipline implicit in setting a turn-round time, there was minimal time available for discussion, to pick an alternate line or to gear up.

The climbing was 4th Class, steep and exposed and I immediately wished I'd roped up. After some dicey moves I finally hit the wall – actually and metaphorically - at the bottom of the flower filled groove. It was almost vertical with no obvious purchase for hands and feet. A crack to its left offered plenty of potential for pro – but I'd chosen to do this solo. I needed to make two moves to get above the difficulties, whereafter the summit, now only 30 vertical metres above, was ours, just a short walk away. It may as well have been 300 or 3000. Unroped, this line was beyond my level of courage. A very nervous down-climb back to Tony, all the while trying to ignore the exposure, soon confirmed the wisdom of my decision.



Conuma summit block with route indicated PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

By now, we were forty-five minutes past our turn-round. Yes, I could see another possible line and yes, I knew my original line would go with the comfort of the rope but this was going to take at least another hour and was, therefore, academic. So we took all the usual photos, took one last look at the summit and turned for home.

With the benefit of the GPS up-track we were able to reverse the summit block tidily enough. A minor hitch developed when we didn't fancy reversing one of the bush-filled grooves we'd climbed up and which didn't offer anything obvious to rappel off. However, a waterfall-like feature just to its west had a handy tree at the top, so out came the rope and down we went.

Apart from the brief open interlude on snow at the top end of the south ridge, we were soon enveloped once more in the bush and slavishly following the GPS track for hour after hour down the ridge with nothing to see but foliage a few inches from your face and, frequently enough, not even your partner.

Finally at 7 p.m. we reached open terrain at the top of the slash and the car just before 8 for a long, long fourteen hour day. My GPS showed an accumulated distance of 13.1 kilometres and accumulated relief climbed of 1,830 metres, the majority of it over difficult, bush-choked terrain. No wonder it took so long!

Epilogue

For those who aspire to climb Conuma Peak under current access conditions, and unless they relish the prospect of what I would estimate as 7-8 kilometres of thick bush on the ridge and another two on the summit block, I wouldn't recommend our route. Instead, I would advocate walking H-60D and following the original route that ascends to the ridge just south of the summit tower.

Whilst climbing the summit block we both wondered whether we were on route or not. We saw not a single trace of anyone having been this way before; not one piece of flagging nor cairn anywhere on the mountain. Ascents of Conuma are infrequent at best. However, several accounts mention having to rappel or rope up for a pitch here and there. We saw no rap slings. Certainly no-one mentions a difficult pitch right below the summit nor the characteristic shark-fin pinnacle. So, if anyone recognizes anything from my photos, especially those from the summit block, give me a shout. The best I can say about our chosen course is that it was a route but perhaps not the route.

The west side approach via spur C-15 may one day be open to the public and remains an option. However, although it looked like a short, easy climb up to the ridge crest from that side, looks can be deceiving and, even then, it only saves the climber the time up to the crest above the big gully – perhaps an hour. The whole of the lower South Ridge and all that bush still lies in store. Also worth mentioning in this paragraph is that, during the course of the day, we were shaken by two huge explosions from below us on the west side. Ample justification for our decision not to risk the wrath (or worse) of the crews down there during working hours and, perhaps, an indication regarding future difficulty of access from the west.

It was a hard thing to do to turn around with success so close to hand. Some may offer solace along the lines of “what’s 30 metres” or “how different would the views have been from the top”. But as we all know, that that’s not how our game is played.

This article originally appeared on the SummitPost website. Follow the link <http://www.summitpost.org/trip-report/468283/exploring-northern-vancouver-island-ii-frustration-on-conuma-peak.html> for the original article and lots more photos.

Participants: Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn.

Warden Peak: A Long Quest

Tony Vaughn
June 28-29

It finally came to pass that on June 20, 2008, I stood on the summit of Warden Peak. This was my sixth attempt to climb this very worthy objective. My first attempt was in February 1996 when I turned around after half an hour in the bush feeling ill. Attempt number two in August 2000 resulted in a torn calf muscle in my left leg half way up the hillside to the lake. Number 3 in July 2003 was to be a day



Warden Peak on approach PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN

trip from a car camp on logging road WR381, scene of the last two attempts. A torrential downpour put a stop to that one without even a hike up the hill. June 2006 was attempt #4, this time the approach was new and the weather was good. We approached from WR380, which is a thousand feet higher than WR381 and camped on Victoria’s West Ridge with spectacular views of Warden and Victoria Peaks. Next morning we awoke to fresh snow, so homeward we did go but at least this time we got a close up view of the mountain.

July 20 and 21, 2007, not a very good forecast but we went anyway for attempt # 5, you never know, maybe the forecast will be wrong. But it wasn’t. We did, however, push for a new high point and reached the Victoria/Warden Col with no visibility and driving sleet, not good conditions to try the summit block. So wet and once more defeated homeward we went.

Now for attempt #6, this time the forecast was for good weather, so on June 28, four of us, Rick Hudson, Charles Turner, Christine Fordham and I left for the WR380 trail-head once more. The route up to our campsite was familiar to all of us as we’d all been this way before. Rick had been with me last year on attempt #5 and Christine and Charles had been with me on attempts #3, 4 and 5. This time with dry bush the climb up to camp didn’t seem quite as painful as before, even though we were all another year older.

June 29 dawned clear and bright, a promising day for a summit attempt. By 5:55 a.m. we had left camp and worked our way down to the alpine lake below the Victoria/Warden col and then up to the col itself. The snow conditions were excellent and we made good progress reaching the col by 7:30 a.m. From there we crossed onto the slopes below the summit tower’s south side. We continued around the base of

the tower until we reached the gully leading up to the chock stone. The gully was snow filled and the snow soft enough for kicking good steps. No one felt we needed a rope so up we went, soon climbing up under the sling festooned chock stone and out onto the North Face.

We were now faced with the crossing of the snow couloir with its long run out down into the White River valley. It was time for a bit of rope work! Rick set up a belay and one by one we safely crossed to a ledge on the other side. From here it looked possible to climb up towards the summit but the initial start getting off the ledge was very awkward and we had been told that if you carry on along the ledge the gullies become easier. So we continued on along the ledge, getting soaked from water running down from above. I was glad it was a hot day so the soaking was not too uncomfortable. On reaching the end of the ledge we found the route up was no easier and we were faced with a short very exposed climb to get off the ledge that also had a difficult start. Rick once again took the lead and belayed by Charles climbed up the initial twenty or so feet of steep rock, then belayed the rest of us up. Once above the ledge it was a simple matter of scrambling up class 4 rock up to the summit. Looking back at photos it would seem that the easiest route to the summit is by crossing the couloir trending diagonally upwards, thereby bypassing the awkward move up from the ledge and then going straight up to the summit. As we climbed over the last rocks onto the large flat summit we were greeted by the spectacular sight of Victoria Peak's North Face directly ahead and towering above Warden Peak.

It was 11:00 a.m. by the time we reached the summit and following lunch and the obligatory summit photos we said

our farewells to Warden's glorious top and started the climb down directly to the snow couloir, which, as before, we belayed across. Once on the other side it was a simple matter of retracing our steps under the chock stone, down the gully and back to the col. As we travelled back to camp we noticed what appeared to be a mushroom shaped pinnacle of ice sticking out of the snow below the Victoria Glacier. We couldn't resist the urge to go and investigate, even though it was out of the way. Sure enough it was an ice mushroom standing about ten feet high. Speculation was that it fell from the glacier above as a large block of ice and melted out into this form. Following our detour we headed straight back to camp for a brew before packing our gear and moving on down to the vehicles, leaving Rick behind in the solitude of the mountains for a solo climb of Victoria Peak the next day. An hour and a half later we were down at the vehicles and by 6:30 back on the logging road for the long drive up the White River valley back to Sayward.

Participants: Christine Fordham, Charles Turner, Rick Hudson and Tony Vaughn.

Going Solo: Climbing Victoria Peak

Rick Hudson
June 30

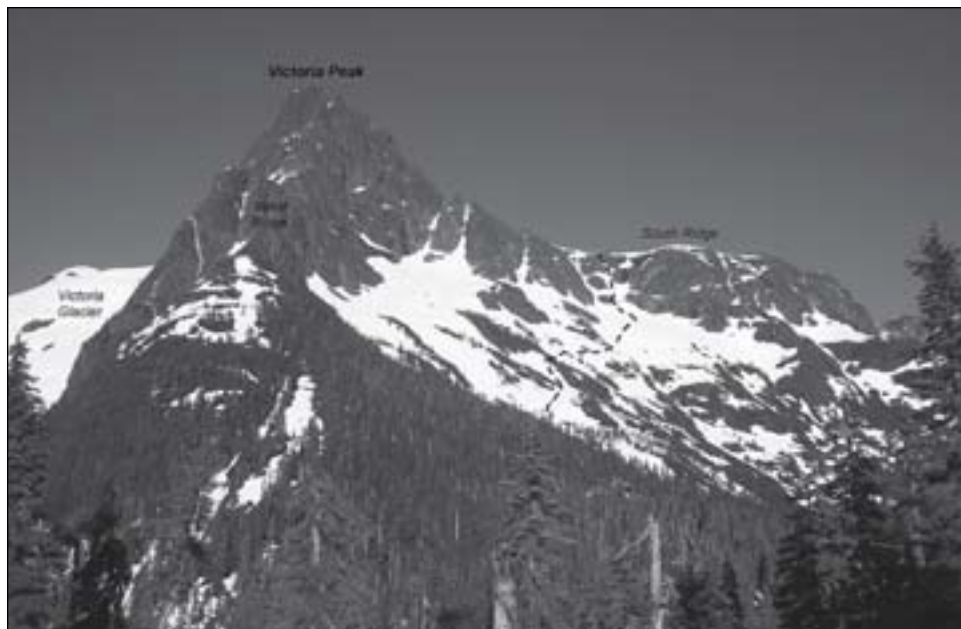
Ernest Hemmingway is credited with the remark: "There are only three sports – bull-fighting, motor racing and mountaineering. All the rest are games." Whether Papa actually said those words (they certainly aren't in any of his writings) or whether the observation is merely attributed to him, the fact remains that like so many quotes, there is more than a ring of truth to it.

Games are not about risk, but sports are. And in the matter of climbing mountains, there are, at times, considerable risks. Yet in my experience of four decades I have noticed a slow and steady reduction of that risk, due to better information, better equipment, greater safety awareness, and more advanced communication when things go pear-shaped, as they occasionally do.

In fact, so pervasive is risk reduction in our modern climbing genre that I would venture to say that today there is a great deal less uncertainty than there was even a decade ago. This thought led me, inevitably, towards a yearning for a simpler time when life was indeed more fraught with risk, but the resulting rewards were all the sweeter for it. Stolen



Charles Turner crossing the snow couloir PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN



Victoria Peak from camp PHOTO: CHRISTINE FORDHAM

fruit taste better – that’s our nature – and the gradual compartmentalization of adventure into ever-safer cubicles has resulted in something essential being lost.

It seemed a natural choice then to step back from where I was, and try for that old elusive feeling again. It turns out that achieving that state of mind – setting the clock back – was easier than I thought. We had had a grand day out on Warden Peak, the weather was stable, and no one in the party seemed particularly interested in climbing Victoria Peak on the morrow.

Here was a golden opportunity. I knew in only the vaguest terms where the standard route on Victoria Peak went. I had neither route description, map, GPS nor cell phone. I had a compass and a headlamp – that was it. Back to basics! I bade farewell to my friends in the mid-afternoon with mixed feelings, so engrained is our expectation of companionship in the hills. With them gone, alone by choice, I was aware that I was upping the ante of climbing this handsome peak. Yet the simple act of being alone also dramatically increased my pleasure in so doing.

For the rest of the afternoon I looked at the two snow couloirs that led from the snowfield on the western flank of the mountain to the South Ridge above. Neither looked as steep as the one we’d just climbed on Warden Peak, although both were considerably longer. If I was careful, either one would go, I was certain. Getting to them, however, was another issue.

From camp under the West Ridge, my proposed route led into a stand of dwarf old growth. The trees would be well spaced, I surmised, and access from there onto the slopes above, still well covered in snow at this time of the year,

would likely not present a lot of bush. But after that, the snow slopes might be tricky. There was no clear line from forest to couloir, and I would have to follow a complicated path if I didn’t want to get blocked by rock outcrops or melting rivers.

It was a long, lazy afternoon. Mosquitoes were in full spring bloom. I studied and re-studied the topography until certain I had the key points memorized, mindful that when on the slope itself, things would likely look different.

Now, which couloir to choose? The left one appeared the better of the two. It was early evening, and I had just made the mental decision to go with the left, when a huge snow avalanche fell off the cliffs to the right of the right-hand one. The noise of fall-

ing debris went on for over a minute. I squinted at the slope, wondering where all that debris had come from, that now lay exposed on ledges, or strewn down the snow below. If there were more slides from concealed gullies, perhaps I should rethink the left-hand couloir. It too had hidden ground above. The right-hand one, in contrast, appeared more open. Perhaps the right-hand one was better after all.

By 4:30 a.m. there was light enough to see, and by 5:00 I was away from camp, the snow patches still soft underfoot after a warm night. The forest was open, as I’d hoped, and the snow slope above proved long but not complicated. On the previous evening I’d estimated two hours to the base of the couloir, but I made it in an hour and a half. Always nice to be ahead of a schedule, even if it’s a speculative one. Near the avalanche debris, I stopped and put on crampons. The silence of the early morning was absolute. Normally I might have chosen just to boot up the couloir, but today I was alone. Being solo meant I needed to take the utmost caution.

The couloir stretched up long and steep, but not nervously so. I started a rhythm of two steps, up axe, two steps, up axe. Within a short time I was sweating under my helmet. Below, the moat seemed to be a long way below. Above, the snow tapered to a chute that was less than five metres wide at the exit point. Two steps, up axe. Two steps, up axe. The rhythm kept me from thinking too long or hard. Just keep the tempo, I told myself, and you’ll be there in no time.

The angle increased imperceptibly, and I found myself pausing to take a breather, and to stay focused. Don’t look down. Just keep the rhythm. Set mini-stages. Get to that bump in the snow. Keep going until opposite that rock spur on the left. Climb until the crack in the ice. Nearing the top,

the slope eased, until finally I was kicking off my crampons and hiking up easy rocks to the South Ridge, relief and pleasure flooding over me.

Here, I made a mistake, and turned left toward Victoria Peak. There was a faint trail that led along the ridge, which soon became narrow and steep, with precipices plunging down on either side. After fifteen minutes I reached a spot where any further progress was impossible. Before me, a steep notch led over a 100 metres down to a snow-covered saddle. Beyond, a huge blank wall on Victoria Peak showed clearly that this was not the way to gain the summit.

A momentary doubt, as I struggled to connect what I had heard about the route with what I saw in front of me. And then, far below on the snow to the southeast, I saw a faint line of tracks. That was obviously the way, but how to get there? First, I'd have to retreat from where I was. Twenty minutes back, the ridge flattened out and I could see where to descend to those tracks that were now not so far below.

What comforts there are in seeing the evidence of humans! Without the company of others (something so basic that we take it for granted when climbing) the loneliness of the setting, the brooding nature of the black basalt cliffs, and the silent isolation all dissolved in seeing those tracks in the snow, faint as they were.

They led around the southeast snow bowl to the start of a scramble up through the lower cliffs. From a distance, there seemed to be no line of weakness in those black crags, but as I approached, a faint ramp gradually morphed into a well-trodden scramble up an adequately wide staircase. The only problem was the warm weather, which was melting snow patches higher up, sending cascades of frigid water onto the ramp below, and forcing a rapid traverse of the first section.

The track, well-used, continued up to the right. I became aware that as the cliffs below increased, the ones above diminished at a similar rate, leading hopefully to the upper talus slopes. Finally, when the track could climb to the right no more, but ended in a sudden drop-off, a short broken wall and a line of knotted tape slings indicated the route. Carefully avoiding the tapes (both because of their unknown strength and for aesthetic reasons) I scrambled to a broad shelf above on firm brown rock.

The track had led far to the right, and a long climbing traverse to the left was needed to get under the summit. But which exactly was the summit? I thought I remembered that Phil Stone's guidebook had a photo in which the top of the peak was in cloud, so there was no way of knowing which of the many towers on the quite lengthy ridge was the highest. But wait a minute! In the snow slopes near the top there were faint tracks again, leading to the left-most spur.

I took a breather for a quick snack, and to assess the risks above. The slope looked stable, and the weather was holding. There was little wind, and high cloud spared me the heat

of the previous day. At the first snow slope I again put on crampons, just to be extra safe. The snow was firm and the axe penetrated easily. Yet being alone made everything more intense – the snow seemed somehow more tactile, the sound of crampon on ice sharper, the lichen on the rocks more defined, the handholds more acute. Gaining height, I was becoming progressively more excited as I neared the top.

A steep but short snow slope led into a steeper rock chimney, which I climbed without removing my crampons. Above, it was apparent there were no more snow patches, no more surprises. The peak had to be less than a 100 metres higher. I built a temporary cairn to assist me on the descent, and then continued up in boots, the rubber soles quiet on the rock after the scraping of the crampon points.

A final short ridge, and there was the summit cairn. The western side of the peak came into view and far below I could see where the tent was pitched, among the late spring snow patches. I glanced at my watch – it had taken four hours. A feeling of great peace filled the space around the top, brought on by the pleasure of moving quickly but safely over complicated ground. The climb itself had not been difficult – the single challenge of the past few hours had been to stay on route. Getting lost would quickly have changed an easy scramble into a complex undertaking.

Taking off my pack, I pulled out a bottle of water and a snack, and sat near the cairn, drinking in the view and feeling my heart rate dropping to normal. It was grand to be there, alone, atop such a fine peak. And it was all mine for the hour, perhaps the day, maybe even the week. It didn't compensate for the lack of a climbing partner with whom to share the day's pleasures, but it did feel good to be alive and on top of the world. The bronze plaque next to the summit register said it all: "They hold the heights they won."

Moyeha Mountain

Lindsay Elms

July 18 - 19

Moyeha Mountain is one of those peaks that many consider a remote and difficult mountain to get to, hence the reason why it has seen very few ascents. The few ascents it has seen were via Tenant Lake and the ridge towards Mount Thelwood from Mount Myra then down into the Thelwood Creek and up the mountains northern snowfield. In Phil Stone's Island Alpine guide book he talks about the alternative approach from Jim Mitchell Lake and then up the Thelwood Valley. He says: "This [route] has the benefit of close



Valerie Wootton on the summit of Moyeha Mountain PHOTO: LINDSAY ELMS

road access on the Jim Mitchell Lake Road from Buttle Lake Parkway but comes at a high price. The bushwhack up the Thelwood valley is a trying feat of endurance with sustained B3 throughout the valley.” I am about to refute that statement as Val and I had a beautiful trip up Moyeha Mountain via the Thelwood valley this year.

I am continually surprised how trip information appears to fall into place just at the appropriate time. I had been considering Moyeha Mountain for some time and had even thought about a winter ski trip via the Thelwood valley as a prospect, however, it never happened. I decided that the bushwhack couldn’t be that bad as I had spent hours studying the topo map for the best route and I thought I had come up with a plan. The day of reckoning had arrived! We had decided to go in Friday afternoon/evening after getting off work at 2:30, however, before then we were down paddling in the canoe around Comox Harbour on the Tuesday evening when I saw Karl Stevenson (author of the first guide book to Strathcona Park) on his boat. We stopped and began chatting about the mountains and then I mentioned we were going into Moyeha Mountain. Karl informed us he had been in several times to Greenview Lake from Jim Mitchell/Thelwood Lake, most recently was last year. He then told us about the route he had established from the head of Thelwood Lake up to Greenview Lake. Aha, I thought, here is my chance to get some first-hand information to make our trip easier. We pulled the map out and he showed me where the route went and described in detail the intricacies of the route almost to the point of where to put our feet with every step! The mountain felt like it was already in the bag!

Friday afternoon we quickly loaded up the vehicle, grabbed our supper out of the fridge and drove around to Buttle Lake. We then continued up past the Bedwell Lake trailhead to Jim Mitchell Lake. Here we unloaded everything out of the vehicle, put it into the canoe and then we had a quick supper. It took us fifteen minutes to paddle up Jim Mitchell Lake to the cat-track that we were to portage. First we carried our packs through to Thelwood Lake which took us fifteen minutes then we hiked back and picked up the canoe. The portage took a bit longer as it wasn’t flat but was up and down and quite rough in places, but doable! We then just had to paddle up Thelwood Lake to Thelwood Creek, passed all the dead snags and into the forest. After setting up camp we scouted around for the route and once found we returned

to the tent to get away from the no-see-ums.

Saturday morning we were up early and away by 5:45 a.m. following the route up onto a bench above a side creek (not Thelwood Creek) that goes up the south side of Greenview Lake. Eventually the route dropped down to the creek and then zig-zagged up onto a rocky bench. We by-passed several small tarns and after two hours we were sitting down beside the alluring Greenview Lake. Steep bluffs diverged into the lake all around and reflected in its mirrored water was Mount Thelwood. It was a beautiful day: clear blue sky, a great route and tantalizing mountains stood in front of us.

The rolling rocky benches continued and we arrived at a small lake one kilometre southwest of Greenview Lake. We were in the open alpine now and could easily see where we had to go. Beyond the lake a short draw went up to a ridge and then a chain of mountain tarns linked to a larger frozen lake under the mountain’s West Face. We stayed on the south side of the tarns as there were bluffs on the other side and then we walked across the frozen lake. Our eyes were continually drawn to Moyeha Mountain as we picked the snow ramps that would lead us through the bluffs to the upper snowfield.

Route finding up the mountain was easy as there was just enough snow linking the benches and ramps. We put our crampons on for that extra adhesion on the steepening snow. We eventually emerged on the upper snowfield and traversed up and around onto the north side of the mountain. A short scramble up the rocks and we were on the summit at 12:15. What a great view point! Mariner Mountain just to our south and the ridge connecting to Mount Tom Taylor; Mount Thelwood to the north and all the peaks of Strath-

cona Park and beyond; and Mount Splendour, Scimitar, the Scissors and Lone Wolf to the west. Below us twisted the Moyeha River down to the west coast! What a place to plan future trips! Although there was a cairn on the summit there was no summit register, but the brass bolt cemented to the rock by the surveyors in 1937 was still there.

We only spent thirty minutes on top as it was a long way back to camp. The return trip was straight forward and pleasant although we misplaced the route when descending the rocky bench east of Greenview Lake. We lost a bit of time trying to find it but soon gave up and bushwhacked down to the creek where we soon picked the route up again. We arrived back at camp after twelve and a half hours. The next day we paddled and portaged back to the vehicle satisfied with the ascent. Chris Wille, after recalling his solo trip to Moyeha Mountain in 2000, said: "It was a very special, beautiful place, untouched like a sleeping lion." What more can I add!

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Name origin and peak history:

Moyeha Mountain was adopted on March 13, 1947 by Norman Stewart, BCLS, in association with the river of the same name. The river's name was adopted in 1934 by the Hydrographic surveyors after the Moyehai Indian Reserve near the mouth of the river.

The mountains first recorded ascent was in 1937 when the surveyor, Norman Stewart, made a topographical survey from its summit. A brass bolt was cemented to the summit rocks and is still evident, however, it appears as though earthquake action may have moved the rocks somewhat. From what I have been able to glean, the mountain has seen about half a dozen ascents (but this could be wrong) with a winter ascent by Doug Wale in 1999.

Mount George V and Peak 1920

Tony Vaughn
July 18-21

July 18 was one of those hot and sunny days we'd been waiting for all through a long cold spring. Perversely we were now wishing for some of that cool cloudy weather as we hiked in towards Circlet Lake with full packs on a trip to climb Mount George V and Peak 1920.

We had started out after lunch at the Ravens Lodge having driven up that morning from Victoria. The trail was mostly clear with a few patches of snow still lingering on and



Remaining snow patches on Mount George V PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN

defying the heat. As we passed the end of Helen McKenzie Lake on the usual wet and muddy section of trail, we ran into momma bear and her two Labrador sized cubs no more than ten feet away crossing the trail heading for the lake. She rapidly chased her cubs up the nearest tree while she watched and waited for us to go by. We decided it was not prudent to stop and take photos, much as we would have liked to, so our encounter went unrecorded as did a chance to win the coveted Nature award in the annual photo contest.

By late afternoon we had reached the ridge above Circlet Lake and decided to set up camp. It wasn't long before the bugs found us. They descended in their millions, obviously starved for fresh blood. We turned in very early that night and arose very early next morning. It was not, however, early enough to beat the bugs, which at least added extra protein to our breakfast.

It was shortly after noon when we reached the summit of Mount Frink. Looking down the West Ridge to the Eric/Ralph Pass at a 500 metre descent followed by a 500 metre return ascent with full packs, it was an easy decision to camp on top of Mount Frink and day trip our objectives, particularly as it was early enough in the season for there still to be snow for water on Frink.

Next morning we left with light packs and followed a cairned route down off the side of the West Ridge. The cairns were few and far between but gave us a general direction to follow for the easiest route down to the end of the ridge and a steep drop off down to the col. At this point there was no obvious route to follow so we worked our way down broad heather ledges until we reached one with no visible way off. We had been following game trails thus far and so continued on until we were above Charity Lake. This obviously was not the right way so we backtracked until we noticed signs of travel that disappeared into the krumholtz. Pushing aside the bush-



Martin Smith on the summit of Mount George V PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN

es, we saw obvious signs that others had been this way. Sure enough the route went across and down coming out on a scree slope with a cairn at the top, a sure sign that this was the way others had gone. In fact it appeared to be the only way down through the cliff band without having to use a rope. Once we reached this spot a well marked trail took us down to the Eric/Ralph Col and a much needed break. Getting down the cliff to the col turned out to be the crux of the trip!

Following our break we climbed out of the pass and onto the easy snow slopes on the west side of Mount George V. Continuing around until we reached the cliffs dropping down into the Ralph River valley, where we turned east carrying on till we came close to the pass between George V and Peak 1920. From here we went up an easy gully to wide gentle slopes that lead to the summit. Just below the summit we found the register tube, minus its cover. We returned it to the summit cairn, repaired the tube and added a few fresh sheets of dry paper. The soggy register we brought out to be dried and entered into the archives of the club. From Mount George V it was down to the GV/1920 Col for lunch, then another easy hike up to the top of Peak 1920. After lunch we retraced our steps back to camp finding it much quicker and easier now that we knew the route. We reached camp just before 7 p.m..

The next day's trip out started in thick fog which we broke through by the time we had come off the ridge part-way down to Circlet Lake. As usual, the hike out seemed to go on forever but was in fact much quicker than we expected, allowing us time for a beer at the Raven Lodge before heading for home.

Participants: Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn.

Flower Ridge to Cream Lake High Route

Dave Campbell

July 25-27

The origins of this trip first came from the "Top 10" lists in Phil Stone's *Island Alpine* guide. He recommends the Rosseau circumnavigation as being one of the top ten backpacks or ski touring trips on the Island. In 2007 a club trip was posted from Cream Lake over to Flower Ridge and I was pretty excited about checking it out. Unfortunately, bad weather and a road washout meant the trip didn't go ahead, but the seed was planted.

I decided to post a club trip for a summer traverse from Cream Lake to Flower Ridge, and then reversed the direction to try to take advantage of ending at either Price Creek or Bedwell Lake as being a way to hitch, bike or walk back to the cars at the end of the trip.

The usual ten people signed up for the trip and by the time we left we were down to Jeff and Kathleen Ward and me. We headed off early Friday morning and were on the move up the Flower Ridge trail at about 11:00.

We had fantastic weather as we made our way up to the top of the ridge. Once up top we had great views up along Buttle Lake and south towards Mount Septimus, Rosseau, Nine Peaks and Big Interior Mountain. We also had good views over to the traverse from last year over Shepherd Ridge. We called it a day at about 6 p.m. at a set of tarns along the ridge as the weather began to cloud in and we finished dinner just as it began to shower.

In the morning it was still clouded in and a little moist. We were able to make our way along the rest of Flower Ridge without trouble though the views were pretty limited. We did get to see over to Cream Lake - our destination for the day. It looked pretty close as the crow flies yet we still had to work our way over a lot of terrain to get there.

From the end of Flower Ridge we dropped down to Price Pass. The route was fairly straightforward but was pretty steep grassy slopes. We had lunch at Price Pass and lamented the fact that it was so socked in we couldn't see the route up to the shoulder on the east side of The Mithorns.

We followed the ridge up from Price Pass to the top of a small knoll. This was the main unknown for the trip as I had not heard any reliable information at how tricky this section was other than one report of a party being unable to get past. The backside of the knoll was steep on all sides, and required a bit of scouting to find a way down. At that it was pretty steep and bushy but we were able to down climb it without bringing the rope out.

From the base of the knoll we hit snow and put on crampons and took out the ice axes. We had a false start head-

ing towards the first gully system to the east of the ridges coming down from The Misthorns summit which would have forced us to gain too much elevation too fast. We backtracked a hundred metres and dropped below a cliff band so that we could traverse out eastwards. We went across for a few hundred metres then angled up diagonally. There was some great views looking down to Margaret Lake and it started to clear up as we approached the col and had views back to Mount Rosseau.

From the col it was fairly easy going along snow on the south side of The Misthorns and Rosseau. We dropped down a hundred metres past a meltwater lake then did a short climb up to a bench high on the shoulder of Mount Rosseau. I spotted a black bear wandering around in the scree and as we passed he ran up the slope a ways to get more distance between us and have a better perch to watch us.

The traverse was steep enough that we had to pay attention not to slip and it took a while to complete the entire length to the col below the West Ridge of Mount Septimus.

At the end of the bench a little bit of route-finding was required to get into the couloir that comes down off the side of Mount Septimus. Once we found the right gully it was fairly easy to drop down onto the snow. I glissaded while Jeff and Kath boot-packed down the last kilometre or so to Cream Lake. The X-Gully route on Septimus was starting to melt out and looked like there could be some difficulties getting passed moats that were forming. Originally Jeff and I had been tossing around the idea of giving Septimus a go on our way by but after checking out the route and given the lateness in the day, we gave up our aspirations. We pitched camp near the lake after what was a fairly long day.

The last day we were up and off early. We followed the trail back down to Bedwell Lake without too many problems. There was still a fair bit of snow around and we lost the trail in a couple spots (including one unnecessary bush thrash down a cliff band).

We got down to the trailhead and debated what to do about getting back to the car (which was parked at the Flower Ridge trailhead ten kilometres away). We decided to wait for a family that we saw on the trail to come back and see if we could grab a ride down with them. It took about three hours before they returned and luckily they had a big truck which could fit all our gear and us! On the drive down we were thankful we didn't have to hike back to the car.

Overall, a fun time was had. A little more strenuous than I was thinking. Difficulties were mainly in route-finding and the step down off of the knoll above Price Pass. There are also some longer steep side hill traverses which we were grateful to have the crampons on for.

Participants: Dave Campbell, Jeff and Kathleen Ward.

Rambler Peak

George Urban

July 26-28

Rambler Peak guards the east flank of the Elk River pass at the headwaters of the Elk River. At an elevation of 2105 meters, it is the fifth highest mountain on Vancouver Island and is in close proximity to the other giants of Strathcona Park, Elkhorn and Colonel Foster. It's jagged peaks can easily be seen throughout Strathcona and hence has held my interest for many years as other mountains were being explored.

Our group of five from Victoria met 2 climbers from Courtnay and made it to the Elk River trailhead by 12:30. The hike up the Elk River Trail (ERT) moves along easily, beginning in sunshine and ending in a light rain. We decided to camp in the old growth forest of the upper Elk valley reasoning that this would get us closer to Rambler and hence make for an easier summit day. The forest here is a magical place with ancient mountain hemlock and little understory vegetation. The Elk River itself disappears into the limestone river bed just north of the old growth leaving the forest in a quiet stillness.

The following morning we were up and ready to go by 07:30. Immediately on leaving the forest the ERT enters an area of slide alder and huge boulders. The trail degenerates into a difficult to find flagged route eventually emerging from the alder and ascending on the east flank of the valley crossing numerous slide paths.

We proceeded up the centre of the valley on hard snow to a beautiful area of small lakes just below the Elk River Pass. This is spectacular alpine country and would make a good summer camp for climbing Slocumb Peak or attempting many of the other routes up Rambler. From just below the pass we decided to climb up a snow ramp to the left and gained Rambler's south col. Here are the first views to the east of the Golden Hinde, El Piveto and the chain of peaks on the Cervus-Wolfe divide.

The way up from the south col is obvious with the lower east gully a thin ribbon of snow set against the red rock of Rambler's east flank. The climb up this gully is steep but went smoothly with crampons and ice axe. Near the top of the lower gully the snow gave way to rock and some loose gravel which required some care.

We emerged from the lower gully onto the Rambler Glacier in full sunshine. Immediately to our left was an impressive pinnacle of rock, Rambler Junior. We crossed the glacier to the north side of the summit block and were surprised to see the upper gully free of all snow. We were expecting a

snow climb and knew that a rock climb and rappel descent would be both more difficult and slow our group down. It was just after noon and we decided to continue on.

The upper gully starts on loose rock but is followed by numerous good hand holds. We emerged from the upper gully onto an exposed shoulder with 20 meters of low 5th class climbing on good rock to the summit. The time was 15:00 hrs, 7 hours from camp. The views were spectacular. It was the kind of weather you prayed for on the summit. 15 minutes later we began our descent with a combination of rappelling and belaying. Unfortunately this is a long process for a group of seven made all that much longer when the rope became caught at the last rappel station. We down climbed/ glissaded the lower gully and reached the south col at 20:00 hrs. Darkness overtook us as we were crossing the last avalanche path on the ERT and by sheer luck were able to navigate the slide alder by starlight to the old growth forest. We arrived at camp with headlamps on, tired and with one sprained knee in the group after a 15 hour day. All in all, a great day in the mountains.

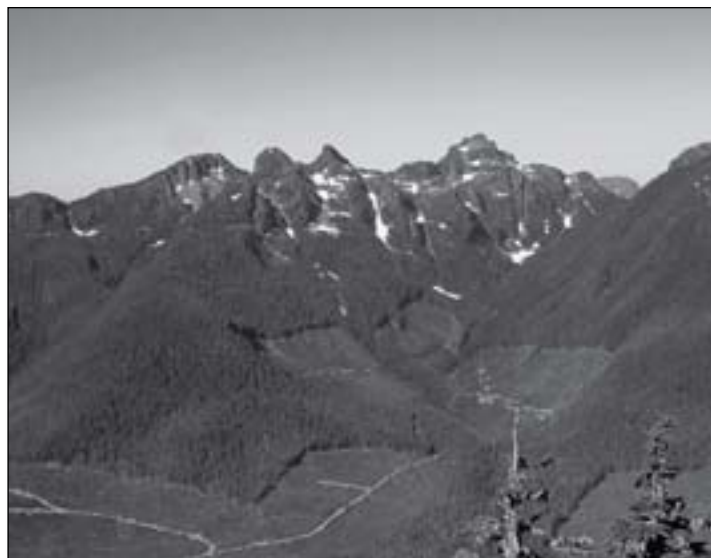
Participants: Russ Moir, Yan Yesthin, Paul Erickson, George Urban, Karun Thanjavur, Tawney Lem, Tim Turray

Naka Peak* and the Bevy of Unnamed 5,000 foot Peaks

Lindsay Elms
August 7

An avalanche can create havoc on the landscape: it leaves an ugly scar that can take decades to regenerate; trees are twisted and gnarled into bizarre shapes or uprooted and broken; and soil and vegetation is eroded down to the bare rock. Many times this occurs in creek beds when the huge quantities of snow careen down from the peaks and steep slopes above, taking the path of least resistance. However, there are times when the paths left behind have opened up highways through stretches of second growth timber that would be hideous and extremely time consuming to try and force a route through – especially when logging roads that once criss-crossed the slopes have now rejuvenated into a thick, luxuriant jungle. South of Mount Derby and Peel, in the junction that forms between the Tsitika River and Naka Creek, I found one such path that gave me easy access to a series of unnamed 5,000 foot peaks that have seen very little climbing activity.

After driving up from Comox Wednesday afternoon, I turned off the Highway onto the Tsitika Main and trav-



Peaks 5300 and Naka Peak PHOTO: LINDSAY ELMS

eled down that for seven kilometres to where the Naka Main joins. I followed that for about five kilometres then turned left onto the South 800 which I followed as far as I could drive before it became too overgrown. After parking I took a brief walk to see if I could follow the road to a spot where I could access the old growth, however, the road very quickly became over grown and thick with alder. After five minutes of fighting with the vegetation, the road opened out into a creek bed that appeared to go straight up between the peaks. It was this creek bed that previous avalanches had funneled down and it made for a veritable highway that I planned to go up tomorrow.

In the morning the thick alder was dry as no dew had formed during the night so I was able to remain dry as I made my way to the creek. Once in the creek bed I gained elevation quickly, passing the upper limits of the old logging and now becoming hemmed in by old growth timber. About two thirds of the way up, the creek became too steep and I deked out to the right into the forest and climbed parallel to it. It wasn't long before the trees gave way to heather which in turn became scree slopes and I was able to get back into the creek bed and get onto the residual snow. To speed the ascent I switched to my boots and crampons and soon caught a glimpse of one of the 5,300+ foot peaks as its summit began to appear on the horizon. The other twin summit was immediately to my right. After cresting into the upper boulder filled basin I saw an easy route up the southern summit via its North Ridge. After two and a half hours I was standing on its summit (Grid Ref. 795820) under a clear blue sky. I didn't spend much time on top as there were quite a few summits that I hoped to get around to so I had to keep moving. The northern of the two summits was a little higher and again straight-forward as I made my way up. Several bumps to the

northwest (about 1.5 kilometres) was the highest peak in the range: the unnamed 5,600+ foot peak which I began calling Naka Peak (Grid Ref. 783830). I have not progressed beyond the old map and compass and upgraded to the GPS therefore I can't offer latitude and longitude readings. I descended off the ridge and over another 5,300+ peak then made my way up Naka Peak. On the summit was a large cairn which I had been told was up there. Last year an acquaintance from Port Hardy had climbed the peak and mentioned that there was already a cairn up there but neither of us knew who erected it. I only spent a few minutes on top as I had been without water for three and a half hours and I could see a couple of alluring ponds six hundred feet below towards the saddle to the north. I made a quick beeline directly to them and polished off a litre of water like it was a pitcher of beer which reminded me of my misspent youth! Here I took a fifteen minute break.

The second half of the trip was to climb the three peaks (or some might say bumps) to the north that are between 5,200 and 5,300+ feet. I am not going to get into what constitutes an individual peak or summit as all I was wanting to do was ascend each highpoint along the ridge to satisfy my own cravings. Half way along the ridge I dropped down a snow gully to the basin below (to the north) and meandered passed several beautiful mountain tarns. It was then a six hundred foot climb to the northern most highpoint (Grid ref. 795853). Six hours after beginning I was on the summit and my cravings were satisfied. I got to spend a half an hour enjoying the views of the familiar surrounding mountains from the top. All that was left was the return trip.

I followed the ridge back around to the point I had first reached and then I dropped back down towards the saddle half way between to the two groups of peaks. I had eyed up an alternate route back which basically traversed under the bluffs back around to the ascent gully. This went as planned and all I had to do was descend the heather slopes into the forest, find a way back into the gully and then follow it back down to the old logging road. I was back at my vehicle in just under ten hours, pumped at having completed all the peaks I had wanted to climb all in one fell swoop. I wouldn't have to return to these peaks and I could concentrate on other objectives on future trips on the island. Of this there is no shortage!

** This is not the official name of the peak as yet but is the name submitted to the Geographic Naming Dept. It is located at the head of Naka Creek (hence the peaks name), on the Adam River 1:50,000 topo map. I have used feet instead of metres for the heights of the peaks as the map I have is still in one hundred feet contour intervals.*

Mount Regan: Hmm, Blue Gaiter?

Peter Rothermel

August 8-10



South aspect of Mt Regan PHOTO: PETER ROTHERMEL

The year before while standing on Mount Mitchell, Tak Ogasawara pointed over to Mount Regan and said, "next year!" So I had a year to bone-up on the route beta for this next peak over 6,000 feet. As it turned out, BC Parks invited me on a Bedwell Valley inspection in September 2007 and we flew in with a helicopter. We passed right between Mount Albert Edward and Mount Regan, with me snapping photos of our intended route as fast as I could.

Then in June 2007, Tak and I took a reccy trip up the Oyster Main to access the North Ridge of Mount Regan. Knowing that the road is gated and only open from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and that camping isn't allowed, we weren't under any illusion that we could summit with only about ten hours climbing time. It's too bad that decent access to Strathcona Park is often at the whim of a private corporation. Looking at Mount Regan's western and eastern aspects, you soon come to realize that the North Ridge is narrow with big steep drops offs on both sides.

That day we gained 500 metres in about two and a half hours before we decided to turn back due to time constraints. We weren't even half way to the summit! With better access this could be a classic island climb.

Two months later on August 8, we returned to Mount Regan, but this time we went in from Paradise Meadows as part of a leisurely three day trip. On this hike were Tak, Linda and myself. Linda is relatively new to mountaineering,



Linda and Tak on the summit of Mt Regan PHOTO: PETER ROTHERMEL

but what she lacks in technical skills, she makes up for in exuberance and her love for the mountains. I think her goal is to go on every club trip!

Mount Regan is sort of the unloved step sister to the ever popular royal consort of Mount Albert Edward. Where Albert Edward sees hundreds of ascents every year, poor old Regan might only see one ascent every couple of years.

We had an easy four hour hike into Circlet Lake where we set up camp. On the trip in we stopped at Sid's Cabin since Linda had never been there before. Inside the cabin was a single blue gaiter hanging from a nail and I just kind of stared at it thinking to myself, "blue gaiter, hmm, means something." But I couldn't remember so I left it for the owner to reclaim.

Next day we prepared our day packs and headed up towards Albert Edward. Our aim was to drop down the ramp from near the summit of Albert Edward and reach the col between the two mountains. The ramp starts about 70 metres below the summit of Albert Edward where there is usually a lingering patch of snow. We reached the start of the ramp after about four hours hiking from camp.

It wasn't the ramp I had pictured in my mind but more a series of ledges and scramble sections to reach a thirty degree snowfield. Going down we climbed mostly facing out with only a couple of places where we felt the need to face in. There's a bit of exposure and the rock is loose in places but mostly solid if you search it out.

When we got to the snow it was soft and I kicked a few steps in and proclaimed that crampons were not needed. As we traversed downward the soft snow got thinner and the remnant glacier underneath got harder. Although the slope

eased back a bit, we noted ahead that we needed to traverse above a crevasse. Directly below us, about 30 metres was a small screed ledge so I decided to climb down and put my crampons on. The lower I got, the thinner the snow was and the harder the icy surface got, until my boot wouldn't penetrate at all and I slid the last five or so metres. When Linda followed, she lost purchase and slipped almost 10 metres. The scree ledge, while not looking too large, was enough to stop her, but still the look on her face would have made a great photo. Surefooted Tak made it down without a slip. With crampons on the rest of the slope was easy!

We passed an ugly rock chute off of Albert Edward that looked like it regularly sent rocks down on schedule like a Swiss train. We climbed up and

over a huge moraine wall of loose rock and reached the col. Above us was a loose but easy gully to the base of Regan's West Ridge which was followed by a steep headwall. We found a chimney comprised of a whitish coloured rock and scrambled up it. Once on the ridge the angle eased to where we rarely needed our hands although it was very rotten. The ridge went fast and when I realized we were at the summit, I let Linda claim first ascent of the day. I brought up a summit register tube and book and good thing, as there was none. After a long lunch in the sun where we picked out distant peaks, we headed down.

We descended the West Ridge quickly and when we arrived at the top of the white chimney we decided to drop down a bit further and try to find an easier way down the headwall. We did find a way but realized the white chimney was the better option. One interesting note: At the bottom of our descent chimney, there were about a dozen plants called Sky Pilot growing. They are rare on Vancouver Island and I just keep running into them on the mountains.

The climb up onto Albert Edward's shoulder was a fun scramble with each of us picking our own line. Of course, once at the top we took the ten minutes to run up and tag the summit of Albert Edward.

Back to camp where we had a long dinner and an even longer sleep! Leaving camp the next morning at 11:30 made for a relaxing trip to the mountains.

Participants: Tak Ogasawara, Linda Berube and Peter Rothermel.

Marble Peak (Marble Meadows)

Martin Smith
August 14



Marble Peak from Morrison Spire PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

For years I've been telling myself that I really ought to visit Marble Meadows plateau. However, since I don't own a boat and have never so much as sat in a kayak or a canoe, access has always been a problem. This year, however, a friend offered me a ride down Buttle Lake in his boat and my chance to visit this unique and lovely area had finally come.

I spent nearly a week up there and had a great time fossil hunting (there's not much "hunting" to do – they're EVERYWHERE) and marveling at the geology and the eye-popping views of mountain and lake but there's been plenty written about Marble Meadows in previous editions of the Island Bushwhacker and elsewhere, so I hadn't really thought that a trip report would be necessary. However, my ears pricked up when, over beers the night before I left, Lindsay casually mentioned that Marble Peak was no "gimme". In fact, Peter Rothermel had also noted this in his report in the 2005 Annual. Both gentlemen are correct. The route to the top involves some tricky route finding and exposed, stiff 3rd Class scrambling on loose rock; well worth reporting on in fact.

Situated high above the west shore of the centre of Buttle Lake, Marble Peak is a familiar sight to anyone driving down Westmin Mine Road towards the south end of the lake. It even has one of those information signs pointing it out for all the tourists who drive down the lake.

From Phillips Creek, Parks' excellent, switchback trail took me – and a full pack – up to the plateau crest in about four hours. I based out of the Wheaton Hut – about another hour west of the crest and proceeded to enjoy all the usual plateau diversions as described above.

On the fourth day of my trip, I left the hut early and headed over to the col between Marblerock and Globeflower Lakes. From this location there is a clear and cairned track going northeast off the col.

I walked up the lower part of the Southwest Ridge for 400 metres and through a characteristic limestone band to N49° 41.505 W125° 36.795 where a large bluff blocked further easy progress. From the west (Wheaton) side, and apart from this bluff, the Southwest Ridge looks like an easy walk-up. From the east (Limestone) side, however, the true nature of the beast is apparent. At least two places are visible where the Southwest Ridge is split from east to west by gaps that must be crossed in order to make forward progress. On closer, first-hand examination, there are, in fact, three gaps.

At the large bluff I descended briefly but steeply to the right down a sandy gully. I then traversed ENE for approximately 200 metres across ledges at the foot of the cliff above and found a narrow, vegetated gully heading up towards the SW ridge. The gully went at Class 3 and thereafter, I traversed a few metres to the right and found another, very narrow "squeeze" gully that took me further in the required direction. Peter notes this feature in his 2005 report. Some nice, exposed and strong juniper roots are available to help you into the squeeze gully.

Emerging from here in the neighbourhood of N49° 41.574 W125° 36.592 I was back on the Southwest Ridge once more.

Only 75 metres along the ridge the next gap barred the way. I was faced with a short but vertical wall above a platform – perhaps a chockstone – right in the middle of the gap. I climbed down onto the platform and examined the wall. It looked climbable to me but not down-climbable on my own. Instead I descended to the right once more, this time for quite a distance – perhaps 30 or 40 metres – before finding the gully that leads back to the ridge for the second time. This one had a bushy juniper at its base. I hung off its branches and went around the front with some exposure, although it might have been possible to squeeze through behind it.

The next gap was only 60 metres away and, although it looked like it was going to be difficult, it was, in fact, the easiest.



The last gully crossing PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

I made a short descent, once more to the right, from where a step-across to a solid ledge revealed itself. I then climbed up the opposing ledge, also on solid rock and onto the summit block proper. Thereafter it was just an easy scramble following a few cairns to the top.

The summit has a large cairn but no register. I didn't hang around it too long since the cairn was covered in hundreds of biting flies. Anyway, the best all round views, particularly down to Buttle Lake, are to be had by going a few metres north down off the summit and climbing back up to the east to the edge of a bluff there.

Marble Peak is the closest of the Meadows mountains to the plateau crest and the views are simply wonderful. If the weather is fine, almost the whole of Strathcona is visible from here in one stunning 360° panorama, all underpinned by the giddy drop down to Buttle Lake over 1,500 metres below.

The trip took me just under two hours one way from the Wheaton Hut. A swim in Marblerock Lake and a snooze made for a rather longer return leg.

Considering that it's four hours with a full pack to the plateau crest from Phillips Creek, an hour from there to the Globeflower/Marblerock col and a longish hour from there to the summit, Marble Peak is certainly a day trip candidate for those with a light pack, limited time and an interesting objective in mind. The real question would be, of course, with such beauty all around you, why rush it?

For more information, route photos and lots of panoramic summit views visit <http://www.summitpost.org/mountain/rock/433569/Marble-Peak.html>

Solo participant: Martin Smith.

Not mount what or where this time, but, Mount Russell again!

Lindsay Elms

August 15

It was thirteen years ago that I had last climbed Mount Russell (IB Annual, 1995 p. 22-23) and since then it has seen very few ascents (if any). I had climbed it from the Palmerston Creek side (east) when active logging roads brought me high into the valley. On that trip I suffered from a curable disease known as "Alpine Confusion." I say curable because it required the mist to clear (I was in a whiteout) for a brief moment so I could take a bearing with my compass to quickly confirm where I was. Basically I knew I was either to the north of the peak or south of the peak but as the terrain was very similar according to the map, I needed that brief clearance in weather. Fortunately I got that clearance and was able to confirm where I was and proceed to the real summit. This time I was planning on climbing it from the Naka Creek side (west).

On the trip the week before when I had gone into Naka Peak (unofficial name), I was able to look across at the logging roads which zig-zagged high onto the western slopes of the mountain that would make the ascent of Mount Russell an easy day trip. Val and I left home in the early hours of the morning and were able to drive to about 3,000 feet on the mountain, thus leaving another 2,700 feet to go. From where we parked we only had to walk the road a hundred metres then deek off into the slash, cut across it for a few minutes then enter the old growth. We were then able to pick up a ridge that swung around and up to the northern 5,488 foot summit. From this summit we descended the South Ridge and then followed the west ridge over another bump to the main summit of Mount Russell at 5,709 feet (1,740m). This time there was no "Alpine Confusion" as the weather was beautiful and we had full views all around. Below us to the south were all the beautiful little tarns that I had seen last time that look like it offered some wonderful ski terrain. However, what interested me the most were the logging roads on the south side of the Tlatlos Creek that would give us access to a spectacular rockwall and another unnamed 5,600 foot summit that I had been eyeing up for sometime.

I actually was looking at two options: one seemed to offer access from the west of the peak and the other from the east. After then conferring with my map I was able to deduce that the route from the east appeared to be the shorter, more straight-forward route. So, now all we had to do was descend the mountain back to the vehicle. We took an alternate route

down which was more direct and cut off some time and we arrived back at the vehicle about 3:00 in the afternoon. This gave us plenty of time to check out the access roads to the next peak we were planning to climb tomorrow.

Participants: Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Tlatlos Peaks

Lindsay Elms
August 16

After searching around yesterday afternoon in the South Tlatlos Valley for the logging road I had seen from the summit of Mount Russell, we eventually found the road and drove as high as we could until we came across road building equipment. It was obvious they had recently been working on the road and was due to come back again but as for when we didn't know. Knowing that weekends don't stop contractors from working we decided we had better not park next to their equipment so drove down a kilometre to where we could park and camp for the night. Next morning we were up early anticipating contractors coming up the road, however, it appeared maybe they were having the day off after-all. We hiked back up the road to their equipment, got across the section of road they were rebuilding and continued up the road to the end of the valley. Ahead I could see a five hundred foot climb up through old growth to a saddle on the ridge. This saddle would put us about two and a half kilometres east of the twin summits of the mountain I began referring to as the Tlatlos Peaks.

From the saddle we continued climbing up the ridge until we broke out into the alpine where we could see the peaks in the distance. It was another beautiful day without a cloud in the sky and the ridge was a pleasant hike with views to the south of Peak 5800 and Mounts Russell and Palmerston to the north. Eventually the final ridge rose above us to the first and slightly lower of the two summits! A little 4th/5th class scramble brought us out onto the summit where we got our first view of the impressive rockwall I knew existed on the nearby ridge from brief glimpses in the valley below. The near vertical wall was about five hundred feet high and whether the rock is of high enough quality for climbing is up for someone else to find out. As a self-confessed peak-bagger, rockwalls are not on my "bucket list!"

We scrambled down off the first summit and made our way over to the slightly higher summit to the west. There was no sign of any previous ascents, although on the flat ridge



The twin summits of the Tlatlos Peaks PHOTO: LINDSAY ELMS

above the rockwall a half kilometre away is a repeater tower owned by Western Forest Products so communication workers occasionally fly up for general maintenance and inspection. Whether they have the time and inclination to scramble across to the main peak I can't say but I know helicopter flying time isn't cheap so they probably haven't got much time to play!

We sat on the top for an hour enjoying the "summit high" we get from every mountain we climb. We eventually dragged ourselves off the summit and began the descent back to our vehicle. We still had one more day off and another summit was beckoning! Once back at the vehicle we drove out to the highway then up to the Mount Cain turn-off. Instead of going all the way up to the ski-hill we cut-off onto the Davie Road and drove out to the end of it which put us near the creek coming down between Mounts Sarai* and Abraham*.

As there are no recorded ascents or attempts on this peak that I know (Rick Eppler has looked at aerial photographs of it in the late 1970's) I have applied to the ministry that is responsible for the geographic naming of features in British Columbia to have the name Tlatlos Peaks officially recognized.

Participants: Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

* *Unofficial names but locally used and found in the guide book Island Alpine.*

Mount Abraham*

Lindsay Elms

August 17

After coming down off the Tlatlos Peaks and driving around to the end of the Adam Road which stops at the boundary with Schoen Lake Provincial Park, we still had several hours of baking in the summer sun, however, we managed to cool off (briefly) with a couple of cold beers before packing it in for the night. In the morning not only was the tent covered in dew but so was all the fireweed, salmonberries, devil's club and salal that we had to hike through to get to the old growth on the other side of the river. This river descends from a series of lakes between Mount Sarai* and Abraham and flows into the Davie River. Once across the river we started climbing up through an open forest in a southeast direction which would take us up to the western end of the mountain. After about two hours we broke onto heather slopes and then the alpine of the western summit. Although it was another beautiful day it felt like there was a slight change occurring: a few wispy clouds and a couple of degrees lower in temperature, however, I couldn't see any drastic changes for the day.

We climbed over the western summit and were soon confronted with loose, crumbly gendarmes on the ridge in front of us. Since we didn't want to waste time on these we took a steep narrow gully down the north side to the scree slopes then traversed across below the gendarmes to the next saddle. The saddle is located at the head of a big gully that goes all the way down to the lower lake in the valley below. We had looked at this a couple of years ago from Mount Sarai and thought it would be a great ascent route in the spring and a wicked ski descent. At this time of the year it was almost completely free of snow but would still make for a quick descent later in the day.

Again heather slopes took us to the top of the next summit but once more we were confronted with unexpected bluffs. This time we had to descend off the ridge to the south (above Schoen Lake) and then wind up through a series of steep gullies that eventually brought us out onto the final summit ridge. Ten more minutes and we were on the summit of Mount Abraham. Once more I was looking across at all the familiar peaks that I had climbed over the years and trying to see if I had missed any. The one glaring peak was the unnamed 5,700 foot peak near Mount Maquilla. (I eventually climbed this solo on September 18).

The descent down the gullies was straightforward and we soon were in the saddle above the big gully. Even without the snow we were able to descend the 1,500 feet in about

thirty minutes to the lake and have a late lunch. Although it was warm out it still wasn't "warm" enough for a dip in the lake (beside I believe if we were meant to swim we would have gills). I may have been born under the water-bearers sign of Aquarius but I am somewhat hydrophobic (unless the temperature is over 40 degrees outside).

From the outlet of the lake we descended on the south side via benches and relatively open timber, thus avoiding the bluffs and waterfalls of the river. At the bottom we crossed the river and struggled through the slash for ten minutes before we picked up the logging road back to our vehicle completing another successful weekend in the mountains of northern Vancouver Island.

Participants: Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

** Both of these peaks are not official names but are found in Philips Stone's mountain guide book Island Alpine.*

Name origin:

In Judaism, Sarai was married to Abram. When God told Abram to leave his homeland and journey to an unknown land Sarai accompanied him. However, when they arrived they were met with a famine and decided to take refuge in Egypt. Fearing that Sarai's beauty would put his life in danger if their true relationship became known, Abram proposed that she pass as his sister. As Abram had feared, Sarai was taken by Pharaoh, who rewarded Abram richly on her account. However, God struck Pharaoh and all his house with severe plagues, after which Pharaoh suspected the truth. He censured Abram and requested him to take his wife and depart. While God promised Abram that he would yet be a father of nations, Sarai remained childless. To help her husband fulfill his destiny, she offered her Egyptian handmaid Hagar to him as a concubine. Hagar became pregnant immediately, and began to despise her mistress. Sarai bitterly upbraided her husband, and Abram responded that she should do with her handmaid as she deemed best. Sarai's harsh treatment of Hagar forced the handmaid to flee to the desert, where she encountered an angel who announced that her children would be numerous and urged her to return to her mistress. After Hagar returned, she bore Abram a son whom he named Ishmael. Afterwards God changed their names to Abraham and Sarah to help them fulfill their new destiny as progenitors of the future nation of Israel. In Hebrew, Abraham means "father of many" while Sarai means "woman of high rank."

Beyond Paradise: The Fellowship Of The Curtain Ring

Peter Rothermel

August 28-31

I had been trying for years to organize a multi-day trip with the in-law side of my family. Everybody is always “definitely in” yet when the date comes around there’s enough excuses to fill a thick book. This year I had one exception, my niece Tricen. She had taken the COLT (Canadian Outdoor Leadership Training) course at Strathcona Park Lodge the year before and was raring to go. My friend Linda wanted in as well and since they are about the same age I thought they would get along fine, which they did.

We decided to stick with the original family plan which was to camp at Circlet Lake and day trip Mount Jutland, Mount Frink and Castlecrag Mountain. Besides, Linda wanted to do some peak bagging, so she could qualify for the Island Mountain Ramblers “Up Your Peaks” award for climbing so many peaks over a certain height, in a given time frame, which she did with summits to spare.

Since the first day was going to be an easy hike into Circlet Lake, we met at my place late morning to divvy up the group gear of tents, stove, fuel and such. I usually weigh my pack by standing on a bathroom scale with my pack on and then with it off and subtract my weight to get the pack weight. My pack was about 50 lbs. and Linda’s was about 45 lbs., with everything including water. Tricen’s pack was something like 70 lbs., before she had even put in water! I said, “What on earth have you got in there?” and she said, “Just the stuff I carried on my COLT course, I think.” I suggested we repack her bag and get rid of some weight but she said “No, I like a challenge.” She’s pretty thin and willowy but is in great shape and since the hike in is easy, I dropped the subject.

Once passed all of the boardwalks on the hike in, talk often trends towards Tolkien-like subjects, especially when Castlecrag looms into view - “ooh, Mordor!” Such was the case with us.

We took the short side trip to Sid’s cabin and when we looked inside, there was the lone blue gaiter I had seen two weeks previous and then Tricen exclaimed, “There’s my mom’s gaiter!” It turns out that my sister in law, Kari, had asked me to look out for the gaiter her daughter (Tricen) had borrowed and lost on her COLT course. So everything comes around eventually, except maybe my memory!

When we reached camp at Circlet Lake it started to rain and blow! Even with the heavy pack Tricen still had spring in her step and could have gone further. I had brought a three by four and a half metre sil-tarp so we set up our tents facing



The Fellowship on Mt Jutland PHOTO: PETER ROTHERMEL

in under the tarp and had a nice dry nest. In the morning I looked out and it was pouring and windy enough to keep the tarp from puddling. I resolved to sleep the entire day but by afternoon the weather started to clear a bit and I finally got out of bed. Day two was a complete write off!

Day three was looking good so we were up early packing for a day trip. Tricen pulls out a bag of Gorp that is as big as a horse’s feedbag and I comment, “That’s enough for all of us for the whole weekend.” and she says, “I brought one of these for each day.” Then she asks if anyone wants a banana, orange or apple because she has a bunch of them. No wonder her pack was so heavy - she had an entire grocery store inside! At one point Tricen rummaged into the lid of her pack and pulled out an old brass curtain ring and exclaimed, “That’s where it is!”

At any rate we got off early and were up on the ridge as the sunrise broke over the horizon. Our immediate goal was Mount Jutland! We are on the summit in three hours from camp and this was the first time for all of us. The Comox District Mountaineering Club has placed a well made register in the summit cairn so I didn’t have to repair or place a new one.

Our next objective was Mount Frink with the goal to do the Castlecrag circuit. At the crossroads cairn with the directional wood signs where the ridge starts up Mount Albert Edward, the clouds came in and it started to rain and hail with the wind picking up. People were bailing out of their summit bids: some were just dressed in light cotton clothing and soaking wet. Still we meet up with one sensible family that summited and were dressed for the occasion. Their young children were encouraged with a promise of a hot chocolate back at camp.

We continued on to Mount Frink in thickening clouds and I took a compass back-bearing of the way we came. On the summit of Frink the weather had deteriorated to a blizzard with sideways driving snow at times. In some small breaks we got a glimpse of Castlecrag, Mount George V, and Hope and Charity Lakes, but mostly it was a whiteout! We turn back and follow our compass bearings until we got to the Albert Edward/Jutland divide and of course the sun breaks out. Oh well, no circuit! We're high enough to get patchy cell phone coverage and Linda makes an emergency call on my cell phone and can only text message her sister, "am staying extra day, feed cat" before the batteries die.

Coming down we run into tents pitched everywhere and it dawns on me that this is the Labour Day weekend. The Circlet Lake camping area is overflowing and there are people everywhere and the trail into camp is a mud bog. It would be more apt to rename it "Circus Lake" yet we are still as much of the problem as everyone else. This is what results when a popular Provincial Park loses much of its access so that people tend to go to where it's easiest and these places then get overrun.

Back at camp the debate is on to stay an extra day or head out the next. Tricen and I are okay with an extra day but Linda is kind of wanting to scoot home. We decide to get up early, hoof it to Castlecrag and hike out in the evening. We fix camp for an early departure to Castlecrag and pack the rest of our gear for an afternoon exit.

On the morning of day four we leave camp early and when we come to the fork in the trail to Castlecrag, everything goes mellow - no mud and no people! Wow, sort of like I remembered my first trip up Albert Edward. We hiked past Moat Lake and into the high country and alpine meadows and only come across one other party traveling in the opposite direction. Castlecrag is a beautiful mountain yet it looks like it might tumble down if one even sneezed.

The summit was easier than the mountain looks from a distance and once again we found a good register tube placed by the CDMC and all I had to do was place an extra waterproof book, as the old one was almost full. Tricen dug into her pack and refound the brass curtain ring and we dubbed our trip, "The Fellowship of the Curtain Ring".

Returning the way we came, I was impressed with how aesthetic the route was and I thought just how good it would be for beginning mountaineers or families with children. Once back at camp, we packed up quickly and started hiking out. Some hours later we reached our truck in the dark with the aid of headlamps. Another great trip was finished!

Participants: Linda Berube, Tricen Gratten and Peter Ro-thermel.

A note on cairns:

On Mount Albert Edward the "Cairn Builders" are more prolific than the "Cairn Breakers". It is rumored that these two groups were once from the same tribe, but they don't resemble one another at all anymore. They likely all work under the cover of darkness, as their doings seem to just appear overnight. The "Builders" are said to be slight of stature and have pointy ears and pointy beards, yet are capable of moving heavy rock and make clicking sounds as they pile up stones in the night. The "Breakers" are said to be short and wide of stature, with long forked beards and brushy eyebrows and they make clattering sounds at night, as they kick at the rock with hobnailed boots. The "Builders" and the "Breakers" steadily go about their work, canceling out each others efforts, as they have for generations and will likely continue for many more years.

Higher still on Sutton Peak

Kent Krauza
August 30

"The great question was: would the mountain go?"

– Binder, Expedition Leader

The Ascent of Rum Doodle, by W.E. Bowman

Standing at considerably less than 40,000 and one-half feet in elevation, Sutton Peak is nonetheless an impressive tower that has caught the attention of many climbers standing on the summits of nearby Victoria and Warden Peaks. It was on just such a trip that Sutton caught my eye several years ago, and as I worked through my tick list, it became a primary objective for a day trip in the summer of 2008.

Attempts to get updated road and route conditions for this apparently infrequently visited north island summit proved fruitless, so we headed up island at 4 a.m., hoping the original logging roads were still clear, and the trailhead would be easy to locate. We gave ourselves a fighting chance by pre-programming several waypoints along the mountain's West Ridge approach, in order to provide bearings whilst wandering the maze of logging roads in the surrounding valleys.

We spent almost three hours exploring the various logging roads and spurs in the area, trying to find the access point with the highest starting elevation and closest to the treeline. Finding ourselves without the services of Yogistani porters, we wanted to minimize bushwhacking efforts and so eventually settled on what we thought to be the best start.

Apparently someone had previously drawn the same conclusion as we happily stumbled upon an established trail that started very close to where we parked.

To get to the trailhead: about 55 kilometres north of Sayward on Highway 19 take the logging road on the left that goes to Schoen Lake Provincial Park. After only a few hundred metres, there is a Y in the road - left branch goes to Schoen Lake, right branch goes to Gold River - take the right branch, the Nimpkish Main. Nimpkish Main will then snake past both Klaklama Lakes, and 18 kilometres from the highway you arrive at an unused but very interesting and unique log sort/rail loading area. Take the left road (Stewart Main), following the signs to Stewart and Fiona. Drive about 6.5 kilometres from the log sort along Stewart, and you will come to Fiona Main on your right (well signed). Take Fiona Main for 2 kilometres then turn right onto a badly overgrown, unsigned spur road. Bash through alder thickets for a couple of kilometres before the road opens back up - do not use a vehicle with a nice paint job. Pass several spur roads and you will come to a T intersection where the logging road goes from old and decommissioned to brand new. Keep going straight at this intersection and the road will quickly switchback in a westerly direction. These roads are brand new and logging the second growth in the area is poised to begin shortly. About 1 kilometre from the T intersection at the very top of an old logging slash, a new spur road goes off to the right. Take this spur then when it branches again a couple hundred metres later, take the right (higher) spur which steeply climbs up onto the sidehill of the ridge. Take this spur a few hundred metres along the ridge to a dead end and park. It appears that current WFP logging company access to this area is via the new road that comes in at the aforementioned T intersection. A little exploring may lead you to find the source of this road which appears to climb up out of the Nimpkish River valley near Vernon Camp thereby avoiding the paint scratching alder thickets. The trailhead is at 50 deg 02.349' N, 126 deg 17.686' W, GR937463, at 3,850 feet elevation. This is only 700 metres distance and 800 feet of elevation from the beginning of the alpine.

Because of the time consumed checking out all the spurs, we didn't hit the trail until 12:15 p.m.. Given the shorter daylight hours in late August, we were a bit concerned about getting back before dark so we set ourselves a 4 p.m. turnaround time. This left us an estimated one hundred and fifty-three minutes to return to the truck before sunset.

A surprisingly good trail begins near the parking area. The trail is in good shape but disappears and reappears in a couple of wet meadows before becoming continuous and easy to follow a little higher up. Some occasional old flagging was in place and we added more, especially in the places where the trail disappeared and reappeared. We clearly marked the spot where the trail joins the ridge top which was important for identifying the spot to drop down off the ridge into

the forest on the descent. In less than a half hour from the vehicle we were in beautiful alpine meadows and fifteen minutes after that we were on the ridge top.

The West Ridge of Sutton Peak is a crooked affair resembling a couple of W's strung together. The ridge would have been very easy to follow in good visibility, however, we were frequently in dense fog and the pre-programmed waypoints on the GPS became our primary means of route finding.

Throughout the day the weather was strange with alternating snow, hail, rain, high winds, blue skies and warm sunshine, often changing between these extremes several times in an hour. As I braced myself against the harsh elements and pondered if we would gain the day, the sage words of Binder came to mind as he had faced much worse conditions on that cruelest of mountains - Rum Doodle: "I moved slowly. My knees trembled; my feet turned to ten past ten; I frequently fell on my face." If Binder and his team could prevail against such long odds, surely Rob and I could go on.

The scrambling along the West Ridge is quite varied with nothing more serious than 3rd class until the final summit tower. From the trailhead to the summit there is a total elevation gain of 3,100 feet including all the up's and down's and about four and a half kilometres of total hiking distance. The up's and down's were fairly minor with only two significant notches in the ridge. There was plenty of water, even in late August, as there was still significant snow pack on the north facing side of the ridge. In fact, there was a long flat snowfield on the ridge just before the summit tower providing us with almost 1 kilometre of nice easy going.

When the fog occasionally lifted during the day, the views from the ridge to the north and northeast were nothing short of spectacular. There are several stunningly beautiful glacial blue lakes in a hanging valley northeast of the summit, and a very dramatic drop off from the ridge for most of the route. We experienced another visual treat as we moved along the ridge - we encountered a total of fifteen ptarmigan including several chicks and were able to get some great close-ups of these beautiful, if somewhat loopy, alpine birds.

As we faced the rather impressive summit tower for the first time we plotted a course that would avoid the tricky bits. In order to bypass a cliff band we started on the slabs to the right of the large snowfield that cuts the summit block in half, then traversed left across the snow to get onto a large ledge just above the cliffs. From here it was almost continuous 3rd class scrambling to the summit. We generally stayed on the left edge of the summit tower as the scrambling was easier. A couple of 4th class moves puts you on the northwest summit which is slightly lower than the main summit 100 metres to the southeast. A few minutes of easy scrambling had us at the true summit.

With our high starting point it only ended up taking us three hours and forty-five minutes to reach the summit arriving right at our turn around time of 4 p.m.. We were looking

forward to the view to the east from this angle but alas did not get a good look at Victoria and Warden as even when the skies around us cleared a huge cloud hung over these familiar peaks obscuring the view. Looking down from the summit, the East Face of Sutton Peak is fantastically steep as it drops a near vertical 1,500 feet into the White River valley far below and it was abundantly clear why Phil Stone listed this as one of the top ten last summer problems on the Island.

We had an unusual luxury as there was a good sized tarn providing fresh water right at the summit. This was more than offset, however, by the worst weather of the day which hammered us with wind and driving snow as we hurriedly ate our lunch. Due to the time factor and inclement weather we only stayed on the summit for fifteen minutes.

Before departing we checked out the summit register, such as it was. The only summit register was a film canister with drenched contents containing Sandy Briggs' UVic business card offering "remote alpine chemistry tutoring services", and Frank Wille Jr's business card as well as a couple of completely indecipherable, washed out scraps of paper. On the lower summit at the northwest end of the summit ridge, another film canister contained a scrap of paper from the 1986 party of Len Zedel and John Robertson.

We left the summit and bolted back for the truck highballing our way out in three hours fifteen minutes, and arriving at the vehicle with about forty-five minutes of daylight left. A great trip all in all and we looked forward to a nice dinner at Pong's as we drove back toward civilization.

An interesting post script to the trip occurred when my usual climbing partner George Milosevich accidentally left his ice axe at the Nathan Creek Col coming down from a pleasant ascent of Rugged Mountain's East Ridge about two weeks prior to the Sutton Peak trip. Who should stumble upon the wayward axe but John Robertson and Len Zedel. Unbelievably, they found George's axe on Rugged at about the same time I was reading their 1986 entry in the Sutton Peak summit register, some 40 kilometres to the northeast. These two fine gentlemen graciously located the owner and returned George's axe to him (a rather emotional reunion) banking significant karma points in the process. In the course of communicating about the missing axe, I casually mentioned our Sutton Peak trip to John not yet making the connection with the names. It all hit me in a flash when John told me about his and Len's amazing trip back in '86. They approached from the White River side and hiked along the chain of high alpine lakes we had seen from the summit. Incredibly, in order to reach the mountain, they built a raft to cross one of the larger lakes. When they reached the summit the register only had two names in it from 1962. Compared to our logging road assisted day trip, theirs was a true adventure!

Participants: Kent Krauza and Rob Ciarniello

On a Clear Day You Can See Forever – A New Route on Red Pillar, Strathcona Park

Rick Hudson

September 7, 2008



The East Ridge of Red Pillar in September, seen from the Comox Glacier. The roped section is marked by the two 'X's. PHOTO: CHRISTINE FORDHAM

September can be a good month on the Island. The bugs are gone, the days are still long enough to get things done, and the weather is obligingly stable. On the Saturday, we climbed Mt Harmston in glorious sunshine, lingering on the summit for over an hour. Across the Cliffe Glacier, Red Pillar's north face drew our attention, and we talked about the routes on that side. Attractive though they were, Sandy and I had other plans that had been brewing for several years. There was still an unclimbed ridge on Red Pillar, and we were curious to find out why it had never received an ascent.

Early Sunday morning we left the camp in the alpine on the south side of Red Pillar, and hiked an hour up the broad ridge to the notch, where the paths divide. (See 'Notes on access to Red Pillar'.) On the previous day we had scouted the peak's southern approaches and in doing so had spotted a possible line that traversed east at the same height as the notch. The big question was: would it go all the way round to the right?

It was going to be another perfect day. The early sun warmed the bluffs as we followed the ledge around the curve of the mountain. The line we'd spied the previous day turned out to provide an easy route to the south-east side of the peak, and in less than an hour from the notch we were tramping up a gentle snow slope towards our objective, the unclimbed East Ridge.

There's something special about going for an unclimbed route. Of course, there's always uncertainty before any climb. Will the weather hold? Do we have the right gear? Are we capable of climbing the grade? But those uncertainties are based on known parameters. We have a good idea of what the weather will do. We have a written description of what the route will be like. We know we can climb 5.X. But with a new route, there's a heightened feeling of the unknown that sharpens the senses and makes the day more brilliant, the senses more in touch with their surroundings.

At the top of a snow patch, we looked up at the blank southern wall that made up the East Ridge. The skyline looked straightforward enough, almost gentle in its angle as it curved up towards the summit. But there was a vertical step about half way up – would it go? Would we have to bypass it on the south or north side? We both agreed this side looked unclimbable. Perhaps the north flank, which we couldn't see, would offer something a little kinder.

We dropped down to bypass a spur that blocked the view, and noticed a snow couloir leading to a notch at the start of the ridge. The snow looked steep, and the rock above unfriendly. Rather than commit ourselves to the couloir, we opted to scramble some slabs and cracks to the left of the ridge proper, aiming for an obvious ledge about 200m above. From there, a traverse right would bring us close to the crest of the ridge. And then? Well, we'd have to see.

We soloed the lower slabs – clean class 4 – before emerging onto the ledge, which turned out to be the terminal moraine of a pocket glacier, now much diminished. The walk across to the start of the climb gave us time to examine the rock above at close quarters. It looked red and clean, plus there was a splitter diagonal crack leading towards the ridge crest.

Sandy uncoiled the ropes, while I set about finding an anchor, and then led out. The rock was superb – small firm holds, although protection was scarce. Reaching the crest, a ledge of dwarf cedar trees offered a bomb-proof belay. There's something very comforting about a couple of trees to tie to, especially when the pro has been thin.

Above, the ridge crest rose up out of sight, with plenty of clean rock and small ledges. A number of pitches let us gain height, the view improving as we closed with the summit. But, unspoken by both, each wondered when we'd come up against that vertical step. At the top of the fifth rope length, Sandy wondered aloud where it was. Could we have passed it already? Another pitch confirmed that possibility – we were above it, wherever it was. The ridge had maintained a steady angle, and the step was an illusion.

At a heather ledge we coiled the ropes and stopped for a snack. The air was still, the sun warm, and the peaks of Strathcona Park lay spread out in every direction. It didn't get better than this. A few gulps of water, and we were mov-



Sandy belays on the East Ridge, with Mt Harmston and Argus behind.

PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

ing again, scrambling up easy ground that led to the snow field that hugs the north side of the ridge. We had crampons, but chose to stay on the rock just to the left of the snow – smooth slabs that gave us another 150m of clean scrambling.

Above, the summit tower was broken by two chimneys. The left looked dark and possibly overhanging, but the right hand one turned out to be a natural dike of white diabase that presented a fine staircase up through the cliffs. Another scramble on red rock, and the summit cairn was ours. I glanced at my watch: it was 11:30, and we'd been climbing for 2½ hours.

Technical description:

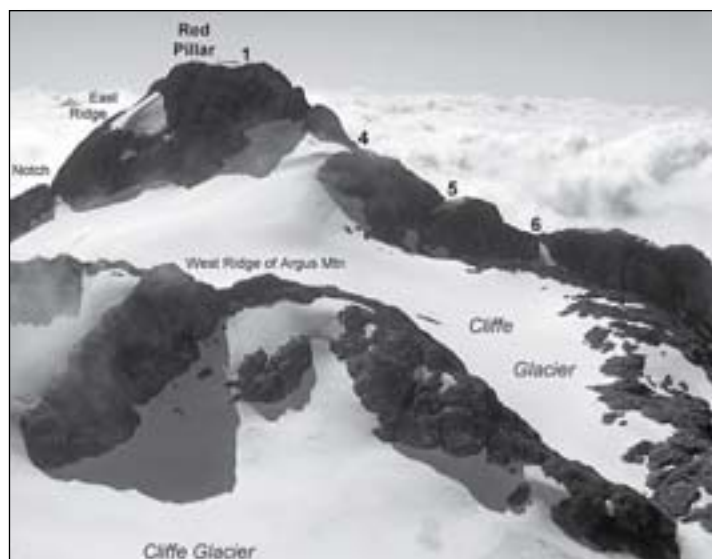
- 200m Class 4 Some 250m left of the E Ridge, climb the slabs and cracks to a pocket glacier.
- Traverse right to the end of the ledge, close to a clump of dwarf cedars.
- 45m 5.4 Climb a crack diagonally right to reach the crest of the E Ridge. Dwarf cedar belay.
- 120m 5.4 Climb the ridge by the easiest line to heather terraces.
- 200m Class 4 Scramble terraces and a slab that is just left of the large snowfield.
- 50m Class 4 Move right into a chimney formed by a white dike, and scramble.
- 30m Class 4 From the top of the dike, scramble diagonally right to the summit.

Participants: Rick Hudson, Sandy Stewart

Notes on access around Red Pillar in Strathcona Provincial Park

Rick Hudson

The Red Pillar acts as the fulcrum for a number of fine peaks in the southeast corner of Strathcona Park. With access over the Comox Glacier becoming difficult, the route in via Oshinow Lake becomes more important, and knowing how to bypass The Red Pillar efficiently on your way to Argus Mountain, Mount Harmston, Tzela Mountain, the Cliffe Glacier or Comox Glacier becomes useful information.



Red Pillar seen from the north (in September). PHOTO: RICK HUDSON



Red Pillar seen from the south, close to 'the Notch'. PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

The Oshinow Lake route puts you, after a steep five to six hour pull, into alpine meadows next to small lakes, and most people choose to camp there. From there, a broad ridge leads north to the foot of The Red Pillar proper. Where the ridge meets the cliffs of The Red Pillar, there is a 40 metre drop onto a snow saddle, which we chose to call "the Notch"

From the Notch, there are a number of ways to go, depending on your objective. To climb The Red Pillar via the 4th class diagonal and chimney route on the south side (called 'South Ridge' in Phil Stone's Island Alpine), follow line (1), which starts from the snowfield at the Notch and passes just under the cliffs on the right, to gain the open slopes leading to the start of the big diagonal ramp.

To bypass The Red Pillar completely to get to the Cliffe Glacier, there are two options, shown as (2) and (3). The former route hugs the lower cliffs before following a rising bench to gain the west shoulder of Red Pillar. Route (3) involves losing 100 metres of height down the snow, before following a series of gullies up to the west skyline.

At the West Ridge, there are only three points where you can access the Cliffe Glacier, shown as (4), (5) and (6). I cannot vouch for access point (4) as we didn't use that line, but from both sides of the mountain, it looked like it would go, and it has the advantage of getting you to the short west and north routes on The Red Pillar by the most efficient route.

Access (5) involves a descent on the north side on loose rock and then steep snow to access the mid-level of the Cliffe Glacier. Crampons, hard hats and axes necessary. Access (6) puts you at the top of a very steep broad snow couloir that descends to the lower Cliffe Glacier. A rope as well as axe, hat and crampons might be in order here, depending on conditions.

To access the east side of The Red Pillar from the Notch, follow a prominent ledge that runs horizontally from the Notch (not shown) between cliffs to the right.

A Visit With the Merry Widow

Tony Vaughn
September 9-10

Merry Widow Mountain first took my interest when I saw its picture on the front of a Macmillan Bloedel logging road map. Hearing about a trail to the mountain also intrigued me, "Why?" I wondered "would there be a trail to a mountain many miles from anywhere?"

Martin Smith also had an urge to visit this mountain for the same reason. So on September 9 we left Victoria for the long drive up island. Following an early dinner at the



Merry Widow Mountain PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN

Rugged Mountain Hotel in Woss, we turned off the main highway onto the Keogh Main just before 6 pm for the drive down the three Creeks valley towards Merry Widow. With a clear and straightforward description of the route to the trail head we anticipated no difficulties and expected to set up a car camp early and relax in the sunshine. As is often the case, the description in the guide does not always match what is found on the ground. We had easily found the Merry Widow Main, however, the right turn after 2 kilometres was not to be found. So we took the first right turn we came to and searched high and low for the trail head, no luck, it was not in this area of the mountain. We then retraced our steps to the Merry Widow Main and decided to carry on along it as long as it continued to go up and in the right general direction. We did this until we reached a large abandoned mine. After some time contemplating which direction to take, we opted to leave the vehicle at the mine and walk the road leading upwards out of the mine area and towards the direction of the mountain. After about twenty minutes we reached a large washout which was going to be the limit of our driving. Partway up this road Martin returned to collect the vehicle as dusk was fast approaching. We had concluded that if we couldn't find the trailhead off this road, then we would camp here for the night and continue our search in the morning. Approximately 100 metres beyond the washout, to our great pleasure, we came across the sign we had been looking for. Clearly printed, black letters on a white background were the words MERRY WIDOW MOUNTAIN TRAIL. Our next step was to find a flat spot on the road to camp before it became too dark to see.

Next morning we awoke to a beautiful day, looking down on a blanket of cloud that filled the valley and stretched across to the Haihte Range clearly visible to the southeast.

Though uneventful, it was a beautiful hike along a well boot-ed in trail most of the way to the mountain through gorgeous alpine scenery. The track did eventually peter out close to the mountain, but the route was obvious and the short 3rd class scramble up to the summit via the North Ridge posed no difficulties.

Sitting on the summit with superb views in all directions it was easy to understand why this peak has become popular enough to have a trail to it. How many visits per year it gets I have no idea, as there was no summit register that we could find, but it is sufficient to keep the trail boot-ed in.

The trip back was equally pleasant and five hours after leaving we were back at camp preparing for the drive back south, leaving the Merry Widow behind in the good hands of the North Island residents who, at some time must have developed and still maintain the trail to this North Island beauty.

As a point of interest I have been told that due to the large amounts of iron on the mountain a compass cannot be relied upon when travelling in this area.

Participants: Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn.

No Ifs or Ands, only Butt's (Buttresses, that is)

Sandy Briggs and Andy Arts
September 13-14

I have had my eye on the Centaur's butt (North Buttress of Centaur) for quite a few years. (There may be those who would say this helps to explain quite a lot.)

In fact, in February 2005 I went to "have a look" at the Centaur buttress with two Heathen friends from Campbell River. The thing was very out of condition. And it's a good thing it was — we might have done something stupid. We had perfect weather but we wallowed up to our waists in deep, dry powder snow, working very hard just to get a glimpse of the proposed route from below Redwall's North-west Ridge. Centaur looked formidable. In retrospect it seems to have been a bad idea for me to have even considered trying it in winter. We satisfied ourselves at the time with climbing Mackenzie Peak, but I remained intrigued. I had seen this buttress in wintry conditions from the ridge of The Cat's Ears and it seemed to be a completely obvious line that somebody needed to climb.

It was therefore puzzling to me, but also satisfying, that of the several parties that had put up new rock-climb-

ing routes on the north side of the Mackenzie Range in the last ten years or so, nobody had claimed to have done this gem. I can only assume that they were very good climbers and considered the Centaur Buttress to be either too easy or too bushy. Since I have seldom been intimidated by either of these objections, the route continued to be near the top of my list of “projects that must someday be checked out”.

And so it was. In mid-September the weather forecast was fine, the stars lined up correctly — as did a few ducks — and I set off early one Saturday morning with Andy Arts, a new arrival from Canmore, to drive to the Mackenzie Range. We started hiking up the familiar climbers’ trail at about 11 a.m.. In a fit of altruism I had brought along a spray can of orange paint and we took turns improving the visibility of many of the metal tags that help mark the first third of the trail. I am pretty sure that I had mentioned to Andy that it wasn’t a chip trail, but he continued to show the same enthusiasm he had displayed earlier in the summer when I convinced him that we should bushwhack up the West Ridge of El Capitan in the rain. Which is to say that he ate it up. But the weather was warm and the major blow-down damage to the bottom third of the trail that had occurred in the preceding winter conspired with our loads and our trail-marking mission to slow us down, so that it took us about seven hours to reach a good bivy site at the saddle between Mackenzie Summit and Perez Lookout. The view out over Kennedy Lake to the Pacific was spectacular. Part way up the trail we had heard some helicopter activity and I had joked to Andy that likely someone was flying into the area to scoop our route. This proved to be half right.

There were some mosquitoes. (Andy comments: “I’d like to pipe in here. “Some mosquitoes” is not what I would have said. There were thousands of them; they were just taking turns sucking the blood from us. No matter where we ran to, the mozzies were hovering patiently for more blood.”) Fortunately we had had the good sense to bring head nets. (Andy continues: “Yes Sandy had mentioned to me that he had a head net for me. Well, I’ve never been anywhere where I needed a head net but I thought I should listen to him, I mean the man has a wealth of knowledge and experience. He pulled out this netting that looked like a pillow case. I started laughing really hard, then asked him if he was serious! Have you ever slept in a pillowcase made out of mosquito netting? Let me tell you it wasn’t fun.”)

We ate dinner while enjoying the sunset — except that I had forgotten to bring a spoon. So in order to enjoy my dinner I had to carve a spork from a bit of random wood. It worked fine. We lay down in the open and fell asleep with the night sky, and the almost-full moon, divided into many tiny squares.

Perhaps we should have planned to get up before six o’clock, but we didn’t. We got up a little after that, and set

off about 7:30 to descend around the base of the Northwest Ridge of Redwall to the “great Mackenzie ice sheet”. Upon reaching this snowfield Andy spotted human footprints, so we began to follow them. Then he spotted the tents and the people. Vikki and Matt had flown in by helicopter the previous afternoon as part of the provincial government’s ptarmigan survey. Vikki I had met before at a friend’s party; Matt is a former student of mine. After a brief chat Andy and I set off to begin our climb, spotting a ptarmigan right at its base, where we left our boots and changed to climbing shoes.

From this point in the report Andy and I offer a tag-team description of the climb:

First Pitch (about 9:00am)

Andy - I offer to take it partly because I want it. I haven’t been on the rock for a while and I need to put myself out there. And, to tell the truth, male ego comes to play. I’m climbing with Sandy Briggs and I want to prove that I can walk the talk. The climbing doesn’t look beyond my limit, but it’s definitely a run out. Sandy checks out an alternative start because he agrees that the availability of gear might be a bit sparse. But it doesn’t go and we start up as planned.

At first the climbing is easy, 5.6 or 5.7. About 7 metres up there’s still no gear to be found. Meanwhile, I’m thinking about my family, asking myself, what am I doing? I know this feeling, it’s not really about my family, it’s just fear. I shake my head, find a place for a bomber nut, and I feel better. I move up farther and start to run it out again as it gets a little harder in grade. Shit, it’s tough to find pro. I stop at a ledge about six inches wide, take a comfortable stance. I look and look and finally see a spot for a piton. I yell down to Sandy, tell him it’s for psychological reasons that I’m clipping it. As I place it I laugh to myself knowing that the sound of the piton does not instill any faith, but it’ll have to do. I move up and in 2 metres I find a hex placement that I could hang a truck on. Finally, 20 metres up I feel happy: good pro does that to you. Wow, this is mentally challenging. It has definitely been a few months since I last climbed. I get to the first belay and set up a solid anchor with three good pieces of gear. Sandy comes up in good time and we look at each other and agree: “Huh, this is a bit run out.” We check out the next pitch and I ask Sandy if I can take it. I need to climb it to get rid of that fear that keeps knocking inside my head.

Sandy - I follow the first pitch admiring Andy’s tricky lead on minimal pro. Bits of it must be close to 5.9. I climb with a rock stuffed into my pocket. We have brought one hammer and Andy has it. I use the rock to remove the piton. I am glad I didn’t get this pitch to lead. I throw the rock away.

Second Pitch

Andy - I start off with a corner crack; get good placements in the crack on my left as I climb the face, which be-

comes a bit slabby. The gear is outstanding; especially the three tiny roots that I girth hitch and clip, thanks to Briggs's suggestion. In my head I'm saying, OK, maybe not that piece, but the cam below is bomber. I look out to my right and see slab and no gear placements. Then I look out to the left and see that if I can get out on the buttress I can climb the face. That option looks better. I grab this huge jug as I swing out onto the face and look up. Yes, some gear! Awesome gear. The climbing gets harder but the gear is in abundance. I traverse left a little and find a spot for an anchor. Sandy arrives in record time wearing the pack. I'm glad I'm not wearing it on lead. "I'm fried," I say, and offer the rack. "Shall we keep going?" Meanwhile, I'm thinking to myself, Say no. We can still get off this beast and I wouldn't feel bad because we did try. "Yes, I think I should have a look," he replies. OK, I say to myself, happy to give up the lead and rest a bit.

Sandy – I get to Andy's belay thinking "Jeez. I hope this thing gets easier or I am not going to be much use in leading my share."

Third Pitch

Sandy – I traverse up and left a bit and find a place for a shallow piton before climbing up and into some mossy bits to a sturdy tree belay. The climbing is not too hard, fortunately, but the pro is not plentiful either. But once leading I kind of get into it and have some fun. These three rock pitches have actually been pretty nice (well, apart from the thin pro issue).

Andy – I follow Sandy's lead wearing the pack. Huh, this is harder than it looks, I'm glad I'm not leading this. It was at this point that I realized that the mozzies were still hungry even after Sandy and I fed them well last night and early this morning. Climbing, I curse to myself that I didn't bring any mosquito repellent.

Fourth Pitch

Andy – I have a look at the pitch and ask Sandy if he wants it. He says, "I guess if I were a gentleman I'd say yes." I grab the rack and tell him he hasn't gotten to that level yet. We laugh. It's good to laugh. That means things are all right. Hey, we're likely the first people to climb this route. It wasn't till then that I actually thought of it. This pitch is quite stimulating, especially when I arrive at a blank wall about 40 metres up. Huh, where to now? There's this horizontal crack veering off to the right, with shrubs protruding out of its two-inch gap, and then what looks like a bonsai with a delicate two-inch stem holding it up. I have to traverse to the ledge, which is only two metres away, palming the rock face, weaving between the wall and foliage. I crawl to the ledge telling myself, 'Don't slip'. As I get to the ledge I use my fingers like ten little ice axes to dig into the moss, and scamper onto the ledge. Finally, I am on a solid ledge with lots of gear. Sandy comes up and traverses over to me as if he's having a walk in the park.



Our route shows best on this April photo of Centaur from the west ridge of Cat's Ears PHOTO: SANDY BRIGGS

Sandy – The start of this fourth pitch is up a large cleft/chimney that turns out to be harder than it looks. Andy soon reaches a bushy bulge and has to hunt for a good gear placement before stepping out left to a thin and exposed situation. When my turn comes I pause to be impressed by this move, then follow up a bit, and then leftward along some small blocks. Then up to the said blank wall that requires the bushy rightward traverse to the good ledge. Bushes attenuate the sense of exposure. Nice. Sometime around now the helicopter comes in and collects Vikki and Matt. Hmmm, what time is it getting to be anyway?

Fifth Pitch

Andy – I climb over a ten foot boulder, see no way through or up, come back down, and push through a huge tree as the branches scrape my back. I grab vines and roots, slip on moss, dislodge rocks, my feet struggling to find footholds, and finally find a place to set an anchor. Real Island climbing, as Briggs says later.

Sandy – We know from earlier observation that there is an upper headwall that could turn out to be the crux. This short pitch reaches that headwall, the bottom of a V-gully of bare and relatively featureless rock. My mind is grappling with doubts. But we are in a spectacular situation.

Sixth Pitch

Andy – I start off going up this corner crack hoping to veer off to the left. The right is overhung and too hard for me. I get up about 3 metres and realize it will not go. Mark Twight's words come to mind: "Don't climb up anything you can't down climb". Uh oh, did I just do that? "Sandy, help me out here!" He guides me down. Then I'm off to the left on a gently rising traverse until I come to a break in the cliff. I set up an anchor and wait for Sandy. Before he has a chance to say anything I hand over the rack. I am pooched!

Seventh Pitch

Sandy – I am not so sure I want the rack, but I do want to be a gentleman, and Andy has done most of the leading so far. It's time to see if I can balance the workload a little. The pitch is definitely a kind of mixed climbing — Not the type that you would find in the Canadian Rockies, says Andy — luckily not wholly unfamiliar. The pro is just adequate, and includes hitches around vegetation. Finally I feel as if I am contributing something to the effort. The next belay is a sturdy tree. I think that we have reached the top of the upper headwall and that all the harder climbing is behind us. This turns out to be the case.

Andy – Sandy grabs the rack and I see this huge 6 foot 3 ox heading up the wall. He doesn't find much until about five metres above the anchor and then a few more placements as he gets higher. He's climbing a concave gully where he is able to stem to the sides a bit but the moss makes it difficult to trust the feet and the climbing is hard. It feels like old school 5.8 climbing right out of the Rockies. Then he arrives at the shrubs. What is he planning to do now? I see the bushes thrashing about while Sandy grabs and clutches those little twigs. Will they hold? All I see is this giant swinging side to side and then launching himself onto the face of the rock. I say to myself, "That looks interesting." When I get to that spot I can't figure it out. "Hey what did you do here," I ask. "Oh, just grab the roots and Tarzan out on to the ledge." I laugh, "No, really, what did you do?" Well, it went. As he hauls my ass up to the belay, I am so glad I didn't lead this pitch. Climbing Vancouver Island style is new to me. I'm from the Rockies where we don't run into moss, twigs, shrubs, roots, and slime that often, especially not on a rock route.

Eighth Pitch

Sandy – I penetrate the tree band onto the Centaur's back and into a nice wee meadow where there is a laden blueberry

bush. A quick scramble puts me at a nice horn belay on the ridge proper, with a grand view across to Redwall.

Andy – I come to a point on the cliff where if I look over to my left it's steep, real steep. I feel a touch of vertigo starting to take over. I direct my vision towards the tree I have to go under and around. When I come to a blueberry bush I gorge myself quickly.

Ninth Pitch

Sandy – This is a casual hike up a small meadow but we run out the rope as a matter of convenience.

Andy – I see a stunning meadow with flowers still in bloom, bright yellow and orange petals all over. It is such a beautiful spot in such a harsh environment.

Tenth Pitch

Sandy – There are a couple of easy moves over some very sharp-edged loose blocks to gain the regular route that comes up from the other side. We are at a point one pitch from the summit, but because it is after 5pm we can hear the clock ticking pretty loudly. Andy graciously professes not to care about the summit, so we immediately rappel the short pitch to the big south-facing ramp, where I set off to check out the descent while Andy coils the rope.

Andy – This is my apprenticeship to Vancouver Island climbing. If I had ever doubted it, I know now that there is life after the Canadian Rockies.

And the rest of it.

We couldn't reasonably descend by the normal route because we had to retrieve our boots from the base of the route. Therefore we rappelled to the notch east of the peak. A second rappel/handline got us over a snow patch and onto the east side of the gully on rock with good holds. It was then easy to scramble to the top of the east (right) fork of the lower gully, where a horn provided a good anchor for a third rap. In retrospect it might have been as easy in the end to descend the west (left) fork of the lower gully, but at the time I thought that the moat at the bottom looked harder to cross. We scrambled down and then did another quick rappel to within striking distance of the snowfield. As often happens on the Island, we were separated from it by a problematic moat. Andy belayed me on a descending traverse to a place where I could hack a footstep into the snow side of the moat. I then stepped across the gap with my left foot, planted the pick firmly, and heaved myself up onto the frozen snow. I had a brief "Yay!" moment, and then began contemplating the fact that I was on steep frozen snow in rock shoes. I belayed Andy to the crossing spot and slid the ice hammer down the rope to him. He planted the tool and made the same big step onto the snow. There was the same "Yay!" moment, and then came the thought that "Now there are two guys in rock shoes with one ice tool on steep frozen snow."

Mount Wolfenden/Mount Markusen

Lindsay Elms
September 27 - 30

Andy suggested snow bollards. I agreed but suggested hand-lining it rather than actual rappelling. It worked, except that my arms were so tired I could hardly chop the bollard in that icy late-summer north-side snow. We did this about four times. Tired, tired arms. I trod carefully down the sun-cups holding the nut-remover tool in case of a slip, leaving Andy to coil the rope. (Sheesh, again. I seemed to do this a lot.)

We finally scrambled down to our stash of boots. With the tension released, to use Tilman's words, "I believe we so far forgot ourselves as to shake hands on it." We changed footwear and slogged back up to our bivy site, arriving at 8:00 p.m.. It had been quite a day.

But then we noticed that our weekend had run out of days, and we were in the inconvenient predicament of needing another one to get home. A quick mental calculation showed that indeed a useful third day could be found if searched for, so we set out on this search.

We started our descent at 8:25 p.m. using headlamps from the start. At the first snowfield we crossed fresh cougar tracks on snow. The night was dark and we both quietly began thinking about cougars lurking in the bushes. We stopped briefly at a small stream to fill up with water and then continued groping our way down the sometimes-subtle trail. Several times we had to backtrack and cast around carefully in order to re-find the path. Giving up on the path and just bushwhacking downhill was not an option. Once we were into the forest the path became more well-defined, but the descent started to feel like some kind of masochistic triathlon. We were exhausted. A full moon rose over the ridge. Stars twinkled. An occasional pair of headlights snaked through the valley far below.

We arrived at the car at 3:30 a.m., gulped a can of coke each, and began driving at 3:50. I took the first shift and we had to switch drivers four times on the way home. After dropping Andy off I arrived home at 7:45 a.m.. (This set a new personal record for me for late return from a weekend trip.) There was time for a shower and a bowl of cereal before I headed off to campus to give my ten o'clock lecture. I am pretty sure it wasn't my best lecture ever, but it may not have been the worst. (One of Andy's friends, Shannon, who happened to be in my class, told him later that she knew that our trip had been eventful and successful because of the smile on my face.) I was a zombie for the rest of the day. I finally got to bed at 6:00 p.m., and arose at 6:00 a.m. the next morning – feeling very, very happy.

Participants: Sandy Briggs and Andy Arts

A climbing trip doesn't have to be about just going to the biggest peaks on the island or to climb technical routes. As we have all found out for ourselves, even some of the lesser mountains have unique features which can make the climbing both challenging and interesting. The views from the summit are still spectacular and we get to eye-up some of the peaks that we are familiar with from different angles. We also get to see peaks we hadn't noticed before and find ourselves thinking about a trip to them. For many of these peaks there is no written information and it is hard to find someone who has been up them previously to question if there are any technical difficulties enroute or to get logging road access information. Although they may be found in guide books, the information is sketchy and the author quite often has obtained any details by looking at various maps and trying to decide which logging road and which ridge might give the best access. This information can make the climber frustrated when the road is found to have been de-activated or overgrown for many (sometimes many) years and you are back at square-one. Sometimes they send us on a wild goose chase up one valley when later we find a well used trail up another. No doubt we all have one such story! Today we can use the internet to view various satellite images of the area we want to visit but I have found that those views can also be old (logging roads become overgrown very quickly) and at times they are taken at the wrong season – winter images when we are planning a trip for the summer. Writing these trips up in the Island Bushwhacker at least gives some information for those interested in visiting a specific mountain, however, as the years go by that information can become outdated (especially logging road info) as new roads are built in adjoining valleys.

The following account is another write up of two such mountains on the north end of the island which have no climbing or access information currently available, however, I do find myself going through periods of misgiving in exploiting these mountains (if that is what I am doing by writing about them). I personally love the sense of adventure and exploration associated with having to find my own way onto the mountain. Following some ones route description has its benefits (especially when time is a constraint) but takes away the challenge of the unknown for those who like the feeling of going somewhere maybe no-one has been before. These peaks are worth a visit (what peak isn't) and maybe it will inspire someone with a sense of adventure to leave their footprints on these mountains.

Over the last week I had been emailing Peter Curtis in Port McNeill and Tim Sanders in Port Hardy about a trip to Mount Wolfenden, the highest peak on the northwestern part of the island, which overlooks Port Alice on the west side of the Neroutsos Inlet. In the end Peter went caving as there were some caves that needed to be mapped while the weather was still good, however, Tim and his wife decided to come with us for a stroll. The weather was gradually improving with clouds on Saturday followed by clearing skies Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. I reckoned this was our last chance to climb something up the north end of the island for the year so both Val and I took two extra days off work. On Saturday we drove up island to Port Alice, called Tim and arranged to meet the next morning at Coqueis Creek on the Yreka Main.

Sunday dawned clear with all the summits blessing us with their presence. We met Tim and Natasha at 8:15, loaded everything into their truck then drove to the top of the Y400 logging road. This road was in excellent conditions and we were able to drive to around 700 metres. Mount Wolfenden is 1,273 metres. Although there was still machinery up there it didn't look like they were working today. From the end of the road we crossed the slash and entered the old growth which was open and made for easy travel. After a hundred metres we were on an obvious ridge which we ambled along while chatting for an hour and a half gradually gaining more height until we came to a steep headwall. We turned the headwall to the left which we hoped would angle across to a saddle on the main ridge between Wolfenden and Comstock Mountain, however, it wasn't long before we encountered a steep gully. I pulled the very light weight rope I was carrying out and belayed everyone down and then up the other side. Again it looked like it would go okay but we soon came across another steep gully. Natasha decided not to go any further as the exposure was unnerving her. Val quickly got across to see if it was straight forward from here to the saddle which it appeared to do now while I went back to the first gully and got Tim and Natasha safely across. They said they would meet us back at the truck later on.

Once I got across the two gullies, heather slopes then took us up to the saddle in a few minutes. The main summit was about one and a half kilometres to the south over a couple of false summits. I could see that the eastern aspect of the ridge was steep and gullied while on the western side it was lower angled and more open with big timber interspersed with heather benches. We traversed the ridge and just before the penultimate summit we dropped our packs and went with just the camera and rope. A short descend and then some scrambling over very loose choss saw us on the summit of Mount Wolfenden. We weren't the first ones on the summit as there was a small cairn but we had also been following old flagging along the ridge. From the top I gave a yodel hoping Tim and Natasha might hear me, however,

from where they were sitting they could see us on the summit but couldn't hear me. We had wonderful views from the summit. Below us was the Neroutsos Inlet and Port Alice and to the southeast we could see Merry Widow Mountain and Tlakwa Mountain. To the north the mountains became rolling hills and we could see the towns of Quatsino and Coal Harbour. There was obviously nothing north or west of here worth climbing!

The descent back along the ridge, through the gullies and down to the vehicle was straight forward and we met up with the others around 4:30. Tim greeted us with a couple of cold beers which quenched our thirst. There was no water along the route and we had forgotten to carry any but we did get some sustenance from huckleberries. It was a perfect day to be up there as the bush was totally dry and none of the slopes were slippery. The weather continued to improve into the afternoon and it looked like we might have a few more nice days. That afternoon we drove back to Port Hardy and stayed the night with Tim and Natasha.

Monday Val and I hiked the Tex-Lyon Trail out to Dillon Point from Fort Rupert and then in the afternoon drove back down island to Woss. We had one more day left and we wanted to climb something else, however, we were unsure about what we were going to climb as there wasn't much left in the way of day trips for us. We have slowly been picking away at everything over the last few years, however, just as we were approaching Woss I looked up to the left and saw an alpine summit that we hadn't climbed. A quick glance at the map and we saw it was called Mount Markusen. "How about that peak," I said. We turned off the highway onto the logging road that goes to Claude Elliot Lake Provincial Park and then just before the lake we turned onto the road that goes up to the head of Kari Creek on the north side of the mountain. Again this road took us quite high and very close to the East Ridge which we thought would be a great ascent ridge.

We set up camp on the road at a nice flat pull-out and even got to enjoy sitting around a fire for a change. With it becoming darker earlier in the evening it is easy to just climb into the sleeping bag but a fire gives you a reason to stay up a little longer and helps make the night seem a bit shorter. The next morning there was no rush to get moving early, however, because the sun wouldn't hit us for a long time we had no reason to linger around camp. Even at 8:30 it was balmy out and we started up the road in shorts and a t-shirt. Once in the old growth we had to contend with thick huckleberry and copper bush but again everything was nice and dry. The East Ridge gradually ascended to a small shoulder and then we could pick our way up steep heather slopes to the summit. We encountered no tricky sections and within two hours we were enjoying the views from the 1,435m summit. Behind us Mount Ashwood loomed up as the prominent peak and below us the town of Woss was as bustling while behind it

Woss Lake stretched out toward the Tahsis Inlet. There were no clouds in the sky, although it was a little more hazy, and every mountain was visible. The Haihte Range looked impressive and hopefully will be the focus of my attention next year.

We spent an hour on the summit just soaking up the energy we get from the mountains. For the descent we decided to go down the West Ridge to a saddle and then cut down through the old growth beside a gully where avalanches in the winter ensured that the bush was thick and stunted. For those living lower down the island it makes for a long drive for such a short climb but if anyone is up this way and they are looking for an enjoyable climb, this fits the bill.

Participants: Tim Sander, Natasha Miles, Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Name origin:

Mount Wolfenden is named after the late Lieutenant Colonel Richard Wolfenden, born 29 March 1836 in Rathmell, Yorkshire, England. He arrived in New Westminster in 1859, as a Corporal in the Royal Engineers under Colonel Moody; appointed Superintendent of Printing for the colony of British Columbia in 1863; moved to Victoria in 1866 after the union of British Columbia and Vancouver Island, and continued in office as King's Printer until his death 5 October 1911. He was also Lieutenant Colonel of British Columbia's Provincial Regiment of Garrison Artillery (later 5th Regiment, CCA), from 1885 until retirement from the militia in 1888.

Climbing Into History: Crown Mountain

Martin Smith

September 29-October 1

For any student of the history of climbing on Vancouver Island, a trip to Crown Mountain is pretty well obligatory at some point in his or her alpine career.

The Ellison Expedition of 1910 chose Crown as their principle objective and it was from the summit of this lovely peak that the glory of the high peaks of Strathcona Park to the south became apparent to all and sundry for the first time. The fact that Price Ellison, the expedition's leader, was also Minister for Lands in the provincial government of the day meant that official incorporation of the Park followed not long after the group's return to civilisation. The first ascent of Crown, therefore, was pivotal in the creation of an



The upper north ridge of Crown Mountain PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

incomparable resource that generations of visitors continue to enjoy almost a century later.

Given the foregoing, it might come as a surprise to some that Crown Mountain receives very few ascents. The latest information I could find came from the 2004 Island Bushwhacker Annual in which Chris Fordham described a July trip that noted just seven entries in a summit register dating from 1986.

The equation: history + seldom visited summit = must-do, meant that Crown had been on my and a few chums minds for a few years and when a perfect late season weather window presented itself, Peter Rothermel, Tony Vaughn and I were packed and off to the mountain in short order.

September 29 - Approach

Foremost amongst Peter's considerable knowledge of the climbing scene on Vancouver Island is a large database of pre- and post-trip eateries. The pre-trip entry for Campbell River – the closest town to Crown Mountain – is the “Ideal Café” and it was there that we started the trip with several thousand calories worth of fuel and sufficient caffeine to last the next three days. Tales that the Ideal offered a “loggers breakfast special” that consisted of 6 pancakes and a beer proved (thankfully) to be apocryphal and we were soon on our sober way to the logging roads that gave access to our objective.

The Menzies and South Fork main lines were well signed, as was our approach spur, SF 900. The nice sign, however, belied the state of the road, which was heavily choked with alder in quite a few spots. However, Tony's truck made short work of it and we arrived at the abrupt road-end in an impenetrable alder thicket at about 10 a.m. Gear up and away we went fifteen minutes later on the de-built remains of SF900.

There wasn't much in the way of the advertised path but we soon reached the old, partly collapsed helipad that marks the point at which you leave the old road and head west up to the long North Ridge of the Crown massif.

There's no hiding the fact that the next bit was ugly. With a half-digested, high-fat breakfast still very much in evidence, a full climbing/camping pack and only half warmed up muscles, launching directly up a 45° slope choked by immature second growth nicely concealing treacherous old logging slash, now counts amongst my least effective ways to get the day off to a happy start. The fact that there's only fifteen to twenty minutes worth of this torture provided scant mitigation.

And if we thought that reaching the old growth spelled relief, we were left in no doubt that it didn't. Even steeper ground presented itself ahead but at least in open forest and with the prospect of being able to use animal trails to go the way we needed to. In fact the ground was so steep that the animals had left us with contoured tracks to help lessen the angle. There was also a little flagging evident at this point to confirm that we were going the right way.

Rather surprisingly, the open terrain we were heading for turned out not to be the crest of the North Ridge but rather another old clearcut. Either roads come up from the west side to reach this, or it was the site of a heli-logging operation. In any event, it was a flat, easy 50 metres travel to the south through the slash in order to get back into the old growth right under a set of bluffs that was the last obstacle to getting onto the North Ridge proper. We soon found a steep but reasonable route on the left of the bluffs and were on the ridge ten minutes later. All told, reaching this point took us just over an hour from the truck with a couple of rests along the way.

From now on we would be almost exclusively in open old growth with hardly any of the usual in-your-face bush so common on the Island. There was no trail but we didn't really need one. We just kept heading up and south checking the GPS every so often whenever a "sucker" option tempted us the wrong way.

During our lunch break we made an interesting observation. Everywhere in the forest looked pretty much like everywhere else and so we chose to drop the packs by a convenient log on a reasonably flat, open spot pretty well at random. Lunch was almost over when we noticed that we'd serendipitously chosen our spot right where a blaze had been cut in a tree directly in front of us. It was clearly very old, in that trees grow slowly up here and this one had had time to put on a lot of bark since the blaze was cut. At least on the way up, we saw no more such cuts and wondered what had induced a party from yesteryear to make such an isolated mark.

Following lunch we simply plodded on up the ridge – with one detour for water at the only source before the alpine – before arriving at an open bluff at about 4 p.m. From here we could see open, heather clad slopes above marking

the beginning of the sub-alpine. Getting there involved a significant initial descent of 60-70 vertical metres to a boggy saddle before resuming upward progress once more. By 4:45 we were in open terrain with tarns everywhere and it was time to call it a day.

Considering it was so late in the season the weather was superb. A warm wind sprang up from the west just as the sun was going down making unnecessary anything heavier than a light fleece.

September 30 - Summit day

We got up at 6 a.m. the next day to a balmy and clear morning. By 7:30 we were off, following the ridgeline southwest and then due south up to the alpine. The twin summits of our objective came into view no more than fifteen minutes after leaving camp and we were also treated to lovely early morning views of Victoria and Warden Peaks to the northwest. The last trees fell behind as we approached the unnamed "Peak 5412".

We hiked right up and over Peak 5412, traversed the next bump on the ridge on the left (east) and then dropped down over scree and boulders to a point about 100 metres above the base of the north glacier of Crown.

The snow was hard and compact, as we had expected it would be, and we were happy that we hadn't lugged axes and crampons all the way up here for nothing. It was an easy but steady climb up to the narrow col between the main and west summits.

We'd already gathered from reading descriptions of the climb that a 3rd Class gully off the col leads to the summit ridge. However, the guidebook shows a route sketch that goes up a gully from a few metres below the col. There was certainly such a gully in evidence but it looked steep and loose and decidedly un-3rd Class. Peter and Tony headed that way but I was having none of it and went right into the col where, lo and behold, there was the easy gully. I yelled to the others to head over to me. They didn't need much urging having got themselves onto some exposed ice above a nasty run-out that their crampon points were barely sticking to. Looking at this gully on the way down and from further back shows that it dead-ends anyway.

After regrouping on the col we were soon off up the gully. It was loose at the bottom but otherwise straightforward. Once on the ridge we strolled up to the heathery summit in ten minutes with just one minor detour around the top of a steep gully known as "The Cleft".

Now we could finally see what Price Ellison, his daughter Myra and the rest of the 1910 party saw. The light wasn't the best but the high peaks of northern Strathcona were there in all their splendour to the south. The western horizon included Victoria, Warden, the Haihte Range, the Alava-Bate Sanctuary, Conuma Peak and much, much more. And, of course,



Tony and Peter on the summit of Crown Mountain PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

to the east were Georgia Strait and the Coast Mountains on the mainland. We soaked it all in over a leisurely lunch and, at least on my part, with a distinct sense of privilege at just being in such a place.

Visitors to Crown may note that the hydrographic survey tripod on the summit has one leg broken. This is because it was struck by a helicopter that was attempting to land there in 1988. The aircraft crash-landed but, happily, without injury to the pilot. The authorities certainly did a good job on the cleanup. All that I could find were a few shards of plexiglass in rock crevices just south of the summit.

Our visits to summits are all too brief and it was time, finally, to add our names to the new waterproof book that Peter added to the summit register and, with regret, to take our leave of this wonderful and historic place.

There were eight entries in addition to the seven noted by Chris in 2004. Business on Crown is clearly better than it was but this is still not what you'd call a well-frequented mountain.

Our return journey to camp was a leisurely affair. We had decided that there was no point in packing up and walking part way out that night. We would enjoy the afternoon soaking in the views from the ridge and savouring the trip to the utmost degree. The only variation we made on the descent was to avoid going right over the top of 5412. Instead we found a bypass route to the west just below the ring of krumholtz that guards the summit.

We were back in camp by 3:45 where Tony and Pete promptly fell asleep while I spent time pottering about constantly losing and then re-finding stuff as is my wont. (If anyone finds a pair of reading glasses on the summit of Crown – they're mine!)

October 01 - Out

An unprecedented 3rd clear morning followed another warm and pleasant night. We were again up at 6, packed and off in record time (for me) at 7:15.

With the benefit of the outbound GPS track we were able to avoid a few "bumpets" on the ridge on the way down. The few pockets of bush we had met two days before were likewise easily bypassed. We did find an area of blazes on trees similar to our find on the way up but quite some distance away and only because we had wandered off our outbound route a bit.

The descent from the higher clearcut was as steep as I remembered and that through the slash even more painful but we were soon on SF900 and ten minutes later at the truck. Just over four and a half hours to come down. It makes quite a difference when you have a known route to follow.

Less than two hours later we were back in Campbell River where Peter's database produced the "Royal Coachman" and his cellphone produced Tak. The Coachman has a lovely patio garden, fishpond etc. Quite bijou. No loggers' breakfast offered here. It was a climbers' lunch though. I can't remember what we ate; only what we drank. No prizes for the guess.

This article originally appeared on the SummitPost website. Follow the link <http://www.summitpost.org/trip-report/459231/Climbing-into-History-Crown-Mountain.html> for the original article and lots more photos.

Participants: Peter Rothermel, Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn

Up and Over Pogo

Tawney Lem October 6

Well before I started hiking, anytime I drove to the West Coast on a clear day I admired Pogo Mountain. Since I started hitting the hills this past year, Pogo became an objective and not just a passing view. The mountain became all the more intriguing after hearing growing tales (horrors) of serious bushwhacking, steep slopes and route finding challenges. A recent story had an unfortunate couple of hikers emerging in the dark (not planned) without a pack that included a wallet, cell phone and other gear (also not planned). With summer drawing to a close, I decided to find out for myself what Pogo was all about. Having just been up the mountain the previous week (to add more flagging and look for the above mentioned missing pack), Quagger offered to lead me up.



The lovely long ridge running out west for the descent PHOTO: TAWNEY LEM

The plan was to ascend and descend via the east side. With the shorter days upon us, we donned our headlamps and hit the trail before sunrise. The road walk to the trailhead was overgrown a bit but the odd slap of an alder branch upside the head served to clear to my morning grogginess. The trail quickly asserts its character by heading up, up, up, in steep fashion. However, as a positive spin, steep slopes just mean that you gain elevation more quickly. The early reward was gaining some great views of Steamboat Mountain lit up in the morning sun.

A word about gear choice is timely at this point in the story. Quagger's footwear of choice for steep trails is caulk boots. He had an old pair to lend, and with a few extra pairs of thick socks, they were a reasonable fit. Feeling a bit nervous about hitting the trail in a pair of boots that I had never worn before, my own boots got stuffed into the pack for safe measure. I had worn caulks before in my field survey days, but had never considered them for hiking. However, the traction was great whether climbing over deadfall or scrambling up rooted inclines (I liked the caulks so much I recently had the Vibram soles on a new pair of boots converted, much to the dismay of the shoe repair guy). The other slightly unconventional piece of gear that was brought along was an old ice axe, despite the fact that snow was not anticipated. Sure enough, where the trail got really steep, sticking the pick in the dirt or hooking it over a root was the most effective way to gain purchase.

At the mid morning break I was convinced that the caulk boots weren't going to be an issue and that my own boots didn't need to be getting a free ride anymore. So, they got tied into a tree and a waypoint was marked on the GPS so I could collect them on the way down. And, on we went. Once we reached the alpine, we ran into about twenty centimetres of fresh snow which had already hardened up. When climbing some of the steep rock sections, the new snow was a bit of a hindrance making it hard to find the small ledges Quagger

usually followed to weave through the rock band. However, a reasonable way up was eventually found. Amidst the many green belays and gnarly bush, one particularly fun spot involved squirming up through some tightly bunched branches and climbing a tree to gain the next section of rock.

Upon reaching the summit the weather was absolutely outstanding. T-Shirt and tanning weather in October! Having made decent time, and expecting a reasonably quick descent, we lounged over an extended lunch and soaked in the view. At that point something caught my eye and the conversation went something like this:

"Hey, that's a great long ridge running out west. Ever descended that way?"

"Nope, but I've always wanted to."

"Do you know how to go that way?"

"Nope, but I could figure it out."

"Have we got time?"

"Nope, not really! It's 2 p.m. with four hours of daylight left. But if we really giver..."

And so the decision was made. "But what about your boots," Quagger asked. Oh yeah, I was supposed to get them on the way down. Cool new route, or go back for the stinky boots? I'm ashamed to admit that the tug of the West Ridge was stronger than my 'leave no trace' principles. With that, we headed west without looking back.

Quagger figured the alpine section was more than doable, but was also aware that there were several cliffs that needed to be avoided and route finding might slow us down. Getting over to the West Summit was very enjoyable, and there wasn't too much issue getting off the summit. A continuous series of green belays reminiscent of George of the Jungle got us down to an unnamed lake. Low water made it possible to hike around the shoreline and we stayed on the east side of the outflow. We continued picking our way through the descent, and just before reaching slash at the bottom, a long cliff section presented itself. We were rapidly losing light at this point, but Quagger's 'spidey sense' kicked in and he found a way down. Once in the slash the bush was soaking wet, and we arrived at the Clayoquot Witness trailhead drenched with only fifteen minutes before darkness fell. Donning the headlamps once again, we rounded out the 18 kilometre loop with a 6 kilometre logging road walk back to the truck and smiles on our faces. Thanks Pogo! Hope you enjoy the boots.

Participants: Tawney Lem and Craig (Quagger) Wagnell.

Mountaineering with Kids – OR – Who Won the Snowball Fight?

Nadja Steiner

with contributions from

Emma Reader-Lee, Brandon Milne,
Anna-Lena Steiner, Finn Steiner

Over the last three years now we have been organizing an annual kids mountain trip with friends of the family. So, in 2008 we finally decided to put an official Mountaineering-With-Kids series on the ACC schedule. I thought the Annual would be the perfect place to give a little bit of an account of those adventures, of course including some kids point-of-views....

The series consisted of a *get-to-know* daytrip up Mt. Finlayson continued with getting a feeling for rock & rope at Mt. Wells, some exposure with an overnighter at Mt. Cokely, a fun hike & swim from Tod Inlet to Durrance Lake, and to end the season a 3-day trip to Cream Lake at the end of August. The trips were set up so the kids (and parents) could slowly get to know each other, their backpacks and the mountainous terrain; and our family was certainly keen to get to know other families or parts of families who liked to take their kids out into the mountains.

So one day in April, all excited, we were waiting on the bridge at Mt. Finlayson to see who might show up. With 8 kids (age 2-11) mostly running ahead (you'll need to be well trained to keep up with Piper), we headed for the summit. It seems on every trip there is at least one little kid that absolutely amazes me. This time it was 5 year old Heidi. Always a smile on her face, climbing up her way, she definitely was a Heidi of the mountain. Here is another voice on this trip:

Hike Up Mount Finlayson - by Emma Reader-Lee (age 9)

The best thing about the hike up Mount Finlayson is that everyone (including me) was having fun. It starts by Goldstream Park (the place where they have the salmon run) and is 413m above sea level. When we got back down my knees were exhausted and my feet ached nonstop. It is a beautiful place and it is about the tallest mountain I ever climbed.

Nothing really I can add to that. In May we tried out some rock climbing at Mt. Wells. Our section was generous enough to purchase some kids climbing harnesses and helmets (Thank you!!!) which were well used that day. Harry, Martin and Josh set up several top ropes at the Prisoner Wall and South Cliffs and I think all kids met their challenge that

day, even though it needed at least a 5.9 to intimidate Tashi, (officially named 'gecko of the day').

In June we got already quite adventurous. Fully packed with overnight camping gear, helmets and harnesses we got on our way to camp at the Mt. Arrowsmith saddle. Snow had been deep that winter and we weren't too surprised to still find plenty around. Before crossing the steep snowfield, Harry sorted the kids into two rope teams, each with an adult in the front and back to practise some real mountaineering. I was amazed how much the kids enjoyed this part. Reaching the saddle, the kids found their favourite camp spot and tents were set up. While the parents started in the kitchen department, the not-at-all-tired kids started with great enthusiasm to build a snow fort - in anticipation of the adult-against-kids snowball fight. By dinner time the clouds had mostly disappeared, leaving us with an amazing view in all directions. After all stomachs were filled, the adults had to start working on some defence walls to stand any chance against the kids full blown fortification. The no-crossing-line was drawn and snow balls flew in any direction. Who won? Well, I guess Brandon is right:



Departure from the saddle (left to right: Connor, Brandon, Anna-Lena, Hannah, Tashi, front: Finn) PHOTO: N.STEINER

Mt Cokely - by Brandon Milne (age 11)

My name is Brandon and I am a member of the ACC. I am 11 years old. I went with the Alpine Club up to the saddle between Mount Cokely and Mount Arrowsmith and camped with a group of kids on the Kids mountaineering hikes put on by Nadja and Harry. We met at the trail head and then started hiking through deep snow and steep slopes and we were roped up. We climbed to the top of the saddle and set camp. We had a snow ball fight with the adults and made deep snow forts. I think we won!

It was Fathers Day so we had Fathers Day cards from Nadja that we gave to our parents. We had Fathers Day con-

tests to see which dad was the best, but they all won. The next day we packed up and climbed to the summit of Mount Cokely. The part up onto the ridge of Cokely was really steep and the trail up to the summit also was. We had gummy bears and took pictures of the view. The view was really good.

On the way down it was steep and beside the trail we found crystal rocks. Farther down Peter Rothmel our tour guide showed us an old cabin and we spent some time there. And then we made our way down to the trail head. Thank you Nadja and Harry for bringing us on the hike and I am looking forward to more hikes....

Well, thanks Brandon, we ARE planning more. And yes, we definitely couldn't let Father's day just come like that! So, on that beautiful evening the kids distributed with obvious pleasure their hats and mittens across the snow. Dad's job now was to find the respective child's ones and hang them up as quickly as possible. As a next task the dads had to join efforts and build a sled from backpacks etc. that was able to carry all kids. Thanks to very cooperative kids, they succeeded and were ready to build a human dads & kids pyramid. As a last challenge we wanted to hear a lovely good night song. I think we all agreed that Josh & Connor's Rocky Raccoon deserved the trophy. No need to say that all dads deserved their Father's day chocolate chip cookie. (Slightly wondering if we need to worry about similar testing on Mother's day, we realized that 3 of the 4 present dads had been stuck in the same tent in a snow storm, attempting to ski the Spearhead traverse on Mother's day... so it goes...).

Mt Cokely – by Anna-Lena Steiner (age 12)

For some Dads, a perfect Father's day is sleeping in and being served breakfast in bed; while others (not to mention any names, DAD...) prefer celebrating the holiday trudging up a snow-covered Mt. Cokely. So this is, what my family ended up doing, along with a couple of other kids and parents. On the drive up the mountain, the fun started with the kids waving out the windows and making faces at each other. Once at the parking lot, everybody geared up, some proudly showing off new gear, and some realizing they had the same. The hike up was fun, with lots of whippy branches, rushing creeks, (not to mention blisters). Halfway up, we had a lunch break, with a beautiful view of the valley and mountains. After a while we heard kids laughing and realized that Brandon and Finn were gone. Following the whahoos, we found the boys on a shoe-slide they had been making from the snow. We packed our food and joined the fun. Soon we got harnesses on, clipped onto a rope and hiked up the snowy saddle. There we quickly set up tents, unpacked sleeping bags, and warmed up. Dinner was quick freeze-dried backpackers pantry and homemade beef jerky. The next day was father's day and we had some really fun games. The kids made a

snow fort and had a snowball fight with the adults. Then the moms had a challenge for the dads to see if they were worthy of being dads. There was the sled-making race: the dads tied backpacks together and piled kids on the "sled" and raced across the saddle. After that was the pyramid, which didn't exactly work, as the human pyramid kept falling apart. Second last was who could sing the best lullaby. Apparently, in the world of dads, "Rocky Raccoon" is considered a lullaby. Last but not least, it was who could make the fastest cup of hot chocolate. At the end of the day, all dads got what they deserved: A nice downy sleeping bag and a good night's sleep. Then everybody disappeared into the tents...

Well at least Anna-Lena and most of the other kids disappeared...The rest was able to watch first hand what not to do in the mountains. Since Mt. Arrowsmith is not only a beautiful Mountain, but also fairly easily accessible, it attracts quite a few mountain-going folk in all states of preparedness. This was no different on this weekend. While our group enjoyed some hot tea in nice company, voices hinted that there was another group making their way down around dawn. Two youths, equipped in jeans/runners and a reasonably well equipped woman appeared, who seemed to have led them down from the gendarmes, all of them feeling really cold and already probably hypothermic. It turned out that the woman was part of a group of four who had made their way up fairly late. She didn't feel she could go all the way up in time and decided to stay back, waiting on one of the gendarmes while the others tried for the summit. She ended up waiting 4 hours (!) while it was getting cold and dark. Since she didn't have any communication device, she didn't know where the rest of her group was at this point. But when the 2 younger people (in jeans and runners) showed up, she decided to come down to the saddle (between Mt Cokely and Arrowsmith) with them rather than continue waiting in the cold.

Good for the youths, since finding a bearing in the darkness seemed to be a problem (without a headlamp), and good for her, since hypothermia is not far when you sit too long in cold and dark. They reached the saddle where our camp was marked with a bright gas lantern and took immediately shelter since the wind had picked up quite a bit. While the two youths continued on their own, the female hiker decided to wait and enjoy a few cups of hot tea. After an hour passed, her team mates showed up and found themselves in a slightly embarrassing situation. Leaving behind a team member in the darkness as well as not being properly equipped and unable to communicate to their friend, gave them lots of time to think about how easy it is to get themselves into trouble. Heading off into the darkness, they reappeared back at our camp about 5 min later; they had lost their way and couldn't find their way down. Rather than let them try again, Harry and Josh decided to lead them down to the gully, so they'd at least descend into

the right valley. As we could not see their cars the next day, it seems they were able to find their way home.

Everything turned out all right, but things could have ended quite differently. Weather changes and getting lost can happen all too quickly in the mountains, even if it is just Mt. Arrowsmith. We might sometimes make jokes about Harry being a safety freak, with all his extra FRS-radios, GPS, ropes, wilderness First Aid etc., but don't we want to give the kids that secure intro rather than have them getting lost in the mountains when they are 17 or 20? The kids after all, had a lot of fun and gained a lot of experience!

Anna-Lena's view - continued

The next day Peter Rothermel joined us and we first went up to the summit of Mt Cokely, then hiked down a different way, we had never done before. It was quite exhausting and we kept going up and down, up and down, till finally it went straight down. After a long time of rocky paths, the cars came into sight. We all perked up and raced back, soon collapsing in the cars. On the drive back down, of course, we stopped by the ice cream store and all had double scoop waffle cones. All in all, it was a really great kid and family friendly tour.

Yeah, the next morning we were greeted by blue sky and at breakfast also by Peter Rothermel who had planned to join us for the climb up to Mt Cokely and show us the way down via Rousseau trail. After Harry had set up a rope to practise falling, Peter showed the kids the proper way to walk down a snow field. The following steep climb up from the saddle was definitely a challenge for some (not only kids), especially with a pack on the back. We decided to put in a top rope for the last bit for whoever might need it. Everybody made it all right and it was definitely time for lunch AND some chocolate (good for the nerves says Prof. Lupin, and he must be right). The view from the summit was amazing and the Rousseau trail down a real treat. Even Hannah had recovered from the "scary" ascent and her usual wide smile returned to her face. Unfortunately my shoes refused further cooperation and dissolved under my feet. I had to make use of Dave's generous supply of duct tape.... By the time we got down everybody was really tired (not only the kids) and the big ice cream cone at the Whiskey Creek gas station was definitely well deserved.

In July we went for a nice easy hike from Tod inlet trail head through the woods to Durance Lake. Unfortunately the wind decided to come along too, which made the swim a bit of a frosty event. Nonetheless we had a whole bunch of kids and adults on the float. The sound coming from there told us it was a lot of fun, anyway! The way back always seems to be faster than the way there and the backyard of our nearby house a welcome place to end the day with a nice scoop of ice cream.



Tashi climbing down from Mt Cokely, Mt Arrowsmith in the back

PHOTO: N. STEINER

In August we had planned our big trip, originally to Mt. Myra. However the heavy winter snow had destroyed the Tenant Creek bridge. With respect to the recent heavy rain-falls and me not having done the trip before, we decided to take the well maintained trail to Bedwell Lake instead, and go for a day trip to Cream Lake from there. Driving up to Strathcona we kept a close and probably a bit worried eye on the grey clouds. However, when we reached the trail head the rain had dissolved to a light drizzle and we got on our way. After the last week(s) of rain, the trail had turned into a collection of creeks, ponds and little waterfalls as Finn knows well to describe:

My hike to Cream Lake - by Finn (age 9)

On my hike to Cream Lake me and a bunch of kids had fun picking blueberries, eating them and picking more blueberries! The scenery was awesome, even though the trail was a stream deep enough for salmon to swim in. In some cases we had to get our boots wet, while we walked across a submerged boardwalk. We even saw a blue grouse! We camped at Bedwell Lake where Brandon and I went fishing. Though unsuccessfully, seeing as I ended up in the lake – boy, that water is cold!!!

The next day we went up to Cream Lake. I almost managed to climb on top of Mt. Boulder, a huge rock, where you can find crystals on the top. Brandon and Daniel made it up and brought some crystals for us to share. We hiked back - of course eating blueberries all the way. Unfortunately I left my mums hiking pole at Little Jim Lake (she is still mad at me for that...so if you find a Leki - Pole there, please let me know). Holy mackerel, there's lots of mosquitoes at Bedwell Lake! On the way down, me, my sister and Daniel were talking about books all the way down, ranging from Dora the Explorer to Eragon.

This time the trails were NOT RIVERS! (no salmon swimming there anymore, too bad I wanted to go fishing). Originally we wanted to go to Mt. Myra to find my mums lost camera. That will be next years mission!

Oh well, I think I will have to post a L.i.t.M (lost in the mountains)-list... Olympus camera, Leki pole, Nalgene bottle..... (maybe also a F.i.t.M (found in the mountains)-list; that one would contain a camera from Kings Peak..?!).

Reaching Bedwell Lake it seemed the clouds had just waited for our arrival to lift. Everybody on the campground seemed to crawl out of their holes where they had been hiding from the rain for the last few days. The next morning we headed for Cream Lake, enjoying the blueberries on the way just as much as beautiful Little Jim Lake and the waterfall below. Hiking up the pass I couldn't help being amazed about 7 year old Hailey. With a seemingly endless storage of energy she was chatting away almost running along, usually to join Brandon at the front of the group. The sun stayed with us and presented an amazing view to Nine Peaks, Big Interior Mountain and Mt. Septimus ahead. The beauty of Cream Lake was definitely a highlight for my brother Nicolai who had joined us, visiting from Germany. As soon as we reached the lake (maybe also after some re-fueling) the kids-forget-about-their-tired-legs-when-they-reach-their-goal-syndrom kicked in and, while we adults enjoyed our well deserved rest, the kids explored the surroundings. Finn and Anna-Lena remembered from an earlier trip to Cream Lake, that there were crystals to be found on the big boulder. Unfortunately their own legs got pretty shaky trying to climb to the top and I regretted having left the rope and harnesses (which I had packed just in case) at the Bedwell Lake Camp ground. However, Brandon was up and down the boulder quicker than a mountain goat and with his help Daniel followed up soon. They brought down plenty of little crystals for all to share. Eventually, even that beautiful day had to end and we had to head back. On the last bit of the trail a rain cloud caught up with us, but fortunately the rain stopped for dinner. Tired, the disappearance into the tents followed swiftly. Descending the next day, we were amazed at how quickly everything had dried up. A river that was big and swollen when we came up was now a small little creek, the

lakes flooding the boardwalks had disappeared and all the little waterfalls were gone. (Luckily the blueberries were still there). The bookworms in the group, Anna-Lena and Daniel, had found their topic and instead of more usual complaints from my daughters side, I heard a surprised, "What, are we here already" when we reached the trail head. Yeah!!! Isn't that what it's all about???



Descent from Bedwell Lake (back: Nicolai, Nadja, Ron, Dave, middle: Finn, Anna-Lena, Daniel, Brandon, front: Hailey) PHOTO: N. STEINER

With the Cream Lake trip our 2008-Mountaineering-with-kids series came to an end, too. For me, it was definitely a wonderful experience. What a pleasure to meet such a great bunch of kids (and parents!). They all deserve a big High Five and I am looking forward to seeing every one of them again on another trip next year, or maybe even in the winter....

Participants:

Mt Finlayson: Keith & Piper Battersby, Cathy Reader & Emma Reader-Lee, Rob, Marie-Noel, Heidi & Carolyn Prins, Josh Slatkoff, Tara & Connor Sharpe & Alistair, Nadja, Harry, Finn & Anna-Lena Steiner

Mt Wells: Keith, Brenda, Finn & Piper Battersby, Josh Slatkoff, Tara & Connor Sharpe, Nadja, Harry, Finn & Anna-Lena Steiner, Dave & Brandon Milne, Jim, Daniel & Julien, Derek & Iain Sou, Martin & Tashi Hofmann

Mt Cokely: Birgit Carviel & Hannah Taylor, Martin & Tashi Hofmann & Alcina De Oliveira, Josh Slatkoff, Tara & Connor Sharpe, Nadja, Harry, Finn & Anna-Lena Steiner, Dave & Brandon Milne, Peter Rothemel (day 2)

Durrance Lake: Ron, Wendy, Daniel & Hailey Burleson, Cathy Reader, Emma & Rebecca Reader-Lee, Warren Lee, Martin & Tashi Hofmann & Alcina De Oliveira, Keith, Finn & Piper Battersby, Nadja, Harry & Finn Steiner

Cream Lake: Ron, Daniel & Hailey Burleson, Nadja, Nicolai, Finn & Anna-Lena Steiner, Dave & Brandon Milne

Jamie Duncan Got His IQ's – 1996 to 2008

Ken Wong



Jamie counts out nine big ones PHOTO: KEN WONG

Under a warm noonday sun in early September 2008 on the flat summit of Warden Peak, I snapped a few photos of Jamie with his nine outstretched fingers and then we heartily embraced and shook hands. Jamie got his last Island Qualifier! How did he accomplish that? I know because I was there for all of them.

The first one was in 1996. I didn't know Jamie very well then. Sarge Bhatti was our co-op student and they were university buddies. A year or so before, we did our first hike to the Olympic Peninsula where Sarge failed to make a beach fire. Jamie and I badgered him for his failure. We started a huge fire and hence cemented our alliance. In June with two metres of snow in the alpine, three of us plus Eddie Welwood headed up the Philip Ridge Trail which I was on twice before to attempt The Golden Hinde, the apex of Vancouver Island. The first time I was driven away by a Thanksgiving Weekend snow storm. The next attempt was thwarted by three days of downpour and legions of mosquitoes. Now hard packed snow made easy travel. We were marooned in the tent for a day by a whiteout. Sarge taught us an East Indian card game but in no time I slaughtered them. Sarge was flabbergasted while I was laughing my head off. On the fourth day we were at the bottom of the South Face of the Hinde. The sun was intense and the snow slope was crunchy. The sugary

snow turned into water when I squeezed it which quenched my thirst under the intense sun. Half way up we traversed to the right to gain the ridge. Further up on a level spot we stopped and ate. This was Eddie's and Sarge's first mountaineering expedition and they opted to wait there. Jamie and I arced left onto the hard icy slope. He had stiff boots so he led. We chopped, plunged and kicked the last 80 metres to come to a wooden cross on the featureless summit blanketed with snow. Thus Jamie and I took our first Island Qualifier unknowingly. A couple of days later we paid two bucks at Campbell River Community Centre to wash off the grime. My fried face peeled off in my hands.

Next, the three charges of Elkhorn Mountain, the second highest on the Island. The first try was beaten by a horrible August rain storm somewhere on the North Ridge. Next year, six of us started from the gravel bar camp in iffy June weather and were slowly climbing the loose summit block when white flakes started swirling around. Jules the Quebecois had no warm jacket so we beat a hasty retreat while he demonstrated rappelling with a rope across the back and around the arms for a quick escape. A rock hit me on the chin which cemented my plans to buy a climbing helmet next week. We got tired of getting stung by Elkhorn and decided that our next attempt would be a day trip under high atmospheric pressure. In August 1998, Jamie, his friend and I started from the parking lot at 4 a.m.. We left our bonked partner at the North Ridge camp and were below the summit block by noon. Climbing the crumbling block with just two of us was a lot quicker than before. We went left below the horn and edged along facing inward on a seemingly never ending super narrow ledge. What's below my feet? The North Glacier beneath the mist! It was easy going afterward and then we were on the broad boulder summit of Elkhorn, our second IQ unknowingly. We saw our third target 30 kilometres away – the third highest Victoria Peak. What was that little vertical bump next to it? No time to ponder so we headed down. I caught up with Jamie at our camp on the West Ridge and chatted briefly with an ACC group which had just arrived while refilling my water bottle. Under a setting sun, Jamie and his buddy vanished down the gully and I followed. Missing the exit from the gully, I panicked scrambling up and down on wet logs in the fading light. I backtracked and found the exit but precious daylight was wasted and they were nowhere to be seen. Thus down and down I plunged into the deep dark forest alone. Soon the pink ribbons were out of reach of my headlamp. Down and down I lunged into steep wet gullies guarded by devil's club and slippery moss. By 11:30 p.m. I could hear the Elk River below but bluffs barred the way and the headlamp went out. I settled next to a rotten log and had my first open bivouac. Are there cougars prowling in the dark? Luckily it was a warm night! I got to the parking lot at 8 a.m. and learned that they got out

slipping and sliding at 1 a.m. with one working headlamp. Hey why didn't you guys wait for me?

Gerhardt Lepp was the trip leader of the two attempts of Victoria Peak in 1998 for his final IQ. He told us about the ACC Island Qualifiers, these nine seemingly randomly picked Island summits. Rain and whiteout terminated our first trip on the West Ridge. A couple weeks later we went back, heading up the right side of the South Face. We thrust Eddie up a short vertical gap and he dropped the rope down for the rest of us. After some very loose boulders on a long steep slope, we scrambled up the knife edge ridge peeking down several hundred metres to the North Glacier. A final push got us to the top for our photo shoot. Warden Peak was below us coming in and out of the mist. Back to the sliding boulder slope and down we went. A little fun rappel and then we made a beeline to the wine cache which I left behind on the first attempt. We buzzed happily to the cars.

I first met George Butcher on an ACC ski traverse of Garibaldi Neve when he triggered a little slide. Later back in the office I was surprised that he worked just down the hall from me! As his kids were older by then, he was free to join our IQ request. Mount Harmston was our first joint target. On a June 2001 morning, we left my car in the middle of a huge cut block and bushwhacked up the trail-what-trail to Kookjai Mountain, camping on top of the Black Cat Mountain. All day we heard the droning of heli-logging behind us. The next day we dropped down to Lone Tree Pass and went up over the Comox Glacier toward Argus Mountain. Deep snow was everywhere and the view of the half frozen Milla Lake was absolutely stunning. Gerhardt tipped us about the ramp just before Argus that led down to the ridge joining Argus and Harmston. Jamie and I didn't like the look of that steep snow ramp but George reached over the lip and went kicking down. We hastily followed. Mount Harmston was an easy peak to hike up but it was a bloody long way to reach from the trail head. On the way back before the Comox Glacier I saw many needles on the snow. Hmmm, the nearest tree was a few hundred metres below. Oh the needles moved! Wow! Ice worms! Poor, poor ice worms beware of climate change. Where will you live when the Glacier is gone? We stayed the night at Black Cat and then hiked out the Frog Ponds route. We passed beneath the huge helicopter making rapid trips up and down depositing old growth logs cut from high above. The clear cut was a busy place. A smaller helicopter was in the middle while trucks and an ambulance were parked around the perimeter. Where was my car? It took a helicopter ride to the side. The parking brake was still engaged!

We bagged Nine Peaks later in that summer, another long tiring way from the Bedwell Trail. We scaled Big Interior Mountain first before heading to Nine Peaks. Della Lake was beautiful from above but Della Falls was hidden from

view. Yellow and pink monkey flowers carpeted Bear Pass and the Septimus Range was in full view. I described to Jamie and George how I climbed Mount Septimus a couple of years before with Gerhardt. Back to Nine Peaks, we climbed the third peak from the right as it looked the highest and then we retraced our steps. Hiking up to the camp from the bottom of Big Interior Mountain icefall I came across the most spectacular flowers display. The fading sun saturated the flowers with colour against the darkening background, turning them into sparkling gems, dazzling my soul.

While I was biking coast to coast in the summer of 2002, Jamie and George ascended the wrong Mount Septimus, aka, Mount Rosseau, following the incorrect route description on the ACC web site. They were also barred by the formidable moat at Rugged Mountain. So in early summer of 2003, three of us plus Rob Adams were tripped and whipped by the slide alders up the overgrown logging road. The worst was the titanic struggle in the wide band of clear-cut filled with leg breaking holes and broken stumps which thoroughly zapped my strength and dulled my spirit. I was very mad when Jamie and George skipped the beautiful camp site and kept charging towards the big red mountain, finally camping across from the wide boulder chute which led up to the Upper Rugged Glacier. Next morning we were rewarded with a spectacular view on the glacier surrounded by sharp rugged summits seldom visited. The moat guarding Rugged was huge and sinister! We set up protection in front of the last remaining snow tongue almost touching the slimy rock wall. George leaped across on belay and threaded his way up onto the steep snow gully where we regrouped. We cached the rope at the notch on the East Ridge, rounded the pinnacle and became lost but then followed the steady Rob kicking up another super step snowfield hanging over the moat to reach the top. With fading daylight we were back to the camp, tired but happy. It was the right choice to pitch there. The other camp site would add three hours to the summit day. Three of us went on to climb Warden Peak a couple of days later while Jamie was home with his young child and new flame. What's more important than getting an IQ?

On Friday the 13th, July 2007, Jamie, George and I climbed the toughest of them all, Mount Colonel Foster. The six day adventure was reported in the 2008 Bushwhacker. Jamie drooled over the IQ plaques presented to George and me at the 2008 ACC Banquet.

George and Jamie couldn't stand me bugging them about their Septimus debacle any longer. On June 27, 2008, the three of us and Simon Norris loaded up our packs with beer at the Bedwell Trail head. Heavy snow buried and twisted the stairs going to the frozen Bedwell Lake. A glacial blue curly ribbon of water decorated the Little Jim Lake. Nine Peaks was as pretty as before to the right and Mount Septimus loomed huge before us. George laid out his bivvy



Jamie and George in the X-gully on Mt Septimus PHOTO: KEN WONG

sack below the bivy rock while we pitched our tents without flies on the snow next to the solid Cream Lake. We drank half of the beer and went to sleep. I got up before sunrise photographing the crescent moon over the silhouette of Septimus. Kicking up the X-gully this time was a piece of cake after the North Gully on the Colonel. We were in brilliant sunshine at the col and stayed high on the smooth glacier before scrambling up the last rock to the summit. The view was marvelous with the Comox Glacier group to the northeast and Nine Peaks and Big Interior Mountain to the southwest. We sought the peaks which we scaled before and looked for future goals. Delicate flowering Phlox diffusa was in many of my photos framing distant summits. After signing the summit register, I fruitlessly searched for the tube containing the registry which Gerhardt and I lost in a crack in 1999. We drank the rest of the beer at camp to celebrate and then ran into several groups coming in for the long weekend. We were back in Victoria around mid-night.

I was not keen on revisiting Warden Peak because of my experience when Rob almost walked off a bluff in the dark and the subsequent cold bivy 100 metres above our sleeping bags. However, the alliance formed years ago obliged me to be there for Jamie's last summit. After all, I had not missed any of his IQ moments. On September 5, after a six hour drive with George Urban at the steering wheel, Simon occasionally waking, and the sniffling Jamie and I snoring at the back, we arrived at the devastated trail head which was still old growth when George Urban climbed Warden two year back. The huge trees laid where they were slain, seemingly left to rot for no reason. As access to the intact forest further up was blocked by the tangled mess, we angled left into steep brushy unfamiliar territory and made a dicey

crossing of the raging slippery creek. A couple of hot and buggy hours later we reached the boggy flat where we saw a pair of elk and numerous bear poops. After a mighty struggle against the downward pointing white rhododendrons and copperbushes, we gained the tarn above the waterfall with daylight to spare. George pitched his tent. Simon laid out the bivy sack. I erected my tent without fly. Oops, Jamie had only his tent fly! His cold afflicted mind stuffed the fly instead of the inner tent into his pack. Let's hope the air pressure stays high as no one would share a tent with the sick. Before 10 a.m. under a bright blue sky we arrived at the col between Victoria and Warden. My previous traverse below the Warden summit block along the steep ice with no run out was quite unnerving. There was no ice this time. After filling my tummy with munchies, I attacked the chimney head-on pulling myself up the vertical bit while the three of them scrambled up on easier ground to the left. Once we were all in the chimney, we tiptoed among crumbling rocks, staying close together to limit the damage of falling rock. Ducking past the choke stone we emerged onto the exposed north face to look straight down 1,000 metres to the foaming White River. The face was bare of snow so we cached the ice axes and crampons and bounced across. Half way through the train stopped and George whipped out the rope to belay Simon along. While George coiled up the rope I scrambled up the easy second chimney which took us over an hour to locate in 2003. I waited near the top for them to catch up and then pulled myself up to the flat summit of Warden. Last time I could afford only a few minutes here. Now we savored the view for an hour and a half. My two excitements on the way down were a little difficulty in locating the exact holds on the North Face and then my awkward rappel down the first chimney using an improvised seat harness restricting my leg reach. I should have reviewed the chapter on making webbing harness in the Freedom of the Hill. The setting sun ignited golden flame on Warden and Victoria while we drank single malt whiskey mixed with glacial ice collected from blocks broken off the Victoria Glacier. What a way to end Jamie's IQ quest!

Thank you to all who shared Jamie's IQ moments over the last thirteen years. Without you he probably would be zero IQ: Ken Wong 9, George Butcher 6, Gerhardt Lepp 1, Rob Adams 1 and Ed Welwood 1.

2008 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS



Mountain Activity Winner

Cradle Mountain, Tasmania Photo: Selena Swets



Vancouver Island Mountain Scenery Winner

Skiing Mt Cain Photo: Tawney Lem



Nature Winner

I Love Sushi Photo: Sandy Stewart

2008 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS



Mountain Scenery Winner

Amphitheatre Mountain on approach to Burwash Creek, Kluane, Yukon Photo: Dave Campbell



Mountain Portrait Winner

Karun Reflects Photo: Mary Senserino



Mountain Humour Winner

Colin the Sasquatch Photo: Phee Hudson



Interior Ranges and the Rockies

Lake O'Hara Camp

Geoff Bennett
August 10-17

Near Three Valley Gap a semi-trailer jack-knifed and crashed. Motels filled to capacity. Graham spent the night under his car waiting for traffic to clear while the next day we crawled for two hours through the same jam. Far to the east in Kicking Horse Pass, lightning flashed, thunder echoed between the cliffs and the rocks came tumbling down. Near Revelstoke we passed a dead bear on the road. Sandy's car overheated until we crested the hill and zoomed down the highway to Golden where the mother of all traffic jams awaited. Cellphones buzzed and rumours flew among the gas pumps – mud slides in the pass...a day to clear... power failures in Lake Louise. We turned off the Trans-Canada amid a convoy of Calgary-bound boats and headed south to Radium. As the sun set on the Rockies high above, our weary gang pulled into a bar for a burger and beer – and terrible country karaoke. Some of us wanted to stay and belt out another verse of "Country Roads," but more sensible folk preferred the thought of a warm bed, still many miles away. Sandy drove through the night until finally we reached Lake Louise. No lights, no traffic, no signs, nothing familiar until we stumbled into the hostel almost by accident. Candlelight illuminated the faces of a dozen weary travelers. No computers, no reservations. A resourceful Aussie produced keys for all of us and so, at last, to bed.

Lissa, Krista and Cedric – he with the hut reservation and the lock combination – were missing on Sunday morning. Albert played the elder statesman and sweet-talked the bus driver into taking everyone up the gravel road to Lake O'Hara. He even knew the combination. We gratefully lugged our packs to the Elizabeth Parker Hut, elevation 2,040m, and claimed our bunks for the week.

Lake O'Hara is my favourite place in the mountains.

With family and friends I've hiked, skied and climbed its peaks on at least a dozen trips over the years. Green meadows, golden larches, turquoise lakes and snow-capped summits have attracted mountaineers, artists and thousands of other visitors such as Liz, the gentle wrangler from Muskwa-Kechika. She found "a private reach of forest stream...coral mushrooms and candy lichens...Time had carved the walls of rock around me... At my feet ran bright-eyed little fur people with busy hands, while invisible warblers sang from the spruce trees."

Their beauty notwithstanding, the Rocky Mountains have a reputation for treacherously loose limestone. This is unfair. When you find a good handhold you just take it with you. It is also unfair to the splendid Grassi Ridge on Wiwaxy Peak, the best climb at O'Hara with its multiple steep pitches of solid quartzite. The day after Don Vockeroth and Brian Greenwood made the first ascent in 1962, Don returned to climb it solo. Rick Hudson led this route in 2004, as did I long ago but not so elegantly.

On our first afternoon at O'Hara we were glad merely to have survived the journey. Most of the group hiked up to Lake McArthur. Sandy, Roger, Graham, Ronan and I teamed up to climb Walter Feuz, the south summit of Oday. A meandering stroll through the meadows via Tommy Link's trail brought us to the moraine at Grandview Prospect, followed by loose 3rd and 4th class rock to the ridge. Three hours after leaving the hut we stood on the 2,960m summit where we met Larry Stanier, a local guide and his two clients. "Welcome to the Holy Land!" he cried, waving his arm theatrically at the magnificent panorama. Dark clouds billowed behind his curly hair as he spoke. I asked him what he thought of the routes and conditions.

Four summits rise above the magic number 11,000' (3,353m). Of these, Mount Victoria is indisputably the best climb. Hungabee is higher but committing and dangerous, suitable only for pairs of experienced climbers in fair weather when the rock is dry. Huber boasts an airy summit arete now somewhat icy after years of warm summers. The couloir on Lefroy is straightforward and straight-up, but out

of condition after July. Later in the week we saw huge boulders tumbling down the face where in 1896 Abbot became Canada's first mountaineering fatality. Of the remaining peaks, Biddle is the most imposing, a gravelly but "sporty" climb. The name seems inappropriate until one learns that the Philadelphia millionaire Drexel Biddle founded a popular movement called "Athletic Christianity," taught US Marines dirty fighting and kept alligators as pets. Nearby Park Mountain is not often climbed for good reason although a group of us reached its summit in 2004. Ringrose is a steep, steady but loose scramble from Opabin Meadow. Glacier is an interesting route-finding puzzle above Lake Oesa. Two lesser but very popular summits, in addition to the one upon which we stood, are Yukness and Schäffer – the former with its unsurpassed views of the lakes and high peaks and the latter a fine quartzite scramble, low 5th class. But the one I really longed for was Odaray, right beside us, looming large and gray against the threatening clouds. Four years earlier, five of us had tumbled off its face.

We bid Larry adieu and hastened, too late, off the summit of Walter Feuz. A driving hailstorm punished us before we reached the warmth of the hut. There we met up with the Zala family and our guide for the week - Peter Amann. We crowded around two tables for the first of seven hearty dinners and listened politely as each of us explained why we were here. With a jovial nod to Jules, Terry asked, "Do I have a choice?"

Liz, for one, questioned the wisdom of her choice when after a night beside "other, somewhat musical, sleeping bodies," she awoke on Monday morning to "a low cloud ceiling, freezing rain, damp gear and a gloomy hut" and "the olfactory experience of the outhouse." At breakfast she suffered "a short-lived chill of horror – the sickening discovery that my stash of Alex Campbell coffee was (God forbid) actually DECAF."

The wind blew hard and the rain bucketed all day. Half the group wisely remained in the hut where Peter improvised a crevasse rescue school, winching ten climbers out of the chaos of jumbled packs and sleeping bags. Undeterred by a mere "Vancouver Island mist," Ian and Kari splashed off to Linda Lake; Jules and Terry headed for the Yukness Ledges; Ronan, Brenda, Liz and Roger walked around the lake. Mike, Graham, Colleen, Karen and I hiked the O'Hara grand tour for six soggy hours – Lake Oesa, Yukness Ledges, Opabin Plateau and All Souls' Prospect. Sandy met us halfway running the entire distance in shorts and T-shirt.

Tuesday morning fog patches and a rising barometer heralded a welcome change in the weather. However, a blanket of fresh snow covered the tallest peaks and would need two sunny days to dry out. Three summits remained in fair condition. Peter bravely led an expedition to the top of Walter Feuz with ten people tied in behind him, including Brenda O'Sullivan and Lissa, who reached their first summit ever.



Looking across at Odaray Mountain from Yukness PHOTO: GEOFF BENNETT

Albert, Liz and Brenda Moysey enjoyed the well-trodden path to Lake Oesa, ascending Lawrence Grassi's incomparable stone steps beside the cascades. Gray-crowned rosy finches and thieving golden-mantled ground squirrels inhabit the margins of this icy lake. Pikas peep and marmots whistle from every rockpile. Albert and Brenda continued via the ledges to Opabin Lake while high above them the Lemon family climbed Yukness (2,847m). They did it the hard way by first ascending the switchbacks to Wiwaxy Gap, then descending to Lake Oesa, traversing the ledges to Sleeping Poet Pool and slogging through scree to the summit. David Lemon, who has climbed Robson, congratulated Alex and Ian on their first ascent of a peak over 9,000'.

The lichen-covered quartzite on Schäffer had dried out just enough to permit Sandy, Graham, Peter, Roger and me to ascend the North Ridge. Jules and Terry joined us at All Souls' Prospect where we tied into Roger's shiny new rope for this classic scramble – like a mini Mount Sir Donald but much kinder, gentler and only three hours from hut to summit. A short fifth class step halfway up is the only obstacle and even this can be avoided by traversing into a gully on the left. Beyond the high point at 2,692m the ridge continues toward distant gargoyles and the treacherous North Ridge of Biddle. Most parties descend the West Ridge toward Lake McArthur, where the challenge is to search for solid rock by avoiding all the gullies among the shattered blocks.

Radio calls throughout the day kept everyone informed. By noon we realized that we had achieved a new record for the Vancouver Island Section – twenty-one summiteers in a single day! That evening we celebrated with wine and song – and a cake for Brenda O'Sullivan's birthday. Amid the hilar-

ity David, Sandy and I made plans for an ascent of Odaray the next morning.

I woke before I needed to and stared out the window at a gray and cloudy sky. I remembered the scene four years earlier. I had tied into the tail end of a rope with four other climbers and trudged up the steep Odaray Glacier. The snow was thin and loose beneath my crampons. Out of sight above me the lead climber slipped without a sound and toppled over backwards. In slow motion horror the others plummeted past. I dug in my axe but the rope plucked me off my feet like a fly. I remembered to keep my crampons off the snow as I lunged for my axe, flailing above me at the end of its tether. I grabbed the pick and drove it in as hard as I could, then watched in fascination as it dug a jagged groove into the ice. I saw the rope looped over my wrist at the precise moment when my pick held and we all stopped. The pain was breathtaking but nothing broke and we all walked away from Odaray.

I rolled over and tried to sleep, praying for a rainy day and an honourable excuse. No such luck! At the leisurely hour of 0730 we started up the trail believing Sean Dougherty when he wrote in his guide book that the summit was “3-6 hours from the hut.” We traversed low on the glacier, below the point where I had fallen, and climbed the snow couloir that leads to the col in the summit ridge.

One of the curses of global warming is that Rocky Mountain couloirs are not what they used to be. I wasted precious time traversing the loose, dirty, downsloping slabs looking for a safe route. Finally, I found an old three-pin belay stance on firm rock and then another solid stance thirty metres higher. Loose but easier rock led to the long summit ridge where the only difficulties were “two minor rock steps” mentioned by Dougherty. Seven hours after leaving the hut we stood just below the summit tower (3,159m). Except for the delay in the gulley we had been moving fast. To our surprise we still had to traverse a deep notch and climb two steep and sustained pitches, none of which were noted in the guide book. I knew that to go there and back, with three climbers and two rappels, might take two hours. We were out of time and very disappointed. Two hours and two raps later we reached the glacier and in another two hours returned safely to the hut. I’ll have to come back some day, leave the sandbagged route description behind, hit the trail at 0400 and hope for “third time lucky.”

In the meantime, the unflappable Peter led Colleen, Karen, Yves, Cedric and Krista to the summit of Schäffer. All of them had climbed Walter Feuz the day before. Albert and Brenda enjoyed another epic tour of Lake O’Hara by stitching together the trails from Grandview Prospect to Opabin Plateau via the All Souls’ alpine route. On the other side of the lake Terry and Jules hiked to Wiwaxy Gap then descended to Lake Oesa via the Huber Ledges. Several hikers headed north – Liz, Lissa, Ronan and Roger to Linda Lake while

Ian continued deeper into Cathedral Basin. They watched a family of mountain goats and kept a wary eye out for the local grizzly. Not to be outdone by Sandy, Kari ran down to the parking lot and back! Graham, Mike and Peter climbed Yukness and made a touching but unsettling discovery – a cylinder containing the earthly remains of a member of the Chicago Mountaineering Club.

Thursday morning dawned clear and sunny – at last – but whispers of an even more unsettling discovery circulated around the breakfast table. Some people say that it’s a man’s world and that men get all the best jobs. This is just as true in the mountains as anywhere else especially when it’s time to change the outhouse barrels. “A man’s gotta do what he has to do” announced a square-jawed Ronan as he gathered his stalwart band around him. Brenda pleaded with her husband. “Don’t go!” she cried. Lissa wiped a tear from her eye as Cedric gazed at the lofty summit of the outhouse, the sun glinting from the shingles. Some of the harder women demanded to join the expedition but, “no,” they were firmly told, “this is man’s work.” David and Sandy donned gloves and girded their loins for battle: “souls that ever with a frolic welcome took the thunder and the sunshine and opposed free hearts, free foreheads.” With scarcely a backward glance the gallant foursome strode up the path and disappeared from view. What happened next may never truly be known, although the legend lives on. Screams of anguish pierced the silence of the grove. Those left behind, desperate for news of their loved ones, could only wring their hands in despair. At length our heroes emerged from the dark side, choking into handkerchiefs, leaning on each other, hollow-eyed. The deed was done!

Whatever demons they exorcised in that outhouse, it seemed to do the trick. Forgotten was the overturned truck, the mud slide, thunder, hailstones, the dead bear and the Odaray bugaboo. The weather had changed for the better and with it our luck, or so we hoped. Nine climbers saddled up for a climb of Mount Victoria.

Everyone basked in the sunshine of a perfect day. David and Ian went fishing in Lake O’Hara. Colleen, Mike and Yves enjoyed some top-roping in the quartzite cliffs then climbed up to Wiwaxy Gap. Cedric and Lissa headed in the same direction and traversed the Huber Ledges. Brenda M traveled with Terry to Linda Lake while Brenda O toured Lake McArthur and Odaray Prospect with Liz.

Albert reached the high point of his week by solo climbing the scree slope to Abbot Pass (2,926m), arguably one of the most gruelling hikes in the Rockies for people of any age. As he carefully picked his way through the boulders on the way down he greeted the rest of us going up – Peter Amann, Krista, Karen, Sandy, Jules, Alex, Graham, with Roger and myself bringing up the rear. Five uphill hours after leaving Elizabeth Parker Hut we reached the famous Abbot Hut,



Climbers on the 'Sickle', Mt Victoria PHOTO: GEOFF BENNETT

built out of local stone by Swiss guides in 1922 and for many years the highest building in Canada.

That evening we listened to seracs thundering into the Death Trap below Victoria and watched boulders bouncing down the couloirs of Lefroy. Krista restrung the prayer flags while Alex, a former chef, whipped up a superb shepherd's pie. I discovered that Clifton, the hut custodian, and I had lived in Jakarta around the same time. We exchanged greetings in Indonesian, probably a first for the hut. Graham asked a Russian climber who spoke little English, "Where are you from?" "Moscow." "What do you do?" "I work with pigs."

A full moon rose two hours after sunset on my thirty-seventh wedding anniversary. I had last climbed Mount Victoria exactly twenty-seven years earlier. With the first orange glow in a blue eastern sky we donned helmets and harnesses and wandered up the Southeast Ridge. Peter led the way with Krista and Karen, followed by Sandy with Jules and Alex. Roger, Graham and I formed the Seniors Rope Team with one hundred and eighty-one years of combined experience – "made weak by time and fate, but strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

After two hours of treacherous 3rd and 4th class rock we reached the southeast summit and prepared to descend the famous Sickle. The scene in the early morning is spectacular with the summit ridge beckoning, a sea of peaks all around, and the sun gleaming off the steep eastern face. Gingerly kicking steps down slushy snow atop steep ice, each of us tried not to look straight down to Lake Louise. Safely passed, the two younger teams bounded ahead of the seniors.

Out of sight of the other teams I heard the sickening clang of an ice axe tumbling into the abyss. I suffered through long minutes before we caught up with the others and counted heads. All present and none injured. The ridge is the kind of mixed climbing where one wears crampons all day, even on rock, and slips the axe under shoulder straps when two hands are needed. While down-climbing a narrow chimney, the tip of Karen's axe had caught on the rock and launched itself like a missile. It could happen to anyone. Peter had fashioned an ersatz axe out of a snow picket and was now carefully shepherding his team back home. Although neither Krista nor Karen would reach the summit that day, they did cross the magic 11,000' contour.

The remaining six reached the summit of Victoria (3,464m) around

noon, six and a half hours after leaving the hut. I drew a heart on the summit and toasted my bride of thirty-seven years with a swig of Gatorade.

On the way back Graham's crampons slipped while down-climbing loose rock and slashed his leg. I held his fall but Roger, in the middle, slammed into the rock and damaged his knee. Bloodied but unbowed, the Seniors Rope Team limped off the mountain and arrived safely back at Abbot Hut twelve hours after leaving. Roger and Graham elected to enjoy the rarefied heights for another night while I trudged back down the pass to rejoin the others.

I nearly caught up with Jules but despite her heavy pack she kept sprinting ahead like a mirage. At the final bridge over Cataract Brook she met Terry who had been patiently waiting. "May I take your pack?" he gallantly proposed. Overcome with emotion she cried "Yes!" and fell to the ground. Really!

It was sure nice to be home. That night I heard about Colleen and Kari's trip to the mysterious Consummation Peak where they enjoyed amazing views but nothing more indelicate. Kari even spotted a wolverine. The Brenda's, Ronan, Liz, Lissa and Cedric spent the day at sunny Opabin. I also heard how Mike had led Yves, Peter, David and Ian on an incredible journey over Opabin Pass and across two glaciers to the Eagle's Aerie. This is a most unusual outcropping of pristine dolomite at the headwaters of Tokumm Creek in Prospector's Valley. Charitably described as a Buddha, a Norman fortress or something indecent, it is certainly the most prickly and preposterous tower in the entire Rocky Mountains.



The 2008 ACC-VI Section Lake O'Hara Summer Camp PHOTO: T. IMER

After such a spectacular day Saturday felt like a winding-down. Jules, Terry and Karen headed home, joined soon after by Peter Amann – but not before conducting one more glacier school. Mike, Colleen, Ronan, Kari, Cedric, Krista and I followed him up to Opabin Glacier to learn the intricacies of crevasse rescue, short-roping and rappelling on ice. I wore my trademark green three-piece suit with fuzzy Alpine hat but for some reason Peter asked me to walk about ten minutes behind the group. Despite his lack of appreciation for mountain fashion, Peter certainly knew his trade and he related well to the group. Over the course of six days, nineteen climbers participated in three snow schools and three guided climbs. The most enthusiastic learner was Krista who signed up with Peter every day.

Other parties enjoyed one more sunny day at Cathedral Prospect (Albert, Yves, Brenda M, Sandy and David) and Lake Oesa (Brenda O, Liz). Alex the fisherman caught and released three fine cutthroat trout in Lake O'Hara.

After a dessert of rum-soaked baked apples we enjoyed a party for which the previous six nights of singing and hilarity had been just a warmup. Never before have we witnessed such an outpouring of talent. As usual, Cedric the conductor held it all together with his voice, song books and mastery

of the guitar. Colleen broke the ice by guiding us into a circle where we faced the back of the person beside, then she commanded us to sit on each other's laps. It worked! More deviously, she asked four volunteers to bare their legs then instructed several blindfolded victims to identify the shapely gams. Fortunately, no one confused Albert with any of the ladies but Ronan did commit an unpardonable sin when he failed to identify his own wife. Albert regaled us with a poem by Banjo Paterson, the Aussie legend who wrote "Waltzing Matilda." With suitable passion, Mike recited John Betjeman's "Miss Joan Hunter Dunn" then teamed up with Liz to perform the Monty Python cheese skit. The talented Peter Rogers sang and played two original songs and the Lemon family astounded us by reciting "Jabberwocky" in unison. Sandy, now a doting father as

well as a trail-running mountaineer, entertained us with Dr. Seuss before I shot him as "Pious Pete" in an obscure Robert Service poem. Krista outdid us all with an amazing rendition from the loft of "The Cremation of Sam McGee."

These mountain weeks are magic but all too soon they come to an end. On Sunday morning after a flurry of packing and sweeping the cabin lay bare. I thought of all the friends who had passed this way, especially Viggo, who climbed these peaks with us four years earlier and Gerta, who loved these summer camps. "All experience is an arch wherethrough gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades for ever and for ever when I move." I hitched up my pack and headed down the trail. "Whose socks are these?" was the last plaintive cry before we boarded the bus and drove away.

Participants: Ian Lemon, Alex Lemon, Cedric Zala, Sandy Stewart, David Lemon, Mike Hubbard, Peter Rogers, Albert Hestler, Roger Painter, Krista Zala, Geoff Bennett, Brenda O'Sullivan, Colleen Kasting, Kari Frazer, Ronan O'Sullivan, Yves Parizeau, Lissa Zala, Liz Williams, Graham Maddocks, Brenda Moysey, Terry Gagne, Karen Payie, Jules Thomson and Geoff Bennett.

Into Bear and Beer Country: Kokanee Glacier Summer Camp

Rick Hudson
August 17-21

We're bound for beer country! Or, make that bear country! In any event, we're heading for Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park and the temperature is hovering in the mid-30s. It's hard to pack for snow and ice when you're wilting, even in the shade.

Due to the peculiarities of the ACC reservation system, we have only been able to block-book half the hut – ten places – so this is a limited second Section Summer Camp. But Geoff, who is at O'Hara Summer Camp, is going for the double whammy and plans to come directly from the Rockies to the Selkirks.

The final 16 kilometres of gravel road up Kokanee Creek is rough. It's a weekend and the people of Nelson are at the Gibson Lake car park en-masse cooling off at the water's edge. We shoulder heavy packs (despite hiring two porters who will each carry twenty-five kilograms for us) and totter up into the cool of the tree shadows. The trail is wide and gentle, climbing five hundred metres through forest and then alpine to Kokanee Lake at 1,970m elevation, following an old mining trail.

The history of the area can be traced back to the silver mining boom of the 1890s when men with more fibre and less sense braved harsh conditions to make their fortunes in what was then the back-of-beyond. Mines like Smuggler, Molly Gibson and Silver Cup employed hundreds of men in their heyday. Apart from humans, horses were the main beast of burden, hauling in supplies and carrying out ore over the rugged terrain. It wasn't long before the townsfolk heard about the alpine beauty of the region and in 1922 almost one hundred square miles were declared a park – one of the earliest in the province.

We are on an old horse trail now. Beyond Kokanee Lake the path climbs gently to Kokanee Pass before skirting Keen and Garland Lakes. The area is granite, making the valley feel warm and friendly. At the north end of Kaslo Lake we reach the Kokanee Glacier Cabin, a gigantic chalet complete with three floors, hot and cold running water, electricity, and its own septic plant, more suited to St Moritz in Switzerland than the middle of BC. But we can't complain – the blue skies under which we started have turned to cloud. Thunderheads build, and lightning flashes off in the distance. It rains as we reach the hut and we're glad for the shelter.

The morrow promises to be good (the custodian has an internet link and posts the weather forecast each evening).



Granite grabbers Sylvia, Russ, Rick, Denis, Phee & Catrin balance on the Giant's Kneecap summit PHOTO: UNKNOWN

Geoff is still traveling from O'Hara, but the remaining nine are loathe to waste a good day waiting for him and decide to tackle the main objectives in the area.

Southeast of the hut lies Kokanee Glacier which covers the north flank of a line of summits – Pyramid, Giant's Kneecap, Keyhole, Esmeralda, Cond and, of course, Kokanee Peak, from which the glacier, creek and brewery get their names. All of these summits are within a few metres of each other in height (about 2,750m), with the highest – Cond Peak named after the surveyor Fritz Cond¹ – being 2,810m. The nice thing about a day on Kokanee Glacier is that once you've reached your first objective, the others are reasonably close and comparable in height.

An early start, a cool and clear morning, and we pass the Slocan Chief Hut (once a miners' shack, later an ACC hut, and now an historical museum) and climb a long shadowed couloir past the Battleship, a lower spur of the main range. Out into the warm sunshine again, we take stock and decide to scramble the Giant's Kneecap as our first objective as it involves easy bouldering on granite blocks. The summit is small and crowded (for nine bodies) and then a quick descent for a mid-morning snack on the glacier. The day is shaping up to be another stinker and we all seek out pockets of shade to hide in as we suck on nalgens, camelbacks, dromedaries, platypuses, or just plain snow. What a diverse group we are!

As the day progresses we head southeast along the ridge, enjoying the summits as they fall, but keeping a keen weather eye on the thunderheads. At 2 o'clock the sky is clear as we leave Cond Peak heading for Kokanee's summit, but when we get there the horizons are beginning to fill. By the time we've taken a few photos, signed the summit register and



Returning across the Kokanee Glacier from Kokanee Peak. This was how we were roped up when disaster was narrowly avoided an hour later. PHOTO: PHEE HUDSON

roped up again, massive columns are building to the south.

But the day is still sunny and surprisingly warm. Liz leads the first rope of four with Denis leading the second of five. Liz obligingly finds a hidden crevasse but only goes in to her waist although she later explains that her feet were hanging over a lot of nothing. The storm holds off as we traverse the long bench of the glacier, and by 4 p.m. we are beginning to relax.

Crossing below the Battleship on bare ice that is running with melt water, we are strung out, nine in a row, evenly spaced when suddenly there is a thundering noise from above. I glance up but at first can see nothing as it is directly into the sun. Then, high on the rock flank of the mountain, a rock the size of a washing machine can be seen spinning in the air. It strikes the slope and explodes into two large pieces and a shower of cobbles now just a few hundred metres above.

Time stands still. We are roped, equally spaced. There is nowhere to hide, no time to think beyond the immediate question on everyone's mind: "Is it coming for me?" The two large pieces are bouncing and spinning at chest height, the noise loud and terrifying. Below, we react instinctively. Denis, at the head of our rope, drops on his side and drives his axe into the hard ice. Sylvia, Tony and Phee are in the fall line. At the back, I stand foolishly wondering if it will cut the rope, or just rip us off our feet.

Above, one piece slides to a stop, but the larger one is still spinning and bouncing as it reaches the start of the glacier. In the middle of the rope, Sylvia and Tony both realize they are 'it'. Sylvia lunges forward, Tony pulls back, both trying to get out of its path. In far less time than it takes to read

this, the slack rope between them pulls tight, the boulder strikes the ice just above us and accelerates like a toboggan passing under the taught rope like a limbo dancer sliding to a stop a short distance below. A moment later, Sylvia loses her footing and falls. The taut rope drops to the glacier but the danger has passed.

Silence! Then everyone is shouting. "Put on your helmets!" "We don't have time for helmets!" "Let's go, let's go!" We scamper across the blue-ice like rats and regroup somewhat out of the firing line. We are all talking. Adrenaline is pumping. But this is no place for a replay. Denis leads down the slope towards safer ground. By the time we've reached a ridge we are a lot calmer but still shaken and the long hike home is spent in reflective silence. It has been a close thing and except for some good

luck we would not have emerged unscathed. Back at the Cabin we find Geoff has arrived and there is much chatter about the O'Hara Camp and how it had been.

The next morning is overcast and raining. Undaunted, we head southwest towards Sapphire Lakes and Lemon Pass. The alpine country is rolling and beautiful, sprinkled with lakes and late summer snow patches. This is superb hiking country and despite the lack of sunshine a photographer's paradise. In the aptly named Glory Basin the clouds lift from the surrounding peaks, all easy hikes, and we choose Outlook Mountain to the south.

Arriving on the summit the clouds hover just above but the rain stays away as the ten of us eat lunch and discuss in which direction to throw an old frisbee that someone has picked up on the way up. Later, some scramble a rocky ridge northeast towards a peak of similar height while others drop back into Glory Basin. Moving sun patches illuminate the slopes but there is a growing sense of bad weather coming and by the time we meet again near the lakes, it's pouring, then hailing furiously. We trudge back to the Cabin resigned to getting soaked knowing there's a warm space and a large drying room with an electric heater. Ah, the comforts of the wilderness.

The following two days are basically a washout. Rain falls, the temperature sinks from the mid-thirties of the first day to 50C. Just above the hut we can see new snow. But we are snug; there are New Yorkers and American Scientifics to read, jigsaw puzzles to piece together, and bridge hands to be won and lost. Denis gives a demonstration on anesthetizing and suturing an orange. Some faint at the sight of orange

juice but Russ does a sterling job of patching his segments together. It all helps to pass the time.

And in the evening, there are sumptuous meals to be eaten, prepared in rotation by us all with everyone professing modest menus and delivering great cuisine. We are grateful for the luxury of indoor plumbing as the rain continues all night. The only downer is the limited liquor supply – we being too cheap to pay for more than two porters. Tony, however, being the oldest present produces a large box of wine that he's carried up and invites us all to enjoy it.

Our final day arrives and with it the promise of drying skies. We leave early and see blue above for the first time in what seems an age. The trail is wet but just above the snow-line reminds us how much worse it could have been. The air is wonderfully fresh, the visibility such that the local peaks feel close enough to touch and water droplets sparkle on every passing leaf. It's sad to go, but the vigour of the morning lifts us all as we pass the lakes and start the descent to the car park below.

Acknowledgements: A special thanks to Phee for organizing this trip.

Participants: Sylvia Moser, Tony Vaughn, Liz and Doug Turner, Catrin Brown, Denis Brown (no relation), Geoff Bennett (late as usual), Phee and Rick Hudson, and Russ Moir.

- 1 As an interesting footnote, Fritz Thomas Percy Cond signed on with the Royal Navy at the outbreak of war in 1914. In 1916 the BC Gazette posted a first name change for him from Fritz to Frederick – an astute decision, given the anti-German feelings of the day! He died unexpectedly on his return to Canada in 1919. The peak, formerly known as Apex, was renamed in his honour in 1924.



Passing the time on rainy days. Sylvia and Catrin 'anaesthetise' an orange prior to suturing. PHOTO: PHEE HUDSON

South of the Border & Distant Places

Springtime in the Santa Lucias: Junipero Serra Peak

Martin Smith
April 30

My son's participation in a triathlon at Lake San Antonio in central California saw me heading down south on April 27 with the added intention of getting some hiking in before the race.

Only a few months into recovery from a second knee surgery in as many years, I was looking for something pretty gentle at this stage of the game. The Ventana Wilderness in general and the lovely coastal Santa Lucia Mountains in particular seemed to fit the bill nicely. Junipero Serra Peak is the highest point in the range at 1,787 metres and a very worthwhile daytrip at that, with 20 kilometres of map distance as well as nearly 1,200 metres of relief to deal with.

After a quick trip up Cone Peak on April 29, I drove through Fort Hunter Liggett – replete with its assault courses, armoured HumVee convoys etc - and car camped at Memorial Park in preparation for an early start the next morning. At this time of the year there's almost no one around and I had the place pretty much to myself. It's a rather dismal site though, completely in the trees and rather unkempt. I'd have been better off to camp right at the trailhead with its wonderful view across open meadows to the mountain beyond. But hindsight, as they say, is always 20:20.

After a surprisingly cold night, I was up with the lark and away by 7:45.

An easy trail led east across oak-lined, spring flower filled meadows, until eventually entering the trees themselves. For forty-five minutes the route was almost flat. In fact, it was well over an hour before I noticed any appreciable uphill.

Eventually the way turned north, out of the trees and up steep grass before arriving on the chaparral covered south



Lovely open flower filled meadows at the start of the trail up Serra Peak. The summit is the high point on the left skyline. PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

ridge of Serra Peak at about 10 a.m.. The route is starting to become quite choked with bush and, although contoured and well made underfoot, a bit of effort was required to push through on occasion and a sharp eye needed to avoid getting spiked by yuccas or covered in the ever present ticks that frequent this and all the hills in the Santa Lucias.

In any event I had a last break at 10:45 at 1,565 metres and thought from the position of the old summit lookout that I was about fifteen to twenty minutes away from the top. In fact I was still forty-five minutes away. Rather than continuing up the South Ridge, the trail crosses over a saddle between Serra Peak and a bump to the north and contours the north side of the peak in an easterly direction before heading back up and south to the summit.

Immediately one crosses the saddle to the north side of the mountain, the habitat changes from dense chaparral to open bristle cone pine forest. I found the abruptness of the change quite fascinating.

The summit of Junipero Serra is a bit disappointing. In fact it's quite hard to find. Around the old lookout tower is

a flat area one or two hectares in size with several possible high points. I wandered around up there for an hour and still might not have found the right spot. I did find a USCGS witness benchmark at N 36° 08.749 W 121° 25.249 but no main mark.

It was all very pleasant, however, and I enjoyed the wonderful views, particularly to the west, a snooze in the sun and lunch before heading down at 12:45. The dicey knee held up well as I dropped the 1,200 metres to the car in just over two and a half hours. The bush on the South Ridge held me up a bit but other than that it was put the brain in neutral and enjoy the scenery time.

Just to complete a perfect day not a single tick attached its odious little body to mine. I saw plenty but they thankfully left me alone.

Just a few days after I got back to Victoria, the news was full of reports of raging wildfires right across the Ventana Wilderness. Serra Peak was particularly badly hit with fires consuming the route I took right up to and over the summit. For a while at least, check access permission with the local authorities before heading that way.

This article originally appeared on the SummitPost website. Follow the link <http://www.summitpost.org/trip-report/403568/Springtime-in-the-Santa-Lucias-Junipero-Serra-Peak.html> for the original article and lots more photos.

Solo participant: Martin Smith

Nostalgia and a Haggis for Breakfast. English Lakes and Scottish Highlands

Russ Moir
May 2008

A trip brewing for several years came about this year, sort of a 'blast from the past' or a 'rave from the grave' as cool DJ's waxed on in the crazy 60's. Well that's what it was intended to be. Keeping in touch with old climbing mates from college days has been fun. Three years ago John and Norm, from Sheffield, had suggested a traverse of Corsica, along the craggy GR20. We did it in fine style, glorious weather and lots of laughs. So when the chance came of meeting up with Rick Johnson and Sandy Briggs in the UK, for a look at some 'Brit Crag's', it just felt right to team up again with Norm and John.

From the start things went from good to better. After a week with my sister and time to pick up climbing gear in Sheffield, I drove over the lovely sheepfolds of Derbyshire on



Sandy raps off the Inaccessible Pinnacle PHOTO: RUSS MOIR

a warm, sunny morning, passing by some of the fine grit-stone outcrops where I spent too many of my college days. After a pick up of Rick at Manchester Airport, we sped up the motorway to the Lake District to try to meet up with the mysterious rendezvous given by Sandy. By sheer serendipity we found him in the idyllic back-country above Ullswater, where we spent a jovial evening with his friends (herein lies an amazing coincidence of 'mutuality'-another story!)

After a communal breakfast we drove together over the narrow walled-in roads to meet up with Norm in Langdale, one of Britain's climbing meccas. Conditions were perfect. Norman with Ian, another Yorkshire pal, had selected Original Route on Raven Crag, strategically positioned above the Old Dungeon Ghyll Pub. The place has a 'history'-some of this is not for publication, as it often involved escapades by Don Whillans and cohorts (not the best behaved lads!)

The route, as its name suggests, was first done in late Victorian times by climbers in tennis shoes with hemp ropes and no pro worthy of the name. It's a gorgeous route of mid 5th class, with 3 to 4 pitches. Short of gear for the five of us, we did it in several shorter pitches. Rick and Sandy, when stopped for breath, were giving off admiring grunts on the quality of



A guilty feeling we soon got over with the comfy chairs and cold beer

PHOTO: RUSS MOIR

the rock and the beautiful views over the nearby fells, which unfolded as we climbed higher. I think they were happy.

I was proud of Norm, an outspoken character as always. With a hip replacement operation scheduled in a month's time he pluckily led us up a series of superb slabs and grooves, sometimes needing to lift up his gammy leg when it didn't follow his directions. Ian and he were gracious hosts on this, our first day of routes, and.....yes.....we finished up in the pub below, to imbibe the good ales therein. Sitting amidst pictures of Lakeland poets and British 'rock stars' of old, frequenters of the bar here, added a tasty dessert. Over the next two days we hiked placidly over bracken-coated fells, including a crowded ascent of Scafell (England's highest, most human-afflicted summit); I was starting to feel weepy with flashbacks from a distant youth.

Next morning we said our farewells and we three 'colonial boys' drove off in our jam-packed car to the Highlands, nowadays an easy day's drive on the motorway mosaic.

I'd arranged to meet with John in Glencoe, at the plush Caravan Club site. With John in his motor home we felt a little guilty, a feeling we soon got over as he pulled out comfy chairs and cold beer for us. We lounged beneath the dominant slopes of the historic Pass of Glencoe. Shades of a mad history are all over the area, obviously bolstered by the tourist trade, but it did seem poignant that the famous Massacre of Glencoe took place only yards from here, over 200 years ago; the atmosphere is charged.

Next day, under cloudless skies, we traversed the Aonach Eagach Ridge, a splendid rib of rock, bordering the North

side of the pass. From it we could look down into the bottle-neck corries where the fleeing McDonalds met their fate in the snows; the ones who escaped the sword that is. This ridge I'd done before but never in such ideal conditions. It is, I think, the finest introduction to the Highlands. Views across to the famed peaks of Buchaille Etive Mor and Bidean Nam Bean are impressive and then you can scan over to the West to the distant Hebrides, our future goal.

The Buchaille was big on our agenda. Sandy did some of his first climbing here, as a grad student at St Andrews, so we were keen to re-touch this impressive crag. It's sited above the eerie, lonesome stretches of Rannoch Moor. We chose Crowberry Ridge as our target. In the early mists we hesitantly searched for the starting gully, browsed the guide book and somehow stumbled on what we hoped was the true start. Sandy led up the remnants of winter's snow pack and stepped gingerly onto the rock. For the next three to four hours we delighted in moving up on sound, sharp holds, though never really being sure we were on the genuine track. As we rested on heather ledges we could scan across to the bleak moor below. The wastes are seen as a gateway to the Western Highlands and feature much in Scottish lore. We could see the tiny dots of several climbing huts where generations of Scots and 'Sassenach' climbers have based their forays into this alpine training ground. In winter these crags give challenges to meet any big mountain comparison.

We topped out on the summit in the approaching 'gloaming' (more Scot's vernacular!), made our way along the open rock ridges and down to the car. Satisfied with another great day of cragging we drove the narrow road down the glen to...another climbing mecca....the Clachaig Inn. Funny how many climbing goals are pubs! The bar is surrounded by bottles of the finest whiskies and on the menu, just for Sandy we thought, his delight, a haggis. It became his standard request. Well the Scots have survived centuries on them, so why not? We plebs slummed with cod and chips; great big helpings to our delight.

The weather was fixed in a balmy frame as next day we drove with great expectations around the lochs to... THE BEN. On this talismanic peak, Britain's highest, we had selected another classic route, Tower Ridge. Though Ben Nevis is 'only' 4400ft in elevation (1,330m sounds puny), its crags are imposing/daunting and when winter storms plaster them with frozen cover, they are testing grounds for aspiring alpinists from far and wide. We skirted off the tourist track around into the deep gulch of Allt a Mhuillin, above which soar the cliffs on the north flank of the mountain, frequently a gloomy place for most of the day.

The Tower is a commanding ridge, ascending directly to the summit. It's an obvious line. We relished the fine solid rock as we traversed over scratched-up slabs and grooves, evidence of many winter ascents in crampons. There were delightful cushioned ledges to rest on and view the sur-

rounding ridges and glens. However, by the time we hit the summit block, clouds had masked the views and our descent was in a rare (for us) rain squall, buffered by the thoughts of...‘another haggis halt’ and good ales to wash it down. This was becoming a trip for hedonists.

The last part of our journey was “Over the Sea (or now a bloody bridge) to Skye”. The Isle is symbolic in Scots lore, though now much changed from the isolated place I visited in the 60’s. Nevertheless it is still a dreamy, romantic scene; open sea lochs, green, glistening meadows and hills, with the added drama of the dark Cuillins. These are a dynamic, crenellated range of hard gabbro rock. The views from all over south Skye draw your eye towards them; the famed traverse of the whole ridge was our target, though by now we were in a lethargic space. How else do you explain the laid back state of our camp on the peaceful beach at Glen Brittle, at the western end of the range? I have to say here that in three previous visits to this remote glen it had been horizontal rain and poor views. Now, in May, we were basking under warm, sunny skies, the sea glistened in a flat calm and the Outer Isles, Rum, Eigg, Muck and others were hazy mounds in the distance. Boy, could life get better?

Next day, a little less than frisky in the warm sunlight, we set off towards the corries above Loch Coruisk. We intended to circuit the western section of the Cuillin. This is awesome rock architecture; big stone chutes, spidery ridges that beg to be scrambled over and such rough rock to give you secure feelings on scary angles.

We shuffled our way up the screes opposite the well-known Great Stone Chute of Sgurr Alisdair (more memories) and on to the narrow ridge beneath the Inaccessible Pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg. This spike is a celebrity among ‘Munro-ists’, those intrepid climbers who seek to ‘bag’ all 284 peaks over 3000ft, as being the only one needing a rope to ascend. The longer East Ridge is only low 5th class but it’s an airy catwalk with big holds, quite exposed. Descent is via a short, overhanging rappel off the west ridge. By good fortune we were the first of several parties on the “In Pin”, so we had no waits.

Lunch on the narrow ridge opposite the Pin was one to remember into old age. We could look out over the glistening bay, across to those mystic islands of song...romantics that we all are; hazy outlines on the horizon, floating above sinewy lochs bordered by green, green headlands. It’s hard to see these landscapes as tragic places, but when I read accounts of the sufferings of the people from here and elsewhere in the Highlands during the savage Clearances in the mid-19th Century, my blood boils. These hills were populated, loved and farmed for centuries. Now they are mostly empty, save for pockets of marginal farming and ‘return-to-home’ highlanders with their fortunes made via emigration.

The final fling for us came two days later with an ascent from Sligachan up to Sgurr Nan Gilleann. We had intended to

take in the imposing Basteir Tooth, an isolate buttress on the northern end of the Cuillin. We did scramble up its flanks but with a minimal amount of gear for the four of us, security would have been a time consuming operation. We were in the mellow mood to set this aside and carry on over to the equally inviting arete on Gilleann’s West Ridge.

The chirpings coming from Rick as we scrambled up dry chimneys and stepped over exposed blocks told me he was in Seventh Heaven. Sandy, in his quiet, charming manner, was grinning from ear to ear. This was the stuff of kings; Nirvana even. And below us, waiting by the placid loch wasyes.... more quality ales to savor and massive plates of cod and chips.

A fine way to leave this world!

Mount Kosciuszko and a walk on the “wet” side to Carstensz Pyramid

Sylvia Moser

November 15-December 15

In November 2008, my quest for the “seven summits” continued taking me to Australia and New Guinea.

Australia’s Mount Kosciuszko (pronounced kos-e-osko) at 7,310ft (2,228m) is the highest on the Australian continent however, Oceania, which includes New Guinea, has Carstensz Pyramid (Puncak Jaya) at 16,024 ft (4,884m) as the highest.

Mount Kosciuszko is in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales where the ski resorts are located. I arrived in Sydney on the November 15 and after fourteen hours of sleep I rented a car and drove the 600 kilometres to the ski resort of Thredbo. The next morning I hiked up to the summit. At first I was all alone, hiking through a very beautiful snow-gum tree forest, but when I reached the top of the chairlift my solitude was gone as all of a sudden there were a lot of other hikers. To protect the fragile eco-system one walks on a metal track that leads almost to the summit. It was a beautiful, blue sky day! I was quietly grinning from ear-to-ear as I reached the top as this was number six out of the seven!

The following day the weather was gray and windy, and it was threatening to snow. Just for the fun of it I decided to hike up the other side of Mount Kosciuszko via Charlotte Pass. This route has no chairlift access and hence no people! It was wonderful and unlike the day before it really felt like I was in the mountains. There is a hut, the Seamen’s Refuge, which was built in memory of some hikers who lost their lives in a white out. So, even Mount Kosciuszko is not to be underestimated!



A jubilant Sylvia tops out on the Carstensz Pyramid PHOTO: UNKNOWN

Then it was off to the coast for some R&R on the beaches. Great hikes along the coast: beautiful white sand beaches, numerous colourful birds and plants but hardly any people.

On the November 23, I flew to Bali to meet the rest of the group to climb Carstensz Pyramid. Our team consisted of two Americans, (Bob and Joe) both of whom had tried unsuccessfully to summit by flying into base camp, a Dutchman named Adriaan and myself. There were also two American guides from the Seattle based outfit called Mountain Madness. They had never been to Carstensz Pyramid so they subcontracted an Indonesian company that had also never organized a walk in.... get the picture? Needless to say a lot of things went wrong!

First we had problems with visas which resulted in two extra days in Bali. One of these days we spent sightseeing and the next attempting to climb Mount Agung 9,888ft (3,014 m), the highest Volcano on Bali. As most people start at midnight, we thought this seemed a bit of overkill as it was not that long of a hike, however, we soon learned the reason why. At noon we started our climb, walking past a large temple into the dense jungle. We hiked up fairly steep terrain for two hours and then had a break only to realize

we had company – a large monkey had been following us. This monkey was wiser than we were for he left soon after we started hiking again. Very soon after leaving the trees the rain started and we were drenched in a matter of seconds. This was only a sample of what was to come in New Guinea! Anyway, we thought we could continue until a loud crash of thunder made us all retreat very quickly in the pouring rain. The lesson we learned: climb at night and stay dry!

The flight to Tamika, New Guinea, left at 3 a.m. on the November 26. We were not scheduled to overnight there, but we could not leave until we had been duly warned in person by the police that under no circumstances were we to trespass into the Freeport Mine, the biggest gold, copper and silver mine in the world. There had been some Belgian climbers some months previous who, when attempting to descend through the mine, were locked into a container with only water for five days until their embassy paid the fines. After all this they still had to be airlifted by helicopter at their own expense.

On the November 27, already a couple of days behind schedule, we finally flew by Twin Otter to Sugapa (7,000 ft) on the northwest side of the mountains. It was from this remote village that we got our porters for the “three and a half day trek” to base camp which was about 80 kilometres away as the crow flies. But again this took so much time that we ended up spending twenty-four hours in a small hut with Dani people all around. They argued about everything and we really had no idea what was happening.

Manado Expeditions, the subcontractor, had provided us with a “cook” named Steve, who could neither “cook”, nor was in any shape for the trek to base camp; an interpreter/climbing guide named Romey, the only one that had actually been to the mountain (but never on foot) and Raymond a “guide” who just helped out.

Next day at around 11 a.m. we finally got under way. Eighteen porters had been chosen and supplied with rubber boots, which most of them never wore, and lots of cigarettes which they smoked constantly. We had two armed military policeman to escort us for the first day in order to keep the peace until we were in the jungle. We walked out of Sugapa and lost about 1,500 feet in elevation. As we walked that day we passed many fenced-in properties. The Dani grow potatoes, yams, taro and a number of other things that were all doing very well so no one looked hungry! There are also pigs, chickens and goats running inside these fenced areas. They build thatched round huts where many people live together. There is no source of light (day or night) other than a smoldering fire in the centre of the huts and no way for the smoke to escape other than seeping through the grass covered thatched roof. This gives the impression that all the huts are on fire but also means you can see the smoke rising from far away. In general, the Dani people were very friendly and one got used to the fact that they yell all the time and that the

men often wore only penis gourds and women would nurse their babies very openly. However, we did encounter a number of trail and bridge blockades where the tribes' people extorted large amounts of money from our local guides before we were allowed to pass. These meetings were not altogether peaceful; there was a lot of tension which resulted in much loud and intimidating yelling, along with fist, spear, machete and rock waving.

The next two days we were in very hot, thick jungle with about three layers of canopy above us. The route was often hard to find and the mud was up to our knees. There were mud slides which had they given way while we were crossing would have carried us down into the raging river. There were many river crossings, some which were relatively easy and some that were very dangerous. The "bridges" were so sketchy that often only one person could cross at a time. Every afternoon the rain was a given! Yet I found the jungle to be amazing with its sounds and smells, and the absolute darkness at night! By the end of the third day we were out of the jungle, but the swamps and mud were even worse and so was the rain – oh yes, almost thirty-six hours straight! Day four: More equatorial bog, strange vegetation and weird gray trees that all look dead. Yet, there were an amazing amount of very beautiful flowers even at an elevation above 10,000ft. We finally saw some foot hills with larger mountains in the distance! On the fifth night we were at 12,000 feet and still wearing our rubber boots! The next morning, day six, the sun was out – amazing! We packed up and after the porters' daily arguments about loads we were on our last day of trekking. We climbed some vertical bog and then saw the beautiful limestone mountain range. It rained and rained, but by now this was normal! We crossed New Zealand Pass in semi whiteout conditions and descended into base camp at 14,200 feet. There are many lakes and amazing rock formations, but also an abundance of garbage which I found very shocking!

December 6 - Summit day! We had been in camp for one night and a day due to continuous rain. I was so worried that I might not be able to rock climb in such conditions. We had wanted to start at midnight but it was pouring, however, by 1 a.m. the rain finally stopped. By 2 a.m. five of us (excluding Bob) and Romey were on the path that led into the next valley and after two hours we were on the fixed lines, jumaring our way up the most incredible limestone. The route was definitely very steep and the rock very sharp so we had heavy leather gloves on all day. By dawn we were just about on the ridge and we had our first really good look at the mine from which the glow of its lights lit up the sky at night. It is huge!!!!

Sunrise over the glacier on the ridge in front of us was very beautiful (no rain)! The ridge was exposed but easy to walk along until we reached the famous gap. Here I had my first experience with a Tyrolean Traverse! Wow, what an adrenalin rush especially if you look down at the 2,000

foot drop when you are half way across! Here I was thinking "I have to do this again on the way back!" We reached the summit (16,024 ft) at 8 a.m. and for Carstensz Pyramid's standards the views were great with just a little mist drifting about. Everyone was very happy, especially Joe and myself, because this summit meant that there was "only" Everest left in our quest for the seven summits. We got back to camp at about 1:30 p.m. in the pouring rain but somehow now it really did not matter – we had summited!

As it turned out we were not able to walk out as planned, instead we flew but not by choice! Bob and Joe felt that they could not make the trek as Joe had a very bad infection on his leg, probably due to a parasite from one of the many river crossings, and Bob had not been eating for days. We had to wait for five days until the helicopter could pick them up and by now our already very sparse food and fuel had come to an end. Adriaan, Mark and I then waited another two days and flew out as well. The days at camp were spent trying to clean up the garbage; sorting and burning, which was very hard to do as everything was soaking wet. Unfortunately, we could not undertake much in the way of climbing other peaks as everyone was very hungry and then of course there was the never ending rain. As much as I would have liked to trek out, the flight was very interesting as we got a bird's-eye view of the mountain and then of the mine. The mine is enormous and it is shocking to see how it is eating up the mountain side with no one to keep it in check.

It took two days to get back to Bali! I enjoyed the shower, the bed and the breakfast buffet more than words can say, but if you were to ask me if I would go again I would say in a heartbeat - yes!

Mount Elgon – Uganda

Albert Hestler

November 28 – December 2

One may well ask: What were six persons from Vancouver Island, four of them members of the Alpine Club, doing in Uganda? The answer must be seen in the indefatigable spirit of Russ Moir who, since his retirement as a teacher, has made it a habit of doing volunteer work in third-world countries – first in Nepal, now in Uganda. The last three years he has been organizing work parties to do remedial work at the Mengo Hospital in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. Of particular interest to him was the Katherine-Luke Building, the oldest structure on the compound, completed in 1904. It was built under the auspices of a Christian Mission from the



The approach trail passes through cultivated areas towards dense bush PHOTO: ALBERT HESTLER

U.K., was the first hospital in the region, and was probably the biggest building in East Africa at the time. It thus has some historic significance as well. But through neglect and lack of finances since the tragic years of civil war in Uganda, Mengo Hospital has declined in its ability to maintain its structures and medical equipment. Ergo - enter Russ!

Last year he tackled one of the wings at the hospital, the Luke Ward. This year he proposed to attack the other wing, the Katherine Ward. To this end he assembled a Canadian work crew of six people (ACC members Rudy Brugger, Albert Hestler, Russ Moir, Charles Turner, plus Bill Gilchrist and Derek Sargent). Together with a crew of Ugandan workmen, sometimes numbering fourteen, we succeeded in restoring this ward in eight weeks to a point where it is now one of the best facilities at the hospital. Another beneficial side effect was the training provided to local craftsmen in the safe use of the various power tools which we left behind for ongoing maintenance. On a personal level, the opportunity to work together with people from another country and culture was a rewarding and enriching experience in itself.

Of course, we also used our stay in Uganda as an opportunity to see other parts of this country: Lake Victoria and the source of the Nile; Murcheson Falls National Park with game drive and river cruise; Lake Bunyonyi which included paddling in dugout canoes and hiking to a pygmy village; visiting the chimpanzee reserve in Budongo Forest and the gorilla reserve in Bwindi National Park (the respective areas where Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey did their famous studies). But what was missing in all this was a trek in one or more of the many mountainous areas in this part of the world, e.g.

the Ruwenzoris (the fabled “Mountains of the Moon”); Mount Elgon (at 4,321m the second highest mountain in Uganda); or any of the 4,000m volcanoes in “Parc des Volcans” in the southwest corner straddling the borders of Rwanda and the Congo. We finally chose Mount Elgon for various reasons: it is the closest to Kampala; it can be climbed in four days; and it is not as overrun by tourists as Kilimanjaro or Mount Kenya. We settled on the last weekend of our stay in Kampala, which would allow Charles and me to continue from there directly to the Kenyan border and on to Tanzania. (Charles wanted to climb Kilimanjaro – which he did – and I wanted to spend time on safari in the Serengeti and the Ngorogoro Crater.) In the end we declared it an official club trip, though we didn’t publicize it in Victoria – we

didn’t expect that anybody would come over on such short notice and join us. Unfortunately, Russ felt that he couldn’t afford the time off as he still had commitments during his last week on the construction project. That left the three of us – Charles, Rudy and myself.

Charles contacted the Uganda Wildlife Authority, first the head office in Kampala, then their branch in Mbale, the town closest to Mount Elgon National Park. Their manager gave him all the necessary information regarding directions, organization, hiring of guides, rental of equipment, costs, and the climb itself. Armed with this information, we took the bus from Kampala to Mbale. There we immediately transferred to a taxi in order to reach the UWA office before 5:00 o’clock. They had kindly agreed to store our travel gear until our return from the mountain. Because of the lack of daylight hours (it gets dark regularly at 6:30 each night) we took the same taxi to Budadiri, the closest village, at a rate which we managed to negotiate down to a slightly less than exorbitant level. The driver dropped us off at the only hotel in the village. There we were met by a park warden with whom we arranged next day’s expedition: two ranger-guides (compulsory), three porters, rental of tent and sleeping bags, and hire of taxi to trail head. For those who are interested, I am quoting a few costs: park fee including the two guides US-\$30 per person per day; porters \$5 per person per day; food for the mzungas (white foreigners) supplied by us; food for guides and porters included in their fees. The total cost for five days amounted to US-\$290 each.

Mount Elgon is an extinct volcano. It has a very broad base, which leads geologists to believe that at one time Elgon

may have been higher than Kilimanjaro. At the top of the mountain is a large crater some 5 kilometres across, with a group of peaks in a ring around its rim. The highest peak on the whole massif is Wagagai, 4,321m. The trailhead starts at the small hamlet of Bumasola where, after a hair-raising taxi ride, we were met by the guides and porters. The trail goes first through cultivated areas with fields and houses to the park boundary, at which point one has to climb up a steep rock wall (the Mudangi Cliffs) to reach dense bush. This in turn gives way to bamboo forest, then heathland, and finally moorland. At higher altitude the vegetation includes ground-sel and giant lobelias, which for some reason have intrigued me ever since I first read about them and I have always wanted to see them. On the first day of our trek we hiked from 1,770m to the Sasa River Camp at 2,900m. We slept in our tent while the guides and porters slept in a primitive bamboo hut, rolled in blankets, keeping a wood fire burning all night to stay warm. On the second day we reached the Mude Cave Camp at 3,500m, where we slept on bunk beds in a relatively new hut. The temperature dropped below freezing that night and we were glad to get up in the morning and get our blood circulation moving. That day we climbed for 8 kilometres along the crater rim to Wagagai Summit which we reached after four hours in brilliant sunshine. (One can't really call it a 'climb' because there is a good trail all the way and stunted bushes grow right up to the top.) The return of course was much faster, so we decided to continue and descend as far as the Sasa River Camp. On the fourth day we made it all the way back to the trailhead and by minibus to Budadiri and Mbale early afternoon. There Rudy hopped on the overland bus to return to Kampala while Charles and I settled into a local hotel to get cleaned up (body and laundry) and prepare for the next leg of our journey.

As Rudy said afterwards, it had been the easiest 4,000m mountain he has ever climbed. However, it gave us a much more intimate view of Africa and a better understanding of the life of Africans outside the big cities. On the way to Mount Elgon we passed through several villages where the people paraded down the road dancing, drumming and singing. And the reason? They were celebrating the circumcision of young boys, usually around age fourteen, presumably an ancient rite of manhood. Or when we walked through the countryside and saw people working their fields or picking coffee beans, they would invariably greet us with "jambo" or "karibu" (i.e. "hello" or "welcome" in Swahili). And the children would still be staring at us wide-eyed, rather different from the youngsters in tourist areas who usually greet foreigners with outstretched hands asking for money or pens. It was also refreshing to have the mountain practically to ourselves. We only shared the first camp site with a group of four German girls, and passed three Norwegians, two Italians and a Japanese on the trail, but met nobody on our summit



Brilliant sunshine on the 4000m summit of Mt Elgon PHOTO: ALBERT HESTLER

climb. Yet we had the classic African experience of trekking with guides toting rifles, porters carrying our gear, sleeping in tents, and having our food prepared over an open fire.

In closing, I would like to relate a small episode which touched me personally: On the third day of our trek we had to pass a ranger station which is situated a short distance above the trail. The ranger on duty came down and we had to sign a register, providing name, country, etc. as well as age. On the way back, the ranger didn't bother to come down but collected the necessary information by shouting back and forth. Our guide mentioned afterwards that one of the questions was: "Did the old man make it?" This made me chuckle, but I also took it as an acknowledgement of what I had just accomplished. It suddenly occurred to me that I had now climbed to a point above 4,000m in every continent (except Australia, for obvious reasons). In an earlier age, in the days of intrepid explorers and great white hunters, I might have expressed my sentiment with this response: "Just call me Bwana".

Participants: Rudy Brugger, Albert Hestler and Charles Turner



Mountain News

Mount Arrowsmith: A Dream Come True

Peter Rothermel

For nearly a century there has been public interest in making Mount Arrowsmith a protected park yet governments have all been slow to respond.

My involvement in trying to get Mount Arrowsmith park status was born in 1996 out of outrage over a ski developer, in a public park, wanting to restrict public access to the now defunct ski area on the north slopes of Mount Cokely, a subsidiary peak within the Arrowsmith Massif.

While not on Mount Arrowsmith proper, the ski operation is in a regional park of about 600 hectares and is known as Mount Arrowsmith Regional Ski Park. Working with a grass roots group, the Public Access Resolution Committee (PARC), to keep unfettered public access into the ski park, people would often ask “If the summit of Arrowsmith isn’t in the park, what is its status?” and then ask “Why isn’t it a park?” Questions I couldn’t answer at the time but ones I found I wanted answered for my curiosity.

The area known as Block 1380, which encompasses the peaks of Mount Arrowsmith and Mount Cokely, was Crown Forest Reserve and in researching its past I would come to learn of its rich and long history. In getting to know this mountain better, I would come to climb its many aspects and routes and in every season. I would spend so much time on its slopes that I would come to refer to it as “my mountain”, not so much as me claiming ownership, but the mountain having an ownership over me.

Looking for help, I targeted a dozen clubs and organizations for their support. Along the way, I made many friends and joined a few organizations, including the Alpine Club of Canada and eventually became a Director for the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC.

With over thirty-five letters from various clubs and society’s offering support, we first went to the Regional District

of Nanaimo looking for help to obtain Provincial Park status, with me giving very nervous presentations and their Board of Directors eventually voting in favour. The RDN took our request to the Province but were denied due to “lack of funding”. The Province suggested we try for Regional Park status and intimated that we would get support from them.

In these early days of the campaign, before computers and e-mail use was common, we relied on faxing, photocopying, long distance phoning and “snail mail”. The costs were high and with encouragement from, our then ACC-VI Section Chairperson, Claire Ebendinger, I applied for a grant from the National ACC and received monetary help that was greatly needed to defray costs.

After several years of letter writing and much work by Jeff Ainge and David Speed, Parks Staff from the RDN, we found we were just hitting “brick walls” and not getting letters returned from the Province. Our efforts were starting to stagnate a bit.

Then in 2004, ACC member, Don Cameron and I teamed up, with a committee of advisors from various Island clubs, including Sandy Briggs, Martin Hoffmann, Judy and Harold Carlson, Harriet Rueggeberg, Cedric Zala and Evan Loveless. With Don’s excellent power point presentation skills, we gave presentations to The Regional District of Nanaimo Board of Directors and the Alberni/Clayoquot Regional District Board of Directors and we met with several area MLA’s. To further public interest, and with Don’s skills, we created a web site (www.mountarrowsmith.org). We also designed and printed a colour brochure with financial help from Mountain Equipment Co-op and the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC, and distributed it where ever we could. I led trips up Arrowsmith’s easier summer routes, taking area MLA Scott Fraser, RDN Chair Joe Stanhope, Qualicum Beach Mayor Tuenis Westbroek, among other political persons and a bevy of reporters in order to get news coverage. As well, I developed a four part slide show with Arrowsmith’s history, flora and fauna, physical aspects and recreation values represented and brought it to numerous clubs and societies.



The west ridge of Mt Arrowsmith PHOTO: PETER ROTHERMEL

Every year we seemed to be slowly getting closer to our goal of obtaining some kind of protected park status. With two new RDN Parks Staff, Tom Osborne and Wendy Marshall, and all of the RDN Parks and Trails Committee, we had a good group pulling for us. Once again we sought for Provincial Park Status and went through the motions to the point of having Senior Staff from the Ministry of Environment recommend that we get Provincial Park Status, with the RDN taking on the management and the area clubs being the trail stewards. We went as far as to do a LEAF evaluation (Land Evaluation Acquisition Framework) which is one of the last steps in gaining BC Provincial Park Status. Ministry Staff recommended a Provincial Park, managed (paid for) by the RDN and stewarded by Island clubs. In other words the Province would not have born any costs but could reap huge kudos. When it reached the Minister of Environment, for some unfathomable reason, he rejected the proposal.

With the help of RDN Chair Joe Stanhope and Qualicum Mayor Tuenis Westbroek in convincing the Minister of Environment to support us regionally, we finally got Minister Barry Penner and Minister of Community Services, Ida Chong, to act as sponsoring Ministries and had our foot in the door. After arriving with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Hupacasath First Nations, we were awarded Nominal Rent Tenure of a dollar for thirty years, from the Province for the new Mount Arrowsmith Regional Park. At the RDN Board of Directors meeting, November 25, 2008, the vote was unanimous and the new park was declared. I donated to the Chair a twoonie, enough to cover the rent tenure for sixty years.

The new park is about 1,300 hectares in size and will take in the summits of Mount Cokely, Mount Arrowsmith and

the South Summit (unofficial name). As well, it will encompass the high mountain lakes of Fishtail, Hidden, Jewel and Lost (last two are unofficial names). It will protect several popular trails including the Judges Route, Saddle Route and the Upper Rosseau Trail.

Mount Arrowsmith is the apex of a United Nations Biosphere Reserve, encompassing the Little Qualicum and Englishman River's watersheds. From the peak of Arrowsmith down to Cameron Lake and following the Little Qualicum River to the Straits of Georgia, much of this area is either Provincial or Regional Park lands, with several gaps. An eventual goal is to see one continuous wildlife and recreational corridor, of protected parkland, from the summit of Mount Arrowsmith to

the mouth of the Little Qualicum River ... an alpine to tide-water protected park.

The new Mount Arrowsmith Park culminates over a decade of work by the Alpine Club of Canada and the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC, lobbying for protected park status for the Arrowsmith Massif.

It wasn't a "battle won" as headlined in one recent news article, but rather like most typical mountain climbs, a very long uphill slog, with a bit of scrambling here and there and a great summit for the finish ... a dream come true.

Vancouver Island Spine: A Wilderness Hiking Trail from Victoria to Cape Scott

Gil Parker

Someone once said that climbing was 95% hiking - at least on the Island. Climbers have to hike, just to get to their peaks. But there's another breed, called long-distance hikers, for whom hiking day-after-day on a linear trail is an end in itself. That was the idea behind the Appalachian Trail, and the Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Manning Park. While walking the PCT in 2007 I wondered why we didn't have that kind of a trail on Vancouver Island, where the wilderness is at least as inspiring as the Cascades or the Mojave Desert!

VI Spine is the result of long ruminations; the idea is to provide a wilderness hiking trail from Victoria to Cape



Scott. Vancouver Island is a wilderness paradise, but without access the terrain is unforgiving, and where timber has been harvested, traversing through slash is very difficult and not at all aesthetic. With a constructed trail these obstacles are minimized.

The advantages of the VI Spine will accrue to more than just the long-distance hikers. It will provide access to some parts of the backcountry for climbers, fishers, botanists and perhaps skiers. In other long-distance trails, communities along the way “buy into” the trails, providing material support and accommodation, a commercial benefit to the towns near the trails. Volunteer clubs and individuals assist with trail maintenance and act as “trail angels,” becoming part of the mobile community formed by trail users.

Along the PCT I have met volunteer crews who happily spend their holidays at trail improvement camps. People living near the trail have left water caches for hikers in dry areas, boxes of fruit and, nailed to trees, mailboxes full of chocolate bars. I’ve been offered a bed, a shower (!), an Email connection, and a burly contractor once bought me breakfast in a town on route. Everyone is into the PCT, whether they hike it or not.

The projected route of VI Spine has not been finalized, but there are many communities that will benefit economically. Side trails will connect other areas to the Spine. Utilizing about 190 kilometres of existing trails will give the Trail a substantial start. That leaves approximately 550 kilometres to be built. I can see hikers eventually completing the entire 740 kilometres in less than a month.

In the southern Island, the Spine will follow the Trans Canada Trail, a non-motorized, multi-use connection from Victoria to Lake Cowichan. From there, the Spine will con-

nect to Port Alberni, partly along the 1913 railway grade that still exists in places. Around Port Alberni there are several connecting routes where crews are extending trails now. After skirting Comox Lake to the east, the Spine will probably traverse a small part of Strathcona Park, (where cyclists and horse travel are prohibited) but avoiding the heavy snowpack of higher ranges and the technical terrain where climbing skills are needed. Farther north, the Spine will connect to the North Coast Trail and the trail to Cape Scott.

The Vancouver Island Spine will be a single trail through backcountry, sometimes mountainous, but periodically coming near to villages and towns where hikers can re-supply, or get a meal or a shower. The heavy use of similar trails in the United States and Europe is an indication of the commercial and social advantages the Spine would bring to Vancouver Island.

The construction of the Spine is an attractive project in this period of low demand for the Province’s timber, and the ready availability of skilled outdoor workers. The VI Spine will bring tourism and local recreation dollars to communities that are currently searching for ways to diversify their economies. It complies with the current draft of the Trails Strategy of BC, of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, of the BC Government.

The work of planning and organizing the VI Spine is being done by a Task Force, with members up and down the Island, some from outdoor clubs, but also involving other community leaders. VI Spine is now adopted by Hike BC, a provincial organization, part of the National Hiking Trail of Canada. (At Port Hardy, the ferry to Bella Coola will connect to the NHT heading east.) Our own ACC-VI executive has enthusiastically endorsed the VI Spine concept.

Over the next few months, several initiatives will kick-start work on the Trail. A website: www.vispine.ca, will describe the Trail. Endorsements by outdoor clubs will be requested, with links to their websites. Details of the route in the northern part of the Island will be planned. Negotiations for easements across public and private lands will proceed, mainly via the offices of the Regional Districts. And publicity and funding initiatives will begin.

How can you contribute? Hike BC is applying for charitable status. Currently there is a dedicated bank account solely for VI Spine. If you have knowledge or skills in land negotiations, route finding, backcountry navigation, First Nation issues, or you envision other aspects of the Trail we have yet to consider, please be in touch.

Gil Parker at 250-370-9349, gparker@telus.net or visit www.vispine.ca

Victoria's TrailRider Program Enters New Phase

by Gerry Graham¹

2008 was a banner year for the TrailRider Hiking with the Disabled Program in Victoria, the most notable accomplishment undoubtedly being the acquisition of our very own TrailRider unit. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the TrailRider, it is a single-wheeled, non-motorised device that facilitates access to the wilderness and all its strenuous hiking trails for people with disabilities. Porters front and back push and pull the TrailRider and its occupant over otherwise inaccessible terrain. The local TrailRider program operates with the support of Recreation Integration Victoria (RIV) and the Vancouver Island Section of the Alpine Club of Canada. All of our porters and all of our clients are registered as volunteers with RIV, while most of our porters and at least one of our 'clients' are ACC members.

The year began in March with a nice little circuit of Elk Lake with Nairne in the TrailRider, followed by a snowy, fun-filled outing with Jeff out at Thetis Lake in April. We capped the year with a 'thank you' outing for Pippa Blake, of Rise Above Barriers fame, at East Sooke Park in late November; the group photo above is from that outing. Pippa's epic TrailRider trek in Nepal in November of 2007 included two of our staunchest porters- Shawn Daniels and Karun Thanjavur. Upon her return from Everest Base Camp, Pippa generously donated her TrailRider to RIV, and it was that TrailRider unit that we used throughout 2008, before acquiring our own.

Between April and November we also successfully completed a number of other day trips, involving a number of new venues, many new porters, and a couple of new 'clients'. Aside from two more trips to East Sooke Park and one more to Thetis Lake, we made it up Mt. Work twice, and Mt. Wells and Finlayson (the back way!) once each. We also had our first outing up, down and along the trails out at Royal Roads University. During our August Thetis Lake outing Shaw TV videographer James Green filmed our trip. The resulting three minute segment, which aired on Shaw TV in September, 2008, has been a great marketing tool for our program.

Shaw TV provided us with a DVD version of the clip, which is also posted on YouTube. To further publicise our program, one of our porters, Martin Hoffman, who administers the Section's web site, kindly created a TrailRider sub page which can be easily updated to include timely information.

Another big development this year was the addition of several new TrailRider Trip Leaders, including Mike Hubbard, Karun Thanjavur, Shawn Daniels, Karen van Dieren, Russ Moir and Roger Painter. In addition, we added significantly to our complement of porters, going from just eight at the beginning of the year to three times that by the end. Lissa Zala was kind enough to allow us to mount a TrailRider display at the Banff Mountain Film Festival, and with Lenka Visnovska and Deborah Buckley diligently manning the



booth, we managed to sign up eight more porters that night alone! Having more leaders and more porters allows us to schedule more events, and offer our services to more people. By the time the fall came around, we had a TrailRider outing on the Alpine Club schedule every second weekend. In the three years we have been in operation, a total of six clients, with varying degrees of disabilities, have participated in the twenty TrailRider treks offered.

In the fall of 2008 we received word two second hand TrailRiders coming back from another trek to Everest Base Camp would be up for sale from the British Columbia Mobility Opportunities Society (BCMOS). This was a great opportunity for the Vancouver Island Section of the Alpine Club of Canada to acquire its own unit, providing us with more autonomy and flexibility in the running of the

program. In the space of two short months we were able to raise the four thousand dollars required to purchase one of the two BCMOS TrailRiders, which we took possession of in mid-December when Shawn Daniels transported it back from Vancouver. Our Section Executive generously donated a thousand dollars towards the purchase price; a further \$2000 came from a Saanich Legacy Foundation (SLF) grant², over \$750 came from Roger Painter's running club out at Royal Roads, and the remainder was donated by various individuals, including porters , clients, their families and friends. Further donations to the Section-administered TrailRider Fund, which are tax deductible, will be used to defray maintenance and other operational costs associated with the running of the program. Now that there are two of these late-model TrailRiders in Victoria, we expect to be able to put two teams together for various outings in 2009.

We have already enjoyed our new acquisition on a trial run at Mt. Douglas, where it was found to perform according to specification, although we have decided to make a series of alterations to the unit in time for the 2009 season which starts in mid-March. The alterations are being done free of charge (except for parts) by CanAssist, a program at the University of Victoria that designs and builds assisted devices for the disabled. One of our porters, Ryan Truant, a CanAssist engineer, is in charge of the TrailRider upgrade. The modifications will make the TrailRider safer, more comfortable for the occupant, and easier for porters to operate on local trails. Our plans for '09 include a multi-day camping and hiking trip in Strathcona Park, and midweek/mid-summer evening outings in local parks, to accommodate those who tend to be unavailable on weekends.

All the statistics on the trips we've completed, where we've been, and who we've taken out, simply do not capture the fun we invariably have on these outings. Everyone involved in the program- clients and porters alike- gets so much out of this shared experience. A great sense of camaraderie and trust has developed with our clients as we push and pull them in the TrailRider, up and down the slopes, up and over obstacles such as boulders, ledges and fallen trees, for up to four hours at a stretch, occasionally in rather inclement weather. Clients are always eager to book their next outing. There is a growing wait list for participation and even a bit of an attempt at queue-jumping, if you can believe it! As for our dedicated team of porters, they, too, invariably ask when the next outing will be, and many of them lament the fact that we take a break over the winter months. However, the TrailRider program is evolving and expanding from year to year!

The program's success can be attributed to the fact that there is something in it for everyone. Our disabled clients enjoy the outings immensely, as they allow them to get to places that are otherwise out of bounds to a person

in a wheelchair. For their part, the porters are happy to assist others and enjoy a good workout pushing and pulling the TrailRider along. Everybody, clients and porters alike, thrives on the energy generated as we travel along together on local trails and slopes, talking, joking, having a pit stop or picnic, or just quietly enjoying the moment. In short, while Victoria's TrailRider Hiking with the Disabled Program undoubtedly facilitates access to the outdoors for people with disabilities, it is also creating lasting bonds between the disabled and able-bodied communities. It all makes for a very satisfying experience.

Heartfelt thanks to the dozens of committed individuals, too numerous to name here, who devote their time and energy to the TrailRider program, thereby contributing to its continued success.

- 1 Volunteer Coordinator, Victoria TrailRider Hiking with the Disabled Program. The author wishes to thank all those who provided comments on a draft of this article, especially Deborah Buckley and Shawn Daniels.
- 2 Subsequent to the presentation that Jeff Hollands, who is one of our TrailRider clients, and I made to the SLF Board in October, 2008 in support of our grant application, one of the Board members, Claire Reynolds, has become a TrailRider porter.

Section Avalanche Skills Training 2008-09

Dave Campbell

Although I had taken a Recreational Avalanche Course (RAC 1) in the past, it had been a while and I thought it would be a good time to brush up on my avalanche skills and take a course. And why not? We spend time every year practicing beacon searches, and in the First Aid world, re-certification is done every couple of years, so why not refresh our avalanche skills and knowledge. There have been significant changes to the ways in which recreational avalanche courses are taught in recent years. In the past, course put a large emphasis on snow stability analysis, and professionals in the avalanche field were finding that this focus was not helping to reduce avalanche incidents amongst recreationalists (in fact you were more likely to be in an avalanche incident if you had basic avalanche training than if you did not). So the Canadian Avalanche Association worked with avalanche professionals to develop new curricula, and hence the Avalanche Skills Training (AST 1 and AST 2) courses were born. The major shift in these programs is that a higher degree of emphasis is put on terrain evaluation and support tools for decision-making. On top of the shift in focus of the

courses, there have also been major advances in technology, such as digital transceivers, the "Avaluator", fat skis (though I still don't think this makes a difference!) and new shoveling techniques.

Avalanche Skills Training 1, Mount Cain

December 19-21, 2008

Despite getting a dump of snow in Nanaimo of over a foot, there was not much more at Mount Cain. On Friday, a crew of early-arrivers did a quick lap down the first T-bar to confirm that the snow was in fact pretty limited (don't get you tips caught in the bushes!) People filtered into the cabin throughout the evening, and we all got settled in.

Saturday morning started with a series of classroom presentations. The main focus of the lectures was on avalanche terrain and terrain management. Key terrain features were identified which make up avalanche terrain, with a discussion that typically avalanche terrain starts around 30°, with the prime avalanche initiation angle being 37-38°, and avalanches becoming rarer (because of more constant sloughing) above the mid-upper 40°s. A focal point of the discussion was around the fact that avalanche terrain is avalanche terrain no matter where you go, or despite snow pack conditions (e.g. avalanche terrain on the Island is the same as the Rockies, it is the snow pack that changes). This was an important point, as perhaps the most important factors for decision making is onto terrain management. The terrain discussion continued to include issues around terrain traps (e.g. areas with high consequences if you were to be swept by an avalanche such as cliffs, crevasses, depressions, or trees). Terrain management included identifying avalanche terrain, areas of weakness (shallow points, slope convexities), terrain traps, and mitigating risk through terrain avoidance, route-finding, and group management (e.g. skiing one at a time).

The classroom lectures included discussions on the basics snow pack formation, and discussions of why the Coast is typically more stable than the interior and Rockies. We discussed how avalanches form, and some of the key points for the development of avalanche conditions (wind-loading, temperature changes, rain on the Island, slab formation, triggering). The point was raised that at the basic recreational-level of avalanche decision making, avalanche bulletins and forecasts are a prime resource. We discussed the various avalanche hazard classes and on-line resources (Island Alpine Guides forecast for Vancouver Island and the CAA for mainland areas). An important note was made that statistically most avalanche accidents occur when hazard is rated as considerable. We also discussed how important the decision-making process is for managing avalanche risk. Typically human-factors play a major role in avalanche accidents as people are often enticed by ego, over-confidence,

making the most of limited time, or desire to maintain pattern/routine/consistency (e.g. repeating bad decisions if you got away with them in the past).

The terrain (consequences) and avalanche hazard components were combined with the use of the Avaluator. The Avaluator is a simple card which combines terrain and forecast hazard to assist in a formalized decision-making process which identifies potential avalanche risk. The terrain component is broken down through the ATES (Avalanche Terrain Exposure System) into Simple (essentially no avalanche terrain), Challenging (well-defined avalanche terrain with options for mitigation) and Complex (multiple avalanche paths and mitigation options are limited). For various backcountry trips on the Coast, Interior, and Rockies, the ATES ratings can be found on the CAA's website, and Island Alpine Guides are in the process of developing ATES ratings for trips on the Island. In addition to the hazard and terrain components, the Avaluator also incorporates a series of obvious clues questions regarding snow pack, terrain and signs of instability to further assist in the decision-making process. The results of the Avaluator are not intended necessarily to provide a go-no go decision, rather it is intended to identify where extra caution is appropriate, or whether travel is not recommended.

The classroom session concluded with an overview of companion rescues and transceivers. Newer beacons tend to be digital or digital/analog in comparison to older beacons which were exclusively analog. Cliff convinced us that analog beacon's should go the way of the dodo, but I personally felt that both types of beacons have there pros and cons. Analog beacons have the advantage of being able to pick up signals at greater distances, use less battery power, and provide a tone which can assist in identifying multiple-burials. Digital beacons provide a lock on buried beacons once found, most have multiple antennas which reduces false maximum signals, and in general are easier to use and are quicker at locating buried victims. The downside of digital beacons is that, depending on the make, multiple burial situations can be difficult to manage. Perhaps the digital-analog mix provides the best of both worlds, but I think the most important thing is that you practice with the gear you have, and are proficient at using it. We talked about how to deploy a companion rescue (primary, secondary and pin-point stages) and new digging techniques were discussed (using a conveyor belt method of digging into the slope rather than digging straight down. We discussed how the chances of survival drop dramatically if the victim has been buried for more than about 20 minutes, and how digging is generally the component of the rescue that takes up the most amount of time (particularly for deep burials).

We proceeded to take these skills outside, and spent some time practicing transceiver searches and companion rescue

for single-burials. One twist that I had not really practiced before was burying small board attached to a box (with the transceiver inside) as a target. Once we pin-pointed the buried victim, we would find the target through probing. Probing technique started with probing the pin-point location, then working your way out from that location in a spiral, probing every 15 cm or so. The importance of probing was emphasized for real searches, and particularly once a victim is found, probing can assist in identifying the orientation of the victim (and hopefully the head location) so that digging can be focused on getting an open airway to the victim as a first priority. Once the victim's mouth has been excavated, it is important to also release snow from the chest area, as sometimes this can be compressed on the lungs and be inhibiting breathing.

The second day we spent mostly in the field. We continued on with a focus on terrain evaluation, and hiked up to the rim of the West Bowl to have a look into some avalanche terrain. Snow conditions provided for some interesting learning opportunities. Despite there being fairly limited snow cover, the snow that was there was quite unstable (the infamous facet layer which was a factor/failure plane in all of the avalanche fatalities over the Xmas season). Many of the "obvious clues" of instability were present, including whooping and cracking. We concluded the day with digging a pit and examining the snow pack and testing stability.

Overall, AST was great learning experience. The take home messages seemed to be, at a novice-intermediate level the big support tools for avalanche decision-making are the avalanche forecasts, identifying and managing terrain, and using the Avaluator for trip planning and for obvious clues of instability.

Participants: Dave Campbell, Jon Clarke, Arno Dirks, Kristen Erickson, Brian Miller, Kelly Miller, Matt Lawley, Nic Scott, Harry Steiner, Tim Turay, Peter Rothermel (Organizer) and Cliff Umpleby (Instructor)

Avalanche Skills Training 2, Mount Cain

January 30 - February 2, 2009

The AST 2 course began much as the AST 1. A crew headed up early on Friday and went for a brief ski. The evening was spent socializing and meeting people as the filtered in throughout the evening.

Saturday began with a quiz to test participants' knowledge, and was a good overview of the material covered in the AST 1 course. We did a brief overview of the Avaluator, with a discussion of the avalanche forecasts. Cliff informed us that they had managed to get the Island Alpine Guides forecasts linked into the CAA website. We continued with a further discussion of terrain, and the importance of ter-

rain identification and terrain management as fundamental to mitigating avalanche risk.

We reviewed the science behind avalanche transceivers, and expanded the companion search techniques to multiple burial scenarios. We then took this, and headed into the field for practice. The goal for the course was to be able to find 2 victims in less than 5 minutes. The basic premises behind the multiple victim searches were similar to the single-beacon searches; first, eliminate terrain where the victims are not by sweeping across the potential burial terrain, and then once you find a signal, use the induction method to locate then pin-point the first victim. Once the first victim is probed and located, two methods were used to locate the second victim. The first method involved sweeping circles around the first victim, first at a distance of about 2m, then 4m, 6m, etc. Once you picked up the signal on the second victim, you can move into the induction method and pin-pointing that victim. The other method involved sweeping back-and-forth at short intervals across the unsearched avalanche deposit, and again going to the induction and pin-point once the second victim is identified. For these searches I tried using a digital Tracker beacon (I normally use an Ortovox F1 Focus analog beacon) and found the multiple burial scenarios challenging. Once the beacon finds one victim, it tends to lock onto that signal, and you need to play around with your location, paying close attention to the signal distance, in order to pick-up the second signal. I think everyone felt like more practice on the multiple burials would be helpful.

After beacon practice, Cliff felt that the best approach to understanding and identifying avalanche terrain was to get into it. Based on the forecast of moderate avalanche hazard and signs that the snow pack was stable, we ended up dropping off into the ridge from the ski hill into some steep, cliffy, gullied terrain. To manage the terrain we went one at a time, and discussed methods for mitigating hazard through avalanche terrain.

The second day of the course, we continued on with our focus of getting close and personal with avalanche terrain. We skied down another steep line off the ski hill ridge and into the flatter terrain below the West Bowl. We then skied up into the West Bowl, and discussed issues around setting up tracks into avalanche terrain, and how to manage avalanche terrain when it is above you. We skied back down the flanks of the West Bowl, and enjoyed some well deserved turns.

En route back to the cabin, we stopped and had a session on snow pack analysis. Cliff demonstrated how to dig a pit and analyse layers. He emphasized the importance of standardizing the way you dig pits and do stability testing, and how keeping things neat and tidy help with being organized. We discussed what should be in a snow analysis kit that you might carry around in your pack, and Cliff suggested that

the keep it simple approach was best. He had an old broken ruler which was ideal for using to slide through the snow pack to identify layers (a little wider than a scraper or a card which cuts a bit too well) and suggested that that was the main tool. While a loupe and a crystal card are handy, major changes in snow crystal size and density can be identified easily enough by feel and by hardness tests with your glove. A ruler is handy, and many probes now have rulers built into them which can perform double-duty. A Rutschblock cord can be handy on the Coast (where the teeth on them are important for cutting through hard crusts), and a simple cord may be sufficient for the task in softer snow packs like in the Rockies. A thermometer might be useful for the snow-geeks, but in general the influence of temperature gradients manifests itself in the density and crystal structure of the snow pack, which can again be picked up by feel as easily as measuring it.

Cliff demonstrated an analysis of the layers in the snow pack, and we could see strong evidence of several crust layers in the snow, as well as the lingering facet layer from before Christmas time. It was indicated that when layers are dated (e.g. the December 17th facet layer) that the date indicates the day that the layer was buried. While snow pits are useful to gain insight into the layering, it was noted that they do not give an indication of the spatial variability of the snow pack, and that picking suitable locations for a pit is important (i.e. representative of the elevation and aspect that you are interested in, not influenced by wind effects). A probe can fill in this knowledge gap, and skiing around with your probe out and using it to feel for various layers is an excellent way of identifying the spatial extent of certain features.

Cliff then demonstrated a compression test and Rutschblock test. It was emphasized that having standardized dimensions was important for both, in order to be “speaking the same language” as is done in industry and within the research of these tests. Shovel shear tests are now considered passé. For the compression test we isolated a 30cm x 30 cm block in the pit, and then saw cut 70 cm down the back (testing layers deeper than 70 cm can be done by removing the upper 70 cm and then doing the test on the lower column). A major shift in understanding and interpretation of compression tests has come from recent research. Historically, failure of the column through successive tapping (1-10 taps from the wrist for Easy, 11-20 taps from the elbow for Moderate, and 21-30 taps from the shoulder for Hard). Nowadays, it is recognized that the way in which the failure occurs in the column is more important than when it fails. We were introduced to the terms “pops and drops”, and how sudden planar (pop) and sudden collapse (drops) indicated the highest likelihood of slab failure (i.e. avalanche initiation). Details of failure mechanisms were left for the evening lecture. On the compression test, we found that the failure occurred “Easily”

on the facet layer, but that the failure was through progressive compression (e.g. not as reactive). In order to have some repeatability of the testing we did two compression tests at the same location.

We discussed issues around the Rutschblock, including the importance of site location (for slopes less than 20°, subtract one from the score) and standardized size (2 m at the front, 1.8 m at the back). The Rutschblock test has the advantage that it simulates the effect of skier cuts on stability and propagation, and is not suitable for testing deep instabilities (deeper than 1.5m). Again, the mode of failure is as important as the actual score. We were unable to fail the block during the test, which was supported the result of the compression test.

We returned to the cabin and spent the rest of the afternoon practicing our beacon searches, honing down our multiple burial searches and introduced a deep burial simulation.

Evening was spent with further classroom details of snow science, crystal structures and formation, and snow analysis. Cliff showed some amazing photos of different types of snow crystals. We talked about how crystals metamorphose over time, and how crystal rounding promotes stability over time and how faceting/depth hoar reduces stability. We discussed how temperature gradients drive this metamorphosis with strong temperature gradients (>1°/10cm) promoting faceting and weak gradients (<1°/10cm) promoting rounding. We also talked about the development of surface hoar and how it can create an unstable surface once buried. These temperature considerations and crystal metamorphosis are the driving factors behind why Coastal snow packs tend to be more stable than Interior and Rocky Mountain snow packs.

We followed this with a discussion of the compression test, and different failure mechanisms. These include sudden planar (pop), sudden collapse (drop), progressive compression, non-planar and no failure. Cliff presented research from the University of Calgary which suggests that tests with failures through sudden planar or sudden collapse were more related to skier triggered avalanches than overall compression test scores.

We finished the night with a discussion of the importance of human factors in the avalanche decision making process. Often times this is the most important component of avalanche accidents. This point was emphasized with a viewing of the movie “A Dozen More Turns”. The movie focuses on a group of fairly experienced backcountry skiers that make conservative terrain choices over a number of days of skiing in high avalanche conditions. The desire to “keep their stoke” and their bolstered confidence from being able to ski safely (in non-avalanche terrain) entices one member to slightly push the envelope into avalanche terrain with dire consequences (one fatality and serious injury to

another member resulting in a challenging rescue operation and ultimately a leg amputation).

On the final day of the course, we woke to about 30 cm or more of fresh snow that had fallen overnight; starting cold, and then warming as the night/day went on. We headed out in to the ski hill, and observed several natural avalanches that had run on chutes down Mount Abel. We skinned our way up to the top of the upper T-bar, and then had a discussion about conditions as we peered down into the West Bowl. Our guess was that the avalanche hazard was in the considerable to high range, and we pulled out the Avaluator to look at the list of obvious clues. All seven of the obvious clues were present, which suggested that skiing in avalanche terrain would not be appropriate. Cliff was able to dislodge a small cornice from the ridgeline into the West Bowl, which resulted in a sympathetic slope failure upslope of the cornice drop, and triggered a Class 2.5 avalanche. This confirmed our assessment of an unstable snow pack.

We then skied our way down the slopes of the ski hill, and stopped to give a chance for each person to dig their own pits and have a chance to do some analysis and compression tests. Compression tests typically failed with Easy to Moderate taps, and ranged from sudden planar to non-planar). The range of compression test failure mechanisms was supported by our observations of the natural slide, but it also showed how quickly the new snow was beginning to bond with the lower layers (failures mechanisms were transitioning). We then did another Rutschblock test which yielded similar results (failed but with a non-planar failure). Cliff then demonstrated a “top secret” new stability tests which focuses on the ability for the snow pack to propagate a failure (i.e. how likely is a local failure going to propagate into a failure of a whole slab). Cliff emphasized that this will likely be the “new wave” of stability tests, but at the moment the avalanche professionals and researchers are trying to fine tune the methodology before introducing into the recreationalists (so he did not give the full details of the method). The propagation test was not reactive, which supported our observations of increasing stability as the day went on.

As we wrapped up the course, there were several key take home messages. First, a little bit of information can get you into a lot of trouble and that just because we had taken an AST 2 course did not mean we were experts. Cliff emphasized the need for experience and mileage. Avalanches are a bit of a black art, with a mix of science, common sense, and intuition. Avalanches are hard to predict, even for experts who essentially spend years of time immersed in avalanche terrain and examining snow packs. Therefore, be conservative. Use the avalanche bulletins. Don't make decisions to ski a particular line based on a compression test. Watch out for human factors, and if you find yourself trying to make excuses why the slope you want to ski is safe, when all the

clues are suggesting it isn't, don't do it. As a fall-back, always use terrain as the key piece of the decision-making puzzle; watch for terrain traps, use terrain management as a way of mitigating risk, and if hazard/consequences are high, ease off on the terrain.

Many thanks to Cliff Umpleby for instructing these courses. His knowledge and experience are unquestionable, and he very effectively conveyed the important aspects of avalanche management. Thanks to Peter Rothermel for all the organization, and providing the role of “kitchen bitch”. And to all the participants for their enthusiasm for learning and I think a fun time was had by all.

Participants: Cameron Adam, Linda Berube, Dave Campbell, Terry Conville, Chris Davis, Ally Dickhout, Mark Edwa(?), Matt Lawley, Bill Rickson, Otto Schulte, Peter Rothermel (Organizer) and Cliff Umpleby (Instructor).

Useful Resources:

Island Alpine Guides

[http://islandalpineguides.com.wedodns.com/bulletin/-avalanche-bulletin-for Vancouver Island and provide training](http://islandalpineguides.com.wedodns.com/bulletin/-avalanche-bulletin-for-Vancouver-Island-and-provide-training)

Canadian Avalanche Centre

<http://www.avalanche.ca/HomeCAC>
-avalanche bulletins for the Coast, Interior, Rockies, and North BC
-source for other information, reports, articles, conditions, and avalanche incidents

Environment Canada

http://text.weatheroffice.gc.ca/canada_e.html
-weather forecasts

Avalanche Handbook 3rd Edition

by P. Shaerer and D. McClung.

The September 1913 ascent of Big Interior Mountain, Vancouver Island, by Sir James Sivewright

Stephen A. Craven

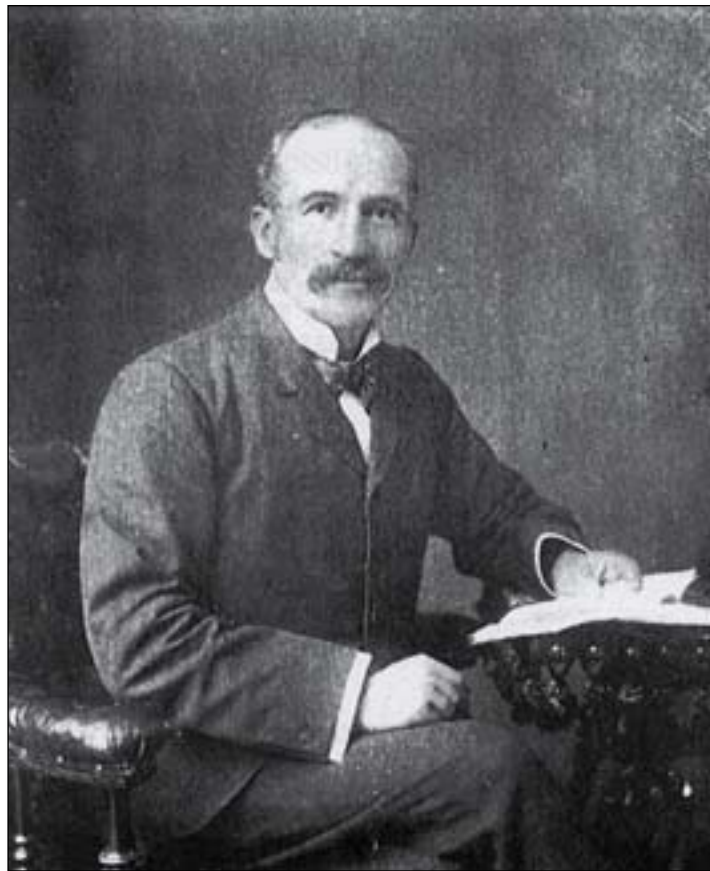
(Dr. Stephen Craven is in private practice in Cape Town, South Africa and serves as Branch Councillor of the SA Medical Association. He attended to the inmates at Polsmoor Prison for fifteen years and is a member of the Association of Police Surgeons (UK). He was the Vice-Chairman of Cape Primary Care in Cape Town, is an avid spelunker and writer, and a member of the Mountain Club of South Africa).

Lindsay Elms

Sir James Sivewright is not known in the mountaineering world for the very good reason that he was not a mountaineer. He is better known in South African historical circles for his political career¹. Inter alia he was Commissioner for Crown Lands and Public Works (1890 – 1893 and 1896 – 1898) in the Cape Colony, having been elected Member of the Legislative Assembly for Griqualand East in 1888². This gave him control of, and influence over, much Crown land – of obvious benefit to the members of the newly founded Mountain Club who elected him their first President. He held office from 1891 until 1899, during which time he attended only one meet when the members rambled around his country estate near Somerset West. From time to time he did attend meetings and, more importantly, he looked after the interests of the Club in Government circles. Having lost his seat in 1898, Sivewright returned to Britain, but did occasionally return to the Cape and its Mountain Club³.

In 1913 Sivewright sailed to Canada having the previous year invested in Ptarmigan Mines Ltd., registered office Finsbury Pavement House, London, England. In September that year, at the age of sixty-five years, he surprised everyone by climbing to the top of the 1862m. Big Interior Mountain (then known as Bear Mountain) on Vancouver Island. This is the only occasion when he is known to have climbed a mountain. The ascent was made for commercial reasons, to assess the viability of gold and copper deposits in the Ptarmigan Mine, access to which was not easy. The aerial ropeway had not been installed; and there was a 5 km. gap in the wagon road. Sivewright was described as being, “well known in Cape Town”. The party included, allegedly from South Africa, Major Johnson and H.G. Latilla who were also said to be well known at the Cape⁴.

“Just think of it, he is seventy-seven if he is a day, and yet he was first at the top, some six thousand odd feet in the air. And he was very nearly lost to us, too. Climbing the mountain at this season of the year is a tremendous task, and how he and Lady Marjorie [Feilding] managed it I do not know,



Sir James Sivewright

but there they both were at the finish, fresh and smiling, and ready to do anything to help the others. In making one nasty turn on the rope Sir James was swung from his footing over a sheer precipice, and was dangled there for what seemed an interminable time. I was below him and saw him swing against the rock with a bang, and I thought for a minute that it was all over with him. When I gained the landing below some thirty minutes later I was amazed to see the old gentleman away ahead again as blithely as ever”.

The others in the party were Rudolph Robert Basil Aloysius Augustine 9th. Earl of Denbigh and his daughter Marjorie Feilding who, at the age of twenty-one years, was the first lady to climb the mountain. One of the minor summits was named “Marjorie’s Load” for her. Also present were Captain John George Corry Wood, MPP for Alberni and, representing the vendors, Messrs. H.F. Hunter, J.D. McLeod & H.H. Sutherland⁵.

Major Johnson was in fact Major (later Sir) Frank William Frederick Johnson⁶, the Managing Director of Frank Johnson & Co. Ltd. He had achieved fame because he was Cecil Rhodes’ contractor who organised and led the 1890 Pioneer Column which successfully occupied Mashonaland in what is now Zimbabwe. His autobiography tells us that he returned to Hove, Sussex, England in 1897 where he

had overseas interests in mining. His “dearest friend” was Sivewright. He also had friends in Canada who recruited volunteers to serve in the First World War⁷.

Also involved in the Ptarmigan Mine was Frank Johnson’s brother Harry H. Johnson, but he is not recorded in the climbing party⁸. He was consulting engineer to the mine at 109 Belmont Building, Victoria, B.C.⁹.

Herbert George Latilla inherited the Marlands Estate near Itchingfield in Sussex, England, in 1911¹⁰. He was director and Chairman of innumerable gold and other mining companies¹¹ in the Transvaal, Rhodesia, Nigeria, Gold Coast, Canada, Trinidad and Burma. He died on 16 August 1949, leaving a widow Edith and two daughters Edith and Gwen¹², his connection with Cape Town (if any) remaining obscure. His short local obituary emphasised his business interests in West Africa, but made no mention of those in Southern Africa¹³.

It is remarkable that an apparently unfit and elderly gentleman should have survived a fall and completed the ascent. Although there was a packhorse trail to the mine entrance, Sivewright definitely did a lot of the work himself in getting to the summit of Big Interior Mountain¹⁴. He had bought the Tulliallan Estate, Kincardine-on-Forth in Scotland¹⁵ (32 km. NW of Edinburgh¹⁶) during the spring of 1901¹⁷. I had originally thought that this proximity to the Scottish mountains may have allowed him to become fit by climbing in that country. However there is no record that Sivewright climbed Scottish mountains¹⁸.

He died of “arterial cerebral oxygenation, apoplectiform seizures and cardiac failure” at Church Stretton, Shropshire¹⁹, on 10 September 1916 aged sixty-eight years²⁰, and is buried on the Tulliallan Estate.

Acknowledgements:

Lindsay J. Elms of Comox, British Columbia, has kindly supplied information about Sivewright’s climbing activities in Canada, and all the Canadian references.

Mrs. Eileen Latilla of Johannesburg kindly identified H.G. Latilla on the Nanoose photograph.



The climbing party on the Vancouver Island ferry; L. to R. Frank Johnson, Marjorie Feilding, unidentified, unidentified, Herbert George Latilla, unidentified, Sir James Sivewright, (presumably) the Nanoose’s Captain. Photograph kindly supplied by Dr. Kenneth Wilburn of East Carolina University.

Endnotes

- 1 A detailed biography of Sivewright is being written by Dr. Kenneth Wilburn of East Carolina University, USA.
- 2 Kilpin R. (1938) *The Parliament of the Cape* p. 155 (London: Longmans, Green & Co.).
- 3 Craven S.A. (2005) Beginnings of the MCSA Sir James Sivewright and the Politics of Access. *Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa* (108), 159 – 162.
- 4 British Capital in Island Mine. *The Daily Colonist* 16 Sep. 1913 p. 14 (Victoria, B.C.).
- 5 Means Big Boom In District Mining. *The Daily Colonist* 25 Sep. 1913 (Victoria, B.C.).
- 6 Harington A.L. (1977) *Dictionary of South African Biography* 3. 449 – 450 (Cape Town: Tafelberg).
- 7 Johnson F.(W.F.) (1940) *Great Days* pp. 107, 194 – 208, 250 & 254 (London: Bell).
- 8 Ptarmigan Gold Copper. *The Alberni Advocate* 28 Sep. 1913 p. 1.
- 9 Annual Report of the Minister of Mines for the year ending 31st December 1913 ... in the Province of British Columbia (Victoria BC) 1914 p. 302. Available at http://www.em.gov.bc.ca/DL/GSBPubs/AnnualReports/AR_1913.pdf
- 10 Hudson T.P. (ed.) (1986) *A History of the County of Sussex* 6. (2), 10 – 13 (Victoria County History Series; OUP for the Institute of Historical Research).
- 11 Crowson N.J. (ed.) (1998) *Fleet Street, Press Barons and Politics The Journals of Collin Brooks, 1932 – 1940* p. 57 Camden Fifth Series Vol. II (published for the Royal Historical Society by Cambridge University Press).
- 12 *The Times* (London) 19 August 1949 p. 1.
- 13 Mr. H.G. Latilla Dead. *Cape Times* 19 Aug. 1949 p. 3.
- 14 Elms L.J. (1996) *Beyond Nootka* pp. 66 – 68 (Courtenay, B.C.: Mithorn Press).
- 15 Anon. (1914) List of members of the Cape Town Section on January 1st, 1914. *The Annual of the Mountain Club of South Africa* (17), 155.
- 16 Bartholomew (1973) 1:250000 Map of Edinburgh & Glasgow.
- 17 The Kincardine Local History Group website read on 01 Nov. 2005: <http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:1GkQL9bdRdEJ:www.rocinante.demon.co.uk/klhg/kinhistory/histy1.htm+%22Sir+%2Bjames+%2Bsivewright%22&ht=en>
- 18 E-mail 10 Nov. 2005 Robin N. Campbell Esq., Hon. Archivist, Scottish Mountaineering Club, to S.A. Craven.
- 19 Cape Town Archives Depot MOOC 6/9/1243 4069.
- 20 *The Stainless Knight*. *Cape Argus* 12 Sep. 1916 p. 7.

Für Gerta

Our friend Gerta was everywhere and always included others in her life, be it in the mountains, a walk to the beach or local hills, or a celebration at home. She touched so many lives in a caring and giving way, and left a legacy of love of the outdoors and of music, to her family and to many people who crossed her path.

On any outing now, we remember her presence, the music and dance, the mitts/hats/scarves she made for us, the brandy and home-made goodies she shared, her smile and good cheer, her determination, her "yodel" of success, and "Berg Heil" on the summit!

On a recent ski trip to Elfin Hut, Catrin recalled words Gerta said when we celebrated her 60th birthday there: "I consider myself extremely lucky to have been able to do the things I have done with the friends that I have. And I hope when you reach 60, you'll all be able to say the same thing".

10 years later we gathered on Mt Becher to celebrate with her again. She lived her life fully and was a great companion and friend to many. Gerta will be happy to be remembered in a song; so sing or hum as you read the words.... "The Happy Gerta-Wanderer".

– Claire Ebendinger

P.S. You can read more about Gerta's life in the Memorial Fund section of the www.accvi.ca website.



Gerta Smythe
1937 – 2008

The Happy Gerta-Wanderer

- 1. It started back in Austria, she joined the Alpine club,
an early start, and on the bikes, they went to the trailheads.
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta and her smile*
- 2. When to Jasper she moved one day, to meet her faithful Ken,
she had to start a ladies' club, to "wisssh" down on the slopes.
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta on her skis*
- 3. While raising kids and nursing too, she never gave it up,
by then Ken knew he had to share, her heart with mountain tops.
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta and her love*
- 4. They moved to Vancouver Island, where mountains are so far,
she joined the Ramblers, the Comox gang, and again the Alpine Club.
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta and her clubs.*
- 5. She said you drive so I can knit, and planned the trips ahead,
we laughed and joked and tried for size, the hats, the scarves and mitts.
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta and her gifts.*
- 6. She hiked the hills and climbed the highest mountains in the world,
and when they made it to the top she called Berg Heil ! Berg Heil !
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta and her friends.*
- 7. Then on Mt Wells she did her job, of warden volunteer,
and when she met someone quite keen, she gave her alpine spiel.
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta and her dog*
- 8. She always sang and played the tunes for us to dance and cheer,
she went with kids of any age, and shared her sparks around.
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta and her recorder.*
- 9. Now we do miss our Wonder friend, but she has gone so high,
She went to Heaven to sing and dance with all her angel friends.
Valderi who is she? Valdera I can see, e,e,e,e,e
Valderi who is she? It's Gerta in our hearts forever.*

Requiem for a young climber lost in Alaska

Fingers resin-tipped
curved to the granite's flute
supporting all and nothing
in a fluid flow
of grace
upon the vertical.
So effortless,
to slip the bonds of gravity
and with careless ease
float skyward,
easy as thistledown carried on the breeze.

That was the first time.
Later, armoured in equipment -
carabiners, prussiks, nylon, alum-alloy -
bent to storm another wall
of cracks and columns
flakes and ledges.
Heart-stopping, just to watch
believing, and yet not believing.

The next was winter
when with frost-encrusted face
you cut steep bends
down fearsome headwalls
far from any crowd.
Such a silence
only blue sky days could echo.
So free, so wild, so happy.
Adaptive creature in an element
of ice and snow and frost.
So free.

Thirty summers
swelled the rings of saplings,
saw you grow from lad to legend,
challenge mountains,
distant ranges,
reputation,
felt the aura.
All gone
in a moment with a friend.
Vanished as if there never had been -
unfulfilled
unfinished
unfound
leaving mediocrity behind.

- Rick Hudson



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