

# ISLAND BUSHWHACKER

THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA • VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

2010 ANNUAL



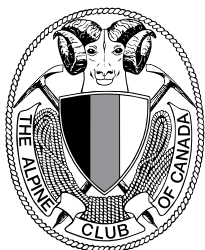
A hiker is seen from behind, wearing a backpack and a hat, walking along a rocky mountain trail. The background features a vast, hazy mountain range under a cloudy sky. The overall image has a muted, sepia-like color palette.

THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA  
VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

# **ISLAND BUSHWHACKER ANNUAL**

**VOLUME 38, 2010**

VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION  
*of*  
THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA



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Cover: *Climbing 'The Thumb', Alava- Bate Sanctuary, 2010 VI Section Summer Camp* PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN



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## Message from the Chair

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Cedric Zala



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## Message from the Chair

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Cedric Zala

The energy of our executive and members during 2010 has been quite wonderful. We have continued our past successes and broken some new ground as well. I'd like to mention some of the highlights of the past year.

Our redesigned education program has proven very popular. Many of our courses continue to be free, and instructed by club members, and we build a subsidy of about 50% into the cost of other courses like Avalanche Safety Training and Wilderness First Aid. In addition we provide a subsidy of 50% for courses taken with guiding companies. In all, the section spent about \$5000 on education this past year – our biggest expense. It is hoped this will encourage members to get out there, and also to gain the skills to lead more trips.

Our membership is healthy and continues to grow slowly, with about 340 members (including partners). There was a small burst in membership after the BMFF, where we encouraged people to join during the introduction and by handing out application forms at our booth.

We continue our monthly electronic newsletter, and have improved its appearance and tweaked its name a couple of times – it's now back to the historic "Island Bushwhacker". Each month I also print and send out paper copies to those

few members who don't have email or computers. All but five of our members are on-line now. And our flagship Island Bushwhacker Annual continues to be a publication we can be fiercely proud of, and it just gets better, glossier, and cheaper to produce as print costs come down.

And speaking of publications, we were featured in the January issue of Senior Living, with profiles of three of our members and descriptions of some of the things we love to do. Great publicity!

We maintain our schedule as an electronic document on the website, which gives us some flexibility, and allows us to deal easily with the occasional addition or rescheduling of trips. It can be printed for those who want to do so. The website itself continues to slowly grow and is far easier to maintain since it was set it up so that individual executive members can look after their own areas. We have also entered the mainstream by starting an ACCVI group Facebook page. And we have acquired a new display board and pictures, and used it at the BMFF and at a special night at MEC.

Financially, we continue to be in the pink! There was a record income from BMFF despite a small increase in ticket price. The newly imposed HST in BC will further add to our revenues, as we get back 56% of the HST (12%), rather than 50% of the GST (5%) in the past. Further, Revenue Canada has ruled that HST is not due on BMFF tickets, which also improves our situation. Plus our summer camp's costs were less than expected and we made a profit this year.

A real high point in the year was the trip, funded by our youth grant program, by four UVic students to the remote Brooks Peninsula with the objective of climbing Mt. Doom. They will be giving a slide show in May and have written a very thorough and engaging article on their adventures, which will appear in the next Island Bushwhacker Annual.

Another high point was our summer camp in the Alava/Bate Sanctuary, between Gold River and Tahsis. Up to recently we have had hut-based summer camps on the mainland, but decided to break with tradition and organize a tent-based camp on the Island. It was amazingly popular, and the original two week-long camps had to be supplemented to include a third one in order to meet the demand to experience and climb in this fabulous, pristine area. Spirits were undampened by having to camp on two metres of snow, and except for the very last day the weather cooperated to make it a superb experience for all.

The section also increased its involvement in community issues in response to the threat that off-road vehicles might be permitted to regain access to the Sea-to-Sea Regional Park

in Sooke. The club took a lead role in developing an umbrella group called Protect Our Parks (POP) that brought together over 10,000 members of different clubs and organizations to successfully influence the Parks Board to maintain the ban on such incursions. POP continues into 2011 with new objectives.

A couple of thoughts about the future now. Next year (2012) is the section's centenary, and we have a number of initiatives planned for that year, including producing a thorough index to our Island Bushwhackers so that people can much more easily obtain information about areas and routes, and supporting the production of a history of mountaineering on Vancouver Island. Anyone is encouraged to suggest other activities to mark our centennial year.

And although the schedule is reasonably full, we always need more trips and leaders, particularly from the younger age groups. We are not alone here – finding enough experienced leaders is an ongoing challenge facing every section. We believe that part of the reluctance of members to lead stems from their lack of confidence in their own leadership skills. For this reason, we are aiming to increase our training initiatives.

Finally, I want to say how much I appreciate the efforts of our executive over this last year. They are a dedicated, effective, and fun group of people who work very harmoniously together. I look forward to continuing to work with them all to serve the club in the coming year.





# Vancouver Island

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## VI Spine: A Proposed Wilderness Trail

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Gil Parker

By now, you might have seen two previous annual reports in the Island Bushwhacker Annual about VI Spine. The trail from Victoria to Cape Scott is planned to follow existing trails up the middle of the Island, passing nearby many communities, but avoiding the higher mountains with their long winter snowpacks. But the big job of linking all the existing trails into a continuous track is just beginning.

The concept, over three years old, is gaining considerable traction, thanks to an active Board and the support of many organizations, including the Alpine Club. (Three of our eight person Board are ACC members, Robie Macdonald, Andrew Pape-Salmon, and the writer.) VISTA is the trail association that runs the project as a non-profit society, with CRA designation as a charity and permission to issue tax receipts for donations.

Last June, VISTA organized «VI Spine Relay 2010,» a traverse of the current trails on the VI Spine route, linked as needed along Island highways and roads. This was a major success, involving 65 participants and holding community publicity days in six centres along the way. It was a tremendous achievement, especially for Andrew Pape-Salmon, who did much of the organizing, and who led all the sections, including the challenging North Coast Trail and a snowbound traverse of Forbidden Plateau.

Last fall, VISTA has named Scott Henley of Qualicum Beach as Executive Director of VISTA to direct our business plan. Scott has extensive experience in mapping, management, and in execution of non-profit projects. VISTA now has a membership chair, ACC volunteer Ann Harwood, who has solved the many CRA requirements and takes care of an expanding membership list.



*Start of VI Spine Relay 2010, Cape Scott.* PHOTO: GIL PARKER

VISTA will be a presenter to the Coastal Communities Convention in Sidney, BC, in April 2011. This Convention will include delegates from all levels of government on Vancouver Island, including regional districts critical to the success of VI Spine.

Currently, we have established a preliminary route for each segment of the VI Spine. This route needs to be proven on the ground, possibly using forestry/trail consultants. Usually, this will be done through the six Regional Districts the route traverses, as the ultimate owners of the VI Spine. We are cooperating with the Trans Canada Trail, especially the segment from Victoria to Lake Cowichan. Missing links over the Malahat are expected to be started in 2012 by the CRD and CVRD. The trail builders in Port Alberni are making good progress, with the «Runners Trail» from the Canal east to Francis Lake completed last year, and the link from Alberni south over Mount Hankin proceeding.

If you wish to assist in this project, we happily accept donations, and the annual membership is \$30. (Cash or cheque or

via «Canada Helps» on our website, [www.vispine.ca](http://www.vispine.ca).) Member fees and larger donations will get you a tax deductible receipt at year end!

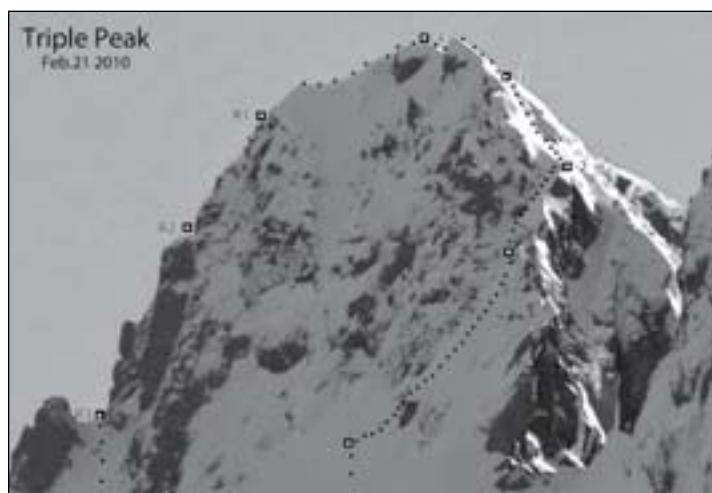
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## Triple Peak: First Recorded Winter Ascent

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Sasha Kubicek  
February 21



*Triple Peak route map* PHOTO: SASHA KUBICEK

The conditions in the mountains could not have been more perfect in the early part of the winter of 2009/2010. Valleys were snow free and 2-3 metres of consolidated snow greeted you at snow line at about 900 metres. As we drove up Marion Creek main towards Triple Peak, it was surreal how good the road was this time of year and we almost thought we were going to be able to drive right to the trail head in winter! Almost as if the mountain heard us we passed the 5040 Peak West Ridge parking area and saw two huge old growth trees across the road! We got out and there was no way to get past these big trees. Triple was going to make us earn her summit! We geared up and started up the logging road. Crossing the creek to the trail up the water falls was no problem and the trail took us quickly to base of the waterfalls. Ice covered some of the rocks and we had to be careful in spots as we made our way up. I could only imagine how impenetrable this approach would be in full winter conditions! We sure were lucky to have timed things so perfectly. Here is the rest of the account in Quagger's words.



*Summit crew- Left to right Quagger, Lindsay, Sasha* PHOTO: SASHA KUBICEK

"Last weekend while coming down off Logan Peak with Tawney and Lindsay, we were wondering what to do when the nice weather that was being forecast came. I mentioned Triple off the top of my head and before I knew it Sasha Kubicek, Lindsay Elms and I were walking 4 kilometres up the Marion Main line to the Triple Peak trailhead. Before I knew it I was hanging off a cedar sapling pulling myself up towards the lake at the base of Triple Peak. Snow conditions were rock hard the whole way and were great for crampons and we front pointed nicely up the lower slopes before reaching the base of the main peak. We decided to take the line up the North Face which is a popular climb in the summer and come down the route I normally take which heads down the south side.

The climb up took four short pitches with some good exposure. Sasha and Lindsay swapped leads with Sasha leading the first pitch and setting up a snow anchor for the first belay. I took it easy by taking the middle so I could take pictures. Lindsay came up third and continued past the belay and topped out onto the West Ridge proper. Here Lindsay set up another belay and brought me and Sasha up. The exposure and view from the ridge crest was incredible! Some debris crashed down one of the south facing gullies on the other two summits behind us enhancing the alpine atmosphere. Sasha got to the ridge and continued past the belay up the ridge towards the summit. It looked like he was going to make the summit on this pitch but he had to set up another snow anchor and brought us up again. This belay really had exposure as we were on the ridge crest with the south face dropping off below us. Lindsay again passed through and climbed carefully avoiding the corniced ridge edge and made the summit. The summit views were breathtaking with everything from the Broken Islands to the peaks of Strathcona Park all in view. We logged into the summit register and soaked up our time on the summit.

For the rappels I took the lead as I had a good idea where the saplings were hiding and was able to dig them out enough

to wrap a sling around for an anchor. It took us three raps to reach the upper snow field. Time was getting late in the day and I was dreaming about a good feed and a stiff mug of coffee so I picked the pace up and got us all the way back down to the vehicle in just over two hours which impressed all of us.”

**Participants:** Craig (Quagger) Wagnell, Lindsay Elms and Sasha Kubicek

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## Mount Hall North Bowl - First Recorded Winter Ascent

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Sasha Kubicek  
March 20



*Quagger and Tawney coming up North Bowl of Mt Hall* PHOTO: SASHA KUBICEK

The winter of 2009/2010 with its strange snow fall made it great to reach peaks which normally are inaccessible except by long ski or snowmobile approaches up snow covered logging roads. Taking full advantage of the last weekend of winter and these conditions I found myself zooming up to Port Alberni Friday after work to join Quagger and Tawney on another adventure. This is recounted by Quagger.

“Weather had been great for the past few days but unfortunately, on the day I had planned for an outing the weatherman was calling for a system moving inland by mid afternoon. Guess I just have to make it an earlier start. Sasha was driving up from Victoria on Friday after work and Tawney wanted to get out before heading back east for work. So I thought why not try and get up Mount Hall which is located at the headwaters of the Toquart River. It was a 2 hour plus



*Quagger stepping onto summit of Mt Hall* PHOTO: SASHA KUBICEK

drive then a fair hike up an overgrown logging road which has two wet river crossings. At road's end the hike through the slash can be a nightmare if you take a wrong turn but luckily it was short. The venture in the timber up to alpine is fairly straightforward and enjoyable with next to nil for undergrowth. Once in alpine the views open up and you finally end up in a wide open basin with Toquart Peak to the north, Triple Peak to the west and Mount Hall to the south. This vantage point is very Lord of the Rings like.

The North Bowl of Mount Hall is a sweet snow climb with no technical difficulties. That's if you go the right way but if you want some steep snow take the left snow chute directly below the false summit which takes you up steep snow before topping out right next to a cornice. This is the way we went up and after topping out we walked carefully on an exposed ridge to the true summit.

Once reaching the summit ridge clouds appeared out of nowhere roaring up the south west side, quickly taking away our views unfortunately and trying to blow us off the ridge. Damn!! No summit snoozes today. Instead we made a quick retreat off the mountain. Luckily we were able to reach the timber before the rain began falling. By the time we reached the slash the rain had turned into a downpour. I could now hear squish, squish coming from Tawney's footsteps. I didn't have the heart to tell her I was dry until we got back to the Jeep.”

**Participants:** Craig (Quagger) Wagnell, Tawney Lem and Sasha Kubicek

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## Spring Skiing in the Nahmint Valley

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Chris Ruttan

May 1 thru to June 20

Last year spring was an outstanding season for late skiing and I was lucky to have chosen this year to satisfy my curiosity about the roads into the Nahmint River Valley. A long time ago I had gone into Adder Mountain from the west via branch 514 off Highway #4 and then up onto the meadows below and north of the summit. A lovely camp spot dotted with lakes and flowers galore but a bit hard to get into. On the occasion of reaching the summit the next day, as I lazed about enjoying the sun, I saw far off to the east a group of hikers heading my way so I waited and pondered which way they had come in from. It was pretty clear they had come in on a logging road reaching up high on the east slopes but I didn't yet know that road system so I waited some more. At last a group of delightful people began to arrive singly and in small groups till all had arrived and I was able to ask some questions about the access. It was August 11, 2001, when that trip took place but as is so often the case there just wasn't the time to do everything and I didn't get in there until May 1. On that first trip Karen Payie and I drove out to Port Alberni and then with the aid of the backcountry road book figured the connections of roads to finally climb up and over the pass at Gracie Lake then down to the beautiful Nahmint Valley road which we would follow intending to drive to the very end. The road was fairly good most of the way but at 28 kilometres there was a washout that we made it through with some careful rock relocating. The next issue didn't crop up until 32 kilometres where there was a bad washout on a hill and I couldn't get through it so we backed off and loaded up our gear to begin the walk. Very near the end of the road at about 35 kilometres we dropped our skis and began to tour to the west end of the road then into the forest at the edge of the slash where we spotted some ribbons and followed up the slope. It was soon clear we weren't getting up Adder that day so we turned back and returned to the car absolutely thrilled with the beauty of this awesome valley and excited beyond words by the huge snow slopes waiting here to be skied.

On the May 8<sup>th</sup> weekend Karen and I returned into the valley but this time we were armed with picks, shovels, wheelbarrows and a powersaw with the intention of staying overnight. We worked most of Saturday morning on the 32 kilometre washout then once through made our way up the road, bucking huge windfalls and scratching at cross ditches to get through until we finally got stopped very near the snow about 35 kilometres by a debris slide. We set up camp and spent the night.



*The summit block of Adder* PHOTO: CHRIS RUTTAN

The next morning, May 9, we left camp at about 7:20 a.m. heading out again on our previous track but Karen was in snowshoes this time so we made good time and though we couldn't always see the ribboned route it was fairly straight forward as we headed west working always for the spine of the ridge through steep old growth forest. There are a couple steep sections to negotiate and the terrain is complex in many places but the skiing was top notch and after the second steep step the ridge opened up and we had a great view of the way ahead to the summit up lovely rolling glades. The east face of the summit block looked a bit steep to skin up so I contoured around to the south slope and found a way up to glory in the sun. I really wanted to ski down that east face so after a rather tricky hop off a cornice I dropped onto the face and yahooped my way down onto the gentler slopes below.

We had lunch below the summit out of the wind and in the sun then began the long glorious ski out taking a run then waiting for Karen then repeat to car. What a great place to ski and what a lot of snow, I was able to ski all the way out and we were on our way home by 2 p.m.. The very next weekend I was back by myself and used the same road to ski into Klitsa Mountain crossing a frozen lake on the way. I did a bit more work on the road as I drove in so that I didn't hit the trail until 10:45 a.m.. I had to bootpack up the road till I reached the creek draining the aforementioned lake then I handrailed up till I could ski across the lake. From there I headed for the west ridge coming down off Klitsa into the Gibson Klitsa Plateau and then skied up the ridge crest stopping just where the big trees peter out and the huge open slopes rise above; it had taken 2 ½ hours to reach this point and I set up my tent, hung my food bag and set off to find running water. I had lunch then rested a bit before setting off at 3:15 p.m. for the summit. The snow was kind of wet and inclined to slough due to the warm weather but once past the



first very steep roll I made good time working my way up the vast slope. At one point I looked up and stopped short with surprise, then rubbed my eyes, there high above was another solo climber but on foot. I was a little taken aback someone else would be alone on the mountain at this time of day but I was now determined to catch up if I could and I pressed on. My fellow climber was making a slow go of it and I was indeed gaining but he was so far ahead I only met him about 25 metres below the summit as he was coming back down. I had dropped my skis there because it was icy and very steep and I didn't want to risk a fall. His name was Rick Roe who I hadn't met before and but we had a nice talk and he described coming up the big couloir and having it avalanche while he was in it. He was able to duck to a protected spot as it went by. I realized then that I had in fact heard the roar of that slide and presumed it was farther away.

He soon moved on and I pressed on to the summit for some quick photos and a curious glance to the west and the gathering gloom of incoming rain. The ski down was awesome and I was in heaven dropping all the way down to then past my lunch spot, then skinning back up all the way to the last block below the summit. By the time I was up there again I was tired and I resolved to make this my last run so I turned down the mountain and skied back to my tent. It was raining lightly by then and I thought about skiing back out with wet gear and how the slopes would be the next day if it rained all night so I decided to pack up and make a run for it. I made one variation to my route up by following the ridge out a bit farther before heading for the lake and that worked well. Across the lake then and starting down the heavy forest in the gathering gloom with the snow getting thinner and thinner till I reached the road where I picked up my skis and bootpacked down through the old growth reaching my car at 8:30 p.m.. I slept over in the car and to my chagrin woke the next morning to blue skies.

On May 29, Karen and I returned to Adder Mountain; I was on skis while she snowshoed again but it wasn't great due to heavy fog and we never did quite reach the summit although I enjoyed a couple good runs on the lower slopes that were a bit more clear.

The next trip was June 12 when Karen and I made a run at the double peaked mountain [ed. Jacks Peak] south of Louise Goetting Lake by making a left off the route up Adder and dropping into the col on a connecting ridge east of the lake. I refer to this mountain as Half-Pipe because of the impressive half-pipe that forms between the two peaks due to the prevailing winds in winter. From the col we ascended steep and difficult terrain till we reached the easier ground above the heavy timber and made our way up to the lower more easterly peak where we stopped for lunch. I left Karen in the sun after lunch and skied down into the half-pipe and then skinned up to the proper summit and had a run back

down into the col. From there I skinned back up to her on the east peak where we gathered our gear and started back down. From the car to the top had taken us 4 ½ hours but we discovered information on the way that would save time next trip. It was 4:15 p.m. when we began our return trip. Oh how I would have loved to just open up and fly down the crest of that ridge but I couldn't leave Karen behind. At the bottom of the col I skinned up again to work back up to the Adder Mountain route then off with them to finish the ski out. On the map it looks as though you could traverse across from lower down on the route but there is a deep rock canyon that is the nascent Nahmint racing down to the valley bottom and you have to go up high to avoid it. We reached the car by 6:40 p.m. and started the long ride home tired but happy.

Our last trip out was June 20 when we returned to ski to the summit of Adder again and this time I skied the north slopes, very nice! After a few runs we headed back east again and to the car, great skiing!

I can only hope that the snow lingers again in the coming spring because on a trip out later in the year we discovered the loggers had moved a machine out and fixed up the 32 kilometre washout so it won't likely wash-out again because the creek is running under the road again as it should. One thing to keep in mind out there is the large population of bears, we saw at least one on every trip and I mean both on the roads and while on foot.

**Participants:** Chris Ruttan and Karen Payie

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## A Spring-like Ascent of Elkhorn Mountain

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Dave Campbell  
June 5-7

In the quest for the IQ's, Peter Rothermel has observed that peaks often require multiple attempts before finally getting to the top. For me, Elkhorn has certainly been one of these peaks. My first attempt there, a couple of years ago, was short lived. I had a spare day, and was going to attempt a solo climb of the west gully. This trip was short lived, and I "lost motivation" (seems to be common when on solo trips) heading up steep ice on the trail just below the Tarzan rope on the approach gully.

Attempt two was a trip only in theory; the theory being a day-trip up the north spur on King's Peak, along the ridge-line connecting Kings and Elkhorn, and then up the north ridge on Elkhorn. Sounds fun doesn't it? On the day of the big trip, we awoke at 4 a.m. at the Kings Peak trailhead to bucketing rain. Gear was stowed in the car, we spent the day





*Tim Turay high in the west gully on Elkhorn Mountain* PHOTO: DAVE CAMPBELL

swimming our way up King's Peak, and Elkhorn remained but a theory.

Attempt three started grand; another solo attempt in late summer of 2009. Having the crossing over the Elk River and approach dialled from the previous trip, I made quick time up to the "hand-line" up the gully, and beat my previous high-point. The trail grinds on, and it was still early in the day by the time I emerged into the alpine. I worked along the ridge heading up towards the looming summit massif of Elkhorn, and traversed around and into the west gully. All started well, and I worked my way up some of the lower scrambling. Then I hit the crux: a short constriction in the gully with a chock stone which needs to be negotiated. Despite numerous attempts, and considerable soul searching, I couldn't muster the gumption to push through this section. "OK, I need to come back with a rope and a partner" I reasoned. At 5 ½ hours into the trip, and 250 metres from the summit, I turned around and headed down.

Trip number four occurred in early June, 2010. I reckoned that early season might be a good time to climb the west gully and take advantage of snow filling in the route and reducing the amount of loose rock to be dealt with. I revisited and revised my attempt two "theory", by simultaneously scaling back and enhancing the idea: climb King's Peak, descend the "hiker's route" over to Elkhorn, up Elkhorn, down to the Elk River Valley, and then over to climb either Rambler or the south peak of Colonel Foster. I posted these stages as 2 separate trips on the club schedule, and in the end Tim

Turay was the only person to bite at the trip. Tim and I had been having good success over the past couple of seasons and was a solid partner for the trip: we had climbed the X-gully on Mount Septimus the weekend before. Tim was a little sceptical about the ambitiousness of my plan, so we agreed to scale the trip from a 4-day to a 3-day trip, heading up the standard approach up Elkhorn and climb it via the west gully, traverse around the west side of the mountain over to climb Elkhorn South (now officially named), and then descend to the Elk River.

With heavy packs we worked our way up the grind that is the north-west approach. We hit snow around the hand-line, and donned snowshoes shortly after. In 2010, the June snow-pack was more similar to a typical April-May one. The day warmed, and the snow turned into a real slog even before we hit alpine. Exhausted, many hours later, we

emerged in the alpine. It would have been nice to camp at the shoulder, but we felt we wanted to camp as high on the mountain as we could so that we would have a good shot at getting up the mountain the following day before the snow started to soften. We continued along the ridge and its ups and downs. With the heavy snow cover, some parts of the route escaped my memory, and we ended up on one dicey traverse on soft snow over a cliff band (never noticed that in the summer). It was evening before we pulled into a camp spot on a level area before the final rise up to the base of the northwest face on Elkhorn. We spent the evening re-fuelling and enjoying the vistas out to Colonel Foster and Rambler Peak. The weather had been fine all day, and the clouds had just started to settle in as we headed off to bed.

The following day we were up early and off towards the west gully. The clouds from the evening before had lingered, and cloud level was starting to fall. We traversed into the gully, and started up the lower portions. As we neared the chock stone crux that turned me back on attempt #3, we donned harnesses, and pulled the rope out. Tim belayed me up through the crux, and I was happy to have the rope on this time. A few moves of 5<sup>th</sup> class brought me up to the upper snow slopes where I belayed Tim up. We put the rope away, and started the long, steep snow climb up the west gully. The gully is fairly steep (~60 degrees) and I was happy to have two tools (Tim only had one axe, and the first purchase he made when we got home was another tool!). The clouds had descended, and we were now had poor visibility, and snow

flurries had started. Slow and steady, we worked our way up to a notch, and then up the final stretch to the summit. This was my 5<sup>th</sup> IQ and Tim's 3<sup>rd</sup>. The summit register was buried under the snow, and the weather was socked in, so we spent little time on top before starting the steady descent.

We delicately retraced our steps down, and rappelled down the crux corner. From there it was a quick jaunt back down to our tents. It was still early in the day, and we had a bit of a rest in the tent before packing up and starting our traverse around the west side of Elkhorn. Steep cliffs on the flank of Elkhorn require that you descend a bit to hit a gully that works its way through the cliffs (check out the GoogleEarth image for a good look at the route). Snow from the morning had turned to a drizzle, and after a few hours we decided to set up camp at tree line below the Elkhorn-Elkhorn South col. In the warm, wet afternoon, we saw and heard a number of avalanches and rock falls which were being directed down into what was our escape gully back down to the Elk River valley (it's the obvious, main gully).

The next morning we awoke to more rain and poor visibility, and we decided to forgo a summit attempt on Elkhorn South. We packed up and headed into the "shooting gallery" gully, which was fortunately less active in the early morning. We made quick progress glissading down the snow which has avalanched down the gully through the winter. When the snow ran out, we made an interesting traverse out of the gully and into the forested slopes on the south side of the creek. We eventually picked up a flagged route, and only hit one tricky section through a bluff. Down, down, down, and we finally emerged at the Elk River, just downstream with the confluence with the Landslide Lake outlet.

We were still on the wrong side of the Elk River. On the approach, we had been able to cross on a series of logs spanning the river. For the return crossing, we could find no such logs, and after hiking a ways downstream with no success finding good locations, we decided to just go for it. My boots were wet from the previous 3 days of slogging around in wet snow, so I kept the boots on for the crossing. Tim went for the delicate approach, and took the boots off and rolled up the pants. Overall, it was cold, but a reasonable thigh-deep crossing. We emerged onto the Elk Valley trail right after the crossing, and then the long march out to the car. What a great trip! We encountered a lot more snow than expected, but I think in a normal year early-June would be a good time to climb Elkhorn. In any event the west gully route is pretty fun while in snow cover, and we didn't have any loose rock to deal with. Elkhorn South will have to wait for another day.

**Participants:** Tim Turay and Dave Campbell

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## Trio Mountain - West Ridge

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Sasha Kubicek  
June 20



*Dan on Trio's summit and satellite peaks west of summit* PHOTO: SASHA KUBICEK

Trio Mountain is a seldom climbed peak just outside the northwest boundaries of Strathcona Park.

Dan and I found ourselves driving up Saunders Main on the morning of June 20<sup>th</sup>. Trio Mountain was our Plan B due to a less than favorable weather forecast, but the morning was looking great so far with not a cloud in the sky. To add to this Saunders Main was gate-free and in great condition - not a bad start to a Plan B! On our way up the logging road we were too eager and turned off onto a wrong spur road, but figured things out and got back on the mainline until we hit the well signed S-40 spur road. We drove up S-40 to the west bowl at about 700 metres and parked. The old growth looked quite close and some well worn elk trails took us through the logging slash fairly well with just 50 metres of snotty bush to negotiate.

Once in the old growth going was great and we were on the west ridge proper before we knew it. Cruising up the ridge we came to a major bluff section, but we scooted to the north and found a perfect snow filled gully that took us past the bluffs and into the alpine. Great snow conditions, more gullies and snow ramps took us up the summit.

The views on the way were stunning and even better on the summit. The summit had a surveyor's pyramid on it but no register. Trio Mountain is almost right in the centre of the island and has one of the greatest vantage points of the Island peaks that I have seen. I am not sure why it does not see more visits. We soaked up the sun and views. The

satellite peaks west of Trio's summit sure looked great and worth a future visit.

We had an uneventful way back down and as we drove out caught a glimpse of a few Elk who were the maintainers of the trails we used getting to the old growth. Thanks guys!

**Participants:** Sasha Kubicek and Dan Goodwin

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## Adder Mountain East Ridge

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**Martin Smith**

**July 3, 2010**

Once again this year I found myself in debt to the folks of the Alberni Valley Outdoor Club and their unsurpassed local knowledge of the mountains on their doorstep.

Like most non *cognoscenti*, I have been accustomed to approaching Adder Mountain from Sutton Pass and getting up it via the broad north ridge route. This entails an initial, rather tedious approach to the alpine up a river valley that requires several water crossings. In early season, climbing up and down multiple 2 metres high snow banks to get at each crossing can become a bit wearying for us old folks, not to mention the risky use of snow bridges if any are still in place.

This year even July was still early season and in such conditions those in the know approach Adder up the Nahmint Valley and climb it via the East Ridge. My good friend Karen George was leading such a trip on a weekend I had free, so I didn't need much urging to make the familiar trip up to Port Alberni.

Bright and early on July 3rd the usual AVOC suspects, as well as a couple of new faces, assembled *chez* Karen where we organized the transport and set off in convoy at about 7:45.

Once assembled at the trailhead (see below), the group of 8 of us geared up and set off in mostly cloudy weather at about 9:15 a.m. No one had brought snowshoes as we expected conditions to offer firm going but Rudy, as always, had his skis strapped to his pack. Tawney was carrying a huge and heavy pack as this trip was part of her training regime for the upcoming Strathcona Park Centenary Expedition to retrace the steps of Price Ellison's 1910 party to the summit of Crown Mountain and beyond.

From the start point we walked across the big washout and ~ 1.5 km up the remains of the road right to its end at N49 14.694 W125 16.924.

Heading off the road, we picked our way slightly north of west up through the logging slash following flagging where we found it. This route is less frequently travelled than the north route and consequently there was nothing startlingly obvious in the way of a use-path. About 10 minutes in the



*Martin and Ursula approaching the summit of Adder Mountain*

PHOTO: TAWNEY LEM

slash saw us safely into the old growth above.

We proceeded up through the trees gradually swinging round to a true northwesterly heading to intersect a stream that flows down from a small tarn above. We were already out onto nice friendly open slopes at about 850 metres elevation. The majority of us headed up the right (true left) bank of the stream, whilst Rudy, who'd strapped on his skis at the earliest opportunity, crossed over and went up the left bank.

Above the tarn, which was still frozen over of course, the sub alpine ridge was wide, expansive and offered wonderful open hiking.

Heading left (west) from the tarn up the wide ridge, we encountered two steep phases before the summit block itself. Several bluffs provided sporty diversions along the way and Ursula, Harry and I accepted one of the challenges. The rope wasn't quite necessary but it was a close thing.

Approaching the summit proper, we found the steepest pitch of the day, easily identifiable by Rudy's skis, stashed at the point beyond which he'd chosen to boot it. Some might appreciate an axe at this point.

We were all on the summit just before 1 pm in nice time for lunch. Louise Goetting Lake sparkled below and the surrounding mountains peeked out of the clouds now and again. My previous visits to Adder had been in solid clag so today was at least a distinct improvement.

We all set off down just before 2 and after a pleasant and uneventful descent arrived at the cars at 4 p.m.

### **Driving directions to the trailhead**

From the signal light at the bottom of the hill in Port Alberni, drive 6.8 km and turn left on McCoy Lake Road.

Drive 1.9 km and keep right on Tyler Road. Go ahead 1.6 km to a 4 way junction and go straight across onto gravel.

Approximately 1 km later the road swings round to the west and begins to follow Taylor Arm, an offshoot of the south side of Sproat Lake.

Continue about 13 km and keep left at N49 14.018 W125 02.867, the junction with Taylor Main. Shortly thereafter the road turns south (now called Gracie Main) and begins to climb up a pass ahead. Proceed 6 km up and over the pass and down to the junction with Nahmint Main at N49 11.720 W125 04.421. Turn right and cross the Nahmint River within 1 km.

Immediately after crossing the river keep right at a junction at N49 11.983 W125 05.223

Drive west on Nahmint on good 2WD surface and after 5.8 km cross the river again to its north bank at N49 12.810 W125 09.049

Proceed west on Nahmint for just over 4 km from the second bridge and note spur 600 on the right at N49 13.732 W125 11.935. This gives access to Klitsa Mountain. Continue west on Nahmint. Soon after spur 600 the road deteriorates and the first of the cross ditches/water bars appear. Lock in 4WD and go ahead a further ~ 7 km to a large wash-out at about 640 metres elevation that bars further progress. There is adequate parking here.

#### Route details

- Return distance from cars: ~ 10 km
- Net elevation gain: ~ 870 metres
- Total elevation gain: ~ 950 metres
- Time up: ~3-3.5 hours
- Time down: ~2-2.5 hours

For more details on the above, as well as the north ridge route including all the critical waypoints and route photos, see my SummitPost write-ups at:

<http://www.summitpost.org/adder-mountain/297537>

**Participants:** Rudy Brugger, Karen George (trip leader), Ursula Knoll, Tawney Lem, Jesse Mah, Harry Schwartz, Martin Smith and Karli Van Vliet

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## Unnamed 1300m Peak – Toquart area

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Lindsay Elms  
July 3

There aren't many of the higher mountains on Vancouver Island left that haven't had first ascents, however, there is still the odd lesser peak (around 1300m) that can be found, with one in particular behind Toquart Bay south of Triple Peak. This area has seen little activity, probably due to the long drive on the logging roads. The king of



*Lindsay on top of one of the unnamed spires* PHOTO: THE ELMS COLLECTION

the area is Mount Hall which although its first ascent was talked about by a number of people for many years, wasn't climbed until June 2002; neighbouring Toquart Peak\* was first climbed in June 2003 (two ascents to date) and Sawtooth Peak\* in September 2003 (one ascent to date). Two other peaks (Lucky Mountain and Handsome Mountain) were climbed by surveyors but have only had one or two ascents since then.

To access these peaks one begins on the Maggie Lake Access Road located off Highway 4 at Kennedy Lake. At 16 kilometres the Toquart Bay Recreational Area is reached and from here the road turns into the Toquart Main. It's about another 19 kilometres to the end of the road where the trailhead for Hall, Toquart and Sawtooth is located. This is also the location of the side branch road that we turned up to access this unnamed peak. This road is heavily cross-ditched (high clearance vehicle mandatory) but we managed to drive about 1 kilometre before we parked. Our visibility of the mountain was poor due to mist!

With a touch of moisture in the air we donned over-pants and jackets and started walking up the road. After a few hundred metres the road became covered in alder which we negotiated for another couple of hundred metres whereupon we came across a big slide path coming down from the general direction of the peak above. We decided to scramble up this as far as we could before entering the bush.

Near the top of the slide path where it increased in steepness, we decided to deek off into the bush on the left. The scrambling remained steep but there were plenty of bushes and branches to pull up on and the nice thing was the direct line got us closer to the ridge with each foot climbed. Eventually the angle eased off and snow began to appear on the ground as we zig-zagged up a few heather draws. Eventually the heather gave way to snow as we crested the ridge. Still



no visibility but we did get the occasional glimpse of blue sky above which caused us to be optimistic about it clearing completely.

Ahead of us (according to Quagger's GPS) was the first summit which we wanted to by-pass on the north side as there appeared to be steep bluffs down the other side. After a couple of false leads we soon found a path around the peak and into a draw angling towards the main summit. Above us loomed a steep, sharp spire that in the swirling mist didn't appear to have any obvious line to climb but still this wasn't (according to the GPS) the main summit. The ultimate goal was just behind it (according to the GPS).

At one point while traversing under the spire the mist began to clear and we could see the main summit, but just as quickly it closed back in. One final snow slope and we were on the summit ridge with a two minute easy walk to the summit. According to the GPS this was the Main Summit! Both Quagger and I weren't aware of anyone having climbed this peak and as there was no sign of any presence on the summit we concluded that ours was probably a first ascent!

We partook in the usual summit scenes: hand-shaking, photos and lunch, but as the mist cleared, looking back a second spire appeared. To my eye this spire appeared to be higher than the one we were on. Quagger reiterated that his GPS said this was the highest point! To hell with the GPS – I had to climb across to the rocky spire just in case the GPS was wrong! After I summited it got the better of the others and they made their way to its peak (just in case the GPS was wrong)! Again the sharp spire beside us looked a tad higher but without a rope there was no way we could climb it from this side. It looked like we would have to trust the GPS!

After 45 minutes it was time to leave but we decided to have a closer look at the sharp spire from the other side - maybe there was a way up it! I checked out a couple of possible lines but they were both too steep! Finally just before I called it quits I spied a series of ledges traversing across to a steep, bushy ridge. I deduced that where trees grew there was a line to climb! Once in the stunted trees I wriggled my way up and after 10 minutes walked the last 20 feet to the summit. There was no cairn on top and after all that the other summit did appear higher (they are probably all within a few metres of each other). I guess the GPS doesn't lie! A couple of minutes later Quagger joined me on the summit but Val and Sasha decided to stay below. Maybe they trusted the GPS off the get-go! It had to be climbed anyway!

Once back down with the others we followed our tracks back but instead of following our route up, we decided to follow the Northwest Ridge down to avoid the steep bush. After about a kilometre and a half on the ridge we deked off and in a couple of minutes found our selves in the slash just a

few minutes above the road. The vehicles were then just 100 metres down the road.

**Participants:** Valerie Wootton, Sasha Kubicek, Craig (Quagger) Wagnell and Lindsay Elms

\* Both Toquart Peak and Sawtooth Peak are unofficial names. Quagger made the first ascent of both peaks and gave the name Sawtooth because of the jagged summit ridge. The other peak had unofficially been known as Toquart Peak for many years.

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## Crest Mountain to Mount Heber Traverse

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Pam Olson  
July 5 - 9

Mount Heber, a collection of low rocky summits north west of Crest Mountain, can be reached from Crest Mountain around the Crest Creek valley. Having read a few trip reports, we were aware that the route could be completed in less than 10 hours by strong, young climbers. However, as old fahrts, we were in no hurry and had no intention of crashing through the bush by flashlight. That kind of trip would be just too much stress for the knees. After one of the coldest Junes on record, the weather forecast predicted a warm, sunny week. Our plan was to get out and enjoy the mountains for a few days.

**Day 1.** We left the Victoria area around 05:30 and after a short stop in Parksville to purchase a few groceries we reached the Crest Mountain pull out on Highway 28 around 11:00. After having lunch and repacking our packs we started along the trail. A few years ago the footbridge between the Drum Lakes was damaged by heavy snowfall. BC Parks posted signs stating that the bridge was unsafe and the trail was closed. The signs did not deter some hikers from stepping over the barricade and gingerly walking across the bridge. In June 2010, the Friends of Strathcona Park (FSOP), after much negotiating with BC Parks, built an alternate temporary route around the other side of Drum Lake to intersect with the existing trail. New signs gave directions to the alternate trail.

After examining the bridge we decided that it did not look any less safe than it had the year before when we crossed it so we walked across to the other side. The trail was in good condition and we encountered snow just below the lake on the summit plateau. The lake was almost completely frozen over.

**Day 2.** From our camping spot near the repeater cone we continued north along the ridge, past the summit of Crest





*Frozen lake on the Crest summit plateau, Big Den in the back ground* PHOTO: PAM OLSON

Mountain. Turning a bit to the northwest we dropped into the Crest Creek valley. This area is frequented by elk and while we saw plenty of tracks, however, we did not see any of the elusive animals.

Soon after passing the last lake at the head of Crest Creek, we were at the foot of the north east ridge of Mt. Heber. A layer of soft, spring snow overlying the consolidated winter snow made for slow going as the day warmed. The ridge was an easy snow ascent with a few scrambles. Toward the top the ridge became quite narrow and at about 5100ft/1555m we found a reasonably flat and dry camping spot.

**Day 3.** On a previous trip to the area, we had seen patches of rock and scree on the final approach to the north summit of Heber. This time the slope was snow covered making the ascent of the north summit an easy walk.

The north summit is higher but the south summit is the official summit (5468ft/1666m). A narrow snow bridge connected the north and south summits. One side was corniced and the other side was steep with a run out into trees. The snow conditions were excellent and we marched across the snow bridge then scrambled up to the south summit. The impressive summit cairn, built by the survey party who made the first ascent in 1913, did not seem to have a record and I didn't spend a lot of time looking for one.

Having reached both summits of Heber, we thought we had done all the work for the day but the mountain consists of a series of knolls and we slogged southward through soft snow for a few hours more. Then we came to a fairly precipi-

tous cliff and after a bit of exploration found the deer route. We descended safely and slogged up the next bump. By then we decided we'd done enough for the day and found a pleasant camping spot near a snow melt pool at about 5040ft/1535m.

**Day 4.** Before setting off we studied the map to confirm our route. We were heading for the old logging road along Crest Creek. Starting at the highway at about 1000ft/305m the road rises up the valley to about 2600ft/790m. By heading south and east we figured we'd hit it somewhere and then we'd have an easy walk to the highway. We dropped off the summit ridge into steep, old growth forest, riddled with small cliff bands that had to be negotiated.

After a few hours of zig-zagging across the mountainside to avoid the cliff bands we encountered a deer trail at about 3200ft/975m and followed that through the old growth and into the bushy second growth. At about 1800ft/550m we finally reached the old logging road.

We estimated that we were about an hour or so from the highway but it was late in the day and the weather was warm with temperatures up to 30°C. Rather than walk out to the highway and drive back home tired, we set up camp near a small stream that was running down the old road. Nearby we found a nice 7-point elk antler which we left in place.

**Day 5.** It took less than an hour to walk to the highway along the old logging road. We emerged near the Crest Creek Crag parking area. DF waited with the packs and ice axes while I hitch hiked to the car. It was only about 2km to the Crest Mountain pull out but Highway 28 has a fair amount of traffic and is not a pleasant place to walk. I got a ride within minutes from someone in the logging industry. When I got to our car I found a note under the windshield wiper. The note was from the Park Ranger advising us that the bridge was unsafe and that we should use the alternate route. Why had he assumed we had crossed the bridge? As there was limited parking near the alternate trail we could very well have parked at Crest and walked to the alternate trail. I placed the note in the car and feeling reckless I dashed across the bridge to retrieve the beer we had left cooling in the creek. Then I had to risk crossing the bridge again to get back to the car.

Philip Stone in *Island Alpine* (Heriot Bay, BC: Wild Isle Publications, 2003) briefly describes the approach to Mt. Heber from Highway 28 at Crest Creek Crag as a primary



*Snow bridge between the north and south summits, Heber River valley in the background* PHOTO: PAM OLSON

route. Having descended that way I would not recommend the route for aesthetic reasons. The forest sections, particularly the second growth area, are covered in steep bush which is more difficult to ascend than to descend. The approach from Crest Mountain presents no serious technical difficulties and is a very pleasant trip. The snow level in early July was high concealing the many pools on the summit plateau and summit ridge that would offer ideal campsites later in the summer.

**Participants:** Team Bleue, Pam Olsen ( ACC member for 30+ years) and DF (who wishes to be anonymous and wouldn't belong to any club that would have him as a member.)

## Triple Peak – South Ridge

Dave Campbell  
July 10

Triple Peak is a bit of an oxymoron when it comes to west Vancouver Island peaks. Most of the peaks in the area are notorious for their thick brush and horrible bushwhacking required to reach alpine. On Triple Peak, the situation is opposite: the approach itself is a scramble, suprisingly devoid of bush (and up a waterfall to boot) and the climb is a full on bush thrash, including some exciting exposure and 5th class climbing.

On the morning of Jul 10<sup>th</sup>, Tim Turay and I made early start for Marion Creek. The road was in decent condition and we parked at a small spur just beyond where the road drops into the Effingham River drainage. We donned packs and from the spur we dropped down into the forest and down to the upper Effingham River. From the other side of the creek, we had a bit of bushwhacking to find the flagged route. Almost immediately the flagged route worked its way out into an opening which was alongside a waterfall that fed out of a nice lake at the northern base of Triple Peak. The flagged route weaved its way back and forth across the waterfall, sometimes with some interesting scrambling and fabulous positions. There was still a considerable snowpack in July of 2010, and the day of our climb was a hot one. The snow was melting rapidly, and the waterfall was in good flow. What a great approach!

In a little over an hour, we made our way up to the lake. From the lake there is a pretty good view of the upper flanks of Triple Peak, but mostly of the northern summits, not the true summit (which is hidden a bit from view around to the left looking up at the mountain). The lake was just starting to become snow-free, and the slopes above were all in snow.

From the lake we pulled out the ice axes and quickly kicked our way up the snow slopes towards the main peak. There are two routes that I know of up the main summit. The standard route, written up in *Island Alpine*, takes a line on the northwest side of the peak. An alternative route has been written up by Quagger, which heads to the left side (south) of the summit peak, and works its way through bushy ledges to an upper, steep corner. We chose to follow Quagger's south ridge route.

A bit of a manoeuvre was required to exit the snow and get over the moat onto rock. We managed a short chimney move between the moat and the rock to gain a short gully which led to a notch at the base of the final south ridge. From there we roped up and hit the bush. The climbing was pretty good by pulling on trees and shrubs, and there were a number of rappel stations we found on the way up (these were tied fairly high on some shrubs which led me to believe these were place on rappel during the first winter ascent



Tim Turay climbing through crux corner on Triple Peak PHOTO: DAVE CAMPBELL

of the peak last year). We did 2 pitches through the bush, then a 3rd pitch which was the crux corner. This required some stemming, and was interesting 5th class in that it was somewhat technical, but also featured heavily on hand holds which were either small shrubs, or just digging your hands into the dirt in the bottom of the corner.

One more short pitch brought us to the top of the ridge, then we just had a short, easy traverse over to the main summit. From the top we had amazing views out to the rest of the area - 5040 Peak, The Cats Ears, Mt Hall, and a layer of low cloud over the west coast.

We were able to descend via 2 and a bit rappels (25m each), though got our rope caught up a few times which slowed things down. Back at the snow it was a quick glissade back to the lake, then downclimbing the waterfall back to the car.

Overall, outstanding peak. Probably one of my favourite trips I have done on the Island, and certainly one of the most enjoyable approaches around.

**Participants:** Tim Turay and Dave Campbell

## Mount Cederstedt

Lindsay Elms

July 11, 2009

I had been home for less than two hours but had showered, re-packed, thrown some food together and was ready to leave on another mountain trip. I arrived home from a trip to the Limestone Twins (behind Steamboat Mountain) at 5 p.m. and Val had just finished her shift at work and was also ready to leave. We had chosen Mount Cederstedt as our destination for this trip as I only had one more day off. Mount Cederstedt is one of those peaks that I consider a “filler” mountain; that is it is an easy day trip that I can fit in when there isn’t time for anything more strenuous (or I don’t want to do anything strenuous). It is a bit like Mount Becher or Arrowsmith or those peaks along the Beaufort Range, the only difference is I hadn’t been up Mount Cederstedt before and it was on my “bucket list,” albeit near the bottom of the list, hence a “filler” mountain.

The 1379m Mount Cederstedt is located along the coast between the Eve River and Naka Creek north of Sayward. While climbing Mount Russell last year we had looked across at Mount Cederstedt and seen active logging on the western slopes above Tessium Creek. It appeared as though it would be a short hike through the forest from the road to get to the alpine which extended for a couple of kilometres along the summit plateau.

After driving up the highway we turned off at the Eve River Main and drove down to within a kilometre of the log sort at the mouth of the river then turned onto the logging road that follows the coast to the logging camp at Naka Creek. Along the way we pulled over and stopped to watch the sun, which appeared as a spectacular huge orange ball, set in a blaze of colour behind one of the islands to the north-west. A picture of it is now on the screen of our computer at home! Two kilometres before the Naka Creek campsite we turned left up the Tessium Creek Main and followed this road as it gradually climbed up the valley towards Mount Palmerston. At 10 p.m., in fading light, we parked the vehicle and found a spot to put the tent up on the side of the road near some running water. It was a beautiful starry night but it didn’t take me long before I was in the land of nod.

The next morning we walked up the road and found a convenient spot to climb through the slash and then enter the forest. The route directly above us would bring us out onto the southern summit then we could traverse the plateau to the higher summit to the north. The forest was steep but easy to negotiate and after an hour we had reached the heather slopes. Fifteen minutes later we were on the south-





*The main summit of Mount Cederstedt from the south* PHOTO: LINDSAY ELMS

ern summit and looking at the convoluted route across the plateau to the large cairn adorning the northern summit. A couple of hundred metres below us to the north was another huge plateau laced with numerous tarns then beyond that was the Johnstone Strait. Barges, pleasure craft and cruise ships were out on the water enjoying the beautiful weather.

It took us an hour to thread our way across to the main summit and once there we were able to spend an hour on top relaxing and taking in the views. On the descent we took a different route back across the plateau to a large tarn and then where the creek came out we took a direct line down through the bush beside it and came out onto the road a kilometre from where we had gone in. Mount Cederstedt was a pleasant climb that made a nice change from the usual run-o'-the-mill peaks that we do as day trips.

**Participants:** Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

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## Random Thoughts on Volunteering, Hoare's Law, and Summer Camp 2010

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**Rick Hudson**

One of the things about being in the Army – actually the only thing about being in the Army – is it teaches you never to volunteer for anything. Never. Volunteering is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, along with Sloth and Pride and a few others I can't remember. Volunteer, and you'll quickly find yourself wriggling through minefields to get the brigadier fresh strawberries, or carrying Howitzer parts over

footpaths fit only for mountain goats. It's Rule #1: Never, ever volunteer. I should know. I've been in the Army.

At an ACC executive meeting in October 2009 the Hon. Chair said something along the lines of: "So, has anyone had any ideas about summer camp next year?" and someone said: "How about Wates-Gibson?" to which someone else had said: "We've DONE Wates-Gibson!" and someone else (there were lots of someones at the meeting that night) said: "We're not getting the turnout we used to, you know." And someone else said: "What about Elizabeth Parker?" and the previous someone had repeated: "We've DONE Elizabeth Parker!" At which point someone else said: "Why can't we have a camp on the Island?"

There was a long pause, before the someone who'd nixed both the Wates-Gibson AND Elizabeth Parker suggestions (I'm not naming names) said: "But there aren't any huts on the Island", as though that was the most obvious thing in the world. And that's when I made a serious mistake and volunteered the thought: "But we could have a temporary hut, couldn't we?"

There was an even longer pause, the sort that romance novelists call 'a pregnant silence', and then just as the double-nix someone was about to say something to shoot the whole stupid idea down in flames, someone else said: "Yeah!" And before you could say "Motion approved", the Hon Chair had delegated the job to me. "Just to look into," he said craftily, meaning; "Have something on my desk by Tuesday, or you're fired." Or words to that effect.

Everyone knows Murphy's Law: "If things can go wrong, they will." But few know Hoare's Law: "Inside every large problem is a small problem struggling to get out." The 2010 summer camp turned out to be one of those. The first and obvious problem was how do we find a temporary hut? But inside the large hut problem was that little problem struggling to get out: Even if we DID find a temporary hut, where would we go?

Some years back Phee and I had trekked in Sikkim (see IBW 2004) where the group's base had been a Mountain HardWare Space Dome – a splendid 6m diameter by 3m tall tent, with three entrances and ample room for everyone. A quick search on the Internet showed they were retailing for US\$5,000, and a call to the Hon. Treasurer rapidly put paid to that idea. Then Phee reminded me there'd been a dome tent at the ACC's General Mountaineering Camp for years. Perhaps national office could loan or rent it to us?

As the section rep, I was going to Banff a few days later anyway, so while there I asked around. It turned out the ACC didn't itself own the tent, but Brad Harrison, mountain guide and GMC camp manager for many years, did. Only, it had got loose last year, and rolled up the valley in a wind gust, breaking poles and tearing fabric. Brad had patched it, and bought new poles, and yes, it could be for sale for half of what a new one cost.

When approached with this new proposition, the Hon. Treasurer muttered something darkly about ‘kids today having no idea of the value of money’, but acknowledged mercurially that ‘he would consider it’. Gratefully, I retired from the inner sanctum of power and pondered the next move.

At the following executive meeting I was still wrestling with the small problem – where to go? – when to my delight the answer was offered. “How about Alava?” asked Russ, one of the few at the meeting who had actually visited that remote corner of Vancouver Island. Well, how about it? We’d all HEARD about Alava-Bate of course, the superb peaks, the broad treeless alpine region, the blue lakes. We’d also all heard about the bush – from both east and west the devil’s club and slide alder were second to none. That was what kept the region so pristine. Like Sleeping Beauty, an impenetrable thicket of thorns and tangles protected the virgin prize within. But with the benefit of a summer camp helicopter, we could leapfrog over the barrier of thorns, and gaze upon the flawless beauty. Or something.

It was obviously time to talk to those hallowed few who had actually set foot within the sanctuary – Rick Eppler and Robie Macdonald, Julie Henderson, Paul Ericson, and then more recently Sandy Briggs, Selena Swets, Charles Turner, Don Morton, Christine Fordham and Rick Johnson. Plus, Chris Barner of The Heathens had organized camps there in 1999 and 2001. He spoke in glowing tones of the place. But what surprised me was the almost universal wish of all who had been there before, to go again. Everyone described in rapt terms the summits, the rock, the glaciers, the valleys, the lakes, the flowers. If folk were willing to go back again, there had to be a reason. Our little problem struggling to get out had been solved.

The only caveat that everyone added was, “It’s gotta be zero trace. It’s just too special.” OK, so THAT became the new small problem struggling to get out. How do you achieve a zero trace summer camp when there were now two full weeks of participants? As someone (not that same someone) observed at the next executive meeting, “That’s a lotta shit, man.” Indeed.

On the positive side, the camp had attracted plenty of interest, and people who hadn’t been to a summer camp in years were signed up, had paid their fees, and were expecting big things. In fact, the Hon. Chair was now suggesting that demand was so strong that he was wondering if we could add a third week? A third week! Happy days. With that sort of economy of scale, the Hon. Treasurer might be willing to loosen the purse strings sufficiently not only to buy the tent, but acquire some gear to equip it too. The prospect of spending Club money on plates, dishtowels and toilet paper suddenly had a dizzying appeal. I revised the budget, and prepared to grovel before the Keeper of the Coin. But he, being suitably distracted on an oil project in Singapore, made the



*Just before the start of Week 1, Lindsay and I hiked into the basin from Conuma Main, only to make a surprising discovery.* PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

mistake of leaving the Club chequebook with the Hon. Chair and me, a mistake he will not likely repeat.

So, we had participation. We had a tent. We had a venue. And we had a chequebook and a budget. Now our toughest challenge was estimating how much helicopter time we’d need. A small change in flying time meant a significant difference to each person’s contribution. I didn’t want to get it wrong. Nor did the Hon. Treasurer. In November I received information from Vancouver Island Helicopters on their machine in Gold River (the nearest town), its carrying capacity, and hourly rate. This was factored into the budget and promptly forgotten.

In April, I dutifully emailed the pilot to confirm our July plans, and received no reply. I phoned, but there was no answer. A day later I called again. It took a week to discover the phone had been disconnected. In a panic I tracked down a Gold River resident who explained that E&B Helicopters had bought VIH’s Gold River operations. I called E&B. “No problem,” said Ed. “Here are the rates.”

It was Hoare’s Law again: The hourly costs had jumped 15%, plus 12% HST now replaced the previous 5% GST. Could we ask for a ‘fuel surcharge’? It was finally agreed that we could. To our delight, everyone was very nice about it (unlike when dealing with airlines).

Now it was just a simple task of closing my eyes and thinking of everything you find in a regular mountain hut. That’s what we’d need. Then the tent arrived and we tried to pitch it on the Hon Chair’s lawn both before and after drinking beer. There was a hopeless confusion of muddled interpretations of the assembly instructions (they turned out to be wrong). The Hon. Chair later assembled the whole thing, and then marked every pole and every clip. It must have taken him hours. Thereafter, even a mentally deranged ATV operator who couldn’t tie his own shoelaces could do a perfect job every time.





At the same event I circulated a wish list of all the expensive items I hoped to borrow, rather than buy. Folks were very kind; offers poured in and we saved ourselves a lot of money. Thanks, all of you who loaned goodies. I hope you got them back. I know I didn't. They're probably still in Robie's truck or the Hon. Chair's garage!

As July approached, things were going smoothly, but there was still the nagging issue of Not Having Seen The Site. All the descriptions from those who'd been there, and all the articles in past Island Bushwhackers, and all the aerial views on Google Earth, couldn't substitute for the real thing – what was the campsite really like? So many details depended on knowing the layout of the area. But who would bell the cat?

Who else, but the legendary bush-thrasher Lindsay? I picked him up in Comox a few days before the start of camp, and we drove to Gold River, where we met the chopper pilot, talked to the RCMP, and ate a very bad meal. Later we drove Conuma Main and figured out where the helicopter could land, and where we needed to start our bush thrash on the morrow to reach Alava basin.

I won't bore you with the sordid details of trying to keep up with Lindsay. Anyone who's ever been on a trip with him knows that nothing short of a rocket propelled mountain goat would even come close. Suffice it to say we reached the basin a lot earlier than I predicted, in my case feeling like I'd just done three rounds with an avalanche. My partner looked spry, and chatted brightly about our surroundings, as though strolling through a city park on a Sunday afternoon.

The visit revealed many things, the most important being the basin was still in the grips of winter. Two metres of snow lay on the gravel flats where we had planned to pitch our tents. So, this was the new small problem struggling to get out. Wild ideas about digging down to ground level were quickly discarded, but adjustments had to be made. Then, just as my breathing was returning to normal, we faced about and plunged down the mountainside again.

On Saturday, July 17, 2010, a helicopter arrived at the loading zone on Conuma Main at 10:00 a.m. precisely, and my volunteering came to an end.

Now, who's doing 2011? Can I come too?



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## The Alava Bate Sanctuary Summer Camp: Overview

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Martin Smith

As recently as 30 years ago virtually nothing was known about a rumoured hidden alpine paradise in central Vancouver Island somewhere to the north of the road between the mill town of Gold River and the west coast village of Tahsis. A range of rugged snow capped mountains was obvious from the coast – and, indeed, had been long used as marine navigation aids – but, at that time climbers had yet to penetrate the thick bush and steep cliffs that surround the massif on all sides.

Finally in 1979 and 1980, Island climbing legends Syd Watts, John Gibson, Paul Erickson, Robie Macdonald and others made forays from the northeast via Sebalhall Creek and from the west via the Perry River and on the second trip Macdonald and Erickson were able to climb to the summit of Mt Alava. From the summit they were able to look down on a series of glaciated valleys surrounded by the massive barren red rock walls of several major peaks. Cradled between the mountains were two lovely green/blue lakes. It was a scene unlike anywhere else on the Island, almost as if the glaciers had only just retreated.

*Panorama from the summit of Tlupana Ridge on the eastern edge of the Sanctuary. Spans an arc from south to northeast. From left to right: Mt Bate, Mt Alava, Mt Grattan just peeping above the shoulder to the left of the Thumb gendarme, Thumb Peak and the northwestern end of Tlupana Ridge. Ice covered Shangri La Lake below between Mt Bate and Thumb Peak.* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

It was Robie Macdonald who originally coined the phrase but it wasn't long before this unique and breathtakingly lovely area became known to all as "The Sanctuary".

Thirty years on and the Sanctuary remains a little visited place. One attempt has been made to gain park status but, as yet, the land belongs to the Crown and enjoys no formal protected status. Although logging has penetrated far up the Perry, Sebalhall and Conuma watersheds, the natural defenses of the Sanctuary are formidable and, so far, have remained intact.

The southern limit of the Sanctuary is located about 10 km northwest of the junction of the Gold River/Tahsis (Head Bay) Road and the Conuma Main logging road and as a whole is, perhaps, 25 square kilometres in area.

Four major summits and a number of satellites surround three main lakes. Beginning roughly in the south and moving clockwise; Mt Bate, Mt Alava, Mt Grattan, Thumb Peak and the unofficially named Tlupana Ridge define the limits of the area.

The Sanctuary encloses the headwaters of two watersheds. A tributary of the Perry River flows northwest out

of Peter Lake and down to Alava Lake between the walls of Mts Alava and Grattan. The Conuma River has one of its origins in “Shangri La” Lake which is found below the north aspect of Mt Bate and the south aspect of Thumb Peak. The river flows out of the lake southeast down the canyon between Mt Bate and Tlupana Ridge. A low col between Shangri La and Peter Lakes separates the two drainages

As with many of the mountains of Vancouver Island, the geology of the Sanctuary has its foundations in volcanic activity. The entire area is mid/late Triassic volcanic with the predominant rock type being karmutzen pillow lava. It is this that gives the sheer rock walls surrounding Shangri La and Peter Lakes their distinctive red/brown hue. Rough textured, solid and grippy, climbing karmutzen lava is like climbing on Velcro.

The Sanctuary comprises a compact but rugged area. Distances between objectives are short but travel times and effort are considerable. From camps at Peter or Shangri La Lakes, almost everything is a full day trip.

It has been a number of years since the Vancouver Island section of the ACC held its annual summer camp on the Island. A more worthy Island location than the Sanctuary is hard to imagine and this, therefore, was our chosen objective for 2010.

The following articles by Rick Hudson, Russ Moir, Cedric Zala and Tony Vaughn describe the preparation that went into organizing this most memorable of events as well as the experiences, thoughts and feelings gleaned from each of the three week long camps.

Every day eager hikers, climbers and skiers were to be found exploring the peaks, ridges, snowfields and couloirs of this wonderful area. From the technical demands of the Mt Bate and Mt Grattan to the friendly confines of Tlupana Ridge, we were out there every day in perfect weather, climbing, scrambling, skiing, botanizing and more.

By my estimate the combined efforts of the three weeks saw 33 successful ascents of Mt Bate, 28 of Mt Alava, 26 of Mt Grattan, 11 of The Thumb gendarme, 46 of Thumb Peak and 48 of Tlupana Ridge. The number of ascents sometimes exceeds the total number of participants since folk went back to repeat enjoyable routes on a number of occasions. In fact I think Frank Wille (Week 3) did everything twice! There were also several recorded trips to the Sanctuary’s lesser known objectives, “Little Alava” and the SE pinnacles on Mt Bate for example.

All of our adventures made an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of the area and reinforced in us all the fact that the Sanctuary is Crown Land that still does not enjoy any formal protected status. As long as this continues, vigilance will always be required so that others may continue to quietly enjoy the area as we did.

I cannot summarise the event in any way that improves upon Catrin Brown’s entry in the camp log at the end of Week 1 and quote her verbatim.

“Having heard and read so much about this area over many years, in the back of my head before the trip had been a quiet unspoken thought that I might be underwhelmed – that it could not live up to its expectations. I could not have been more wrong, or more impressed by everything that we have experienced here. Suffice to say this has been one of the best weeks ever in the mountains for me, heightened by the sense of how few have gone before.

Grateful thanks to the early explorers and especially to Rick and Cedric for making it happen. May the next 2 weeks be as happy for you all”.

For those interested in further details on the Alava Bate Sanctuary visit:

<http://www.summitpost.org/area/range/650691/the-alava-bate-sanctuary.html>

[http://members.shaw.ca/beyondnootka/articles/bate\\_alava\\_sanctuary.html](http://members.shaw.ca/beyondnootka/articles/bate_alava_sanctuary.html)

<http://www.mountainclubs.org/Cloudburst/2010/Fall10.pdf>

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## Summer Camp –Week 1

### Alava-Bate Sanctuary

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Russ Moir  
July 17-24

The Rock, the only visible ground in the basin, proved a magnet for the first week’s camp. Rick Hudson’s photo of the basin from his recce a few days before we had left had shown the remarkable snow cover at Shangri La. It was an amazing difference from my previous visit of five years ago, same month, when alpine flowers dotted the gravel flats by the open tarn. This year Rick J and I had sweated up Conuma River, over snow banks across the upper river to find a solid white canopy over the whole basin. We estimated over six feet of snow atop the ground. So we chose the psychological ‘warmth’ of the rock slab to pitch alongside and settled in for what became a chilly night under the stars. In the crisp and stunningly clear morning we waited for the expected chopper. Right on time it descended from the Conuma crest and deposited its welcome load of six friendly faces and the sling load of gear, which included above all else the “Dome”.

Rick H, Phee, Cedric and others had spent many hours in purchasing, erecting and patching this fine addition to the Section’s equipment. Within minutes it began to take shape on the pristine snowfield. It was staked down with makeshift anchors and then a raft of tables( yes tables!) appeared inside to support the mounds of food packs, pots, pans and varied bric-a-brac. It was a veritable ‘safari camp’ up there in this

remote mountain fastness on our lovely Island-all that was needed were the lions.

The Alava-Bate sanctuary is known for its imposing rock peaks, its scenic lakes (Peter and Alava) and this flat, open playground, Shangri La, nestling beneath the buttresses of Mt Bate. For the next three weeks it was to be the scene of our Section's Summer Camp. It proved to be an ideal location for a variety of enjoyable jaunts over warm, solid, exhilarating rock, up firm snow gullies out onto sculptured peaks, all with impressive views over distant islands in the ocean, glistening fiords and seemingly endless crenulations of N Island peaks. The week continued to pass by under cloudless skies. The atmosphere was idyllic, both actual and metaphorical.

Each day the group met under the shelter of the Dome's increasingly elevated canvas. One continuing battle through the week was the rapid melting of the snows around our tents, which left them 'high and dry' after only a day or so. Constant 'replatforming', (a verb coined to suit the activity) kept everyone fit and occupied. Smaller groups formed after discussions and at varied times, depending on a metering of keenness, set off onto the surrounding heights. Because of the unusual snowpack the normally difficult access through the notch at the lake's head out to the Peter Lake basin was a relative cake walk'. Rick J led a gaggle of troops around the sloping snows to climb Alava. The seemingly direct route up the facing gully looked to be 'risky', threatened by the cornice above, so a sweeping course to the left took them onto the connecting line to Alava at the gully's top. The long trip and the col's dodgy exposure cut the summit party down to four but eventually after a successful gambit onto the top, the whole group trooped back to camp satisfied with a scorching climb on a lovely peak.

A trio of Rick H, Morgan and Russ took off briskly along the snow ramp to gain the imposing pyramid of Mt Bate. Morgan, exuding boundless energy (as he did all week) led up the initial fissure, over onto the airy rib and then up the triangular flake which is all that summiters can squat on to admire the views around. These stretched out from Tahsis Inlet, to Strathcona and over to the distant Haite Range. Bate is a fine summit and applause was duly given to Rick Eppler and Rob Macdonald for their pioneering ascent of this and several more peaks in the range.

A third group, led by Moneybags Geoff Bennett, took in the panoramic Tlupana Ridge to the SE of camp. Due to the extensive snows, several inviting gullies gave access to this long, elegant rib. After tromping the length of the ridge, the party descended to the notch on its N end and continued up the rock then snow slopes to the summit of Thumb Peak. At this point there's an awesome view over the thin traverse across to The Thumb (confusing eh?). The Thumb took the fancy of many of the group, it's certainly

a classic target, being so.....digital. It's another Eppler/MacDonald delicacy.

Afternoons and sunny evenings brought out a bevy of exposed and covered bods onto The Rock, basking in the warmth while it lasted before sunset. The slab also served as an efficient drying rack and so became a congregating place, some quietly reading or bending limbs into contortions, some firing off tales of heroism on their day's ventures or making jocular comments on the scary scenes around. The sight of Morgan prancing barefoot across the snows in his underwear was a memorable vignette, not to be missed!

On the next day, Rick J and Morgan scooted off to try for The Thumb. Half way they became sidetracked by the view of Grattan. It's a bold peak sited above Peter Lake. It looks hairy but has a delightful, solid direct route up to its craggy summit. The climb was repeated several times through the week and seemed to sum up the relaxed quality of the sanctuary.

Days merged into sunny days as the activities continued until.....a moment of true drama, rescue and relief. On Thursday, the sixth day, the camp struggled to its senses in the cold dawn. A yell from near the creek area brought bodies surging to see Graham valiantly hanging on to the Dome which was hell-bent for takeoff. A sudden gust had ripped out the buried snow bags and pickets holding down our mansion. In a few brief moments the gang had returned the tent to the ground and had begun to anchor it as for the Queen Mary. The propane stove had been burning as the tent flew off and by sheer luck the flames had not ignited the canvas. The relief led to much jubilation, jollity and a vow to be far more careful of the camp's central social scene. Its demise would have been a disaster. Thanks to Graham's alertness it continues its life.

I'll leave others to describe other camp aspects, such as the wonderfully scenic toilets, perched above the camp, developed scientifically by the 'biffy king', Rick Hudson.

I won't leave it to others to acknowledge the amazing, efficient organisation which Rick H, Phee and Cedric put into the Camp's organising. This was only the first week of three splendid sessions enjoyed by over forty members. The whole event was a jubilant, satisfying time, and was a fine testament to the vision and skills of the organisers. We give them our heartfelt thanks. The camp was a great climbing event and a worthy tribute to such a magnificent mountain stronghold.

**Participants-Week 1-** Rick Hudson, Phee Hudson, Geoff Bennett, Catrin Brown, Graham Maddocks, Roger Painter, Morgan Blakely, Kelly Osbourn, Krista Zala, Roger Taylor, Peggy Taylor, David Lemon, Fiona Lemon, Rick Johnson, Russ Moir



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## ACCVI Summer Camp 2010, Alava-Bate Sanctuary: Synopsis of Week 2

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Cedric Zala  
July 24-31



*Week 2 Participants (L to R): Back row: Byron Johnson, Jules Thomson, John Gray, Peter Brunette, Jeremy Gallie, Martin Hofmann, Cedric Zala, John Young; Front row: Terry Gagne, Judith Holm, Alcina De Oliveira, Karen Payie, Chris Ruttan, Andrew Pape-Salmon* PHOTO: CEDRIC ZALA

Spring arrived in Week 2! When we got off the helicopter, it seemed that the Sanctuary was still held tightly in the grip of winter. Deep snow covered everything in the basin except for parts of the stream and some isolated rock outcroppings that made great sunning stations. The dome tent was perched maybe 10 metres from the open stream, on a raised half-metre platform of snow that had been protected from the roasting rays of the midday sun. There were also a number of smaller plateaus where the other tents had been, giving the place the appearance of a mini archaeological site.

But this wintry state was not long to be. Each day the snow melted and retreated dramatically, and gravel beds soon appeared beside the widening stream-course. The melting revealed masses of marsh marigolds and other plants all ready to burgeon and burst into flower as the snow cover retreated. By the end of the week of hot days the snow bridges across the stream were all gone and the banks had become flowering grounds for a wealth of riparian plants. And to top it off, the first croaking frog – heard midweek – heralded that the thaw was underway in earnest.

This was all the more motivation for the skiers in our group to make way while the sun shone! Martin, Chris, Andrew and Judith had all brought their boards, lured by Rick and Lindsay's reports of deep snow everywhere. And what skiing there was! – both Bate and Alava saw ski ascents, and the keeners also found a great bowl just on the other side of Thumb Col. Chris and Martin skied through the sun-cups from the summit tower of Mt Bate back to camp in just 43 minutes.

The thaw was also a boon for the naturalists in our group. Judith had the goal of doing an inventory of the region, as there had been little in this way done to date. And Geoff (Week 1) had volunteered us to collect arthropods on behalf of his brother, an entomologist. Judith enlisted the services of anyone willing to collect plants, and Alcina, Jules, Terry, and others took up the challenge of collecting samples. For several days the dome tent resembled a room at a Natural History Museum, with tables covered by the flora to be identified and classified by curator Judith. And not to be outdone, the bug squad also stepped up to the plate. Martin rigged up a net and went stalking butterflies and other airborne critters, and soon the little ethanol-filled vial was brimming with local buggy conscripts.

As the thaw relentlessly proceeded, what had been deep snow beside the dome tent morphed into a network of streams steadily encroaching on the tent, so that by midweek we definitely had to move it. We found a new spot on the snow that seemed to be a good distance from the meandering depressions indicating hidden streams. Then a team of us freed the tent from its tethers, lifted it up and way over the tables and carried it over to the new site. Observers from the adjacent ridges had a good chuckle at what looked like a giant ladybug moving over the snow. The site turned out to be a good choice and the tent stayed in its new home for the remainder of the camp.

But perhaps the most memorable part of the camp for me was the music. I had brought my old classical guitar along hoping that we would have some songs and even sing-alongs. It was great when Chris picked it up and started doing renditions of songs he had written, and Peter and I both regularly picked it up as well, and we spent several late sunny afternoons sitting and singing. One of my fondest memories will be the sounds of music and singing coming from the gravel bar beside the stream in the afternoons.

If it seems like the focus of my experience was on other things besides the climbing, that's just my point of view on what made the week really special for me. It was certainly great to spend the days exploring, hiking, scrambling and climbing in this truly spectacular region, but it was the triumph of spring over winter, the skiing exploits, the natural



history angle, and the music, that really made the experience come alive for me. Go back? You bet!

**Participants:** Peter Brunette, Alcina De Oliveira, Terry Gagne, Jeremy Gallie, John Gray, Martin Hofmann, Judith Holm, Byron Johnson, Andrew Pape-Salmon, Karen Payie, Chris Ruttan, Jules Thomson, John Young and Cedric Zala

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## Alava-Bate Summer Camp Week 3

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**Tony Vaughn**  
**July 31 - August 7**

Saturday we stood under a bluebird sky, looking around at what must surely be one of the most beautiful locations in the mountains of Vancouver Island while listening to the receding whump, whump, whump of the helicopter as it descended back down the valley, leaving us in the calm and tranquil basin known as Shangri La. Following several weeks of hot sunny weather, the deep snowpack that the previous groups had to deal with had now thinned out, so tent sites on gravel were available. Soon a small village of multi coloured tents sprang up on the gravel alongside the stream.

Once settled in we congregated in the large dome tent for lunch and to get acquainted. It soon became apparent that the members of this week's group were here for one purpose, and one purpose only, and that was to climb everything in sight, no plans for rest days with feet up reading and relaxing, not for them anyway. As for me, well I planned on having several rest periods.

The first order of business was, "What shall we climb this afternoon?" As no one at this camp had climbed the Thumb this was Lindsay's first objective. So with Val, Karen, Mort, Walter and Frank in tow, away they went to climb the Thumb. Not being quite that ambitious, Rick, Rob, Martin, Cory, Ken and I opted for Thumb Peak, while Paul and Nicole headed for the little peak to the west of camp. All three groups were successful in reaching their objectives. Looking down from the summit of Thumb peak and watching Lindsay's group climbing the Thumb the view was fantastic and the cameras were soon clicking away recording a spectacular view of their ascent.

Sunday morning found the entire group of fourteen heading towards Peter col for an ascent of Mt Alava. It was as we traversed on the rocks around Peter Lake, having already descended from Peter col, Lindsay fell amongst the rocks, dis-

locating his thumb and cutting his head. Here is the extract from the camp journal describing the aftermath of this event.

"As mentioned, Lindsay slipped and as it turned out what could have been a scuffed hand ended up as a compound dislocation and a substantial scalp wound. Val dressed and stabilized Lindsay's hand; the cut on his head was thankfully not very bad. Once Lindsay was ready to go, he returned to camp with Mort, Karen, Val, Robie, and Walter. The climb back up to the col is not the easiest at the best of times, but Lindsay naturally did a great job one-handed. From there it was across the steep slope to the west of the lake, and then back again to camp.

Once back at camp, Robie and Mort used the satellite phone (one of air rescue guys said "Global Star" makes a good paper weight) to try to call out. After finally being able to get a signal, calling the RCMP did not work so they called 9-1-1 and sent in our coordinates. In the meantime Val, Karen, and Walter helped ensure that Lindsay was comfortable.

After travelling back to camp and calling for help at 10:00, the wait began for help to arrive. This consisted of Lindsay entertaining the group plus periodic spotting of the other folks up on Alava. At 13:00 we heard a helicopter coming in, landing close to camp. The four air rescue people assessed Lindsay's condition and said they would be taking him to Gold River where he would travel by ambulance to Campbell River for treatment. They also said that a RCMP helicopter would be a few minutes behind them as it was unknown if the first would be able to land. With Lindsay onboard they flew off toward Alava on their way to Gold River (we miss you already, Lindsay)."

Following the accident party's return to camp the rest of us continued on towards our objective. All of us ascended the ridge to the west of the large snow couloir except for Rick who chose to climb the couloir itself, meeting us at the upper snowfield below the summit block. From here we traversed around to the south side and climbed the loose gully to the summit ridge then on to the top, reaching the summit around noon.

Following a lazy lunch we headed back down to the snowfield on Alava's south side where again we split into two groups. Rick, Martin and I decided to return to camp, back the way we had come, while Paul, Nicole, Cory, Ken and Frank chose to climb Alava South. This they did successfully, reporting that "It was a pretty steep climb up a snowy face with icy parts and no run out. The top was meadow-like but the last step up was again quite tricky." They continued down the other side, found a gully to descend and made a circuit of the route back to camp.

Once Lindsay had departed, the remaining party back at camp had little to do, so they split into two groups, with

Mort and Karen going rock-climbing on Mt Bate, while Robbie, Val and Walter headed up to Tlupana ridge, Val and Walter taking a detour up Thumb Peak while Robbie went bathing in a tarn.

Monday soon arrived, another beautiful day; and having already climbed Thumb Peak and Alava, I decided it was time to take a rest day. So along with Martin, Paul, Nicole and Cory we did chores around camp, while Robbie, Rick, Frank, Ken and Walter made a successful ascent of Mt Bate. This was a return for Rob as he had done the first ascent along with Paul Erickson back in 1982. Mort, Karen and Val went off to climb Mt Grattan which they did in rock shoes. It took them an hour to summit, half the time it took us the next day.

Having lounged around camp the previous day, I had no excuse for today, Tuesday, so I joined Rick, Rob, Frank, Ken, Martin and Walter to climb the East Ridge of Grattan. Was I ever glad I did, as it turned out to be my favourite climb of the week. With Rob and Rick doing all the work of leading and setting up rappels all in perfect weather, life couldn't get much better.

By 8:45 a.m. we had started up the snow gully to the col below Grattan's East Ridge. Looking across at the East Ridge from this vantage point it looked very intimidating. However, once below the ridge itself it looked a lot more benign. We split into two rope teams of three and four with Rob leading one and Rick the other and simul-climbed the three pitches to the top.

While we enjoyed the views and ate lunch, Frank left us and went across to climb the other summit of Grattan (I don't think he had brought lunch so decided to pass the time in other ways). Following a long restful break the time came for us to leave the summit and head back to camp. So with Rick and Robie setting up the rappels we descended back down to the base of the East Ridge, all done with three double rope raps, taking twice as long to get down as it did to get up. It was 4:20 p.m. when we got back to camp just as the sky was turning hazy with smoke from forest fires to the east.

While we were climbing Grattan, Mort, Karen, Val, Paul, Nicole and Cory were busy successfully ascending Mt Bate.

On Wednesday morning the sky was thick with a smoky haze and views were very restricted. Nevertheless Martin, Frank and I spent the afternoon hiking Tlupana Ridge. The access to the ridge was getting noticeably more difficult as a result of the melting snow.

While we were off hiking Rick, Rob, Ken, Paul, Nicole and Cory had joined forces and gone to climb the Thumb. I say joined forces because originally Paul, Nicole and Cory had planned on climbing Grattan, but had a change of heart when they met up with the others. Once again another successful climb was completed. While these events

were taking place and unknown to us another epic was unfolding on the climb to Mt Alava. I will let Walter's journal entry pick:

### ***Wednesday August 4 — The Peter Lake Circuit***

*Under a red, smoky sunrise, Walter, Val, Mort and Karen set off to complete their interrupted climb of Mt. Alava. Snow conditions had changed a lot in 3 days. The traversing slopes above the small lakes leading to the col were steeper and icier than earlier in the week. As we neared the enlarged rock fields at the bottom of the col to Peter Lake, we heard the crack of an avalanche let go and looked up to see large snow chunks rolling down the middle 2/3 of the approach col to Alava. Right over the route. This was at 8 in the morning as we sat on the rocks and guessed which section would go next.*

*Val and Karen had a memory of Lindsay telling them that there was a regular route around the east side of Peter Lake which would lead to the east ridge of Alava and the summit. Mort and Walter took their word for it and the foursome started scrambling along the lake shore bluffs. Before long we were spread eagle in a kilometre long traverse of steep cliffs above the lake. With screeching gulls circling overhead.*

*The exercise came to an end at the top of a smooth, angular ledge that ended at what Mort now calls "Terror Wall". He needed an emergency roped belay to come down from that spot and it was dear we had to go down to the lake or back the way we came. Val slipped on her rock shoes and scampered down a few ledges to the lake shore rocks. The rest of us (slightly shaken and wearing boots) rappled down to where she had picked out a spot onto the snowfield and over to the boulder run out.*

*A speedy walk led to "first lunch" at 12:30 in a beautiful meadow.*

*From the meadow, Walter, Mort and Karen took the high road over rounded bluffs around the end of the lake to the outflow. Val accused us of lacking "adventurous spirit" and opted to do a little bootless lake hiking. It looked like a shallow, underwater edge would run all the way along the shore to the grassy outflow. But before the end, she was bootless, sockless and bottomless and scampering up from the lake onto the bluffs. After composing and clothing herself she followed the high route to join us for the wade across the stream.*

*From this point it was an easy 600 metre hike up the beautiful rock ridge. Views would have stretched in all directions except for the smoke which obscured everywhere equally. All we could enjoy was the fantastic, braided waterfall out of Peter Lake and the clean shape of the "Thumb" that gave Thumb Peak its name.*

*A short trod across a snowfield led to a careful climb up*

a rocky gulley. All four of us stood on top by 3:30pm.

The vertical-ness of Alava South looked like too much for our tired group. We decided instead to start the unknown descent down the ramps to a safe spot to cross that blasted gulley. There hadn't been a single snowflake roll down it since the morning's release.

In less than two hours we easily skipped down the rock buttresses to less than 100 feet above the lake. Singly we made quick runs across the gulley and then walked steadily across the rock fall fields and ice berg calving self.

After a quick snack on the last boulder field, Mort made sure we were over the col and back to camp in less than 45 minutes.

A long trip just short of 12 hours with a long story to tell and write.



Climbing the prominent 'Thumb' gendarme PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN

Thursday, our 6<sup>th</sup> day at Alava Bate, and the sky was still hazy with smoke. Several members of the group are taking a rest today. Cory, Paul and Nicole spent the morning up on Thumb Peak. Mort was busy with a recce for a possible Thumb to Thumb Peak traverse while Ken and Martin were up on Tlupana ridge taking photographs. Walter was off photographing around the lake being joined by Val after lunch for a hike down to the lake below the Shangri La basin. In the meantime Rob, Rick, Frank and I went off to climb Mt Bate, leaving at 8 a.m.. The others had climbed Bate once already this week, but were willing to do it again if I wanted to summit the prize peak of the area, which I really did.

By 11:15 we were at the base of the summit tower putting on harness and helmet for the climb up to the summit. Rick led the climb up to the top without difficulty in his boots and then belayed the rest of us up. I have to admit that the last 10 metres up the final slab were hard and without the help of Rick keeping me on a tight rope, I doubt I would have made it (thanks Rick). Rob, who took the tail end, easily climbed up to join us, so by noon all four of us were sitting cheek by jowl on the very small summit. Climbing down to the ledge followed by one long double rope rappel, we were back on the snow and heading back to camp getting back by 3:45 p.m..

Friday August 6<sup>th</sup> was our last climbing day. For me this meant a day in camp with my feet up trying my best to visually follow Mort and Karen as they attempted the Thumb enchainment. See Mort's journal entry:

### **Thumb Enchainment**

7:10 am start for Karen and Mort on an attempt to link the Thumb to Thumb Peak via the south to north ridge. Climbed the Thumb standard route from south. Set a rappel about 10 metres up the last pitch on the north edge. One rope rappel to a notch between the Thumb and the serrated section of the Thumb to Thumb ridge. Short pitch up and down serrations to sling belay on last spike. Down climb to base of serrations. 45 metre roped scramble along the ridge with a couple of sling runners. Belayed at large block in large notch of eroded dyke. Ridge then blocked by near vertical wall. Down climbed rappelled 30 metre down gulley towards the east. Loose rock, not enjoyable. Climbed out of gulley and up Thumb Peak in two roped pitches and a scramble up east side of peak.

All climbing mid 5th class or less.

Route could be reversed from north to south if a rappel was set above near vertical wall. The climb up from the serrations to the first rappel would again be mid 5th.

1st recorded Thumb enchainment — "All Thumbs traverse" we arrived at summit of Thumb Peak at 1:00 pm. Enjoyed summit snacks then scrambled back down to camp through a few spits of rain. Back at camp around 3:00 pm.

Paul, Cory and Nicole's objective was an ascent of Grat-tan, the last peak on their list. They climbed the East Ridge route in short order and arrived back in camp in time for a late lunch.

Rob, Rick, Val, and Frank took off to climb Alava South and the south point on Alava ridge which they accomplished just before the rain moved in.

All told, we enjoyed a wonderful week of climbing in fabulous weather and a stunning location.

That evening we started taking down the camp, packing gear in boxes in preparation for our trip out the next day. Little did we know at that time that the light rain that was coming down was soon to change into a full blown rain storm, leaving everything wet and sodden and keeping us here for an extra day.

By the early hours of the morning the rain had passed through leaving us to rise at dawn to a Shangri La basin filled with dense cloud and grave doubts about a helicopter pick up at the designated time of 11:00 a.m.. Being optimistic we took down our tents, packed up the dome tent and completed the arrangements for leaving. Now we had to deal with the issue of approximately 300lb of human waste contained in three metal garbage cans. During the week a plan had been devised on how to deal with this waste and all that was needed now was one volunteer to cut open the bags, once dropped in place. As you can imagine there was not a lot of interest in this position. However, one stalwart finally stepped forward; it was Cory, the bravest of the brave, who earned his title of "Cory the Biffy Slayer".

Having now packed everything up it was time to wait and see if we would get out that day. But by 4:00 p.m. no helicopter had appeared and the tents started to pop up again. The remaining food was cooked and eaten and by 7:30 p.m. everyone was back in their tents for the night.

Sunday morning dawned with much better flying conditions, although clouds still kept rolling up the valley. Rob and Rick had made contingency plans in the event that we didn't all get out that day, fortunately they were not needed as by noon we and all our gear (human waste included) were down at the staging area dealing with the last of the chores and having a much appreciated beer. Then it was off for the long drive home.

**Participants:** Rob Macdonald and Rick Eppler (camp managers), Mort Allingham, Nicole Barrette, Paul Barrette, Lindsay Elms, Karen Hoover, Cory Milne, Walter Moar, Martin Smith, Tony Vaughn, Frank Wille, Ken Wong and Valerie Wootton

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## Alexandra Peak and Mount Adrian

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Martin Smith

July 20-22

Situated approximately 40km due west of the east coast town of Courtenay, Alexandra sits in the crook of land where the Oyster River deviates from its north/south course south of the massif and turns west up to its headwaters in lovely Pearl Lake. Mount Adrian flanks Alexandra to the north across the head of the Alexandra Creek watershed. The western slopes of both mountains drop precipitously into Buttle Lake nearly 1,600 metres below.

Mount Adrian is relatively frequently visited via the Sihun Creek/Roger's Ridge approach to the north. Alexandra, however, sees few visitors most likely as a result of the difficulty of access from the usual Oyster River approach. Timberwest owns both mountains and restricts access to the Oyster River valley from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. No overnight camping is allowed, so you have to reckon on a fast moving daytrip.

Driving down Buttle Lake in the past, I've often wondered about a gated logging road just south of the Lupin Falls day use area and seemingly within the Park. In 2008 I spent a wonderful week on Marble Meadows and, from Marble Peak in particular, was able to see exactly what that gate bars access to. Some nefarious past swap deal has given Timberwest a conduit through the Park to extract timber taken from the west sides of Adrian and Alexandra, down to Westmin Road and out from there. Whatever else we might feel about this, there was no denying the fact that the roads built right across the western faces and beyond to the saddle between the Alex and Adrian would offer superb high access to both mountains.

A chance conversation with Dean Williams that fall confirmed that he and John Young were also aware of this approach, had gone along, found the gate open and summited both mountains from the intervening saddle. Returning from their trip, however, they found themselves marooned behind a locked gate! How they managed to extricate themselves and their vehicle is something you'll have to ask them personally.

Nevertheless, Tony Vaughn and I remained interested in this route. The gate was closed throughout 2009 but early this year a rumour went around that it was open once more. Time to grab our chance we thought and so headed up from Victoria on July 20th for a look-see and with a backup trip to Adrian from Roger's Ridge in case the gate was locked.

We were in luck. The gate was open. Lock in 4WD and up we went.

"Buttle Bluffs Road" or "Park Main" as some call it, was not for the faint of heart. Particularly in the upper reaches it





*Mt Adrian, Alexandra Peak and the "Buttle Bluff" approach roads west aspect from Marble Peak* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

was extremely steep, narrow due to rockfall and beginning to slough off in places. Don't try to drive it alone. A "spotter" is essential to guide you through some spots which were just wide enough to get my 4Runner through with the near side wheels on the last few inches of road overhanging the 1,000 metres drop to Buttle Lake below.

Keeping right and/or uphill at any junctions, we drove the steep and narrow road about 7 km southeast and up to the junction of two high hanging valleys with logging roads everywhere. One branch of the valley turned southeast down towards Pearl Lake and the other northeast, up towards the high pass between Alexandra Peak and Mt Adrian.

Taking the left hand fork, labelled "Prk 300", we negotiated the remains of the road as high as we could towards Alexandra and Adrian. From the valley junction onwards some severe washouts were apparent but my 4Runner made it a further ~ 1.5km to 1,200 metres elevation before reaching the apparent limit of its capabilities. We then spent the rest of the afternoon walking up the rest of the road to scout out a likely route to Alexandra the following day.

The main gully up to the west bowl was partially filled with rotten snow undercut by running water. Nothing doing there. So we walked right over the saddle and down to the end of the road, identifying the spur we needed for Adrian on the way. The best option to approach Alex appeared to lead up through bluffs on the east side of the main gully and a cairn just off the road appeared to confirm the possibility. So we called that it and walked back down to the truck to look for somewhere to camp.

A nice enough spot on a spur off Prk 300 in a little patch of old growth at the confluence of two creeks was ideal but above my truck. It was too good to pass up, however, so to

the tune of screeching metal and the smell of burning rubber, I subjected the truck to a little more abuse for the sake of shade and comfort.

Settled in to camp we soon fell, as usual, to perusing the map in order to plan out the next day's route. It didn't take long to pinpoint our exact whereabouts nor to identify that the ridge above our camp led to the west bowl from where we hoped to access the summit of Alexandra. A 5 minute stroll up to the end of our spur led right into old growth and a promising line up to the ridge. We had been fortunate in our choice of where to camp. We re-jigged our route plan and turned in at about 9 p.m.

#### **July 21**

The next morning we were up about 5 and off at 6:15 in perfect weather.

From the end of the spur at N49 43.950 W125 31.222 we entered the old growth on climber's right of the gully there. There was falling boundary tape to follow at first until we were above the limit of logging to the north. Some open, friendly angle bluffs lay above reasonably open forest before we were forced briefly back into the gully proper. After about 10 minutes back in the gully we reached a branch. That to the right looked to be a dead end. So we went left up steep and bushy ground with the gully wall on our immediate right and followed this line out onto open ground on the ridge crest at about N49 43.995 W125 30.696 and 1,600 metres elevation. Once on the open alpine ridge we were treated to superb views west across Buttle Lake and south down the length of the lake to Septimus, Nine Peaks, Big Interior and all the other old familiar friends down there.

From the point at which we intersected it, we then continued east along the ridge until it petered out into the west bowl below the main summit and the Thumb.

Traversing the bowl east until we were almost due south of the Thumb, we chose what appeared to be the only vi-



*Tony Vaughn on the summit of Alexandra Peak* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

able line up to the south shoulder, a 300 snow ramp midway between the steep gully between the main summit and the Thumb and the corniced cliffs to the south.

From the south shoulder we traversed around the east side of the base of the Thumb and dropped into the notch below the main summit on quite exposed ground. Climbing out of the notch northwest and up ledges and gullies with a little Class 3 here and there we arrived on the main summit at 10:30 a.m.

The weather was clear and the views beggared description. Everything but everything in view from Arrowsmith to the Haihte Range and everything in between. I just seem to have to keep on changing my mind about the location of Vancouver Island's best view!

On the summit also was a rather battered witness survey monument pointing north to N.C. Stewart's 1937 main mark underneath the survey tripod.

Rather surprisingly there was no summit register. Luckily we'd picked one up from Peter Rothermel on the way up Island and left it there with our names as the first entries.

After an hour on top, which included an early lunch, we retraced our steps back to camp, arriving at 2:30. We'd entertained initial (and ambitious) thoughts of going on to Adrian that afternoon. From Alexandra we could see the route and it looked quick and straightforward. But the afternoon was hot and the bushy gully had taken its toll on the way down, so we opted for a lazy afternoon in the shade instead.

## July 22

The next morning we were again up early and off at 6:15 to the spur road at N49 44.368 W125 31.113 at about 1,300 metres elevation just before Prk 300 reaches its high point. This was the road we'd spotted on our first day reconnaissance that heads up towards Mt Adrian. As we walked up the spur we were soon able to see the communications station that sits on the south face below the south summit.

From the end of the road rough tracks led through the slash where machines had been pulling out timber. We made our way up these tracks aiming for the top left hand corner of the clearing at N49 44.570 W125 31.311 and entered the old growth there.

Our route from this point led north through open bush towards the communications facility. Three series of bluffs barred the way, each one becoming progressively more difficult. The most difficult was the last, right underneath the station. It proved possible to find routes around and up the sides of this bluff on either the east or west. We scrambled up on the east and came down on the west, the latter proving preferable.

From the communications station we climbed open rock, heather or snow slopes directly north to the south summit. There were a few flags and other signs of travel - rudimentary use-path or foliage stripped off krumholtz etc - to follow.

From the south summit we could see what had been hidden from Alexandra Peak; a 100 metres descent down steep, icy snow to the intervening col. Seduced by the easy aspect seen from Alex, we'd neglected to bring axes and crampons along today and spirits fell briefly. However, by going right over the south summit we found friendly ground and descended northwest down heather ledges to the flat saddle below.

From the col we headed northwest to avoid bluffs on the ridge ahead and found easy ground on the far side. Turning north as the ground began to drop away towards Rodger's Ridge, we continued up to the summit with some minor scrambling, arriving at 9:35 a.m.

Once more I found myself revising my best-ever-view criteria. Once again the conditions were clear and once more mountains beyond number were in view but, today, it was all underpinned by the vertiginous view directly down to Buttle Lake 1,500 metres below. Simply breathtaking.

No survey mark this time but there was a logbook, albeit battered and torn. Just a few loose sheets of paper in a plastic tube and nothing to write with. I left my business card if someone wouldn't mind writing the date on it for us at some point.

After an hour on the summit and a second breakfast, we turned for home, took our time going down and were still at the truck in time for lunch.

It took almost an hour to drive down Buttle Bluffs Road. Going up I was sitting on the uphill side of the vehicle. This time I got to enjoy the view down to Buttle Lake as Tony spotted me around the various obstacles and rockfalls. But "this too shall pass" as they say and we eventually found ourselves at the thankfully still open gate and in no time thereafter at Starbucks in Campbell River from where we had a very nice view of our erstwhile and very enjoyable objectives.

For more details on Alexandra Peak and Mt Adrian including all the critical waypoints and route photos see my SummitPost write-ups at:  
<http://www.summitpost.org/alexandra-peak/642656>  
<http://www.summitpost.org/mt-adrian/642903>

**Participants:** Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn

### Postscript

The discovery of the open gate prompted me post the information on our listserve. Based on this Lindsay and Val went in two days later and found the gated closed and locked!

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## Sutton Peak

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**Martin Smith**  
**July 25-26, 2009**

My introduction to Sutton Peak – as well as its neighbours Mount Alston and Waring Peak – was probably the same as for most folk; the view of those impressive east facing cliffs above the White River valley from Victoria Peak. The fact that it took me four goes to get up Victoria Peak meant that I got to see an awful lot of that that lovely trio and that climbing them became all but imperative.

Tony Vaughn saw even more of the same view during his long crusade in search of the summit of Warden Peak and was as compelled as I was to add the summits to his tick list.

The usual late July heat wave was well in place when Tony and I set off from Victoria on July 25th set up for car-camping on high logging roads and armed with the detailed approach directions from Kent Krauza's excellent 2008 Island Bushwhacker report.

After the usual dinner at the Ridgeline in Gold River we took the Nimpkish Valley road 45 kilometres from the Gold River bridge to the old log sort/railway siding near Vernon Camp and found Stuart Road in the northeast corner of the yard. There is also a sign for Fiona Road at the same spot. We followed Kent's directions along Stuart for 6.5 kilometres to the point where Fiona branches right. Taking Fiona for the required 2 kilometres we soon found the correct unsigned spur on the right. HOWEVER 200 metres before the correct spur there is now a brand new road that goes off to the right. This may tie in with the roads described below but we didn't explore it and, therefore, report only what we know works.

The unsigned spur is currently unused with some alder growing back in but is eminently drivable. The further you drive it the more it opens up before finally running into an-



*Sutton Peak summit routes. Mount Alston on the right. Colonel Foster and Rambler Peak in the distance, centre.* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

other brand new road after ~ 2 kilometres at a T-junction at N50 03.142 W126 19.974.

We went straight ahead at the T-junction and drove as high as we could following the main line as it switchbacked up the hillside. If in doubt we went right when faced with a choice. The end of the highest spur to aim for is at N50 02.323 W126 17.745 and 1158 metres altitude.

As Kent predicted in 2008 all these new roads were the precursor to active logging that, in 2009, was well under way. In fact a large grapple yarder parked on the highest road prevented us from getting all the way to the road-end. If you visit Sutton during working hours, park your vehicle well out of the way. There is a small side spur that doesn't appear to be being used at the moment at N50 02.451 W126 18.176 that does admirably for this purpose. It is, however, a 10 minute walk up the road from there to where the approach route starts. The spur had enough flat space for a truck and a tent and it was there that we duly settled in for the night. The night was still and warm and I didn't bother putting the fly on the tent. The views of the Milky Way whenever I woke up were simply stunning.

July 26th dawned clear and promised to be hot. We were up at 5:30 and walking the last of the road at 7. There was no flagging at the road end so we just plunged into the bush in the direction indicated by the GPS. A minute or two later we found the first flag at N50 02.349 W126 17.686. A couple more pieces of bunting took us down and across a dry creek bed and up to the mother of all elk trails.

The elk highway, as these things do, tended to phase in and out but it and the occasional (green) flag led us, as promised, northeast out of the forest, into the already hot sun and onto a high alpine ridge in under an hour. For those of you intending to go, aim for N50 02.696 W126 17.374 and mark





*Tony Vaughn approaching the main summit of Sutton Peak.*

PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

the waypoint as the point to drop off the ridge on the return journey.

Before visiting Sutton we had thought that once into the alpine that we'd be on a continuous ridgeline leading to the mountain. As we found out, this is not the case. We were on the first of two ridge systems that we would have to traverse before reaching the summit block proper.

Accordingly, once on this, the first ridge, we turned right and made the best route along it east and then northeast crossing several high points along the way. We were soon on open ground with views in all directions except towards Sutton which was hidden by the second ridge across the valley to the east.

The high point of the first ridge is at N50 03.031 W126 16.284 and 1615 metres altitude. However, as soon as we had clear sight of the col below between the first and second ridges we made a descending traverse southeast down and into the low point. Even so, it's 150 -160 metres elevation loss into the col at N50 02.767 W126 15.880.

We then continued southeast out of the low point and up to the crest of the second ridge 250 metres above. The summit block of Sutton now came into view for the first time to the east looking pretty steep and imposing. Turning left (northeast) we hiked up towards the high point of the second ridge. Snow fields on the north side made for easy travel during this phase. Once on the high point the impressive summits to the east of the White/Gold Pass - Victoria and Warden - came into view.

Once again we looked to avoid going right over the highest point on the ridge and, as soon as feasible, made a descending traverse another ~150 metres southeast and into the col at the base of the summit block and some well-earned shade. Temperatures at this point we estimated at well into the thirties.

The west face of Sutton Peak is split by a large snow field in the south and guarded by a cliff band at the foot of its northern half. We chose an ascent line that took advantage of a weakness in the cliff band.

From the col we climbed grassy slopes up to the cliffs and then a narrow ramp heading up from right to left. This led at easy Class 4 to an open area above the cliffs where the angle eased. As I started up the ramp I was seized by debilitating cramps of the hamstrings, first in one, then both legs. The heat was clearly taking its toll. The cramps would return every time I made a long step, so the ramp was accomplished with every step-up limited to six inches. This made for interesting climbing!

From the open area we scrambled easy ground, staying left to avoid difficulties, before traversing back right and climbing a series of steep Class 3 heather filled chutes that led directly to the northwest summit. From there we walked (or, in my case, limped) across to the main southeast summit in 5 minutes or so.

Views from the summit of Sutton are amongst the best I've seen on the Island. Across the White River Valley to the east, Victoria and Warden Peak dominate the view but don't obscure the mainland Coast Mountains beyond. North and south lay Sutton's immediate neighbours in the range: Mounts Schoen and Maquilla to the north and Alston - our next objective - and Waring to the south. Beyond Alston the mountains in the north part of Strathcona looked closer than the 40-50 kilometres involved. Rambler Peak, the Colonel, Elkhorn, King's and more were in plain and uninterrupted view. Just south of west the distinctive needle of Conuma Peak was easy to recognize and as the eye swung round to the true west it picked out the Alava/Bate Sanctuary, further north the Haihte Range and beyond that, summits in the far north of the Island as far as the limit of visibility.

Our views from mountain tops are usually all about looking across or up to neighbouring peaks. In Sutton's case don't omit to look down and northeast. In the cirque 600 metres below are two of the most breathtakingly lovely alpine tarns you are ever likely to see.

The lack of obvious signs of travel throughout our route and the partially collapsed summit cairns would indicate that Sutton sees few visitors. In spite of reports to the contrary we found no summit registers in the form of film canisters on either summit.

After lunch and an hour to soak everything in, as well as rest my tortured hamstrings, we set off down at about 2 p.m. After scrambling down the heathery chutes to the flat area we traversed off to the left (southeast) across slabby ground and then scree aiming for the flat section of the snow field at about its half height. We found a convenient crossing point for the usual moat and walked across to the talus slope



ahead. It was then a simple walk down talus and easy angled slabs and back into the col at the base of the summit block.

The rest of the return trip was simply a question of re-tracing our up-track whilst managing my frequent cramps. We arrived back at the truck at about 7 p.m. An excellent and rewarding day in such tough, hot conditions.

The next day was scheduled for Mount Alston but I needed to repair my electrolyte levels, so a rest day ensued. Tony takes up the story with his Alston report which appeared in the 2009 Bushwhacker Annual.

#### **Approximate route data**

Total distance: ~ 16 kilometres

Net elevation: ~ 750 metres

Total elevation out and back: ~1700 metres

Ascent Time: ~ 5-6 hours

Descent Time: ~ 4-5 hours

(Maybe an hour less each way without the cramps)

A MapSource/Garmin tracklog is available for the asking for the approach and summit routes. Just send me an email.

This article originally appeared on my SummitPost web page. Follow the link for the complete article and lots more photos.

<http://www.summitpost.org/mountain/rock/537536/sutton-peak.html>

**Participants:** Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn

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## **Flower/Rees/Ralph Ridges Traverse**

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**Pam Olson**

**July 28 – August 4**

Flower Ridge is a popular area of Strathcona Park and a starting point for several back country routes through the Park. Having hiked Flower many times in July and August over the past twenty five years or so, I'm familiar with the usual snow conditions. This year, the summer snow levels were higher than average. While the winter snow had consolidated, there was still a layer of softer late spring snow over top of the winter snow. These conditions made for slow going as the weather was lovely and warm. Our plan was to complete the Flower Ridge to Ralph Ridge traverse by way of Rees Ridge, a route we have enjoyed hiking in previous years. The route was established decades ago and is described in Hiking Trails 3. Since we don't like to rush, we allow ourselves a week.

We left the Victoria area around 05:30 Wednesday morning and by the time we got to the Flower Ridge parking area in Strathcona Park, after quick stops for coffee and last



*Snow covered lakes at the head of Henshaw Creek* PHOTO: PAM OLSON

minute groceries in Parksville, it was close to 11:00. After making lunch sandwiches, we were about to shoulder our packs and set off. However, a couple of vehicles drove up and tourists from Australia and Germany asked for information about the area. Giving directions and suggestions delayed us a bit that first day and we didn't get as far along the ridge as we had hoped.

Thursday morning we were on our way by about 08:00. At around 1540m, Flower Ridge turns slightly eastward. There are a couple of large bumps that must be passed. Usually passing these bumps involves crossing steep heather meadows and a couple of scree gullies high above Green Lake. This time the slopes were blanketed by steep snow with bad run outs. We tried to go above the snow and ended up at the top of a bump looking down a precipitous cliff. After wasting quite a bit of time on this bump, we retreated to the col and set up camp. We spent the rest of the afternoon reading our books and watching avalanches slide down Mt. Septimus and Mt. Rousseau.

Getting away to an early start on Friday, we set our course lower and finally got past the ridge bumps. We found a gully that had melted out enough to have vegetation hand holds and using the huckleberry pull up, we clawed our way up to the ridge again safely past the last bumps. Finally we were at the junction where if you turn to the right you can carry on toward Cream Lake and if you turn to the left you are on your way to Shepherd Ridge and Rees Ridge. We turned left.

The next section involved some ups and downs following along the ridge between the Ash River and Henshaw Creek. The soft snow conditions made for easy descents but the up-hill sections were a bit of a slog. When we reached the lakes at the head of Henshaw Creek we were a bit disappointed that the usually lovely lakes were almost completely frozen.



*The col above Tzela Lake, note the cornice* PHOTO: PAM OLSEN

The route between the head of Henshaw Creek and the col above Tzela Lake went over a number of bumps of various heights. Descending a short cliff was the only difficulty in this section of the route. The tree at the top that hikers use as a handhold has been losing branches over the years. We used the 8mm hand line to lower our packs and with the packs off, down climbing was easier.

Saturday was the day we made the push to the col above Tzela Lake. The last time we came through this area there was very little snow. We walked over rocks to the col. This time the col was protected by cornices. My policy on cornices is to avoid walking on or under them. Chopping through them is not a good idea either. We took a slight detour climbing up to the ridge-top to avoid the cornices. At the col an unfrozen Tzela Lake gleamed blue green below us.

After contouring around the side of the mountain we slowly worked our way down the ridge to the Tzela valley bottom and camped near the creek. The valley bottom was covered with clumps of brightly coloured flowers and there was a good choice of camping spots.

There is an easy way and a not so easy way to get from the Tzela valley to the col below Mt. Harmston. There are two obvious openings on the slope above the Tzela valley. The previous time we hiked this route we found the easy way. However, this time we got on to the wrong opening on Sunday morning and followed a game trail for a while through azaleas and huckleberries then over mixed terrain of rocks, meadows and snow to the col. At one point we saw half melted out boot tracks in the snow and were relieved that some other fools had taken the wrong line also.

From the col below Mt. Harmston the standard route traverses a short section of loose rocks to a steep snow slope that hides a small glacier. The glacier is not very active but if the snow level is low, ice might be exposed. This area possibly

is the most technical section of the route. The snow slope drops from about 1600m to about 1400m. We did not see any ice but we avoided the route anyway mainly because on a previous trip we had examined the standard route and decided we did not like it. On that trip the snow levels were low and we found a very nice traverse at the base of the cliffs below Harmston then dropped down on gently sloping rocks to the lower part of the snow slope.

This time, from the col, we down climbed some low fourth class rocks and crossed a couple of short steep snow slopes to get to a place where the angle of the slope had decreased enough for us to plunge step more easily.

At the bottom of this long snow slope we crossed the creek then contoured around toward the outflow end of Milla Lake, attempting to stay near the base of the cliff. This section was very bushy. Milla Lake was frozen over and the log-jam was buried by deep snow, making for an easy crossing of Shepherd Creek. We found a very nice camping spot just above Milla Lake.

Getting from Milla Lake to Rees Ridge the next day involved a mainly snow slog. We worked our way upward and a bit to the west catching Rees just past Iceberg Peak. We had planned to have a rest day on the trip and camped early that day. Finding a rocky island with a flat spot and pool in the middle of the Aureole Ice-field we stopped and set up camp. After tea we settled in to read our books.

Tuesday morning was the only day we awoke to clouds but by the time we were ready to head out the clouds had lifted and we could see our route toward the ridge above Ink Lake. While we have seen very few cairns or flagging tape on this route we have noted that there were some cairns at crucial points on Rees Ridge. The ridge itself was quite stark with little vegetation other than lichens. The reddish yellow rock contrasted nicely with the white snow.

At the point where we dropped off the ridge we were looking down at Ink Lake. We descended a steep snow slope down to the north edge of the unnamed frozen lake. With lower snow levels this descent would be through scree. The small knoll above the lake was easy to get over and soon we were at Ink Lake.

We crossed Ink Lake's unnamed outflow creek then contoured around above Delight Lake and dropped down to cross the creek at its outflow end. Both creek crossings were remarkably friendly. We waded across the Ink Lake outflow, the log-jam providing a safety rail. Delight Lake's outflow log-jam consisted of a number of fairly large logs that were easy to walk across. Were the water level lower it would be easy to jump across the creek.

Between Delight Lake and Ralph Ridge there was an area of old burn that was quite bushy. By heading directly toward a spur ridge that comes off Ralph Ridge we were able to avoid most of the thick brush. Then, turning a bit to the

west, we worked our way toward Ralph's main ridge. Late in the day we found a dry camping area and set up for the night. Smoke from forest fires on the mainland had drifted over to the island and we observed a very red sun setting behind the Golden Hinde.

We woke on Wednesday morning to the sight of smoke filling the Buttle Lake valley reducing visibility to the immediate area. We could not believe that the smoke was coming only from the mainland fires but listening to our tiny radio we heard no reports of fires in the Bedwell Sound or Gold River areas.

We were on our way by about 09:00; our knees dreading the long walk down Ralph Ridge to the Buttle Lake/Westmin Road. The slopes were covered with blooming flowers and the huckleberries and blueberries were ripe. We have been up and down Ralph several times by various routes; sometimes we have found flagged routes and managed to follow them for a while. This time we noticed recent flagging tape and were able to follow the flags from the end of the ridge to the junction of Shepherd Creek and Ralph River near the highway. The flagging certainly helped us get around the only tricky part, the cliff bands, near the top of the ridge.

Rather than use the slippery log across Ralph River, we walked a bit further upstream on Shepherd Creek and waded across at a place where the water was shallow and slower moving. There was a large log across the creek that served as a handrail. After climbing up a short, steep bank, we followed the nature trail back to the Buttle Lake/Westmin Road near the Ralph River campground.

By that time it was about 17:00 and there was no traffic on the road. The Flower Ridge parking area was approximately 3km from the campground and while DF waited with the packs and ice axes I started walking toward the car. When we have done other horseshoe routes in Strathcona we have found that drivers were not likely to stop for two people with huge backpacks and ice axes. They were more likely to stop for a woman in hiking clothing walking alone. When I was a bit over half way to my destination a car finally stopped for me. The two young German tourists wanted to know where I had been hiking as they were also hikers who had been exploring some of Strathcona's trails.

It was about 19:00 when we got to Campbell River and pulled into the parking lot of the all you can eat Chinese smorgasbord restaurant.

**Participants:** Team Bleue, Pam Olsen (ACC member since the late 1970's) and DF (who wishes to be anonymous and would not belong to any club that would have him as a member.)

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## Buttle Lake to Great Central Lake: Bugs, Bush, and Bergs on the Strathcona Park Centennial Expedition

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John Young  
August 3-7

*Rewarding? Yes.*

*Exhausting? Yes.*

*Relentless? Yes.*

*Amazing? Yes.*

*Fun?*

*Why?*

Yes, that's what I ask myself now that it's all over. How can a trek that had such relentless bush be fun? Probably because of the purpose behind it, and because we accomplished it together.

Last August 3-7 I was part of the Buttle Lake to Great Central Lake leg of the Strathcona Centennial Expedition, which was a re-enactment of Price Ellison's 1910 trip. This was Philip Stone's idea, an idea he first had a few years ago. The complete commemorative expedition was 17 days long, starting from Campbell River, and including an ascent of Crown Mountain, exactly a century after Ellison's party climbed it. I joined them for the last and probably the toughest leg of the trip.

Initially, there were nine of us who would be doing this last leg, four newcomers and five who did the complete expedition. However, we were at the trailhead of the Price Creek trail at the end of Buttle Lake, and a group came down for a swim who had just returned from climbing the Golden Hinde. One thing led to another, and before we knew it two of this group, Barry and Tyler, had joined us. We were now eleven, a group with varying levels of experience in the backcountry, but all enthusiastic and fit.

We started off by hiking up the Price Creek Trail, a now un-maintained trail which leads from Buttle Lake (225 m. elevation) to Price Pass, adjacent to the Septimus/Rousseau/Misthorns massif. The trail was excellent initially as it followed an old roadbed for the first few kilometres. However, it became bushier and blocked with blowdown as we gained elevation. A beautiful forest, though, with first growth Douglas fir, balsam fir, and red and yellow cedar. We camped the first night near the Cream Lake Trail junction, at about 700 metres elevation. Phil read us our "bed-time story," a passage out of the trip log from Ellison's trip, and it gained relevance as we traversed the same route.





*Phil leads us through the relentless salmonberries.* PHOTO: JOHN YOUNG

## Day 2

The second day was bushy for the first two hours, with some tricky creek crossings, but we finally broke out of the trees at Green Lake, just below Price Pass. This is one of the most spectacular areas I have had the pleasure of witnessing in Strathcona, with jagged peaks towering over glaciers down below. We had lunch at the pass, and then hiked up onto the ridge and east about 500 metres where we made an early (2:30 p.m.) camp, at about 1375 metres. A wonderful spot with glorious vistas, albeit with a dearth of level tent sites. We revelled in the view, even if it was obscured by the smoke from the mainland forest fires. But the smoke made for an impressive sunset!

## Day 3

The third day we set off just after nine, not in too big of a rush as it was only four or five km to Homasum Lake, that day's destination. We soon descended into a snow gully, and our progress was immediately slowed when one of our members lost her footing and slid perilously close to a moat. Luckily, some of us had axes and stiff boots, but even still kicking steps in the hard snow was laborious. We slowly zig-zagged down the gully, with Evan and Phil scooting ahead to scout the route. They came to a melted out snow-bridge, so we climbed back up about 50 metres where we could scramble up the rock into the bush above. We had another tense moment when Barry slipped and slid into a shallow moat, but he was extricated without much difficulty by Evan, and we continued on our way. Phil led us on a serpentine route

down to Margaret Lake at 1025 metres.

Margaret Lake! Wow, what a sight! Ice-bergs calving from the 10 metre thick snow field below Margaret Peak, booming as they plunged into the crystal clear waters below. We stopped for lunch, and a few hardy souls braved the ice-cold water for a quick dip. It had taken us three hours to travel the one k. from camp, and before long Phil announced,

"We'll leave in five minutes." And sure enough, Phil was off in five minutes, with me hurrying to get my boots on and catch up. It was slow going picking our way around the lake, as we had to avoid the holes in the snow, but we finally reached the end of the lake and were soon out of the snow and into some sublime alpine meadows. We didn't lose much elevation, though, for hours, and needed to drop down to 700 metres for our next camp. Then, the going became steeper and bushier, resulting in the old "green belay."

Sometimes, agonizingly so, we even had to go back uphill, pulling ourselves back up on the convenient heather and blueberries. We finally reached Homasum, an idyllic little lake with two islands, and found a suitable campsite up on a bluff, again with no level tent sites, and a stiff climb down for water, but a gorgeous vista. Most of us slithered down the hill for a swim in the deliciously warm waters and out to the nearest island, and even the voracious horseflies couldn't spoil our fun.

## Day 4

We knew this would be a long day, and a tough one, as we had about nine kilometres to cover, the first half through bush before joining the Della Falls Trail at Margaret Creek. Well, the bush-whacking didn't disappoint, especially the section through the relentless salmonberries that grasped onto us, not wanting us to proceed. We also had much dead-fall to negotiate, and seemed to spend half the day climbing across and off logs, some comfortably large, but others nervously small. At about 10 o'clock we came out onto a bluff and Phil pointed out the valley we had to reach, a way off in the distance, with nothing but bush between us and it. "Uncle!" yelled Phil, only partially joking that we wanted to give up.

Finally, about four o'clock, we were freed of the bush and onto the trail, and after reviving in the creek we knocked off the last five k., reaching Great Central by about 5:30. After loading our gear into the two war canoes that the Ark Resort had left there for us, he headed off down the lake with a light breeze behind us. About seven, however, the wind changed



direction and we were now heading into it, and some ominous looking clouds were forming on the horizon. We pulled over on a rocky point and found wonderfully flat tent sites with great seating down by the lake. Oh what a day!

#### Day 5

It rained a little overnight, the only rain during the whole 17-day expedition, but stopped before we resumed paddling at 9:30 the last morning. Canoeing down the lake seemed tedious after our adventuresome hike, but nevertheless we reached our destination, the Ark Resort, right on time at three p.m. We were given a hero's welcome and treated to a feast in Port Alberni, bringing our amazing trip to an end.

**Participants:** Marion Bryan, Gwenda Bryan, Evan Loveless, Chris Kruger, Aaron Black, Tawney Lem, Philip Stone, John Young, Kate Balzer, Tyler Hasabe and Barry Smith

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## Mount Regan

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Martin Smith  
August 10-12

A wet morning and a worse forecast were the order of the day as I met up with Tony Vaughn at the usual Peatt Road Park and Ride en route to our rendezvous with Mount Regan, the last summit left on our tick lists on the east side of the Oyster River.

I'd had my eye on the route that traverses across from Albert Edward even before it appeared in Phillip Stone's guide but seeing it in black and white is always a comfort especially when, like me, you're too chicken for first ascents. Lindsay Elms, Shawn Hedges and Peter Rothermel (see 2008 Island Bushwhacker) all confirmed that the route was perfectly viable and that no-one needed a rope. Thus informed we packed accordingly and set a date - naturally just as a month-long hot and dry spell came to its predictable end.

Driving up-Island on August 10th neither of us was feeling too optimistic about the conditions. However, as we drove up through the clouds to the Paradise Meadows trailhead, the rain eased and the sun made a brief appearance. There was certainly no reason to procrastinate so we grabbed a quick lunch, stuffed the last things into the packs and briefly joined the tourists on the groomed trails before hoofing it to Circlet Lake as fast as we could. We'd thought about shortening summit day by risking censure and camping on the ridge between Jutland and Albert Edward but the rain had already resumed by the time we got to the ranger cabin and it seemed prudent to spend the night lower down.

The usual crowds were crawling all over the place at



*Mount Regan ascent route. Alexandra Peak in the background.*

PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

Circlet and I was glad I'd brought my climbing-hut-tested earplugs by the time we gave up on the weather and dived into the tents before 8 p.m.. Earplugs notwithstanding I was woken up a couple of times in the night by the rain pounding down on the tent. Isn't the forecast always right when it's for bad weather and wrong when it's for good? At least we'd made a smart decision about where to camp but summit day looked like a washout even before it started.

Both of us, therefore, were absolutely astonished when we got up at 5:30 the next morning to the sun and a cloudless sky. Hey, we'll take it! A quick breakfast, pack for the day and we were off at 6:45.

There was nothing new to explore for the first 3 hours or so. It was just the familiar and well trodden path up Albert Edward to a point about 100 vertical metres below the summit where we traversed across to the ridge edge at N49 40.664 W125 25.604 and contemplated the descent to the col between Mount Albert Edward and Mount Regan.

The route doesn't, in fact, follow the ramp-like feature that can be seen clearly even from Mount Washington - at least as far as our trip was concerned. In fact, following an initial somewhat exposed traverse underneath the seasonal snow patch on Albert Edward's ridge, it was more a question of grass and scree slopes heading consistently northwest and down to the glacier. The last bit onto the snow proved trickiest and involved some exposed Class 3/4 down a narrow rock tongue above a deep, yawning moat - a route we chose in order to hit the snow below a very large 'schrund.

Tony advised crampons before the long step across to the snow and he was spot on. It was steep and frozen solid.

Once on the snow, we angled down towards the bottom of the glacier to the trench under the moraine crest and left the crampons and axes there. By this time our good fortune



*Tony Vaughn descending towards the AE/Regan col* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

with the weather began to run out as clouds started building fast from the south.

After climbing the moraine and we hiked along the crest as it swung left before meeting the Albert Edward/Regan col at its west end.

From the col we headed north towards Mount Regan's South Ridge. A wide, loose gully took us up towards a headwall above. We followed the gully for about 300 metres before deeking off right and up to a black ridge which we climbed to its end at the east side of the headwall. A number of gullies seemed to provide potential passage through this section. I started up the first and was just about to commit when my handhold pulled cleanly out of the rock under the merest of loads. So we backed off that one and looked elsewhere. In all we spent an hour or more looking at several possibilities before settling on the first one we tried. It went at Class 3 with minimal effort and using the space created by the pulled hold for a nice boot jam. For the record, the bottom of the right gully is at N49 41.033 W125 25.907. This is an in situ waypoint not one added later from the GPS tracklog. You can rely on it. As you approach the headwall from the black ridge, it's the second gully on the right. The first gully has an undercut overhanging base.

The remaining 15 metres of the gully went smoothly at Class 3 and led to easy but loose ground above. Thereafter we simply headed due north with some easy scrambling to the summit ridge, turned left and walked 10 metres to the satisfyingly airy summit - about 10 minutes climbing time above the gully - at 12:55 p.m.. Our hour of route finding cost us the views as by this time, the front had re-established itself and cloud enveloped the mountain. The first raindrops fell just as we were signing Peter's brand new logbook. There were 5 entries to date, one of which claimed the summit in 5.25 hours from the Raven Lodge (and wasn't Lindsay or Quagger!)

I'm sure there are wonderful views from Regan but we had to be content with cloud swirling up the Oyster and over the Albert Edward/Regan col. Very dramatic but I'd really like to have seen across to Albert Edward having seen the reverse view so often.

The weather argued against hanging around, so after only 5 minutes on top we headed back down. We thought we might have to leave a sling or two in the gully but it proved easy to downclimb. Having got the (we thought) hard bit out of the way, we finally stopped for lunch at about 1:30 just above the col.

The return leg down to and up the glacier was quite straightforward but by this time it was raining steadily and the rock tongue was an accident waiting to happen. This was the only time on the trip that we wished we'd brought a rope. But we hadn't and a few sphincter tightening minutes ensued as we inched our way up the slick rock.

By 3:15 we were back at the ridge drop off point and all that remained was the familiar plod down to Circlet. We even passed on the 10 minute trip up to bag Albert Edward for the umpteenth time. A couple of dry interludes made the plod tolerable and another at the tents delivered a dinner window but by 8 the rain was coming down in torrents and another early night was in the offing.

It was much too early to go to sleep but I had plenty to occupy my thoughts. How lucky we'd been really with the weather. If we'd listened to the forecast, we'd probably never have left Victoria. The route had been varied, challenging, full of wonderful alpine character and we'd bagged a really nice - and long coveted - summit in difficult conditions with limited summit views as the only price we had to pay. With this happy and satisfying thought and as the rain poured down outside, I finally drifted off to sleep.

#### **Approximate route data**

TH to Circlet Lake ~11.5 kilometres

Circlet to Regan summit and return ~ 16 kilometres

Net elevation TH to Circlet ~ 50 metres

Total elevation TH to Circlet ~ 350 metres

Net elevation Circlet to Regan summit ~ 825 metres

Total elevation Circlet to Regan summit and return ~ 1,400 metres

A MapSource/Garmin tracklog is available for the asking for the approach and summit routes. Just send me an email or PM.

This article originally appeared on my SummitPost web page. Follow the link <http://www.summitpost.org/mountain/rock/543373/Mt-Regan.html> for the complete article and lots more photos.

**Participants:** Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn

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## Waring Peak

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Tony Vaughn

August 25

Waring Peak is a seldom visited mountain which lies at the southern end of the Sutton Range. It is named after Harry L. Waring, a cook with Slocomb's west coast survey party who died from injuries received out in the field in 1947. Waring Peak rises up above the Gold River valley to a height of 5250ft/1601metres and, like many peaks in the Sutton Range, has precipitous cliffs on its eastern side and relatively gentle south western slopes.

Last year Martin Smith and I climbed the two adjacent peaks in the area, Sutton Peak and Mount Alston, but time constraints prevented us from ascending Waring at that time. This year, accompanied by Rick Eppler, we returned via the same access as last year.

We went along the Nimpkish Road from Gold River for 27 km before turning off up the unmarked Waring Road. Approaching from Gold River this turn off is approximately 100 metres before the marked Alston Road turn off and is just before a bridge. Due to road deactivation, it was only possible to drive about 4.5 km along the valley below the southwest ridge of Waring to an altitude of 650 metres before being stopped by Waring Creek whose bridge had been removed. At this point we set up camp in preparation for the next day's ascent.

As the other two organized the camp, I left in search of a route for the following day's climb. Our map indicated that the road we were on continued up the valley, then swung around and climbed the ridge to an elevation of about 900 metres. Figuring that this would be the easiest approach, I crossed the creek and started up the road. After five minutes or so of brisk walking, I came across a sandy gully on my left that was obviously used by game to connect the lower road with the upper one. Being aware that the wildlife knows the best routes, I headed up this gully, which was steep and very loose in places, making me question my decision several times about taking this route, especially by myself. Nevertheless, after about 30 minutes and 250 metres of altitude gain, I came out on what had once been a road but was now completely deactivated and had become part of the landscape of the hillside. Turning left (west), I followed a faint game trail to the end of the old road. Seeing the trail disappearing into old logging slash and thick bush I continued on for several minutes until I could see clear hillside and old growth forest ahead. This I concluded would be a suitable route onto the ridge top.

After retracing my steps to the top of the gully, I decided to return to camp by way of the debuilt road in hopes of find-



Waring Peak summit block PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

ing an easier route up and down from camp and avoiding the gully. Twenty minutes later I reached a major washout with no sign of the old road or trail beyond, only a solid wall of slide alder. Sooner than return to the gully I chose instead to follow the creek bed down to less steep ground and then bushwhack to the valley road, which I knew I could follow back to camp. After about half an hour of staggering and stumbling down the creek bed and through several years old logging slash, I finally reached the road and walked back to camp with a recommendation to climb the gully next day and ignore the road.

At 7:15 the next morning we crossed the creek and followed my previous day's route to the old growth forest. As planned we traversed up steep forest onto the ridge top and followed it until we broke out of the trees onto heather covered open slopes beneath the summit block. Other than a couple of very old flags in the old growth there was no indication that anyone had been this way for a long time.

Looking up at the summit block from this vantage point it appeared that the easiest route to reach the summit would be to our left, which was the west side, and so it was. We found low angled rock slabs and heather gullies of class 3 difficulty that took us to the summit ridge. A short walk along the ridge brought us to the summit cairn by 11:10 a.m.

Retracing our upward path we were soon down to the gully between the upper and lower roads. We looked around for an alternate route down, but once again this gully appeared to be the only choice. So down we went, staying close together and slipping, sliding, cursing and choking on the dust we raised. Finally, just before we reached the bottom, a large rock came loose and took a beeline for Martin. Fortunately it didn't have time to gain much momentum before it struck his hiking pole, bending it into a perfect semi circle before coming to a stop. Thirty minutes later we were back



at camp having a brew and listening to Martin's opinion of the gully, which even in this era of accepted use of colourful language, cannot be printed here.

Overall it was a successful and pleasant climb.

**Participants:** Rick Eppler, Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn

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## Impending Doom or Breaking the Brooks Peninsula

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Cory McGregor, Derek Cronmiller,  
Gillian Nicol and Cody Gold  
August 26 - September 1

### *"Bombardment!"*

The rock sailed through the air and panged off a washed ashore buoy; this was entertainment at its finest – no television, no radio, just a whole lot of rocks and things to throw them at. It was the morning of our second day on the Brooks Peninsula and we were camped at the mouth of Cladothamnus Creek eating breakfast unawares of how our impending trek into the forest would lead to the most heinous bushwhack any of us had ever experienced.

The start of our adventure had begun much earlier on Thursday, August 26th. Procrastination and the allure of a final home-cooked dinner and dessert in Nanaimo caused us to miss our intended departure time entirely. We set out at 10:30 p.m. with elated and caffeinated spirits, fortified for our six hour journey on dark roads. Most of us had put in a full day's work, and the cumulative exhaustion began to take hold in the wee hours of the night. By the time we hit the logging road for Fair Harbour we had resorted to maintaining rational thought by an invigorating game of "spot the bridge". The rules are simple: the first person to spot a bridge and shout "bridge!" wins.

At 4:15 a.m., the dark logging road came to an end in a small parking lot inhabited by a number of vehicles that appeared to have ceased functioning many years before. With alarms set to go off in less than three hours we wedged the four of ourselves into the back of the pick-up; two of us each spooning a wheel well with the others in between, and all tucked underneath a tarp. It was okay - it was cosy even - we would get a few hours of sleep and then catch the water taxi to the Brooks Peninsula. At least, that was the theory. Instead, we spent the remainder of the night trying not to wiggle while wondering if the itching sensation we felt on our faces was fatigue or just insanity. It turns out it was neither - we were the unknowing victims of no-see-ums.

Torn between maintaining our terrorized sleep and escaping from the infernal itching the pests were inflicting, we finally rose in a rush of anticipation and adrenaline fuelled by the excitement of catching our water taxi.

Leo, our driver and an experienced sea-farer with a cataract in his left eye, arrived punctually at 8 a.m.. "I like backpackers much more than kayakers" he explained while releasing the mooring lines, "they just step on the boat and they're ready to go". Partway through the journey, we stopped into the small village of Kyoquot to change boats; Leo intended to pick up a group of kayakers on his return voyage.

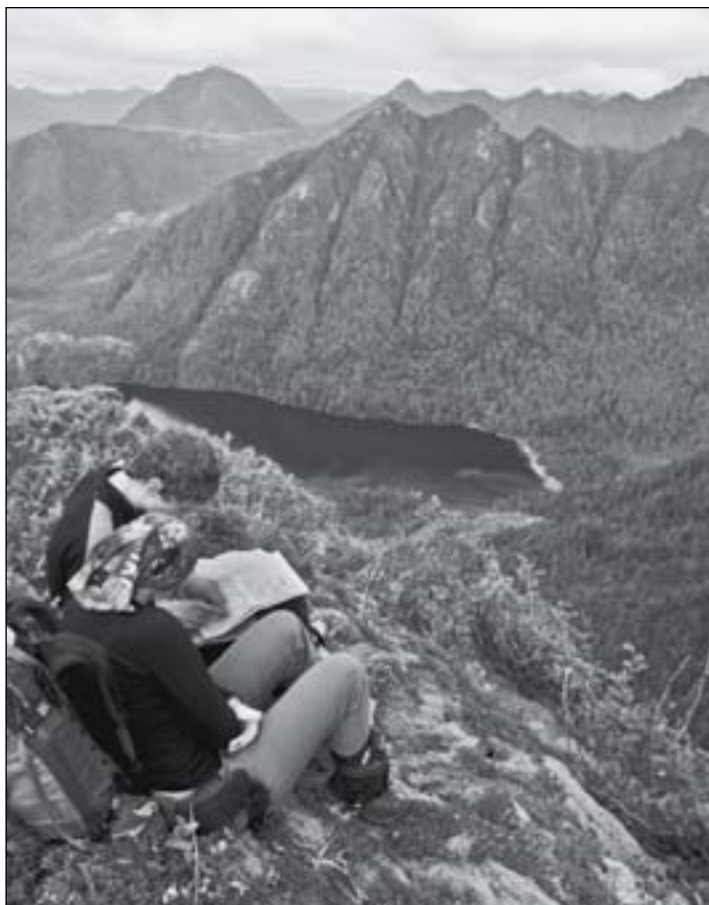
Leo estimated that about 200 people call Kyoquot home, though most reside only seasonally. Since most of the coloured tin houses appear to be propped up on rickety stilts, the seasonality is not surprising; the stormy season would be terrifying! The remainder of the 1.5 hour journey was full of the breath taking scenery responsible for the annual pilgrimage of kayakers to the area. Motoring along we were fortunate enough see swarms of eagles, seals, and several whales.

As we pulled up to the rocky intertidal zone covered in barnacles and seaweed that Leo intended to drop us off at, we spotted a black bear waiting to greet us on a nearby beach. Leo told us about the Brooks Provincial Park marine trail, spanning much of the southern peninsula with several suitable camping beaches, no doubt assuming our expeditions would be limited to the shoreline.

We donned our encumbering backpacks and gingerly stepped out onto our dubious drop off point. With so little sleep, thirty kilogram packs felt twice as heavy and only made stepping onto the seaweed covered rock more nerve wracking; the trip could have ended very quickly if we had fallen on the rock. Once we were ashore and had hiked to the first of several beaches we were appalled by the amount of washed up pollution that littered the area. Hiking along the backshore wasn't so much walking as it was wading through sloughs of plastic bottles, buoys, shipwrecked debris and even rubber boots. Some past explorers had even created a scarecrow from the refuse, though we weren't sure who he was supposed to be scaring.

Once we had made our way down the beach and were back on the trail, the easiest sections often proved the slowest going due to the abundance of the plumpest salal and huckleberries we had ever seen. Further along, we stumbled upon a washed up and unexploded military canister sitting on the beach. Unsure whether it was still explosive, we decided not to linger and continued until we discovered a cavernous cave in the shoreline bluffs. Our first day came to an early end when we finally reached the mouth of the Cladothamnus Creek after much delay from our excitement combined with fatigue from the night before. We enjoyed the last of the sunlight with a game of Bombardment. While Cory proved the master of bombarding random objects Derek perfected the





*A contour map can hide a lot.* PHOTO: CODY GOLD

art of the caber toss. As night set in we reflected on the toll of our fatigue; our greatest stretch of uninterrupted movement was no longer than 45 minutes and we had only accomplished 6 kilometres of travel. We would attempt to follow the creek up towards Doom Mountain in the morning.

After achieving a real night's sleep, we woke at sunrise on Saturday and took our time enjoying the calm of the morning. We then ventured into the brush to do some preliminary scouting, exploring the right side of the creek. Cody decided to do some brief scouting on the opposite bank, and after a few minutes of pushing through the brush, made the discovery of the remains of a black bear long since deceased. After some group discussion of our two options we decided to go along the left side of the creek. This proved advantageous initially as we made good time across dried out bog; however, travel through the brush eventually became very slow and tedious. We could see the dried out creek bed now a fair ways below us and Cory and Derek decided to drop down to scout out the creek bed. After a few minutes they signalled to come on down, the creek had not received significant rainfall and thus proved to be a viable route for a large stretch of the hike. On frequent occasions, rapid water and the absence of stepping stones forced us into the salal

thickets and dried bogs on either side of the creek. As our distance from the shore increased, so did the abundance of deadfall and the size of the boulders. It soon became apparent that Gillian's footwear did not mix well with the slippery rocks, and she resigned herself to wet feet.

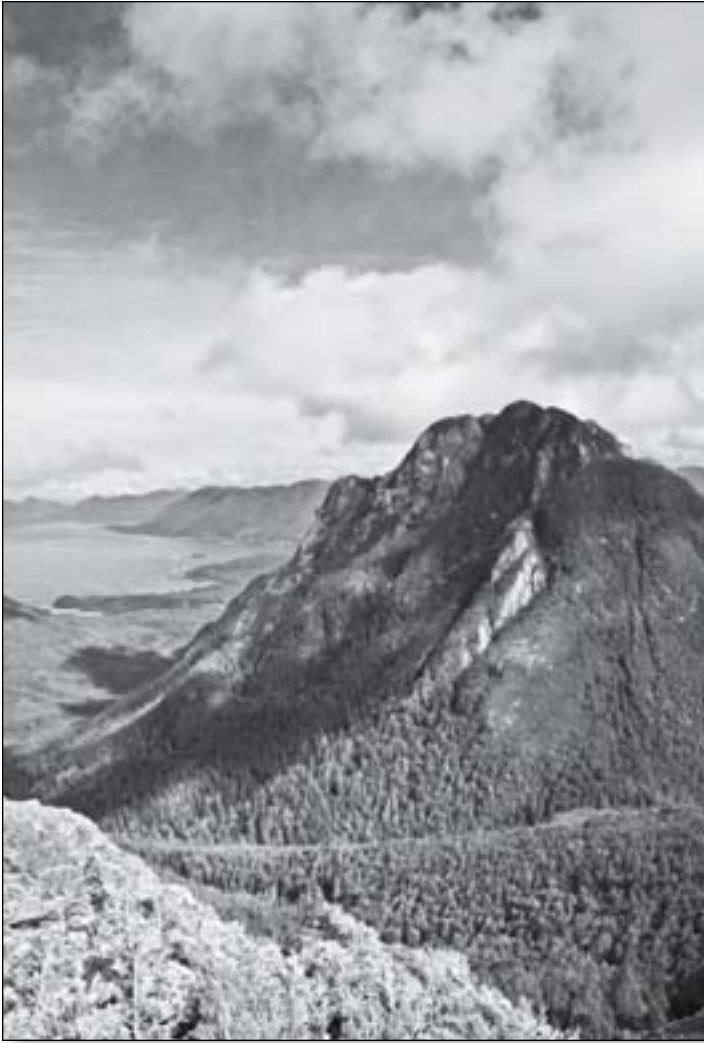
The effects of our first taste of Brooks bushwhacking began to manifest in exhaustion, as we redistributed the weight in our packs to stop our pace from slowing too much. For the last 2 kilometres up the creek, Derek employed the tactic of constantly assuring us the lake was only a few hundred metres more; "It's just around that next meander," or "we're almost there, it's just up ahead," he explained while checking the GPS. Eventually, one of these claims was proven true as a clearing was spotted up in the distance. Surrounded entirely by steep hills and ridges save for the single creek which drains it, Cladothamnus Lake looks as if it could have been formed from a meteorite impact. With free reign over our newfound campground, we chose a sandy piece of lake-front real estate to put our own scent on.

We awoke Sunday morning in the shelter which would serve as our base camp for the next few nights. Hungry for Doom, and determined to make a push, we stuffed the day's water, Clif bars and trail mix into a single pack along with the GPS, satellite phone and a few layers of clothing. Derek volunteered to shoulder the load. Our summit aspirations however, led to over eagerness, and Cory's proposition to cut up to the ridge early soon saw our group on the wrong side of an outwash gully. After a quick backtrack down-slope we continued our journey having lost an hour to the false start. Back on track and double checking our GPS, we advanced slowly but steadily towards the ridge through deadfall, bramble and evergreens. On several occasions our progress was impeded by bluffs, requiring some scrambling and circumnavigation.

As we climbed higher and higher the bush somehow became denser and even more heinous than the day before. Gnarled windswept cedar made the prior hike seem like provincial park trail. The cedar was low and dense, and we were forced to balance on low shrubs while pushing through the dead trees barely taller than ourselves. Slowly picking our way across the cedar, we eventually broke through and caught our first glimpse of the surrounding landscape; our base camp was a small speck along Cladothamnus Lake far below. We revelled in this view of the landscape, but we still had yet to spot our mark, Doom Mountain. We continued to push on until we broke free of the hellish cedar and came to stand on top of the ridge, strangely barren of anything.

And then we saw Doom.

Doom Mountain is aptly named; imposing and clearly incongruous with the surrounding landscape. It is a massive slab of exposed rock dropped smack dab in the midst of rolling forested hills and low lying bogs. Seeing Doom was



*A view of Doom from the southwest* PHOTO: CODY GOLD

elating. With the goal in sight, we continued our progress up and down a north running ridge before pausing on a crest for lunch. We stopped partly to appease our hunger, but mostly due to the fact that a 100 foot contour map does a poor job of illustrating 99 foot cliff faces.

Looking at Doom now became bittersweet. There it was, our target, the subject of much preparation and pre-planning, and it was clear that we were not going to make it there. We had too little in the way of provisions with us, and that's not to mention the remaining daylight. We had checked various maps, read what we could and tried looking at aerial photos to make our best attempt at it, but now on day three, we knew it was a done deal; we couldn't cross across the ridge we had hoped to and a detour would take too much time. In addition, we were unable to spot a feasible line up Doom Mountain given our lack of mountaineering equipment.

Having come about 750 metres of our goal, we shifted our sights to a nearby peak with an appreciable view of the

landscape to avoid an empty handed hike back. The trek up was no easier than anything we'd gone through before as we joked that we were each accomplishing first ascents of our chosen lines. Once on top, locating the highest ground became another challenge altogether. We were balancing on tree tops high enough to conceal Gillian's head when she was standing on the ground. While our Doom Mountain aspirations had vanished, the victory scotch had not, and so we christened our compensational summit "Bombardment Peak" with a fitting toss of a rock. Back in good spirits, we hiked back towards camp and made use of the last of the sunlight by having a dip in the refreshing waters of Cladothamnus Lake before settling down for the night.

Monday morning proved to be the most beautiful of the trip, as the sunny blue sky was majestically mirrored in the still waters of the lake. Though Doom had been removed from the agenda, we intended to head back up to the ridge and explore the landscape. The day began similar to the last, as we packed our provisions into a single pack and Cory volunteered to carry it this time. Contrary to the previous day, Cory picked a fantastic line of least resistance up a small creek bed bordered by numerous and abundant berry bushes. These bushes proved a valuable ally, providing handholds to pull ourselves up-slope, while simultaneously supplying berry fuel. Our efficiency this day allowed us to reach the top of the ridge in little more than an hour. The sun's warming rays continued to shine strong as we travelled west along the ridge, away from Doom. We nicknamed our path "nude ridge", named both for its comparatively sparse vegetation and for the attire in which it was travelled. By noon, we had discovered a small seismic tower atop the ridgeline, complete with a weathered helipad which served as a sturdy picnic table. After refuelling our bodies, we set off to summit a tall peak looming over Cladothamnus Lake.

The path towards this summit proved especially difficult, as the abundance of five foot tall cedar trees grew to the perfect height to block any view of one's footwork beneath their crowns as we waded through them. We attempted to balance among the tree tops, bounding towards our destination, though only "Legolas" McGregor was able to float unimpeded through the brush. As we drew nearer to the summit, the height of the cedar trees increased, forcing us to travel at ground level. Thousands of petrified skeletal fingers reached out from the foliage, scouring clothing, packs and skin. By the time we reached the summit, the sun had disappeared behind the clouds, along with the view. We built a stone cairn and in continuing with our tradition of nick-naming the landscape, we later dubbed this "Wiggle Peak" as a tribute to an improvised fire dance. While not nearly as technical as Doom, the pinnacle of the peak reaches an elevation of 809m, making it taller than Doom Mountain which stands at 787 metres.



*A panorama from the helipad. Doom Mountain is on the left, Nude Ridge and Bombardment Peak are dead centre, with Cladothamnus Lake below, and Wiggle Peak is just off-camera to the right. Note the ridge line connecting from Bombardment to Doom, we made it as far as the second peak.* PHOTO: CODY GOLD

We had hoped to snag a view of our return path to the beach for the next day, but once we arrived on the summit a cloud began to roll over the mountain. After half an hour on the summit waiting for it to clear, we gave up and began the descent back towards the lake. As we travelled back down from the ridge, the weather ceased to befriend us and rain began to fall. No big deal, we thought, rain isn't an issue. That is until we ended up in a deeply scoured river bed, composed of rounded stones covered in moss. The river bed and moss became progressively more and more saturated and became absolutely treacherous to travel on. Though it was aesthetically beautiful we were forced back into the brush for the final portion of the descent. By the time we reached camp, we were cold and wet, but in decent spirits from an active day. The rain continued to come down and we decided to settle down early for the night with the knowledge that the following day would yield the long return back to the beach. The rain continued to fall.

By 5 a.m. Tuesday morning, the rain had shown no sign of letting up. Our group awoke before the sun, but even by headlamp, it was obvious the lake's water levels had risen overnight: Yesterday's footsteps could be seen beneath half a foot of water. It turned out that Cody and Derek had unknowingly set up on a lovely patch of sand created by runoff from the surrounding hills. These encroaching waters tested the amphibiousness of Cody and Derek's tent. Waking up and getting out of the tent was a relief, and the soaked camp was packed up in record time. We suited up for the return journey and tried to stuff all we could in the two dry bags we had.

Over breakfast we warned ourselves that frustrations might boil over and that we should avoid taking anything personally – and the rain continued to fall. With increased outflow from the lake and connecting tributary streams, the river we had used to reach the lake could no longer be travelled by foot; whitewater kayaks would have been nice right about now.

Travelling through the wet bushes alongside the river became a test of mental strength as the number of items we could recount on the "thank God it's dry" list became smaller by the minute. Gore-tex jackets may function perfectly in vertical rainfall, but with the transfer of water from the surrounding vegetation, the outfits designed to keep us dry began to function more like wetsuits, retaining an insulating layer of water against our bodies. Breaks for food and rest were restricted to 15 minutes, which was the longest any of us could bear to stand still in the growing lakes inside our boots.

Most of the return journey was done in silence, allowing us to become well acquainted with the various personalities in the forest. Abundant near the river's edge there was the woody salal, enticing travellers with the appearance of flimsy branches while concealing thorns and devil's club. Many obscenities were uttered as even the largest intruder will tumble amidst ensnaring salal. Further from the river's edge there were the burly evergreens, challenging travellers to remain on their feet as they weaved their way over, under or across decaying deadfall. Intermingled in between were the wooded marshes. These tricksters first deceive travellers with scarce forest cover, before taunting them as they sink into the soft, soggy ground.

After about seven soaking hours of stumbling, we caught our first glimpse of the shore in the distance through openings in the trees. The surge of elation that followed overpowered rational thought, as we nearly charged right over a 5 metre escarpment concealed by the foliage. After carefully descending this obstacle, we madly clawed our way through the last 200 metres shoving aside the foliage and cursing whenever the salal grabbed our ankles. Once we broke through and were at last on the beach it was as if Mother Nature was acknowledging the triumph we felt; the rain stopped and fragments of sunshine began to peek through the clouds.





*From left: Gillian, Cory, Derek and Cody emerging triumphantly from the Forest on Tuesday afternoon* PHOTO: CORY MCGREGOR

Without wasting too much time, we started back to cover the last 6 kilometres of beach travel to reach our initial drop off point. We may have been tired, but we managed to reach the first beach in little under 2 hours, a stark contrast to our pace when we first arrived. While the region is quite remote, the trace of surfers past is abundant through a number of driftwood shelters constructed on the southern beaches. With one night left on the peninsula, we selected a box-shaped frame held together by nails to convert to a weather proof fortress. Using our tents, flies, poles, some driftwood and a few ragged tarps we found buried in the forest underbrush by a storm, we built ourselves a suitable looking shelter. "This thing is bombproof" Derek declared, "I hope there's a storm tonight." Unfortunately, his wish was granted.

It was 3 a.m. before the rain exposed a weakness in our design. Gill was awoken to a small leak, dripping water between her and Cory. The rainfall had begun to accumulate in one of the tents strapped to the roof, and about four litres of water were suspended menacingly above the two of them. With our group now fully awake, Derek suggested we should gently push the water towards the side of the shelter, where it would run off harmlessly. The word "gently" was lost in communication. Gillian slammed the pooling water with enough force to open the roof, causing all of the suspended water to land directly onto Cory's sleeping bag. The tone and magnitude of the shouted utterance would not be accurately reflected in print, but upon realizing the futility of anger in this situation, Cory resigned himself to what little soggy sleep he could get.

In the morning, we sloppily gathered the wet equipment for what would be the last slog of the trip. Reflecting on the adventure amongst ourselves, we caught sight of Leo's water taxi, right on time. Upon boarding the vessel, Leo seemed to be in a better mood than he was on the way out; presumably because he was not strapped for time in making another pick up. After surprising Leo with a recount of where we had ventured, he shared his own aspirations. He wanted to create a trail on a sparsely travelled island to a lake overflowing with fish and start a fishing retreat for which he would provide transportation.

We set our feet back on the Fair Harbour dock, and carried our gear to the truck. With the turn of a key, and start of an engine, our journey was almost finished; we could begin the return to civilization.

Much of the long journey home back down from Zeballos to Victoria was spent reflecting on how grateful we were for the once in a lifetime experiences we were afforded by the Alpine Club of Canada. We cannot give enough thanks for the opportunity the ACC Memorial Fund/Youth Grant has provided us. We are truly privileged to live in British Columbia and this adventure helped us experience just one small slice of this magnificent and magical place we call home. This trip is imprinted indelibly in our memories and it is our hope that some of these words convey that.

Thank you!

**Participants:** Cory McGregor, Derek Cronmiller, Gillian Nicol and Cody Gold

**Cody Gold** is a third year student at the University of Victoria. His area of study is Political Science and Environmental Studies, and he is also enrolled in the Restoration of Natural Systems Diploma program. He volunteers as co-President of the UVic Outdoors Club and is deeply grateful for the unique experience the Youth Grant has provided.

**Cory McGregor** is a fourth year Geography and Psychology student at the University of Victoria. He volunteers at the UVic Outdoors Club as equipment manager and climbing co-ordinator. He is an avid rock climber and hiker.

**Gillian Nicol** is a third year Geography and Business student at the University of Victoria. She is also an experienced sea kayak guide.

**Derek Cronmiller** is a fifth year (taking the scenic route) Earth and Ocean Science student. He is an island native and an obsessive climber.

PS. We would also like to thank Dr. Sandy Briggs for all the support he offered and continues to offer to us and our fellow UVic Outdoors Club members. Thanks Sandy!



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## Shepherds Ridge Marmots!

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Peter Rothermel  
August 27-31

Tak and I had a multi-day trip planned from Mirren Lake to Mount Washington along Ree's Ridge, but due to forest fire closures, we couldn't get in to the Comox Lake access. At the last minute Tak suggested a trip to Shepherds Ridge to try to knock off two more peaks over 6000 feet. I should have known...

A year before, while we stood on Tzela Peak, Tak mused about Shepherds Ridge in front of us and said something about going there someday and I just put it on the back burner of my brain. It seems that every time Tak and I are on a summit, He points to a distant peak and comments on maybe going there... And sure enough within a year or two, I find myself heading to where Tak pointed his finger in my past memory.

Our original plan was to ascend Flower Ridge, traverse to Shepherds Ridge and finally down to Buttle Lake, but we thought we would keep the option of just reversing our route, after our high points, and going back down familiar territory.

Day one was just getting up Flower Ridge to near the Central Craggs [the highest point at the apex of the ridge]. If you haven't been up this route, it is easy to follow, but is a very long uphill slog. After 6 hours of hiking we were near the end of Flower Ridge and made camp by a large tarn.

The next day we headed out under clear skies and had good views of our Shepherds Ridge objective across the deep intervening valley. "Doesn't look all that far from here" was what I might have foolishly said. It took us 9 1/2 hours to reach the low point col between Central Craggs and Shepherds Ridge and I was starting to think that this was not just another walk in the park.

Along the way, while ascending up a steep melted out couloir, I came across a dried up deceased animal. My first thoughts were maybe a martin, but when I turned it over, the buck teeth and chocolate brown fur made it evident that it was a Vancouver Island marmot, one of the most at risk species of mammals in all of Canada. I took a few photos and cut off the two ear tags and left the carcass. A couple of metres above the carcass was an active burrow, judging by the freshly dug earth. Beyond the marmot, the terrain to and passed Central Craggs got rougher, with more ups and downs and route finding became more difficult than the well trodden Flower Ridge route.

I had read Dave Campbell's 2007 report on this route and noted his time, but realized he is half my age and that there



*Dead Marmot on Flower Ridge* PHOTO: PETER ROTHERMEL

was no way I could keep to his itinerary. When we reached the col between Central Craggs and Shepherds Ridge, we were bagged and we decided to just do a day trip from our, now, base camp to Shepherds Ridge and return via Flower Ridge. We referred to this as the "granite camp", because we had a large flat granite outcrop to set up camp on, with an adjoining tarn. It rained hard and blew that night and I figured that our trip was probably a wash out, but on day three we woke up to clearing dry weather.

We got away early and found our way down a bit and then up towards Tzela Pass, through a headwall that had a melt water cut in the rock that we could work our way up. Then onto rock hard snow-fields! Boy was I glad we had brought crampons and ice axes... otherwise the trip would have ended there and then. The snow was so steep and hard, with such poor runout in places, that I down climbed a few places facing in. When we reached Tzela Pass, we stopped for a second breakfast and after our break, were on rock again.

Once we were heading towards the "Shepherds Horn" (unofficial name), we worked our way up the south side through an obvious line, but on loose rock, that got worse the further up we went, with the crux being a large loose block that needed to be pulled on, to get over and I thought, "No way can we down climb that". Once past the rubble, we were a short hop and skip to the summit. This leg took us about three hours from our "granite camp". There was no summit register, so we placed one and then thought about our way off. One report we had was that there was no way off the north side, but when we looked down that slope, it was fairly easy heather gullies, so down we went.

At the base of the mountain, we got onto the northeast-facing glacier and it was melted out enough to be slick, yet steep, with poor runout and open crevasses below. Crampons were needed for the underlying hard glacier base, but the surface



*Granite Camp with Shepherds Peak in the background*

PHOTO: TAK OGASAWARA

was soft and balled up our crampons. In retrospect, if we had stayed on the rock ridge a bit longer, we could have bypassed this steep glacier section, as further along, the glacier had better runout, if not better cramponing conditions.

Beyond the glacier, we got back onto Shepherds Ridge rock and just before “Shepherds Peak” (unofficial name), we encountered a steep drop that others had said they avoided by dropping down to the west, to some small lakes, but we decided to see if we could find a way down the ridge. Sure enough we found enough connecting ledges and ramps that we were finally at the base of Shepherds Peak.

There’s a wide crack feature that leads up the South Face of Shepherd’s Peak and we looked into it, but we found the ledge system to its east to be easier. On the summit, we placed another register and added the old papers to our new tube and had a late lunch. On our way down, I placed my hand on a large desk sized rock that I’m pretty sure that I pulled on during our ascent and just the weight of my hand set it loose. It went down in a terrific crash, creating dust and an acrid smell as it continued. Lucky that it didn’t happen on our way up, as Tak would have been just below.

Then the long slog back to our “granite camp”. We got off the glacier onto the ridge rock before the exposed part of the glacier and it went easily. At the base of the “Shepherds Horn” we thought we would try to bypass it on its west side,

by dropping down a rocky gully. The further down we went, the steeper and looser it got and it almost looked like we’d have to turn around and go back up and over the peak again, but the gully eventually went and we traversed on snow back to our granite camp. It had been a 12 hour day and I was glad to have done it from a base camp and not with a heavy multi-day pack on my back.

Day four, we awoke socked in by cloud and after breakfast and packing up, started our long slog back. Along the way we wandered off on a sucker ridge that didn’t seem right and back tracked to where we knew the route was. While sitting there, whenever the clouds would part, I was looking down on a low point, looking for a lake that we had lunched by on day two on our way in, but could only see black rock and was unsure of which way to go. All of a sudden we got some sunlight and the flat black rock turned into our blue lake. When we reached Central Crag, it started to rain and came down hard the rest of the day.

We reached the marmot gully and I noted fresh marmot scat, so there was at least one surviving critter.

In a later conversation, Don Doyle, the man that heads the marmot recovery operation, said that they had placed a group of marmots there in 2009. The carcass I found was desiccated and totally mummified, suggesting that it likely died in the burrow during winter and was swept out during spring cleaning. Don suggested that anyone finding a dead marmot, that the best plan is to retrieve the carcass intact and deliver it to the Ministry of Environment offices in Nanaimo. All released marmots have a surgically implanted radio transmitter with a unique frequency that can be used for positive identification, or might be able to be reused again. Failing that, if ear tags can be removed and/or a GPS coordinate can be noted and/or photos taken, any information would be appreciated.

We continued to slog on, in the downpour, onto Flower Ridge and after 9 1/2 hours of this, we found level dry (ish) ground near a tarn and set up camp. Then the rain stopped! The next day we woke to clear skies and dried our gear out as best as we could, before packing up and heading down Flower Ridge. It was another 6 1/2 hours hiking back to the truck but at least I had another two summits over 6000 feet climbed with my good friend Tak.

**Participants:** Tak Ogasawara and Peter Rothermel

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## Climbing Camp with Cinder-Bella and an Agitated Park Ranger

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Nadja Steiner with contributions from Silas Boon, Finn Steiner and Anna-Lena Steiner  
September 3-7

It's late August and more than time for another kids climbing camp. This year we decided to set up base at the Buttle Lake Campground and venture from there. Unfortunately the intro session planned for Friday night didn't quite happen since the organizers (ahem us...) were delayed due to technical difficulties. By the time we arrived, most tents were already quiet or echoing with snores. However, it seemed everybody had found their spot on one of the four reserved sites and introduced themselves to each other. The next morning everybody was up early and after a short breakfast we assembled on our campsite for a little review on day-hike-packing and buddy-finding. Crest Mountain was the plan of the day. This was the first time for us as well and I was looking forward to it. After deciding that it was more dangerous for 13 kids to walk 1 kilometre along the shoulder of the road than climb over a broken bridge we decided to take the old trail head. In good mood we hit the trail. However, that one stretched and stretched and streeeeetched..... The calls for food got louder and louder and if the grumbling tummies of a handful of male pre-teens didn't send the message, the coordinated "We Want Food"- call from a few more than a handful of kids voices certainly did. And so, although we were hoping to be at the little lake for lunch we had to break in the middle of the woods without the view. While the cold slowly crept under the clothes the continuation of the hike was slightly delayed due to the refusal of our youngest member (age 6) to switch to his warmer pants. The colour and design did not go along with his perception of style and the issue could only be resolved with intense persuasion from several team members and by finally wearing the beloved brown shorts over the unloved blue pants. With lightened spirits the leftover distance to the little lake was covered rather speedily and that's where for most kids (and adults) the enthusiasm for further hiking ended. While some, however, including young Hailey (8) who has already proven on several other trips that she should not be underestimated, headed for another hour of hiking to some kind of peak, the rest discussed the inviting option of testing the freezing cold water. Finn, under intense cheering, took the first plunge; however, his own cheer got almost stuck in his throat when he realized just how cold it was. Nonetheless others followed and luckily the sun was rather supportive,



Lunch at the lake at Crest Mountain PHOTO: NADJA STEINER

at least she took care of a warm reception after. But I better let him tell in his own words:

### By Finn Steiner (11)

*"On Friday, we packed up our bags and made just before the gate closed. After dinner we dove in our Marmot bags and slept like one, too. Next day we woke up, had breakfast and met with the other kids. Only Lindsay and Silas were new to me" (seems like he counts only the ones in his age....)" We headed off to hike Crest Mountain. After testing a rickety bridge, we went up a trail and after losing what felt like 1lb in calories, carbs and vitamins, I started the chorus: WE WANT FOOD and eventually the parents obliged. After lunch we got out into the sunlight and being a young naturalist I identified AND ate: Mountain blueberries, wild blueberries, huckleberries, wild black current and even an unripe salmon berry. We finally made it to the lake. It was so hot, and under encouragement, I changed into my swim trunks and dove into the lake! It was so cold I thought I was swimming in liquid nitrogen. We made a bow and arrow for Lindsay and hiked down, singing, swapping jokes and talking about school. We made it down and I went with Lindsay to Gold River to get fuel, eat chips and have a good time...."*

Finn was a bit more saddened, when he realized at home that his new watch, which he had taken off for the swim has been left behind on Crest Mountain. Anna-Lena, a bit frustrated that all the other teenagers had on short notice bailed out of the camp, while her mean parents forced her to come along despite the much more exciting Saanich Fair, was absolutely delighted to have her friend Faeryn (with parents) belatedly join the crowd for the day. The two girls spend the rest of the summit break as well as the whole way down chatting and discussing the important things in teenage life. This could certainly only be heard in the back since the front was dominated by the scream-singing of another part of the group.





Sue (standing), kids from left to right: Finn, Raven, Hailey, Lindsay, Silas, Martha and Daniel

PHOTO: NADJA STEINER

Harry's ears were certainly ringing, since he had innocently agreed to take on the lead. I guess we shouldn't forget to view the major ascent with the perspective of a teenage girl:

#### **Anna-Lena, 14**

*I seem to recall a lot of noise and screaming for food from the opposite end of the line of hikers as we twisted our way up to the (not quite) summit. The opposite end, meaning the front of the group. Meaning, as you've probably guessed by now, I was at the back. As usual. All alone. With only adults for company. (Actually, I think they were pretty happy to be there with me. The alternative would be a headache at the hands of the little monsters in the front. Honestly, I don't know how they have the energy to run, talk, and sing, well, if you can even call it singing, all at the same time). I was a bit annoyed because who in their right mind would miss the Saanich Fair to hike up a mountain. But at the same time it was nice seeing the beautiful scenery around us, and feeding the whiskey jacks when we stopped. Maybe that's why the kids were so hungry. Because they were giving all their snacks away every time we stopped. Hmmmm. (Me? noooooooo, of course not me. Well, maybe just a little...) The ascent up the mountain was tougher than I was expecting, but we finally began to see it getting lighter in the canopy, and at that point the singing had turned to hungry chanting.*

*Eventually we found a light spot and decided to have our lunch on the trail instead of at the top. After a quick lunch, because it started cooling off, we packed up again and started to make our way to the top. Well, that was the plan, anyways. First we had to deal with a mini-crisis revolving around the young-*

*est member of our group, not wanting to put on his long pants, because they were blue. Eventually we resolved the problem thanks to our lovely "Auntie Sue" putting the beloved shorts on top of the tantrum-inducing blue pants. Of course, ten minutes later the sun came out again, completely ruining our efforts. Ah well. After much stomping up the mountain, our efforts were rewarded by the view we got at the tiny little pond/lake thing. We could see so much, and the sun was out, which caused some of the more eager people (yes, this means you, Finn,) to go for a swim in the deceptively warm-looking water. Of course, they were out of the water sooner than they had expected. For others, it seemed perfect weather for continuing up to the top of the mountain.*

*Halfway around the lake on our way up we heard a sudden disturbance, consisting mainly of "Hey! How'ya doin'" and "oh hai!" "where did you come from?" As I look for the source of*

*excitement, I see my friend Faeryn and her parents Jim and Libby coming up the trail. Yeah! My day just got a heck of a lot better. Of course, my mission to the summit was aborted immediately in favour of sitting on top of a cliff by the water and catching up on today's world. (Yes, I know what you're thinking- But that was real important. Adults usually say this accompanied by an eye roll.) However, Au Contraire, Mon frère. It was very educational. Anyways, needless to say, the hike down practically zoomed by, as it often does with someone to talk to.*

Everybody was happy to reach the trail head, it had been a rather exhausting hike and not necessarily my first choice for a kids hike again. Everybody was pooped and the planned "evening challenge extraordinaire" was postponed to the next evening. This was very much to the disappointment of young Cees (7), who not only had kept up with the big kids all day, but also seemed the least tired. However, maybe it was because he knew he would have to miss it the following evening.

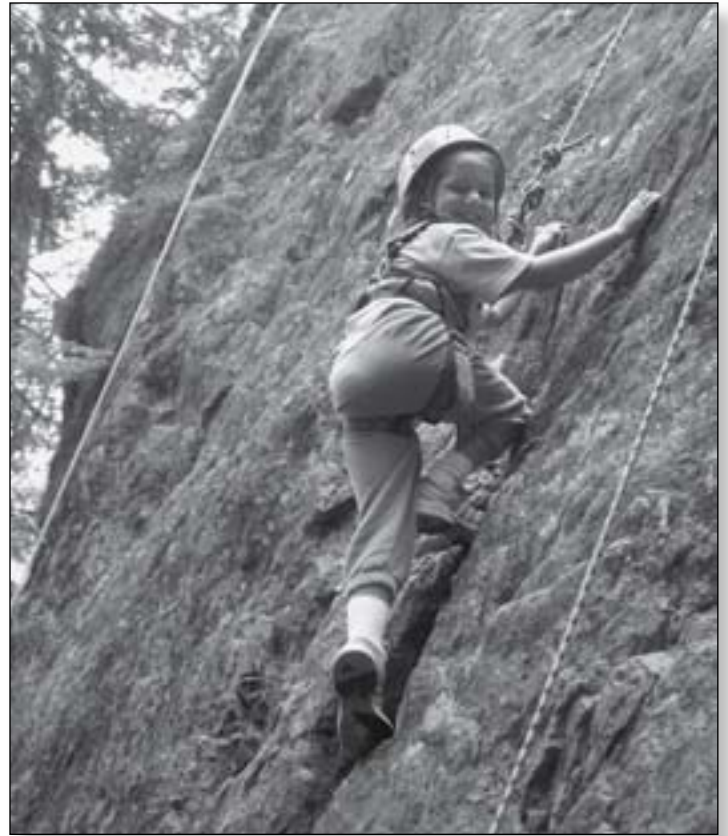
The next day was reserved for climbing at Crest Creek Crag, something especially Silas had been patiently waiting for:  
**By Silas Boon (11)**

*"After the long drive from Nanaimo to our campsite we finally arrived. We set up camp and met who we were sharing the site with, Ron and his family. After a yummy dinner we went to bed. The next day we woke up early and drove to the start of the Crest Mountain trail. It was a long uphill struggle until we finally made it to the lake. Just before the lake we got good views over the surrounding peaks. There were lots of wild blueberries*



*which we all ate greedily. I didn't have enough energy to hike to the peak so most of us stayed and played at the lake. After a not so tiring hike back down, and more blueberries, we drove back to the campsite. That night I slept like a log. The next day was the day I had been waiting for, the day we went climbing. I was the first one to complete three climbs. One of the climbs took me almost half an hour to complete. One of the climbs was very mossy and slippery. Another had a huge overhang and when I thought I had made it there was another wall right in front of me. That evening we nearly got asked to leave the campsite when my dad was singing an opera version of Cinderella as part of the evening fun that we had. The next morning was wet and so we woke up, packed up and drove home. This was my first activity with the Alpine club and it was awesome."*

While Harry with several other parents put in the ropes, the kids and myself did a review on climbing safety (remember the turtle helmet and control buckles?) and dug out all the good climbing stretches... Warmed up and keen we hit the rock. This was certainly a lot of fun for most, and a big challenge to overcome fear for some. The kids who weren't actively climbing rock were going back in time and many a ranger has been seen with bow and arrow that afternoon. Some were unsatisfiable and kept going up again and again especially little Martha (7) and her older brother Silas. For Silas we finally had to put a rope into a 5.10 so he could challenge himself for the rest of the afternoon until even his young arms gave up. After most of the kids had exhausted themselves, the adults got their turn as well and, yeah, does it feel good to climb real rock!!!! Crest Creek Crags is a great place for climbing especially with kids (I know many of you have known this for a long time....). We will definitely get the kids (and adults) back there again. We kept climbing until late afternoon, only few parents succeeding at the wall we called Silas' challenge (I wasn't one of them, grmpf..., next time...). Some of us then had to prepare for departure and the rest was enjoying free time which some spent getting necessities in Gold River, others for a quick dip in Butte Lake; although "free time" might not be the right word since climbing itself is one of the highest forms of free time in itself, right?). After dinner we reconvened with a huge bag of costumes around the campfire for a little bit of team building activity (Courtesy CISV – children's international summer village program members Harry and Finn). Sorted into groups via the distribution of playing cards the day before, we were assigned to reiterate the Cinderella story in the one or other way. We had 20 minutes of preparation time which my team members Raven, Anna-Lena and Lindsay certainly enjoyed while creating the Cowboy version of Cinderella. Watching the different scenarios afterwards definitely raised the spirits (and the voices, ous). Peter and EJ were starring superbly in the opera version with narrator Silas. The finale came with the Vampire "orchestration", Cinder-bella dramatically impersonated by fully bearded Mike. The vampires were only shortly irritated by the sudden



*Martha climbing at Crest Creek Crags* PHOTO: NADJA STEINER

spotlight shining on them and continued with even more enthusiasm, unaware that the spotlight was in fact caused by the front beams of the park ranger truck. The lady in charge was not impressed by the apparent ignorance of the performers, and the audience was simply too deep in laughter to listen to her lament and clarify the situation. Luckily this was our last performance and we willingly agreed to turn the unbearable noise level down, "conveniently" not exposing our alpine club member identity. When I looked at the watch it was 9:45 p.m. and the boom box at a campsite further up was still happily going. I didn't feel quite that bad anymore... This was for sure a fitting finish to our camp, however with the impending doom of school starting, everybody packed up the next morning to head home. We left with the good feeling of a great weekend, wonderful new and old friends and many adventures yet to come...

**Participants:** Su and Raven Castle, Tanya Inglis and Davis Inglis-McFetrick, Jenny, Liam and Eryn, Peter, Silas and Martha Boon, Ron, Daniel and Hailey Burleson, E.J. Hurst, Mike and Lindsay Richards, Arno and Cees Dirks, Harald, Nadja, Finn and Anna-Lena Steiner, Jim and Faeryn Curtin, Libi Stewart

# 2010 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS



**Vancouver Island**  
**Mountain Scenery Winner**  
*Approach to Septimus*  
Photo: Tom Roozendaal



**Mountain Portrait Winner**  
*Rick – Belay on The Thumb*  
Photo: Ken Wong



**Mountain Activity Winner**  
*Dining in Huayhuash Mountains*  
Photo: Christine Fordham

**Mountain Scenery Winner**  
*Snowpatch Shadow*  
Photo: Nicole Barrette



**Mountain Humour Winner**  
*After Lunch Naps*  
Photo: Colleen Kasting



**Nature Winner**  
*Bird's Eye-view of the Andes*  
Photo: Catrin Brown



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## Mount Maitland

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Lindsay Elms

September 5

Sunday morning dawned blue and cloudless! The short burst of rain in the late afternoon the day before failed to penetrate the upper canopy to the underbrush below although there was a hint of dew on the salal this morning. We decided to put our gaiters on just in case! Although a path had once been clipped along the old road there was recent activity as Forestry engineers had been along hanging flagging tape at every bent and culvert and surveyors twine was strung out the length of the road. It appeared this road was due to receive a fresh make-over in the near future, a sure indicator that active logging is forecast in the pristine forest above.

We had camped in the back of the vehicle beside a small lake above the Kennedy River near the head of a logging road that would give us (currently) the best approach to Mount Maitland, the southern most peak of the Maitland Range. For me this was the last peak on the west side of Highway 4 to be climbed! It was one of those overlooked peaks that rarely received attention, firstly because of its diminutive height (it is the lowest in the range), secondly because there didn't appear to be any easy approach and thirdly because of the nature of the bush and steep slopes on this part of the island. One early ascent back in October 1994 saw a party led by Sandy Briggs have an epic on the descent. Jack Fisher wrote: "Sandy was concerned with getting out of the bush before nightfall, and instead found his reputation was enhanced to a new level." At one point, around 7 p.m., they found themselves between a 'gully and a hard place' where they wound their way down the bluffs to the place where two creeks converged. As 'no one could shine a light on the situation', they forced the route by rappelling in the dark eventually reaching the vehicles at 10 p.m. and Victoria at 3 a.m..

In the book *Guide to Climbing and Hiking in Southwestern B.C.* Bruce Fairley says of Mount Maitland: "The name is incorrectly placed on map 92F/3. It should be 3 km farther north". He was assuming it would be the highest mountain in that group of peaks in the Maitland Range, however, the highest point is the aptly named Hidden Peak. Unfortunately Mount Maitland happens to be the lowest named summit in the whole range. On the 92F/3 1:50,000 Effingham River map it shows Mount Maitland as being a little over 1200m in height and it indicates the peak having a twin summit, however, it is impossible to tell from the map that the eastern point is the slightly higher. As a point of confusion, on the government website for the Ministry of Integrated Land Management Bureau which is responsible for the naming of

peaks it gives the lat/long for Mount Maitland as a point a few hundred metres southeast of the highpoint on the map. This anomaly can be explained by the fact that the survey marker and station that surveyor's George Jackson and Robert McCaw occupied while taking azimuth readings was at this location and not on the summit. Maybe the main summit appeared too daunting to climb!

From the end of the logging road we observed blue flagging tape attached to the branches of trees and hoped this would mark the route. Silly us for believing that we would have a flagged route to follow! Next a piece of yellow flagging on the other side of the creek gave us a bit of hope but again no! I consoled myself with the thought that this climb was up to me to get us to the top and back again without any assistance from previous parties. The bush was typical for this area of the island – thick underbrush, lots of blowdowns and rotten logs that looked solid! Still one must always look on the bright side - eventually the bush MUST become a little easier to negotiate. After an hour and a half we broke out of the forest and started up through a thigh-high fireweed/sword fern slope that was overlying scree. Here was the easy bush we were looking for! Another hour and a half saw us at the top of the slope cutting across to our left through some trees to where we popped out into an upper basin. Here we scrambled up a rock slab to where we could scan the rest of the mountain and plan our next moves!

Above us was the jagged ridge leading up to the 1240+m sub-summit but immediately below it on the east side there was a boulder field that swung across the to the South Ridge of the summit. The tricky part would be getting across some initial gullies to the boulder field. As it turned out, after a little negotiating we managed to get across and eventually scrambled up to a notch in the South Ridge. Now we could see the summit of Mount Maitland to the south only it looked a little further away than we had anticipated. To reach it required a descent of 100m, traverse the ridge and then a climb of 120m, however, the summit block looked a little intimidating from this angle. Hopefully there was a way around it and up to the summit.

We slide down (literally) to the saddle then scrambled across to the end of the ridge and out of the trees to where we could see the peak. The twin summits were obvious and there was a boulder filled gully running up between the two. We decided to go for the summit by going light with just the rope! At the top of the gully we deked out to the left through some trees up to a rock-wall. We then angled around and up to the right under the rock to a left-slanting rock draw. This draw on 4th class rock then took us up to within a few metres of the summit. A short move over a boulder and we were there! A small pile of rocks indicated the highest point which was first built by Derek Fletcher and Dave Routledge in August 1990 when they climbed the peak from the Sand River



Main. Although swirling clouds were coming and going we did get a view but because time was running short we didn't linger. Initially I had been a little concerned by the incoming cloud but my fears were soon alleviated. I felt more at ease that we wouldn't be enveloped by mist! We climbed down to the saddle, stumbled down the gully and then angled back across to our packs. A quick drink and then we traversed the saddle and started up the steep fir needle slope to the notch in the ridge.

We picked our way across the boulder field and found our route through the tricky section to above the upper basin. By now it was 4:45 and the day was drawing on but first we had to take on more water and some nourishment. We gave ourselves 15 minutes before continuing with the descent. The scree gully and fireweed/sword fern slopes were straight-forward but Val was getting tired and needed to be careful. I was only too aware how quickly accidents can happen even on easy terrain having dislocated my thumb a month ago after a stumble on the flat.

Although the scree gully continued further down we decided to follow our ascent route through the trees. The saying 'familiarity breeds contempt' wasn't written for the mountains as a familiar tree, a snag or a rock, even a pile of bear shit, is like an old friend and a confidence booster in your route finding ability.

Lower down the bush became thicker and knarlier but it didn't matter because we knew we were getting closer to the old logging road. We dropped down into the creek just where the piece of yellow flagging was hanging limply and crossed to the other side. Ten minutes later we were walking the road back to the vehicle. It had taken us 15 minutes shy of 12 hours for the round trip but the nice thing was we had beaten the dark and weren't going to have an epic. Epics might make for a great campfire story or a telling at a slide presentation but at the time one's anxiety is max'd out. We may have been tired but we were happy!

**Participants:** Val Wootton and Lindsay Elms

**Postscript 1:** Mount Maitland is named after British Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Maitland, the 11th Earl of Lauderdale, GCB (1803-1878). Maitland was the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Station in Esquimalt from 1860 to 1862.

**Postscript 2:** Nothing to do with Maitland but in 2008, 14 years on, Sandy Briggs got back to the car at 3:30 a.m. and Victoria at 6:45 a.m. after a climb just across the highway – aren't you suppose to get wiser the older you get!

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## 5040 Peak via Cobalt Lake

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Martin Smith

May 24 and September 24



*5040 reflected in Cobalt Lake* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

5040 Peak is no stranger to the pages of the Island Bushwhacker Annual. Past reports, however, have dealt with the Northwest Ridge route from Marion Main. A new route via Cobalt Lake was put in by the Alberni Valley Outdoor Club several years ago. This option starts further along Marion and at a higher elevation and is fast becoming the route of choice for winter and summer climbs alike.

I knew nothing about this approach when I sent an email to Peter Rothermel asking if he'd care to meet me for an early season trip to 5040. Not only Peter but Karen, Rudi and Doug from AVOC were equally keen and we arranged to meet on Marion Road on the morning of May 24. Still ignorant of the Cobalt Lake option I car camped at the usual spot between the bridges at the bottom of the Northwest Ridge and was waiting,



5040 routes from the ridge above Cobalt Lake PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

booted and spurred, for the others when they turned up at the next day only to be told that we'd be driving further up the road. The spurs are only artistic license of course but the boots made for interesting driving as we bounced up the increasingly rough road towards the Marion/Effingham pass.

Just before the pass snow blocked the road so we hoofed it up, over and down to the well flagged route start at N49 10.935 W125 18.142 in what had quickly become lovely spring weather.

As soon as we stepped into the slash I became immediately aware of the tremendous job that AVOC have done on this route. They've even cleared and built a trail through the slash. What a treat! And in the happy frame of mind that always accompanies nice surprises such as this, we were soon out of the industrial debris, heading up steep but lovely old growth and into the alpine right at snow line in less than an hour from the car.

Pete decided that he'd got things he really had to do at home, so the remaining four of us donned skis (Rudi and Doug) or snowshoes (Karen and Martin) and headed east up towards the lake.

Snowshoeing is not my favourite thing to do. Side-hilling on snowshoes ranks even further down the list and side-hilling on snowshoes in mashed potatoes is somewhere on a par with having my finger nails pulled out. Thus the happy frame of mind was severely attenuated by the time we pulled into Cobalt Lake about an hour later, whereupon Karen and I decided to just enjoy the day whilst the skiers carried on.

And enjoy it we did in this lovely spot, sitting in the warm sun and drinking in the views across the valley to Triple Peak and The Cats Ears. After another hour or so Rudi and Doug could be seen on the summit and half an hour later they rejoined us. Rudi pronounced the snow conditions as crap and that was good enough for me.

Well before we geared up and headed back down about 2 p.m. I'd already put a return trip on my schedule.

Four months to the day later found me at the now familiar trailhead and heading up the friendly slash at 9 a.m. In the clear conditions I could see that the excellent trail continued above where there had been snow before and I arrived at Cobalt just over an hour after leaving the car. It was even lovelier than it had been in May. 5040 beamed down on me from above and its twin did likewise from the depths of the lake. What a day this was shaping up to be!

After a long break at the lake I headed off on continuing excellent trail north along the west shore of Cobalt Lake, directly up the forested slope facing me and onto the open ridge above. Once out of the last trees I turned right (north-east) and walked up to the rocky bowl below and to the south of the summit block at about N49 11.399 W125 17.008 and about 1400m elevation. Two ways to proceed from here were apparent.

- Head right (east) and into the col between 5040 and a lower satellite to the south. Then turn left (northwest) and up the ridge to the top. Or
- Go straight ahead up steep slopes direct to the summit ridge.

I chose the latter for the ascent and subsequently came down via the col. The climbing route was grass/heather at first leading to rock/scree with some exposure and was very enjoyable. Once on the ridge the summit was just 5 minutes away and, in total, only a gentle hour above the lake.

Of all the many reasons to add 5040 to your hit list, the single most compelling reason must be the summit view. I thought I'd seen the best the Island had to offer but the views from 5040 left me wide-eyed and lost for words. I would never have believed that so much beauty was possible within one 360° arc. Barkley Sound, Hall, Triple, Cats Ears, Hidden, Steamboat, Pogo, Adder, Nahmint, Arrowsmith – all these you would expect. But the Olympic Mountains in Washington State – 160 -170 kilometres to the southeast! And is that The Golden Hinde 60 kilometres to the northwest? The bearing was correct but the aspect unfamiliar from this angle.

You'll know what I mean when I write that this was one of those perfect, perfect mountain days that keep us coming back to the hills time after time. For the very modest effort required to reach the summit, 5040 delivers the goods in spades. All thanks to our friends at AVOC. Way to go guys!

### Approach

Drive up Marion Main for 6 kilometres to a flat wide area between two bridges. This is the access point for the northwest ridge route. Proceed another 3.6 kilometres up the increasingly rough road, over the divide between the Marion and Effingham drainages and down the latter to the trailhead for the Cobalt Lake route at N49 10.935 W125 18.142

and 625m elevation. There is room to park 2 or 3 vehicles at the trailhead and room for several more just a couple of hundred metres back up the road.

#### **Approximate route data**

TH to Cobalt Lake ~ 1.25 - 1.5 hours

Cobalt Lake to summit ~ 1 hour

Total descent ~ 2 hours

Although these times are short they don't include the many stops you'll want to make to take photographs and generally soak in this wonderful area. I'd allow at least 6-7 hours overall.

A MapSource/Garmin tracklog is available for the asking for the approach and summit routes. Just send me an email.

This article originally appeared on my SummitPost web page. Follow the link <http://www.summitpost.org/mountain/rock/558245/50-40-peak.html> for the complete article and lots more photos.

**Participants:** May – Rudi Bruegger, Karen George, Doug Hurrell, Peter Rothermel and Martin Smith  
September – Martin Smith solo

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## **Augerpoint to Ralph Ridge Traverse**

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**Pam Olson**

**September 29 - October 3**

After a wet September, the weather promised to clear up for a few days. We had been watching the weather forecasts closely and when a string of little suns appeared on Environment Canada's website, we decided we had to get in one maybe last hike of the season. A stretch of five days of good weather meant we could tackle one of the longer back country routes in Strathcona. The Augerpoint to Ralph Ridge traverse came to mind. We have hiked this route in four days but five is more relaxing.

We left the Victoria area about 05:30 on Wednesday morning and got to the Jack Shark Augerpoint trail head around 11:00 having stopped for last minute groceries and coffee in Parksville. The trail was dry and in good condition. With the shorter autumn days we stopped around 17:30 hoping to have finished all our camp chores before dark. We set up camp near two small pools of water on the ridge above Shark Lake. By 19:30 it was dark and Jupiter was visible in the eastern sky.

Thursday morning we woke around 05:30; the sky was clear and we were on our way before 08:00. Before descending



*View of the Golden Hinde and Marble Meadows from Augerpoint*

PHOTO: PAM OLSON

the scree slope toward Ruth Masters Lake we dropped our packs at the col and did a quick ascent of Augerpoint Mountain. The route was dry and easy. The thick summit record has only a few pages of entries.

In the section between Ruth Masters Lake and Mt. Albert Edward we spotted two small hawks circling above the meadows. If following the route established decades ago and described in Hiking Trails 3 from Albert Edward we would have had to ascend the mountain then contour around above Charity and Hope lakes then around the north side of Mount Frink to reach the top of the ridge.

Several years ago we found a shortcut route from Albert Edward to Charity Lake; a gully the deer use to get to the Charity Lake area. The gully was steep but there were plenty of trees and bush holds. About the point where the steepness began to decrease we wanted to traverse toward Charity Lake but encountered several fallen cedar trees which we had to bash our way through and around. Soon were on the rocks above Charity. We worked our way around to the outflow end of the lake and crossed the creek on the logjam; a fallen cedar tree making the exit a bit trickier than it should have been.

By the time we reached Charity Lake the sun was starting to retreat behind the trees. We set up camp on one of the few flat tent sized areas.

*Photo 2: Charity Lake*

Overnight, the wind picked up and the temperature was fairly warm. Friday morning when we awoke at about 06:30 the temperature was around 17° C and it was still windy. We were on our way before 09:00.

There was a bit of a bushwhacking to get to the base of the slabs below Mt. Frink at the south side of Charity Lake. Just to the right of a small waterfall we followed a ramp that led up to the slabs. Once on the slabs we walked toward the ridge picking the easiest route and avoiding the rivulets. The





*Misty morning, with ptarmigans* PHOTO: PAM OLSON

dry slabs were an easy walk albeit a bit exposed. Nearing the ridge we had a choice of exits to reach the top. We rejected the ugly gullies in favour of a short, vegetation covered cliff with good hand and foot holds and evidence that animals had used the route. Once on the ridge top we walked to the northwest and found the cairns marking the route between Mt. Frink and Mt. George V.

Walking up to the ridge top we were protected from the wind by the mountain side. By the time we were on the ridge we were in the wind again which now was gusting strongly. Traversing around to the base of Mt. George V was easy as the route was dry. This section crossed steep meadows with some precipitous gullies dropping down to frozen lakes. Getting over George V was relatively easy as the slopes were gentle and covered in dry vegetation and rocky patches.

The first time we hiked this route we took the time to walk across the entire summit ridge just so we could say we had been to the top of Mt. George V. This time, at about 1935m, we cut back to the west around a bump and found the loose, narrow ledges that led to the scree slope and then to the snow patches at the col.

We passed the survey marker and continuing along the ridge we enjoyed a very pleasant walk over rock. There were numerous pools and some snow patches. At about 17:30 we found a suitable camping spot and set up for the evening. While the weather had been sunny all day the wind was cool. From our vantage point we could see thick clouds beginning to form over the valleys and the Straight obscuring the lights of Comox.

Clouds still blanketed the lower levels when we arose Saturday morning around 06:30. By the time we were packed up and ready to leave, fog had rolled in.

The evening before we had heard ptarmigan calling and in the morning we spotted a group of seven birds very close to our camping spot. Their plumage was beginning to change from mottled brown to white.

The route along the ridge was obvious and fairly well marked with cairns and even in the fog we had no trouble finding our way to the gully that led into the Upper Siokum valley.

Having hiked this route a few times in both directions we knew what to expect but we remembered the first time we came to the gully above the Upper Siokum; there was a cairn marking something. The gully dropped down forever and we were sure that could not possibly be the

route. It wasn't. After closer inspection we found that on one side of the gully the route contoured around a small cliff with good hand and foot holds. From there it was a matter of following a wide ramp that led to a short scree gully then to grassy slopes. The few cairns have been augmented by recently placed flagging tape.

At the bottom of the gully we continued to follow the flagging tape across the grassy slopes out of curiosity as to where the flaggers were going. They seemed to be heading for the lake but we didn't find out as we diverted from the standard route. From the Upper Siokum the established route turns south and ascends to rejoin the ridge between two bumps.

Since we were planning to exit by way of Ralph Ridge we started up the slabs aiming for the col at the head of Ralph Ridge. The slabs were dry and very easy with some exposure. As we were nearing the top of the slabs the fog became thicker but finally we were able to see a cliff wall and that meant we were a bit too far to the right. We corrected our course and soon reached the col. The wind was blowing the fog through the saddle and we could not see much. As soon as we rounded the bump at the head of Ralph Ridge and started down the ridge itself we were out of most of the fog.

By around 16:30 we had reached the pools near the 1585m level. Having been down Ralph Ridge earlier in the summer we were aware that there was a small pool at about 1370m that might have water. On the chance that the pool had dried up we filled our water bottles. We also filled two



three-litre collapsible Nalgene Canteens about two-thirds full and put them in our packs. We've descended Ralph Ridge several times and have not always taken the same route through the cliff bands. Within the past couple of years the route down Ralph has been re-flagged so we decided to see how the flaggers had gotten through the cliff bands. The route took us right to the little pool we were planning to reach and not only was the pool filled with water there was another pool of rainwater next to it. We set up camp for the night.

Sunday morning we woke to a dry, clear morning and a dew-free tent. In fact, we had woken every morning of the trip to find there had been no dew overnight. The sky was a bit cloudy when we started out but the clouds cleared off later. As well, the cloud layer over Buttle Lake drifted off to the north rather than rising and engulfing us in mist. We continued down Ralph Ridge.

At the confluence of Shepherd Creek and Ralph River there was a wide but slippery log to cross Ralph. We rejected this crossing in favour of wading across Shepherd a bit further upstream where the creek is shallower. By the time we reached the crossing place at Shepherd Creek the day was sunny. After crossing the creek we scrambled along an elk trail that joined up with the Shepherd Creek Nature Trail then followed that trail to the Westmin/Buttle Lake Road. DF stayed with packs and ice axes at the roadside across from Ralph River Camp Ground while I took my wallet and car keys and started walking down the road toward the place where we had left the car at the Augerpoint trail head.

There was not a lot of traffic in either direction. A couple of vehicles passed me without stopping. Not long after I had walked past the Karst Creek Day Area, a vehicle came along and stopped for me. The driver cheerfully said "Hop in. I'll drive you to your car." He said he had stopped across from the camp ground where he had talked with DF so he knew where I was going. By 16:30 we had changed into clean clothes and were on our way home.

Walking from Ralph River Camp Ground to Karst Creek Day Area, I counted 20 beverage containers in the northbound ditch, the majority of which were Lucky Lager tins. The next two most popular brands were Labatt's Blue and Budweiser.

**Participants:** Team Bleue, Pam Olsen (ACC member since sometime in the late 1970's) and DF (who wishes to be anonymous and would not belong to any club that would have him for a member.)

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## Mount Beadnell and Lupin Mountain

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Tony Vaughn  
October 2-3



*Lupin Mountain from Mt Beadnell* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

Beadnell and Lupin mountains, a pair of hiking peaks, are located on a series of ridges high above the east side of Buttle Lake. Lupin is located at the northern end, with Beadnell as the high point on Rodger's Ridge at 5728ft/1746 metres.

The weather forecast for this weekend was questionable for hiking, but Martin and I went anyway in hopes of getting a weather window to climb both mountains the next day.

As we drove up the Quinsam Mine road, onto Argonaut and Granite Mains, the visibility became worse and worse until by the time we reached the spur road to the trailhead, it was down to about 100 metres. Finding the trailhead had been quite fortuitous. As we passed the turn to Beadnell Lake, by chance Martin wanted to check out a spur road that branched off the main line towards the ridge to the south of Lupin. In doing so he came across a parked vehicle and a trail which obviously led up toward the ridge. We thought that this was definitely worth investigating so we set up camp here for the night.

Overnight the clouds lifted and by morning we had good visibility to allow us a clear start up the trail, which we hoped would take us to the ridge. It soon became obvious that this was the main route up to the ridge used in winter by snowmobilers, as a wide swath of trees had been cleared for access through the forest to the sub alpine. On reaching the sub alpine there were many clear signs of passage, with a worn boot track in places and flagging which led us past tarns and heather benches below the ridge.



*The new cabin on Rodger's Ridge* PHOTO: TONY VAUGHN

Finally we sighted a fairly recently built cabin. The log book inside indicated that it had been built in 2008. Beyond the cabin signs of travel became less distinct with just the odd bit of flagging here and there. However the way up was obvious, traversing over a shoulder towards a bench. Here a heather gully led up to the ridge top and on to the summit of Beadnell.

Following a break for admiring the views over Buttle Lake and the Peaks in Strathcona Park visible between the clouds, we decided to explore along an east west branch of Rodger's Ridge.

Travel along this ridge was most pleasant with great views all around, down to the Beadnell Lakes, into the Adrian Creek valley and along the ridge to Mount Adrian and Alexandra Peak, both of which we had climbed earlier in the year.

Our next order of business was to climb Lupin Mountain, but first we wanted to investigate the new cabin on our way. We found the sliding door unlocked so we entered to find a comfortably appointed cabin fitted out with woodstove, table and benches and a sleeping loft being developed upstairs. Whether it was built legally on private land or not, it's nice to know that it's there in the event of an emergency for those travelling in the Rodger's Ridge area in summer and winter.

Leaving the cabin behind we returned to the low point on the ridge between Beadnell and Lupin, by way of the trail we had followed in. From this tarn filled saddle there was no boot track or sign of travel to follow. It was simply a matter of heading upward through forest in a northerly direction to the top of the sub alpine ridge.

The summit of Lupin was some way along this ridge which has many areas of beautiful tarns and heather benches. There are also quite a number of ups and downs along the way and many trees to obscure the view. After about two hours we reached a point on the ridge that the GPS map in-

formed us was the summit. As this wasn't a high point, the map was obviously incorrect. Having passed a high point behind a large tarn just a few hundred feet back that looked promising, we thought we had better check it out. So back we went, passing around the tarn and up through trees and bush to the top. Here we found a cairn, so we concluded that this must be the official summit of Lupin Mountain.

By now the sky was darkening and clouds were drifting up from the valley giving us concern that there was going to be a repeat of the previous evening's thick low cloud, and no visibility. With this in mind we rushed back along the ridge without taking the time to savour some of the very pretty tarn filled meadows on the way. We reached the trail at the same point that we had left it earlier in the day and followed it back to the trailhead without the mist forming as we had feared. We reached our vehicle at about 6 p.m. just before it got dark.

Lupin Mountain itself is not an appealing objective, which probably accounts for the lack of visits it gets, but the ridge leading up to it is quite pleasant.

So ends another weekend in the mountains and a couple more ticks in the guide book.

**Participants:** Martin Smith and Tony Vaughn

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## Mount Schoen, More Marmots?

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Peter Rothermel

October 16

Mount Schoen had been on my personal list of objectives for several years and even though Tak had been up this mountain already, he agreed to go again. His first trip with Doug Hurrell took about 8 hours round trip, in the spring on snow much of the way. They were also a decade younger, so that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

I sent out invitations to a few friends and got a positive response from Tony and Linda. Unfortunately, Martin couldn't make it, due to his first grandchild's imminent arrival.

We drove up on the Friday and car camped at the route start, just at the southern edge of Schoen Lake Provincial Park and did a recce hike to Schoen Creek before dinner.

The following morning we were off just after first light. We found places to cross the braided creek in our boots, except for one spot that Tak opted to go bare footed, while the rest of us splashed as fast as we could, hoping to displace as much water as we could... and it worked!

Up through the forest, the ever steepening forest, the first growth forest where the underbrush is thin, but the fall-



*Schoen Peak on approach, West aspect* PHOTO: PETER ROTHERMEL

en sticks need to be climbed over, rather than stepped over. It went on forever and when the trees thinned, it got worse. We found the best route up what would likely have been an easy boot pack in the snow, but we were pulling ourselves up on downward laying willow and alder. We finally reached the tree line at noon and had a quick break (not lunch).

Looking up at the headwall, there seemed to be no easy gully, but Tak said if we went up the scree-field, trending westward, we would find it and sure enough it was there. Yet without snow it had some steep rock steps and there were weeps that were iced up. We finally came to one step that wouldn't go and tossing back and forth, we couldn't find anything better. It was 1:00 and our turn around time was set for 1:30 and I was grumbling about giving it up. Tak gave it one more try and made it go. With that encouragement, the rest of us followed and all got up the gully.

Now we were in the windy, cold, snow zone and still, unbeknownst to us, with a long ways to go. Along the way we came across small tracks, in the snow, of an animal that gamboled around in a playful way... a marmot? We finally reached the summit at 2:15 and snapped a few photos and placed a new register and headed down. Just before the top of our gully we came across the tracks of a larger creature mixing with the smaller "marmot" tracks. I searched around, but the snow was too powdery to identify the larger animal's tracks, although they looked to be about 4 to 5 inches in diameter. There was no blood or any other thing to note, so the track encounter is a mystery.

Heading down the gully, there was some pretty loose rock and we kept our group close together, so any rock that let go wouldn't gain much momentum if it were to hit someone below. We had brought two twin ropes, 7.5 mm X 40 metres and put in a rappel/hand line on one of the steps, which slowed things down a bit and reached our "lunch" spot at 4:00 and finally had our real lunch.

Heading down felt fast, but we knew we were going to get caught by the dark. Tony had his GPS and had stored our route up, so on our way down the forested ridge, I would be leading with my instincts and every now and then Tony would call out, "bear left" or "bear right". I was amazed at how right on the route I was most of the time, especially since I have never thought of my instinctive route finding skills all that great.

Finally darkness fell and we all had our headlamps on. Heading down through the upper forest went well enough, but when we reached the lower slopes, the temperature was warmer and our breaths fogged up our vision. Also, the trees were bigger and every time Tony would say "bear right", or "bear left", inevitably a four foot diameter fallen tree would be blocking the path. Being the point man, I was constantly tripping or falling into holes and finding devils club. Finally we reached the creek and we splashed through the water, with no care about getting our feet wet, knowing we were close to "home".

Still we had to make our way uphill, with Tony calling, "We're almost to the road" and next thing, I saw our boot prints from the morning and we were in the land of dry clothes.

I was so impressed with Tony's GPS talents that I went out and bought one the next week. Now, if I could just figure out how to make it talk to me!

**Participants:** Linda Berube, Tony Vaughn, Tak Ogasawara and Peter Rothermel



Lindsay Elms

Five! Four! Three! Two! One! The clock clicks over from 23:59:59 (1999) to 00:00:00 (2000). The cheers go up. Happy New Year! You turn to your wife, husband or significant other and give them a kiss, the first one of many for the new millennium. After the kiss you shake hands with your friends who you are sharing this once in a lifetime moment with. You are happy, laughing and feeling great! For some the euphoria is compounded by alcohol. But still, how often do you get to celebrate a new millennium? Once every thousand years the astrologists tell us.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the mountains the first snowflake, which has drifted down from the blackened sky, touches down after midnight adding to the accumulating snowpack. Its shape and size supposedly unique, but once it touches down it immediately bonds with all the other snowflakes and becomes one. Its unseen uniqueness gone forever! In the coming months before it all melts away, skiers, snowshoers and mountaineers might walk on what is left of that snowflake and never realize that it was the first to land in the new millennium.

At five minutes past twelve, after the initial celebrations, you realize that the world has not come to an end the way some soothsayers had predicted and the national power grid is still humming along. The Y2K glitch that was supposed to create havoc with any electronic device with built-in timing (especially those diabolical computers) has happily clicked over from 1999 to 2000. All that hype and stress for nothing! Within minutes it is all forgotten, stored away in some remote recess of the cerebral cortex.

Eleven years on we look back and think how long ago that night was and then remember the other New Year celebrations since then. We're all "Eleven" years older (that's Eleven with a capital "E"). If you were in your teens you are now in your twenties and if you were 40 you are now 51. Where did all those years go? You begin thinking about what you did and whether you achieved your goals!

You are not alone when it comes to reflecting on the past year and decade (plus 1.) Every year the CBC looks back at the year in news: stories that inspired people, stories that changed the world and the best and worst in politics. Even weather forecasters look back at the year, however, they also look back at the last decade, the last 20 years and the last century hoping to find patterns in their attempt to better predict the fickle science known as meteorology.

Let's just admit it that we all, at some time, look back at history whether it is one year, 10 ten years or 100 years. It is



human nature! We in the ACCVI also look back on our past. Through reflection we see the goals the club has attained; we see the changing standards in climbing – from what was once considered impossible to now become “possible.” We can honour those who have committed their time and skills to pass on knowledge and we can see the personal growth of some members through their climbing. Through reflection comes understanding. New goals are set. We can add to that growing list of climbs “to do.”

So what have members of the ACCVI done on the island in the eleven years since January 1, 2000. Believe me a lot has happened and some of it can be read in the Island Bushwhacker newsletters found online at [www.accvi.ca](http://www.accvi.ca). The rest can be read in the Island Bushwhacker Annuals, the Vancouver Island section's magazine that is an account of member's stories of alpine excursions both on the island and further afield.

The new millennium saw Tom Hall taking over from Claire Ebendinger as section Chair, followed by Jules Thomson and finally Cedric Zala. Each with their unique skills: each with their own style of leadership and each with a vision for the ACCVI in the 21st century. Members of the executive committee have changed; some taking on new roles while others felt the need to stand down and allow new blood into the system. All performing valuable functions! Financially the section is doing well, membership numbers are growing, trips are lead by highly experienced leaders and the trip schedule is continuously full. The following are some year-by-year highlights of what members have been achieving in the mountains, on a personal level and what the section has been performing.



## 2000

- The year started off with Peter Roethermel leading the Katzenjammer climb on Mount Arrowsmith on New Years day: a tradition that he began in 1998 and appears to be continuing into the future. In an email from Peter he said: "I got its name from the cartoon Katzenjammer Twins. Katzenjammer is translated from German as "Cats Yowling" and is slang for a massive hangover... hence a New Years Day climb."
- Gerhardt Lepp and Richard Keltie attend ACC Winter Leadership course near Golden.
- In February, Sandy Briggs and Lindsay Elms climb the first new route (Shovelgate Gully) of the millennium and 1st winter ascent of Mount Juliet.
- John Clarke is guest speaker at the Annual banquet at Cedar Hill Golf Clubhouse.
- Prime Minister Jean Chretien announces Mount Logan will be renamed Mount Pierre Elliot Trudeau but this name doesn't go over with the mountaineering community.
- Patrick Morrow presents a slideshow at UVic's David Lam Auditorium.

## 2001

- Gil Parker publishes his first book *Aware of the Mountains: Mountaineering as Yoga*.
- Tom Parkin republishes his guidebook *Haida Gwaii: The Queen Charlotte Islands*.
- Gerhardt Lepp (webmaster) gives section website a facelift and introduces a Listserver where subscribers can post messages.
- Sandy Briggs receives the Silver Rope for Leadership Award.
- Margaret and Ian Brown receive the Distinguished Service Award.
- Katherine Brandt-Wells summits Aconcagua in Argentina followed

by Tony Vaughn, Sylvia Moser, Mike Hubbard, Don Morton, Charles Turner and Selena Swets.

- Aconcagua climbers are guest speakers at the Annual banquet at Cedar Hill Golf Clubhouse.
- Katherine Brandt-Wells is the recipient of the Active Living Award at the 2001 Women of Distinction awards.
- Jules Thomson attends Summer Leadership course in the Rockies.
- Chic Scott presents a slideshow to promote his new book *Pushing the Limits*.
- Frank Wille Jr., Chris Wille and Eric Wille climb the Golden Hinde return in 22hrs 20min. A week earlier Randy Davies and Mark Meiras completed it in 20hrs 44min.
- Lindsay Elms and Peter Ravensbergen climb El Piveto Mountain in 16 hours return from the Elk River trailhead.
- Hinrich Schaefer, Joachim Stadel and Steven Harnig complete the rare feat of a north/south traverse of Mount Colonel Foster including the North Tower.
- Tak Ogasawara, Paul Rydeen and Chris Barner complete the 2nd ascent of the West Buttress of Rambler Peak.
- Since the fall of 2001 the Vancouver Island Section has participated in the ACC Student Outdoor Club Affiliation Program in connection with the UVic Outdoors Club. This affiliation agreement has been renewed every year since 2001, and many student affiliate members have benefited from participation in our trips and mountain education offerings.

## 2002

- Keith Battersby attends the ACC North Face Winter Leadership course.
- Barry Blanshard gives slide shows at various locations on the island.

- Katy Holm is the guest speaker at the Annual banquet at the Cedar Hill Golf Clubhouse presenting a slide show titled "Climbing in Greenland."
- Gil Parker receives the Distinguished Service Award.
- Claire Ebendinger receives the new section "Leader Award."
- Russ Moir, Sandy Briggs, Hinrich Schaefer and Rick Johnson make the long awaited 1st ascent of Mount Hall near Toquart Bay.

## 2003

- Sylvia Moser and Hinrich Schaefer attend the ACC North Face Winter Leadership course.
- Geoff Bennett takes over the Treasurer role from Rick Eppler.
- Peter Fuhrmann, Honorary President of the ACC, is the guest speaker at the Annual banquet at the Cedar Hill Golf Clubhouse.
- Rick Hudson publishes *A Field Guide to Gold, Gemstones and Minerals of British Columbia Vol 2: Sites within a day's drive of Vancouver*.

## 2004

- Gil Parker publishes his second book *Mom, Marion and Me: A Families Poetry*.
- Jacqui Hudson is the guest speaker at the Annual banquet at the Cedar Hill Golf Clubhouse with a presentation on Mount Logan.
- Sylvia Moser competes in the Everest Marathon: Everest Base Camp to Namche Bazaar 42.2km.
- Sandy Briggs, Paul Rydeen, Darren Wilman, Hinrich Schaefer and Julie Deslippe climb the entire (Integral) West Ridge of The Cats Ears.

## 2005

- Viggo and Judith Holm receive the Don Forest award.
- Tom Carter is the guest speaker at

the Annual banquet at the Cedar Hill Golf Clubhouse with a presentation on Nepal.

- Joseph Hall attends the ACC North Face Summer Leadership course.
- Rick Hudson and Stan Leaming publish *Jade Fever - Hunting the Stone of Heaven*.
- Rick Hudson, Rick Eppler and Rob Macdonald make the 1st ascent of Peak 5700 near Maquilla Peak.
- Rick Johnson and Sasha Kubicek complete the 3rd ascent of the Northwest Face of Rugged Mountain and 1st ascent of Lama De Lepore.
- Frank Wille Jr., solo/daytrips the Red Pillar from Oshinow Lake.

## 2006

- Gerry Graham initiates a TrailRider program with the ACCVI.
- Don Cameron takes over from Viggo Holm as Webmaster.
- Nancy Hansen is the guest speaker at the Annual banquet at Cedar Hill Golf Clubhouse with a presentation on climbing the 11,000ft peaks of the Rockies.
- Elkhorn, Golden Hinde, Elkhorn South, Southeast Summit of Mount Colonel Foster, Kings Peak and Mount Slocomb are climbed as part of the sections 1906 – 2006 ACC Centennial project.
- Hinrich Schaefer and Julie Deslippe get engaged on the summit of the Golden Hinde.
- Chris Wille completes a solo/day-trip from the Comox Glacier to Mount Washington.
- Rick Hudson publishes *A Field Guide to Gold, Gemstones and Minerals of British Columbia Vol 2 Revised Edition: Sites Within a Day's Drive to Vancouver*.

## 2007

- Gil Parker publishes his third book *Looking through Glasnost: Aware of Modern Russia* followed by *Coast Mountain Men*, short biog-

raphies of island climbers.

- Tony Vaughn, Mike Hubbard and Catrin Brown are the guest speakers at the Annual banquet at Cedar Hill Golf Clubhouse with a presentation on climbing in the Tavan Bogd range in Mongolia.
- Sasha Kubicek and Craig (Quagger) Wagnell make 1st ascent of Lucky Mountain.
- Karun Thanjuvar and Shawn Daniels assist Pippa Blake reach Everest Base Camp in a modified wheelchair called a TrailRider.

## 2008

- Cedric Zala initiates a monthly online newsletter.
- Sandy Stewart takes over the design and layout of the Island Bushwhacker Annual.
- Monthly slide shows are scheduled by Rick Hudson at the Swan Lake Nature House.
- Jacqui Hudson gives a talk on her 3-woman first ascent of a 5,200m rock tower in Pakistan's Karakoram at the David Lam Auditorium at UVic.
- Pete Hudson and Tom Furst are the guest speakers at the Annual banquet at McMorran's Beach House with a presentation titled "Climbing and Skiing in the Coast Range."
- Gil Parker is involved in a visionary proposal to establish a trail along the spine of Vancouver Island, from Victoria to Cape Scott, and passing through some of the most rugged and beautiful regions of Vancouver Island.
- Judith Holm is working with the CRD, Saanich and the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, for a third reprinting of their wildflower brochure.
- Martin Hofmann takes over the role of Webmaster.
- Nadja and Harry Steiner organize the "Mountaineering with Kids" program.
- Christine Fordham attends the

ACC North Face leadership course in the Bugaboos.

- Rick Hudson publishes *A Field Guide to Gold, Gemstones and Minerals of British Columbia Vol 1: Vancouver Island*.
- Sandy Briggs and Andy Arts climb a new route on the North Buttress of The Centaur.

## 2009

- From donations in memory of Viggo Holm and Gerta Smythe a Memorial Fund legacy is established.
- Don Morton is the guest speaker at the AGM giving a talk and slideshow on Afghanistan at the Wild Rose Room at Uvic.
- Jeremy Frimer is the guest speaker at the Annual banquet at McMorran's Beach House with a talk on Peru, Patagonia and Pakistan.
- Frank Wille Jr. and Lindsay Elms make the 1st ascent of the Little Eiger.
- Rick Hudson and Sandy Stewart climb a new route (South Ridge) on the Golden Hinde.
- Beginning in 1996 out of outrage over a ski developer, in a public park, wanting to restrict public access, Peter Rothermel finally sees his dream of Mount Arrowsmith (and Mount Cokely) becoming a Regional Park.
- Peter Rothermel is awarded the Distinguished Service Award.
- Mike Hubbard is awarded the Don Forest Award.

## 2010

- Lindsay Elms, Tawney Lem and Craig Wagnell make the 1st winter ascent of Logan Peak.
- Lindsay Elms, Sasha Kubicek and Craig Wagnell make the 1st winter ascent of Triple Peak.
- Sasha Kubicek, Tawney Lem and Craig Wagnell make the 1st winter ascent of Mount Hall.
- Lindsay Elms, Val Wootton, Sa-

sha Kubicek and Craig Wagnell make the 1st ascent of an unnamed 1300m Peak near Toquart Bay.

- Both directly and through its membership in the Protect our Parks Alliance, ACCVI is actively involved in maintaining the ban on motorized access to local Regional and Provincial Parks, particularly CRD's new Sea to Sea Park in the area known more commonly as the Sooke Hills.
- Sylvia Moser is the guest speaker at the Annual banquet at McMorran's Beach House with a slideshow on the Seven Summits.
- Four UVic Outdoor Club students are awarded a grant from the ACCVI's Memorial Fund for a trip to Brooks Peninsula.
- Vancouver Island Spine Trail and Relay event saw members covering the length of Vancouver Island by cycling, trail running, mountain biking and hiking various sections.
- Syd Watts Peak officially recognized.
- Geoff Bennett still section Treasurer (and making money for the section.)
- Section members Tawney Lem, Evan Loveless, Barb Baker and John Young participate in the Crown Mountain Centennial Expedition.
- Tawney Lem becomes the new Chair for the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee.
- Russ Moir receives the Don Forest award.
- ACCVI joins Facebook.



*The Septimus-Rosseau Massif, Strathcona Park* PHOTO: SANDY STEWART

### Those sadly missed:

Eric Wille - 2002  
 Larry Talarico - 2005  
 Brooke George - 2006  
 Viggo Holm - 2007  
 Gerta Smythe - 2008  
 Herbert Harzan - 2009

### Those who achieved their Island Qualifiers:

Tak Ogasawara - 2000  
 Peter Rothermel - 2004  
 Tom Carter - 2006  
 Valerie Wootton - 2006  
 George Butcher - 2007  
 Ken Wong - 2007  
 Jamie Duncan - 2008  
 Rick Hudson - 2008  
 Christine Fordham - 2008  
 Kent Krauza - 2009  
 George Milosevich - 2010

### Distant objectives:

Section members have travelled and climbed in many exotic locations in the last 11 years including: Mexico, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Japan, Argentina, Peru, France, Andorra, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, New Zealand, Indonesia (Irian Jaya and Sumatra), Antarctica, the Falkland Islands, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Jordan, Egypt, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, Georgia, South Africa, Mongolia, China, Tibet, Australia, Singapore and more.





# South of the Border

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## Desert Peak Bagging in Oregon and Nevada

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Martin Smith

May 03-12

### Introduction

Perhaps oddly for a resident of an island in the verdant, rain-soaked Pacific Northwest, I've been interested for some time in the mountains of the Alvord Desert area of south-eastern Oregon and the adjacent area of Nevada. A family trip to the Grand Canyon was already booked and May is iffy weather time on the Island anyway, so it made sense for me to drive down, get some lovely warm early season spring hiking in, tick off a few of my southern objectives en route and meet the family in Las Vegas. So off I went on my solitary but merry way on May 3rd with the family due to arrive in Vegas on the 12th.

### May 5th Pueblo Mountain, Oregon, 2631 metres

Warm weather spring hiking did I say? White-out conditions, jackknifed trailers and 20cm of snow had lain in wait for me on the Government Camp Pass on the way down and I barely got over the pass before the police shut it down.

There was a nice layer of ice over everything in Denio, NV (or "Dead n' Alive" as I soon began to call it) at 7 a.m. on the morning of May 5th. Cold weather gear went into the pack and I was at the top of the infamous narrow and exposed approach road at the top of the Cougar Creek Valley and the bottom of the North Ridge route on Pueblo Mountain by about 9.

I thought the road was quite OK. Narrow certainly and I wouldn't have fancied meeting another vehicle along the way but evenly surfaced and with nothing much in the way of obstacles.

Beyond the top of the approach valley, however, it soon got boggy and traction became an issue. So, since I was alone

and it didn't seem likely that anyone else would be coming this way, I gave up on plans for the West Face Route and returned to the North Ridge and the guarantee of being able to drive out of there later.

Gear up and off I went at 9:20 in cloudy, cold weather.

Following the description from my usual SummitPost source for all things obscure, I flogged 300 metres up the initial grass and sagebrush slopes, bypassed a 7500 foot high-point on the ridge to the west (bit of unpleasant-ish side-hilling on talus here) and dropped into a broad saddle below the continuation of the ridge all in about an hour from the start. Out of the shelter of the ridge a stiff wind cooled things off even more and I began to put layers on rather than take them off. The occasional snow squall subtracted even more from the less than spring-like conditions.

From the saddle I picked a line to the west of the ridge crest mostly on snow and intersected the ridge once more just below the first false summit, finally arriving there at about 11:30 in a full-on snow storm/gale.

From the false summit it's reportedly a pleasant walk up the remainder of the ridge to the summit plateau and to the true summit beyond. Today it was a head down trudge into the teeth of the wind. Certainly not the conditions in which to saunter along and I hit the summit only 15 minutes past the first false summit in an effort to keep warm. With the wind chill, I estimated the temperature on the summit at -15C (5F). At least it stopped snowing and I got some spectacular all-round views of what I could still appreciate as a truly lovely area.

A quick search for summit register, survey monument etc proved futile before I settled into the best shelter I could find just south of the summit cairn for lunch and photos.

Even wearing every stitch of clothing I'd brought with me – which included 3 fleeces and a shell – I still couldn't stave off net heat loss and, with teeth chattering, I got moving again at about 12:20.

Keen to get as low as possible as quickly as possible in conditions that were deteriorating by the minute, I trotted back across the plateau and then dropped off the false sum-

mit northwest in order to intersect some roads I could see down there. The map told me they led to the continuation of the road to Ten Cent Meadows and this, indeed, proved to be the case. Running down friendly snow and then grass slopes I hit the first road 25 minutes from the false summit and the Ten Cent Meadows road shortly after. I then simply walked around the foot of the north ridge and back to the truck well before 2 p.m.

### **May 6th Whitehorse Butte, Oregon, 1852 metres**

Off at about 8 a.m. on another frigid morning but at least sunny and with no wind.

Immaculate SummitPost instructions got me to the Willow Creek Basin off Whitehorse Ranch Road in next to no time.

As the guide says “Whitehorse Butte does not have a trailhead let alone a trail so find any line up the mountain you like”. I found such a line and parked after driving about 9 kilometres south from Whitehorse Ranch Road at N42 14.206 W118 13.752

Heading across lovely open desert, I aimed initially for the west side of the summit escarpment hitting it about N42 15.059 W118 13.076. From there I was able to choose any entertaining scrambling option I liked as I made my way around the ridge northeast to the large summit cairn at about 11:30 a.m. By this time the day had turned balmy and I was able to enjoy the views at leisure.

And what views. Except for Whitehorse Ranch itself, nothing but empty desert all around. The Trout Mountains, Pueblo, Steens and more framed the view from south through west to north whilst to the east Whitehorse Canyon provided a nice counterpoint to all that snowy high ground.

Perhaps the most spectacular aspect of the view, however, was what I couldn't see. I estimated the radius of my field of view from the summit of Whitehorse Butte at about 60 kilometres. I had driven 40 kilometres on gravel from pavement to the west just to reach the turnoff for Willow Creek Road, leaving a long dust trail behind me all the way. Similar gravel roads radiate off in all directions across the desert. And yet in the ~ 11,000 sq kilometres I was looking at from the summit of Whitehorse Butte I saw not one sign of another vehicle's passage!

The hour was early and the route quick so I spent a long hour wandering up and down the length of the summit escarpment (finding a lower summit with survey tripod and



*Pueblo Mountain* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

monument along the way), taking photos and enjoying a leisurely and sun-warmed lunch.

Heading down finally I picked a line through the escarpment “cliffs” starting from just east of the large cairn on the true summit and then made a beeline south-southwest towards the tiny dot in the distance that, happily, turned out to be my truck, arriving at about 2 p.m.

### **May 7th Buckskin Mountain, Nevada, 2669 metres**

I have to be honest here. At the outset of the day, I'd never even heard of Buckskin, let alone intended to climb it. My objective for the day was Granite Peak, the high point of the Santa Rosa Range. The weather conditions to this point should have warned me that this was an unlikely objective in terms of access at this time of year, but I went anyway.

It was no real surprise when I found the “Buckskin Canyon” approach road impassable well below Windy Gap and prepared to turn back disappointed. I did, however, not want to write off the day and an attractive ridgeline directly above the road to the east offered exercise and potential views. The map revealed that the snow capped summit due north of the ridge was “Buckskin Mountain”. “I wonder if they connect,” I thought. If I couldn't find a way through the cliffs to the ridge crest, it appeared that I could simply traverse north to where they petered out and investigate further from there.

So, armed with such stunningly detailed preparation as the sum total of foreknowledge of the route, I found a convenient spot to park at the bottom of the switchbacks on



*Buckskin Mountain from the top of the west face* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

FR084 (aka Buckskin Canyon Road), geared up and set off in sunny weather at 10:30 a.m..

Initially I walked the road for ~ 2 kilometres before finding a shallow grassy gully at N41 46.259 W117 33.474 which led due north up the hillside to the sub ridge above.

I climbed the gully north for 100-200 metres before gradually swinging round to the west. The ridge wasn't that well defined so it was a question of making my best choice of a route up grass, sagebrush and talus aiming directly for the foot of a distinctive "cockscorn" green lichen stained rhyolite buttress that I could see above. It was about 500 metres of map distance and 300 metres vertical from the road right to the foot of the buttress.

Once at the base of the cliffs I turned left/northeast up a ramp at the base of the cliffs. Seeing no obvious weakness in the cliff line above, I made a rising traverse 500 metres map distance across steep slopes to the point where the cliffs tapered into the ridge crest. There was some exposure, lots of loose rock and some Class 3 here and there.

Once on the crest I discovered a gentle east side of the mountain complete with snow covered roads! I checked the map to find that these originate at Windy Gap and, as I discovered later, have a lot to do with the extensive mining history of the area. At this point, however, my main interest was if the point I was on would connect with the summit of Buckskin and I was delighted to discover that it did.

From the point at which I had intersected the ridge crest, I continued north and then northwest on the snow covered

old roads towards the summit and eventually simply climbed snow slopes directly over the south summit to the main summit just beyond at 2 p.m.

By now the day had turned cloudy and cool but views were still spectacular and included my erstwhile objective, Granite Peak, and the rest of the Santa Rosa Range to the south. A mineral claim was evident just below what appeared to be a predominantly limestone summit. All in all, not too shabby for a day based entirely on happenstance.

The old roads down to Windy Gap served to avoid what might have been a nasty and loose side-hill descent and from there it was 5 km down FR084 to the truck at 4:30 p.m.

### **May 10th North Peak, Nevada, 2148 metres**

After Buckskin Mountain it was time to head further south. Armed with Courtney Purcell's "Rambles and

Scrambles Around Las Vegas" as well as my usual SP source notes, I figured I'd sample some hot weather hiking around Vegas while waiting for the family to arrive.

North Peak from Red Rocks summit road sounded like a nice half day objective and I duly headed that way on a pleasantly warm morning.

Directions from Courtney were right on and I soon found myself in the National Conservation Area and bumping up the dirt road from Willow Springs towards the pass at Red Rocks Summit.

About half way up I encountered a rather deep wash-out. Not knowing how often folk drive up here and without a "spotter" on board, I figured I'd better leave the truck at this point rather than get stuck. In fact, it was a very pleasant stroll up to the pass with opportunities to look around that I wouldn't have had if driving.

In any event, I got to the pass in about an hour and took to the trail up North Peak at the very civilized hour of noon.

The trail to the summit was well marked, including the junction with the route to Bridge Peak, and I was on top less than an hour later to stunning views over this very special area.

It turned cold and windy on top but with the change came improved air quality and not only the whole northern segment of Red Rocks - with Bridge Peak and Mount Wilson particularly prominent - but also downtown Vegas and Lake Mead were in clear and uninterrupted view.

The summit was equipped with a register in a, some might say quintessentially Nevadan, receptacle - an ammu-



nitition box. The register confirmed that North is a frequently visited and popular destination.

Half an hour on top sufficed for photos and lunch and, with that cold wind blowing ever stronger, I set off down at 1:30 and reached my truck at 3:15.

Reading the guidebook later that day I discovered that most people regard a sandstone promontory 500 metres to the northeast of the limestone summit I was on as the “true” summit of North Peak. First time I’ve ever encountered a lower “true summit”. Oh well, I’ll just have to go back and bag that one too.

### **May 11th Charleston Peak, Nevada, 3633 metres**

Every trip has one component that turns out to be a bust and, unfortunately, Charleston turned out to be it in this case.

I should have expected little else. The high winds that blew in while I was on top of North Peak yesterday were well established by the time I got to the South Loop trailhead at about 6:45 a.m. to find it fenced off and not yet open for the season. So I drove round to the alternate “Echo” trailhead and walked 20-30 minutes back over the hill from there.

Heading up finally from the Cathedral Rock campground I ran into snow almost immediately and soon lost the trail following the boot tracks of equally misinformed folk.

The GPS got me back on track and enough path appeared now and again to assure me that I was going the right way. However, on bullet hard snow and without axe and crampons, matters got hairy on the climb up to the ridgeline above Echo Canyon. With the wind literally howling by this time and considering what it would be like several thousand feet higher up, out on the open ridge, I had the good sense to turn round and (largely) write off the day.

### **May 12th Northshore Peak, Nevada, 1103 metres**

Lake Mead was next on my “sampler” Las Vegas area list and friendly Northshore Peak my chosen objective.

My SP notes were, as usual spot on with the directions and I was parked and ready for an alpine start of 11 a.m.

There’s no trail up Northshore, nor is one needed. You can see the whole thing in front of you across the road from the car. Unless it’s foggy, leave the GPS at home.

From the start point, I just walked across the desert, invented a scrambly line up to the east ridge at a convenient



*Bridge Mountain and downtown Las Vegas from North Peak, Red Rocks* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

spot and simply followed it up to the summit in about an hour, conjuring up options as I went.

A knife edge provided entertainment at one point and led almost to the documented Class 3 downclimb. There were newly blooming cactus and other brief lived desert flora to admire and views all the way up. A quick route but entirely enjoyable.

The summit had a cairn, a register and, for the moment, a little puppet to keep it company.

The all round views were tremendous, the weather benign and the company (me) unanimous in declaring Northshore a great little mountain with which to finish off the solo portion of my trip.

After a lovely lunch, I hiked happily down the mountain looking forward eagerly to my family’s arrival in a few hours and already anticipating a great time in the Grand Canyon. But that, as they say, is another story...

A MapSource/Garmin tracklog is available for the asking for all of the trips above Just send me an email.

This article originally appeared on my SummitPost web page. Follow the link <http://www.summitpost.org/desert-peak-bagging-in-oregon-and-nevada/662790> for the complete article and lots more photos.

**Participant:** Martin Smith solo



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## The John Muir Trail in California

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Don Morton  
August 7-10

Years ago when climbing in Yosemite Valley I had heard how wonderful the high ground above was for hiking and camping, so in July I reserved a four-night Wilderness Use Permit (\$10 plus a Park fee of \$20) by telephone. A month later after a conference in Berkeley, I rented a car and drove to Tuolumne Meadows where the John Muir Trail crosses the Tioga highway. With my tent, sleeping bag and stove I headed south through forest and meadows passing attractive granite peaks and pretty tarns. An elk grazed near my first campsite.

About 14-½ km along the trail, just before it descends into Yosemite Valley, there is a 2 km branch that leads to the top of Half Dome, initially through forest and then over granite slabs to the cables! To accommodate the multitude of tourists who hike up from the Valley each morning, the Park staff have installed a pair of cables up the final 130m on the near vertical northeast face. With feet flat on the face and a hand on each cable I pulled myself up two metres at a time, resting on a cross board at the base of each pair of supporting stanchions. Fortunately there was a collection of heavy-duty gloves at the base. From the top I could see the entire Valley with El Capitan in the distance and some spectacular rock routes when I looked over the edge. I had camped near the junction with the Half Dome trail so I was ahead of most of the hikers coming up from the Valley. It is necessary to start very early for that long hike in order to be off the Dome before the frequent afternoon thunderstorms. This cable route has become so popular that a special extra permit will be required beginning in the 2011.

Back at my campsite, just after a late breakfast, a brown bear ambled by and continued along the path confirming the need to carry the indestructible plastic bear box I had rented for \$10. My route back to Tuolumne was equally delightful over the white granite ridge of Clouds Rest at 3025m and the nearest of the Sunrise Lakes with its granite shoreline.

A return trip with rock climbing gear to for some of the granite peaks in the meadows would be fun and would avoid the hordes of climbers and tourists in the Valley.

**Participant:** Don Morton



*The Cables on Half Dome in Yosemite Park* PHOTO: DON MORTON



# Distant Places

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## Jebel Umm Adaami

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Graham Maddocks  
December 23-27 2009

At 1832 metres, Jebel (mountain) Umm Adaami is Jordan's highest peak on the rarely visited southern border with Saudi Arabia. The closest access point is the desert village of Wadi Rum, set in a magnificent desert and mountain landscape written about so evocatively by T.E Lawrence in "Seven Pillars of Wisdom," his account of the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Turkish empire in 1915-18.

He described the sculptured rocks, dunes and Bedouin encampments: "The crags were capped in nests of domes, less hotly red than the body of the hill; rather grey and shallow. They gave the finishing semblance of Byzantine architecture to this irresistible place: this processional way greater than imagination... Our little caravan grew self-conscious, and fell dead quiet, afraid and ashamed to flaunt its smallness in the presence of the stupendous hills".

There is plenty of scope for rock climbing in the area with huge eroded sandstone bluffs towering over the red sand desert. The name Wadi Rum lends itself not just to the broad valley flanking either side of the towering, domed pillars of Lawrence's description, but to a whole series of beautiful broad valleys (wadis) stretching north to south for over 100 km. The central valley, 900 km above sea level, fans into an area dominated by Jebel Rum, 1754 metres.

People have lived in this area since the beginning of time on the camel caravan trade routes, and still do. There are many Bedouin encampments out in the desert, where extended families live in their traditional black goat hair tents, tending flocks of sheep, goats, donkeys and camels, often far from any water source, in the search for scarce pasture.

Pre-historic water drainage channels have been chiseled into the rock to drain precious water into cut rock cisterns.

There are ancient rock carvings all through this area in a Thamudic and Nabataean script, both pre-date Arabic. There are depictions of camel caravans, hunting warriors and various animals including the wildly curving horns of the Arabian oryx and giant horned ibex (both now sadly extinct).

Part of the reason for my trip was to re-trace the camel tracks of T.E Lawrence and his Arab army after enjoying a re-read of "Seven Pillars of Wisdom". I visited the desert castle at Azraq where Lawrence had wintered with the Arab army before the attack on Damascus in 1918. The castle dates its origins from 300 CE and is still exactly how he wrote about his drafty room over the main gate and a huge door made of a single massive slab of basalt. Lawrence describes how it "went shut with a clang and crash that made tremble the west wall of the castle".

In 1917, Azraq was a vast oasis where desert wildlife, gazelles, oryx, ibex and their predators came at night and jackals and hyena's howled and screamed, sounds that the desert tribesmen attributed to ghosts. Today, sadly, the castle stands in an arid desert, the oasis pumped dry for drinking water in Amman. Overgrazing and lack of water conservation are causing desertification of much of the Middle East. The Jordan River is now a polluted ditch at the biblical baptism site.

Wadi Rum was an important water hole for camel caravans travelling between Syria and Arabia. There are the ruins of a 2000 year old Nabataean temple in the village and near the temple are some inscriptions by hunters and nomads dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. The present temple was built upon an earlier structure. Behind the settlement, a path leads to a spring with a shrine to the Nabataean god Lat, described in "Seven Pillars of Wisdom":

"In front of us a path, pale with use, zigzagged up the cliff-plinth...from between the trees, in hidden crannies of the rock, issued strange cries; the echoes, turned into music, of the voices of the Arabs watering camels at the springs which there flowed out three hundred feet above the ground"

T.E Lawrence based his camel mounted guerrilla force in Wadi Rum while raiding the Hejaz railway line that ran from Damascus to Medina. He dynamited many bridges and



*On the trek from Wadi Rum to Jebel Umm Adaami* PHOTO: G. MADDOCKS COLLECTION

locomotives after his capture of the port of Aqaba which allowed the British army to supply him with munitions. His tactics tied down large numbers of Turkish and German troops while the allied armies advanced to occupy Ottoman Palestine.

I left Wadi Rum for Jebel Umm Adaami on camels with two Bedouin guides for the five day round trip. Because of the remoteness of the area I went to the Jordanian Border Police to register my presence. The border police have a Beau-Geste style fort in Wadi Rum and cut a dashing sight in khaki skirts, red Bedouin headdress, bandoliers of bullets, pistol and dagger. I explained my request and they smiled courteously and wrote my name down on a loose scrap of paper, which didn't inspire much confidence.

On the trek, we spent the nights at Bedouin camps in the desert where it seems everyone is related. The only social introduction needed is to arrive by camel, tap his knees to sit and give a "Salaam Alaykum" (Peace be upon you) greeting. A young boy will step forward to take the camel's rope, the Bedouin women cover their faces and fade into the tents and I was led through to the mens' circle around the fire for coffee, mutton, bread and sweet tea with sage or mint.

I have trekked before with camels from Timbuktu and Rajasthan and camel handling techniques are popular conversation pieces. The Bedouin use a bridle similar to a horse, whereas in India wooden nose pegs are used. Topics like this keep the conversation flowing.

The Bedouin men spend a great deal of their time loung-

ing around the fire for coffee, smoking, conversation and tea while multiple wives are out in the desert with the flocks of sheep and goats. Here in the desert camels are loved, wives collected and children are a gift from God. One of my guides had 11 children, 2 wives and 7 camels. I had previously camel trekked from Petra to Wadi Rum (six days) with a Bedouin guide who had 10 children, 4 wives and only 3 camels. Every man makes his choices.

At one camp I was invited to join a large communal meal for the men of Mensef, a traditional Bedouin dish of layered bread, rice and a complete sheep cooked in the ground. The dish is then saturated with hot yoghurt and mutton fat and sprinkled with nuts. The meal was served on a metal plate the size of a table with the sheep's head in the middle, its teeth gaping upward. Hands were splashed with water and everybody dug in. I was apprehensive about being offered an eyeball or some questionable morsel, but I sat next to an old man who was referred to as "Sheikh" who relished the head and stripped off the lips and cheeks with pleasure. I reflected that every day my guide has to think of a way to feed 14 people, while the lotus eaters are united in uproar over the harmonized sales tax being added to their restaurant bills.

We slept on the ground, which was like iron; the consensus being that the snakes and scorpions were sleeping as it was winter.

The most useless item I took was a bottle of hand sanitizer. The camel guide, who had never washed his hands with soap in living memory, (toilet paper is considered un-hygienic in the Middle East), kneaded some wheat flour and baked traditional Arab flat, unleavened bread in the embers, it was delicious after he beat it with a stick on a rock to remove the ash. He then served a bean and tomato stew from a pot I had earlier seen him use to give the camels a power snack of barley. I bridged this cultural gap by putting the hand sanitizer away and digging into the food with my grubby hands the same as everyone else.

The weather for the whole trip was clear and hot during the day and surprisingly cold at night. The Bedouin guides put on huge overcoats as soon as the sun went down and slept under piles of camel saddle blankets. The display of stars was incredible so far from artificial light.

Jebel Umm Adaami only involved a few hours of scrambling, with a little exposure, over eroded red sandstone to

summit on a crystal clear Christmas morning with endless views over the desert of Saudi Arabia and Wadi Saabet. Basic Vancouver Island route finding skills were called for when it became obvious that the “guide” had never actually been up the mountain.

The guides had intended to find water for the camels at ancient rock dams, but we went to three and all were dry. No one seemed to be concerned, least of all the camels, who the guide said could go a month without water. They kept up their steady diet of thorn bushes, cropping off quarter inch branches with inch long thorns and grinding them down. The camel, indigenous to the desert, does no harm to the environment. They leave the thorn bush intact and do not compete with any other species for food. The camel’s large cushioned hoof pads do not damage any vegetation that they step on. The Bedouin herds of introduced sheep, goats and horses compete for food and clearly are destroying the fragile desert eco-system by overgrazing.

On the fourth day, I was concerned for my camel who didn’t seem to be eating much. I gave him a drink of water from a plastic bottle. He seized the bottle and downed it and then refused to give the bottle back. I assumed he thought that if water came from the bottle once, it could again.

On a later trip I summited Mount Sinai, 2260 metres, in Egypt. A first ascent has been attributed to Moses.

**Participant:** Graham Maddocks

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## L’Arête des Cosmiques in France

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**Don Morton**

**June 7-8**

After attending a physics conference at Les Houches in the French Alps, I continued up the valley to Chamonix. There I met two young American friends, Lucas and Martin Saul, grandsons of Lyman Spitzer with whom I had climbed on Baffin Island and Mt. Waddington. Martin suggested one of the classic ridge climbs, l’Arête des Cosmiques that leads up to the 3842m l’Aiguille du Midi. Consequently late one afternoon Saul and I took the telepherique up to Midi and descended the steep snow ridge to the broad glacier. We walked south towards the Refuge des Cosmiques at 3613m, with the Arête rising steeply above us on our right, both named after a cosmic ray observatory at the base of the ridge.

Though early in the season, the hut already was crowded with climbers planning to depart before dawn to traverse Mont Blanc du Tacul (4248m), Mont Maudit (4465m) and Mont Blanc (4810m). I had done the traverse in 1964 in the



*L’Arête des Cosmiques from the Bossons Glacier* PHOTO: DON MORTON

opposite direction, which had the bonus of a fourth ascent up to Midi.

Lucas joined us the next morning directly from Chamonix. Many

climbers do the ridge in a day trip from there, but I was happy to have an acclimatization night in the hut. The first five pitches on easy snow and rock could be climbed unroped, as Lucas did catching us. Then the route became much more exposed, first with two rappels, as much horizontal as down. Two more pitches of mixed climbing brought us back to the ridge with views of the Vallée Blanche to the east. After skirting a huge tower we reached the crux rock slab that we ascended with much scraping of crampons. Beyond, a notch brought us to the even more exposed west side of the ridge. With the upper Bossons Glacier now directly below we climbed chimneys and cracks to a horizontal snow ridge that took us to one of the Midi observation platforms.

So if ever you are in Chamonix and are looking for a not-too-difficult climb that typifies the area, consider l’Arête des Cosmiques.

**Participant:** Don Morton



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## Hiking the Via Engiadina, Switzerland

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Albert Hestler

June 17 - 22

In recollection it seems that I have always been attracted to the great outdoors, especially hiking – which should come as no surprise as I grew up in Germany, more precisely in the triangle formed by the Swabian Jura and the Black Forest, where a walk in the woods on Sunday is practically a national obsession. Over the years, my ways of being in the outdoors expanded to include skiing, bicycling, mountaineering, and – after immigrating to Canada – canoeing and kayaking. My favourite way of pursuing these modes of travel is to do it on trips which last several days or, if possible, several weeks. On top of the list is trekking in the mountains – which I have done on all five continents.

There are obvious differences when hiking in different parts of the world. Heading for the mountains in North America (as practiced by members of our Club), even if only for an overnigher, invariably involves carrying a rather heavy pack, consisting of all the essentials regarding food, shelter, clothing, and sundry gear. In contrast, trekking in the Himalayas is usually done with porters, who carry practically everything, often including the proverbial kitchen sink. This allows the ‘paying guests’ to travel with only a light day pack. Hiking in the Alps entails a slightly heavier load because one has to carry one’s personal gear and clothes for the duration of the trip. As camping is not encouraged, often not even permitted, one might as well sleep and eat in the huts or other accommodation found along the route. Thus a 10-day trip in the Alps is in effect a series of ten single-day trips.

Over the last few years I have come to appreciate the relative ease of hiking in Europe, notably the Alps. I have managed to keep the weight of my pack within the recommended parameters (10% of one’s body weight or 10kg/25lbs). There is plenty of reasonably priced accommodation (huts, hostels, B&B’s). The routes are easily accessible; conversely, in bad weather or an emergency one can abort the trek and reach human habitation within a matter of hours. Many areas tend to be overrun with people during the high season in July and August, but the shoulder seasons of June and September are just fine. And the scenery is still beautiful.

Earlier this year I visited my hometown of Giengen/Brenz near Stuttgart in Germany to attend a class reunion. I thought that this was a wonderful opportunity to do some more trekking in the Alps. There are several international hiking trails in Europe, one of them, the E-5, leads from the Atlantic near Brest through France, Germany, Austria and Italy to Venice on the Adriatic. The section from Oberstdorf in Bavaria to



*The Inn Valley above Scuol, as seen from the Castle of Tarasp, Switzerland*  
PHOTO: ALBERT HESTLER

Bolzano in the Italian Tyrol has become something of a classic alpine trek, taking 9-10 days. The route has been used for a very long time – in fact, it passes the glacier where Oetzi, the ‘iceman’ of 3300BC, was discovered in 1991. I had planned to start this trek on June 12th, the first day that the huts were to open officially. Unfortunately, there was still a lot of snow in the mountains, and continuing precipitation still fell as new snow in the higher regions. I was therefore advised to cancel this trip for now and return at a later date (which I couldn’t), or look for an alternative. Enter Plan B – the Via Engiadina.

The Via Engiadina is a hiking trail which starts in Venadi on the Austrian border and follows the Inn Valley upstream via St. Moritz to Maloja in the Upper Engadin. The whole trip takes about 10 days and offers several advantages: one can choose the official ‘high route’, opt for an alternate route at intermediate elevation, or travel at the bottom of the valley along the river’s edge. Also, because the trail is on the south-facing side of the valley, it promised to be free of snow. I started my journey a few days late because I had the unexpected fortune to obtain a ticket to the Passion-Play in Oberammergau. Because it is only performed every ten years, I just couldn’t pass up this opportunity. Then I travelled by train via Munich and Innsbruck to Landeck and by bus to the small town of Pfunds on the Austrian side of the border. It boasted two youth hostels whereas Venadi on the Swiss side had no overnight accommodation at all. And that’s where the adventure actually started.

**Day 1:** On the morning of June 17th I travelled across the border to Martina where I should have changed to take the bus to Venadi. However, the guide recommended that in case of bad weather one should ascend directly from Martina and intercept the Via Engiadina at Vadrain. (Some sections of the trail between Venadi and Vadrain are very tricky and dangerously exposed to potential mudslides.) As it was raining quite heavily and the visibility was severely restricted, I

followed this advice and trudged on a wide track suitable for utility vehicles from 1000m to 1700m. A well-marked trail continued from there in gentle contours through forests and open meadows to the small village of Tschlin. I didn't see a single person on that trek. Although the rain had stopped by late afternoon, my shoes and pants up to my knees were thoroughly wet. To make matters worse, the only inn in town (Hotel Macun) was closed that very day because of "staff holiday". Fortunately, a young man (the local bus driver, as it turned out) noticed my predicament and guided me to the address of a lady, Ute Boerner, who usually runs a B&B, but hadn't opened yet for the season. She kindly took me in - hallelujah. It felt great to dry out over a meal of liver dumplings (retrieved from the bottom of the freezer) and a beer, warmed by an open fire and pleasant conversation. Of course, being able to speak German helped a lot.

**Day 2:** I had a fairly late start because Frau Boerner insisted on a proper breakfast, which she had to go out and buy first. Today, though, I was dressed in full wet-weather gear, because it had started to rain again quite heavily. Again, the path leads through woods and meadows, passing enroute through a wild gorge (Val da Ruinas) where the trail is secured with ropes. Next stop is the picturesque village of Vna, where I had a hot soup at the local restaurant. The village is literally plastered against the side of a hill and gained fame as the locale of a daring mountain rescue in 2008 which involved its whole population. The route then continues in a sweeping curve to the resort Val Sinestra and finally the village of Sent, where I stayed in the Backpackers' Hostel. This was the longest day of the trek at 6 hours, covering about 16km.

**Day 3:** Today started sunny and clear. It was a pleasure to hike through meadows at their spring-time best, carpeted with flowers in an array of colours and in full bloom. Add the sight of docile cows and the sound of the cowbells, and there is no doubt that one is in Switzerland. The trail leads steadily upwards, mostly over open terrain, contouring along a steep scree slope, and over an interesting suspension bridge up to the ski-lift station Jonvrai. This was the only place where route finding was difficult because there were no signposts. As it had started to rain again and the wind had picked up, it became very cold and inhospitable. I had to climb further still to a high point of 2300m before dropping down to Motta Naluns, the top station of a gondola which



*The alpine village of Ardez in the Inn Valley, Switzerland* PHOTO: ALBERT HESTLER

runs down to Scuol. I was glad to take the ride into the valley and settle into the comfort of the Scuol youth hostel.

**Day 4:** I had originally planned to take the gondola back up to Motta Naluns and continue my hike from there. But the precipitation turned to snow, dropping the snow level from 2500m to 1500m overnight – the date was June 20th, the summer solstice. Considering that the trail would be obscured by fresh snow and that I was travelling alone, made this plan seem rather foolish. What to do next? I discussed the situation with my roommate, a fellow mountaineer from Saxony, who knew the area fairly well. On his recommendation I booked another night at the youth hostel and spent the day hiking to Schloss Tarasp, a beautifully restored medieval castle.

**Day 5:** Though the rain had stopped, it was still cold and overcast, and the snow was still visible at higher elevations. That's when I decided to opt for the 'middle route'. I took the bus to the village of Ftan and hiked from there to Ardez (a typical Engadin village with artistically decorated houses) and Guarda (considered the most beautiful Swiss mountain-village, designated in its entirety as a National Monument) and finally Lavin. As there was no hostel in that town I stayed at the Hotel Piz Linard, which turned out to be the most expensive overnight stay on my whole trip.

**Day 6:** At this point of the trek, I had no choice but to travel along the river's edge on the valley floor. This was a casual, easy walk via Susch to Zernez. At this point there would have been the possibility to continue the trek on the 'high route', but

it entailed climbing 800m up to elevations over 2000m, which was still a questionable proposition. The only other alternative, i.e. continuing to hike in the valley, didn't appeal to me very much, especially as the weather didn't promise to improve any time soon. It was then that I decided to wrap up this segment of my trip. After all I had seen wonderful scenery, met interesting people, and had memorable experiences – all the hallmark of a great trip. I felt it was time to head for warmer climates.

**Postscript:** One of the advantages of travelling in Switzerland is its incredibly efficient public transportation system. I was able to catch a bus to Livigno in Italy that same afternoon. With another good stroke of luck, I could stay overnight at the bus driver's home where his wife runs a B&B. I spent the day in Livigno and hiked on Piz Mottolino, a mountain-biking park, which was accessible by gondola. And as hoped for, "sunny Italy" lived up to its name in that it was indeed sunny. Late in the afternoon I took a bus across the Bernina Pass to Pontresina in Switzerland, where I stayed in the youth hostel. As I booked for two nights, I received a ticket which allowed for free rides on the respective gondolas to the Diavolezza (2978m) and Piz Corvatch (3303m) – both of which I did the next day. From there I enjoyed great views of the 4000+m Bernina group, the many lakes of the Upper Engadin, and all the way to the mountains of Zermatt. Back down in the valley, I hiked from Suttlej to St. Moritz before returning by bus to Pontresina. The following day (alas, my last day in Switzerland) I rode non-stop by train-bus-train via Scuol, Landeck and Lake Constance back to Giengen/Brenz in Germany, and a last good-bye before returning home to Victoria.

**Participant:** Albert Hestler

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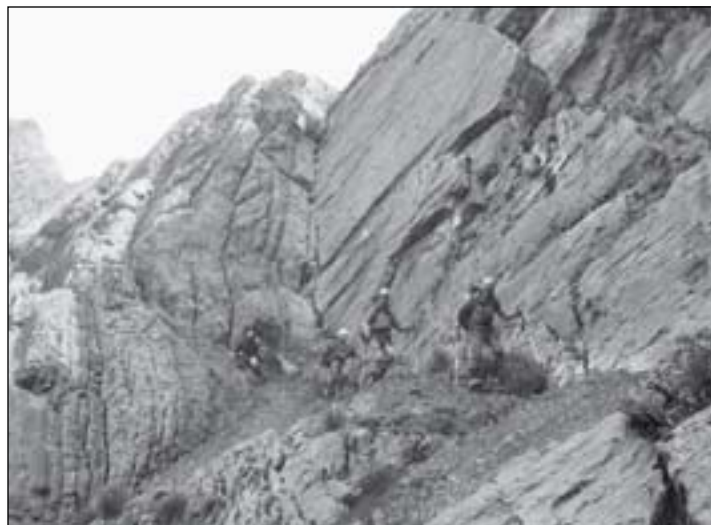
## An Alpine Circuit: Cordillera Huayhuash, Peru

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**Rick Hudson**  
**June 18–27**

Every story has a start, I suppose, and this one began on a Tuesday evening in Tony and Anita's condo at Demos Place. We were several beers into undoing the good of the day's exercise when a copy of Peter Potterfield's *Classic Hikes of the World* (W.W.Norton, 2005) was pulled from the shelf, and discussions started. It confirmed what had always been a faint awareness before, that the circuit of the Cordillera Huayhuash (pronounced 'why wash') was one of the classics. "We should do that," someone said.

Years passed, and then in 2007 the guest speaker at the



*The crux of the matter – descending Punta Garacocha's east side after two rappels.* PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

ACC dinner was Jeremy Frimer. During the course of the evening he mentioned the Huayhuash. Although a small range (it's barely 20 kilometres north to south, and 12 kilometres west to east), it boasted a string of famous summits, including the beautiful Yerupaja and Suila Grande, both over 6000m. Jeremy had written a guidebook to the range (*Climbs and Treks in the Cordillera Huayhuash of Peru* – Elaho Press, 2005) in which he included an intriguing description of an alpine circuit that differed markedly from the 'classic' circuit described by Potterfield.

The strands were coming together slowly, but more time passed before thoughts turned to action. My daughter Jacqui had accompanied Jeremy on two of his Huayhuash expeditions. She recommended we use an outfitter and guide, and put us in touch with a friend who was both. In October 2009 we made the commitment and began planning a visit for the following June, when the mid-winter season (southern hemisphere) ensured the least likelihood of rain and the peaks would be at their clearest.

The choice of a team slowly morphed from the Tuesday Tigers, none of whom were available, to others in the Vancouver Island ACC. This was going to be a challenging trek, so I was keen we had people whose strengths we knew. In due course Catrin, Christine, Stan, Russ and Charles joined us, while Ferdi and Bernhard (old climbing friends from elsewhere) came from the UK and Germany respectively.

In early June we assembled in Huaraz, an alpine town that serves as the jumping off place for the Huayhuash's more famous sister range, the Cordillera Blanca. Huaraz has an elevation of over 3000m, a fact quickly noticed each time we walked from our hostel down into town, and were then obliged to puff and pant back up later. "Don't worry, you'll get better," said Russ on the first evening, as Phee and I struggled to keep up with the rest of the group, who had al-



ready been there two days. The body is a marvellous thing, and in due course, we did.

Acclimatization was now the order of the day. We arranged to be driven up a bad road (all roads in Peru are bad, including the main paved ones) to a lake, where we straddled mountain bikes and made a wild, dusty descent into the valley, the Cordillera Blanca facing us under a blue sky. The down-hills were easy, but the occasional up-hill reminded us we were at 4000m, and needed time.

Our Huayhuash outfitter was Alfredo Quintana Figueroa, who owns and operates Mountain Climb Travel in Huaraz. He it was, with friend Christian Silva Lindo, who had completed the inner alpine circuit of the Huayhuash in 2004 for the first time. Jeremy Frimer had based his description of the route in his guidebook to some degree on their account sent to him, together with his own experience of a number of the passes.

Now, it should be mentioned that many people claim to do 'the alpine circuit'. Indeed, one evening in Huaraz we met a well-known ACMG guide from Banff together with his clients who had just completed it. Yet, when questioned about certain passes, they seemed not to know them, nor be aware of the technical difficulty of others. Clearly, there are at least two, and possibly more, alpine circuits of the range, and some ambiguity existed. With Alfredo, we felt confident that we could adhere to Frimer's new classic, which, Alfredo enthusiastically explained, was considerably better than the traditional circuit. Which, in turn, you will remember, had been deemed one of the world's best by Peter Potterfield.

A further bonus was that Christian Silva was to be one of our two guides, together with Alfredo's brother Jaime Quintana. We had, therefore, the most experienced team with which to tackle this relatively new route; a route that rose and fell by a thousand metres on most days, and crossed at least one and sometimes two passes close to 5000m each day. Many of these passes would be impassable to donkeys, so the team was strengthened by adding two high altitude porters (Marco and Cesar) to carry food and equipment where the donkeys could not go. To the four guide-porters was added a cook team of four who would also carry when needed, and would provide culinary extravaganzas, we hoped, to power us up those long slopes.

Acclimatization continued: a day was spent hiking to a



*An absence of trees makes hiking the Huayhuash a visual treat every step of the way.*

PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

4500m high lake in the Blanca, followed by a 3-day, 2-night loop over a 5200m pass, as a shake-down to see how the gringos handled the altitude, the guides could lead, and the cook team could deliver. There were some adjustments all round. Finally we boarded a bus bound for the isolated village of Llamac, at the end of an excruciating track of twists and plunging precipices.

Camped on Llamac's soccer field during the midst of World Cup 2010 fever, we resisted the invitation to play the local team. We were at 3300m, after all, and needed our oxygen for more pressing matters. To my surprise, the tourist register revealed that over half the visitors to the Huayhuash that season were from Israel, a small country with a big interest in the region.

The following morning, after so much planning and preparation, we climbed a thousand metres out of the valley to Pampa Llamac Pass (4300m), before a long descent to Lake Jahuacocha (4066m). The forecast had been for rain, and as evening came on and we approached camp, it arrived. We were a cold crew who huddled that first night in the mess tent to tuck into a hot and very welcome dinner, as the rain drummed on the canvas, and snow fell at higher elevations.

We were now at the start of the circuit itself, with the option of going either clockwise or counter-clockwise around the range. Although Frimer recommends the latter in his guide, we had opted for the clockwise choice for a number of reasons, most notably that in the clockwise direction, the two toughest passes are last – met at a time when we would





*Climbing to the 5100m pass near Trapezio at the southern end of the alpine circuit.*

PHOTO: PHEE HUDSON

be fittest and most acclimatized, we thought. In retrospect, we made the right choice for the wrong reasons. In a clockwise direction, the approaches to the 10 passes are generally gentler, while the descents were steep and not the sort you would choose to ascend.

There was thick cloud on Rondoy close on our right as we crossed Sambunya Pass (4750m) the next day, and shortly thereafter said goodbye to the team of burros and their masters. Where we were going, they could not follow. We would meet them on the following evening at Lake Mitococha. In the meanwhile, we had a long descent into the Rondoy valley, followed by a further 350m rise to the pocket Lake Garacocha, hanging on the side of the Cerros Paria.

During our approach over sharp weathered limestone, we gazed at the ridge above the lake and queried our guides as to where exactly tomorrow's pass went. It was certainly not obvious. A confusion of answers did not instil much confidence, which was added to by a new dump of snow overnight that did little to encourage us the following morning. But in due course we scrambled a series of limestone ledges and slabs, happily with excellent friction, which brought us to a long rising ramp about 30m below the skyline. There our guides showed their mettle, and strung a rope up a face that turned out to be an easy 5.3 pitch with plenty of holds and ledges.

At noon we stood perched on a narrow ridge, and an airy position it was, with a dramatic drop on the east side down to our evening destination, a long way below. The wind had

dropped, and the sun was out for the first time in a while, so the inevitable wait to get 9 trekkers and 8 crew down two rappels passed pleasantly enough. Later, as we stood below the cliffs and the ropes were coiled, we were unaware we had just done the crux of our alpine circuit. Other passes would be higher, other days would be longer, but Punta Garacocha was the most technically challenging.

The following morning offered glimpses of Rondoy (5870m) towering above our meadow camp as we began another steady climb to Kiricasha Pass. Having yesterday crossed the northern buttress, this was the start of our trek down the 'back' (east) side of the range. Initially the slopes were covered in grass, flowers and ubiquitous cowpats (the area is not a national park because it has long been privately held and used for winter grazing of cattle), but above 4500m the alpine gravels and talus

slopes appeared with only occasional pockets of flowers, and a few birds. At the 5000m pass, a wide barren area of broken rock, the guides amused themselves hunting for ammonite fossils in a specific rock band, and subsequently appeared with several nice specimens.

Over an idle lunch in the sun we learned that our day was far from over, and there was another optional pass to cross before the long descent to Lake Carhuacocha at 4138m. There being little alternative to this 'option', we gamely traversed across steep grassy slopes before another long rise brought us to a pass which the guides called Chaclan Col. However, this is not the Chaclan Col (5180m) shown on maps, located between Jirishanca (6094m) and Yerupaja Chico (6089m). Happily, our col was a mere 4780m, but it offered a spectacular view of the east side of the main summits, and we stood for some time, despite the cool wind and light rain. Clouds sent ragged shadows sliding across the twisted icefalls that are now all that remain of the glaciers that once covered these magnificent summits. The guides pointed to where classic ice routes of the 1980s were now unclimbable, with barely a snow patch left on their once white faces.

A feeling of sadness enveloped me as we made the descent to the lake more than 600m below, as thoughts of what has been lost, and what is still to lose went through my mind. But the arrival of rain in the late afternoon focused my attention on getting down steep wet grass slopes with a minimum of injury, crowding out the bigger picture as we straggled into Carhuacocha camp.

Dawn brought another day of hope. Through the morning fog that lingered after the night's rain, there were tantalizing views of the range, so close, yet invisible. Half an hour's walk along the south side of the lake brought us under the giants, and as we arrived, the mist burned away, and in front of us rose two thousand metres of spectacular summits, glaciers and ridges. The nearness and sudden exposure combined to create a dramatic effect. From the northern outlier Rondoy, past the spear-shaped Jirishanca, to the massive bulk of Yerupaja (at 6617m, the highest in the range) to Suila Grande (6344m, where Joe Simpson touched the void), a panoramic sweep dazzled the eye in the bright morning light. Cameras clicked, superlatives gushed. This was what we had come to see.

That evening, we camped at the village of Huayhuash, although the word 'village' is used cautiously. The vista of scattered thatched shepherd huts and stone corrals, set in a shallow green valley with a stream running through it, was offset by the sad reality that we were sharing our camp that night with the 'normal' circuit trekkers. The area was littered in garbage and unburied human waste. It transpired that our 11-day route touched the popular circuit at only two points, but at both the lack of clean-up by the owners, who pocket a handsome profit from every trekker, and the apathy of the many groups' guides, has led to this sorry state. The irony is that many donkeys go down the mountain lightly loaded and could easily be used to carry out trash that was not burned on site.

Happily, the next morning saw our path once again diverge from the madding crowd, and we were quickly on our own, without trail, heading up a broad grassy valley that offered wonderful views of the outlying peaks at the southern end of the range. Jurau (5674m), Quasillo (5600m) and at the southern end, the beautiful Trapezio (5653m), towered into a blue sky. We slowly curved round their bases, keeping Trapezio on our right all day. At noon we were close to a high pass that led back into the western drainage. It was there we said goodbye to the burros again. We would not be seeing them for some days now. This in turn meant our daypacks became real packs again.

Loaded down, we crossed the Nishaqui Pass at 5120m next to Trapezio, then roped to descend a short tongue of glacier. What followed was a very long descent (800m) to Lake Jurau, which stayed obstinately out of sight round a corner of the valley for much of the afternoon. Above us, soaring basalt columns formed summits that backed the Jurau Glacier, but we only had eyes for that blue pool of water in the valley. It finally appeared after some hours of descending ice-polished slabs. Back on grass again, we found a cattle trail that provided the best route – something we had learned early – when in doubt, follow a cow.

Incredibly, the next day had been designated a rest day, and while one or two folk seemed to misunderstand the meaning of 'rest', most took a well deserved break to wash socks,



*Team Huayhuash - Stan, Charles, Bernhard, Rick, Phee, Ferdi, Christine, Catrin and Russ with Yerupaja (6617m) behind. PHOTO: RUSS MOIR*

re-proof boots, and eat as much as possible. Sadly, this latter option was limited. All the food in camp had been carried over the pass by our team, and was needed for the next 2 days. Feeding 17 people makes for large packs, and our porters and kitchen staff had acquitted themselves impressively, but there is a limit to what even the sons of Quecha, bred at 4000m and built tough, can carry. However, half way through our rest day an arriero arrived unexpectedly with three burros, bringing welcome supplies, including fresh potatoes and unlikely oranges. Then our porters, avid fishermen all, caught tiny trout in the lake, so the rest day was doubly blessed.

We now faced our final two days, and final two passes, both of which were high, and had a certain reputation. But after the rest day, we were in good spirits, and ready to tackle such challenges. An early start took us past the base camp of Simon Yates and Joe Simpson, an empty spot like any other except for a large boulder that identifies the place. It was here that Joe finally dragged himself after breaking a leg on the descent of Suila Grande, being left for dead, and then crawling for 7 days down the Suila Glacier, as told in *Touching the Void*, (Jonathan Cape, 1988).

We were in no mood to crawl, despite our packs. Our line took us up the west side of the Suila Valley, where a long, steep and grassy slope rose 800m to the Velilina Pass at 5000m. Clouds had moved in and our view of Suila Grande, its infamous north ridge, and the more infamous glacier, were partly obscured. Nearing the top, we trudged up fine loose gravel that held startlingly healthy succulents, before dumping our packs at the saddle with relief. Beyond lay another long descent, this time into the Segya River valley and Lake Garamarca, where we would camp for the night. And beyond the lake, the approach to tomorrow's crossing, the dreaded, glaciated Rasac Pass (5120m), visible under scudding cloud.

Like so many things in life, that which is most anticipated often transpires to be the least dramatic. Our prom-

ised nemesis, Rasac Pass, turned out the following day to be a good plod up an easy glacier. With local knowledge from the guides we exited through an un-obvious notch and descended cliff bands on the north side, with only one steep scramble. Thereafter, it was simply a matter of putting one boot in front of the other to lose 1100m so painfully gained over the previous days. By nightfall we had closed the circle and were back at Lake Jahuacoche (4066m) where trekkers, trash and trinkets for sale were all in evidence.

It was the end of the trip in many ways, and we celebrated with our gallant guides, porters, cook team and donkey crew in a suitable manner, and a day later reached Llamac where the bus was waiting.

**Participants:** Catrin Brown, Christine Fordham, Stan Marcus, Russ Moir, Charles Turner, Ferdi Fischer, Bernhard Steinbeis, Phee Hudson, Rick Hudson. Average age: 60.

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## Mountains (El Misti) and Canyons (Colca) in Peru

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Don Morton  
November 5-23

Since the wet November weather on Vancouver Island can be rather discouraging, I flew to Peru for 17 days of climbing and trekking. This also is the wet season in the northern Cordilleras Blanca and Huayuash, but in the south around Arequipa the rain does not come until December. I first went to Cusco (3360m) to acclimatize and explore Inca ruins I had not seen on my previous visit. There was some rain during the 7 days I was there and en route to Puno on Lake Titicaca, but no more than summer showers in Victoria.

Two high volcanoes dominate the northern horizon of Arequipa, the conical 5825m El Misti and the jagged 6075m Chachani, but the 2325m altitude of Peru's second largest city is not adequate for acclimatization. From Cusco I had contacted Zarate Aventura and hired Johan Zarate Flores, grandson of Carlos Zarate, who started guided climbing there in 1954. Johan's uncle, Miguel Zarate, also was a guide and had found the body of a sacrificed Inca girl on the top of Nevado Ampato (6318m) in 1995.

From the end of the road on the south side of El Misti we climbed a good trail 1200m up to a camp. Another 1200m the next day, initially with headlamps, brought us to the rim of the broad crater and up to the summit. The descent to our camp and part of the way to the trailhead was much faster, down fans of soft sand. The altitude did not bother me so I



*Volcan El Misti with a Lenticular Cloud* PHOTO: DON MORTON

arranged with Johan to climb Chachani after a rest day touring museums and colonial mansions in Arequipa. With the help of other local guides he had developed a new route on the mountain from the north free of the danger of rock fall. The first day we were able to drive to 4800m and hiked over the col with Volcan Nocarami to a camp only 125m higher than the trailhead. So the next morning we had 1100m to climb. In places the climb was steeper than El Misti with the need to kick some steps in the compacted volcanic debris and to cross one short exposed section, but the route proved to be an excellent way to reach the summit.

Arequipa also is the starting point for exploring the Colca Canyon, reputed to be one of the deepest in the world, almost 3200m below the local mountains. This is a popular trekking destination so I joined an organized 3-day trip for only 135 soles (\$US 49). I would have preferred a trek by myself but the public buses did not run at convenient times and I could not find a good map. The tour van took us 260 km north and west to Cabanaconde (3287m) stopping at Cruz de Condor to watch one of the birds riding the updrafts. The sheltered climate and abundant water in the canyon support productive orchards and fields, but access is limited to zig-zagging donkey trails. We descended 900m on one of these to a bridge over the Colca River and spent two nights in trekking lodges in the valley. The second stop at Sangalle included a refreshing swim in the lodge pool. On the third day we had a 1000m climb back to Canbanaconde and a swim at the hot springs near Chivay on our return to Arequipa.

The next time I would consider the more demanding 5-day Colca trek to Andagua that crosses Paso Cerani at 5100m or a trip to the more distant Cotahuasi Canyon that is claimed to be the world's deepest.

**Participant:** Don Morton



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## Uganda: Climbing in Wellies (Hat's off to the Duke)

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Russ Moir

December 8-15

For too many mornings the daily routine had begun with an early wake-up call around 5 a.m. from a raunchy cockerel, followed by loud, cheery banter from other early risers passing along the dirt track by our campsite (they seemed to be walking over my head!). The several Canadians and Ugandans working on the project would begin to stir, ready for yet another day's work. We were building a school on an open slope overlooking the DRC (Congo) border and to the north the nearby Rwenzori Mountains - the fabled Mountains of the Moon.

On clear mornings we caught glimpses of a snow-lined peak, imposing and tempting, as this was right on the Equator. Through the long, hot, often drenching days, as we sweated to build the new classrooms, Charles and I would chat about organising a trip into these legendary mountains and of climbing their pinnacle, Mount Stanley (Margharita Peak), a real challenge at 5100m, with its exposed glaciers and steep rock crags. Little did we know as we planned that there would be other, considerable obstacles to our goal. The idea grew on us as we approached completion of the imposing brick, wood and steel structure we'd come out to complete.

The Rwenzoris, not a well publicised range, have had a long mark in history. Ptolemy, the Greek geographer (AD 150) flagged some mysterious high peaks at the end of his amazingly realistic map- prediction of the path of the Nile from out of the emptiness of sub-Saharan Africa. He christened them The Mountains of the Moon and ever since they have appeared in several fictional and real exploration accounts.

After the Victorian explorer, John Speke, claimed he'd found the source of the Nile, at Jinja on Lake Victoria in 1889, (the Ugandans rightly claim to have known about this long before!) he trekked across to near what is now the border with the DRC. From there he saw glistening, high peaks in the distance. The locals thought them to be salt crusted but as he got closer he saw them to be heavily glaciated rock peaks, sitting on the Equator, not exactly a normal occurrence. Later travellers tried to get into the range but the heavy rains (up to 2500mm per year) made access difficult and it wasn't until the 'good old Duke of Abruzzi', that indefatigable, prolific mountain explorer wisely chose the June/July "dry months" of 1906 to get into the place that the summits were reached.

My hat goes off to the guy! Even though he did have loads of servants, guides, porters and probably the family



*Charles and John tackle the Giant Groundsels* PHOTO: RUSS MOIR

silver along, it must have been a tour-de-force for the era. We later sheltered under some of his cave-camps, slithered down his greasy route and can attest to his fortitude.

With the help of Nelson, the dynamic community leader of the local NGO, Cobra, with which we were working to support the education of over 700 orphaned teenagers in this remarkable vocational school, we arranged a guided entry. The Rwenzori Mountain Services are another example of a community based co-operative and they have an agreement with Uganda National Parks to organise and guide in the mountains.

So fairly briskly, after completing the school's roof, Charles and I along with Simon (a young but old friend of my son, Cam, who were both here experiencing Africa in the raw) packed up a minimal load of clothing, food and gear for the sortie. Early one morning we were driven to Park Headquarters by Peter and Natalie in the group's elderly van and left to meet up with the local guides and porters who would be our companions and saviours over the next week. The trip was finally on!

Before we had ventured from Bwera we'd been told that Wellington boots (wellies) were needed - we mildly scoffed at

the idea. We should have known better - arrogant and ignorant of what was in store. Our big packs were loaded onto our porters, our three guides (suitably shod in fancy blue wellies) greeted us and after a briefing we were off.

We were headed with rented axe, crampons, harness etc for Margarita Peak. Poster shots showed glistening glaciers, craggy ridges and bold rock pinnacles under blue skies. As alpine addicts, to Charles and me, it seemed a tempting 'fix'. For Simon, a newcomer to alpine terrain, it must have seemed a daunting prospect, but he stuck out his chin and happily tagged along. As he works for the Coast Guard off the Queen Charlottes he knows danger and discomfort, but still the trip must have raised questions for him. I've known him since early teens and what I saw over the next several days only added to my respect for him.

The Rwenzori Circuit consists of a big loop route served by about seven mountain huts. We planned to head up to the fourth one, Elena hut at 4600m and from there go for the summit in a four hour push.

The first day was á piece of cake as they say. We waltzed up the relatively dry trail, passing through thick tropical vegetation. We scanned the bush for signs of the diminutive mountain elephant, now rarely seen, but though we spotted some of their trails, we missed any sighting. Still it was an interesting passage before we arrived at the simple but substantial first hut. We were impressed to say the least with all the materials that had been carried up for its construction by the local people, all on top of their heads. Yet this was just the 'tip of the iceberg'. We'd soon get to the 'jaw dropping' stage in the coming days.

On the second morning our guides kindly informed us that 'rubber boots' would be in order from now on. They were! After a vegetated and slippery descent to a suspension bridge over a turbulent river we began the long climb into the hills, an ascent which would take us three more days. It took a little while and care to gain confidence in our thinly-soled wellies but after a while they felt reasonably comfortable and secure on the rocky sections and certainly held sway in the glutinous, black ooze we began to encounter; an easy introduction to 'the bogs'.

As we approached the second night's shelter through bamboo thickets, stretches of strange giant ferns and the odd Grand Lobelia (a massive plant), our clothes started to become more mud-spattered and the wellies were certainly non too clean. Again looking around the cabin, outlying shelters, toilets and cookhouse, we marvelled at the effort which must have been put in to construct all the huts over increasingly rough terrain. During the evening we explored the muddy track down to the swirling river below and met up with the next day's challenge, a really bottomless bog, waiting patiently to suck a leg into its grasp. We'd been issued wooden poles (Charles had his own trekking poles) and here they

came to the fore. A prod here, a push there and we began to get the knack of searching for partially solid places to trust our footing onto. The river was easy with the waders though the rocks needed care to balance on.

On the subject of balance, it felt as if we were high-wire artistes as we traversed the endless mire. Our lead guide, the 71 year old Peter, would prod a featureless morass with his stick to indicate where to step. When we followed we would find a small branch placed underwater which gave some support. Missing the branch or slipping off would result in immersion, often over boot-level. How he and his fellow guide John knew the branch locations all along the journey remains a mystery. All of them had been placed at some time by the RMS folks. Without them the traverse would need hip-waders.

This third day brought us onto two very interesting bog areas. The Lower and Upper Bigo Bogs have been designated RAMSAR sites, part of a worldwide marshland conservation programme to recognise significant wetlands. As such the locals have built, at an enormous effort, a one kilometre boardwalk suspended on barrels to protect the flora. The boards gave us confidence to look around and admire the strange vegetation around us. There were Giant Lobelias with popsicle style tufted tops, prolific white flowers which only open in rainy weather, glorious emerald green mosses and the inviting tussock grasses. These latter gave us a spot to hop onto for secure footing. Beware the foot which didn't reach the next clump!

As we ascended, the temperatures grew colder and though the sun did peek out occasionally the mountains above us were tantalisingly shrouded in passing mists. A brief opening gave us glimpse of a high, threatening hanging glacier set above steep, scoured crags. It was our first sight of the alpine we had come to climb. With minimal alpine gear (we really were on a tropical building project) as soon as night fell around 7 p.m., we huddled into all our clothes and then into thin sleeping bags. Even so we still enjoyed firing up our stoves together under candlelight and feasted on some great combined dishes, some quite novel.

The Bujuku Hut at 3962m was delightfully sited on a vegetated slope beneath a col on the DRC border about 600m away. We felt as if we were really on the edge of somewhere. The 'serious' elevation now began with yet another boggy traverse. Steeply the route headed up a big ridge towards the high camp at Elena. Still the weird vegetation often brought out our cameras. We could look back over scenic views to the dark lake along which we had squelched and slithered the previous day. Now we were into stands of Giant Groundsel, a unique representative at this elevation in East Africa's mountain areas. Growing as high as twenty feet they look like heavy, tufted cigars with long leaf formations, stuck onto a steep hillside. The scene was like a Tolkien backdrop, especially with the drifting mists, drizzle and moss-hung rocks.



*Elena Hut and Mt Baker* PHOTO: RUSS MOIR

Again we puzzled as to how the locals had carried the long steel ladders up the cliffs of Groundsel Gully, all done on their heads and shod in wellies.

At this altitude (c 4400m) unnerving symptoms can start to appear. Simon, on his first high level trip, was suffering from a continuous headache. At a dry spot under an overhanging cliff we reviewed our position, but Simon stoical, after medication, grinned and stepped off up the steepening rocks. In short order we burst into the alpine. It was a joy to be on solid rock and at last to be in view of the high pinnacles and glaciers we had come to challenge. At the simple but effective shelter at Elena (4600m) we settled in to soup-up and to go over our climbing gear, including putting on our boots at long last. Our excitement grew at the prospect of ascending the inviting rocks and ice above us.

As dusk fell the wind increased and with it came sleet and snow flurries, bouncing on the thin metal roof. All night the door banged and at alarm-call (5 a.m.) we saw.... nothing. A thick mist blanketed the scene. Grumpily we reviewed our options with the guides. We waited for some clearing but inevitably it dawned on us that the upper slopes, especially on the crevassed glacier, would be too risky in the wind and poor visibility. When some clearing did occur we saw fresh snow covering the rocks over which we would have to scramble.

Now came the completion of the Rwenzori circuit, back to the normal trekking route. Down steep, greasy rocks we slithered until the much-awaited advice from our guides came - "Put on your wellies". As we rejoined the normal circuit at Scott Elliott Pass the ooze began again. The initial descriptions had only off-handedly mentioned 'more bog', so we were a little chagrined at what seemed continuous slurrp for the next two days. In addition to this the exit required a steep, craggy ascent to Freshfield Pass (4300m) and two very wet rock descents worthy of the Rockies. Two days later we were back at trail-head and ready to try to clean up.

If all this sounds far-fetched you have my sympathy. It seemed to us like some crazy dream. I still wake up from sleep with a vision of a mud hole in front of me. A cold sweat follows. For a route description imagine, if you can, the West Coast Trail (before boardwalks)

superimposed onto the traverse of the Golden Hinde and then put it all on top of Mount Rainier. Oh, and have someone throw globs of mud at you. My gratitude goes to my two unflinching, compatible friends. Without their good humour and determination this trip would have taken too much out to have been able to appreciate the remarkable scenes.

As an aside, the guides were ever keen to ask our advice on 'exposing' the circuit to potential clients and to get further training in rock skills. The glaciers are rapidly retreating. This leaves behind long stretches of ice-scoured steep rock. Their skills had left a visiting alpinist a little un-nerved. He graciously arranged for some German and British guides to give the RMS personnel an upgrade on Mount Kenya. I admire their efforts to spread the wealth of Rwenzori 'tourism' around the impoverished locality. It is just the sort of low-level input which is so more effective in Africa than large scale government projects. They have their hands full in attracting clientele. A realistic description of the trekking would not act as a magnet for the well-heeled muzungu (white man). Mind you we were pretty 'black' when we came out!

Oh, the noisy cockerel? We enjoyed him on our return.....in the pot - poetic justice no doubt.

**Participants:** Charles Turner, Simon Jesshope, Russ Moir, Peter, John, Herbert (guides) and assorted helpers



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## La Sierra Norte: More Bang For Your Buck (or is that more perks for your pesos?)

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John Young

December 11-12

One hundred dollars! What can \$100 buy you these days? Well, in the Mexican La Sierra Norte, it buys you two days of private guided hiking, four meals, and one night's accommodation in a deluxe cabin with hot running water.

Granted, my hike doesn't start out too smoothly. I caught a second-class bus this morning, and my itinerary, as far as I can figure, indicates that I'm to start my tour in the village of Benito Juárez. The bus stops, and I enter the eco-tourism office, show them my itinerary, but they tell me, in Spanish, that I have to walk for a kilometre back down the road. I'm confused. My emerging Spanish language skills aren't quite up to deciphering the intricacies of someone explaining where I need to go. The man in the office walks back down the road with me, and I think he's going to guide me to where I need to go, but, no, he only takes me as far as the outskirts of town. He then points down the winding road, says something about walking a kilometre to a curve in the road, and draws a rough map in the dirt. I head off, stopping to take pictures of the drying corn husks on the roof of a house. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to see in a kilometre, and after 15 minutes I come to an "S" turn, but there's nothing there that looks significant. I continue on, thinking that it's a nice day for a walk anyway, and come to another curve; then I see a sign: "Benito Juárez, 4." Relieved, I start off down the dirt track.

Los Pueblos Mancomunados (joint towns) is an ecotourism project that includes hiking and mountain biking trails linking several villages in La Sierra Norte, mountains just east of the city of Oaxaca in south central Mexico, from 2000-3200 metres in elevation. This is an extraordinary and unique area containing seven of the nine vegetation types that exist in Mexico, and is rich in flora and fauna. One could hike from village to village for up to a week, staying in the luxurious cabins and eating in the dining rooms.

It's a beautiful walk in the warm sun through farmland, with agave growing along the roadside. I meet nary a soul before I hit Benito Juárez, a pueblito at the end of the dirt road. From here, it's another six kilometres to La Nevería, my destination for the day. I head into the tourism office, show the girl my itinerary, and ask her if I can walk to La Nevería. She looks at the young man beside her and says no, but gets on the phone. Then she tells me there'll be a guide for me in half an hour. To kill time, I head to the "comedor" next door and have a "rica" vegetable soup, chicken and tor-



*Miguel, my guide on day one* PHOTO: JOHN YOUNG

tillas. I return to the tour office, and the girl introduces me to Miguel, the young man who was there before, and tells me he'll be my guide. He gestures for me to follow him, and he heads out, carrying nothing but a VHF radio. For the first while, we walk off and on a single-lane dirt road, but about the only "vehicle" we see is a burro laden with grain sacks followed by a farmer. The trail reminds me of Nepal at lower elevations, with tall pine trees, but with hills in the distance instead of the Himalaya.

After two and a half hours we reach La Nevería, or the Expediciones Sierra Norte cabins, adjacent to the pueblito. Miguel has a bite to eat and returns to Benito Juárez. The cabins are situated on a hill overlooking the valley we crossed on our way, and the camp director points out Benito Juárez across the way. I'm surprised by the cabins, both by the quantity and the quality. There are about 8 of them, and they are all new looking, built of pine, with stone fireplaces and hot (!) showers. I have a cabin all to myself, and there are only two other tourists here, the second weekend in December.

After I luxuriate in the hot shower, I head up to the comedor for "la comida." I'm the only patron, and have a delicious vegetable soup, followed by rice and salsa, tortillas with veggies, egg, and cheese. More food than I can eat! I attempt to make conversation with the mother and daughter working there, and learn that they can accommodate up to 85 people here. They claim that it does get busy.

The next morning, I arise at dawn and wander around La Nevería taking pictures. It appeared to have frozen overnight, and yet flowers are still blooming. I return for a bountiful breakfast, and at nine set out with Aniceto, my new guide. His wife joins us, and we haven't walked far before we come across a vehicle. Aniceto seems concerned. We're still in the sanctuary, and the cutting of plants is forbidden. We haven't walked much farther before Aniceto stops, cocks an

ear, and heads off down a path. He returns shortly after, followed by three men and two women, who had been illegally harvesting pine cones and branches for Christmas decorations. Funny, thing, though, when the five of them reach me and Aniceto's wife, they politely say, "Buenos días. ¿Cómo está?" Then Aniceto's wife heads back with the five "poachers." I'm not sure why. To make sure they leave? Or had she not planned on walking with us the whole way anyway?

We walk on a trail most of the way, high up on a ridge overlooking farmland below. At one point we stop and Aniceto tells me there's a nice spot for photos. I climb under a fence, and out to the edge of a cliff, and there in the distance is the city of Oaxaca, lightly shrouded in smog. I talk to Aniceto along the way, and he tells me he guides most days of the week. From La Neveria he leads clients to a few different spots, usually on foot, but sometimes on bike. I also learn that the children in the village have kindergarten there, and then after that must go to Benito Juárez, either by foot or bike. After a couple of hours, we take a break, and I eat the bagged lunch the ladies had given me at breakfast, but all Anecito has are a few little apples he picked along the way. He shares one with me, and I share my sandwich with him.

The last half hour we're walking on a road, and have another great vista of Oaxaca. We come out to the highway and a short while later a colectivo taxi comes along and we catch a ride to Oaxaca. Aniceto is heading into the city, and will stay with relatives before catching the bus back to the Sierra Norte tomorrow. I'm sorry the trek is over so soon and vow to return next year, for longer! I want to return for the wonderful scenery, accommodations, and food, the tranquillity, the sunshine, but most of all, to share some time with such wonderful people.

If you're interested in visiting La Sierra Norte:

**[www.sierranorte.org.mx](http://www.sierranorte.org.mx)**

The city of Oaxaca, arguably the most beautiful colonial city in Mexico, merits a lengthy stay all on its own.

It helps to know some rudimentary Spanish to visit La Sierra Norte.

The wet season is from May to December, but November is generally dry, and warmer than the winter.

**Participant:** John Young

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## Snow Storm on Mount Kenya

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Charles Turner

December 20-25



*Charles Turner at the base of Nelion, Mt Kenya* PHOTO: C. TURNER COLLECTION

After our failed attempt on Margarita Peak in the Rwenzori mountains I decided I couldn't let the hard earned acclimatization go to waste. So, having just enough time before returning home, I decided to go to Kenya and attempt the main summit of Mount Kenya a mid 5th class classic. I tried to get there on my last visit to Uganda 2 years ago but ran out of time but still had a contact from then, Hiram Munuhe. So I emailed him and he remembered me and was more than happy to make arrangements for my climb this time.

Next I found a flight and was soon on my way to Nairobi. Unfortunately my 1 hour flight was delayed 3 hours so I had to overnight in Nairobi. I found my transport easily the next morning; a 12 seater Toyota van that doesn't leave until it is full. Two hours later we are off on our 3 hour journey. I called Hiram on my cell and he told the driver where to drop me off. I arrived to a warm welcome and lunch. We went over some details and decided there was still time to leave that day. So it was off to buy food and pick up porters arriving at the Naro Moru Park gate at 3 p.m. with a 3 hour hike ahead of us. We made it just before dark. While I set up my tent the porters cooked dinner. They also carried my pack. I think I can get used to this way of traveling.

The next day we had a 6 hour hike to Mackinder camp at 4300m. The views of Mount Kenya were spectacular, especially in the evening light.

The next day I was away at 6 a.m. to climb Point Lenana at 4985m. This is the destination of most trekkers. Other than



*David on Nelion, Mt Kenya* PHOTO: CHARLES TURNER

the altitude and some ice it is a fairly straight forward route and was a really good acclimatization climb for me. The views of Batian and Nelion, the 2 summits of Mount Kenya, were amazing but rather intimidating as I was going to attempt to climb them the following day. To bed early as my climbing guide David and I were going to leave at 3 a.m..

The following morning I was presented with a huge breakfast of French toast, omelet and porridge. I managed a little porridge and tea and then we were off into the cold dark night. I was very aware of how I was feeling and hoping I was well enough acclimatized for the climb.

We arrived at the bottom of Nelion to a beautiful sunrise. We put on our harnesses and helmets, tied into the rope and we were off. The rock was solid, the day was clear and so far I felt good. The climbing was challenging and occasionally David would ask for tension in the rope and then I knew there was a hard section coming up. We had been climbing for hours but still the summit looked a long way off but slowly pitch by pitch we made it in 6 hours at an altitude of 5188m.

It started to hail so we dove into the small bivy shelter that was a welcome sight for lunch. The weather was getting worse and soon we were looking out on a full blown blizzard. So much for the main summit! Oh well, it's only 11 metres higher. We slept for a while hoping the weather would change. Unfortunately it didn't but we had to leave anyway to be down before dark.

There was about 6 inches of new snow on the ledges which made rappelling a little hairy. Very carefully, one rap after another, we made it down cold and wet in the failing light. I was very relieved to be off the mountain as a bivy in those conditions could be fatal. Very tired but happy, we made it back to camp in snow the whole way after an 18 hour day.

The next day was Christmas Day though it really didn't feel like it. I managed to hike out and make it back to Nairobi for a hot shower and Christmas dinner. I flew back to Uganda the next morning and spent my last few days in the Ssesse Islands on Lake Victoria.

**Participant:** Charles Turner





# Mountain Air

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## A Big Day Out: Mountain Biking the Amiskwi Valley to Blaeberry River

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Michael Davison  
June 7

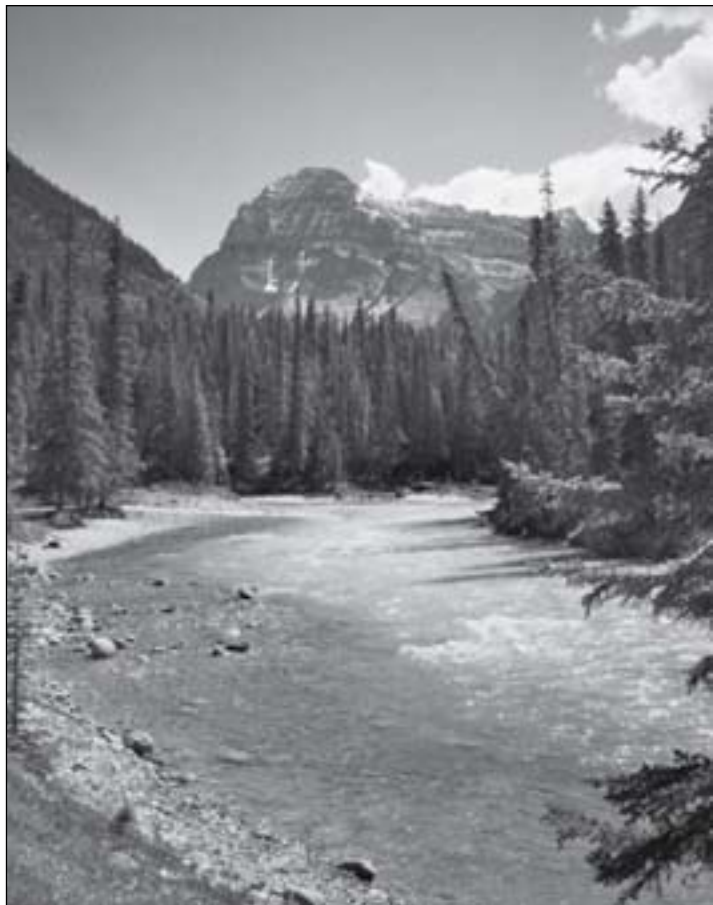
Whenever we get to new area, we as mountaineers are always keen to map out exploring routes, peaks to climb, and trails to get us into the remote areas of the backcountry. For me it's about all of those, but for some reason I always like to plan more of circle route rather than an in/back-the-same-way route, especially when I'm using a mountain bike as a mode of transportation. Now I know this has been a touchy subject for a lot of our members, but a lot of what we hike or ride nowadays has been at one time or another a logging road or FSR for access to the backcountry for fire suppression or the pillaging of our forest resources. That said, the majority of these kinds of rides I have undertaken have also been on horse-style trails that are designated also for mountain biking.

So after working the winter in the area in Golden, BC, and having spent previous years working in the Rockies neighboring this huge area, I have a certain amount of unfinished business on my list of peaks to climb or areas to explore. It's always amazing to me not so much that I actually plan these massive and long one-day rides, it's kinda the fact that I actually undertake them, solo. Probably because most people I know wouldn't be so motivated to ride such big kilometres in one day, and doing it solo, there isn't the option of having somebody talk you out of it, or I'm just crazy!!

So the goal for this epic ride was to ride from Golden, BC along the Trans-Canada highway #1 to approximately Field or a few km's just before, turn north towards the Emerald Lake road, pick up the fire road for the Amiskwi valley, follow that up to the Amiskwi Pass, and drop over and down

into the Blaeberry River valley for a completed circuit back to Golden.

After a few weeks' planning for a long ride such as this, it was slowly looking like it was going to come together. Scheduled days off were coinciding with a great stretch of warm weather (though I've been skunked before by bad forecasting), and I was just hoping the legs and energy level were going to get me through it all. So on an early Monday morning in June, I loaded up my water bottles, made a quick stop at the store for some more provisions, and off I went. Now anybody who has driven the #1 out of Golden heading east knows that it climbs continuously for a good 20km to get up to the Kicking Horse River valley, but hey what a good warm-up. On a previous ride through to Calgary for training, this first 20km was my slowest of the whole ride. This time though, being on fatty knobby tires, it was just as slow. I did have the pleasure of chatting and riding/pacing with a group who were on their way across Canada, and as they were spread out for nearly the whole 20km it was interesting chatting with some of them, and just riding with others, the roadies, as they can't stand when somebody on knobby's passes them. But I did a pretty good job of keeping up, riding my own pace as I knew what was ahead of me, as this was only the warm up for what lay ahead. So riding along the TC to the turn-off to Emerald Lake proved to be a good warm-up completed in a few short hours. A short rest stop and fuelling at the Natural Bridge spot and I was soon on the FSR for the Amiskwi valley. Now Parks Canada does some updating of their trail reports but – I'm sure mostly due to low \$\$ in the budget (though ironically user fees have gone up) – the last report for this trail was several weeks old. I kinda laughed when it said to watch out for wolves, cougars, black bears and grizzlies along this important wildlife corridor, only because, sadly, a lot of the wildlife we see nowadays is beside the highways, not in the backcountry. But as I slowly left civilization behind and turned up onto the FSR road there were so many bear shit-piles along the first 10km that I started beginning to sing out loud, very loud. A pile very



*Confluence of Kicking Horse River and Amiskwi River, Mt Field in background* PHOTO: MICHAEL DAVISON

few hundred feet had me a little edgy, and some were much fresher than others. The trail/road itself was becoming quite overgrown, not so much that I couldn't ride it, but enough that it could certainly hide a big black beast only a few feet from me and I wouldn't even know as I rode by.

The trail continues for 30+km from the original trail-head, meandering through forest for the first 20km or so, before finally breaking out into some great wide open views of towering peaks on either side and the destination pass in front of me. As the kilometres passed by, the trail changed from an overgrown fire road to a single-track trail. Signs of previous man-activity scarred certain areas of the trail, as the FSR was cut into this valley for fire suppression many years ago, so at certain areas there are still lots of old remnants of a camp that obviously had equipment breakdowns in the area. There are rusted rims, shafts, and other bits of metal lying all around.

So after riding for little more than an hour from pavement the pass was visible to me, albeit in the distance quite a way, the weather so far looked like I might luck out, as the few clouds in the skies were disappearing. As the trail meandered in and out of the open forest, following the river up

the valley, it also became quite overgrown in spots. Having to put my head down and barrel through overgrown alder and pine trees was tricky, as every once in a while the alder was so thick it would either force me to stop to make sure I was actually still on the trail, or it would simply pull one side of the handlebars, driving me into the alder on the side. The occasional sink-hole in the middle of the trail was also a reminder to keep my mind focused on the task at hand. After several kilometres it finally broke into more open, rough trails, keeping the views stunning, but also providing several chilling river crossings. The last bridge I had been able to cross was over a small creek a little way back. The Amiskwi River was running a little too fast to try to ride through it, so it was bike/hiking through the thigh deep fast running water. Thankfully there were lots of sticks around that could be used as a balance pole. It was so refreshing though, walking through it, as the heat was bearing down on me now that I was in the open alpine sun. Within about 10km of the main pass the trail disappeared for a few kilometres, but I managed to pick a faint trail on the north side of the river, eventually this trail opened up into a rideable trail to within 2km of the final ascent to the pass. I bike/hiked the last few kilometres to the pass, as it was unrideable.

Once at the pass, the half way point of this ride I was a delighted at the vistas looking both ways. Looking way back down the Amiskwi valley, or north across the Blaeberry valley towards the Mummery Glacier group. Now as the ride distance goes, it was at 90km and this was the half way point: if I didn't think I could make it I would simply turn around. Or, if I thought I could I would keep going, the reason being that at least I knew what lay behind me, and I was a little unsure still of what was to come. Starting out again heading over the pass I encountered snow in the trees, and for part way down the trail. But as I was going downhill the snow was a pleasant riding challenge – almost like skiing but with a different braking system. As I approached the end of the single-track, again the trail split into several forks before ending in a clearing, an obvious staging area. Once you break out of the pass you hit a logging road, not more than 5km from the pass that is used by the backcountry lodge close to the pass. I always find it ironic in BC that the moment you leave a park boundary you visually know it. A staging area for the lodge was littered with chicken wire, fuel barrels and an assortment of garbage in several burn piles. As my map showed there was a logging spur to take me back down to the Blaeberry main, I'd hoped for more of a single track descent, but the ball-busting, bone-jarring, high-speed 4500 feet descent of the logging road proved challenging enough, skidding around corners, taking a few serious jolts on some big hits. Less than 30 minutes later I was back down to the main road at the Blaeberry River. Decisions, decisions; turn right to head back towards the divide and Howse pass, or left back towards pavement and civilization.

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## Extolling the virtue of Tea

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Lindsay Elms



The famous British mountaineer Frank Smythe, once wrote about the delights of tea in his book *Climbs in the Canadian Rockies*: “Cocoa nourishes the body, but tea elevates the soul of man; for its flavour is unique, not obvious like cocoa or coffee, but ambrosial and infinitely delicate. In this delicacy and fragrance we perceive those far gardens whence it comes, the scented hills of Ceylon [Sri Lanka] over the blue southern seas; the slopes of Darjeeling at the foot of the Himalaya; the hills of Assam; the isles of the Indies; eternal China.” I can hear all you ex-pats saying: “G’on luv, pop into the kitchen and put the kettle on like a good girl will ya while I finish reading this story.”

Tea is the agricultural product of the leaves, leaf buds, and internodes of the *Camellia sinensis* plant, prepared and cured by various methods. “Tea” also refers to the aromatic

Considering my energy level, time of day and weather I made the proper decision, and turned the bike towards the direction of the Columbia valley and Golden district (leaving Howse Pass for another time). Now as FSR roads go for riding, they are not my most favorite places to ride, but being back onto pretty solid ground, and able to pick up the pace, it didn't seem too bad, yet. After riding for about 5km down the valley, I came across the first of several flooded parts of the FSR road. The river itself was way too fast and high to try fording around the flood plain, but lucky for me water has a way of finding the lowest areas to go to. Unlucky for me it was still a deep, mucky wallow through 'glacier cold' swamp water, while carrying my bike overhead. I encountered two more of these types of fords, the last one actually involving a tricky log crossing that ended up forcing me into the forest to avoid the deeper part of the water. As I pushed, pulled, and dragged my bike and myself through the thick brush, stumbling out back onto the road, anybody there as I stumbled out of the bush would have had themselves a good laugh, more for the sheer surprise as well as the sight of a mountain biker popping out of the bush. Hoping that this was the last of those, I wearily got back on the bike and began pedaling off again. Unfortunately just after this I noticed that my bike computer had been knocked off somewhere, probably in the bush-whacking part of the last ford. The last recorded kilometre mark was at 210km. (The total kilometres were estimated after this to be 240.) Several more low water spots were encountered, but nothing more serious, just streams running over the road for 100 metres or so. Now the boredom of the FSR was beginning to set-in, as the best scenery was all behind or above me, it was time to put the head down and just 'spin'. Ironically when I got to within about 10km of pavement there was a barricade provided by BC Forest service to warn people that the road was flooded – the area from which I had just come – indeed it was!

Having ridden in drier spots of our province I was very grateful for the continuous supply of fresh creeks to keep the water bottles full. By this point of the ride, energy bars only do so much, and water was probably the best thing for me. The rest of the ride was fairly uneventful, riding back into civilization. Considering the amount of kilometres travelled and the area I was in, I never saw or encountered any wildlife, nothing, not a deer, bear, wolf, squirrel, or blue jay, not to say I wasn't being watched.

After hitting the Trans Canada #1 for the 10 km ride back to town and turning off the highway to the 7-11 store for the biggest slurpee they had, my phone suddenly rings, signaling that I am back in civilization once again.

Distance: 240 kilometres

Time: 14 hours

Bike ridden: Jamis Xpert, full suspension

Amount of water consumed in 14 hours: 10+ litres

## of beers consumed before bed: Hmm don't remember!



beverage prepared from the cured leaves by combination with hot or boiling water. After water, tea is the most widely-consumed beverage in the world. It has a cooling, slightly bitter, astringent flavour which many enjoy. There are six varieties of tea; white, yellow, green, oolong, black and pu-erh of which the most commonly found on the market are white, green, oolong and black. All tea are made from the same bushes but processed differently, and, in the case of fine white tea, grown differently. Pu-erh tea, a post-fermented tea, is also often used medicinally.

The term “herbal tea” usually refers to an infusion or tisane of leaves, flowers, fruit, herbs or other plant material that contains no *Camellia sinensis*. The term “red tea” either refers to an infusion made from the South African rooibos plant, also containing no *Camellia sinensis*, or, in Chinese, Korean, Japanese and other East Asian languages, refers to black tea.

The British are famous for their “cuppa tea” but things haven’t always gone the way they would have liked. On December 16, 1773, in a town in the British colony of Massachusetts called Boston, colonists threw a little party that remains an iconic event in American history. After officials in Boston refused to return three shiploads of taxed tea to Britain, a group of colonists headed to Boston Harbour. There a group of 30 to 130 men, some of them thinly disguised as Mohawk Indians, boarded the three vessels and, over the course of three hours, dumped all 342 chests of tea into the water.

The Boston Tea Party was a direct action by colonists against the British government. It was the culmination of a resistance movement throughout British America against the Tea Act, which had been passed by the British Parliament in 1773. Colonists objected to the Tea Act for a variety of reasons, especially because they believed that it violated their right to be taxed only by their own elected representatives. Protesters had successfully prevented the unloading of taxed tea in three other colonies, but in Boston, embattled Royal Governor Thomas Hutchinson refused to allow the tea to be returned to Britain. He apparently did not expect that the protestors would choose to destroy the tea rather than concede the authority of a legislature in which they were not directly represented.

The Boston Tea Party was a key event in the growth of the American Revolution. Parliament responded in 1774 with the Coercive Acts, which, among other provisions, closed Boston’s commerce until the British East India Company had been repaid for the destroyed tea. Colonists in turn responded to the Coercive Acts with additional acts of protest, and by convening the First Continental Congress, which petitioned the British monarch for repeal of the acts

and coordinated colonial resistance to them. The crisis escalated, and the American Revolutionary War began near Boston in 1775. All because of tea!

However, tea can also be a catharsis in promoting goodwill. In the mountainous region of Pakistan (once a British colony) there is a Balti proverb which says: “The first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family...” In 2006 American Greg Mortenson wrote a book, *Three Cups of Tea*, describing his transition from a mountain-climber to a humanitarian committed to reducing poverty and educating girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was the result of the care and hospitality he received by the strangers after an accident in the mountains.

Unbeknownst to most people Britain’s current ruling monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, (bless ‘er ‘eart) deliberately pays (from a secret slush fund) the colonists, or ex-pats as they are now known, around the world to keep alive the daily tradition of drinking tea. It has been a tough, up-hill battle as North Americans, since the party in Boston, have become known for their coffee consumption. However, with the coming of the new millennium, specialized tea shops have infiltrated the continent with more and more people appreciating the subtle and remedial flavours associated with tea.

We, out on here on our beautiful little West Coast Island, have always felt more British than American. With our capital city named after a royal monarch and a Union Jack fluttering from the top of the Empress Hotel in the coastal breeze, it must be true! Therefore in the best of British traditions (Rule Britannia) we, including us mountaineers, have been imbibing the “brew” for a long time. We all know that a good cup of tea begins by picking the choicest tea leaves but once that is done and they are dried, what does it take next?

In a 1961 article in Victoria’s *Daily Colonist* Eric Sismey wrote: “To make good tea one must have good water, bubbly boiling, and Salmon River water seeping from the slopes of Crown Mountain and from snowfields on Victoria Peak’s rock spires cold and unsullied, unlike much of the water we are forced to use, which we first contaminate then sterilize until it reeks of chlorine. The water I used in our tea wasn’t from the Salmon River but it wasn’t far away coming from the slopes of Rugged Mountain. When the tea was made I had time to sit back and enjoy the brew and reflect on the climbs of the last two days. They had been smashin’!”

Today the tradition of “brewing-up” is still practiced by many in the mountains and most of the observations are that it tastes better than the tea at home which no doubt has something to do with the source of the water.



Rick Eppler – Mountain Man  
1952 – 2011

*Rick gaining the 'Freedom of Tryfan'.* PHOTO CATRIN BROWN

Perhaps I am not alone in my guilt of remembering all the wonderful aspects of the lives of our friends, only after they have died. We are all complex beings, none moreso than our companion of the mountains, Rick Eppler. We climbed together periodically for over 23 years, and my major memory of Rick is, despite his obsession with climbing (and with finding lost golf balls), that he was generous to a fault and a true friend.

When Rick joined the 1975 Basic Mountaineering course that Dave Tansley and I were teaching for the YM/YWCA, he was a scrawny young guy with a developing physique that would take him well beyond the ambitions and capabilities of his instructors. As others will testify, his ability in the mountains, was partly a natural talent, partly a learned skill, the result of his focus on everything related to climbing. Rick seldom did anything by halves. Whether it was collecting model trains, building powered model airplanes, painting mountain scenes, racing cars, or climbing mountains, it was the same. And fortunately, he was as constant with his friends.

Robie Macdonald was his more consistent climbing partner, but I will mention a few of our climbs, beyond those “graduating climbs” of Arrowsmith and Baker. In 1976 we were in the Waddington region, where we were over-awed by the scale of the terrain. But Rick searched for peaks that he still could attach a name to, and we climbed as many as the waist-deep snow and our fledgling ability allowed. We had memorable “failures” on Sir Donald and Hood. On Mount Hood, trying to be in a advantageous spot for a solar eclipse, Rick, Robie, Diane Erickson and I



*John Simpson, Bill Feyrer, Gil Parker and Rick Eppler on Mount Baker summit in 1975*

PHOTO: GIL PARKER

had camped in winter near the top of the ski tow waiting for better climbing visibility and/or the eclipse. We amused ourselves ski jumping off cornices in the whiteout, and digging a massive snowcave for the night. But Rick’s claustrophobia would not allow him to sleep in there, however, and we had to flip pot lids to determine who would stay with Rick in the (noisy, wind-blown) tent outside. Robie lost!

I won’t list the many summits we shared, except to thank Rick for dragging me up Lefroy, Tomyhoi, Shasta, Glacier and many more, long after I had exceeded my “past due date”. My gratitude to Rick is only matched by thankfulness that he was able to explore and climb right up to the last year of his exceptional life.

– Gil Parker



Let us remember Rick Eppler, and celebrate a life well lived. We can ask for nothing more after we have passed through, leaving a little behind. He was a man who never failed to give of his best when needed. His abilities in the backcountry were legend, his capacity for bushwhacking second to none. He could wrestle his way up insane slopes, choked with slide alder, suspended orang-utan-like on faces that were only possible with a prehensile grip and a simian's ability not to fall out of trees. He was cheerful and funny, the dry humour slipping out when least expected, to take the tension down a notch and bring courage to those whose own might be failing, as dusk approached and the prospect of a dry bed was vanishing. His skills on steep wet rock with few handholds and no rope were of the highest order, and his passion for the unclimbed summit caused him to go, so often, where others had not simply not gone before, but had not even considered going.

For much of his adult life he lived alone, but unlike many bachelors, Rick was meticulous about his home. Everything had its place, everything was tidy. His garage was always swept, the truck clean, despite the previous weekend's mud bath. His attention to maintenance bordered on obsessive – fixtures were painted, upgraded, changed, serviced with an attention rarely found in bachelor pads. The walls of his apartment showed the phases of his collecting passions – model trains, mineral specimens, art – yet despite this tidiness, he kept a parrot that was free to wander anywhere, splatting where the mood took it, and accountable to no one.

Over the years, he identified many unclimbed summits (he worked at the province's aerial mapping department – an ideal location). In the company of friends, notably Robie Macdonald, he climbed them in a series of bold and often epic trips. Rick brought two important skills to those sorties – his willingness to roll out of a warm sleeping bag, regardless of what the weather looked like in the dark pre-dawn hours, and his astonishing strength. He had a physique like a steelworker, and legs that never tired. He could carry heavy loads all day, and at the end, settle down and say in a dreamy sort of way, "Well, that was a long one," as though it was nothing at all.

That strength was apparent in other fields too. In middle age he switched from collecting HO trains to mineral prospecting. The transformation fitted him perfectly – there was the adventure, the possibility of



*Just four months before the end, Rick still carried a massive pack, and hiked long distances. He was a real trooper who could go all day and never complained.*

PHOTO: RICK HUDSON

finding something interesting, plus the cheery prospect of fighting through bush for many hours, loaded down with hammers, mauls and steel chisels, and the even better prospect of reversing the whole operation on the way out, only now loaded down with interesting 'stuff'. On a memorable day in the Jordan River, where we'd come across some superb minerals, he carried over 50kg of chalcopyrite up a steep talus slope for over an hour in the heat of the day. Then, when we reached the car, he offered me the entire packful. "I thought you wanted it," was his answer to my disbelieving question.



*Rick on the summit of Mt. Alava during the 2010 Summer Camp* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

On a mineral trip we did together in the Okanagan, he spent an afternoon chiselling a nodule of blue agate out of the hardest rock you could imagine. The temperature hovered in the mid-30s, sweat poured off him as he swung a huge sledgehammer, hour after hour, gradually breaking away the surrounding casing. Others came to look, admire the nodule, and retreat in disbelief at the human machine that wouldn't give up. Late in the cool of the evening it finally came free. We were alone on the slope – the others had long since left. A day later, as we drove back to the coast, he presented it to me. I protested. “No,” he said, “I don't need it. I just wanted to get it out!”

There were so many great trips and better memories. Chasing pegmatites with tourmaline in the Sooke Mountains. Hunting quartz crystals on Mt Arrowsmith. Climbing peaks on the extreme western edge of Strathcona Park. Wriggling along an exposed ridge near Mt Landale. All special for what happened on them. Let me close by telling you of our

last field trip together. For years Rick and I had fantasized about a famous mine, balanced on a steep ridge hanging over a glacier in the Coast Mountains. The abandoned site was at over 1,900m, and access complicated – a 7-9 hour approach. Robie and I decided we couldn't put him through that sort of effort in his weakened state, and chartered a chopper.

We flew in on a perfect autumn day, balanced the skids on a flat spot and threw out the gear. The helicopter swung away into the valley and all was quiet. Around us was one of the greatest collections of rare minerals in the province, but everything was on a 50 degree slope, and even though it was late summer, snowfields clung to the loose talus. After making camp, we turned our attention to prospecting. Rick was like a terrier after a rat. His long fight with cancer had weakened him, but he still had the strength of two. He went up and down that slope for the next two days, hammer in hand, collecting, sorting, analyzing. I think we all knew it was going to be his last hurrah, but he never let the mood get melancholy, and he never complained about the discomfort. It was a magical time spent together in the peaks, doing what he absolutely loved – climbing and collecting.

Let us remember Rick Eppler. Funny and serious. Strong and yet vulnerable. Light-hearted and complex. Rough and gentle. Let us remember him and celebrate a life well lived. We can ask for nothing more after we have passed through, leaving a little behind.

– Rick Hudson

Rick Eppler, the mountaineer's mountaineer, passed away February 22 late in the afternoon, after a long battle with cancer. With his passing we have lost a friend and a Vancouver Island climbing legend. Rick was proud of his family, and from many conversations I had with him I came to realize what a pivotal touchstone they were for him throughout his life. It is said that his nephews and niece recount in awe stories of the escapades they got up to with "uncle" on Sunday afternoon rambles. They know only the half of it.

Since the 1970s, Rick led and participated in more Alpine Club trips than anyone can remember, and he quickly established a legendary ability to find the way to the summit and back, no matter the conditions. During his early climbing days, Rick pored over maps and aerial photos to plan his attack on a dwindling number of Island peaks that remained unclimbed. And so it was my fortune to become his partner in crime as we pioneered the more remote mountains off Highway 4; credited to Rick are the first recorded ascents and naming of Adder Mtn, Cats Ears, Hidden Peak, Steamboat, Limestone Twins, Fifty Forty and Triple Peak. These trips always started with the words that so captured why he climbed – "*let the adventure begin.*" His explorations did not stop on Highway 4, and he went on to climb all of the major peaks on our Island including other notable first ascents such as Mt. Cain, Mt Ashwood, Rhino and Velella Peaks, Tom Taylor Tower, Mariner and subsidiary peaks, Grattan and the Thumb. Rick's faultless memory of the route and meticulous note-taking made him the go-to person before setting out for the Island's mountains and it is little wonder that Bruce Fairley depended so much on Rick's Island knowledge when producing his update of the Culbert Climbing Guide. But I believe Rick's most enduring contribution to Island climbing was dreaming up the notion of an Island Qualifier Award. Thus it was that the *IQ Plaque* became a coveted commemoration of a person's achievement in climbing all of the infamous nine qualifying peaks, any four of which would suffice to become a full-fledged member of the ACC. The days of qualifying in that manner have passed, but this award will go on for generations to challenge youth, no matter what their age, to go out and find themselves in the sublime reaches of Vancouver Island. Appropriately, Rick was the first to attain that award, which I surprised him with on the summit of the Golden Hinde.

Although Rick explored other avenues to 'feed his rat', like drag racing or fly fishing, at his heart Rick was through and through of the mountains. Rick had an artist's eye for mountain photography and I continue



Rick receives the very first Island Qualifier Plaque on the summit of the Golden Hinde, 1987 PHOTO: ROB MACDONALD

to be amazed at his prize-winning photos that I had blindly walked past. I suppose I should not have been surprised that Rick took up oil painting – of mountains of course – and in these was able perfectly to capture the mood of setting out on a spring climb. Right about now was his favourite time of year; snow packed down on the bush, the days were getting longer and it was time to put down skis and ice tools and take on that list of climbs cooked up over winter. The early training on our local hills launched him into bigger projects and he climbed widely in the Coast Range, the Cascades, the Rockies, the Kluane Range, and the west-coast volcanoes.



Rick frequently took part in club ventures where he really shone. His presence on any trip increased the depth of experience and strength of that party. Who in this club cannot remember the relief of Rick providing a rope down a greasy rock pitch, or a steep, exposed, nasty patch of ice, often as darkness or weather pressed? Only after seeing to the safety of his fellow climbers did Rick then come down, unbelayed and with sure steps. Rick was at his finest when things got tough, and when his skills were most needed.

Rick was a collector; of model trains, mugs, T shirts, Clint Eastwood movies, rocks and minerals, mountaineering books, photographs and, of course, summits. These treasures could be found surrounding him wherever he lived, encroaching happily on his space. Rick was not an easy person with himself or others, but he was there always when it counted. More recently, Rick took his energy out on the Sooke Hills where he explored extensively and frequently with an assorted collection of like-minded friends. I never met these colleagues, but over beers he was full of his weekly escapades with them and I think this outing became for him the window back to adventure.

About a decade ago, Catrin, his wife, introduced Rick to Europe where he came to appreciate exploring in Wales, Scotland and the Alps including an ascent of Mont Blanc in a storm. Especially during the past three years, Rick went as often to Switzerland as he could. During a single day in the Alps he could photograph flowers in the alpine meadows, climb a vertical wall using the self-belay of a *via ferrata*, summit



*Rick and Robie, the old masters on Mt Grattan* PHOTO: MARTIN SMITH

a 4000 m peak and take a couple of rides on those cogwheel trains he so loved. All this followed by rösti, brätwurst, beer and a Swiss cheesecake with far too many blueberries on top, delivered by a young lady in Swiss attire in the antique cellar of some wayside inn. This was Paradise. If courage and steadfastness under duress define a mountaineer and friend, then there was never better than Rick. Walk untroubled to those last blue mountains, my friend, sure in the knowledge that your life enriched ours.

– Rob Macdonald









