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Cover image: Roger Taylor crossing Garibaldi Lake (photo: Roxanne Stedman)

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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Catrin Brown

It's been a year since I took over the role of chair from Mike Hubbard, and I did so knowing that the club was in really good shape. Thanks to the preceding chairs and the team of volunteers on the executive, the Vancouver Island section has been built into a vibrant community of people engaged in the vision of the ACC:

To bring together and give voice to Canada's mountaineering community.

I'll come to the bit about voice at the end, but I would first like to highlight why I think that, collectively, we lived up to this vision very fully in 2016.

Winter 2016 brought good early snow, and we enjoyed ski and snowshoe trips to old favourites like Becher, Elma and Brooks, Albert Edward, and Arrowsmith as well as adventures from Mount Cain. (Yes, I'm afraid the secret of Mt. Cain's powder is out.) Harry Steiner and his team enjoyed magical conditions on the Spearhead Traverse, the photos of which were clear winners in our annual photo contest. Conditions on our Wapta Traverse in March gave us less to boast about but still gave us great skiing, especially from the top of Mount Gordon. George Butcher organized a week of skiing in Wells Gray Provincial Park, and there were late ski ascents of 5040, Jutland and Mount Regan. The wide offerings of hikes to the Sooke Hills, Gowlland range and Cowichan Valley hills also helped get us out there, especially in the shoulder seasons. We owe the leaders of all these trips our sincere thanks.

Our section seems to need little excuse to celebrate a special occasion. Trips were organized to mark New Year, Canadian Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day and, in a different mood, Hallowe'en. This last one is an example of a growing trend of organizing joint trips with other like-minded outdoor groups, surely a good way to strengthen our mutual community. Another first this year, which was also a collaborative event, was an up-Island Christmas party, generously hosted by Clarke Gourlay at his home. Talking of generous hosting, we are indebted to Tom and Pam Hall for sharing their beautiful, spacious home with us for both the late-summer barbecue and the South Island Christmas party. What is more is that Tom has built a skookum shed on his property to store our summer camp equipment. We are so lucky for this and very grateful to Tom.

Summer camps continue to be a strong part of our program. This year, members were offered chances to explore the Vancouver Island's Alava Bate Sanctuary during two week-long fly-in tent camps and/or to enjoy a week based at the Elizabeth Parker Hut in the Rockies. Altogether, a total of 55 members, a good proportion of our membership, took advantage of these camps and returned home with rave reviews. These high participation rates are a reflection of the enthusiasm and dedicated work of a small group of people, notably Cedric Zala and the summer camp committee led by Liz Williams.

Summer activities also included many ascents of notable peaks. Trips were scheduled to Harmston, Argus, Warden, Garibaldi, Rainier, Septimus, Triple, Rugged, Regan, Nine Peaks and Myra. Janelle Curtis, our membership coordinator, led a snowy traverse of Flower Ridge in June, something that I repeated with a group in August. Looking at the photos, however, it would be hard to know that it's the same place. That's the joy of seasons – imagine living on the equator — which one of our members, Geoff Bennett, actually does while working in Singapore. Yet he still manages to shepherd youth applicants patiently through our memorial grant process. Thanks to Geoff for his careful work on this and his encouragement to youth.

Janelle Curtis' many friends were shaken to learn of her

serious accident in Strathcona Park in July. We have been much encouraged by the steady and ongoing recovery from her injuries, driven by her strong spirit and the support at every step from her partner Rowan Laver. It was a delight that Janelle and Rowan were able to attend the AGM in January 2017, and we look forward to sharing outside times together soon.

Our rock climbers have had a busy year. In addition to regular sessions in Crag X and Stelly's in Victoria, and the Romper Room in Nanaimo, trips have been organized to Crest Creek Crags in Strathcona Park and to the relatively new climbing opportunities on Quadra Island. It is a source of pleasure that our healthy finances enable us to make donations to worthy ventures, such as Phil Stone's ongoing work to develop climbing routes on Quadra. Other contributions were made from our operating fund to: the Canadian Alpine Journal, Arrowsmith Search and Rescue, Campbell River Search and Rescue, the Vancouver Island Avalanche Bulletin , the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Foundation and the Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association (VISTA).

Our finances are indeed healthy, and we are indebted to Colleen Kasting for her diligent and meticulous work with the books. Our largest fundraiser is the Banff Festival of Mountain Films in Victoria in November, and our sincere thanks for organizing this so well go to Krista Zala. The fact that she achieved a capacity audience of many hundreds without spending a cent on advertising is remarkable. Other armchair mountaineering activities included our slideshows at Swan Lake, which provide a social venue and opportunity to hear eclectic tales of members' exploits. For the seamless organization of this monthly offering, we are indebted to Peggy and Roger Taylor, as well as to Victoria Clarke and Neil Han, who all work hard both in front of and behind the scenes. I know there is talk of up-Island slideshows being organized, and I really hope this will evolve.

Education and skills development are ongoing aspects of mountaineering. Here we owe a debt of gratitude to Harry Steiner for his legendary workshops and courses over many years. I know there are many who consider themselves graduates of the Steiner school, and these skills benefit us all. Harry has now stepped down from his coordinating role, and we are delighted that Colin Mann and Alois Schonenberger have taken this on.

Keeping our schedule full with offerings is an ongoing challenge. The leadership team headed by Christine Fordham's irrepressible enthusiasm, has helped greatly in encouraging people to step forwards and offer a variety of trips. I would like to encourage everyone to consider adding something to our schedule, as these trips really are the lifeblood of our community, and we have an ongoing need for leaders and coordinators. Christine is also our representative at the national club, and does a fine job communicating between us and representatives from the ACC's twenty-one other sections.

Of course, our members are involved in many trips beyond

the schedule as well. Luckily, we are often able to learn of each others' exploits through our newsletter, beautifully put together by Mary Sanseverino. This production, ever evolving in its form, is a labour of love – and we love receiving it every month – thank you Mary. Martin Hofmann, our web guru and good-natured brains behind the code, does a terrific job of keeping our website up to date. Thank you Martin for your countless hours of patient toil on our behalf. And our main communication, the Island Bushwhacker Annual, again assembled to a highly professional standard by Cedric Zala, continues to be our flagship publication, and acts as a long term reference of useful access information.

Access is a thorny subject on the Island, worse than devil's' club. Restrictions on access through private land seem to pop up with unwelcome and increasing frequency. It will take our collective energy and tenacity to battle this trend, and we are very lucky to have Barb Baker, our access guru and advocate. Thank you Barb for continuing to keep us updated on gates and closures, and for taking on the negotiations with forest companies, which I know can be very challenging work. Your efforts and input make a big difference.

There were two things that were a bit disappointing last year, which hopefully we can make happen in 2017. For the first time in years, we didn't have a spring banquet, mainly because of the difficulty of finding a reasonably priced venue. The other thing that did not happen as hoped was trail building/repair work on Mount Arrowsmith, championed by Russ Moir. Bloodied but unbowed by the disappointment, Russ is now planning a new offering for the schedule in spring 2017. Let's plan for a fine turnout at this worthwhile cause and show that "work party" is not an oxymoron.

At the AGM in January 2016, Chris Jensen shared some of his early ideas and vision for a potential ACC hut on Vancouver Island. It is hard to believe that was only a year ago, as so much has been achieved since. As of January 2017, we have a location determined on the 5040 Peak West Ridge, an architect's design, support and approval from large numbers of stakeholders and interested parties, and a building permit from the province. What is more, we have interim finances in place, thanks to the generosity of our members and significant grants, including from MEC and the national ACC. It is an extraordinary achievement by any measure. I know I speak for everyone when I congratulate Chris heartily for this, as it is his cheerfully tenacious approach and tireless work that have brought us to this exciting point. The construction phase is next. Credit and big thanks also go to Martin Hofmann, Chris Ruttan and Lindsay Elms, active champions on the hut committee, and to Rick Hudson, for ably chairing the fundraising subcommittee. The project is definitely a shot in the arm for the section and gives us much to look forward to.

I've mentioned many things, but there are two components of our program that receive little fanfare yet have enormous impact. The first is the Trail Rider program, which has been in place for over 10 years. Now very ably run by Caroline Tansley, it takes people who are chair-bound into the

wilderness in our specially built Trail Rider. The joy of the clients and the camaraderie of the porters make these very special trips. If you haven't yet, I encourage you to sign up as a porter for one of these trips. There is a role for everyone and, as is often the case, just showing up is the most important thing you can do.

The other program is our kids and youth program, which has been running now for nearly 10 years. Initiated and led by Harry and Nadja Steiner, this has introduced dozens of youth and their parents to the wilderness. And we're talking significant trips here, and lots of them – 56 at last count, including ascents of Mount Arrowsmith and Mount Tom Taylor. I think the program's greatest hallmark of success is that some of those youth are now leaders and instructors. We are delighted and grateful that, as Harry and Nadja pass on the torch of their "baby," Derek Sou and his family are enthusiastically picking it up. Thank you Derek.

I hope this brief report helps to validate my claim that we are a thriving community. I often feel that my role as Chair is nothing more than to act as a cheerleader for this dedicated group of enthusiasts who make everything happen. So, for those I have not mentioned so far, a few quick words:

- To Karun Thanjavur, who encourages trip leaders and cheerfully translates ideas for trips into postings on the online schedule.
- To Robie Macdonald, who has represented us carefully in the FMCBC and helped with the ongoing access issues.
- To Mike Hubbard, who welcomes a parade of people to his home at all odd times, helping them with gear rentals, and never being judgemental about late returns.
- And to Martin and Christine, for quietly picking up the membership communications during the second part of the year, without being asked.

When something is done well and with good heart, I think it is often not noticed that it is done at all. That's the way I see how this executive works. In closing, let me say that I hope we can continue to work for this community to be as active and as inclusive as possible. Whatever your age, gender, experience level, background, interests, skillset, location and financial means, if you have enthusiasm to explore and protect mountain environments, there is a place here for you. I am delighted at the broad representation in our section.

You may notice I snuck the word "protect" in there, in the context of our environment. Without wishing to end on a political note, I think it safe to say that we live in a time when there are strong forces of influence that show little interest in taking care of wild places or ensuring easy access to natural areas for all. I think that makes our voices for the protection of what we cherish all the more urgent and significant, and I hope that by being members of a club such as this, it makes our voices stronger too. Let's share ideas on what more we can do to be heard about what matters to us.

VANCOUVER ISLAND



Kids Mountaineering at Mount Arrowsmith, Shanda, Iain, Sydney, Evelyn, Finn (photo: Stefan Gessinger)

Mountaineering with Youth – Passing the Towel

Nadja Steiner with contributions from Sydney Gessinger, Evelyn Sou, lain Sou and Finn Steiner

February - July

Another year of active youth mountaineering has passed with a series of exciting trips. In February, we had our annual Mount Cain ski trip. With Anna-Lena as youth leader, we invaded as usual the Lions Cabin, where kids and youth tend to occupy the area under the roof with their mattresses. Some of our former little ones now drove on their own and left their busy parents behind. While the snow wasn't superb, we still had lots of fun doing our people slalom down the groomer or exploring the snow conditions in the trees. We also played glow light dodge ball in the dark on the snow-covered lake, with disco lights and music. Everyone had super fun, until the next day when Lindsay discovered that he had lost the key to the car he had borrowed from his parents, yikes! Unsuccessful searches in and around the cabin left the dodge ball field as the prime suspect location. Equipped with shovels, a search party made its way to the field and, by sheer luck, managed to find the needle in the hay stack... oh, Lindsay owes me big time for this....



Mount Arrowsmith camp, Evelyn, Sydney, Snow Man, Iain, Derek, Finn (photo: Stefan Gessinger)

To start the summer, we hiked the Jocelyn Hill trail in Gowlland Tod Park, but soon after the kids got hardcore. Youth leader Finn planned a mountaineering mini camp at Mount Arrowsmith with Stefan. They had a fabulous time and, for extra training, Stefan took our keen youth leaders lain and Finn up a steep snow slope, once everyone else had settled down. According to what I heard from them upon their return, it was an exceptional challenge and really cool. When asked to write up stories, this was the one that must have left the big impression, since I received three perspectives, all three with almost the same title: Steep Snow on Arrowsmith. Here they are:

By Finn Steiner (17):

"It's early. Far too early for a sleep-deprived teenager to be up, let alone contemplating a trip up Mount Arrowsmith. But, with kids hopped up on enough caffeine to kill a small elephant, we would have to push through a few kilometres of bush and up into the main bowl. With kids and adults alike trudging upwards, stopping every hour to break, we continued our journey, pushing on to Shangri-La through overgrown West Coast brambles and patches of snow. Upon arrival at base camp (a conveniently placed snowfield), Iain, Stefan, and I decided that a quick evening climb was in order. Donning crampons and ice axes, we made our way up a snow-filled gully and were graced with the last rays of sun turning the countryside a fierce orange. Back to camp we went, one belay station at a time. The next morning we awoke, and prepared for the day. Tents were rolled up, and sleeping bags were packed. Yet they lay there silently as we donned daypacks and made our trek upwards. If you haven't tried leading a group of three children up a steep ramp of snow with parents looking on, the true meaning of stress may not speak to you. Up we went, with an appropriately placed gendarme serving as our summit. Lunch was spent staring out over Qualicum Beach. Before those famous winds could make themselves known, we were off again, descending back to camp. Daypacks were packed away, and the descent back to the cars commenced. Through layers of bushes, spruce, and ferns, the landscape became ever greener until we arrived back at the road. After a debrief, we were headed back to Port Alberni to plan our next trip."

By Iain Sou (18):

"We parked at the bend in the road where we always park when going up to the west bowl. We got our last minute packing done and geared up. There were seven of us and it took a while for us to get all our gear sorted. We started out with no snow and, as we moved up the trail, we encountered quite a bit of snow, and for about half of the ascent to base camp we were kicking steps in dense snow. When we got to the bowl, we chose our camp by the only bare rock around so we wouldn't have to spend all our time on the cold snow. After we set up camp Stefan, Finn and I decided to head up a nice-looking gully, the Main Gully. We all tied in and started climbing. As we made our way up, it got steeper than we thought, but we made our way to the top easily. The top wasn't anything special, it was a valley between two peaks so there wasn't much of a view, but we had a good view of the camp. We started heading down almost right after we reached the top because it was getting late. Finn first, followed by me and Stefan giving us a belay down. Once we got back to camp we had dinner and chilled around camp a bit. The next day, we had an early start, we put our crampons on and divided into two rope teams; Stefan led one team and I led the other. Stefan went first. The snow was quite steep so he lead the first pitch and set an anchor. We climbed for thre or four pitches until we reached the top of the one of the bumps. It was around lunch time. so we decided to eat lunch and then we headed back down a different way than we came up. This way had a bit less snow but it was less steep so we walked down in teams for a bit, but it got steep again so we made a big boulder anchor and everyone down climbed on a belay. After that it was just a short walk to camp. At camp we packed up

everything and started our way down to the parking lot. We encountered a part of snow that had been in the shade all day and was too hard for boots so we cramponed up and made our way down. After that, it was smooth sailing through the trees to where we parked our cars."

By Sydney Gessinger (10)

"On May 7, we reached the climbers' trail for Mount Arrowsmith. We were hiking in the forest for a few hours. I was tired. We finally got to the snow. This is when we got out our ice axes and tied to the rope and started climbing up the steep snow. We started looking for a place to camp for the night that would have a nice view. It was getting late in the day. We found a nice spot where there was a creek for water. As dinner was being made, Evelyn made a snow man, a snow throne and

went sledding with our foamy. We all ate dinner and Finn and lain asked dad if he would take them up a gully that we could see from camp (Nadja's note: Main Gully on Mount Arrowsmith). We watched them go up until we couldn't see them. Then we saw them coming down and dad was boot skiing fast. He did a cartwheel at the end because he tripped on his boot, but he was OK. The next day, we got on our gear so we could climb one of the bumps. It was very steep, and I really had to use my ice axe. It was scary at first, but then I got used to it and just looked up. We all got to the top and it was a beautiful view. It was a nice sunny day, and we had lunch on the bump. After lunch we found a different way down to camp. As soon as we got down, we had to pack up camp and make our way down to the forest trail. Evelyn and I slid down some steep snow before we reached our trail. It was a fun way to get down. We slowly made our way down to the car, said goodbye to everyone and drove to the ferry back to Salt Spring. The trip was hard and I felt tired. But I also felt good that I had climbed the steep snow."

Our big summer trip led us to Mount Tom Taylor. A Friday morning in July found us distributing gear among the group at the Bedwell Lake trailhead. Ropes and harnesses disappeared into the packs, axes and helmets fixed outside and off we went. The weather was good, and everybody was in good spirits. Once we turned off the main trail with Evelyn as our champion bushwhacker and youngest participant, Gill (also called Rocky) following suit (and frequently disappearing between the salal bushes overgrowing the trail) we moved along. It was a tough ascent to the base camp, and everyone was glad to put down their packs. Unfortunately for us, the bugs were having a convention, which soon replaced any human conventions with disappearances in the tents and the fog started moving in. Plans were laid out in the evening and summit day found us up early.

With only temporary appearances of the summit, we eyed



Belay station: Finn, Shanda, Iain (photo: Stefan Gessinger)



Decent from Arrowsmith col: Sydney, Shanda (photo: Stefan Gessinger)



Above the clouds, Tom Taylor ascent, Iain, Derek, Harry (photo: Nadja Steiner)



Summit for some, Derek, Harry, Evelyn, Gill, Tina, Nadja, Iain (photo: Nadja Steiner)

the fog with some worry. However, like magic, the fog kept creeping up behind us, but never actually reached us and we spent a day above the clouds, watching it roll down mountain sides and hide Bedwell Lake under its blanket. The group was great! With four adults and three kids, we had a lot of experience among both and had agreed to take newbies Tina and Gill on this somewhat challenging trip. We set up ropes where needed or put the two younger ones on short ropes, youth leader lain just as much involved as the adult leaders. The snow this year forced us to manage a tricky snowfield crossing with huge gaps and some intimidating overhanging stuff. We were glad about the choice to take ice axes and to have the ropes at hand.

The upper part was easier, and we reached a beautiful pre-summit.

By then it was clear that we wouldn't make the main summit that day. Tina and Gill already felt like they had climbed Everest and decided to take a break and refuel before the decent. lain joined in, and the rest of us went to the Tom Taylor B summit. (Apparently there are two summits which, at various times in Vancouver Island's mountain history, have been named Tom Taylor). The one we call B is much closer and easier. Evelyn earned her name "cloud runner" here, speedily outpacing every adult on this beautiful ridge run above the clouds. Once we returned, the others were well rested and, following a guick "summit shot," we made our way down the mountain.

To avoid the tricky snow slope with its treacherous bits in the heat of the afternoon sun, we decided to rope down about 60 metres, and then traverse below the prob-

lem. Harry and lain set up anchor and rope, and I went down to collect everyone after the rappel. Since we were still on the snow slope after the 60-metre rope ended, we built another snow anchor there. Evelyn, who had been the youngest participant of our youth mountaineering camp a few years earlier, had no problems taking the chance for a ride, put on her rain pants and slid down the snowfield (roped up of course). This clearly less tedious decent was inspiration enough for Gill to do the same. As quick as the descent was, it did finally lead us into the fog. While I went ahead equipped with GPS to make a nice track, Harry and lain took Tina and Evelyn in a rope team, and Derek put Gill on a short rope. At this point the snowfield was safe but nonetheless intimidating, especially if you have never done this before, and it's excellent practice.

Back on our old track, we climbed down the rocky slope with one more rappel station on rock to a small snowfield. While Harry taught Tina how to rappel, Gill, who was so inspired by the swift snow slide above, seemed also to have gained a lot of confidence. He got roped down swiftly, and he and Evelyn spent the waiting time running up and sliding down the snowfield. From there, it wasn't too far back into camp where a refreshing dip in the lake was most welcome. Unfortunately, the bugs quickly turned the outside time into misery and given that it had been a really long day everyone disappeared into the tents quickly. This cut out some clarification regarding the morning departure, which was a buggy annoyance for some and I apologize for that. Once on the move though, the bugs were bearable. The descent seemed to stretch out, as descents tend to do, but with a nice rest stop at Little Bedwell Lake everything was just peachy. Filled with great memories of a fabulous weekend in the mountains, we parted ways at Buttle Lake.

This was the last trip under my leadership, and I was joined

by Harry again, who over the last years had focused his efforts on the education program but had originally started up the youth program with me. After nine years and with now almost adult children, it is time to pass on the towel. Our last trip to Mount Tom Taylor was a true highlight among all the trips we have done, and a great final adventure. But, not for the first time, none of our own kids was participating. With one traveling in Europe and the other working as a kayak guide, it was time to move on and focus on more trips geared towards ourselves. We had a nice BBQ at our house to end the season and to entice a new leader. To my great joy, the kids and youth program is now continuing under new leadership, and I would like to give a huge thank you to the Sou family, Derek, lain, Evelyn and Tessa, not only for being the one family who has been participating for all 9 years, but especially for taking over the leadership. While it is an exceptionally rewarding job, it requires a lot of work and responsibility, not only during each trip but in the lead-up to each and every one of them.

Participants in one or more trips: Derek, Iain and Evelyn Sou, Harry, Nadja, Anna-Lena and Finn Steiner, Tina, Gill and Bianca Lynch, Thomas and John Uhlig, Lindsay Richards, Dale, Stefan and Sydney Gessinger, Shanda Lemke, Malachite Miller, Luc and Cedric Lachance, Arno and Cees Dirks



Evelyn "Cloudrunner" Sou – Tom Taylor summit ridge (photo: Nadja Steiner)

Nine Peaks - The Endless Stairmaster

Tim Turay May 6 – 8

After a good sleep at the Bedwell trailhead, we set off with our full packs. The trail was in excellent condition for this early in the season and was snow-free. It was nice to see the water flowing under the suspension bridge; most times, I had seen it dry and bare. We made good time up the well-maintained route and hit snow at the first set of steel ladders. The trail didn't require snowshoes or crampons, and we quickly made it down to Baby Bedwell, which was still in winter conditions. The route around Bedwell was a patchwork of snow and bare trail which added a bit of fun. Once we got to the outhouse at the Bedwell campground, we took a nice long break.

From here we went in the direction of the large drainage bowl. After a bit of route finding, we made our way down to the stream and thankfully it was low enough to allow us to cross without getting wet. We had lunch in this area and psyched ourselves for what we knew was going to be a lot of uphill work. And up we went!

The snow in this area was very wet; even with snowshoes, we were sinking in a good six inches. The views were awesome! The snow cover really brings out the best of the mountains! Up we went, swapping leads. We reached the point where we could either head straight up and go for the Big Interior summit or contour around below the summit. We decided to go for the contour around to the southwest cirque and Marjorie's Load. In hindsight, going up to the summit would have been the better idea. The contouring-around plan was long, really long, with us sometimes gaining elevation and sometimes losing it in order to get around obstacles. We eventually made our way to the other side just below the Big Interior summit. All of us were officially bagged at this point, as we had been going for a good 12 hours and still no sign of Nine Peaks!

We found ourselves on a nice snow slope just above a large rock band and decided to dig our tent platform here. Thankfully the snow was so wet that this made building the tent platform relatively easy. We then settled in for dinner, enjoying the great views and the very warm breeze that evening.

The warm breeze continued throughout the night and dried everything nicely. The only issue was that the snow never firmed up and was still the mushy slop that we had experienced the previous day. We left camp early and, soon enough, we finally saw what we came here for: Nine Peaks! And still so far away!! At least the snow cover on Nine Peaks was in excellent condition, and the glacier wouldn't



The three amigos: Chris Burns, Tim Turay and Chris Sommers.

be an issue. Getting there would involve a huge loss of elevation and then a huge slog up to the peak, so off we went.

The slogging went well, and we made good time. Before we knew it, we made it to the gulley just below the saddle of peaks three and two (from the west). Here we decided to put on harnesses just in case we needed to rope up for the final summit push. The gulley up was nice and is not as steep as the main gulley on Mt. Arrowsmith. Once we all got here, we decided that a rope was not required for the final push, and we made it up to the summit.

Wow what a view from the top! With beautiful, clear skies we could see everything in all directions. After a nice lunch and signing of the summit register, off we went. We down-climbed the steep stuff and managed to do some boot sliding and, soon enough, we were at the saddle between Nine Peaks and Big Interior. Up we would go.

The sun and the heat were intense that day. In order not to run out of water, I filled my water bladder up with snow and stuck it to the outside of my pack for the sun to melt. It was stinking hot that day, and my face and lips would pay for it when I got home. As we got further into the uphill grind, we decided that maybe we should take a shortcut and go up and over sooner rather than where our tracks would take us. This shortcut would take us very close to Marjorie's Load and, once we crested the ridge, we could see our tent way off in the distance. And wait a second, our tent was on its side, flapping in the wind!

We had been going for 9 hours at this point and the gas tanks were running on empty but with the potential of losing our tent, we sugared up and moved as fast as we could. This last bit into camp was agonizing, seeing our tent on its side flapping in the wind and being unable to run over and save it. We finally got to camp and rescued the tent. What had happened was that the sun was so intense that it melted out the snow stakes and the afternoon wind had picked up significantly, thereby pushing the tent over. Thankfully the tent rolled on itself and kept the remaining stakes out of the sun.

Once camp was re-established we set about getting dinner ready. This was when Big Interior started its call. Chris S.

and I hadn't summited Big Interior before and from where we were camped it was really close. I was content with forgoing a Big Interior summit, as I was too tired, and my hip was bothering me, but Chris couldn't take his eyes of the prize. After hydrating up, Chris went for the summit. Going light and fast, he reached the summit in 20 minutes, and soon enough he was back in camp convincing me I should go.

The next morning with my hip feeling better, I decided to make my summit attempt. Twenty minutes after leaving camp, I was on the summit seeing the sun rising over Strathcona Park. That was a pretty awesome sight, and given my tendency for wanting more

sack time, I would imagine this to be my one-and-only summit sunrise. Once back at camp, we packed and started to make our way back to Bedwell. That night, we did experience a freeze of sorts and crampons proved very helpful on some steeper sections.

We cruised down into Bedwell enjoying the magnificent views along the way. In the Bedwell campground we took a nice long lunch. Once again the sun was out in full force, and the snow started to soften up. After some solid hydrating and PowerBar eating we pushed on. Even though the trail from Baby Bedwell is so nice to be on, it always seems to take forever on the way out.

Participants (# IQs): Tim Turay (6 – trip leader), Chris Sommer (1) and Chris Burns (1)

Trip Participants: Chris Jensen and Michael Loch

Mount McQuillan

Dave Suttill May 10

On a clear day you can see Mount McQuillan from any of the major peaks above the north shore of Cowichan Lake or in the Nanaimo Lakes area. It looks like a miniature half dome way off on the skyline and seems to hang on to its winter snow a little longer than other peaks in its vicinity. And so it became an objective for a day trip a little further afield than the usual Victoria area repertoire.

Compared to some hikes that start with a bushwhack, this one was comparatively civilized. The trailhead, at the headwaters of the Franklin River, was a one-hour drive south from Port Alberni. Only the last kilometre required 4WD because of water bars on the deactivated section of road. We started hiking at 10:30 a.m. The first part of the hike was



Roxanne on the final push to the summit of Mount McQuillan (photo: Dave Suttill)

along a good Forest Service Recreation Site trail to Father and Son Lake. The 150-metre elevation gain to get to this beautiful subalpine lake took a little over half an hour. Being the time of year that it was, the lakeshore was yellow with pollen. We followed the trail around the north shore of the lake, where we got a spectacular view of snow-covered Limestone Mountain 2.5 kilometres to the south. We were headed for the forested ridge 200 metres above the east side of the lake. The flat, open forest behind the lake was carpeted in Calypso orchids.

As we got near the base of the ridge, the trail deteriorated somewhat. We saw some ribbons heading up the ridge, which we followed. The route was a little ambiguous, but by 11:30 we were on the semi-open, low point of the ridge. Although we could not see Mount McQuillan, route finding would be easy. We would follow the ever-steepening ridge one kilometre south to a minor summit, then continue east along this ridge in the direction of Mount McQuillan. The patchy snow immediately gave way to continuous snow as we headed up. Snow conditions were excellent for hiking: soft enough for kicking steps, but no post-holing. It took another 1.5 hours to get to the top of the minor summit (1,490 m). Once there, we had one more bump to get to before we realized which peak was actually Mount McQuillan. To get there, we would have to drop down 150 metres along the connecting ridge. So down we went. By now it was 1:30 and definitely time for lunch.

The final climb up Mount McQuillan reminded me of our trip to Nahmint near Port Alberni several years earlier. It too was a fairly steep, rounded summit with a little bushwhacky route finding around bluffs here and there. Except this time there was snow. On the way up, there were two unexpected level spots where we could catch our breath and look around. We had picked an exceptionally clear day for the trip so wherever we looked the views were excellent, especially north to the Strathcona Park mountains. We could see Big Interior, the Golden Hinde and Comox Glacier quite clearly. We finally reached the summit (1,575 m) at 3 p.m. It was a good-sized expanse of flat, snow-covered ground with the summit cairn poking through. There was even a summit register. We were the first ones to sign in this year. Way off, 160 kilometres to the south, Mount Olympus was clearly visible. We allowed ourselves a half hour on top. Much to Roxanne's surprise, I hauled out some homemade goodies complete with a candle to celebrate this, her (39th?) birthday.

Participants: Roxanne Stedman and Dave Suttill



Val approaching the summit of Watchtower NW, aka Timekeeper Peak (photo: Lindsay Elms)

Watchtower Peak Northwest (aka Timekeeper Peak) 1,715 m

Lindsay Elms May 25

For me, the hunt for unclimbed peaks on the island is like a botanist on the hunt for a new plant species – you just have to look in the most unlikely places. I'm happy to say that there are still unnamed, unclimbed peaks to find on Vancouver Island, and the great thing about them is they are just as beautiful (and thrilling) to climb as any other peak on the island.

While up Schoen Creek last year, I saw several peaks that I wanted to climb which were unnamed. One in particular was a satellite peak of Watchtower Peak. This summit was located about 1.5 kilometres northwest of the rarely climbed Watchtower peak. We had noticed logging crews working in the side valley that led towards the saddle overlooking Kokummi Creek – this is the saddle that the Vancouver Island Spine trail is proposing to go over. Although the road didn't go all the way up to the saddle, it did go a long way

up the valley. I knew I wanted to head up there this year as the road would be in good condition because of the recent activity. I have learned over the years to take advantage of new logging roads whenever possible. I don't want to wait for them to be de-activated or become de-commissioned.

Val and I drove in late in the afternoon, and it appeared that the logging crews had finished in the valley, but just in case they weren't, we parked well off the road where their vehicles could easily get by. In the morning, we got up early and started hiking at 5:30 a.m. We wanted to start before any crews might come in and tell us to leave. Fifteen minutes later, we deaked off the road and dropped down to the creek. On the other side of the creek, we were able to wind our way up some rocky creek beds until we reached the snow. It had been cool during the night so we put our crampons on and started up to the gully on the left side of the face. Although the right-hand gully looked fine, we choose to go up the left gully and onto the ridge. From there, we hoped to be able to traverse around the subsidiary summit and gain the ridge or face heading up to our destination.

As we climbed, the early morning mist started rolling in, but it wasn't too thick to hamper our route finding. Eventually we popped out onto a ridge, and then a few minutes later we also popped above the mist. In front of us, across the basin, was our objective. The snow slopes looked enticing so instead of climbing to the top of the small sub-peak and

then following the ridge around, we chose to sidle across the basin. The snow was in perfect condition so we put our crampons on and just walked across. One short steep section on the final climb and soon we were sitting on the summit (I am fairly certain no one had been up here before) taking it the view. Another beautiful day in the mountains.

On the descent we followed the ridge instead of sidling across the basin and ended up arriving at the small subpeak looking back down at our two options to reach the road. To our right was our ascent route and the left hand gully we had climbed in the morning, but to our left a short steep down-climb would put us at the top of the right hand gully. We chose the latter. The snow was softer now but most of the gully we were able to boot-ski until the angle became just too shallow for any further forward momentum.

By early afternoon we were back down at the vehicle, me with a beer in my hand and Val with a cider. But the great thing about the trip was we saw more peaks for us to climb. Yes (as I pump my fist)!

Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

Moakwa Peaks (West 1,597 m and East 1,602 m)

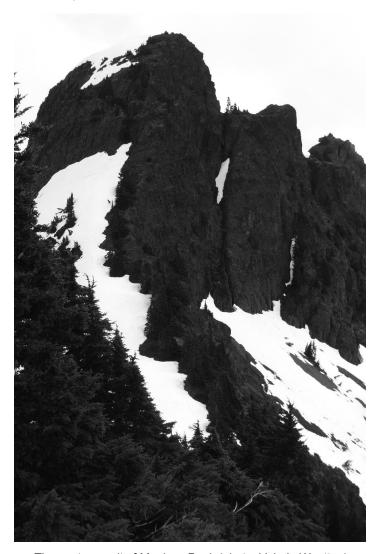
Lindsay Elms June 1

From the top of Watchtower Peak NW (aka Timekeeper Peak) just a week earlier, I saw two peaks east of Mount Adam that I wanted to climb. Again, there was no indication that either of them had any previous ascents, but that didn't matter as it was the idea of covering new ground and seeing everything from a slightly new perspective that enticed me.

We drove up the White River Main the day before and then took the connector that meets the Adam River Main. A few kilometres down, we turned left and followed the logging road up Moakwa Creek (MC Main). I had talked with Ryan Van Horne a few days earlier about road conditions as, earlier in the year, he had been up the valley when he skied Mount Adam. He said it was a good road all the way up.

The next morning was overcast, but there was no sign of any rain, although the forecast was predicting it in the afternoon. Time to hustle. With very light packs – a few snacks, raingear, crampons and ski poles – Val and I headed up through a recent cut block and then into the old growth. We then just took a direct route up through the forest (500 m) to the alpine and onto the west summit of Moakwa Peak. As I predicted there was no sign of any earlier ascent. Half a kilometre away was the east summit, which looked a little

steeper. However, to the northwest we could see a weather front starting to move down the island, but I figured we still had a couple of hours before it would reach us.



The east summit of Moakwa Peak (photo: Valerie Wootton)

We dropped down into the saddle between the two summits and then started up the steepening ridge. Although not difficult, we had to be careful where we stepped off the snow onto the final rock section. It wasn't long before we were standing on the summit of the east peak. This time I was surprised to see the weather was coming in faster then I expected so there was no time to linger. We down-climbed the ridge and then dropped into the snow basin below the two summits. A quick snack and a drink and then down through the bush to the vehicle. Ten minutes after we arrived, the heavens opened up, but by then we had changed out of our boots and were comfortably sitting in the vehicle. Perfect timing!

Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

Warden - Here We Go Again!

Tim Turay June 18 – 19



Team Warden: Jonathan Bell, Tim Turay, Chris Burns, Chris Sommers, Roxanne Stedman, Chris George, Kelly Sommers, Dave Suttill

About half the group had attempted this trip with me last fall and, after a valiant attempt, we were shut down by verglas a couple of hundred metres from the summit. This time, we would be prepared for everything and, in the end, we ended up bringing way too much gear. Our group consisted of eight fearless mountaineers and, in two vehicles, we made the familiar drive up the White River main. Once at the trailhead, everyone suited up and we began our bush-bash up the logging slash. I was hoping that a solid snow cover would help us with the bush but that was not to be as the snow had completely melted out. Morning showers had left everything with a bit of moisture and everyone got a bit wet by the time we made camp. Camp was going to be at the base of Warden at a nice pond that we had scoped out on our previous trip. It had only taken us about 1.5 hours to reach here so we had plenty of time to make camp, eat and relax a bit. We were treated with great views of Warden and could see our upcoming route.

We awoke early to a partial cloudy morning but no rain to everyone's delight. The path upwards was covered in a nice thickness of soft melted snow that would not require crampons. Up we went, swapping leads and taking a few breaks. After a bit of route finding, we made it to the saddle and took an extended break. Here we put on our harnesses and got ready for the fun stuff.

The snow cover here was solid, and we made our way around the base of Warden to the notch. In the notch, the snow had melted out some but was still about three-feet wide in most places so it made for an easy snow slope up. Once at the top of the notch, we could look over and see this amazing exposure everyone was talking about. With a solid cloud cover around us the exposure was kept to minimum, but we all knew it was there. Once in a while, the clouds would part for a bit and we could see all the way down into the valley but, for the most part, we didn't have to worry too much about this. No complaints from me.

The snow was of a good consistency and, one by one, we left our little spot and ventured out and around to the start of the final push to the summit. At this area, we gathered again and decided to rope up and belay people. Jonathan would lead a group up the left side and Chris S. would lead on the right. The process of belaying the leaders up, establishing anchor points and belaying people up took a long time, in hindsight it would have been better to have put up a hand line instead and prusik up it.

The final pitch up to the summit was uneventful and everyone high fived and cheered one another as we got to the top. Even with obstructed views, the feeling of standing on the summit was awesome!! The summit registry was brought out and everyone signed it while eating a nice relaxing lunch.

After an hour or so, it was time to leave and begin our downwards march. We decided that we would do two rappels, which would take us to the start of the original roping-up area. From here we made our way around to the notch. We decided to set up another rappel here and, soon enough, we were down and made around to the saddle. Here we took a break, put the ropes away and got ready for our descent.

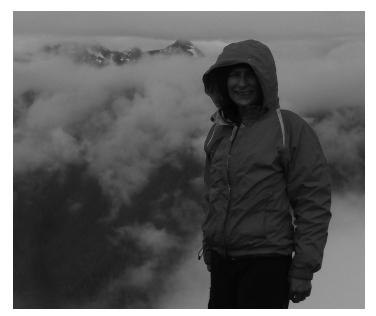
With the awesome quality of snow cover we were able to boot/ burn slide all the way back to camp. Here we made up some serious time. What took us three hours to go up took about 30 minutes to go down! Everyone strolled into camp on an unbelievable summit high! After quickly packing up camp, we had our fun bushwhacking back to the vehicles. Soon enough the vehicles were packed, and we were cruising on White River Main towards to Sayward.

Participants # IQs): Tim Turay (7 – trip leader), Dave Suttill (7), Roxanne Stedman (7), Chris Burns (2), Chris Sommers (2), Kelly Sommers (1), Jonathan Bell (5), Chris George (3)

Swah Peak (1,415 m)

Lindsay Elms June 25

This trip was to another probably unclimbed peak on the road between Woss and Gold River. Over the years, I have slowly been chipping away at the higher peaks and now I was getting down to the lower peaks. That doesn't mean they are any less challenging or beautiful. Lawrence Philippsen helped me out with access to this peak as he



Val on the summit of Swah Peak (photo: Lindsay Elms)

had worked for years at the Vernon Camp and knew all the roads into the various valleys. To access the area of the peak we decided to call Swah Peak, he said to drive to Vernon Camp and then take the road towards the Sebalhall. A few kilometres in, turn left onto Surprise Road, which follows Surprise (Swah) Creek to the head of the valley. At the end of the driveable section of the road, we camped and got ready for an early start the next morning.

If the entrance to the side road wasn't washed out, we could have driven further but that didn't matter. The old road swung around and eventually climbed high into a hanging valley. A heard of elk were startled by our approach and took off into the bush – the last we were to see of them. From a corner on the road we climbed into the slash and spent 25 minutes wending our way through the

stumps, fallen boughs, new bush and slippery logs until we reached a saddle where we entered the old forest. There was a quick discussion about whether to go on or not as the weather was obviously turning, but we decided to continue. We never let a little moisture in the air stop us (very often).

The ridge above was steep but easy and, after 30 minutes, we were in the alpine with just a short 20-minute traverse across to the main summit. As we summited, the last view of the surrounding peaks disappeared. Although we sat up there for half an hour hoping to get a glimpse of something, it never eventuated, so we headed back down. I knew we would be back in the area as there were other peaks to climb, and hopefully from them we would get a view.

Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

A Fall off Augerpoint Mountain

Janelle Curtis July 2

I fell off the ridge between Augerpoint Mountain and Mount Mitchell in Strathcona Park on July 2 of last summer. I don't remember a lot from mid-June to early October, so much of this article is based on the online news reports, some old messages I sent, and the recollections of my dear partner and friend, Rowan. I don't even remember planning the trip or approaching Augerpoint Mountain via Jack's Trail, but now that I have a better sense of where we were, I can understand why we were there. Photos taken before I fell show that we were in lovely alpine terrain surrounded by some of my favourite mountains. We were on our way to climb Mount Mitchell, and we had to negotiate some steep and technical terrain. In total, I slipped down about 15 metres off the ridge and rolled/tumbled down another 80 metres or so.

My rescue involved the help of Search and Rescue teams from Comox and Campbell River, and three helicopters. I was flown to one of the hospitals in Victoria. Rowan witnessed my fall and was involved in my rescue, from his SPOT and In Reach calls for help to the ways he applied first aid and helped the Search and Rescue teams. His Search and Rescue training and considerable outdoor experience were invaluable and probably are partly to explain why I'm still here today. I'm guessing several hundred people have been involved in my rescue and recovery, sadly many of whom I will never know or remember or be able to



The ridge to Mount Mitchell. (photo: Janelle Curtis)



Janelle Curtis on the way to Augerpoint Mountain. (photo: Rowan Laver)

thank in person. If you're one of those people, thank you so much!

Fortunately, I was wearing my helmet and backpack; otherwise I might have sustained much more serious injuries. I had surgery to fix a broken ankle, both my knees, and one of my hands. I shredded one of my wrists, fractured a sinus, shattered at least four teeth, and was in a coma for about three weeks. Although it sort of feels like my other injuries are greater issues, I also sustained a severe head injury. Again, thank goodness I was wearing my helmet! Rehabilitation is ongoing and there is a long road to recovery ahead, but fortunately I have an excellent prognosis and fantastic support. My recovery team is hopeful I'll be back to hiking this year. But first, I have to master walking! One step at a time.

One of the first memories I have from my time at the Victoria General Hospital included looking at all the cards and photos on my hospital room wall. These included a poster assembled by our ACC-VI president, Catrin Brown, with much of your help and contributions. The poster included lovely photographs of climbing or being outside with one or



Rowan Laver in camp with the Golden Hinde in the background. (photo: Janelle Curtis)

more of you. The poster is still up at home, and the photos are a reminder of the great beauty of the outdoors and of sharing adventures with you.

Some of the key things I learned through this experience are: being outside with someone you trust; having the equipment to request help; knowing first aid; wearing your helmet or other protective gear; having lots of support; and being ready for the unexpected. That I fell off a ridge in Strathcona Park and sustained so many injuries is still surprising to me.

My family, Rowan, and I are so very thankful and really appreciate ACC-VI's support. ACC-VI members were so kind in their messages, visits, and offers of accommodation (nicely organized by Colleen Kasting!), and help, and I can't tell you how much all of this means to me. It was so lovely to see Lenka, Sonia, Vivian, Lyle, my climbing friends, and to hear from many others. It was also really nice to see many of you at the AGM and sample your yummy treats. Thank you all so much for your kind support!

Participants: Janelle Curtis, Rowan Laver



Looking towards the main summit of Centennial Peak (to the right) (photo: Valerie Wootton)



The NE summit that Laurence Philippsen climbed in 2005 (photo: Valerie Wootton)

Centennial Peak (1,453 m)

Lindsay Elms July 3

In the spring of 2005, Laurence Philippsen took advantage of the daylight hours to make a quick jaunt up one of the peaks above Tolnay Creek. Not the highest point but the northeast summit of what he called Centennial Peak. He called it Centennial because the road below was the Centennial Main that he had been working on. This peak was directly above the huge scree slope that he had been looking at all day. The temptation was too great and after work on June 5, he switched to his hiking boots and took off up the scree slope (500 m) to the small saddle below the summit. From the saddle, he deeked left, then made short work of a dirty gully and exited to the right of the unclimbed peak's summit. He hadn't been back to the valley since 2005, but one evening after work in 2016 he again drove up the road to check conditions and then pass the information on to me. Just over a week earlier, Val and I climbed nearby Swah Peak, appreciative of his evening jaunts up the old roads.

It was the Canada Day weekend, and Val and I had just climbed Mount Mitchell from above Pearl Lake on July 2. That afternoon, we drove back out onto Hwy 19, then headed towards Gold River. A stop at the Ridge Roadhouse Pub for dinner, and then we drove towards Woss on the forestry service road. At Tolnay Road (Centennial Main), we turned

left and then took an immediate right and followed the old road for about three kilometres. It was quite bushy, and there were a couple of narrow sections getting around large boulders. At the top of the last rise, we found the creek had washed out the bridge so I had to back down the road to a flat area where we camped for the night.

The next morning, we walked for one and a half kilometres up the road to the bottom of the scree slope Laurence had told us about, but to reach it we had to hike down to one of the largest elk wallows I have seen and then scramble around a few large boulders to the scree. The mist was continuing to lift and by now we could see the saddle at the top, but more alarming was the big open rock face at the top of the scree slope where all the rockfall had come from. It was huge, and we could hear rock coming off it periodically. I decided to stay on the right-hand side of the gully in case anything came down while we were climbing.

The scree slope was very loose, but we gradually gained height and, after an hour and a quarter, we reached the saddle. Through the trees, I could just pick out two high points – one of them must be the summit. Up through a band of trees, then a small rockwall and then we were in the alpine. I guessed the main summit was the peak to the right, but Val was non-committal. We continued up a ridge towards a prominent gendarme and then cut across the face to a steep band of rock and vegetation. Not too difficult but while scrambling up I looked for an alternate route to come down. After ten minutes, we were on the broad saddle between the two peaks – it was clear the highest point was out to the right. Ten minutes later, we were on the summit.

From the top, we saw more peaks to climb in the future, some of which I am sure have not been climbed. The descent was straightforward, and we got back to the vehicle just before the drizzle started. There was no sign that anyone had been up the peak before, not even the surveyors, so it was likely another first ascent.

Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

Nootka Island Trail

Jim Raper Summer

The date was set to hike the Nootka Island Trail. The date changed, so this meant I was going alone. This trip would be my first solo multi-day trek. I joined another group flying up to Gold River.

Eagerly, we jumped into the six-passenger De Havilland Beaver.

Flying up the coast, we passed beautiful waterfalls and stunning rugged beaches, typical of West Coast terrain. Up to the north end of Nootka Island there was Louie Lagoon: long, flat, and untouched. The De Havilland landed smoothly; we disembarked and waved good-bye to the pilot. The first part of the trail was to Third Beach (1 km). As I was surveying the map, making my route, I overheard the group sorting out their equipment ("This is how you use your poles.") I guess they didn't read the fine print –THIS IS THE WEST COAST.



I arrived at Third Beach. The sun was out, the beach sandy, I was here all on my own! There was a campsite further down at Skuna Bay with drinking water, sounds like a great spot for the first night. Some of the sections were steep with impassable headlands; you really need to keep your eyes open to get around, lots of steep incline with ropes. The campsite was awesome, tucked in behind some big old logs. I chef'd up some dinner as I watched the sunset with the waves pounding on the shore. "It doesn't get any better than this."

Day two. Up and heading for Calvin Falls, beach walking on endless sand. Wow, I like this hiking. I had the beach to myself. I rounded the corner to Calvin Falls, one of the most breathtaking falls. I watched the water cascade into deep pools below, alongside the beautiful sandy beach. Only one soul was there, and that was mine. The falls were epic, the beach was stunning, and the pools were inviting: this is where I chose to be for the night. Up with the tent, off with the gear, in for a swim. The sun was beaming down, the gear was drying, and an artisan had carved a chair out of a foam block just for me. My afternoon was rewarded with some reading time in my newly found chair, basking in the sun, with the waves licking at my feet. The weather was to hold for 3 more days. As dinner time neared, the clouds rolled in, the weather was changing; this is the West Coast.

Day three. My destination for the day was Beano Creek Camp. As I rounded Bajo Point, the rain and wind were in full force. I discovered the map is incorrect, as it shows the camp on the wrong side of the Indian Reserve (IR). This would have been nice to know prior to crossing the creek. I decided on a new destination, Callum Creek Camp. As I headed in the direction of the camp I came upon one very steep black slimy cliff, where someone had attached a rope, thank goodness. I made it, I arrived at Callum Creek Camp and surveyed the site. It was full of hikers taking shelter from the rain – there was one spot in the mud, no



good for me. Next destination looked like four more kilometres: I arrived, found a spot high and dry, started a fire, tarp up, tent up, dinner on; whew, that was a long, soggy day – 17 kilometres. Then it started, that West Coast rain, bucket after bucket all night long. Upon waking, still monsoons, back to bed, the rain continued all day long, good spot for my camp high and dry. That was Day four in the tent with my book looking out and wondering how much longer it will rain this hard. The rain continued another full night.

Day five. There was a break in the rain, the buckets subsided and it was now just West Coast mist. It was off to Friendly Cove to catch the boat. I had plenty of time. As I moved along the scenic coast, parts of the trail were flooded with six feet of water. There was no route around that I could see. I pulled out my map and compass and took a bearing, and I pushed up into the salal. The salal was getting thicker, the going was extremely tough, but I knew there had to be a bypass route. There I was, second-guessing myself - was this the right thing to do? I knew there had to be a bypass. Bingo, found the bypass route, I was on my way again. This detour took up a lot of time I wasn't counting on; I looked at my watch, I was still okay. I headed towards Macquinna Point which is about a 10-minute walk off of the main trail. I passed spectacular rock outcroppings and stunning sea caves.

My next hurdle was the crossing at Tsa'tsil Lagoon, then home free. I arrive at the lagoon; it was 30-feet wide and 15-feet deep with rain water. I look at my saw and said, "I guess I will build a raft if I want to cross this raging lagoon." I scan the area looking for windfalls to start constructing a raft. I spot a cabin in the bush, up I head towards the cabin, once there I am greeting by a chap with his mug of coffee in his hand. "I guess you want to cross," he says. Cabin man tells me he has a small plastic boat in the bush with a rope on it. We had to flip the boat over as it had accumulated 10 inches of rain water. I jump in the boat to cross the lagoon - the tide was on its way in and the water was rushing out from the lagoon; this made for some interesting paddling. I thanked him for the ride. I spent more time negotiating this part of the trail than anticipated. They certainly do not mention anything like this in the books; I guess that is why they call it hiking not golf.

I am still headstrong on meeting the MV Uchuck at Friendly Cove for the 2:30 p.m. departure. I arrive at the church at 2:45 p.m. I thought I had missed it, I peered over the blackberry bushes and there in the bay was the boat, I ran down the dock, saw a puff of black smoke and watched as the MV Uchuck backed out. I starting running faster down the dock, soaked to the bone, waving my poles, blowing my whistle as the boat was backing out. I guess I will be spending the night. I stood on the dock for what felt like 10 minutes watching the boat. They must have seen me as they came back for the crazy man waving his poles. I threw my wet pack down to the deckhand, which just about flattened him. All the camera-touting tourists were on deck watching me, waiting for me to jump. I fooled them by climbing down the piling onto the deck of the boat for my

voyage home. The deckhand offered me their warm quarters to change into some dry clothes. Then it was off to mix with the tourists. The canteen opened up: hot soup and a clubhouse, toasted on warm bread – this beats nuts, dried fruit & dehydrated meat. My conclusion is one could fly in and hike to Calvin Falls, camp there for two days, then hike out and fly to Gold River, which would be a trip of a lifetime for someone who is not as keen as I.

As I sat in my truck and started to drive away, I felt a huge rush over my body and a real sense of accomplishment.

Augerpoint Traverse, Rookie Edition

Mike Knippel July 16-20

Since taking up hiking four years previously, the obsession had taken its normal procession from small to large hikes, to subalpine day-tripping, to multi-day coastal hikes and, eventually, Strathcona Park hikes, discovering all the usual suspects, while increasing difficulty gradually so as to find our limits. So the next step in this pursuit was to be alpine ridge trekking in 2016. We warmed up with four days on Flower Ridge in early August, and after learning some valuable lessons concerning bugs, we were set for the summer's true challenge, the Augerpoint Traverse. Armed with recently purchased bug nets, some refresher training on map and compass use and all the knowledge we could find online, we set aside five days for the effort, a longish time, because we like to rest, dally, rest, gawk, rest, explore and rest a lot.



Beautiful Lake Lives Up to it's Name, Forbidden Plateau, Wendy Baulne Langelo, Gary Lahnsteiner



Two Mikes Bump Into Each Other, Mt. Albert Edward South Ridge, Mike Knippel, Mike Blake

We left Victoria on Tuesday at 6 a.m. in Gary's and my trucks, picking up Wendy in Duncan on the way After parking my truck at the far end, we doubled back to Raven Lodge so as to hit the trail by 1 p.m. Before striking out, Gary and Wendy expressed their preference to deviate from my plan and to camp at Kwai Lake instead of Circlet Lake. I explained this would make a long day two and that they didn't need to be worried about the Circus too much, it being a Tuesday, but they weren't to be dissuaded. Knowing I had the upper hand by vote, because my wife Manon would assuredly vote for my plan, and then I could invoke my tiebreaker authority, we put it to vote. With a vote of three to one, the mutiny was complete, and we struck out for Kwai Lake.

After a nice amble of 3.5 hours, we arrived and staked out some choice sites (they're all choice at Kwai), set up tents, then headed off to explore the Beautiful Lakes and the Cruikshank Canyon lookout.

What a spot! We made promises to come back here to explore someday. The canyon view is great, although I prefer the view from the other side above Moat Lake, where there aren't 1,000 rock cairns guiding the way for people who can only see two feet in front of them. But I think we accidentally knocked some over, so there's that.

We started early Wednesday morning, as we had to make up the time lost due to the plan change (did I mention there was a mutiny?). We made that up quickly and before we knew it, we're heading up to the first little plateau on the way to Albert Edward's ridge. I had seen a little lake while up there a few years previous, and we stopped for a bit while I searched for that, and what a glorious little lake it is, peering over the edge above Moat Lake. After that brief stop, we regrouped and headed up to the main ridge at the double tarns, where we stopped for lunch around 12:30. Here we bumped into a young man from Australia and a young lady from Van Isle, who had forgotten to bring their sunscreen. Of course, I brought about 10 times more than

I needed, so we lathered them up good and had a nice chat.

Now as anyone who knows this area will tell you, the hike from here to the summit takes a while, and you never seem to be getting any closer. At least for our speeds, that was how it felt. This was confirmed when we bumped into the same couple on their way back from the summit, and we were still at least an hour back. "We took a lot of pictures," I claimed. Anyway, we lathered them up some more, and the young fella told me "I'm super proud of you guys for this trip you're doing." I think this meant he was amazed old people would do this, but whatever, the intent was noted. At least that took my mind off the mutiny for a while (I am NOT fixated!). We trundled on, and at the big pile of rubble before the summit (I should

really learn the names of these mountain features), Manon decided she was taking a rest, and Wendy, Gary and I went and summited and signed the register by 3:30. Returning and picking up Manon, we struck off down Albert Edward's south ridge, and I told everyone there was a good chance we wouldn't see anyone else until Saturday.

We had hoped to camp at some tarns around 1,500 m, but I knew there might be some at about 1,800 m and, given it was running late, that higher tarn became the evening's target. As we approached the first major cliff band, we peered over, and saw two tents by a small tarn. So much for my earlier proclamation. Anyway, they were about to get some company. After some slow cliff band picking and making sure we didn't turn ankles, we finally got to the site. There was a lady standing by one of the tents, and as I introduced myself I discovered she was being guided across the traverse from the other direction. The guides were in the other tent having a nap. When I found out they were Mike Blake and Lara Campbell of MB Guiding, there seemed to be only one course of action – go wake them up and have a chat! Which we did, and all had a fun time. I shared my home-dehydrated salt and vinegar beet chips, and Mike gave me some advice for route finding above Ruth Masters Lake (which, we will discover, I forgot...but that's for later). It was a great time meeting people we had chatted with online up on this remote ridge. It was also great to meet their client, a lady slightly older than us (we think), who had wanted an adventure but couldn't find friends interested in the challenge so decided to hire some guides so she could achieve her goals – impressive!

Because Thursday's goal was Ruth Masters Lake, and as I felt this wouldn't take too long, we allowed sleeping-in this morning. Wendy and I still got up before sunrise so we could get some pictures and soak it all in, and we got to wave good bye to Mike, Lara, and their client, who started early so as to make it out (I think) to Raven Lodge that same day. But a sleep-in I had promised, and Manon took full advantage of it (nothing too good for my princess).

Eventually we were all up, heading down the ridge by about 10:30 a.m., and eyeing Hope and Charity lakes and the route from Mount Frink to Mount George, making plans to get down there someday, once we could figure out the routes. We picked our way through a few more cliff bands but for the most part, it was fairly easy navigation and all there was to do was to stay upright, keep to the left, and soak in the vistas, which were incredible. We had a snack at the 1,500-m tarns (a pretty little spot) and got down to the divide by 2 p.m., missing a grassy ramp that was supposed to be available, and having to hand packs down in one spot, but that was as tough as it got. We found the route up the other side easy enough by watching for the flag, found the marsh, then struck up the hill behind and to the north of the marsh. This was steep, and there was some laughter mixed with fear at times, and some bluffs that we probably should have respected a bit more, but we were in a scampering mood, full of the joy of solitude and nature, and pretty full of confidence that we were actually able to make our way around fairly well without falling off the sides of mountains. That pride would go away, just a bit, the next day but for now, we were rocking this alpine trekking business.

We crossed a bluff on our way to find the waterfall that would mark our ascent route to Ruth Masters, stopped for a bite, and when I went around the corner for a pee, I saw the waterfall we were looking for, not too far away at all. It was a stroll over there, a very quick climb up to Ruth Masters, a hike around her north side, and then we were there, setting up camp on the west side of the lake by 4:30.

Well, what a spot! Closed in by rock walls to the south and north, a steep gully to the west where we would climb out of the next morning, and open views to Mount George to the east, this spot earns its reputation as one of the most idyllic settings in Strathcona Park. The sun disappeared

early in the spot we had chosen to camp, but the moon was full and the skies clear. Now, I think some local effect caused some pretty big winds that evening. I'm no meteorologist, but I know daytime heating can cause wind effects when the sun goes down, and I suspect that's what happened here, because we were seeing 40- to 50-km winds from both the west and east, alternating back and forth, for a couple hours. So the winds followed the shape of the cirque, coming in the open side to the east, hitting the end wall, roiling around for a bit, and then backing out the way it came, testing our staking prowess. All to say, everybody's tent stood up to it but mine, and a couple repair jobs were required during the evening. The good news is I got some great pictures with the aid of the full moon, although Manon couldn't understand why I kept asking her to keep still for ten seconds. ("The aperture needs to be open for a while, honey, its dark out here!" - she told me to just click faster...sigh.)

So, on Friday we were raring to go. The plan had been to climb Albert Edward, Augerpoint, Syd Watts, and The Fell on our way, but I had started developing blisters (you mean a couple half hour periods wearing my new Salewas around the house isn't enough to break them in? Who could have forecasted that?) on Wednesday, so I had decided to skip the peaks after Albert Edward so I could make sure I finished the trip in reasonably good shape. So Wendy and Gary took off early to climb Augerpoint while Manon and I relaxed a bit at the lake, and we established a time to rendezvous at the Augerpoint col.

Well, the climb had other ideas. We made our way slowly up the gully well enough but encountered a pretty steep bluff requiring some scrambling. I got up OK and sat down to talk Manon through it, but she wasn't comfortable. So I told her to check out the other side, where I thought if she got up to this tree, and was able to find a way across to some bushes beyond, she could pull herself up through the brush. Well, she got to the tree, let her know the way to the brush was tougher than it looked from where I was (by this time, lying down and soaking up some sun), and further, she wasn't comfortable returning down the way she had just come up (feasible...up being relatively easier than down for some of us). So she was stuck. I told her to hang tight, and worked my way up above her to drop a rope and pull her pack up, then looked for an easier way up, which I found, before heading off to her location and helping her down from her perch. (It turns out the way we eventually took up was, I think, the advice Mike Blake had given us during our meeting, although I had mistaken exactly where I was supposed to apply that advice.) Anyway, we got up that way, which was a steep bushy slope to the right of the bluff I had scrambled up initially, and headed back up to the col. Of course we were now about 90 minutes late for our rendezvous, but we met up on the col and took a needed break, Manon being still a bit rattled from getting stuck-



Cool Kids at the Augerpoint Col, Augerpoint Col, Mike Knippel, Manon Knippel, Wendy Baulne Langelo



Only Slightly Happy!, Westmin Rd, L-R Mike Knippel, Wendy Baulne Langelo, Gary Lahnsteiner, Manon Knippel



Manon In Moonlight, Ruth Master's Lake

Luckily there was a snowfield up there, and I made the best cherry Kool-Aid slushie I've ever had.

We headed to the west along the ridge, up a steep talus slope to an unnamed 1,750-m peak. For us, this was the toughest part of the trip. Very steep, very loose rock, and we're climbing with packs along a razor-edged ridge at times five metres to our right that drops off a few hundred metres straight down. It tested our resolve but, knowing the

only other alternative was to turn around, we weren't having any of that. So we toughed it out, although none of us liked it much at all. The tension was broken when someone I won't name (Manon) said, near the top, "I think I just sharted!" – poop humour being the antidote for most things, we find. Of course, we were in stitches, and the morale challenge was overcome, our most testing moment since the mutiny (still NOT fixated!).

So we worked ourselves around the ridge top, stood and gawked at Syd Watts Peak for a while, but decided to give it a pass, given our delays that day, plus we really enjoyed getting to camp before 5 p.m. so we had time to soak in our surroundings. So with Syd Watts left for another day, we decided to try to cut off some distance by going around the last false peak of about 1,685 m. Gary and Wendy took one way just under the bluff, and I took another way down a gully and then back up across some rock, with

Manon faithfully following me. She would have been well advised to not be so faithful, as my way took much longer, however, it's about the experience and not the speed I kept telling her. At any rate, we could now see the evening's tarns down below, and it was a fairly simple amble down there and very nice meadows at the 1,500 mark. Wendy did her usual routine of showing off her speed once we saw the target, and she was lying on her back for about 10 minutes by the time we got there. On our last night of the trip, we shared laughs, soaked feet, and Gary and I took off to gaze at Jack Shark Lake and invent routes down to it that we will probably never execute, or remember. But it's about the moment, you see.

Saturday we were off, knowing full well we would likely not climb The Fell on the way, as that bag of Miss Vicky's chips in the truck was on all of our minds. It's a nice ridge hike from here to where the trail heads down to Buttle Lake for a few hours of knee-knocking descent. At around 9 a.m., we made our first human contact since Mike and Lara two 20-something-year-old men planning to undertake the traverse in a day. We were pretty amazed and felt it would take them all day and evening to achieve this, although we found out later they finished it in daylight. Well, we're not trail runners; we're trekkers with lofty goals and the intent to achieve them slowly. Gary, being in the construction business, was particularly enamoured of one fellow's safety vest, which was apparently a Binford 3000 or something, or as he said, "a really cool safety vest." (Whatever, we embrace nerds!) And then, an hour later, we bumped into another group, five women about our age, with what looked like new, shiny clothes and makeup. I had my doubts about their preparedness for a run of this type but, as I found out later, they made it in daylight with plenty of time to spare. They were obviously fully prepared and in condition for this type of day trip. These trail runners amaze me, I could never do what they do, and prefer a slower pace and time

to relax, but these mountains offer unlimited options for all tastes.

We made it down the steep descent, taking some time to negotiate the two talus slopes, which sure seemed like one really big talus slope to me, doing a bit of butt hiking and backpack roping, depending on each's level of comfort with the grade. After a stop at some nice frog ponds at 840 m, we got down to the road and the truck and the Miss Vicky's chips by 3 p.m., quite thrilled and satisfied with our accomplishment.

As glad as we were to be done, it did not take long in the truck before we were discussing what to do next. Obviously, the limits had not yet been found. So the future holds more ridge hiking as we push further, with Elk River – Westmin traverse firmly in our sights, as well as other challenges. We're pretty delighted with our progress thus far, and we're learning things with every trip, challenging ourselves while staying within our abilities, being considerate of our environment by practicing leave-no-trace principles and respecting the terrain. We're also pretty happy to have broken the 30-pound barrier with our packs. We are learning, and we are buying stuff. Mutiny aside, this trip has without a doubt been the highlight of our short hiking/back-packing careers, but some glacier training seems a logical next step, right? Can anyone say "Rees Ridge?"

After a rib meal in Campbell River, I listened to the final Tragically Hip show on the radio to help keep me awake, but driving visibility was impaired, as my eyeballs seemed to be sweating a lot. We got home shortly after 9 p.m., washed off five days of trail; Manon went to bed, and I stayed up and watched the Hip show I had taped. Still buzzing from the trip, the concert and thoughts it generated in me put everything in context — the trek Gord and his family and band were on, the grace and courage with which they faced it, the opening of his soul to Canada — these were mountains they were climbing, with fear to be sure, but moving onwards, one foot ahead of the other, into the unknown. It was a perfect ending to a perfect trip.

Participants: Mike Knippel, Wendy Baulne Langelo, Gary Lahnsteiner, Manon Knippel.

Alava Bate Sanctuary Summer Camp Week 2: Welcome to Shangri-La

David Fishwick
July 31- August 7

I'm not generally very big on committing to things well in advance, but when I learned that the 2016 summer camp would be at the Alava Bate Sanctuary with the luxury of not having to bushwhack in, I was sold. I had long been curious

about this little travelled corner of the North Island.

After months of anticipation, I found myself at the helicopter staging area, getting acquainted with my companions for the week as our pilot began a stern safety briefing. Suppressing our excitement to get going, we patiently listened to detailed instructions on how not to break the helicopter or get ourselves decapitated. We were assured that damaging the machine in any way would cost \$10,000. I guess it would probably also cost \$10k to clean up after anyone who errantly wandered into a rotor too. "Good to know," I thought, "now let's fly this thing!" manoeuvred

Logging roads and clear cuts in the valley soon gave way to thick green Island forest canopy, eventually thinning to expose rock underneath. When we thought the view couldn't be better, we banked right around a bluff to reveal a spectacular drainage, whose steep walls were cut by cascading waterfalls. Simultaneously everyone aboard blurted out "whoa!!!..." We then manoeuvred up between dark peaks with snowy white accents before the copter set us down at Shangri-La Lake. Giddy with excitement, but also being careful not to break the heli, we piled out next to two giant orange dome tents erected by the week one group.



Lenka and Brianna on summit of Mount Grattan; Mount Bate (left) and Mount Alava (right) in distance



Camp at Shangri-La Lake

The outgoing crew quickly shouted tidbits of advice for our stay, most of which was lost beneath the whine of turbine engines. Cryptic messages were uttered about tents full of rocks, spas, throwing money to the wind, impassable lakes, stone tools, frozen meat, and failure to master Bate. Without further explanation they clambered aboard their ride, and disappeared through a cloud of dust into the distance.

Intrigued, we looked to the log book to help decipher their advice. They described the legend of Shangri-La, "an enchanted place where time ceased, no one aged and beauty reigned". Subsequent pages went on to describe money fluttering in the wind amongst the talus. Had they gone mad? Perhaps they were suffering blood loss due to the ever present swarm of mosquitoes that now followed our every move.

The twin dome tents provided ample space for food preparation, eating, chatting and getting out of the sun, rain and most importantly, the mosquitoes. Unfortunately, the wind had taken its toll on the older of the two domes, and we found it lovingly taped together by our week-one colleagues, and both tents were anchored to the ground with no less than seven tons of rocks.

Camp was situated ideally next to the lake on flat ground amongst mountain wildflowers. Potential objectives stood all around, perfect for day trips. Mounts Alava, Bate, Grattan, Thumb Peak, The Thumb, Tlupana Ridge, and infinite rock problems had the potential to keep us all busy

for weeks. Unfortunately, we only had seven days, so we would have to prioritize.

While there was not the legendary amount of snow of the 2010 camp, we had enough to make travel interesting, providing direct access up gullies and quick boot-ski descents back to camp. The lack of snow also allowed us to enjoy a series of tarns near camp which baked all day in the sun. Thius feature came to be known as "the spa." It had warm (-ish) and cold temperature zones, lanes for laps, hot-rock treatment, and even a slip-n-slide. It soon became a favourite spot to relax the muscles after each day's excursions.

The previous group said the Shangri-La Lake was impassable due to lack of snow, which would limit possible objectives. Dennis took this statement as a personal challenge and, along with Alois, Jes and myself, we did a quick recon of the ridge to the west of camp and then searched for a passage around the lake. What looked like a short distance was complicated by deep snow receding from rock, and made more exciting by the chunks of ice that would on occasion calve off into the lake, creating mini icebergs. Before we could complete our mission, the dinner bell post-poned this project for another day.

The bar was set high for dinner that first night, and it remained there throughout the trip. We each took turns producing meals that met the tough criteria of "vegetarian, wheat-free, dairy free, and not too spicy." Albert would periodically compliment the chefs by popping his head into the



Mount Alava from Peter Lake

tent while meals were being prepared and describe wonderful smells drifting in throughout the valley. No one went hungry or unsatisfied all week. Dinner entertainment was typically a combination of stories of daily feats, interspersed with creative dance performed by those battling mosquitoes.

The fact that relatively few people have travelled through this area made route-finding interesting. While we had some beta from previous bushwhacker articles, the lack of snow-cover made the lay of the land quite different. Given there were no worn paths, it was cool to basically figure out our own ways to reach the summits.

The quality of rock was fantastic, and there were many snow-filled gullies to facilitate rapid boot-ski descents of pure joy. For this reason, peaks like Mount Alava took hours to ascend, yet mere minutes to descend. Super fun. Over the week, multiple parties summited Alava, Bate, Grattan, The Thumb, Thumb Peak and Tlupana ridge. Details of each day's routes and participants are in the camp's log book, so I won't bore readers with tedious details of each one but will share a couple of memorable moments.

Circumnavigating the puddle known as Shangri-La Lake continued to be an objective on its own. After finding a route around the north side of the lake, it was subsequently cut off when a large chunk of snow broke off and floated away. Dennis and Jes later found a new low-fifth-class southern route as a short cut for the return from Alava, which was dubbed "the gimp" to commemorate her complaining spine.

Days later, I joined Dennis and Albert one evening on "the gimp" route around Shangri-La Lake to the next valley. It was a fun, short trek across ice, snow, and fifth-class terrain overlooking large sea monster-like boulders deep below the crystal-clear waters. Once on the other side of the lake, we



Looking down on camp from Tlupana Ridge

hiked to a viewpoint above Peter Lake where we were able to enjoy the evening "Alpenglühen" as it washed over the peaks. What a great way to end the day.

Near the end of the trip, Paul, Dennis, Lenka, Tim and I explored what may have been a new route up the south aspect of Mount Bate's peak. At one point I stopped to think to myself, "I wonder if anyone has ever stood right here before...ever?" Pretty cool. Dennis called this route "Flower Wall" after the tiny purple flower that was sacrificed to make a solid foot hold during the ascent.

I get stoked seeing people learn, grow and celebrate successes. On trips like this, you spend time with people you wouldn't normally get a chance to hang out with. I always learn something from everyone, and it is never what I would have planned or expected. This camp was a great opportunity for some of us to push our alpine skills outside our comfort zone, with the benefit of being mentored by those more experienced. I certainly went to places I wouldn't have had the confidence to get on my own, as I began to bridge the gap between my scrambling and sport climbing experience, and learned to place trad gear to reach alpine objectives. I also learned that summit logbooks in airtight Tupperware containers are an excellent media for mould growth. While mycologists will celebrate this fact, it made for some challenging logbook records for the rest of us. Ick.

There were, of course, a few odd and memorable discussions. While slinging a precarious pile of crumbly, rotten rock to protect an exposed blocky section on Mount Bate, Alois decided that this was an excellent time to discuss seismology. More specifically, when "the big one" was going to hit and how it would impact this spot. Thanks Al. The debate over the source of the mysterious feces on the summit of Mount Alava was also a winner. (If readers weren't envious before, I bet they are now!)

As the week went by, the mysteries of the previous group's log book entries slowly began to reveal themselves. The legend of money floating around the sanctuary began to grow. Walter reported finding a \$20, and soon other bills were popping up. It turns out that the powerful winds of the week previous had sent one of their group's tent tumbling through the 3:30 a.m. darkness, tearing it to shreds and scattering his belongings, including about \$200 cash across Shangri-La. The treasure hunt was informally on. By the end of the week, we had recovered \$120, which was eventually returned.

We had brilliant sun and temperatures for all but one of our seven days, but even that misty day added a new and welcome dimension to the landscape. As the week came to an end, I stood on Tlupana ridge, and looked across the valley to see Albert, George, Paul and Tim boot skiing the north snow slope off Mount Bate, while Lenka could be seen doing a solo exploration of the valley below, just below where Dennis and Jes wiggled up three wet pitches on a big crack that was named "Hash Tag". What a fantastic place. The terrain provided so many diverse opportunities.

In the end we met the primary objectives of the camp. We all came home as friends, and we all had great experiences. I had high expectations for the AB camp and, I have to say, my expectations were met and exceeded. The sound of the helicopter returning to pick us up was marked with a chorus of "Awwww.....but I don't wanna go home yet." I think that says it all.

Participants: Dave Fishwick, Dennis Hollingshead, Jes Scott, Lenka Visnovska, Mike Hubbard, George Butcher, Coleen Kasting, Alois Shonenberger, Paul and Diane Erickson, Tim Taddy, Albert Van Citters, Barb Brooks, Walter Moar and Brianna Coates

Rugged Mountain

Tim Turay August 12 – 14

When I put this trip on the list I really didn't expect it to go. The weather had been so unstable for the summer with lots of nice weekdays but cloudy weekends. In anticipation of a short weather window, I even decided to change it from a four-day trip to a three-day trip. I so badly wanted an extra day to explore the Haihte Range, but it wasn't going to be.

The group was going to be six of us: Peggy, Chris 1, Chris 2, Roxanne, Dave and myself. None of us had been in the area before, and everyone was very eager for the attempt. That Friday morning saw two car loads of climbers leave Victoria, with Chris 1 and Chris 2 stopping in Courtenay



A very happy summit crew: Dave Suttill, Tim Turay, Peggy Taylor, Chris Sommers, Chris Burns and Roxanne Stedman

to pick me up and change vehicles. Thirty minutes later, we met the other car load just outside Campbell River. We proceeded up HWY 19, past Woss and finally got to the turn off for Zebellos. We headed down the gravel Nomash Main until we got to the N20 turn off, which we followed to the flagged trailhead, which had plenty of space for two vehicles.

Soon enough, everyone was packed, and we started the long slog up the old deactivated logging road. The day was going to be a scorcher and, soon enough, everyone was drenched in their own sweat. Thankfully, about 30 minutes into the hike, we found a bit of water flowing, and everyone was able to soak themselves in some cool water which helped lift everyone's energy levels. Soon afterwards, the bush started and would never let up until we reached the alpine. All the write-ups that I have read talk about the bush level, and never in all my hikes/climbs have I ever experienced such a level. At times, we had no idea where we were stepping; it was so thick. Then the bugs started and would not relent for the rest of the trip. I can't remember the last time I was so bothered by bugs: no-see-ums, mosquitoes and horse flies, we had them all and all at once! Like the one blog mentions, you have to go through hell to get to heaven. It is so true on this one.

I knew this day would be a long day. The heat, the bush, the bugs, the terrain, and the packs would take their toll on everyone. We slowly made progress and, eventually, we broke out from the bush and made it to the alpine with great views of Rugged! As the sun was setting, we finally reached Nathan's Col and set up camp. Water was boiled and everyone chilled out on the nice big rock; this would serve as our base camp communal area. The views from our dinner area were incredible and with the boil-the-bag dinners cooking themselves, the name-that-peak game was in full action. We decided that a somewhat early start was needed, and we agreed that 7 a.m. would be enough.

We decided on the Walsh-Facer-Hutchinson Route, which begins right at the top of Rugged Glacier. We used crampons for this section as the snow was pretty firm in the morning. Once off the glacier, the axes and crampons were

put aside and wouldn't be needed again. Here we decided to put on our harnesses just to be on the safe side as we didn't quite know what type of terrain to expect. From here, we followed a ledge system that would take us to a gulley. The exposure and views from here were awesome!!! But there were enough handholds and foot places that the rope wasn't needed. Soon enough, we made it to a large shoulder area. From here, we headed off to the right and came to a huge grey slab area. Up we went and, soon enough, we made it to the top ridge. The views from here were absolutely fantastic, and no one minded waiting for people to make the short scramble up to the summit. From base to camp to summit took us about 2.5 hours! I have to say that sitting on the top of a summit and enjoying my breakfast was a first! The bluebird day made the views from the top truly fantastic. We spent well over an hour discussing peaks in the distance, future climbs and how beautiful this area is.

With much regret, it was time to leave. Chris Sommer set up an anchor and everyone rappelled down the tricky final pitch. Going up is much different than going down, and I couldn't believe how steep the slab area was. Thankfully everyone took their time and no loose rocks made their way down on someone. The descent back to base camp was uneventful and everyone just went at their own pace. Soon enough, we got to the Rugged Glacier, which in the morning sun had become nice and soft and perfect for boot skiing. Once back in camp, a strange feeling set in and people were unsure what to do. It was only around 1:30 p.m., we had just summited, and everyone was feeling great. It was beautiful out, but a little too late to go after a major peak in the area. Chris S., Dave and I, decided that we would tag the south needle while the rest of the group snoozed and sunbathed,

The south needle is right there and took around 30 minutes to get to the top. It was great relaxing on top of the peak and looking at possible routes of the nearby mountains, but all good things must come to an end. We slowly made our way down and joined the snoozing group. It was a pretty sweet afternoon of just doing nothing and enjoying the view.

The next morning we left at the crack of dawn. Everyone knew what they were in for, and we proceeded to battle our way through the heat, bugs and bush. We made good time and, soon enough, we were at the vehicles, exhausted but with smiles on our faces. What better way to recharge then with a swim! When you turn off the Nomash Main onto spur N20, there is the best swimming hole. Everyone took advantage of the refreshing water, and no one wanted to leave this little gem. An hour or so later, everyone was back in the cars and heading back home. Thanks to everyone for coming along and making this trip so enjoyable.

Participants: (# IQs): Tim Turay (8 – trip leader), Peggy Taylor (5), Roxane Stedman (8), Dave Suttil (8), Chris Burns (3), and Chris Sommer (3)

Mount Myra

Catrin Brown 26 August

Mount Myra, 1810 m, stands sentinel on the south side of Buttle Lake in Strathcona Park. On our trip to Flower Ridge in August, we were rarely out of sight of this prominent peak, and it somehow seemed to beckon, especially as the sunset lit it up each evening from our high camp. With a spare day at the end of that week, it would have seemed rude not to heed its call. In any case, I had some unfinished business with this mountain. On my first ski trip to Strathcona Park, back in the 90s, we had turned back from high on its flanks above Tennent Lake due to avalanche danger. So its summit was waiting.

Mike Hubbard, Victoria Clarke and I headed up from the Westmin Mine parking lot soon after first light. The seven-kilometre trail to the lake was as unrelentingly steep and rough as we had read, and demanded a certain level of zen acceptance that this investment would yield reward later. After about one-and-a-half hours of silent plodding, we were at Tennent Lake, and things started to look a whole lot more promising. After a short break, we scrambled up the retaining wall at the edge of the dam and were soon on a loosely marked trail leading around a few small tarns to a beautiful lake, unofficially known as Sandbag Lake.

Progress was slowed by our indulgence in the blueberry harvest, as plentiful and juicy as I have seen. Around the east side of the lake, the trail rose steadily up the broad southwest ridge of Myra. Some sections involved a bit of scrambling and steep bush, but the rock was dry and the route easy to follow, with dis-



Summit of Mt. Myra. Victoria Clarke celebrates her first island summit.



View back towards Sandbag Lake on the way up.

tracting views below. There is a small false summit, and a short drop from this brought us to the gully that leads directly to the summit. This was a little rubbly and exposed at the bottom (I could hear Sandy's "Do not plummet" ringing in my ears), but it quickly became well protected by bushes and roots, with an abundance of solid green belays. The summit block was an easy hike, and suddenly there we were on top with a large swathe of Strathcona Park in perfect view below us. A late lunch and time to savour the vista was more than reward for the early morning grind. This was Victoria's first big Island summit, so we had another reason to celebrate.

Being up there was like looking down on a map. We recognized familiar peaks like old friends, and discussed future possible traverses and routes with the sense of zeal that summits can create.

The descent was a straightforward reversal of our route, with a stop for a deliciously refreshing (aka frigid) swim in Sandbag Lake. By the time we were back at Tennent Lake, the light was fading, and the rough cat-track down seemed to have become much longer and steeper than it was in the morning. Funny that, I'm sure that often happens to a descent trail in the time when I'm on a mountain. We just made it to the road without headlamps, and it was with some relief that we reached the car with no twisted ankles or nasty stumbles, approximately twelve hours after we'd set out.

By the time we'd tried and failed to find decent sustenance in Campbell River in the late evening and shared the long drive back to Victoria, the birds were already singing. That's what I call making full use of a day, and I am grateful to my fine companions for sharing in this adventure with such enthusiasm.

In summary, Mount Myra is one of the easier peaks to climb

in Strathcona Park that affords a true mountain experience and exquisite panoramas over the park. Give yourself some mind-numbing exercises for the grunt up and down to Tennent Lake, and consider making it a two-day trip by camping at Tennent or Sandbag Lake at times of the year with shorter days.

Participants: Victoria Clarke, Mike Hubbard, Catrin Brown

Mounts Regan, Albert Edward, Castlecrag and Frink in a Day

Peggy Taylor August 26 – 28

George Butcher, in the quest along with Ken Wong to climb some of the VI peaks over 6,000 feet, planned a trip to Mount Regan (6,500 ft) for the weekend of Aug. 26 – 28, 2016. Our group included George, Diane Bernard, Chris Sommers, Ken Wong and myself. We had a civilized start. At around 9:30 a.m. in Victoria. Chris came to pick me up. but his vehicle was making funny noises so a quick change of plans and my XTrail was packed with our gear, and we were on the road. We picked up Ken and headed to Duncan to meet Diane and George. The drive up was uneventful and, after sorting our gear, we headed off from the parking lot at around 3 p.m. for the hike into Circlet Lake. There were lots of folks on the trail, and we really wondered if there would be room left at the campground considering our late departure. Luckily, there were spots in the overflow section by the smaller lake and we nabbed those. After our tents were set up, we took a nice dip at the far end of Circlet Lake and headed back to eat dinner and watch a lovely sunset.



Mount Regan as seen from the col between Jutland and Albert Edward with our approximate route in red ink

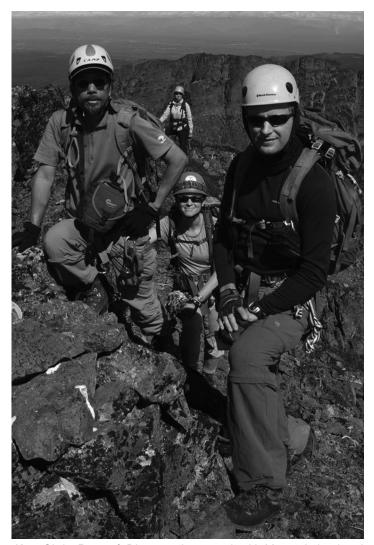
On Aug. 27, we started at about 7:20 a.m. from Circlet and enjoyed our hike up to about 100 metres shy of the top of Albert Edward (AE) in fine weather. George, Ken and Chris dropped packs and went to the summit to check out the route on Regan from that aspect, while Diane and I had a break to eat and rest before our summit push. I did not feel the need to summit AE for a 6th(?) time! We dropped down off the AE ridge along some nice rock steps/benches and onto an old glacier section using our crampons, ice axes and helmets. The snow was a bit firm but not icy. Ken had decided not to bring crampons so we (Chris, Diane and I) kicked in steps for him, and George belayed him on rope part of the way just so that he was past a point where, if he slipped, he might slide down to a large moat/crevasse. All went well as he traversed, but he did take a slip later on during the down line in a safer area and self-arrested pretty quickly. A textbook arrest indeed!

We crossed the snow, stopping to fill up on water at melted-out places on the glacier, went up and over a lateral moraine and up to an obvious small gully, then right over to the rock ridge right of the gully, where we did some really fun scrambling right up to the summit. There was only one small 5.5/5.6 move in a bit of a chimney type feature that was fairly easy on the way up, but required focus and precision on the way down due to the exposure. We were up on the summit by around 1 p.m. and spent almost an hour there, gawking at all the lovely views and identifying mountains. AE had many people on the summit that we could see from Regan, and there was hooting and waving on our part in their general direction with some hoots and waves back. What was notable was how few signatures were in the summit register. Only one or two parties per year were on the register! This seemed quite surprising considering the easy access to this mountain and what a fun route and scramble it was! After our leisurely summit lunch we carefully picked our way back down the loose rock, onto the moraine and snow and were back up at AE by around 3:30 to 4 p.m.

George had initially thought that we might do the Frink-Castlecrag loop if there was time and energy. As no one else in the group had done this loop, I became the source of info on the route and quasi-leader since I had done the circuit twice before. I did mention it was a long way, and we would definitely be returning in the dark, maybe by 9 p.m. or even later. But with five people and three headlamps, everyone was still eager to "bag 'em all" as Ken always says.....so, after a short discussion, off we boogied. We were on Frink just before 6 p.m., had a short food break and carried on at a good clip. I gave the group the option to skip summiting Castlecrag and just pass by on the ramp to the right, but all agreed we had all come this far and we must bag 'em all! After all I said, "it is only about 10 to 15 minutes up!"

So we scrambled to the top by 7 p.m. via the ridge trail just after the col between Frink and Castlecrag and enjoyed a quick view and down again. The only glitch was that we discovered a wasp nest just as we dropped our packs and headed up Castlecrag. George received a nasty sting on his hand, which swelled up a fair amount. Luckily there were anti-inflammatories in one of our group's first aid kit, which George took and we carried on. I had forgotten how long and far down the trail goes after Castlecrag and really hoped we could get across the boulder fields before dark. With doubts we were still on the right trail....(was my memory right?)....we did get to the boulder fields and cross them before dark. Phew! On the plateau before descending to Moat Lake it was getting dark so we stopped for a quick snack/pee break and got out the headlamps as night was definitely upon us at this point.

Ken offered to lead the group at this point, and we all stuck close together and hiked at a fairly slow pace. We placed those with headlamps in first, third and last positions in the line so that we could all see potential hazards and not stray off the trail. Luckily most of the trail here is white or grey rock/soil with sporadic cairns and some flagging so it was easy to follow. There were some campers at the end of Moat Lake closest to us with a huge bonfire and what



Ken, Chris, Peggy & Diane on the summit with Mount Jutland and Mount Washington in the background. (photo: George Butcher)

looked like lanterns in a circle. Although likely an "illegal" camp and fire due to fire bans, it was very inviting and reassuring as we came down the steep trail to the lake in total darkness! I think the young campers were pretty startled to hear and then to see hikers out at around 9:30 p.m. and were a bit unfriendly (maybe because they knew that they should not have a fire), but we just carried on.

We thought we would never get to the end of Moat Lake as that part of the trail seemed to go on forever, likely because we were all dreaming of food and sleep by this point. There was one spot close to the far end of Moat Lake where we lost the trail for a bit, but after five minutes of searching George found it again and off our little troop went in line again. We finally made it back to Circlet Lake by about 11:20 p.m. Needless to say, most were pretty tired, but all were in pretty good spirits and happy to have done the circuit. It was just shy of a 16-hour day, this being a record long day for me. Actually, I was feeling pretty good and not too wiped, surprisingly, but Diane was in bed within 10 minutes of getting back to camp. That is the fastest I have seen anyone shoot into a tent. Amazingly, Ken even cooked a full meal, but the rest of us just ate a few snacks and followed

Diane's lead and crashed by midnight.

We found out the next morning that some of the neighboring campers had been worried that our group had not returned before dark, and one couple stayed up late to see us return. They were wondering about if and who they should call if we did not turn up. They were thinking "who are these people?" They had no names, descriptions or idea where we had gone. Ken and I chatted with the lady of the couple on Sunday morning during a slight drizzle and reassured her that we were never in any real danger of getting lost or hurt, but we did have to take our time in the dark and underestimated how long the long circuit would be. Moral of the story, don't do AE, Regan, Frink and Castlecrag with five people in one day (unless you are Lindsay Elms or Quagger). This number of peaks in a single day is not recommended for beginning hikers, to be sure.

The hike out was in cool, overcast conditions with a bit of showers that subsided, and we toasted our great weekend at George's truck with beer supplied by him and chips supplied by Ken before heading back down-Island. Thanks to George for organizing this amazing trip. It was super fun and a definite highlight of my summer next to Rugged Mountain. Mount Regan truly is a gem that should be climbed more often.

Participants: George Butcher, Diane Bernard, Peggy Taylor, Chris Sommers and Ken Wong

Date with the Colonel

Brianna Coates August 19 – 22

"My bed's one big, rocky lump"

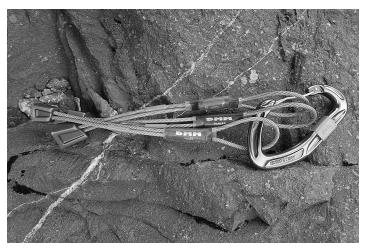
-Mr. Chi Pig

It starts with a punk show in Victoria on a Thursday night. SNFU, one of Walter's favourite bands, is playing, and I buy tickets despite our plans for a second attempt of Walsh's Foray on Colonel Foster. The band finishes their last set early; it's a good thing everyone's getting older. Friday morning we drive to the trailhead and it's 2 p.m.when we start the hungover hike into camp. It's hot, and the mosquitoes are plentiful.

We arrive at Foster Lake just before 7 p.m. and meet two folks planning to climb Cataract Arête the next day. One asks if we're familiar with the route up to the North Col. We admit that, yes, it's not our first time through this B2. They describe the snow avalanches they've been watching all evening off the East Face routes. We bid adieu and return to our uphill trudge, with the sounds of weak, icy snow booming through the valley. The bush goes easier than



View to the south from the main summit



Rescued gear!

before, and we are under Joe's Boulder in forty minutes.

The night before really starts to catch up to me, and I ask Walter if we can set up camp soon. We will have to hike further in the morning, but I can't imagine continuing to the North Col at this point. The tent goes up, close to some running water below the bouldered slope that leads to the ridge below the col. The platform is a little small and our feet hang off the large talus. We are in bed by 9:00 p.m., but I lay awake for hours as Walter sleeps soundlessly beside me.

Saturday morning we're up at 5:00, filling our packs with the necessities: ice axe, helmet, crampons, small rack, webbing, rope, some food, two litres of water, a space-blanket bivy bag each, and some extra clothing. The two litres of water is a gamble, knowing the likelihood of finding more is low. We are below Evacuation Gully at 7:10 and climb what's left of the snow below the constriction and waterfall and then move onto the rock. Twenty minutes after we're off it, the snow below the waterfall collapses onto itself. Moving quickly, we weave between icy snow and rock, attempting to skirt the gully but not having much

luck with the steep walls. The snow that remains in the gully is hard and sharp, carved into massive sculptures with an eye for beauty that only the sun has. Our final traverse takes us under an arched snow bridge, where we veer right and spot the familiar ledge. It's 8:20 a.m.

On our first attempt in late June of 2016, we climbed a completely different Evacuation Gully. It was stuffed to the brim with steep snow. We pitched out the whole thing over about five hours. That trip was incredibly challenging for me, ripe with fear from hours of climbing with only one ice axe and new boots that were too flexible for any degree of front-pointing. Like silver balls in a pinball game, we moved from one gully wall to the other, making rock anchors where we could. It hadn't even crossed our mind to bring pickets. At the top, on the transition out of the gully to the ledge, one of Walter's

gear loops on his backpack broke and all the pro hanging on it dropped into the small moat. Walter made a valiant effort to recover everything and, at the time, we thought we had. It wasn't until later, at home, when re-racking our gear that I noticed we were missing a carabiner with three offset nuts on it. Our nuts became an unintended tribute to the mountain gods. Even with five hours spent in the gully and the anxiety of having to recover the gear, neither of us was ready to acknowledge that things were not going well. We attempted to traverse the ledge, and after an hour of fumbling around we finally called it and made the slow and equally nerve-wracking descent back to camp. The rope got stuck twice, and Walter and I each took a turn climbing back up to get it. In hindsight, trying Colonel Foster as my first Island Qualifier seemed laughable and a bit outrageous. I climbed Elkhorn a few weeks after the failed attempt on Foster and decided that maybe, just maybe, I could find the gumption to make another date with the Colonel.

At present though, I am feeling great, and am the first to pop out from under the snow bridge and spy the ledge. I know it's the same ledge, because there, glinting in the sunlight, on a lower bit of rock, previously covered by snow, was our carabiner and nuts. I let out a loud expletive of surprise and excitement. Finding the gear is a triumph, and my secret, superstitious self takes this as a good omen, but I don't dare tell Walter, not wanting to break my logical facade. We carefully climb the rock to the ledge, ditch our ice axes and unused crampons and begin the traverse.

From this point on, it's new territory. We follow our instincts, some multi-sourced beta, a few cairns and the occasional flagging-tape-wrapped rock, like gifts amongst the heaps of precariously perched rock. I understand why the route finding is difficult, there are so many choices. We find success in following the path of least resistance. When we find the route getting harder or looser, we downclimb

and look for an easier or more solid way. We high-five at our first high point near the top of the Northwest Peak, but unwilling to push our luck we quickly move on, downclimbing to the chockstone and col framing a lovely view of Foster Lake.

Up we climb to the summit of the Northeast Peak, making note of potential bivy spots. Down we climb to the last col and up to our destination and halfway point. It's just after 1 p.m. on Saturday when we arrive at the main summit. The feeling of being on top of a mountain that we have long put on a pedestal is indescribable. Having already decided we would spend the night on the mountain, Walter and I grin at each other as we relax for hours in the beautiful sunshine.

Walter searches for some fabled summit beer but comes up empty handed. We hope for anything to supplement our dwindling water supply but further exploration towards the east, where you can sometimes find late snow, offers us nothing. We strain our ears to listen for our fellow climbers on the arête, but not until hours later do we hear a yell of "off-belay."



Foster Lake from the col between Northwest and Northeast Peak

Reading the summit register from 1996 to present day is a delight. Even though it's only Walter and me on the summit in this moment, by reading the small book of dates, names and stories, it's as if I am surrounded by generations of amazing people who live (or have lived) life to the fullest.

We make our way back to the top of the Northeast Peak, which has a bivy spot that has been nicely engineered to block wind. We lay out the rope for insulation from the cold rock, and compare water rations. Walter's winning with just over half a litre. A short while later, we are asleep before the sun sets.

We awake to a blood-red moon rising in the east and a strengthening breeze. The hypnotic atmosphere created by the moon is overshadowed by the feeling that I'm in some kind of cold, clammy sauna. Unfortunately, this is what happens when you try to sleep in the equivalent of a plastic bag. We may have overestimated the amount of "comfort" we could gain from our space blanket garbage bags. We sleep in patches, rotating on our rope mattress like rotisserie chickens, letting one side go numb before moving to the next side. Anytime I start to shiver uncontrollably, Walter mumbles "eat something, it will help you stay warm," but I'm worried that eating will make me more thirsty and I have very little water left. Later in the night I lay awake contemplating the fact that, having not roped up at all for the ascent, we could have traded the rack for a sleeping bag and more water.

We leave our bivy at 7 a.m. on Sunday, attempting to retrace our footsteps and arrive below the Northwest Peak, ready to start the multiple raps - eight in total. I drink the last of my water while setting up the first station. In addition to 25 metres of webbing, I sacrifice a couple of slings and a cordelette. We discuss how that lower snow had collapsed yesterday morning and recall the warning a well-respected climber had given me: "Don't go into the gully in the afternoon or evening, I've seen bus-sized chunks coming down that thing." We are unable to find a rappel route that keeps us out of the gully, and the lower raps take us right to the constriction, above the waterfall. It's about 2 p.m. when we make the final two rappels, removing the last of the old tat from the stations. We carry out about four kilos of old webbing, cord and slings. Although we try to move quickly and efficiently, we are at the bottom and off the snow at 3:30 and back to camp just after 5 o'clock.

Exhausted, dehydrated, and not wanting to make the six-hour trek back to the vehicle, we spend another night in the boulder field. My mattress feels so comfortable, and with my feet hanging off the talus I am mostly occupied with thoughts of our post-climb celebratory meal, but deep down I am imagining how my next date with the Colonel will go.

Participants: Brianna Coates and Walter Moar



Part of our group on the way up Mount Olive. The rest skied down to Balfour Hut with our guide marking some open slots on the Vulture Glacier with his GPS for future reference



The Wapta Traverse – Thirty Years of Climate Change at Work?

Scott Collins April 21-24

Over the period of April 21-24, 2016, yours truly and eight other clients were guided across the Wapta Traverse from Bow to Wapta Lake by Yamnuska Mountain Adventures, a guiding company based out of Canmore, AB. Demographically, we were a diverse group of people ranging in age from 18 to 59 (i.e., one token, older fart in the form of the author), though it seems everyone involved had some, or even extensive, ski touring experience from across Canada. We were shepherded along the route by two lead guides and a practicum student guide - so plenty of exper-

tise and attention to go around.

Now, there is a bit of history here, at least as far as the author is concerned. As a young graduate student at the University of Calgary, I accompanied Mike Benn (faculty member in the Department of Chemistry, now deceased) and some others (can't remember who) on the Wapta Traverse at some point during the period 1979-1983. It was my final extended ski trip of this sort before leaving Calgary forever for points far to the east.

The sole evidence for this crossing, which involved skinny skis (and no Scott Duncan hut along the way), is a yellowed photo taken at the Balfour high col on the final, long ski out to the highway, Balfour Hut to Wapta Lodge in a day!

This, my first traverse, was conducted in May, and I want to indicate it was the Victoria Day long weekend but can't be sure – the exact details are lost to the ravages of time. In any event, we were able to ski the entire route, though I do remember the final stretch down to Wapta Lodge from Sherbrooke Lake as being quite sporty in spots. Further, this trip actually predates the establishment of the most common exit from the ice field used today, the Schiesser-Lomas route.

Now, to make a long story incredibly short, I returned to Western Canada in 2010 after a very long stretch (30



At the top of the low ramp before the crux below the Balfour High Col. Note thickening cloud layer, Mount Olive and the Vulture Glacier behind.

years) away from ski touring and even downhill skiing on a regular basis. The absence got to the point where I could never justify replacing my old kit with modern equipment. Boy, was I in for a surprise!

I delayed at least one year before replacing my aging touring skis (210 cm Europa 99s tricked out with Villom cable bindings and leather tele boots, which no longer fit my flattened feet) and downhill skis (200 cm Dynastar Equipe slalom skis) with a single ski (177 cm G3 Tonics equipped with Fritschi Freeride bindings sold as a demo set at a discount) and Scarpa AT boots.

This combination is very nice for going downhill but a real pain in the arse for anything else! Gone were the days of efficiently covering long distances on skis with a confident Nordic stride, to be replaced by a mind-numbingly, slow shuffle across the flats or uphill. Of course, in the intervening time I had managed to blow one ACL and sustain osteoarthritis damage to the medial compartment of my left knee so all of this is probably moot anyways. I can't even skate ski more than a few yards these days.

Anyhow, back to our story. We started our traverse at Numti-jah lodge amid a throng of early Japanese tourists milling about their tour bus. The snow pack adjacent to the lake was clearly isothermal (a glimpse of things to come) but still skiable along the main track established to the water's edge. Fortunately, Bow Lake was still passable though open leads were clearly visible as we shuffled across. As soon as we reached the other side, we encountered dry gravel flats - with a river running through it. This necessitated several trivial bouts of boot packing and creek crossings followed by the normal ascent into the forest on climber's left. The normal short descent slope back to the start of the canyon had basically melted out but this was easy enough to negotiate. Once in the canyon there were numerous creek crossings (I lost count) and suspect snow bridges to keep one's blood flowing. Eventually, at the last very dodgy one, we climbed up a steep bank to exit the canyon, if a little prematurely. Even then, we were not out of the woods as the creek draining the Ferris Glacier was a raging torrent!



Telephoto of the Balfour High Col taken from Scott Duncan Hut. Large transverse crevasses clearly visible in the late afternoon

Fortunately, the final ascent to Bow Hut was uneventful but very warm, with expansive views of climax avalanche debris along just about every slope, including just to the side of the last slope leading to the hut, to delight the senses along the way. Fortunately, we did not have to cross any of it!

The following day dawned clear and sunny again, and so off we went up the toe of Bow Glacier and onto the ice field. This was done roped though to be honest, I think this was more pedagogical than necessary – there were very few open slots or even sags to give one pause here. A short boot pack was necessary at the St. Nicholas-Olive Col with distant views of Mount Forbes visible. At this point the group splintered with about half opting to summit Mount Olive and the remainder skiing (un-roped) down to Balfour

Hut. I was in the latter group (a very nice ski except for one face-plant lower down at the toe of the glacier on an aspect change where the crust broke down), but those who went up the peak were only delayed about 90 minutes. In the interim, a third splinter group went out to ski the Diableret Glacier - turns on corn snow and unfortunately, lower down, variable crust were to be had. Evidently, I was not the only person who experienced a "crust mishap" that day.

Unfortunately, the diminutive Balfour Hut was over-subscribed (20 people occupying space designed for 16 during the winter months), but we all managed to stay out of each other's way during the warm afternoon and evening — which was actually punctuated by a fairly intense rain storm at some point. The evening's weather report (via satellite phone) was quite guarded, so we opted for an alpine start the following morning. I regret to inform that the author, who is an inveterate snorer, was probably the only one who got any sleep that night.

The next day we started out in a light (ground) fog before sunrise, which quickly burnt off on appearance of the sun heading up the low route to the Balfour High Col. Any heavy weather held off long enough for this climb and we had good visibility through the entire crossing to Scott Dun-



A look back up the Schiesser-Lomas high bench with (L-R) Mount Niles, Little Niles, and Mount Daly looming overhead.

can Hut despite the lowering cloud ceiling during the day. In fact, though there were many dark and ominous clouds to the southwest, anything organized basically dissipated before reaching our area. What luck, a predicted bout of precipitation never actually materialized that day! The evening at Scott Duncan Hut was actually quite magical with many fine photo opportunities as the sun set.

The weather report for the following day was again guarded and so another alpine start necessitated. Unfortunately, this also coincided with a feckless attempt (mea culpa) to cook bacon, powdered eggs and rehydrated hash browns by headlamp and without anything in the way of cooking oil (basically the bacon). But on the positive side, there was fresh snow overnight so everyone was looking forward to a few turns of dust on crust!

We were underway by six and again the first few turns off the perch that housed the hut were made in dense fog so best to stick close, but not too close — to the person in front of you. We were aiming for the saddle between Mount Niles and "Little Niles" to access the high bench that is the start of the Schiesser-Lomas exit route.

A rather steep wind lip had to be crossed to gain this bench, but the guides hacked out a suitable "launch" platform from which to drop in. I reflected on the relative ease of just skiing down the gulley that drained this col — the traditional route complete with terrain traps and severe overhead avalanche hazard — but those were in the days where avalanche cord was still in use, and avalanche instruction and avoidance was in its infancy. In other words, we didn't know any better so we always took the most direct, and expedient route anywhere.

After a quick contour down and around the bench, we arrived at the slopes leading down into Sherbrooke Creek. Normally, this would be a delightful ski down through winter powder or spring corn but the warmth of this spring, and the past few days in particular, had assured that neither option was really in the cards.



Skiing alongside Sherbrooke Lake with blue slush below and dodgy slopes above!

True, the snowpack was mainly supportive but not to the point where you could actually confidently ski it with a full pack. So, it became a case of side-slipping down the fall line, punctuated by traverses and the odd change in direction, especially lower down in the short trees. The author's bad knee was complaining the whole time during this process, and so he arrived dead last by the creek in a nice meadow area.

I would like to say that the remainder of the trip out was uneventful, but no, we were just getting warmed up by the guides for what was to come. Never having skied this route before, I cannot comment on what is the normal route down the creek and out onto the flats. We had to divert to steep trees on skier's right fairly soon after starting down as the creek was basically open. Since I was having difficulty even kick-turning at this point, I eventually opted to post-hole through the worst of this, admittedly after everyone else managed their descent on skis.

Even then, I still knew we were not out of the woods; there was an interesting, somewhat exposed traverse, high above the creek (actually alongside and above a significant waterfall – I regret there are no photos of this passage) on skier's left before dropping down through another wooded area to the flats. Then, we had to locate places to cross the many braided streams in this area. Fortunately, we did not have to climb back up the traditional exit route, though we were close before we located a suitable crossing of the main one.

We arrived at the lake to find extensive open water along the near shore; it was not even obvious how one would get out onto the ice and so we opted for a traverse on the east side of the lake. Fortunately, most of the large avalanche slopes above had already slid, though there was one small slope down low (i.e., next to the lake) that had not, just to make things interesting!

At this point, the party had definitely spaced out, to the point where I lost sight of the person in front of me. I was vaquely aware that Shaun (one of our lead guides) was

2015 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Alpine Summer Activity Winner

Mt. Colonel Foster via Walsh's Foray

Photo: Chris Istace



Mountain Scenery Winner

Nightscape at Shangri-La Lake

Photo: Chris George



Glissading with Mike and Chris

Photo: Mary Sanseverino





Alpine Winter Activity Winner

Tent city on the Spearhead Traverse

Photo: Roxanne Stedman

Nature Winner

Ptarmigan in Foley's Meadows, North Selkirks

Photo: Denise Hook





Vancouver Island Winner

Evening reflections on Shangri-La Lake

Photo: Mary Sanseverino

behind me but eventually we regrouped shortly before heading down the luge run to Wapta Lodge. Unfortunately, as I had confidently predicted prior to our departure, this was about 50 per cent boot-pack and 50 per cent survival skiing, with at least one binding mishap and a few downed trees to keep things interesting for the group.

Anyhow, the final day (as well as the entire week-long visit which was based out of Canmore, ostensibly to acclimatize) made clear a couple of things to the author. Evidently, April may be the new May (or even June?) at least when it comes to spring skiing in the Rockies 30 years on. Though I did repeat the traverse, I needed a lot of help and encouragement from the guides to do so, despite a very manageable pack of 16 kg on the first day.

As for the future, I am not sure. The construction of the new Richard and Louise Guy Hut now makes possible the Bow to Yoho traverse with lighter packs, something I have also done a long time ago - but via the Yoho Glacier exit from the ice field in February.* As a betting person, I expect any repeat visits will involve guided ski touring, complete with cafe lattes at the turns!

Trip participants: Stan Chorney, Scott Collins, Megan Heise, Leigh & John McAdam, Sheldon McLaughlin, John Minnery, John Sparrow and Michael Wonnacott

Guides: Adam Burrell, Shaun King, Jason Guptill (student guide)

Photo credits: Michael Wonnacott

*This exit is not recommended, except when the Collie shoulder appears impassable or at least dodgy for only two, roped, skiers. For one thing, the Upper Yoho Valley features several, glaciated rock ribs that must be passed by crossing Waves Creek, with its many falls and deep pools, or climbed directly to gain the valley bottom. Participant: Graham Maddocks

From 16 to 72: Bridging Generations on the Spearhead

Nadja Steiner April 7 – 11

This was Harry's third or fourth attempt to do the Spearhead traverse. After being stuck in a tent due to whiteout, cancellation due to lack of snow, or too much snow, it was time for a trip of a lifetime.

Since our planned family Spearhead traverse over Easter had also succumbed to the weather, Finn and I decided to tag along with Harry's ACC trip. In early April, following Harry's usual bulletproof preparation, our group of eight



The young one (Finn, 16) first section of Spearhead traverse

was well equipped and prepared with gear, waivers, extra crevasse rescue and beacon practice, Whistler hostel bookings, tent and cooking groups. After our gear check at the Whistler gondola (they require every person who wants to purchase a back-country lift pass to show their complete AVI gear), we navigated the Whistler lift system to get to our starting point. The snow was spring snow but mostly decent, the avalanche conditions navigable, and the weather, yeah, the weather was simply stunning!

Stripping on skins, we made our first ascent opening up the view on what to come. Something caused some trepidation in Roxanne, and she suddenly wanted to turn around, but given her skill, Harry convinced her otherwise; we lightened her load and went off to one of the most beautiful ski trips one could imagine. The first section starts at Mount Blackcomb and crosses Blackcomb, Decker and Trorey glaciers, edging around Mount Pattison. Finn, our youngest participant, was bursting with energy and excited to be sent to the front to break the trail; he also, without complaint, accepted to be more or less permanently loaded with some extra gear and a rope. The tail was made up by Tak and either Harry or myself. Apart from one somewhat challenging steep descent that required a one-by-one, cautious sidestepping approach, we were mostly busy admiring the amazing views than worrying about the trail.

Accessing the south shoulder of Mount Pattison required us to boot-pack up a short stretch. From there, most of us took the little extra tour to the summit, while the rest skied down to the glacier to set up camp. The descent was less exhilarating than we hoped, since the apparently nice snow was mostly frozen, making every turn a challenge. Keith, on an older pair of telemark skis, was especially disadvantaged. Our camp was beautiful and even the walk to the toilet hole offered stunning views. But the temperature was definitely going down in the evening and everyone was happy about their down clothing. My usual temporary heat source, the Mountain House dinner in a bag, soaking in boiling water under my down jacket, caused some resentment: The seal failed and sudden moisture soaking my jacket let me jump up with discomfort, argh.... Walking around to take pictures,



Camp on Diavolo Glacier

I was impressed and inspired by Tak and Mike who had dug out a square in front of their tent, so they could comfortably sit on their mattresses with their feet down. We immediately adopted the idea for all future snow camps.

The strong sun in combination with the glacier/avalanche terrain called for early mornings. Our next morning began with a steep ascent up Pattison Glacier to Tremor Mountain. Another party had camped further up and was already on their way and yet another party (some fast-paced day-trippers, yes it's a busy traverse) caught up with us when we decided how best to navigate the last steep little bit to the col. Harry was ahead, but unfortunately without a rope which we needed to put in for those who felt uncomfortable without. Bill tied his skis behind him and booted up to supply the rope. In the meantime, Tak slipped and lost his ski which immediately started to race downhill. Before any of us could react, one of the day-trippers was alerted by the shouts and shot down to retrieve the ski. Dear unknown, we owe you a huge thank you! The excitement called for a break at the col. One of the amazing traits of the Spearhead traverse is that since you keep passing cols and skirting mountains, the view constantly changes. Even if you might start to get tired of one view, it would soon be replaced by the next, possibly more stunning, view. The next section included a traverse under a rock wall. For safety, we kept some distance between each other. in case something would slide. We were passed again by yet another group, these ones more cool than smart. They

thought since it would take too long to wait, they would just go ahead and simply ski past us cutting the snow above; yeah, if we want to release an avalanche this is the way to do it. Mr. Supercool in his muscle shirt and red body-parts also told us that they had taken off their beacons, because they didn't think they would need them today. We let them move on...

With the heat, the height, and the hot sun, everyone needed a break. Tak had adopted a slow but continuous pace. He later told us that he might probably back down on trips as strenuous as this one, but if you are in you just have to keep putting one foot in front of the other. When I heard that he is actually over 70, I was simply impressed by his performance. Our next stretch included a really nice ski decent with a view of Mount Overloard and its retreating glacier. Unfortunately after a brief ridge traverse, we had to gain the height again in a slow ascent. By then, it was already afternoon and given the state of some we decided to camp on Diavolo Glacier. Again, a most stunning site; everyone dug out their camp platforms and set up. Enjoying the setting sun comfortably in down jackets and cabin booties around our circular snow table setting, we realized that we were easily one of the best trained ACC winter touring group constellations we could imagine. With five graduates of the ACC-TNF leadership training, one of them a guide in training, at least one ski instructor and even our youngest member just graduated from the Grade 12 adventure tourism program, and holding multiple first aid and survival courses. Not bad, eh?



Travelling geese – ascent to Pattison col, left to right: Tak, Keith, Finn, Mike, Harry, Roxanne, Bill



The experienced one (Tak, 72)



Overlord Mountain

Despite the early start, the steep ascent to Overlord caused beads of sweat for everyone. We managed to convince Tak that since he carried so many years of experience, the young ones could carry some of his gear. The Overlord traverse turned out a bit tricky. While the early morning allowed for relatively stable conditions, it was also icy in the shade of the mountain. With my wide skis and skins barely exposing the edges, I felt completely uncomfortable and was glad once we were around the looming mountain. The descent to Overlord Glacier also turned out to be a challenge. A descent of about 20 to 30 metres, which a skilled skier might be able to ski in soft snow, called for ice axes and a belay station under these icy conditions. Harry set up the belay while the rest provided axes as needed and started to tie up skis to hand them down. Finn led the way down, followed by Keith, and established a ski retrieval station. Unfortunately the skis kept getting stuck in a hole in the snow along the line of descent, and I had to position myself in between. Once the skis were all down, people started to follow and we started to leave the not-so-ideal rest location. Another two pairs of people came past, happy to be allowed to use our rope descent.

We reassembled at a safe place with a view of Mount Fissile, where some people were just making up their way to the summit. We skipped that one (not sure if my skiing skills would have been sufficient for that descent, anyway) and started the long descent towards Singing Pass. The snow was a bit warm and slow, but nonetheless it was fun and a real treat to just ski down after the workout of the morning. The last stretch before reentering the Whistler ski area was a bit of a slog but still beautiful. Lots of high-fives at the end, and Mike navigated us through the Whistler ski hill to ski right into the market-place in Whistler. Keith's skis continued to cause grief, and when they finally delaminated, he decided it was probably time for a new pair. Back in the hostel, we got a slight shock looking at the burned faces staring at us from the mirror. Three-days of high sun exposure on glaciers with sunscreen repeatedly wiped off by sweat had taken its toll. The combination of the burned faces and the smiles going from ear to ear made us look like trolls. But, hey, what the h..., this was an awesome trip no doubt.... Thanks to an expert group of great people, an awesome leader and most fabulous weather.

Participants: Harald, Nadja and Finn Steiner, Mike Morley, Bill Rickson, Keith Battersby, Tak Ogasawara, Roxanne Stedman

AT Ski Lessons on the Garibaldi Neve Ski Traverse

Peggy Taylor April 8 -10

A week prior, Roxy Jensen, on the spur of the moment, asked Roger and me if we would like to ski the Garibaldi Neve Ski Traverse since she had missed going with her hubby Chris and friends on the Easter weekend as she was under the weather. Not being experienced AT skiers, we needed a meeting to go over all the details, route, gear and weather forecasts and, after much discussion and thought, decided that this would be a good one to cut our teeth on. So began four quick days of gear preparation and planning.

The idea was to ski the route from north to south, the reverse of most parties, and I am super glad we did. We accomplished one hard part right at the start by hiking in ski boots about 5.5 kilometres up the switch-backed Garibaldi trail. Neither Roger or I had hiked in ski boots before and were wondering if we and our feet could manage it, but it was not as horrendous as anticipated at all. The trail would have been super nasty to ski down and exhausting at the end of the trip. So doing the exit down the gentle slopes from Elfin Hut to Red Heather Day Hut and down the road was much preferable for our skill level.

The weather was bluebird, warm and sometimes downright hot, but the snow was in great condition. All was going well until the point when we veered right of the trail following some sucker tracks to the left of a small lake/stream. Realizing that the trail was likely above us we took off our skis in steep terrain and slogged up the hill about 50-60 metres until we met up with the trail. Putting on our skis



Roger and Peggy descending to Ring Creek (photo: Roxy Jensen)

again, all went well to Garibaldi Lake where we had a nice leisurely lunch in the sun, soaking in the rays and views. A big highlight for me was skiing across Garibaldi Lake with the gorgeous views of the Sphinx Glacier at the south end and Black Tusk to our left/east. I love the flow of push and glide on a flat surface and did not find this boring at all with the spectacular views. Many tourers find this crossing long and tortuous, but I was in heaven! My ski buddies may not agree though, as Roger and Roxy needed a stop half way across the lake to put their feet in the snow to cool off some pressure points. At the end of the lake, we found the glaciology huts empty and these were a welcome sight and felt like a luxury hotel to us after a day of toting 35 – 40 pound packs. We had a nice meal on the rocks in front of the hut, enjoyed the sunset and had a sound sleep.

Day two was our hardest, as we knew it would be. We wanted to start early to potentially skin up and tag Mount Garibaldi, but were all quite slow moving in the morning and the snow was quite hard-packed and icy so we did not get off until around 9 a.m. or so. The hill we chose to go up was quite steep and, unfortunately, I missed sticking a kick



Roger crossing end of Garibaldi Lake towards the Glaciology hut (photo: Roxy Jensen)



Roger and Peggy with Mt. Garibaldi in the background (photo: Roxy Jensen)

Roxy on Garibaldi Lake with Black Tusk in the background (photo: Peggy Taylor)

turn about half way up in the slick conditions. fell and one ski came off. I needed to take off the second ski due to the way I fell in order to get up and put them back on. In that process, the second ski shot out and off my boot when I pressed down on the release and flew down the hill.....aargh!! Rookie mistake! Nothing I could do but tromp down and fetch it. The snow was still quite hard packed, and I had to make the decision of either skinning up to the same point and hope to heaven the same thing did not happen again or doing it the hard way and boot pack up with my skis on my pack. Not feeling like it was quite soft enough for my comfort level, I opted for the hard way. Roger came to help me carry my skis on the last bit of this section while I shouldered my pack.

Once on more moderate uphill terrain, I was able to carry on skiing. In retrospect, I probably could have left my pack up where I fell and just carried my skis up the hill, but my skis do not stay together well, and even

strapped together, are certainly more awkward to carry then just strapping them on the pack to haul up.

The views heading south are out-of-this-world stunning and keep getting better and better as one skis along. The Sharks Fin, Mount Garibaldi and Tent Mountain rise above on the right and the skinning was unbelievable. We took our time soaking in the views, taking snack, photo, or cooling-off-the-feet breaks as needed. At Mount Garibaldi, we took the decision not to skin up as it was later in the day and the snow was softening up enough to be hazardous higher up (as one other party coming down relayed to us) and we needed time to get to Elfin Hut. Sorry, Roxy....all my fault for holding up the crew an extra 45 minutes. At a high point on some rocks before you start to head down the Garibaldi Neve/Glacier, we met a couple of young fellows, one of which Roxy knew; Wow, small world!

After a nice lunch with them, we carried on down without harnesses and rope as all was looking pretty safe and solid. Roger has never skied with a big pack on before and performed like a seasoned pro, doing nice turns right off the bat. Impressive, as was Roxy. I, however, was a bit gun-shy after my fall in the morning and did not want to repeat a fall and have another potential slow-down or, in this case, the loss of a ski down a crevasse or something equally bad. So in the steeper "black" bits at the top I traversed and sideslipped until I reached "dark blue" terrain, where I felt comfortable doing turns with my pack on. We would stop every few hundred meters to suss out the terrain and find a good line, and some older ski tracks were of assistance too. That was an exhilarating section of the traverse and it gave me a small insight into why so many folks love ski mountaineering and touring.

The crux of the tour came at the bottom when we came to Ring Creek. Chris had warned us that this section is very steep, hot like an oven and prone to avalanches. Some trip reports we had read said to just boot pack it up or down the steepest sections. Roger led and found a good line, which he and Roxy successfully executed on their skis, but once again I found my steep skinning technique to be lacking, and I could not get over a two-metre section of very steep and chunky snow without slipping backwards constantly. With no way, at least that I could see, to ski around, above or below it, and rocks and stream directly below me, I took the decision to clip out of my skis and boot pack back down to a small old and consolidated avalanche path and trudge straight up it, thus cutting off the V-traverse set by Roger.

So off came the skis and, up to my knees and hips in snow, I plowed back to this route that Roxy had spied earlier and had considered going up as well. It was hardening up and I did not plunge down quite as much under each step and made it two-thirds of the way up when my lovely husband came down to take my skis off of me. My route and decision to take off my skis was not a popular decision with my husband, but at that difficult point I kept slipping backwards and I felt a fall was inevitable for me if I pressed upwards with my flawed technique. Again a delay, but I felt a necessary one given the potential injurious consequences if I slipped and fell downslope. One good thing is that it was not an oven here, as Chris had alluded to, since it was later in the day. So, luckily, Roxy and Roger could wait in some cool shade for me. There was one other steep tricky spot for me on the way up from Ring Creek, where I needed to take off my skis and boot it up a short section. Despite this delay, we all made it to Elfin Lake Hut by about 7 p.m., where we collapsed on a bench inside.

It was a zoo inside hut, completely filled to the gills with snowshoers and a few skiers, eating, drinking and making merry. It all seemed a bit too crowded and noisy after being in this incredibly quiet and pristine piece of wilderness. Luckily, Roxy had her bivy bag and we had our tent. We found a spot a bit away from the madding crowd with some other tenters and set up home for the night. We cooked dinner by the fading light and "Roy Henry Vickers-ish" sunset over the distant mountains. Sigh.....what a sight and what a day! We were exhausted but proud to have made the distance all in one piece.

Day three from Elfin Hut out was a treat after the exertions and challenges of the previous day. We slept in a bit and slowly packed up and left around 10 a.m. and had a leisurely tour out. Roger gave me some tips on steep skinning technique and how to handle those steeper spots without slipping backwards, and I was starting to get it a bit better by the end of the trip. How is it that he, with only four half-days of AT skiing on new skis and boots, just somehow psychically absorbs this knowledge and learns how to do this so darn quickly, when I have been on my AT skis for 6 years? Both frustrating and amazing at the same time.

Well, Roger being the speedy resort downhiller that he is, did have a couple of falls on the way down due to crossing too many snowshoe and ski tracks at Mach 10. I felt somewhat redeemed in that my slower, wider turns through

the trees kept me upright. Although Roxy and Roger had blisters on their feet, I was spared this and only had a few rubbing points on my knobbly ankles. So we all had our challenges on this trip, but I have to say that it was 90 per cent fun and only 10 per cent not, or as Roxy would say, mostly Type-A fun.

I cannot thank Roxy enough for the invitation, the support and for putting up with us green and old AT skiers. It was an amazing opportunity and a trip to remember for years to come. Roger and I both know what we need to work on to hone our AT skills and will no doubt be seeking out opportunities to do next season. I would highly recommend this traverse for anyone wanting an "easier" three-day traverse not too far away from Victoria and even more highly recommend the north to south option.

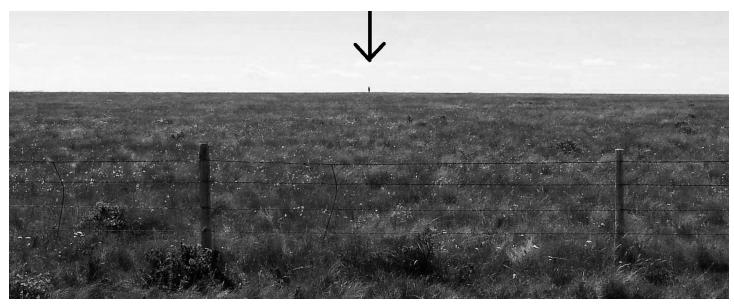
Trip Participants: Roxy Jensen, Peggy & Roger Taylor

The Quest for Saskatchewan's Highest Point

Dave Suttill July 26

One day a few years back, while perusing the mountaineering section of a local Victoria used bookstore, I stumbled upon a 1999 book called Not Won In A Day, Climbing Canada's Highpoints. So, naturally, I bought a copy. While paging through the section on Saskatchewan, I found that I had unknowingly been within a few km of the highest point in Saskatchewan the previous year (2011) while visiting the Cypress Hills. I bookmarked this bit of trivia in my brain should the opportunity for a return visit ever present itself.

Well, it looked like 2016 was going to be the year. My wife and I were planning to visit Writing on Stone Provincial Park in Alberta and a side trip to the Cypress Hills was well within reach. So I buried myself in researching my objective on the internet and there was no doubt about it, this was the highest point in Saskatchewan. Now you may laugh, Saskatchewan is pretty flat and so are the Cypress Hills for that matter, but they do stick up some 300 metres above the surrounding prairie, depending on where you start your baseline measurement. And the high point is a respectable 4,567 ft above sea level. That's 1,392 m in metric. Final preparations included loading the appropriate 1:50,000 maps into my GPS and checking the weather forecasts. Like most mountaineering trips, weather forecasts play a crucial role. In this case, I did not want to find myself stuck in prairie mud while off the side of a side road.



Standing on the high point, beyond which the horizon curves away below the line of sight.

The actual approach was quite straightforward. The route in from Alberta Hwy 41 to the west was about 25 kilometres along a relatively level, reasonably well-gravelled road: a much better approach than the one from the east described in the guidebook, which involved a steep climb up a loose-surface, dry-weather road with a poor base that would have required aid if wet. After about 23 kilometre in from Hwy 41, we came to a north-south fence marking the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. All was flat with groups of black cattle here and there, claiming the high country for themselves. We crossed a cattle guard and continued on another two kilometres. I parked at the appropriate spot, and I set off, GPS in hand, to crisscross a barely perceptible rise 175 m to the south. Luckily, it was free of cows. The only real obstacle, objective hazard if you will, was a four-strand barbed wire fence. This was dealt with by crawling under a suitable line of weakness.

I soon came upon an area perhaps 10 metres in diameter that looked like parts of it might be higher than all the rest. If someone would just take the time to build a cairn or mound up some dirt, there would be no question where the high point was. Maybe if I'm ever back this way again. Anyway, a subsequent check of the elevation profile on my GPS confirmed that I had indeed stood on or traversed over the highest point in the immediate vicinity. There was no register so I posed for a picture. I then returned to the car and brewed up some tea on the camp stove to celebrate.

Mission accomplished.

Participant: Dave Suttill

Sir Donald – Not the Last Spike for Us

Thomas Radetzki August 16

Every person with an eye for the mountains passing through Roger's Pass has seen this mountain and marvelled at the Matterhorn shape. Mount Sir Donald, 3,284 m, the knife-edge northwest ridge, 1,000 m of granite beckoning and frightening at the same time.

The annual father-son adventure was first talked about and planned for August 2015; perhaps we could add to our collection of Matterhorn-shaped peaks. The mountain laughed at us with a cloak of eight inches of freshly fallen snow. We had to retreat to the eastern ranges of the Rockies and enjoyed drier conditions in Canmore.

Fast forward to August 2016. My son was determined as ever, and we reached Illecillewaet with a great weather forecast for the week. We needed to have an early start to cover the first 1,000 m of elevation to the bivy site below the col. We cheated a bit to get past the Parks Canada sentry by paying for four climbers. Reaching the bivy by noon and stashing our gear, we climbed to the col to check on the route for Sir D, since our start would be in the dark morning hours.

At the col, my son convinced me we needed a warm-up for tomorrow on Uto Peak.

We moved freely along its south ridge to reach the top at 2,927 m. We had a fantastic view of Sir D and studied and discussed tomorrow's route. Traversing and down climb-



ing the west ridge, we reached camp late in the afternoon. Tired but certainly warmed up, we cooled off in a nearby tarn, watched a beautiful sunset and called it an early night.

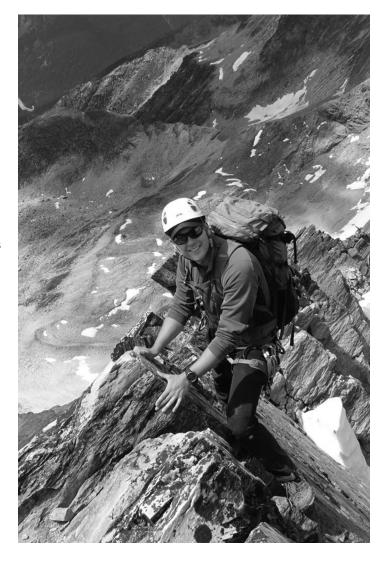
We used headlamps to reach the col before 6 a.m. Climbing shoes came out of the pack, and we free climbed the lower section, which I found the most difficult, until we were greeted by sunbeams coming down the mountain to our breakfast ledge of granite.

During the middle section of the climb, a young couple on a long rope passed us to spell off the route finding. Watching them on the summit block, and since the wind had come up, we lost our nerve and pulled out the rope for a running belay. At noon, we shared the summit and some chocolates with the young couple from Squamish.

We sat in awe of the incredible scenery around us. We gazed at the Freshfield, Columbia, Wapta and perhaps Assiniboine, Hermit and the Swiss Traverse, Rogers and the Pass, Asulkan with Jupiter and the expanses of ice and snow of Illecillewaet. Time was passing way too quickly, and we gave our new climbing partners a half hour's head start in case of rock-fall, an excuse to linger longer on the summit.

But we had to get going, the hardest part of the climb and a long way down ahead of us. At 1 p.m., traversing below the summit tower, we found the ridge for the down climb again at a marked elevation point. Getting tired we short-roped the middle section; time was running like sand through our fingers.

Finally, the first of twenty rappels, the gap between the sun and the Jupiter Range was closing quickly now. A stuck rope, tension, low fuel and an almost empty water bottle, all signs indicating the late afternoon. Some route-finding challenges, it should be easy now, we see our tiny tent at the bivy. The mountain does not release us easily at this late hour of the afternoon. We breathe a sigh of relief when









Around the Salton Sea: A Road Trip through Southern California

Rick Hudson January-February

we reach the rubble field, my son racing ahead now, father carefully picking the way through the boulders.

It is 8 p.m. by the time we crash beside the tent, 15 hours on the mountain, the constant intense focus has us bone tired. My wife is waiting in the Illecillewaet campground. Yes, she will worry, but it is another three hours of packing and walking into the dark. So we decide to pool the last food scraps and make copious amounts of tea, feeling elated to have been allowed to reach our goal.

I make my son get up early, not an easy task, and we move off into the rising sun, refreshed and surefooted. Reaching the campground at 9 a.m., my wife is not around the camp, and it's my turn to worry now. Finally at 10 a.m., out of the forest she comes, having picked blueberries with the bears and had climbed the Pearly Rock, 2612 m, on the previous day to boot.

Participants: Jens and Thomas Radetzki

For three weeks we'd wound our way south down the coast road through Washington, Oregon and Northern California. The month was January, the weather dark and damp. To the right were steep slopes dropping to pounding surf and swell-washed sea stacks offshore, the road clinging to the edge of the continent, at times seemingly defying gravity. To the left were hills that ran up into forested mountains, capped in snow. The contrast was stark, the temperatures cold, and the driving demanded continual concentration. Another switchback, another climb, another descent, the road wound away to the south and the promise of warmer weather.

Skirting the chaos that is Los Angeles, we found ourselves in flat, empty backcountry that was more reminiscent of Nevada than the Golden State. Sage scrub and chaparral made for a bleak viewscape, peppered with solar-panel farms that stretched to the horizon, past the community of Hinckley — site of the movie "Erin Brokovich" that won Julia Roberts an Oscar in 2001 — and then increasing suburbia as we curved round the east end of LA through towns like Victoriaville and San Bernadino, cut by massive

freeways, where the car is still truly king.

It was time to break away, and at Banning on the I-10 we turned south and began a long climb into the San Jacinto Mountains, which rise to 2600 m. The day was warm (mandatory in California, even so close to the winter solstice), but as we climbed the loops and bends, the temperature dropped again, and snow patches appeared ahead. Why come all this way just to return to the very conditions we were trying to escape, you might wonder? Well, there was blue sky instead of dull Victoria grey, and the honey-coloured granite boulders seemed altogether more inviting than the black basalts of Vancouver Island.

As the only campers in the Idyllwild campground, we passed empty tourist stores filled with souvenirs waiting the returning crowds of summer, and drove to nearby trailheads. Snow lay thick on the ground, but the days that followed were still and sunny, the trunks of the Ponderosa pines orange against the white, the upper mountain slopes a swath of green and cream as we followed meandering trails to places like Suicide Rock and Strawberry Junction. Hikers were there none, but our bird count rose with the elevation - white-headed woodpeckers, Townsend's solitaires, the white-breasted nuthatch.

Later, driving south-east along the range, we followed the spectacularly twisted Hwy 74 down, down, down into Palm Springs, the trees giving way to low chaparral and finally desert grassland and sagebrush as the elevation dropped. After a stopover at the Nature Centre on the outskirts of town, crowded with cactus varieties and feeding birds, we entered the golfing Holiday Inn of North America, passing vast gated communities crammed with identical marigold beds and standardized palm trees, clipped verges, manicured golf courses and nearly identical club houses, before fetching up at a supermarket. The car park was about the size of Nanaimo.

We were short of food, and it was dark by the time we emerged from the air-conditioned aisles that were, curiously, lacking the fresh California produce seen on our shelves here at home. Perhaps lettuce is an export-only product. It was a struggle to buy basics; everything seemed pre-cut, sliced, -peeled or -wrapped. Outside in the warm twilight, after the recent cold of the snow-covered mountains, we strolled back to the trailer in a mellow mood. Above, the first stars of the evening appeared in a clear desert sky.

One of the nice things about many US supermarkets is their tolerance of RV camping. It's a good relationship — we get to use their ultra-clean washrooms any time of night, and they get to sell us freshly baked bread at dawn. In many such car parks, a small group of RVs forms in the evening in some remote corner, usually where the paving is flattest.

Dawn, and we visited the Thousand Palms Reserve, an oasis of trees clustered around open water in the Coachella Valley. This was to become a bit of a theme in our desert travels — visiting small clusters of native palms, seemingly



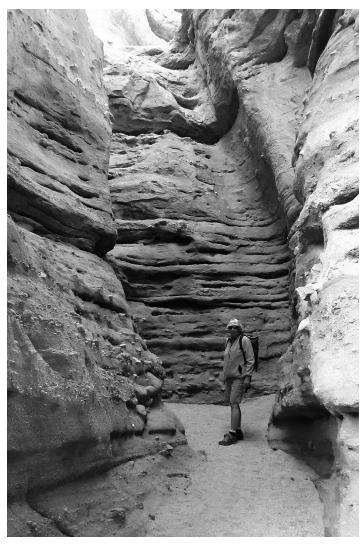
Small mud volcanoes gush steam in the south-east corner of the Salton Sea in a scene reminiscent of Yellowstone NP. Numerous nearby geothermal turbines harness this power for the grid.



Evening shadows stretch across a remote valley in the Anza-Borrego Desert, where campsites are empty and often free.



Granite domes provide both hard climbing and panoramic views in popular Joshua Tree NP.



Exploring a narrow slot at Painted Canyon in the Chocolate Mountains, but not a good place to be during a flash flood.

dumped in random spots on an otherwise arid landscape. But always, just below the surface, underground moisture must be feeding their roots. Palms are quick to crowd everything else and become the dominant canopy. You'll see many palms in California lining boulevards and parks, but most are imported. Only the fan palm (Washingtonia filifera) is native to the area. Outside the reserve's perimeter, sand and sagebrush stretched away to gravel hills. Inside, a cacophony of bird calls and scurrying rodents showed that where's there's water, there's life.

South-east of Palm Springs lay our trip's destination - the broad, fertile Imperial Valley that's home to the huge Salton Sea and Anza-Borrego National Desert Park. The sea is shallow, salty and a curious remnant of lateral flooding from the Colorado River, in the days before that river was dammed and damned into oblivion. Today, barely a trickle makes its way across the Mexican border to empty into the Sea of Cortez. But in days of yore, before the coming of the Great Concrete, much the runoff from the Sierras and Rockies drained through the Grand Canyon down to the sea, and the Salton Sea was flushed regularly with clear mountain water. At one stage, it was three times larger than

its current 55×25 kilometres. Now, cut off from that great river, its area shrinking through evaporation and groundwater draining to less than 900 km2, it is saltier than the ocean.

With its surface 71 m below sea level (just 15 m higher than the bottom of Death Valley), the Salton Sea offers great winter camping, especially along its eastern shore, and tens of thousands of birds over-winter there. In recent years the US Corps of Army Engineers have started to rectify some of the environmental damage done by early agriculture in the area, creating extensive freshwater ponds that allow birdlife to thrive away from the increasingly saline Salton Sea itself.

On the east side of the Salton Sink, lie the Chocolate Mountains, a desiccated range that barely reach 750 m in elevation. They appeared as a crumbling skyline on our left as we drove south. But on the advice of a friend, we headed east into them in search of the Painted Canyon, a spectacular slot carved by ancient flash floods that cut deep, narrow gorges out of the soft strata. A dusty approach made us appreciate the 4WD truck, and despite it being a weekend, we were early and alone as we hiked about a kilometer up the canyon.

Forewarned, we kept a lookout for an unobtrusive side slot, poorly marked, which allowed us to move out of the morning sun into the cool of the shade, squeezing through narrows barely wider than a person, high walls of rock offering a narrow strip of blue sky far above. A series of ladders mounted dry waterfalls, and an hour later the canyon began to shallow and widen. A final ladder brought us out onto the top, a broad, arid landscape dotted with ocotillo just starting to green up with spring growth.

A trail across the dry uplands led to a steep descent into the upper part of the main canyon. As we walked out, small groups of people appeared (carrying cellphones but no water or hats, and wearing flip-flops), ambling up the sandy arroyo. On the high side walls, coloured rock bands confirmed the Painted Canyon was well named.

Back at the Salton Sea campsite, there were pelicans, cormorants, herons and egrets, Sandhill cranes, eared grebes, white pelicans and much more, a birder's delight. At the southern end of the Sea a few days later, we visited the Sonny Bono ("I got you, babe," Cher partner, Palm Springs mayor and later congressman) Wildlife Refuge, another area set aside for the multitudes of birds that over-winter in the area. On an island, we must have seen a million double-crested and pelagic cormorants, while overhead Vs of snow geese crossed the setting moon for an hour.

Close at hand, agriculture stretched to the horizon. Americans build on a grand scale. Almost 80 per cent of the nation's winter crops come from this one valley. Lines of lettuces ran to infinity, converging with lines of tomatoes, beans, broccoli, and fields of wheat. Orchards of citrus loaded with golden fruit flashed by, offering glimpses to the mountains as the gaps between the trees lined up momentarily. We stopped and stole fallen lemons.

With a trillion gallons of water a year from the Colorado River, and a steady supply of cheap labour from across the border, the agro-industrial complex appears on a roll, although many of the Colorado River dams are now below 50 per cent and have been falling for the past 30 years. But for now, we in Canada can be grateful for the efficiency of the system, and the knowledge that the environmental damage being done by this system is happening far away.

There's a strange irony to the move to be more "organic" in food production. As the demand for pesticide-free produce grows, agronomists (I won't call them farmers) have adapted their techniques of weed control by laying down vast lines of plastic sheeting which cover the ground (and snuff the weeds). Produce is machine-plunged x units apart, mile after mile, the tiny plants growing without the competition of indigenous rivals. But once harvested, what happens to the plastic sheeting? It lies in vast strips on the ground, or shredded in the soil, or wrapped around distant trees and fences. It would appear that the cure is worse than the disease. We are a peculiar species.

Over the period of weeks we slowly circled the Sea clockwise, and in due course began to head north up the west side into the Anza-Borrego Desert. This is very different from the east side. More mountainous and dry, the region is true high desert, home to gravel and stone and sparsely scattered cactus. Camping, even in designated camping areas, is usually free (a pleasant benefit), most of the license plates were from Canada or northern states like Montana and Idaho, and the skies universally clear. The days were T-shirt warm at midday, below freezing at night as the cloudless sky wicked the heat out of the ground.

Hikes, scrambles and trails were plentiful. In the few places where others congregated, 10 minutes away from the vehicle meant complete solitude. A great silence hung everywhere. With summer temperatures in the high 40s, early spring was the time to visit and enjoy the region. In a few more months, the horizon would shimmer shortly after sunrise every day, all day.

Hot springs at Agua Caliente, ancient pictographs in the Blair Valley, fan palms at Mountain Palms, were all just tiny dots on the map before we headed into the mountains again to the touristy town of Julian, once a gold mining hub, perched at 1,300 m in the cool of the North Piñon Range. There were deer in the campsite under oak and pine trees, and new varieties of birds like the acorn woodpecker, the oak titmouse and thick-billed kingbird. But the hiking was bushy and the weather turned cloudy as a front swept in from the coast. We retreated to Borrego Springs in the low desert, to bumble through more narrow slot canyons and drive sandy arroyos where, if we broke down, it would be days before we would have been found.

Finally, north again past the Salton Sea into the Little San Bernardino Mountains, to high chaparral and barren granite in Joshua Tree National Park, close to 1,000 m in elevation. This is where the cactus-scattered high Mojave Desert meets the lower creosote and yucca Colorado Desert. The

park's elevation makes the winter days mild, but the nights are below freezing. In the summer, temperatures soar and there's no tourism, but February is a popular time, and we were lucky to find a site at Hidden Valley.

From there, we took bike trails along Queens and Geological Valleys, hikes into the old gold mines at Wall Street Mill, climbs to the summit of Lost Horse Mine, and side trips to Keys Ranch and Barker Dam. With the ice still crunching underfoot there were early morning walks to great granite domes that led up to weathered tops amid balancing boulders. There were views across parched sand flats, cut by shallow arroyos left as a reminder of what water, when it came, could do. A long winding trail brought us to the top of Ryan Mountain (at nearly 1,700 m elevation), where the vista stretched far north over the Mojave Desert National Preserve into Nevada, and south over Palm Springs to the San Jacinto Range.

And, everywhere, boulder stacks offered short, fierce rock climbs on Cyclops, the Old Woman, Chimney Rock and more. Popular during the week, at the weekends the mobs arrived from LA in everything from VW camper vans to BMWs. Most campsites doubled up (sort of allowed) while wardens checked regularly that only official sites were used. Squatters were promptly moved along.

After 10 days, with water running low (bring your own, there's none at the campsites) it was time to descend to the valley, have a shower, see the inside of a supermarket again, and start to head north, as the planet spun towards the spring equinox. Another great road trip, with so much left to do.

Summiting North America's Third Highest Peak: Pico de Orizaba (18,491 ft)

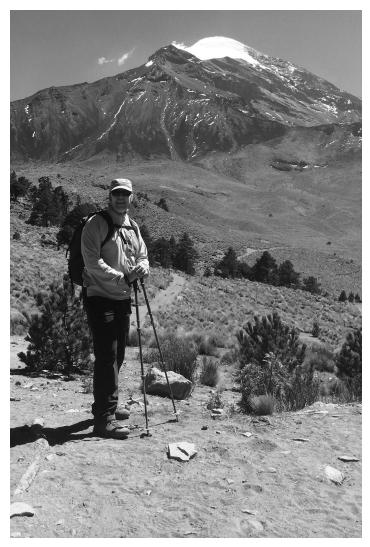
Richard Eaton February 24-25

"It isn't the mountain ahead that wears you out, it's the grain of sand in your shoe."

- Robert W. Service

The best way to successfully climb big mountains is slowly and at night.

If this conjures images of sleep deprived, heavily burdened summit aspirants slogging remorselessly and anonymously upwards to meet their fate, you would not be far off the mark. Except, when you are doing your slogging at high altitude, you can probably add "dyspeptic and gasping for breath" to that list.



Day 1: Acclimatization hike to 14,000+ feet, Mount Orizaba (Star) sparkling in the background

Doesn't sound too glamorous, does it?

Well, if glamour is your aim then mountaineering isn't your game. That's probably why it suits me, and why I found myself in this situation on summit day, leaving the hut at 1:00 a.m. on our way to Pico de Orizaba. My guide, Alejandro ("you can call me Al") had taken the wise precaution of hiking me up to 15,379 ft (according to my GPS) - the day before to further my acclimatization process. It was only a two-hour stroll, carrying minimal gear, taking us less than 2,000 ft above the hut, but this personal lifetime high point experience left me exhausted.

It was hard to get a full dose of air into my lungs and I found myself panting like a dog. Should you wish to try and recreate this experience at home, try holding your breath and then running up a flight of stairs. When you get to the top you will find yourself gasping like a madman (or madwoman, as the case may be). That's kind of like how I felt. After each step. I couldn't imagine what this would feel like tomorrow as we headed above 18,000 ft carrying about 30-40 pounds of gear, rope, water and food each.

We returned to the hut, packed for the big day, ate dinner



Al (centre) and the awesome support crew from OMG - Orizaba Mountain Guides - at the Piedra Grande hut. Alt: 14,000 ft

and turned in at 6 p.m. We intended to get lots of sleep, rise at the magical hour of midnight, eat breakfast, don climbing gear and depart no later than 1 a.m. on the morning of Feb. 25. Everything worked out pretty much according to plan except the "get lots of sleep" part. I've never had problems sleeping on trips like this before, but I discovered that things are different at 14,000 ft for a sea-level dweller like me. I tossed and turned through the night for what seemed like an eternity and guess that I caught about two hours of sleep. Eating anything was also a big effort as altitude is an infamous appetite killer (Jenny Craig - there might be an angle here for you), but I managed to force down, and more importantly keep down, some porridge, toast and jam and, of course, coffee.

So, early on the morning of Feb. 25, we headed for the summit.

The first part of the route winds up through the canyons left behind by the retreating glacier, threaded by small streams. It was cold, probably about -10 C, so everything was frozen and sparkly in my headlamp beam. This called for some first-class route finding and upward snow, rock and ice grovelling through an area known as "the Labyrinth". True to its name, we found several fellow climbers wandering lost in this complex area of glacial moraine, their headlamps jerking back and forth as they fruitlessly tried to find their way. Al called out to them to get them back on the right route, commenting sotto voce: "Better to help now than rescue later."

After about three hours of threading through the Maze, we emerged onto the glacier proper. It was still dark but clear, and the sky was an astronomer's dream. The darkness also hid the true scale of the next phase, mercifully, and we headed up the slope toward the summit, the view confined to the small patch of ice, snow, rope, boots and crampons illuminated in front of me by my headlamp.

It started off steep, about 30 degrees I would guess, and then it got steeper. And steeper. How steep? Imagine you

are walking down the street and you look up to ogle the top of a giant skyscraper — kind of like that. To add flavour to what otherwise might have been a less interesting experience, the surface of the glacier was textured with millions of small, wind-sculpted ice ridges that I called sastrugi, but were known to the guide as the "penitente" for their resemblance to a crowd of people kneeling while doing penance. What a beautifully apt description of what it was like to cross over these torturous little speed bumps, paying our way up the mountain.

As we climbed, it also got colder, and I was soon wearing everything I carried including, from the inside out, T-shirt, thermal underwear, soft-shell windproof jacket, and Gore-Tex hard shell, all topped with my large down jacket. Helmet, headlamp, rope and harness, and large mitts helped make me look more like an astronaut on an EVA than a climber.

We settled on a slow, steady pace that ate up miles without burning us out. But it was really, really hard to keep going. Three days ago I was at sea level behind a computer and now, here I was, approaching the cruising altitude for most domestic flights over mountain ranges in BC. Large drops of sweat dropped rhythmically onto the toes of my boots. Short breaks consisted of slamming my ice axe into the glacier for protection, collapsing, then hurriedly scarfing a chocolate bar snatched from a pocket (must remember to unwrap it first) while rationing a few sips of precious water. To save weight, we each carried only two litres and, for me, this was about ½ of what I could have easily consumed during the day.

Every once in a while we crossed crevasses, which you could sometimes plainly see striping the surface of the glacier. These cracks, up to a foot wide and who knows how deep, we negotiated with adrenaline-fuelled leaps worthy of a prima ballerina, or more accurately, landmine jumper. I found that any sudden extreme exertion like this was equivalent to a kick in the guts, and I had to stand, doubled over and gasping like a landed trout, until I had recovered enough to go on. I heard the story of a climber, travelling alone and unroped, who had recently fallen into one of the larger crevasses and had to stay there for a day until other climbers fortunately heard his calls for help and pulled him out.

The sun finally rose at I have no idea what time, time having lost all meaning for me by this point, and the eastern horizon was riven with a beautiful bright red and multi-hued band the likes of which most people only see from airliners. I could now see the mountain ahead.

The true summit of Orizaba is well defended by a series of false summits so that, when looking up, you see the crest of what might possibly be the top but isn't. In my state at the time, this was roughly equivalent to a castaway spying a passing ship, which turns out to be a mirage. Well, several mirage ships passed me by until, finally, we hit a dirt track which, zig-zagging through some steaming volcanic vents (hey, I thought you said that this volcano was dor-

mant?) led inexorably to the summit nine hours after leaving the hut. On reaching the top, I was immediately proudest of the fact that I did not throw up at any time during this successful climb. Honest.

Off in the distance, Mount Popocatépetl — at 17,802 ft, the second-highest mountain in Mexico - was erupting, sending a plume of ash and smoke skyward. "Wow, that's 'Jurassic Park' cool," I thought.

Following the obligatory summit photos, and flying the Berlineaton 20th anniversary flag, we descended. Most climbing stories leave out this part. I am convinced the main reason is that most people are exhausted by the effort of getting to the top and have chosen to forget the additional suffering for reasons mainly related to their personal mental health. Let's recap the previous day or so to this point: acclimatization hike to personal lifetime high point, not much sleep, not much food, several thousand vertical feet of suffering punctuated by various scary events, and completely dehydrated now that the water had run out. The weather was pretty much perfect though, with little wind



Summit, finally. Happy 20th anniversary Berlineaton! And now for the hard part

and clear skies: a godsend to mountaineers.

We descended through the dreaded "penitente" in the full glare of the now fully risen, tropical sun. Warm clouds rose up the valleys and enveloped us in a high-altitude Turkish bath. Making for a specific exit point from the glacier, which connected to the track to the hut, we traversed downwards and sideways for forever.

With no reference points, it was impossible to judge distances accurately so, with the battle cry "no brain, no pain," we continued on, smashing relentlessly through acres of icy ankle breakers. I was in front the whole way down, roped to Al who would brake me safely if required. We eventually made it to the track, and I threw myself onto the bare earth like a starving man hits a box of Tim Bits.

By this point, I was getting a bit wobbly.

We were unable to return the way we came as the sun melts the Maze, returning it to a more liquid and dangerous state, so we followed an alternate route back to the hut that meanders through several square miles of glacial detritus. With the sun at its high point, the glacier spewed huge gushers of ice melt, cascading downwards across our path. Ironically, although fully dehydrated and out of water, we were unable to drink from any of these streams due to health concerns. Regardless, this area is a geologist's dream, and I was fascinated by the many and varied physical features along the winding trail.

By 3 p.m. we had returned to the hut - 15 hours after the alarm sounded.

A full day, indeed.

Participant: Richard Eaton

Mount Olympus, a Quarter Century Later

Ken Wong July 15–17

It was the 1991 Canada Day long weekend. After our first crevasse rescue practice at a Dallas Road cliff in Victoria by following the instructions in the guidebook "Mountaineering: the Freedom of the Hills," Brian and I headed across the Juan de Fuca Strait to conquer Mount Olympus. At the Blue Glacier, we tagged closely behind three American rope teams of 13 people. We were novices at this glacier stuff and hoped that if we got into trouble they would rescue us. When we arrived at the false summit, most of the Americans stayed put. Two of them along with Brian went ahead. I followed behind. The long snow ridge to the rocky summit block was very exposed.



Aplineglow on Mount Olympus above the Blue Glacier

The right side below was full of big bad hungry blue crevasses. The left side was a 300 m steep, airy snow slope which I doubted that I would be able to self-arrest. I was unnerved! I dug the ice axe deeply into the slope and gingerly reached the summit block. Brian and the Americans were not able to find a way up. I turned tail and hurried back to the false summit. I was so relieved! When I looked back I saw Brian halfway up to the summit block. Oh well, I was not going to cross that snow slope again. This three-day, 71-kilometre trip took 10 hours to hike in, 13 hours to climb and 8 hours to hike out.

Seasons came, seasons went. I nurtured this little regret in me for not standing on the top of Mount Olympus.

A quarter of a century later, and two weeks after my last day of work, it was time to finish the job. Shortly before 8 a.m., we hoisted up our heavy packs and walked onto the well maintained trail. The 29-km Hoh Rain Forest trail was a long, but pleasant slog besides the Hoh River. The trail going through the majestic forest was dead flat until the last 6 km at Glacier Creek. We marched in a brisk pace pausing only momentarily to snap a photo in front of some huge trees. From Glacier Creek it was a steep 900-metre ascent to the campsite at



On the false summit with summit block in the background



Ken Wong on top of Mount Olympus

Glacier Meadows at 1,300 m elevation.

Our pace slowed to a stop when we headed up along Glacier Creek as one of us had developed a problem in both feet. Yes, it was a long, long slog and good that we had a physician in our team. We improvised and made two padded foot beds. This made the problem tolerable and we pushed on. We climbed a long iffy ladder down a landslide. This was not part of my adventure in 1991. We arrived at the campsite just after 5 p.m. Tomorrow we would go another 200 meters up to the edge of the Blue Glacier with a fantastic view of the East, Middle, and West (2,432 m and the highest) peaks of Mount Olympus.

At 3:30 a.m., I was awakened by thre head lamps walking pass my bivy sack. Some keeners had a very early start. We left camp at 5 a.m. and were the last team roped up to cross the Blue Glacier. There were many more icy blue patches on the glacier than I remembered on my first trip. However, the crossing was straightforward as we just followed the foot prints of the groups ahead of us. We passed a rope of three at the other side of the glacier. We had an early 8:30 a.m. breakfast/lunch on top of Snow Dome. We were able to use my monocular to watch the three keeners already standing on top of Mount Olympus.

We arrived at the false summit at 10:40 a.m. I was in for a big surprise. The scary snow ridge between the false and main summit was GONE! It was now a 20-meter descent into a snow bowl, and then a 40-metre climb on snow to the bottom

of the rock summit. Global warming is an undeniable fact. There were already a dozen people on the summit block. We waited 40 minutes for the traffic to clear out before we went over. There was a line of people rappelling down the obvious route up. One nice young fellow from Seattle showed us a gully on the right to bypass the chaos. The two Georges got out the rock gear. With George U. belaying, George B. climbed up. I followed in second, cleaning up a couple of slings and a quickdraw. There was one tricky spot that required me to use my knee. Soon I was shaking hands with George B. at the belay station. I walked to the top, a quarter of a century later. I dropped the slings and quickdraw next to the aluminum box containing the summit registry.

We got back to camp around 5 p.m. It had been a good 12-hour day. We sorted our gear.

"Hey, where are our slings and quickdraw?" I was asked.

"Didn't you guys pick them up at the summit?" was my answer.

"You have to hand it to us!" was the reply.

I was badgered for leaving the equipment by the two Georges for the rest of the trip. It was funny!

The hike out was quick. We met 20 teenaged climbers on their way up. Mount Olympus is a popular peak. A few kilometers before the end, I checked the time. Hey, I thought, maybe I can break my old record. I quickened my pace to pass the En

ergizer bunny Roxanne. A few hundred metres before the end, I broke into a run, scattering the tourists like bowling pins. I reached the parking lot in 7 hours and 50 minutes, 10 minutes faster than my youthful record!

Back in town, I delivered a new quickdraw to George U.'s home. I did not give George B. two slings because he pestered me too much!

Participants: 1991: Brian Adams and Ken Wong. 2016: George Butcher, Roxanne Stedman, George Urban and Ken Wong



A winter attempt on Rishiri-Zan (1,721 m)

Graham Maddocks November 15, 2015

Mount Rishiri is on every Japanese mountaineer's bucket list. Rising out of the ocean, this extinct volcano dominates the tiny island of Rishiri-to. Located in the Sea of Japan off the northern coast of Hokkaido, it is within sight of Sakhalin Island, Russia.

The mountain is also known as Rishiri-Fuji for its resemblance to Fuji-San. Mountaineers, botanists and birdwatchers flock to the island in summer via a ferry service operating out of Wakkanai on the northern tip of Hokkaido. The attraction for mountaineers is obvious. Botanists come



Mount Rishiri

for the summer profusion of wildflowers found only on Rishiri and the neighbouring tiny island of Rebun, including the white flowers of the endemic Rebun-Atsumori-So (Cypripedium marcanthum varebunese) found only on this island. Alpine plants that only bloom above 2000 meters on Honshu, the main island of the Japanese archipelago, bloom here on the sea-level flatlands of the islands and are believed to be the remnants of the glacial period.

But by mid-November, the season was over. Snow blanketed the mountain, and the island was largely deserted. I was the only person staying in my guest house. I had rented a car from the owner of the guesthouse for a tour of the circle coast road to see the typical rural Japanese fishing villages. The coast road hugs the sea passing through many tiny settlements where the chief occupation is fishing for sea urchins. As I passed through one village, I heard a tsunami warning siren and thought they must test the siren regularly given recent history. As I drove on, I reflected on how deserted the coast road was. When I returned to the guesthouse, the owner told me there had been an offshore earthquake and a tsunami warning was in effect. I concluded this was the reason I had the coast road to myself. There were tsunami warnings on the two following days due to aftershocks of the 6.7-magnitude offshore earthquake.

Hokkaido is on roughly the same latitude as Victoria, and I had assumed the climate would be similar, but while the prevailing wind onto Victoria is from the Pacific Ocean, the prevailing wind onto Hokkaido is off Siberia, and it was much colder.

A summer ferry runs from Wakkanai to Sakhalin Island in Russia. Sakhalin is still a presence in the culture of Wakkanai. Called Karafuto by the Japanese, it was part of Japan until a treaty of 1875 gave it up to Russia in exchange for the Kuril islands. These islands are a volcanic archipelago that stretches for 1,300 kilometers northeast to Kamchatka,

Russia, and separate the Sea of Okhotsk from the Pacific Ocean. The islands are visible from Hokkaido as is Sakhalin. An earlier treaty of 1855 had divided the Kurils into the Japanese-controlled South Kurils and the Russian-controlled North Kurils. After Japan won the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War, Japan reclaimed Sakhalin. On Aug. 18, 1945, three days after Japan surrendered, Russian forces invaded Sakhalin and expelled the Japanese inhabitants and indiginous Ainu people. In summer, people use this ferry to see where they were born or to visit family graves. The control of the South Kurils by Russia is disputed by Japan. In Wakkanai, all public signs are in Russian and Japanese.

There are several high quality campgrounds around the base of the summit trail that obviously cater to the big summer influx of mountaineers. I stayed at a traditional Japanese questhouse, called a ryokan, with a tatami

room, meaning there is nothing in it except a woven straw mat, a cushion and a low table. The meal was served in the room on a table that was brought in by the owner and contained over 20 different kinds of seafood. These were some of the best meals I have ever eaten, and I was surprised by the high degree of care in presentation in beautiful individual ceramic dishes. Seaweed, abalone, squid, mussels, sea snails, octopus, crab, fish roe and many kinds of fish were elegantly presented with the island's specialty, sea urchin cooked with rice. The meal began with a soup of shellfish and toxic-looking fungi. After the meal was over, which was more of a culinary ceremony than a meal, the owner took the table away and brought in a futon for sleeping, which was much more comfortable than a Thermarest. These simple rooms have plenty of space to move around in. A western hotel room has everything, except room to move around in.

Slippers and a stylish cotton kimono were provided in the room following my daily hike and soak in the hot thermal pools at the base of the summit trail. Breakfast was smelts, squid, raw fish and toadstool soup with seaweed. A bit more challenging than toast and marmalade! These highly nutritious meals containing vitamins, minerals and trace elements were reflected in the general health of the wiry, slender islanders. These vitamins and minerals are what is lacking in the western diet of processed food. I reflected on how little Victoria makes use of its abundant marine food; factory raised chicken wings are more popular. The island shops contained a staggering variety of processed seafood from giant Alaska spider crabs to tiny seaweed appetizers woven into the shape of a fish and tied with a neat bow.

Strangely, there was a sign at the developed hot springs, called onsen in Japanese, that said no tattooed people were permitted to enter. In Japan, a tattooed male can often be a member of a criminal gang, or yakuza. A tattooed female is considered to be advertising the world's oldest profession (or, as the Brits say, on the game). These signs are present at all onsen in Japan.

I had planned to do some hiking but not summit the mountain. The route is not technical, but is more than 1,500 m vertical gain and is an 11-hour round trip for the very fit. Given the short daylight of the winter and the amount of snow on the upper levels, it was not doable. But while I was on Rishiri, a warm front came in, and the sun came out. I decided to make an attempt. The summit trail starts above the main settlement of Oshidomari and climbs through pine forests and low-lying bamboo thickets. Crystal clear water flowed from a spring at the start of the trail. The mountain is subject to fierce winds, and a recent storm shattered and snapped some large trees. There were several blowdowns blocking the trail. As I climbed, the trees turned into contorted, tortured shapes hugging the ground, a testament to those fierce Siberian winds. I had hoped to reach the Rishiri-Dake-Yamagoya mountain hut at 1230 m but deep snow finally ended my attempt. I was rewarded by magnificent views over the Sea of Japan and Rebun Island. The return trip got even better when I stopped at the Rishiri Fuji onsen, hot thermal pools on the way back down the mountain.

Mt. Jagungal and Kosciuszko National Park

Pam Olson February 2 - 7

Two summers in one year are better than one. For the past 25 years or so, during the North American winter, we have taken annual punishment holidays in the antipodes – Australia or New Zealand. Such holidays involved loading up our mountain bikes with camping gear and exploring back roads. They are called punishment holidays because we made ourselves ride at least six hours a day before allowing ourselves to enjoy some of the wonderful wines produced in those countries.

Since our first cycling trip to Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) in 1999, we have revisited KNP and the high country of Australian Capital Territory (ACT), New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria a few more times. Cycling in the bush is great fun, but as we have gotten older, we have found that cycling on the highways to access the back roads has become increasingly scary because of the vehicular traffic. Since we are long-time mountaineers and hikers, a bushwalking holiday was an obvious alternative.

Our introduction to KNP was during a bush ride in December 1999. Just before Christmas that year, we left Khancoban pedalling toward Cabramurra on loaded mountain bikes. We stopped at Bradneys Gap picnic area for a rest and to check our route. There was something about the road surface or our tires that seemed to make for slow progress. We felt like we were riding in glue. One of our maps showed Everards Fire Trail (FT) joining up with Dargals FT then rejoining the road to Cabramurra. It looked like a more interesting route than the highway. Everards was steep, and we had to unload the bikes and carry our packs up the steepest parts. The only thing more difficult than riding a loaded bike uphill is pushing it.

The first night we camped on Everards Flat next to Khancoban Creek, a peaceful spot with a view of the cascade on Waterfall Creek. In the morning, we filled all our water containers. Between the two bikes, we had about 10 litres of water. Our intention was to camp in the snow gums, and we were not sure of the availability of water on Broadway Top. However, just as we got to a lovely camping spot, we could see dark thunder-heads building so we beat a retreat down to the Tooma River. The river was fairly shallow, and we could easily have waded across it carrying our bikes. Foolishly, we chose not to cross. Being somewhat naive at the time about Australian mountain storms, we sat in the tent for about 18 hours listening to the rain and thunder.

When the rain stopped, the Tooma was a raging torrent.



Descending to the Tooma River, 1999

There was no way we were going to get ourselves and our bikes across it. We looked at our 1:50,000 Khancoban topo map and saw that there was a hut and a fire trail about two kilometres in a direct line from our position. It took all day but, by ferrying loads, we carried our bikes and all our gear through Spanish broom, tussock grass, wombat diggings and creeks to Wheelers Hut, where we camped. The next day, we followed Snakey Plains FT out to the highway and continued toward Cabramurra. By the time we reached the Tumut Pond Reservoir, we had ridden off our map and realized the town was up a long hill. We were not going to get to the shop by the time it closed at 5:30 pm., but that is another story.

Kosciuszko National Park came into existence in 1906 as NSW's National Chase Snowy Mountains. In 1944, this became NSW's Kosciusko State Park. It became Kosciusko National Park in 1967. The spelling was corrected to Kosciuszko in 1997. The park is named for Australia's highest mountain, Mt. Kosciuszko (2,229 m) which is comparable in height to that of The Golden Hinde (2,195 m). It sits on a high plateau and is easily accessible as a day trip. Two of the most popular routes are well-defined tracks. One of them starts at the end of the road to Charlotte Pass (1760)

m), and the other is a walkway from the top of the Kosciuszko Express Chairlift (1,925 m) at Threadbo.

In early January 2016, we flew into Canberra and, after a few walks in Namadji National Park (NNP) to acclimatize to the warm weather, moved on to KNP. The weather had been a bit unsettled, with rain and thunder storms. Since we'd rather not be in the mountains in inclement weather, we did some lower-level walks. As it was getting close to our departure date, we figured we'd better get a move on if we wanted to get to Mt. Jagungal.

There are some differences between bushwalking in Australia and hiking and climbing in B.C.'s mountains. During our first few walks in NNP and KNP, it took us a while to get used to the idea of walking along a serviceable road. Many of the walking tracks in Australia are old roads, remnants of agriculture and industrial activities. Some of those that are in park areas are also used by park and hut maintenance crews. Others are fire trails, roads built for fire management purposes such as back burning and containment lines.

Getting used to walking through old pasture land took a while. When we had cycled on fire trails, because our focus was mainly on the road, we had not been as aware of the surrounding landscape. While walking, one has time to look around without worrying about skidding on a patch of loose gravel or avoiding a snake or large lizard. The scarcity of trees on the higher slopes and ridges was somewhat disconcerting. The early white settlers were unaware of the long term consequences that would result from the practice of grazing cattle and sheep on the sub-alpine and alpine grasslands, a practice that was carried from the mid-1800s until the mid-1900s, when conservationists became concerned. Whereas there is plenty of undisturbed wilderness in the high mountains of Canada, Australia had to re-invent the idea of wilderness by turning old grazing areas into parks.

Canadian topographic maps have both geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude) and UTM grid references (GRS), and Australian topographic maps have only grid references. After some fiddling around with the GPS, I figured out that if I set it to UTM, waypoints would be set and saved in GR format.

Except for ice and snow gear in winter, the same equipment is required for going into the mountains in B.C. and Australia. Poles are useful for balance when crossing streams and rivers, some of which might be thigh deep. Boots and long gaiters are recommended as snake defences. While most snakes don't want trouble and usually leave if disturbed, there are a few aggressive species. Pressure bandages and instructions on what to do in case of a snake bite should be in every bushwalker's first aid kit. And, of course, a plastic trowel is a necessity.

Having cycled on many fire trails over the years, we were aware of many huts. The huts were built for various reasons, and some date back to the early days of the high country cattle graziers and drovers while others were built for mining exploration, the Snowy Mountain Authority (SMA) hydroelectric project, or as ski club cabins. Many of the huts in KNP are maintained by the volunteer-led Kosciuszko Huts Association (KHA). While we prefer to camp, the huts offer good temporary shelter from bad weather. Australian mountain weather can change suddenly and dramatically. Many of the huts are situated near a drinking water source or have a rain water tank.

We were aware that thousands of people walk to the summit of Mt. Kosciuszko annually, but we were a bit surprised by the crowds at Charlotte Pass earlier in our holiday when we were on our way to Mt. Townsend, Australia's second highest peak. Just as we started out, a group of about 30 teenagers surged along the track, herded by a few adults, one of which had a drone camera and was filming the expedition. One boy was carrying a cricket bat. A few minutes into our hike, we caught up to the group at the Snowy River crossing, where one of the herders had her first aid kit out and was tending to a girl who had fallen and hurt herself. We veered off the track and headed for the Twynams by way of Hedley Tarn. On a bike trip to the same area in December 2005, we had visited Kosciuszko from Threadbo. At that time, we were surprised by the number of people walking to the summit carrying bottles of designer water and yakking on mobile phones. I wonder if all those people going to the top of Mt. Kosciuszko think there is a paved walkway to the tops of all mountains.

Early on a sunny day in February 2016, we drove to the Round Mountain parking lot from Corryong, a small town in Victoria near the NSW border. The weather was warm and



Mount Twynam Trig

sunny and the track easy to follow.

We had chosen the Farm Ridge-Round Mountain route for a couple of reasons. There are some huts if the weather turned bad. The route is well established and there is no possibility of getting lost. Even if we got disoriented or lost all navigational equipment, walking a few hours in any direction would lead to a track or the highway. And the bonus was Mt. Jagungal (2061 m). Earlier in our holiday, we had

been to the tops of Mt. Twynam (2196 m), Little Twynam (2120 m) and Gungartan (2068 m), but they seemed to be bumps on the ridge, some with a lopsided, metal quadripod triangulation station (informally known as a trig) marking the summit. Jagungal looked like a real mountain, with an impressive profile and rocks on the summit.

We gave the Round Mountain hut a brief inspection and continued along the track. It was mainly downhill and, after



Mount Jagungal from Farm Ridge Track

a refreshing wade across the Tumut River, we started the uphill slog to Farm Ridge Top. The walk along the undulating ridge through bush fire recovering snow gums was very pleasant. As we walked along, we were treated to many views of Mt. Jagungal. Although it appeared that the silver daisies were finished flowering for the season, there were still patches of colourful flowers among the grasses: gentians, blue bells and eye bright. After dropping off the ridge to join the Grey Mare FT, we continued downhill to Bogong Creek. Very soon, O'Keefes Hut came into view. We tried several tent sites before settling on one with the fewest ants. Australian ants come in all sizes, from tiny to huge, and all are vicious biters.

The next morning we got an early start as the weather fore-cast was for rain developing later. The plan was to walk up Jagungal, then carry on to Dershkos Hut. The walk along the fire trail was fairly easy. We did not see a cairn or any other marker near the meteorological station indicating a route to the summit so we continued until we spotted the cairn near the upper Tumut River. By this time, clouds were forming and rain threatened. We had already pulled the covers over our packs and were dressed in our Gore-Tex jackets. At this point there was some discussion as whether we should go up the mountain since we would not be able to see anything anyway. There was some dissension and, finally, I said, "Well, when are we ever going to be back here?" It wouldn't be the first time we'd been to the top of a mountain and couldn't see anything.

We thought about leaving our packs so we would be faster but then decided that if the weather got worse, we might have to put up the tent on the ridge and sit out a rain storm. We headed off along the foot pad in clouds which got increasingly thicker the higher we went. Luckily, there was little wind. It was obvious that the route gets enough visitors to make the foot path easy to follow even in the clouds. Jagungal's summit trig is a concrete pillar which eventually loomed into view. So much for the advertised magnificent views of the Main Range. The usual summit crows were nowhere to be seen. No time for photos, snacks or checking for a phone signal. We turned around and charged back down to the Grey Mare FT, hopped across the upper Tumut and set a hasty pace for Dershkos Hut, arriving there just after the rain started. We sat in the hut for a while letting our jackets and pack covers dry while we had tea and shortbread. By early evening the rain had let up enough for us to set up the tent. We chose a spot above the hut where we could get a view of Jagungal if the clouds ever lifted. Just before sunset, a hole opened in the clouds, revealing a patch of blue sky and a rainbow, but the mountain remained in the clouds.

A cold, fierce wind blew in overnight, and we woke early in a wildly dancing tent. Since the previous two days had involved long walks, we decided we could do a shorter day as our plan was to walk out toward the parking lot, camping somewhere along the way. We retreated to the shelter of the hut to make coffee and have breakfast. The wind died down by late morning, and we got on our way. At the Hell Hole Creek FT, we took a detour. The weather had turned sunny, and we wanted to extend our trip. It was a pleasant walk to the confluence of Hell Hole Creek and the Tooma River, where we found a level camping spot.

What better way to start a day than a cool wade across a river? The morning was sunny and warm and after crossing the Tooma, we put on our boots and headed off. The track to the second Tooma crossing was circuitous, up, around and down a hillside, probably because the river floods. When the vehicle road was built, the river valley would have been impassible at high water. At the second crossing, we had a good look around, trying to remember if we really had been at that spot around Christmas of 1999. It looked familiar and we thought we could identify the tree on the top of the



Descending to the Tooma River, 2016

hill where we carried our first load of bikes and packs. We debated retracing our route to Wheelers Hut, but when we realized we'd have to wade the Tooma yet again to get back to Dargals FT, we decided two crossings a day were enough. We did see Wheelers in the distance as we walked along Dargals FT. We carried on to Patons Hut which had been nicely rebuilt after being destroyed in the 2003 fires. There were a number of flat, ant-free camping spots near the hut.

After coffee and breakfast the next morning we reviewed our options: walk out to the highway then walk or hitch-hike



Cool Plain Hut ruins

back to the Round Mountain parking lot, retrace our route back to the Round Mountain FT, or see if we could find the old Thiess Village FT that was on our topo and GPS maps.

"We'll give it an hour and see if the road is still there," my partner remarked. I'd heard that before, but since I had won the "let's go to the summit in the fog", I had to endure the "let's find the old road."

The area had been burned badly in the 2003 fires and there was a lot of new growth. We spent a few hours fighting through thick clumps of eucalyptus saplings, tall, prickly grevillea bushes and tall, thick vegetation, possibly swamp or alpine heath. We finally found the semblance of a road, and it was just where we needed it to cross a deep, ugly stream gully. There was a culvert and an intact earth bridge leading to a road cut on the other side. After that, we saw no traces of a roadway until we came to another stream just east of Musical Hill, a feeder stream for Ogilvies Creek, where we could discern a faint road cut.

On the GPS, our route was a zig-zag crossing and re-crossing the old road line. We were crashing around trying to avoid the worst of the undergrowth. When we couldn't see over the tops of the saplings, we moved upslope or down-slope to see if we could get a better route through the tangled vegetation. Having done a lot of bush-whacking in the B.C. mountains, we had to agree that this Australian bush had our bush beat for fierceness.

It was late afternoon when we reached this stream which had lovely clear water. We were exhausted as well as cov-

ered in scratches and cuts. Fortunately, we were past the badly burned area and into open forest with nice tall gum trees, maybe alpine gum or mountain ash, with little undergrowth. We found a level camping spot and set up the tent. We had our tea and shortbread but were too tired to eat anything else but muesli bars and nuts. We really needed our bedtime Disprin Forte (aspirin with codeine) to ease the bush-bashing aches. If you are not covered in scratches and bruises after a hike, obviously you did not have any fun.

After a good sleep, a couple of cups of coffee and some breakfast, we were on our way. Walking through the open forest was restful after the previous day's bushwhack and soon we came to Ogilvies Creek. While crossing the creek valley, we could see the remains of an old quarry and considered trying to reach it as a bail out route if we could not find the overgrown Thiess Village FT. However, as soon as we got to the other side of the creek valley, we found the old road. It was still very viable. Obviously the road had been closed deliberately as large trees had been dropped across it to deter vehicles. We made good time to the remains of the Cool Plain Hut where we stopped for a rest. The hut was destroyed during the bush fires of 2003 and was a pile of metal sheets. Remarkable that some huts survive bush fires and others are reduced to heaps of scrap.

The walk to the Round Mountain FT was easy and we reached the parking lot late in the afternoon. Quickly we changed our clothes then set off to find civilization. The Alpine Tourist Park in Adaminaby has a friendly manager and comfortable ensuite cabins. We checked in, parked the car at our cabin and walked over to the Snow Goose Hotel for cold beers and a pub meal. We got into an interesting conversation with a retired SMA employee who used to ski into the mountains to check on electrical installations. He knew where we had been. Adaminaby's big trout sculpture had been repainted recently and looked quite stunning.

Before we left Australia, we sent a donation to the Kosciuszko Huts Association.

Participants: Pam Olson (ACC member) and DF (who wishes to remain anonymous)

Further Explorations in the Andes of Chile

Don Morton March 6-15

This is an account of two solo trips to Chile to explore the mountains directly southeast of Santiago in the Maipo Valley, the southern limit of the high Andes. The last of the 6,000 m peaks is Cerro Marmolejo (6,108 m) on the border. Cerro Sosneado (5,169 m), 100 km farther south in Argentina, marks the end of the 5,000 m peaks. As I will explain, I failed in my objectives in February 2015 so returned in early March 2016.

In 2015 I rented a car and drove up Rio Maipo and its tributary Rio Volcan to Banos Morales at 1,900 m. I had an old map that showed a trail that followed the north side of the river and then swung north into Valle del Arenas and on to a glacier lake. I set off with my camping gear and food for three nights. My minimal Spanish prevented me from asking detailed advice, but packhorses and trekkers on the lower part of the trail seemed to confirm that I was on the correct route. However, after 4 km and gaining 400 m of altitude, I found a drivable road and a parked car!

Higher up the road, I was further surprised to see a huge construction site but no activity, only a couple of watchmen. After a night near the construction site, I trekked up the new dirt road north to an obvious parking area. There, the route divided with the new road rising gradually on the right with



Glacier Colgante del Morado at 3,200 m in Chile.

the river beside it and a much deteriorated road on the left climbing the side of the hill, heading in the same general direction. Which was the route on my old map? After some inconclusive exploration under a very hot sun, I camped for the night and retreated the next day. I pitched my tent in the primitive campground at Banos Morales and enjoyed a swim in the hot spring.

I later learned from another climber that there is a big hydroelectric project underway in the valley, but work had stopped because the essential crossing of Rio La Engorda, a tributary to Rio Volcan, had been washed out. All the workmen and the owner of the parked car had to escape to Banos Morales the way I had come. If it had been my trapped car, I am sure the rental company would not have been pleased.

Next, I made a day trip up to the picturesque Laguna San Francisco in the ranger-controlled Monumento Natural El Morado. Due to overuse, camping is no longer permitted there. On the south side of Rio Volcan in the village of Lo Valdes, there is a major operation bringing gypsum from above the road to Banos Colina and transferring it to trucks for Santiago. More attractive is Refugio Aleman established by Chilean members of the German Alpine Club in 1932 for both summer climbing and cross-country skiing in winter. It nicely reproduces the style of a European alpine hut in the Andes (www.dav.cl/wp/2014/06/refugio-lo-valdes/). At a sharp turn in the road leading up to the refuge, a trail crosses a stream and ascends the steep cliff face to give access to the high country south of Rio Volcan.

I was certain the road to the hydroelectric development would be repaired quickly so I returned in 2016 for a second attempt the reach the glacier lake. This time, I found three huge culverts carrying the road over Rio La Engorda and drove directly to the parking area that had required much effort the previous year. When two separate day groups arrived and set off on the right-hand fork, the choice was clear. The route provided good walking towards a skyline ridge on my left and an easy stream crossing. Following the stream and re-crossing it brought me to a view of the upper part of the hanging glacier between Morado Sur (4,330 m) and Morado Principia (4,647 m). Only when I climbed over the final rise at 3,200 m did I see the lake below the glacier with its icebergs. There were several tent sites and one couple already established for the night. Just as I was unpacking my tent it began to snow, so I made a quick change into suitable clothing. My Big Agnes Fly Creek tent weighing a little less than a kilogram gave me a comfortable night. For my descent the next morning the weather was back to the typical cloudless sky all day.

While in the area, I wanted to make another attempt to reach Refugio Plantat, also known as Refugio Volcan San Jose because it is en route to that 5,856 m peak on the Argentine border. I started from the parking area just past the bridge over Rio Volcan and the sign giving directions to Banos Colinas to the south and Valle Cerro Arenas to the north. One of the local men, who also organizes packhorses there, politely requested 2,000 pesos to leave my car.

A few hundred paces along the new road to the hydroelectric development, a trail with some yellow markers goes up through the rocks on the right. After a couple of kilometers and 150 m in altitude, one comes to an extensive plateau known as Valle de Engorado, presumably leveled with sediments draining from broad valleys to the north and south-east. I had been here in 2015 but retreated because I could not find stream crossings where I felt safe as a solo climber with a heavy pack. Nevertheless I wanted to have another look. This year I found the beginnings of a second hydroelectric project, the most conspicuous working being a graded fenced area with prominent port-a-potty that provided a beacon on my return down from the plateau.

I had a delayed start so, by late afternoon, some of the streams were rather powerful. Fortunately, I got help across the worst of these from a day-tripping couple. For a safe return I knew I must get back to the crossings earlier in the day. I headed east towards the right-hand one of two greenish patches in the rock wall where there is evidence of a trail up the lowest part. At the base, I found a wonderful campsite on dry grass beside a little stream. I was able to pitch my tent and cook dinner in my bare feet. A man on a horse leading another came down the trail, presumably having carried up supplies for some climbers.

The next morning I followed a good trail up the gulley, passing grazing horses and heading southeast over rolling grassland to the refuge at 3,130 m. Water flowing from the boulders beyond filled a small pond in front. Inside, I found an open area for cooking and eating and two rooms of bunk beds behind. The hut was built in 1937, indicating a serious early interest in climbing by Chileans. Going higher was more risk than I wanted as an elderly solo climber, so I left soon after daylight the next morning. On reaching the plateau, I was able to find the main trail and follow it to better stream crossings than where I jumped on the way up.

Part way into the Maipo Valley, another road branches northeast along Rio Colorado to Hidroelectrica El Alfalfal, Parque Rio Olivares and the approach to Cerro Tupangato (6,148 m). In 2003, my Norwegian friend Sverre Aarseth and I attempted Tupangato but had to retreat 300 m below the summit due to insufficient acclimatization. Unfortunately, to go beyond Alfalfal, a special permit is needed, which we had to arrange in advance through a climbing organizer in Santiago.

While in Chile in 2016, I also explored the route to the ski resorts northeast of the city. The road has 39 numbered hairpin turns up to the town of Farellones at 2,340 m and 18 beyond to La Parva and El Colorado both at about 3,000 m. La Parva is the usual start for climbing glacier-covered El Plomo (5,424 m). Alternatively at Farellones one can take the right fork and 21 more hairpin turns to Valle Nevado, also about 3,000 m with ski runs up to three kms in length from 3,670 m down to 2,805 m. On the summer day I was there, I was fascinated to watch a dozen condors enjoying the updrafts arising from the deep valley immediately east of the hotels. The longest runs at the more famous Portillo Resort off the highway to Argentina are only

1.4 kms between altitudes of 3,330 and 2,590 m.

On my way back to Santiago, following the advice of a local climber, I stopped at Parque Cordillera Yerba Loca at Curva 15 on the lower road (www.yerbaloca.cl). After about a 10 km drive from the entrance, I found a delightful campground among shade trees and a mountain stream around 1,900 m, where I spent two nights. There is a good 20-km trail to the north that I followed part way up the valley towards Glacier La Paloma.

Participant: Don Morton

Maunga Pu – The Lowest Highest Mountain – Aitutaki, Cook Islands

Lindsay Elms March 28



Val and Lindsay on the summit of Maunga Pu - Aitutaki.

So at what height must a hill be for it to be called a mountain? The distinction between a hill and a mountain is unclear and largely subjective, but a hill is universally considered to be less tall and less steep than a mountain. In the United Kingdom, geographers historically regarded mountains as hills greater than 1,000 ft (300 m) above sea level. A hill is a landform that extends above the surrounding terrain. It often has a distinct summit, although in areas with scarp/dip topography a hill may refer to a particular section of flat terrain without a massive summit. A mountain is a large natural elevation of the earth's surface rising abruptly from the surrounding and, according to one dictionary, it has to be greater than 2,000 feet (610 m).

This is a regular debate amongst climbers, but as we see there is no straightforward answer, unless you've watched the 1995 movie "The Englishman Who Went up a Hill but Came down a Mountain," starring Hugh Grant and Ian Mc-Neice. The film, set in 1917, revolves around two English cartographers, the pompous Garrad and his junior, Anson. They arrive at the fictional Welsh village of Ffynnon Garw ("Rough Fountain" or "Rough Spring" in Welsh) to measure its "mountain" — only to cause outrage when they conclude that it is only a hill because it is slightly short of the required 300 m in height. The villagers, aided and abetted by the wily Morgan the Goat and Rev. Jones (who, after initially opposing the scheme, grasps its symbolism in restoring the community's war-damaged self-esteem), conspire with Morgan to delay the cartographers' departure while they build an earthen cairn on top of the hill to make it high enough to be considered a mountain.

On Aitutaki, one of the northern Cook Islands, the highest mountain is named Maunga Pu and is often referred to as Mount Maunga Pu. This "mountain" does not come anywhere near the elusive 300 m or the mightier 610 m mark but measures in at a whopping 124 m. I hear the remark: "how can that be considered a mountain?" I am not going to debate whether Maunga Pu should be called a hill or a mountain, but I am going to write about my intentional "ascent/climb" (if I can be so bold to say I climbed it) of this lowest highest mountain. However, before I get down to the nuts and bolts of the climb, I am going to relate the fascinating legend associated with the mountain. This legend is known as The Stolen Mountain.

On the west side of Rarotonga, the main island of the Cook Islands, stood a very proud mountain. Her name was Maru, and she was higher than any of the other mountains. In fact, Maru would hide the sunrise during the dawn with her shadow, giving the people of the village Puaikura more time to sleep. The mountain was the envy of the other villages as they all wished they could have a mountain just as high and just as useful as Maru. The fame of Maru reached far across the sea to other islands. The people on the island of Aitutaki were especially interested to hear about this high mountain called Maru on Rarotonga, because Aitutaki was flat.

The Aitutaki chiefs, Vaeruarangi and Tamatoa, decided upon a devious plan. They called their strongest warriors together and told them what to do. Building big canoes and making strong tools took some time but was soon finished. The Aitutaki warriors said their prayers to their mighty god Rongo and sailed for Rarotonga. They planned their arrival in the early hours of the night and, after one day at sea, they sighted Rarotonga and the proud peak of Maru. They paddled westward, circling the island towards the village of Puaikura. When it was dark, they paddled through the tricky inlet of the reef that surrounded Rarotonga and went ashore.

While the people of Puaikura slept, the mighty warriors worked fast, cutting the mountain Maru. This difficult task took a few hours, but finally when the cutting was finished they began the more difficult task of carrying the mountain to their waiting canoe. Their grunts, puffs and lifting noises told the Puaikura people that something unusual was going

on. They thought the chopping noises which had awakened them were spiritual activities, but the grunts were human. The Puaikura warriors went inland to investigate and saw intruders carrying their beloved Maru away. They gave chase, but the Aitutakians had seen them. The chase resulted in some of the rocks dropping and falling off as the Aitutakians ran, holding their prize. They made it to their canoes and pushed off before the Puaikura warriors could catch up. They paddled hard and lost sight of the island of Rarotonga before daylight. After four days of hard work, they reached Aitutaki. Tiring in their last efforts, pieces of the mountain fell off as they lay Maru in the village of Amuri. At last, Aitutaki had a mountain, but the lost parts reduced its size tremendously. The Aitutakians renamed the mountain Maunga Pu, meaning top of the mountain, in remembrance of their achievement.

Meanwhile back in Rarotonga, the people of Puaikura prepared for a search. Life wasn't the same without the towering top of Maru. The sunrise came too early and disturbed their sleep. But before the war canoes could be finished, they discovered that waking up early had its advantages. They could catch bigger and better fish. They decided to stay and get used to the now shorter mountain. They renamed Maru as Raemaru which means "empty shadow". Even today if you visit Rarotonga and Aitutaki in the Cook Islands, you'll see evidence of a great story, the story of the stolen mountain.

The sign pointing to the trail up Maunga Pu was just a few kilometres down the road from our motel. We parked our motor scooter under a tree but made sure it wasn't a coconut tree. The rental company had warned us to avoid parking the scooter under a coconut tree so that it wouldn't sustain a concussion from falling coconuts. It was still nice and cool out, but by the time we reached the summit, just under 15 minutes from when we left the scooter, we were breaking out in a sweat. Really, there is not much more to say about the climb except that it was, well, easy. Like any summit, the view was spectacular. From the top, we were able to look out over the lagoon where we had been snorkelling the previous day and the myriad of low, sand-duned islands that make up Aitutaki. Maunga Pu is the lowest highest mountain that I have intentionally set out to climb, but a high point on my trip to Aitutaki.

Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

Te Kou - Rarotonga, Cook Islands

Lindsay Elms April 1

As previously discussed, the height of a mountain is inconsequential. It is the pleasure one gets from both the process of climbing the mountain and ultimately the view from the summit. We all know that it not until we get to the summit that we finally get to see, not just over the other side, but the whole 360° panoramic view. This is when we take it all in and go "wow this is incredible." This was the feeling Val and I had when we stood on the summit of Te Kou.

At 588 m, Te Kou, when viewed from anywhere on Rarotonga (and it can be seen from virtually anywhere as the ring road around Rarotonga is only 32 km), looks more like a mountain than a hill. It has steep, fluted ridges and many of the faces are impervious due to the thick, luxurious vegetation. The only feature lacking in the bush are colourful, tropical birds – something that I was surprised not to see on the Cook Islands. The three most common birds were the myna, the dove and chickens.

Our initial plan was to climb Te Manga, the highest mountain in the Cook Islands, but the trail hadn't seen any maintenance for several years and was wildly overgrown. The bush grows back so fast that within a few weeks a machete is required to brush-out all the new growth. This revelation called for Plan B – the second highest peak on the island.

While riding around the island on our rented scooter we went up one of the inland roads and checked out the trailhead for Te Kou. Although there was no sign at the end of the road, we were pretty sure this was where the trail started. The next day we rode back around to the end of the road, locked up the scooter, and started hiking up the 4x4 track. After 10 minutes it narrowed to a trail and started wondering through someone's taro fields. Taro is the pre-eminent crop of the Cook Islands and surpasses all other crops in terms of land area devoted to production. The prominence of the crop in the Cook Islands has also lead to it being a staple of the population's diet. Taro also plays an important role in the export trade of the country. The root is eaten boiled, as is standard across Polynesia. Taro leaves are also eaten as a delicacy, cooked with coconut milk, onion and meat or fish. Taro is usually grown in paddy fields under flooded conditions where water is abundant. The water needs to be cool and flowing; otherwise warm, stagnant water causes basal rot. For maximum yields, the water level is controlled so that the base of the plant is always under water. Flooded cultivation has the advantage over dry-land cultivation in that the yields are almost double, but requires a longer maturation period.

After about 20 minutes we came to a fork in the trail. The



The view from the summit of Te Kou - Rarotonga (photo: Valerie Wootton)

trail to the right had a sign saying "No trespassing," which in my wisdom I took to mean the trail up Te Kou was to the left. I am able to confirm that my conjecture was correct. A few minutes later we were out of the taro fields and on a narrow trail that started climbing up steep embankments that if wet would be a veritable water slide. Fortunately for us it had been dry for a couple of days. The trail continued rising steeply up several fluted ridges but we were still surrounded by tall trees and thick bush. The only wildlife was the occasional chicken.

The trail had seen regular maintenance and in about half a dozen places there were rope lines to pull up on to get up even steeper sections. Eventually we topped out on the summit ridge where we found old war-time concrete bunkers. Across a thickly bushed basin we could see the summit about 15 minutes further on. Of all the peaks on Rarotonga, this is the only one with a high basin as usually the steep fluted ridges lead directly to the summits. After a few minutes we crossed a small rivulet where we (well I did, as Val had picked up a water-born bug on Aitutaki) took a drink. I wasn't concerned about protozoa up here as there were no animals. Ten minutes later we scrambled onto the summit where a radio shack was located with a tower. Although Val was feeling under the weather she too couldn't help but marvel at the view around the island. Beyond the beaches where we snorkeled we could see the outer reef where large waves were dissipated before rolling onto the sand.

We spent an hour on the summit before beginning the descent. The ropes were a boon as they made the descent easy but obviously wouldn't last long with the tropical climate. The last couple of days on Rarotonga were spent snorkeling but I couldn't help periodically looking up at the beautiful peaks above.

Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

"Walk the Loch"

Josh Slatkoff and Sandy Briggs May 4-18

Planning a return trip to the Highlands began on a dark and damp December evening at the Brentwood Pub.

The "lads" had two previous shared trips to Scotland. Quite a respectable amount of local knowledge sat around the table considering that none are actually Scottish. Russ came closest, having been raised in Sheffield and Sandy minored in mountaineering while studying at St. Andrews. The rough climbing itinerary was hatched by Russ with two key criteria – each hill must qualify as a Munro (wink, wink) and must end within hobbling distance of a pub.

Rob, Sandy, Russ and Josh met in early May at the Glasgow airport. Sadly, Rick Johnson got grounded in Victoria while the rest of us converged baggage-laden at the Europecar rental desk. We got volun-told to upgrade to a larger vehicle than we intended or needed, and off we rolled into the only rain we would see for the next two weeks.

Based in Glencoe, our "warm-up" day was a traverse of the Aonach Eagach, a 10 km frequently exposed ridge flanked by steep grass and scree with little possibility for retreat. Two Munro summits, Sgorr nam Fiannaidh and Meall Dearg (but who's counting – well, some of us were), were traversed en route.

Our next stop was Glen Nevis where the idea had been to try the Carn Mor Dearg arête. However, extenuating circumstances intervened and two of us (Russ and Rob) just went up Carn Mor Dearg and back, while Josh and Sandy did the



View from Slioch, with Loch Maree (photo: Rob Macdonald)

tourist track up Ben Nevis (with several hundred other folk and one oversized garden gnome). We had rare visibility on the top, with great views along the north side to a still very snowy-looking Tower Ridge. Parched from the long descent Sandy started to feel unwell, so we went along to the pub to rehydrate. Sadly his shandy and half a hot chocolate reversed their course all over the table in the pub. The staff was very kind and understanding, bless them. It seems Sandy picked up a bug at the hostel that hitched a ride for the next several days.

As a side note, we stayed at hostels run by the Scottish Youth Hostel Association throughout our trip and found them to be economical, clean, well run, and staffed by gracious and helpful hosts. The on-line booking system, however, did have the curious request to identify one's title — Captain, Sir, Lady — when making a reservation, prompting Russ to wonder whether we should be amused or appalled.

The next day we drove up to Torridon and got established at the hostel there. The plan had been to traverse Liathach (contrary-wise, west to east) the following day. However, Sandy was still trying unsuccessfully to shake the bug, so we contented ourselves with lying around in the sun for 3.5 hours on top of Mullach an Rathain. Not a shabby spot to convalesce!

Sandy returned to form the following day and the five of us (including Sandy's friend, Colin, who came to visit) set off for Beinn Alligin. We got up Tom na Gruagaich in bright clear sunshine, but it was windy. We went along the ridge to the second summit, Sgurr Mor, and descended a short way toward the Horns. But there we made the decision that the wind really was too strong to ensure a safe traverse of the Horns, so we reversed our route over Sgurr Mor and descended the gentle slopes into the valley to the NW just for something different. This semi-circumnavigation of the mountain proved to be very scenic, and led eventually to exceptional views to the south over inner Loch Torridon, after which we regained the Diabag road for the walk back to the car park. To enhance our enjoyment, Sandy pulled a (glass) bottle of Glen Moray scotch from his pack on hour 5 of the trip and we all savoured the "water of life." (Colin, a Scot of very refined tastes, was not impressed, dismissing it as 'cooking whisky'.)

Despite aching knees and quads, we were all buoyed by the fine weather and endless vistas so the next day we made for Beinn Eighe. We took the track up between Liathach and Beinn Eighe and hiked around to the beautiful Coire Mhic Fhearchair with its scenic lochan and famed Triple Buttresses. We hiked up Ruadh-Stac Mor and then back and along the lovely ridges to Spidean Coire nan Clach, from which we descended.

After a day of rest, we drove in the early morning to Kinlochewe and hiked up Slioch. The clouds dispersed before we reached the summit, so that we again had grand views, though now inland views rather than sea-loch views.

Josh returned by train to Glasgow the following day to meet

his family while Russ, Rob and Sandy crossed over the sea to Skye and hiked up Blaven (Blà Bheinn), which none of the group had ever done before. The normal track becomes easy not to find at about half-height, so we lost it and went up a slightly non-routine way, but managed to sort out the usual track for the descent.

Awed by the craggy tundra-like landscape, warmed by the sun and the scotch, and steeped in Russ' history lessons, northwestern Scotland left us all thirsty for more.

Participants: (Commander) Rob Macdonald, (Lord) Sandy Briggs, (Earl) Josh Slatkoff, and (Just) Russ Moir The view from the summit of Te Kou - Rarotonga - Valerie Wootton photo

Cordillera Blanca, Peru

Don Morton July 8 - 20



One of 8 condors in the lintel over the entrance to the main building at Chavin. Each condor is about 15 cm across.

The summer of 2016 was exactly 50 years since my first climbing expedition to the Cordillera Blanca of Peru so I took the occasion of a physics meeting in Brazil for a visit on my way home. The central town of Huaraz has expanded enormously with many outfitters and shops for trekkers and climbers. It is serviced by luxury buses with both daytime and overnight schedules for the 8-hour journey from Lima. At 3,090 m (10,138 ft.), Huaraz is the place to acclimatize for exploring higher altitudes if you survive the initial shock of going up from sea level so quickly.

The ice-topped peaks of the Cordillera Blanca rise directly east of Huaraz in a chain some 150 km long. About 45 km north of the city the twin summits of Huascaran Norte at 6,654 m and Sur at 6,768 m are the highest places in



Nevado Tayapampa (5,675 m). From this camp in 1966 we crossed the ridge to the right of the peak and ascended the west face

Peru. A team from Vancouver Island including Gerta Smythe and Reinhard Illner climbed the southern one in 1997. To the west are the rounded summits of the Cordillera Negra with nothing much above 5,000 m. The Rio Santa flows north in the valley between the two ranges. To the south is the separate Cordillera Huayhuash where nine members and friends of the ACC Vancouver Island Section completed a challenging nine-day trek in 2010.

While acclimatizing I took a bus tour to the Chavin ruins, travelling south to Catac, crossing to the Amazon side of the Cordillera Blanca through a tunnel at 4555 m and then descending to 3,140 m. Until 2001 when reliable dates became available for Caral and Sechin Bajo near the Pacific coast, Chavin was the oldest known archeological site in the Americas. The buildings there were constructed between 1,200 BC and 800 BC. I was pleased to see that the site now is properly protected, unlike 50 years ago when the valley road passed by a corner of the main structure giving easy access to the famous grinning stone head attached to the wall by a long shaft. The internal passages are accessible to see the 4.5-m high Lanzon statue. However, a rope barrier in front of the main temple entrance prevented anyone from getting close to the exquisite carving of 8 condors on a huge stone lintel now returned to its original position bridging two stone pillars. Attached is a photo I took in 1966 when this lintel was lying face-up amidst other rubble. One wonders what sort of tools the artisans had more than 2,000 years ago. Unfortunately the local museum that now holds many of the artifacts

and smaller sculptures from the site was closed when I visited in 2016.

In Huaraz, across the street from Plaza de Armas, is the small Museo Arqueologico de Ancash displaying local artifacts along with many small statues in a garden behind. Other acclimatization activities could include exploring the many trails east of the city or taking a collectivo 9 km north for a swim in the thermal pool at the Monterrey Hotel. Farther north is the memorial park over the mudslide from Huascaran that suddenly buried the original town of Yunguay during the great earthquake of May 31, 1970. The tops of four tall palm trees that marked the original Plaza de Armas remain above the new ground level, including one that is still alive. Some 65 km north of Huaraz is Caraz, the last town large enough for shopping en route to treks and climbs in the vicinity of 6,259 m Cerro Santa Cruz and the famous Nevado Alpamayo at 5,947 m.

In 1966 four gringos and two local porters spent four weeks in the Alpamayo Valley. After crossing the Santa River on a cable with a pull rope made from donkey hide, we hiked for four days, crossed two 4,800 m passes and established a base near a British team climbing Alpamayo. This route now is part of the Alpamayo Base Camp Trek, which Catrin Brown completed 1n 1994. Lonely Planet describes it as "demanding". In 1966 we climbed 6,036 m Nevado Quitaraju to the south and made first ascents of three separate snow summits all around 5,300 m in the Pilanco group to

the north. As a final project, Richard Goody and I set up a camp on the east side of the long north ridge off Alpamayo and made the first ascent of a sharply pointed snow and ice pinnacle of 5,675 m. Since it had no name we proposed Nevado Tayapampa by applying a name from a nearby area. It was very satisfying to see that our name has been accepted on the trail signs and official maps.

This time my goal was to follow part of the easier Santa Cruz Trek that goes east through the Santa Cruz Valley south of Cerro Santa Cruz, Quitaraju and Alpamayo. While following the long sharp west ridge to the summit of Quitaraju in 1966, I noted how steep it was down to the Santa Cruz Valley so I wanted to see this south face from below. From Caraz I hired a taxi to Cashapampa at 2,900 m, paid 65 soles for a park permit at the ranger's office and spent the night in a small campground for five soles with no facilities and numerous donkey droppings.

The next morning I set off in my usual solo mode carrying everything so trekking parties soon were passing with donkeys carrying their gear. On reaching the upper level about 4,000 m, I found a good place to pitch my tent with water easily accessible in the nearby Rio Santa Cruz. After my hot dinner I crawled into my tent, intentionally leaving outside my dirty trekking poles and my stove with the attached butane-propane canister. In the morning they were gone! The thief must have seen them in the bright moonlight that night. With one ankle that no longer supports my weight, poles are essential for travel over any irregular ground, so I had no choice but to retreat. I found a couple of curvy branches to help steady myself on the way down.

Further exploration was somewhat constrained, but with the help of a sawed-off broom stick I did take a taxi from Yungay up to the Llanganuca Lakes between Huascaran and 6,160 m Huandoy. I found a free campground at the east end of the upper lake with flush toilets. Beyond one can hike up the road to a trail to a hut below 5,752 m Nevado Pisco and another to Laguna 69 that I must investigate when I return with new stove and poles.

An interesting way back to Lima by a non-luxury bus is from Caraz down the Santa Valley through the steep Canon del Pato to the coast and Chimbote. I counted 39 tunnels and likely missed a few short ones. The bus arrived at the Chimbote terminal on schedule at 2:30 p.m. just in time to catch a luxury bus departing for Lima.

Participant: Don Morton

Walking and Wheeling the Haute Route

Cedric and Lissa Zala August 26 – September 5

Several years ago, we had the great experience of hiking the Tour de Mont Blanc, a 12 (or so) day walk through some of the most stunning scenery in the Alps. The route took us around the base of this massif, starting in Les Houches (near Chamonix) and through parts of France, Italy and Switzerland. It left us with a taste for hut-to-hut (or village-to-village) alpine trekking and an eagerness to do more. So when we heard of the Walker's Haute Route, another multi-day trek through the Alps, we were eager to spend another weekplus hiking through beautiful, sometimes challenging, terrain by day with the welcoming promise of coming down to decent accommodation in an alpine hut or small village hotel by night.

The Haute Route starts in Chamonix and works its way across mountain ranges of Switzerland to Zermatt. In contrast to the TMB, which involves a lot of walking along gentler valley and subalpine routes, the Haute Route goes right up and over the ranges, with steeper ascents and descents and more rugged, truly alpine terrain from which glaciers have often only recently receded. Well, thought we, we did the TMB, let's have a go at the Haute Route, then – how hard can it be?

The first part of the Haute Route coincides with the last part of the TMB (though going in the opposite direction), splitting off in the postcard-perfect town of Champex-Lac. So this was where we decided to begin our hike. On Aug. 26, we arrived there in mid-afternoon and found the town to be buzzing with activity. It turned out to be the Ultra Tour de Mont Blanc, an ultra-marathon, with runners doing the entire 166-km route in one go (the record is just over 20 hours!). The streets were lined with well-wishers clapping and cheering the runners on, and this went on right through the evening. We happily joined in the shouts of "bravo!" and "courage!" and went to bed feeling the excitement for the coming days.

The next morning, Saturday, Aug. 27, we started out in the fresh mountain air, walking through the town beside the lake and heading on down the mountain track. The walk was wonderful – it seemed we had hit a good time for the flowers to be in bloom and the farmers were still cutting the field grasses, so there was a lovely scent of new-mown hay throughout. From time to time we heard a clanging chorus of cow-bells across the valley, reminding us of the sound of a marina in the wind. The trail took us downhill for about three hours pretty relentlessly before flattening out along a valley bottom, and at Sembrancher we turned uphill to follow a route to the village of Le Chable. There we took the gondolas up through the massive ski resort of Verbier to Les Ru-

inettes cable station. Verbier was a real eye-opener — with much of a huge subalpine bowl being filled with hundreds of chalets and hotels — one of the largest ski resorts in the Alps. We were glad to soar above all that and start our final stage to Cabane de Mont Fort, getting there about 4 p.m. Comparing our GPS elevations and times, we found that we had done much more elevation and taken a lot more time than was outlined in the guidebook. As noted in the journal, this could be "something to watch for..." A thunderstorm rolled in that night, but we slept through most of it, anticipating the first full day of hiking tomorrow, with no gondola assists!

Thist full day of hiking tomorrow, with no gondola assists!

Cedric on the way to the first col after leaving the Cabane de Mont Fort–

Sunday's hike took us over three cols to Cabane de Prafleuri. We started out on the shorter but steeper route to the first col (485 m vertical), which took us 2.5 hours - compared to the guidebook's suggestion of 1.5 hours. We entered a bowl of glacial retreat, with shattered rocks through which the trail wound its way, skirting the occasional tarn. Rugged terrain indeed, but beautiful in its desolation. Over the next col, the going got rougher, with clambering over boulder fields and up and down slopes all the time. Finally reaching the third col, we were the last people on the trail, trudging up to Cabane de Prafleuri after 5 p.m. feeling thoroughly beat and a little discouraged as the effort and times were more than we had anticipated. This hut was very basic, with no drinkable water inside (just an outside pipe from the glacier stream), the showers costing five CHF for three minutes (but they didn't work anyway), there being only one WC (with one toilet booth and the urinals on the wall right next to the sink). Ah yes, and everybody had to leave the hut by 7:30 a.m., apparently so the cleaners could get in. Hrmph!

So we were totally OK with saying goodbye to the Prafleuri Hut early on Monday morning, having taken the (late!) sitting for breakfast at 7:00. We started off on a 30-minute uphill jaunt to the first col and were greeted by sunshine and a truly superb vista to a large man-made lake filling the valley bottom. This was the Lac des Dix, created by the building of the Dixence dam, which was built in two stages and completed in 1961. It is the largest gravity dam in the world and holds water at an elevation of more than 2,350 m, giving an

enormous head to the power generators in the Rhone Valley more than 1,500 m below. A massive example of Swiss engineering. We switchbacked the 600 m elevation down to the lake though fields of flowers, and made our way along the lakeshore track, through herds of black cattle eyeing us suspiciously but ultimately allowing us to pass. We then had a bite and started along the route up the valley at the end of the lake, moving relentlessly uphill through grass and then moraines. But to quote the journal, "Unfortunately, then things start to go to bad, then to worse, then to deadly."



Lac des Dix looking south to where we would encounter the cols in the distance

We were approaching the final route to one of two cols: Col de Riedmatten and Pas de Chevres. These are both VERY STEEP scrambles up and over VERY LOOSE terrain, with the latter involving a via ferrata - steel ladders. We initially tried the Riedmatten col, and found it was a very chossy approach with the gravel slipping away more with every steepening step. Quite guickly we found that it was impossible for us to proceed safely and we retreated down and weighed our options. It seemed that the initial approach to the Pas de Chevres was no better and we looked for alternatives. We studied the slope and Cedric thought we could find a less steep route up to the high cliff near to where the ladders began by going along the base of the chossy scree slope and then angling obliquely upward along a route from large boulder to large boulder, using them as islands of safety. So we took a deep breath and up and along we went.

This went OK for a while, but as we got farther along we found that we could feel and hear the rock slope moving underneath with our every step, and the route got inexorably steeper and looser. We became very concerned and thought that we might start a slide, but also that going back was no longer an option. So we continued, very cautiously, and soon reached a point about 5 m from the cliff base where the chain was clearly visible. But unfortunately, it was just out of our reach! – we had gotten into a situation where it was so steep and loose that Lissa could not make further progress – there were no handholds or footholds that she could reach. Then suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, two hikers came along



Lissa with her rescuers Dave and Dewi



The top of the ladder system at Pas de Chevres

the path above us and ask if we need a hand. YES! They were two guys from Wales, a mountain guide, Dave, and his client, Dewi. In a moment, Dave had whipped out a hand line, looped it and passed it down. Then Dave belayed Lissa up, allowing her to scramble the final few metres to the solid path above while Cedric came up on his own.

After a few deep breaths and giving torrents of thanks to our Welsh saviours, we easily followed the chained route up to the ladders. There were about five sets – the first set had 31 rungs, the second 15 rungs and the remaining three

had five, eight and six - with steel-grid platforms across the mountain front between the vertical bits, so not for the acrophobic among us. But they were solid and very welcome. From there, it was a long but gentle walk from the 2855-m col down to Arolla at 1,998 m and, after our experience today, the most heavenly hotel in the world. Showers! Beer! Fabulous food! More beer! Not getting kicked out at 7:30 a.m.!

As well as a new plan.



The Matterhorn from the Stellisee

It was clear that we had underestimated the effort it would take for us to do the Haute Route. What was advised to be six or seven-hour days were turning out to take us nine or ten. And the elevation gains in the guidebook were quite a bit less than those recorded on my GPS. So what to do? We had arranged for a self-guided hike and the tour company had booked accommodation for the rest of the journey and, of course, we wanted to take advantage of that. So we decided to go from an haute-route to an (h)auto-route plan (sorry about that). We took the bus to Sion down in the Rhone Valley and arranged to rent a car for the week. We then drove each day from a hotel way up in one valley down to the Rhone, and then way up again to a hotel in the next valley, and spent the days touring, valley hiking, or taking a gondola from a village up to the alpine, hiking there, and then riding down again.

Our destination was Zermatt, and we got to spend a couple of nights there. It's a car-free town, and you have to leave your vehicle up the valley in Tasch and train into Zermatt. What a beautiful and charming town, with the Matterhorn dominating the upper valley. It really is as impressive and fearsome as in the photos. We still felt like we were alpine hiking just getting to our room – it was 81 steps up to our room on the top floor of our (elevator-less) hotel, which we climbed several times every day. But our window opened up to a view of the Matterhorn – the million dollar view! The full day we were in Zermatt it was raining and overcast, but we hiked up to a small tea house above the town and then toured the town including the Matterhorn Museum, where we saw the rope that had failed during the tragic first ascent.

On our last morning, we tried for a clear view of the Matterhorn and took the mountain railway, which runs through the solid rock at a 30-degree angle, up to Sunnegga and then the gondola to Blauherd. We arrived at Blauherd, just topping out at the clouds that filled the valley – and the Matterhorn stood in all its splendour before us across the Stellisee surrounded by more than 30 other peaks and glaciers – what a magnificent sight. We hiked the Path of the Five Lakes, about a two-hour ramble in the high Alps between small tarns and dammed lakes. A wonderful way to end our visit to the Haute Route.

Despite the change of plan, we had experienced the glorious feeling of being on the Haute Route and arriving at our destination safely, with stories to tell.

Tracing the Holy Mother Ganga

Roxy Jensen October 8 - November 6

Spinning the Google Earth globe, Chris and I pored over ideas for our next so-called vacation. Landing his finger on

the patch of white forming the border between India and China, Chris said, "This is my travel stoke for today."

"Sure." I shrugged. As I reconfirmed the previous summer in the Peruvian Andes, altitude may oftentimes be miserable, so why not pay another visit to the world's highest mountain range.

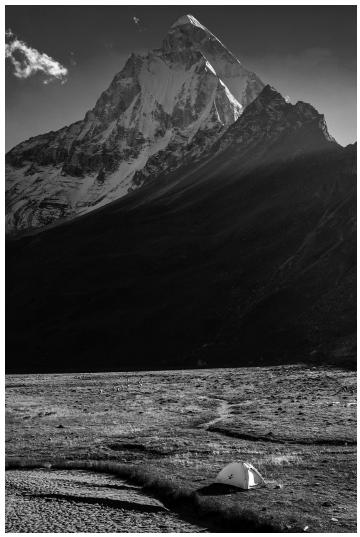
After some surmountable hiccups with visa applications, we were off to New Delhi with an idea to visit the Uttarakhand region of northwestern India and not much more planned. Some of our best experiences have been those edging on the opportunistic side of planning, so we decided to roll with it and allow our plans to unfold as we went along. Arriving in Rishikesh, Chris discovered he had picked up a flu of sorts, with myself following suit soon after. Luckily, we were stationed in a world-renowned yoga mecca arranged along the banks of the river Ganges, with good atmosphere, a cozy enough hotel room to recover for a few days, and, once we were feeling better, an extraordinary three-hour long white-water rafting descent on the Class IV rapids of the Ganges River at a cost of \$8.

Dragging our gear to the local bus depot, we sidestepped the beggar children and boarded the local bus with a destination of Uttarkashi. Feeling woozy off the dose of Gravol I popped in anticipation of the winding, tipsy eight-plus hour journey on Indian mountain roads (and armed with a few strategies for coping with human functions since there were no bathrooms on the bus and no rest stops), we climbed aboard and Tetris-ed our comparatively lofty North American appendages into the tiny seats. Within minutes, the first sounds of passengers vomiting began as the road dipped and turned. A long ride indeed!

Arriving in Uttarkashi at dusk, we had some difficulty locating a suitable hotel as we discovered it was not a tourist town. Finally settling on a dingy apartment, we asked the hotel manager if he could help us find someone to organize porters and logistics for a trek into the basecamp area of Shivling and Meru peaks, with an ambitious plan to start early the next morning. "No problem," he said as he instructed us to settle in and assured us he would have a man.

By 8:30 a.m. the next morning, our man delivered, and we had a guide waiting for us who spoke perfect English, along with a driver and porter. Unfortunately, this guide didn't have much else going for him, but I won't drivel on the details of that – needless to say, he provided interpretation help when we needed it (provided we could locate him as he was usually several hours behind us) and a constant source of entertainment as we watched this train wreck of a man fumble his way through existence.

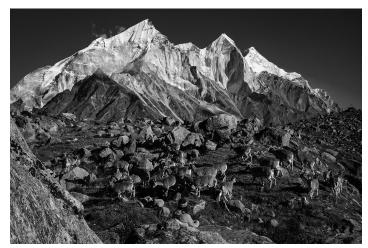
The road to Gangotri was a nail-biter, being exponentially more harrowing than the road to Uttarkashi, which felt like the I-5 in comparison. We estimated the single-lane gravel track generally hung a precarious average of 100 to 400 m above the Ganges River. Several hours later, we unfolded ourselves out of the vehicle and into fresh mountain air, finally above the pollution snaking its way in all directions from



Camped near the base of Mt. Shivling

the epicentre of Delhi. The next morning, having spent the previous evening gasping for that fresh mountain air whilst sleeping at 3,400 m, we began our trek sans guide, who had fabricated an excuse and arrived some three hours after we did, stumbling his way through the dark village of Bhojwasa with nary a headlamp nor appropriate clothing for the freezing temperatures. We didn't mind though, as the ever-improving preview of the gods, which lay looming on either side of the valley ahead, had us excitedly, albeit slowly, working our way towards our destination.

The next morning, we set off for Gomukh, the spiritual headwaters of the Ganges River at the terminus of the Gangotri Glacier and a holy pilgrimage destination for devout Hindu followers seeking absolution from their sins. Up until early 2016, Gomukh resembled the mouth of the holy cow it was named for, although glacial melt had since demolished the characteristic ice cave. Chris and I dipped our toes into the frigid waters and shivered as we watched pilgrims disrobe and plunge their heads below the milky surface. When our guide showed up sometime later, we regrouped and obtained directions for the next destination, Tapovan Meadows, at an elevation of 4,460 m. Watching our porter, Symon, gracefully hop and skip up the loose boulders while carrying a crush-



Enjoying the view of Bhagirathi I, II & III amongst a herd of bharal

ingly heavy load caused us to quicken our pace and realize that our low island peaks had us ill-conditioned for the diaphanous air of the Himalaya. Despite being a relatively popular trail, the path was nevertheless fraught with dangers. The 2013 North Indian floods had all but washed out portions of the trail, and delicate footing was required in some washout sections high above a large drop to the Bhagirathi River below.

Tapovan: place of austerity and beauty. It's no wonder the sadhus and holy men choose to make their practise here in the caves and huts at the base of Mt. Shivling (the divine representation of Lord Shiva) and Mt. Meru (in Hinduism, the centre of the Universe). The name tapovan originates from Sanskrit, with the root word tapas denoting pain and suffering. Despite the striking beauty, it was near here that tragedy had and would strike; just days prior, two Polish mountaineers had perished on the flanks of Mt. Shivling. Hours after we passed through Gomukh, a trekker slipped on the same trail, losing his life. We were later to discover that he had slipped in the precise spot we had thought to be a dangerous section of trail, reinforcing the notion of relishing the moments you have.

The next few days were spent camping amongst herds of bharal, day hiking along the moraines below Mt. Shivling and towards Mt. Meru, and sleeping on the floor of a stone ashram, in the company of a holy muni baba (silent ascetic) who lives in the mountains year-round and hasn't spoken a word in over a decade. Returning to Uttarkashi after the trek, our porter Pardeep was keen to return to his remote mountainside village, where he is also a shepherd, with the novelty of foreigners in tow. Arriving in the settlement to a large reception after an hour-long uphill hike (the village was cut off from all road access during the 2013 floods), we sat cross-legged on the dirt floor and gorged down a spicy lunch complemented by achar and plenty of tepid goat buttermilk whilst a crowd of a dozen or so men stood over us awaiting our grunts of approval. I even attempted to help prepare some chapattis in a smoky hut, but upon seeing my sad attempts at forming dough into something resembling a flat circle, Pardeep's beautiful sister was quick to allow me to return to the observatory role.



Varanasi

Arriving back in Delhi after a few more days in Rishikesh, we resigned ourselves to the conformity and crowds of the tourist track, visiting sites such as the Taj Mahal, Jaipur and Ranthambore as we wound our way along the Ganges to the holy city of Varanasi. By this point, the Ganges had transformed from the milky, freezing waters of the Bhagirathi tributary erupting from Gomukh, to the crystal blue, sharp waters providing us with Class IV rapids in Rishikesh, to the mud-brown sacred bathing liquid that was now progressing its way past 32 streams of raw sewage from Varanasi alone. Despite the crowds, the experience remained unique as we followed Mother Ganga from her source, the smiles and endearing experiences of the locals we met along our journey to remain with us for years to come.

Participants: Chris and Roxy Jensen

Bushwhacking below Kanchenjunga, Nepal

Ken Wong November 4–27

We had arrived at Cheram at 3,870 m yesterday. Today was our acclimation day. The day's objective was to "climb high and sleep low," i.e., ascend a few hundred meters along the ridge of Taskopakiya Danda at 5,310 m to the north east and descend back to Cheram to sleep. The next day we planned to move to the last tea house on the southern approach to Kanchenjunga, Ramchaur at 4,580 m.

We crossed the bridge that spans the foaming Simbuwa Khola. This is the river that drains the Yalung Glacier at the south west aspect of the Kanchenjunga five summits. The steep trail went through thickets of junipers and cinnamon-scented dwarf rhododendrons. We scaled over a three-meter high pile of tree branches which blocked the yaks leaving

the higher pastures. We entered a lovely valley surrounded by tall pines and tree rhododendrons. It must be a stunning sight here in spring when the flowers are blossoming. Our guide said that there is a route that continues to Sikkim, India, only 10 km to the east. We turned north, scrambled over large boulders to gain the grassy ridge. It was the first day that our group reached 4,000 m so we could really feel the rarefied air of 60 per cent relative oxygen. I was well acclimatized as I had spent many days over 5,000 m in elevation in the Everest's Solu-Khumbu region during the previous two weeks.

The elevation took a toll on the rest of the group however, and they lagged far behind. I waited for a while, but then impatience got the better of me, and I marched upward. The river valley opened below and huge snowy Himalayan summits appeared to the north, Boktoh at 6,114 m, the sacred mountain Jannu at 7,711 m, Yalung Kang at 8,505 m and Kanchenjunga at 8,586 m - the third highest in the world. I spent an hour at 4,600 m scanning the soundings with my monocular and took gigabytes of photos and 4k videos. I studied the notorious steep 1,100-m climb above Cheram at the west side of the valley. After reaching the south base camp in two days, we would come back to Cheram, hike up to the pass and then descend 800 m to the Ghunsa Khola valley to the north to continue to the north base camp. I savoured my solitude in this sublime environment, the deep blue sky, the warm sun, the soft wind, the crisp air, the roaring kholas, the mighty glaciers, the vertical walls and the majestic summits. Utterly alone, I was such an insignificant transient in this rugged, primeval landscape.

At 1:30 p.m., my growling stomach interrupted my thoughts. I did not want to miss the late lunch of fried egg noodles at the lodge. I headed down. To avoid a steep section, I went west and came across a well worn yak trail going north. Being curious, I followed it. A couple minutes later, a big cairn marked the steep descent of the trail to the valley. Ah, this route looked promising. My spirit of exploration took hold, and I followed it. In 45 minutes, I was down to the bottom of a side valley which joined the east bank of the main valley. My waiting lunch was merely 2.5 km to the south west and down river.

However, the well-defined yak trail entered a wet, grassy, rocky flat and radiated into multiple faint paths. I wandered around falling through water holes. Crap, it was too much effort to go back to my incoming route, four hundred meters above. I would just have to push on. I surveyed the complex environment. A hundred meters below me was the smaller channel of the river. Then two ridges of the terminal moraine separated it from the main channel of the river six or seven hundred meters away on the west side of the valley. The steep lower banks of the valley looked quite bushy with no obvious paths.

I hurried down on a long narrow ridge to a grassy bench and stopped to frame a photo of an empty stone and wood yak corral. The bench soon became bushy and undulated. I forced through bushes, scaled over rocks, and jumped over



At 5,440 m elevation above Pang Pema or Kanchenjunga north basecamp in far Eastern Nepal looking SSE, left to right: Kanchenjunga 8,586 m with the snow banner, Yalung Kang 8505m and Kanbachen 7,802 m above the hanging glacier.

gullies while getting pierced by thorny shrubs. The air was filled with the scent of crushed cinnamon rhododendron. After plunging into hidden holes a few times, I turned tail, following GPS waypoints back to the yak corral. I decided to try my luck by the river instead. I scrambled down the steep bank and ran along the river. Soon the bank became bouldery, slippery and narrow. I started climbing up the bank. I noticed that the other bank of the river seemed passable. I decided to give it a go. I found a narrower spot to plunk down several big rocks as stepping stones and carefully hopped across the chilly torrent. I was soon scrambling over boulders and log jams, which was no joy. I yanked myself up the bushy bank and struggled up onto the open moraine with scattered dead trees.

I was now in the middle of the valley between the two channels of the river. I took some photos of the rising moon between the peaks over the naked pines. I sped down the open slope but after a few hundred meters, the way was blocked by a pine forest with impenetrable undergrowth. I stumbled around and followed a narrow stream into the heart of darkness, slipping, sliding, and crawling my way down to the flat where the two branches of the river converged. I could smell the wood smoke from the lodges, which were only 500 m away, above the right side of the river. A problem though, crossing the foaming river at this point would be suicidal. I backtracked along the left branch to a narrower span and leaped for the other bank with a hiking pole in each hand, only getting one sock wet. I broke off some ice at the river edge to suck on. I was thirsty after all the excitement.

When the river edge became a headwall, I climbed up into a rhododendron forest with tangled branches. I crashed forward until the bushes forced me back toward the river. I swung from tree to tree, 20 m above the torrent below, until I hit a landslide gully, a 25-m wide gash with a swim at the bottom. Yikes. I unbuckled the chest and waist straps of my pack and shortened the hiking pole. Using the pole as an ice axe and digging it into slope, I ran across. I hoped that my forward momentum would keep me from being swallowed



The bushwhacking valley south west aspect. Kanchenjunga main, central and south summits are at the far left. Kabru I-IV and Rathong are in the middle.

up by the angry white serpent below. Thankfully, the path got easier at the other side. In the encroaching darkness, I saw a shadow dissecting the white serpent. It was the bridge! I stopped in the middle of it and took two ISO 6400 photos to record the time. It was 5:30 p.m.

I pushed open the kitchen door. The wood smoke stung my eyes. My friends were elated to see me. Liz gave me a bear hug. Our guide did not know about my expert bushwhacking skills gained from years of practice on Vancouver Island. He had sent out the porters to look for me an hour before. Now they were lost in the dark!

A summary of the Kanchenjunga south and then north base camp trek for your reference.

- Fly Kathmandu to Bhadrapur at the south east corner of Nepal.
- Ten-hour jeep ride over two days to the trail head.
- Seven days on the south side trail to the 4740 m view point Okhordung near the south Yalung Kanchenjunga base camp.
- One day backtrack to Cheram. Two-day ascent to Selele and down to Ghunsa on the north side trail. Four days to 5140 m Pang Pema Kanchenjunga north base camp. Six days descend to Taplejung. Two days jeep and flight back to Kathmandu.
- Total: 16 trekking days, four rest days and four traveling days.
- Costs: US\$20-30/day/client for food and lodging in the mountains. US\$30/day for one guide. Optional porter is US\$20/porter/day. Flight US\$170/person one way. Jeep US\$250 one way.
- Beware steep trails, loose trails, narrow trails, many landslides, broken bridge crossings, high elevation, off-trail bushes and drinks such as the fiery raksi and the warm tongba made from millet.

If you can spare three more weeks, add a trek to the Solu-Khumbu region. I flew to Lukla, then went up to the 5,400 m Chukhung Ri with stunning view of Lhotse, Makalu and Ama Dablam. I visited Everest Base Camp, and then watched the sunset over Qomolangma from the 5,540 m Kala Patthar. Went over Cho La to Gokyo where I stayed for three nights. I watched the glorious sunset from Gokyo Ri and walked up to Gokyo fifth lake, then went over Renjo La to exit through Thame. I followed the old Jiri trail to Pikey Peak to say good-bye to the Himalayan giants. Took the 11 hours shared jeep ride from Salleri to Kathmandu.

The trail from Lukla to EBC is full of trekkers and their support staff. However, the high passes of Cho La and Renjo La weed out many people so Gokyo and Thame have far less traffic. Few people walk the Jiri trail now. Lamjura La Pass is a noisy flyway for the 30-40 daily flights to Lukla. Most hardy trekkers take a jeep from Kathmandu and hike in from Salleri or Phaplu.

The EBC and three passes trek can be done solo, no guide or porter.

For more information, Google the place names listed above.

Participants: Ian Barclay, Diane Bernard, Liz Williams, Ken Wong and Cyril Szambelan

"Don't Look Down"

Liz Williams November

It was a thrill to be back in crazy, crowded Kathmandu, which had a warm familiarity seeing as I'd only left 11 months ago.

Ken Wong had suggested the trek – a circuit of the south and north base camps of Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world. The Kanchenjunga region is a remote, unroaded Himalayan wilderness conservation area in northeast Nepal, requiring a Sherpa guide and relevant permits. We planned on 22 days with some flexibility thrown in (eventually it was a 23-day round trip from Kathmandu).

Our guide, Siri Pokhrel, four of us from Victoria, plus a young French-Brit, started out by flying to Bhadrapur on the Nepal/Sikkim border. From the plane, we could see the vast Kanchenjunga Massif, floating surreal above the clouds like a fairytale land in the sky, accessible only by winged chariot. It seemed inconceivable that we could ever approach its pristine glory on foot.

From Bhadrapur, we took a tortuous two-day jeep ride along 270 km of dirt road, truck-eating potholes, and hairpin dropoffs. When we finally left the jeep at 3 p.m. on the second day and started climbing on foot, the previous week sitting

on the hotel rooftop drinking Everest beer caught up with us. We were unprepared for a four-hour slog, two in pitch blackness with precarious vertical drop-offs. I'd left my head-lamp in my duffel bag, and it was challenging to manage two hiking poles and a flashlight on a narrow goat track 700 m above the river, but at least the dark hid some of the horror.

We'd planned to stay in teahouses en route, and later when we ran into one or two camping parties, felt huge relief at this decision. We knew it would be cold, and saw how those parties suffered. At several points we had what amounted to a "home-stay" as it was clear that family members were being evicted from their simple rooms to make room for us. Diane and I stayed in room replete with posters of gorgeous Hindi ladies and often a shelf surprisingly full of cosmetics! The teahouses always provide one's food, and it was a huge comfort to warm up by the smoky kitchen fires with garlic soup and warm rachsi, and to request each night a litre of tato pani (hot water) for the Nalgene bottle that was to serve as a hot water bottle in one's sleeping bag.

five or six hours, then an equal descent. All trails in the Himal go up-up-up and down-down-down, there's no in-between. Occasionally Siri would assure us of a plateau area on top: "Nepali flat" that is - up/down, up/down - it became a bit of a joke. Starting on the south route first, we gained altitude fast within a few days, and much of the trek from then on was above 4,000 m.

Being far from road access, the little villages of stone huts are nothing short of medieval. Sometimes we had a wooden building with finger-wide gaps in the walls or window shutters (no glass), sometimes a thin foam mattress but often just a Tibetan rug on boards, sometimes a cobble or mud floor. At one home-stay, in Pholi, our room was used to store the winter supply of cabbages under the beds, and I had to chase out the goats who'd found, and were feasting on, the store.



Cosy bedroom

Each day we woke to an iridescent, crystalline, bluebird sky. In six weeks in Nepal we barely saw a cloud. As we gained altitude and the highest peaks of the Himal came into view, what surely must be the origin of the term "enlightenment" became apparent, for this vast mountain-scape is not merely

white, it is beyond the whitest of whites, it is pure light itself. It is the truest Shangri-La, heart-stopping, eye-watering, mind-obliterating in its sheer beauty. There was not a single day, for all the mundane concerns we westerners have, that I did not thank Buddha and Shiva and Vishnu for graciously allowing me to partake in the wondrous beauty of this glorious land. Each night I went to sleep, filtering out barking dogs, snoring companions, the conversations below of our porters with the locals, knowing and never doubting that I was where I wanted to be. I am eternally grateful for these experiences which are riches beyond measure.

The first week had us approaching the south base camp from where all technical attempts at Kanchenjunga originate in the spring (the north side being fraught with avalanches). We'd climbed gradually up the river courses, the Kabell Khola, Amji Khola, and eventually up the Simbuwa Khola, passing from lowlands of rice, black cardamom, bamboo, ferns, fronds and rhododendrons to a dry rocky landscape rife with rockfall and landslide, bespeckled with Pearly Everlasting and dormant ground azaleas.

After reaching the celebratory prayer flags of the south base camp, we retraced our steps to the village of Tseram, from where we would cross steeply over four passes in two days



South base camp



Chang jars

to the north side of the circuit. Occasionally, we'd step aside to allow a yak train to pass, yet the terrain looked to all the world impossible for them as we clambered and bouldered, using hands and feet and poles together. That first day, after reaching the precipitous Mirgen La, we rounded a ridge to a magnificent sight of Makalu, the fifth highest mountain in the world. After a night in the stone huts of Selele La, we headed down to the Ghunsa Khola, the river that we'd follow upstream to its source near the North Kanchenjunga base camp.

Our teahouse at Ghunsa had a traditional Tibetan dining room, where the rugs were unfolded at night for the family to sleep and brass-ringed, wooden chang jars lined the shelves. We rested up here, ordered buckets of tato pani for showers, rinsed out some of our dusty clothes, and befriended the black, curly-tailed dogs who seem to be a special local breed. Astonishingly, a satellite dish provided BBC World News, and a week before the US election we caught a clip about Donald Trump's real estate success. "Well, thank God he's not being called president elect," one of our party said. It took another couple of days and a crackling kitchen radio for our disbelief to be realized.

Leaving Ghunsa, we headed for the north base camp, continually climbing. The altitude, the sheer hard work (we were probably burning 5,000 calories a day), the fried food and lack of anything fresh, the lack of any "comfort" in the primitive facilities – all these factors paled in light of the sheer, relentless, freezing cold. I've never been so cold for so long in my life. When the sun was up, and when we were climbing, we could feel quite warm. Once the sun was gone, it was bitter. Inside the stone huts at Lonak it was -12 C. Outside, it was closer to - 20 C. I dreaded having to get up in the night to leave a patch of instant amethyst ice on the ground, but I have to say, the ethereal moonlit landscape and the sweep of the Milky Way made up for it.

Although landslides had become de rigeur, there was one above Kampachen that had me ready to turn back and give up on the north base camp altogether. The mountainside had fallen off into the roiling drink below. Our porters kicked



North base camp



Twiq bridge

their way up, climbing high in the loose dust, managing to avoid material falling all around them from above. It was only when Ian pointed out to me that they were nearly over and no-one had yet fallen to their death that I managed to go on, with Siri's assistance. Another landslide prevented us from going beyond Pang Pema, the north base camp, to view the Kanchenjunga glacier more fully, but we did manage to add a few more metres up a side hill, making our highest point 5,200 m.

Despite the slides, we rejoiced on the route down. We'd sat on the slopes where we saw the blue sheep graze and watched snow cocks, alpine chats and white-winged redstarts. We overlooked the vast ice fields and moraines of the Kanchenjunga Massif, with the exquisite beauty of Mount Jannu, the Goddess, Mount Nepal and others, all filling our field of view from the ground to the clouds, separating the sanctity of Nepal from the subcontinent of India. We were heading down, where our cracked skin could heal, where those of our party with altitude nausea and hacking coughs could recuperate.

Yet our final week was almost the most difficult. We wanted to be warm, we wanted the terrain to even out, we'd met our objectives, and now it should be easy. But it wasn't to be. We continued daily to hoist ourselves up and down thousands of feet. We crossed perilous twig bridges over churning gorges, one in particular that defied imagination. Even the last day, as we approached Tapeljung to meet our jeep, we sweated uphill for five hours.

Back in welcoming Kathmandu, we were saddened to read of a jeep that had gone over one of the steep drop-offs. It had plunged 700 m in the night with a family of 12 on board.

Participants: Ken Wong, Diane Bernard, Liz Williams, Ian Barclay from Victoria, BC; Cyril from the UK.



Fansipan summit marker

Fansipan – Vietnam's Highest Mountain

Lindsay Elms November 13

Just a few minutes before 6 a.m. our guide showed up at the foyer of the Fansipan View Hotel in the tourist town of Sapa in Northwest Vietnam. This was the hotel Val and I had booked into the day before with the expectation of having a view of Mount Fansipan (Phang Xi Pang) before heading off to the mountain. However, it was not to be so you could say we were climbing it blindly. At 3,143 m, Fansipan is not only the highest mountain in Vietnam, but in all of Indochina – Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Although we weren't too happy about having to hire a guide, we turned the thought around by at least admitting we were supporting local business. Our guide, Cham, was a Black Hmong, a member of one of the ethnic minority groups of the moun-



View from Fansipan

tainous region of Vietnam. At 20, he had been a porter for a guiding company for two years and now he had graduated to guide, his daily pay rate going up from \$15 per day to \$25.

After leaving the hotel, we walked down to the plaza and waited a couple of minutes for our mini bus, which whisked us the 15 kilometres to Tram Ton Pass (often referred to as Heaven's Gate) at roughly 1,900 m, where the trail began. But first Cham checked in at the office of the Hoang Lien Son National Park to pay the entrance fee. Having done so at 6:30 a.m., we started down the trail. Down because we had to descend 50 metres before beginning the ascent. Of course, we had lots of questions for Cham about the mountain and the climb, and he had a few for us, but one of the first from him was how old were we. He said that his father was 35 and his grandparents were 55 and 58. I could just see him thinking that he was guiding two people old enough to be his grandparents, up the mountain as a day trip. Most parties take two to three days for the climb, staying at one or two of the camps located on the mountain. After a few minutes, he said that we had to be on the summit between 11 and 12, this being the turn around time. I told him "no problem."

After an hour and a half on the trail, we arrived at the first camp at 2,250 m. I told Cham we would stop for couple of minutes to have a quick bite to eat and a drink. This wasn't quite like a climb back home where we could quickly dash to the summit and descend with a minimum of food and drink. I wanted to make sure we remained hydrated. After five min-

utes, we started back up the trail. A few minutes later, Cham said that we were behind schedule and that at this pace we would be returning in the dark. I just smiled and said "no problem." A couple of minutes later he said there was also the option of riding the cable-car down if we reached the summit late. I just smiled and said "yes, that is always an option."

Cham started talking about his family: his young wife and four-month old baby which he missed because this was a fascinating time in the baby's life. Cham said that this time of the year was a busy time for guiding on the mountain therefore he was away from home a lot. Most of his trips up Fansipan were two- or three-day trips and rarely were they one-day trips. I held my tongue but wanted to say, "then why don't you get a job closer to home." I got the feeling he was trying to make out that the mountain was too much for us to do as a day trip, and we should ride down on the cable car. This meant that he would get home quicker.

In February 2016, the cable car the government had been building over the last few years to whisk tourists to the top of Fansipan was opened and hundreds of visitors took advantage of the service to reach the 'roof of Indochina'. We knew that the option was there to pay for a ride down the mountain if we were tired, but we both couldn't see this happening. If we climbed the mountain on our shanks' pony, we would get down the mountain the same way. Besides, we knew that we were strong on the descent.



Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms make the summit

After three and a half hours, we arrived at the upper base camp at 2,750 m. Cham asked us if we wanted to stop for lunch. It was cool, verging on cold, we were sweating lightly, and there was a strong breeze with moisture in the air. We didn't want to stop for long and get chilled so we just had a quick drink. It was only 10 a.m., and I knew the summit wasn't any further than an hour and a half away at the most. As we climbed, we started passing people who had stayed at the upper camp last night and were now returning from the summit. They were looking damp but happy. Thirty minutes later, we were at a saddle at 2,940 m and then had to descend 100 m. Not something we cherished, but that is part of being in the mountains.

We knew we were getting close because the sound of the cable-car was getting louder. Visibility was minimal, and there was a light drizzle in the air. Next thing I looked up and saw a gondola 20 m overhead, with all the tourists (mostly Vietnamese and Chinese) waving down at us. At 11:05, we reached the stairs that go from the cable-car exit to the summit. We were now in a throng of people, some who complained about the 300 steps to the top, others telling their friends they hate them for bringing them up there. Theatrics!

At 11:15, we reached the summit. There was no view to be had and it was a human zoo on top. We tried to get a photo of just ourselves beside the summit tripod, but it was impossible. Some of the tourists also wanted to get their photo taken with us on the summit. I may have been thinking about one of our remote island summits where we rarely encounter anyone else, but I was pretty stoked to be up here. We spent about 20 minutes on top before beginning the descent. Again, Cham asked us if we wanted to ride the cable car down. We both said no, and I could see the hint of disappointment in his eyes. No short day on the mountain for him.

Twenty minutes from the top, as we passed under a rock overhang, Cham asked us if we wanted to stop for lunch here. We were damp, it was cool and we didn't want to stop to eat in this location, where we knew we would quickly get chilled. We told him no and pushed on to the upper camp.

There were two huts at this camp, one for the guests and one where the guides/porters cook and stay. We went into

the guests' hut to get out of the wind and waited for Cham to bring us our lunch. He had carried it all the way to the top and back down to here and seemed a little perturbed about having to do this. Although not that hungry, we did nibble on some of the lunch Cham brought us.

We didn't sit around for too long as it wasn't very warm. After eating, we went over to the other hut to let Cham know that we were ready to continue the descent and found him sitting beside a fire eating hot noodle soup. We had a cold meat and veggie platter. I don't need to let you know what Val was thinking.

I said to Cham that he could catch us up. He agreed. Cham underestimated our speed because it took him quite a while before he caught up to us. As we raced (not literally) down the mountain, we started passing the people who we had met earlier in day on their way down from the summit. After dropping down below the mist and clouds, the temperature warmed up and we were soon able to shed our rain jackets. It became quite pleasant out. We passed through the lower camp and, just beyond that, we passed the last of the people who had summited from the high camp earlier in the day. Cham was obviously impressed and started calling Val "superwoman." At 4 p.m., we reached the national park office at Tram Ton Pass. The whole ascent and descent took us 10 hours. Although a 20-year old like Cham could do the climb in a shorter time, it was a pretty good time for two people the age of his grandparents. However, there is a moral to the story and that is not to underestimate the strength and stamina of older climbers.

Anyway, while we waited for our ride, Cham came out of the park office and gave us both a certificate saying that we had conquered Fansipan and a medal to hang around our necks. Not something that we needed, but it showed us what ascending to "the roof of Indochina" means to the Vietnamese. It's a special place for them. A touching thought.

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Postscript: About 10 days later we were in the Mekong Delta town of Chau Doc in Vietnam's An Giang Province near the Cambodian border. A few kilometres to the west was Sam Mountain (Núi Sam) that on many websites is said to be the highest mountain in the Mekong Delta. "Now here was another challenge," I thought, "the highest mountain, irresistible." At 234 m, it is not that high but it does have the unique designation. After a little research I soon found out it is not the highest mountain in the delta, but we still had go to the summit (there is a road to the top) and visit the Bà Chúa Xứ temple complex and see the view overlooking the vast Mekong Delta. For those who want to know what the highest mountain is in the delta, it is nearby Cam Mountain (Núi Cấm) at 710m in the Thất Sơn Range, also known as Bảy Núi (Seven Mountains).



2016 Leadership Recognition Contest Winners

Christine Fordham

In our continued efforts to have more leaders putting on more trips on our trip schedule, the Leadership Recognition Contest has been continued as a full-fledged program. In 2016, the club offered 249 days on which you could participate in an ACCVI trip or event, with 56 leaders offering scheduled trips and events. A big difference this year was you only got trip points for waivers submitted. I'm happy to say, we had the highest-ever number of waivers sent in. The 70 waivers received is a stark and welcome contrast to all-time low of 24. But the real winners were ACCVI members, who had a plethora of trip choices.

The 2016 winners were:

- 1. Catrin Brown Arc'teryx softshell jacket (embroidered with club crest)
- 2. George Butcher \$100 MEC gift Card
- 3. Mike Hubbard \$100 MEC Gift Card
- 4. Chris Istace \$100 MEC Gift Card
- 5. Alois Schoenberger \$50 MEC Gift Card
- 6. Caroline Tansley \$50 MEC Gift Card:
- 7. Three-way tie (just because they were trying so hard for the jacket): Tim Turay, Peggy Taylor and Colin Mann ACC Water Bottles

Leader badges were awarded last year to everyone who did an "outdoor trip". The eleven new earners this year are: Brianna Cook-Coates, Colin Mann, Chris Ruttan, Natascha Salway, Erich Schellhammer, Jes Scott, Anna Lena Steiner, Roger Taylor, Karun Thanjavur, Sandra Vitulano and Lyle Young.

Earning 10 Trip Day Leader Badges: Catrin Brown, Finn Steiner, Stefan Gessinger, Nadja Steiner, Chris Istace, Iain Sou, Sonia Langer, Caroline Tansley, Alois Schoenberger and Tim Turay.

Earning 35 Trip Day Leader Badges: George Butcher. George won the jacket last year and, in fine style, presented Catrin with her cool new Arc'teryx jacket this year.

Thank you to Arc'teryx, MEC and the national club, our generous sponsors of these prizes.

The Leadership Recognition Program continues in 2017 with same rules and more great prizes. Points can be earned for all scheduled trips and events, as long as the waivers are submitted to librarian@accvi.ca. Cumulative points can be viewed at: http://accvi.ca/documents/ACCVI%20Leader%20 Recognition%20Cumulative%20Points.pd









































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