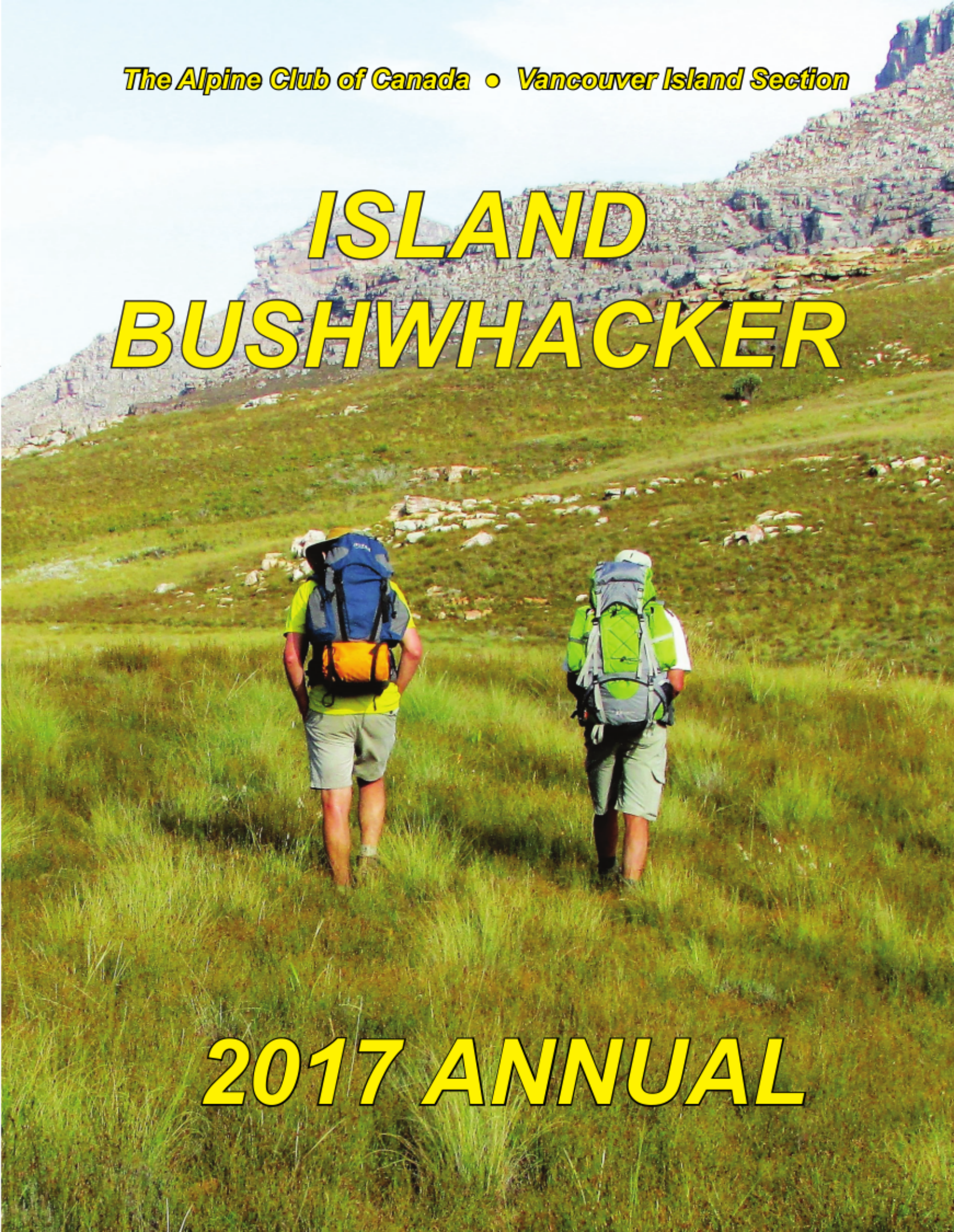
The Alpine Club of Canada • Vancouver Island Section

ISLAND BUSHWHACKER



2017 ANNUAL

THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA

VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

ISLAND BUSHWHACKER ANNUAL

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VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION
OF
THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA

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Cover image:
Hiking under an African Sun in South Africa (see p. 39)

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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Catrin Brown

Catrin Brown, ACCVI chairperson

Reflecting on the past year at our AGM in January, I referred to it as “2017: that was the year that was”. 2017 - the year when the snow came early and in abundance. The year when educational courses and workshops filled faster than the snow melt in the spring. The year our rock climbers roamed far and wide in search of those coveted narrow cracks.

2017 was the year we had a record three members selected to attend North Face Leadership camps, and had several of our members serve on national committees. The year our executive swelled to over 25 active members and we were pulling out extra chairs for our meetings.

2017 was the year we celebrated celestial events with a solar eclipse, solstice hike and a full moon at New Year. It was the year we dodged smokey skies (almost) to have approx 20% of our membership attend week-long summer camps in the Coast Mountains and Assiniboine Provincial Park. The year when – with no fake news – we had “the biggest crowd ever” at the late summer barbecue.

In a somewhat less glamorous way, 2017 was the year when our website was severely hacked. And so, turning problem to progress, it was the year when we got a new website.

2017 was the year we decided to celebrate Canada’s 150th anniversary by aiming to climb and record our ascents of 150 Vancouver Island peaks. We climbed over 200.

And to cap it all, 2017 was the year when we set up a two-month construction camp high in the mountains, assembled a rotating core of worker-bees from across the Island and - build a hut. Just like that!

This sweeping summary may give some insight into the year’s highlights, but does not attempt to do justice to the collective energy that makes all this possible. Let me start with the executive committee and say what a privilege it is to chair this group of enthusiastic, collaborative and thoughtful individuals. They are the engine that drives this club, the reason why I think it fair to say that by almost any metric, we punch above our weight in the national scheme of things. We are indebted also to the many trip leaders and others who volunteer in different ways to contribute to this thriving community. And never underestimate the importance of showing up and being part of the many activities. Thanks to you all. The minutes of the AGM are posted on our website, and contain detailed reports from each executive member of their role. This leaves me here just to focus on a few further highlights and signature events.

The construction of the 5040 Peak hut, the 33rd ACC backcountry hut, has without doubt been a shot in the arm, not just for our section but for the broader outdoors community on the Island. Keeping to the ambitious schedule that Chris Jensen and the hut committee set out, the team of volunteers beat the odds and took the hut to lock-up stage before the winter storms hit. An amazing achievement. Thanks and awe to Chris Ruttan, our indefatigable construction manager, as well as to the hordes of volunteers who swarmed to the site from all over the Island and beyond. The fact that the crew included many non-members and new members speaks volumes about the enthusiasm for the project that is out there. Spring 2018 will see the construction camp start up again, ably directed by Nadja Steiner.

Fund-raising for the hut has been percolating away in the background of 2017, and is ongoing (please note dear reader). Money is indeed the fuel that makes much of our activity possible, and happily our section finances are in excellent shape in the capable hands of our treasurer, Clarke Gourlay. The Banff Mountain Film Festival, held in November, is our major fund raiser, and we are indebted to Krista Zala who has handled this so competently over the years. As Krista is now stepping down from this role, we hope we will be able to continue her trick of achieving a capacity audience with zero investment. Thank you Krista.

I think we deserve a collective congratulations for our achievements in “Vancouver Island 150”, our own celebration of Canada’s sesquicentennial. Mission accomplished, well done us! The project developed into

Stefan and Evan keep count of their Mackenzie traverse summits. (From the VI-150 collection.)

a fun celebration of our Island peaks, showcasing the diversity of mountain environments, climate, people, photo styles and much more. Our sincere thanks to Mary Sanseverino our computer guru who turned idea into reality and gave us this online legacy. At the end of the AGM, we enjoyed a photo show of the year's entries and gave out some light-hearted awards for trivial random achievements (lowest peak, best dressed climbers etc).

Recorded on VI-150 was what I think is one of the most impressive Island mountaineering feats for a long time – the complete traverse of the Mackenzie Range summits (all 9 of them), completed by Stefan Gessinger and Evan Devault in June over 44 hours. We are quite sure this is a first, congratulations to Stefan and Evan.

From the VI-150 collection. Stefan and Evan keep count of their Mackenzie traverse summits.

And another likely first was the Easter ski traverse by Chris Jensen, Chris Ruttan and Neil Borecky from Adder Mountain to 5040 Peak. It seems only right that it was Chris and Chris who got to claim 5040 Peak on the map.

Our education and leadership programs have helped members to gain new skills and experiences, and have encouraged new leaders to step forwards. The results are well reflected in the rich offerings on the schedule, truly the life-blood of our section. We aim to cater for a variety of activities in all seasons – if you haven't done so already, please consider how you might contribute to the mix.

To steal a cliché, "Diversity is our strength". I like to think of diversity in all the ways it can be imagined, knowing that everyone has a contribution to make. For years we have had a successful Trail Rider program for people who could not otherwise access the wilderness, and we are justifiably proud of our active youth program. In the spirit of increasing our outreach to specific groups who may initially not feel confident or compelled to take part, leaders have chosen to offer trips specifically for women, for LGBTQ+ individuals and their families, and for recent immigrants. Thank you to the leaders of these initiatives, and for all the work that's done to make people feel welcome.

In-between trips, our social and armchair mountaineering events and communications help keep us connected and inspired. Early in the year we faced the obvious fact that we are grounded without our website, and special thanks go to Jes Scott for helping us function again with a new clean and reliable web presence. Sincere thanks also to the coordinators of our beautiful monthly newsletter and Bushwhacker Annual, the monthly slide shows, Christmas parties and summer barbecue. The feedback and attendance show how much these are valued contributions to our community.

Stewardship of our mountain environment is an important part of our mission, and demands our ongoing vigilance. While we celebrate the growth in our membership and the increase in the population accessing the back-country, we know this brings new questions. Braiding and erosion of trails is a growing concern in many of our favourite places. A work-party, organised by Russ Moir with the support of the Regional District of Nanaimo, did some remediation work on the over-used trail up the Judges' route on Mt Arrowsmith in July. We also took some baby steps during the year to address the increasing restrictions on access to the backcountry with a letter-writing campaign targeted at politicians, and meetings with forest company representatives. While some responses have been quietly encouraging, we know there is no silver bullet here, and it will take our collective energy to increase the volume of those baby steps and achieve legislated change.

And so, while 2017 was the year that was, a banner year for our section with much to celebrate, 2018 has much promise. We have a hut to finish and to plan for its official opening sometime in the fall. Our ever-popular summer camps will be augmented by an inter-generational family camp. And, with your help, we will continue to work towards promoting and protecting what we value most.

Thank you all.

VANCOUVER ISLAND

Mountaineering with Youth

February - July

I count myself very fortunate to have been part of Harry and Nadja's kids program from the beginning: that storied trip up and (fortunately) down Mt. Albert Edward with an unruly brood. Over the years since, I have been on many memorable trips and had lots of fun in the Kids and Youth program; however, for me, the coolest thing has been to watch the kids mature in years and knowledge to where they are leading trips and joining the executive as adults.

In late 2016, with some trepidation and sadness (boy, I miss those trips with the Steiners when my kids were young), I took over as the program coordinator for Kids and Youth. Nadja provided me with her contact list and, with her help, I compiled all the information on all the trips they had led: over nine years they had led 57 trips, of which 21 were mountaineering trips, 11 climbing, 11 skiing, nine hiking and five other events. Members of the program summited Mt. Albert Edward three times, Jutland Mountain twice, Kings Peak twice; Cokely, Becher, Tom Taylor and Sutton Peak once. I then commemorated these achievements with a slideshow and, a few months later, presented Nadja and Harry with a golden boot at the AGM. Thank you Harry and Nadja.

In 2017, we completed the program's tenth year and 64th trip. We started the year with a hike up Mt. Work followed by a gym climbing session at the Boulders. Then followed a ski/snowshoe trip to Lady Lake in Paradise Meadows. We had lots of fresh snow and quite a bit of stoke among the kids, which carried them through the long process of building quinzhees and a deluxe kitchen. The following day we went tobogganing and stress tested our quinzhees (four adults and five kids on top made no discernable impact). A storm was forecast so we opted to head out in late afternoon, arriving at the Mt. Washington trail network with headlamps on.

Our next trip was the annual Mt. Cain spring break ski trip. We had much fun skiing as a large group through the trees in great conditions. The stoke was high, especially among the parents who had been grooming their kids over the years for such an experience. Later in the spring, we completed another day trip (which are quite popular with young families) going up Mt. Finlayson and climbing at Mt. Wells.

Lions Cabin by Evelyn Sou

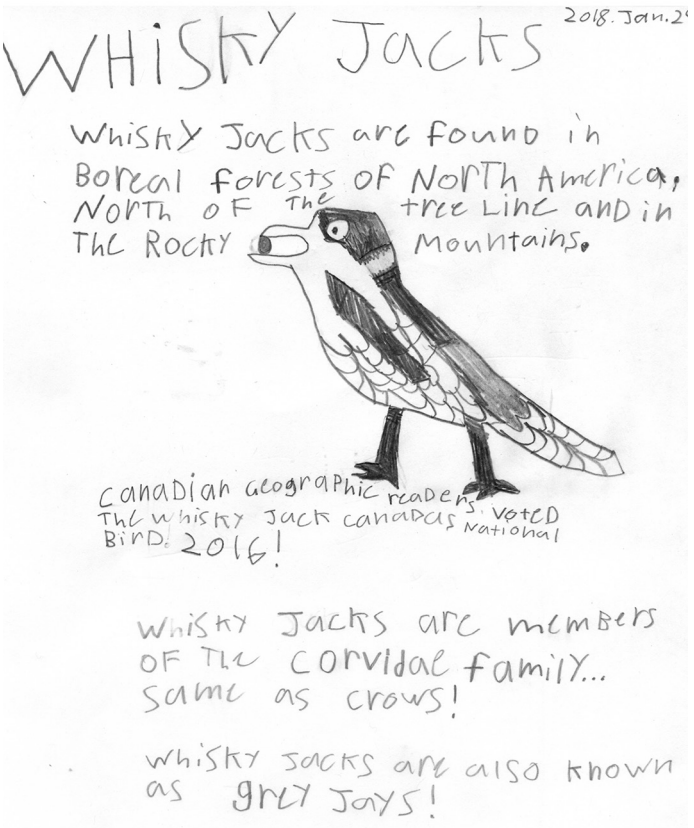
Evelyn writes: "Some of my favourite trips are when we go skiing at Mt. Cain for the weekend. There is tonnes of snow and slopes for all levels. I like weaving in the trees with my friends."

Quadra Island was the site of our largest trip, a three day climbing camp that included nine adults and 11 kids/youth. We arrived on Saturday afternoon and headed to Hidden Corner on Chinese Mountain's South Peak. After climbing for a few hours, we went back to our campground on Hyacinthe Bay for a late dinner. Some later arrivals had skipped the afternoon's climbing for a swim in the bay and were waiting for us. The kids played a variety of games born from their imagination, and the adults got better acquainted.

Iain and I were intrigued by the description of a number of climbs at Sunset Slab, and we decided to go there the next day. Unfortunately, the access to three of the climbs required scrambling up to a ledge that we deemed unsafe for the younger kids, so we dropped down to the lower climbs and rigged them up. A Dream of Wild Onions at 35 metres required our full 70 metre for top roping. The climbs were fun, but their length meant less laps for our large group, so we went back to a busier Hidden Corner. After a full day of climbing in the sun, we headed back to a tasty feast cooked on a deluxe BBQ one of the parents had brought. On the last day, we returned to Hidden Corner to set up some more challenging climbs for our group after checking out of our campsite. Come late afternoon, the ferry and long drive home were calling, so we departed this wonderful location, concluding a great trip.

The kids and youth trip comprised Stefan and his family, who went up to the 5040 hut site to help out and do some trail maintenance. Unfortunately, we didn't get high into the mountains due to sickness and conflicting schedules, but there is much interest to do so in the coming year. In all, 20 kids aged 7 to 18, from 10 families participated on our trips this year.

Rockclimbing by Jude Riddell-Matte



Whiskey Jacks by Joe Riddell-Matte

We have continued Harry's tradition of including what-if scenarios and outdoor, mountaineering, or backcountry skill-building in our trips.

Both the Steiners had often told me how appreciative they were of the ACCVI's executive support of the program, and I soon found out why: free equipment rentals, ready advice and quick responses. Thank you Catrin, Mike and the entire executive.

Leaders: Stefan Gessinger and/or Derek Sou led all trips. Iain Sou served as a youth leader on most trips.

Participants: Shanda Lembke, Aila Gessinger, Sydney Gessinger, Tessa Sou, Evelyn Sou, Anthony Spick, Arabela Spick, Mateo Spick, Ronan Spick, Karel Dietrich, Tanja Dietrich, Hendrik Dietrich, Marlene Dietrich, Weline Dietrich, Meg Johnston, Tina Lynch, Guy Parcher, Bianca Parcher, Gil Parcher, Josh Matte, Jen Riddell, Jake Riddell-Matte, Jude Riddell-Matte, Joey Riddell-Matte, Jessie Riddell-Matte, Naomi Morrow, Aron Bookman, Sarah Bookman, Ella Bookman, Kevin Kondra, and Owen Kondra participated on one or more trips.

Poncho Peak
Lindsay Elms
May 9, 2017

In the summer of 1960, Dick Culbert, a climber whose name became synonymous with the Coast Mountains of B.C., and Ted Stevens made an exploratory reconnaissance to the mountains of Vancouver Island. The highlight of the trip was a first ascent of a striking spire that can be seen on the south side of Highway 4 to Tofino – Redwall Peak. This is the northern most spire on the ridge that is known as the MacKenzie Range. Since then, other great climbers: Patrick Guilbride, Syd Watts, Bob Tustin, Mike Walsh, Al Harrisons, Bill Perry, Ron Facer, Rob Macdonald and Rick Eppler have all had their names associated with the MacKenzie Range. Throughout the 1970's, 80's and 90's, they all made repeated trips to the range, none of them afraid to face the primordial forest that had to be negotiated to reach the wonderful alpine region. After Redwall Peak and the range's highest peak, the MacKenzie Summit (1968, Syd Watts and Patrick Guilbride), were climbed, future climbers gave Tolkein-like names to the spires that form the backbone of the MacKenzie Range: Shadowblade, Flat-top, Witch Hat and The Centaur. Then came the climbers looking for alternative routes on the spires: Aaron Hamilton, John Waters, Sandy Briggs, Andy Arts and Francis Bruhwiler.

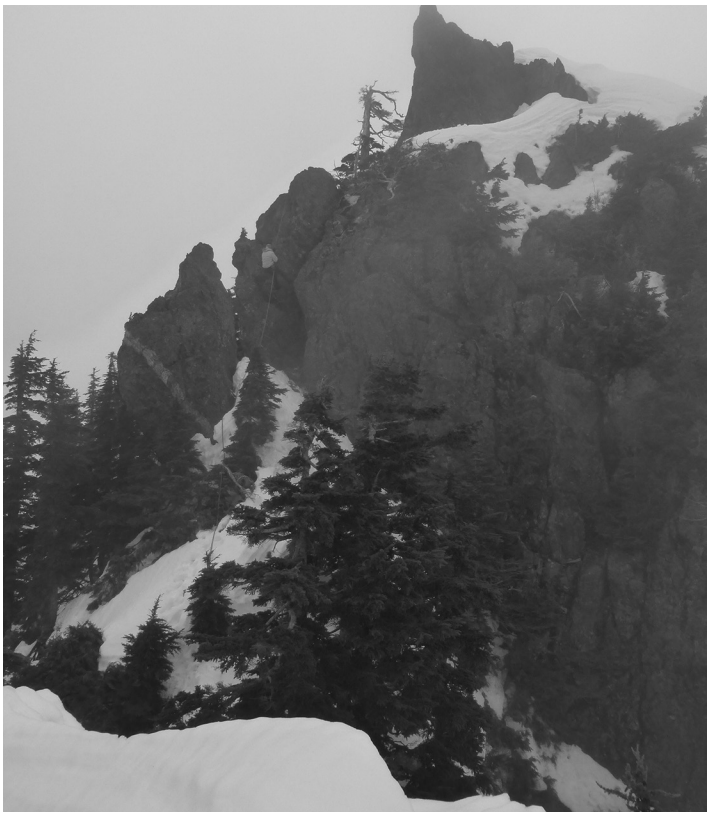
But the MacKenzie Range has more to offer then the six peaks that those climbers were attracted too. Further to

the southeast along the ridge are another four spires that never received attention until the 2010's. After repeated trips up the Climbers Trail and looking across at those remaining spires, I knew I had to access them one day, but there were always other peaks to climb. Then on May 10, 2013, Valerie Wootton and I made our first foray up Canoe Creek to the head of the valley to climb on these obscure spires. Access to the valley had been made easier by the building of an access road to a mini-hydro scheme an hour up Canoe Creek. In the 1960's and 70's, Canoe Creek was the standard access (bushwhack) to the range, but in the early 1980's members of the Vancouver Island section of the Alpine Club of Canada cleared a rough trail (Climbers Trail) up the next valley to the west, making for fast, easy access to the MacKenzie Range. Val and I climbed the middle spire which we named Razorback, trying to keep with the thought-provoking nomenclature. We found that we only wanted to negotiate the upper basin of Canoe Creek in the spring, when it still held its winter snow pack. A year later (March 2014) Stefan Gessinger hiked up Canoe Creek and climbed the highest spire, which he named Poncho Peak and then traversed across Razorback to another peak he named Sunrise Peak. Two weeks later, he returned with Ian Kilpatrick and climbed the remaining untouched spire, calling it Ravenhorn – another alluring name.

Val and I visited Canoe Creek several more times and found that the best time to access the upper basin was in the spring, when the heinous vegetation is still covered with its winter mantle. However, the three spires we hadn't climbed were still beckoning. I had been watching the weather and making note of the snow conditions in the mountains throughout the spring and finally the time was right for another trip into the MacKenzie Range. Rod Szasz was free for a day trip so on the morning of May 9 he met us at the bottom of the Canoe Creek hydro road at 5 a.m. The walk up the road to the intake dam usually takes an hour and then we had to enter the bush. From previous trips I had learnt not to follow immediately beside the creek as the bush is thick and prickly. A route, though still a little tedious, was found on the east side of the creek about 50 metres above it. After an hour we dropped down to the creek and then crossed to the west side where a delightful open forest took us to the creek crossing at the bottom of the upper basin. Next was the long slog up the snow slope that hadn't consolidated as much as I would have liked it too. We all took turns at breaking trail until we reached the saddle between Canoe Peak and Poncho Peak.

From the saddle, we traversed across the heavily snow-covered slopes to a gully that took us up onto the ridge between Poncho Peak and Ravenhorn. Although there were signs of old avalanches everywhere and cornices on some of the ridges above, the soft snow was stable and didn't present any concern of breaking away. By now the mist had trickled in, and visibility was limited. Since the forecast had no mention of precipitation, we harnessed up and started up the East Ridge of Poncho Peak after a short discussion.

Lindsay Elms, Valerie Wootton and Rod Szasz



Rappeling off Poncho Peak
(Photo by: Lindsey Elms)

The ridge was narrow and, in places, still covered in snow. The first pitch was up a steep rock gully/ridge, where we were able to place runners around live trees. We then belayed across a flat section to the base of the final climb. Not difficult, but the rock was solid and the climbing fun. On the summit we all squatted beside the sharp spire and took our obligatory summit photo. Occasionally, the mist would clear briefly, and we would get views down towards the Broken Group Islands and across to Triple Peak, but it would never last. Finally, it was time to leave. We rappelled to the saddle followed by two more rappels on the increasingly softer snow. We traversed across the slope towards Canoe Peak, then sunk up to our knees in snow as we descended down into the upper basin. Through the forest to the dam and then the walk down the hydro road saw us back at the vehicles at 6:30 p.m. We could tick one more peak off our list of summits for the MacKenzie Range, but I knew we would be back again. We continue to be lured to this incredible area, although not lofty in height, it makes up for it with its spectacular climbing.

Participants: Lindsay Elms, Valerie Wootton and Rod Szasz.

Mt. Schoen
Tim Turay
July 2017

Being busy with a recent move to Nanaimo, it wasn't until the end of July did I realize that I better get into the mountains soon or it just might not happen this year. Some emails were sent out and soon enough David Suttil and I were deciding on our route up Mt. Schoen. The most recent information we could find involved going up Vancouver Island's longest (?) scree slope. According to the info, this route could be done as a very long day trip. Huffing a full pack up a scree slope doesn't sound like fun, so going with daypacks sounded great to me.

Dave picked me up on Friday, and the trusty Subaru reached the start of the campsite (a deactivated logging road) just after it got dark. Good thing we ate in Campbell River since all we needed to do now was pitch the tent and grab some z's. The alarms went off at 6 a.m., and we were soon on the go. There is no actual trail, and we just made our way in the right direction, following the old logging road as far as we could go, then bushwhacking for a bit until we hit the scree slope.

Navigating the scree wasn't difficult, but it does take time and effort. In a lot of cases, it was one step forward and three (or four) back. About three-quaters of the way up, we ran into a few deer, which added the possibility of rock fall as they tried to get out of our path. But like most good mountain animals, they were sure footed, and no rocks were dislodged as they scurried away.

It took us about three hours to finally clear the scree slope. A break was well deserved, and we both enjoyed the views. Using our breaktime for maximum advantage, we examined the valley floor below us and plotted a possible better path back to the car. With the Powerbars downed, we turned our attention on Mt. Schoen. From here, the peak still looked really far away, and we were about to lose a boatload of the elevation we had just gained. We made quick work getting to the bottom of the next saddle, but going up was going to be slog. From our breaktime vantage point, going up this slope seemed so clear and easy. However, once in it, we quickly got bluffed out and had to do a bit of renavigating. Once up to the top of this slope, we could see Mt. Schoen and, once again, it looked really far away! Mt. Schoen was going to be one of those mountains. Actually, this approach reminded me of the approach to the Golden Hinde, lots of ups and lots of downs!

Getting us to the next highpoint presented us with two options, either to go over the next few bumps or take the snow slope along the base. The snow slope sounded good to both of us, and we proceeded to contour around the bumps as best we could. We finally made the base of the last gulley and up to the top. Heads down, we powered up the slope, making some good progress. We both wanted to get up to the summit for a well-deserved lunch break. We had been going really strong, and the body was needing some refueling. So when we crested the slope and saw that the peak was still miles away (huge exaggeration), it was time to push the thoughts of a lunch break out of the brain and death march over to the summit.

High fives were exchanged when we got to the summit cairn, and lunches came out. Like the Red Pillar, Mt. Schoen's summit is massive, you could easily play a football game up here. It took a bit of time, but all the peaks eventually fell into place from this rarely seen viewpoint. After maybe a couple of bites of his sandwich, Dave was fully recharged and was off snapping pictures from every possible lookout point. I enjoyed the lengthy lunch break and took my sweet time.

We eventually got rolling again and made good time going down and up the many bumps again. Once we got to the scree slope, the fun began. The best method that we came up with for descending the scree was one of us would go down first, then hide as best they could behind something big, and then the other person would could come down.

This top portion of scree was more like hard mud with all-sized rocks on it, making it very treacherous and impossible to avoid creating a rock slide. Hiking poles

Mt. Schoen (Photo by Tim Turay)

performed fantastic here for me, Dave chose his ice ax. Once we got down further, the scree slope widened enough that we could both descend at the same time, I took the left side, Dave the right. Here, at times, the scree was quite good and you could boot ski the scree. Then we reached the much larger rocks, and the skiing stopped. Here you had to be careful with your footing as many of the rocks were very loose, just sitting lightly on one another. Talk about a never-ending scree slope!

We eventually made it to the end of the scree slope, and we could see from our vantage point the deactivated logging road that would take us back to the car. It didn't look far, just some bush in the way. Well the bush wanted us to stay for a while. This was the kind of bush in which you held on to tree branches and took a step into the black, hoping there was something below! After some close calls and interesting twists\summersaults, we emerged at the road and drank the last of our water.

Soon enough, we were at the car refreshing ourselves with the last of our supplies. On the way out, we stopped at the Mt. Schoen Provincial Park campground to see the view of Mt. Schoen across the lake. Here we ran into some German tourists, who couldn't believe we had just been on the summit and wanted to hear all about it.

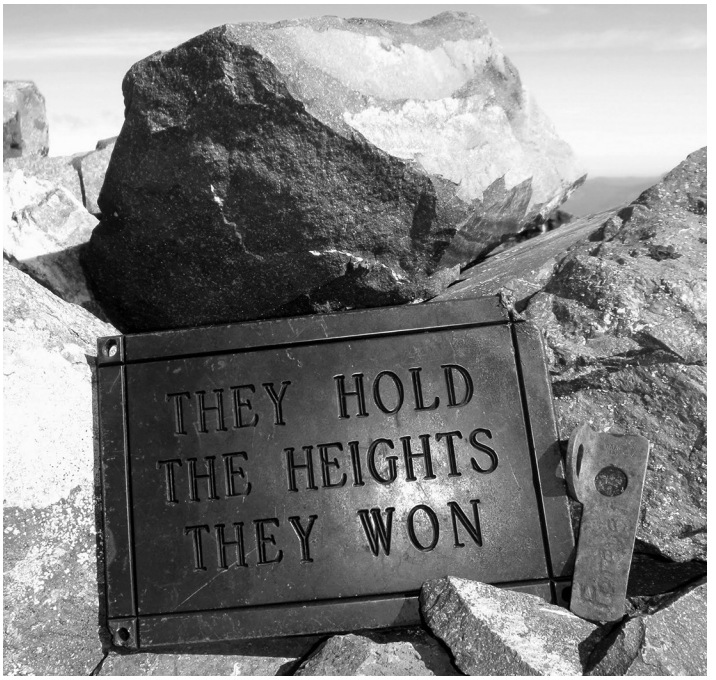
Mount Victoria
Tim Turay
August 2017

September was rolling around, and I knew this would probably be the last big trip of the year so I had to make it a good one. Chris Sommer was itching for a go at Elkhorn, but the weather window would only allow for one day, so we decided to give Mt. Victoria a try. We recruited Peggy Taylor and Chris Burns to help us out.

I had done Victoria from the Sayward side a little while back and was very keen to attempt the mountain from the Gold River side. The ridge looked like a very appealing route and would entail a lot less effort than coming in from the other side.

We made great time on the inland highway the night before and had a quick dinner break in Campbell River before heading over to Gold River. We had wanted to stay at the trailhead, but with darkness quickly approaching, we opted for a small campground by a lake. It felt good to stretch out in the tents and try and get some sleep.

Reveille happened quick enough, and we were out of



Summit marker, Mt. Victoria
(Photo by Tim Turay)

camp before sunrise. We were less than an hour from the trailhead and got there just as the sun was lighting up the valley. From the trailhead, we quickly picked up the trail and headed towards the ridge. In very little time, we were on the ridge enjoying the views and the gentle hike up to Mt. Victoria.

After a while, we came to the area that presented the full view of Mt. Victoria and the snow slope down to the glacier. Not wanting to crampon up, we all took our time getting down and around the hard morning snow of the snow slope. The last time I was here, there wasn't any snow, but hard mud proved to be crux here.

Once down on the snow, we made our way back up to the hidden gully and proceeded upwards. The weather forecast proved correct, and we all enjoyed the fantastic weather. We eventually made it to the famous exposed step. We got Chris Sommer to take lead and, in two quick moves, he was up and building an anchor for us. After belaying us, we stashed the rope and made our way upwards, trying to find the cairns. When in doubt, we just followed our noses.

A few more ups and downs and we were standing on top of the summit, high fives for everyone! What a fantastic view from the top, and what an enjoyable scramble! With the great weather, it was hard to leave, but we had to go. We packed up all the gear and slowly made our way down.

We opted to set up a belay one ledge higher up than the original belay in order to create more area to work with. After successful rappels for everyone, we made a quick descent to the glacier and to the snow slope. Here we decided to not waste any time and put on our crampons. The afternoon sun had only melted the first few inches of snow and bellow it the snow was as hard as concrete. The crampons would allow for a quick beeline to where we needed to ago. Amazing how easy a tricky snow slope becomes with crampons!

At this point, we enjoyed the views during a quick break. This gave everyone a chance to pack away the crampons and eat something. Reluctantly, we returned to the task at hand of getting back to the trailhead. We easily followed our upward route and, before we knew it, we were off the ridge heading towards the logging road. Once at the truck, we were all feeling the effects of a long 10-hour day. Chris Sommer convinced us that we could stay at his sister-in-law's place in Campbell River and, after making sure it would be alright, we decided to head for CR.

It was really nice to reach town because all of us were fading fast by the time we got to CR. We stopped at Moxie's for a celebratory dinner and then headed for the relatives. Thank you to Kristy and family for opening your house and being so welcoming to three strangers. We all really appreciate it. After a great night sleep (and some great pancakes!) we headed for home.

Congrats Chris S, Chris B and Peggy for notching another IQ.

Blood Sport:
Mt. Washington to Ralph Rigde
Ken Wong
August 5-8, 2017

We arrived at the overflow campsite of Circlet Lake at twilight, after a fast trot from the trailhead at Mt Washington. I quickly set up the tent and crawled in to escape the mosquitoes. It was a bad bug year.

The next morning, we ascended the familiar Mt. Albert Edward trail under the yellow sun. The brown smoke from the mainland fires were clogging up my throat. I wondered how many carcinogens were getting into my lungs. It was hard to shallow breathe while going uphill. We skirted Mt. Albert Edward and made a beeline towards Mt. Frink, reaching its highest bump by 10:30 a.m. We took a GPS reading and posed for a summit photo as proof for the ACC's Vancouver Island Mountains 150 Challenge (2017 is 150 years since Canada's Confederation). Now it was time to start the real goal of the trip, which was to bag the four 6,000-foot summits to the south: Mount George V, Peak 1931, Peak 1909 and Mt. Siokum, a quest to complete the 53 Vancouver Island summits over 6,000 feet (1,828.8 meters) for the newly created ACC Charles Turner Island 6000 plaque.

It was a steep and carefully executed descent to the

George crossing Shepherd Creek

col above Charity Lake followed by a gradual ascent on smooth rock slabs and snow to Mt. George V. There were numerous cascading streams to drink from and to cool my head. We signed Mt. George V's summit registry at 3:10 p.m. Looking back at the rugged way we came, we started to think of a Plan B. After an hour and 15 minutes of easy ridge walking, we were at Peak 1931 reading its summit registry. A long descent on scree, then more ridge walking got us to the large flat top of Peak 1909 by 6:50 p.m. We took a self portrait in front of the hazy background of Mt. Siokum. Long shadows were everywhere now. We urgently moved on.

We descended 200 meters towards the col, but were stopped by a cliff. We searched for a way through, but it was steep on all sides. It was exhausting. I laid back on the ground to keep the bugs off my back and studied the route description in Hiking Trails III. It mentioned a game trail leading to a small slide to the right of the ridge. George went to look for the slide and yelled back that it might be a go. We dropped another 250 meters into the canyon. We were now 200 meters below and 700 meters from the col. There was no wind, and the bugs were ferocious. We discussed crossing Siokum Creek and going directly up Mt. Siokum. However, the high bank of the creek and the unknowns of the route on the other side deterred us. There was no time to explore so we opted to go for the col. It was big boulder hopping at first until we reached a steep scree slope that angled up to the col. It was hot and gruelling work and a struggle to get up. It's true that the ice ax is a climber's best friend. I dug the pick into the dirt to pull my body up some vertical parts. George was far ahead. I ran out of fuel and had to stop and chuck down a munchie bar. The bugs covered my arms and shoulders, biting through

Mt Siokum from Peak 1909

my sweat soaked shirt. I killed half a dozen of the blood suckers with every whack. Some of them spilling blood onto my arms. It was oh so itchy. What were they injecting into me? West Nile, dengue, yellow fever, zika? The images of small-headed babies clouded my vision. When I reached George just below the col at 9:30 p.m, he was cooking his dinner. I found a spot scores of meters away from him to plunk down my tent. He doesn't appreciate my apparently thunderous snoring. I cooked dinner in the dark. The bugs did not sleep that night. The tent mesh kept them buzzing a few centimetres away.

It was a buggy morning. We broke camp quickly and went up to the col, which would have made a much better campsite. There were pools and wind so the bugs could not keep up. We went up the long snow slope and, by 9:30 a.m., got to the top of Mt. Siokum, which is just a high bump on the Ralph Ridge. There was no summit registry. We figured that it would take a bloody gruelling full day and a half to retrace our way back to Mt. Washington. We agreed to take Ralph Ridge to Buttle Lake instead. It was a delightful ridge walk at the beginning. I took off my sweaty salt-stained clothes and washed them with water from a tarn. A dragonfly was patrolling the surface, picking off emerging mosquitoes. We had lunch and enjoyed the sun while waiting for our clothes to dry.

We reached the spot where the ridge falls off towards Buttle Lake by 1 p.m. I had a final look at the high, serpentine Strathcona Park ridges all around us and then plunged down. It was a wild unrelenting descend. There was no trail, no sign, nothing, just unbroken bushes, trees and bluffs. As a precaution, I had entered some waypoints of this escape route into my GPS. Now it proved to be essential. We jumped from waypoint to waypoint no matter what obstacles Ralph Ridge threw at us. Note: do not injure yourself here as there is no place to summon a rescue. George and I agreed that it was one of the toughest descends we had ever done. Finally we reached easier terrain and found flaggings. We followed them to the convergent point of Ralph River and Shepherd Creek by 5:30 p.m. On the left, surprise! a long log spanned high above the rushing Shepherd Creek. George hopped on and demonstrated the proper way to slide across. I unbuckled my packs straps and followed. “Do not slip,” I told myself. I did not want to end up in Buttle Lake.

At the parkway, we did not think that anyone would pick up two wild guys with ice axes so I went to the Ralph River Campground. Turned out George thumbed his way back to Mt. Washington and so was gone when I got back to the road 30 minutes later after setting up my tent. The next morning a young German couple picked me up in their beat up van. I was so busy telling the nice couple about the places they should visit that I didn’t see George driving down the Buttle Lake Parkway looking for me. We eventually met up again in Campbell River.

The year 2017 was a good one! Thirteen 6,000-foot peaks checked off. Nine remain. Beware you blood suckers, I’ll be back soon, but next time I’ll bring a bug zapper. I love the electric sparks of revenge and the smell of singed bugs.

Participants: George Butcher and Ken Wong

Lake Helen Mackenzie: Another Wonderful Milestone
Janelle Curtis
August 26-27 2017

This has been a year of milestones, including mastering the art of walking. As many of you know, I am recovering from a fall off the ridge between Augerpoint Mountain and Mt. Mitchell in Strathcona Park. On July 2, 2016, I sustained many broken bones and a severe head injury, which makes me feel all the happier to continue to be here to explore and enjoy our lovely wild places.

In late August, I set out with Jennifer, Amelia, and Mary to camp at Lake Helen Mackenzie in Strathcona Park. This was my first hiking and camping experience since my accident. I had never camped at Lake Helen Mackenzie before, having typically wandered past the lake in boots or on skis on my way to explore some other peaceful place in Strathcona Park. One certainly doesn’t have to undertake a long or challenging hike to be immersed in the great outdoors! It was such a treat to hike with these women, not least because they refused to let me carry very much besides a bit of my food and water. It was also a treat to explore new trails in Strathcona Park. I didn’t know that the park was improving accessibility to its wild places for those in TrailRiders, but I was very happy to notice this during our hike and to meet one of the users of the TrailRiders in camp.

Some of us swam in the lake, and we all enjoyed the panorama of the surrounding landscape. The campground was set in a beautiful part of the park and we had a lovely view of the ridge that leads to Mt. Albert-Edward. We had all made our way to or over the summit of Mt. Albert-Edward before as part of ‘fun’draisers to help educate girls in developing countries, a cause that remains dear to our hearts.

On the way there and back, we stopped to savour delicious blueberries and thought of our dear friend and co-‘fun’draiser, Lenka, who was getting ready for some more of her own backcountry adventures. We ate so many blueberries that our hands and tongues were blue; Lenka would have been proud!

I have to say that being surrounded by friends in one of our beautiful local parks and hiking to and from Lake Helen Mackenzie was an emotional experience for me. My orthopedic surgeon wasn’t sure, while my ankle and knees were healing, that I would ever be able to walk long distances again. I just can’t imagine not being able to hike into and enjoy wild places. Before we started our hike, we found a painted rock with the words: “Live in the sunshine,

Pictured from left, Jennifer Boldt, Mary Thiess, Janelle Curtis and Amelia Mahony on the trail to Lake Helen Mackenzie. (Photo by Amelia Mahony)

swim in the sea, drink the wild air." The artwork captured the simple beauty of being in wild places, and certainly summed up how I would like to spend the rest of my days.

Participants: Jennifer Boldt, Janelle Curtis Amelia Mahony, and Mary Thiess

Winess Trail Report
Adam Hering
Summer 2017

– Dedicated to our beloved dog, Kupffer (2014-2017). We can all learn from your fierce love of life and unbreakable spirit.

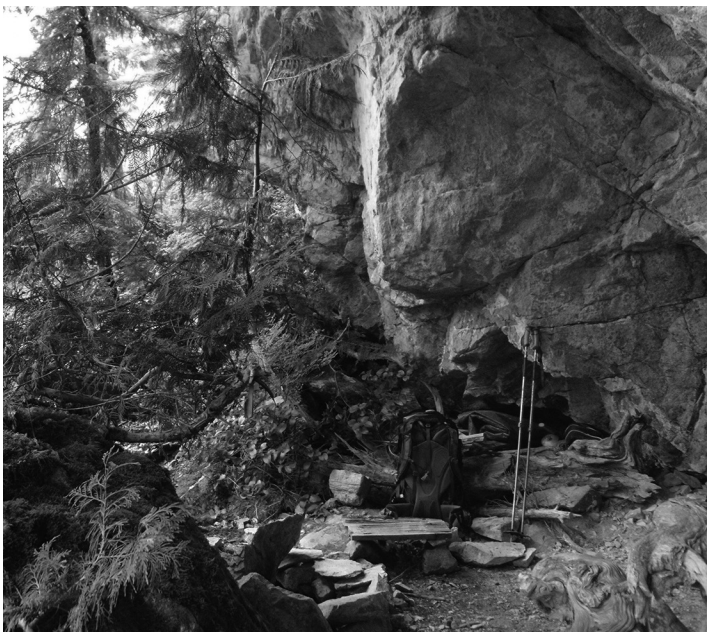
The planning

I first heard of the Clayoquot Sound Witness Trial in 2010 as I as preparing to take a group of 16 year olds on a three-day hike and was looking for good options. The witness trail, built in 1993 as part of the Clayoquot protests, seemed like the perfect choice. It promised a challenging multi-day hike and, at the same time, the opportunity to learn about environmental activism and the power we have to protect our wilderness when we come together to defend it. It was the largest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history and happened the year before many of them were born. Unfortunately, thanks to their victory in protecting that beautiful area, the logging roads used to access this old trail have been decommissioned, washed out, and largely grown over. I spent a day searching for the southern trailhead in 2010, but I never did find it. The trail was relegated to the bucket list but not forgotten.

The scouting

In the summer of 2016, I went looking for the trail again; this time from the north end. After several hours of biking, walking and exploring overgrown logging roads alone with our two dogs Kupffer and Scout, I found the unmistakable trailhead, complete with a decrepit but endearing old shelter with a map of the original trail. The shelter, covered in moss and graffiti, has become a makeshift trail log book for those who find it. We spent the remainder of the day walking the first portion of the trail and clearing what I could with my machete. Evidently, the northern portion of the trail had been cleared and reflagged between 2008 and 2010 by a crew of volunteers from the Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the Tla-o-qui-aht Nation, but it had grown over a lot in the six years since then. I didn't have time to do the whole trail, but I vowed I'd be back.

Adam and his faithful companion Scout. Taken in front of the broken down shack that marks the trailhead at the north end of the trail. (Photo by Adam Hering)



A small sheltered cave camp can be found just past Solstice Lakes. Soon after this point is where the remnants of the cleared trail disappeared. (Photo by Adam Hering)

The return, Sept. 9, 2017

Enter summer of 2017. I had plans to spend a week doing the Stein Traverse at the beginning of September with some friends, but those plans got cancelled at the last minute due to a rare neurological illness in my dog Kupffer. I was forced to send my friends off without me while my partner and I tried to treat and eventually had to say goodbye to our sweet Kupffer. I was left reeling from the loss and in desperate need of some forest therapy. Back to the witness trail I went, armed with a clear memory of how to find the trailhead and a desire for some physical pain to accompany my mental anguish. This time I was going for the whole thing. I mapped the route on Google Earth and it was only 35 kilometres (not taking into account what were once switchbacks), but according to the Falcon Hiking Vancouver Island guidebook: “Beyond Norgar Lake (km 7), the trail is so overgrown and poorly marked that only the most determined of bushwhackers should attempt it.” I thought to myself: “That’s me,” and packed the smallest pack of essentials I could. I gave myself four days to cover the distance, in case it was as bad as the book said, and Scout and I headed out.

Finding the trail was no problem this time, but thanks to heavy rain and overgrowth, the water poured down my legs, under my gaiters and into my boots. Both Scout and I were thoroughly soaked within the first hour. I was astonished by how much foliage had grown in the one year since I was there last. The trail to Solstice Lake is in poor shape but well flagged and definitely doable. Just past Solstice Lake, I found a beautiful shallow cave that had clearly been used as a camping spot. The last evidence of a trail disappeared just after Murrelet Lake. There was a trail marker but no evidence of which way the trail went. I guess it’s bushwhacking time, I figured, as I ventured into the dense wall of forest, following the topo lines and compass to make my way on to Norgar Lake, my objective for the night. Four hours later, Scout and I arrived beaten down, soaking wet, and exhausted in the beautiful meadow that surrounds Norgar Lake. I set up our tarp, gave Scout his food, got fresh water from the lake for dinner and sat among the mint and wild flowers as the sun went down and the water boiled silently on the alcohol stove. Finally, we settled in to sleep, unsure if we’d have the energy to keep pushing forward in the morning.

Sept. 10, 2017

I’m not sure what drove me to think continuing along the trail the next day was a better idea than turning back. Maybe it was thinking the unknown trail ahead could be okay, while I knew for sure that turning back would mean enduring the same painful bushwhack I’d completed the day before. Or maybe it was simply knowing I’d be disappointed if I gave up that easily. Either way, on we went, down the hill to Claoyoquot River. With no more switchback in sight to follow and with a little help from gravity, we fought our way down the 225-metre elevation drop to the level of the gully. I finally had the opportunity to give myself a break from breaking through salal and devil’s club by following the river. My boots couldn’t get any wetter, and the rocks were all covered in moss so I felt free to avoid the rock hopping by just walking down the center of the river. Scout, my hydrophobic husky, was not impressed. We followed the river, finally covering ground at a reasonable pace again, strolling past groups of salmon making their way upstream to spawn. Periodically we’d check the GPS to make sure we were still on track and hadn’t missed our turn. A half a dozen times throughout the route I would come upon an old board walk or a trail marker fastened to a tree that would tell me this was where the trail was, however I could rarely spot where exactly the trail had been. I always felt the need to take a picture to prove

Camping in a field of wildflowers at Norgar Lake. (Photo by Adam Hering)

Norgar Lake (Photo by Adam Hering)

it nonetheless. Eventually we hit the tributary on the left that the old trail followed, and I walked up the stream until I realized I'd turned too early and should have waited one more. Back to the bush we went to traverse the side of the mountain over to the one we were actually aiming for. On track once again, we followed our stream up the hill until we reached the camp known as helipad (according to the GPS), where we finally succumbed to exhaustion and set up our cute little camp beside the stream for the night.

Sept. 11, 2017

At this point, Scout and I were battered and bruised but well past the halfway mark, so there was no turning back now. The third morning, we continued up the stream into the headwaters, getting more and more nervous about the growing height of the walls on either side of the stream as the stream dwindled. Occasionally we'd bushwhack our way up a side wall to get around a waterfall that had boxed us in. Finally, after scrambling through 100 metres or so of logjam, we reached the top of the pass to get over the mountain range and into the other side. At the top we came upon a gorgeous old boardwalk that wrapped around the side of the mountain. It was too rotten to walk on, but this was clearly a well-loved, hard-earned trail when it was made. I wish I could have seen it in its day. At this point, with no more streams to follow, we walked down the other side of the pass, mostly travelling along fallen trees to avoid the dense undergrowth until we knew we were far enough to hit the logging road above us that once led to the trailhead. Occasionally, Scout or I would miss a step when moving from one tree to the next and disappear into the undergrowth below, but for the most part, these trees were a welcome walkway. We finally started working our way up the hill to find the old logging road. I've never been so excited to see a logged tree in my life. The logging road carried us down the hill but was so thick with alder trees, that had it not been for the fact that this was the first flat ground I'd walked on in three days, I wouldn't have been able to tell there was a road there. Even though I often couldn't see my feet, we made quick work of the logging road because at least I knew the ground was flat. It carried us back to the Kennedy River which was running low at the end of the summer and made it possible to wade across it to the highway with no problem.

After a quick Campsuds bath in the river to remove some of the stink, and changing into my dry clothes, Scout and I were lucky enough to catch a ride back to my car. The couple that picked us up said they'd passed us by at first, only to turn around and come back for us because Scout looked so sad standing there in the rain. We were both very relieved to get back to our car safe and sound for the drive back to Victoria.

Kleeptee Peak
Lindsay Elms
October 5, 2017

Rod Szasz, Val and myself, did a day trip last fall to a remote peak overlooking Nootka Island. This peak, although not official, was called Cougar Peak and is directly above (east) of Cougar Creek, a popular campsite and boat launch for fisherman who wanted to drop their lines into Nootka Sound to catch the much sought after wild Salmon. Access to Cougar Peak was via the Head Bay Forestry Service Road, Tlupana Main and then Neesok Main, which took us onto the north side of Muchalat Inlet

Alomg the route to Kleeptee Peak (Photo by Lindsay Elms)

and drops into Neesok Bay across from Gore Island. For Rod, coming from Nanaimo, it was a round trip of roughly 600 kilometres, 200 less for Val and I. While on Cougar Peak, I saw another peak a few kilometres to the south that was about the same elevation as the one we were on — Kleeptee Peak (unofficial). My interest to return to this area was piqued.

At the beginning of October, the weather forecast looked stellar for the west coast so I quickly threw a few things together and drove back out to the Neesok area. I arrived at the end of the logging road (elev.: 900 metres) by late afternoon, cooked dinner then lit a small fire and sat around it while having a beer or two. Finally, when the sun disappeared behind Nootka Island and the beautiful tangerine glow from the sunset faded into darkness, I climbed into the back of the Forerunner and went to sleep. There was not a sound to be heard and no lights, just me and the wilderness.

In the morning, I was up bright an early. My daypack had what I needed for the day, including my harness, helmet and a 7mm x 30m rope. I wasn't expecting to need them, but something inside told me to put them in. I angled up through the logging slash and into the old growth. Not a lot of underbrush to thrash through but then I came to the rock bluff that appeared to skirt the ridge I was climbing. I wound my way through the bluff and then popped out on top of the ridge about 1.5 kilometres from the main summit. It was a beautiful warm day considering the time of the year and not a cloud in the sky.

The ridge was up and down but the rock was solid and a joy to scramble over. Ahead on a major bump, I could see a huge rock cairn, which seemed strange as it wasn't the highest summit, but further on I could see another cairn on the main summit. Although I hadn't heard, or read any accounts of anyone climbing this peak, I realised the surveyor, Alfred Slocomb, had probably climbed the peak and built the cairns while surveying the area in the mid 1940s. They had to be large enough for him to see from other peaks so he could take triangulation readings. Twenty minutes later I was at the 1.5-metre-tall cairn poking around it to see if anything had been left underneath the rocks, but there was nothing.

I continued along the ridge and arrived at the final wall leading up to the main summit. Although steep, I was able to zig-zag my way up the wall, my GPS laying biscuits, breadcrumb, or some flour-based baked good as I went. Soon I was on the summit standing beside another 1.5-metre-tall cairn and, again, I poked around to see if anything was inside, but again there was nothing. The thrill of being on another summit that I had never climbed had me on a high.

After 40 minutes, it was time to head back. I scrambled along the ridge and then down to the wall up which I had

zig-zagged. I looked over and realised that I could probably find my way down, but it was quicker to rappel. I could have pulled out the GPS and follow the digestives but what the heck. I quickly slung the rope around a good-sized shrub and then made the first of two rappels, glad that I had thrown the rope and harness into my pack. The rest of the trip down the mountain was uneventful, but my gaze was continually drawn to the obscure bushy peaks at the head of Muchalat Inlet on the south side between Silverado Creek and Mooyah Creek: Mt. Gore, Mt. Rufus, Mt. Albermarle and Mt. Crespi. I don't know if anyone has climbed them, but if anyone has it would most likely be surveyors. I know, however, that next summer there is are at least three people, one in the ACCVI, who will be thinking about how best to approach them so they could tick them off their list of 'to-do' peaks. Currently they are not on my 'to do' list, but who knows, maybe I'll join them.

Participants: Lindsay Elms.

Wild Women of Vancouver Island
Brianna Coates

I can't remember the exact details of how and when it all came together, but it definitely included a night at my place in January with a couple bottles of wine. Krista, Jes and I each have our own stories of how we came to love climbing and being in the mountains, but together we have a passion for seeing more diversity in the outdoors. We saw the potential in offering women-only trips to create space for us as leaders who desired to organize more technical trips and for participants wanting to experience those kinds of trips, perhaps to practice their own leadership and technical skills. So the Wild Women trips were born.

We offered three trips initially: a spring ascent of Mount Arrowsmith's Main Snow Gully, a weekend of climbing at Crest Creek Crags in Strathcona Park, and an ascent of Warden Peak via the Prefect Guilbride Pfeiffer route. There was an additional trip offered in the fall, by Jes and Mela Brown, to Sugarloaf Mountain in the Sooke Hills.

Each trip filled incredibly quickly, with multiple people asking to be on the waitlist. I don't think we could have imagined how popular these trips would be. The response and feedback for the trips was amazing. One participant suggested some more inclusive language for the trip description, instead of just "self-identified" women. We took that feedback and now our trips will say for "women, trans and non-binary people" with the intention of creating even more inclusivity. We had someone tell us they never would have signed up for trip like this if it wasn't all women. They were worried about not being strong or fast enough for a mixed-gender trip. This story was both heartening and sad. Heartening in that we were glad to have created a space for this person to come on a trip that they would normally not have joined, but sad because they had some experience that convinced them they might not feel comfortable or welcome on another trip.

Already these trips are bigger than us, with new and established leaders asking if they can organize and lead Wild Women trips on the island. One participant who attended the first three trips is now gearing up to organize her first trip as a leader. A group of women who met during our climbing trip set off on their own cross-Canada climbing trip later that summer. It's stories like these that set my stoke on fire. To share some more stories, here are some reflections from participants and leaders:

Mount Arrowsmith, Main Gully Route, April 29, 2017

Kara Aschenbrenner, Participant

It was great to be a part of this trip and apply the skills I had learned the previous summer in a supportive and encouraging environment. After breaking through the trees and climbing some snow slopes, we were shortly turned around due to poor visibility, strong winds, and snow. Despite the short climb, we still had a fantastic day. It was the first mountaineering trip of the season for all of us.

Brianna and Kara, below the Beehive on Mount Arrowsmith

Crest Creek Crags

Brianna Coates, Leader

Climbing with a bunch of stoked people at Crest Creek Crags; I can't think of a better way to spend a weekend. There were fifteen of us, including Jes, Krista and I, and we took over the crags with energy and excitement. Some of our group were new to Crest and a few new to climbing outside. After Jes gave us a tour of the main areas, everyone eyed up their routes and started climbing. I spent a lot of time walking around, checking in with people, making sure everyone had a belay and taking in the glow of everyone's smiles and laughs. Despite the dampness of the rock people were stoked. That evening we had devised a few games with prizes: rope coiling, plank challenge and a knot relay. The plank challenge had a wonderfully dramatic outcome. I teased Krista that she is not allowed to compete because she'd blow everyone out of the water (that woman is a machine!), but countered my statement saying there may be some secret plank warrior among the group. Val decided to record the challenge, so fourteen of us arranged ourselves in a circle and got ready to plank. Last on planking won. By two minutes most people were down. At 3:20 there was two people left, Colleen and Krista. It is important to note that at the beginning of the challenge Colleen asked someone "What is a plank?" By 3:30 both Krista and Colleen were down, Colleen but a second behind Krista. Colleen was our secret plank warrior. On day two, I got some climbing in, the highlight being a jaunt up "Lady of the Lake", a thoroughly enjoyable mixed 5.7 that had rave reviews. Then Lisa, Ellie and I practiced some crevasse rescue at the base of the Middle Hidden Walls, much to the delight of the Heathens lounging about in the area. Lisa and I were gearing up for an ascent of Mount Rainier, which unfortunately never came about because of less than ideal weather.

Wild Women take over Crest Creek Crags. From left to right starting at the back, Hannahbess, Sarah, Krista, Jessica, Chloe, Ellie, Lisa, Val, Easha and Brianna.

Warden Peak, July 15-16, 2017, by Jes Scott, Leader

As we approached the summit block of Warden, it became clear that we had to either turn around or forget all plans of returning home at a reasonable time. We did a group check-in. The stoke was high. The weather was good. Everyone had adequate food, water and clothes. So we kept going.

When I was first starting to learn about mountaineering, I was told that the way to be a good team member was to silently tough it out. Don't ask for help. Don't admit you're afraid. Fix problems on your own. These are stereotypical "masculine" traits.

What amazed me about this group was our ability to freely ask for and give help. At times we all felt tired, challenged or frustrated. We all also had opportunities to give, whether that be taking the rope from someone who was tired or lending someone extra batteries for her headlamp. Everyone kept it together and everyone supported each other.

I don't think you need to have a group of women to make this happen but it was certainly easier to practice making the kind of world we want in this safe, supportive environment.

Nadja Steiner - Participant - Warden Peak, July 15-16, 2017

Warden Peak, July 15-16, 2017, by Lenka Visnovska

Warden, what a beautiful, impressive peak!
It would be great to have a summit peek!
Now, going up there with seven wild women,
There's no doubt, no hesitation, I'm in.

First day, after a long drive and bushy walk,
We set our camp, enjoy the sunset and fun talk.
Suddenly, Warden unveils itself to says hello.
Enfolded in silence and rolling clouds, what a show!

We begin our climb early, although not quite an alpine start.
Steep down and up, the beauty is not the only cause of pounding heart.
Soon we realize that group of eight doesn't move that fast.
But we keep going while the favourable conditions last.

Snow, rock, exposure, a couple of hairy moves, the final climb.
Mountain babes on the top having a blast, a great time.
The vistas are splendid, I behold the beauty that's all around.
But we know, it's not over, we still have to go down.

The progress is slow, well, there is eight of us.
We get to the camp at the same time darkness surrounded us.
Decisions are made, some have to work tomorrow, aah, almost today,
So we pack, we snack and are soon on our way.

Fourteen hours post outset, the bushes seem to be growing.
But without much choice, we keep going.
Darkness, fatigue, slipping, camaraderie.
What really matters, is to get down without injury.

At last, we found ourselves by the cars,
Tired, but happy under the dazzling stars.
Thank you Warden for letting us summit and to get safely down.
It's hard to keep eyes open while driving to the awakening town.

Perhaps three days as some suggested,
Would be a way to perfect it.
But then, all those unplanned imperfections,
Become a story, great memory collections.

For me, and I pledge, I'm in my right mind,
It was superb, an adventure of my kind!

Sugarloaf Mountain, Oct. 7, 2017, by Keri Laughlin

I showed up early and keen for this women's hike up Sugarloaf Mountain. I wasn't exactly sure what to expect as I had never done this hike nor met any of the women before. I pulled off the highway near the mailboxes where we had agreed to meet, and all of a sudden women started getting out of their cars. Some geared up with the latest packs and gaiters, others (a.k.a. me) in runners and a windbreaker. Whoops! The ladies ranged in age (25-70 years) and abilities, so we took our time and stayed together as a group. And, of course, we talked. Women love to talk, and it's amazing what topics come up when you get a bunch of women out in the forest who have all had their morning coffee times two. I learned about the ancient Japanese practice of forest bathing, gender-based policy analysis, how to grow your own arugula, and how I'm not the only mother whose children still don't sleep through the night. After all was said and done, I left those trails feeling more connected. Not only to nature, but to a group of women who had begun as complete strangers and managed to form a bond over a few short hours (and wasp bites) on a regular autumn Saturday.

Sugarloaf Mountain, Oct. 7, 2017, by Lilija Gulbis,

The past two summers I've been lucky enough to spend a few glorious days at the Elizabeth Parker Hut at Lake O'Hara and this was my first Vancouver Island ACC hike. I spotted this perfect sounding Sugarloaf hike on Facebook and talked my friend Grace into coming too.

We were by far the oldest of the group (in our 60s), and it was lovely to hike in these gorgeous woods with a group of young and super-enthusiastic women.

I was one of the participants stung by a couple of wasps. Not even that dampened the spirit of a spectacular day.

In the Beauforts 2017
Pam Olson

The Beaufort Range, a sub-range of the the Vancouver Island Range, is located north of Port Alberni and to the west of Qualicum Beach. The location can be described also as between Comox and Cameron lakes. The Beauforts encompass Mt. Schofield, Mt. Mark and, the highest peak, Mt. Joan (1556 metres). According to the BC Gazetteer, the range was named in 1860 by Captain George Henry Richards (1820-1896), who conducted hydrographic surveys on the coast of BC between 1857 and 1862 and was later hydrographer to the British Admiralty from 1864 to 1874. He named the range after Sir Francis Beaufort (1774-1857), who had served as the British Admiralty hydrographer of the Navy for 25 years and was the inventor of the Beaufort wind force scale.

During the 1960s, Don Apps, a mountaineer and hiker with the Comox District Mountaineering Club (CDMC), spent a lot of time exploring the Beauforts. In the the 1970s and 1980s, he and his wife Sylvia continued to explore the area and worked on access trails. Ruth Masters, a long-time CDMC member, was responsible for the naming of many of the peaks for residents of the Alberni and Comox valleys as well as carving some of the signs placed on the summits and at trailheads. I met Ruth Masters once but never had the opportunity to meet either of the Apps. Don Apps died in 2011, and Sylvia Apps, 69, went missing while hiking near Castlecrag Mountain in 2014. Searchers found her pack and poles but no trace of her was discovered. Ruth Masters died in 2017 at the age of 97, and the eponymous name of the lake in Strathcona Park is now official.

Much of the area in the Beaufort Range has been owned for decades by logging companies and many of the roads are gated. Interestingly, even though there are established routes in the Beauforts known by many hikers, in particular members of the CDMC and the Island Mountain Ramblers (IMR), the area was not mentioned in the Vancouver Island Trails Information Society's Hiking Trails 3 until the ninth edition in 2002. The Vancouver Island section in Bruce Fairley's 1986 A Guide to Climbing and Hiking in Southwestern British Columbia did not mention the Beauforts. A little known publication issued in 1989 by the defunct Nanaimo Nordics Cross Country Ski Club called A Guide to Cross Country Ski Tours of Central Vancouver Island, described a route to Mts. Apps and Joan. Philip Stone's 2003 edition of Island Alpine included route descriptions for peaks in the Beaufort Range. Of course, now there are several online sites with route descriptions and trip reports.

We made two trips to the Beauforts this summer. The first was June 22 to 24 to Mt. Joan and The Squarehead with a side trip toward Mt. Apps. We approached Joan from the branch line between kilometres 14 and 15 of the Cook Creek Forest Service Road (FSR), parking at the big rock by the washout. After tiptoeing nervously across the rickety snowmobilers bridge, we walked up the logging road to the forest edge, then followed the ridgeline to Joan, circling around above Joan Lake. There was a lot of snow, but it was mainly consolidated so walking was fairly easy. Somewhere along the way, we encountered a snowmobile route marked by cut trees and some flagging tape. Getting to the summit involved contouring around the less steep side until we found a way to the snow-covered summit. The summit register did not have any entries for 2017 yet. Since we never sign summit records, no one but us and our GPS knows we were there. Continuing along, we camped along the ridge between Mt. Joan and The Squarehead. The next

day, we passed over The Squarehead, stopping only to check the last entries in the summit register and discovered that an Alpine Club (ACC) member that we have met several times in the mountains had been there in October 2016. No one yet had signed in 2017. We then dropped off the ridge and headed toward Mt. Apps. The weather was warm, which softened the snow a bit and made it slow going. Finding a melted out, level camping area with a water source proved to be a challenge. We returned by the same route. We spent the rest of the summer doing routes in Strathcona Park.

The weather forecast predicted a few days of warm weather for the first week of October and we decided to have another run at the Beauforts on October 3 to 5. This time, we went up the CDMC trail from the Roaring Creek branch of Cook Creek FSR. The short days and our slow pace found us camping again on the ridge near The Squarehead. In the morning, we discussed going toward Mt. Apps again or doing the circuit to Mt. Curran and back down that route. We headed off toward Mt. Apps with no real objective in mind, just a nice walk in the autumn sunshine. By coincidence, we camped in the same place as we had in June; there are only a few flat tent spots on that ridge. There are, however, numerous tarns and most had water in them. We headed back the next day as the weather forecast had changed for Friday, and we don't like being out in bad weather. We take a small radio with us so we can get the forecast. By the time we got to the ridge at The Squarehead, it was about 14:30, and we decided that we did not have enough daylight time to get over to the tarns by Mt. Curran. There were a few pools of rain water on the ridge, and we found a nice camping spot where we would have a good view of the sunset, sunrise and possibly the moon rise as it was an almost full moon. The daytime temperature was around 18C but, at night, the temperature went down to around 7C. We were very cozy in our -10C sleeping bags. We could get a phone signal so we sent a text to our cat sitter to let her know our schedule.

While walking during the October trip, I was reminiscing about some of the trips we have made in the Beauforts. My partner, Dave, and I like to go there in the early and late summer. In the early summer, the snow melts off and consolidates sooner than on the higher ridges of Strathcona Provincial Park. By fall, the days are shorter and the temperatures at higher elevations are lower overnight on the ridges and peaks of the Beauforts.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, we accessd the area by way of Roaring Creek. At that time, the main access to Cook-Horne FSR was from the Horne Lake end as there was a washed out bridge near the Cook end. The "Road Closed" and "Bridge Out" signs piqued our curiosity and, at the end of one trip, we drove along the road to find the location of the washout. It might have been 1994. We were listening to the CBC Sunday morning radio show, which was playing the tape of the infamous 1962 interview by the BBC's Douglas Brown with Hastings Banda during which the Malawian leader answered most of the questions about his aspirations for his country with "I won't tell you that" or "Leave it to me." It was in May 1994 that Banda was defeated in Presidential election after holding that office since 1961.

Often we would drive to Roaring Creek on a Friday evening, car camp, and on Saturday and Sunday, we would explore with our mountain bikes, riding up overgrown or decommissioned roads as far as we could and then walking to the top of the ridge. We did a few reconnoitres and determined that we could go up the north side of Roaring Creek to Mt. Joan and then come back down on the south side of the same creek. Sometime in the early 1990s, on the long weekend in May, we headed off to do that. There was no trail; we followed the old logging road as far as we could, then bushwhacked our way toward Mt. Joan. The bridge at the Roaring Creek tributary was out, but there were still remnants of it, although not enough to walk across. The logging road that contoured around the slope was not so overgrown as it is now, and we could see around a bend from time to time. At one bend we spotted a bear at the next bend; it was coming toward us with interest. We yelled at it, but it kept moving closer. We picked up some bits of wood and started making a lot of noise bashing them on the ground and on other chunks of wood. The bear decided it was no longer interested in us and retreated up slope. However we did have to pass below where the bear had gone and we could see it sitting above us in the clear cut. We could even see the white ring on its muzzle.

Mt. Joan in the background, June 2017
(Photo by Pam Olsen)

Avalanche lilies
(Photo by Pam Olsen)

On the way to Mt. Joan, Oct. 2017
(Photo by Pam Olsen)

Looking toward the Comox Glacier at sunset, October 2017
(Photo by Pam Olsen)

We camped just below Mt. Joan and the next day made our way over Mt. Joan and down the ridge toward Joan Lake. It was a warm day, and we wanted to go for a swim. The lake is in a steep-sloped cirque, and the only place we could get into it was at the outflow end. The water was refreshing. I have heard of only one other person who has swam in Joan Lake and that is Quagger. The lake sees quite a bit of snowmobile traffic in the winter judging from the tracks we saw on it earlier this summer. From the lake, we bushwhacked through the forest and clearcut until we got to the old logging road where we spooked a bear who let out a "Wooof" and, immediately, jumped off the road and disappeared into the bush. After the bear incident, it was an easy walk back to the car, which was parked at Roaring Creek. I didn't take any pictures on that trip.

One day in the mid-1990s, we drove in to our car-camping spot on Roaring Creek only to find a camper-equipped truck parked there with an overweight guy sitting in a lawn chair with a case of beer and a blaring ghetto blaster. We decided we would go somewhere else to hike that day. It was then that we realized we would have to get to the Beauforts from Beaver Creek on the Port Alberni side. The next weekend, we drove out Beaver Creek Road to Comox Main and found the right branch to take, branch 122. Island Timberlands (IT) renamed it CX91 but the former company, MacMillan-Bloedel (MB), had a different numbering system for its branch lines. Weyerhauser, one of the intermediary owners, had kept the MB branch names. We found a flagged route and, even though the the route was indistinct in places, we followed it and eventually came to Lake Rosemarie. We didn't really need to know about the marked route as the way to get to the lake was obvious from the information on our topo map. What a pretty little lake.we thought. Then we found the cairn and plaque placed by Don and Sylvia Apps in memory of their daughter, Rosemarie, who died in infancy in 1969.

During another late spring trip to Lake Rosemarie, we crossed the outflow stream and camped on the ridge above the lake. During the night, the weather changed, and we awoke in an ice and sleet-covered tent. By the time we had packed up to walk out, our gloves were soaking wet and our hands were going numb. Then we discovered that the lake's outflow stream was a bit too wide and full of water to jump across. We looked around for fallen trees and branches and built a make-shift bridge, which we crossed quickly but gingerly. When we got to the creek crossing lower down, there was too much fast-flowing water in it to cross safely. As well, all the hopping stones were covered by water and looked slippery. We bushwhacked down to a logging road and hoped that it was the same one where the car was parked. Fortunately, it was the right road. This was in the pre-GPS era. Now we set a waypoint for the car so we can find it if we return by another route.

From that same branch line, we wandered around, exploring, and found the flagged routes to Mt. Apps, Zella Lake and Mt. Joan. We made several trips, at least once a year, to those areas during the 1990s and 2000s. During one trip to Mt. Joan, the weather fogged in and we got disoriented so we stopped and camped. Luckily, we found a snow-free area that was about the size of the tent. The weather cleared up by morning just enough for us to see where we were. We had to decide whether to continue on to Mt. Joan or to turn back. The rain that started made our decision easier and we began to slog back in mushy snow. Along the way, we heard a helicopter and it sounded as if the machine was making a landing. We followed the

The plaque at Lake Rosemarie
(Photo by Pam Olsen)

Tarn, Spring 1999

sound to an open snowy patch and there it was with the pilot climbing back into the cockpit and starting up again. A pit stop? We waved to the pilot who waved back, and we continued to the car, where we poured water out of our boots.

The first time we got to Mt. Joan from Comox Main, we did not realize that the flat topped ridge we walked across to get to it from our base camp, had a name. The Squarehead was officially named in 1989. The name submitted, of course, by Ruth Masters who, uncharacteristically, named it for its shape rather than for a person with significant historical ties to the Alberni and Comox valleys.

The Joan cone, 2000
(Photo by Pam Olsen)

As well as the bear encounters during our first trip to Mt. Joan, we have had a few other wildlife encounters in the Beauforts. During one trip to Joan, we found cougar tracks near one of the tarns on the top of a ridge. We could see the prints clearly where the big cat had walked and slid down the snow to the water's edge. We camped near another tarn and in the morning started walking along a ridge only to discover more cougar tracks. Had the animal been watching us? Another wildlife encounter was the siting of a marten, who stared at us from a tree at the side of the road. We had stopped and gotten out of the car to check the road ahead and noticed the little animal with its bright eyes and big ears. While we are walking along, we often make jokes about stump bears, which usually turn out to be old blacked stumps or fallen logs. As we were walking up an old logging road towards Mt. Joan, one of us remarked on the stump bear lying under a tree ahead. Suddenly, it rose and lumbered up the logging road and out of sight. Some stump bears are shy animals.

The Beaufort Range is a popular area for Alberni and Comox valley snowmobilers. We found their efforts in repairing washouts with old pallets to be useful as these temporary bridges allowed us to drive further up some of the old Comox Main branch lines. We have had a few encounters with snowmobilers and found most of them to be quite friendly. On one occasion, we were somewhat awed with their high-marking antics. Hikers, climbers and backcountry skiers try to avoid setting off avalanches, but these guys were doing their best to start one and be in its path.

Our last trip to the Beauforts by way of Comox Main was in 2010. About that time, Island Timberlands began to make plans for relogging the area and closed down CX91 with deep water bars. In May 2011, we returned to Cook FSR and Roaring Creek and discovered that the industrious CDMCers had built trails to Mts. Joan and Curran around the late 1990s. The route to Mt. Joan followed, more or less, the route we had taken years ago except they went around the bump we had gone over. We had walked up their route to Curran and looking over toward The Squarehead realized that it would not be too difficult to get there and then to Mt. Joan. There was quite a bit of snow, some of it rotten, making for slow going in sections. The route took us about four days. Since 2011, the lower part of the slopes along the branch line have been logged and, in 2016, the branch was closed with water bars. A high-clearance vehicle or motorbike could drive up a ways but would eventually be blocked by fallen trees. The road closure just adds another 35 to 45 minutes walking time to and from the old trail head.

Access to the Beauforts is very limited now; most of the roads have locked gates, some of which are open limited hours on weekends. Island Timberlands, the main company in the area cites reasons such as vandalism of their equipment, garbage dumping and stolen or abandoned

Lake Rosemarie, early summer 2010
(Photo by Pam Olsen)

Base camp between Apps and Joan, looking toward the mainland, 2003
(Photo by Pam Olsen)

vehicles being burned for the closure. There is active logging in several valleys, and the cutblocks are moving higher up the slopes. IT does not want people camping on their private lands and, while the company as well as the other major logging company, TimberWest, have made agreements with some local ATV and snowmobile clubs giving their members access to the logging companies' private lands, they have not entered into any agreements with hiking or climbing clubs. The proposed Vancouver Island Spine Trail from Victoria to Cape Scott includes a section across the alpine and sub-alpine areas of the Beauforts. The planned route would run between Mts. Clifton and Joan with an access from the Log Train Trail near Port Alberni. The 700-kilometre route is being developed by the non-profit Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association (VISTA). The Association is negotiating land-use agreements with the owners of the private forest lands. Similarly, the ACC Vancouver Island Section has an Access and Environment person acting as a liaison with IT.

The only open access road seems to be Cook-Horne FSR which, strangely, does not have a gate. It is sad that the Beauforts are being logged so severely. The range is very friendly and a good spring and fall training ground for old fahrts like us who are doing our best to keep going out into the mountains.

Lovin' the Haihte
Darren Wilman
Recollections from 1993 to 2017

The Different Phases of a Mountain Relationship

The Attraction (Aug. 1993)

I don't know if it's possible to have a love affair with a mountain range, but if it is then "I do."

I recall the first time I saw the Haihte Range. I was on the summit of Mt. Ashwood with Peter Curtis and Stu Crabe as we gazed across the valley. I think the three of us said at the same time "Oh, what's that?" We were looking right up Woss Lake at her east faces. She looked so beautiful with her jagged hair and white cloak of snow and ice. I knew right then and there that I would have to be introduced.

The Introduction (Aug. 1994)

So off we went, Pete, Stu and Stu the dog. Back then you could drive all the way up N-20, so by the end of the day we were camped on the west side under the Ears. The next day we took off up the mountain with all the wrong gear. We had wool socks, Stanfields and Helly Hansen rain gear for clothes. For climbing gear, we had a caving harness, caving helmet and a caving rope, a three-foot wooden Aplenstock and ridged ice climbing crampons that somehow attached to my boots. We climbed straight up to a tight col right above camp only to find the other side very steep and exposed. No problem we had climbing gear. Right?

A little down climbing brought us to a 30-foot snow and ice covered traverse that we had to cross. I lead across to the other side while Pete tied in Stu the dog. Once on the other side, Pete let Stu the dog go. I remember seeing this poor dog swinging across and down the ice face, yelping at the top of his lungs. Hauling as fast as I could I finally got Stu to the other side. Phew, that was exciting, but I don't think the dog was ever the same again!

Needless to say, we had a great day exploring the beautiful glaciers and lakes of the Haihte Range. It was a great introduction to the area. I left with a twinkle in my eye.

First Date (Aug. 1996)

It would be two more years before the first date. The three of us made our way to Nathan Col this time. You are a

Darren Wilman rapping off the south ridge of Rugged Mountain

little smarter after you've been there once. And, of course, Rugged Mountain was on our mind. We climbed the northeast face to the east ridge. Rapelling into the shrund, we left the rope fixed so that we could prusik back out later. That left us with no rope for the rest of the climb. Well, our plan worked. We made the summit of Rugged. It was our first peak in the range. I think I have a thing for this place! - Stu Crabe

Second Date (Sept. 28, 2003)

East Ridge of Ya'ai

It was on the descent of this trip that Paul and I decided that us Heathens should clear the alders off the N-20 spur and create a trail. It was late fall of 2003, I organized two trail work days. Eight people turned out the first time and six appeared for the second round. Over those two weekends, we cleared the entire road up to the spur that swings to the right under the southwest face. The third trip was just Paul and I, we cleared the upper spur road and brushed in a rudimentary trail to the old growth off of it.

Over the next two years Allana and I did several more trips to N-20, doing more work and continuing to improve the trail. This place holds my interest, so putting in a trail

Darren Wilman rapping off Haithe Spire

seemed like the right thing to do. Like all new relationships you have to put a lot of work into it if you want it to last. - Paul Rydeen

The Infatuation Stage (2004 - 2010)

May 23, 2004 - Haihte Spire - Paul Rydeen, Chris Barner, Nick Elson

June 3, 2004 - West Ridge of Merlin - Paul Rydeen

Aug.12-13, 2004 - Outliers 4, 5, 6- Alanna Theoret

Aug. 19, 2004 - Z-6 North buttress, (out of Zeballos Lake) - Alanna Theoret

Sept. 6, 2004 - Rugged Mountain east ridge - Paul Rydeen, Alanna Theoret, Stu Crabe

Aug. 2, 2005 - South Blade - Solo

Aug. 2, 2005 - West buttress to the west summit of the Pitchfork - Solo

Sept. 10, 2005 - Pitch Fork main summit - Paul Rydeen, Stu Crabe

Sept. 25, 2005 - Rugged southwest face - 6 hours car to summit - Alanna Theoret

Feb. 9, 2006 - Skied the upper basin of the N-8 spur after bailing on skiing the Merlon Couloir - solo

Aug. 5, 2007 - Climbed the three main Merlon summits - Alanna Theoret

Aug. 6, 2007 - Nathan's Needle north east face - Alanna Theoret

June 29, 2008 - Walsh Facer Hutchinson with a south west variation to finish - Phil Stone

Aug. 27 - 30 2009 - Rugged creek traverse - Paul Rydeen

Dec. 28, 2009 - West ridge of Merlon, first winter attempt - Paul Rydeen, Alanna Theoret

Aug. 1, 2010 -

South Ridge Integrale - My plan on this trip was to climb all the peaks between Rugged and the Pitch Fork. Together they make up the south ridge of Rugged. I left my camp in Nathan Col and traversed all of the east-facing snowfields until I got to the Key Col at the start of the south ridge. I started by climbing a small wall to gain the ridge moving up the ridge you get to the first summit of the triplets, then the other two, before you descend the north ridge back to the snow.

Darren Wilman and Alanna Theoret on their first winter attempt of Merlon

Climb steep snow on the northeast side of Rugged south until you get to a point where you are right under the summit tower. Climb the wall to the left of the obvious chimney to the summit. Just after Rugged south you will have to do one rapple into a tight notch, you will now be on the south west side of the mountain. Climb back up to the crest of the ridge to locate the perfect ramp to get around Lama de Lapore on the east side. The route to the summit is on the north side of this peak, I did try to climb the tower but it was just a little out of my comfort zone to solo. Continue climbing the south ridge right onto the summit of Rugged.

Aug. 2, 2010 - West side Gendarme and southwest Ear - solo

Aug. 28, 2010 - Lama de Lapore - Paul Rydeen

Aug. 29, 2010 - Southeast ridge of the south spire of Merlon - Paul Rydeen

Sept. 22, 2010

And there were even times when she tried to kill me. I was heading into the blades area, via the lower shelf that cuts across the bottom of the of the southwest face of Rugged. Climbing onto a small hanging glacier, I was forced to jump off the ice onto the rock and climb a small wall to a safe zone. As if that wasn't exciting enough, down comes a huge rock fall taking out my footprints where I was just standing not five minutes ago. Holy f**k she just tried to kill me. The three-blades traverse, Solo - 5.6 A0

Enlightenment Stage (2011 - 2014)

June 18, 2011 - My only trip with Sandy Briggs into the range, and we sat under the tarp out of the rain for the entire day

Paul Rydeen and Darren on our 2nd winter attempt of Merlon.

June 19, 2011 - Climbed the Merlon Couloir to the ridge - Paul Rydeen, Sandy Briggs

Aug. 10, 2011 - South Ridge of Z-6 - Paul Rydeen

May 17, 2012 - South gulley to south ridge of Outlier #1 - solo

July 24 - 26, 2012 - Haihte Range traverse, Outliers 3, 4, 2, 1 Haithte spire, Ya'ai, Merlon, Rugged, Pitch fork, to finish on the highest stocked mini bar on the island - the South Blade - Paul Rydeen

Jan. 26, 2014 - Second attempt of a winter ascent of Merlon Mt. - strike two - Paul Rydeen, Ahren Rankin

July 13, 2014 - The two south Outliers - solo (bike & hike)

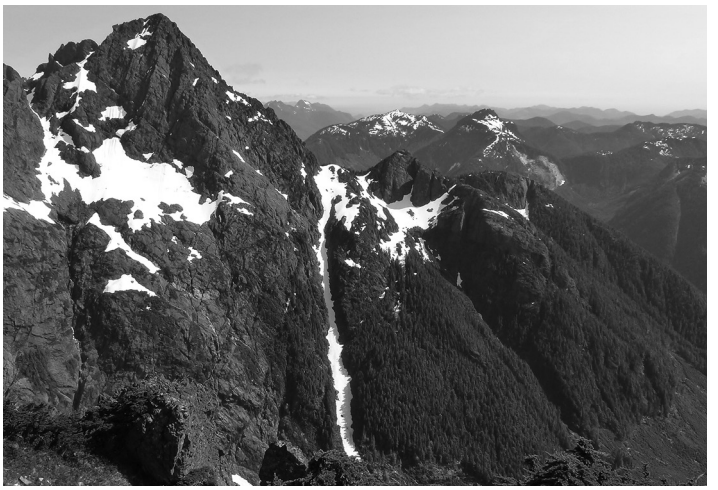
Aug. 14, 2014 - South summit of Haihte Spire, Sandy's leftovers - Paul Rydeen

Commitment and Engagement Phase (2015)

Feb 15, 2015 - It's Valentines weekend. Conditions and weather look awesome so a winter date with the one I love most is long overdue. I leave Campbell River at 3:30 a.m., after a nine-hour round trip, car to car, I managed the first solo winter summit traverse of Rugged Mountain. I climbed across the northwest face via the Walsh, Facer, Hutchinson route, finishing on the southwest variation to its icy summit, and down climbing the east ridge back to the glacier and

Darren Wilman on the Lama de Lapore

Darren Wilman in the Rugged range



Merlon Coulouir and west ridge (on right)

Nathan Col. Well that was fully committing.

June 6, 2015 - Our first attempt at the skyline traverse of the Haihte Range. We managed to climb the 10 peaks south of Rugged Mountain, it would be a 14 hour day before reaching our camp in Nathan Col. Hopefully there will be a second date on this one! - Paul Rydeen, Ryan Van Horne

Like all successful relationships you need a good partner and I can honestly say I have had a few of those. From the very beginning with Pete and Stu to my more technical times with Paul and Alanna, without all my good partners most of this would not have happened. But as you have read I am a bit of a lone wolf.

So after 29 trips into the Haihte Range, I have reached the summit 62 times on 30 different mountains, peaks, and high points, including “getting lucky” with Rugged 10 times. I’d say our relationship is in full bloom.

PS: Sorry, I don’t usually kiss and tell.

A Short Week in Kluane National Park
Rick Hudson
May 27 - 31, 2017

It was a sunny morning in Whitehorse, YK and the party was assembling. Both Mike and Graham had flown in from the south, and there were rumours that Catrin and Erich would surface shortly. While all four had just arrived, Phee and I had been on the road for several weeks, driving up the Alaska Highway. The plan now was to venture west for another 230 kilometres to Silver City at the south end of Kluane Lake, where we'd catch an Icefields Discovery (ID) flight into Kluane National Park. On the ice, we'd stay at a fixed camp on the upper Hubbard Glacier, within sight of Mt. Logan.

The idea of visiting this iconic region of Canada – the largest icefield complex outside of the poles anywhere in the world — was triggered months earlier when Martin Hofmann had given a talk on club night about attending the camp. Instead of planning all the logistics yourself, you just emailed ID, booked a week, and bingo! They took care of the planes, the food, the tents, everything. What could be easier? And as a bonus, there was an 'ACC Week' which provided a modest discount.

We picked up Graham mid-morning and took Hwy 1 west. The others would follow in a rental car. The morning was cold and showery but gradually cleared as the Kluane Mountains came into view on the left hand side of the road. Tall and snow streaked, these were mere foothills to the main ranges, hidden behind. At one pullout, a gap in the front peaks allowed views of Mts Kennedy (4250 metres) and Hubbard (4557 metres – Canada's 10th highest summit) an astonishing 100 kilometres away. The mountains of the St. Elias are nothing if not big. And for the record, Mt. Hubbard wasn't named after Mike (despite a natural tendency to think so) but after Gardiner Greene Hubbard, first president of the National Geographical Society.

At Silver City we checked in with ID, which is a family business. It was started by bush pilot Andy Williams 40 years ago, a man who has been flying expeditions and other adventurers into the Kluane Ranges in a Helio Courier, a STOL plane that's almost as old as Andy himself. Yet its safety record in what must be one of the most dangerous flying areas in the world, and its ability to carry three passengers and pilot and land almost anywhere, has made it the plane of choice for decades.

Part of that success is its wing design. While most planes have trailing wing flaps that are lowered at slow speeds to provide extra lift, the Helio has forward wing flaps too, that deploy automatically if the plane's speed drops below 50 knots. This allows it to land safely at 30 knots on very short airstrips. If there's a downside, it's when those leading edges deploy unexpectedly, making a sudden thump, and startling unprepared passengers!

Besides Andy, there was his daughter Sian, who would be our camp manager, her husband Lance (who was the aircraft mechanic) and two contract pilots, Sherpal from India and Tom from New Zealand. Andy no longer flies (he's in his late 70s), but he's still a presence at the airstrip. When we arrived, he and Lance had the contents of one of the two Helio engines in pieces spread across the hanger floor. Seeing our dismay, he grinned. "No problem," he said. "We'll have this all back together by tomorrow morning for your flight!"

The afternoon was spent at the cabins near the runway, where ID provides facilities to ingoing and outgoing customers, such as four walls and a hot shower after a month on Mt. Logan. We had no such needs yet, so spent the time packing gear for the morrow and then drove out to Slims Creek, which empties into the bottom of Kluane Lake. On the vast gravel slopes that stretch up to the sky, tiny white spots (Dahl sheep) could be seen through binoculars. Elsewhere, when we walked on the sandy beach along still-frozen Kluane Lake, we became aware of dents in the sand that, on closer inspection, turned out to be fresh, giant grizzly tracks.

We returned to the truck briskly and drove back to Silver City. The name, by the way, is misleading. Silver City is by no means a city. It's a collection of about ten shacks and a runway. Anything less like a city couldn't be imagined. Further, the 'Silver' part has nothing to do with a mineral strike, unlike so many other names in the Yukon. It's drawn from a silver fox farm that once stood at the end of the lake, when furs were de rigeur in the reception halls and opera houses of Europe.

The others arrived, which involved more unpacking and repacking, and one of the pilots advised that our 7 a.m. start tomorrow would be delayed as there was a rescue planned on Mt. Logan at first light. We could expect to take off about 8:30. Such is the life of a bush pilot, especially one who serves the climbing community in the north. But the next morning we were woken early to be told the rescue had resolved itself, and could we be ready by 7:45? The usual chaos ensued, but four of us made it to the airstrip and loaded the planes. Because of our skis, one of the passenger seats had been removed in each aircraft. When we lifted off on a sunny morning, it was Mike and Graham in one plane, Phee and I in another, leaving Erich and Catrin to follow later.

The flight into Kluane National Park up the massive Kaskawulsh Glacier (right), with the South Arm (centre) feeding into it. (Photo by Phee Hudson)

The flight was about half an hour, and the views were spectacular as we flew first up the Slims Valley and then west onto the massive Kaskawulsh Glacier. Snow-clad peaks stood huge and beautiful on either side of the river of ice, sparkling in the morning sun. Sherpal provided a running commentary on the view as it passed at 80 knots. It was everything I had expected and more, and I gained a greater respect for my son, who some years before had initially carried a massive pack and then skied with it up this same route, taking four days to do what we so easily covered in half an hour.

The plane climbed steadily. Ahead was a wall of haze surrounding Mt. Logan, but on this side of it we saw the dark specs of ID's camp, perched at 2550 metre on the Upper Hubbard Glacier. A smooth landing on skis, and then the inevitable grab and stack as we unloaded the planes in the frigid prop wash. Within minutes they were emptied and taxiing away, picking up speed in a flume of snow, and airborne. Good weather is rare in Kluane, and the pilots had much to do that day.

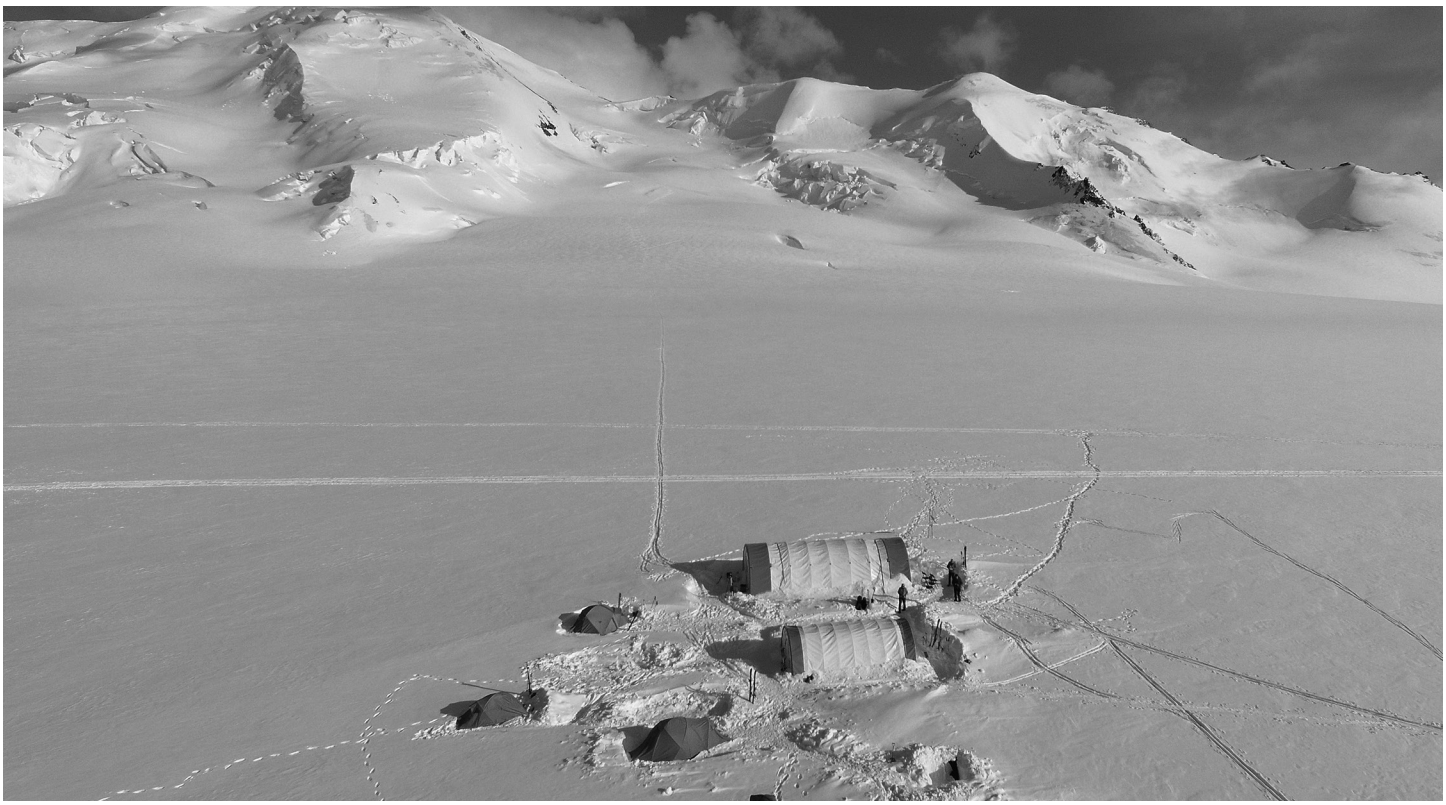
We humped our gear and Sian's kitchen supplies across to the main Quonset hut that served as kitchen and mess tent. It was bright inside, but the air was cool, even with the greenhouse effect of the white canvas skin. There were a number of sleeping tents already pitched nearby, and we each chose something suitable and then, by the time we'd furtled a bit, the sound of the returning planes was heard, bringing Catrin and Erich.

After lunch we were keen to explore the region. Located on a relatively crevasse-free area, the camp offers safe ski touring in any direction. We chose northwest, heading for a nunatak with a meteorological station atop it just two kilometres away. A strong wind was blowing and we watched with interest as Sian went skiing using a small power kite to tack back and forth across the snow. It looked like fun, but hard work, and not something you'd want to try in crevasse country.

From the top of the nunatak, the view back to camp with Mt. Queen Mary (3928 metres) behind provided a dramatic example of how small we were in a giant land. Our faint ski track meandered towards us from camp in an otherwise untrammelled and pristine world of white. The air temperature was about -5°C, the snow perfect.

As we assembled on the top, I couldn't help but admire Catrin's commitment to this week. Undaunted by a recently broken shoulder, she had been determined to be here. But to get around the risk of falling and re-injuring herself, she'd gone to a sports store and bought hockey armour to protect her upper body. Of course, on hockey players you don't see it under the team shirt. In the Kluane cold, you couldn't have freezing plastic close to the skin, so she'd opted to wear it on the outside, looking like a bionic humanoid from a Transformer movie!

The north sides of the nunatak offered good slopes and we made a couple of runs, noticing on the up slog that we were indeed at elevation. Breath was short and steaming, but the pow made it worthwhile.



A drone photo of the Icefields Discovery camp with the 'airstrip' beyond and Mt. Queen Mary (3,928m). (Photo by Rick Hudson)

Back at camp we gathered in the Quonset hut for a hearty supper, produced by Sian. There were three other guests enjoying the ACC week – all from the Yukon section – and we spent a pleasant evening shooting the breeze with them. With no actual heating in the hut, however, the indoor temperature dropped remarkably quickly after the sun disappeared behind a wall of cloud in the west. Although still high in the sky (it was nearly the summer solstice and we were above 60°N), a chill developed as soon as the propane cooking was done for the evening, and we all turned in early, keen to get into our polar sleeping bags and get some warmth back in our bodies.

It turned out we'd all recently upgraded our one-inch Therm-a-rest mats to the seriously decadent three-inch model. That said, we were cold at night. By morning there was frost on all the interior metal poles in our tent, which slowly dripped as the day wore on. Others fared better, although Graham told us he couldn't get warm, despite the usual tricks – thick socks, toque, duvet jacket, Nalgene hot water bottle – nothing seemed to work.

Sunday dawned mild but with zero visibility. There were new snow drifts around everything, and it was an icy run to the biffy tent. Because the camp is "clean," everything has to be removed, including poo. This meant we were all issued a poo bag (you could get more if/when you needed them). The bag attached to the seat, you did your business, clamped it closed and then dropped it in the snow somewhere where it promptly froze solid, so it was no bother to use again a day later. Upon final exit from camp, the poo bags were to fly out with us.

The morning remained milk white, with light snow falling. Managing a poo bag was nothing compared to managing the snow which drifted in through the biffy vents, accumulating in little piles at surprising speed. Biffy stops were necessarily swift. For the rest of the day, we did what climbers always do in bad conditions — endless tea and coffee, cards, Scrabble, BananaGram, talk, read, tell tales of faraway places — something that both Mike and Graham were particularly entertaining at. And we got to know Chris, Rudi and Peter. As one of them was a climate change denier, it made for spirited debate, all of which helped to pass the hours.

It snowed much of the night, but cleared at 5 a.m. for a while, before closing in again. At breakfast, Sian advised it looked like it was going to be another day at least before things improved. We stamped our feet, dreamed of deep hot baths, and played more cards. There were a number of climbing books on the camp shelf, and some of the party spent time going over crevasse rescue techniques, discussing nuances in rope work, debating optional methods, critiquing the diagrams in the manuals. It was a slow day.

A curiosity occurred in the late afternoon when a Wilson's warbler turned up in the Quonset. It must have been blown far off course into this frozen world of white. No doubt seeing the huts, it had sought refuge. Its bright yellow body and black cap were in stark contrast to the colourless world outside. Weighing about eight grams, songbirds don't have much reserve energy, and sadly by morning it had succumbed to the cold.

Mike and Catrin (in bionic armour) on ski tour.
(Photo by Phee Hudson)

When the visibility was good, the region offered spectacular ski touring. The team was heading for the nunatak on the left, with the lower Hubbard Glacier beyond.
(Photo by Rick Hudson)

The holy trinity: Mike Hubbard emerging from a Hubba-Hubba tent on the upper Hubbard Glacier.
(Photo by Phee Hudson)

Tuesday dawned clear. Finally. We ate quickly and prepared to leave, heading west towards Mt. Logan (still completely obscured). The two ID planes buzzed overhead, bound for the big mountain to pick up climbing parties as we tracked across the level snow and then began a gently steepening descent towards another nunatak about three-kilometres away.

There were some nice turns in the fresh powder before skins were back on and we kicked slowly up the hill, breaking out onto a little platform at the top. Around us, lower peaks were all visible, but cloud hid the higher summits. Shadows drifted across smooth white glaciers below, and everywhere there was a great silence and remoteness. Unlike the Coast or Rocky ranges, here was no distant green or brown of a lower region, reminding you of where you'd come from. Here there was nothing but snow, ice and rock stretching away in every direction. It was almost overwhelming until someone commented thoughtfully, "This is what Vancouver used to look like 15,000 years ago!"

We'd booted up the last steep section. Below that we put on skis again and slid quickly onto a saddle out of the wind, where a sun trap made it feel almost warm. This was followed by a slow rising skin-ski back to camp for a late lunch. The Yukon three had left and we had the place to ourselves as haze descended again. Catrin, Erich, Mike and Sian chose to ski onto a bench on Mt. Queen Mary to the south. The haze lifted somewhat, and I assembled my drone, but by the time I'd thawed a battery and assembled the plane, visibility had deteriorated again, the sharp horizons fading to white.

The party returned. After a hearty supper of stew and dumplings we noticed shadows on the hut wall and, emerging, saw the sky had cleared, except for Mt. Logan (inevitably). The drone was quickly launched and made to circle camp, shooting both video and stills, capturing the brilliant low light and sharp tracks that led away into nowhere, vanishing to infinity.

Returning to the Quonset, we heard from Sian that a three-day storm was forecast to arrive around mid-day the next day. After some discussion, we decided to take the chance to get out before it hit, even though we'd only arrived on Saturday and had hoped to stay a week. The prospect of 3 more days kicking our heels in an unheated hut with no exercise appealed to no one.

Ironically, Wednesday dawned clear. To the west, the entire massive grandeur of Mt. Logan (5959 metres) – Canada's highest summit and a sight truly to behold at least once in a lifetime – was laid clear in the sparkling sunshine. One of Phee and my reasons for coming to the camp was this view. Back in 2002, our daughter Jacqui, with three friends, skied from Haines, AK to Mt. Logan in a month. At the mountain, they'd shifted gears, climbed the difficult East Ridge (carrying skis), crossed the high terrain, and descended the King's Trench on the west side. Then,

An acrylic painting done later by Phee of Mt. Augusta (4,298m) which was visible from camp. It is one of the boundary peaks between the Yukon and Alaska. (Photo by Rick Hudson)

Canada's highest summit Mt. Logan (5,959m) cleared at dawn on the last day, shortly before a storm swept in. The East Ridge is on the left. Taken from camp. (Photo by Phee Hudson)

incredibly, they'd skied out to Cordoba, AK – a total of 55 days and 674 kilometres.

The mountain stood clear. Cameras clicked, breakfast was rapidly served, duffle bags were stuffed, and a roundup of poo bags was done. Strong winds and new snow drifts baffled some of the party, who had to seek diligently for their sacs de toilet, while Sian warned the front was approaching, as were the planes.

By the time we heard the familiar roar of engines at 7:30 a.m., the visibility had deteriorated. The planes came with three passenger seats each, meaning the whole party could fly out together, leaving Sian and our skis for later pickup, if the weather allowed. We gratefully climbed aboard, turned up the heat, bounced down the snow strip and into the air, glad to get away before the storm arrived.

Turning east, we flew in lowering cloud down the Kaskawulsh Glacier, Tom giving us a running commentary about what we could almost see, following the dark medial moraine along the pale highway of ice, the only contrast in an increasing world of white. By the time we reached Silver City it looked like our skis would be (as Air Canada euphemistically puts it) 'on a later flight'.

Spilling out in warm rain, we drove to the cabins for a hot shower and shave – a treat made even better by the ambient temperature and excess of oxygen. But we had barely emerged, scrubbed and clean, when to our delight Sian arrived with the skis.

Mike, Graham, Catrin and Erich had agreed to share the rental car back to Whitehorse (we were going west from here). There was the small logistical challenge of how to fit three large and one medium sized person, plus baggage, into a small Japanese import, but this was resolved when Sian kindly offered to take the skis into Whitehorse separately a few days later.

In short order, bags were packed, goodbyes were wished, hugs exchanged, and we watched in wonder as the four squeezed themselves into the car to head east. We pulled onto the Alaska Highway and turned west past the now unfrozen Kluane Lake.

Participants: Catrin Brown, Mike Hubbard, Phee Hudson, Rick Hudson, Graham Maddocks, Erich Schellhammer.

Looking east at the summit of Rocky Peak.
(Photo by Dave Suttill)

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SOUTH OF THE BORDER

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Rocky Peak - East of Mt. Angeles
Dave Suttill
Sept. 4, 2017

Rocky Peak can be seen on the skyline 50 kilometres to the south of Victoria. It lies at the east end of Klahhane Ridge, which connects it to the more prominent Mt. Angeles. The closest trailhead can be reached without need of a car by taking the ferry to Port Angeles then cycling 12 kilometres up to the Olympic National Park entrance. There one can make a 21-kilometre loop hike via the Heather Park and Lake Angeles trails with a “short” side trip to the summit.

Rocky Peak is not a particularly noteworthy objective in terms of its height (1895 metres) and is somewhat out of the way. The approach is not overly inviting either, even though you go right by it en route to or from Mt. Angeles. For one thing, the Mt Angeles is by far the bigger draw and is demanding, requiring a full day. However, after going there a number of times in the past, the time had come to give Rocky Peak a closer look.

Come August 2017, with thoughts of another trip to Mt. Angeles in mind, we decided to do just that. We went up via the Lake Angeles trail to hit Rocky Peak first. All we had to go on was the brief and somewhat vague description included in the fourth edition of Olympic Mountains: A Climbing Guide. Once up Klahhane Ridge, the route drops 150 metre on its south side and traverses eastward along the side of Rocky Peak past an obvious “greenish” rock. The rock wasn’t quite green enough for me, but Roxanne was quite sure we found the one mentioned in the guide. We were looking for access to a “second” notch via a series of ledges and gullies. It was not at all obvious which the second notch was when looking straight up at the numerous gullies and ledges. We headed up the first gully that looked promising. The gully got progressively more difficult and seemed to be heading too far west of what we took to be the desired notch on the GPS. As we gained altitude, the going became more or less continuous fourth-class rock. Quite doable but the route finding was becoming a concern. We reached 1790 metres and were clearly making for Peak 1834, some 550 metres west of where we wanted to be. The weather was really hot, water running low and, at 2:45 p.m., a comfortable turnaround time was approaching. We decided we were not likely to reach the summit on this trip. Disappointed, we made the best of the day by returning via the very scenic Heather Park Trail. We got to the bikes at Heart of the Hills at 7:15 p.m., with plenty of time to make the ferry.

On the ferry ride home, we discussed what it would take to make a serious attempt on Rock Peak. It would mean more water, including a water cache on Klahhane Ridge and 30 metres of climbing rope to use as a hand line. Cooler weather wouldn’t hurt. Lights would also be needed in case we would be riding to the ferry after dark. Another thing that would be particularly useful would more beta. After we got back, the only thing we could find was an entry in Peakbagger.com by David Carmody in 2014. His written description was rather scant and did not add to what we already knew. However, he did post a large number of photographs of his ascent. These we could piece together in order, some following geographic features from one to the next. They did not appear to show any insurmountable obstacles.

So, two weeks later, on Sept. 4 we embarked on Rocky II. As before, we reached the east end of Klahhane ridge a little before 1 p.m.. Not much you can do about that if you don’t come over the night before. We stashed a spare litre of water in a shady cleft in the rock before following a goat trail down the ridge line east to the major low point between Klahhane ridge and Peak 1834. This was much more pleasant than dropping down the steep side hill on the south side of the ridge. Part way down, we were surprised to see a lone hiker heading up toward us. He didn’t seem too inclined to go out of his way to talk to us. However, we did find out that he had come from the summit and that you had to go a considerable way over before heading up to the

ridge line. Once we got down to the low point of the ridge we contoured along the south side at the base of the rocky part of the ridge on steep hard packed gravel scree. This was not the kind you could easily recover from a slip on. This time we went above the green rock. We continued on beyond our previous track until the GPS indicated that we were even with the major notch between Peak 1834 and the main summit, Peak 1895. At that point it was easy to imagine there were two gullies above leading to the ridge crest. The one on the left matched one of Carmody's photos so up that one we went. It was comforting to match the landmarks from one photo to the next as we ascended. The connecting sequence of photos seemed to run out about 40 metres short of the actual ridge crest. Here the climbing became more earnest with a short stretch of class four. We would need the rope for one four-metre drop on the way down.

Rocky Peak from east end of Klahhane Ridge.
(Photo by Dave Suttill)

Once on the ridge crest, the view to the other side was breathtaking. It was not immediately apparent how to continue east along the ridge. I went ahead to check a potential route angling up a ledge and to the right around a corner of rock. Although exposed, it proved to be just within our comfort zone. The route beyond seemed to magically unfold as we went. We were mindful of what it looked like looking back as route finding would be critical on the way out. There were several minor false summits as we continued along. We finally got to what was clearly the highest point around 3:15 p.m.. The view was spectacular. We could see the southern part of Vancouver Island to the north and Mt. Baker way off to the east and, of course, the whole of the Olympic Range all around. We were a little surprised to find there was no cairn on top. We left it that way. It was kind of nice to not have a reminder that others had been there. Definitely a summit less travelled.

On the way back, we investigated going down what would have been the right gully from the bottom looking up. This might have been the one the climber we met earlier had taken. After dropping down about 60 metres, it got steeper and steeper. As we could not see what was below around a corner without committing ourselves, we decided we had better return to the summit ridge to retrace out steps out.

We were back at Klahhane Ridge on the Lake Angeles trail at 6 p.m.. There we saw some goats, which were actually in one of our summit photos though we had not seen them at the time. We made it to the bikes by 8 o'clock and to Port Angeles by dark, with an hour to spare for the 9:30 ferry home. I remember thinking at the time that we won't have to do that one again. But you know, it would be fun to go back and explore a different route up.

Participants: Dave Suttill, Roxanne Stedman

High Sierra Adventure
Thomas Radetski
September 2017

It all started with winning the lottery for a six day permit in Yosemite National Park. Actually it started with our wedding anniversary and camping at Illecileweat, climbing Pearly Rock and holding chunks of glacier ice in our hands.

Now we are standing at the trailhead in Toulumne Meadows with heavy packs and food for six days, stored in an U.S. Gov. approved bear container, which weights as much empty as our tent.

We hike up Rafferty Creek to Booth Lake above 2800 metres for our first basecamp. It is fantastic to be able to choose a campsite to one's own liking. Another day to explore Vogelsang Pass and see Amelia Ehrhard Peak. A heavy thunderstorm with hail moves through in the evening. We are finally in the High Sierras with peaks close to 4000 metres high and passes that reach around 3000 metres. Fantastic dome-shaped granite slabs weathered to christaline quartz sand, a dream on which to set up camp. Trickles of water and clear creeks running over polished rock features to the Merced River.

We camp high and move toward Half Dome thanks to an added permit made possible on an first-come basis. A small rocky outcrop three miles before the dome becomes our new basecamp. Blue-bellied lizards sun themselves under the fall sun. An early start gets us to the base of the cables before many other hikers from lower Yosemite, an added bonus of being able to approach from the backcountry. We enjoy the challenge to scale the rock face with the

Above, Thomas Radetzki airs out in the High Sierra. At left, Thomas and Waltraud Radetzki behold the views overlooking Yosemite's famed Half Dome.

help of steel cables like many others before us. We view the Yosemite Valley below us and are glad not to be down there. Not long before we head down and back to our hideaway camp, the valley has woken up.

On day six we are now on the John Muir Trail, at a viewpoint overlooking the Sunrise Basin and all the mountain ranges we touched on in our circle. We decide the view is worth the effort to carry water up to the camp. Unplanned day seven and eight has us nibble emergency rations and soup for sustenance, but it is too amazing to end the trip. We arrive at Cathedral Lakes and have our legs dangling over a cliff edge enjoying the rays of the setting sun.

Eight days through the High Sierra with it's amazing vistas, a dream come true after thirty years. Wild camping is the way to go for us, and we will be back for more. For now, we move on to the Ansel Adam Wilderness after the first winter storm with plenty of snow let's us pause.

Participants: Thomas and Waltraud Radetzki

DISTANT PLACES

Reunion Island: Piton des Neiges
Graham Maddocks
Jan. 22 - 23, 2017

At 3070 meters, Piton des Neiges is the highest mountain in the Indian Ocean. It stands in the centre of Reunion Island, a French overseas department. It is situated at the point where three massive cirques meet, the cirques of Cilaos, Salazie and Mafate. The whole island was once the dome of a vast prehistoric shield volcano, centered on Piton des Neiges, but the collapse of subterranean lava chambers formed the starting point for the creation of the cirques. Millions of years of rainfall and erosion did the rest, scouring out the amphitheaters that are visible today.

Reunion has an active volcano in the south of the island. Piton de la Fournaise (2632 meters) is a geological wonder that erupts with great regularity. In April 2007, the central 900-metre-wide crater collapsed by 300 meters; new lava fields formed on its southeastern flanks, closing the coast road for several months. In 1998, there was a major eruption, the longest eruption of a volcano in the 20th century with a total of 196 days of volcanic activity. In January 2010, a new eruption occurred, though less powerful. It is possible to hike up to the rim and gaze down at the bottom of the caldera 350 meters below.

The uninhabited island was settled by the French in 1649 and named Isle Boubon. Coffee, spices and cotton were introduced in 1730, and African slaves were imported to work in the plantations. In 1810, during the Napoleonic Wars, the island was seized by the British. Under British rule, sugar cane was introduced and quickly became the primary crop. The vanilla industry was established in 1819. In 1815, under the Treaty of Paris, the island was returned to France. Britain retained Mauritius, Rodrigues and the Seychelles, all former French possessions. All of these islands were a haven for pirates and privateers who preyed on merchant ships sailing to the Indies and the Spice Islands. Both countries encouraged their privateers to prey on each other's ships. In 1804, a sole French naval victory occurred in a small bay in Mauritius when four Royal Navy ships attacked four French warships. During the ensuing cannonades, three British ships grounded on the reefs while trying to manoeuvre in the confines of the bay. The French victory was short lived. Three months later, the British landed a large force and Mauritius was ceded to Britain. This French naval victory is the only one inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. In 1848, slavery was abolished when the Second Republic was proclaimed and Ile Boubon became La Reunion.

The island's inhabitants are descendants of these early African slaves and indentured Indian labourers, who were brought in to work on the plantations when slavery was abolished. They speak an unintelligible Creole based on French and African languages, which I am told is similar to the Creole spoken in Mauritius and Seychelles.

The cirques have something of a dark history, as these inaccessible heights became the hiding places of maroons, runaway slaves who were hunted for a bounty. The Cirque de Mafate is named after one such escaped slave: the chieftain and sorcerer Mafate, who took refuge among its ramparts. He was tracked down and killed by a slave hunter in 1751.

The local Creole style of cooking is superb, influenced no doubt by the French. A spicy curry (carri in Creole) being the most popular meal. Fish soup and curried octopus were excellent as was swordfish steak in vanilla sauce, a far cry from the bland restaurant fare of Victoria in spite of our rich fishery. In any French overseas territory one can always buy the omnipresent baguette.

The unique French system of making each overseas territory an actual department of mainland France means Reunion receives huge subsidies from the European Union, and the standard of living is very high for a small island in the middle of the Indian Ocean, where the main

Piton des Neiges, Reunion Island. (Photo by Graham Maddocks)

occupation seems to be huge family picnics and the Euro is the currency. These EU subsidies may have something to do with Brexit as it seems bizarre that the British taxpayer should be subsidizing a family beach picnic marathon in Reunion. I saw the same thing in French Polynesia, where subsidized islanders drove new Range Rovers on the Marquesas Islands, which only have few kilometers of roads. France will never hear a squeak about independence from their overseas departments, who clearly understand which side of their bread is buttered. Like the Quebec separatists, they can count.

The base for the ascent of the mountain is the delightfully bucolic town of Cilaos, which is surrounded by the massive ramparts of the Cirque. Cilaos is accessed from the coastal road by 37 kilometers of some of the most difficult road I have ever driven, with steep, tight single-lane hairpin bends and single-lane tunnels. My rental compact was in first gear most of the time, struggling to make the grade. Cilaos sits at 1200 meters and is pleasantly cool in the evening, a relief after the stifling heat and humidity of the coast. The town was developed as a spa resort in the 19th century. After the discovery of the thermal springs by a goat hunter, a track was constructed into the cirque in 1842, paving the way for development of Cilaos as a health spa for rich colonials. The spring is heated by volcanic chambers far below the surface. The spa made the usual claims of relieving rheumatic pain, bone and muscular ailments. Delicious, sun-ripened tropical fruit was sold very cheaply at the roadside, and I brought lychees, mango and passion fruit by the kilo.

The rugged and eroded volcanic topography reminded me of other islands that have evolved in a similar way: Hawaii, Tahiti and the Marquesas. The access route climbs through a forest of planted Japanese pine (Cryptomeria). The cirques still have some original forest cover of small trees, bushes and indigenous plants. This is more so than on Mauritius, where I had to climb the highest 800-meter mountains to find some original forest; most of that island has been cleared for the cultivation of sugar cane. The forest cover was made up of native Tamarind hardwood and Lacoa (Pandanus Utilis), a screw palm that is endemic to Madagascar and that grows to an enormous size there. At the altitude of the gite (mountain hut), the flora changes to giant heather and eventually bare lava rock. The route is not technical but is a steep, never-ending staircase. The journey journey takes about six hours to reach the Gite de la Caverne Dufour at 2479 meters, where I spent the night and food was served. There is water and a shelter at Plateau du Petit Matarum at 1969 meters in a forest of Japanese pine, from where the trail climbs through stunted indigenous trees and shrubs in a cloud forest environment. I am not a botanist, but the flora was unlike anything I had seen before. I was surprised at the number of colourful, small birds that zero in on an unsuspecting hiker and his coveted baguette.

At 2469 meters, the trail reaches Croisee Coteau Kerveguen, where there is a crossroads of trails linking the villages of the three cirques, which are only accessible on foot. The B&B industry of these charming villages that are supplied solely by helicopter serves mostly vacationing French hikers. Five-day treks make a circuit of the cirques with every night spent in a different village. A dozen guests were at the gite: climbers from France or French expatriates who worked in Reunion. When dinner was served, the French influence was evident. An aperitif was provided: rum arrange, local rum flavoured with small red goavier berries. Then came rice, large white beans in sauce, chicken in herb sauce, curried fresh tuna, fresh-cut-chili sauce and apple compote. This mountain hut meal would be considered superb fare if introduced to Victoria's restaurant scene. The gite is supplied by helicopter. My French is poor, but the mantra at dinner was to get up at 3 a.m. for the three-hour push to the summit to view the sunrise when atmospheric conditions guarantee a clear view that will mist in later. This had been the weather pattern that I had seen from my hotel room in Cilaos, which had a lovely view of the Piton and the surrounding cirque, but it often did not mist in until mid-morning. I had learned this early start is not necessarily a good plan on Kilimanjaro. Yes, you see the sunrise, but the icy wind means you have to immediately retreat. I stayed in my bunk until daylight at 5 a.m. and set out. The summit was misted in and, as I ascended, I met the summit parties coming down who had not seen much of anything other than the inside of a cloud. On the way up the route to the gite, I had noticed small grottos on the trail with a plaster Virgin Mary and some candles and, as I neared the summit, there was divine intervention, a gust blew the mist away and there was the summit: lava cone set against a clear blue sky.

The views were superb in all directions of the cirques of Cilaos, Salazie and Mafate and down to the coast and the ocean. It gusted with strong winds but was warm enough in the sun to savour the views. An unusual visitor was a confused looking mouse, with only lava rock to eat I assume he must have hitched a lift to the summit from the gite in someone's pack. Climbing down the route was difficult, with baseball-to-football-size lava boulders under my feet, I followed a smoother route in a dried up rock watercourse but eventually I descended too far into a dead end cirque with a sheer drop off. The weather was clear, and I was able to correct my mistake, but it dawned on me that if the mist had returned, I would probably still be there.

The cut off time for breakfast at the hut was 10 a.m., and because of this route-finding error it was 10:10 when I reached the hut. I politely asked the French custodian if I could still get petit dejeuner. "Non," was the reply.Perhaps just un café? "Non," again. I was feeling tired and hungry and was tempted to start a conversation about the outcome of the Battles of Waterloo and Trafalgar, but it was too nice a day. So I headed back down the staircase from hell.

Addendum for the botanists:

Later, I was hiking the granite mountains (905 meters) of the Seychelles. This granite is the mountain tops of the

super continent Pangaea that once encompassed India and Africa. On Praslin and Curieuse, two very small islands, there grows naturally a rare endemic palm, the Coco de Mer (Lodoicea Maldivica) which produces the largest seed in the world. It got its name when early explorers found the seeds floating in the Indian Ocean and thought that they came from a sea garden. The Latin name is also mistaken as it was thought the seed originated in the Maldives. The huge palms, which can grow to over 30 meters high (the record is 57 meters) during a lifespan of 250 years, also produce the largest leaves in the world. The fan shaped leaves are seven to 10 meters long. After 25 years, the female plant produces a nut that takes seven years to mature and is the largest wild fruit in the world, recorded at 42 kilograms. When this fruit is dropped, the seed can weigh up to 25 kilograms. Having picked one up, I can believe that. Other endemic palms have formidable spines thought to have been a means of defence against grazing by the giant tortoises that once roamed these islands (extinct by 1840).

A Mexican Adventure
Don Morton
Nov. 15 - 18, 1996

Occasionally on a climbing trip something happens that is just too embarrassing to include in a report. However, now that the ACC has generously given me a Silver Rope Award, perhaps I can admit how careless one can be.

This story began with an ACC Columbia Icefields Expedition in the summer of 1996. I shared a tent with Suave Lobodzinsky, a biomedical engineer at the California State University in Long Beach. When I learned he originally came from Poland, I immediately asked if he knew any of the Polish climbers who had climbed Noshaq, a 7492 meter peak in the Hindu Kush on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. I was aware of two Polish expeditions in the 1960s because I had climbed the mountain in 1969. Suave replied he had climbed Noshaq on a later expedition in 1972. Later, he joined the 1989 Polish expedition to the west ridge of Everest, where five of his companions were killed in an avalanche while retreating over the south summit of Khumbutse. Our camp on the Athabaska Glacier was Suave's first climbing since that tragedy. At the end of our Icefields expedition, he encouraged me to contact him if ever I were in Southern California because there was an interesting mountain across the Mexican border in Baja California called Picacho del Diablo (3095 metres). We soon came to understand the appropriateness of the name.

The opportunity came in mid-November, when I had Friday to Monday for travel between astronomy meetings in Tucson, Arizona and Hilo, Hawaii. On the Friday morning Suave met me at the San Diego airport in his Nissan 4x4 Pathfinder and stopped at a nearby hotel, where I made a reservation for the Sunday night and left a suitcase with my going-to-meeting clothes. When we drove across the border to Tijuana, Mexico I noticed a wall of corrugated steel on the U.S. side and Immigration Service vehicles patrolling the open space between the wall and the actual border.

We continued south on the main highway of Baja California

Picacho del Diablo far to the northeast from our viewpoint on the ridge
(Photo by Don Morton)

to the city of Ensenada and a further 140 kilometres to a dirt road going east to Rancho Meling. Beyond was Parque Nacional Sierra de San Pedro Mártir and Observatorio Astronómico Nacional de San Pedro Mártir, which is Mexico's primary optical observatory. I had never visited this observatory so I hoped I might have a chance to see it while in the area. A little more than 93 kilometres from the highway we crossed a stream on a concrete ford and explored a track on our right, where we found a camping area and a small building that appeared to be the pump house for the observatory's water. By 5 p.m., I was glad I'd brought my down jacket.

Our information about the route to Picacho del Diablo lacked many essential details, so after dinner we drove a further five kilometres up switchbacks to the observatory. There, using our minimal abilities in Spanish, we confirmed that we should follow the track going southeast from the pump house.

Early on the Saturday morning, we drove along the track, encouraged by the occasional cairn or piece of pink tape. After about 10 kilometres, we passed a ruined cabin, then a cairn on our left with a white tape in a tree and soon reached the end of the road. We turned back, left the Pathfinder at the cabin about 8 o'clock. and shouldered our packs in anticipation of a two-day trek. At the white tape, we headed east into the forest for want of any better indicator of the route. Two more white tapes brought us to a section of trail, an abandoned scrap of clothing and then a beer can. We climbed a rocky cliff to higher ground and through a pass to a cairn and an indistinct trail in a broad valley. We began to wonder whether this route was taking us toward our objective, so Suave proposed we climb up to the ridge on our right for a view.

This we did, leaving our packs part way up among the rocks. About 9:30 we reached a ridge from which we saw what must be Picacho del Diablo to the northeast. Our driving and hiking had brought us to the southeast side of the mountain. We were heading in the correct direction, but the peak was far away. We descended to collect the packs and try our best to reach it. Unfortunately, among all the boulders and bushes on the hillside we could not find our packs.

As we searched for the packs, I commented to Suave that if we did not find them before the late-afternoon drop in temperature we would have to retreat to the vehicle and return to civilization. He replied that the Nissan key was in his pack and the only spare one was on his dresser at home in Long Beach! After nearly three hours up, down and across the rocky hillside with no packs, we had no choice but to descend to the road and hike 14 kilometres to the observatory up the hill before the night became too cold. The day was wonderfully sunny so all our protective clothes were in the packs.

We reached the observatory administration area about 4:30 p.m., a little hungry and very thirsty. Multiple glasses of lime juice were most welcome, but with our limited abilities in Spanish we had difficulty explaining our problem. Then Suave discovered that one of the Mexican astronomers, Gagvic Toumasian, was originally from Armenia. Like Suave, who also grew up under Soviet domination, he had to learn Russian as a child. So, sentence by sentence, Suave related what had happened to Gagvic, who then repeated each part in Spanish to the Mexican staff, who responded with much laughter.

Alfredo Meling, the site supervisor, most generously offered to feed us, give us beds for the night and a ride in a vehicle going to Ensenada the next day. However, the retrieval of the Pathfinder required the spare key from Long Beach. At that time, the observatory's external communications depended on a radio-telephone link with the Ensenada Institute from where a staff member could telephone Suave's wife in the United States. The message from a stranger in Mexico requesting Magdelena to bring a car key to Ensenada the next day did seem rather suspicious, but she checked by independently calling the Institute and then agreed to come. A visiting German astronomer, Heinz Tiersch, thoughtfully lent us $50 dollars in case we needed money before meeting Suave's wife.

Early Sunday morning we left for Ensenada with four us sharing the front seat in the Observatory truck. In Ensenada, the $50 was very helpful, buying some lunch and reserving a room for the night. Magdelena arrived by late afternoon with the key and an accompanying friend, Nancy. Suave stayed the night and rode back in the observatory truck on Monday. The driver very helpfully took him all the way to the parked Pathfinder.

I rode back towards San Diego that night with the ladies, taking my chances at the border because my passport and driver's licence were in my lost pack. Fortunately, Nancy was from Newfoundland, the wife of a hockey player in Los Angeles. So, for the border we arranged for Nancy to be the driver with myself beside her and Magdelena behind. The American official asked each of us our citizenship. In the front seat we said "Canada" and "Canada" and from the rear window Magdelena said "Polish" and waived her green resident card. With no further questioning, the official let us enter. Soon I was at the San Diego hotel for the night, collecting my suitcase with alternate clothes and a bank card left behind. I still lacked my plane tickets, which also were in my pack, but on Monday morning I contacted the Canadian travel agent, who authorized a replacement by telephone to the airline, permitting me to fly to my Hawaii meetings that day as planned. No further identification was needed at the gate.

Back home in Victoria, I made a claim on our household insurance policy and collected some compensation for the lost climbing gear after relating my story to a trusting adjuster. In October 1997, I received a message from a Mexican climber, Rudolfo Araujo who had visited the area and happened to find the lost packs. He recovered some credit cards, which we had cancelled, and some cash

which we told him to keep. With his advice on an alternate route, Suave and I returned to Baja California the next month with priority for a second attempt on Picacho del Diablo rather than searching for the packs. This time when Suave met me in San Diego he handed me a second key for his Pathfinder.

From the place where we had parked the 4X4 in 1996, we followed a trail to the northeast that took us over the summit of Cerro Botella Azul (2950 metres). From there we descended northwards 1100 metres in Cañon del Diablo to Campo Noche for the night. From the camp, a trail to the east ascends 1200 metres to Picacho del Diablo, but we had time to explore only the lower part on Sunday because Suave had to be back in Long Beach in time for a teaching commitment the next morning. We returned to the vehicle, confident that we could start it this time.

Participants: Don Morton and Suave Lobodzinsky

Blue Nile Falls

From High to Low: Trekking in Ethiopia
Liz Williams
November - December, 2017

My winter travels focussed around the River Nile, the longest river in the world at 6850 kilometres in length, draining 11 countries. Mountains of volcanic rock, mud, salt, and sand are all part of the landscape from its headwaters in Ethiopia, through Sudan and Egypt, and on to the Mediterranean.

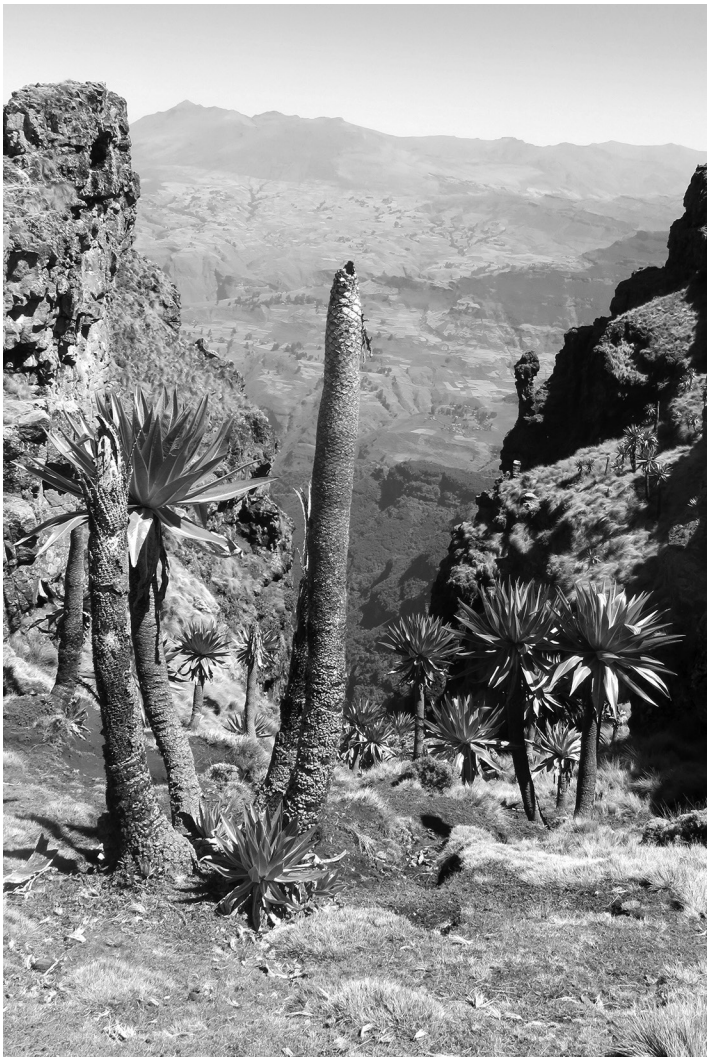
I started by visiting some of the obligatory sites of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, including the bones of our oldest relative, 'Auntie Lucy' — she of the bipedal knees three million years ago, so called because her finders in 1974 played Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds all night. Addis is as chaotic and polluted as any other African city, and I soon went north to Lake Tana, the fourth-largest lake in Africa, and the headwaters of the Blue Nile.

The islands of the lake hold many medieval Coptic Christian monasteries — circular, thatched temples with seven ostrich eggs on top symbolizing steadfast watchfulness. Their concentric corridors and inner sanctums, some of which are barred to women, hold 18th century biblical paintings on cloth stuck to the walls. They are as gruesome as anything by Hieronymus Bosch. The olivaceous waters of the lake are plied by tankwas. These papyrus fishing boats are unchanged in 2000 years. Hippos, fish eagles, and white pelicans abound at its outlet, the Abay River, which flows to the Blue Nile Falls, two hours south via a truly appalling dirt road. It was there that I crossed the Nile for the first time, punting in a dugout between fields of chat and sugar cane, then taking a shower in the spray of the falls, wondering how long my sweat would take to reach the Mediterranean.

Lake Tana is fed in part by springs in the Simien Mountains, a spectacular range of high plateau intersected by a hundred Grand Canyons. The Simien trekking routes follow the edge of the vertical escarpments, dropping here and there to rivers and waterfalls. I took a seven-day 75 kilometre trek from Sankaber to Ambiko with several 10 and 11 hour days. The main objective was to climb Ras Dashen (4543 metres) and Bwahit (4430 metres), first and third highest peaks in Ethiopia. We climbed up through the Afro-montane eco-zone with juniper and olive hardwoods and sunbirds sucking nectar from red hot pokers. Then came the heather zone, where tree heathers reached 10 metres high. Highest of all is the Afro-alpine zone of surreal, giant lobelia, often with a black kite or thick-billed raven sitting on top. The days were scorching, the nights below freezing.

There's a lot to be said for walking across the land. Its essence seeps into one with the patterns of unfamiliar foliage – waving tall grasses, rat's ear wild geranium, cinque-foil trees; the aroma of wild rose and thyme; the purring of doves in the trees, and the chatter of the babbler birds. On grassy slopes, troupes of Gelada monkeys shuffle along eating grass, looking much like large clumps of grass themselves. They amiably let people walk amongst them. In the bush, we see klipspringer and Melenik's bushbuck. High on the rock is a walia ibex. One day I ran after an Ethiopian wolf, the rarest canid in the world, and got some blurred photos. Above us soared the lammergeyer with its 10-foot wingspan, looking for marrow bones. Many of these species are endemic not only to Ethiopia but to the Simien Mountains alone.

The fifth day started at 3 a.m. With an early breakfast



Simien Mts

before setting off for Ras Dashen. At first we scrambled over precipitous, loose slides before meeting a more solid path. Once it was daylight, it was a long, hot grind up to the plateau below the butte of Ras Dashen. The rock wall to the summit is easily climbed by those less acrophobic than me. I made it to a ledge within 20 metres of the top and sat frying in the sun, somewhat anxious that my sunscreen, sunglasses, and protective clothing were all in my pack taken up by the guide. It took six hours to reach Ras Dashen, and by noon our small group was back on the grassy plateau enjoying a lunch of flat bread and bananas. By 3 p.m. we were back at the Ambiko Camp for a welcome dip in the river after our 11-hour hike.

Below the park elevation line are steep terraces of white, red, and black barley. At harvest time, groups of three oxen or mules plod round and round threshing piles of cut grain, all medieval and picturesque by our standards. People are constantly on the move with laden donkeys, oblivious to the heat, altitude and steep terrain. I drank local beer with the consistency of gravy from a rusty tomato can, and rode back to Chenek on sacks in the back of a lorry with 20 locals, fearing at every pothole the butt of my scout's Kalashnikov was going to knock my teeth out.

In order to climb the volcano of Erta'Ale one goes down, down, down to the Danakil Depression. I soon learnt why a guided tour is required with a minimum of two vehicles. With 10000 square kilometres of salt desert at more than 125 metres below sea level, this is one of lowest, hottest, and emptiest places on earth (but only 39 C in winter). A ridge of volcanoes runs down the centre of the depression to Lake Afrera, which holds the lowest island in the world. The area has a complex geology with the meeting of three tectonic plates, resulting in Dallol's phallic salt mountains and unworldly, erupting emerald and orange lakes of sulphur and iron oxide. The sight of the Afar men hacking salt blocks out of the ground in the brutal heat, and loading camel caravans that travel for weeks to market is daunting to say the least. But sleeping on a rush bed under the stars at Lake Asale was a highlight.

Erta'Ale is a mere 615 metres but, nevertheless, a 15-kilometre night hike with armed guards —apparently necessary since a German photographer and his guide were killed by Eritrean rebels the following day. While we ate supper, our camels were loaded with foamies – we would sleep on top – and lots of water. We set off at 7.30 p.m., tramping with headlamps through thick, black volcanic dust with the glow of the active shield volcano above us. At the top, the recent lava was as fragile as black meringue, breaking at every step. Erta'Ale has one of the few permanent lava lakes in the world. Choking on gusts of acidic gases, we looked down into the bowels of the earth at a roaring furnace emitting a boiling river of molten lava, which seemed to flow under the very edge we were standing on — a terrifying experience.

Elsewhere in the depression, camels, goats, donkeys and people roam all over the road. In the middle of nowhere, children appear, laughing, waving, running barefoot over the razor-sharp lava. There appears to be no food, forage or water. Nothing but the baking hot black and brown landscape for mile after mile. How on earth do they survive? We wouldn't survive 24 hours.

Camel caravan

I finished up in Ethiopia in the broad Omo River Valley, which runs south to Kenya's Lake Turkana, the world's largest alkaline lake and Kenya's largest lake. A local Ari tribesman was my guide, and we visited six tribes over a week, covering about 750 kilometres on washed-out dirt roads. My plan was to then follow the Nile from Khartoum, Sudan, up through Egypt to the Mediterranean, exploring man-made mountains (aka pyramids) as well as mountains of sand (aka dunes) en route.

Throughout my journey, I was welcomed by almost everyone, everywhere. One memory stands out between our cultures. At a Dassenach village on the Lower Omo River, where people live in simple mud huts, almost isolated from western culture, a tour guide was handing out made-in-China Halloween trinkets for which the tribal people were eagerly lining up. Two young women ripped open the plastic wrap of what was a ghastly, garish severed hand. They appeared completely non-plussed at what the "first world" has to offer.

Under an African Sun: Cedarberg Mountains, South Africa Rick Hudson Dec. 6 - 8, 2017

Although I've lived almost four decades in Canada, most of it on Vancouver Island, much of my fanciful youth was spent in the mountains around Cape Town, South Africa. Nowhere are the memories stronger than in the Cedarberg, a range about three hours drive north of the city.

Unlike our peaks on the Island, there are no glaciers an d few trees, just low bush on the slopes (makes navigation easier) with dense thickets in the valley bottoms, where precious water trickles. In the winter (July & August), snow falls on the higher peaks but barely covers the alpine's grass tussocks and boulders.

Four of us were heading for the Cedarberg at the start of summer. Sadly, the entire east side of the range had been ravaged by fire a month earlier when a diligent boy scout (I'm not making this up) dutifully set his toilet paper alight and burned about 3500 hectares of mountain terrain along with it. No one died in the conflagration, but it meant that the best hiking areas, which included the iconic Wolfberg Cracks and Arch, the cliffs of Tafelberg, Welbedagt Cave, and the rolling country around Middleberg, were all off limits.

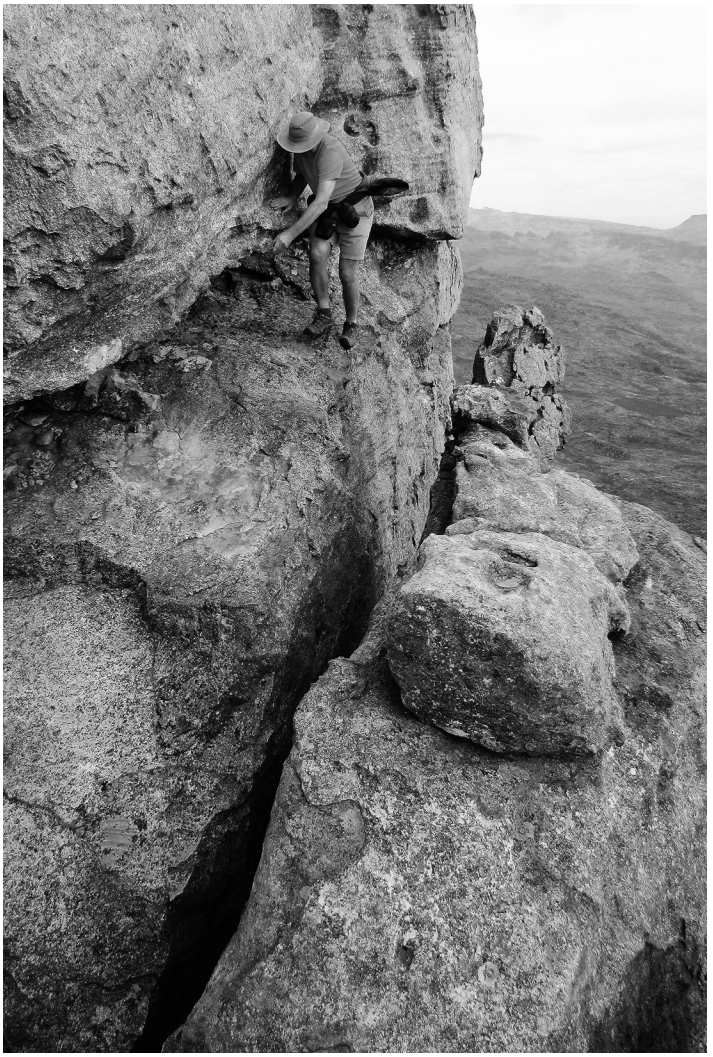
No problem – our local host Brian had an alternate plan. We'd visit the west side of the range, an area I hadn't set foot in since my first Easter Meet with my university

An unexpected companion – a large puffadder slides off the trail after nearly being stepped on.

club in 1968. Giles was so enchanted with this idea that he dropped everything in Alberta and flew out to join us. Clearly, he considered an invitation to hike the western Cedarberg as something worthy of sitting in a plane for two days. We picked him up at the airport, tired and smelly after a gruesome string of flights. The day was warm. We opened the windows to let him blow clean on the drive out.

The fourth of this band was my old friend from England, Ferdi, with whom I've shared the odd adventure over the years. Ferdi had been in South Africa for a couple of weeks and wasn't jet lagged. Giles, on the other hand, was. As he slept the sleep of the tattered tourist, the rest of us discussed our up-until-then vague plans about where to go. Brian proposed a three-day route, which Ferdi dismissed as 'a long day hike'. Fortunately (as you will discover), sanity prevailed, and the plan stayed as a multi-day trip.

The wind was howling at the deserted mountain campground. Not blowing, but howling. We retreated behind a wall to cook on a fluttering camp stove and hoped like heck this wasn't going to be the norm for the next few days. Mid-day heat can burn your brain, but you know that within a few hours the evening's cool will come. Not so the



The trail to the top of Sneeuberg involved some delicate ledges and chimneys.

wind. The trees above — ancient oaks — shook with the onslaught, and we wondered aloud whether it was even safe to camp under them that night.

It proved to be a restless time, but before dawn we were packed. A friend had appeared, and as dawn broke he drove us to the start of the hike, returning the car to the campsite. At the trailhead, we shouldered packs and set off from Uitkyk Pass. The wind had dropped, the air had that breathless cool that presaged a hot day, and subtle smells from the fragrant indigenous plants (fynbos) gave tantalizing hints of herbs and spices.

The trail climbed steadily for an hour before leveling off between two parallel sandstone cliff faces. As the valley widened, the sun reached down and we moved into its rays. The path meandered across a grassy plain, a sandy ribbon that made easy hiking. Ferdi, who was in front, suddenly jumped backwards. Just beyond, I saw the fat loops of a puffadder. Drawn to the warmth of the trail's sand in the early morning, it turned to face him, but Ferdi was already in full reverse. For a guy who'd had a hip replacement barely five months earlier, he showed a remarkable ability to change direction quickly. The puffadder has one of the fastest strikes in Africa, but it's a slow mover. As fat as my arm and a metre long, it slid off into the grass.

That was the morning's excitement. We passed through sandy uplands peppered with massive sandstone boulders weathered into the most bizarre shapes. There was a dragon; there a bird; there a pill box. At mid-morning, the trail dropped over the lip of a steep gorge and traversed along a cliff face to reach open ground beyond. Crossing, we admired the steep drop into the forested ravine below, and thanked the trail builders of yore who had managed to traverse such complicated ground with such a minimum of height change.

We arrived at the Sneeuberg ('Snow Mountain') Hut for a late lunch. Built onto the side of a massive boulder, one wall was a smooth natural face of sandstone. We settled in for snacks as the wind freshened again, and by the time we had finished, it was howling just like the previous evening. Although we'd hoped to get further that day, being buffeted by a gale wasn't on anyone's agenda. We opted for the shelter of the hut and, there being not much else to do, slept for a couple of hours to make up for our early morning start.

As the sun set, a super moon rose over the eastern horizon, backlighting a ragged skyline of fantastically formed rock towers and arches. We sat and watched it climb into the darkening sky until it was time to go inside and cook supper out of the wind.

Sometime during the night, the blow eased and, by first light, we faced another calm morning, the sunlight creeping down the slopes. We made the most of the cool and were on our way early. A good trail led along the eastern flank of Sneeuberg, and then up to its flat south ridge. At the crest, we dropped packs and made an interesting discovery. Scattered among the bare rocks, clusters of strange green leaves, like kitchen knives, fluttered gently in the mountain breeze. Hidden within them were perfect, white proteas – the very rare Snow Protea (P. Cryophila).

Excitement! Although not botanists, we were all aware of the mystic nature of this plant. None of us had ever seen one in all the years we'd knocked around the region, where it is endemic but very rare. Tough and slow growing, it endures blazing summer heat and drought and is one of very few protacea that can handle months of cold and winter snow.

To our delight, Sneeuberg's shoulder turned out to be an ideal environment for them. There were numerous plants scattered around the slope as we climbed to the summit (2026 metres). Near the top, like most Cedarberg peaks, the route took numerous twists and turns, traversing along exposed ledges, doubling back up smooth chimneys, and even threading through a tunnel before we finally popped out onto a summit terrace. The battered remains of the survey beacon came into view.

The day was pleasant and still early. We loitered awhile, playing the familiar game that all mountaineers play of identifying peaks on the far horizon. A handful of nuts, a chug

The pleasures of hiking in a treeless range, but it's tough finding a sleeping spot amid the tussocks.

of water, and we turned to descend, the route not easy to find as we chimneyed down drops and balanced across airy edges.

Back at the packs, Brian remembered that the south ridge provided an easy descent and was in the general direction of our evening's destination, but after several hours and numerous cliff bands we were beginning to question his memory! Finally reaching a saddle, we ate lunch in the shade of a boulder, tucked in close to the rock to avoid the sun. The day was getting increasingly hot. The name of the place – Bakleipas ('Fight Pass') – was a reminder of the area's history. Between 1891 and 1902, the Dutch speaking Boers fought the British Army, despite being few in number, at this site.

The evening's destination was still a depressingly distant point on the map. It was hot, and we were tired from a hard morning's climb and descent. With some reluctance we set off into the afternoon heat, the sun blazing down, and no running water since dawn, following a faint track for three hours. No doubt yesterday's puffadder incident was on all our minds as we tramped through dense tussock and low bush, our boots often invisible below. But despite our concerns, no snakes were stepped on.

Late in the day we emerged onto a wide meadow carpeted in tussock and turf, through which a string of pools lay. Walking downstream for another hour, we stopped finally where there was a steady flow of water. No flat ground was to be had, but we'd been going 11 hours, so with considerable relief the packs were dropped, and we stumbled into a pool to wash, cool, and recover.

To everyone's surprise, supper was accompanied by a surprising range of wine, whisky and even sherry. No wonder we were all burned out! As darkness fell and the stars shone brilliantly above, we each selected an uneven spot amid the tussocks, inflated our Thermarests, and fell into a deep sleep which bore no relation to the flatness of our beds.

The night was clear, and everything was damp with dew in the early morning, but such was the sun's power, half an hour after sunrise most of the gear was dry enough. We packed up and were moving before 6 a.m.. For the last hour of the previous day, we'd been without a trail, and the same applied that morning. Somewhere down the valley it was rumoured there was a trail, but where exactly it began, no one knew for sure.

By noon, we'd covered a lot of ground. The broad valley carpeted with tussock grass had narrowed, deepened and was now covered in shoulder-high bush, some of which had burned a few years ago, leaving black branches that stabbed as we passed, tracing black streaks on everything. Occasionally a 10-metre-high protea tree provided shade from the sun.

Where was the trail? High on the flank of a wide slope we searched in vain. Added to this was a growing problem: Ferdi's new hip was giving him trouble, and he was dropping behind. We took turns walking with him while the other two forged ahead, looking for the easiest route through the bush.

And here's where the real story starts. Tired, hot and frustrated by the lack of a track, Giles and I were ahead and, as was the custom, stopped in the shade of a tree to wait for the other two. They were never more than five minutes behind, but it was a good idea to stay close, given the terrain — shoulder high shrubbery dotted with low trees, small bluffs and massive boulders. You could get lost easily.

We waited 10 minutes. No one appeared. Oh, oh. Another five minutes passed, and there were still no approaching figures on the near horizon. We discussed what to do. Giles dropped his pack and headed back the way we'd come, until he reached the horizon about five minutes away. He shouted back that there was no sign of them. Damn. I reluctantly dropped my pack, left the cool of the shade and headed towards him.

Passing, I went another 10 minutes, keeping Giles in sight behind me. Not a sign. We shouted ourselves hoarse, until the cliffs on both sides of the wide valley echoed. Nothing, not a sound. I went on until I could see where the four of us had last sat under a tree. Still nothing.

How could they just have disappeared? A fall? A snake? One person might have had an accident but not two. Could they somehow have passed us? The sun beat down. It had been a long morning, with much yet to cover in the afternoon, and I didn't need to waste precious energy on some crazy search. What to do?

I thrashed back through the bush to Giles to discuss strategies. They must have passed us. That was all we could logically think. Now we'd wasted an hour looking for them, and they would be an hour ahead, wondering where we were.

We headed back to the packs, but the ground looked strangely unfamiliar. Where exactly were our packs? Under a tree, for sure, but which tree? There were dozens, scattered up and down and across the slope. Which one had it been?

With growing concern we tried to remember what had been unique about 'our' tree. There'd been a swath of purple flowers on the ground just before we'd reached it – I'd taken a photo – but flowers were low to the ground, and the bush blocked the view. Then we discovered that there were lots of clumps of purple flowers near lots of trees.

This was serious. Neither of us had drunk for several hours, and the only remaining water was in the packs. If we couldn't find the packs and drink, we'd have to descend 300 metres to the river below – a major bushwhack that wouldn't help in the long run. Without a container, we couldn't carry water, so we'd have to stay in the lower valley and hike out through even worse bush. And the chance of re-finding our packs after a descent to the river and back up again was about zero. We were likely within half a kilometer of our packs right now, and we couldn't find them.

It's strange how a simple act can trigger so many thoughts. If only we'd stopped earlier to wait for them. If only we hadn't left our packs when we'd gone back to look for them. If only we'd built a couple of stone cairns to mark 'our' tree. If only I'd brought my GPS. Any one of those actions would have made this a non-event. Instead, here the two of us were, on a complicated and confusing slope, under a blazing African sun, getting increasingly tired and making dumb decisions.

It was time to re-think. Number One: We had to find the packs. It was that simple. Perhaps we were too high on the slope. Or too low? Giles went one way and I went another as we combed the area, always within shouting distance. There weren't that many trees. One of them, somewhere, had to be hiding our packs. But which one was it?

I headed up and across the slope again, trying desperately to remember the view we'd had from the cool of its shade while we'd waited for the others. Maybe it was that one over there, except I'd already looked there. No, nothing there. That one higher up? No, we weren't that high. Sure of it. Wait, what was that?

A strap came into view in the dappled light under the tree, difficult to see in the brightness of the afternoon sun on nearby leaves. And then, the wonderful sight of two packs, just where we'd left them two hours ago. Relief. Suddenly, our situation had changed from being serious to being just inconvenient. I shouted to Giles. He scrambled up the slope and flung himself down in the shade. "Damn, that's a relief," he said. Then he added, "By the way, while I was on that cliff edge down there, I saw a path about 100 metres below."

So that's what must have happened. The others had obviously seen the trail and angled down-slope. We'd missed seeing them, screened by a low ridge. That was two problems out of the way. We drank the last of our water. All of it, realizing we had some catching up to do and this was no time to save for the future.

Two hours later we found them, sitting in the shade of a ruined farmhouse wall. Like us, they'd been trying to figure out why we hadn't appeared, and were on the verge of coming back to look for us. Better yet, they'd found running water in a side valley. Dehydrated beyond measure, Giles and I drank two litres each before we stopped for breath.

"Just one last pass," said Brian, "and we're back at the campsite." It was 5 p.m., and the sun still had a bite. We stepped into its burn and turned for home. The less said about that final climb and descent, the better. We tottered into camp as it got dark – a 12-hour day, tired but happy.

"And you said this was a day trip," said Giles.

"Maybe not," said Ferdi. "Or maybe we're just getting old."

"That too," said Brian.

Party: Brian deVilliers, Ferdi Fischer, Giles Twogood, Rick Hudson.

Shortly before the mistake that cost us two hours in the sun - typical bush peppered with boulders.

2017 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Alpine Summer Activity

Alpine Glow

Photo: Natasha Salway

Nature Winner

Satinflower in the Sooke Hills

Photo: Mary Sansevarino

Mountain Scenery Winner

Space Stations at 5040

Photo: Chris George

Humour Winner

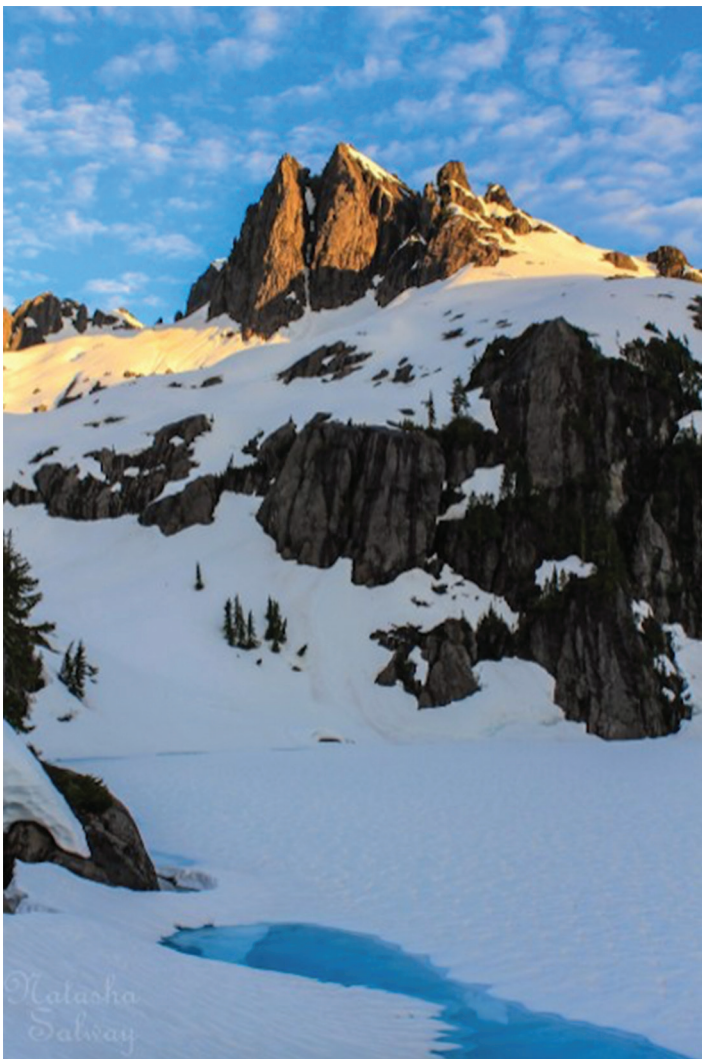
Sign in Alska

Photo: Rick Hudson

Winter Activity Winner

Snowy Big Jim

Photo: Natasha Salway



Vancouver island Winner

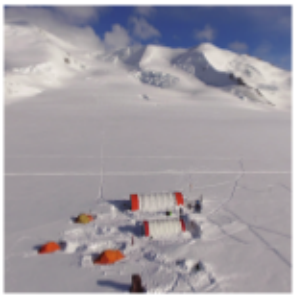
Triple Reflection

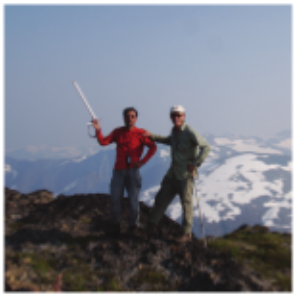
Photo; Natasha Salway















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