

Island Bushwhacker



**The Alpine Club of Canada
Vancouver Island Section**

2023 Annual

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

**ISLAND
BUSHWHACKER
ANNUAL**

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OF
THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA



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*I gratefully acknowledge that the land on which I live and prepared this volume of the **Island Bushwhacker Annual** is in Nanaimo, the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. Let us be grateful for opportunities to explore the land known today as Canada and acknowledge Indigenous peoples on the lands, waters, and glaciers we visited this year on Vancouver Island, the mainland, and in distant places.*

*Many thanks go to all those who shared their inspiring articles and lovely photos of wild alpine places for publication in the 2023 volume of **Island Bushwhacker Annual**. Special thanks also go to Lindsay Elms and Barb Baker for helping to edit the text, to Catrin Brown for reviewing a penultimate draft, and to all contributors who patiently answered my many questions.*

This journal celebrates explorations, history, geography and nature in our Island mountains and further afield. It also reflects the colourful diversity of people who make up the ACC Vancouver Island Section and bring a richness of values, community, mentorship, adventure, and a shared joy of mountaineering to our club. The photo just after the Table of Contents is a tribute to Gil Parker (1937 - 2023) who founded the Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association. The Vancouver Island Trail wends its way from Victoria to Cape Scott and provides a backcountry route that passes close to many of Vancouver Island's major peaks.

~Janelle (she/her | elle/la)

Front Cover Image:

*Golden larches lit by the rising sun in the north Cascades (October 2023 in North Cascades National Park).
(Photo by Chris Neate)*

Image Just After the Table of Contents:

*Hiking the Vancouver Island Trail.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)
See Amy's article on page 25.*

Back Cover Image:

*Spectrum Range.
(Photo by Catrin Brown)*

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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

David Lemon



It has been a return to another active year for the club, as the schedule for trips and other club events was filled throughout the season. The articles in the **2023 Island Bushwhacker Annual** describe many of these, including a few ski trips early in the winter and numerous other outings on Vancouver Island, the mainland, and in distant places.

Due to problems in obtaining the land-use permit now required for the traditional fly-in camp, it did not take place in 2023. There was a very successful hut camp at the Wheeler Hut in Rogers Pass, where the 22 participants enjoyed a week in the birthplace of Canadian mountaineering despite some wildfire smoke at the end (unfortunately becoming a fact of life).



Lise, Mike and Leona at Balu Pass during the Wheeler Hut camp. (Photo by Cedric Zala)

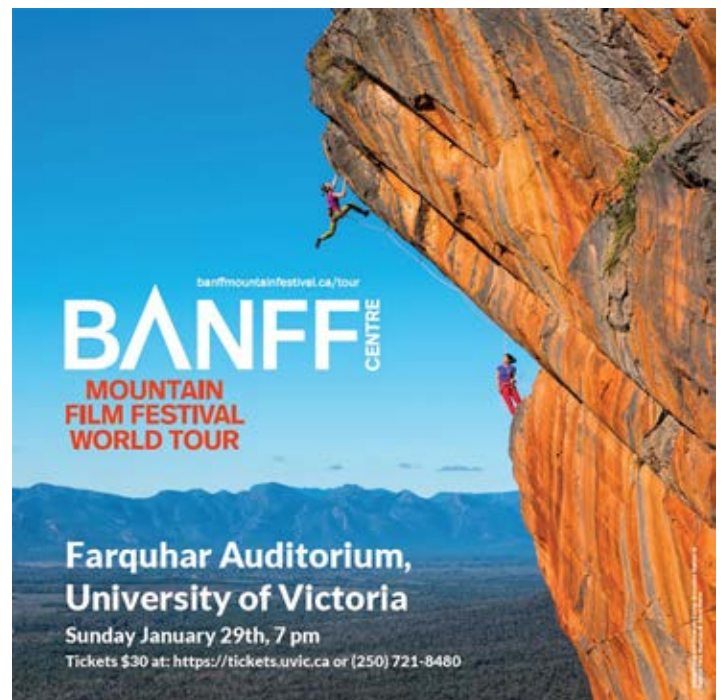
It was another successful year for Hišim'yawił, with good occupancy and several improvements to the hut and trail.

This year saw the publication of the fiftieth anniversary edition of the **Island Bushwhacker Annual**, superbly produced by Janelle Curtis and full of fascinating articles. Congratulations to the contributors and especially to Janelle for a great achievement!



Education courses restarted this past year, with sessions covering first aid, ski touring and avalanche safety. Two club members, Josh Slatkoff and Dave Fishwick attended the ACC / North Face Winter Leadership Program and shared their learning.

Our major fundraiser, the Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival took place at the end of January, and thanks



to the great organization and publicity by Laura Darling and Joanne Verano was a sold-out success.

Two section members were recognized by the National Club for outstanding service: Janelle Curtis received the **Don Forest Service Award** for her tireless work editing the *Island Bushwhacker Newsletter* and *Island Bushwhacker Annual* and Derek Sou received the **Eric Brooks Leadership Award** for his work as Kids and Youth Program Coordinator. Congratulations to both!

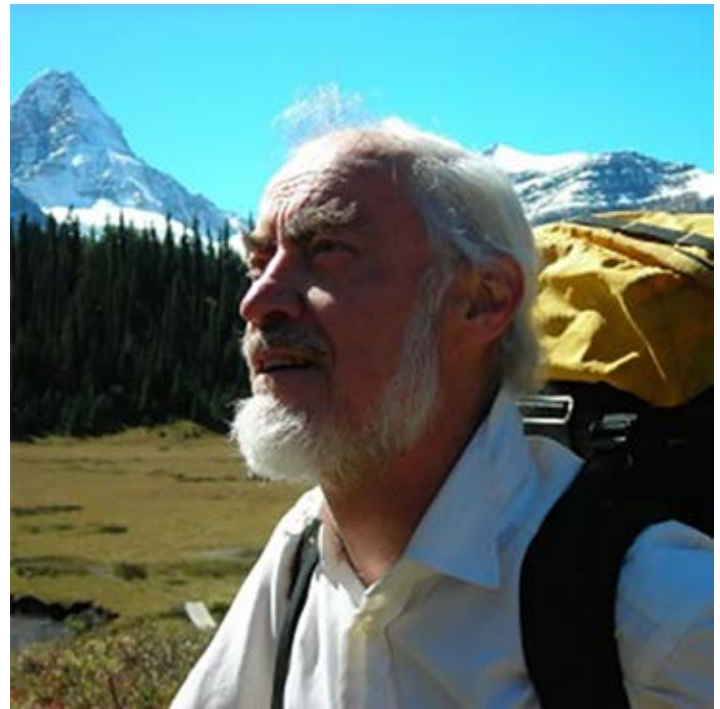


From left to right, Derek Sou, David Lemon, and Janelle Curtis at the summer corn fest. (Photo by Sandy Briggs)

The section lost a distinguished long-time member when Gil Parker died in April. As well as his long service to the Section, he was the driving force for the establishment of the Vancouver Island Trail, a fitting legacy of his love for the mountains.

Monthly slide shows at Swan Lake resumed regularly last year, and culminated in the annual photo contest in November, ably coordinated by Mary Sanseverino. Winners from the many excellent submissions may be seen on the section website and on pages 129-134.

Here is to 2024 being another year of fellowship and shared enjoyment of the mountains.



Gil Parker.
(Photographer unknown)



Intro to Backcountry Skiing

Nicole Harris

January 3, 7, and 8, 2023

Trip Leaders: Josh Slatkoff, Martin Hofmann, Keith Battersby, and Nadja Steiner.

The "trip" started on Tuesday 3 January 2023, with a zoom presentation. The presentation covered a refresher on backcountry travel, some tips and resources on how to plan backcountry travel, a few common ski touring places on the island, and finally an overview of our upcoming weekend trip.

The practical portion of the trip started on Saturday 7 January, when the group met outside the Vancouver Island Mountain Centre at Mount Washington. After a quick debrief and beacon check, the 15 participants split into two groups and we started our ascent up to

the north-west end of the Boomerang Ridge. Our goal was the ridge skiers right of the Boomerang chair. Due to the recent snowfall, we learned how to set an up-track for all of us to follow.



*Following the up-track.
(Photographer unknown)*

remedy his unfortunate situation, including duct tape, 4-pack ring tops (is that what they are called?), and a very good tip to turn the ski pole upside down. We also got an 'on-mountain yoga lesson' on how to do a kick turn; this was easier for some of us than others. We reached the ridge just past noon, so we stopped for lunch.



*Stopping for a break.
(Photographer unknown)*



*Following the up-track.
(Photographer unknown)*

The snow kept falling and was getting wetter and wetter as the day went on. We all got fresh tracks on the downhill, although apparently the split boarders didn't recognize the spot we were planning to regroup and went further down the hill. Thankfully someone had cell service and we were regrouped a bit further down the mountain. We skied down to the final trail that brought us back to the parking lot, where the faster people got the tip to unlock their heels. Those of us who were a bit slower missed this tip and the final trail out seemed to take forever.



*Crossing Lake Helen Mackenzie.
(Photographer unknown)*

Not too long into the ascent, Dan also learned the importance of having baskets on his ski poles. Several suggestions were brought forth on how to

The morning of day 2 we met at Raven Lodge. Our objective for the day was Mount Elma. The wet heavy snow made conditions less than optimal. We had a few people drop out after the previous day's adventures. A few of us commented that the tour to Mount Elma was noticeably more difficult than the tour up beside the hawk chair. Some of us (me perhaps) struggled with the sliding concept of skinning. We reached the Mount Allan Brooks/Elma saddle around noon. By this point, most of us were saturated as the "snow" was melting on impact. We split into two groups; one continued up Mount Elma, while the other turned back for Raven Lodge. On the ski back, we learned the benefit to having others nearby to help dig us out/pull us up when we fell. Eventually we all arrived safely at the parking lot in thorough need of drying out!



*Part of the group enjoying the snow.
(Photo by Josh Slatkoff)*

Participants: Daniel Lafleur, Charlie Varney, Steve Hurschler, Lika Hurschler, Scott Roberts, Olivier Roberts, Olivier Oullet, Nicole Harris, Eva Gnech, Saurabh Ray, Ron Vlooswyk, Alcina De Oliveira, Tyna Lynch, Lyndon Jaworski, and Dan Kurchurka

Plan E - Augerpoint Traverse

Stefan Gessinger

January 21-23, 2023

Three-day trips are my go-to format for Strathcona Park outings. You can almost squeeze them into

a weekend and just need an extra kilo of food and gas for the additional day. Originally this outing was proposed as an early January three day ski trip. Seventy-three emails and numerous potential objectives later, a team of four came together for skiing the Augerpoint traverse from the Mount Washington Ski Resort to Buttle Lake January 21 - 23.

Jim Everard and I set out from Victoria on Friday afternoon. We picked up Curtis Lyon's truck in Courtenay which we drove out to the Augerpoint trailhead before returning to Curtis's place - a 600 kilometre total drive! Saturday morning the four of us got a ride to Mount Washington with John Water's wife and we were on our way early enough to have to break trail through the deep snow from the previous day's storm. We set up camp above Circler Lake at 1500 metres just as we were running out of daylight.

Sunday morning's early start put us in a prime viewing position for an amazing sunrise as we were skinning up the Mount Albert Edward summit ridge.



*Jim Everard on Mount Albert Edward's summit ridge.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

Many variables affect conditions on winter trips, and I aspire to leave the objective more flexible than on summer trips. The summit of Mount Albert Edward marked a crucial decision-making point and after a brief assessment it was agreed by all that we are good to go with our traverse plan. This came as a great relief for me as a few years back my wife Shanda and I had encountered a lot more snow than anticipated on our second day of an Augerpoint winter traverse attempt. Shanda and I returned to Mount Washington from Mount Albert Edward - stashing and retrieving a getaway car at Buttle Lake as well as driving to Mount Washington with two cars added an additional 1100 kilometres of travel to our trip.

Descending the wind-scoured south ridge, crusty turns soon gave way to what we pray for - beautiful soft powder. As tempting as it was to backtrack for another lap our schedule pointed us in the forward direction. We were pleased to find a route up to Ruth Masters Lake that did not require any boot-packing. We filled our water bottles at the open outflow in order to save on gas/effort to melt snow later at camp which we set up at the Augerpoint Col. Curtis and I opted for some evening skiing back down to the lake in the soft and deep snow.



*Ruth Masters Lake.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

The short winter days make dawn patrol so much easier with 6 a.m. still feeling like the middle of the night. And so we left our camp behind in the dark as we skinned and boot-packed our way up to Augerpoint Mountain. A dramatic sunrise synchronized with the unfolding expansive views of many of Strathcona Park's peaks. This excitement



*When 7 a.m. is still dawn patrol.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

was appropriately narrated by an audibly excited Curtis and all that was missing was a booming soundtrack as we gained Augerpoint Mountain's summit. John and Curtis skied a great line from the summit and I joined them a bit further down the ridge. We all enjoyed glorious turns back to our camp.



*Curtis Lyon and Jim Everard ascending Augerpoint Mountain.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*



*John Waters, Augerpoint Mountain summit.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

The skin track remained deep on our third and last day and we took frequent turns breaking trail. As is so often the case with ski-touring we walked past beautiful ski terrain below Jack's Fell, lacking the time or energy for a lap, leaving us with dreams of lingering here for a day or two. But it was Monday and there was no more weekend left and it was time to descend to Buttle Lake. The good ski turns quickly got heavier and steeper, the forest denser, and the snowpack thinner. Concerns about a drawn-out transition from skiing to hiking with deep post-holing in snow were unfounded and before long we were descending Jack's Trail back to our parked truck.



*Augerpoint turns.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

Another one for the bank as Rudy Brugger would say. Fun company, lots of great turns, two dramatic sunrises, beautiful sunsets, awesome touring terrain, no backtracking for the entire trip - good times all the time!

Participants: Stefan Gessinger, Jim Everard, Curtis Lyon, and John Waters

Blind Date

Stefan Gessinger

January 28, 2023



*Curtis Lyon descending Jack's Trail.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

Despite all the summits of the Mackenzie Range being below the treeline, the ragged ridgeline has a very alpine ambience. In winter the snow transforms the steep and bushy (some say annoying) approaches into more climbing terrain and there are zero bugs!

Climbing Razorback and Sunrise Peak in winter had been an objective of mine for a while and conditions seemed promising. I proposed the outing to several of my regular partners, none of which were available. A wider net would need to be cast and I sent Rich Priebe a text. We had met on the internet, exchanging information of routes, etc, but never in person. Rich was indeed available and we made plans to meet at the trailhead ready to head out at 3.30 a.m. on Saturday, January 21. We should be able to reach the base of the north walls by daybreak and have ample time to climb several of the peaks. Traveling conditions were great and we ended up waiting for

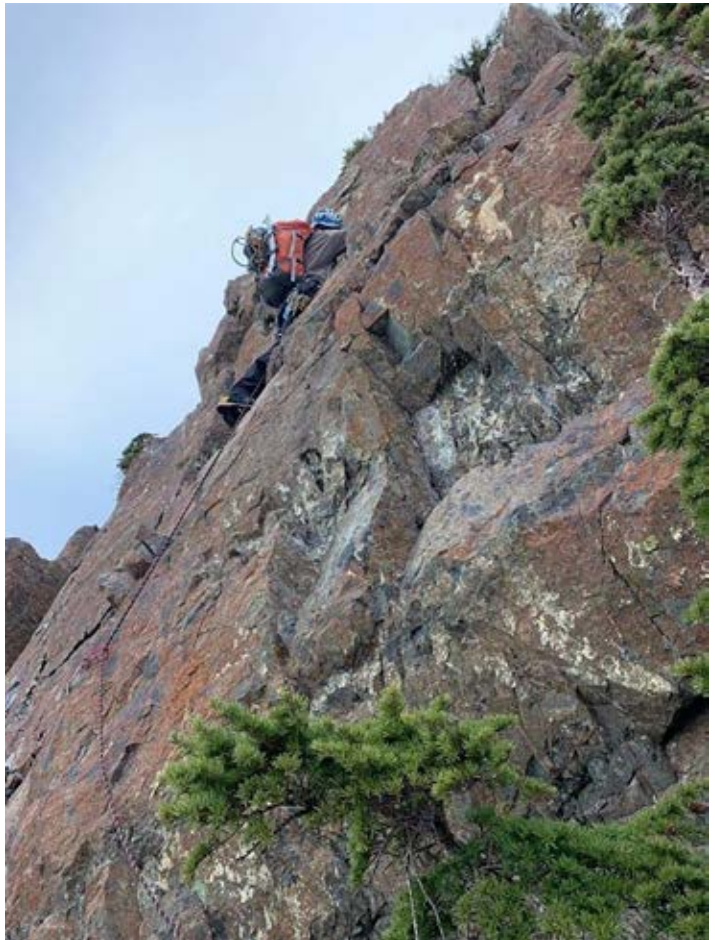


*Day break in N-bowl.
(Photo by Rich Priebe)*

In an effort to stay present and savour my time in the backcountry I try not to think about the timing on my last day beyond making it back to the car. By mid afternoon I did however calculate that with good flow we could get back to our parked vehicle, retrieve Jim's car in Cumberland and make it back to Salt Spring Island. We skipped dinner and I made it home to sleep in my own bed the same night.

daylight prior to starting the climb. It was only at this point, after meeting on the access road and hiking for three hours, that we could see whom we were rambling around with.

Razorback and Sunrise Peak made for fun, steep snow climbing conditions. We simul-climbed and pitched out the odd pitch with both summits requiring a mix of down climbing and rappelling. We arrived at the col of Sunrise Peak and The Centaur with lots of day time left. The steep, south facing rock was dry and bare of snow. We strapped our ice axes and crampons to our packs and switched to a few pitches of rock climbing. The climbing is really fun on solid rock with some engaging moves on exposed terrain. A very awkward to reach rappel anchor is half a pitch down from the summit, from where a 29.5 metre rappel brings you back down to a large snow field - a single sixty metre rope seems to work to get down from any of the Mackenzie Range summits.



*Steep snow on one side, dry rock on the other. The Centaur.
(Photo by Rich Priebe)*



*Sunrise Peak.
(Photo by Rich Priebe)*



*Rich rappelling The Centaur.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*



*Rich Priebe down climbing Sunrise Peak.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

We stopped for lunch, marveling at our position. Looking to the south, winter stops a few hundred metres below our feet and the rocky mountains give way to a steep, forested valley winding its way out to the coast, which is only 12.5 kilometres from here as the crow flies. The island cluster of the Broken Islands group are such a strong contrast to the alpine, winter environment we are enjoying our lunch in.



*Centaur snow field with view to Broken Island group.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

After briefly discussing what to do with the rest of the day, we decided to head back home as we were starting to feel the early start. We rappelled and down climbed our way down between The Centaur and Sunrise Peak and made our way back to our vehicles which were parked 50 metres above sea level.



*Mackenzie Range.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

Hiking, snow climbing, rock climbing, six rappels, night and day made for fantastic variety and the blind date worked out.

Participants: Rich Priebe and Stefan Gessinger



Ravenhorn and Poncho Peaks in Mackenzie Range

Barry Hansen

March 29, 2023

The Mackenzie Range is a fine dining restaurant, and its individual peaks are the menu items. And if you're feeling hungry, you might have a multicourse meal. But be forewarned, once you've eaten there, you'll probably want to keep returning until you've sampled the entire menu. At least, this has been my experience. I've dined at this exquisite Michelin-star destination numerous times, six to be precise, but still haven't finished the menu. I've even had the same dish a few times because it was so darn tasty.

I've enjoyed menu sampling at Mackenzie Range with a variety of friends, but my main companion has been Rich Priebe. I had the honour of being with him when he completed his final menu item. And I must confess, I was slightly jealous. But also determined to experience the satisfaction myself. There are three main courses I've yet to try: The Centaur, Sunrise Peak, and Razorback. Perhaps this year.



*Approaching Mackenzie Range with
Poncho Peak sunlit on centre-left.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

All my Mackenzie Range adventures have been in September or October when the days are getting shorter and the vertical and horizontal surfaces are snow and ice free. All except one. I received a message from Rich late-March asking if I wanted to climb Poncho Peak and Ravenhorn. He had recently

climbed The Centaur, Sunrise Peak, and Razorback as winter ascents and was itching to get a couple more Mackenzie peaks. How could I say no?

With a favourable forecast, we met at Highway 4 near Highway 19, left his car, drove to the start of our adventure at the bottom of the Canoe Creek dam access road, and hiked up to the dam in the dark. We hit snow just before the dam and donned our snowshoes, following some fresh tracks up the creek and into the open slide area beneath Canoe Peak. Just below the final steep pitch to the Canoe/Mackenzie connecting ridge, we veered right towards the base of Poncho Peak at the east end of the range. Traversing across the steep, forested slope was calorie-burning as the deep snow kept giving way under our snowshoes. It's hard to say if skis would have been a better choice. Especially considering it wasn't long before we were on hard-packed snow that required crampons.



*Barry gearing up beneath Poncho Peak.
(Photo by Rich Priebe)*

At the base of Poncho Peak, we exchanged snowshoes for crampons, grabbed our helmets and axes, and kicked our way up the steep, hard slopes to the Canoe/Mackenzie ridge. From there we roped up and ascended the final steep pitch to the ridge

connecting Poncho Peak and Ravenhorn. Our plan was to climb Ravenhorn first and return to Poncho Peak, climb up and over it, and descend back to Mackenzie's north bowl via the Poncho/Razorback col. We hoped to grab Razorback and Sunrise Peak too, but that turned out to be overly ambitious.

The ridge to Ravenhorn was much longer and more difficult than we anticipated. I'd like to try it without snow someday to see if it's easier. But I assume the snow cover made some sections more difficult and others easier. The first bump on the ridge was Ravenhorn's crux. We contemplated going up and over it, but it was knife-edged with cornices and wickedly exposed on both sides. Instead, we decided to drop slightly and traverse its west side. Still steep but much less exposed, and no cornices. Rich led this first crux pitch through the awkward terrain of steep snow, bushy trees, and icy rock. From there, an easy traversing ascent on good snow brought us back up to the ridge at the south end of the first bump. We felt good about our progress to this point. But now looking down the long, undulating, corniced, knife-edged ridge with Ravenhorn at its far end, we wondered if enough day remained to complete our objectives. Ravenhorn? Definitely. Poncho Peak? Should be fine. Razorback and Sunrise Peak? Highly unlikely.



*Traversing the long, exposed ridge to Ravenhorn.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

We worked our way along the ridge in a running belay fashion, avoiding cornices. Sometimes we were on the ridgetop and other times just beneath it on one side or the other. Protection consisted of clove-hitching slings to intermittent small trees. We followed the principle that if one climber fell to one side, the other would break their fall by dropping off the other side. This scenario, of course, was to be avoided in the first place. But knowledge of it provided a sense of security.

We eventually crested Ravenhorn's summit, where we took some photos and ate a quick, late lunch. To the south, the Broken Group Islands punctuated the shimmering ocean. To the north, the Mackenzie Range was looking fine, and our snowy steps meandered back along the ridge to Poncho Peak in the distance. We still had a lot of ground to cover, and we'd already burned through the better part of the day. It was time to get going again. Retracing our steps allowed us to make good time back to the east base of Poncho Peak. But that's where things slowed down again.



*Rich on steep Ravenhorn ridge.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

The problem with the less-vertical routes up the Mackenzie peaks is the abundance of low, dense, krummholz trees. And anyone who's climbed in the Island alpine knows exactly what I mean. These inhospitable trees create impassable barriers and viciously tear at those who attempt to run their gauntlet. Most of my scars and shredded fabric were the victims of krummholz. And Poncho Peak's east, south, and west faces are littered with it, along with smattered thickets of false azaleas and alders. Adding snow and exposure to this alpine vegetation exacerbates the challenge. These were the conditions as we took turns battling our way across and up the short 50 metres of elevation gain to the summit. We arrived at the top thoroughly spent but elated, mostly because of what was now behind us. The views were spectacular, and we took a moment to snap a few quick pics before heading down to the Poncho-Razorback saddle.

The route down the Southwest Face to the saddle was much easier than our ascent route. Easy except for a short rappel at the very end, which had an extremely awkward start through a tangle of horizontal alders. I was upside-down at one point with legs,



*Traversing slope with Poncho Peak behind. We climbed up the right side and descended the left.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

arms, and pack caught up in the web of branches. From there it was an easy and quick descent down the wide col on good plunging snow back to Mackenzie's open north bowl. Night was approaching and we hoped to reach the dam before darkness arrived. The lower treed snow slopes were even more challenging to traverse downhill. The surface beneath our snowshoes kept giving out, resulting in nonstop, body-wearying slipping. I tried removing my snowshoes but that led to groin-deep leg plunging. The snowshoes went back on, and we struggled our way down to the open, gentler slope of the slide area beneath Canoe Peak. From there it was quick travelling to and along the forested creek.



*Barry on Poncho Peak summit.
(Photo by Rich Priebe)*

We arrived at the dam in darkness and trudged down the steep, loose road to our parked car, 15.5 hours after we began, tired but happy.

Participants: Barry Hansen and Rich Priebe

5040 Peak to Klitsa Mountain: A Short Ski Traverse

Keith Battersby

May 1-3, 2023

Before memory turns to myth, a few words about a short ski traverse from 5040 Peak. The idea had been in our minds for several years, at least since touring from 5040 Peak to Adder Peak and Sutton Pass four or five years ago.

The plan for this traverse was to follow the ridges north from 5040 Peak to the base of Adder Peak, turning more east to Klitsa Mountain, ascending the mountain and then descending via the gully off the northeast aspect. This gully can be seen from the highway as one of the approaches at the end of Sproat Lake.

Twenty-twenty-three was not a reassuring year for snow and we were not certain of conditions and timing. The weather was warming fast and Martin had plans to head for France as soon as visas came through. We planned to tack this traverse on to a three-day hut visit (a follow up to our Introduction to Back Country Skiing trip) at the end of May. Heading up to the hut the weather remained questionable and more than half of the attendees chose to withdraw. But once on the snow the base was solid. It was the warm temperatures that had us wondering.

Sunday was a whiteout, but Monday showed promise. We began our trip skiing towards Adder Peak in soft spring snow on a fine day. My main attraction of this trip was to ski Klitsa Mountain. I had viewed it too many times from 5040 Peak and Martin really wanted to ski the gully. We had our reservations, however.

Our first day took us up and down through numerous transitions along the ridges to a low point above Louise Goetting Lake. All day the snow was soft and we took some precautions on several sections. There were numerous short, steep awkward pitches through trees and hollow snow. Along the way we had to transition between skiing down without skins



*First camp above Louise Goetting Lake.
(Photo by Keith Battersby)*

and putting them on to ski up. I recorded over 40 waypoints when we transitioned from ski to skin and back in less than 20 kilometres. Our shortest leg was only 30 seconds! Five years ago, we had camped on Jack's Peak in fine calm weather. This trip we pushed on further and dropped into the trees to enjoy the first of two warm peaceful camps. The descent, however, was a series of benches and bluffs that forced us to traverse back and forth. Finally, further to the east we found connecting pitches to the skiers right. If only we had remembered this from our previous trip it would have gone smoother.



*The north side of Jacks Peak.
(Photo by Keith Battersby)*

The route trending east from the base of Adder Peak's south ridge was new terrain for me. One south facing slope warranted extra caution. Otherwise, the travelling was straightforward with fewer transitions between skis to skins. The route follows a low ridge until climbing a hill due south of Mount Gibson. Our path climbed a steep gully requiring plenty of kick turns as it narrowed near its top. Once out of this there was a short ascent to the open slopes. Here we could see our path back and see beyond to our

destination - Klitsa Mountain. The descent to valley bottom between Wisemiller and Richards Lakes again required some route finding for suitable ski lines. I fished Martin out of a tree-well once after a buried branch tripped him up.

Here we crossed the Brigade Lake Trail and began the ascent towards the base of Klitsa Mountain. I fear we didn't find the most sensuous path, but we persevered and were rewarded in finding a sun-soaked bench below the western slopes of the mountain. I think a route just to the north ascending more gradually would have been more efficient.

On the third day the real fun of climbing and skiing Klitsa Mountain began. The west ridge is a series of broad rolling benches. We essentially skied the Brooks George Trail. We left early to ensure this slope remained in shade and as firm as possible given the warm temperatures. (Many will have seen a video posted on Facebook of a slide on Nahmint Mountain taken by drone on the same weekend!) Conditions improved with elevation though. We dropped some gear below the final pitches to travel light.

I am writing this three months later..... Good things take time, right?

Near some rocks we found weak faceted snow as one would expect. But the slope felt okay to ski as we worked our way through these bands. On the final step we broke through a steep wind lip. Not a problem as it turned out, but it had us a little concerned. From the summit we were gazing down the length of Sproat Lake and back across our entire route so far.



*From the top of Klitsa Mountain.
(Photo by Keith Battersby)*

A fabulous short ski following our up-tracks took us back to our gear on the shoulder above the northeast



*Top of the northeast gully.
(Photo by Keith Battersby)*

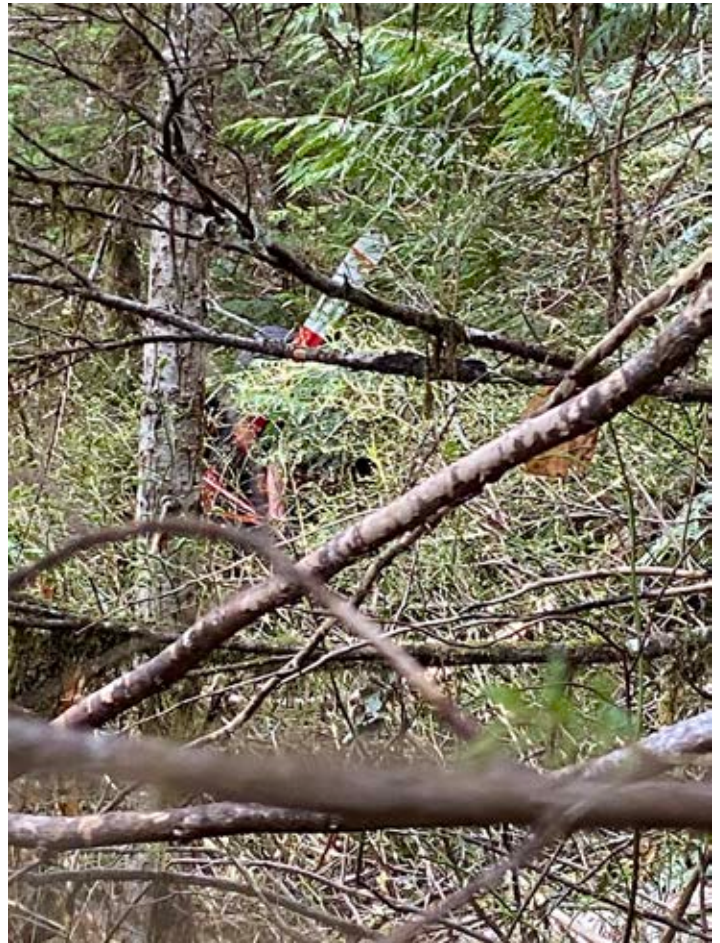
gully. The east end of a broad north facing slope rolls in a long arc into the gully. Below was old avalanche debris, now likely hard and ugly. One look was enough to say no way! It was very committing and dropped into a terrain trap. Given the temperature and heavy snow it got no real consideration.

This brought us to the 'Adventure begins when certainty ends' phase of the trip. There remained two to three very nice pitches following this north trending ridge, but we had to swing back east to try and descend through the runout from the gully. The snow was now very heavy and wet. We traversed across lumpy avalanche paths and scrubby terrain. The exits down to the runout zone all dropped away over unskiable terrain. But the thought of skinning back and exiting closer to Mount Gibson was rather unappealing. At almost the lowest toe I found a break that allowed us to drop down onto some very ugly avalanche debris. This two hundred metres was not fun skiing at all.

We negotiated the streams to the north side of the drainage and found hints of the old Klitsa Mountain trail. The first part in the old growth was very enjoyable, open without many holes. It wasn't long



*The northeast gully from bottom.
(Photo by Keith Battersby)*



*Bushwhack.
(Photo by Keith Battersby)*



*Cooling off.
(Photo by Keith Battersby)*

before there was not enough snow to ski. Somewhere along the way though we lost that trail, but fortunately found an old timber-cruisers flagged route. It was perhaps some of the worst alder bashing I have had to hike through. Ever! Two hours later we emerged onto the end of a heavily overgrown logging road, but it did connect with our vehicle. I guess hardship is often part of a great trip so we accepted the bushwhack as our share.

Sadly, what I could not accept was the vandalism to my son's car. They didn't break into it, but the vandals tore off bits of molding and a mirror and visibly tried to jimmy the window. I guess I am thankful they did not actually break a window. This left a sour taste after what was otherwise a very beautiful traverse.

Participants: Martin Hofmann and Keith Battersby



5040 Peak - Adder Mountain Loop: Big Day Out

Stefan Gessinger

May 12, 2023

My Australian friend and coworker Andrew Welsh had been intrigued about day tripping the summits of 5040 Peak – Jack's Peak – Adder Mountain for a while as I had been telling him about the great touring terrain with lots of awesome ski turns. Andrew had been wanting to visit the zone between 5040 and Jack's Peak for a while and so it was decided that we would look for good spring conditions to go for it. We were looking for a long spring day with a high cloud cover to keep the surface temperatures a bit lower while still having good visibility for efficiently navigating the ridges.



Big Day Out loop, orange is travel by foot, green is by bike.

The Big Day Out was a large Australian music festival which jammed tons of good music into a full day when I was able to visit it in Sydney in 1993. I thought the name was suitable for jamming in a bunch of touring, skiing, summits and bike riding with an Australian partner. Friday, May 12, promised to have the conditions we were hoping for. Getting out during the work week is bonus for us weekend warriors and super stoked we leave Salt Spring Island Thursday evening straight from work. Before driving up Marion main on our way to the 5040 Northwest Ridge trailhead we detoured up the logging road towards Adder Mountain, where we stashed two bikes at the snowline.

We set out at 4 a.m. reaching continuous snow after about 1.5 hours and the 5040 Peak summit around 7 a.m. The summit of 5040 has cell phone reception

and we could not resist notifying our coworkers that we were about to drop in for the first of many runs of the day. The undulating ridge between 5040 and Jack's Peaks tours well on mostly open terrain with some sections through widely spaced trees. Savoring the great spring snow skiing we ripped off the skins even if we would only get half a dozen turns - we had the time and this is what we came for.



*One of a few short boot packs necessary after we had reached continuous snow.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*



*Andrew descending Jack's Peak on his way to Adder Mountain.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

After the investment of the initial 1100 metre ascent to 5040 Peak the additional highpoints/summits are gained much easier with the remaining traverse staying within a 500-metre elevation band. We stop for a proper lunch at the deck of the repeater tower between 5040/Jack's. Hoping to avoid blisters I take off my ski boots in order to cool off and treat myself to some fresh socks. However, we don't call it the "Big Day Out" for nothing and by the time we reach

the final 500 metre climb on Adder Mountain we are feeling the elevation gain, kilometres and hours adding up and are glad that it is the last one of the day. Each of the three summits have a great ski descent and with a deep spring snow pack the final run on Adder Mountain skis out with just minimal faffing around; we are able to ski within a two minute walk of our stashed bikes.



*Andrew cruising the long downhill run from Adder Mountain to Marion main - wearing Blundstones naturally.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

I switch my ski boots for sneakers I stashed with the bikes while Andrew has chosen Blundstones for this occasion. He actually forgot to pack an extra set of shoes and ended up having to put on his ski boots when we stashed bikes/shoes the night prior. With skis strapped to our packs we enjoy the mostly downhill run back to Marion main. Biking down Highway 4 with skis strapped to our backs in May earns us some honks and woo-hoo-holler badges. Upon reaching Marion main we drop our gear and Andrew volunteers to guard it while I retrieve the truck at the trailhead. We have lots of time to make it back home to Salt Spring Island and still have the whole weekend ahead of us.

Participants: Andrew Welsh and Stefan Gessinger

Nine Peaks and Big Interior via Bedwell Trail

Brian Nesbitt

May 20-22, 2023

Our motley crew, lead by John Relyea-Voss, assembled in Campbell River for the standard 5 a.m. 'pre-trailhead' feast. Spirits were high as we discussed the challenges that lay ahead. Everyone in the group was familiar with Bedwell Lakes beauty, but not all had summited Big Interior Mountain or Nine Peaks before. Some in the group had also not experienced the magic of that area while still draped in white, nor the energy and commitment required to achieve our objectives in current conditions. Overall, the forecast seemed promising, however, we suspected mid-day travel would be challenging. We were expecting the snow to soften up.

To our surprise the access road to the trailhead was free of snow and in excellent condition. We touched ground at Bedwell trailhead by 7:00 a.m. and after a brief safety tailgate we marched into the chilly, misty trees. We made excellent time up to Baby Bedwell Lake where we faced our first group decision. With no recent trip reports as guidance, we were unsure heading in if lake traversing would be possible. Some shoreline testing yielded disappointing results, relatively prompt travel across the lakes would not be possible. This added a few additional hours as we meandered around Baby Bedwell Lake and Bedwell Lake through matted brush and recent downfall.



*Bluff above Little Jim Lake.
(Photo by Stephanie Leblanc)*

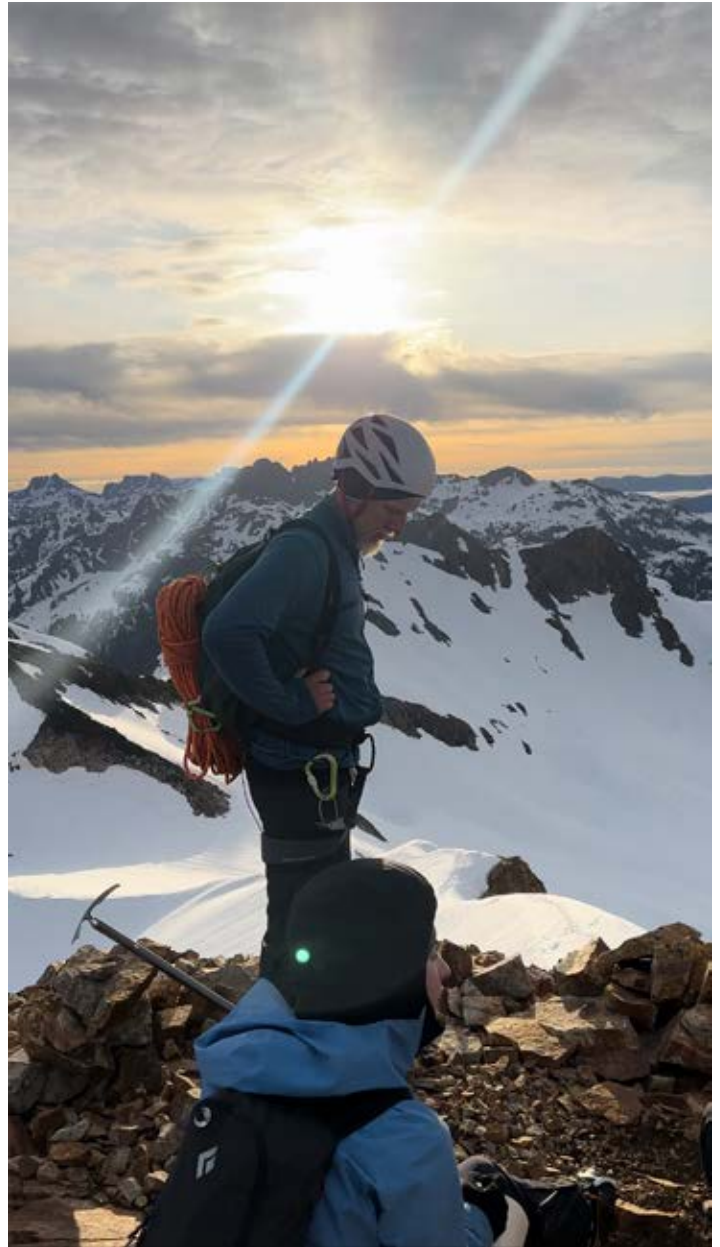
By noon our steady saunter had delivered us to Little Jim Lake for some bevy and snack replenishment under a blue-bird sky. On the bluff above Little Jim some decided to stash snowshoes and put on crampons before the battle raged on ascending through Hells Gate. Our aim was to make base camp on the col below Big Interior Mountain before dusk. By 6 p.m. camp was set, and our primary objective Nine Peaks was on full display.

Prior to nestling in, we experienced one of the most memorable and breathtaking alpine sunsets, the kind that leaves a lasting impression on your soul.



*Basecamp sunset.
(Photo by Brian Nesbitt)*

We arose before dawn, excitement was high, our bodies running on adrenaline. It had been discussed that we should aim to summit Big Interior Mountain before sunrise. That decision proved fruitful as we had another heavenly experience from the summit as the sun warmed our faces while looking onward to Nine Peaks.



*On the summit of Big Interior Mountain.
(Photo by Brichelle Brucker)*



*Heading up to the summit of Big Interior Mountain.
(Photo by Brichelle Brucker)*

From our vantage point on the summit of Big Interior Mountain we could see our route as it descended towards Bear Pass. Just before we reached Bear Pass we encountered thick fog and some rain so we took a pause. Although visibility was down to five metres and our clothing was damp, we made a team decision to push on towards Beauty Glacier. To our amazement the inclement weather began to disperse and within an hour we had rediscovered sunshine. Nine Peaks was peering down upon us.

This following leg truly tested our resolve. As the rays beat down urging submission, we found laughter in the pain knowing our primary objective was within reach. At 1 p.m., after a final steep pitch, Nine Peaks conceded one of the best alpine views Vancouver Island has to offer. For some it was their 1st Island Qualifier, for others it was a chance to reminisce. Strangers in the group had become friends and together we had achieved our goal, eight strong in full cooperation and the first to summit in 2023.

It wasn't long before the clouds moved in and we didn't see the blue sky for the rest of the day. By 2 p.m. a mix of heavy fog and rain once again set in as we headed back to base camp. The homebound slog was powered by expletives and numerous snack breaks but we all managed to nestle into camp by 7 p.m. Few words were said, only a shared silence of knowing that we had done what we came to do.



*On the summit.
(Photo by Stephanie Leblanc)*



*Group on the summit of Nine Peaks.
(Photo by Brian Nesbitt)*



*Nine Peaks from Basecamp.
(Photo by Brian Nesbitt)*

We broke camp at 8 a.m. Below us the inversion completely enveloped everything but above was clear.

Staring back at Nine Peaks our faint tracks to the summit could be seen with a squint. Although it was cold we took pleasure in the views of Nine Peaks and the Golden Hinde as we departed base camp. We all arrived intact but weary at the trailhead by 3 p.m.

What a ride!

Participants: John Relyea-Voss (Leader), Stephanie Leblanc, Brichelle Brucker, Brian Nesbitt, Brodie Anderson, Daniela Zafra, Jordan Anderson Davies, and Darryl Winmill

The Alpine Social, Mount Donner and Kent-Urquhart

Eryn Tombu-Haigh

June 7-8, 2023

Initially, when Barry Hansen and I started planning Mount Donner and Mount Kent-Urquhart, we were planning a long day trip, which with the right conditions would be easily attainable. Then the forecast came out and it looked amazing! Barry and I decided to do something we never do: an overnight when we could have done a day trip instead. Jes Garceau and his dog Tzela also wanted to join, and Rich Priebe, although he couldn't get June 7 off, was bound and determined to hit the Mount Kent-Urquhart summit with us on the 8th. He planned to leave Courtenay at 2:00 a.m. and wander into our camp in the cirque (around 1100 metres) at about 8:00 a.m. Us overnights would either tag Mount Donner bright and early then meet Rich enroute, or else tag Mount Donner in the evening and have a leisurely morning and leave for Mount Kent-Urquhart with Rich. Easy enough.



*Donner basin camp.
(Photo by Eryn Tombu-Haigh)*

A week before, Barry had invited himself on an all-female Mount Klitsa day trip. After the hike Barry and us girls hit up Twin City Brewing for a beer and pizza in Port Alberni. One of their featured Halftone beers was a lime mojito beer, which got us talking that perhaps mojitos in beer was not our favourite idea, but we did love a good mojito. So, I started

speculating if I could make a backpacking mojito mix with the right combination of sugar, lime, mint, and rum that could be poured over snow. Barry immediately said I should definitely do that for Mount Donner, to which I scoffed at the extra weight I'd have to carry. Without missing a beat, Barry, who is a firm ultra-light backpacker who had previously shot down my suggestion that we should split group gear based on our personal body weight, immediately offered to carry the drinks if I made them. And thus, the basis for an alpine social was born. A relaxed trip with a few sun-downers.

I mixed a litre of lime and mint simple syrup and rum mix and put it in a Platypus soft bottle. When Barry and Jes picked me up at 8:00 a.m., I happily handed over the concoction and we hit the road. Two and half hours later we were able to drive all the way to the end of the spur road off Ucona Main. Barry, having already been up Mount Donner ski touring a couple months earlier, had fresh beta and a great route for us. We followed the overgrown road until Barry decided this was the point and we turned into the bush.



*The old growth firs.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

The dense bush was momentary before we emerged into beautiful open old growth. We passed a few humongous gnarled old firs, and we climbed the steep terrain beside the creek. Navigation was easy with only a few route-finding hiccups before we emerged after a leisurely two and a half hours at the lake. Tzela kept easy pace with us, and I was impressed at her agility. As I'm not a dog owner, I am often skeptical of them in the backcountry, but Tzela was a pleasure and not a liability at all. We ate sandwiches and dabbled our feet in the cooling water while marvelling at the elk tracks scattered along the muddy lake bottom. After a good long break, we navigated up, over, and around the cliffs that line the north side

of the little lake. From there we found a good route through the forest before scrambling up the last bit of steep terrain and into the open alpine where we were greeted with impressive views to Matchlee Mountain and beyond. Emerging at the cirque we were delighted to find enough clear ground for our three tents on a flat island of heather that was embraced on its two sides by babbling snow runoff. The view from our tent doors of the mountains across the valley to Matchlee N4 [Peak 1720] was phenomenal as we basked in the warm spring sun. And it was only 2:30 p.m.

We weighed our options: have a mojito and lounge around for the next 6+ hours of daylight or slog up the snow to Mount Donner in the afternoon heat. Barry hates heat. I love it. So, naturally I won the battle of the wills, and we headed up the side of the solar oven kicking steps up the snowy slopes. It was fast travel on great snow conditions, and with no trouble we found the gully up from the base of the summit block.



*Barry on the summit of Mount Donner.
(Photo by Eryn Tombu-Haigh)*

A quick scramble and we were on the top of Mount Donner less than an hour and a half from camp. We looked east where Donner Lake stretched its vastness across the valley below us and beyond it all the Elk River Valley peaks we knew well. We noticed how the early season conditions were already melting out on Rambler Peak, Mount Colonel Foster, and Elkhorn Mountain. We left the amazing 360-degree views of Vancouver Island peaks and glissaded back down to camp in record time.

Back at camp we found a warm, rocky knoll overlooking Matchlee N4 and poured mojito mix over snow garnished with fresh mint. Jes surprised us with a charcuterie spread he brought up. He also produced a speaker to which Barry complained, "I told you not to bring music in the alpine," which Jes countered



*Charcuterie and mojitos, alpin style.
(Photo by Jes Garceau)*

saying Tzela had actually carried it in her pack and that he'd downloaded a special Old Man music mix just for him. So, with Gordon Lightfoot wafting out, we snacked on crackers and cheese, sipped our drinks, and marvelled at just how beautiful the world can be. We watched the sunset before crawling into our tents.

With dawn so early, I was boiling water for my coffee around 6:00 a.m. and who should come trudging up the snow but Rich. Over two hours ahead of schedule. His long legs and light pack had only taken him two and a half hours to reach our camp. We were impressed and hustled into our morning routines while Rich lay on our seat pads, wrapped in our extra gear, and re-charged for an hour. It was still before 8:00 a.m. as we donned crampons and started up towards Mount Kent-Urquhart. The sun quickly softened the snow and conditions were once again ideal for fast travel. We gained the ridge connecting Mount Donner and Mount Kent-Urquhart and followed it, admiring some exposed rock quartz along the way. We had originally planned the northwest ridge, but with the snow so perfect we figured the steep north face might just be easy kicking steps. Asking Jes if he thought Tzela would be fine on it, he confirmed that she would be okay going up but may opt for the ridge coming

down. Another 20 minutes kicking steps up to the top, we were basking like walruses on the large blocky summit. And it was barely 10:00 a.m. The day's objective accomplished.



Jes, Tzela, Eryn, Rich and Barry on the summit of Mt. Kent-Urquhart. (Photo by Barry Hansen)

Back at camp, Rich took another power nap while we packed up camp and then we all headed back down. At the lake Rich commented that it would probably be easier to just cross the lake instead of fluffing around the cliffs on the side, and besides, the elk had done it. With that he'd convinced me, Jes and Tzela. So, as Barry navigated up and down, we took off our boots and navigated the soft mud and slippery wood underfoot. As the day was hot, the water and even the mud felt wonderful, and we laughed and cursed our way across, occasionally startled by how deep some of the steps were (4 inches of water over 3 feet of soft mud).



Eryn and Rich wading across the lake. (Photo by Jes Garceau)

We reunited on far side and although neither route was faster, both parties swore theirs was better. We dried our feet and continued down. Reaching the cars around 1:30 p.m., we couldn't believe how easy the day was: we felt fresh, well rested, and ready for a cold beer. I was back in Courtenay in time to pick up my son from daycare and grab a beer with the boys while we talked about how delightful the trip was. Maybe we should slow down in the alpine some more? Or at least one trip a year. Perhaps an annual Alpine Social.

Participants: Barry Hansen, Jes Garceau, Eryn Tombu-Haigh, and Rich Priebe

A Mystical Adventure

Kambria Ernst

9-11 June, 2023

We had planned this trip over the course of two to three months so we could include every tiny detail, and we got it all right! It began when we all met up in the China Beach parking lot on the West Coast. Owen, Charlie and Nick all came in one car, Jonathan and Mason came in a second and finally, Tivon and Kieran arrived in a third. We all took our heavy bags and our food rations and started down the trail, but five seconds into the hike Scouter Kambria reminded us to take a photo. We all stood before the signpost that read: "Mystic Beach, 2 kilometres" while she took it. When we began, Jonathan immediately started chatting about the suspension bridge, which was all he would talk about until we reached it. It was a green, long, 20-metre bridge that was around 25 metres above the creek below. We were about to cross the terrifying bridge when we encountered other Scouters from Mississippi, USA. Mississippi is precisely 3,836 kilometres away. We talked for approximately 5-10 minutes until we said our goodbyes and the Scouter agreed to shout us out on his Instagram account when he got back to Mississippi. Looking back, I wish I had asked him: "Why did you visit Vancouver Island?" Anyway, we crossed the suspension bridge in pairs and when we got to the end of the bridge it went downhill. Not figuratively, luckily, but literally. Most of the hike from then on were either steep stairs or tall hills. When we got to what we thought was the end, we encountered the steepest stairs of all time! Well, maybe they weren't, but they were pretty steep. Once

we finally got down to the beach, we set up tents and made KD mac'n'cheese with tuna for dinner. It sounds sort of gross, but was surprisingly good. Finally, after reading for a little while, we all fell asleep.

Mice were a big problem during our weekend at Mystic Beach. One of us especially felt the brunt of their aggression. His bag was attacked by the gobbling mice. His poncho was chewed to shreds, the front pocket of his day bag was destroyed, his brand-new sandals were demolished to the point where one was completely unwearable and multiple plastic bags were ripped open. Another one of our scouts' bags was also brutally attacked by the mice. His day-pack was ripped beyond use. He had no bag for the 14 kilometre hike we did the next day.

Our troop woke up early Saturday morning around seven o'clock. We had a delicious breakfast of oatmeal that we cooked on a mini burner stove. After breakfast, we went down to the ocean and washed our bowls. After that, we packed up our day packs

and got under way. The first part of the hike was very uphill, but gradually changed and got easier towards the middle. We went over a few bridges and saw lots of beautiful trees, waterfalls, cliffs and the ocean. Luckily, the trail was quite wide, so you weren't getting smacked by bushes every second! As we approached the beach, we encountered some ladders coming down a very steep cliff. The ladders were SUPER fun, and they had little ledges you could stand on while waiting for your friend to get off the next one. After the ladders, we hiked for a couple more minutes and finally got to our destination.

When we got to Bear Beach, we sat down at a log to make lunch.

As the parents put together some food, everyone else started throwing rocks towards the ocean or trying to hit other stones, or even break the rocks they threw. Some tried to hit small puddles that had formed on the beach at low tide. After we had a lunch of crackers, jam, cheese and pepperoni, we went to refill our water



*2nd Camas at Bear Beach.
(Photo by John Bartle-Clar)*

bottles at the waterfall with our pump water filters. Soon after, we had about five minutes of free time before we packed up.

When we started heading back to Mystic Beach from Bear Beach we went back up the ladders. Soon after we got up, we saw some other hikers with a little kid on the trail and were surprised the little kid walked that far. Then we saw another group of youth hikers and they were biting holes into leaves to make faces so they could mark the trail that they were on. Most of us were talking about soccer for the whole hike back. We saw more hikers and beautiful places until we finally reached Mystic Beach. After that, we relaxed and played catch on the beach, and built a giant sandcastle. For dinner, we had this delicious Thai curry and we filtered water to make hot chocolate. We were all very tired from the long hike and went off to bed.



*Beautiful evening at Mystic Beach.
(Photo by Kambria Ernst)*

In the morning, we packed up all our gear, including the tents, pots and pans, into our backpacks. We remembered the rule we always follow: leave no trace. Soon after, we hiked out. After getting to the car, we all said our goodbyes, split up and drove away. Overall, this experience was a lot of fun and we hope to do more like this soon. We'd like to thank the Vancouver Island Section of the Alpine Club of Canada for giving us a youth grant from the Memorial Fund to buy one of the backpacks. Not all of us own a backpack so this makes new adventures possible.

Participants: 2nd Camas Scouts including Owen, Charlie, Nicholas, Jonathon, Tivon, Kieran, Mason, and their trip leaders Kambria Ernst, Lori Henderson, Justin Lovelass, and John Bartle-Clar

Mount Clark and Carter Peak

Lindsay Elms

June 22-23, 2023

For mountaineers on the island there are the big mountains – Mount Colonel Foster, Elkhorn Mountain and the Golden Hinde – which can challenge the climber physically and mentally with technical routes and confusing micro-navigation. Then there are the easy peaks – Mount Finlayson, Mount Benson and Mount Becher – that have trails to the summit and can be climbed in a couple of hours by people of all ages. These are the “go to” peaks when someone just wants to blow the cobwebs out of their system without having to think too much about the route or the drive. And then there are the remote and obscure peaks – Mount Clark, Carter Peak and Mount Pickering – that no one (except a few) have heard of.

These are not big mountains or easy ones with trails to the summit. They have their own set of challenges. The mountaineer needs to first figure out how to get to the base of the mountain often via a complex system of logging roads, and then come up with a plan on which might be the best route to reach the summit. 1:50,000 topo maps have logging roads marked on them, but the roads can become overgrown very quickly or deactivated. It takes a bit of navigating to figure out where you are in relation to the mountain and the backroads map book. This book has become one of the climber’s “backcountry bibles” but has many inaccurately marked features. Sometimes exactly which peak is the one you are aiming for isn’t obvious as there may be nothing distinctive about it. It’s just a name on the map. Success at reaching the summit can be ‘hit or miss’, but there is one thing all the peaks have in common for the mountaineer who chooses to climb them and that is the summit.

Every mountaineer who parks their car, motor bike, quad, bicycle or boat at the trailhead, has one goal in mind and that is to reach the summit. Of course, with any attempt there are a number of reasons why the summit might not be reached. There are too many to even contemplate trying to describe. But if the summit isn’t reached on this climb, it will be attempted again on another trip. The mountain and its summit don’t disappear. So, the summit IS important! There is a sense of frustration – call it what you will – but the mountaineer will then say they enjoyed the process even though they failed to reach the

summit. No one curses or swears at a fun day out in the mountains. Even in hindsight when caught out in inclement weather, the pain and suffering (is it really pain and suffering?) are soon forgotten and it will be remembered as a valuable experience.

But what is it about the summit that makes the mountain so important? I believe there are two main reasons: the sense of physical achievement in reaching your goal, and the view from the top. There is a natural 'high' from standing on the summit. It's not the same high from half-way up the mountain or at the trailhead. This is why I climb mountains. It's a unique feeling that I only get from the summit. Any summit - big, small or obscure. I call it my Peak Bagging Experience!

On Wednesday 21 June Val and I took the long drive up to Port Alice on the east side of the Neroutsos Inlet. There we fueled the vehicle up and left the paved road and headed out on the dusty logging roads on the west side of the inlet. A short distance up the inlet we turned left onto the Cayuse Main and followed it until we reached a spur road on the south side of Mount Clark. We were able to drive for a couple of kilometres until a washout on one of the corners at an elevation of 330 m stopped us. Even though the road continued up to about 830 m, we were not going to risk the vehicle trying to negotiate the rutted road.

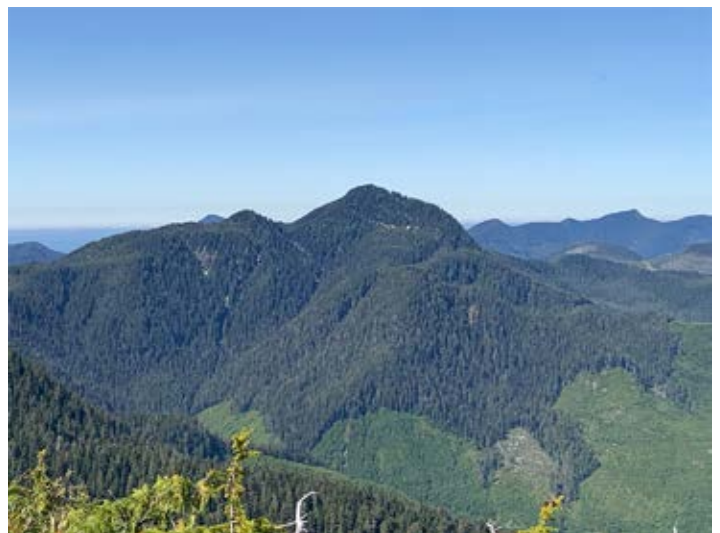
The next morning (22 June) there was a typical west coast fog hanging over the valley but by the time we reached the end of the road the fog was below us and we were in clear blue skies. A twenty-minute thrash through and over numerous blowdowns in the logged area and we were in the forest pushing aside the huckleberry and copper bush. After three hours of easy climbing from the vehicle we were on the summit of Mount Clark at 1036 m taking in the views of the Neroutsos Inlet to the east and Mquqwin/Brooks Peninsula to the west. It was a gorgeous day to be in the mountains.

After lunch we descended and drove further west on the Cayuse Main to another spur road which we hoped would take us to over 850 m on the southwest side of Carter Peak - our second objective at the southern end of Mackay Ridge. At the northern end of the ridge was Mount Pickering. Unfortunately, the logging company had recently blocked the road with huge boulders at 530 m.

The next day (23 June) was another three-hour climb to the 1128 m summit where again we had beautiful views to the west coast. Harris Peak on the edge of Mquqwin/Brooks Peninsula was an easily identifiable peak as was Red Stripe Mountain on the north side



*Val near the summit of Mount Clark.
(Photo by Lindsay Elms)*



*Carter Peak from Mount Clark.
(Photo by Lindsay Elms)*

of Klaskino Inlet - both objectives for possible future trips. With the weather holding for a few more days, we drove to Side Bay and explored Lawn Point Provincial Park on the west coast. On the drive home we looked at the peaks we had climbed on previous visits up island: Comstock Mountain and Mount Wolfenden, but now we took note of other logging

roads that would potentially give us access to a couple of other peaks for next year.

Participants: Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms

Information on the names of the north island mountains.

Carter Peak is named to remember Canadian Army Private Lawrence Henry Carter, from Port Alice. He served with the Calgary Highlanders, a Canadian Army Primary Reserve infantry regiment, and was killed in action on 1 August 1944 at the age of 22. He was buried at Bretteville-Sur-Laize Canadian War Cemetery, in France. It was adopted on 3 April 1959 on 92L/5 map.

Mount Clark is named to remember Royal Canadian Air Force Warrant Officer 1st class James Anderson Clark from Port Alice. He served as a pilot with 419 Squadron when he was killed on 15 September 1942 at the age of 21. He was buried at Cottesmore (St. Nicholas) Churchyard, Rutland, England.

Mount Pickering was named to remember Royal Canadian Air Force Flight Sergeant Walter Henry Pickering, originally from Port Alice. He served with 419 Squadron at Cottesmore Aerodrome, UK, an operational training school, when he was killed on 15 September 1942 at the age of 26. He is buried at Cottesmore (St. Nicholas) Churchyard, England.

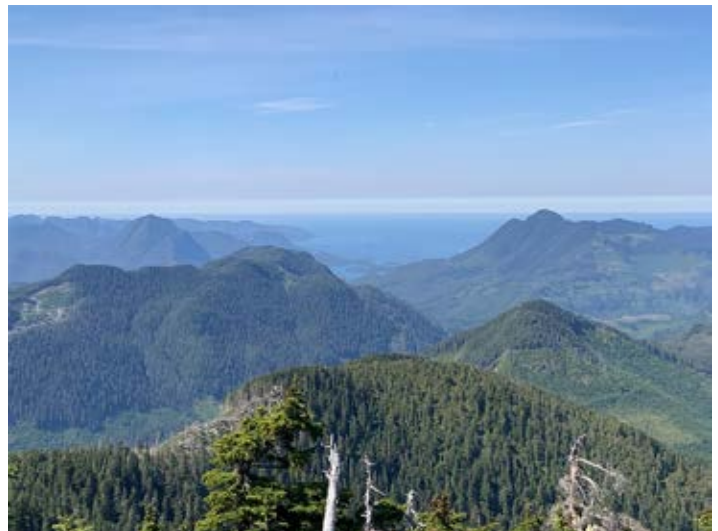
Mackay Ridge is named to remember Canadian Army Private James W. McKay, originally from Port Alice who served with the South Saskatchewan Regiment of the Canadian Army Primary Reserve infantry regiment. He was killed in action on 3 March 1945 at the age of 28. He is buried at Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, Netherlands.

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

Comstock Mountain was named in association with the new Comstock Group of mineral claims on the east side of the mountain which were surveyed in 1902. "...some 4 miles up [Neroutsos Inlet, Quatsino Sound] is the wharf and post office of Yreka, where

is also situated the Mining Recorder's office for the Quatsino Mining Division. A townsite has been laid out by the Yreka Coper Company Ltd, which also has a store, sawmill, blacksmith shop, large bunkhouse, etc. Rising above the townsite at an angle of 40° is a peak, somewhat higher than the range, which has been named Comstock Mountain, and on which have been located two groups of claims: the New Comstock Group and the Superior Group, both owned by the Yreka Copper Co. Ltd..." (B.C. Mines Report, 1903, p.198.)

Harris Peak adopted 5 November 1946 on C.3680, as recommended by Hydrographic Service; not "Sharp Peak" as labelled on British Admiralty Chart 583, 1865 et seq. Re-named in 1937 by H.D. Parizeau, Hydrographic Service, according to his daily journal, after sealing schooner captain Charles J. Harris.



Looking west from the summit of Carter Peak. Mount Harris is the prominent sharp peak on the left and Mount Kotzebue on the right. Klaskish Inlet and Brooks Bay are between the peaks. (Photo by Lindsay Elms)

Red Stripe Mountain was adopted 5 November 1946 on C.3680, as labelled on British Admiralty Chart 583, 1865 et seq.

Mount Kotzebue was adopted 5 November 1946 on C.3680, as submitted by Hydrographic Service, after the Imperial Russian Navy leader Otto von Kotzebue, who commanded an expedition to the northwest coast of America in 1815-18.

Doom Mountain was adopted 29 January 1985 on 92L/4, as submitted by the Provincial Museum's Brooks Peninsula Expedition of 1981. So-named by expedition members because of the forbidding appearance of sheer cliffs, and because the mountain top was usually shrouded in cloud while the rest of the area was clear.

Footsteps Across Vancouver Island

Amy Tunstall

June 23 - August 5, 2023

On June 23, I left my home in Victoria to hike the Vancouver Island Trail (VIT) with only a 50-pound backpack and a set of hiking poles. I was ready to start the pilgrimage north in what I expected to be a two-month trek through the interior of Vancouver Island. This hike would connect my footsteps from the southern tip to the northern most point of Cape Scott in a 770-kilometre journey. The route would follow the Vancouver Island Trail (formerly referred to as the Vancouver Island Spine Trail) linking many parks and pathways throughout the island and connecting them with the use of industrial roads and old railway infrastructure.



*Cowichan River.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*

Amid a heat wave, I began my journey following the old railway beds towards Lake Cowichan - a route that I had cycled multiple times. The VIT starts by following a series of popular recreational trails which make up a small section of The Great Trail - connecting one from the populated urban landscape of Victoria and Langford to the Cowichan Valley. For 100 kilometres I followed what was mostly former railway lines over a series of restored trestles which had been a community

effort to save and restore. I walked this road-like trail of gentle grade through a forest of giant ferns and moss-covered maples. Even though the forest looked vibrant, the rivers were low and the creeks ran dry. In the heat of the day and the newfound weight of my pack, my body struggled.

Giant blisters had formed on the bottoms of my feet. With every step, I questioned my decision to leave and every piece of me wanted to quit, to do something else, *anything* else. But I pushed on through this discomfort. I knew that I just needed time to allow my body to get stronger. Prior to my departure, I had felt stagnant and what I craved was change and to feel good in my body again. Even though I wanted to be anywhere other than where I was, my intuition told me that the trail was probably the best place for me. This propelled me forward, and in three and half days I made it to Lake Cowichan where I would leave the manicured trail behind for logging roads and single track through the backcountry.



*Trail markers along the Tuck Lake Trail.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*

Before I could continue any further, I needed to deconstruct the contents of my bag, and begin the process of "**Letting Go.**" By the time I flushed away the non-essential items, I had a 9-lb box filled with several layers, random camping gear, and my DSLR camera. With less weight, I found a new sense of

freedom and began to enjoy the journey and to find my stride as I walked the dusty logging roads north towards Port Alberni.

Truckers stopped in confusion, wondering if I was lost, wondering why there was a random hiker walking these roads. Small pieces of pink and orange flagging led me away from these industrial roads towards my first river ford. Through steep cut blocks my path became obscure - flagging lost beneath the slash and fireweed. Like a child, I climbed, pulling myself up these steep sections, balancing on the large trees like tightwire over piles and piles of slash towards the covered forest where the trail would become defined and easy to follow once again. Eventually, I'd connect to a section referred to as the Runner's Trail - a 17-kilometre section that traces a First Nations traditional trade route constructed mainly by the Tseshaht First Nations. Eventually this route would end and once again I'd link back to the former Canadian Northern Pacific Railway.



*Runner's Trail.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*



*Tuck Lake Trail.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*



*Port Alberni Trail.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*

Out of Port Alberni, I began my 1200-metre ascent into the Beaufort Range. The trail was steep, and eventually the logging roads would disappear into a multitude of dirt bike paths throughout the forest, and those paths would begin to fade as I climbed into the

subalpine of exposed rock and mountain heather. Flagging became sparse as land usage agreements have yet to be finalized throughout this section. A well-known route across this range exists, however the use of my GPS would become essential to navigate this low-trafficked traverse. A nearly 90-kilometre slow-moving backcountry trek involved steep pitches and areas that would need to be bushwhacked. From

the summit of my first peak, Mount Hal, I could see the partial crest that I would be following over the next several days as well as a few of the peaks that I would need to climb: eight summits.

Throughout this section there was little time to think. My only focus was on the route ahead and being methodical in my foot placement because an ankle injury would end this journey quickly. Snow hid in the shadows of the gulleys and I crossed these sections with caution. Every time I approached a peak, a rapid ascent and descent of steep pitches would follow. Hemlock and pine needles covered the slopes, and the earth would give way when my foot made contact. I fell repeatedly and with immense frustration, my only choice was to pick myself up once again.

I navigated around the erect boulders and small alpine lakes that scattered the plateau like ridge. Short sections became lost as I'd descend back down into the dense conifer stands. This was true backcountry, and although I had experience in the backcountry this section challenged me both physically and mentally: the rapid elevation gains and losses, the bulldozing of shrubs that ripped at my skin, the buzz of a thousand biting insects every time I stopped, and a feeling of being perpetually lost.



*View of Beaufort Crest.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*



*Campsite from the Squarehead.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*



*View of Mount Albert Edward.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*

Although I had experience in the backcountry, it had always been on lakes and rivers that were easy to navigate or on well-established trails that led one up towards a distinguished ridge line. This was new, and I took it slowly. I'd wake up with the sun and make camp near dusk, in these long days of over 12 hours I never made it any further than 20 kilometres.

Another high elevation section lay ahead through Strathcona Park. I climbed up from Cumberland climbing back up to 1200 metres through what was once the Wood Mountain Ski Park into the Forbidden Plateau. A wooden kiosk informed me that I had reached the park boundaries, the large path through the park followed the contours of the land through dense mountain hemlock.

In a short amount of time, I made it to the base camp of Mount Albert Edward, where I would camp with 20 other groups at Circlet Lake, all of us preparing for the ascent ahead. Although I left relatively early, I hit a bottleneck as individuals of all ages pushed towards the summit. When I reached the main ridge, the impressive peaks dominated my view, but I veered away from the line of people who were trekking to the summit. Instead, I went in a northwesterly direction up

and over Jutland Ridge. This section was particularly beautiful. My only wish was that I could stay a little longer and give myself more time to explore the many peaks and valleys in BC's oldest provincial park.

The next day I would face the hardest section of the entire trip, my ascent and descent of Adrian Ridge. On this section there would be no trail or trail markers. I started with a bushwhack up a nearly vertical cut block that halted at a steep cliff-like scramble. I looked at my GPS to double check my route, which indicated that I'd need to climb. Back and forth I paced along the bottom for nearly 15 minutes deciding upon my safest route up, and then I climbed. Only to be stopped by another taller, steeper scramble less than 500 metres from the first. I began to panic, and my hands shook. Again, I'd need to climb. This time I'd need to make two different attempts to try and get up and over this steep section of crumbling rock. When I arrived at the ridge, I was met with only a short-lived sense of relief because the descent off Adrian Ridge was the most technical part of this entire VIT hike. It was a short section that left me bloody and shaken. This was the section that I felt could have caused me the most injury: a steep set of cliffs met with a non-intuitive route down. At the bottom of the cliffs the trail picked up once again, where I could begin to shake off the nerves from this challenging portion of trail.

I popped out of the trail near Upper Campbell Lake, on the side of Highway 28. Low on supplies, I had no other choice than to hitchhike my way into Campbell River. The next day I made it back to the trail, energized after having completed the two hardest sections of the Vancouver Island Trail. This was the point where I knew I would make it to the end. My body was now remarkably strong and attune to being in the mountains.

I formed a new relationship with this environment: one of respect, of inspiration and creativity. I loved the challenge, the demand and intricacy of each day. Again, I dove back into the monotony of road walking. Industry roads that would eventually connect me with trail, and trails that followed creeks and rivers. Trails that I assumed would be simpler. But when I connected with Glen's Trail it looked as though a tornado had ripped through the area. Sections of forest were completely uprooted. I was shocked. Never in my life had I seen so many trees ripped from the ground and stacked one atop another. For miles I climbed up and over the blow-down. Old signs hung in trees indicating this trail's former name. In its prime, this section would have been beautiful, but now most of it lay buried under piles and piles of blown-down trees.



*Campsite from Adrian Ridge.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*



*An example of the blow down through Glen's Trail.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*



*Old Vancouver Spine Trail Sign.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*

The forest erupted; large Roosevelt Elk began dashing through the bushes. For days I had been following their tracks as they used the trail like a corridor. These large animals were abundant as I made my way towards Stewart Lake, from where I'd be able to see mountains once again. A river trail took me toward my final large climb up and over a small pass. The rain began, fog rippled around the peaks, and water cascaded from high up on the mountainside. Water began to add life to the landscape and a vibrance which had faded in the drought. Watchtower Peak dominated my view, and I wanted nothing more than to be there high up in the alpine once again. Although, for now I'd just be passing through. From Kokummi Pass I began making larger pushes with my distance. Something that began to happen naturally as the trail eased and my body transformed. Out of the mountains, long days of persistent rain began. Stopping became infrequent. In a few days I would make it to the coast.

When I arrived in Port McNeill, it was my first contact with the ocean since leaving Victoria: a cause for celebration. And it was my first time travelling to the north of the island. I followed the coastline north as bear tracks zigzagged across the beaches. A well-marked trail ran parallel to the coast. As high tide approached, I diverted back into the woods following a hilly route to the Port Hardy Airport. From there I bushwhacked around the chain link fence through dense highbush raspberries, watching as small planes took off. The next day I'd need to decide how to get to the North Coast Trail: I could either take a water taxi or follow a 43-kilometre stretch of logging roads and cross Shushartie Bay.

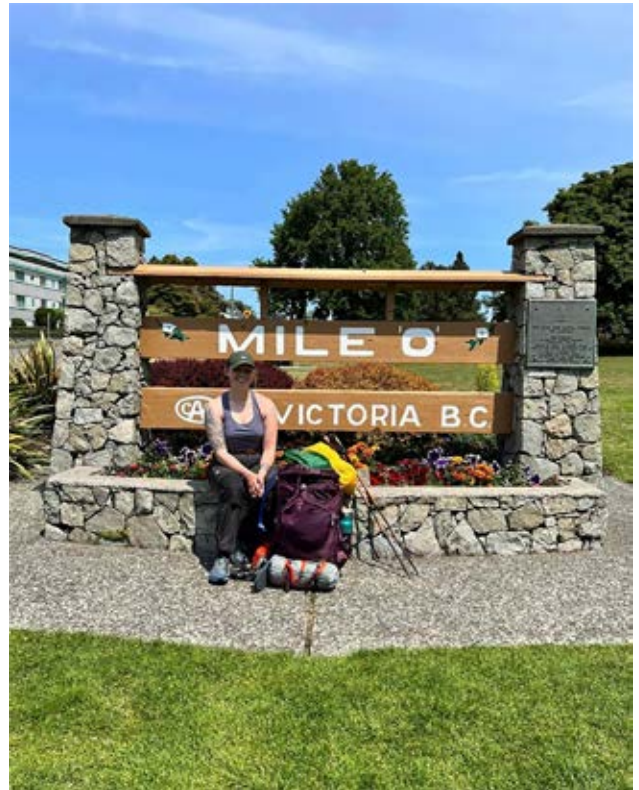
I chose the second option, determined to connect my footsteps from end to end. A small goat trail led me down into Shushartie Bay. I followed along the river that I'd need to cross but I reached it at high tide. For three hours I waited on the banks of the Shushartie River watching the water retreat into the sea. Finally, the time came, but still the river was waist deep. I crossed in pursuit of a campsite at the far end of the bay, climbing over rocks and trees that made up the shoreline.

At 4 a.m. I awoke to a single wolf howling from the bay I crossed only hours earlier. The melodic tune echoed through the night and several others joined in the course and sang until sunrise. In the morning I met with four other groups who had arrived by water taxi, and we began to leapfrog 120 metres up from the coastal shores and high into a bog of scattered boardwalks and knee-deep mud. A slow section, up and down over exposed roots and random pieces

wolves. On some days the trail felt like it was never ending, but on others it felt like it has gone by too soon.



*Wolf tracks on the North Coast Trail.
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*



*Victoria (Day 1).
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*

of wood. We celebrated the end of these overland sections and enjoyed the ease of beach walking. I decided that I wouldn't do any large pushes through the North Coast Trail. Instead, I took the recommended 5-6 days to navigate this route and savoured the final few days of this journey. I crossed over muddy headlands and root systems that acted like ladders guiding one from beaches into the forest above. Plastic buoys and lost crocs decorated trees like ornaments. Cable cars ran across the rivers, and the North Coast Trail became my playground.

From Christensen Point, grey whales patrolled the shoreline and I watched as spouts of water rose not too far off in the distance. Then the odd fluke. On my 44th day of the Vancouver Island Trail, I arrived at the northern Point of Cape Scott, a bittersweet moment. The North Coast Trail felt like the perfect way to conclude such a journey. Throughout my time on the VIT there were sections where I encountered not a single soul: through the Beauforts, I spent 6 days completely alone. To end my journey, I spent it in the company of others, sharing stories, food, and connection as we navigated this windy, muddy, coastal route following in the footsteps of coastal



*Cape Scott (Day 44).
(Photo by Amy Tunstall)*

Threshold Extension on Mount Colonel Foster – 5.9

John Relyea-Voss

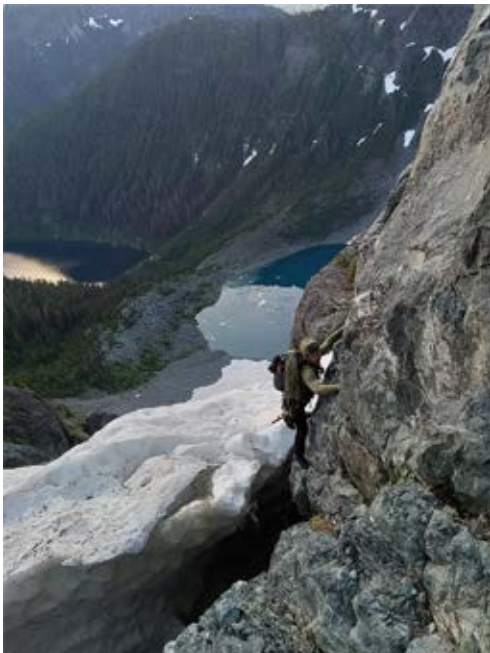
July 1/2, 2023

I met Josh Overdijk in Campbell River at 1 p.m. and we drove to the Elk River Trail (ERT) to begin the afternoon hike to Berg Lake. There we set up camp and prepared for the next day's climb.

We set our alarms for 3:00 a.m. and left camp not long after to begin the first pitch of *Doubleshot* which shares the beginning of the *Threshold Extension* route. *Threshold Extension* was originally ascended in winter by Ryan Van Horne and Hunter Lee in February 2020. This route leads to the gully referred to as *Threshold Extension* and connects to the ridge crest of the Mount Colonel Foster summit traverse. It was an incredible day; Tent to tent was 11 hours of climbing and our descent to Berg Lake was via the Great Western Couloir. Afterward, we hiked out to the car, making it a 22.5-hour day!

Route Information:

Pitch 1: Climb up the slabs and move off the snow into Pitch One of *Doubleshot* and finish at the horn belay.



John transitioning to the rocks below pitch 1.
(Photo by Josh Overdijk)

Pitch 2: Low fifth class - climb straight up from the belay for 70 metres to a large horn. It's a rope stretcher and the route trends slightly right with minimal protection. After a short scramble, trend left to a gully with a chockstone at the top where there is a good belay.

Pitch 3: Protect the chockstone and execute a 5.9 move which leads to more fifth-class climbing with moderate protection. This pitch is 70 metres long and leads to another horn from which to belay.

Pitch 4: Scramble up right-trending ledges which lead to a steep and narrow right-trending ramp. Belay from this point and make a 5.9 move onto another steep chockstone. Continue up the narrowing and exposed right-trending ramp, avoiding the easier but insecure flake to the right. Moderate gear. Climb to a large horn and continue to a flat landing on the climber's left. There is a snow-patch here and the pitch is 70 metres long.



Josh climbing in the gully of *Threshold Extension*.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)

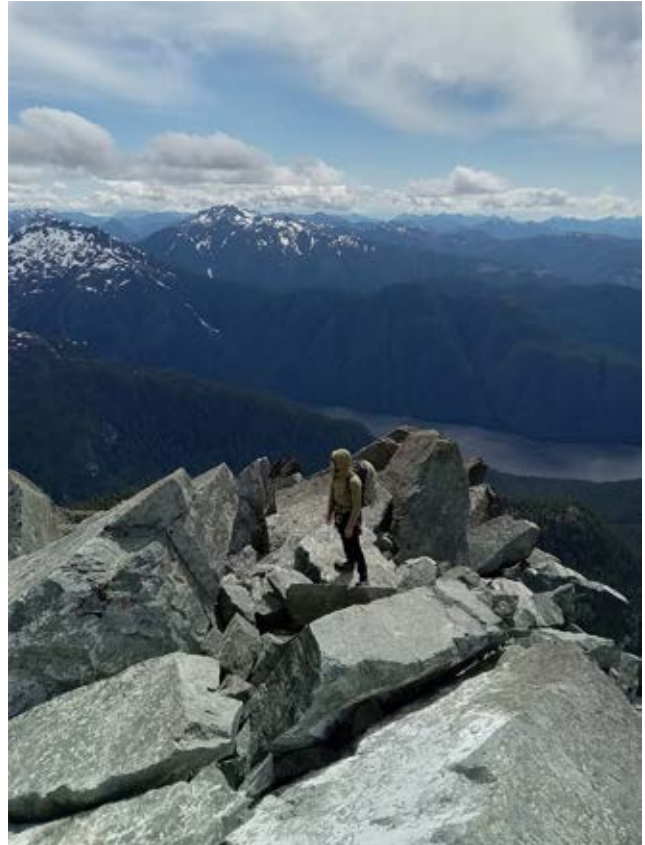


*John making an exposed traverse to finish Threshold Extension.
(Photo by Josh Overdijk)*



*Josh on the summit traverse.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

Threshold Extension (450 m): Once you enter the gully of *Threshold Extension* between the Northeast Peak and the Northwest Peak, there are several choices to follow on rock of varying difficulty. There are occasional short steps up to 5.9. Near the top of the route, trend right towards the Northeast Peak and connect with the ridge crest of the summit traverse.



*John on the summit of Mount Colonel Foster
(Photo by Josh Overdijk)*

Finish the route to the main summit and choose your descent route. We decided to continue the summit traverse to the top of the Great Western Couloir, which we descended...

Participants: John Relyea-Voss and Josh Overdijk

Schoen Lake Provincial Park Explorations

Peggy Taylor

July 7-13, 2023

Roger and I had arranged a six-day kayak expedition out of Port McNeill in July when, out of the blue, we received a lovely invitation from our Sooke Hills hiking buddy, Diane Bernard, to join her on a hiking

trip the week earlier. Perfect! We would be up island so why not turn a one-week vacation into a two-week vacation? Diane, her husband George Butcher, and his friend George Urban were keen to take a float plane into Paradise Lake and explore the mountains in that area east of Tofino. Sounded amazing! But we found out the lake was too short for a float plane with five people and gear, so the company suggested a helicopter instead. OK no problem, but then, a few days later the company informed us that all of their helicopters were needed to fight fires in northern B.C. Yikes....So two weeks before leaving what were we to do?

Luckily George Urban came up with another marvelous idea. What about hiking from the end of a logging road near Mount Cain into a rarely explored area north of Schoen Lake? There was a group of three lakes with Mount Abraham, Mount Sarai, Mount Abel and Kunnum Peak as potential climbing objectives. I had never heard of any of these mountains, but a quick look on Google Earth showed us some potential camping sites at the second and third lakes with lots to keep us busy for five days. Special thanks to Matthew Lettington for providing us with GPS tracks for two day hikes - one up Mount Sarai and the other Mount Abraham from the end of a logging road. This was a huge help to us for getting into these three lakes!

So, after spending a wonderful day up in Cumberland with our friend Ulrike, we headed out on Saturday July 8 to meet Diane and the two Georges at the Esso station in Campbell River. Upon meeting up with them we drove our two vehicles to the Mount Cain road beyond Sayward, and took a right on another logging road and travelled to the end. Here big boulders blocked any further progress on wheels. Luckily, there was a waterfall nearby in which to store the beer provided by the Georges upon our return.

We headed off with our backpacks fully loaded at 1:50 p.m., walking about a kilometre of old de-activated road, which gradually turned into overgrown bush. Now we were truly into a bushwhacking, the likes of which was as gnarly as you get (minus the devil's club, thank goodness!). We did a very prickly, dense bush crossing of a small stream, and traversed uphill on the east side of the valley towards the first (unnamed) lake. Only about 30 or 40 minutes in I felt quite hot and dizzy, generally not great...Aargh! So we stopped to drink copious amounts of water, eat some food and take a rest. That was what my body needed. At one point after the break George Butcher decided to take a line straight uphill, while the rest of us continued on a more gently angled traverse. However, the going was tough and quite steep in

places. There were definitely a few places where both Diane and I were thinking.... "There's no way we are coming down this....Too dangerous"! Unbeknownst to us, George Butcher had found a more open route up higher. After going straight up for a time, he turned left into more open mature forest. We didn't know this and were wondering where he had gotten to. As we got higher and closer to popping out near the first lake we met up with him after some calling back and forth. Reunited again....Phew! I never like being apart from anyone, but this turned out to be a really good diversion, as George told us of the ease of his route. Sadly, though during a quick snack break he put down his camera and forgot to pick it up. Oh no! So, we decided then and there to try to retrace his steps out on the last day since it was a better, less bushy route and to see if we could find his camera.

We arrived at the first lake in the eastern shadow of Mount Sarai at about 5:20 p.m. Whereupon Roger had to take a dip and the rest of us were not far behind. It truly felt great on such a hot day after humping heavy packs through the bush. We carried on for about another hour to the second lake where we saw a very lovely flat camp spot complete with a nice rocky area for a kitchen by the lake. However, we decided to check out the third lake as it was



George Butcher, Diane, Peggy and George Urban pose at a tarn on the way up to Mount Abraham. (Photo by Roger Taylor)

only a few minutes further. We arrived at the third and biggest lake at 6:50 p.m., but there was not sufficient area to pitch three tents. Back to lake two we trundled, arriving at 7:15 p.m. We quickly set up our tents and had a very satisfying late dinner. We all slept well that night and had agreed to just get up when we awoke and then aim to find a way up Mount Abraham. Sunday, July 9 dawned a lovely sunny/ partly cloudy day and was not too hot. Although we had Matthew's track to follow up Mount Abraham, his track would take us backwards to the first lake and we thought, after looking at the map, it might be fun to see if we could get up by the northern ridge. So off we went at around 9:10 a.m., exploring back to lake three and then veering right up a stream bed, figuring out the route as we climbed higher. There was a short stop where Roger took a dip in a tarn around 9:50 a.m.

Afterwards, we encountered some rubble and scree and the occasional small snow patch. There was a hump we decided to go around on the left to reach an obvious ridge. It was lovely hiking terrain with no technical challenges. We soon came across an amazing plateau with some wonderful, highly enticing tarns to the west below Mount Abraham. Those of you who know Roger, know that he cannot pass a perfectly good tarn or lake without a cold water therapy session! Up on the ridge the views opened out to many mountains all around – what a gem of a place.

We continued along the ridge in a south by south-easterly direction towards the summit, soaking it all in. We came to a spot where we had to find a way up a steeper rockier bluff to a higher ridge. Which way to go? George Butcher attempted to climb a chimney, but the rest of us did not like the look of it and trended further to the right. I saw a route that looked quite fun and asked George Urban if he liked the look of it.



*George Urban scrambling with Schoen Lake below.
(Photo by Peggy Taylor)*

It was a 50-metre section that would get us to the next ridge. He was keen, so off we went.

Diane and Roger went further right than us and found an easier route. Unfortunately, George Butcher's chimney did not go. The only way down safely was by rappelling. We waited and showed him the easy route as he had expended a bit of energy attempting the chimney. Once all of us were on the subsidiary ridge we had a stunning view down to Schoen Lake and over to Mount Schoen.

It was an easy walk to the summit (1702 metres) which we arrived at about 1 p.m. Here we relaxed and ate lunch, taking in all the splendor around us. While we relaxed, we congratulated everyone on a great team effort navigating. There was some discussion about doing a loop down the south side of Mount Abraham, but in the end we decided to just reverse our route and do the known-known. That would not involve an uphill climb from lake one to camp at the very end of the day. We put our harnesses on just in case we decided to do any climby-variations, but did not need the gear after all. There were some small variations during the descent which included going on the other side of the rocky hump. There we found nice snow to plunge step down.



*Hiking down off Mount Abraham to tarn plateau.
(Photo by Peggy Taylor)*

Of course, there had to be a stop at the first tarn (3:50 p.m.) on "tarn plateau" for a snack, and then, naturally a dip. After the refreshing swim, we took a slightly different route down through the forest. Swimming was becoming a big theme and at 5:22 p.m. we were down to the third lake and all of us were enjoying a swim. George Butcher is not typically known as a swimmer, but even he was getting into the spirit. After drying off, we headed back to camp arriving by 5:40 p.m., with plenty of light and time left for a leisurely dinner. I always find it interesting to see what backpacking buddies bring for meals. We are lazy and typically bring boil-in-the-foil backpacking meals with some extra pasta or rice to throw in. However,

the other three cooked together, and had carted in a lot of real food. I had wondered what was in George Urban's big pack and now I know. However, he over-catered and we were lucky enough to be able to help out with eating some of the leftovers....Thanks George! At our camp beside the second lake there was a couple of families of Goldeneye ducks. It was great fun to watch them swimming about, but what was even more amazing, was we had several high-speed fly-bys. They literally flew by at such a high speed that they were just a blur, and sounded like small jet fighters. This is something none of us had ever seen or heard before – quite amazing.

On day three, Monday July 10, we arose to another super weather day. I noticed that Diane was also a hardy cold water devotee as each morning she took an early morning dip well away from our kitchen and water collection area, and before the sun hit the lake....Brrr!! After a leisurely breakfast we headed out around 9 a.m. to the third lake to climb up the north ridge towards Mount Sarai. There were thoughts of trying a forested ramp slightly to the west, but the north ridge idea prevailed as the ramp looked to be pretty darn steep. We found our way up the easy ridge, weaving in and out of trees to a nice shaded spot with great views over to Mount Schoen. Here we had a snack break. Continuing we crossed to the right of a creek and up to the sub-alpine level of the ridge. We had a great view over to Kunnum Peak, and noted that it was a quite steep descent to a lake with another steep climb up to the ridge. Maybe another day. It was a nice, relatively simple hike up the north ridge over mostly easy rock. We encountered a small snow patch and then it was up onto the open ridge amongst a beautiful saxifrage garden. We really enjoyed the vistas in all directions. George Butcher and I took special note of the previously mentioned tarn plateau to the east. We also spied a potential route up to the plateau very close to our camp. Tuck away that information!

Further up the ridge we encountered a wee bushy crux. There was a narrowing of the ridge with some trees trying to block the way and on either side were steep cliffs. After a bit of humming and hawing, Roger launched into it....Up and over the small trees, along a small rock ledge hidden by the trees, over some more trees while carefully stepping on big branches over airy gaps below. Finally he crawled through a tree tunnel. Each move had to be repeated by all of us with precision, but it worked well.

After we all negotiated this interesting and fun section, we continued up the ridge to a high point, arriving around 1:10 p.m. We were unsure as to whether or not this bump was the summit or if it was the next bump to the south. After a nice lunch break at this high point of 1666 metres, all of the group, except me, wandered over towards the next bump. I opted to rest and reserve my energy while they did the recce. As I suspected the next bump would not go. The group did not like the look of the terrain and figured it might be too technical. We also had a long way back to camp, so they decided to turn back. We headed back down the way we came up, again with a few variations to keep things interesting.



Mount Sarai sub-summit. From left: Roger, Diane, George Butcher and George Urban. (Photo by Peggy Taylor)



Hiking up to Mount Sarai with Mount Abraham, Mount Schoen and "third lake" centre and left of hikers. (Photo by Roger Taylor)

On the way up we had noticed a very small tarn, so we made a small diversion for an obligatory dip around 3:50 p.m., and another quick snack. No day is complete without a descent swim, so a stop at the third lake was also enjoyed by all at about 5:20 p.m. Then it was just a short jaunt back to camp for 5:40 p.m. and a leisurely dinner. The evening was another pleasant one with very few bugs. We had a short yoga session with the group to stretch out many of our tight muscles and chatted about possibilities for the next day's outing. Roger was getting a bit of a sore foot, and I was generally tired and advocated for an easier day. We decided to explore the tarn-studded plateau below Mount Abraham and everyone seemed fine with taking the energy levels down a notch for a more casual day.

Tuesday, July 11 dawned beautiful again and the usual preparations were made. Diane had her morning swim. We ate our breakfast and then headed out at the leisurely hour of 10:45 a.m. George Butcher and I were happy when we found a pleasant way through the forest and meadows. It was a lovely, easy stroll. But, I must admit, I was puffing up a storm after four days of exertion and was moving a bit more slowly. George Butcher and Diane kindly hung out with me, while George Urban and Roger sped ahead. Maybe Roger saw another tarn?

We had a truly lovely day wandering amongst the seven or eight tarns on the plateau. Roger, of course, had to dip in each one that was big enough to accommodate his body, and George Urban joined him for many of those dips. Diane, George Butcher and I enjoyed a nice rest at the first tarn and did some bird watching as the Goldeneye ducks were hanging out there. On the way back down later in the day, Roger scared a solitary male Elk in the brush just 10 metres ahead of him. The rest of us (except George Urban who was further down slope) had a good view of the Elk running up the hill. Such amazing creatures! That spry Elk ran up a steep forested slope for about 200 metres in about 10 seconds, way faster than it would have taken us to hike up the same terrain. A nice hike brought us back to camp by 5:00 p.m. After dinner we discussed the next day's potential objectives. Other than Kunnum Peak, we felt we had covered all the easy ground. Kunnum Peak would be a much longer day than the Mount Abraham climb, and due to Roger's increasing discomfort in one foot, we decided to backpack out the next day.

After packing up camp on Wednesday, July 12 we headed out slowly making our way down to the cars. We took George Butcher's higher line traversing the slope after the first lake and it was indeed a superior

line through the mature forest. Along the way we kept our eyes peeled for George's camera, but sadly we did not locate it. There was a bit of nasty bushwacking near the bottom again, but we all managed to get through unscathed. Once back at the car, Diane, Roger and I took a full-on "bath" at the small waterfall and we all had a cold beer in celebration of a very successful trip. After all packs were stowed in the vehicles, we drove back to Sayward and found sites at the local free municipal campground.

Dining out was a definite requirement to re-calorize so we headed to the Crossroads Restaurant and Pub for burgers and fries... So yummy! While there we took out all the reference books and maps to see if we could find another, easier objective for July 13 and we decided to give Mount Romeo a go. It did not seem to be a long drive from Sayward. A friendly local, who could not help but listen to our plans, came over to give us intel on the best logging roads to take. That was super helpful... Thanks mystery man!

Thursday, July 13 was again a beautiful day. After packing up camp and negotiating the many logging roads, we drove as high as we could, parked and started hiking at about 10:45 a.m. We were very surprised at how many new logging roads were in this area, and how high they climb, so there was almost more driving than hiking. We started hiking up a steep cutblock (20 minutes) and then hit the sub-alpine where we had an easy time route finding in the open terrain. Just before the summit ridge Roger and I opted to take a steep, direct, rocky ridge-line to the summit. The others took a lower traverse on less steep terrain.



Mount Romeo ridge looking west towards Mounts Sarai and Abraham centre and left. (Photo by Roger Taylor)

Both routes worked well and we met near the summit at around 12:10 p.m. (1668 metres). We spent a thoroughly lazy hour on the summit looking at the tremendous views all around, figuring out where our previous days' mountains were located, and looking at other potential mountains for future trips. The route down was reversed and we arrived back at the cars about 2:45 p.m.

Sadly, we parted ways after this hike as Roger and I were heading up to Port McNeill to join the aforementioned kayak adventure, while the two Georges and Diane stayed a day or two more to do some other North Island explorations. This was truly a wild and wonderful area we visited and a great place to explore with a super group of Alpine Club folk. Many thanks to Diane for inviting us along!

Participants: George Butcher, Diane Bernard, George Urban, and Peggy and Roger Taylor

All Women Hike along the Forbidden Plateau Traverse

Janelle Curtis

July 11-13, 2023

A lovely group of ACCVI women hiked the Forbidden Plateau from 11-13 July this year. This was planned as an all-women-beginner-friendly trip (<https://accvi.ca/events/all-women-beginner-friendly-forbidden-plateau-traverse-in-strathcona-park-b2/>) and everyone in our group had a wide range of experience from hiking to mountaineering. Two women expressed interest in learning about emergency locator devices such as SPOT and InReach, and another one wanted to confirm that she could solo hike albeit within a group of people. We were also joined by two of ACCVI's Executive Committee members for the first few hours of our traverse: Christine Fordham, who is our Alpine Club of Canada National



At Raven Lodge. From left to right, Jessica Koski, Barb Baker, Jessica Moretti, Janelle Curtis and Michelle Steel.
(Photo by Christine Fordham)

Representative, and Barb Baker, who works tirelessly on gaining public access to public places on Vancouver Island.

The traverse started with the challenge of working out how we were going to shuttle our group from the Mount Becher end of the traverse back to our starting point at Mount Washington's Raven Lodge. I met Michelle Steel at the Mount Becher trailhead where she kindly left her Subaru and then we drove to Raven Lodge in my car. There we met the two other trip participants - Jessica Moretti and Jessica Koski. It was also lovely to be greeted so warmly by Barb and Christine at the trailhead.



Christine, Barb, and Michelle at Battleship Lake.
(Photo by Janelle Curtis)



Jessica and Jessica at Battleship Lake.
(Photo by Janelle Curtis)



Morning mist at Mackenzie Lake. (Photo by Janelle Curtis)

After a round of introductions and a bit of paperwork (waivers, camping fees, etc), we started hiking around 1 p.m. Christine hiked with us to Battleship Lake and Barb turned around at Lady Lake.

Before Barb left us, she and I agreed that we would investigate the possibility of co-leading a day hike for people with physical disabilities around Raven Lodge, perhaps with a Trailrider. The rest of us stopped for a short break at Croteau Lake and were disappointed to find a sign that said there was no swimming. It was quite warm out, so we dunked our hats and clothes into the water to cool down before we set off down the trail again. I always love walking the trails close to Raven Lodge because they are so full of fun and adventurous memories!

We reached Kwai Lake around 4:30 p.m. and set up our tents near the overflow camping area. Then the two Jessicas and Michelle hiked to Cruikshank Canyon for a look. I decided to stay behind and enjoy a bit of quiet time by myself.. The bugs were out and I kept seeing ghosts through my head net. I used the time to rehydrate, take some photos, and gratefully spray myself with Icaridin to keep the mosquitos away. I also found a small pile of glass on a rock that looked like beach glass and immediately thought of Christine who collects it. When the others returned, I learned a bit more about them. Jessica Koski was on an all women trip to the Elk River Trail in 2021, while Jessica Moretti was planning to hike the Vancouver Island Trail in 2024. Michelle is a recent empty nester from Ladysmith.

The Forbidden Plateau is a wonderful area of rich landscapes and biodiversity. We explored Murray Meadows, old-growth forests, and many alpine lakes, including Mariwood and Panther Lakes. It was another warm day so we took more opportunities to dunk our clothes in the cool water.

As we hiked, we encountered grazing deer, busy beavers, relentless mosquitos, and thieving whiskey jacks. We also heard from someone about a relatively close encounter with a black bear. And we enjoyed the diversity of colourful flowers, including Columbines, Queen's cups, and my all-time favourite – the Columbia Tiger Lilies.

One of my treasured moments that day was hearing the excited exclamations from the three others as we were walking into Mackenzie Meadows. We weren't sure what to expect at Mackenzie Lake or even if there was anywhere comfortable to set up our tents; I had only been there once before in the spring on skis and none of the others had been there before. But the camping area was beautiful and there was more than enough room for us to set up our four tents. There was also a handy open-air toilet. We followed the trail to Douglas Lake and some looked for the old hut. Then we enjoyed a meal together on the shore



Amy and Jessica happily chatting about the Vancouver Island Trail. (Photo by Janelle Curtis)

of Mackenzie Lake near our tents. We all went to bed early. By coincidence, Amy Tunstall, who was hiking the Vancouver Island Trail, set up her tent next to ours at Mackenzie Lake around 8 p.m. after we were all in our tents.

We woke up the next morning to another calm day of blue skies and we enjoyed our breakfast by the beach. Amy joined us and we peppered her with many questions about the trail. You can read about Amy's hike along the Vancouver Island Trail on page 25.

Amy then set off for Jutland Ridge and we headed toward Mount Becher. In the end, we decided not to hike up Mount Becher, but to head straight back to Michelle's car and drive to Mount Washington. Over lunch at the outdoor grill we enjoyed a trip debrief and our group made plans to hike to the hut on 5040 Peak later that summer. We have stayed in touch and made other plans to hike together in the future.

Participants: Janelle Curtis (trip leader), Jessica Moretti, Jessica Koski, and Michelle Steel

The High Route from Bedwell Lake to Bedwell Sound

Barry Hansen

July 12-17, 2023

It was a six-day alpine adventure filled with climbing, laughing, singing, dancing, swimming, sweating, bleeding, cursing, falling, and apparently snoring from 12-17 July with Eryn Tombu-Haigh, Quentin Thomas, Garrett Beisel, and Emily Port. It began at Bedwell Lake Trailhead and ended at Bedwell Sound. The primary objective was summiting Mariner Mountain* but every day was uniquely satisfying. It felt more like a sustained alpine party than a climbing trip. (*Three of us were denied Mariner's summit three years previously when we had to turn back upon reaching the east glacier.)

Day one began with a good omen. My reading glasses broke (bad sign) just before arriving at the trailhead and my spare pair was missing. Fortunately, the 'No Campfire' sign at the trailhead had a pair of reading glasses hanging from it (good sign), which I commandeered for our journey. They were even my correct magnification strength. We stopped for a refreshing swim at a tarn beside the unnamed lake at the base of Mount Tom Taylor's east ridge before continuing. We pitched camp late afternoon beside

a small tarn at 1600 metres with panoramic views of the Bedwell Valley and surrounding peaks. A bountiful charcuterie emerged from our packs, the consumption of which led to an impromptu dance party with Eryn-supplied spirit sticks and Daft Punk's 'One More Time' blasting from her phone. Our theme song was born and would be sung frequently throughout the remainder of the journey.



*Charcuterie and wine on Mount Tom Taylor.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

Day two brought us up and over the west summit of Mount Tom Taylor after tagging the south summit (we couldn't remember which summit claims official high-point status these days. My GPS recorded both at 1790 metres so I can see why the controversy exists). We continued along the lengthy and undulating high alpine ridge towards Mariner Mountain, enjoying the spectacular views in every direction. Unfortunately, Emily left her ice axe where we had lunch at the outflow of the large lake at the western end of Mount Tom Taylor's glacier. If you happen that way and find it, she'd be thrilled to see it again. A little farther along the ridge, I recovered a metal spork I dropped



Looking back at Mount Tom Taylor en route to Mariner Mountain. (Photo by Barry Hansen)

at a camp spot three years previous. Something lost, something found. We finally stopped to camp at a lovely alpine lake at 1100 metres just above the pass separating Mount Tom Taylor from the unnamed peaks just east of the Mariner Mountain massif. The spirit sticks came out again, trailing behind as we launched off short cliffs into the revitalizing water.

Day three began poorly for me but concluded gloriously for all. Shortly after leaving camp, I misstepped on a rock (on flat ground, of course) and rolled my ankle badly (again). I tightened my boots and we carried on, dropping down to the pass before ascending a short, steep, dense, forested section back up to the alpine. A little more up and down brought us to the eastern flank of Mariner Mountain, where we indulged in a soul satisfying swim before ascending Mariner Mountain's southeast ridge, travelling mostly on snow with some occasional rock forays. We set camp at the southern edge of Mariner's south glacier at 1600 metres and enjoyed a gorgeous summer alpine evening before crawling into our tents.



*Spirit sticks on the summit of Mariner Mountain.
(Photo by Quentin Thomas)*

Day five began with a leisurely morning before packing up and hiking a short distance to the base of Penny Peak where we left our overnight gear (and Emily, who opted to chill) and quickly ascended 300 metres to the summit. Spirit sticks came out once again as we danced to "Pump up the Jam." As we began descending, a helicopter landed along the shoreline of the lake below, where we planned to camp. It was still there when we arrived but once we were spotted, the pilot and passengers quickly boarded and flew off. Not supposed to be there? We set up camp and went for a leisurely swim in a warm tarn overlooking the lake with Penny Peak towering overhead. During dinner, Quentin expressed his hope for a special level of suffering on our final day, typical of every big multi-day trip we've done. Words have power.



*Swimming at east flank of Mariner Mountain before ascending.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

Day four we climbed Mariner Mountain's main summit via its south face. The short chossy section to start quickly transitions to a straightforward fourth-class scramble to the summit on good rock. We returned to camp, ate lunch, packed up, and headed towards our next camp at the western base of Noble Peak, arriving late afternoon. Another swim, some laundry washed in the alpine, dinner, and deliberations about objectives for the next day. My original plan was to climb both Noble and Penny Peaks [both unofficial names] on day five, but my worsening ankle sprain convinced me to turn around and scratch Noble Peak from my list of objectives.



*Campsite at the base of Penny Peak.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

Rain fell throughout the night, and it was dark, damp, and dreary when we crawled out of our tents at 5:00 a.m. on day six. We quickly packed and skirted the

shoreline before dropping into the steep, wet, bushy forest following a line from Penny Peak 1000 metres downward to the road just east of the Clayoquot Wilderness Resort. It was a brutal descent and not recommended. Our clothing and boots were quickly saturated by the water-logged foliage. We initially estimated the descent would take four to five hours, allowing plenty of time for our scheduled 1:00 p.m. water taxi pickup. Seven hours and four forest rappels over bluffy obstacles later we arrived at the road. Eryn was only on the road two metres when she was stung by a wasp on her hip. The trek concluded with a six-kilometre squishy boot march to the boat launch one hour late. Thanks, Quentin, for a sufferfest conclusion. Dreams do come true.



*End of trip in Tofino after water taxi from Bedwell Sound.
(Photo by Linnea Hansen)*

My wife and a friend were waiting for us at the main dock in Tofino. Hugs, photos, fresh clothing, and we were on our way. We stopped at Port Alberni Brewery on the way home for some real food and cool brews where we relived and re-laughed our grand adventure.

Participants: Barry Hansen, Eryn Tombu-Haigh, Quentin Thomas, Garrett Beisel, and Emily Port

Kids and Youth Hut Trip

Neil Ernst

July 21-23, 2023

Over the July 21-23 weekend, four families headed up to the Hišimýawił hut and 5040 Peak. We had members from age 5 to ... more mature ages. On the trip were Neil with sons Elliott and Kieran; the Hornby Island contingent Meredith and Andrew with sons Olin and Killian; then Ian and Jules with kids Beckett and Opal; and Saltspring Island contingent Sonia and Sofia. This was five year old Sofia's sixth trip to the hut, which is pretty impressive. We were lucky to also have Nadja Steiner join us as the hut steward.

Day 1 started by navigating our way past the Highway 4 "SLAT" (single lane alternative traffic) in place to manage rockfall risk due to the earlier wildfire. Fortunately, Islanders are no strangers to this road system and we all made it through. We rendezvoused at the Marion Main turnoff and arranged vehicle sharing. The forest service road (FSR) is in rough shape at the 4 kilometre and 8 kilometre sections although our Subarus managed with some careful driving. At the trailhead we shouldered our packs, of varying weights, and our group set off up the trail to the hut.



*Navigating the first of the rock climbing sections.
(Photo by Neil Ernst)*



*A brief pause for some restorative nutrition helps little legs up the 700 m vertical gain.
(Photo by Meredith McEvoy)*



*The McEvoy-Mark clan relaxing on the deck, before the mozzies got too bad.
(Photo by Meredith McEvoy)*



*We paused for a much-needed swim break in the newly ice-free Cobalt Lake. After that, we tried out Martin's new trail up the hill to the hut and arrived after about five hours to our mountain sanctuary.
(Photo by Meredith McEvoy)*



*We spent the rest of the day running around outside, playing games like Catan, Uno, and Crazy Eights, and doing a delicate kitchen dance as each family cooked up a tasty meal. Meals included space food lasagna, beans and rice, and vegetarian noodles.
(Photo by Neil Ernst)*



The weather Saturday was more mountainous, overcast in the morning with heavy fog, but we donned rain gear and emergency ponchos, and headed hopefully up to the summit. Our confidence was rewarded with a timely break in the clouds as we all reached the summit, enabling sporadic views of Triple Peak and Nahmint Mountain. I was going to boldly claim an (ACCVI unofficial) record of “lowest average age of party on 5040 Peak” but Sonia explained that in 2022 “we had ages 4,5,5,6 up there with five adults.” (Photo by Jules Platt)



Some of us then traversed across to the little bump south of 5040, where we practiced our glissading skills before returning for dinner and dessert. (Photo by Neil Ernst)



After a morning of cleaning and packing, we headed back down to the cars. A less eventful drive back down the FSR to the highway and some fond farewells concluded the trip. Some had ferries to catch. It was great so see the club’s younger members do so well on this hike, and of course it is great to have such a wonderful location as our destination. (Photo by Sonia Langer)



*Staying hydrated in the summer warmth.
(Photo by Neil Ernst)*

Participants: Neil Ernst (leader); Meredith McEvoy, Andrew Mark, Ian Emberton, Jules Platt, Sonia Langer (Parents); Olin and Killian McEvoy, Opal and Beckett Emberton, Kieran and Elliott Ernst, and Sofia Langer (kids)

Splendor Mountain and The Scissors

Barry Hansen

August 2-6, 2023

Eryn Tombu and I had a wild, five-day climbing excursion into a rarely visited part of Strathcona Park. We both began the trip with pre-existing injuries: Eryn with a recently fractured or severely bruised tailbone, and I was still recovering from a severe ankle sprain that happened on our Mariner Mountain climb two weeks previously. It wasn't the wisest decision I've made and I'm still bearing the consequences of it six months later with nerve damage on that foot.

Our primary objective was summiting Splendor Mountain and traversing the twin-peaked Scissors. Our secondary objective was Scimitar Peak. Our other goal was to do the trip completely self-propelled from where we parked (not using a water taxi).

Little information is available about these peaks, but we were grateful for some beta provided by Sandy Briggs and Lindsay Elms. A couple of decades-old trip reports in the *Island Bushwhacker Annual* also provided some insight. Perhaps someone will use this report for beta sometime in the future?



*Boat launch at Gold River.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

Day 1:

We parked at the Gold River boat launch and were a curious sight to the sport fishers as we carried my weathered old canoe and large climbing packs to the shoreline and pushed off. We paddled nine kilometres across Muchalat Inlet and up the smooth and turquoise waters of Matchlee Bay before continuing another three kilometres up Burman River, occasionally stepping out to maneuver shallow water. The canoe was temporarily abandoned on the shoreline. We also set a couple bevvies in the river to reward ourselves on our exit.

Ten kilometres of good logging road brought us to steep, bushy forest at the base of Splendor Mountain's Northwest Ridge. Within 20 metres of entering the forest, Eryn was molested by wasps, stirred up by yours truly. The result was a stung elbow and right buttock, which swelled and affectionately became known as her half Brazilian butt lift and celbow (a term inspired by the cankle I was still sporting from my ankle sprain). Expletives and Benadryl were dispensed and upward we continued through the hot, humid, and inhospitable forest. Well, not completely inhospitable. Numerous blueberries and black huckleberries found their way into our mouths as we battled our way uphill. Our initial camp goal was a plateau at 1250 metres with plentiful tarns. Our backup goal was a small bump at 850 metres with possible water, which we reached at 8:00 p.m., thoroughly beaten. Fortuitously, recent rains had filled a small shallow tarn (more puddle than tarn) where we gratefully pitched camp (the tarn/puddle was almost empty three days later on our way out).

We decided to descend via a narrow gully slightly further to the west. Two short rappels brought us to the summit block's base from where we hiked back up to the ridge to retrieve our gear before continuing southwest down toward to a small alpine lake overlooking Hygro Peak, The Scissors, and Scimitar Peak.



*Eryn on Splendor Mountain with The Scissors and Scimitar Peak behind.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*



*Sunset over Burman River valley.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

Day 2:

We continued up Splendor Mountain's Northwest Ridge and ascended the glacier below its east face, gaining the ridge at the summit block's southeast terminus where we ditched Eryn's pack and reloaded mine with essential climbing gear. The beta we had was scant and described an undesirable loose gully, which we planned to avoid, if possible. We traversed moderately exposed ledges around to the south, scouting for a non-chossy route up. We found a line with some exposed low 5th moves, which we roped up for. From there it was an easy scramble to the summit where we congratulated each other, ate some food, and checked in with friends and family before heading down (yes, there was cell service up top).

Our original plan was to set basecamp further along at a large tarn on a plateau at the south end of Hygro Peak's long connecting ridge, but we decided the added elevation and distance with full packs wasn't worth the effort. Instead, we opted to stay put and push harder and longer the next day with daypacks to climb The Scissors and, hopefully, Scimitar Peak. We pitched camp and plunged into the frigid lake. Well, I plunged but Eryn in classic form stood at the water's edge for about an hour before mustering the nerve to finally jump in. Although, I must admit, it was the chilliest alpine water I'd been in all summer (there



*Making dinner at basecamp with The Scissors and Scimitar Peak behind.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

was still a thick band of snow along the opposite shoreline). We basked on the sun-warmed, smooth rock for a while and eventually prepared dinner followed by tea as the surrounding mountains glowed orange in the fading sunlight.

Day 3:

We set off at 7:00 a.m. but the day didn't begin well as we immediately got hung up in a steep gully dropping the short 100 metres down to the saddle of the Hygro-Splendor pass. We dreaded the thought of ascending it on our return, especially knowing how tired we'd be. We worked our way down on good terrain towards the Hygro-Scissors pass before encountering a large section of dense bush and forested bluffs, which took far too much time and effort to navigate. We readily agreed to take a different route back to camp. As we ascended the heather slope to the Hygro-Scissors pass, we looked back down at the wide meadow we just crossed where a bear now wandered about. After reaching the top of the pass, we climbed the short, steep, forested step up to the long, wide ridge sloping up to the base of the North Scissor. We reached the peak and climbed its North Ridge to the summit, pulling out rope for two short sections.

A quick lunch break was followed by a fun 60-metre rappel down the steep South Face to the notch between the two Scissors. We scrambled the short distance to the summit of the South Scissor and then more airy rappelling 120 metres down its almost vertical South Face to the Scissor/Scimitar saddle. We brought two 60-metre half-ropes to descend this face and we were glad we did. It was worth the extra weight. (And not that it really matters, but after some post-trip research, we were informed that we were likely the first known ascent of the South Scissor and

the first to traverse these twin peaks.)

Once at the saddle, we concurred there wasn't enough time to climb Scimitar Peak, especially after seeing it up close. There were challenging features higher up that would take significant effort to navigate and climb. As it was, we'd be pushing hard to get back to camp before dark. We followed Sandy Briggs' golden beta and navigated the steep, complex terrain of bluffs and gullies down to the narrow valley that separated The Scissors from Hygro Peak. We followed a well-trodden elk trail that meandered up the low-sloping, pretty valley through mostly open meadows to the Hygro-Scissors pass.

From there, we diverged from our approach route and opted to traverse up and over Hygro's long, south shoulder back to basecamp, avoiding the troublesome bush and bluffs we battled in the morning. We stopped for a quick, but much needed dip in a warm tarn partway up the shoulder. Once on the crest of the shoulder, Eryn spotted a heather slope leading back up to basecamp from the Hygro-Splendor pass, avoiding the dreaded gully that began the day. We



*Basecamp overlooking The Scissors and Scimitar Peak.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

effortlessly ascended the slope, arriving at camp in the dark, 14 hours after we began.

Day 4:

We packed up camp early and began the long trek back to our awaiting canoe on the Burman River. It was a scorcher right from the get-go but we made great time, congratulating ourselves along the way. Even the final steep, bushy descent off Splendor Mountain's Northwest Ridge to the logging road seemed comparatively effortless to our ascent three days earlier. But disaster struck 100 metres from the road when Eryn stepped on another wasp nest and was once again viciously swarmed. She frantically swatted while attempting to get away. I



*Barry on the Scissors with Scimitar Peak behind.
(Photo by Eryn Tombu)*

ran back up towards her and began smacking them off her clothing. She ended up with five more stings, including one near her eye. I felt horrible for her. What a crappy way to seemingly end an otherwise amazing trip. More Benadryl was followed by a very cautious decent of the final few metres, not wanting to encounter another nest of angry wasps.

We made it to the road without another wasp incident and began the long trek back to the canoe in blistering heat, pausing briefly at the Burman River bridge to cool off and rinse the sweat-laden forest detritus from our bodies. My feet were on fire as we plodded along the remaining six kilometres of the logging main, and I'd lost all sensation on the bottom of my right foot. Additionally, every time a horsefly buzzed past, Eryn went into panic mode, thinking it was a wasp. We arrived at the canoe at 6:30 p.m., removed our boots, plunged our feet in the cold river, and poured the river-cooled beers down our throats. Smiles and laughter returned as the term Botched Backcountry Botox job was coined in reference to Eryn's now-

*teenage girl at a Britney Spears concert... actually, I take that back, I was way crasser. As a mariner by trade, you can only imagine the string of profanities that left my mouth. Sobbing uncontrollably as Barry slaughtered hundreds with his bare hands is a more accurate account. My eye swelling, through tears I said something along the lines of "I AM NOT TAKING ONE MORE F*ING STEP". Gradually calming down, face swelling, in the 32-degree heat, I donned my rain jacket (complete with hood) in an irrational attempt to counter any more attacks. In a sweaty mess, I inspected every inch of soil as we slowly descended the final 100 metres to the road.*

Day 5:

We awoke to low cloud and had a pleasant paddle down the Burman River and across Matchlee Bay and Muchalat Inlet on calm waters back to Gold River, passing a raft of sea otters along the way. We arrived at the boat launch body weary, but happy and satisfied. Celebration beers and nachos at Ace Brewery in Courtenay made the previous day's suffering a distant memory.

Participants: Barry Hansen and Eryn Tombu-Haigh



*Burman River bevies.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

swollen eye. We set camp along the river and enjoyed a lovely sunset dinner before calling it a day.

*Note: Before submitting this report, Eryn asked if I downplayed the second wasp attack. I told her it wasn't my place to disclose her trauma. And so, she offered to write the real story, as follows:

Barry is 100% downplaying the second wasp nest incident to be kind to me. To say I was frantic, and got 5 stings, downplays the whole event. As I followed Barry's steps on the soft dirt valley between two rock bluffs, Barry kicked up a wasp nest that I did not notice. Therefore, it is his fault. As hundreds of wasps swarmed up my legs (thank goodness I always wear pants), I hysterically screamed like a

Permanent Structures – Triple Peak Northwest Tower

John Relyea-Voss and Michael Ness

August 12-16, 2023



*Mike and Lindsay Ness on Pitch 3 after the route was opened.
(Photo by Deon Towle)*

It's well-known that Vancouver Island has very few bolted routes considering its vast alpine attractions.



Lindsay Ness topping out pitch 3 after the route was opened.
(Photo by Deon Towle)

One of the major reasons for this is because bolting is forbidden in Strathcona Provincial Park where much of our alpine is located. However, outside of Strathcona there are a few popular bolted routes: *Time Machine* on Mount Arrowsmith; numerous climbs on the Nomash Slabs of Grayback Peak, and *Thunderbird* a 22-pitch mixed route on the southwest face of Rugged Mountain established in 2019. As a passionate climber, the absence of adventurous alpine bolted routes has consistently occupied my thoughts. In recent years, the escalating costs of ferries, fluctuating prices of fuel at the pump, and logistical planning associated with traveling to the mainland has taken its toll. With so much potential on the island, why do we find ourselves with so few bolted alpine routes to enjoy?

Vancouver Island has been said to have garnered a reputation as “uninviting to most alpinists,” with thoughts of questionable rock quality and heinous bushwhacking. My time spent exploring the Island's alpine has led me, along with Michael Ness and Casey Matsuda, to embark on a mission started in early 2022 to establish a climb that might inspire other climbers.

On Wednesday 16 August, our endeavor came to fruition with the completion of *Permanent Structures*, a route bolted on spectacular Triple Peak. This line ascends the steepest section of the Northwest Tower, encompassing a 100+ metre dihedral and a sporty crux pitch with a challenging roof. The ascent concludes with a breathtaking traverse along an exposed arête, adding another 70-metres of enjoyable climbing before reaching the summit. We hoped *Permanent Structures* would become a new Island classic and our aspiration was to ignite a fire among climbers, and hopefully lead to new lines being created.



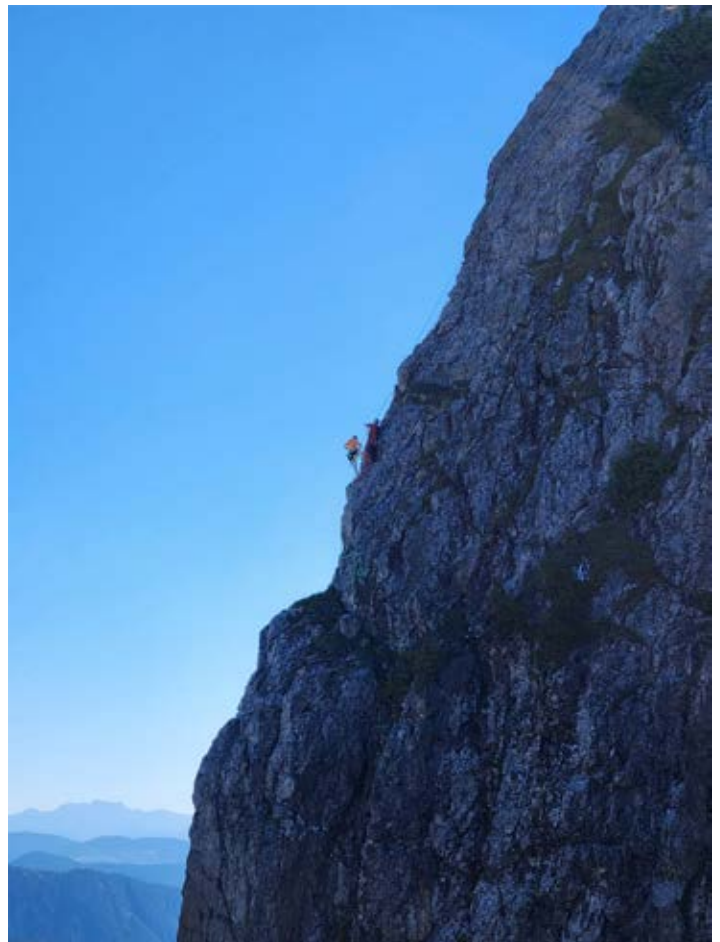
Route Topo for *Permanent Structures*.
(Edited by Sean Holroyd)

Triple Peak ranks as one of our Island's most picturesque mountains. From the end of the Forestry Service Road not far beyond the trailhead to the ACCVI's Hišim'yawił hut, a steep trail climbs beside roaring cascades and stunning waterfalls to a crystal blue alpine lake with the imposing tower standing sentinel above. Recognizing that the tower lacks reliable protection for traditional climbing, we singled out this canvas of rock to be our pallet. Casey, Mike and I visited the area several times during 2022 to assess the feasibility of a new climb and with the aid of a drone were able to make a closer inspection. It looked very promising. After some discussion, a plan crystallized, and we set it into motion. One year later, we found ourselves hauling hundreds of metres of rope and a ton of hardware to the base of the tower.

Saturday 13 August, Mike and I, along with Laurel Frost-Mitchell and Emily Port set off up the trail with heavy packs. What was usually a one-hour ascent to the lake consumed half a day. The blazing 30+ degree temperature exacerbated our slow progress. Eventually, we reached our designated campsite for the next few days, beneath an impressive boulder. After a short rest, a drink and a bite to eat, we set off to summit the Northwest Tower via the standard route, setting fixed handlines along the exposed sections as we would be carrying up a lot of gear up later. At the summit we secured our first anchor then rappelled 70-metres to the end of the rope. We didn't know it at the time, but just below us would be the crux pitch, a steep overhung roof. As we peered over, we got a glimpse of what awaited us. We then ascended our fixed rope and made our way back to camp where that night we marveled at the Perseid meteor showers streaking across the sky.

The next morning, we returned to the summit with more gear. Laurel and Emily loaded up with bolts, hangers, and a drill, and prepared to work on the top two pitches. Mike and I began the descent off the summit and put in an anchor directly above the crux pitch. Since the lower arête lay outside the line of sight, we were eager to inspect the rock close up; the rock we had envisioned climbing for the past year. I was not disappointed and was feeling pretty excited. We fixed two lines off the anchor: one for Mike who began studying the features that define the pitch, while I rappelled off the other to the top of the vertical dihedral. There was a convenient ledge here which would serve as a place to cache our hardware and ropes, and also to safely assess the route's progression. The shade on the east side of the tower in the afternoon was a welcome relief, providing respite from the heat.

I returned to the summit to gather more ropes and to check in on Laurel and Emily. They were doing a great job. Much to my delight, they offered me a charcuterie board they had prepared. We nestled into a small cave out of the sun to enjoy the treat. Once more, I descended with another load of equipment. Mike had made notable progress, putting in bolts and revealing more of the splendid rock. What would be pitch six from the ground up, comprised of a blend of slopers and laybacks, and finished off with a sporty roof section. With the day slipping away, we had to decide whether to rappel the whole route or ascend back to the top. Laurel and Emily climbed back to the top and descended the handlines off the summit to camp, cleaning them on the way down. Mike and I decided to rappel down so we could scope the route, but before we did, Mike worked on the crux pitch a little longer while I installed my remaining anchors and fixed more rope.



*John and Mike on Triple Peak Arête Pitch 6.
(Photo by Laurel Frost-Mitchell)*

Midway up the dihedral, I established a fantastic station on a clean, foot-wide ledge, serving as a secure place to belay the vertical pitch above. A few more steep pitches brought us down to the snow. At the bottom of the route there was a moat that was

easy to cross. On the glacial-scoured rock we found a great place to build the first belay station. Fatigued, but with a sense of accomplishment, we all returned to camp for a well-deserved rest.

The work accomplished was a significant weight lifted off our shoulders. With the bulk of our gear stashed on the route and all lines in place, the task of hauling gear was now minimized. This allowed us to approach the pitches individually, delving into the essence of what the climb held in store.

The next day Mike resumed preparing pitch 5, while Laurel and I tackled the pitches below him. With the aid of fixed lines, we trimmed away vegetation, scrubbed holds and marked where we wanted to drill. It was enjoyable working with Laurel. We discussed the options available on the route and found our visions aligned. Working in a group of two allowed us to rehearse each pitch on top rope before committing to drilling the bolt holes. We then started bolting, slowly progressing pitch by pitch. Mike had been working most of the day on his own but joined us later in the afternoon. It was awesome to hear how things had gone for him. By the end of the day, we were working together like a well-oiled machine.

It was sad that Mike had to depart at the end of the day, but reinforcements were on their way. Before they arrived, Laurel and I went down to a nearby waterfall to cool off. The icy cold water melting from the upper snow slopes was refreshing. When Stephanie Leblanc and Casey Matsuda joined us in the early evening, I could barely contain my excitement. We were ready to complete the first ground up ascent. Once again, we enjoyed the beautiful sunset and watched the meteor showers. But we had to get to bed, to rest before the big day.

The following morning, regretfully, Laurel and Emily had to head home. Stephanie, Casey, and I did some final cleaning on the route, packed up the cleaning brushes, hammers and pry bars, and then we began the ascent. Stephanie led the first pitch and Casey led the second pitch to the base of lower dihedral. I led the next two pitches up the dihedral. The pitch began on a vertical wall, tracing a rightward trending fracture where holds became scarce, compelling me to take a step of faith into a stemming position. I stemmed and palm-pressed my way up the 30-metres. There was nothing but air between my legs for hundreds of feet. The exposure was a little rattling, but this is what we wanted from the climb. Excitement!

I reached the belay ledge above the dihedral, perspiring and fatigued. I belayed Stephanie and Casey up to ledge where we all had a rest. Casey



*Laurel on Pitch 3 of Permanent Structures.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

then took the lead for the next two pitches. The sixth pitch ended with the sporty roof which had Casey delicately traversing right to a ledge, using small crimps to reach the anchor. We then climbed the final two pitches to the summit and high-fived each other. We had finished all our water and were mighty thirsty, but there was no better feeling than standing at the top of the climb.



Casey on Pitch 4 Permanent Structures.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)



First Ascent Team on the summit: Casey, John, and
Stephanie. (Photo by Casey Matsuda)

We then began rappelling the entire route careful not to make any mistakes. While descending, we cleaned the anchors and removed any fixed lines from the route. Once down on the snow we searched for a stream and wasted no time pressing our faces into the ice-cold water. I could hardly contain myself when I returned to camp for the night. Sharing the climb with Casey and Stephanie made the whole experience worthwhile. I want to give a big thank you to all those who helped with this project. Before I closed my eyes for the night I thought about the future of the route. I hope those who come to climb the eight pitches appreciate that it was done for them—for everyone to enjoy—whether they are from the Island, the Mainland or overseas. *Permanent Structures*, 5.10b, 250m.

Participants: John Relyea-Voss, Laurel Frost-Mitchell, Stephanie Leblanc, Casey Matsuda, and Michael Ness

Thelwood / Moyeha Divide Route

Pam Olson August 15-19, 2023

When I started climbing mountains in the 1970s, I never gave any thought to how long I could keep walking up and down mountains. At that time, the oldest mountaineers I knew were in their fifties and they were fairly fit. Now my partner, Dave, and I seem to be the oldest people we meet out in the mountains. We've been wandering around Vancouver Island mountains for several decades and have compiled a list of favourite multi day routes. Each summer we try to do as many as we can, endeavouring to not compare our effort with past performances. One of those routes is the Thelwood/Moyeha Divide.

A beautiful ridge walk with splendid views of Mount Tom Taylor ends with a classic Vancouver Island bushwhack. In *Exploring Strathcona Park* (Wild Isle Publications, 2017), Phil Stone describes the Thelwood/Moyeha Divide route in the opposite direction to the one we take. We leave the Bedwell Lakes trail by the Bedwell Sound route, pass below Mount Tom Taylor and end up at Jim Mitchell Lake.

The first pictures I have of the route are dated early October 2004. After our traverse of Mount Tom Taylor sometime in the 1990s, we had identified on topographic maps an interesting looking ridge connecting the Bedwell and Thelwood Lakes areas



*View from the ridge.
(Photo by Pam Olson)*

and finally decided to give it a try. At that time, the trail to Bedwell Sound had not yet been officially marked and we headed off into the bush between Baby Bedwell and Bedwell Lakes. From the inflow end of Bedwell Lake, we followed a flagged route to the base of Mount Tom Taylor. This route is now a well travelled trail. Our first camp was near the pretty tarn in a cirque at about 860 metres southwest of Big Bedwell Lake and below Mount Tom Taylor. The next day, we hopped across the outflow stream then pulled ourselves up onto the top of a granite mound. From there, we had a short, but nasty bushwhack to get to the north end of the ridge. Following animal trails, we meandered along the ridge, finally reaching a high point. The ridge tops out at about 1480 metres. We passed many snow patches and tarns; there was no shortage of water.

After a pleasant walk along the ridge, the descent



*View from the ridge.
(Photo by Pam Olson)*

became very interesting. The ridge, mainly granitic rock, features a number of small cliffs, the kind you come to and think, we're going to die getting off this thing. But, as with many mountains, when you look around, often you find a down staircase or escalator. The ridge has several of these nuances.

On that first trip, from a high point, we had spotted an attractive tarn at about 1140 metres and decided that would be our destination for camp two. We worked our way in that direction, in some places resorting to short tree rappels. When we reached the tarn, we found the water to be deep and clear, perfect for a swim.

The following day we invested several hours in bushwhacking. Getting down the ridge to Moyeha Lake involved several tree and bush rappels down short cliffs or steep slopes. When we reached the west shore of Moyeha Lake, we discovered a few pieces of flagging tape hanging on branches. Following them sporadically, we wound our way among rocky outcrops, knolls, lily pad filled tarns, bush and eventually came to Thelwood Lake. There is a marked trail along the south shore of Thelwood Lake which we followed to the dam site, then climbed down the long ladder to reach the dam. Camp three was at the dam.

A few years earlier, we had heard of an old trail along the north side of Jim Mitchell Lake from Thelwood Lake. I think it was an employee at Strathcona Park Lodge who had given us this information. We were surprised and pleased the next day, after crossing the stream and scrambling into an old rock fall beyond it, to discover a faded piece of flagging tape hanging from a tree. Looking around, we noticed old cut marks on branches. Following these clues, we continued walking along an old, well constructed trail on the north side of Jim Mitchell Lake. We crossed a few wide rock slide areas guided by cairns that obviously had been erected by someone who knew how to build cairns to last. Finally, after passing above the gauging station, we descended to the dam road. From the dam end of Jim Mitchell Lake, it was an easy walk down the access road to the Bedwell Lakes parking area. There is a shortcut tunnel through the mountain but only mine employees are allowed to use it. Huge metal doors with big locks and warning signs on them are a deterrent.

Since our first run at this route, we have completed it a few more times, each time looking for an easier way from Moyeha Lake to Thelwood Lake. After our 2015 trip, we swore we would not do it again because of the bushwhacking section. However, in 2020, we tried again, looking for a route along the south side of Jim

Mitchell Lake but were cliffed out.

In August 2023 we planned another trip to the area to find yet another way to Thelwood Lake. We had a vague memory of having reached the dam on Jim Mitchell Lake by way of the south shore several years ago and planned to try once again to find it. Having acquired a GPS around 2007, we have some waypoints and tracks from previous trips. Some of the tracks show us walking on water but that is inaccurate. When the water level in Jim Mitchell Lake is low, it is possible to walk along the north shore to near the gauging station, part of the way on an old road bed. Just before the gauging station, the road disappears and it is necessary to scramble up the bank to the old trail. The water around the gauging station is very deep. Our memory of an approach along the south shore must be an illusion or delusion. The south shore features precipitous slopes, steep gullies and cliffs to the water edge.

Having crashed around in the bush looking for something a little easier than abrupt cliffs and steep bushy slopes, we have never found a particularly nice route from the ridge to Moyeha Lake then to Thelwood Lake. The easiest route seems to be around the west shore of Moyeha Lake.



*Moyeha Lake
(Photo by Pam Olson)*

Our August 2023 trip took us five hard days, partly because we were taking yet another route between Moyeha and Thelwood Lakes and partly because we have become very slow in our 70s. At one point on day four as we walked along the top of several steep cliffs looking for exit routes, we wondered if we would ever get back to civilization. We were spurred on a

strong desire to avoid the embarrassment of seeing a headline like “Elderly hikers plucked off mountain”.

The origin of the trail on the north side of Jim Mitchell Lake is a mystery. After making a number of inquiries, I have come to the conclusion that it was built by the mining operation during the construction of the Thelwood Lake dam in the 1980s. It is not a BC Parks trail and I don’t think Parks wants to admit it exists although some members of the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee (SPPAC) are aware of it. The mine has changed ownership several times since it was first established in 1959 and began mining operations in 1966. The most recent mine operators know of the trail’s existence and used it in the early 2010s to access the lake for an environmental impact study.

Repeating a route, the experience is different depending on the conditions, the time of the summer and the route choice. We have hiked this particular circuit in July, August, September and early October. In spite of the horrible bushwhack at the end, there is a beautiful ridge walk with spectacular views of Mount Tom Taylor’s glaciers, plenty of water and lovely camping places. The highlights of the route are the endless views of the mountains of that area of Strathcona Park: Mount Septimus, Big Interior Mountain, Mount Tom Taylor in one direction; Mount Thelwood and Moyeha Mountain in another. In yet another direction, the Golden Hinde and its neighbours are prominent. Lower down and looking west, Mariner Mountain is visible in the distance. And there is the solitude. Not many hikers explore the area between Mount Tom Taylor and Mount Thelwood.

Participants: Pam Olson and DF, who wishes to remain anonymous and would not belong to any club that would have him as a member

Warden Peak – Standard Route

John Relyea-Voss

September 21, 2023

On September 21, Stephanie Leblanc and I set our sights on an ascent of Warden Peak. We arrived the night before and set up camp on the ridge. The plan was to meet up with Laurel and his friend Malcolm, who were joining us after climbing the Sceptre on

Victoria Peak. Stephanie and I arrived just before dark to see Laurel and Malcolm finishing their climb. We contacted them by radio and said we would set up their tents. Malcolm had accidentally forgotten his tent poles, but fortunately Laurel came equipped with a small tarp. Stephanie and I put our skills to the test, pitching his shelter with hiking poles, a tripod, a 60-metre tag line, and some stakes Laurel had left with the tarp. After they made their way back to camp, we celebrated their ascent with drinks and snacks. Brian and Brichelle were planning on arriving early the following day.



*Stephanie tagging a rope up to set a top belay.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

In the morning after Brichelle and Brian arrived, five of us set out making quick work in getting to the base of the standard climbing route. Malcolm headed back to his vehicle.

We ascended the standard route, practicing our alpine skills along the way. Climbing as a five-person group, we took our time. We wanted to make sure everyone was safe. We elected to pitch out a few sections of the climb to ensure everyone felt comfortable.



*Stephanie belaying the team!
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

After we all reached the summit, some time was spent taking everything in. The descent was a series of rappels from set stations along the standard route.

With each rappel we would discuss the pros and cons of each anchor station, the different techniques we used and any knowledge we thought useful.



*Brichelle and Stephanie standing on the summit.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

After making our way off the mountain in the early evening, we arrived at the last bluffs in the dying light. The last rappel got us back to the meadow area just



*Brichelle rappelling the standard route.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

before dark. It was a longer-than-anticipated hike back to our tents as we arrived pretty late.

We quickly packed up our tents and decided to make our way out that evening. We made the mistake of dropping off the ridge on the wrong side, which set the group up for a pretty extreme descent back to the trailhead. We struggled for a while attempting to



*Stream Crossing – Brian and Stephanie.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

traverse the steep hillsides back to our intended route. Luckily, we stayed together as a team and safely made our way down in about four hours. Patience tested and bodies very tired, we shared a drink back at the vehicles.

Large groups always bring their own set of unique challenges, and it's always interesting to see how

a group works together. It was an awesome night out with a great group of friends and another alpine adventure finished for Stephanie and Brichelle.

Participants: John Relyea-Voss, Brian Nesbitt, Stephanie Leblanc, Brichelle Bruckner, and Laurel Frost-Mitchell

Mount Harmston – Day Trip

John Relyea-Voss September 25, 2023

After departing Campbell River at 7 p.m., we made camp beside our vehicle at the end of the Kweishan Creek road at 9:30 p.m. Our objective was a day trip to Mount Harmjnnnnnnnnnston, and a redemption for Brian Nesbitt from a previously foiled trip to the mountain a week prior.

With alarms set for 4 a.m., we hunkered down, hoping to salvage a few solid Z's. Deprived of coffee in the morning, we saddled up. In our light packs we included bivy gear. With headlamps on, we made our way towards the trailhead. Sparse flagging led us through an overgrown cut block and into the forested area. Despite a few wrong turns in the thick alder because of the dark, we were happy with our time. Just before dawn, we emerged into the meadow and traced Kweishun Creek west up towards Mirren Lake.

The dried creek beds made fast travel to the waterfall and by 7 a.m. we were below the slabs leading to Mirren Lake. Golden rays broke out above, headlamps were stored, and by 8 a.m. we were skirting the south side of Mirren Lake.

At the end of Mirren Lake, we climbed 500 metres up a scree slope beneath the hanging Comox Glacier. Scree gave way to grass, and we gazed toward Milla Lake and the route down from the col to the lake. Above the lake was the granite boulder gully. From the col, we meandered down to Milla Lake and traversed the western side to the base of the Argus/Harmston col using crampons on the hard snow.

At 11:30 a.m., we reached the gully and started our steep 300-metre ascent. With a few short 5th class steps, we breached the col. The shoulder of Mount Harmston was to our right and the north end of the Cliffe Glacier was center stage. The wind was howling at the top of the gully, but the sun warmed our faces as we trekked up the remaining 400 metres to the

summit. The rocky scree on Harmston sounded like clanging metal in a medieval battle.



*Snow cave below Mirren Lake.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

We reached our primary goal at 1:30 p.m. and then we signed the registry and feasted. At 2 p.m., we started our descent. It was a race against daylight which we were sure to lose. Using the small rope we brought, we rappeted the gully. We made it as far as the slabs near Mirren Lake just as nightfall hit. It was an interesting journey down the side of the waterfall leading back into the meadows.



*Brian scrambling around the side of Mirren Lake.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*



Summit shot. John and Brian. (Photo by Brian Nesbitt)



*Brian high above Milla Lake.
(Photo by John Relyea-Voss)*

Questioning our choices and discussing our many epic journeys of the season so far, our remaining hike included four hours of travel in the dark. The hike seemed more obscure than the first pass.

Darkness can surely slow one's progress. After some GPS issues, we had one final duel with Devil's club. In the bushy cut block we elected to take a straight line

bearing directly to the logging road as the trail was almost impossible to find if we took one wrong step.

Once we found the trail, we slowly slithered our way back to the car. Eighteen and a half hours had passed! We broke camp and headed to the nearest McD's, yapping about how beautiful this Island is and how we can't wait for the next adventure. I was happy to have helped Brian finish his #7 IQ on what may have been the last warm weather window for Mount Harmston this season. In retrospect, this may not have been the greatest decision as we sat the next day for an hour picking thorns out of our hands. However, Mount Harmston as a day trip was quite the accomplishment for us and our biggest trip together to date!

Participants: John Relyea-Voss and Brian Nesbitt

Kings Peak

Rachael Treloar

September 30 to October 2, 2023

I had been wanting to hike Kings Peak for some time, but injuries foiled my plans the first two times. Christine Baghdassarian and I were going to co-lead this trip, but sadly she had to drop out at the last minute. Peggy and Roger Taylor kindly jumped in and offered to assist as they had done the route several times. We were joined by two newer members of the club, Becky Noble and Scott Roberts.

Roger, Peggy and I set out from Victoria first thing on Saturday morning and met Becky and Scott in Campbell River. We arrived at the trailhead at about 10 a.m. We were all delighted to be starting out on a sunny fall day.



*At the start.
(Photo by Roger Taylor)*

The bottom section of this trail consists of switchbacks through beautiful old growth forest. At a few points we found ourselves crawling up steep root beds and rock slabs. We took a quick break at the first waterfall and then crossed the creek several times. We had been warned that just after the second waterfall was a huge in-ground wasp nest. We saw the hole but fortunately there had been torrential rain a few days before and the wasps must have drowned. Sorry, not sorry! Soon we started up the very rough steep trail along the creek and began to see lovely fall foliage.



Beside the creek.
(Photo by Rachel Treloar)

On arriving at the lower meadow, we set up camp. Much to Peggy and Roger's surprise, there was a new food cache and a toilet near the camping area. We spent a leisurely evening cooking and chatting near our tents. Just after dusk we were amazed to see a rainbow in the sky.

The next morning, we headed out shortly before 9 a.m. for the summit. After following the gully to the upper meadow, we started to enjoy amazing views. The terrain also flattened out considerably.



Dusk rainbow.
(Photo by Rachel Treloar)



Upper meadow.
(Photo by Scott Roberts)



After skirting below Queens Peak we continued up to the summit.



*Enroute to the summit.
(Photo by Rachel Treloar)*

We moved across gravel and rock, then about 10-20 centimetres of snow.



*Onto snow.
(Photo by Peggy Taylor)*

A flock of nine ptarmigan greeted us just below the summit. We traversed to the peak, stopping for a quick snack and photos.



*Elkhorn Mountain.
(Photo by Roger Taylor)*



*Roger at the summit.
(Photo by Rachel Treloar)*

A gorgeous vista was our reward, with views of Victoria Peak, Mount Colonel Foster, Elkhorn Mountain, Berg Lake and the Elk River Valley. The views from the summit were so stunning that we could have stayed for hours. However, as it was beginning to snow and had become quite chilly, we started back down.



*At the summit.
(Photo by Becky Noble)*



*Heading down.
(Photo by Rachel Treloar)*

We arrived back at our camp mid-afternoon and decided to cook before it started to rain. We all turned in early as it also became quite cold. Soon after, it began to pour, with the rain continuing all night. We managed to catch a short break in the weather to



*Soaked but happy!
(Photo by Roger Taylor)*

pack up and headed out. The creeks were raging, completely unlike on the ascent. We hiked down to the cars in record time and changed into dry clothes. A good time was had by all, as you can see from our smiles.

Participants: Peggy Taylor, Roger Taylor, Becky Noble, Scott Roberts, and Rachel Treloar

Forbidden Plateau in Autumn Colours

Janelle Curtis
October 2-3, 2023

After I hiked the Forbidden Plateau traverse in July with a few women, Rowan and I decided we wanted to do a hike together. It's a straightforward hike through an area rich in landscapes and biodiversity. We were both busy with work, travel, family visits, and other commitments, so the earliest time we had to complete a hike together was the first week of October. On the Sunday before our trip, we met up with a group of people very special to me and joined in celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Comox Valley Search and Rescue Team. The next day we set off from Raven Lodge on the trail towards Mount Becher.

It was raining when we arrived at Raven Lodge, but we assumed from the forecast that it would be a light rain which would only last a few hours. However, it ended up pouring on us for most of the day, but I am glad we went when we did. Paradise Meadows was more magical than usual because everything was in stunning autumn colours. I haven't experienced such a vibrant rainbow of leaves since I was living back east in Ontario and Quebec. It was simply amazing!

We stopped briefly for a snack at Croteau Lake. Fortunately, someone had set up a large tarp next to the yurt, so we enjoyed a few dry moments out of the rain. While under the shelter we decided to head straight to Mackenzie Lake and make this a one-night trip instead of diverting to Kwai Lake for a night. It was surprisingly quiet on the trails - we didn't see anyone else beyond Croteau Lake.

The trails were in excellent shape and there were some relatively new bridges which meant we could keep our feet dry while crossing the creeks. Thank you to the Comox District Mountaineering Club (CDMC)!



*Walking through the rainbow of autumn colours.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*



*Rowan at the turn off to Mackenzie lake.
(Photo by Janelle Curtis)*



*Soaking up all the colours and the rain.
(Photo by Janelle Curtis)*



*Mackenzie Lake in the calm morning.
(Photo by Janelle Curtis)*

We arrived at Mackenzie Lake in the late afternoon. Because Rowan was planning a solo hike in Australia, he wanted to use this trip to test out his new tent and backpack. We set up our tents, changed out of our wet clothes, and each of us got settled. It continued to rain very lightly, so I opted to spend the rest of the evening in my tent to stay warm and dry.

The sun came out the next morning and it was nice and calm. We both enjoyed the morning mist

over the lake. While we sipped our coffee, we saw busy beavers swimming around the lake undisturbed. Everything was still wet, so I wore my rain gear as I walked through Mackenzie Meadows in the early morning sun. We enjoyed the rest of our hike and time alone and decided to do another hike together the next weekend.

Participants: Janelle Curtis and Rowan Laver



*Walking through a wet Mackenzie Meadows.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*

Mackenzie Range – Fall Retreat

Eryn Tombu-Haigh October 5-6, 2023

I do not think I can write this trip report without acknowledging where and how I first met Celina. In 2022 I did a horrendous “day” trip of 21 hours up Nine Peaks. Somewhere between the summit and regaining the ridges of Big Interior Mountain, I lost my ski pole. Not that it was particularly fancy, a lower end carbon G3, but I do hate losing stuff in the back country where it will sit until someone rediscovers it or it stays put for eternity. When I discovered its loss as I went to put my ice axe away, I realized I did not have time to safely backtrack. The weather had changed,

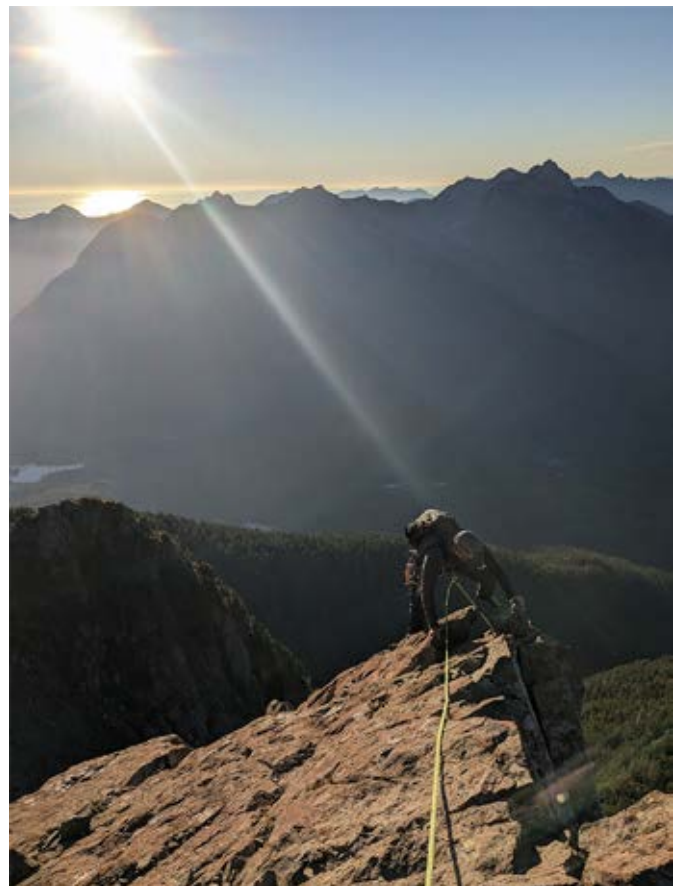


*Eryn and Celina on Redwall Summit.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

we had no visibility and a thunderstorm loomed nearby.

Back home I put out a plea for anyone back in the area to keep an eye out for the match to my pole and within that day I got a reply that this guy’s girlfriend had my pole and would drop it off the next day. That is how I met Celina Rodzinyak. This random chick who found my pole. I got her number, promising to climb together, then you know how summer goes, weeks, months ... and suddenly fall ... and work ... and at work, my new boss shows up ... and low and behold, I had never called, or even texted her. This is the basis for a true friendship I feel.

Fast forward to October 2023. The weather forecast was bomber for a couple days and begging for one last alpine adventure. I find it moderately funny that this year my trip reports are for my first summer alpine climb of the year and my last (see the Mount Donner Alpine Social on page 63). Mainly because Barry is a better writer, and he stole the two epics we did (see his trip reports which I’m sure are a lot more eloquent than mine.) Anyway, Barry Hansen and I had planned an overnight to the Mackenzie Range to get one last hit of alpine. Celina couldn’t bear the thought of missing out so she juggled her obligations to help her family and we matched our two-day trip.



*Barry coming up the final Redwall pitch.
(Photo by Eryn Tombu-Haigh)*

So, on Thursday 5 October Celina and I met Barry at the turn off for Port Alberni at a very relaxed 8:45 a.m. and drove out to the trail head. The Mackenzie Express was in great condition. Admiring all the fall colours and mushrooms we quickly climbed the trail and shortly established camp at about 1120 metres at a beautiful tarn with epic views to the west.

We had planned for an evening warmup on Redwall Peak's northwest ridge, which we had all previously climbed within the last few months. Happy to return to this beautiful route with gorgeous views to the coast, Kennedy Lake, all the surrounding mountains, and horrendous and relentless biting flies, which feasted on us for the next 24 hours. As well as the loss of blood from the flies, Celina also suffered an epic nosebleed. I have never seen so much blood secrete from someone's proboscis. But she assured us all was fine while she stuffed toilet paper up her nose. As the blood kept pouring and splattering into blueberry bushes, Barry very proudly produced a menstrual pad. When I say proudly, I mean he was absolutely glowing in delight, having carried pads on numerous trips with no use of them to anyone. And granted this probably was not the exact right tool for the job, Celina politely took it and shoved pieces of it up her nose. Once the geyser in Celina's nose dried up, and we had a quick snack on some of Barry's EPIC biscotti (which is totally the main reason to hike with Barry) and then we made quick work of the five 30-metre pitches to the summit, trading off leads and words of encouragement.



*Eryn tossing rope to rappel the south side of Redwall.
(Photo by Celina Rodzinyak)*

A beautiful sunset awaited us on the summit and we dawdled in the alpenglow, all feeling rather confident with the descent and return to camp. The first rappel down the south side went smoothly although I felt my ATC was perhaps a notch to close to my body for a super cruisy rappel. So, while Celina and I bullshitted about mountains and Barry slipped down the second

rappel, I unhooked my ATC to move it another notch down my anchor system on my harness.

I made Barry and Celina swear to secrecy about the next part, which I have now, four months later, come to peace about. Somehow ... I dropped my matte grey ATC. I heard it bounce at least three times down the rocks into the abyss, on the second rappel of a MANY rappels trip. Barry made a sarcastic shout up into the falling light, "Hey, stop kicking rocks!" to which I politely informed him - "Actually, that was my ATC" as we all registered how much I just F'ed that up. Barry being the kind man he is, tied his ATC to the end of the rope, which I then pulled up so I could use it and we all re-met at the start of the last rappel off Redwall Peak. This is my big take-away: review your munter hitch. You never know when you'll be as big an idiot as me and be stuck on the side of the mountain fumbling through the knot you thought you would never really need. Luckily, when Barry was a young boy, ATCs were not invented and he also loves old-timey things, so he was fairly confident and familiar with said munter hitch and offered to use it the rest of the trip, to which I was very grateful. We gave the ground search for the evasive matte-grey ATC the good old college try, but by headlamp in a matte grey rock field we knew our chances really did not exist. So, if anyone finds it, please keep it as a spare if you ever need it.

Back at camp, we had a lovely evening meal under the stars then climbed into our respective shelters. Barry and I into our matching one person Nemo dragonfly tents, and Celina into her beat up Canadian Tire emergency bivy that she swears by. We all slept well, excited for the next day with the plan to summit Flat Top, Shadowblade and Mackenzie Summit.



*Morning fall colours in front of Redwall.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

We were moving as soon as the sun was shining its first light, which is a quite reasonable time in October. The morning light was beautiful on the autumnal foliage, as we made our way back to the base of

Redwall Peak. Once more we scrounged around the base of the peak looking for my ATC, this time in daylight. Unsuccessful, we headed up the choss slope, not towards the saddle with Perez Lookout, but the higher col directly below Mackenzie Summit. We were optimistic once on the other side we could traverse over to the col between Flat Top and Shadowblade, climb those, then head back to finish on Mackenzie.

As we popped over to the south side we were presented with a steep, loose, small gully lined with steep rock. Not ideal as we tried to descend. We quickly had second thoughts and tried to traverse in the general direction of Shadowblade.



*Barry summiting Flat Top.
(Photo by Eryn Tombu-Haigh)*

Barry managed to get himself stuck on a ledge and Celina and I scrambled higher to try to get rope down to him. Of the probably 20 times I've asked for a rope from Barry, this is the one and only time I have been able to return the favour. I managed to anchor myself into a tree and belay Barry up to our perch. By this time, we realized we were only maybe 100 metres below the Mackenzie Summit, so we changed our first objective and made fast work up to the summit of Mackenzie. The views were outstanding as we grabbed a bite and looked over to the imposing Shadowblade. We rappelled down Mackenzie's east side, crossed the gully, traversed the obvious but bushy weakness in the rock, and made our way to climber's right, gradually gaining height. From the notch between Flat Top and Shadowblade, Barry ascended a short step of some stretchy and exposed fifth class moves, where after a half-hearted attempt I asked for the earlier favour to be returned. I was happy to have the security of a rope as I quickly joined Barry on Flat Top, which really should be named, Sloped Top. With Celina momentarily joining us, we walked up the sloped red rock and a couple scrambly moves had us on top of our second objective of the day.



*Eryn, Celina and Barry on the summit of Flat Top.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

We downclimbed and rappelled back to the col, ditched our hiking boots for climbing shoes, and edged our way around to a sloping but adequate platform on the south ridge of Shadowblade. From there Celina took the lead up 5.7-5.9 moves up the side of the narrowing pinnacle. When she was anchored, I was impressed by how easily she led some very reachy exposed moves for someone even shorter than me. We had a 70-metre rope and found that it wasn't quite enough, so Celina had us both simul-climbing for about a third of the pitch as we shouted out to each other when we were at the sketchier parts.



*Eryn working along the knife edge summit on Shadowblade.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

All of us re-united at the belay station and Barry took the lead over the final traverse along the airy knife-edge that leads to the summit. What a delightful climb with sphincter appropriately puckered for the last few metres to the summit. After congratulating each other on an amazing fall day, we cautiously downclimbed the traverse and rappelled straight down back to the notch between Shadowblade and Flat Top.



*Celina starting a bushy rappel.
(Photo by Barry Hansen)*

From there, we alternated between scrambling down sections and very bushy rappels until we got down to the chossy, treelined slopes where we could work our way over to the saddle at Perez Lookout. Back at camp we packed up and had a very enjoyable hike back down the trail to the car. Mackenzie Range - we'll definitely be back.

Participants: Barry Hansen, Celina Rodzinyak, and Eryn Tombu-Haigh

Elk River Trail

Janelle Curtis
October 6-8, 2023

Although this beginner-friendly trip was on the ACCVI trip schedule for more than a month, only one person signed up to join me. They cancelled a few days beforehand, so I talked Rowan into coming with me instead. He was keen because he had never been to Landslide Lake or Foster/Berg Lake even though

we have walked past the turn off a few times over the years. This trip was originally scheduled for 7-9 October, but because rain was in the forecast and we had already had our fill of rain on the Forbidden Plateau a few days earlier, we decided to start our hike along the Elk River a day earlier than what was on the schedule.

We left Nanaimo at noon and were on the trail around 3:30 p.m. Because of our late start, we hiked to Butterwort Creek Camp and set up our tent while the sun was shining. Even though this has been one of the worst years for wasps on the Elk River Trail, we didn't encounter any. I was relieved because a week before we left, there were still reports that people were being stung repeatedly.

We were up early the next morning and were on the trail to Landslide Lake by 8:30 a.m. It took us three hours to get to the lake and then we debated what to do next. I was encouraging Rowan to hike up to Foster/Berg Lake on his own because I wasn't sure that I could get there and back to our camp before dark. I had been there before and said the beautiful lake was well worth the visit. Then along came a solo hiker who introduced himself as David. We chatted for a bit, and it turned out that he was from Quadra Island and knows our friend Tak Ogasawara. He and Rowan decided to hike up to Foster/Berg Lake together while I waited at Landslide Lake.



*Rowan's first view of Landslide Lake.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*

After many busy months and a stressful week at work, it was nice to unwind for a few hours and enjoy

some quiet time on my own to reflect. I had the 10 essentials with me including my InReach device, food, water, and warm clothes. I simply took in the quiet and calm and enjoyed the sounds of the water flowing from the lakes. Rowan and I texted each other on our InReach devices while he was hiking, so I knew when they were on their way back.

After everyone was back at Landslide Lake, we said our goodbyes to David and then headed back down the trail. We arrived back at Butterwort Creek Camp in time for sunset and enjoyed another lovely evening. The next morning, we packed up early and headed back to the trailhead to beat the rain. Rowan says the highlights for him were going for a walk somewhere new and enjoying a hot cup of Tang afterwards. The highlight for me was revisiting many memories on the Elk River Trail and making new memories with Rowan. We had hiked down the trail after traversing from the Golden Hinde in 2013, and we had hiked up the trail in 2015 on our way to hike a section of the Wolf/Cervus Creek divide. I have no doubt we will be back to the Elk River soon.

Participants: Janelle Curtis and Rowan Laver

Nile Creek Hike

Lise Gagnon
December 30, 2023

On the second to last day of December, six of us from various parts of the mid island, met up for one of the last ACCVI outings of the year. Jane, our leader, proposed a hike along Nile Creek, short to moderate,



Barb, Christine, Lise, Rowan, Janelle, and Jane.
(Photo by Jane Maduke)

depending on rain or shine.

Three of us left Nanaimo; myself along with Janelle and Rowan, on a drizzly morning. We drove through some torrential rain. However, when we met up with Jane, Barb and Christine in the parking lot at the end of Linx Road, south of Bowser, we glimpsed a patch of blue sky. The day looked promising after all.



Christine with licorice fern.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)

Jane led us along the power line and onto a treed path bordered by salal and sword ferns. As we entered more mature forest, Christine spotted some licorice fern (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*) growing near the base of a moss-covered Douglas fir. Soon we were chewing on the roots of this plant, used traditionally for flavour and medicinally to treat colds and sore throats by many Native American groups.



Jane and Barb amongst the sword ferns.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)



*Jane at the head of the Billy Goat trail.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)*



*Rain drops clinging to hanging moss.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)*

Jane took us on the Billy Goat trail. It led us down through a lush ravine to Nile Creek. We crossed a bridge and ambled along the northern bank, the trail leading us downstream. Our leisurely pace gave us time to stop and chat, observe various native and invasive plant species, and take lots of photos. We passed through stands of mature moss-covered trees. Water droplets from the morning showers clung to the thick moss hanging from branches.



*Moss covered branches.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)*



*Janelle, Christine and Rowan along the trail.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)*



Fungi.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)



Jane on the log bridge.
(Photo by Christine Fordham)



Crossing Nile creek on the log bridge.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)



Rowan, Christine and Janelle on the log bridge.
(Photo by Lise Gagnon)

We crossed the creek once more, along a log bridge. Then we climbed up out of the ravine and looped back to the trail leading us through the power line and back to the parking lot. We covered just over four kilometres in about two hours! As mentioned above, it was a leisurely pace. We all stopped for a coffee and treat, or lunch, at Footless Rooster Coffee in Magnolia Court, on the Island Highway in Bowser, and parted ways with the promise to meet again in the new year.

Participants: Jane Maduke, Barb Baker, Christine Fordham, Lise Gagnon, Janelle Curtis, and Rowan Laver



*Janelle, Barb and Jane on the trail.
(Photo by Christine Fordham)*



*The whole gang from the summit of Mount Prevost.
(Photo by Eva Gnech)*



*Greg, Yvonne and Steve, just below the summit.
(Photo by Eva Gnech)*



*Enjoying the view from the big rock.
(Photo by Eva Gnech)*

Mount Prevost (Swuq'us)

Eva Gnech

December 31, 2023

On December 31, seven of us carpoled to Duncan and hiked Mount Prevost (Swuq'us) on a beautiful sunny last day of the year. The view from the top was spectacular.

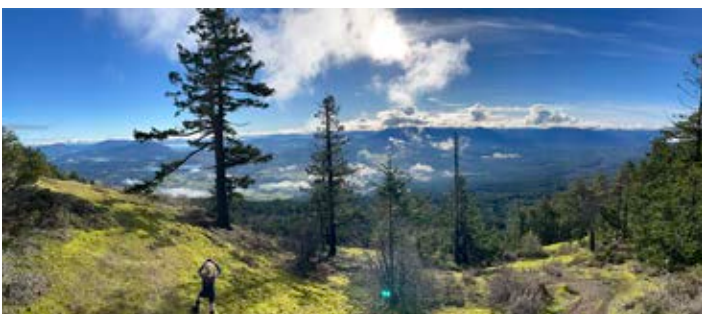
Starting from Drinkwater Road, we followed the regular trail taking the rope-section up to the top, visiting both the main peak and the second peak with the War Memorial. After much picture taking of the amazing views, we then looped around counter-clockwise to meet back at the trail just below the ropes, and proceeded down.

On the way, we crossed the creek at the 300 metre elevation and proceeded down the ridge between the two creeks, to meet back up with the main trail near the trailhead.



*It wasn't easy getting up – even harder coming down (gracefully).
(Photo by Eva Gnech)*

The trail was a bit muddy in sections, but otherwise in great shape. There were a few mountain bikers using the trails, and a few other groups of hikers enjoying this beautiful day. We covered 9.6 kilometres and 680 metres of ascent in just over 3 hours of moving time.



*Eva capturing the bird's eye view of Duncan.
(Photo by Tracy Sobotkiewicz)*

Participants: Eva Gnech, Tracy Sobotkiewicz, Greg Dallas, Martin Davis, Steve Parker, Lauren Dake, Yvonne Blum-Gabel.



MAINLAND



Into the Alpine from Princess Louisa Inlet

Rick Hudson

July 11, 2022

The British Columbia coast is a rare place. Any mountaineer will tell you that much of it is inaccessible. Deep fjords and steep mountains push against the tide-line, and for that reason alone, having a boat opens up a world of opportunities.

Jervis Inlet is one such place. Just north of the Sunshine Coast, it bisects the Coast Mountains like a knife cut, slashing a 90 kilometre trench deep into the range. Sailing up that marine highway on a broad reach, Genoa and mainsail goose-winged under a stiff inshore breeze, is one of those experiences you'll never forget. The shrouds hum. Whitecaps chase the boat. The sails creak with the pressure. Everything feels invigorating and alive.

There's a not-so-secret side fjord near the head of Jervis Inlet that many travel to see. Once through the squeeze of Malibu Narrows, 8-kilometre long Princess Louisa Inlet opens up, edged by soaring granite mountains that frame this picturesque, tiny fjord. Much has been written about this extraordinarily beautiful place, so tucked away that even the wind seems to hold its breath there. The sea is often glassy calm long into the day, while the surface of Jervis Inlet beyond the rapids is whipped to white horses.

Come with us. The current in Malibu Rapids is turning, and a line of pleasure craft are pushing through the narrows into the deep, calm world of Princess Louisa. Deep is a key word here. The inner fjord is very deep, carved by giant glaciers not that long ago. Finding an anchorage in a place where the bottom is over 500 metres is a challenge. Happily, there's a B.C. Park's dock at the far end, close to Chatterbox Falls. Isn't

that a great name for a waterfall? Chatterbox Falls in flood (May and June) is a thing to see, its white cataract plunging 40 metres almost into the sea.



Looking down into Princess Louisa Inlet. In the distance, Malibu Rapids connects with the much larger Jervis Inlet. (Photo by Phee Hudson)

If there's room, most boaters choose to tie to the dock. There's a Ranger on duty during the busy months, and the staff are aware of the shortage of available space, so they ensure boats are tightly packed along the 140 metre length of the dock.

Walking to the falls is an obvious must-do. Braver folk will take a swimsuit, and shower in the cascade, but even in mid-summer the temperature is fresh, to say the least. In spring when there's runoff from the snow pack high in the alpine, it's positively frigid.

The other popular activity on some people's to-do list is a hike up to the trapper's cabin. It's a scramble over 4 kilometres with a height gain of nearly 600 metres. The path is obvious and well flagged but not easy, as it crosses many tree roots. After rain, the trail becomes slippery, especially on the descent. That said, boaters are notoriously cavalier about footwear – we've seen flipflops – and twisted ankle rescues are common. The cabin is near another waterfall that's a similar height to Chatterbox Falls.

And this is where the story really starts, because while talking to the Ranger one evening, and asking about the trapper's cabin, she happened to mention that the trail went on up into the alpine. "It's a long way," she cautioned, "but the high country is wonderful."

Remarks like that are like a red flag to a bull – the trapper's cabin wasn't going to be enough – we wanted the whole enchilada. The following July morning we left at first light (4:30 a.m.) bound for the top. The dock was noticeably quiet, apart from a dog

that lifted its head, wagged its tail sleepily, and settled back into a cockpit. Swiftly over the creek bridge and up the track. As described, it was root-bound and slippery in the morning's dew. The thunder of the falls gradually dwindled as we climbed into the forest.

The light improved as we neared the cabin, and the sound of the small falls just beyond grew louder. Then we were out of the trees and in the fine spray. Water cascaded down a smooth granite cliff, ran across a level section, and then disappeared into the canopy below. The sun had reached down this far into the valley already, and the treetops were flooded with colour in contrast to the gloom of the up trail.

We'd been warned that it was a long way beyond the cabin to reach the alpine zone above, but what the Ranger hadn't mentioned was that the trail improved significantly. There were few wet roots beyond the falls, although the angle was relentless. The surrounding forest thinned as we gained height, and there were glimpses back down of a mirror calm fjord far below.

And still the trail went up. Then it took a strange turn –disappearing under a huge boulder. Packs off, we squeezed through a hole into darkness, scrambled a couple of metres and then popped out on the uphill side through an equally small hole. We blinked in the sudden sunshine, like marmots. But there was no stopping. Not far above, a ridge crossed the line of the track, and there was the promise of level ground and possibly views.

After three and a half hours of hard going we reached the ridge. We'd gained 1,250 metres from the dock. It was a perfect, blue-bird day. No wind ruffled the inlet below and even on our exposed position, all was



The upper basin is rolling granite country with lakes and dwarf trees. Sun Peak (out of view) is about 2 km to the east. (Photo by Rick Hudson)

calm. It didn't get better than this. But the work wasn't over. Along the ridge there were still another hundred metres of elevation gain to reach the upper basin; and what a basin it turned out to be. Bare, honey coloured rock sloped down to tarns the colour of turquoise, the granite smoothed by great glaciers that had scoured, shaped and polished their surfaces not long ago.

After that four-hour grind, the slope eased as we strolled around the basin, enjoying the easy undulations in the grade. Patches of grass covered spots where soil had collected; low-growing heather added colour to the scene. Occasionally, a copse of dwarf alpine fir clung to pockets of damp peat. Just above the basin, patches of snow still lay everywhere, melting in the warm sun, streams trickling down rocks on their short but very steep descent to the sea not far away. No wonder Chatterbox Falls was so cold!

It was time to eat and recharge the batteries, while checking the skyline to the south. Not long before, friends had come over that skyline, starting from Squamish and the Ashlu River valley. Just 25 kilometres away as the crow flies, the long, undulating ridge that connects the two places is likely double that distance. That was a project for another day. Or lifetime. Right now, we ate and marveled at the world that surrounded us.

But there was a problem – where we were seated in the bowl, there was no view of Princess Louisa Inlet. A ridge to the west blocked that aspect. But we had come too far not to go the final distance. Half an hour of bushwhacking and scrambling brought us out to a high point on that ridge. Below lay the cobalt blue of the inlet, the steep walls that surrounded it



A Google Earth track of the route taken from the park dock in Princess Louisa Inlet via the Trapper's Cabin to the upper basin at about 1,250m. (Photo by Rick Hudson)

still boasting numerous thin waterfalls from dizzying heights. A floatplane moved slowly into the basin over Malibu Rapids far below, and touched down near the boat dock, leaving a pair of white lines behind. From our observation point, we couldn't hear its engine at all.

The spell broke. It was noon, and turnaround time. While the uphill had been a grind, the downhill was going to be even harder. We had the happy prospect of shedding all 1,450 metres that we had so painfully climbed that morning, mindful that we would be tired by the time we got to the trapper's cabin and the slippery tree root section. Caution advised.

One last look at the sunny basin, and then it was down, down, down to the inlet far below.

Participants: Phee Hudson and Rick Hudson

The Chess Group GMC – Week Two

Mike Hubbard

July 15-22, 2023

When our ACCVI summer camp was, unfortunately, cancelled at the end of June, I checked with Canmore and found that there was space available on week 2 of the General Mountaineering Camp (GMC) from July 15 – 22. After a rather strenuous drive to Golden on my own, I spent the night at Mary's Motel. The next day I met up with the group at the airport. The smoke was intense and it looked as though a nuclear winter had descended on the world. I was, however, delighted to find that two other members of our section were also on the week - Sandy Stewart and Jane Maduke. On Saturday we drove in convoy some 100 kilometres north of Golden on the Bush Creek forest service road to the helicopter staging area. By noon, Alpine Helicopters had deposited us at the camp, a spectacular although rocky site below the Chessboard glacier at an elevation of 2020 metres. The smoke at camp was considerably less than in the valley, but it was still very hazy. After settling in and having a wander around camp, we had a meeting with our camp manager, Simon Grafton, and were introduced to our guides, amateur leaders, and doctor.

Sunday was an instructional day and snow school on the toe of the glacier. This was good for acclimatisation as those of us from the coast

were feeling the effects of altitude. I was in a small group with the lead guide, Dylan Cunningham, who gave us a basic introduction to travelling on snow, use of crampons, ice axe and rope. An excellent presentation and useful refresher. After returning to camp, we signed up for the next day's trips and enjoyed an excellent meal.

My choice for Monday was Queen's Gambit which involved descending below camp and traversing several slopes before again going up to the ice and snow. Our group made the col about an hour below the summit, but with the weather deteriorating we decided to return to camp. A major thunderstorm and heavy rain set in and beat us to camp. We got thoroughly soaked to the skin. After a windy night where the tents were almost flattened, we woke for the usual 6:30 a.m. breakfast to greatly improved visibility and weather.

Tuesday - I elected for a rest day to dry out my clothes and recover as did Katherine Thom, a retired Professor of Pharmacy, from Salt Lake City. She helped in the kitchen whilst I had a most enjoyable day reading Ben Gadd's *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies* which I found in the tea tent. I drank a lot of tea, wandered up the creek to the fresh water intake, and snoozed in my tent.

Wednesday - I elected to climb Princess Pyramid, (2700 metres) an aptly named mountain to the west of camp. The guides suggested that Katherine and I should go to the col and then scramble around, but it was a beautiful clear day and Princess Pyramid was beckoning. Apart from one low 5th class pitch which our guide, Alex Geary, belayed us up, it was mostly short-roping on a rather steep and narrow ridge. The crest was sharp limestone slivers and one risked an involuntary vasectomy (not Katherine) on many a step, but after an hour and a half of rather tortuous scrambling we lunched/perched on the small and precipitous summit rather dreading the descent. It was, however, negotiated without accident, although short-roping on such terrain is not my favourite activity especially with a companion who had not done it before and had the occasional panic attack. That evening Sandy told me of his day on King Peak (3100 metres) followed by a snow and ice climb up Bishop in glowing terms. I decided to sign up for King Peak.

Thursday was a crystal-clear bluebird day. After a rocky scramble up to the snow we crossed the lower glacier to the foot of the ominously named Black Gulley. This is composed of crumbled black shale and we climbed it wearing our crampons on a well-established, but narrow zig-zagging trail. On one exposed portion the guides had driven in rebar and

fixed a hand line as an aid. The view from the top of the gulley was absolutely spectacular. To the east a big glacier led to King Peak, which was not visible from camp, and in the middle distance was Mount Columbia and the Columbia Ice-fields. To the north one could just make out Mount Clemenceau and to the west Mount Sir Sandford. My heart jumped. This was my sort of mountain. After an hour or so of glacier travel where we had to avoid some crevasses near the summit, we had an easy scramble up some slabby rock to the summit. My face pictured here tells it all. I could not have been more delighted in reaching such a high and spectacular summit of a calibre that I had doubted I would ever reach again.



*Mike on King Peak.
(Photo by Bridget John)*

Thanks to guide Darren Farley and my rope team of Allan and Doug for their patience in going at my 84-year-old pace! A leisurely lunch with many photos and then it was a three-hour descent back to camp where a fine meal awaited.

Friday - I felt up to climbing Duchess and a second attempt at Queen's Gambit, but one has to put a second choice on the sign-up sheets and the powers that be (the Guides and amateur leaders that is) decided that I needed some Rock Schooling. They

them and being lowered back down made a relaxed and enjoyable end to my week of climbing in the Chess group. It left me with some energy to enjoy the 1st Annual GMC Olympics organized by our kitchen crew - the program of which is shown on the attached photograph.



*Descending King Peak.
(Photo by Mike Hubbard)*



*The GMC Olympics.
(Photo by Mike Hubbard)*

thought I would hold up the rest of the party on the Duchess. Teige Frid, who hails from Squamish, had set up three ropes on a fine out-cropping of fairly solid limestone about 400 metres from camp. Interestingly this continues in the folded strata to the one piece of good rock we had had to belay on during our climb on Princess Pyramid on Wednesday. Two of the climbs were somewhere around 5.6. Climbing



*The Boat Race.
(Photo by Mike Hubbard)*

The boat race was down our water source creek. Various boats were constructed, some elaborate with sails, others duct-taped together beer cans and plastic bottles. A hilarious race with some of us delegated to catch wayward boats that missed the finishing line and were heading downstream for the Fraser River. The egg toss resulted in many broken eggs and more laughs, the dirty sock shotput ruined one of my socks,

and I don't know how those who took part in the cold plunge survived the glacial temperatures for the 10 minutes or so that it took to go from feet only to total submersion. The Guides Treasure Hunt involved the guides scrabbling through the foul-smelling remains of all our meals for hundreds of dollars (plastic bills). It was a riotous evening which went on until after dark and culminated in awards and skits.

It was a great and varied group of people. We had a doctor from Brooklyn, New York, Bruce Gelb, who MC'd our story-time every evening and who in real life does leading-edge face transplants; a Ukrainian mother, Nataliya Zadorozhna and her teen age son, whose father had been in the Soviet Armed forces and Robert Boucher who had driven all the way from Quebec. There were many others from all sorts of backgrounds too varied to list, but all of whom became like old friends. The GMC experience is not to be missed if you haven't been to one. The price makes one appreciate the great value of our section summer camps, but it was worth every penny.

Newfoundland: Hiking is Great – the People Even Better

Gordon Kyle

July 17 to August 5, 2023

Our 20-day visit centered around an eight-day backcountry traverse through the Long Range Mountains in Gros Morne National Park on the western side of Newfoundland. Only a small number of hikers are allowed at any time, so we had the 40-kilometre route almost to ourselves. We got the prime July/August dates by booking in January.

Most elevation gain was on the first day to a campsite near actual Gros Morne Mountain, the namesake for the park. At just 805 metres it's almost the highest point of the whole island. Day hikers go up the front rocky gully and descend via a nice long wood staircase on the opposite side so they don't knock rocks loose onto other hikers in the gully.

We chose to start our traverse at this south end and exit at dramatic Western Brook Pond at the north end (the last picture below). People correctly told us that it would be no problem to hitch a ride on one of the tourist boats back to civilization. Likewise, they said folks would be happy to drive us back to our car if we



*Up and down innumerable ridges and hills.
(Photo by Gordon Kyle)*

through the boggy parts in fog, the booted path wasn't always the best route. ☹



*Bog country is better in the fog.
(Photo by Gordon Kyle)*



*Bug-eating pitcher plant.
(Photo by Gordon Kyle)*

chose to hike the trip in the opposite direction. What a refreshing attitude. Everywhere we went people had a pleasant can-do attitude.

After nipping up Gros Morne Mountain on the second day we left the developed trail to tackle the dreaded first hill.

Turns out dire warning of roots, rocks and slippery bits is no match for Vancouver Island bushwacking experience – it was no worse than a shortcut on a damp day in the Sooke foothills!

There is purposely only a suggested route but no developed trail through this entire area, which helps keep the rustic wilderness feel.

During the pre-hike interview they mention that the website's highly detailed route with GPS coordinates is only a general suggestion and the best route changes each year! There was typically a booted path, and during clear weather the general route was visible so there was no problem. Of course,



*No trail; no bridges.
(Photo by Gordon Kyle)*

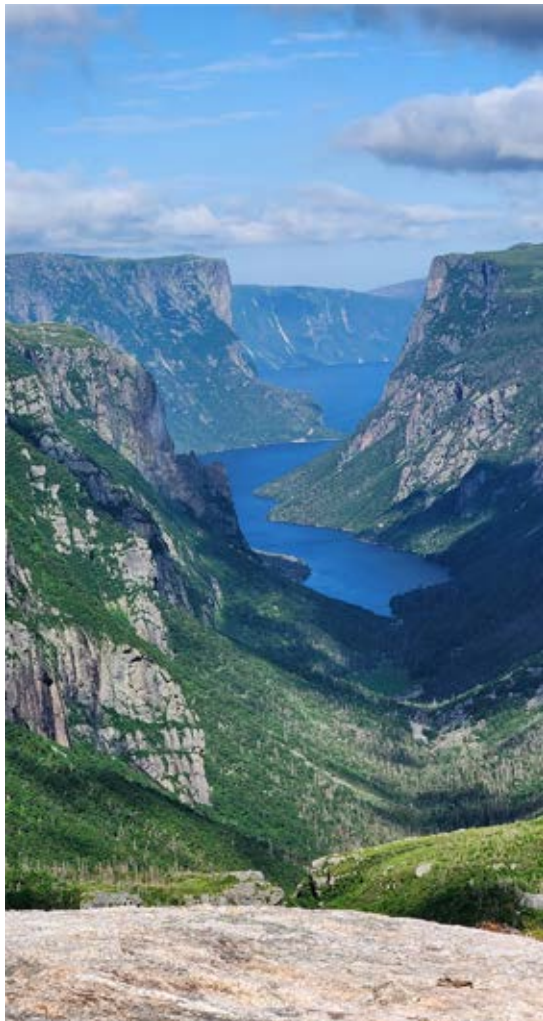
In contrast to Vancouver Island, every hilltop gave clear vistas unimpeded by forests. Forests likely haven't been able to develop yet due to the anaerobic peat bog which is the only kind of soil that could develop on the bare rock after the glaciers receded 12,000 years ago.

Note that this trip can be extended an extra 40 kilometres to include the Northern Traverse where it's



*Sunset from a bog on a hilltop.
(Photo by Gordon Kyle)*

important to hit key navigation points in order to wend a way through large tracts of tuckamore - think of this as five feet tall impenetrable krummholz (densely packed short conifers with stiff, dense branches). Our Long Range traverse didn't have much of this so we were free to ramble up whatever route seemed best, with no concern about being blocked by tuckamore. Most days were sunny, or at least not raining. When it does rain, though, it can be heavy rain, with a couple thunderstorms passing overhead. Maybe even more important than rain gear is a **full bug shirt** for the clouds of flies!



*The last four kilometres down to
Western Brook Pond, an ex-fjord.
(Photo by Gordon Kyle)*

The major airlines used to fly into nearby Deer Lake Regional Airport, but they now only service St John's International Airport. This turned out to be a good thing since we enjoyed a couple days there, and the highway across island was great. With the rental car we were able to drive up to spend a night at Quirpon Island lighthouse on the northern tip of Newfoundland, and visit L'Anse aux Meadows where Vikings visited 500 years before Columbus. Geologists would love the Tablelands where we walked on part of earth's mantle that actually sticks up through the crust.

Definitely book anything important far ahead since accommodations in popular areas are booked well in advance. There are tons more we didn't have time to see, and all the people we met were inherently helpful and pleasant. All in all, a recommended place to explore.

Participants: Gordon Kyle, Brian Parsons, and their friend Rebecca.

Spectrum Range and Mount Edziza Provincial Park

Catrin Brown

August 9-20, 2023

All photos by Catrin Brown except where indicated otherwise

The Mount Edziza area had been on our collective radar since back in BC (Before Covid), so like many other things, got postponed over several summers. With passing time, our goal had developed to include the full south-north traverse of the Spectrum Range and Mount Edziza Provincial Park. This plan got a boost from George Butcher's excellent account of his trip there in summer 2022 (see *Island Bushwhacker Annual* Vol. 50, p.109). Thanks George, and George, and Diane for this extra impetus.

Our 12-day traverse was well worth the wait in being realised. I hope these images help to share some sense of the unusual beauty of this place.

Participants: Vivian Addison, Lyle Young, Erich Schellhammer, and Catrin Brown



The adventure begins. Our Cessna float plane awaits us on a beautiful morning at Dease Lake. After an hour of dodgy flying in and out of clouds, we are dropped at Little Ball Lake at the south end of the Spectrum Range. The packs are heavy and the weather is iffy, but we're here!



The relatively benign Ball River gives us a chance to hone our river-crossing skills. Those will become crucial in a few days' time.



Within a short time, the Spectrum Range lives up to its name. A wolverine is spotted, the flowers are glorious, and no one grumbles about sore shoulders.



We pick our way over a pass and down to the Arctic Lake Plateau. The Boundary Range starts to appear to our west and will watch over us for the next 10 days.



This entire vast landscape is ours, all ours.



We spent a lot of time discussing our route every day. With no trails or markers, and not carrying enough spare batteries to power electronics, it was back to good old map and compass. We enjoyed that.



Yagi Ridge, a relentless climb to 2096 metres on very steep scree. It is often described as the crux of the route, but as we have cut our teeth in Strathcona Park, it is a semi-familiar grunt. Our crux is still to come.



We hike upstream to the glacial source, but a safe crossing eludes us. No one wants to voice the thought of retracing our steps if we can't cross the river, but there are not good options. So, we wait. After two more nights and a major storm, the temperature drops and the rain abates. We get up early, form a strong chain and make it across. Yes!



Picking our way down from Yagi Ridge towards the Nagha River. It has a reputation for being difficult to cross but it doesn't look too bad from here, does it?



Happily on the other side of the river, a treat is in store as we climb up to the Kitsu Plateau. The sunny weather matches our mood.



The Nagha River close-up, different story. Several nights of heavy rain had produced this nimble torrent. Underwater boulders rumbled and groaned as they were swept downstream. We didn't fancy becoming part of their journey.



It's a 360-degree panorama from the top of the ridge, and under our feet smaller scale treats - obsidian galore! Progress across the plateau is slow as we indulge endless examination of the fragments. Tools made from this volcanic glass played a key role in the life of the Tahltan over thousands of years.



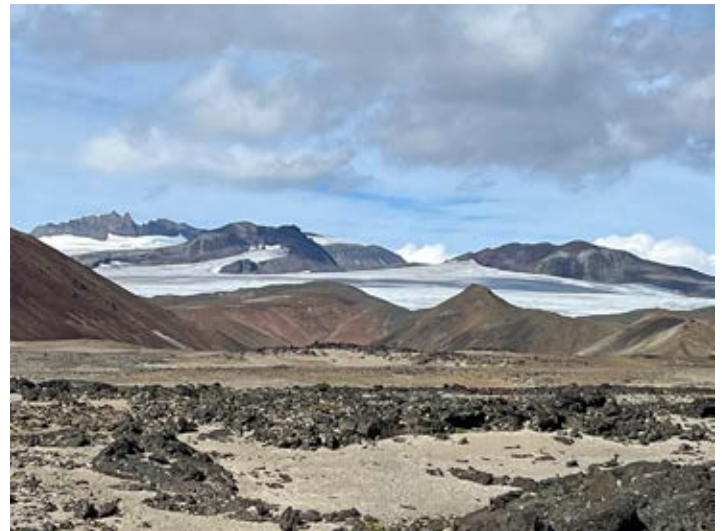
The entire area is a geologist's delight.



The colours just keep on changing and getting better.



It's a steep scree descent to our campsite by the lakes at Raspberry Pass. A storm blows in making it impossible to cook. But with two extra days' meals now to cover, a cold granola dinner is a good saving of our rations.



*Coffee Crater with the Tencho Glacier behind. We are now in the south part of Mount Edziza Provincial Park.
(Photo by Lyle Young)*



Up and over another plateau and across to Tadedá Peak. The scenery is glorious, the navigation is complex. Vivian takes time to take it all in.



*Our need for water determines that we camp near the foot of the glacier under Cocoa Crater. It's a very cold night and we wake to fresh snow.
(Photo by Lyle Young)*



The snow highlights every undulation in the volcanic sand as we skirt Cocoa Crater heading north on the Big Raven Plateau. (Photo by Lyle Young)



The north end of the park is characterised by cinder cones and increasingly lush vegetation. We've shaved a day off our itinerary in the last few days and have made our food and fuel last despite the delay at Nagha river. The float plane picks us up from Buckley Lake the next day. We leave this unique place with a mix of awe and gratitude for what we have experienced.



Another cold camp on the south side of Mount Edziza with the chilling effect of the katabatic wind from the glacier. (Photo by Lyle Young)

ACCVI Summer Camp at Wheeler Hut 2023

Cedric Zala

August 13-20, 2023



Mount Edziza shows off its 2786-metre bulk as we hike out through the dramatic volcanic landscape on Day 11.

Building on our section's super-enjoyable 2022 hut camp at Lake O'Hara, we targeted Rogers Pass for our 2023 hut-based week in the mountains. We had booked The Wheeler Hut, which is accessible by car and just beyond the Illecillewaet Campground in Glacier National Park. The group was diverse, and included a few gentle-terrain hikers, many more who were interested in more challenging trails and scrambles, and one who was intent on mounting a full-on climb of Mount Sir Donald.

The lead-up to the camp was intense and trying – a string of really bad luck. A couple of days before the planned drive up, co-leader Geoff Bennett developed medical issues and needed to be hospitalized for tests and so had to withdraw – a huge loss. Then on the way up late on Saturday afternoon, Cedric's recently rebuilt VW van broke down catastrophically on the Coquihalla Highway just north of Merritt. With



ACC's Wheeler Hut. (Photographer unknown)

a flurry of emails and tremendous support from the other participants we hatched an alternative plan, and eventually all the gear, and Cedric as well, were transferred to other up-bound cars on Sunday and so arrived safely at the Wheeler Hut by dinner-time. What a start!

But after that it was all up-beat! Each successive day offered many different (and thankfully far less dramatic) wonderful self-guided trips. Here's a sample of some of the hikes, etc., our members got up to during the week (and there were many, many more).

- Monday: Russ led a group of seven up to Abbott Ridge on this very hot day. The views were wonderful but the going was tough in the extreme heat. Meanwhile a ladies group drove down-valley and then up to Mount Revelstoke Park, where they enjoyed a hike and a swim in Miller Lake. This option allowed access to the alpine without first having to hike up 600+ metres, and later in the week several groups opted for this lower-impact drive-and-hike, some with a relaxing stop at Albert Canyon Hot Springs.

- Tuesday: Two groups took the Avalanche Crest trail. One, led by Sylvia, left early with the aim of scouting out and if possible summiting Avalanche Peak, while the other, led by Cedric, wanted to reach the bowl below Eagle and Avalanche Peaks. Meanwhile Mike led a group up to the Asulkan Cabin.

- Wednesday: Leaving at 2:20 a.m., Chad led a party of two up the NW ridge of Mount Sir Donald (3284 metres). They ascended quickly but had to contend with a lot of smoke in the air. Once underway, the climbing was amazing, but eventually

the oppressive smoke and increasing winds led them to call it quits at 2950 metres and descend.

- Thursday: Mike, Sylvia, Janine, Becky and Ian descended from the Asulkan Cabin, while two parties went up the valley trail, one just to the final moraine where it steepened, and the other with the intention of going all the way up to the cabin. It did not go entirely as planned, as described in the following bit of doggerel:



- Bryan and Leona on the Avalanche Crest Trail with Asulkan Pass in the background. (Photo by Cedric Zala)*

An Asulkan Drama – a Rhymed Account of Thursday's Adventure

*Leona and Bryan and Cedric
decided to go for a look*

*On a smoky Thursday morning
along the Asulkan Brook.*

*On their way upstream they scoured the trail,
looking this way and that,*

*Hoping to solve the mystery of Mike's
missing Asulkan hat.*

*Alas, their efforts were thwarted,
so they looked with eyes agleam*

*At the many cascading waterfalls
that swelled the Asulkan stream.*

*Pushing relentlessly onward,
they finally reached a sill*

*Where the turbulent water flowed
under a bridge that spanned the Asulkan rill.*

*They awaited the down-bound party
while the rocks in the stream were a-crunchin',*

*And sat in a streamside hollow
and ate their Asulkan luncheon.*

*With the two alpine parties united,
they soon heard a clatter - the feet*

*Of the up-bound party, but one of their group
was down with Asulkan heat!*

*The unfortunate member was ambushed!
And although his arms he did flail,*

*He was right then conscripted to join the group
on the down-bound Asulkan trail.*

*Overall then, the endings were happy
and we came back alive and friends¹,*

*Looking after each other and doing what
we could in pursuit of our alpine ends.*



*Lise, Mike and Leona at Balu Pass.
(Photo by Cedric Zala)*

- Friday: The weather changed, with rain, cooler temperatures, and a thunderstorm, too. Valley walks were the order of the day.

- Saturday: Cedric led a group from the Visitor Centre in Rogers Pass to Balu Pass. The smoke was largely gone by then and it was a fabulous day for hiking, with stunning views from the pass. On the way back we happened upon a marmot on the trail, and had the totally unexpected experience of watching her nurse one of her pups right there in front of us. Back at the Wheeler Hut, Mike and Becky saw a young grizzly on the road right outside the hut! Later, during the traditional evening last-night party, Bryan and Cedric sang "I Gotta Get a Woman with a Chain Saw" and then Ian gave the most amazing juggling demonstration with red glow-balls in the darkened room. And finally Mike recited "The Ballad of Idwal Slabs" to great peals of laughter.

Thanks so much to everyone who attended. It was a shame that some people had to leave early due to smoke and other happenstances that arose at the last minute. I'm particularly grateful that the group pulled together so willingly at the start of the trip, when my van broke down and the organization of the trip threatened to come apart at the seams. But people enthusiastically got involved and the camp went off very well.

¹ ACCVI's motto is:

(1) Come back alive; (2) Come back friends; (3) Respect the land; (4) Have fun; (5) Get to the top (in that order!)

Participants: Bruce Batchelor, Ian Brown, Janine Buckley, Scott Collins, Nikki Ducharme, Lise Gagnon, Mike Hubbard, Abe Johnson, Chad Katunar, Fred Katunar, Bryan Kingsfield, Cheryl Milne, Russ Moir, Lynne Moorhouse, Sylvia Moser, Becky Noble, Roger Painter, Bruce Patterson, Shaun Peck, Siobhan Wagner, Leona Winstone, and Cedric Zala

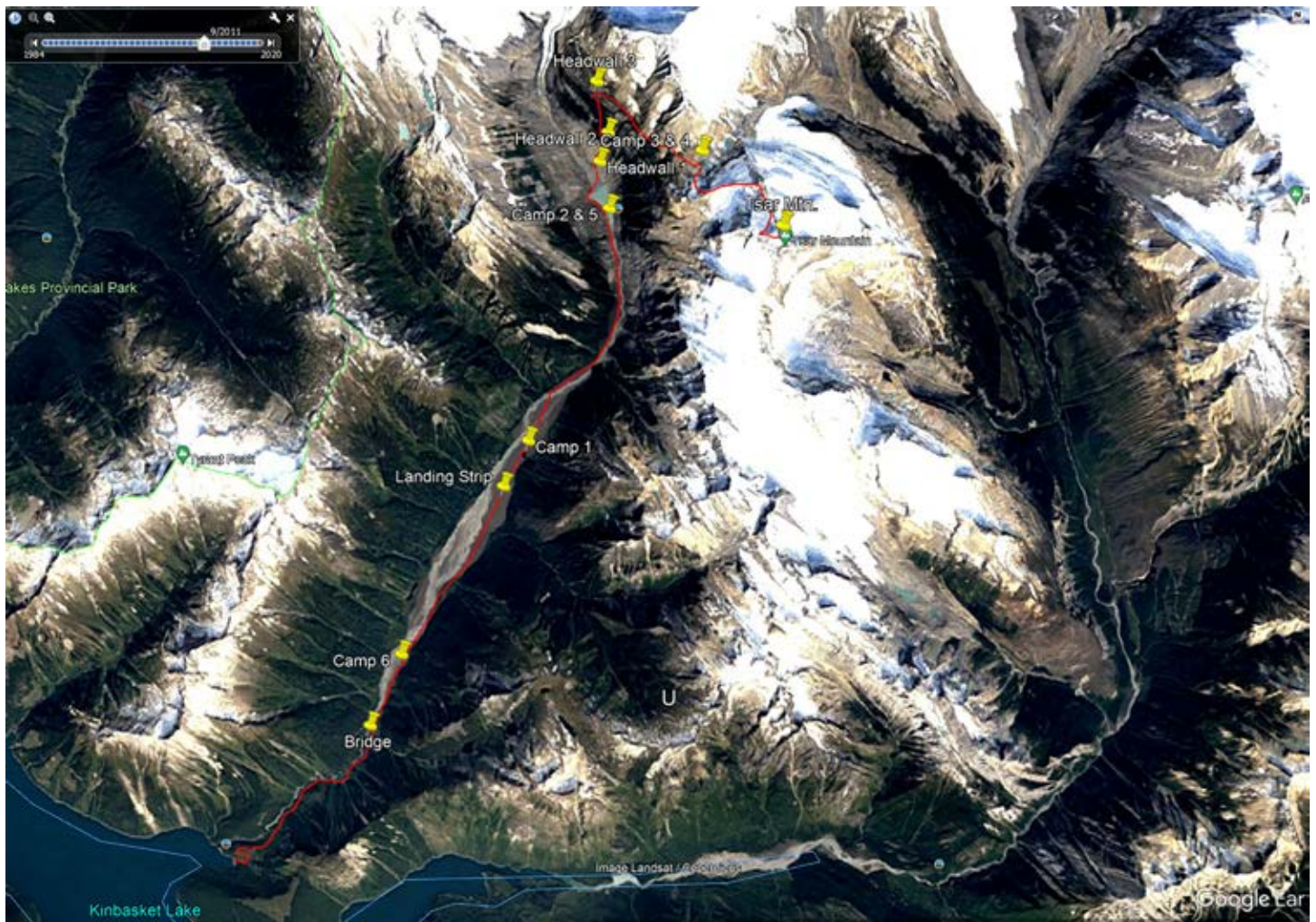
Tsar Mountain Via the Kinbasket River Valley

Jim Everard

August 24-31, 2023

In the late 1990s, Tsar Mountain was one of the easiest for self-propelled access in the Clemenceau Range. That changed with the decommissioning of the Sullivan Forest Service Road circa 2005 (access from the west), and the bridge washout over the Athabasca River in Jasper National Park circa 2013 (access from the east). Since these events, guidebooks such as Bill Corbett's *11,000ers of the Canadian Rockies* (2nd Ed.) have labelled Tsar Mountain as the "most inaccessible."

Undeterred by this inaccessibility, a few climbers pushed 5+ day approach routes in from the Icefields Parkway, some via Wooley shoulder down into the Black Hole and Habel Creek then west through complex terrain. Their egress included bushwhacking via Fortress Lake and Chisel Pass.



*Approximate path during our Tsar Mountain ascent.
(Prepared by Blair Piggot)*

Blair Piggot and I had considered climbing Tsar Mountain from the Icefields Parkway or repeating the 2008 effort of Rich Gebert who paddled from the Mica Dam area, into the Wood Arm and bushwhacked/hiked in. But what repeatedly caught our eye was access from the west via the Kinbasket Arm and River. The fact that there was no record of reaching the summit of Tsar from this approach matched our affinity for less-travelled terrain.

A small part of the approach puzzle was potentially solved in 2021 when a logging road was gouged into the slopes on the east side of Kinbasket Lake, 20 kilometres past the end of the previous network of Forest Service Roads (FSR). This brought the total distance along the Bush River FSR, Sullivan River FSR and Kinbasket extension to over 145 kilometres or about 3-4 hours of driving, depending on road conditions and logging traffic.

Weather was another puzzle piece. Too much precipitation could doom any effort in multiple ways, from impassible river crossings to deep snow. Too little precipitation and record heat might

close the backcountry due to fire hazard. In any event, the summer of 2023 was dry, hot and smoky.

The last potential hurdle was finding a way up the 1000 metre “headwall” at the end of the Kinbasket River valley.

We began the approach and climbing challenge in mid-August by driving the FSRs. Our VHS mobile radio regularly squawked traffic information such as “Bush, 75 Down, Loaded.” The Sirius satellite radio network delivered songs (from its crusty Classics selection) only about 25% of the time, owing to the steep mountainside. What reached our ears was sort of amusing (and sort of not), including:

Three Dog Night’s:

Mama told me not to come.

Mama told me not to come.

That ain’t the way to have fun son

Paul McCartney:

*If I ever get out of here
Thought of giving it all away
To a registered charity
All I need is a pint a day
If I ever get outta here*

About 12 kilometres from our destination, we were forced to stop at a plugged culvert which had diverted water, soil and stone across the road forming a deep gelatinous mass. Even with Blair's 4x4 truck there was no guarantee of passage. One and a half hours of work included road building, determining the depth of the detritus and outlining a possible runway. It worked. But then it begged the question: were we just entering a self-made trap for the return trip?

The end of the road was reached after 8 p.m. near the Kinbasket River drainage, so our start would have to wait till the next morning. For the following two days, we hiked with aching heavy packs in and beside the Kinbasket River.



*Towards clarity in the Kinbasket River.
(Photo by Jim Everard)*

The hot daytime temperatures meant that river crossings favoured the lower flow of the mornings. Passage was mostly via the wide, (mostly) tree-free valley bottom with the occasional sign of moose and grizzly. The once plentiful caribou (pre-Mica inundation days) were noticeably absent. Noticeably present were the clever Kinbasket "armour-plated" blackflies. 'Clever' because they had figured out that during crotch deep river crossings they could swarm your temple area then drill and bore their way in knowing your attention was laser focused on staying upright, walking poles vibrating in the swift moving current.



*Up the moraine below the headwall.
(Photo by Jim Everard)*

On Day 3 we weaved up the 1000 metre headwall, a route we had recce'd the previous year. Dozens of waterfalls streaked down the eastern limestone wall, some tumbling over edges from the upper plateau while some shot out halfway down wall. We reached the plateau at an elevation of 2,000 metres and hiked south, past Summerville on our left with Tsar Mountain increasingly filling the view to the south. By day's end we set up a lakeside camp. I was pretty knackered, sore and circumspect, even after partial rehydration and a good weather forecast. It was probably this dulled state that contributed to a slow realization that someone other than Blair was talking. Other people? We didn't hear the helicopter? "Jim? Blair?" came the question from behind us. It turned out that Bryce Brown and Sunny Twekler had also traced their path up the Kinbasket River (having read a note left on our truck dashboard). The coincidence was astonishing. They were fit and efficient, covering the approach in two days. We compared experiences and plans for the next day. I was immediately heartened by the thought of another party on this mountain; it just felt good. They returned to their tent, some 900 metres away.

At 4 a.m. the moonless morning revealed thousands of white pin holes in the otherwise inky darkness. With jitters and anticipation, we choked down our predawn gruel and drinks. It was nautical dawn when we began the grinding 400-metre ascent up the West Spur of Tsar Mountain. (Ascent line #16, p. 388, in David Jones' *Rockies West Guidebook*). Halfway up, we could see the headlights of Sunny and Bryce making slow and steady progress on a nearby rib which also led to the West Spur. We traversed this spur to where it Lego'ed into the North Ridge (the ridge that is unmistakable when seen anywhere from the east).



*Tsar Glacier and North Ridge.
(Photo by Blair Piggot)*

We waited a few minutes for Sunny and Bryce and, after a few brief exchanges, began to work together as a team. The terrain proved loose, with mostly 4th class climbing and a few steps of low 5th class. By 10 a.m. we were high on the mountain with unrestricted views to the east. Old friends revealed themselves, but with new features, faces and unfamiliar slopes -- a grand sweep that included Rockies giants such as Mount Fryatt, Mount Columbia, Mount King Edward, Mount Alberta, and west to the Adamant Range of the Selkirk Mountains.

We cramponed across the Tsar's North Face about 400 metres below the summit. Everyone's second ice axe was put to work to surmount the bergschrund. The crumbling rock towers of the Northwest Ridge were all that remained, and by noon we were all on the summit. Almost two glorious hours were spent there, slack-jawed by the views, absorbed in the moment. We were humbled and thrilled.



*Ukraine Above Tsar Mountain
beyond Putin over Authoritarianism.
(Photo by Jim Everard)*

I had another objective on my "to do" list. I wanted to acknowledge and recognize how absurd it felt to be on a mountain named Tsar in 2023. Russia's unprovoked and ongoing war with Ukraine had been modelled on and inspired directly from Tsarist strategy, a fact that I could not shake in the lead up to this trip. The peak was assigned the name Tsar in the mid-1920's by A.O. Wheeler, then President of the Alpine Club of Canada. His selection of this name reflected post-World War I British imperialist orthodoxy. But fast forward to 2023 and this name presents a conundrum: it brings attention to a repressive, authoritarian and expansionist regime, but it also stands out as an educational opportunity to showcase these facts. Trying to straddle this duality, I flew the Ukrainian flag over Tsar Mountain then added a few lines to the summit register:

UKRAINE: Over Tsar, Beyond Putin, Above Authoritarianism

(A more detailed account of this aspect of the trip can be found in ACC's *Aspects* publication at <https://blog.alpineclubofcanada.ca/blog/2023/11/15/ukraine-over-tsar-beyond-putin-above-authoritarianism>)



*Towards Snowy Pass.
(Photo by Bryce Brown)*

After an extended stay on the summit, we retraced our route. Many ice and rock sections were rapped, knowing the effects of fatigue at this stage of the day. Camp was reached about 6 p.m. Lying down was a sweet privilege.

Blair and I were deeply satisfied with reaching the summit and getting back safely. Equally, we were delighted to share the day with our new mountain friends. It was even better knowing we'd share time and the egress with them, too. We could show them an easier way down and continue to swap stories of other experiences in Canada and abroad.

The following morning, we packed up and heading out under indifferent skies and high spirits. Staccato

conversation ranged from experiences in Nepal to mountaineering gear to giardia. As we sauntered across the plateau towards a sea of glaciated peaks, I asked what song aligned with the recent experiences. For Blair, it was the Beatles “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds”. For me the frozen chicane of the Clemenceau echoed ELO’s “Can’t Get It Out of my Head.”

Soon after lunch we reached the cairn marking the start of our descent. Knees groaned audibly. Blair’s experience cruising timber proved invaluable as he picked the best lines down. By mid-afternoon we were experiencing the mercy of flat ground on the upper Kinbasket River valley. As expected, the river was growing ever-deepening channels with ever faster moving water. Getting to the other side (for our stash of gear and food) proved to be the most difficult crossing of the trip. Wisely Bryce and Sunny opted to stay on the east side and see how they might make progress. Blair and I returned to the campsite from three days earlier. A real mix of emotion played out: relief that we made it down the “headwall” when it was dry, and concern over the remaining river crossings, especially if the forecasted rain fell. The words of Wade Hemsworth (National Film Board) also began (again) to play in my head:

*’Twas blackfly blackfly everywhere,
A crawlin’ in your whiskers, a crawlin’ in your hair,
Always the blackfly no matter where you go,
I’ll die with the blackfly pickin’ my bones...*

Day six was one of slowing progress, crossing more river braids and positioning ourselves for the final push.

In my mind I’d imagined day seven to be some kind of easy going and celebratory affair, but shifting river channels had other designs. My personal notes caught the raw edge to the morning:

“At 6 a.m. we got up and headed into the water. Initially knee deep, then pants off and > than waist deep water and retreat into vegetation = 40 minutes of awful bushwhacking. Exhausted and bruised out the other side and continued with the pantless expedition. What a brutal exit.”



*Last day last crossing.
(Photo by Jim Everard)*

But at last, we reached a rudimentary trail partially cleared by Simon Lamberts, a.k.a. Foresty Forest as he calls himself. He is a selfless, thoughtful, authentic hiker/trailbuilder fueled by the love of the outdoor and sustained in his projects by income donated by many thousands of followers -- meaning only eight kilometres lay between us and the truck. Only now did we begin to really relax.

It was still afternoon when we got there. Sunny and Bryce had left a note on the windshield saying they had experienced a challenging exit of sketchy rock passages and rappels down forested and cliffy slopes. But still they got out the previous night.

That they did not greet us meant we did not have to be gripped about road conditions. It was time to gorge ourselves on salty snacks, rehydrate, and put this excellent adventure in the rear-view mirror.

Participants: Jim Everard and Blair Piggot

All the Ways to Get There

Shanda Lembcke

September 10-17, 2023

On a January evening in 2019 a group of Saltspringers gathered at the library to listen to mountaineering pioneer Rob Wood read from his new book *At Home in Nature*. He spoke of the life he and his wife Laurie have created on Maurelle Island. With a wide smile and bright eyes, he shared stories of explorations close to their home on the edge of the Coast Mountains. I didn't know it at the time, but these

stories and pictures of the catamaran Quintano that Rob and Laurie built to sail up inlets to access their remote and rugged "backyard" were the beginning of a new chapter for me. Sitting next to me, my husband Stefan, was realizing, upon seeing the humble catamaran in Rob's pictures, that his long-held dream of sailing a multihull could be attainable sooner than he'd hoped. A mere three months later we're road tripping down to LA to pick up the trailerable 24-foot folding catamaran found on Craigslist for the irresistible amount of \$1000. As we drive south, we have time to dream and scheme and I am beginning to understand that this basic boat is also our newest piece of mountaineering equipment.



*Picking up the newest piece of mountaineering gear in LA.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

Stefan sets to work most evenings fixing, refitting, painting, sanding, fiber glassing and I help wherever I can. This is a labour of love and I find myself believing in the process and trusting that we are investing time and money in the right place. It takes almost a year and the start of the pandemic until we launch Alice J for our maiden voyage in August 2020 up to Jervis Inlet. It's an understatement to say that we learned a lot on that first trip. Stefan has sailed quite a bit in his past, but I had only ever accompanied my Grandpa on his boat. The next two years we fill as much time as we can exploring and honing the systems. The mountains call as they do and we still plan trips up into the alpine but sailing, beachcombing, walking around little islands, swimming and enjoying sheltered anchorages start to take up more of our time. Still, the conversation often turns to places where we can possibly throw the anchor down and leave the boat while we head upwards to those beckoning ridgelines and peaks.

Throughout the past few years Stefan has corresponded with Rob and Laurie about their trips into the local area hoping to gather some beta on routes and places to safely leave the boat. This is our third summer on Alice J and we hope to be

able to explore farther north. The Wood's extend an invitation to drop in if we find ourselves close. We've moored the boat on Cortes Island for the summer and have taken several trips in the area. Sailing north of Cortes feels very different from the Gulf Islands - we are enchanted by the rocky shorelines where the mountainous mainland towers out from the deep waters and at every turn marine life jumps, slaps and splashes. Our little boat is made for these parts as we nimbly cruise the narrow channels and inlets and tuck into the shallow bays. We find The Wood's dock on a scorching hot afternoon and are glad to walk up the shady forested path that leads to their homestead. Rob and Laurie graciously welcome us and we spend a few hours with them looking through photo albums and maps of the area. They're interested to see the catamaran and so come down to the dock to bid us farewell. We sail away with a plan to go for a climb up into what Rob calls one of the most beautiful places in the world. Visiting Rob and Laurie at their homestead and seeing what years of work, dedication and love have created leaves us inspired and motivated to stay on the course we've set.



*Photos, maps and stories at Rob and Laurie Wood's.
(Photo by Shanda Lembcke)*

We're now close enough to be able to look up and see the slopes and ridgeline we will try to get to. As luck has it the forecast for the next two days is for heavy rain, but we are well prepared. I actually welcome the fresh rainwater after days on the salty sea. The rain comes down in torrents all night smacking on the roof of my sleeping cabin and I'm a bit sleepless wondering how much of a dense bushwhack I'm in for and how many grizzlies really are wandering up above the inlets that snake so far up into the mainland. Just to ease my worried mind the first thing I see in the morning when I pop my



*Discovery Islands channels.
(Photo by Shanda Lembcke)*

wet that there are dozens of rivulets rushing down the round slopes. Hiking up the grippy rock is a total treat for us southern Gulf Islanders and we both are energized by this special terrain. This is a scrambler's paradise with acres and acres of beautiful white granite spread as far as the eye can see.



*Scramblers paradise.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*



*Our ridgeline destination coming into view.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*

Now at 1500 metres with higher clouds we soak in the spectacular ocean to alpine panorama. Below we see the Discovery Islands and the bay where our boat is anchored for the night. Vancouver Islands peaks are on one side and on the other we see huge icefields up in the Coast Range.



*The way we came.
(Photo by Shanda Lembcke)*

head out is a very healthy black bear on the beach turning over rocks. I say hello and tell her we're just coming for a visit and thank her very much. Somehow this one-sided conversation calms my nerves. Alice J is securely anchored and we close the hatches, drop our overnight packs into the dingy and paddle over to land. The rain falls hard and steady, but we can walk the old logging road for a fair way with umbrellas and gain about 500 metres of elevation before the alder starts to thicken. I'm glad for the change of terrain when we reach the second growth forest. Weaving through, crossing a few small creeks the faint trail steepens, the ground is practically bouncy and soft and all the hues of green in this old growth forest feel restful to my eyes. The only sound is the pouring rain on my hood and our occasional call out "hey bear, heeey bear." At about 1000 metres we emerge from the forest and get a view of the open ridge. It is so

Here in this landscape, time seems to stop and I feel like I am exactly where I'm supposed to be.

tantalizing and naturally the conversation once again turns to future sea to sky objectives. The possibilities are endless and there are many ways to get there.

Participants: Stefan Gessinger and Shanda Lembcke



*Happy on the granite ridge.
(Photo by Shanda Lembcke)*



*Another trip another time.
(Photo by Shanda Lembcke)*

Many steps, tacks and gybes, conversations and plans have come together to get to this place, and I agree wholeheartedly with Rob Wood. This is one of the most beautiful views in the whole world. As the sun begins to set, we head back down to our shelter. Again, the rain is torrential all night. In the morning, we accept that we will be soaked as soon as we re-enter the blueberry and salmonberry zone. Within minutes our shoes squish and we have fully embraced this watery element. The small creek we crossed yesterday has transformed and is swollen from all of the rainwater and so we carefully cross the fast moving almost waist high rapids fully clothed because at this point, we can't get any more wet than we are. After a few more soggy hours we are back aboard Alice J with dry layers and foul weather gear on. I pull the anchor and we motor away through the black water and grey drizzle. A day later the sun has come out and Stefan and I bask in the warmth on one of the huge granite boulders that make up the shoreline of Prideaux Haven in Desolation Sound. As our wet gear dries on deck, we cook a warm meal while gazing over at the view we have of Mount Denman. The vantage from our anchorage is



*Alice J Prideaux Haven in Desolation Sound.
(Photo by Stefan Gessinger)*



DISTANT PLACES



For centuries savage weather and wars took their toll on those who lived along the coast. A beautiful monument of a mother and child waiting for a loved one's return is a reminder of the harsh reality of life along the Costa da Morte. (Photo by Wayne Saunders)

Another West Coast Trail, Spain's Lighthouse Way

Wayne Saunders and Erna Burda

May 12-23, 2023

Between 12 - 21 May 2023, we [Wayne and Erna] spent 10 days hiking the Light House Way route along the Costa da Morte in Spain. The Lighthouse way is a 200-kilometre-long series of life saving trails that connect the lighthouses and villages along the west coast of Spain between Malpica in the north and the Fisterra lighthouse at the south end. The weather was typically sunny, cool and windy. This trip took place at the end of a 7-week hiking and cycling trip in Spain. We were able to leave our cycling gear at the Hotel Rua Villar in Santiago De Compostela. Our other luggage was transferred between accommodations by taxi so we just carried our daypacks along the route.

We stayed in bed and breakfast hotels, hostels and guest houses. The proprietors usually provided a packed lunch. In the evening, we ate at restaurants in the villages. In more remote areas dinner was provided by our hosts. Most nights we found ourselves enjoying Galician seafood.

Note: There are only two quiet beaches along this route. All the other beaches have strong or moderate waves and are not recommended for swimming unless a lifeguard is present.



Our route largely followed the coastal trails that pilgrims take to reach the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. (Photos by Wayne Saunders)





The route starts in the north at Malpica then to Ninons beach, Corme, Lax, Orou, Camarinas, Cereixo, Muxia, Lires and finally Finisterre with the night spent in Fisterra.
 (Photo by Wayne Saunders)

In May the route is blooming with wild flowers:
 (consider the flower names a best guess):



Sea Fig.
 (Photo by Erna Burda)



Common Gorse at Punta Nariga lighthouse.
 (Photo by Wayne Saunders)



Heather.
 (Photo by Erna Burda)



A serene sea of wild flowers.
 (Photo by Wayne Saunders)



Myrtaceae.
(Photo by Erna Burda)



Asphodel.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)



Malpica.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)



Casa Luz.
(Photo by Erna Burda)



The route to Ninon's beach.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)

The route follows the coastline using accommodations in the small villages along the way.

The route also varies from hiking back roads, sandy beaches, scrambles across rocky outcroppings and along hillsides covered with ferns.

The trip ends at the Finisterre light house, the westernmost point of the Spanish mainland.



*The route to Ninon's beach.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*



*Approaching Playa de Soesto.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*



*Along the route to Laxe.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*



*Camarena's headlands.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*



*Near Canduas.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*



*Camarena's headlands.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*



*Camarena's headlands.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*



*Finisterre lighthouse.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*



*Waterfront at the Muxia lighthouse.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*

Tour arrangements were made by On Foot Holidays UK. On Foot Holidays arranged accommodations and taxis to pick us up from the trail heads and returned us to the trail head the next day. They also provided detailed Topo maps, route finding instructions with an alternate route for vertigo sufferers, a GPX file we used with GAIA GPS and most importantly daily cell phone contact with an English-speaking local.

Participants: Wayne Saunders and Erna Burda

Wayne and Erna are seniors living in Vancouver. They have a long history with the BCMC and membership in the ACC Vancouver section. They joined the ACCVI section a few years ago in order to attend the ACCVI summer camps when spots were available.



*Nemina beach.
(Photo by Wayne Saunders)*

Peaks of the Balkans

Catrin Brown

June 4-14, 2023

There are not many regions of the world that have given rise to their own verb in the English language. So "to balkanise" - "the break up of a region into smaller and often hostile units" (from Merriam Webster) - is a pretty stark reflection of the tumultuous history of the Balkan peninsula. And I think it fair to say that my perspective on the region was previously dominated by its complex history. Happily though, that view broadened significantly - and wonderfully - when we actually spent time there.

Our story started with a chance reading of an article promoting a relatively new trail, the so-called *Peaks of the Balkans*. “Go soon” was the subtext, as it became clear this was about to become very popular. Conceived as a cross-border, circular route through spectacular mountain landscapes in Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo, the trail passes through high passes, remote valleys, and alpine lakes. It clocks just over 200 kilometres in distance and 10,250 metres of accumulated elevation.



Our track on Google Earth.

The route is broken down into obvious stages by the mountain villages, where accommodation and food are provided in traditional homestays. The trail was developed by GIZ, the German development corporation, in order to encourage sustainable local tourism in these mountainous areas and to help foster cooperation across political borders. It is only recently that many of the villages have seen foreigners as the area was off limits for travel for so many years. So here is a chance to explore a whole new mountain region with a moderately challenging trek and a light pack – what’s not to like?

Well, plenty on Day 1 as it turned out. As we got off the bus from Podgorica, Montenegro’s capital, to start our trek in Plav we met a couple of fellow hikers from Germany. They were quite emotional and warned us they had turned back after encountering too much snow on the route, and had scared themselves with a very nasty fall. It got worse when we heard reports of two fatalities on the route just a few weeks ago – the same thing, two young women tragically slipping off the steep trail on snow. So, we spent a glum afternoon listening to the rain on the roof of a café in town, and researching escape options to the Adriatic Coast. The forecast was downgraded from miserable to awful, and there was no libation to warm our spirits, for Plav is a Muslim town with no alcohol served.

Daunted but unbowed, we set off the next day determined to find out for ourselves whether we really

were too early in the season. Within hours of climbing we emerged into a glorious mountain landscape, with vistas of peaks and passes, most of which we would encounter again in the coming days. The route was clearly navigable and the flowers were unbelievable. I don’t think I’ve ever seen entire hillsides of crocuses and gentians to rival this show.



Erich looking up at Prosloppit Pass from the summit ridge of Vrh Bora in Montenegro. We will cross this from the Albanian side in a few days’ time. (Photo by Catrin Brown)



As the snow recedes, the flowers take over. (Photo by Catrin Brown)

The trail stayed in Montenegro for the first few days, passing through the spectacular Prokletije mountains - ‘the accursed mountains’ according to folklore. This area is now a national park, boasting spiky peaks which reminded us strongly of the Italian Dolomites. Glaciation occurred here at a lower elevation than in the Alps further north, so the valleys are broader and karst features are prominent. These were some of our longest and favourite days of the 10-day trek, completely turning the tide on any sense that we had come at the wrong time of the year. It was so

quiet on the trail, the guest houses all had vacancies and warm welcomes – and the flowers. Yes, I have to keep mentioning the flowers! There were other times when we were warned that snow would make it dangerous, including one guesthouse where the owner implored us not to go on. Understandably, the locals were likely extra concerned because of the early season tragedies.



Early June and parts of the trails were covered in snow. It meant we had the route almost to ourselves. Erich is the solitary figure on the traverse. (Photo by Catrin Brown)

We crossed from Montenegro into Albania on our third day, via the Ropojana Valley and the high pass Qafa e Pejës before descending to the village of Theth. The border is marked by an innocuous concrete marker, and although we had obtained a cross-border permit as required, it was never checked on the whole trek.



Erich relaxing on the Montenegro-Albania border in Prokletije Park. (Photo by Catrin Brown)



The steep descent into Theth. You get a sense of scale if you look closely and can find Erich hiking down. He needs a coloured shirt. (Photo by Catrin Brown)

Albania and Montenegro both have candidate status to join the EU, and the Euro is the currency here and in Kosovo. The guesthouses were a unique feature of the trip, ranging from farmhouses and shepherds' huts to small hotels. More than once we turned up unannounced and soaked from an afternoon thunderstorm, and were made welcome in front of a roaring fire with the family. The younger generation spoke good English, and proudly acted as translators for their parents. Food was almost always home-grown and freshly prepared, and included a 'lunch packet' for the next day's hike. Actually, this was essential because we only passed through one village with provisions in the entire trip. And no desserts, or chocolate, for love nor money!

We stayed in Albania for several days, crossing over the Valbona Pass and north to the remote settlement of Doberdol. Occupied only in summer months, this is a beautiful location below the point where the borders of Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro meet. The route took us up to a high pass just west of Tromedja 2366 m, also known as Three Borders Peak. From here we negotiated several passages of snow before gaining



*In Albania the trail passes several little bunkers like this. Apparently, the former Communist leader Enver Hoxha had around half a million of them built between 1967 and 1986 as defence against a possible invasion. Not a bad place to be stationed.
(Photo by Catrin Brown)*



*Beautiful forests and lakes in Kosovo.
(Photo by Catrin Brown)*

glorious and very long day took us to Qafa e Jelenkut, the highest point of the route before we closed the loop southwards back to Plav.



*Erich and Catrin at Qafa e Jelenkut, 2300m near the end of the trail. You can see how it was impossible not to stand on the gentians.
(Photo by Catrin Brown)*

the border ridge at about 2200 m where at times our right foot must have been in Kosovo and our left in Montenegro. Eventually the trail took us steeply down into Kosovo.



*These mountain ranges are known for their rich biodiversity. This is a small sample of our daily delights.
(Photo by Catrin Brown)*

For the next few days, the route in Kosovo stays pretty high, though the peaks have a gentler profile. There were quiet reminders of the difficult history of the region in wayside memorials, made all the more poignant by photographs of the young soldiers. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, and a majority of its people identify as ethnically Albanian. We had some of our best encounters with local people in Kosovo.

The trail is a figure of eight circuit, which means we retraced our steps in the opposite direction for a short while over the Kosovo-Montenegro border ridge. One

Every day on the trail was distinct, with approximately 1000-metre elevation change to cover from valley to pass. At low elevations the deciduous forests, mostly beech and white oak, were freshly opened and vibrant. Higher up were the alpine species such as juniper and blueberries, with flower-filled meadows and rocky scree slopes above. The bird song was a delight, and we could almost have set our clock by a cuckoo calling every day. With almost equal reliability, we were well rinsed by a thunderstorm most afternoons.

The Peaks of the Balkans Trail is quickly becoming very popular, and for good reason. It offers wild and rugged scenery, challenging but accessible trails, and glorious flora and fauna. And perhaps our favourite take-aways were the seamless borders and the people sharing their pride in how their region can now be enjoyed by visitors.

Participants: Erich Schellhammer and Catrin Brown

Just a Taste

Rowan Laver

November 22-25, 2023

There is a track in Australia called the “Australian Alps Walking Track” (AAWT). It starts in Victoria in a town called Walhalla and traverses the alpine areas of Victoria and NSW to end near Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory (if you go from South to North). It is 655 kilometres long and is challenging due to the terrain, navigation and that it doesn’t pass through any towns. It crosses several roads where food drops can be placed and passes close to Mount Hotham ski resort (the place to go to ski steep powder in winter).



“Feathertop, great winter skiing” (Photo Downloaded from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/australionalps/6954941667>, Parks Australia, photographer unknown)

It had vaguely floated around in the back of my mind for many years. It was only when Janelle’s Mum gave me a recent book about the track *From Snow to Ash* by Anthony Sharwood that I suddenly gave it a lot more thought.

Years ago, when I was a teenager, I walked into Tin Mine Huts with a couple of mates. I remember one night lying in my tent thinking about how remote and far out there we were. What if I got appendicitis in the night? What then? We were rock-climbing by then and it was all part of poking our heads out of the comfort zone and confronting fear. (Even though I didn’t think of it that way then. I just remember being scared most of the time. These were pre-harness, pre-cams and pre-sticky rubber days). Tin Mine Huts is a couple of days walk in on the far end of my planned trip and I was looking forward to revisiting those days.



Australian High Country.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)

I bought the “Bible” of the track (*Australian Alps Walking Track* by John Chapman) which is an almost essential guide for navigation. I then started planning to do just a portion of it, Mount Hotham ski resort to Dead Horse Gap near Thredbo ski resort. I figured that I could do it in 12-14 days. I then debated whether to place a food drop on the Omeo-Mitta Mitta Road or Benambra-Corryong or just carry 14 days of food and fuel. My old mate Shane, who I have climbed with for nearly 50 years, lives several hours away in Orbost and would be happy to meet me on one of these roads if needed.

I wanted to go in the spring while there was still a bit of snow around and a better chance of finding water.

I left Nanaimo and arrived at my sister’s farm near Murrumbateman on the 3 November (Wednesday).

I went into Canberra the next day (Thursday) and bought my food and fuel for 14 days.

The day after (Friday) I went with my sister Penny to see my mum in an aged care home in Yass. She had severe dementia and various physical problems starting to erode her quality of life, but she seemed

about the same as I had seen her recently. Penny and I went to the grocery store to buy some last-minute items for my trip.

Then my plans took a radical change of direction.

As we were about to enter the store, we had a call from my mum's aged care home saying that we should get back as soon as possible. She had started Cheyne-Stokes breathing and may only live a few more hours. We went back and my other sister Merran arrived too. Her breathing was as described but then stabilized. I spent the night in her room and then the next 10 nights. My sisters would come for the daytime and somehow it was good that we were all together for this time.

My mother didn't eat or drink for 12 days as she was heavily sedated. Eventually her body gave in, and we watched her take her last breath. My sisters and I spent the rest of the day with her in her room and then the process of paperwork and funeral arrangements started.

We knew that she wanted to be cremated so we decided to do that and then have a service a week or so later. I realized this was the time that I really needed to get out into the alpine alone. My sisters and nieces volunteered to go through old photos and put together a presentation of my mum's life and they sent me off.

I packed for four days and headed to Orbost to see Shane (and deliver the ritual duty-free whiskey).

He offered to drop me at Mount Hotham and then pick me up on the Omeo to Mitta Mitta Road. We drove up next morning and he walked the first few kilometres with me. Then he headed up to another peak on his own. It was great to be alone and walking in the alpine. I went through a big valley and past Dibbins Hut and as I topped out on the other side, I could hear the dingoes howling in the valley behind me. They had probably watched me go by. I felt smaller. Then I was attacked by the animal I fear most in Australia: an aggressive nesting magpie. It chased and swooped me for 500 metres until I was finally up on the Bogong High Plains, a vast alpine area above the treeline. I walked for several kilometres and then walked off the track 300 metres and set up my first camp.

The next day was a long one and as I walked alone across the High Plains my mind was finally allowed to roam. I also started to plan some words for Mum at her service. Walking on easy ground is for me the best time to think.

I camped at Ropers Hut which is just before the big drop into Big River. It was a beautiful spot despite another swooping magpie. I tried to camp as far from



*Setting off with Mount Feathertop in the background.
(Photo by Shane Carson)*



*Camp in the vast Bogong High Plains.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*

its nest as possible, but it would randomly swing over to my camp and remind me I was not welcome.

Next morning was a long hike down, wading Big River and then a long hike up the other side. Once there I made the decision to go climb Mount Bogong, which is the highest peak in Victoria and too hard for me to just walk past.



*Easy walking.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*



*Clev Cole Hut and my camp.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*



*Ropers Hut.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*



*Mount Bogong.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*

I hiked up to and set up camp at Clev Cole Hut, which is a nice hut maintained by the local skiers. The huts are the preferred place to camp as there is usually water available. I set up my tent and headed up to Mount Bogong just as a "Big Rain Event" was starting. I was back to my camp before dark and cooked in the hut because it was blowing hard and pouring rain. It rained all night, and the forecast was for much more rain in the next couple of days.

The next morning, I decided to bail down the north side of Mount Bogong. I sent an inReach message to Shane to see if he could pick me up on the north side somewhere. I went up to Mount Bogong summit again and then started down. It was 1300 metres down to the road in torrential rain. I hitched a ride to Mount Beauty and Shane picked me up during a violent thunderstorm. We drove the five hours home to his place, had dinner at 11:00 p.m. and then sampled his whiskey selection till 2:30 a.m.



*Whiskey time.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*

I was up early and drove all day back to my sisters' place and looked at all the history my sisters and

nieces had unearthed about our Mum. Mainly photos. We had a few good laughs. My niece Aulikki has the skills and an artful eye, and she put it all together.

The service was nice, and I said my bit (despite that being way out of my comfort zone). Another violent thunderstorm at the end. My mother loved the rain, and this was appropriate timing.

The AAWT is a challenging and rewarding way to see some of the Australian Alps. I had only the opportunity to see a small portion of it and one day I may try to walk some more of it or all of it. I still have a barrel of food that needs to be used.

If anyone is interested in this “through-hike,” I’d be happy to part with any knowledge I have.

Participant: Rowan Laver

Shanks Pony in Patagonia: the Chiloe Archipelago and Rapa Nui

Liz Williams

November / December, 2023

South America is like nothing I’ve ever seen before! Every shrub, grass, tree, and animal are different.

The Argentine part of Patagonia comprises all the southern provinces of Rio Negro, Neuquén, Santa Cruz, Chubut, and Tierra del Fuego. My first introduction to Patagonia was the Patagonian Steppe of the Valdes Peninsular, Chubut. The Steppe is a very dry, endlessly flat, treeless area with desert shrubs and tuft grasses. It was there that I first saw guanacos (*Lama guanicoe*), the second largest camelid after the llama. They were all over the road. I also met the Magellanic Penguin (unbearably cute, in the world’s largest breeding colony at Punto Tombo. I also saw the Rufous-collared sparrow, the Elegant-crested Tinamou, and everywhere the small Chimango Caracara (a falcon). Being flat and a bit thorny the terrain was far from challenging.

From the Valdes Peninsular I flew to the mountainous region of Tierra del Fuego. My first Ushuaia hike was to Laguna Esmerelda, part of the Magellanic Deciduous Forest ecosystem. Here, Lenga and Nirre forests abound, both being types of Southern Beech, as well as the Canelo tree, sacred to the Mapuche tribe of Chile. I was told that there are more than



Punto Tombo.
(Photo by Liz Williams)

100,000 beavers destroying the local forests, the result of a Canadian introduction in 1946 in an attempt to start a fur industry. Beavers of course cut down trees, which in El Fin del Mundo grow very slowly. I also saw lots of Darwin’s fungus, *Cyttaria darwinii*, a parasite on the *Nothofagus* genus of trees (Southern beech), and looking like orange golf balls around a gall on a branch or trunk. It is known as Indian Bread because the indigenous Yahgan ate it, as I did too – it’s pretty tasteless.



Darwin’s fungus.
(Photo by Liz Williams)

I saw many new birds on my hike along the Beagle Channel including the Patagonian Sierra Finch, the Southern Crested Caracara, the Dolphin Gull, and the Magellan (or Upland) goose, always in pairs. The male will always mourn the loss of his lady, but the lady would find another mate. I had always thought Tierra del Fuego was named due to volcanic activity.

Not so: it's named after the Yahgan people who carried fire in their canoes. The crew of Magellan's ship, The Trinidad, saw fires everywhere along the shore. The Yahgan wore no woven clothes, only skins, and they slathered themselves with sealion grease. Their numbers decreased rapidly after colonization because constantly damp clothes caused their sickness.



*The Beagle Channel.
(Photo by Liz Williams)*

From Ushuaia I flew to El Calafate for the bus to El Chalten, which lies within Los Glaciares National Park. I did the Laguna de Los Tres hike to the base of Mount Fitzroy [also known as Cerro Chalten from a Tehuelche word meaning "smoking mountain" because a cloud usually forms around the peak], named after Vice-Admiral Robert Fitzroy, captain of the second voyage of the HMS Beagle during Darwin's famous voyage. At the age of 22, Darwin hoped to see the tropics before becoming a parson and accepted the opportunity, being told that the voyage would be two years, in fact it was nearly five.



Mount Fitzroy. (Photo by Liz Williams)

From El Calafate I had a boat trip to the Perito Moreno glacier – a simply 'Must-do' if you're in the area. It is a stunning sight, even for a gal from the frozen north, and was calving repeatedly into the Lago Argentino. The terminus of the Perito Moreno Glacier is 5 kilometres wide, with an average height of 74 metres above the surface of the water.



*Perito Moreno Glacier.
(Photo by Liz Williams)*

From El Calafate I crossed over into Chilean Patagonia. The two Chilean regions located entirely within Patagonia are Aysén and Magallanes. Torres del Paine (pronounced Pine-aye) means Towers in Spanish and Blue in the Tehuelche language. This was where I encountered the Pre-Andean Shrub Land, where plants have the ability to save water and survive Patagonia's fierce winds. Here you will find the Chilean Firetree, with its dark red flowers as well as the famed Calafate – everyone loves Calafate berry jam.

I'd hoped to hike to the base of the Towers but the Navimag ferry wanted us on board that night so sadly there simply wasn't time. That said, I did see a Patagonian fox harassing a bunch of baby rheas (their mother was having none of it) and a bit later, a PUMA no less! The landscape was breathtaking!

The Navimag ferry ran over four nights and three days, from Puerto Natales up to Puerto Montt. We passed through the channels of Angostura Inglesa and Santa Maria. We stopped at Puerto Eden to drop off supplies, and then on to view the wreck of the Cotopaxi, passing through the Golfo de Penas and an open ocean crossing for about 12 hours (I got a bit seasick), all with stunning views of the glaciers and ice-fields of Patagonia. Oddly we passed an island called Vancouver Island, and then Whidby and Chatham Islands!



Puma.
(Photo by Liz Williams)



The Torres.
(Photo by Liz Williams)

From Puerto Montt I came to the Chiloe Archipelago, where the Indigenous people were the Chonos in the south and the Huilleches in the north. The Huilleches were closely related to the Mapuche people (mapu - earth, che - people) who were one of the many American native groups who have strongly retained their beliefs, customs and identity. All through the Colonial period they maintained a stubborn resistance to the Spanish crown. This forced the administration to let them enjoy a certain autonomy.

I spent some time in Chiloe National Park with an excellent botanist learning about the different forest types, being mostly from three genera: Nothofagus, Mirtacea, and Protacea. He pointed out to me the various fragile ferns growing as epiphytes. We also found on the west coast beaches *Fragaria chiloensis*, the very same coastal strawberry that we have on Vancouver Island! Sadly, I never saw the little

Darwin's pointy-nosed frog (*Rhinoderma darwini*). It's an IUCN red-listed species (i.e. Endangered) but captive colonies have been established at two zoos in Chile, the National Zoo (working with the US Atlanta Botanical Garden) and the Concepción Zoo (working with Germany's Leipzig zoo). But one thing I DID see is a Southern Pudu! A very small deer, IUCN status: Vulnerable.



Fragaria.
(Photo by Liz Williams)



Pudu.
(Photo by Liz Williams)

From Chiloe via Santiago, I went to Rapa Nui, aka Easter Island, basically to chill out over Christmas and New Year. Despite the selective theories of Thor Heyerdahl who was convinced that Rapa Nui was colonized from South America, it's far more likely that it was colonized from Polynesia, possibly from the Marquesas. Rapa Nui has close to 10,000 inhabitants, and is a little bit smaller than Saltspring Island. The main town of Hanga Roa is a sleepy, somewhat ramshackle little place with bright bursts of colour

from the bougainvillea and hibiscus everywhere. The US built a full-size runway which spans the western side of Rapa Nui for a potential landing of the space shuttle.

A bit of history: of course, people come to Rapa Nui to see the unique Moai (pronounced Mweye) which represent the ancestors of ancient times. There are 887 Moai still on Rapa Nui with 397 of them remaining half buried at the quarry of Rano Raraku. They used to have a name, now they only have a number. The Ahu Moai phase was the classic era lasting from about 800 AD until the 17th Century. The Huri Moai phase followed, a period of inter-tribal wars when many Moai were toppled from their ahus (platforms), Rapa Nui being short on resources once it became deforested, and the local tribes could no longer build fishing boats.



*Tongariki.
(Photo by Liz Williams)*



*Rano Raraku.
(Photo by Liz Williams)*



*Tongariki.
(Photo by Liz Williams)*

collect the first egg of the season from the Sooty Tern, on the islet of Motu Nui, swim back to Rapa Nui, and scale the 300-metre cliff to Orongo village at the top of the Rano Kau volcano. How they ever did this is a miracle, given the sheer rock wall, and the turbulent rocky waters that I witnessed on a boat trip.

Rapa Nui has a lot more to offer than its history: walking; fierce cultural shows; horse-back riding; boat trips, diving and more. I very much enjoyed walking the hills around Tere Vaka, the highest point on Rapa Nui at 510 metres, which I repeated on horse-back.

Participant: Liz Williams (solo)

After the Huri Moai phase, the Tangata Manu (Birdman) ritual arose (Tangata - human; Manu - bird) which lasted from the 17th century until the catholic missionaries arrived in 1864. Like missionaries the world over, they replaced the indigenous ceremonies and rituals with their own. The winner of the annual Birdman competition was the first person who could





NOTES FROM THE SECTION



De-mystifying Septimus and Rosseau

Lindsay Elms

Ever since I can remember there has been uncertainty over the identity of Mount Septimus and Mount Rosseau, and some continue to perpetuate that confusion today. The name Mount Septimus has been around for at least one hundred years and is given to a peak in the heart of Strathcona Park. The range that encompasses Mount Septimus, Mount Rosseau and the Misthorns was known in 1896 as the Laing Neck Range, so called by William Bolton during his traverse of Vancouver Island in honour of his friend and benefactor John Laing. But the name never came into popular use. The first reference I found to Mount Septimus was an article by E.M. Young in 1924 (see 'Strathcona Park is Island Paradise of Nature Lover' *The Daily Colonist* on Sunday September 7, 1924, p.32.) It says: "South of Buttle Lake are Taylor Glacier, Big Interior Mountain, Mount Tyre [Mount Myra] and Mount Septimus, all between 6,000 to 6,500 feet in altitude." The next article was in September 1929. The mystery has always been why



John Gibson on the summit of Mount Rosseau 1974.
(Photo by Syd Watts)



Rano Kau crater.
(Photo by Liz Williams)



Tere Vaka.
(Photo by Liz Williams)



Hanga Roa.
(Photo by Liz Williams)

is Mount Septimus not the highest peak on the massif, but the slightly lower peak to the west? The highest point is known as Mount Rosseau and we will see why and when it was named in this account.

When I started gathering the mountaineering history for the Island in the early 1990's, I was asked by Rick Eppler and Rob Macdonald which summit was Mount Septimus? We all know the contribution they made to climbing on the island and the knowledge they accumulated over the years, but they were unsure. They weren't the only ones. Gil Parker, who edited and revised the *Hiking Trails* series of books in the 2000s, at one point also asked me the same question. He was wondering if the book, *Hiking Trails III: Central and Northern Vancouver Island* had the peaks marked correctly. All the editions of the book beginning in 1975 marked Mount Septimus as the lower west summit and the highest point on the ridge Mount Rosseau.



I knew where Rick and Rob's query was coming from. In Dick Culbert's 1974 book *Alpine Guide to Southwestern British Columbia* there are a few pages covering Vancouver Island. For Mount Septimus, he has credited the first ascent to Ralph Rosseau, but gives no date. However, the most glaring note is that he says Mount Septimus is 6400-feet while Mount Rosseau is the lower peak at 6003-feet.

Mt. Septimus (6400)

A group of 7 rocky peaks at the head of Price Cr.

1st ascent, - R. Rosseau

The SW side of this group may be reached by crossing S from Cream Lake. The peaks are short rock scrambles from this side. The 4th peak from NW is highest, and one on the S has been named Mt. Rosseau (6003). The group may also be approached by crossing from Flower Ridge, presenting slightly steeper defenses on this side. A fairly strenuous weekend trip.

Nowhere in the book does he mention his source of information. Culbert did climb on Vancouver Island a couple of times, but he was primarily a Coast Mountain climber. His guidebook was the first of many that would be built upon and expanded throughout the years by others. They were, and still are, bibles for some climbers. Guidebooks do have erroneous information at times. Culbert's book credits Frank Stapley and Dave Williamson as the first to climb Victoria Peak in 1961, while in *Island Alpine: A Guide to the Mountains of Strathcona Park and Vancouver Island* published in 2003 it says Syd Watts, Otto Winnig et al in the 1950s. Although Culbert had the right climbers, he had the year wrong, it was 1960. Watts, Winnig et al climbed Victoria Peak a few weeks after Stapley and Williamson. All errors can be corrected with later editions, although at the time they do create confusion. Bruce Fairley in his 1986 guide book *A Guide to Climbing & Hiking in Southwestern British Columbia* has a small section on Vancouver Island but has just used Culbert's information with some recent data from Bob Tustin.



When I first arrived and started climbing on the island, my go-to book was *Hiking Trails III* because it had maps indicating trails and climbing routes. The beautiful postcard (remember them) of Cream Lake and Mount Septimus taken by Stuart Lister, inspired many hikers and climbers in the years before Facebook. Cream Lake still is one of the most popular hiking destinations in Strathcona Park and was where the Vancouver Island section of the Alpine Club of Canada wanted to build a hut in the 1970s. I told Rick and Rob that Mount Septimus was the slightly lower summit to the west of the highest peak. I had visited Janet Mason several times, beginning in 1992, at her office with the B.C. Geographic Names department in Victoria, and in the files on the Origin Notes and

History for Mount Septimus I found the following which is now on their website:

Adopted by the government on August 5, 1948, as labelled on B.C. map 2A, 1913 et seq, and as identified in the 1930 B.C. Gazetteer.

As for its name there are two sources:

By some, thought to be descriptive - Septimus being a mountain of seven peaks." (List of Place Names in Strathcona Park, compiled by Allan C. Brooks, and reprinted in "Natural & Human History Themes, Strathcona Provincial Park" a special report produced by Betty Brooks for B.C. Parks Branch, 1989.)

And:

Possibly named after Septimus Evans, surgeon aboard S.S. Beaver." (note that this assumption is likely made because of the mountain's proximity to Price Creek and a mistaken assumption that Price Creek was named for Captain John Price, H.M.S. Scout, under whom Septimus Evans was surgeon before joining the hired vessel Beaver under Captain Daniel Pender, 1868.)

All topographical maps are linked with the information from the B.C. Geographic Names office, including the 1:50,000 and 1:20,000 maps that climbers use. Unfortunately, the sources weren't definitive about the origin of the name Septimus. Once the internet was operating (that makes me sound like a dinosaur) I was able to do a google search for Septimus Evans. I found Derek Pethick's book *S.S. Beaver: The Ship That Saved the West Coast* (1970) and James Delgado's *The Beaver: First Steamship on the West Coast Victoria, B.C.* (1993), but there was nothing useful in either. There wasn't much I could find anywhere about Septimus Evans. Eventually I found his name associated with the steam sloop *H.M.S. Doterel*. *The Doterel* was launched in 1880, commissioned in December and left Sheerness Harbour near the mouth of the river Thames on 17 January 1881. Under the command of Commander Richard Evans, she arrived in Punta Arenas (Chile) on 26 April 1881 to take on coal. An hour later an internal explosion destroyed the ship sending her to the

bottom in three minutes, killing 147 of her 155 crew, including Staff Surgeon Septimus Evans.

After delving further, I found a relative of Septimus Evans – Christine Clifford. I emailed her and asked if she had any information on Septimus Evans' time on Canada's West Coast and Vancouver Island. She didn't have anything but was intrigued and said she would probe into his history herself. She eventually forwarded the following information to me which wasn't anything startling:

The Canadian Geographical Names Database in Ottawa states that Mount Septimus in Victoria, British Columbia was possibly named after Septimus Evans, surgeon aboard the *S.S. Beaver* and that this assumption is likely made because of the mountain's proximity to Price Creek and a mistaken assumption that Price Creek was named for Captain John Price, *H.M.S. Scout*, under whom Septimus Evans was a surgeon before joining the vessel *Beaver* under Captain Pender, 1868. There is no mention that I could find of who did the naming, or when. Could it possibly have been Captain Pender?
See next item.

Evans Arm, Fisher Channel. Named after Septimus Evans, R.N. by Captain Daniel Pender (nav. lieut., R.N., *Beaver*, 1867).

The *Beaver* was the first steamship to operate in the Pacific Northwest of North America. She was chartered by the Royal Navy for surveying the coastline of British Columbia.

I [Christine Clifford] feel confident that this is our Septimus Evans. The Navy Lists have him appointed as Acting Assistant Surgeon to the *H.M.S. Scout* (Pacific) under Captain John A. P. Price on 02 November 1867; page 50, no. 268. In *The Canadian Medical*

Association Journal, Vol. 61, page 536, it states: "Septimus Evans, R.N. was surgeon on the S.S. *Beaver* 1868-70 and went through many of Her Majesty's ships of war - the list is long and imposing." Unfortunately, I have not been able to access the Navy List for 1868 to see his actual appointment to the *Beaver*, but other sources mentioned above do have him there in 1868. The item about Evans Arm is from John T. Walbran's book *British Columbia Coast Names, 1592-1906* (1909), page 175.

I felt there wasn't much more I could garner about Septimus Evans, but I am always hopeful further information will come to light. The next mystery to solve was why did Culbert credit Ralph Rosseau with the first ascent of Mount Septimus. It was known that Rosseau died when a snow bridge collapsed near Mount Septimus in 1954, but details were lacking until I dug into the old newspapers (see 'Disaster Overtakes Island Climber' *The Victoria Daily Colonist* Monday July 5, 1954, p.1).



MOUNTAIN DEATH SCENE shows where Mountaineer Ralph Rosseau, 46, was hurled 30 feet when snow where rescuer stands broke off as he was stepping over to rock wall. Pilot Fred Eilertson of Okanagan Helicopters Ltd., took picture before flying body out of Great Central Lake area to Port Alberni.

Photo scan from *The Daily Colonist* 7 July 1954, p3.

In July 1954, a large party of hikers made their way up to Della Falls from Great Central Lake. A small party that included Ralph and Lillah Rosseau, Alma Currie and Ulf Bitterlich broke away from the main party and took the trail up to Love Lake and then up onto the glaciers at the east end of the Septimus massif. On 3 July, while crossing a snow bridge, it collapsed plunging Ralph to his death and injuring Alma Currie. Lillah and Ulf were not on the bridge, but watched the accident unfold. After stabilizing Alma and comforting Lillah, Ulf rushed off to get help. The next day a helicopter lifted the climbers back to Port Alberni and then Ralph's body. Ralph was an experienced mountaineer, and his loss was felt in the Alberni community. This didn't answer the question about his ascent of Mount Septimus, but if I kept digging, I felt confident I would solve the riddle.



Ralph Rosseau 1947.

(Photo courtesy of Louise Eck (née Rosseau))

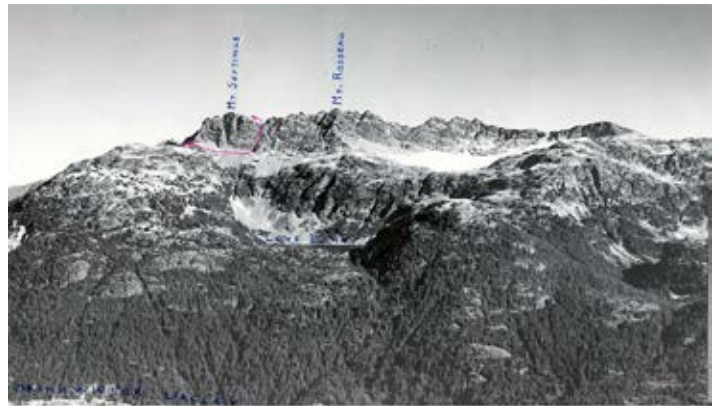


ULF BITTERLICH, young German immigrant who accompanied Rosseau on ill-fated expedition and hiked out for help. An experienced mountaineer, Bitterlich trained in Austrian Alps.

Photo scan from The Daily Colonist 13 October 1954, p1.

In 2010, I found out that Ralph Rosseau had a younger sister living in Qualicum Beach. I phoned Louise Eck and arranged to meet her. In her possession were many of Ralph's photos. But what was of significance to me was Ralph's personal diary of his trip from Great Central Lake to the Aureole Snowfield in 1947. The trip began on 24 July when he hiked up the Drinkwater Creek to Della Falls. His diary report for 27 July is brief and ambiguous: "To Camp 1 over Septimus." The next day the weather was mixed so he explored the Sherwood Mine near Love Lake in the morning then went back up to his camp. By the late afternoon the weather had cleared so he decided to make a carry to Camp 2 and return. "Up correct pass on Mount Septimus but could not get down slide north side. Dangerous. So had to go higher up and down north spur. Reached Camp 2 at 9:15. Wonderful spot. Cached grub and started right back. Lost route in dark. Reached summit in wrong place. Moonlight helped difficult descent. Arrived camp 1:00 a.m." The next day it appears he went around the east end of Mount Septimus to his Camp 2 to avoid the climb. That night he was kept awake by ice constantly breaking off and falling into "Iceberg Lake" [Green Lake]. He continued his journey north and on 1 August climbed Iceberg Peak and Mount Celeste. On his return journey he climbed Argus Mountain on 2 August and went to the base of The Red Pillar, but there didn't appear to be a safe route for him to climb. On 4 August he wrote: "up Septimus. Waited on top for sun to break through. No luck, so down

Rusty Pass across Septimus Glacier to Camp 1." The next day he reached the head of Great Central Lake and was picked up by Paddy Burke and his boat. It was a remarkable solo journey and although some of the details are vague, we now know why Culbert credited Rosseau with the first ascent of Mount Septimus. Obviously, there were some climbers who knew about Rosseau's climb, but we may never know who informed Culbert. In 1946, he took a trip to the Rockies where he climbed Mount Aberdeen, Popes Peak and Mount Victoria, and attempted Mount Lefroy and Mount Edith Cavell. The quality and stability of the rock on the peaks would be similar to that found on Mount Septimus.



*Septimus route.
(Photographer unknown)*

The question arose again about Septimus/Rosseau so I decided in April 2020 to call Ulf Bitterlich again. I had phoned Ulf in 1995 seeking information on his attempt of the Snowband route on Mount Colonel Foster with his brother Adolf in 1955 for the chapter in my book *Beyond Nootka: A Historical Perspective of Vancouver Island Mountains*. This time I wanted to talk to him about the accident involving Ralph Rosseau, and Mount Septimus and Rosseau. He remembers Ralph talking about climbing Mount Septimus and pointing out which summit it was - the peak to the west of the highest point on the ridge. After the accident Ulf wanted to name the highest peak after Ralph in his honour but couldn't remember who he spoke too about it. It was officially adopted on 7 July 1955. Although we have always known why Mount Rosseau was named, this helped clarify the details as there is nothing on B.C. Geographic Names website under Notes and Origins as to who submitted the name. Ulf passed away in May 2021.

There will always be some who call the highest point on the massif Mount Septimus. The facts are the highest peak is officially Mount Rosseau, while the slightly lower peak to the west is Mount Septimus. When Ralph Rosseau says he climbed Mount

Septimus, we have to accept his word that he knew what he was climbing. Just as Ulf Bitterlich knew which peak he wanted to name to honour his friend.



*Looking at the summit of Mount Septimus from the top of Mount Rosseau.
(Photo by Lindsay Elms)*

Benevolent Ableism: Yes, I Have a Physical Disability, but I *am* Able

Janelle Curtis

Events that occurred during a climbing trip I took with my dear love Rowan Laver to the mainland in June 2023 were a revelation for me. I experienced what I now recognize as discrimination based on my disabilities, which is a microaggression called ableism. While Rowan drove us home, I wrote detailed notes about my experiences during that climbing trip and realized I felt traumatized by what had been happening for more than six years. Collectively, those experiences had utterly shattered my joy of climbing!

Last summer, the national Alpine Club of Canada facilitated a series of sessions on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. When the sessions were announced, I signed up and am glad I did because they were very informative and constructive lessons. After a lot of reflection on those lessons, I now feel it is important to share my experiences as I recall them, especially if it prevents someone else from having similar experiences in the future. Maybe a reader will recognize what is happening to them or think twice

about discriminating against a fellow climber who has a disability. Writing this article has also been very cathartic for me. What follows is a description of my experiences based on my memories and notes.

In June Rowan and I spent a few days climbing at Skaha Bluffs Provincial Park with someone we had been climbing with for more than a decade. I was looking forward to climbing and rappelling outdoors because most of my climbing since my accident in 2016 has been on a top rope at Nanaimo's [Romper Room Indoor Rock Climbing Centre](#). Before my accident, I was climbing 5.10 comfortably on a top rope and lead climbing, albeit at a lower level. But injuries I sustained to my right hand mean that I am now wary of lead climbing because it's harder for me to place trad gear and/or a quickdraw and clip the rope with that hand.

Many of you will remember that I fell off a cliff in Strathcona Park in July 2016 on my way to Mount Mitchell. You can read about my fall in the [2019 Spring Issue of the Island Bushwhacker Newsletter](#). My accident did not affect my memory or cognition. But I do often struggle with balance and fine motor control of my right hand.

I spent five long months at Victoria General Hospital recovering from my accident but was back at the Romper Room within a few days of my discharge. My first post-accident climb was on what is affectionately called the "race wall," where kids are playfully introduced to climbing. I climbed about three quarters of the way up but came down in part because my broken ankle and knees were so stiff that I couldn't bend my legs in the same way I had been able to before. Over the next few years, I climbed there most weeks with Rowan and two of our regular climbing partners. I regained some of my flexibility and gradually worked my way up from the "race wall" to climbs graded as 5.9. I even managed to climb a few more challenging Skaha-like routes.

Despite my recovery and a few years of post-accident climbing, I felt like I had to keep proving that I could climb and belay safely. This is because almost every time we were planning to go outdoor rock climbing as a group, my lead belay skills were re-tested by the Romper Room manager and one of my usual climbing partners. Being tested like this once is normal and expected. But after a climber passes their belay and lead belay tests, they usually don't need to be re-tested. No one else in our group had their climbing skills formally re-tested periodically. *Just me*. Although I appreciated everyone's concern, I was unhappy about being the only one caught up in a perpetual testing and assessment loop. I inferred

that our usual climbing partners didn't trust me to climb safely, so I began avoiding the climbing gym whenever Rowan wasn't there to climb with me.

A few months before we went to Skaha in June, I went climbing with Rowan and our friend Vivian Addison at Comox Lake. I wanted to practice cleaning the anchor and rappelling while climbing outdoors because it had been a few years. It wasn't long before we were all comfortable with me cleaning the anchor and rappelling.

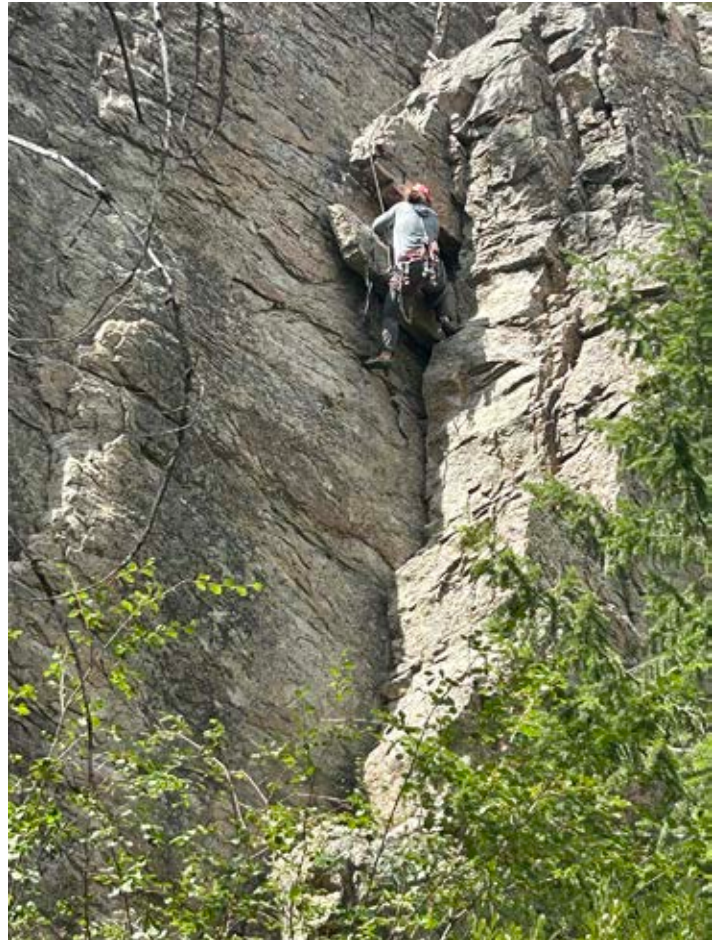
Rowan, one of our usual climbing partners, and I arrived at Skaha and spent part of 19 June climbing at *Day Care* crag. The next day we climbed at *Another Buttress*. In my notes, I wrote that while I was climbing *Pry Baby*, a 5.6 route, our climbing partner gave me unsolicited instructions on where to place my feet. I remember how unpleasant it was being told what to do by someone who does not understand my physical limitations, especially when *I had not asked him for help*. I requested Rowan to immediately lower me after my first few moves on that route.

Rowan and I remember our climbing partner insisting that I practice setting up a rappel at least 20 times at nearby practice anchors set at eye level where he could watch and assess what I was doing. He said that *if I could do it well, then he might allow me to rappel with supervision the next day*. It seems he did not think I was capable of rappelling safely on my own, even though I had rappelled many times before my accident. He was also aware I had rappelled safely after my accident, including a few times under his supervision at Skaha in 2019. That day, I was comfortable demonstrating that I could clean the anchor and set it up to safely rappel *once*. But after being re-assessed by our climbing partner repeatedly at *Another Buttress*, I felt exasperated and disheartened, especially because he did not have any suggestions for how I could rappel more safely, and no one else practiced their rappelling.

My notes from the drive home included details about a few equally unpleasant memories with our climbing partner the next day at *Go Anywhere* crag. As I recall, Rowan led an easy 5.5 climb (*Autumn Gold*) and I was preparing to climb it on a top rope, clean the anchor and rappel back down. I then reluctantly agreed to belay our climbing partner while he climbed the route to the left of *Autumn Gold* because he wanted to supervise me. I agreed that he could watch me provided he not say anything unless I was being unsafe. I was crystal clear about wanting to rappel on my own. Even so, once we were both at the top of our respective routes, he insisted that I explain every step of cleaning the anchor and preparing to rappel

while I was doing it, as though he was my climbing instructor teaching me how to rappel for the first time. *I felt like I was being treated as a child*.

Later that day I seconded Steve's, which is a 5.5 trad route at *Go Anywhere* crag. Our climbing partner led it because Rowan and I did not bring any of our trad gear on that trip. I was still upset by the way I was treated on *Autumn Gold* earlier, but I wanted to practice removing trad gear and rappelling from the top of another route that I knew I could climb. Again, I agreed to let him watch me set everything up, but I insisted that he not speak about what I was doing unless I was being unsafe.



*Off balance at the first sling on Steve's at Go Anywhere crag.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*

Steve's is an easy corner climb, but I did not enjoy it in the least. According to my notes, our climbing partner placed six cams and two slings while leading and then he belayed me from the top. As I seconded the route, I felt like he was pulling on the rope so much that I was coming off the holds. Although I removed the six cams despite feeling unstable, I had trouble removing the first sling because I kept losing my balance. I patiently asked him several times to give me slack and explained that it felt like he was pulling me off the climb. After a long time of being

unable to regain my balance because the belay rope was too tight, I became frustrated and screamed **SLAAAAACK!** The slack never came...

When I eventually got to the top, I remember him saying that he knew he had me on a tight rope, but he was concerned I would fall. How ironic. It seems his lack of confidence in me had yanked me off a very easy climb despite my clear communication. Then, even though we had agreed he would not speak unless I was being unsafe, he again insisted that I describe each step of cleaning the anchor and setting up a rappel as I was doing it. After I finished setting everything up, he checked it *all over again*. I was really upset now. *I am the one who decides if I need more slack in the rope and can rappel safely, not him.* It took me a few minutes to calm down before I lowered myself over the edge.



*Rappelling off Steve's at Go Anywhere crag.
(Photo by Rowan Laver)*

Rowan and I remember other incidents at *Go Anywhere* crag. As one key example, imagine what it was like when our climbing partner grabbed the rope and attached his own belay device to it while I was belaying Rowan, who very clearly articulated that we did not need his help.

On our way home to Nanaimo, it gradually dawned on me that what I had experienced in Skaha and for more than six years with the same climbing partner was discrimination that seemed to be based on his assumptions about my disabilities. I have passed all my belay tests and safely rappelled since my accident. Insisting I undergo repeated testing and supervision when no one else in our group is expected to do the same, in my mind, simply amounts to **discrimination**. Because he was a usual climbing partner, I assume the specific form of discrimination I experienced was benevolent ableism, which is described by HireMeSC (<https://www.hiremesc.org/>) as:

An action or attitude that occurs when you mean well and offer your help to a person with a disability – without considering their actual needs or asking them first...Benevolent ableism is a microaggression that plays into the stigma of people with disabilities needing help. The “helper” unintentionally makes the person they are “helping” feel disempowered, segregated, and as if they are unable to make their own decisions. Sometimes, helping isn't actually helpful...

That describes exactly how I felt climbing with those usual partners for more than six years. Once I realized what I had been experiencing while climbing with them since my accident was a form of discrimination, I put an end to it immediately. I explained to my usual climbing partners why I would no longer be climbing with the person who came to Skaha with me and Rowan. I also explained to the Romper Room manager why I was uncomfortable with my belay skills being repeatedly tested. The manager was fully supportive of my rationale and clarified that he thought I had been the one asking for repeated belay tests. It seems that all those many belay tests over the years were orchestrated by the climbing partner who came to Skaha.

Rowan maintains he has never had any doubts about my skills or felt the need to double-check what I do or have my climbing skills re-tested. I have no doubt that he closely watches all his climbing partners, including me, while they are climbing and belaying others. But he has also clarified that he too thought I was the one who had been asking to have my belaying technique re-assessed as often as it was.

Here are a few suggestions to keep in mind if you are climbing with someone who has a disability:

- providing help when people with disabilities don't ask for it, need it, or want it is a form of discrimination, specifically it is a microaggression called ableism
- ableism may be well-intentioned but comes across as patronizing
- ableism affects people's mental health and confidence in their own abilities
- discriminating based on disabilities is illegal in Canada

The "bystander effect" prevents many from addressing ableism when they witness it. If you feel safe, it is important to address discrimination and create more equitable and healthy environments.

- Calmly step in without escalating the situation
- Calmly explain what was said or done and why it was harmful
- Lead with empathy and encourage others to empathize
- *Offer your support to the target*

I hope this helps readers become aware of ableism and actively address it because it can significantly undermine those with disabilities, even when the actions of others are well-meaning. Remembering, thinking about, and writing this article has filled me with tremendous heartache, but if these words help prevent ableism from happening to at least one other person who has a disability, it will have been worth it.

Apart from learning about ableism, another key lesson that was underscored for me is the importance of communicating in a timely, clear, and firm manner. Instead of feeling exasperated and disheartened every time my climbing skills were repeatedly re-assessed and supervised, I could have simply asked for the rationale. If I was not comfortable with the explanation, I could have refused to be re-tested or supervised. It is my hope that each of us can take a lesson or two away from these experiences.

Now that I understand what was happening and have put an end to it, I look forward to rediscovering my joy and confidence while climbing. To celebrate this moment of learning and growth, I sewed a new chalk bag. I didn't have a pattern, so I took my torn one apart and modelled the new one after it.

I also stitched "climb with a smile" onto it because whenever I am belaying, I have always said "you are now on belay, climb with a smile." Finishing this filled me with so much gratitude: I can plan, gather necessary materials and tools, think things through, fix mistakes, and create something beautiful and functional. These are all the same skills necessary to climb safely. And I'm looking forward to climbing with a smile again!



Climb with a smile!
(Photo by Janelle Curtis)

Please contact me at janelle.curtis@gmail.com if you have any questions, or would like to discuss ableism or see some reading material.

Gilbert Murray Parker (1937-2023)

Catrin Brown

It is with great sadness that we share the news of the passing of Gil Parker on 29 April 2023. Gil's rich life was characterised by his unwavering interest in contributing to a better world, and he leaves an extraordinary legacy of turning vision into positive

change. We were indeed fortunate that he invested so much of his time and talent in our section of the Alpine Club over five decades. It is no exaggeration to say that we owe much of what we enjoy today as a section to him.



Gil Parker.
(Photographer unknown)

In honour of his unique contribution, Gil was awarded the highest recognition given by the national club, 'Honorary Membership of the ACC' in 2018. The following summary is extracted from the nomination submitted for this award.

"Gil started his life-long interest in mountain exploration in the 1950s with climbs near Calgary and ascents of Mount Rundle. Shortly after moving to Vancouver Island in 1970, he became an active member of ACCVI, leading and participating in many trips on the Island, throughout B.C. and elsewhere. He was instrumental in running climbing courses with fellow section member Dave Tansley through the YMCA in the early 1970s. His ascents of Canadian mountains include Mount Lowell, Mount Parnassus, Mount Garibaldi, Mount Slesse, Mount Louie, Mount Victoria, Mount Andromeda and on Vancouver Island he climbed most of our "Island Qualifiers", in addition to Rambler Peak, Mount Schoen, Alexandra Peak and many others. Gil attended the ACC summer camp at Fryatt Creek in the Rockies in 1972, and also several ACC ski mountaineering camps to Yoho, Adamant and Eremite Valleys. He also climbed in the Tellot Glacier area near Mount Waddington and attempted the unclimbed Mount Noel on the Stikine Icecap.

A key aspect of Gil's approach was his drive to share his passion and expertise through leadership and mentorship. Many younger people who developed into strong ACC leaders, credit Gil with their early introduction to mountaineering. He climbed Mount Olympus, Mount Rainier three times, Mount Hood, Glacier Peak, Mount Adams, South Sister, Lassen Peak and Mount Shasta, all in the company of fellow Island climbers. Between 1999 and 2004 with different back-packing partners, he completed 90% of the 4300 kilometre Pacific Crest Trail. Gil's ventures overseas included trekking in Mexico's Copper Canyon, around Annapurna in Nepal, in the Western Garwhal in India and in Patagonia.

In the 1990s he organized three international ACCVI trips to the former USSR. These combined his love of mountaineering with his interest in Russia and his knowledge of the Russian language, and helped to forge links between the Canadian and Russian mountaineering communities. In 1990, a trip to the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia for a party of ten ACC members from Vancouver Island led to summit climbs of Mount Kazbek and Mount Elbrus. In 1997, Gil arranged a trip to the Kamchatka peninsula where participants climbed Mount Zimina, Mount Gorelli and Mount Mutnovsky.

Perhaps Gil's most outstanding work in promoting mountain activities was his conception and active pursuit of the *Vancouver Island Spine Trail*. Inspired by his time on the Pacific Crest Trail, Gil developed a vision of a similar long-distance trail on Vancouver Island from Victoria to Cape Scott, and founded the Vancouver Island Spine Trail Association. The project has been actively pursued since 2009, and is well on its way to completion, now known as the Vancouver Island Trail. As Gil originally envisioned, the route links existing trails with new sections, providing a back-country route passing close to many of the Island's major peaks. Gil's work included raising over \$100,000, planning route changes as practical considerations have necessitated, consulting with First Nations whose traditional lands are to be crossed, and negotiating access with private land owners.

Gil served on the national club executive as Western Vice President from 1976 – 1980, including under the leadership of Don Forest. He served on the main club's Publication Committee, Huts Committee and Expeditions Committee, which included the time when Everest 82 was first proposed. Gil had strong connections with some of the prominent mountaineers of his generation, which he shared with the Island community through hosting social evenings and guest talks with Doug Scott and Pat Morrow.

Within the Vancouver Island section, Gil served on the executive as secretary/treasurer from 1973 – 1974, as Chair from 1975 – 1976 and as Past Chair from 1977 – 1978. During his tenure as Chair he revitalized the section which had very small membership at the time. His executive committee worked with BC Parks and the ACC in trying to get funding for a hut in Strathcona Park, established the Island Bushwhacker as the section's newsletter, and supported the idea of developing a list of 'graduating climbs on the island' as a criterion for Senior Membership. This list today has developed into the well-established quest to achieve the "Rick Eppler IQ award" – a successful climb of all nine of the "Island Qualifier" peaks. In 2002 Gil received the Distinguished Service Award from the national ACC.

While Gil's training and career were largely in the field of engineering, his avocation was as a writer. Over the years he published regular articles on outdoor adventure, the mountains and climbers of Vancouver Island, as well as on energy and environmental issues. His writings appeared in *The Times Colonist* as well as in *Explore Magazine* and the *Island Bushwhacker*. He wrote several books with mountain themes, most notably

"Aware of the Mountain" – mountaineering as Yoga in 2001, and

"Coast Mountain Men" – mountaineering stories from the West Coast in 2007. In 2008 Gil edited the 10th edition of *Hiking Trails 3 – Northern Vancouver Island including Strathcona Park* for the Vancouver Island Trails Information Society.

Gil's professional activities included work as a structural engineer, pioneering work in solar projects at home and internationally, and starting a trading firm working in the former USSR. His many activities in community and international affairs were recognized with a civil engineering prize, a fellowship from the Rotary Club and an Honorary Citizenship from Victoria City."

Thank you Gil for all that you gave to our community, near and far.



Renaming Mountains

Lindsay Elms

The adoption of a name for a mountain or a natural feature gives it a reference point, a sense of belonging, a descriptive image and/or sometimes a historical reference. It is something Europeans and Indigenous people have been doing since time immemorial. However, the proliferation of naming features in Canada – rivers, lakes, mountains and passes – began in earnest when the early explorers and immigrants moved west across this vast continent. At the time there was no, or little, recognition of Indigenous names and there were no government offices where they could submit the names for official status. The names just gathered support through word of mouth and from the hand drawn maps they produced.

As the precursor of the Geographic Names Board of Canada (GNBC) and the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN), the Geographic Board of Canada was created in 1897 by the federal government to approve and standardize the writing of Canadian geographical names. Once the country had been explored it needed to be surveyed: towns and cities laid-out, railway lines planned and the boundaries between not only the provinces but international borders charted. Men apprenticed as provincial surveyors and had to pass exams before practicing. In 1891 the Land Surveyors Act established a dominion government appointed Board of Examiners for the purpose of examining and admitting prospective members to the profession, as well as the discipline of members guilty of negligence or corruption. Those authorized (or recognized) to practice prior to the Act coming into force were admitted.

As surveying techniques improved, men were required to carry their cumbersome equipment to the top of the mountain, or to a suitable location as high as possible with room to set-up their tripods. From these points, the land opened up around them and they were able to survey the area using new phototopographical procedures. The maps they produced were detailed and, some would say works of art. One such surveyor was Arthur Wheeler, one of the founders and first president of the Alpine Club of Canada. Wheeler qualified first as an Ontario Land Surveyor in 1881 and then in Manitoba, British

Columbia and Alberta. It was while undertaking survey work for the Alberta/British Columbia Boundary Commission, that he received permission from the Geographic Board of Canada to name peaks in the Kananaskis and other areas. The decision would be one that many would regret, as Wheeler, in a fit of patriotism, named most of the peaks after World War I generals and admirals, French villages, songs of the era, and battleships. This prompted R. M. Patterson, in a 1961 publication entitled *The Buffalo Head*, to say: "The Rockies must sadly be the worst-named range in the world." These names weren't inappropriate, but they didn't acknowledge traditional First Nations names or in many cases have Canadian content.

Don't get me wrong. Wheeler wasn't the only person who took the liberty of naming mountains, as there was a cadre of professional surveyors mapping all over Canada, but he just happens to be the most remembered in the Rockies. In a newspaper story (*The Daily Colonist* January 8, 1967, p.4/5/6), Norman Senior wrote about Alan "AJ" Campbell's involvement with the Interprovincial Boundary survey between 1913 to 1924. He pointed out that: "One of the privileges that fell to him [Campbell] in the boundary and other surveys was that of naming sundry mountains and passes. In this he says he preferred to employ descriptive terms rather than commemorate the names of persons. Thus, Mallard Lake and Mount Isosceles call for no explanation." On Vancouver Island, the late Ruth Masters, under the auspices of the Comox District Mountaineering Club (CDMC), a self-titled "Senior shit disturber" who was raised and lived her whole life in Courtenay, named numerous mountains and lakes in Strathcona Park after local WWI and WWII heroes, pioneers including First Nations people, environmentalists and more. She always made sure they were official so the names would be remembered in perpetuity. She also had numerous cairns with plaques built as a memorial throughout the park, but that is a topic for another discussion.

The practice of putting names to mountains continues today and not all use the official process that exists to have them formally recognized. It was once an unwritten tradition for those making the first ascent of a mountain to have the right to name it. That is no longer acceptable. Unfortunately, today people sitting at desks are naming peaks that they have never set foot on and posting it on their website. It has been acceptable though for those putting up a new route on the mountain to have the honour of naming it. It was usually written up in a mountain journal or magazine, or online as is the more common

practice today. As Ian Welsted noted in his Rockies Report (see the *Canadian Alpine Journal* 2023, Vol.106, p.139) it is becoming difficult to confirm claims of a first ascent made by climbers.

Inappropriate, and sometimes, insensitive names have been around for over 100 years. Social conventions of past eras frequently led to naming local geographic features in a manner which is now recognized as disrespectful to pioneers of various ethnic origins. In 1896, a cook for the Canadian Pacific Railway by the name of Ha Ling was bet \$50 that he couldn't summit a nearby peak that overlooked Canmore in a day. He left town in the morning and was back by lunchtime, but nobody believed his story. He took some townsfolk back up to the summit to show them a flag he had planted. The townsfolk were so impressed that they named the peak after him, but not his given name. Instead, they called it "Chinaman's Peak." The name stuck for more than a century, even though the term fell out of common usage and came to be seen as a racial slur. In the late 1990's, Roger Mah Poy became the voice for a movement in Canmore and nearby Calgary to rename the peak. For him, the shame of the name of one of the valley's most iconic landmarks loomed over the town as large as the peak itself. After months of heated public debate, the name was finally changed in 1997 to Ha Ling Peak.

Ha Ling is just one of many peaks that some have wanted to change. For years the Stoney Nakoda First Nations of Banff and Canmore have been lobbying to change Tunnel Mountain, so named because of a proposed tunnel through the mountain which never eventuated to Sacred Buffalo Guardian Mountain. The leaders and elders agree that this is the most accurate English translation of the name from the Stoney Nakoda language. Despite their effort, Tunnel Mountain remains the official name.

It's obvious when we try to take a name away how political it can become, how much people care about it and how heated the debates can develop. A proposal in 1915 supported by Sir Richard McBride, Premier of B.C. was put forward to rename Mount Robson in honour of Edith Cavell: a British nurse executed by the Germans in 1915 for having helped Allied soldiers escape from occupied Belgium to the Netherlands. Proponents felt that the mountain could be easily renamed as the precise origins of "Robson" were not known (see "Would Retain Name of the Highest Peak.", by Arthur Wheeler in *The Victoria Daily Times* November 8, 1915, p.14). This proposal met considerable controversy with numerous letters and telegrams of protest being

sent to the Geographic Board of Canada. Most wanted Edith Cavell recognized, but not through the renaming of such a prominent landmark. Robert Borden, Prime Minister of Canada instructed the Geographic Board of Canada to find an alternative mountain. Arthur Wheeler suggested that the word "Cavell" simply be added to the name of a "splendid spire" near Banff that was already known as Mount Edith. This suggestion was accepted by the board in December 1915, but it soon faced considerable criticism from people who believed that Mount Edith had been named for their family member. The board then asked M. P. Bridgland of the Dominion Land Survey, if there was a suitable peak in that region that could be used to commemorate Edith Cavell. Bridgland replied that a prominent mountain incorrectly identified as Mount Geikie would make an ideal memorial for Edith Cavell. Wheeler had named the mountain in 1912 Fitzhugh Mountain after the townsite of Fitzhugh which was later renamed Jasper, but he supported the name change and sent a telegram and letter supporting Bridgland's suggestion. The mountain was officially named Mount Cavell in March 1916. However, more letters continued to be sent, this time arguing that for people to truly understand the magnitude of Edith Cavell's sacrifice and the depravity of her executioners it was essential to be explicit in the name. These letters and telegrams reached the office of Robert Borden and he again instructed the Geographic Board of Canada to change the name. In June 1916 Mount Edith Cavell became official.

Another politically charged name change was proposed in 2000 when the then Prime Minister Jean Chretien wanted to rename Mount Logan, Canada's highest mountain, to Mount Trudeau after the passing of the late prime minister. The mountain's first reported sighting was in 1890 by Israel Russell during an expedition to nearby Mount Saint Elias. He named the mountain after Sir William Logan, a Canadian geologist and founder of the Geological Survey of Canada. Chretien said that Pierre Trudeau had hoped to one day climb the highest peak in Canada but was never able to do so. He also said another mountain in Kluane National Park would be renamed Mount Logan. Many people from coast to coast to coast opposed the idea, but no group was more vocal than members of the Alpine Club of Canada. Fortunately, it didn't take long for the Liberal government to back down from its unpopular plan.

On 10 June 2006 a peak in the Premier Range near Valemont, a range dedicated in 1927 to Prime Ministers, was named Mount Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Trudeau's eldest son Justin said that it was a truly

fitting honour. Trudeau challenged the people of Valemont and the entire Robson Valley to name more peaks, noting plans for a Mount John Diefenbaker in the range. "It is important that we remember and that we honour the men and women who choose to serve our country at the highest level." In 2007, Valemont mayor Jeanette Townsend said: "We named Mount Pierre Elliott Trudeau last year, and it was brought to our attention that Prime Minister Diefenbaker had no mountain named after him. When we were made aware of the omission, the Friends of Valemont commenced the process by choosing a mountain." On 9 June 2007 it received official recognition. A subtle nudge and a wink by a politician and the naming of a mountain is swiftly processed. For any mountain to be named in B.C. after a person, or Prime Minister, they need to be deceased.

Vancouver Island is not immune to the change movement. In August 1982, a landmark near Cumberland was officially given the name Jap Mountain. Japanese settled in the district in December 1891 when the collieries were booming and were able to bring their families with them, unlike the Chinese who were subject to the prohibitive federal head tax. However, on 31 July 2002 the name was changed to Nikkei Mountain, as instructed by a unanimous resolution passed by the Council of the Village of Cumberland, in turn recommended by representatives of the National Association of Japanese Canadians. The Council determined it "appropriate to respect, portray and promote social and cultural history of their historic community. It was the present-day community's desire to demonstrate that these Japanese families were, and remain, an important part of the local heritage."

Other changes are more subtle. On 13 July 2009 Brooks Peninsula Provincial Park was given a dual name that celebrates the First Nations' connection with the history and culture of the park. The landmark agreement between British Columbia and the Che:k'tles7et'h' peoples saw the renaming of the provincial park to M̓q̓uq̓w̓in/ Brooks Peninsula Provincial Park with the First Nations name appearing before the original park name.

This agreement is intended to foster a strong foundation for the collaborative management of all of the parks and protected areas within the traditional territories of the Che:k'tles7et'h' peoples" said Barry Penner, the Environment Minister. "It provides certainty, acknowledgement, and recognition of the local First Nations and the connection they have to these special areas. This

step is one of many to recognize and increase their involvement in planning.

The process took fifteen years as the B.C. government partnered with the Che:k'tles7et'h', members of the Ka:'yu:k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations, one of the five signatories of the Maa-nulth treaty. The word Mᑕuqʷin means "The Queen" in the Nuu-Chah-Nulth language. At the same time, two other parks, Boya Lake Park near the northwestern B.C. border were renamed Tā Ch'ilā Park, meaning "holes in a blanket," at the request of the Kaska Dena First Nation; and Roderick Haig-Brown Park in the Shuswap was renamed to the traditional Secwepemc name Tsútswecw Park, which translates to "many rivers," at the request of the Little Shuswap Indian Band.

Sometimes these changes also occur within city boundaries. In the city of Victoria, Indigenous people local to southern Vancouver Island have repeatedly requested that Mount Douglas be identified by its Indigenous name PKOLS. In July 2021, a Saanich councilor reported that the District of Saanich was in the process of drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the ṼSÁNEĆ leadership council, comprised of the Tsartlip, Tseycum and Tsawout First Nations, that would discuss renaming important traditional areas. It was expected that the MOU could pave the way for PKOLS to replace or be added to the current park name which recognizes colonizer Sir James Douglas. Tsawout Hereditary Chief Eric Pelkey led a walk up Mount Douglas in 2013 and sent a letter to council then requesting the change. In 2019, Pelkey spoke about the cultural and historical importance of the mountain to local Indigenous people. "We've always known it as PKOLS amongst our people, and we would like that name to be permanently put onto this." Pelkey said that according to traditional history, the Creator came down to the villages on the land now known as Saanich before settler contact and threw four white rocks that became markers for the borders of the ṼSÁNEĆ people's territory. PKOLS translates into the English words "white rock." Now, more than a century and a half later, Indigenous people are drawing up documents concerning the same spot. Saanich council can rename the park but will have to ask the province to rename the mountain itself. The first European settlers in the 1840's named the mountain Cedar Hill. Cedar pickets milled using wood from the mountain were used in the construction of Fort Victoria. Governor James Douglas established the park as a Government Reserve in 1858.

In the 2020's two geographic name changes were

submitted to the B.C. Geographical Names Office. The first was to have Mount Victoria, located at the head of Jervis Inlet, northeast of Powell River, changed to *k'e/s*. This was officially recognized on 21 June 2023 as recommended by shishálh Nation on the Sunshine Coast. In the other the Squamish Nation formally requested Mount Garibaldi be changed to its traditional name *Nch'káy*. "It has a spiritual and historical connection to our people. You know, it probably is our biggest legend because it's the mountain that saved our families and saved our nation during the great flood," said Wilson Williams, a spokesperson for Squamish Nation. "Our people have that deep connection to *Nch'káy*. Going up the Sea to Sky Highway, I'm always reminded of *Nch'káy* being the mountain that saved our people. It's something I teach my children to this day." *Nch'káy* means "dirty place" or "grimy one" in the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh language. The name comes from the tendency for the Cheekye River to look muddy in colour, a result of volcanic debris in the area that colours the water and surrounding landscape. While the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh have always referred to the mountain as *Nch'káy*, the name Mount Garibaldi was given to the peak in the 1860s to commemorate General Giuseppe Garibaldi, a key contributor to Italian unification, but it is unlikely that Garibaldi ever visited British Columbia. The proposal is under negotiation, but at the end of 2023 it is still not official.

Just like Mount Garibaldi, or *Nch'káy*, which has a legend that saw families and people of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Nation saved during a great flood, the K'ómoks First Nation on Vancouver Island also have a similar legend. The K'ómoks' name for the mountain known as the Comox Glacier is *Kwénis*, meaning "whale" and is the most prominent mountain west of Courtenay/Comox. The name Comox Glacier was adopted on 12 December 1939. It was submitted by the Comox District Mountaineering Club, but in earlier years they referred to it in their literature as 'The Dome'. However, the Comox Glacier is unique. The highest point doesn't have a nomenclature of mount, mountain or peak. The mountain is known as the Comox Glacier and is a stand-alone feature. Directly to the west of the Comox Glacier is the Cliffe Glacier, but it is surrounded by the high peaks of Argus Mountain, Mount Harmston and The Red Pillar. The Cliffe Glacier is named for a pioneering family who moved to the area in 1862. When Lynn Martell gave a talk to the Vancouver Island section of the A.C.C. after her book *Stories of Ice: Adventure, Commerce, and Creativity on Canada's Glaciers* was published, I asked her if she knew of any other feature where the mountain and glacier were one. She said she didn't know of any others—at the time.



The Comox Glacier
(Photo by Lindsay Elms)

A few years ago, while proofreading a draft for a new Island climbing guidebook, it was noted that the high point of the feature known as the Comox Glacier had been allocated a western name. After a short conversation with the author, it was agreed not to use the proposed name as it had not been discussed with the K'ómoks First Nation whose territory it was central too. The unendorsed name had been found on an unofficial website on a small peak located between the Comox Glacier and Argus Mountain. When the creator of the website was contacted, he was asked where the name had originated. Two local climber's names were given, but neither of them had ever discussed the peak in question with him. It was suggested that in the interest of the Island climbing community and in respect for the K'ómoks First Nation it be removed to avoid confusion, but it is still to this day posted on the website. This just goes to show how easily confusion and false information can be disseminated. Once the name is in print, such as in a guidebook, it's hard to change people's perception when that is their go-to climbing bible. It's much easier though to remove a name from a website.

In this age of global warming, Canada's glaciers are melting—alarmingly fast. The Comox Glacier is no exception. Fred Fern, a local photographer from Merville, has been photographing the glacier since 2013 and by comparing his images it is not difficult to see the annual melting taking place. The same over-lapping of images is taking place in the Rocky Mountains with the Mountain Legacy Project. Overlaying the 2013/2020 photos Fern estimated a vertical loss of the glacier by around 80 feet. How many years can the Comox Glacier continue losing that much snow and ice before it is completely



Kwénis.
(Photo by Lindsay Elms)

gone? Is this a sign that nothing is permanent? In Sean Isaac's introduction in the 2023 *Canadian Alpine Journal* he points out: "Even mountains—robust and ageless in appearance—have a limited lifespan. They are born and, ultimately pass on. Glacial recession is a prime example of maturation into elderhood." But, with the Comox Glacier melting, many local mountaineers are still wondering when the glacier is gone what will the mountain be called? Not everyone is aware of the traditional First Nations name. The answer is obvious, but the process to get it officially named *Kwénis* needs to be set in motion.

The B.C. Geographical Names Office, and those of other provinces, will have challenges that were never conceived in the past, but with on-going reconciliation talks and land claim issues, we will see more name changes to our mountains. Growing up in New Zealand (*Aoteroa*) I have watched the changes which the country has embraced by both Maori and Pakeha. They have their own *Tuakiri* (identity). It's time we learn more from our Indigenous people and their connection to the land and remove all derogatory and insensitive names from our country forever. To forge our own identity everyone can be proud of.

Major E. Oliver Wheeler and the 1921 Everest Reconnaissance Expedition

Jim Everard

People are remembered for as long as stories are told about them. Retelling the stories of Oliver Wheeler's pivotal role in the 1921 Everest

Expedition is important for members of the Alpine Club of Canada, indeed for all Canadians. It shows appreciation for the Club's roots and Wheeler's legacies. We can spread the story. In the process we may learn some surprises about one of the ACC's most distinguished and decorated members.¹

The story of the 1921 Everest Reconnaissance Expedition includes two major themes. One was scientific: the filling in of a vast blank in the map of Tibet using traditional surveying tools, plus the detailed mapping of the Everest region using the "Canadian method" of photo-topographical surveying. The second theme was mountaineering, specifically sussing out the best approach to climbing Mount Everest and verifying, as much as possible, the most promising ascent line.

Every expedition member contributed to the completion of the Expedition's objectives. Major E.O. Wheeler's cumulative contributions were, arguably, the most significant. He was the first to solve the puzzle of approaching Mount Everest via the East Rongbuk Glacier. He created the first detailed map of the Mount Everest area after spending 41 nights at altitudes of between 18,000 and 22,300 ft, in temperatures as low as -34°F. He was one of six climbers and porters to ascend the Chang La (North Col) at 23,000 ft and confirm the North Ridge as the most viable ascent route up Mount Everest from Tibet.

"Major Wheeler had probably the hardest time of any member of the Expedition, and his success in achieving single-handed the mapping of 600 square miles of some of the most mountainous country in the world is sufficient proof of his determination and grit."

**- Major H.T. Morshead, D.S.O., R.E.
Senior Surveying Officer,
Everest Reconnaissance Expedition 1921**

¹Wheeler's distinction extended into many realms. Militarily, at Canada's Royal Military College "Teddy" was the top graduate in his last year and was awarded both the Governor General's Award and the Sword of Honour. During WWI he served with the Bengal (Roorkee) Sappers and Miners, fighting (including hand-to-hand combat), in the blood-soaked trenches of the Western Front and later in Mesopotamia. He was awarded the Military Cross (and Bar) for conspicuous gallantry, mentioned in Despatches seven times and received the Légion d'Honneur, Chevaliere Class. His personal war experiences were unimaginable, save the other survivors.

Not bad for someone of whom George Mallory had opined, "...I've no hope of him being any use to us" two months into the five-month expedition.

The circumstances that led to E.O. Wheeler arriving in Darjeeling in April 1921 as an appointed Expedition member were extraordinary.

The official mission of the first Expedition was to complete a reconnaissance of the Mount Everest area for subsequent climbing efforts. At that time no Westerner had been closer than 60 kilometres to the mountain. Surveying was central to the effort. Surveyors with plane table experience in the mountains counted for much; candidates with proven photo-topographic experience would be a distinguishing asset.² Oliver Wheeler had this in spades thanks in part to his father's vocation and avocation, which in turn likely planted the seed for Oliver's professional surveying development and career.

"It is from this science [photo-topographic surveying] that has sprung the Alpine Club of Canada."

**- Arthur O. Wheeler, President, Alpine Club of Canada,
Canadian Alpine Journal - 1920, p. 75**

One source of surveying talent for the Everest Organizing Committee was the India Survey. They had local geographic knowledge, the surveyors and support personnel for the enterprise. The Survey would also come at an attractive price tag - nothing - to the Organizing Committee, a key aspect of their budget-challenged situation. Consequently, the Survey generally "called the shots" as related to issues of participants and material resources for the surveying component of the Expedition. Major Morshead, DSO RE was the favoured first choice, given his Himalayan experience and time with the Survey. Other candidates included Major Kenneth Mason, who was favoured by the Royal Geographic Society's Arthur Hinks. Major Wheeler MC, RE was favoured by the Surveyor General of India,

²Captain Ryder, Surveyor General of the Indian Survey was keen to test the "Canadian" method. The "Canadian method" was far quicker, less expensive and bespoke for work in the mountains, compared to alternative techniques. The India Survey acquired equipment (purchased by E.O. Wheeler) based on the original designs of Dr. E. Deville, Surveyor-General of Canada (the acknowledged originator and promoter of the science in Canada).

Colonel C.H. Ryder. At the time Wheeler was seconded to the India Survey and was planning to perform experiments with the "Canadian method" of surveying in the Garhwal in 1921. It was decided that the Garhwal experiment could be shifted to Mount Everest and Wheeler won the appointment to the Expedition.

The prevailing "old boys club" dynamic of the Expedition's sponsor's (England's Alpine Club and the Royal Geographic Society) was critical to the selection of climbers and a factor in the selection of others. That meant being known to or recommended by influencers in The Everest Organizing Committee. Wheeler 'ticked this box' too. Organizers noted Wheeler's membership in the Alpine Club, London, England (he was the youngest ever member to be admitted at the time), with support coming from distinguished Club climbers Arnold L. Mumm and Dr. Tom Longstaff.³ If that was not enough, both Wheelers (father Arthur and Oliver) were well known to Professor Norman Collie of the Organizing Committee, providing further gravitas to his candidacy.

Demonstrable mountaineering experience was another criterium in the selection process, with high-altitude experience a distinguishing feature. Like the officially designated 'climbers,' Major Wheeler had considerable mountaineering experience⁴, which even Mallory grudgingly acknowledged by the time the final assault team was assembled.⁵ This was a material fact since, despite being a reconnaissance mission, this did not "*debar the mountain party from climbing as high as possible on a favoured route...*" Nor was the surveying party disqualified from being part of the climbing effort.

Oliver Wheeler's formal appointment to the Expedition in 1921 might not have surprised his parents back in

³*Relationships with these climbers was multipronged: E. Oliver Wheeler's father A.O. Wheeler was regarded as a dear friend of both these recommenders Arthur Wheeler and Longstaff spent weeks together in The Rockies, Purcells, and Selkirks over many years. E. Oliver Wheeler had also roped up with Mumm and Longstaff. In 1910, 20-year-old Oliver and 35-year-old Longstaff teamed up to climb Chimney Peak in the Lake Louise Group. Oliver took the lead on the crux (low 5th class) pitch. These climbs would have solidified Longstaff's view of the lad's technical skills. The Wheeler - Longstaff family ties proved to be deep and enduring.*

⁴*"Von leedle Swiss Guide" was how Edouard Feuz Sr. described eight-year-old Oliver when they were on the Illecillewaet Glacier. He was 13 when he ascended Mount Hector, 19 when he and Val Flynn climbed Mount Hungabee, and 20 when he stood on the summit of Mount Sir Donald in 1910. Add to that a list of first ascents.*

Canada. Arthur Wheeler had personally witnessed his son's honing of photo-topographic skills for more than a decade in the mountains and carefully read Oliver's academic papers on the subject which began as early as 1909.

Oliver Wheeler's formal appointment to the Expedition in 1921 might not have surprised his parents back in Canada. Arthur Wheeler had personally witnessed his son's honing of photo-topographic skills for more than a decade in the mountains and carefully read Oliver's academic papers on the subject which began as early as 1909.



E.O. Wheeler with photo-topographic camera. (Image by Sandy Woollaston, courtesy of the Royal Geographic Society (with IBS), London England)

Starting behind schedule, the Expedition left Darjeeling in late May 1921. They traversed over 400 miles arriving in Tingri in mid June. The Expedition splintered into subgroups and commenced their appointed tasks: Mallory and Bullock headed toward the valley that led to Mount Everest. Heron, Wheeler and Howard Bury travelled to the Kyetrak Valley,

⁵*When faced with the choice of Wheeler, Morshead, Woollaston and Howard-Bury "only Wheeler had sufficient mountaineering experience, and it was decided that he alone should accompany Bullock and myself on our first attempt to reach the col." George Mallory, cited in Into the Silence, Wade Davis (2012), p. 351*

west of Mount Everest. All were hampered by what they assumed would remain in Nepal: the monsoon. For the next three months the moisture-laden air fell mostly as snow (above 15,000 ft) mid morning to near the end of the day. Opportunities to photograph distinct mountain features - essential to the photo-topographic process - were limited.

For four weeks Mallory and Bullock reconnoitred the North Face, West Ridge and south (Western Cwm) climbing routes of Mount Everest. They deduced that the North Ridge above the Chang La/North Col offered the most likely ascent line up Mount Everest. But how to get to the base of the Chang La/North Col? Its steep western slopes seemed unassailable. Consequently, they resolved to examine the unexplored eastern approach and so began a return march to Chöbuk. This took them down the west side of the main Rongbuk Glacier. They were behind schedule and in their haste they wandered past an eastern side valley (about one mile away) that they had also seen from 21,000 ft on Ri-Ring earlier in their reconnaissance. Describing this as an unfortunate omission might be an understatement.⁶ Wheeler remedied this critical oversight for the Expedition in early August.

For Oliver Wheeler, July was a period when he was alternately exhilarated by the occasional glimpse of soaring peaks, vexed by the growing gap between planned vs. completed work, demoralized by endless 4+ hour ascents to promising photo-topographical stations, - sometimes alone packing 30+ lbs of equipment - only to have clouds boil up and be enveloped in snow⁷, and challenged by loneliness and *ennui*. In mid July Wheeler and his Tibetan porters returned with photographic plates to Tingri. There he spent "five busy days" developing and printing images.

⁶"...there is but a single cleft that opens to the east. Mallory and Bullock had walked right by the narrow mouth of the valley on their first day on the ice. Its outlet stream, a torrent of meltwater, had forced them to detour onto the glacier. From the summit of Ri-Ring they had seen the drainage again and remarked upon it. Their achievements on the mountain had been considerable, even noble, but given that their primary task was reconnaissance, their failure to explore this opening, given the ease of access, was a remarkable oversight, if not dereliction of duty..." Into the Silence, *Wade Davis (2012) p. 292*

⁷By his count only 1 day in 6 provided any opportunity to perform work. This must have been a crushing experience for someone accustomed to more action and results.

"It is simply disgusting, going up these infernal grinds to do nothing, but what can I do? Back home in Canada it would be nothing - a 2 hr grind, nothing at all; but here at these beastly altitudes it literally takes the life out of you."

- Oliver Wheeler, Personal Journal, As cited by Davis (2012) p. 286.

As nice as it must have been to return to a solid roof and improved food, it was no holiday.⁸ Any errors in this delicate work could weaken a pillar supporting one of the two main objectives of the Expedition. Furthermore, the film developing process harboured its own potential health consequences.⁹

Howard-Bury turned the Expedition's attention to Mount Everest's eastern approaches and headquarters was moved to the Kharta Valley. After almost two months of recce work getting one foot up Mount Everest was proved frustratingly elusive, a sentiment keenly felt by Mallory and Bullock. Wheeler returned to his photo-topographical efforts, starting near the Rongbuk monastery and worked his way south towards the hulking mass of Mount Everest.

What happened next was key to the two Expedition objectives.

Wheeler and his assistants, Gorang, Lagay and Ang Pasang, found their way past a glacial torrent issuing from a side valley east of the main Rongbuk Glacier. This was the same side valley others had neglected. They threaded their way through a large area of morainal material, and eventually looked out onto an uncharted glacier

⁸The process of working with photo plates and developing images was solitary and demanded precision. Wheeler described the sometimes exasperating process of changing photographic plates by one of his 'teachers', Canadian M.P. Bridgland..."in the dark entirely by feel (with a stuffy dark tent thrown over the head and body) left him unperturbed and like all his work was done with great care and thoroughness. I can remember as a youngster dropping off to sleep with 'Bridge' still struggling with plate changing." Mapper of Mountains, *M.P. Bridgland in the Canadian Rockies 1902-1930, I.S. MacLaren, University of Alberta Press, 2005, p. 65*

⁹By his coun Colonel Howard-Bury - the Expedition Leader was laid up for several days after being exposed to toxic fumes from the darkroom in Tingri.



Panorama of the East Rongbuk Glacier. From the camera station at latitude 28 04 10, longitude 86 55 01, elevation 20,590ft. (Images by Major E.O. Wheeler. Courtesy of the Royal Geographic Society (with IBS), London England)

that curved up to the south. They were about to solve the mystery of how best to approach Mount Everest.

Wheeler and his assistants continued to work their way up the glacier. Later described by Walt Unsworth, these glaciers were “a maze of melt channels and resemble an icy version of the shell-pocketed battlefields of the First World War. To cross one is purgatory, to go up one almost impossible.”¹⁰ The key was to travel along the moraines, both medial or lateral. They traveled up about four miles, parallel to a double-spined line of ice pinnacles, eventually to a camp at 19,500 ft.

On August 3rd Wheeler ascended the nearby slope and established a camera station at 20,590 ft. The clouds cooperated and six plates (shown in the attached panorama) were made of the complete East Rongbuk Glacier in relation to Mount Everest. Almost all was revealed. Wheeler wrote, “The valley tends a bit to the south and reaches past Everest to a pass at the end of its East Ridge - vastly bigger than I had imagined.”¹¹ The glacial route south was free of any icefalls or tottering seracs. This view all but confirmed that the East Rongbuk Glacier provided access to the eastern slopes of the Chang La.¹² Wheeler produced a hand-drawn map of the area and had it delivered by runners to Kharta

headquarters on or about August 11. It is unlikely Wheeler expected the expedition to return to the East Rongbuk; time was growing short. For Wheeler and his survey party work remained back near the main Rongbuk Glacier and it was to this task that they turned their efforts.

They returned to the snout of the main Rongbuk Glacier for a few days, then headed west to establish a higher camp in now familiar wretched conditions. “I was in this camp for five days; most of them spent huddled under rocks waiting for the clouds to lift. I had one beautiful day, my only one in six weeks, and got some very nice photographs of Mount Everest and its West Ridge.” Time had run out and the eastern approaches demanded surveying attention. Always mission oriented, Wheeler lamented being unable to finish work in the nearby upper Kyetrak Valley.

At the time Wheeler did not appreciate the difficulties Mallory, Bullock and others were having simply trying to view Mount Everest from their positions in and near the Kharta Valley, let alone solve the puzzle of how to best access the Chang La/North Col. It was not until August 16th that Mallory got partial views of the Chang La/North Col, but he was, apparently, still baffled by where the glacier to the north debauched.

¹⁰Walt Unsworth description of glaciers in the eastern Himalaya. Walt Unsworth, *Everest*, Penguin Books Ltd, 1982 p. 53.

¹¹Wheeler Personal Journal, cited by Wade Davis, *Into the Silence*, p. 331

¹²Wheeler wrote “...I had a glimpse of a big peak - Makalu, I thought - over the pass at the head of the southerly branch of the glacier: and this gave me the idea that there must be a comparatively low pass from here to the Kama Valley.” Major E.O. Wheeler, M.C., R.E. “The Photographic Survey” Appendix II Mount Everest The Reconnaissance, 1921, Edward Arnold, London.

Oliver arrived at the Kharta Valley headquarters on August 26th, after "two months almost wholly alone!"¹³ It is hard to imagine just how uplifting it must have been, even if "five days were spent developing and printing" and another seven days taking 'indifferent' photographic stations in the Kharta Valley.

Meanwhile, Mallory and Bullock continued to be foiled by weeks of bad weather until near the last feasible day to mount an effort, the weather improved slightly. Plans were drawn up for one last push to camp on the Lhakpa La and hope to find a feasible route down to the head of the East Rongbuk Glacier. Wheeler, three of his survey assistants, and Major Morshead joined the group at the 22,300 ft Lhakpa La. They completed another photographic station there, the highest ever for the Survey of India. From this vantage point the upper East Rongbuk Glacier was visible, trailing off to the north (where Wheeler and his survey party had been seven weeks earlier). Other expedition members may have begun to better grasp the veracity of Wheeler's August hand sketched map and the relative 'ease' of the northern approach. However, acknowledging this in their personal journals and in official accounts was oblique and padded. Mallory would only allow that Wheeler's northern approach was 'speculative'. The reality is Wheeler had solved the puzzle of accessing Mount Everest weeks earlier; having traversed all but a benign 2.8 mile section of the upper East Rongbuk Glacier.



Mount Everest from Windy Gap/Lhakpa La. (Image by Charles Howard Bury, courtesy of the Royal Geographic Society (with IBS), London England)

The group on the Lhakpa La suffered the effects of high altitude. A "council of war" was convened and it was decided that Wheeler would join Mallory and Bullock in a last effort to

¹³*Ibid.*

ascend the Chang La/North Col. "I was delighted to get into the 'final push,' and enjoyed the few days' change from surveying to climbing, enormously."¹⁴ On September 23 the group picked their way down 1,200 ft to the East Rongbuk Glacier then crossed two miles to the beginning of the slope leading to the Chang La/North Col. At 21,500 ft the wind was punishing and they struggled to erect five tents. The following day Ang Pasang, Gorang, and Legay were the only ones from the group of 10 porters who volunteered to carry on. After a slow start, they post-holed their way up the steepening slope. Ang Pasang and Legay "did wonders in breaking trail through the deep snow."¹⁵ Four hours of climbing brought the group to the base of the most challenging section where Mallory took the lead and chopped 500 steps to just under the lip of the Chang La/North Col.

In the lee of a cornice, a few feet below the Chang La/North Col, Mallory declared he was good for another 2,000 feet of ascent. Wheeler's lower legs were "completely numb", but "I thought I could do another 500 ft". Bullock was tired, but ready to go on. Winds were howling immediately overhead and the "col was smoking." They could see the North Ridge of Mount Everest. Technically, the terrain looked relatively 'easy', to at least 28,000 ft. The last kilometre to the 29,000 ft summit appeared less so. Ascending out from the lee, possibly one or two hundred yards, they collided with the full force of the westerly wind. "No one could have existed on that ridge,"¹⁶ Wheeler wrote. Mallory later described the scene as "blown snow endlessly swept over grey slopes, just the grim prospect, no respite, and no hope."¹⁷ Further progress could not be had. They

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Major E.O. Wheeler "Climbing Mount Everest," *Manitoba Free Press*, March 4, 1922

¹⁶Wheeler *Personal Journal*, cited in *Into the Silence*, Wade Davis (2012), p. 359.

¹⁷George Mallory letter to Geoffrey Young, November 11, 2021 cited in *First on Everest: The Mystery of Mallory and Irvine*, Tom Holzel and Audrey Salkeld, Henry Holt and Company Ltd., 1986, p. 81

turned their back to the mountain and buried their aspirations.

With difficulty and risk the six descended the slope. They observed point release avalanches but carried down as best they could and eventually found refuge in their tents. Mallory worked on and warmed Oliver's legs under difficult conditions, which Wheeler credited for both saving his lower legs and his life. The next day the party of ten recrossed the upper East Rongbuk Glacier, laboured up to the Lhakpa La, and then down to advance base camp in the Kharta Valley. That there was no loss of life was a testament to their collective grit and luck.

The climbing elements of the Expedition had ended; Wheeler's work had not. He re-dedicated himself to surveying and headed into the adjacent Kama Valley in the company of Colonel Bury and Wollaston. More stations were made. Consistent with the theme of the previous four

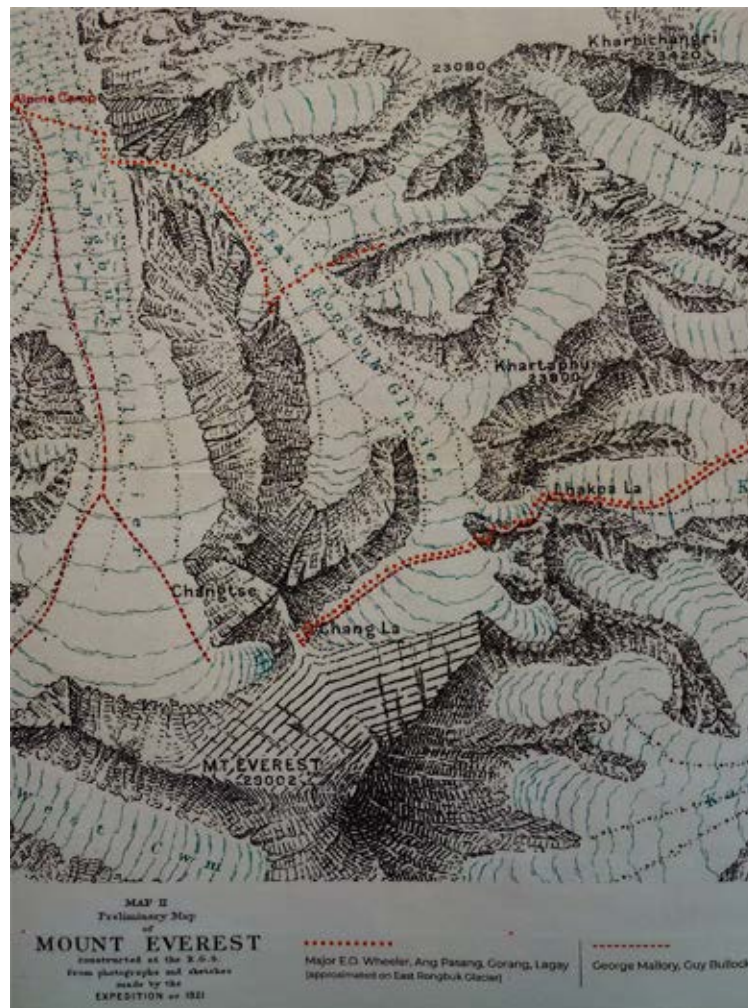
months, "we only had two clear days there, and I had to leave it without covering as much ground as I should have liked, though - as usual - I spent my days in snowstorms, hoping for breaks in the clouds." ¹⁸ Wheeler's dedication was consistently impressive.

With Hinks and the Organizing Committee insisting - verging on a demand - for a map, Wheeler, Howard-Bury, Heron, and Raeburn journeyed back to Darjeeling.

On October 19, after more than five months away, Wheeler arrived in the Darjeeling area and spent November drafting a sketch survey. In December he moved to Dehra Dun to complete the detailed map.

The expedition delivered on virtually every detail of its objectives. But it had been an exhausting affair.

One can read many things into one of Wheeler's



Map of Mount Everest, Reconnaissance Expedition 1921. (Constructed at the Royal Geographic Society from photographs by Major E.O. Wheeler and sketches. East Rongbuk Glacier track added in 2023)

summary comments about the 1921 Expedition:

"I enjoyed the Expedition and my work with it, thoroughly; but in my opinion, Tibet, at any rate that portion of it in which we were, is a place to have been, rather than one to go to!"¹⁹

When approached to participate in the Everest Expedition for the following year Wheeler politely demurred.²⁰

At the start of the 1921 Expedition Oliver Wheeler may have seemed a good, though unproven, fit. By the end he had exceeded everyone's expectations and earned their respect. In so doing he brought distinction to himself and his country.²¹

In 1953 Oliver Wheeler began his 4th, and final year as President of the Alpine Club of Canada. That spring Tenzing Norgay and

"... acknowledgment of our debt to the labours of the First Expedition and in particular to Wheeler's admirable survey, accomplished as it was under conditions of such extreme difficulty and continuous hardship".

- Dr. T Longstaff, Member, 1922 Everest Expedition.

CAJ, Vol XIII, p.38.

¹⁸Wheeler Personal Journal cited in *Into the Silence*, Davis (2012), p. 357

¹⁹Major E.O. Wheeler, MC, RE, "The Photographic Survey", Appendix II, *Mount Everest the Reconnaissance*, 1921.

²⁰Newspapers reported that the Surveyor General of India Col Ryder had invited him back as a climber and correspondent for the Associated Press for the 1922 Expedition, and that Wheeler 'declined citing the completion of the original objective of map making! On the face of it there is more to this aspect of the story, given that Major Morshead (who was the lead surveyor for the 1921 Expedition) had also completed the original objective, yet returned officially as one of the climbers for the 1922 Expedition.

²¹M It is doubtful Oliver Wheeler would boast about his achievements. That would be uncharacteristic. "Very thorough in anything he attempted, he was modest to an extreme in what he achieved. His enthusiasm was stimulating to his friends to whom he offered a warm comradeship....." "In Memoriam", *Canadian Alpine Journal* 1962, pp. 159-62.

Edmund Hillary reached the summit of Mount Everest/Sagarmatha/Chomolungma, 32 years after the path finder efforts of the 1921 Everest Reconnaissance Expedition.

The floodgates of nostalgia surely opened for Brigadier Sir Edward Oliver Wheeler, K.B., M.C., LdH (Fr), R.E.

Sic Itur Ad Astra



Members of the Expedition: (Left to Right) Sitting – Mallory, Wheeler, Bullock, Morshead; Standing – Wollaston, Bury, Heron, Raeburn. (Photo courtesy of the Whyte Museum, from the Canadian Alpine Journal, 1923, Vol XIII)

When commenting on the image above during a presentation to the Canadian Club in Toronto, Wheeler said:

"I hope I do not always look as tough as that."

The Wheeler connection to Vancouver Island was profound.

Arthur O. Wheeler's primary residence was in Sidney for decades. His son, Edward O. Wheeler led the first ascent of Mt. Elkhorn in Strathcona Park. E.O.'s son, John Oliver was a student at Shawnigan Lake School from 1933 to 1942.

2023 PHOTO CONTEST



Summer Activity (Winner)

Spectrum Range.

Photo: Catrin Brown



Summer Activity (Honourable Mention)

Dolomite Daze.

Photo: Joisan Fairwell



Winter Activity (Winner)
Climbing Ravenhorn in Mackenzie Range.
Photo: Barry Hansen



Winter Activity (Honourable Mention)
Snowshoeing Mount Brooks.
Photo: *Eva Gnech*



Nature (Winner)
Outhouse window.
Photo: Keith Battersby



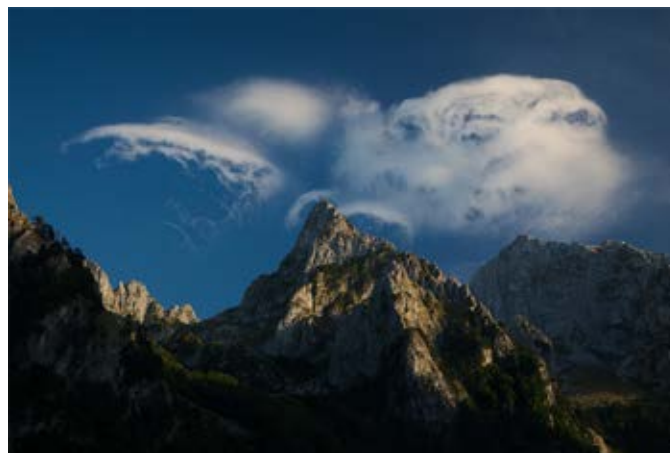
Nature (Honourable Mention)
A Swiss bear.
Photo: Joisan Fairwell



Mountain Scenery (Winner)

Larch madness.

Photo: Chris Neate



Mountain Scenery (Honourable Mention)

Clouds over Karanfil in Grebaje Valley Montenegro.

Photo: Martin Hofmann



Humour (Co-winner)
Contemplation at Balu Pass.
Photo: Mike Hubbard



Humour (Co-winner)
Poof.
Photo: David Fishwick



Humour (Honourable Mention)
Vancouver Island ski tour.
Photo: Keith Battersby



Vancouver Island (Winner)

5040 at sunrise.

Photo: Eva Gnech



Vancouver Island (Honourable Mention)

Triple beauty.

Photo: Catrin Brown

