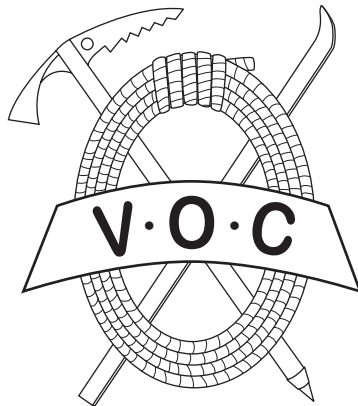


Varsity Outdoor Club Journal



59th Edition
2016-2017

University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC

Varsity Outdoor Club Journal 2016-2017

Cover: Backlit ice crystals near Phelix hut. Photo: Clemens Adolphs

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Table of Contents

- 1-4 President's Message
- 5-6 A Note from the Editor
- 7-10 The Club Executive

12-105 Hiking and Scrambling

- 19 A Tantalizing Series - *Matteo Agnoloni*
- 35 An Arctic Tale - *Cassandra Elphinstone*
- 42 Team Bad Idea Visits Bell's Bothy - *Artem Bylinskii*
- 48 Toba To Powell Alpine Traverse - *Arran Whiteford*
- 54 Chilkoot Trail Family Vacation - *Line Veenstra*
- 60 The Bear Necessities - *Liam Hodgons & Heather Filyk*
- 65 Island Caving Extravaganza - *Shane Monks O'Byrne*
- 75 Stein Valley Traverse - *Birgit Rogalla et al.*
- 84 Bears, Trout Soup, and paddle boards - *Ross Campbell*
- 94 Sunshine Coast Trail - *Richard So*
- 102 Lizzie Workhike - *Fay Chen*

106-114 Photo Contest Winners

115-169 Skiing and Winter Mountaineering

- 121 Blackcomb-Currie Traverse - *Katie McMaben*
- 126 Good Idea to Drag a Snowboard - *Marc Rizkallah*
- 138 A Minor Fiasco - *Jeff Mottershead*
- 143 Lillooet Icefield in April/May - *Krista Cawley*
- 151 Skiing on the Pemberton Icecap - *Birgit Rogalla*
- 159 My First Ski Traverse - *Kasia Celler*
- 164 Second Attempt to Pitt River Hot Springs -
Arran Whiteford & Joane Elleouet

170-252 Climbing and Mountaineering

- 175 Red Rocks Adventure - *Cora Skaien*
- 184 The Nose That Did Not Sneeze - *Veronika Schmitt
& Todd Mackenzie*

- 190 Adventures on Mt Rainier - *Caitlin Schneider*
- 197 First Ascents in the Ossa Region - *Nicholas Gobin*
- 202 All The Light I Did See - *David Hurley*
- 205 Exploring Bugaboo Provincial Park - *Cora Skaiien*
- 215 Mt. Robson - *Nick Matmyuk*
- 220 The Meager Obelisk - *Lea Zhecheva*
- 224 An Appetite for the Alpine - *Kevin Boland*
- 229 The Jervis Expedition - *Spencer Rasmussen*
- 239 Mt. Redoubt Traverse - *Julien Renard*
- 244 Tales from Mount Tupper - *Matt Kennedy*
- 249 Mt. Hood Turn n' Burn - *Carly Peterson*

253-310 Pedals and Paddles

- 259 Powell Forest Canoe Route - *Cora Skaiien*
- 267 Thanksgiving on Wheels - *Lucy Buchanan-Parker*
- 271 Your First Surfboard - *Christoph Schilling*
- 276 A Bikepacking Adventure - *Ilija Capralov*
- 287 An Urban Adventure - *Krista Cawley & Piotr Forysinski*
- 289 Cycle Touring in the Hebrides - *Mike Cancellia*
& Lizzy Dugway
- 298 Waterways of Whistler - *Caitlin Schneider*
- 302 Indian Arm Kayaking Bonanza - *Maya Motyka*
- 306 The 2 Lakes, 2 Rivers Challenge - *Krista Cawley*

311-356 Club Life and Reflections

- 317 From the Desk of *Devon Campbell*
- 321 The Kindness of Strangers - *Cora Skaiien et al.*
- 330 Trail Dreams - *Knut Kitching*
- 333 Crevasse Rescue Practice - *Julien Renard*
- 340 A Moonlight Memorial Walk - *Elliott Skierszkan*
- 342 How the Faff Goes On - *The Phelix Hut New*
Year's Day Crew
- 344 Maybe I'm Getting Fatter - *Christian Veenstra*
- 346 How do you replace a helicopter? - *Ross Campbell*
- 351 Swimming in Cold Water - *Tom Curran*
- 355 Crossing the Squamish River Cables - *Tom and Jerry*

President's Message

Cora Skaien

When I joined the VOC in 2009, I had no idea how much of an impact the club would have on my life. I had struggled with my transition into Vancouver in 2008 and had not developed a community or solid friend group. Further, I always loved the outdoors, but did not have access to the resources or knowledge to move beyond basic camping and hiking where I grew up. Over the last 8 years within the club, I have learned so much about climbing, mountaineering, kayaking, backpacking and more, and now love to teach these skills to others within and outside of the VOC. Additionally, I have a huge friend group of so many wonderful people that I cannot imagine my life without, thanks to the club! I have no doubt that the club changed my life in a very positive manner, and that I owe the club so much for making my life the wonderful life that it is now. In 2016, I had been on the exec for 5 years already; yet, when I was approached about being the president for the 2016-2017 year, I was reluctant. The month before, I had thought to myself “I am off the hook because I have been so busy with my thesis, I have given less to the club this year”, but then I stepped it up in January and landed back on the radar. After Caitlin Schneider, I had been on the exec longest and had been involved in so many different aspects of the club, which made me a likely candidate.

Although I was initially reluctant, I am very glad that I took on this position. Of course, as with many previous presidents, I would not have been able to pull it off initially without the help of “presidents of the past” such as Artem Babaian, Clemens Adolphs, and Caitlin Schneider. Eventually you learn to take the reigns and delegate tasks to try and keep the club running (although many say that the club can run itself, which in many aspects, is true!). This of course would not

be possible without the immense dedication of the rest of the exec, particularly those who stepped up to dedicate 5-20 hours a week when needed. Thanks Carly Peterson, Kelsey Miller, Else Bosman, Katie Moreland, Birgit Rogalla, Liz Lund, Nick Hindley, Devon Campbell to name a few, but there are too many wonderful people to list here properly, thank you all! I also want to thank several non-exec members who stepped up into leadership roles and trip organizer roles this year, allowing the club to provide trips to members!

This year, the club ran approximately 115 trips (via the trip agenda), plus dozens more that were organized on the message board or independently. These trips would not be possible without the dedication of old and new trip organizers, and it has been wonderful to see many individuals transition into leadership roles, which in part has been possible due to the Trip Leader Mentorship program that we ran this year (where we paired new trip organizers with experienced trip organizers). Most of our classic annual trips were successfully run this year (e.g. Son of Rock, Alpine Skills Course, Lead Ladder, Glacier School, Tele-school, Intro to Backcountry Camping, Winter Long Hike, Ice Climbing weekends, New Years at Phelix), except Rock Party (formally known as Long Hike), which had to be cancelled due to a severe rainstorm and high winds. We were also able to continue to offer discounted rates for programs/courses offered by other organizations, such as AST (Avalanche Skills Training) and Wilderness First Aid. We gathered for fun on evenings as well, with approximately 20 slideshows being run in the last year, 5 VOC BBQs, 2 gear swaps, many first aid refreshers, several workshops (e.g. how to be a good trip leader), many beach beacon search practice, a few beer-ienteering, and several additional socials. The Aviary (UBC's climbing gym) continues to thrive under the leadership of Corey Kelly, with a huge community of climbers booming on campus. Here, we offer belay lessons 3-5 days a week for a \$10 deposit, and run 1-2 evening lead climbing lessons a month.

Although some things remained the same, we also experienced some changes. This year, we had access to the new "Square" payment system where we have finally moved closer to the modern age and can now access credit card payments in person for an additional fee (although the system is a bit of a hassle for the treasurer, thanks Else Bosman!). We have also began implementing automated e-mails to trip organizers, one on the Tuesday before a trip with tips and important points of

considerations, and one sent the Monday after a trip with a feedback form (google form) so we can assess how things went (thanks Clemens Adolphs for doing the website stuff for this!). We will hopefully have the new trip rating system up and running soon, which will classify the objective difficulty and the fitness required for any given trip. For film fundraisers, we teamed up with VIMFF (Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival) this year as part of the actual festival as opposed to running the smaller Best of Fest tour afterwards, which is anticipated to be a success, and also showed “Paddle for the North”, a delightful kayak and conservation film in the fall.

Currently we still manage our four main huts, the Roland Burton “Sphinx” Hut, the Brian Waddington “Phelix” Hut, the Brew Hut and the Julian Harrison Hut. We have applied for renewal of our tenure application for Harrison Hut and approved the installation of solar lighting there. We also began assisting with the maintenance of the Lizzie Hut and the trail leading to it (thanks Cassandra Elphinstone, George Hill and Lea Zhecheva). Instead of using a helicopter to get wood to Brew this year, we decided to run a work hike to determine how many people it took to replace a helicopter and had people haul wood up to the hut. Other maintenance activities also happened to keep these huts in good working order.

In terms of gear, this year we doubled our supply of avi packages and now have 39 complete sets (and yet are still always out!), we retired many of our older climbing harnesses and 8 climbing ropes, we had 2 AT ski set-ups donated that have been rented out every week, and we had a splitboard available for renting, to name a few changes. Moving forward, we hope to continue enhancing our gear available to members and continue to ensure safety through regular inspection and maintenance.

One ever growing concern we have in the club that we will need to battle moving forward is the ever-increasing demand for club trips with more members. We are ecstatic to have so many new members keen to get into the outdoors, but need to determine how to mitigate the demand and get our members on trips because some trips have 70+ people signed up as interested, with 10-12 spots available. As we get more trip organizers on board, and more places that we can access, we can hopefully continue providing enough trips to our members in reasonable group sizes (5-12 people approximately) to areas where we

can enjoy the outdoors in an ecologically respectful manner.

2017 is our Centennial year! Thanks to the help of the Centennial Crew, we are collating as much history as possible from old records and communication with members of the past. We will celebrate our Centennial on Labour Day Long Weekend in September 2017, complete with a Centennial Book (thanks Elliott Skierszkan!), a banquet on the evening of Saturday, September 2nd and many trips organized throughout the weekend. I hope that everyone can come and celebrate 100 years of the VOC with us, and that everyone has had as amazing of a time in the club as I have had. Now that I am nearly done in my role as president, I will gladly join the list of “presidents of the past” to help provide insight as requested to future presidents, and continue to be active in the VOC community. With that, I will leave you with one of my favourite quotes and encourage everyone to get out there to explore the beautiful world we live in, and to do so in a safe manner.

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” -- Mark Twain

--Cora Skaien

A Note from the Editor

Caitlin Schneider

I have held many positions on the VOC exec, and helped out with many of the journals made of the past few years. I figured that since I am about to graduate, it was my chance to take on this huge project and make something beautiful.

As usual, I tried desperately to get people to write articles early, but it seems that hard deadlines are the only real motivation. But in the end, we have a really nice collection of articles to read this year, both truly hardcore adventures and some fresh looks at places that we may have visited many times before. These articles from newbie remind me to look back and think about how far each of us has come. I've been in Vancouver for almost 8 years now and learned so much since I came. Living on the east coast I had never even heard of backcountry skiing, and when I started to kayak on the rivers here, I quickly learned they were at a much different level than I was used. My friends and family back in Florida look at my photos and think that I am just about the craziest person there is, but these mountains, oceans and rivers have captured my heart and soul.

This is my first experience trying to publish a book of this magnitude. It's even longer than my thesis! Thankfully I didn't need to write all of it this time. It is amazingly satisfying to see all the articles and all the photos finally come together in book form, they look so nice! It is pretty awesome to know that this journal is part of the club history, that I get to be part of the club history. I hope that people in another hundred years can enjoy reading this journal. I love to read through all the articles in old journals, looking at the photos and dreaming of places that I want to visit soon, and thinking about how much has

changed over the years.

I would like to thank everyone for all their help with making this possible! First, all the article authors who dealt with my constant emails asking for articles and finally came through with excellent stories. All the editors, editing both from my kitchen table and from afar, were able to read through all 50 articles. A special thanks to Katie Moreland who swept in and finished editing all the stragglers. I would also like to thank the past journal editors who helped get me going in the right direction. It's hard to even know where to start sometimes.

It has been a great experience and I am looking forward to seeing the final product. I hope that you all enjoy reading all the articles as much as I did!

--Caitlin



The 2016-2017 Varsity Outdoor Club Executive



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Cora Skaien**



**Vice President
Byron Wilson**



**Treasurer
Else Bosman**



**Secretary
Katie Moreland**



**Membership Chair
Liz Lund**



**VOCene Editor
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**Trips Coordinator
Zach Wentz**



**Journal Editor
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**Archivist
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**FMCBC/ACC Rep
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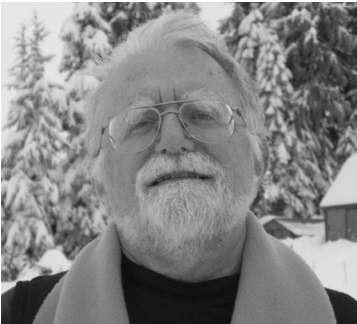
**Huts Coordinator
George Hill**



**Trails Coordinator
Lea Zhecheva**



**Climbing Wall
Corey Kelly**



**Useful Person
Roland Burton**



**Swag Master
Nick Hindley**

The Quartermasters



Kelsey Miller



Carly Peterson



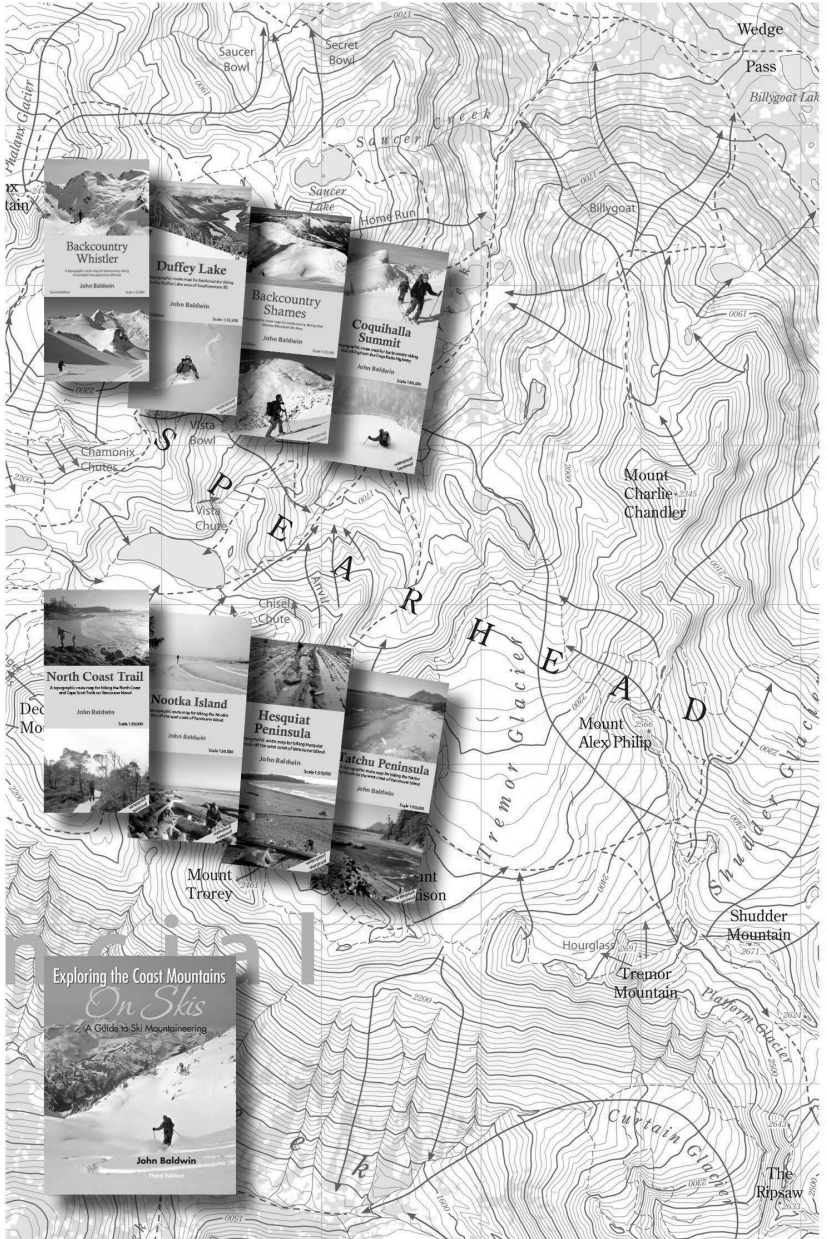
Anna Geller



Nicholas Uleryk-Carvalho



Bryan Starick



 www.johnbaldwin.ca

Hiking and Scrambling



Top: VOCers frolicking near Brandywine. Photo: Roseanna Gamlen-Greene

Bottom: Marc Palyart scrambles the approach slabs to Tricouni's north ridge. Photo: Matteo Angoloni





Top: Getting ready to hike up Mt. Marriott. Photo: Veronika Schmitt

Bottom: A bunch of VOCers on their way up Locomotive on a long weekend trip to Semaphore Lakes. Photo: Clemens Adolphs

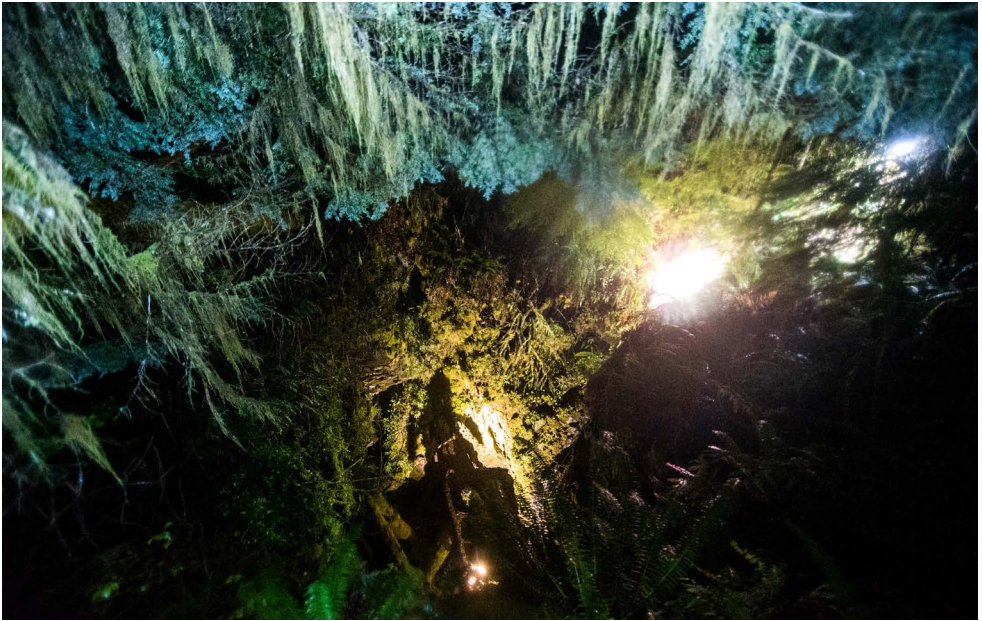




Top: The Ossa crew, ready to summit. Photo: Else Bosman

Bottom: Looking down on Ellesmere Island from helicopter.
Photo: Cassandra Elphinstone





Top: A snap-shot from Nathan's Time-lapse of the ascent while caving on Vancouver Island. Photo: Nathan Starzynski

Bottom: Start of the hike up the valley along the Stein river.
Photo: Birgit Rogalla





Spencer channeling his inner mountain goat above Princess Louisa Inlet.
Photo: Stuart Higgs



Top: Kevin topping out on the summit of Serratus at sunset.
Photo: Matteo Agnoloni

Bottom: Alpine glow on our camp below Mt John Clarke.
Photo: Spencer Rasmussen





Top: Tiff, Liz, Liam, and Heather near Athelney Pass.
Photo by Dhavan Vora.

Bottom: Rich stretching outside the Tin Hat Cabin while running on the Sunshine Coast. Self portrait.



A Tantalizing Series of Unfortunate Events

Matteo Agnoloni

Driving along the Sea-to-Sky highway, it is hard to avoid the beauty that is the Tantalus Range. Its rugged peaks make up a skyline that attracts attention from everyone ranging from your everyday tourists to world-class mountain guides. For a long time, I have wanted to make a trip to this area. Though, initially, it just started with wanting to hike up to Lake Lovely Water. As I climbed more mountains and acquired more skills, I started to think about harder objectives I could tackle. I had interests in climbing Alpha, Serratus, Dione, and Tantalus, but no plan as to which ones or what routes. My job wouldn't start until September, so I was hoping I could spend a decent amount of time in the area and try to climb all of them. I posted a trip on the calendar to try and find potential partners. People were interested, people bailed, and weather was uncertain. I started to worry if this would ever happen. Then, a glimmer of hope emerged; a week of clear blue skies was forecasted for the last week of July. But alas, I had no climbing partner.

I had a friend, Kevin Burton, who also had minimal responsibilities this summer, so I asked him if he would be up to spend some time in the Tantalus Range. He was stoked on the idea, but he had little to no glacier or snow experience. I took some time to think about what we could do. It then dawned on me that the best way to climb all four of the major peaks was to traverse the range. The idea of completing the Tantalus Enchainment entirely by foot sure was tempting. I researched the route, and it seemed there was only a short section of mellow glacier travel between the Jim Haberl Hut and Dione. I somehow sold Kevin on this idea.

Alpine Select describes the Tantalus Enchainment as follows:

TD 5.8 – Highly recommended. This is a fine adventure over 11km of superb alpine terrain, best done in a north-south direction; long on distance and moderate climbing, but demanding skill at routefinding and speed...An entirely by-foot approach would be an arduous affair and render this traverse into a 28km, 3- or 4-day affair.

28km didn't seem that long, and we both really wanted to get our Squamish-River-cable-car-crossing cherries popped. We also decided to go in a south-north direction because so many good things had been said about the east ridge of Alpha. We planned to finish in four days. I was super excited that everything was falling into place for a grand adventure.

Day 1: The Squamish River Epic

We arrived at the yellow gate on the Squamish Valley Road at approximately 8am. There were three cars parked there and we stopped to check if they had received any tickets. Each car had a sticker on their windshield from the Squamish Reserve Authorities warning that they would be towed if they did not remove their car in 15 days. We both thought this was extremely generous. There is a dirt road less than 100m south of the yellow gate that allows you to drive all the way to the cable car tower. We took this route, and my uber low clearance 2WD Ford Focus had no problems making it to the tower. We did some final organizing of our gear and then set off to cross the river. There is a locked chain keeping the gate to the tower closed, but the chain is loose so you can sneak through if you are slenderly built. You can also climb the side of the gate since it seems someone has cut the barbed-wire at the top.

Once at the top of the tower, Kevin expressed interest in crossing first. I had no problem with this, and actually preferred it as I could observe him and improve my strategy to cross. Kevin set off, and decided to wear his backpack as opposed to clipping it directly to the upper cable and dragging it. He easily made it to the first giant air traffic cone. At this point, things started to get really wobbly. Kevin would take one step forward and then spend a good amount of time wobbling back

and forth trying to regain balance. Occasionally, the shaking got so bad he had to sit down on the lower cable in order to stabilize himself. As he approached the second cone,

Kevin yelled over to me:

Kevin: “Dude! I’m so pumped!”

Matteo: “Lookin’ solid dude!”

Kevin: “How long has it been?”

Matteo: “Uhh...about an hour.”

Kevin: “Shiiiiit!”

As Kevin passed the second cone, I continued to shout extremely helpful advice, such as “You got this!” and “You’re totally killin’ it!” The shaking got REALLY bad past the second cone, and it became apparent that Kevin’s loosely fitted backpack was the cause of the issues. Kevin struggled to the third cone. I took a look at my watch and it had now been two hours since he had started. I was starting to get really nervous for my attempt at the crossing. I dazed off for a few moments, recalculating our schedule for the day. The original plan was to climb Alpha’s east ridge the first day and bivy somewhere in the Alpha-Serratus col. Maybe we would have to reassess once we were both over the river. SCHWAAACKK! All of a sudden, both of the cable car wires were vibrating violently. I looked up to see Kevin dangling upside down below both cables, struggling to pull himself back up. At first, though I feel guilty to admit it, I let out a little chuckle. Maybe it was more than a little chuckle. I think I actually had a good laugh. It seriously looked quite comical. This feeling was short-lived as I started to realize how much trouble he was in.

“Holy shit... How is he going to get back up? Holy shit... what if his harness isn’t tight enough and he slips out into the river? Holy shit... What if I have to rescue him?!”

I shit you not, Kevin was hanging upside down for a good 20 minutes. He had almost managed to reach for the upper cable and pull himself back up, but the weight of his overnight pack with 4+ days’ worth of food was weighing him down too much. Kevin called over

to me:

Kevin: “Matteo! I think I need you to rescue me.”

Matteo: “Uhh... okay! Give me one second!” ***whispers to himself*** What the fuck am I going to do?!

I collected some extra gear, with the idea that when I reached him, I would try and clip his backpack to the upper cable so that he could take his backpack off and climb back up. I had never been so nervous. I worked my way across the cable and passed the first cone. At the same time, Kevin was still trying to pull himself back up. I yelled over to him to stop moving as he was shaking the cables quite hard. Then, as I was making my way across, two people in a canoe came down the river. I cannot even begin to describe to you the look on their faces when they saw Kevin dangling upside down with no hope in hell of getting back up. They were on their way back from Lake Lovely Water, so they canoed over to the cable car tower. They sat there watching for a couple minutes, and then yelled up to me, asking if Kevin wants to drop his pack into the river while they canoed under us. I relayed the information to Kevin. He said, “Yeah, maybe.” The two good Samaritans started paddling up stream. I had this grand vision that Kevin and the two canoers would time the dropping of the pack to perfection, resulting in the pack landing perfectly in the canoe. Yeah fucking right. Then, as the canoers continued upstream, somehow, by the grace of all that is good, Kevin managed to sling a piece of his pack and clip it to the upper cable. He was free. He climbed back up and yelled over to the canoers to thank them for their offering of aid. I made my way back to the start of the cable crossing, I looked at my watch. Kevin had been dangling upside down for at least 30 minutes. He gathered his composure and completed the crossing at pretty much exactly the three hour mark.

My crossing was uneventful. I took advantage of Kevin’s suffering and clipped my backpack to the upper cable and dragged it behind me. I made it across in 30 minutes and applauded Kevin’s determination. He would later admit to me that whilst upside down, his legs went completely numb and he almost puked.

After a much deserved break, it was now about 12:30pm. Kevin was totally worked, and it didn’t look like we were going to make it up and

over Alpha. We still needed to cover as much ground as possible. We pushed through the slog that is the Lake Lovely Water trail. Once at the Tantalus hut, we stopped inside for a quick snack break. There was a large group of late-20-something-year-olds, kitted out with jean shorts and snap-back caps. One woman asked me:

Random Woman: “Where are you guys coming from?”

Matteo: “The river.”

She seemed confused with my response. I guess she was asking where we were actually from, since everyone there seemed to have flown in by helicopter. I didn't have the energy to carry on a conversation.

After some fuel, we continued on, with our new goal being to set up camp at the shoulder of the east ridge of Alpha. There is a trail that leads directly to the shoulder. At first you walk along the shores of Lake Lovely Water, and then you arrive at a fork. Going left leads to Lambda Lake and going right is the approach trail for the east ridge of Alpha. The trail is quite steep but very easy to follow. By 7:00pm, we were on the shoulder of Alpha. We set up camp in a very picturesque spot with views of the minor Tantalus range peaks, ate dinner, and set our alarms for 4am. The next day, we planned to climb up and over Alpha, climb the east ridge of Serratus, and descend towards the Jim Haberl Hut.



Kevin scrambling up Alpha with beautiful views of Lake Lovely Water in behind. Photo: Matteo Agnoloni

Day 2: The Deceptive Rappel Route

Our 4am wake-up time came a little faster than we had been hoping for. I woke up, had breakfast in bed, and started packing my gear. Kevin was still a bit tired from yesterday's ordeal, so he took a bit longer to get up. I pleaded with him that we had a very long day ahead of us in order to make up for lost time.

With everything packed up, we started heading towards the east ridge. We stayed on the snow covered north side of the ridge until we reached sections of easy ridge walking. The crux of the route is very obvious and is even marked with a cairn and flagging. You drop down into a notch and scramble up a couple meters to a thin crack that gradually widens up higher with a slight overhang. I started flaking out the rope and I asked Kevin if I could lead the crux pitch. He happily obliged.

There is not much protection for the crux pitch. If I recall, I placed one nut and one #0.75 C4 not too far off of the ground. There was an old piton that I made use of. It seemed pretty solid. If you really wanted to, you could lug up a #4 C4 to protect the upper half of the crux. I belayed Kevin up off of a giant block, and from there we remained unroped to the summit of Alpha. We pretty much stuck to the ridge crest and only deviated slightly to the left or the right if the climbing looked a lot easier there.

On top of Alpha, we had amazing blue skies and a clear view of Lake Lovely Water, as well as our destination for the next few days. We took a short break, had some food, and began our descent towards the east ridge of Serratus. We followed the instructions for the descent route in Alpine Select. We scrambled down the southern face of Alpha until we came upon a small gully leading to the snowy western flank. It went really smoothly and Kevin even found an ice screw in excellent condition.

We managed to make our way over to the Alpha-Serratus col, which involved a sketchy moat crossing and some extremely chossy rock. From here, the east ridge of Serratus looked absolutely massive, and we couldn't even see half of it. In Alpine Select, it is described as being seamed with innumerable gendarmes, offering classic mountaineering on terrain that is mostly 3rd class. Spectacular though it appears, the



Kevin working his way around one of the many choss-littered gendarmes on Serratus. Alpha in behind. Photo: Matteo Agnoloni

rock is poor. Do not take this description lightly. The terrain is mostly 3rd class if, and only if, you have near perfect route finding. It is very easy to make a mistake route finding and find yourself on 5th class terrain. We made this mistake a couple times and found ourselves having to very carefully downclimb 5th class terrain.

The biggest difficulty for us was finding an easy route to the top of the first main pinnacle of the ridge. We made two poor decisions and found ourselves trying to climb some pretty tough spots. Also, the description about the poor rock quality is a bit of an understatement. The rock quality is fucking horrible. We had to double check each hand and foot placement in order to ensure we wouldn't release any death blocks onto each other. This definitely slowed down the climbing and increased our mental fatigue.

Once we were on the high point of the ridge, the climbing seemed to become a little easier. We climbed over top one of the many gendarmes and found ourselves needing to rappel off. There was a bunch of rap tat slung around this giant boulder. We inspected it and decided to use it. Kevin rappelled off first and then me second. We went to pull the rope and it would not budge.

We tried whipping the rope around in different orientations, but whatever we did, the rope wouldn't move at all. I cursed an innumer-

able amount of times and after some more pulling, I volunteered to climb back up. The rappel was overhung, so it would have taken ages to prussik back up. I found a way around the gendarme that was a little spicy and totally exposed with hundreds of meters of air below me. Once back at the top, I reoriented the rope and had Kevin test if the rope would pull. This was the lesson we learned. For every rappel, the first person would lower themselves and then test if the rope would pull. If it did, the second person would continue rappelling and all would be good. If it didn't, the second person would still be on top to put the rope in position so that it could be pulled. I rappelled back down and the rope thankfully pulled.

We continued up and over the multitude of gendarmes. Some areas were definitely easier than others, and some areas I was really wishing that we had roped up. I was definitely feeling scared at times, but it was hard to ignore the fact that the terrain really was truly spectacular. Since leaving Lake Lovely Water the previous day, we had not seen one other person on our journey. I had a feeling of being really out there; just a tiny speck in this massive mountain range.

We finally topped out on the summit of Serratus around 8pm. We had been moving for a solid 16 hours and fatigue was starting to set in. We also only had about an hour and a half of sunlight left. Kevin and I both had the topos for the west face rappel route saved on our phones. It was supposed to be bolted rappel stations straight to the base of Serratus, with an easy ten-minute jaunt over to the Jim Haberl Hut. One of the descriptions we found online said to descend from the summit towards the west face where you will find a cairn. The first set of bolts should be here. We found the cairn, but didn't see any bolts. We spent the next hour and a half tirelessly looking for these shiny steel bolts, but luck wasn't on our side. Kevin yelled down to me that we should probably start looking for a place to sleep. We found the flattest spot we could just below the summit of Serratus and I fell asleep feeling very frustrated that we were not able to find the rappel route.

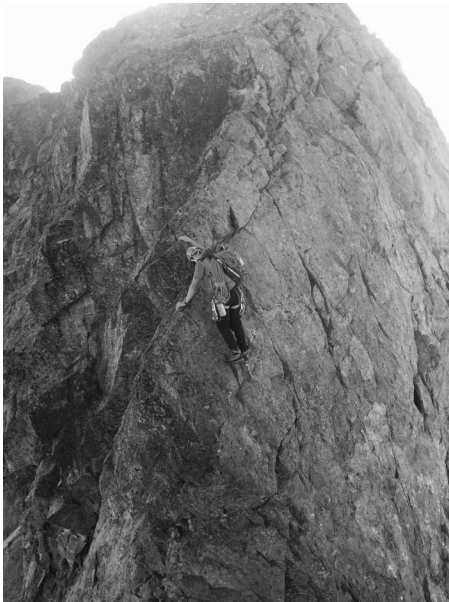
Day 3: The Harness That Got Away

I woke up at 4am, had breakfast in bed once again, and tried for the last time to look for the first set of bolts. I told myself I would spend 30 minutes looking and then I would give up. All this did was increase

my frustration as I was still not able to find the bolts. I scrambled back up to our sleeping spot to wake Kevin up and told him that we should just start downclimbing the west face. Alpine Select recommends the south face couloir as the descent route, but it was completely melted out and past reports of this descent described the base as being plagued with an impassable bergschrund in late summer.

The first third of the descent was very chossy. We had to take turns downclimbing in order to not dislodge any massive rocks on to each other. We rappelled off this tiny horn that brought us into this gully feature leading to the west face couloir. From here, we downclimbed the steep snow slope for approximately 30 meters, and then traversed across the snow slope downwards and to the right towards a rocky rib. We carefully downclimbed the rock rib until we were about 15 meters above the snow. If we continued downclimbing to the snow, we would have had to figure out how to cross the two meter wide moat, but we luckily found two solid pitons in a thin crack that we used to rappel onto the snow slope with. Looking back up at the route we had just descended and comparing it with the topo we had saved on our

phones, it was hard to comprehend how we did not see any bolts since our descent route and the topo looked extremely similar.



Matteo wishing he was on belay while climbing this airy arête on Serratus.

Photo: Kevin Burton

We arrived at the Jim Haberl Hut shortly after and were welcomed by its few other occupants. Supposedly, the rocks we hurtled down the west face of Serratus were clearly heard. I also briefly spoke with one of the guides from Altus Mountain Guides who told me that he was one of the people who put in the bolts for the west face descent route off of Serratus. I expressed to him our difficulty

with finding the bolts and that we just downclimbed the west face couloir. He told me that our descent used to be the preferred route to downclimb, but in the past years there had been too many close calls with guided groups due to the loose rock. He described that the first set of bolts is very tricky to find, but what you want to do is descend the summit towards the north face of Serratus. Downclimb a short section of the north face, 45 to 50 degree snow, towards a rocky notch. There will be some short-lived 4th class downclimbing until you see a cairn. The bolts should be here. There are six sets of bolt anchors, with the last anchor being a single bolt and a nut. According to him, the anchors are lined up vertically, so once you find the first set, it should be a breeze to locate the rest of them.

We took a short break at the hut to fuel up and use the facilities. It was now 11am. When I was planning the itinerary for this trip, I planned on us getting to the Jim Haberl Hut by the end of the second day, with us departing the hut by 7am on the third day. By these standards, we were only four hours behind schedule.

We left the hut towards Dione and Tantalus, with the plan of going as far as we could and bivvying somewhere on route. The Dione Glacier is quite mellow and wasn't showing any signs of crevasses or sagging. We travelled unroped across the glacier and only encountered one partially exposed crevasse that we carefully walked around. From the glacier, we gained the ridgeline leading towards the high snow shoulder below Dione. There was a 10 meter notch we would first have to rappel into in order to gain access to the continuous ridge line. I got there a few minutes before Kevin, so I began to set up our rappel. As Kevin came around the corner, we had a small chat about what our plan was and I asked him if he wanted to rappel down first. The next few words to come out of Kevin's mouth were words that I had never imagined I would ever hear while on the third day of an alpine climbing excursion. "I think I forgot my fucking harness." I stood there wide-mouthed. I didn't believe him. He checked his backpack. Not there. Fuck. I buried my head in the rocks while Kevin continued to yell out expletives. He told me that he vividly remembered leaving it beside the Jim Haberl outhouse, which was about two hours away in the wrong direction. We briefly entertained the idea of him using a sling harness, but that wouldn't have been wise with the amount of rappels and potential roped pitches we would have to climb on route to Tantalus. Feeling

defeated, we retreated back to the hut.

Initially, the first thought I had was that we would have to bail from the enchantment. We could sleep outside the hut tonight and then have a long slog back to Lake Lovely Water the next day. Then I started thinking about how I was starting a full-time job in September, and it would probably be a very long time before I would be able to attempt this enchantment again. I really didn't want to bail. I then had this naïve thought that if we left the hut at some ungodly hour the next morning, and if we moved extremely efficiently, we would be able to finish the enchantment in one long day. What a stupid fucking thought that was. I somehow convinced Kevin that we should wake up at 1am the next morning and move as fast as we can, as safely as we can, and go as far as we can. Fool proof.

We got back to the hut around 4pm. Kevin's harness was right where he described he had left it. The inhabitants of the hut seemed very entertained with our stories of the past few days. We basked in the sun for a while, and then slipped into our sleeping bags at 6pm to try and get some sleep.

Day 4: The Day That Would Not End

It seemed cruel waking up at 1am, but each day suffering became more and more commonplace. On beginner-friendly trips, you tell everyone that suffering is "character building." Here, suffering was a way of life. I was starting to ration my food at this point. I had only packed food for four days, and we were running low on fuel. We prioritized eating cold food first in order to save fuel for melting water. We joked about eating raw oats and uncooked pasta if it came to it, but we both really hoped it wouldn't come to it.

We strapped on crampons and began our third crossing of the Dione Glacier. I asked Kevin if he was wearing his harness. He enthusiastically said yes. The crossing was definitely a slog, but it was hard not to be in awe of the billions of stars streamed across the sky. We reached the ridge leading to Dione, rappelled into the small notch, and continued up towards the high snow shoulder. As we were scrambling along the exposed ridge, the sun began to rise, giving light to the massive Rumbling Glacier, hundreds of meters below us.

We arrived at the high snow shoulder below Dione with ease. I really wanted to climb Dione, but it did not interest Kevin as much. He decided to stay and melt water while I prepared to climb up Dione. I ditched my pack, tied the rope to my back, and brought a set of nuts and rap-tat. The main difficulty in climbing Dione presented itself in getting on to the actual rock. There was a very large moat with no obvious area to cross. I threw a rock down into the moat to try and estimate how deep it was. I heard the rock bounce at least ten times before the sound trickled off, confirming my suspicions that if I fell through the moat, I would probably be spat out at the toe of the Rumbling Glacier.

I found a half-decent spot to cross, where the snow was still semi-frozen. I delicately walked across and breathed a sigh of relief when I reached solid rock. I climbed up and did a rising traverse to the left towards a large snow patch. Once at the snow patch, I traversed the edge of it to the left until I reached an obvious gully feature. The climbing looked easy here so I continued straight up. I passed a very established rappel station with five separate slings and a rap-ring. I made mental note of its location so I could use it on my descent. From here the climbing was very easy, mainly 3rd class, and I reached the summit shortly after. I looked at my watch and it had been 15 minutes from the snow shoulder below Dione to the summit. I took some time to catch my breath and enjoy the views, and then carefully retraced my steps for my descent. I rappelled down to the snow patch, and then downclimbed the same way I had come up. I did a second rappel to cross the moat and I was reunited with Kevin. I was super grateful for the water he melted, as we were now both full on water.

We took some time to mull over the different routes we could possibly take to climb Tantalus. It looked so close, but there was so much complex terrain to get over first. There are two distinguished routes described in *Alpine Select*. The first is the low route. For this you must downclimb about 100m of steep snow above the Rumbling Glacier, cross a bergschrund to gain access to the rock, climb along ledges towards a large gully, and then climb 2-3 pitches up the gully to gain access to easy scrambling to the summit of Tantalus. The second route involves airy climbing towards this prominent gendarme in between Dione and Tantalus, called the Witch's Tooth. You must then rappel from the Witch's Tooth down into the Darling Couloir, ascend the couloir, and then climb the ridge crest towards the summit. The way

the low route was described made it seem like the easier option, so we decided to go with it. We began downclimbing the snow slope, and with every step, the extreme exposure became more and more apparent. If you slipped here, you were taking a wild ride thousands of feet down the Rumbling Glacier. As we continued to downclimb, the bergschrund that we had to cross came into view. It looked impassable. I spotted a sling around a boulder that some parties must have used, but the boulder looked incredibly loose and I didn't have a good feeling about continuing down this route. I yelled up to Kevin that we should find another way and give the high route a go.

We climbed back up the snow slope and looked for a spot to cross the moat. I spotted a line up the rock that looked climbable, but with a sketchy moat to cross. Sketchy moats and bergschrunds seemed to be a recurring theme at this time of the year. I nervously crossed the moat and started making my way up the rock. I found myself in fifth class terrain, edging my mountaineering boots on small footholds, but I spotted a nice ledge five meters above me, so I pushed on. I had wished I was on belay for that pitch, so I set up an anchor and belayed Kevin up. The next section of the climb was an extremely exposed downclimb towards the base of the Witch's Tooth. We had to climb along a ridge crest and around some large refrigerator blocks. The exposure was immense; on our left was hundreds of meters of fall-line down the west facing Dione Couloir, while on our right was hundreds of meters of air with the impressive Rumbling Glacier creaking below us.

At the base of the Witch's Tooth, we did a rising traverse towards an old rappel station. This time we pitched it out, as I was getting tired of finding myself in 5th class terrain without a belay. We rappelled into the Darling Couloir, which was extremely chossy. I started climbing up the couloir and decided to not use a belay. The couloir narrows at the top, so I had to stem up a small portion in order to gain access to a wide hand crack. The crack led diagonally up to the ridge crest where there was some old rap-tat slung around a boulder. I started climbing the crack, but the climbing was becoming harder. "How the fuck is this 4th class?" was something I was getting sick of asking myself. I abandoned the crack and face climbed directly upwards. Once at the ridge crest, I did a scary hand traverse along the ridge with no holds for my feet. I reached the rappel station and belayed Kevin up. We pitched

out the next rope length, which was really cool. We climbed under this giant, overhanging block and then scrambled back up to the ridge. This pitch had big exposure, but the climbing was very secure, so we enjoyed it a lot. From here it was easy scrambling to the summit of Tantalus, 12 hours after we had left our bivy outside the Jim Haberl Hut.

Descending Tantalus was much easier than climbing it. Two rappels got us to a snow shoulder on the north side of Tantalus. We traversed the steep snow, rappelled another section of rock, and gained the north ridge of Tantalus. The north ridge was superb 3rd class scrambling. We mainly stayed on the ridge, with only a few sections requiring us to traverse the snow to the west of the ridge. We looked onwards to how far we still had to go. At first, we thought Zenith was Pelion, so it didn't seem we had to go too far. Then I took a look at my map confirming where Pelion actually was. It was REALLY far and quite disheartening to think that we still had such a large distance to cover. It was obvious we were not going to finish the enchainment today, but we pushed on to cover as much distance as possible.

We reached the last pinnacle of the ridge and started to look for a way to descend down onto the snow. There was no obvious line of descent, so we just slowly worked our way down this rock face. The rock quality was poor, and we were mindful to not release chunks of rock on to each other. By this time it was getting dark, and we maybe



Kevin topping out on the summit of Serratus at sunset.
Photo: Matteo Agnoloni

had an hour of light. Kevin saw a grassy ledge and recommended that we sleep there that night. I didn't like the idea of sleeping under a pile of choss, so I urged him to keep moving. We found a rappel station made up of a cam and a nut. I tried getting the cam out but it was over-cammed and completely stuck. The nut was also in there pretty good. We rappelled off of this, and then did two more rappels to get onto the snow. By this time it was past 10pm and completely dark. Kevin couldn't find his headlamp, but I just told him to stay close to me. We ended up finding a flat rock in the middle of the snow field to sleep on. We crawled into our sleeping bags at 11pm, 22 hours after waking up, and prayed that we would be able to get home the next day.

Day 5: The Long Slog Home

I set my alarm for 4am, but didn't end up getting out of my sleeping bag until 5am. The cold wind was blowing straight through our bivy spot, giving little motivation to get out of bed. As we were packing up our bags, Kevin accidentally knocked his thermarest off the cliff we were sleeping beside. Just more incentive to get home today. I also only had nine dates and a quarter of a salami stick left for food. We marched on towards the col between Pelion and Zenith. From here, we hiked towards a steep, bushy headwall beneath the south face of Pelion. We bush climbed up the very left side of the headwall, gaining access to the snowy south face of Pelion. From afar, the south face looks quite steep, but is actually quite mellow. We traversed across the south face and up towards an obvious gap on the eastern shoulder of Pelion.

This was the only moment where we used the GPS waypoints Kevin had saved on his phone, and we were incredibly grateful for it. Neither of us had hiked the Sigurd Creek Trail, so we had no idea where it was. We descended to the north, hugging skier's right down the glacier to avoid any crevasses. Once off the snow and glacier, we stumbled our way down the horrible glacial debris. We managed to find trail markers on some boulders, but ended up following the trail markers in the wrong direction, wasting an hour. For those looking to do this, aim for the moraine on skier's right. If you walk on the crest of the moraine, you will eventually find some orange flagging. When you do, follow the flagging to the right, not left.

Once on the proper trail, I left Kevin and ran down the trail as I still

had to bike 20-something kilometers back to my car at the Squamish River. I arrived at the trailhead at 7pm and immediately started biking. I biked for an hour, and then pulled on to the side of the road to take a ten minute nap. I continued for another 20 minutes and finally reached my car. I drove back to the trailhead, took a nap, and awaited Kevin's return.

When he arrived at the car, we had officially completed the enchainment. Despite being totally exhausted, I was filled with energy from the happiness and excitement of having completed such a massive objective in such an iconic mountain range. We faced many moments of fear and suffering, but we pushed through and completed something big. I had personally pushed my limits in the past five days beyond what I thought I was capable of, and despite wanting it to be all over at times, I find myself wanting to be back in the mountains continuing to push my limits. Although, if you asked me if I would do the entire Tantalus Enchainment by foot again, I would probably say fuck no and cough up the money for a heli-drop.



Pitching out an exposed section on route to Tanatlus.
Photo: Matteo Agnoloni

An Arctic Tale

Cassandra Elphinstone

“BEAR! BEAR!” I wake up trying to remember where I am. The last few days slowly come back to me as I scramble out of my sleeping bag searching for my bear banger. I am on Ellesmere Island, 79 degrees north. We are here studying small Arctic plants and their adaptations to climate change. Two weeks ago our Twin Otter landed on rapidly melting sea ice crisscrossed with polar bear tracks.

We had waited for 14 days at the base station in Resolute Bay for the weather to clear so we could fly out. In early June, the landscape surrounding Resolute is just ice and snow that stretches as far as the eye can see. Coming from Vancouver it felt like we had landed on the moon. On my tele skis I explored a 5 km radius around the base station but my most interesting discovery was the town, Resolute, itself.

Every morning in Resolute, we woke up eagerly hoping for the weather to clear. For the last four days we have been told we will be going but something always prevents us from actually boarding the plane; be it weather, Russian space debris or other flights. Will we ever leave? One day is different though and soon enough we were in the air. After picking up fuel in Grise Fjord, we headed north.

There is something magical about the Arctic. I can never put it into words. Flying over the endless icecaps and glaciers on Ellesmere Island always gives me a wonderful feeling of being in the right place. Before long we are descending and I feel my stomach jump with excitement as I spot Alexandra Fjord's familiar mountains and the glaciers that surround the little polar oasis. The pilot does his first test run, checking the sea ice for any deformities that might affect the landing, before pulling back up and heading back down for the real landing. As we get



Looking down on Ellesmere's mountains. Photo: Cassandra Elphinstone

closer to the sea ice, I spot bear tracks everywhere.

As soon as the plane's skis touch the snow I know something is wrong. I peer out the window and immediately spot the problem. We have not landed on solid ice/snow. It is just slush. As we slow down the skis sink farther into the sea slush. At first I am worried that we might just keep sinking but, luckily, under about a foot or two of slush, there seems to be something solid. The pilot tries to drive the plane closer to land to make unloading easier but it won't budge in the slush. We hop out of the plane into the slush that instantly soaks my socks. The pilot spends his time digging the plane's skis out of the slushy sea ice as we unload a two month supply of gear and food onto a tarp. We are all wondering how he will get it back into the air. Before long all our gear is on the tarp and the plane somehow manages to get airborne.

The five of us are left on the slushy sea ice about a kilometer from land surrounded in all directions by polar bear tracks. After the sound of the plane's engines disappears, it is perfectly silent. We are the only people for more than 100 km in every direction. We shoulder our personal packs and head for land and the abandoned 1950's RCMP buildings that we will stay in. Once we near the buildings, I spot the first broken window and my heart sinks. The bears have broken into the buildings again... We dump our bags outside and explore the extent of the damage. The stove has been ripped off the wall. All our extra stores of flour, spices, rice and canned goods are scattered, partly eaten across the floor. Four windows (wood covering, Plexiglas protection

and glass) are destroyed. Polar bear tracks, poop and vomit, mixed with our food are frozen to the floor. The kitchen table balances precariously on the guitar. I go to pick it up; at least the guitar is one thing I can save. A million questions enter my mind: where will we sleep now that the bears have half torn down the building we live in? How are we going to get all our remaining food and supplies off the sea ice before the bears attack that as well? I force myself into the present; one thing at a time.

I spend the next few hours pulling a sled filled with our belongings/gear/food and a rifle, back and forth across the rapidly melting slush. Every time I glance up from my skis, I grin. The surrounding mountains are coated in snow and they are even more spectacular than I remembered them. The wonderful silence that is only found in remote places with snow envelopes me. It will be another two and half months before any of us see darkness, trees, or other people. By the time we have everything inside the buildings and the broken windows and doors boarded up, it is 2:00am and still bright and sunny outside. We have been awake for 22 hours so it does not take long to fall asleep.

Knock! Knock! I roll over and listen again. KNOCK! Something is tapping on the window next to my bed (luckily one of the few not broken). Still half asleep and not really thinking, I pull back the window covering used to keep out the midnight sun and stare into a polar bear's face. Polar bears have many facial expressions and this one is definitely surprised to see me. Luckily, it jumps back from the window



Walking on sea ice surrounded by mountains. Photo: Cassandra Elphinstone

and races around to the front of the building where I can no longer see it. I jump out of bed and race into the kitchen, yelling up to everyone sleeping in the attic that there is a bear outside. Glancing out the front window, I watch the bear lick the area where we usually spit after brushing teeth. I guess they like toothpaste... Before long, we are all outside with bear bangers and the polar bear is racing away from our camp headed for the sea ice. This is not the last bear we will see.

Pretty soon we fall into a 'normal' routine. After our daily polar bear encounter at about 4:00am (these are bears who of course keep close track of time), we sleep for another couple hours until 'Sched'. Sched is the twice daily radio contact we have with the base camp in Resolute Bay:

"Alexandra Fjord, Alexandra Fjord. Good morning this is 26 [air-port code for Resolute Bay]."

"Good morning 26, this is Alexandra Fjord."

"Good morning Alexandra Fjord, How are things there this morning and do you have any traffic?"

"All is well and we have no traffic." (Traffic means messages)

These four lines summarize my main contact with 'outside world'. Sometimes, if there is a lot of static, all we get to say is "Roger, Roger, Roger". After Sched, the five of us hike into the field and begin our work studying tundra plants for the day. In the evenings after dinner and a second outside world encounter with Sched, we are free to explore, ski, sleep or just sit and appreciate the place.



Left: Polar bear destruction. Photo: Cassandra Elphinstone

Right: Polar bear checking out the air strip. Photo: Cassandra Elphinstone

...“BEAR! BEAR!” I wake up trying to remember where I am. My memories of the previous day slowly come back to me as a scramble out of my sleeping bag searching for my bear banger. It is not unusual to wake up at 4:00am to a bear but this morning I feel strangely unenergetic and sad; then I remember why. The evening before, someone handed me the sat phone. I decided to check for messages from my family. My parents sent a 160 character note saying my grandmother passed away. I knew she was very sick and would not likely live until I returned but it was still shocking news. As soon as I read through the message, we noticed a young bear headed straight for our camp. This was really not the best time to get a message like this... I wanted to curl up and cry or think or do anything other than chase a polar bear out of our camp. After shooting some bear bangers towards the young approaching bear, we had to admit it does not seem to be going anywhere. Finally we used the rifle and fired a rubber bullet that makes the bear run. Once the bear was gone, I brushed my teeth and crawled into bed telling myself I will think about my grandmother in the morning...

Instead, only a few hours later I am up again to shouts of “BEAR!”... We rush outside and I cannot help but smile to see everyone in pajamas standing in partly tied hiking boots carrying our two rifles. It feels almost like waking up in a weird comedy but I know better than to laugh. The young bear is back and does not seem to want to leave our camp. After shooting some bear bangers, flares and the rifle, we decide to get in a line and walk towards the bear to show it who is in control. It seems fantastical as we all march in a line wearing PJ's across the frozen tundra toward the young polar bear. We are all still half asleep and the midnight sun gives everything a surreal feel. Soon enough, the young bear seems to realize we are too weird and bolts back towards the sea ice. We all breathe a sigh of relief and head back to camp. I fall back into bed and replay the last few weeks in my head. It is going to be hard to re-adjust to the south and my grandmother's death but I suppose I still have two more months here before I will even have time to worry about that.

The last three days have been filled with Katabatic winds of hurricane strength coming off the glaciers. If you jump straight up with your jacket spread like wings, the wind can carry you back a meter horizontally. We are packing up, getting ready to leave, and the winds arrive.

I race outside as a ladder, table, and bench fly across the ground between the buildings and I try to grab them before they are blown into the ocean. We all run around the buildings, collecting everything not secured to the ground. The winds create an enormous arc of clouds above the glacier. Most of our work in the field is finished but so long as the winds continue, no plane can land to pick us up. The wind howls outside and as the days go by, we begin to get more and more desperate to leave. Almost everything is packed so all we can do is wait.

One morning, I wake up to quiet and realize the winds have stopped. The plane can come today! Someone baked a pie to celebrate our departure and I smell the warm blueberries wafting out of the oven. We begin to close up the buildings. We store all our extra dry food in the attic and take down the ladder. The windows are boarded up against bears and lids are put on the chimney to stop snow from entering. As we burn the last of our garbage, a plane appears above the glaciers and roars down our tundra airstrip. We are heading south! We experience quite a lot of turbulence but we arrive safely in Resolute around 2:00am. After a quick shower, my first real one in two months, I crawl into bed. My last thought as I drift off to sleep is that I never got to try the blueberry pie. I wonder how they ate it so fast...

The next morning when we get together for breakfast, I ask my friend if there was any leftover blueberry pie. She stops, freezes and looks up at me with gigantic eyes. "It's in the oven!" For a moment I don't understand, "What oven?" but then it dawns on me. After removing every speck of food from the main buildings to deter the bears, we had left a blueberry pie in the oven. I guess we will have a surprise waiting for us next year. I have a feeling that polar bears like blueberry pie.

As we walk off the plane in Vancouver, I am blasted by the city's hot, thick, moist air. I feel like I am in the tropics. It is 11:00pm and we have had five different stopovers since leaving Resolute Bay 20 hours before. We are greeted by my friend's boyfriend who has come to pick us both up. When we step outside the airport, it is dark and warm. We both stop for a moment in shock. I breathe in the hot night air as we walk slowly toward the parkade. Her boyfriend recognizes we are not used to the city but she has to remind him we have not seen darkness in nearly three months. We drive to their apartment. After noting the running water, electricity and toilet, I fall asleep on their couch. The

next morning I gather my pack and say goodbye. It is daylight when I step out on the street. The sun is hot and shines down through the leaves of a tree. I just stare. People rush by me pausing only briefly to glance at my dirty pack and winter clothes. I have seen only four other faces during the last three months. For a few moments I just watch, listen and feel the people, the cars, the gigantic plants, and the heat. Finally I start to walk down the street. I know I will find my way back to the Arctic: the endless ice, the midnight sun, the silence, the bears, but first, I think I will take some time to remember what ‘civilization’ has to offer.



Top: An upside-down rainbow at midnight; a smile in the sky.
Bottom: Looking down on Ellesmere Island from helicopter.
Photos: Cassandra Elphinstone

Team Bad Idea Visits Bell's Bothy

Artem Bylinskii

Back in March 2016, I received the Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant as provided by the Neil Mackenzie Trust and the Varsity Outdoor Club. I took off to Scotland immediately to catch the tail end of the Scottish winter climbing season. I want to thank the selection committee and everyone who made this possible for me, in particular Neil's folks, whose dedication to the cause is heartwarming. I strongly encourage future generations to apply to the award and share Neil's spirit in the great outdoors.

This is one of my many adventures.

Throwing a thumb up at the side of a road with no traffic in a complete downpour did not bode well. If only renting a car in the UK wasn't such a royal pain... Having ditched some of my possessions at the Broadford hostel, I naively carried much of my climbing kit hoping to encounter many of Neil's climbing buddies at the work party. Surely there would be many of them there, so I wanted to get there that night to scheme and drink whisky!

With perseverance, or rather no particular action on my part, I finally got picked up by a local household appliance refurbisher, who agreed to drive me all the way to the trailhead. In fact, he recommended a scenic "shortcut" to get to Camasunary bay. A cliff-top seaside trail did sound more appealing than a 4x4 track, but in retrospect not in a raging Skye storm.

I set out and biffed it a half-dozen times in the first hundred meters.

The mud was of the highest quality and at a delightful gradient. The whole hillside had seemingly standing water on it, despite it being, well, a hillside. I briefly even considered donning my crampons. But I plodded on regardless.

Human psychology is a funny thing. Walking along the very cliff edge, and you are terrified and ultra-careful. Walk 30 meters away from the same edge, and you don't have a care in the world. But if those 30 m are steep slick mud, or a say a sheet of Teflon, the separation is illusory, as you have no chance of stopping yourself. But somehow the danger of sliding off the cliff top, versus falling off it immediately, doesn't register or affect you in the same way.

Much danger averted (or ignored), the trail descended off the cliffs into a glen. On an average day, there would be but a trickle of water to rock-hop across, but on that day there was a raging river. After an hour of tramping up and down the bog bank, my feet got wet enough that it seemed reasonable to ford it. And it was going well up until the last step before the other side, where the water suddenly went from knee to waist deep. Plop!

Now fully saturated rather than simply drenched, I carried on over more cliffs to Camasunary bay. Unfortunately, my first impression of it was that it is incredibly littered. Junk, from fishing buoys, to oil drums, to plastic crates, seems to wash ashore particularly in this bay due to some tidal phenomenon, and is then whipped up all over the place by the infamous winds. A sad sight. Thanks Britain.

Regardless, I made it and was excited to meet the folk! Only the folk weren't there. The only friend to turn up for the final work party and



Left: A wet arrival at Bell's Bothy in Camasunary Bay.

Right: Bla Bheinn (928m), the Munro guarding the bothy.



Wellies - a delicate choice of footwear.

opening weekend... was me. And I only traveled half-way around the world to get there. There were three other lovely volunteers from the Mountain Bothies Association, but they had no association to Neil and barely knew of the tragedy. To them and the MBA, the bothy would remain Camasunary.

To their due, they'd been on site for over a week and would stay as long as it took to finish the project. They also fed and lodged me in the estate owner's private residence for my entire stay. This residence was unheated however – my everything remained wet for that same duration.

The next day started with some work on the new bothy. Built as an exercise by the army, donated to the MBA, and sponsored by the Neil Mackenzie Trust, the building was ready to go and only needed some finishing touches. I varnished the sleeping platforms and painted the foyer. I appreciated the plaque in Neil's memory and signed a long page in the visitors' book.

The afternoon was spent roofing the old bothy. If you ask me, a pointless task seeing as the estate owner will be overhauling the entire thing to make a lodge, but wanted it returned in the same condition he donated it. Working with the Brits is pleasant as there is no shortage of tea breaks. True to the old adage that everything burns, we burned heaps of trash.

As the day wore on, it nagged me that I wasn't utilizing the brief bril-

liant break of good weather – a rarity for the Isle of Skye. By 16:45, I could take it no more and decided I would go for a jaunt up the nearest mountain – Bla Bheinn. From sea level to the top of a munro would be only a little less than 1000 meters of elevation. No problem!

But by the time I'd talked my way out of working and made it back to the residence, it was 17:15. Only to find the doors locked. I needed to change and grab some water and a headlamp. With total darkness setting on by 20:30, a light wasn't something I could forgo. But too much time would be wasted to run back to the old bothy, get the keys, return and faff, and run the keys back, such that it would become pointless to even start the trail. A predicament indeed.

Well, what am I but an audacious delusional optimist? And what better way is there to commemorate this place than by doing something really, really daft? So I took off running up the hill. With nothing but my camera, and luckily my altimeter watch. Wearing oversized wellies. On bare feet.

I imagined I could gain about 700 vertical meters per hour, and should thus be at the summit by 19:00 at the latest. To be conservative (right...), I set an evaluation-of-progress time for 18:30, and an ultimate turn-around time of 18:45. That would give me 1.5 hours to come down, which is the same as allotted for the ascent. At worst, I would use the lights in the house and the digital compass as my beacons.



Captain Epic striking “The Artem”. Cuilin Ridge on the right. Camasunary on left.

For the first bit, it proved difficult to run through the bog, with it slurping up the wellies all the time, but once on the ridge, I lit a fire under my ass. Moderate scrambling is no match for my prowess and determination. Never mind the ominous clouds rolling in from the sea...

Not slowing down for even one minute, by 18:25 I'd reached the summit!.. Except not. I'd reached the south summit, the existence of which I had previously been blissfully unaware. By Artem's law of tallness, you are higher than another peak only if you can see beyond it to the other side. Well I couldn't. And separating me and that next point was a narrow exposed ridge, now covered in snow-slush. Apparently, gumboots do not insulate or provide any traction. With an abundance of time, I would have fucked about and forced my way there, but having pressed up right against my time limits, I had to call it there. As I found out later, the north and true summit is at 928 m, whereas I stood at a measly 926 m.

At least that gave me a moment to catch my breath and take a few snaps of the sun setting over the majestic Cuillin Ridge. I will be back for you one day! It is true that Bla Bheinn is the fairest of the munros on Skye as the views are unrivaled!

Cue some BMC old-fogies to turn out with full mountaineering kit. To say the least, they were not impressed with this wellie-wearing-punter asking them for photographs. Reluctantly, and with quite the stink eye, they took one picture and hurried off, as if not wanting to get involved in my rescue. I had to do the rest of the work myself.

Another note on human psychology – they see me in my attire and assume I am some sort of chuffer. My true experience and preparedness does not matter and they only see me as trouble. If I had been Finlay Wild, they would have been congratulating me on my speedy ascent and having a hearty laugh of my footwear.

By 18:45, I was jogging back down. Against my reader's expectations, that was entirely uneventful and I made it back to the residence by 20:20 in time for soup and scotch. My ass remained unbitten this time around.

The next morning, the foul weather, roofing, and tea-time returned. However, by the afternoon it was time to leave, as I'd be able to catch a ride to Inverness with one of the volunteers. One more pull of scotch

at the new bothy, and we on our way out the track, which only takes about an hour.

I urge you all to visit Bell's Bothy - it is a magical and emotional place. "His friends and family hope that this place of shelter will be filled with good stories, laughter, and a few drams, all of which he would have shared aplenty. Enter as strangers, leave as friends."



Top: Bell's Bothy, for all to visit

Bottom: Bell's memorial plaque. "Enter as strangers, leave as friends."

Toba Inlet to Powell Lake Alpine Traverse

Arran Whiteford

The Toba inlet: a deep glacial fjord with peaks shooting above the sea like teeth around a tongue. We're dropped off at the tip of the fjord after four hours in a bouncy boat gazing at glaciers dripping almost directly into the sea. Joane and I are perched on a rocky ledge and I already need to poo. Ach, I always get this when I'm nervous...

There's so much unknown ahead. We have ten days of food, and ten days to traverse a mountain range to a water taxi pickup at the next fjord. But is the route actually possible? It looked pretty doable on google earth, but we hadn't found any report of people doing the same trip. Hopefully – fingers crossed – we won't have to eat bears to survive. Or get eaten by bears, for that matter.

The adventure started months before. Incredible satellite imagery and an online report had us hooked on the idea of exploring the area. John Baldwin, the area's legend said, "Typically, mountain ridgetops are difficult to travel but these high coastal divides define routes that can be traveled with relative ease for two to three weeks or more." Hours of procrastination on google earth led us to our perfect 40km-ish divide from Toba Inlet to Powell Lake.

Finding transport was a nightmare. Float planes and helicopters were crazy pricey and no water taxi wanted to drive that far. Fortunately Matt, a friend of a friend of a friend, was keen to drop us off. We almost missed the boat as some overzealous cop tried to confiscate our car, but that's another story.

Back in the forest, we're trying to follow intermittent bear tracks as we thrash through dense steep bush. Generally, it's a futile ferocious

catfight with the undergrowth, interspersed with clambering up mossy cliffs or tottering, top heavy, over fallen trees. Ten hours of struggling is enough, and we crash knackered in a flattish hollow. Our pad thai isn't paired with mountain views as we hoped. Destroyed legs, wasp-stung, exhausted, we're still in the trees having gained just 3 km and 1400m of elevation.

Early the next day, dense rainforest fades to alpine meadows and we're freed from the horrors of forest life. The glorious open air kisses my cheek as the band starts to play. Glory glory, a spectacular campsite. A tarn on a ridge suspended over the fjord behind. The frigid water exorcises our destroyed shells and we feast on pasta di fungo e parmigiano.

The next five days are bliss on a stick. We have our heads in heaven, scrambling along a towering rocky ridgetop. I've never seen so much exposed rock in my life. Sheer granite faces surround perfectly shaped cirques and sharp marlin-fin ridges separate steep glacial valleys. It's bizarre terrain. There's hardly any dirt except for bear poo as we walk, scramble, and climb across different angled hard granite slabs and blocks.

When penciling the route on the map at home, we had assumed the ridge was too sharp to traverse completely. In person, the top of the ridge – smoothed by ancient ice – is flat enough to follow. The rocky route often seems impassable but at every obstacle, a cliff or



Joane looking down on Toba Fjord. Photo: Arran Whiteford

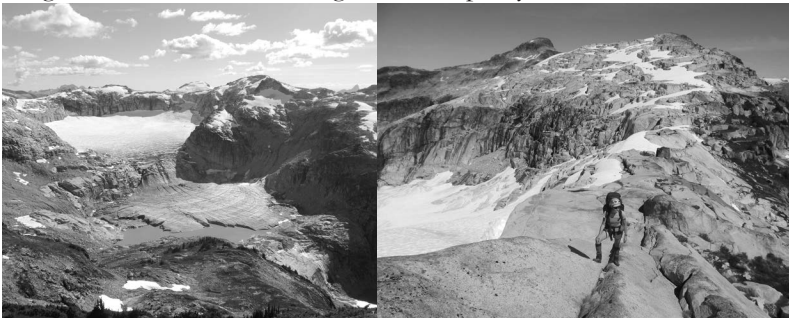
a block, there is some kind of sneaky way forward. We scramble up every mountain along the way: Julian Peak, Chusan SW3, Chusan W4, and a few unnamed.

Beneath the soaring granite cliffs are blobby glaciers and deep azure lakes. For a day we follow a diverging ridge west above a lake to see the wonder of the Daniels River valley. It's completely unknown except to a handful of loggers and bears, yet rivals Yosemite in its grandeur. The tallest rock wall – 1200m tall – is of course unnamed and unclimbed. (El Capitan, the jewel of Yosemite's crown, is 800m.) The only information we found on this area was a trip report from the 80s reading,

“Red alert... Red alert... Rock climbers there is a 3500 foot granite cliff... Go do it.”

Camped, nestled in a system of granite dihedrals that remind me of some twisted puzzle world, we survey our next obstacle – Peak Chusan SW5. Eating hot custard au chocolat, we fail to spot a route. The face is far steeper than what we expected and looks impossible to pass without climbing gear. It seems like it's made of lego, giant granite steps criss-cross the entire face.

The next morning we ascend a glacier to the base of the blocky face. Following a narrow ledge system to our left we come across big bluffs which obstruct the route ahead. Plan B leads us to the right across a hanging snow patch and onto a car-wide ledge. It's unbelievable. With cliffs above and cliffs below, we skirt across perfect hidden granite ledges and snowfields until we have traversed the entire face. I feel like an immigrant who's just tunneled under a border to paradise. The icing on the cake is a flat ridge at the top, a yellow brick road to the



Left: 'Blobby blob' glacier up Chusan Creek. Photo: Joane Elleouet
Right: On the ridge behind 'Blobby blob'. Photot: Arran Whiteford

summit of Chusan SW5. Nothing can go better, as we marvel at the surrounding field of mountains.

For the first time in five days we drop down and descend into a gnome-like alpine forest. I immediately hate it, and long to be back on the ridge. We see a big black bear, the mosquitoes taunt us, and plants mercilessly whip and trip. The next morning we swiftly return to the ridge where we weave between spectacular cirque lakes and glaciers to yet another ridgetop camp.

We've put a lot of effort into the menu for the trip, and it's deliciously rewarding. Each night we feast on flavoursome, filling three course meals. But this is our first campsite to have wild blueberries mmMMM! They're frustratingly small and sparse – I soon lose patience but Joane continues to forage and we have a delicious blueberry dessert as we make our next plans.

We have three days until our pick up, and probably about twoish days of travel. One day to follow the ridge until its end, and one to descend a dreadful cliffy bush bash to the logging roads below. In theory, we could maybe do another side trip – some attractive peaks just off our route look inviting. In practice, we still have another peak to traverse, and absolutely no idea how difficult it will be.

The morning sun never hits our tent. Sticking our heads out we see we're swimming in a suffocatingly thick cloud. Fek. Unless the weather clears we've no chance of continuing along the ridge. If a storm starts, we may have to make a quick descent from this exposed area. We set off optimistically hoping for blue skies. Fixed to the GPS every step of the way, we follow along our planned route until we're miserably wet.

For the first time, we're seriously stuck. In front is a mountain to traverse but with only 20 metres of visibility, this is completely impossible. Huge cliffs ahead mean any route will be challenging to find. Perched on top of large bluffs, gaps in the clouds reveal slab fields just below, definitely where we need to be. We spend an hour and some skinned knuckles fiddling with our rope, failing again and again to find a descent anchor off which to abseil. By now it's raining hard, and the wind is picking up.

It's too dicey to rely 1000% on the weather clearing and traversing the mountain tomorrow. We have to get off the ridge and make some



Looking east towards the North Powell Divide area - Joane Elleouet

positive progress. Backtracking a bit we find a break in the bluffs. But by now all of our beautiful easy slabs have become slick waterslides. To descend, we follow crack systems to get some friction.

A steep bush bash and we're on the sandy beach of a cirque lake. I don't notice its beauty, nor do I have any desire to swim. We start to traverse the lake, and the shores quickly turn steep and punishing. Just as the light starts to fade we come across a massive break in the forest. An immense steep granite slab links the bluffs overhead all the way down until 'plop' into the lake. At least that's the sound I imagine I will make when I slip and slide down the 30m of slick rock into the cool water below. Normally I consider myself relatively good at climbing granite slab, but when it's soaked and slippery?

I tell myself a fall in the lake would be miserable but not dangerous. It's pretty dark now, and I edge across the slab, trying to smear my boots on anything that looks slightly spiky or drier. It's hard to trust, so I paste my fingers, gecko-like on the rock. Bridging a mossy steep spot, I lunge, then some deep breaths and I'm on the other side.

"Fuck!" yells Joane, who is also trying to adhere to the water-slide. I toss her the rope end, more for moral support than anything, and she carefully clambers across.

That night our tent is a soggy wet pit but is delightfully cosy. Deep in our double sleeping bag, we munch dark chocolate as slumber takes

over. I was told absolutely not to eat in your tent in bear territory – except in case of emergency.

The morning rain brings an end to the trip. We had hoped dry sunshine would lead us back to our glorious ridge, but instead we must follow a long bush bash to a logging road below. The old growth forest is magnificent, and we cover 6 km in an hour. Then bang! we hit logged forest, and cover just 100 metres in 50 minutes. One and a half kms later, we reach a fantastic anticlimax for our trip – 13 kilometres of mind-numbing logging road.

Ten days of wilderness, ten days of unknowns. Ten days of not very technical terrain, but ten days of riveting route finding and exhilarating exploring. Maybe the modern world seems less mysterious; we can see every spot on the globe from our home computer. But this technology also allows amateurs like me or you to find our own virgin adventures. The Toba-Powell nook of British Columbia is only 150 km from Vancouver, yet wild, raw and ripe for exploring.



Alpine pudding. Photo: Arran Whiteford

Chilkoot Trail Family Vacation

Line Veenstra

The Chilkoot trail is considered a 53 km long walk-in museum. It was one of major access routes used during the Klondike Gold rush. Between 1896 and 1899 an estimated 22,000 would-be prospectors started up the trail with a year's worth of supplies (about 1 ton), prepared to spend a month on the trail and then build a boat to carry them to Dawson. They all hoped to find gold there. Some didn't survive, most of them missed the gold rush and returned home only richer in experiences.

On a cloudy morning in August 2016 our little family started up the trail together with a dozen or so other people. We carried just around 55 kg between Christian and I (which included Fenya, age 3), and were prepared to spend just 5 days on the trail. We had no hope of finding gold, but hoped to spend some quality family time on the trail.

Getting there:

I felt very relieved as I sat in the flight towards Juneau looking down on the beautiful coast mountains. I had planned the trip months before, but a week before the trip it was confirmed that I had had another missed miscarriage. It doesn't come as a surprise, but it is generally not recommended to be away from emergency care with an unresolved miscarriage due to the risks of excessive bleeding and infection. I knew that hiking would help me process and accept, so I really wanted to go. Luckily it was confirmed the day before we were scheduled to leave that the miscarriage had happened and there were no further risks. I felt happy and relieved to be on our way.

In Juneau, we walked to the outdoor store and the grocery store to get the last supplies for our trip. Fenya had difficulty entertaining herself during the grocery shopping, making mental gram/calorie counting quite difficult; it was a challenge, but somehow we managed to purchase the correct amount of food. After acquiring 6 days worth of backcountry packable food, we called a taxi to take us to the campground. The first one showed up with a booster seat instead of the requested car seat, so we had to call again. We spent the first night at the Auk Village Campground in Juneau. We didn't get to explore much around there as we spent the evening rearranging our packs to fit in all the food. The next morning we walked the 3.5 km to the ferry that would take us to Skagway. I was very happy that I had insisted at the last minute that we bring a small stroller for Fenya - not quite like having a car, but it felt almost as useful. We spent a relaxing 6.5 hours on the ferry, enjoying the scenery and reading children books from the small ferry library. It felt like being in a little time pocket where everything slowed down. After arriving in Skagway, we navigated the tourist filled main street to the train station to pick up our return white pass train ticket and to the trail office for our permit. Before leaving the trail office we received a half hour orientation on the trail and backcountry etiquette. I wish more places in BC had resources to do stuff like that. After about 1 hour in Skagway we got picked up by Ann Moore, who runs a successful business shuttling hikers the 10 miles to the trailhead in Dyea. We spent the night in the Dyea campground before starting out on our adventure.

Day 1 Dyea to Canyon City

Distance: 13 km

Elevation gain: 178 m

Elevation loss: 162 m

Total hiking time: ~4.5 hours (not including breaks)

We had been warned that the trail starts up a steep hill, but it was over almost before it started and the rest of the day was mostly flat. This part of the trail felt close to home. The thick rain forest with lots

of moss and devil's club encroaching on the trail looked very familiar to Southwestern BC. There were an abnormal number of mushrooms along the trail. Christian constantly wanted to stop and take pictures of them and eventually I had to put my foot down. Fenya enjoyed the mushrooms as well. She would count them as we hiked along. At some point I asked how many she had counted, and she answered 'All of them!' My favourite part of the day was passing through the Beaver Pond. The trail went straight through the pond, and at times I was not quite sure if the boardwalk was supported or just floating on the pond.

We arrived in camp mid-afternoon. The weather was nice so we cooked outside. There was a big mud puddle in the cooking area, so while I was cooking dinner Fenya was busy cooking mud pies.

Day 2 Canyon City to Sheep Camp via Canyon City Ruins

Distance: 9.5 km

Elevation gain: 278 m

Elevation loss: 105 m

Total hiking time: ~3 hours (not including breaks)



Fenya and Christian at the Chilkoot Monument in Skagway
Photo: Line Veenstra

We woke up to a nice sunny day and enjoyed a slow morning, since we didn't have much distance to cover. Shortly after setting off from camp we made a turn towards the Canyon City ruins. The suspension bridge over Taiya River was pretty spectacular with a sign warning us to cross just one at a time. I still decided that Fenya and I would cross together. It was very wobbly and kind of scary. The ruins included part of an old tramway, some kind of stove and an old cabin. I am sure there were lots of other things we didn't notice. Christian and I joked that if you just called it a walk-in museum, then you can get away with leaving all your junk behind.

We stopped for lunch at Pleasant camp. Up until this point Fenya had only walked a few hundred meters by herself, but from Pleasant camp she ran a good distance. She pretended Christian was a skunk and we ran away from him. At Sheep camp I enjoyed the nice sun, while Fenya complained about being too sweaty. The camp was busy and we ended up sharing our dinner table with a nice family from Calgary.

Day 3 Sheep Camp to Happy Camp (summit day)

Distance: 12 km

Elevation gain: 1061 m

Elevation loss: 484 m

Total Hiking time: ~5.5 hours (not including breaks)

At Sheep Camp the ranger advises you to leave early (6:00am) on the summit day. We figured a 5:00am wake up time would have us on the trail by 7:00am, which we deemed plenty early. We actually managed to head off at 6:30am though. It was drizzling and as we gained elevation it also became pretty windy. We took a break before heading into the alpine. Fenya was a bit unsatisfied, but after 45 min of cuddles and snacks, she happily went back in the backpack, where she fell asleep. On the way to the summit we were reminded of the Gold Rush days as we passed by shoes, animal bones and a multitude of different rusty objects. We didn't stop until we reached the summit hut around 10:30am. The hut was tiny, but luckily the group of 10 Belgians were a

couple of hours behind us, so we go some nice snack time until they showed up. We covered the rest of the trail to Happy Camp in a couple of hours. This was definitely the most beautiful part of the trail. The blue alpine lakes surrounded by the green moss and the white lichen was gorgeous. I wished the weather was better so we could stop and truly enjoy the landscape, but the cold wind forced us to keep moving.

At Happy Camp we spent a relaxing afternoon and evening in the hut, while the rain was coming down outside.

Day 4 Happy Camp to Bare Loon Lake

Distance: 14 km

Elevation gain: 364 m

Elevation loss: 522 m

Total hiking time: 4.5 hours (not including breaks)

The weather was still subpar when we left Happy Camp, and Fenya was happy in the backpack all morning, so we decided to just go to Lindeman Lake without any breaks. We enjoyed a few mushy blueberries as the alpine changed into boreal forest. An old boat frame reminded us about the long journey the men of the Gold Rush still had before them at this point, while we were getting pretty close to our goal. At Lindeman Lake we hid away from the rain all afternoon in a little cabin by the shore. We lit the fire and dried out, while Fenya played with a game of dominos. We also cooked our dinner in the hut as we knew Bare Loon only had a shelter without walls. It was really nice to just have the cabin to ourselves all day, so Fenya could freely play around. It was a gorgeous location right by the lake and it would have been nice to spend a sunny afternoon here.

Around 5:00pm we gathered our things and hiked for a couple of hours to Bare Loon Lake. We had a snack in the shelter, threw a few sticks in the lake and set up the tent. The lake was beautiful and Christian was reminded about his childhood in Ontario as the loons called out into the night.

Day 5 Bare Loon to Bennett

Distance: 6 km

Elevation gain: 159 m

Elevation loss: 246 m

Total Hiking time: 2 hours

We had a leisurely morning before starting the last section to Bennett, and a few parties passed by us before we headed off. The last part of the hike is dry and sandy, which made for heavy feet on a few sections. At Bennett we waited for the train in the campground cabin together with a few other parties.

Most people hiking the Chilkoot trail seem to have some epic life changing experience; at least, that is my impression from reading the log books. I enjoyed the trip a lot, especially spending time with my family. I enjoyed watching the scenery change from rainforest to alpine and boreal forest. I loved all the mushrooms and the beautiful lichen. I liked learning about the Klondike while travelling in the footsteps of all the hopeful young men seeking out a better future. That being said, I did not have any life changing epiphanies or anything like that. Although I guess perhaps, during the years of slogging around the mountains, that had already happened...

The Bear Necessities: a Journey Past Athelney Pass

Liam Hodgson
& Heather Filyk

The Hikers: Liam Hodgsons, Heather Filyk, Tiff Stevens, Dhavan Vora, Lena Förstel, Liz Lund

With the last long weekend of the summer approaching, we decided to venture beyond the mountain ranges with which we had become familiar. Our objective was Athelney Pass, the midpoint of a long valley lying north of Keyhole Hot Springs. The pass promised scrambles to a number of remote peaks. We set off in two cars early Friday evening. Unfortunately, we neglected to make sacrifices to the gods of backcountry roads and an hour north of Pemberton, on the upper Lillooet FSR, one car's oil pan fell victim to a large rock, leaving it unable to continue. Given the late hour and lack of cellphone reception, all eight of us piled into the remaining five-seater and drove back to Pemberton, where we spent the night. Isobel Mouat and Zach Morse sacrificed their weekends to escort their car to a mechanic, while the remaining six of us set forth for the trailhead, hoping to make up for time we had lost.

Minutes after parting ways, we were flagged down by a truck heading the opposite direction. Its driver informed us that recent weather had destabilized rocky slopes above the road and the resulting landslide risk had led them to shut the road to the public. Intent on our objective, we cajoled our way past, only to be flagged down soon after by another truck driver, who, while scoffing at the supposed risk of landslides, informed us that due to the recent start of construction of a dam upriver, the road was in fact closed to the public. Feeling slightly conspired against, we again pushed our way forward, until we reached

a manned checkpoint where we were told in no uncertain terms that we would not be allowed through. Still unwilling to give up our goal of making it to the pass, we regrouped under the suspicious eye of the checkpoint woman to consider our options. A number of us were dismissed until one enlightened map-wielder exclaimed, “If we’re trying to get to the pass, why don’t we just approach it from the other end?” Sure enough, the opposite end of Athelney Valley appeared to be reachable by a series of ever-narrowing lines on the map. Filled with renewed hope, we cheerfully made the 100 km detour across the Hurley and along the south edge of Downton Lake, reaching the general vicinity of the valley’s outlet with the sweltering sun high in the sky.

Armed only with a 1:150,000 map, we scouted out and rejected a risky river crossing and a questionable glacier crossing before identifying a long, densely forested ridge as our best chance of gaining the valley proper. Only Tiff had hardcore bushwacking experience, so to most of us the half kilometer of treed vertical looked like a minor obstacle. Starting up the ridge, we began to realize our naivety. Gravity appeared to have played a prank on the forest, as most of the trees were lying horizontally, densely crisscrossing the slope at hip height. We barely touched the ground the entire way up, instead balancing our way upwards using the trees as inclined gangplanks whenever possible. Sometimes the trees fought back, repeatedly rejecting Heather’s attempts at progress and catapulting her back down the slope. Many hours of sweating and cursing later, we were still in the (now vertical) trees, but roughly at our target elevation, so we began to contour our



Tiff, Liz, Liam, and Heather. Photo: Dhavan Vora

way off the ridge towards the mouth of the valley, hoping to get a glimpse of it before darkness fell.

As we continued on, our spirits were running low and water levels lower, so our main focus became finding water and a campsite. With those objectives in mind, we realized there had been no signs of running water since we entered the forest and we had not found space for even a single tent. The situation was not completely desperate, as we could hear the distant roar of the river far below us, but the last thing we wanted was to give up our hard fought potential energy and descend. Finally, as darkness settled, we found the merest trickle of water and a small sloped clearing where we made camp. Our way onwards was uncertain, and hopes of making it to the pass were dwindling, but we dismissed talk of turning back until we saw what the next day had to offer.

The dim light reached through the thick branches and woke us up in higher spirits. We decided to continue on. After reaching the top of a bluff, we discussed our limited options. Gaining the ridge offered salvation from the bushwhacking and so up to the ridge we went. But first, we debated whether we would be able to find more water and a place to camp. The rows of trees upon more trees from the day before had played mind games on us, and we did not expect that we would ever be able to escape them, we left the packs. We started straight up the steep slope of sand, bush, and more horizontal logs. We kept zig-zagging up the slope, when suddenly, the ground started rounding out and we were engulfed by beautiful wild flowers.

We emerged onto the ridge and the world opened up in front of us, with mountains sprawling towards the horizon replacing the doldrums of tree trunks. The ground was covered in sunbaked grass and pumice stones, reminding us of the formerly active Mt. Meager nearby. The ridge bulged sharply upwards to the west, blocking our line of sight to our objective. Once we gained the high point, we immediately realized that there was no hope in making it to the pass, without adding days to the mission; the river valley far below wound pencil thin through the dense canopy, dwindling out of sight at the toe of the glacier where we had aimed to camp. The ridge itself however enticed us, its jutting rocky faces promising an exciting scramble. We chose an obtrusive rock pillar on our local horizon as a goal, and set off enthusiastically towards it. The sun pounded us from above, and as we approached,

the pillar resolved itself into the shape of an animal. Which animal, however, none could agree on: a dragon, an otter, a marmot. We decided that this weekend we had unwittingly embarked on a spirit quest, and the vision revealed to us our spirit animals. Satisfied, we returned along the ridge with the cool light of the setting sun on our backs. No deliberation was needed to choose the open ridge top where we had first broken through as our camp site for the night.

Leaving our packs below was not in vain, as we did not come across any new water sources and had to descend back to the stream. This was a surprisingly short effort and our return was rewarded with a golden sunset. We set up the tents with a double rainbow cheering us on. As Heather looked up to smile at the sky, she uttered calmly ‘bear’, no one flinched and continued blowing up therm-o-rests. A more urgent ‘bears! there are bears!’, grabbed everyone’s attention, as we turned to see a mama Grizzly standing on her hind limbs, about 20 meters away, with two fluffy cubs by her side. As Liam reached for our humorously large supply of bear spray, a sound of clanging pots came from Liz’s direction. She was swaying from side to side, chanting and banging the pots. The bears seemed entertained and so, logically, we all joined in. Mama bear sniffed the air and waddled away from our ridiculous antics, cubs in tow, after sneaking one last curious glance.

Despite some primitive part of our brains warning of the unseen beasts, potentially lurking beyond our headlamp beams, the stars called to us. We layed out our sleeping bags in the clearing. From this pedes-



Dhavan, Lena, Liz, Liam, Tiff, and Heather on the journey’s furthest point.
Photo: Heather Filyk

tal, we watched the night flow slowly by. As we gazed upwards a star broke free and streaked across the sky, ending its transit with a flash of light that illuminated a breathtakingly large patch of the sky. Another followed shortly after, leading us to wonder whether our return to civilization would be met with news of first contact.

We woke the next day and headed back down the wooded ridge. Bushwhacking proved itself exhausting for a second time. However, Lena tramped down at an impressive pace, until she was swarmed by bees. We stumbled out of the forest, a little worse-for-wear, but giddy with glee. A nude dip in the Downton Lake run-off cured our sore bodies and the six of us piled back into the five-seater and headed home, Dhavan graciously volunteering to take the seat in the trunk for the ride along the logging roads. Despite not getting close to Athelney Pass, we found that determination, flexibility, great company, and enthusiasm to get out and explore can make even the faggiest of trips a success.



Top: Bear landing. Lena, Heather, Liz, and Liam setting up camp. Photo: Tiff Stephens

Bottom: Scrambling up the unnamed ridge toward the unnamed summit: now (very unofficially) dubbed Bear Necessities. Photo: Heather Filyk

Island Caving Extravaganza

Shane Monks O'Byrne

The Cavers: Nick Hindley, Tor Hansson, Nathan Starzynski, Natanael Villareal and Shane Monks O'Byrne

The trip was limited to five people. At first I was confused as to why the group size was so small, but when you find yourself in a tunnel so tight that to move forward you have to breathe in, it soon becomes apparent why. Firstly, the caves couldn't fit any more, and secondly, as you increase the group size you increase the probability of someone having a freak-out claustrophobic moment that could put the rest of the group in jeopardy. Truly, this dark, muddy, wet, cold, partly-type-2-fun and amazing adventure was going to be a weekend to remember!

Nick Hindley, the friendly VOC exec and ex-caving guide was to be the trip organizer for the so-called 'Island Caving Extravaganza'. A pre-trip meeting was held in the clubroom on the Wednesday prior to the weekend away. Most pre-trips are short and sweet, detailing who has a car and what gear to rent, but Nick felt that it would be beneficial to learn about cave formations and maintenance; both for us and for the sake of the caves. It was enlightening. We have a lot of caves back in Ireland, and I had a small amount of caving experience in the past, but it's so important to know how to act appropriately in these caves. The calcite deposits form over millions of years of erosion and deposition of the surrounding limestone, eventually forming a karst region. These deposits are very brittle and sensitive to the oils secreted from human skin and to sunlight.

And so there were five of us: Nick, Natan, Nathan, Tor and myself,

and we were all oh-so-very stoked. Natan came around to pick up Tor and I very early on Saturday morning to bring us up to North Van, where we would meet with Nathan, our driver for the weekend. We were all pretty tired – although some more than others (Nick and Natan had both been out the night before and had only hit the hay at about 2:00am or so! I believe the term is ‘mad bastards’). Coffee and adrenaline fuelled, Natan safely got us to North Van and we transferred all the kit and ourselves into Nathan’s beastly little 4X4. He drove us to Horseshoe Bay where we were to catch the 8:30am ferry for over to Vancouver Island. We didn’t pre-book the crossing but were lucky enough and got a spot on the boat over.

Taking advantage of the lengthy boat trip, most of us had a good snooze on the way over, and before we knew it we arrived into Departure Bay, just north of Nanaimo. The first order of business was driving to Port Alberni in the middle of the Island which took somewhere in the region of an hour. On the way, there were some incredible sights: Cameron lake – a mountainous, glacial lake was encompassed by beautiful, blood red autumn trees. We even got out of the car at one stage to take a short walk through Cathedral Grove Provincial Park. The trees were ginormous. Mainly Western Red Cedar, Hemlock and Douglas Fir – they towered above us. One might develop a crick in their neck if they were to gawk too long. One of the trees, a Douglas Fir was 800 years old, the oldest tree on Vancouver Island and over 75 meters tall.

The bellies started rumbling so we hastily got back in the car and 15 minutes later somehow found ourselves at McDonald’s, gorging on Big Macs. The perfect adventure food. Apart from myself, no one else had brought any food with them for the weekend so the next pit-stop was Walmart in Port Alberni. It was my first time in Walmart and oh-my-god, it’s just too big. I didn’t know what to do with myself so I just bought some granola bars. Meanwhile, the others had managed to buy the most hilariously inefficient camping food, leaving the store half an hour later with about three shopping bags full. One of which contained a full-sized pumpkin which was deemed ‘essential’ for our pumpkin-carving needs.

We finally hit the road. For real this time. Before I knew it, we were bombing down a fire/logging road following directions scrawled down on a piece of Nick’s crumpled notebook paper. There were times I

genuinely felt bad for Nathan's car – this was not a forgiving road... or perhaps it was his driving. Lo and behold, somehow we made it to our destination, the perfect place to park the car, nice and hidden away and a perfect place to set up camp!

We decided however, not to set up camp straight away, the sky looked clear and we were far too pumped to start getting down and dirty with the caving. After only a quick gear kaffale we were ready to go. With two static ropes, two jumars and a feck-load of slings and carabiners, we were kitted out to the nines.

First up was a cave nicknamed 'The big cheese.' Once you're down there, it's easy to see why; holes... holes everywhere. The entrance was a giant sinkhole in the ground, dropping what must have been 25 metres straight down. I had only ever rappelled once before and that was at an adventure camp many years ago – so I was very much the novice of the group but of course, as always, itching to learn. When caving, all rappelling is single rope – this is to allow you to ascend back up and for most of us, this was a first. We set up our anchor from a sturdy-looking tree and attached opposing carabiners to the 'BFK' (Which here means, pardon my French: 'Big Fucking Knot'. A term I found rather amusing). One-by-one we rappelled ourselves off the ledge attached to the rope by an ATC.

After practically three weeks of continuous rain, it was a slippery-slidey descent down the sinkhole with a slight overhang at the bottom, but after no time at all we had all safely touched ground. It was cool down there; we were standing on thousands upon thousands of years of decaying forest matter build-up and we could see in our immediate vicinity a couple of cave entrances. According to Nick, more than likely we would have been able to see even more entrances had there not been such a colossal mound of 'stuff' beneath our feet.

We decided to first stick our heads into an opening on the right side of the sinkhole. One-by-one, we squirmed our way up a narrow gully and out onto a scree-covered plateau overlooking a sheer drop down. It was tight on the ledge, only room for two at a time and there were spiders bopping around overhead (of which I'm not the biggest fan to be honest). After everyone had had a look in the small cavern, we exited back out and descended our way down into the body of cave, on the left side of the sinkhole. It was about a ten-minute descent or

so and we found ourselves in a lobby-type cavern. There were multiple routes to choose from and we had all night!

The great thing about caving is that you can do it any time of day: It's dark in a cave whether it's sunny or not outside. The first tunnel we chose to explore was on the far-left side of the cavern. I went into the pitch-black first, feeling my way around with the headtorch. The tunnel ahead turned into a crawl space, but we chose not to advance any further as it was flooded due to the amount of rainfall in the previous weeks.

Nick told us that there are only two places on earth that one can experience absolute darkness: At the bottom of the ocean and in the depths of a cave. We all sat down, turned off our headtorches and were engulfed by the blackness. It was quite an experience, truly I've never felt anything quite like it. The first minute or so, I had to stop myself from feeling claustrophobic and try and stay calm. Then I found that I was overwhelmed by an enormous sense of calmness, I could feel my heartrate drop and I was peaceful in the dark. No one spoke. After about five or ten minutes, I felt myself start to hallucinate a bit; nothing crazy, but you start to think you can see a light out of the corner of your eye, you look and nothing is there.

The silence was eventually broken; headlamps were turned back on and our little meditation session was over. We got back on our feet and



Piano hands. Photo: Nathan Starzynski



Tor, looks like he's on the front cover of caving magazine.

Photo: Nathan Starzynski

backtracked to the lobby again. We decided to take another route towards the back of the cavern that sloped down steeply. 'Onwards and downwards,' I believe that's the caving version of it. Nick took the lead squeezing and pushing through narrow shaft again and again. He kept shouting back 'this next manoeuvre is real tricky', and it was no lie. As we progressed through this tunnel it really did get quite difficult. There were parts where you would have to contort your body in the most inhuman way to somehow slink through to the other side.

Caves form the habitat of an insect called a cave cricket, indigenous to British Columbia. Now, we never saw one but they stretch the size of an adult male palm and have feelers about twice their body-length. Nick started telling me about a cave he was in over the summer where he was on his back, pushing through a tunnel head-first where the ceiling was only centimetres from his face. He would pass by these crickets clinging to the top, feelers dangling down and he would just have to close his eyes and mouth, hoping one wouldn't fall on his face. Oh, he thought it would be a good time to tell us this moments before going into a very similar style tunnel.

And so, we had worked our way through this shaft gradually getting deeper and narrower. Eventually we came to a very, very tight passage. Nick took the lead and I went directly after him, we were army crawling along on our bellies. After about 15 minutes of crawling it just kept getting tighter, eventually the ceiling was so low that to progress we

had to take our helmets off and push them ahead of us. The sounds in that tunnel were very strange, the person in front of you could be a metre away, but when they spoke they could have been a mile— their voice very faint, practically inaudible.

About half an hour into the squeeze things were tough and slow going. You could no longer have your head upright, but had to tilt it sideways at 90 degrees because of the lack of head-space. Many times, the question was asked ‘shall we stay or shall we go’, the only way out was for the person behind you to pull you by the foot and then the person behind them to pull them – and so on. But we just kept going. Eventually we came to the tightest point where you literally had to breathe out to move forward. But finally, we pushed through. We had made it to the far side! And out into another cavern!

It had been such a difficult path getting to this part of the cave that we were sure we must have been the first ever humans here. It was exhilarating! We all popped out the far side of the tunnel one-by-one, like the shaft was giving birth to us (seriously it did look like this...) and then we were all through. There was a friendly, jet-black salamander in the middle of the room who didn’t seem to mind our presence at all. We looked up and saw that the small cavern went up and up into the darkness. Who knew where it went.

It had been 45 minutes in that crawl and must have been 100 meters but reluctantly we had to go back in as we had reached a dead-end. This time we bombed through it, knowing that there was an end to it and after only half an hour we found ourselves back in the main lobby-cavern. We were all pretty exhausted at this stage, soaked to the bone and needing a good pee. We headed back up to the sinkhole for a quick break, taking in the last brightness of the late-evening sky before heading back down into the depths of the cave again.

There was one more place we hadn’t explored and that was a rappel on the right side of the main cavern. We had seen it earlier but chose to leave it until the end. We secured an anchor around a rock structure in the cave and placed five, cut-up pieces of burlap sack at different friction points along the rope. Natan descended first and after he touched down I swiftly followed. This was a lovely rappel; a completely sheer rock face and not quite as slippery as the first. After I got down, myself and Natan looked around the small cavern, there was another black

salamander in the middle of the room! Natan saw a very tight squeeze that we could do on the bottom left side and he started into it a short way. He came back out, looked at me and said ‘bro, this is the same cave we were in earlier’. This disorientated the hell out of me. I looked around and sure enough it was... This was the cavern at the end of that crazy-tight squeeze! That was the same salamander! I couldn’t believe it; in my mind we were completely the opposite direction.

Everyone rappelled down to us, examined the cavern and agreed that it was indeed the same place. No point in hanging around – we were all cold at this stage so we got out the jumars, made a foot loop and started ascending the rope. This took about an hour in total, longer than anticipated and at this stage, I was starting to feel the cold, my teeth had started chattering. Once everyone made it up we headed back up to the sinkhole and then started the next ascent with the jumars. It was lashing rain outside as we went up the rope. Everything was wet, not that it mattered – we couldn’t possibly get any damper. After about an hour we had made it successfully out of the hole and back onto ‘dry’ land!

We stuffed the muddy, wet ropes back in the bags and raced down the hill back to where the car was parked. It was raining cats and dogs now so we opened the boot of the car and sheltered under it as we



Left: The bottom of the sinkhole. Photos: Nathan Starzynski
Right: Natan, ascending out of the depths of the big cheese.

stripped off and got our dry clothes on. We quickly got the tents set up, trying desperately not to get the inner sheets wet. We then set up a tarp between the two tents which we were to use as a cooking shelter.

Nathan and Nick had to drive off to find signal so they could text our contact that we had made it out safely. In the meantime, Tor, Natan and myself started cooking our varied meals and drank tea and hot chocolate. It was a couple hours at this stage and the two guys still had not returned – I was getting pretty cold and had left my sleeping bag and pad in the car. We were just discussing how the three of us were going to fit in Natan's single sleeping bag when a pair of headlights pulled up. They had returned! I stayed up with the guys a little longer than anticipated and drank beers happily into the night. We even managed to carve out a face for our pumpkin friend.

The next morning, we had agreed to not have an alpine start and lazily awoke at 10:00am. We had our breakfasts and lethargically disassembled camp, scoffing at how soaked everything was. When everything was in the car and we had our still-damp-from-the-day-before caving clothes on, we were ready to get back into the caves. There was still one task left to do though: Smash the pumpkin! We took pleasure from this, childishy stomping it into an orange, mushy pulp. I must say though, that pumpkin was tough as nails; my foot had swollen up after kicking it.

Today was our last day and we only had a few hours to go cave exploring before having to return to Departure Bay to catch the ferry. Juxtaposed to the morning's pace, we pulled up our socks and moved along swiftly. Today's cave was named 'The right stuff'. We followed the poorly marked trail through a rainforest that felt like a prehistoric, Jurassic jungle and along the way stumbled across a couple other possible caves. Eventually after only a couple wrong turns we found the sinkhole for 'the right stuff'.

We looked down into the blackness, trying obsoletely to see the bottom. We could hear a torrent of water gushing somewhere below us. This looked amazing! This time I set up the rappel, wanting to practice the skill. We were all eager to get down there so one-by-one we hastily descended the rope. Each time someone landed at the bottom we could just hear them shout up, 'Oh guys... this is awesome!'

Eventually I got down and had a look around. There was a tiny red salamander on the ground just by my feet. Although he was a Q'Pie, these guys are quite poisonous – I felt very privileged to have seen one. I continued further into the cave. There was a frothing, white deluge of water cascading from a cliff on the right side, creating the most spectacular waterfall. The underground river was full and fast and ran off into the darkness on the left side of the cave.

One-by-one we ventured further down into the cave, following the direction of the river more than we were our headlamps. It was deafening while we walked beside it. Impossible to converse with one another we just kept walking. Eventually the river disappeared through a sink-hole in the cave wall.

There was a tunnel on the right side of the river gully and we all followed it through a short distance. After only a few meters it let out into a tremendously huge chasm. Genuinely, it was like a ravine out of Minecraft and went down and down into the abyss. What else can you do except set up a rappel?

Nick was just starting the rappel from an anchor we set up from a nearby rock when he saw that someone else had bolted in an anchor in the side of the cliff face! Surprised, he quickly adjusted the rappel to anchor off the bolts instead. This was going to be a huge descent, by far the longest in the two days and easily twice the size of the second largest. Eagerly, we waited at the top of the rope, waiting to descend one at a time.

It was fantastic looking around the cavern as the guys descended. Their torch-lights danced on the cave walls, illuminating thousands of



Like a contortionist squeezing into a crag. Photo: Nathan Starzynski

millions of water droplets and making them shimmer like diamonds. You would reach out to touch one, sure that you had found some sort of precious mineral, only to have it trickle away down your finger into nothingness.

Finally, it was my turn to go down. I strapped in and bounced my way down the rope. I was getting soaked as water showered in on top of me, but I didn't care, it was far too much fun. It kept going and going. Sometimes the rope would get stuck on a prickly rock but you would just shake it out and keep going. Eventually I hit the ground and looked around.

The entire cavern was flooded. We were just above the water-line and looked across the pool to where our path would have continued. Now, there is a sport called cave-swimming, also known as spelunking, however that water looked so incredibly ice-cold that it would have taken a lot of money/alcohol to get me in there. So, this was it, we had reached as far as we could go in this beautiful, big cave. I watched the glacial-clear water for a moment as it rippled from a torrent flowing into it nearby. Eventually I turned around and ascended back up the rope.

We were cold, damp and I do believe ready to go home at this stage so hurriedly, we made our way out of the cave and back to the car. Boy, was I glad that I still had a dry change of clothes to get into, I was so close to using them that day for caving. Everyone got ready briskly and threw their stinking, cold, damp, muddy, used and abused clothes into a large bin bag and we chucked it in the car boot. 'We'll deal with that another day.' Or tonight when we're off the boat...

We drove back to Departure Bay, thoroughly exhausted and satisfied. And although we missed our ferry and had to catch the next one, I don't think we really cared. What else could we possibly have fit into such an adventure-packed weekend.

Caving is one of the most bizarre, unnatural experiences I think a human can do. It goes against every instinct to throw yourself into a pitch-black hole so tight that you practically have to lube yourself up with butter to squeeze through. But It is just that: an experience. It was a fantastic weekend and I would urge everyone to give it a go – There's not much to match it.

Stein Valley Traverse

A combined effort

August 29 – September 4

Participants: Elisa Bjerre, Cassandra Elphinstone, Vincent Hanlon and Birgit Rogalla

Day 1 — Trailhead to Lean-To Camp

Written by Elisa

To our surprise, we found ourselves at the trailhead of the Stein Valley Traverse near Lytton just a little past noon on Monday the 29th of August. Considering the obstacles we had faced since we headed out early that morning, the four of us were quite lucky to have come so far (actually to have come anywhere at all). But the obstacles were of a different kind than you would normally expect on a hike: they included nearly missing the bus, a furious bus driver refusing to take our backpacks on board due to lack of “mandatory luggage tags” (something which Greyhound seems to keep as a secret requirement until departure), and on top of this Highway 1 was closed causing a detour.

We eventually arrived in Lytton where it was dry, warm and sunny. Eager to get going as far as possible, we headed towards the trailhead 8 km away. Within minutes of walking through the small town, we were offered a lift from a lady who told us we resembled her son and three daughters. She took us all the way to the trailhead which included crossing the Fraser River on a stream-driven ferry. As a foreigner in this country I keep being reminded how friendly and helpful Canadians are!

The trail was easy and the weather fantastic as we hiked our way up along the Stein River, enjoying the desert-like forest and the ancient rock paintings. We ended up cooking at Lean-To Camp in the dark that night as we had somehow walked past the intended campsite, and walking back did not seem appealing. Cassandra Elphinstone was entertaining with terrifying stories about her numerous polar bear encounters this summer on Ellesmere Island. Vincent Hanlon and Birgit Rogalla enjoyed their shepherd's pie, the first of many to come. Food-coordination is recommended.

Day 2 — Lean-To Camp to Logjam Camp

Written by Vincent

There were lovely forests and riverbanks on the next day's hike beyond Lean-To Camp, but unfortunately the massive mountains that surround that part of the valley were high out of sight. Beyond the Cottonwood Creek crossing, the trail goes through an old burn, which apparently used to be choked with gargantuan fireweed. Since the whole trail was meticulously cleared this summer, from the trailhead to Stein Lake and even beyond, this is no longer a problem. The trail is obvious and open, and if you touch a plant it's because you want to.

We met some military-looking guys along the trail with absolutely massive packs and a funny way of talking. They stopped to talk with



Start of the hike up the valley along the Stein River. Photo: Birgit Rogalla

our motley crew: Cussin' Cassandra, Expectoratin' Elisa (that's Elisa Bjerre, by the way), Venal Vincent, and — well, Birgit had a nickname too, but I've forgotten it. They were preoccupied with bears (“I have seen a bear down at the Logjam Camp”), and must also have doubted whether our thigh muscles were as fearsome as our names, because they told us at great length how hard the trail ahead was (“You'll find it pretty rough up there, right”). At lunch that day, swimming from a gravel bar in the Stein, something happened that did make the trail much, much harder: Vincent lost the soap. Everyone (else) regretted it for many days. After lunch, blister taping begun.

Arriving at Logjam Camp, we potted around on the logjam, ate, and inconvenienced a bear that wanted to cross the river on the logs, but preferred to avoid walking through our campsite (despite the mouthwatering smell of shepherd's pie that might have masked the less-than-mouthwatering smells of the four of us). Though it may seem like a casual decision, stopping at Logjam Camp was essential to our psychological well-being. On many trips, the farther campsites are the site of unspeakable horrors suffered at the paws of pack rats. We do not speak their names.

Day 3 — Logjam Camp to Stein Lake

Written by Cassandra

After lying in the tent enjoying the sunshine for a couple of minutes, Elisa and I decided to wake up Vincent and Birgit. Little did we know it would be the last night on the trip we would be able to sleep with the fly off the tent and enjoy sunshine in the morning. After breakfast, Birgit began the morning routine of bandaging Elisa's blisters. By using tincture of benzoin and creating some padding around the blister, Birgit enables Elisa's feet to survive the company of her mountaineering boots for the entire trip (~100 km). Amazing!

After seeing the bear the night before, we were on the lookout for exciting wildlife. Not long after leaving camp, our hopes were fulfilled when we spotted an impressive caterpillar. It was 5-7cm long and bright green with red spikes. I had never seen anything like it before.

At lunch, Birgit discovered that her brie cheese bagel had become

slightly furry. We encouraged her to eat it with stories of old French cheeses, but this may not have been the best choice... She regretted it for the next few days.

The hiking was beautiful! We continued to head up the Stein Valley towards Stein Lake. This was the first time we began to gain some elevation. We could look back and see where we had started, and we could begin to see where we were headed. This trip is interesting partly because of all of the ecosystems it passes through. Having started in the dry, desert-like ecosystems, this was the first day we began to hike through more temperate rainforests. The weather seemed to mimic the ecosystems we were passing through: it began to rain quite hard as we entered the rainforest. Addition by Birgit: both Cassandra and Vincent can identify a fair amount of tree and plant species, and thus many hours were spent listening about their interesting descriptions of the ecosystems and plants that were out of the ordinary.

The last few kilometers before Stein Lake we were discouraging due to the rain. We debated if we were on the right trail, and we even stopped to check the GPS. Throughout the entire trip, the distances mentioned in the guidebook seemed deceptive; sometimes far too short, and, at other times, far too long. We continued along the trail we were on, and, after what felt like forever, we did reach Stein Lake. When we arrived, the rain miraculously stopped so we could set up our tents and cook dinner without getting any more wet.

The trail to Stein Lake from Lytton had recently been cleared and fixed up. Vincent pointed out that some of the bridges had been created by cutting down large old growth trees! Whoever had done this had been very skilled with the chainsaw. They selected massive trees growing alongside some of the creeks and managed to topple the trees across the creek to form a bridge. I was surprised they were allowed to do this in a provincial park...

Day 4 — Elton Lake day trip

Written by Cassandra

We woke up to weather looking a bit better and decided to try to hike up to Elton Lake. While eating breakfast, I noticed a “Camp Qwanoes



Elton Lake. Photo: Birgit Rogalla

2016 Getting Started” balloon in the middle of our campsite. At first, I figured that it must have been brought here by someone, but none of us had noticed it the day before. Finally, we decided that must have floated over from Vancouver Island and landed in our campsite overnight. It amazes me that a small balloon could travel that far and by chance land in our campsite.

The guidebook said to follow the ridge south of the campsite to get to Elton Lake. We started up on the trail to the helipad, and, from there, it was reasonably straightforward to follow the ridge. Occasionally there were bits of clear trail and a couple of cairns. When we had nearly reached the elevation of the lake, it began to pour rain again. Although it was wet, we continued up through meadows of blueberries and black huckleberries. The berries here were ripe and delicious, significantly slowing our progress up the ridge. Eventually we reached the alpine, and the density of berries declined, resulting in a quick increase to our pace.

After a quick stroll through some alpine meadows, we found ourselves looking down at Elton Lake. The colour of the lake colour was unreal! I had never seen anything like it before; it was an incredible blue colour that contrasted with the surrounding orange/red rock. After admiring the lake and glaciers behind it (and building an inukshuk), we eventually decided to head back down to our campsite to have time for an enjoyable dinner and lots of sleep before climbing into the alpine with our packs the following day.

We headed back down, careful to stay on the correct ridge leading

back to our camp. Before reaching Stein Lake, we lost the “trail” for a while, but we still found a way down. That evening, we enjoyed a warm dinner and were lucky (as we seemed to be every night) that it was not raining in the evening.

Day 5 — Stein Lake to Tundra Lake

Written by Birgit

This was the promised ridge walk with a fair amount of elevation gain. We started early, left camp, and arrived at the cable car crossing of the rushing outflow of Stein Lake. The cable car appeared large enough to fit all four of us plus packs, so after some doubtful glances, we gave it a go. A hard clunk and few nervous moments later, we made it to the other side. From here, the guide book describes a steep trail with switchbacks leading up to the ridge. Within the first five minutes on the trail, we missed a turn. This resulted in a short exposed scramble section, plenty of climbing over trees and through bushes, as well as route finding to avoid cliffs. Instead of switchbacks, we went straight up (which turned out to be pretty efficient), and after about an hour, we stumbled across the trail again and gained the ridge. The air was cold, especially in combination with occasional rain and wind. We spent the rest of the day walking along the ridge as clouds blew in and out, teasing us with short glimpses of the surrounding glaciated peaks.



Cassandra and Elisa on the ridge. Photo: Birgit Rogalla

On the ridge, we met a man who spent the past seven days hiking solo with his dog from the Lizzie trailhead. He was very keen to talk to people, while his exhausted dog was happy to have the chance to sprawl on the ground. In the afternoon, we dropped down from the ridge to a boulder field leading to camp. The route down involved becoming a bit too close with the thick pine bushes/trees and clinging to the roots and branches while tree belaying ourselves. Lower down there was a meadow that appeared to be permanently caught in light. In this meadow, we saw a large strolling shape; we suspected a Grizzly bear. A reminder to carefully store our food, as our campsite was less than two km away (and we'd all had our share of bear encounters for the summer).

The hike had gone faster than we had anticipated, so we found ourselves at camp by 4 pm. The Tundra Lake camp had an outhouse with a glorious view. Tents were set up, and we all crawled into nap and warm up. Eventually, we convinced ourselves to go back out into the cold and cook dinner. We could not locate the bear cache, and thus Vincent had to pull some interesting maneuvers to build a bear hang. Like many of the nights on this trip, we had an early bedtime around 9 pm. Overnight temperatures dropped close to freezing with wind and rain hitting the tents.

Day 6 — Tundra Lake to Lizzie Cabin

Written by Vincent

The next day we skirted around Tundra Lake through steep boulder fields. This section gives some parties route-finding migraines, but the



Arriving at Lizzie Cabin. Photo: Elisa Bjerre

trick is to stay above the bluffs until it is obvious that you can descend to lake level and boulder hop the rest of the way. At the far end of the lake, sitting on a boulder and looking at the glaciers, the clarity of the water and a chance sunbeam led us to discover that the only thing more stunning than the view of Tundra Lake, is its temperature.

As we walked through the gentle meadows around Caltha Lake, the clouds descended until they were sitting around our shoulders. The trail was still easy to follow – it's a booted-in track through the heather in many places – but later on the poor visibility left us at the mercy of irresponsible cairn-builders that led us astray like will-o'-the-wisps. We followed the most insistent cairns across Cherry Pip pass, and far too high up the ridge to Tabletop Mountain. Finding ourselves at the base of the summit tower in a sudden break in the clouds, Birgit, Cassandra, and Vincent ran up the peak into an exhilarating shower of snow while Elisa shivered below. This section, from Tundra Lake to Lizzie Cabin, was maybe the most beautiful of the whole trip (excluding Elton Lake), even though much of it was as transparent as the inside of an avalanche.

The descent past Heart and Arrowhead Lakes was straightforward, although various joints and tendons were seizing up and failing. After six days of unvaried company – risking social claustrophobia – we managed to force some surprisingly civil conversation while walking, and arrived at Lizzie Cabin with limbs and goodwill mercifully intact. The cabin is as cute as a button, if somewhat porous, and well worth returning to. It was also quite full, so we tented comfortably in the forest nearby, with hot water bottles in our sleeping bags to inspire dreams of normal temperatures.

Day 7 — Lizzie Cabin to the trailhead

Written by Elisa

We woke up on the last day wondering where time had gone. We put on our wet socks and boots and started heading down towards Lillooet Lake. The first section of the trail down from Lizzie Cabin had a lot of fallen logs, so Cassandra and Vincent started to discuss organizing a workhike to maintain the trail. And so they have done! The hike turned more or less into downhill speed-walking when we reached the

old logging road. It was easy to follow, but completely overgrown by bushes. The effect was similar to an automatic car-wash as we were being wiped/whipped by wet branches the whole way down. And then suddenly, the sun came out! It felt unreal, but good to feel the warmth again after so long. Further down, we took a bypass where the river had washed away the road.

As we arrived at the end of the trail, the sun was greeting us, and we were all happy (some more than others) to finally take off our boots. Thanks to Birgit's priceless first aid blister magic, Elisa still had skin on her feet. We relaxed while eating the remains of our snacks and talking about going down to Lillooet Lake for a swim. But it was all just talk – we ended up spending our time relaxing in the sun until we got picked up by the very friendly Julien Renard, Vincent's housemate. On the way back to Vancouver, we stopped for dinner at the "Watershed" in Squamish. After waiting for our well-earned burgers for what seemed like an eternity we downed it all in five minutes, then talked confusedly and sleepily on the rest of the car ride home.



The group at the Lizzie trailhead. Photo: Birgit Rogalla

Bears, Uzbeki Trout soup, and paddle boards

Ross Campbell

Participants: Ross Campbell, Birgit Rogalla, Natalie Makepeace, and Gabe Frame

Our week was hurtling fast towards the Canada Day long weekend, and our weekend plans still consisted of a long, impenetrable e-mail faff of about 10 different options. My solution was to add some more gasoline to the fire. “Why don’t we try to repeat a Veenstra Traverse?” The ensuing fireball decimated our objectives, and we were soon choosing between ten different traverses. Sometimes progress is slow.

If anyone is looking for a pre-worked out wilderness adventure needing plenty of effort, but not too many technical skills, a Veenstra Traverse might well be a perfect, right off-the-shelf option.

Consensus eventually crystallized around a circumnavigation of Garibaldi Lake. However, because we were hoping for a longer trip, and because we are not entirely sheeple (this is a word apparently; We are an interesting bunch to communicate with...), we made some adjustments: we would forgo the Helm Glacier. Instead, we would summit Panorama ridge, and then follow it down and around to Gentian Peak before camping in Gentian Pass. This way, we get to bag a couple of peaks and keep the lake, our focal point, in view. The next day, we would summit Castle Towers before heading down to Sphinx Hut. Our final day would involve crossing the glacier up and over the Guard – Deception Col, somehow getting up and around Table mountain, over Price, and then home along the park trails.

Natalie and Gabe spent the night at the White House so that we could all leave together in the morning. We rose at the ungodly hour of 5:30am so as to ensure we might get a car spot at the trailhead and duly succeeded with an arrival time of 7:30am. Unfortunately, the permit system had been revised since any of us had been before, and we could no longer pay by cash at the trailhead. Payment must be made online or by phone (at additional cost). This means that it is now impossible to stay in Garibaldi Park without access to a credit card. Back home this might be described as crass, discriminatory, elitist bullshit, but apparently not in Canada. Thankfully, Gabe had a phone with data and Natalie furnished us with a credit card. Now all we needed to do was navigate the booking site...

We soon hit the predictable problem that the site requires you to choose which campground you intend to stay at, and, of course, Gentian Pass and Sphinx Hut aren't on the list. We considered choosing any random place with space, but we didn't like the idea of hogging camp spots that we had no intention of actually occupying. Others might want to use those spots, and if we were to book them, they would sit empty. By now a ranger was doing the rounds, and so we asked her where we should say we were camping. "That's a good question" we were told. Apparently there is no limit on booking numbers for the Cheekamus or Helm campgrounds, so we chose one of those. However, completing the booking was less than simple and took some time. At least we got a bit of chat out of the rangers, who had turned up with tablets to "help" fleece the other unexpected overnights. Our plans seemed to be of more than a passing interest for them. We were warned that there was still a lot of snow up there. We insisted that



Happy crew atop Gentian Peak. Photo: Natalie Makepeace

we expected as much.

A little shy of an hour later we were slogging up the switchbacks. It was a little less of a slog than it might have been though, because we decided not to bring any tents. It was currently drizzling on us. Hmm...

Up to Panorama Ridge was uneventful, though the weather didn't improve much. We took some pleasure out of being faster than a mass of day-trippers despite our significant packs. We had lunch on top of the ridge while enjoying the occasional view as the mist parted. Now our adventure began in earnest following the ridge along and leaving the beaten track behind. The unbeaten track was pretty friendly, and we were soon at the base of Gentian Peak. Its ascent involved relatively steep, loose rock but never too steep and never too loose. The weather was slowly improving, and so with it, our views from the top. We found a summit register at the top. We were the first group to sign it in almost a year!

The descent route off of Gentian Peak down to the pass was far simpler (less steep, with nice grassy slopes filled with varied wildflowers) than our ascent route had been, and we were soon setting up camp on a heathery, treed island in the snow next to a stream of melt water. It was perfect with a glorious view of the Sphinx, Guard, the lake, Table Mountain, Garibaldi, and Price all in one panorama. We never regretted the lack of tents. We cooked and ate dinner in bed, hung our food, enjoyed great company, and drifted off to sleep as the sun finished setting.

I awoke to a very anxious sounding Birgit;

“Ross, Ross... ROSS!”

“Hmm, HUH, wha wha what!?”

“A Bear just took our food.”

“WHAT!”

We quickly got up and grabbed our ice axes. We couldn't see anything. Then we moved round slightly, and could see some bags still on our bear hang.

“Are you sure?” Quick look around – “Where's Natalie?”



Incredible view from our camp site. Photo: Natalie Makepeace

“She went to get water.”

Ah, surely the “bear” was just Natalie. What a laugh this will be when we all calm down.

Then we saw one big brown arse slowly wandering away from our bear hang. That’s no bloody Natalie! Birgit went and retrieved Natalie from the creek, and we waited a few minutes, making lots of noise, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. I guess it’s gone? We go over to see what’s left of our food. My lunches have been devoured, as have Gabe’s sausages and breakfasts, and a chorizo sausage. I find my trail mix that was dropped by the bear as it was leaving. Birgit and I follow its tracks round the corner to see what else it might have dropped and where it ran off to.

“Shit, it’s still here!” I hear Birgit say.

I look up and see a bear maybe ten metres away staring right at us. She starts moving towards us, but thinks better of it when Gabe and Natalie join us. All the noise and ice axes in the world are not going to scare her away though. This isn’t the way bear encounters are meant to go. I’ve bumped into bears before. You stare at each other for a bit then the bear pisses off. That’s what’s meant to happen. Not today!

We headed back round to our stuff, sticking together, making lots of noise. She seemed to lose interest in us and wander off. While we are packing up our stuff, I spot a bear again. Not the same bear, but a bloody cub! The cub seems pretty curious and intent on coming over

to say hello. We're not in such a friendly mood. All the noise and axe rattling we can muster is enough to discourage it from getting any closer but, like mummy, he has no intention of going anywhere. We broke our personal best times for packing up and getting out of there. Thankfully, that was the last we saw of the bears.

We travelled a ways away and recounted how ridiculous it all was. After seeing what was left of our food, we decided we could sensibly ration it and continue as planned. We dumped everything we didn't need for Castle Towers (but bringing all our food!) and headed for the summit.

We made Polemonium Ridge without difficulty and progressed quickly to its top. Travelling between the Ridge and Castle Towers proper was when things got tricky. It was a fairly steep, incredibly loose pile of choss. We went very carefully and slowly. It wasn't comfortable, but we made it work. Once we were on Castle Towers proper the going became much easier, though depending on how comfortable you feel on snow slopes, you might not have felt that way. The weather had been good to us up till now, and the views are fantastic, but as we got about half-way up, the clouds rolled in and they were not passing. We had lunch, made the summit, and spent some time at the top until we started getting a bit cold.

On the way down, we sought out the snow slopes as much as possible to make our descent quick and easy going. Gabe was practising his glissading skills and was seemingly improving with every slope. His turns, and even occasionally "tele-turns" were getting pretty impressive! Natalie was sure there was a better route back onto Polemonium Ridge and took a high line instead of heading down to the chossy chute. It looked like an impenetrable cliff face, but, sure enough, she was right. One exposed move, but on solid rock, saved us half an hour from having to deal with all the sliding scree. More snow slopes quickly had us back to the pass where we picked up our camping things before heading to Sphinx hut.

We made sure to hold our elevation, and the going was pretty good through fairly sparse clumps of trees and snow covered boulder fields until we got to the other side of Polemonium Ridge. Sphinx bay was in sight, but the descent was heinous! It was steep. It was fairly slippery. It was thick with shrub. The mosquitos were ravenous. Then we reached

the deadfall. These logs were huge, and there were hundreds of them. Clambering up and over, or crawling under them with big packs, took forever. At one point I swear it took us just shy of an hour to travel about 200 metres. It did eventually level out, and we arrived at the hut VERY ready for some dinner!

To our surprise, we were not alone. Despite the crowded nature of Garibaldi Park, we hadn't seen a soul since leaving Panorama Ridge and hadn't expected to see anyone until we reached the proper trails again on the other side of Price. Our new Russian friends, Viktor, Vadien, and Natalia, had lugged inflatable paddleboards up to the lake and paddled across the day before. It's fair to say their circumnavigation of the lake was far more efficient than ours! Not only were they a source of great chat for the night but, once we recanted our rude awakening earlier that morning, they insisted that we take a bunch of their food too. They had been fishing in the lake, and, for all intents and purposes, had been quite successful. They prepared a Trout soup with Uzbeki spices as well as donating a bunch of lunch supplies which came in handy the next day. We savoured the fish, recounted past adventures with our newfound friends, discussed the route for the next day, and went to bed. It was nice to hear that the rangers had been asking after us earlier that day (they would be coming back the next day to try and deal with the mice...) It wasn't as nice to hear that the weather forecast had been amended since we left civilisation, and that rain was now expected for tomorrow. Viktor was concerned that we wouldn't be able to pass the creek that goes into the lake and insisted that we wake him in the morning so he could paddle us across.



Miserable log hopping on the way down to Sphinx. Photo: Birgit Rogalla

“We are getting up at 6 AM?”

“Yip that’s fine!”

This trip was becoming wonderfully absurd!

Sure enough, when we got up the next morning and started to fill up on our various cereals and left over fish soup, Viktor and Co disappeared to organise the paddleboards. We packed up our things and headed over for the stream crossing. Within minutes we were all on the other side and bidding our farewells. If we had had to wade across that early in the morning, it would have been a VERY miserable start to the morning. Given their dedication to self-propelled travel, and their passion for the ridiculous, I believe I can paraphrase American Pie and say the Russian paddleboarders are VOCers, they just never joined the club (band)!

We headed up towards the glacier that leads to the Guard – Deception Col. We roped up, though no crevasses were showing, and were pleasantly surprised by how mellow and easy going the slope up to the Col was. The descent was a little more tricky, but we arrived down in Sentinel Bay around noon for some lunch and route discussion.

Thankfully the weather had held up thus far, and the visibility was still good. We had been looking at the slopes in front of us trying to decide which way was best. Nothing looked easy. We also weren’t sure which route Veenstra and Co had taken back in the day. I think for all of us this was probably the first trip where route finding was a case



Our Chariot across the water with Victor at the helm. Photo: Birgit Rogalla

of trying to decide which route we could make work instead of trying to find the trail others have followed before us. This certainly adds to the sense of adventure, but it can be scary too. What if you make the wrong choice? Looking up at the options in front of us, I began to worry that maybe none of them were going to do it for us. It was a VERY long way home if we had to turn around now.

After a healthy debate we decided on a steep snow slope that would take us to a ridge line leading to the base of the Table. It was the least steep line up that didn't involve a long diversion across glaciated terrain. We could see that if we could get by one difficult looking step just below the Table then there would be nice mellow terrain all the way to the base of Mt. Price. If this step was no good then I guessed we would have to go round the back-side of the Table and things would get very long from there.

The snow slope took us close to our comfort levels, but in the end it went smoothly and efficiently. The snow was absolutely perfect for kicking steps into and we duly took the opportunity to make ourselves a staircase. The ridgeline afforded us quick and easy passage, and we were soon at the base of the Table in front of the difficult step we could see from the bay. The traverse around still looked scary, but there was also a bench below us though we were less sure that it went anywhere. Gabe set out investigating the traverse while I headed down to see if the bench might provide a less exposed route forward. Eventually Gabe convinced us all that his route was the best way to go. We were again VERY happy that the snow was so compliant and kicked the nicest steps possible.

When we reached the ridge line on the other side of the Table the relief was palpable! Furthermore, looking in front of us, we were presented with a beautiful snow slope leading down to flat marshland. With the going now nice and easy, and the route no longer in question (and all thoughts of having to go the long way home firmly forgotten), song returned to our merry group. The level of singing was generally a good barometer for group happiness/comfort throughout the trip.

Eventually the marsh gave way to ridges of trees, though not so dense as to make bush whacking too bad. Earlier, we had held aspirations of summiting Mt. Price on the way out, but it was getting late and we were getting hungry. The good weather we had been enjoying

up till now was being replaced with drizzle. We choose a route that went round the back of Price and up to a gentle bench from which we could head down to the “lava flats” and home. As Natalie would later remark, crossing the series of ridges between us and the bench was like an ant trying to cross a tyre tread. Every time you got over one ridge you found another. This, coupled with the increasingly heavy rain and encroaching hunger, was beginning to weigh down on us, but still, the way ahead was obvious and all obstacles in our way looked very passable. After slogging up the last bench, the sun came out, and we stopped to eat some snacks and crystallize our final route home.

Now drying off, and less hungry, the sound of singing once more returned. The route down to the lava flats followed a snow covered narrow, but a mellow pass between Clinker Peak and an unnamed bump that made for fast travel. As we approached the Lava Flats, there was more frustrating bush whacking over ridges of trees. The ridges became less pronounced as we travelled until eventually Gabe called out that he had found the official trail down from Mt. Price! And what a glorious sight it was. The trail was not as easy to follow as it might have been because it had many boulder fields covered in just enough snow to hide all the holes you were about to fall through as you stood on them. Still, as the sun began to set, we were very happy indeed to reach the warming hut on the near side of the lake.

We had been on the go now for 15 hours and certainly needed some dinner. We were now back in civilization, and the hut was full of people who were amazed by where we had just come from. At one point we were referred to as “the crazy mountaineers”. We mentioned the Russians that we met over at Sphinx, and word of their heroically ridiculous endeavours had already spread to the hut’s occupants. I guess the crazies stick together! By the time we finished dinner, it was half past ten, and we were in no mood to go anywhere. We decided that we would bend the rules, sleep in the warming hut, and head out early in the morning for the car. We all slept like logs.

We awoke at 5:30 am and made a breakfast out of the random things we had left: some buck wheat (donated by the Russians), some oatmeal, milk powder, and, if you were me, a japati. A conventional breakfast it was not, but it was very satisfying regardless. We finished eating, packed up, and left for the trail just before 7:00 am as the early risers were just coming in to start their own breakfasts. The legs were cer-

tainly feeling it on the way down the switchbacks, but it went without event and we were glad to reach the car a little over two hours later and to enjoy the cookies I had left in there for our return. Just as we drove off it started to rain. How often does it ever go that way round?

And so, all that is left is for me to thank the people on this trip for singing through the good times and hiding the grimaces through the tough stuff. It was an unforgettable trip, filled with the unexpected, where we were reminded of the dangers of bears and the kindness of strangers.



More route discussions during lunch. Photo: Natalie Makepeace

Sunshine Coast Trail

Richard So

The 180-km Sunshine Coast Trail is Canada's longest hut to hut hiking trail, free and open to the public without reservations. The trail has existed since 1992 when a small group of people, led by Eagle Walz, started to connect trails and old roads in the Powell River region to showcase the old growth forest. I first hiked a section of the trail in 2004 with two friends and always wanted to go back (See VOCJ 2004-2005). In 2009, the Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society (PRPAWS) received funding from the Island Economic Trust, which allowed them to construct ten wilderness huts, and put in extensive improvements in trail markers and signage.

In December 2004, I hiked from Sarah's Point to the Shinglemill Pub after my first semester at UBC. Immediately after my last exam, we caught the last connecting ferry to Powell River. We got a ride up the logging road towards Sarah's Point, hiked along Okeover Arm and out to Powell River over three days on this 50 km northern section. The central and southern section of the trail climbs into sub-alpine mountainous terrain, but the northern section stays low, and is usually snow-free allowing for year-round hiking.

I always wanted to go back and hike the rest of the trail. I was also training for an ultra-marathon this summer, and welcomed any 'fun' ways to train for that. I decided to attempt the remainder of the trail, the last hundred and thirty kilometres from Powell River to Saltery Bay over the May long weekend, solo. I would have nobody to complain to if the plan didn't work out, and it was just a big sufferfest. Since my first trip here, I've done plenty of fast and light trips in the mountains.

I set off from Powell River, the same place I finished, twelve years

ago. The Sunshine Coast Trail is well-marked with orange trail markers. Square trail markers are for the south direction, and diamond trail markers are for the north. The Sunshine Coast Trail book by Eagle Walz was my only companion on the trip. I frequently flipped through the descriptions for each of the upcoming sections to get a sense of the terrain, time required, and elevation gain. He recommends hiking the trail from North to South. Consequently, the trail is way better marked for the southbound. With everybody hiking in lockstep, you'll be less likely to see people.

I had a general sense of where I was going, following lots of trail markers and making my way through the forest, wandering along lake shorelines and through second-growth forest. Many sections are accessible by road, allowing you to hike the trail in sections over multiple trips. At times, you are hiking along old mossy logging roads, inside a green tunnel. At times I jogged along a pathway of pine needles and loam with vibrant carpets of moss on either side.

There are many climbs, and one of the bigger ones is up to Tin Hat Mountain, one of the mountainous areas of the trip, reminiscent of the local North Shore mountains. The Tin Hat Cabin is located in one of most spectacular spots along the trail. I didn't get there until early in the evening. I popped inside for a rest, 40 km in my day so far, just in time to catch two other hikers, Devin and Scott having dinner in the cabin. Ironically, both of these guys are semi-pro runners out for a weekend hike, in contrast to myself. I explained that I was only fast



Rich stretching outside the Tin Hat Cabin. Self-portriat

walking. Listening to my plan, they wanted to go “running” too. The conversation went something like this.

“Where are you going tonight?”

“I don’t know. I’ll just keep going until I’m tired. I think I can make it to Saltery Bay in two days if I just keep moving instead of stopping here for the night.”

“Want some leftover dinner?”

As a VOCer, I have a well-formed policy of never turning down food.

This trip was all about suffering and sacrifices. The rational side of me suggested stopping for the night in the hut, enjoying the sunset from up here. Instead, I jogged down the trail, knowing I still had ground to cover. I bonked for the first time here. I struggled on the descent, finding the distances between the kilometre markings on the trees further than I hope for. I would learn to stop worrying about the distance markers and just listen to my body. I ran into a tree branch part way down which didn’t help my morale. I stopped for dinner on the shore of Lewis Lake at sunset. I watched the trout jump out of the lake, as the sun faded into the scattered clouds. I was not alone on the long weekend. Across the lake at the Lewis Lake campground, I could hear the alternating sounds of the local radio station and dirtbikes, the sounds of the great outdoors.

The next section of the trail follows the edge of cutblocks, along logging roads and old railroad grades in the forest. I was happy to hike this less scenic section by moonlight. I could see the moon through the thin stands of trees on the edge of the trail, forming a narrow buffer zone between the cutblock and my path. I was by myself again, or so I thought. Walking along the logging road, I could hear a bear rustling down in the riparian zone below me. I would talk to myself and make noises whenever I saw evidence of bears.

Hearing the bear was motivation for me to pick up my pace. I continued the sufferfest along the new logging road and then back into the historic railroad grade. When I left Tin Hat Mountain, I knew it was unlikely I could get to the Elk Lake Hut to sleep in. It was close to midnight and I was ready to bivvy anywhere. I decided to stop along

an old logging road, just in case my shoes turned into pumpkins at midnight. I crawled into my sleeping bag in the open night air, falling asleep quickly after a 50 km day.

After a few short hours of sleep, I set off on my morning “run” weaving along the old logging roads. I ran along the logging roads, and then climbed up to the Elk Lake hut. This is one of the further huts from any access point. Elk Lake is a beautiful spot, complete with a swimming dock. Most of the huts are simple, but well constructed, providing shelter from the elements and somewhere to sit and cook. Some are fully enclosed and winterized with a pellet stove, while others are more simple. My favourite huts were the Mount Troubridge, Walt Hill and Tin Hat Cabin, simply due to their locations and construction. The Fairview Bay Hut is also up there due to its position next to the ocean. Thanks to the Powell River Wilderness and Parks Society for all their hard work in establishing this.

I carried on towards the Walt Hill Hut, another high point of the Sunshine Coast Trail. The trail weaves through high elevation old growth up here. Up on the bluffs, looking across Vancouver Island, the Salish Sea and into the mountains, I could see sunshine here and on the water, and some darker clouds further into the mountains. I stopped for brunch at noon at the cabin, brewing up some coffee and enjoying a bag of pringles, sitting in a lounge chair, and reading about the next section of trail.

The SCT now drops back to the valley bottom and crosses the Lois River under the Lois Lake Dam. Signs warn hikers to evacuate the area in case the spill gates are opened, signalled by sirens. In these dry conditions, it was an easy ford, the water level was low, with boulders easily hopped across on. I stopped for water here, having run out half an hour ago. I suffered briefly before this point, running through some cutblocks, where the sun exposure toyed with my motivation to continue. I picked up the trail on the other side, climbing up the bank, and then onto a gentle gradient with some muddy patches through lush sword ferns and salal. Everything was so green here. I stepped out onto the Stillwater Main, with a short section of open logging road to go up on, and then left onto the Lois Lake trail.

I found that the trail difficulties described as moderate were usually runnable, and the difficult sections runnable on the downhill direction.

The Lois Lakeshore section is described as moderate, and it was nice ramble along the shore line for seven kilometres. I had a good mix of jogging and walking along the shore line. I reached the Branch 41 campsite on the east shore of Lois Lake at 5:00 pm. At this point, I briefly questioned my self-induced sufferfest, while everybody else was camped out on the lake enjoying some cold beers and hot dogs over a campfire. Seeking out Type II fun is probably a carry-over habit from my early days in the VOC.

Everybody in Powell River seems friendly. I walked up to a group of campers, wondering if I could buy a beer off them. Immediately, Bill offered me a beer and wondered why I was out hiking. I sat down on the picnic table, and cracked open what was likely the most delicious Budweiser I have ever tasted. And the second one tasted even better. Bill was a logging truck driver, familiar with hikers wandering around in the forest in the area. I told them I had hiked from Powell River (although not that I started yesterday morning, that might have seemed nuts to them!), and that I had another 10 km of hiking to go, if not more. Bill asked me if I was hungry, and I told him I could eat something. All of a sudden I had two sandwiches in front of me, a tub of margarine and cold cuts. I wasn't at risk of running out of food, but this was just too good to pass up. I was even handed a bag of chopped pineapples before setting off again. The Powell River hospitality is world class.

The next part of the trail weaves through riparian zones and ravines and second-growth trees, rolling up and down towards Lois Main, another logging road. I was enjoying this section of the trail, and kept thinking about coming back without the pack and running the Troubridge Section next time. Saltery Bay to Mount Troubridge is approximately 42 km. Eagle Walz describes this as a "marathon with attitude, because it's not some flat and paved half-morning sweat, but a marathon with a mountain thrown in. Fabulous views and long stretches of old growth are part of the deal, if you ever look up from your toes."

From Lois Main, the Sunshine Coast trail now begins climbing up. The first part follows a beautiful old bike trail, with relicts between loamy flowy sections of the trail. You might have thought the Hobbits and Ewoks co-lived here. I knew that the next section of the climb would be easy to follow even in the dark, as it linked up a series of old logging roads. When I say old logging road, I don't mean the cross-

ditch alder choked nightmares we tend to have around Squamish or Chilliwack. Some of the logging roads were just a green tunnel, the surface a layer of moss mulch and needles. These old roads were a pleasure on walk on, soft moss and dirt rather than a knee-jarring rubble road. It was easy going, even in the dark. None of the markers are reflective in this section of the trail. I just suffered for a few minutes, when I stopped for a snack at around 9:00 pm. The sun was fading, I pulled out my headlamp and ate way too many chocolate-coconut oil coated cashews chunks at once. I started dry heaving, maybe I was going a bit too fast uphill beforehand. Some coughing, more coughing, some rest, and I was back on my feet jogging up the roads again. There was less than 10 km to go to the Troubridge Hut.

I skirted along the south shore of Elephant Lake, as the symphony of frogs chirping pierced through the darkness. The noise was incredible, and there was no way I was stopping here tonight, even if there was a rough campsite. I stopped at the creek flowing into the lake, wondering if 10:00 pm was dinner time or not. The full moon rising behind the wispy clouds casted a faint glow over the otherwise dark forest. Occasionally, I caught a glimpse of the city lights on Vancouver Island through the open forest.

Inside the hut, there was food scattered across both the table and



The loamy Trail weaving through the old growth. Photo: Rich So

the counter top. There were only two people upstairs, snoring away. I was trying to figure out who these two people might be, by scanning through the food they brought. There were many cans of tuna, and Chunky's soup and chocolate. They must be new to hiking, I thought. It turns out they just didn't have a backpacking stove, so went for heavy food for their entire five day trip. A few minutes later, I could hear the mouse running around on the tabletop, trying to get into the food that was left out. I moved their food higher up, hanging up some of it. Always remember to put your food away in a hut.

I woke up to a light drizzle outside. The Mount Troubridge area tends to stay in the clouds while everywhere else is clear. This was the only rain of the weekend up here on the Sunshine Coast. I hung around inside the hut, stretching and taping up my feet: 20 km left, almost all downhill to Saltery Bay. I continued up to the summit of Mount Troubridge, surrounded by fog. I'll come back on a clear day for the view. There were still a few patches of snow up here. The trail down the east side of Mount Troubridge passes through old growth forests, which were enshrouded in the mist as I descended.

The trail was very runnable, soft and forgiving loam. I was jogging, but I decided to slow down to appreciate my surroundings. I would start jogging, see something and have to stop to take a photo. If anybody else was here with me, they would have been so frustrated by my pace. My words don't justice to the magic within a stand of old growth on a misty day. You'll have to go experience it yourself.

I dropped through some more nice forest and bluffs with short sections of up, down to the junction between Fairview Bay and Rainy Lake. I went left, the scenic route which is the trail from Fairview Bay to Saltery Bay. It follows the coast, a more scenic undulating route through arbutus trees, rocky bays and bluffs. There is another hut here, with a waterfront view. There were only two other campers here in this picturesque bay facing Jervis Inlet. The hut was empty, but there was a hammock strung up inside. I was in no rush, so I took a nap and didn't leave the hut until 1:00 pm, nearly an hour spent doing exactly nothing. It's important to stop sometimes, and just enjoy your surroundings. The Sunshine Coast Trail finishes off as windy stretch down along the ocean. I reached one nice stretch of rocky bluffs and arbutus trees with a great view of Jervis Inlet just before Pirates Cove.

Sometimes you just have to believe in yourself, start walking and see what happens. Twelve years after first hiking the trail, I finally completed the route and hiked 128 km over three days. Pack your bag, leave your tent behind and go explore the Sunshine Coast Trail. It is well worth visiting. Hike it, run it, the whole thing in one go, sections at a time, visit the huts, swim in the lakes and enjoy the quiet trails. It's unique in it's own way, and a great way to spend a few days or a week outside.



Rich next to Trail Marker near Mount Troubridge. Photo: Austrian hiker

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Fay's non-technical Trip Report of a Lizzie Lake Workhike

Fay Chen

I registered for a membership with the VOC, and I dropped off my fee during gear hours. I then signed up for a trip that seemed interesting and made it to my first pre-trip meeting and... found myself the only one in the room not wearing outdoor apparel! It was easy for me to realize that I was the only new one. Harlin Brandvold asked: "Do you usually do sports?", "Do you know what you are facing?" Cassandra Elphinstone just laughed... I didn't know anything, and thus, I was super fearless with regards to this trip.

It felt unreal when I stepped out of the car under the stunning, glittering, amazing starry night sky on Friday night and had my first breath of fresh air from the woods. I thought to myself, "Wow, my first hike!" Thanks Sylvia for letting us stay at the cozy lake-side cabin on Friday night! We had a fast start the next day, which meant everyone walked at a supernatural speed (for me) and nobody was in sight after a maximum of five minutes, except Lucy Buchanan-Parker and Ross Campbell, who were behind me.

The first kilometer was a terrifying narrow trail that goes up and down. I tried quite hard not to think, 'what if I fall?', when going across the boulders. It didn't become any easier with time. The challenges lined up and took turns appearing, one after another. After surviving the rough patches of trail, two hours of going uphill, rain, and the one-log bridge, I ended up on the uphill section near Lizzie Lake. The angle of the trail definitely felt greater than 60 degrees. Millions of thanks to Ross. He deserves the Club Gentleman award, for keeping me accompanied and describing how bad his first VOC trip was. We discovered some blueberries, made the wrong prediction that "the hut

must be somewhere close,” and stopped to rest several times.

We reached the hut around 5:00pm, not necessarily tired but surprisingly cold. The first group had already done lots of work. They fixed the roof shortly after our arrival and we started cooking dinner. It was amazing! There was even a tap with running water in the hut. The stove was also nice and warm. We managed to light up the room using a head lamp and a translucent water bottle. Then I discovered the most interesting part of the VOC.

The situation got totally out of control after someone took out the VOC Songbook. It’s a magical book that transforms a group of backpackers into a drunken choir. City people could never imagine over a dozen people squeezing into one bed trying to read the lyrics of this legendary book in the dim light and singing out loud (and hardly with correct rhythm). I took a video for my newly wedded cousin with everyone saying ‘Happy wedding’ in Chinese. My cousin liked it a lot, she said that’s the most unique wedding blessing she has received and thanked everyone!

It was so cold at night that I had to bury my head in the sleeping bag. At first it was raining outside, then snowing. After struggling for several hours, I decided to climb downstairs to find my hat in my backpack. Harlin was snoring and the famous cute mouse had gotten stuck in some plastic stuff and was making a lot of noise.

Sunday began by trying to activate the chainsaw for over twenty minutes. We then took loads of photos of Cassandra in an orange working



A big smile from Cassandra. Photo: Tom Curran

suit. After three or four people failed to get the chainsaw started, Birgit Rogalla finally started it.

I then left on the return trip to the trailhead. It was much easier the second day. Ross and Lucy enjoyed a quick swim in Lizzie Lake on the way back and I started the brushsaw, yeeeh!

My knees stopped working the moment I walked out of the woods. At the cars, I found at least 3 scratches on my thigh, and my toenails were filled with soil but this was such an amazing experience! I even felt sad about going back to civilization. During the drive back, I realized that my life was going to be filled with updating Facebook posts and walking around the university again.

Here are some interesting memories of my first trip:

You are the most amazing people that I've ever met in university! Full of energy and humour, and super friendly! Thanks for looking after me on my first trip. See you soon!

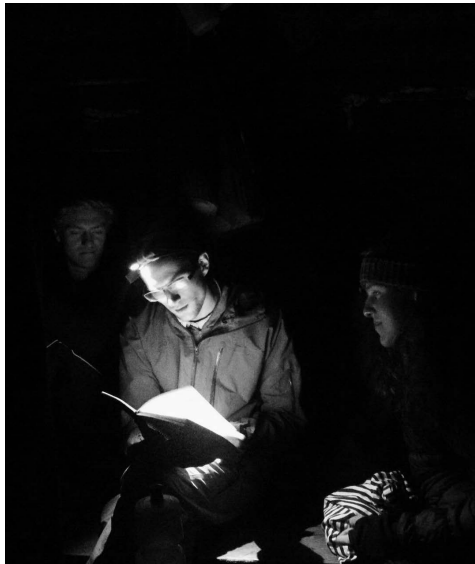
I learned new words for describing different tools: chainsaw and brushsaw; different wood houses: cabin and hut; different animals: rat and mouse.

Since I survived while not washing my face for three days, does it mean the money and time I spend on cosmetics can be saved from now on?

I experienced a new way of living: people will not die without cell-phone signal or a hot shower. It just feels good!

And I love you guys!

Sacred light shines upon
Tom and the songbook.
Photo: Fay Chen





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Landscape Winner: Storm over the Fraser River. Photo: Shane Duan

VOC Photo Contest



Action Winner: The view is just as good upside down. James Campbell pushes through the crux on Subdivisions (12d). Photo: Nick Hindley



Flora and Fauna Winner: The sunsets in the Valhallas are so stunning even the goats stop to watch. Photo: Tim Howard





Club Life Runner Up: Participants of Glacier School, 2016, practice glacier skills on the Cypress Glacier. Photo: Matt Kennedy



Miscellaneous Winner: In the eye of the mountain. Looking up in Antelope Canyon, Navajo land, Arizona. Photo: Katharina Rothe



Top: **Portrait Winner:** Alpine Giggles. Kevin Martin giggling somewhere on the Beckey-Chouinard, Bugaboos. Photo: Megan O'Brien

Bottom: **Club Life Winner:** Polar Bear Swim at Elfin Lakes in June! Photo: Emily Kuang



Top: **Flora and Fauna Runner Up:** Paintbrushes above Hidden Lake, Broken Top, Three Sisters Wilderness Area, Oregon. Photo: Kasia Celler
Bottom: **Miscellaneous Runner Up:** Frosty morning at Windy Joe. Photo: Roseanna Gamlen-Green



Top: **Landscape Runner Up:** Drinnan Lake in the Valhallas during a beautiful (if slightly unintended) circuit of the area. Photo: Tim Howard
Bottom: **Portrait Runner Up:** Be My Valentine? Dakotah Fozzard climbs Valentine's Day ice in Jasper National Park. Photo: Matt Kennedy



Action Runner Up: Climbing Lionsgate Ice. Matt Kennedy making his way up some thin ice on the Seawall. Photo: Dakotah Fozzard

Flora and Fauna Honorable Mention: Open wide!
Photo: Shane Duan





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Skiing and Winter Mountaineering



Andrew Cavers shreds some New Year's turns on the south side of Mt. Harvey. Photo: Matteo Agnoloni



Top: Kasia dropping her knee for some October turns at Keith's Hut.
Photo: Clemens Aldolphs

Bottom: Skiing across the clouds over Mt. Baker. Photo: Nick Hindley



Top: Todd Mackenzie boot packs up the Sphinx above Burton Hut.

Photo: Veronika Schmitt

Bottom: Preparing breakfast. Morning light on Mount Cayley.

Photo: Kasia Celler



Top: Zack Wentz in the belly of the beast - Aussie Couloir on Joffre Peak.

Photo: Matteo Agnoloni

Bottom: Break overlooking Squamish Glacier. Photo: Mike Cancilla





Left: Mistakes were made, lessons still have not been learned. Skunked on the North Joffre Horseshoe yet again. Photo: Ian Johnston
Right: Siks soak up the afternoon sun on the Bridge Glacier. Photo: Caitlin Schneider
Bottom: Skiers abound! Photo: Ian Johnston

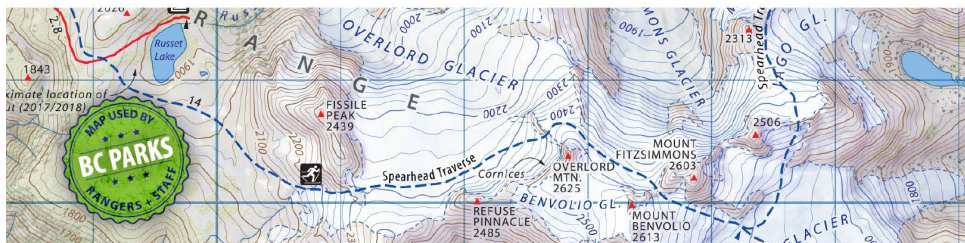




Garibaldi looking glorious under a blue sky. Photo: Veronika Schmitt

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2016 Womyn's Trip: Blackcomb-Currie Traverse

Katie McMahan

Date: April 9-10, 2016

Route: Blackcomb-Currie Traverse (~ 35km, 2,200m elevation gain)

Group: Line Veenstra, Caitlin Schneider, Petra Klupkova, Katie McMahan, Alex Annejohn, Rachel Baldwin, Veronika Schmitt, Klara Steklova, Sarka Vavrova

Line took the initiative to organize the 2016 Womyn's Trip, which has become a VOC tradition. The goal of this annual trip is to get a group of ladies out into the backcountry for a weekend – a nice change from backcountry trips which typically have a male-heavy gender ratio. No stinky boys smelling up the tent or the car on the drive home (oh wait... turns out that's not just a guy thing). The planned adventure was the Blackcomb-Currie traverse, although we opted for a less ambitious option of taking the ski lifts up Blackcomb. Line's husband, Christian, had done the traverse the previous weekend, which was a great help for us. He reported stable conditions and we were able to see his tracks for a large portion of the route, as well as use his GPS track as a reference. Amazingly, he did our two day traverse in 12 hours without chairlift assistance!

Our trip began bright and early Saturday with the car drop and an arrival at Whistler-Blackcomb Guest Services when they opened in the morning to purchase our excessively expensive backcountry passes. After Line took the biggest wipeout of the trip in the Whistler village, in which she ripped her pants and jacket and scratched her glasses, we



Sarka Vavrova traversing across Wedge Pass, late afternoon on Day 1.
Photo: Katie McMahan

heeded her advice of “the city is dangerous... let’s get out of here!”. Good thing she was wearing a helmet, otherwise it would have been a trip-ender!

From the top of the T-bar we joined the throng of people making their way up to the Blackcomb-Spearhead Col. Various small interruptions and challenges for some on the icy slope delayed our schedule, and we left the col at 11:00am, glad to be headed in a different direction than the rest of the mob who were presumably doing the Spearhead. As the day started to warm up under cloudless sunny skies, we made our way down the Decker Glacier and along the drainage towards Wedge Pass. After our only water refill of the day, we made our way up towards Wedge and Lesser Wedge, a roughly 1,000m climb, with everyone feeling the heat and glad to be partially in the trees for the lower 500m. We took a number of breaks through the day owing to group members’ variable skiing speeds, and found ourselves on the Weart Glacier at 6:00pm. After a group decision to push on into the dark if need be (and go beyond our Wedgemount Lake bailout option), we made good time descending ~400m down the icy Weart glacier. Then at last, we made the final ~400m climb to our camp location beneath Mount Moe with the group arriving between 8:15 and 9:00pm.

At camp everyone sprang into action, setting up tents, melting wa-

ter, etc. as night set in. Veronika dug her first outhouse hole, which was a bit on the wide side, but nobody fell in – the right technique helps, who needs yoga anyway? Continuing with her snow creations, Veronika also made a topnotch group seating area around the kitchen (although to her disappointment, the Czech contingent didn't join us to make use of it). Dinners were good all around, although you could tell it was an all-female trip, because everyone had leftovers! Then we were off to bed, as it was 10:30pm by the time we were done eating.

On Saturday morning the group was up at 5:30am, and we were able to beat Line's prediction of it taking us 2 hours to break camp. We made our way up to the top of the ridge and took advantage of the morning light to take a group photo with Mount Moe and The Owls in the background. Traversing down and across to the next ridge, we opted to diverge from Christian's route for something that had less side-hilling (for the sake of our resident split boarder) and a less steep descent on the other side (as morning conditions were icy and we had some intermediate skiers in the group). In the end, our detour didn't save much side hilling, but we got in some "real adventure" -- bootpacking across a rocky ridge to find a slope entry point without a cornice -- and had a delightful second breakfast in the sun. The group tried two different descent options – one being steeper and requir-



Group photo on the morning of Day 2 atop the ridge above camp, with Mount Moe and The Owls in the background.

Left to right: Alex Annejohn, Rachel Baldwin, Line Veenstra, Caitlin Schneider, Klara Steklova, Petra Klupkova, Katie McMahren, Veronika Schmitt
Front: Sarka Vavrova

Photo: Veronika Schmitt



To detour or not to detour: navigational decisions on Day 2.

Photo: Katie McMahan

ing more survival skiing than anticipated to get down the first very steep and icy pitch. Lower down, the sun had started to soften the snow, and the skiing was quite enjoyable. In the end, even with the added elevation gain up from the bottom of Mystery Glacier, we were happy with our detour choice to avoid the steep, narrow, north aspect (i.e. icy!) descent. In the heat of the day, again with beautiful bluebird skies, we made our way up our major climb of the day along Hibatchi Ridge. Despite some nervousness everyone survived a short ~10m down climb, which was the most technical section of the trip, thanks to some great steps courtesy of Line.

Skiing down off Hibatchi Ridge, we contoured around to Mount Currie. Both picturesque and quick ground to cover, it was a very pleasant part of the day. We wanted to connect with the summer Mount Currie hiking trail to get back to the highway, with the goal of avoiding the bad experiences others have had on this part of the traverse (cliffs and heinous trees). There was some uncertainty about the best route for doing this, and we did a couple skins on/skins off/skins on/skins off transitions to end up on top of a bench on the northeast side of Mount Currie. “I think this should be the last time we’re putting on skins”...

The first part of the descent was nice, open, slightly slushy skiing. The trees then tightened up as Line successfully found the hiking trail GPS track. The most challenging part was a very steep tightly treed section that had everyone with their skis off, followed by a slight detour from the trail which resulted in some traversing in very slushy snow. From then on the skiing on the trail was actually better than expected and the snowline transition was relatively short. By 7:30pm we were in hiking mode and headed down the rocky trail, with ~1000m of elevation to hike down. Some major knee troubles drastically slowed a group member down, and progress was slow. The first group arrived at the cars a bit before 11:00pm and retrieved the other vehicle from Whistler, then drove a bit farther up the logging road to save the stragglers some walking. Finally, the last of the group made it out by 1:45am, and we were on our way home. The good news is that during the wait, Katie and Veronika were able to brainstorm most of the trip report! We were glad to have done the car drop – 9 people hitchhiking in the middle of the night may not have been successful, and it saved another 2km or so of walking on the logging road.

We arrived back home in Vancouver by 4:30am, making it a 23 hour day. A late night, but all in all a successful trip that was enjoyed by all! Apparently there was less talk of nudity than the previous girls' trip, and there were no major crises. Kudos to Line for her stellar organization, decision making, and navigation skills (despite the map that mysteriously went missing along the way).

Why I thought it'd be a good idea to drag a snowboard up the Phelix Hut Trail

Marc Rizkallah

I arrived in Vancouver in December 2016 with the main purpose of “getting to know the backcountry better.” It was already dumping snow, which I knew to be relatively rare in Vancouver. I wanted to make the most of it, but I needed equipment, knowledge, and contacts.

I discovered “Sport Junkies” and the staff, bless them, were very friendly and helpful with my completely vague requirements: “I’m sorry – I really don’t know what I want. I don’t even know if I want skis or a snowboard. I just want to know the Canadian backcountry better...”

Luckily, they just happened to have a pair of touring skis in – a great deal for skis, bindings and skins all in good condition. Done. It had taken me longer to pick the right pair of socks at Mark’s Work Warehouse. And for the heck of it, I bought a snowboard for \$60 just because.

Next stop, SportChek for the boots. Found sales on both snowboard and ski boots. I was going to get 28.5 but the salesman insisted, “they should be tight! When you lift your heel, you should still feel your toes.” He insisted I get size 27.5. Since I know nothing about ski boots and I hate shopping, I took those and left.

My birthday present to me. My dad nearly fainted when he saw how much I splurged on gear in one day. It’s rather unlike me – I’ve been trying all year to simplify my life and reduce my worldly possessions enough to live a truly nomadic lifestyle.

The Sport Junkies staff had also mentioned I should look into the VOC as the local backcountry aficionados. When I googled them and

looked at the calendar of events, that's when I first noticed "New Years at Phelix Hut". Sweet! That sounded like the perfect way to spend the holidays. A cozy hut in the wilderness with a bunch of friendly students.

All though Roland Burton and Nick Hindley had been very useful in getting my membership up and running, I still didn't have a ride to Phelix Creek. I figured I'd rent a car and offer some spots to others interested. But someone else had the same idea, and one day I received an email from someone called Michael Spagnut: "Are you wanting to go into Phelix Creek during our holiday break? I may arrange a car rental depending on the interest."

Michael and I spoke on the phone and we found a car to rent, discussed what gear and food to bring, made a menu together and decided to meet at Hertz at 9:30am on Friday December 27th. We drove to his place, packed his gear, did some grocery shopping, and finally we were off to Birkenhead Lake. After stopping in Squamish for a few last minute items and in Pemberton for our last prepared warm meal ("Backcountry Pizza", delicious!), we finally arrived at the parking lot at 6pm.

Michael was happy to camp out at the parking lot and to start hiking the next day, but I insisted I really wanted to get started, at least get the easy "road" out of the way so we only had the trail to do the next day.



Somewhere at the very beginning of the Phelix Creek Hut Trail.
Photo: Michael Spagnut

I expected the hike would take 4-5 hours in total. It didn't look too bad on the map. I also thought to myself I didn't want to repeat the disappointing experience of not having my snowboard, especially in case my ski boots would still hurt, then at least I'd have an alternative up there. Maybe I could just easily drag the snowboard behind me, like a sled. Aha! I could use my hammock to attach it... Genius! Absolutely genius!

Michael's only words were: "Well – I've never seen that before", and "Geez, your pack's heavy".

It was dark, snowing, and the ground was covered with 2 feet of fresh snow, but after about half an hour of organizing our packs, we set off along the road. Emboldened. Motivated. Courageous. Excited. Adventure-seeking. In rather good spirits.

After about an hour, I took a look at my phone's GPS. I had downloaded the .kml file from the VOC Wiki page so I could track our progress. I couldn't really believe it. We'd barely moved at all. We were still at the very beginning. I zoomed in a bit more. We had definitely moved, the GPS seemed to be working, but we clearly weren't going very fast. Probably because we were breaking trail. Still, I felt we were going at a decent pace. Snowboard wasn't dragging too much. I had to keep adjusting the hammock around my waist and the backpack for comfort, but we were definitely moving. Well, it was sure gonna take longer than I thought. But I told Michael, "I'm really glad we started today."

Another hour of hard work and effort went by. I looked at the GPS again. I think I started to cry inside. We'd only done about 1/3 of the "road". Two hours of hiking uphill, on the easy part, and we weren't even close to the trail. Michael was still in good spirits, "we'll just go as far as we can today and continue tomorrow. But I'd like to be in my sleeping bag by 10pm."

After another hour trudging away, we were both tired enough that we decided to camp out. We'd done about 1/2 of the "road" part – only about 1/4 of the whole trail. And we'd been hiking for three hours. It was going to take us all day to get there tomorrow.

Still, I was rather relieved to take off my backpack. I noticed Michael creating a little platform of packed snow with his skis. We were going

to create a makeshift snow shelter with a tarp roof. I was tired but curious, and started helping him to dig a little aisle between our two “beds”. Then tarp came over and we tried to pack the snow around it, but it kept slipping and it turned out the tarp was rather small. We struggled with the whole contraption for about half an hour and then Michael, frustrated, said “it’s not working, screw it” and decided I would sleep under the tarp and he would sleep in his bivouac under the snow.

It was only then that I unwrapped the sleeping mat, that I luckily found at my Dad’s place, to discover that it seemed to be designed for midgets. Michael basically laughed at me. I tried to use my hammock as a base for my feet, but my shitty sleeping bag was basically guaranteed to get wet. At that point, Michael started to panic as he couldn’t find the stove attachment to his white gas bottle. “It was in the pot! Did you move things in the car?” I answered sheepishly that “yeah, things had moved from the back...”. “Well – gotta go back for it. Can’t spend a week without a stove.” “Oh man, seriously? I guess I’ll just wait for you here then. Are you sure?” And he made a last, half-hearted attempt to find it in some other compartment of his bag – *Eureka!* Found it.

With that crisis averted, we proceeded to have some delicious, well deserved hot chocolate. Snuggled into our sleeping bags. And fell asleep.

I woke up at 4am with cold feet and knees. I had enough layers on my upper body but my legs were touching the soaking part of my sleeping bag. I started to wait for sunrise so we could get moving again. I also noticed a rather irritating need to urinate but the effort required to get out of the sleeping bag, put my feet in my ski boots and walk out was way too much to fathom. “Come on, bladder, keep it in.” I dozed in and out of sleep for the following 4 hours as my body fought between the need to pee, the cold, and tiredness. When it started to be light out, I finally mustered the gargantuan effort of putting on my tight, painful ski boots and managed to relieve my poor kidneys.

Michael hadn’t slept that well either. He mumbled something about how he needed another bivouac, spilled some coffee and couldn’t find his glove... but after about an hour of faffing around and packing our stuff, we were finally “on the road again” around 9am. I couldn’t wait to at least get to the start of the trail, but this “road” – I couldn’t believe it was called that, it looked like a bloody trail to me – was so

narrow and there were sticks and branches in the way. The only time it looked like a road were the bridges with signs that said “Max Load 6 Tonnes” and I wondered if I was actually carrying more on my back.

My back was already killing me from the weight. I thought to myself, “why on earth did I decide to bring whole tupperwares full of homemade chili con carne and guacamole, dammit.” I started to think, maybe I should offload some weight on the snowboard. After all, I was pulling it with my waist, and my shoulders were in pain. Michael had gone off ahead, but I was in too much pain. I messed around for 20 minutes trying to stuff things between my snowboard bindings and finally, satisfied, kept trudging on. That is, until I came to the first creek.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” I somehow managed to place my skis across it, it was narrow enough, and then try to slowly pull the snowboard by hand over it. I managed fairly decently the first time. But who knew how many more such painful crossings lay ahead... and already at the second one, my snowboard dove straight into the creek and I struggled for 5 minutes to get it out.

After a while, I felt like I was pulling a cement block. What the hell? Was it all the snow accumulating from the added weight? It was going so well before... Maybe I should put the stuff back on my backpack. So I stopped (again) and spent a few minutes getting all the stuff back onto my backpack, using ropes to tie the helmet and extra bags. Finally started off again, and though slightly better, it was still painful pulling this thing. Maybe it was more uphill. Maybe I was dramatically more tired.



View from Phelix Creek Hut. Photo: Marc Rizkallah

Another creek. Same thing happened. Michael was long gone. But I was completely destroyed.

Out of breath, I got out of my bindings, pulled up the snowboard, and realized that underneath, the water had caused the wet snow to stick to it and become hard slush. I spent about 15 minutes trying to get it all off. Whenever I needed to use my hands, I'd take them out of my gloves. But after a few minutes they'd get cold and I'd have to stick them back into the gloves to warm up.

Snowboard cleaned, I got back in my bindings and trucked along. Much better. But I was spent. 20 minutes later, I came across Michael, who'd sat down and was warming a soup. I definitely needed a break. It was noon, and we hadn't even arrived at the beginning of the trail yet.

Shortly after I collapsed, we saw the first of the "others" and exchanged a few pleasantries. "You pulling that snowboard for somebody else right?" "Um, no... I uh... It's a long story." "Alright well, see you up there! Or maybe later on!" "No, no, you'll see us up there. Don't worry, definitely not before!"

Then Elliott Skierszkan showed up, in a T-shirt and brandishing a small hand-saw. He was quickly and adeptly hacking away at any branches in the way, while skiing up. "It'll make the downhill easier", he winked. I remember feeling humiliated at the obviously huge difference between our preparedness and experience.

There's no way I could keep pulling this bloody thing. I told Michael I had decided to leave it behind. Elliott recommended a big tree with a marker at the beginning of the trail, not far away. Sounded good to me. We were almost there. Almost at the beginning. I asked Elliott, embarrassed, if there was any way he could take up some weight off me – I wasn't sure I was going to make it. He said, his pack was full, and I shouldn't give him anything I might need (like my sleeping bag) anyways, just in case. I knew he was right. "You'll see, you'll be much faster after you ditch the snowboard." I knew he was wrong.

Still, I was more than happy to plant it firmly in the snow, an hour later, next to the big tree. "That's not the big tree", said Michael, "it's further down!" Well, it was big enough for me. "The snowboard shall be dragged no further." I wrapped the hammock around the top, attached my helmet to it, and, feeling slightly lighter, proceeded up the

beginning of the trail. It was 1pm on the 28th, we'd already been hiking for 7 hours, and we were only halfway.

The next 7 hours were some of the most painful hours of the year. I remember delirious thoughts of "This is the worst day of my life. I'm not going to make it. That's it. I'm going to die of exhaustion, pain from a shitty backpack, and hypothermia from a soaking sleeping bag." I remember thinking this was the mountain that never ended. Every time Michael would say "oh we must be close now." The mountain just kept going up. "Hm, I don't remember the steep part being this long." Every 20 minutes I'd ache and tell him "I need a break." He'd reply, "Let's just get to the hut." "I'd love to Michael, believe me, I wish for nothing more! But I can't go on, I need a break, my back is killing me."

At 5pm it was dark and according to the GPS we were about 2/3 up the trail. I finally felt like there was hope, we might actually make it that evening. "Just be like Buddha and ignore the pain," Michael suggested. "It's all in your head." "No it's not, it's in my bloody shoulders!" At some point he was talking about "The Power of Now" and went on some sort of philosophical rant and I told him, "I love that you're thinking about spirituality and the meaning of life, while I'm just focusing on trying to survive and struggle for dear life."

Michael started singing "99 bottles of beer on the wall, 99 bottles of beer..." a rather clear indication of his dire boredom and embarrassment about how long we were taking, and I felt bad and indebted to his patience. "Don't worry, I'm not in a rush", he'd chirp.

Looking on the GPS, I could see we were approaching the lake, I was so encouraged I started joining him with the song. "76 bottles of beer on the wall, 76 bottles of beer..." I started counting the trail markers in Spanish – "Five more markers and then we take a break! UNO!"

At 7pm, we made it to the lake. I was ecstatic with satisfaction. We were so close. Indeed, soon after, we could see the lights in the distance. The hut! We were almost there. I could feel tears of joy and relief welling up. What a bloody day. 14 hours of hiking later – we'd finally arrived at the infamous Phelix Creek Hut. I was so relieved I asked the first person I saw if she'd mind taking a picture. "Not at all! We were wondering if you'd make it!" "So was I! This is the happiest moment of my life!"

Inside the cold hut, we finally managed to take off our packs and our boots, and we cooked dinner. I thought we deserved that heavy chili con carne I'd stupidly packed. I thanked Michael profusely for his patience and we finally headed up and got in our sleeping bags. Unfortunately, my cold, wet sleeping bag wasn't the refuge I remembered it to be in drier weather. And it didn't look like it would dry out anytime soon. I awoke again at 4am and spent the remaining hours of the night shuffling around, trying to warm up.

In the morning, Michael was a bit distant. Maybe he just wasn't a morning person. Elliott and Emily Rossnagel performed some tag-team first aid on my blisters, then headed out. Michael asked: "What's your plan, Marc? Are you going to go ski today?" "That's the plan." "With the others then?" "Well... the others are already gone..." But I got the message he didn't feel like skiing with me. I found out my shuffling had kept him awake. Eventually, we set off together for Cabin Hill.

Halfway up, we ran into the other group. "I was sure you guys would be way ahead!" "Breaking trail is hard work." Cheerfully I asked them, "Hey! Would you mind if we joined you today then?" And I immediately got the sense that I shouldn't have asked that. "You know – you guys should ski elsewhere to minimize the risk." "Oh. Yeah. Ok. Right. Sorry." But Michael was off ahead. Later on, we were standing at the top of a downhill section, and while the others had gone down, Emily and I were left at the top and she politely explained to me that inviting oneself to another's group was somewhat contrary to backcountry etiquette, particularly for this New Years trip. I apologized, explained that it was my first time touring and I'd come hoping to make friends, and I'd just met Michael at the rental car place. She immediately understood the situation, warmed up, and eventually the group of 5 accepted to "adopt me" for the day. We had two beautiful runs in so much powder, and then headed home for lunch. I realized I was the only one who'd taken off my ski boots – they were all headed back out for a third run, but I was spent. My left big toe was killing me.

I was alone in the cabin for about two hours and at some point more people started to arrive at the hut. I was curious about my throbbing toe, so I went upstairs to take a look and, to my surprise, noticed it was completely black. No wonder it was throbbing. I took a picture, headed back down and, in the midst of all the party and frolicking, begged

Emily for some advice. She told me I'd probably have a black toe for 6 months, but that it wasn't a big deal and there was not much she could do about it. I decided to put some snow in a ziplock and apply it to my toe to try and reduce the swelling.

At 9pm, everyone spontaneously disappeared into their sleeping bags. There were about 20 people sleeping upstairs. And eventually, as I slipped into mine, my toe started throbbing particularly intensely. I tried to keep the ziplock with cold water on it, but it leaked all over the sleeping bag. Eventually I was wincing from the pain. I felt bad for my neighbours, wondering if they could hear me trying desperately to breathe calmly. I started trying to distract myself, listening to podcasts. One of the podcasts mentioned anti-inflammatories by coincidence, I decided it was a sign and decided to take one. I headed downstairs for some water. I swallowed the pill and lay on the bench, with my foot on the table, trying to reduce blood flow. I read a few chapters from Jon Krakauer's "Into Thin Air". It described people suffering at high altitudes, in excruciating pain, vomiting, falling into crevasses, breaking bones, dying... It helped me relativize my situation - "could be worse!" It also made me feel even more like a wuss.

I really had to pee, but there was no way I could head out to the pee tree. I could barely walk, let alone put boots on. All these people had these fancy MEC Down Booties, I didn't even have my snowboard boots and there was no way in hell I could dream of putting on my ski boots. Desperate times called for desperate measures – I took the empty cylindrical plastic container of Gorp (good old raisins and peanuts) we'd finished, headed outside the door for purposes of discretion, and peed away. I actually couldn't believe how much I peed. Must have been 4 litres. I filled the bloody thing. Now all I had to do was wait for the first person who'd get up in the middle of the night to go pee. That person was Caroline Jung.

"Psst – hey. I'm sorry but I have a really strange favour to ask you. Would you mind taking this and emptying it out at the pee tree?" Half-asleep she asked, "what is it?" "It's my pee! I'm really sorry, I can't walk there myself!" I think she was too tired to be shocked or grossed out. She just took it and left. A few minutes later, she returned. As I thanked her, she shrugged and said, "whatever, it's just pee."

The pain had finally subsided enough that I managed to climb back

upstairs and half-sleep for 3 hours or so. In the morning, everyone woke up, made breakfast, got ready, left... and finally Michael came up to see me and I told him about my toe. "I'm sorry Michael – I'm afraid it's going to be a long, slow way down as well." I took the "day off".

That evening was New Year's Eve Eve [sic] – a few people had to return on the 31st so they'd brought fireworks and a festive spirit for the evening of the 30th. We managed to play an exciting game of "Big Booty." We added some special rules under which we had to say "Shred the pow / Slay the gnar" – which turned out to be surprisingly difficult. Despite the good spirits, shockingly, everyone was suddenly in bed by 11pm – to think, I'd been worried about not being able to sleep because of rowdy drunken students!

Glen Healy and I were the last ones up. Unwilling to give up on the night, we headed outside and took turns playing guitar, warming up our fingers, and star-gazing. The stars were absolutely, breath-takingly stunning that night. We were the last ones in bed and the first ones up the next morning. I'd finally had a decent night's sleep.

That morning, Michael started giving me some food. "Aren't we eating together?" "No, I'm heading back today." "Oh...! Um... what about the rental car?" "Yeah, I found a ride. I have to head back, sorry. But I'm sure you'll find other people to go back with tomorrow, lots of people are leaving tomorrow."

I bravely decided to try to put my boots back on that day – and to attempt to head up and down a hill to prepare for the long return journey (on my own?). Luckily, I managed to find a group of people who were similarly "not as hardcore" and didn't want to go too crazy. My encounters with VOC members thus far had led me to believe this was simply impossible. But I just wanted a short nice up and down to see if I could survive.

Luckily, I managed to go up and down Cabin Hill and return safely to the hut. Mission accomplished, I felt reassured that I wouldn't have to call a helicopter to come rescue me due to my inability to fit my foot in my boot.

That night, a few people stayed up until 1am (what a record!) but were quickly shushed by people on the top floor exclaiming "Hey! We're trying to sleep up here!" To these VOCers, skiing was clearly

more important than partying. Well, at least nobody puked on anybody else.

The next day was the big day I'd been psyching myself up for – the long, steep return back down. Since Michael was gone, I expected I'd find a few people along the way who would be kind enough to adopt me. But Elliott and Emily were concerned I didn't have pre-established plans. They were planning to do a bit of skiing and be back at the hut around 11:30am, and I told them I'd leave earlier and meet them along the way. A few minutes later Elliott came back and told me, "we're coming with you. We'll pack everything and be off." "Are you sure? I don't want to screw up your plans." "No, it's better this way. We're tired anyways. Don't worry about it." Wow. So nice and unexpected of them. I was both relieved I'd be in good hands on the way down, and embarrassed I'd slow them down.

The way down was not easy. There were some pretty steep bits, and we all fell over at different points. At one point, I was skiing at a decent speed and noticed a log crossing a river up ahead, without thinking I just skied right over the log and when I reached the other side I exclaimed, "holy crap – I can't believe I just did that." Luckily, my feet were behaving well enough and the pain was bearable. The worst bits were the horizontal ones, but luckily there weren't too many of them. We made it down the steep bit in about 2 hours and stopped for lunch by my abandoned snowboard, which was still there, patiently waiting



Between the Phelix Creek "Road" and "Trail".

Photographer: Marc Rizkallah

for me to recover it, ominously foreboding great difficulties ahead.

At that point, Elliott did something unexpected and well beyond the call of duty. He nonchalantly decided he'd strap the board to his backpack. "Are you sure?" I felt a pang of guilt and simultaneous huge relief at not having to deal with my own stupid mistake! "Just don't do it again. And when you become a backcountry expert, pay it forward and give a beginner a hand." "Oh my God I promise I will! I WILL!"

Despite the additional weight, the group of 5 were faster than me. Elliott told me he'd leave the snowboard under my car. 2 hours later, when I finally arrived at the parking lot at the bottom of the steeper-than-I-remembered "easy" hill, there it was waiting for me. I was almost as relieved to reach the parking lot as I had been to reach the hut, but the 14-hour ascent was so much more grueling. In the end, it had taken me 4.5 hours to reach the bottom – the same time it had taken the hardcore VOCers to reach the top from the bottom!

It was a grueling, humbling, life-changing experience. I met some great people, saw some beautiful scenery, and had a great time. I'm definitely hooked on the backcountry, and as soon as my toes and feet recover from their injuries, I'll be slapping my skins on my skis and heading out again. I need to return to the Phelix Creek Hut, better equipped, and without dragging a damn snowboard behind me.

A Minor Fiasco

Jeff Mottershead

I'm supposed to be a climber, but even in the middle of summer my son, Devlin, would rather hike up to some random snow patch or glacier and get some turns in than climb, so for the past five years I've appeared to be a skier who climbs occasionally.

We end up doing Red Heather a lot, because it's close and alpine starts for eight-year-olds only seem to work properly if there's a chair lift. Our standard pattern is to skin up to the warming shelter at a reasonable pace, Devlin eats a bag of rehydrated pasta primavera because change is highly resisted, and then gets the post-meal lethargy. I always have plans about doing something more, like up Garibaldi a ways, some laps on Paul Ridge or something, but negotiations go poorly in the post-lunch coma, and we end up compromising on going up to Paul Ridge, close to the warming hut, and trying to find a line that's at least steepish and usually really short because there isn't anything halfway steep that isn't super short up there.

The night before, I set the alarm on my early 2000s flip phone for 5:00am, got distracted by the internet, and left the phone by the computer. At 6:30am I woke up bewildered that I didn't hear the alarm, found my phone, felt dumb, and started packing. We were out the door and on the road by 7:30am. At around 8:15am I remembered that in my discombobulation I'd left the skins on my bed, so we circled around and got them.

Just as we got into Garibaldi Park we were flagged down by the park ranger.

"Sorry to stop you, but do you have chains?"

“Yes—yes, we do.”

“Are you going to put them on?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know where to put them on?”

“At the sign that says ‘Chains Mandatory,’ before the hill where people slide backwards and go into the ditch at the corner and call a tow truck that also ends up in the ditch while trying to pull it out.”

“So you’re familiar with the problem. That’s great. Have a nice day.”

We started as we normally do, except a couple hours later, with Devlin getting a head start as I clean up the breakfast dishes and faff around with my pack. As he’s gotten older the distance he makes it before I catch up with him has gone from about fifty metres to about a kilometre. There were shockingly few people on the trail, and almost all of them were in this tour group of snowshoers with very vocal guides. They were in the parking lot giving a speech about how critical it is that they never lose sight of their buddy as Devlin cut through them and started up the trail. I was worried that one of the guides would feel compelled to raise a ruckus about that so as not to look like a hypocrite, but they minded their group’s own business.

We were expecting the warming hut to be almost empty given the scarcity of people on the trail, but we had no such luck, as all of the guided snowshoe group was there. Not that they were bad people at all, but they had no idea how to share space in a hut, and Devlin and I ended up huddled in a corner cooking pasta primavera while the tour group leaders loudly announced the many winners of the raffle they were having, using as many different sentences that mean the same thing as they could in order to try to keep the excitement level up. We finished eating as they finished raffling, and then one of them came over to us and asked if Devlin would like to come outside for an Avalung demo. I think in general the answer would have been yes, but we’d had it with people and politely declined.

As we stepped outside, we bumped into another skier who looked frazzled. We had a brief conversation, and she expressed a desire to get as far away from the warming hut as possible. Ideally we would have loitered a bit to give Devlin a chance to digest and recharge, but it was intolerable in there, so we took off.

“I can’t. I can’t go anymore. I’m never going to make it.”

“Just take the rest you need. It’s always like this after you have a huge meal, and like always your energy will come back.”

“I need human fuel.”

“You’re full of human fuel. It just needs time to do its thing. Right now your muscles have no blood because your stomach is using the blood, but soon it’ll be full of energy coming back to your muscles.”

“I can’t. I can’t go anymore. I’m never going to make it.”

We did that for a while, and then he picked up steam again, and we got to the eastern tip of Paul Ridge. Last time we were up there, we’d trudged up this open slope, gone right, and tried to find this steep area. Because there’s lot of trees at the top, it’s hard to tell where you are and we didn’t go far enough and came down a shallower line than we wanted to, so this time we trudged a bit farther.

I got myself rotated by about 135 degrees, so instead of aiming north by northwest, we were south by southwest. After going down some steep treed nonsense, we ended up in some more trees. For a while I’d been holding out that we were going to reach the open steep slope I was trying to get to, but after going down a ways, I pulled out the compass and detected that we on course for Narnia.

I told Devlin to go right as much as he could in the hopes that we’d be able to circle back to somewhere reasonable before we ended up too low. The skiing transitioned from a few inches of powder on ice



Devlin Mottershead getting near the top of Paul Ridge, where we went astray. This photo was from a different trip since I didn’t have my camera with me the day of my dumbness. Photo: Jeff Mottershead

to completely snow-bombed and refrozen nonsense with bent-over saplings and logs sticking out everywhere.

We eventually broke into an open area that I didn't recognize, which looked to be powder. It wasn't particularly steep, but you could imagine it avalanching if it was having a really bad day. I got Devlin to explain the avalanche search procedure to me so I was sure he remembered everything and then told Devlin to cross it and then wait in the trees on the other side. He had much more of a time with it than I thought was realistic, and I wondered if he was on his last legs. As soon as he finished and I started, though, the problem became obvious. It was actually burnt lasagna camouflaged as powder.

We took another look at the compass, and I told Devlin that we were really getting into stupidity, that we hadn't seen another track since the top of Paul Ridge, and that it was only going to get worse from here if we didn't skin to the northwest.

"What happens if we keep going down?"

"If we keep going to the right enough, we'll probably connect up with the trail, but if we don't make it we'll either get to the road and have to walk up or run out of snow and then we'd have a long skin up or a nasty bushwhack."

"I want to go down."

"Do you promise to keep on skinning up without complaining if we get stuck in the middle of the night?"

"Yes."

I wanted to avoid the gamble and just skin up, but I figured that if we went down as requested he'd either learn his lesson or we'd make it to the trail, but if we did what I wanted he could easily stop and complain every two steps until we had to bivvy, so down we went.

If we were trying to head more or less straight down, we could have found a route that didn't involve too much of a fiasco, but since we were trying to get as right as possible, we ended up sidestepping up an awful lot. We'd drop off a log, skitter around on refrozen death cookie, ram through some shrubbery, sidestep up a log to the right, and repeat.

As we got lower it went from all refrozen to a mix of frozen and

still-soft craters reinforced with vegetation. I caught a tip and did an inverted aerial a couple times.

We started to run out of snow. The average depth was still pretty deep, but there was enough junk sticking through it that things were going to start getting hard soon. The sun was setting.

We came to a creek. It wasn't far across it at all, but there was a big drop-off on our side, and it was steep enough on the other side that attempting to jump it would likely have resulted in falling back into it. Devlin said he couldn't make it across. I did some stomping around the edge, which pushed more snow into the gap and made the drop-off shorter. It took Devlin a while to muster up the nerve to cross, but it eventually happened. There was considerably less light than when we started the crossing. We dropped through a few more trees. I was starting to weigh the pros and cons of bivying where we could still dig a shallow cave but for sure spending the night vs. going down further and maybe making it or maybe bivying in the mud. Devlin was getting ahead of me as I was thinking these thoughts.

“What’s that?”

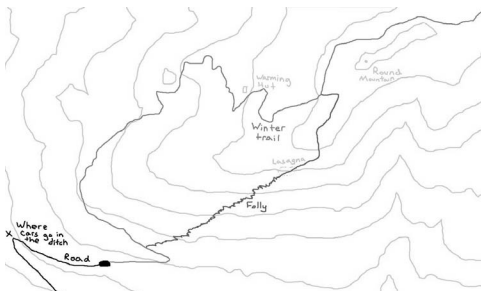
“I can’t see it. You’re ahead of me.”

“Is that the trail?”

“I don’t know.”

“It is! It’s the trail!”

As it turned out we'd just caught the last switchback. We arrived at the parking lot with only a couple vehicles remaining. Two ladies were there, and they were very glad to see us, as they'd parked way down, outside of the park and had gotten a ride up with the ranger that morning but had been waiting for a while for someone that could take them down.



Mountains and Glaciers: Lillooet Icefield in April/May

Krista Cawley

Participants: Julien Renard, Caitlin Schneider, Piotr Forysinski, and Krista Cawley

My breath is taken away as I step up the final snowy rocks to the summit of Mount Lillooet – and a big mountain at that. Wind rips at the flaps on my sun hat beneath my helmet, and I'm thankful for the jacket that protects me from the biting cold. Sunshine and cloudless blue skies above cast light on hundreds of peaks far off in the distance in every direction, and as I look down to the vast glacier below, the only sense of scale comes from the tiny whitish speck of camp in the middle of the uniform surface. Three hours earlier, I remember sitting on my pack and looking up at this peak, attempting to imagine what it might be like standing on top. Now, the four of us are here, soaking in the view for as long as our cold, tired bodies can handle.

This is the story of a 12-day trip into glaciers and wilderness on the Lillooet Icefield, a vast expanse of ice northwest of Pemberton. This was also my first long ski trip, but after a winter of weekend touring we felt prepared and fit to go farther, to places none of us have explored.

The trip began sleepily as Piotr and I woke early and loaded our heavy packs into Trucky Truck (Piotr's trusty Toyota 4Runner), and headed across Vancouver to pick up Caitlin and Julien. Daylight slowly emerged as we drove for hours towards Pemberton and the Salal Creek FSR, our starting point for the trip. Upon reaching the turnoff for Salal Creek, deep slush blocked any further driving – it was time to put on the skis and head into the mountains!

At this point, I began to realize the significance of our ventures: we were not to see city limits for almost 2 weeks, and we were preparing to venture into a glaciated wilderness which I had never experienced before. Several workers in large trucks paused to query our faff, and their reactions were all the same: “You’re going where? For how long? Be safe!”

Too soon, it was time to depart and we helped each other shoulder our packs – they were too heavy to lift on our own. The first few steps felt sluggish and heavy, and I wondered how on Earth I was going to lug this thing all the way up to the glaciers, where we intended to deploy sleds to tow most of our heavier items. The day was broken into 2-hour chunks: slog, stop, rest, and continue. At long last, evening began to fall and we camped near Salal Creek for the night, eager to eat some of the weight we were carrying.

The next day, we shouldered our packs once again, though this time they felt even heavier! Our bodies were tired from the previous day’s work. Many hours of slogging brought us to the joyous moment where Piotr declared, “Let’s deploy the sleds!” Excitedly, we unloaded kilograms of food from our packs and into the sleds, handcrafted from crazy carpets using grommets, rope, and bungee cord.

I wasn’t sure what to think of sleds until we really tried them, but eventually I decided they made life a lot less painful, and each sled became like a little pet. Much like puppies, the sleds faithfully followed our tracks while we were skinning uphill, though pulling awkwardly when we had to cross a side hill. Skiing downhill was another adventure: the sleds become uncontrollable sliding missiles that shoot between your



Left: Skinning up the Bridge Glacier in evening light.
Right: Probing for crevasses on the Ring Glacier. Photos: Krista Cawley

skis, wrap around your legs, or threaten to pull you downhill every time you stop. Piotr's and my sleds also had a habit of tumbling, over and over again, as an edge caught in the softer snow. Although funny at some points, I discovered that my sled couldn't handle the stress of repeatedly tumbling and hurtling everywhere as grommets popped out and it began to fall apart. Lesson learned: hammer in the grommets harder!

Where the sleds really excelled was on the rolling, flat glaciers where we could move for hours at a time and settle into a rhythm. It was in these vast expanses that time moved slowly as we pushed farther into the wilderness.

By the end of Day 3, we found ourselves camped below Bridge Peak and settled in behind a protective snow wall in our tents. We were all particularly tired after a long day, but hot food and good company made the evening pass quickly and before I knew it, we were sound asleep in our tents, dreaming of the next objective.

The alarm went off the next morning and we sleepily awoke to climb Bridge Peak, a stunning mountain nearby. In an increasing whiteout, we skinned and boot-packed to the summit for lunch in the clouds. It was cool to be on such a high summit, but we all wished for views! Alas, no clearing was granted and we skied back to camp. Clouds threatened an incoming storm, so the afternoon was spent hastily fortifying our snow wall before a little nap, dinner, and bed.

It is amazing how time passes when on a glacier and in a quiet space: days passed easily as we moved closer to our most tantalizing peaks, Mount Lillooet and Mount Tisiphone. Rising high above the Lillooet Glacier amidst crevasses and steep faces, these were the peaks we sought out the most. A lovely lunch up on Mount Stanley, in the middle of the Icefield, stuck in our minds as we descended onto the Ring Glacier, our connection to the more southern part of the route. As we made camp on the Ring Glacier, the warmth of the day decreased and we were left to build snow blocks using crusted-over isothermal mush. Caitlin and I dug endlessly to create a satisfactory snow wall, as Piotr and Julien headed in search of water on the "nearby" slopes. What we all expected the boys to take 5 minutes ended up being a solid 30 minutes as distances once again fooled us. But, we had fresh water! Less snow melting!

We awoke and departed early to beat the rising temperatures and headed up to a lookout bump to view our planned route through the Four Way Stop, a cross-shaped feature created from four arms of glacier flowing in and out. Interestingly, we found that the Ring Glacier didn't even meet the other glaciers, instead falling several hundred metres short. Distinct bands of rock below trees indicated the glacier's significant retreat in recent history, and the reminder that our world is changing rapidly rang true in my mind: this is the face of climate change that most don't get to see firsthand.

We easily crossed the flat expanse and began our ascent up the Lillooet Glacier, threading between crevasses. At the crux of the ascent, we roped up through some larger features until the flat icy surface reached on endlessly and merged with the blue sky. After lunch at our intended camp spot, we looked up to the snowy, rocky ridge of Mount Lillooet and its tempting allure. Given that the next day was forecast to be hotter and sunnier, we were motivated to make a summit attempt that afternoon. Hours later, we were standing on the summit of Mount Lillooet after a steep and slightly scary skin up icy slopes, and gazing out at hundreds of distant peaks. Was that Mount Waddington in the distance?

I learned what it meant to ski breakable crust on the way down, as each patch of snow my ski slid on broke underneath, and when side slipping my skis kept trying to push underneath the harder surface. A mistake meant I would catapult downhill, headfirst; falling was not an option. Tiredly, we skied and coasted down gentler slopes and onto the flat glacier once again, and soon we reached our camp spot and



View from the summit of Mount Lillooet! Photo: Krista Cawley

enjoyed a chilly, clear evening and sunset over Mount Lillooet.

After a shorter-than-desired sleep, we awoke in the freezing cold with our sights set on our other big objective: Mount Tisiphone. This was the more technical summit, but armed with ice axes, snow pickets, and rope, we decided to give it a try. By mid-afternoon, we were standing at the base of a smallish snow slope guarded by a rather large bergschrund. In the afternoon heat, as we ascended this slope, Caitlin and I started seeing mini-avalanches sliding off the cliffs above, covering our boot tracks below. As the heat rose and we found ourselves at the summit ridge with no real place to go, we decided to retreat quickly to avoid the impending danger. No sooner had we got back to our skis below the bergschrund that Piotr called, “Avalanche! Watch out!” The slope we had been on decided to let go and a wet, heavy slab of snow slid towards us before disappearing into the bergschrund several metres above. We were lucky.

Back at camp, with time on our hands and warmth abundant, Piotr suggested that we take a snow bath! As we all stripped naked and post-holed in bare feet (which is painfully cold after a few minutes), shrieks of laughter faded into the openness. Snow is really cold, especially on some body parts! It was so nice, partway through the trip to clean off, relax, and soak in the surroundings. The icefields are truly a beautiful place.

This marked a turning point in the trip, when we had to start retracing our steps back the way we came, and a slight feeling of nostalgia swept over me as we descended the Lillooet Glacier and made our way



Telemark style down Mt. Fulgora. Photo: Krista Cawley

back towards the Stanley Smith Glacier. After a long day, we camped below Mount Fulgora and hastily made a snow wall as clouds rolled in. As luck would have it, the soft snow made building a wall incredibly difficult, and our poorest shelter of the trip would have to endure the worst weather we would experience.

We awoke the next day to howling wind, biting chill, and a full-on blizzard. After sleeping in until mid-morning, we awoke, munched on breakfast, and then settled in for a morning nap. A few hours later, hunger once again woke us up and we ate more snacks, this time for lunch. What next? An afternoon nap, of course! We slept a few more hours before it became apparent that if we slept any more, we'd be awake all night. Coffee helped keep us awake the last few hours before dinner, and then we prepared to head out into the storm to cook dinner behind the snow wall. Donned in down and Gore-Tex, cooking became a greater adventure in the storm. Also of note is the challenge of going to the bathroom when it's so stormy: as soon as the pants come down and bare skin is exposed, snow fills the inner pant legs and wind and snow bite at your bottom, like little pinpricks of cold on warm skin. The outhouse, too, fills with snow and everyone must watch their step to avoid stepping in the poo hole.

The blizzard abated around noon the following day, and we took the opportunity to summit Mount Fulgora, the highest peak of the trip and above 3000m, according to Bivouac. As we skied off the summit, we descended steep icy slopes and carefully picked our way across a bergschrund covered in snow. Some sweet turns on mellower slopes yielded hoots and hollers from everyone! I watched as Piotr tele-turned



Alpine wrap! Photo: Krista Cawley

in beautiful style and Caitlin and Julien carved behind, etching curved tracks into the smooth snow.

Early the next morning, we packed up our camp and skied the flat, wide-open plains of the Stanley Smith Glacier in the morning light, fully dressed in our warm clothes as the temperatures had once again dropped below zero. The last bump we climbed was fittingly called Snow Bulge, as it was a glaciated high point in the middle of the ice-field. Spectacular views of Bridge Peak, Stanley Peak, and Mount Fulgora reminded us of our route and provided closure for the place we were about to leave. A return to our third camp below Bridge Peak closed the loop, and its broken remains left a clear reminder in our heads of the impact we had there.

Our last camp was sat atop the ridge at the head of Salal Creek and above the crumbling icefall of Bridge Glacier, also known as the Viewpoint. Lovely views and a spectacular sunset soon faded into darkness as we settled in our tents behind a snow wall for one more night.

In the morning, we elected not to climb Whitecross Peak and instead focus our energy on the descent, which had taken us 2 days on the way in. The exit from Salal Creek was better than I remembered it the first time around: lighter packs and the downhill skiing made for a quicker retreat, and we returned quickly to cross the creek which raged higher than before. We dipped into the icy waters and dried our clothes over lunch, and then plodded on in the mushy snow to the road. I expected the road to be the easiest going after the trees and steeper slopes of upper Salal Creek, but in fact the water runnels and fast-melting snow made for bumpy skiing on the way down. As an indicator of the hot temperatures, we had to take off our skis and hike the last kilometer, whereas on our first day we skied from Trucky Truck. Fragrance of trees and flowers welcomed us back into the spring conditions of the Lillooet Valley, and we were changing into city clothes again once back at the truck.

As we drove the bumpy logging roads and paved streets back into Pemberton, gazing out at other vehicles and people lining the sidewalks, I thought back on the 12 days spent with a fantastic group of friends. I wondered what stories I would share when telling others what we had done. Where do you begin when relating a story so close to your heart and so inexplicable to anyone but those who have expe-

rienced a similar place?

For now, photographs and tales of adventure are what we take from the Lillooet Icefield. Now, get out there and experience its magic for yourself!



The hot ski out, Meager group in the background. Photo: Krista Cawley



Ice worms, rain, and burning skins “interesting” skiing on the Pemberton Icecap

Birgit Rogalla

May 20-23, 2016

Participants: Mike Cancilla, Luca Malaguti, Ross Campbell, Birgit Rogalla

Preparations for this trip started on Monday night, May 16th, when we all met up at the Veenstras’ place to look at maps with Christian and get advice (thank you!). By Thursday morning, with hard work from Mike, we had all the requirements; especially two cars for the traverse. Thursday evening it was time to load Mike’s borrowed car with skis in sunny, warm Vancouver. Funny and maybe a bit foolish. Having dropped off Luca’s car at Callaghan, we loaded into the other car and drove to the 2wd parking lot at Harrison.

Day 1: Bootpacking and postholing to Harrison Hut

The goal for the first day was to get to Harrison Hut. By the time we got up, the rain had disappeared and a few cars had passed, presumably logging workers. In the daylight, the next section of road appeared to be in great shape, presumably fixed up by the logging company. With Mike behind the wheel, the car made it close to the 4wd parking lot, to all of our (and our feet’s) happiness. By 9:00 am we were near the trailhead, and ready to start the long day of bootpacking. Our packs were filled with food, tents, glacier gear, skis, and more, so some of us (me) needed assistance to get our packs on without falling over. The trail was in good condition and we could see trees marked in preparation for the logging this summer. We ate distance slowly, but steadily

with entertaining obstacles such as logs. Upon hitting the logging road, Luca realized he had lost his pole basket sometime after lunch, so while the rest of us napped and lazed around he went on a fruitless search.

Snow patches started after crossing Pika Creek. We were happy to see the snow, expecting to be able to start skinning in a little while. How naive. If only we knew then that the snow would be the start of our problems.

What followed was two hours of ankle to knee-deep postholing. We had to work our way around and out of tree wells, and struggled to get out of collapsed snow. There was plenty of (Scottish) cursing and a failed skinning attempt. Twelve hours from the start, Ross efficiently conveyed our arrival at the hut with a loud “YIPEEEEE” as he spotted the last creek crossing and to our happiness, the snow bridge held our weight. According to the Hut log, only two groups had visited Harrison since last September. The New Year’s group had had an even tougher time and took 13.5 hours to get to the hut.

Day 2: Skinless skiing and Squamish Glacier

The biggest day. Our alarm went off at 5:00 am to get an early start. The first section of the route involved travelling from Harrison Hut up Le Flume Glacier. It was icy, and the sun was intense. Surely the start of some impressive sunburns. Every now and then small rocks loosened from above and wizzed by, rapidly picking up speed as they



Mike gets to know a log very well on the way up to Harrison Hut.
Photo: Birgit Rogalla



Too tired to take backpacks off for a rest. Photo: Mike Cancilla

travelled unimpeded. Mike was on fire and machined up the glacier, while others like me cursed our skins which had accumulated large snow clumps within minutes. I silently vowed to minimize the use of skins at all costs. At the top of the pass, we could thankfully de-skin before passing to the right of The Three Stooges and skiing down into a small plain. The snow was challenging to make turns turn in, and the temperature very warm in the wind shadow. By this point Mike and Luca had replaced their skins but, likely thanks to a combination of aging wax and a buildup of tree sap from a midweek ski at cypress, Ross and I were traveling quite effectively skinless. We began to refer to our setup as “Glacier skis”. How far could we go? After a slight uphill, we skied down onto the Pemberton Icecap, feeling the true remoteness of our location.

We paused for lunch at the far end of the plain, overlooking the giant Ryan River Valley. The next section involved going up the pass between the Consciences. On the right were some impressive cornices with long avalanche debris paths.

After some discussion, we chose to head down and straight up the glacier to avoid this. The glacier was at the perfect maximum angle to go up with our Glacier Skis, so Ross and I successfully shunned our skins for the rest of the day. The crest of every rise seemed to extend much longer than upon first appearance. Not so great weather was coming in from the west and threatened with the occasional snow flakes; but the Consciences held it back long enough for us to reach the top of the pass with visibility. At the top we were treated to an incredible view of the Squamish Glacier with Little Ring, visible at the

far end. We were stoked!

After those with skins on transitioned, we skied down with Ross in front. Given how successful his Glacier Skis had been going uphill he was rather skeptical that they would be so great going down. To compensate for this, he decided that B-lining down the glacier without turning was the most efficient way forward. In the end, the skis were sliding just fine and our progress was unimpeded until Ross came to a fairly innocuous roll up ahead. There seemed no real danger but, we were on a glacier, and you couldn't quite see the terrain below this roll, so Ross decided to traverse right for a better view of where to go next without really thinking much of it. After a few moments, he looked back at the "gentle roll" to see something that the word crevasse doesn't seem even close to being sufficient to describe. "BLOODY HELL!" This colossal chasm, this gaping void in the earth, this endless abyss could have swallowed Vancouver whole! After being slightly puzzled where Ross was heading, we each individually saw this bottomless fissure and had the same reaction. The skiing down was great, and there weren't many open crevasses to worry us, but we were now certainly all keeping a watchful eye out just to be sure. Eventually, with lots of whooping from enjoyment, the downhill turned to flat. We had just traveled about 10 km in 40 minutes! Had we had poor visibility this would have become a much longer trip!

The clouds were threatening and recalling the weather forecast, we chose to set-up camp near the end of the glacier, before the 'storm' would arrive. As we set up our tents and kitchen, we noticed ice worms everywhere the eye could see; hundreds within every couple of square meters. After some attempts to remove them from our water, we accepted the addition to our diet.

Day 3: White-out, Little Ring, and camping halfway up the pass

Having had another 12 hour day and content with the distance we had covered, we happily (and ignorantly) slept in until 8 am. Opening our tents, we woke up to a complete whiteout. Fortunately we had an InReach with a track on it, as well as maps and compasses. Combining the various methods of navigation, we set out. About 5 minutes away from our camp, we came across tracks of what we think must have been a wolverine.

It was a quick ski to the end of the glacier, avoiding the various crevasses signifying the break up of the glacier. Determined to continue skinning without skins, Ross and I did some of the flattest switchbacks you have ever seen, with still hilarious faceplants, before conceding that skins were necessary.

We skirted around Little Ring, staying near the creek. The snow was much wetter than the day before. From here, we headed up Little Ring to then traversed around at ~1750m. There were a couple of ‘interesting’ moments as we were sidehilling on steep, wet snow with cliffs below. The glue on both Ross and my skins proved useless, and the skins were just hanging underneath the skis by tension from the clips. One of my skins decided to come entirely off while reinforced with voile straps, the clip broke*, and I slid a little ways. Ross foresaw similar problems so we both bootpacked straight up Little Ring while Luca



Top: Mike and Ross with the Consciences. Photo: Birgit Rogalla

Bottom: Break overlooking Squamish Glacier. Photo: Mike Cancilla

and Mike switchbacked up. On the other side of Little Ring, white-out conditions returned, and we attempted to find the route to the “magic bench” leading to Ring Peak. As we were debating whether to go down steeply, Ross said, “Mike, should we be losing elevation?”, and Mike said “I DON’T KNOW, I think we need lunch.” Mike was thankful that Ross had reminded everyone to confirm the route and not just motor on like zombies. Then we realized it was 4:30 pm. A magic boulder appeared which sheltered us from the wind/rain-snow and even had soft moss to sit on. This afforded us a nice break to assess our route. With Ross setting a compass bearing, we found the magic bench and completed some creek crossings where Luca’s basketless pole became a useful snow bridge probe.

We decided to go as far up Ring Pass as we could and camp to make the next day easier. Unfortunately by now Luca had joined the skinless struggle as the wet snow had rendered the glue on his skins useless. After more flat switchbacks, all of us except Mike chose to bootpack. Our final destination for the day was a clump of trees near the top of Ring Pass. It was sheltered and even had a rock patch for cooking. It was like Pride Rock overlooking the Squamish River valley (Lion King reference). Luca even managed to make a fire! The fire dried and melted skins as well as clothing. It rained all night. Ross’s tent was not that waterproof.

Day 4: Ring pass, frozen lakes, tough cars, and bears

The last day started off around 6 am, although actually 5:30 am due to a trick from Mike. Along the way up Ring Pass, Ross entertained us with Scottish songs of mothers throwing lunch out the window to their children. By 8 am, we were at the top of the pass and skied down to Ring Lake. Ring Lake appeared frozen enough and we all made it across safely. From there the route followed a downhill treed section and the steepest skiing of the trip. For some of us this involved tree hugging and an accidental 360/cartwheel/somersault.

At the bottom, the trees opened up into a meadowy area with a creek, and we soon made it to the cross country trails. This led to a snowmobile road to the Callaghan Lodge and from there a steady rolling trail to Callaghan Lake.

A decent chunk of the logging road was skiable after which we boot-

packed. An older couple drove by in a living van, and I'm not sure whether they laughed in pity or entertainment at our hitchhiking attempt with skis/boots. Although the arrival back at Luca's car proved the end of adventure for us, it did not prove so for the car. Four people with packs and skis were definitely packed in the tiny car; the folks in the back had to share a seatbelt and rotatate being squished for two hours.

Luca was carefully navigating the waterbars with his low clearance vehicle when we all heard a loud crunch. We piled out and Luca peered under the car and declared, "There's a rock stuck in my car!"

Do we leave it in? Is it like an arrow?

Do we take it out? Will it cause more damage?

We ended up deciding to take it out, it was quite wedged in there, but if you're going to wedge a rock inside your car it was in a great place, in between the frame and exhaust.

With the rock debacle sorted we were in Meager Creek a few hours later, and Mike and Ross hiked/ran the logging road to retrieve the first car, seeing two bears on the way. With both cars retrieved, we ate our last dried dinner while comparing blisters, hearing the sound of a bear, and eventually seeing a third bear. The car shuffle and drive back



Bottom: Eating dinner and drying gear by the fire. Photo: Mike Cancilla

ended up taking ~ 8 hours, with a classic return home between 1:30-2:00 am.

Overall, some of us managed glacier tans, while the rest of us managed with glacier burns that still remain as a reminder of the trip. Thank you to everyone for being great and making this such a wonderful trip! We were so stoked to be able to take on this route with support from the club and friends, a great team, and a dedication to some suffering.

*disclaimer: this was definitely the maximum abuse club telemark skis, boots, and skins will take; not recommended.



Top: Whoops, I just did a 360/cartwheel/flip! Photo: Mike Cancilla

Bottom: Luca inspecting the rock underneath his car. Photo: Mike Cancilla

My first ski traverse: or how I learned to ski ballet

Kasia Celler

April 9-10th, 2016

Trip participants: Clemens Adolphs, Elliott Skierszkan, Martin Cermak, Mirko Moeller, Jeremy Leal, and myself, Kasia Celler

I'm not into making large goals lately, so I wasn't too ambitious for this winter. I thought to myself that it would be really nice to make some tele turns (first tele turns of the season: November 7th! check!) and afterwards, once I'd gotten an amazing ski season in, that it would be nice to do a ski traverse. I've been skiing for quite a long time, but mostly just in resorts, and only recently in the backcountry – well, but ski traverses always seemed quite epic to me, resulting in stunning pictures of little people on large expanses of snow or glacier... So, you see, I really wanted to do one myself. One could argue that ski traverses are a springtime thing (yes, it is now spring) – but since they involve skiing, they are still in my wintertime bucket.

The weather was turning for the beautiful, and so I prodded Clemens a bit (nudge, nudge... wink, wink... traverse, traverse...). Freshly through his final PhD defense, he was tired, but eager to go. As it happened, Elliott posted the Powder Cap Horseshoe traverse on the trip agenda, and so we were set. Completing the group were Martin, Mirko and Jeremy.

The plan for the first day was to start at the dog sledding outfit at the beginning of the Callaghan Valley, and then either (option 1) go directly up to the Brandywine Glacier and then over and down to Powder Lake, or (option 2) go through the valley and up to Powder Lake.

Day two would involve the Powder Mountain Icecap, Banner Pass, and then a descent via the Solitude Glacier to Callaghan and back to the road via the cross-country ski trails.

Serenaded by the haunting howls of sled dogs, we geared up and started skinning right from the cars, despite worries that the warm spring weather would have already melted the logging roads bare. Feeling strong, happy, and ambitious, we opted for the longer option (option 1), and, at the end of the logging road, started in the direction of Brandywine Glacier.

Heading up through some beautiful old growth forest, we had some streams to cross, but luckily these crossings were not too exciting. Then we came across a tree that had a bear in it. It leaped out of its tree hole and scurried away. Shortly after, we came to a point with some stunning views, and then afterwards had lunch at Iditarod Lake. According to the internet, the word Iditarod comes from the Ingalik Indian word, Haiditarod, which means “distant place”. Considering that we managed to get there by lunchtime, it seems that this lake was not so distant from the cars. A butterfly joined us for the break.

After lunch came the ski ballet. The snow was quickly turning into very soft, slushy stuff, and we still had some steep skinning to do to gain the ridge. Fortunately or unfortunately, my tele bindings do not have a free pivot, so instead of using the graceful kick-turn technique, I resorted to the V-triangle-fan method.



The team: Elliott Skierszkan, Kasia Celler, Jeremy Leal, Clemens Adolphs, Martin Cermak, Mirko Moeller



Heading onto the glacier. Photo: Jeremy Leal

Once on the ridge, the views became truly spectacular: we could see the glacier surrounded by sparkling mountains. Our hearts began to beat faster.

We put on harnesses but opted not to rope up, and we headed up the glacier to the col. At this point, I think I had already applied 60 SPF sunscreen three times that day. There was not a cloud in the sky, and it was blazingly hot. Although we could see snowmobile tracks, we didn't see any sleds, and had the entire place to ourselves.

At the col the views opened up again, with a stunning vista of Mt. Fee.

A plan was made: ski around to a knob above the next glacier, the Powder Mountain Ice Cap, and then decide whether to camp there or to descend down and camp at its foot. The little knob turned out to be a beautiful sunny haven, with an amazing panorama and widescreen view of Cayley, so we decided to stop there. We even had some nice rocks to cook our dinners on, and an inviting patch of snow to sleep on. A platform was made, and after we ate and watched the sun set and the stars rise, we crawled into our sleeping bags. I tried to watch for shooting stars, but I didn't manage to stay awake long enough.

The next day a passing bird gave us our wake-up call at 6:15am, precisely between 6:00 am and 6:30am, just as Elliott had requested. With that fortuitous start, it was clear it was going to be an amazing day.

It started with a spicy descent down to the glacier. On the map it seemed that you could traverse across some slopes to maintain elevation. Jeremy started across, and the rest of us followed, but the slope became extremely steep and, in that morning hour, was very icy. After starting to traverse across, however, we were committed. And so gritting our teeth, hearts pounding and knees wobbling, we dug in our edges and tried to make it across as fast as possible. Afterwards, my legs felt like spaghetti and I questioned the reasonableness of traversing across that scary section just to maintain a few metres of elevation. We all agreed that if we would do it again, we would simply ski down to Powder Lake where the slope was not so steep, and then start skinning up the glacier from its base.

After this adrenaline rush, the gentle glacier was a true pleasure. Travelling under the towering majesty of Cayley, we headed towards Powder Mountain. With the sun beating down on us, it was a huge sweat fest. When we reached the flat summit of this mountain, we contemplated the other peaks around us, naming all that we could. Elliott took a panorama photo, and I think it would be cool if he were to label all the mountains and print it off.

Next came the ski down to the Powder Mountain Ice Cap. We flew down and then across the white expanse as fast as we could. Snowmobiles appeared on the horizon, like bad guys in a movie or annoying mosquitoes. We knew we could never outrun them.

After Banner Pass, we were rewarded with an amazing spring ski down Solitude Glacier and into the Callaghan Valley. At the top, the snow was still firm, and then it turned to butter, and then to slush – but it was all fun. Down in the valley, we soon hit the cross-country ski runs, and started practicing our skate skiing technique. Some of us enjoyed this more than others. I was imagining I was Ole Einar Bjørndalen, Norwegian biathlete extraordinaire, “King of the Biathlon”, and most-medaled athlete of the Olympic Winter Games. That guy is a cardiovascular beast! Still, despite the fun I was having, I was happy to find out that from the Callaghan Lodge we had not thir-TY kilometres to go, but a mere thir-TEEN.

Yes, and though the first kilometres through this incredibly scenic valley were mostly enjoyable, as time passed, I could feel the skin coming off of my feet in open sores. Some of the others had struggles too:

Clemens had loads of skin glue goop on his skis, effectively making every up and downhill hard work, and Martin's boots were starting to chew up his feet in an incredibly painful way. But with every step or slide, we came closer, and in this way made it to the road. Shortly afterwards, a large Suburban-type vehicle pulled up, Jeremy and I hopped into the trunk, and we got a ride back to our cars.

The evening ended at the Howe Sound Brew Pub, where we compared our glacier tans and burns.

Thanks to all for an amazing first traverse!



Top: Cooking up some breakfast. Photo: Kasia Celler

Bottom: Admiring the view from Powder Mountain. Photo: Martin Cermak

Second Overland Attempt to Pitt River Hot Springs

Arran Whiteford &
Joane Elleouet

Five hours of slogging up a logging road through razed forest. My pack, I swear, is swelling. Perhaps Jabba the Hutt crawled inside it during lunch. At least we've made progress - it is now 2:30 pm, and we've reached the point we originally planned to start from. Shite and bollocks.

The snowpack is now, thankfully, consistent - lower down, our skis were forced onto our backs a dozen times in order to cross bare patches of road and a river. The wolf, wolverine, coyote, and hare tracks we were following didn't seem to notice the terrain transitions. There's no way we could have driven along this dodgy road as planned, even without the snow. Information on the BC logging road conditions is super hard to find.

A year prior, Joane and I found this out the hard way in the first attempt at an overland mission to Pitt River Hotsprings. The normal route to the springs is to cross Pitt Lake travelling due north from Chilliwack. Our idea was to reach the springs by crossing the divide east of Squamish. We planned to follow the Crawford Creek logging road into the alpine, then skip across a saddle, and frolic down Pitt logging roads to the awaiting blissful warm springs. The logging road was a thicket, so after two days of S&M (whipped by alders, spiked by devils club...) we had only made it halfway and retreated with failing time.

Attempt 2016: a rejuvenated plan with spring, snow, and skis. A new alpine route would keep us above the bushline to remedy our bush-bash woes. We planned to skin up the Pinecone Lake Trail, traverse the mellow rolling mountains (very naive), passing Pinecone Peak, and bush bash the final five km to the hot springs. How hard can an 11 km

traverse be?

As the evening fell, we penetrated the periphery of the Pinecone Burke Provincial Park. So close to Vancouver, yet so very wild - this morning we saw a wolf. Ascending a treeless knob, portholes in the clouds revealed steep majestic cirques and gigantic 10 m cornices. Our plans for rolling across mellow hills would have to change.

A final skin up the massively corniced ridge led us to the alpine proper. Following the ridge was tricky; it was covered by huge snowy waves made from wind streaming behind trees. Visibility disappeared completely as we approached Campo Uno. Our map showed we were on a flat plateau, but unable to see, we shuffled forward centimetres at a time. Some kind of edge half showed itself ahead, so we zig-zagged back and camped near a nice flat spot. As the stars lifted the clouds from the earth, the edge was revealed as a 10 m cornice over a steep bank. Glad to know all that zero viz skiing at Whakapapa (New Zealand) had taught me something.

We had, by fluke, camped with a magnificent nighttime view across the Coast Mountains. Vancouver lights to the left, the orb of Mt Garibaldi the right, Sky Pilot dominating in front, and Tantalus searing behind. A soup and a coffee later, dawn broke, and we swished down a bowl and slid up to a saddle. There we found ourselves with our FVE (First View East).



Left: The route
Right: Arran heads up through the trees. Photo: Joane Elleouet



Flustered, I thought perhaps our end had come early. A large cornice blocked the slope beneath us. Yes, incredible view, but we would prefer to keep moving. The alternative routes, following the ridge north or south weren't an option. After some discussion, we were left with just one choice. Like naked mole rats, we tunneled through the cornice, making a notch to side-slip through. I'd never done this before, and it went much smoother than I expected.

East, the swamp lands were our next goal. All is coated in 6 m of BC powder, so a swamp is really a snowfield. From our cornice notch, gravity and ski wax did (almost) all of the work for us. Mellow, flowing, glacial skiing led on to steep cirque walls. The route finding was challenging, most of the potential routes were too steep with fairly sun-affected snow. Our final path swamp-ward had stunning turns, passing a Matterhorn-esque feature, then following long, flowy, meadowy ridges surrounded by majestic mountainous marshmallows of snow.

The swamp: flat. Our progress: excellent. All we had left to do was descend the forested river valley. Given the opportunity to stay left or right of the river, we chose left - where far further below, the yellow-brick logging roads were waiting to take us to the heavenly springs. This was a grave error. The river curved left, forcing us up the steep bank of the valley, then fell sharply right down a granite gorge. The route ahead was wedged between two ravines in bluffy, granite terrain. Searching up and down for a snow bridge leading to the friendly, right-hand riverbank led to nothing. It seemed too far to slog two hours back up the valley to a known snow-bridge at the start of the swamps. Instead, we chose to pin-ball down between the two ravines, picking a path between the steep granite bluffs.

The first small jump off a mossy ledge into a pile of slush left me waist deep and stuck. To free my feet, I had to remove my pack for my shovel, digging out my trapped appendages. Joane followed and did the same. Slow down-climbing and traversing led us to the valley floor: two hours to travel 200 m. At 4:00 pm, we reached a luscious logging road, calling us sweetly to the hot springs. However, a twisted knee affirmed this was our FPE (Furthest Point East). And so, one arduous river crossing later, we set up camp. One glove, and the dry nature of one ski boot, were sacrificed to the river god.

Our nights were incomparably less fun than the days. Old, mediocre



Enjoying life in camp!

Photos: Arran and Joane



sleeping bags kept us closer than any marriage counselor could. Easter eggs, whiskey and French lessons from a magazine about Rouge-gorge the Robin kept morale high. All night long, rain and snow pelted our tent. My guts tightened. How much snow was falling in the alpine? Heavy snowfall could block our route back by making slopes avalanche prone. With no alternative routes, we would then be forced to wait a day or two for the snowpack to stabilise. But would a delay in our return trigger a search party? Gosh, hoping for no snow.

Skinning back up the valley, now on the true right of the river, was painfully easy. The bluffy region had been entirely unnecessary. Trying to avoid wallowing in faded hot spring dreams, we made a pact to return next year and succeed. Nothing can go wrong now that we know 80 per cent of the route.

The swamp lands flew by, and we skinned skywards. Expecting a dump of snow, our plans were to camp before the steepest section and wait until the snowpack stabilized. Anxiously following our ski tracks into the alpine, the snow didn't seem to thicken. In our favour, only 5 cm of fresh snow coated yesterday's tracks. We quickly leapt up the steep section to make the most of the cold morning snow. Now, safe and secure, we set up camp on a stunning plateau in Le Cirque de Joane, floating on Lac Arran. The 2:00 pm sun glared, so our items were spread out to dry, and an opulent snow-kitchen was crafted. Having the time to soak in the magnificent mountainous landscape felt as glorious as freshly baked bread.

The night revealed frigid temperatures and a stunning sky full of stars. We would have certainly admired them if we hadn't fallen asleep before sunset. Emerging from the frozen tent before dawn, the moon filled the arena as I melted snow for coffee.

Our final day returning had just one hiccup: the cornice gash we had dug two days prior had healed completely. To make matters worse, the snow beneath the cornice was bulging with deposited windblown snow. Digging the cornice from below was not an option, forcing us to skin up a steep side wall. As I set a track, inching forward gently and carefully, loose snow threatened to peel away beneath my skins. Carefully balancing with every kickturn, zigging and zagging led slowly to the waiting safety of the saddle. As Joane ascended next, I learnt some new French vocabulary that I shouldn't repeat. Euphoric at surmounting our final hurdle, we savored some sublime turns towards our first camp.

The sun was shining, the mountains were beaming, but the fat lady had yet to sing. Following the ridge that bridges the park border was steep and tricky. How on earth had we skinned up here two days prior? The huge snow waves we had wobbled up, were too tricky to ski down, forcing us off the ridge where we picked a steep path traversing beneath some bluffs. Lumps of slush rolled slowly down the hill beneath us as we edged around. As soon as possible, we regained the ridge where the weather gave us perfect views to the surrounding untamed mountains. Most impressive was Meslillooet Mountain, closer to Vancouver but even more wild - an inspiring lengthy corniced ridge soaring above an icefield.

In an effort to avoid repeating the dreadful slog of the snowless logging road, we gambled with a new route. Road 'M24', maps claimed, descended directly to our car. We dropped down a small chute leading to a mellow ridge northwards. Eating lunch, we were confident the car was reachable. Our emergency spare food was probably just weighing us down, so we ate it as we applied sunscreen.

The new route side-hilled around a steep lump towards the M24. Skinning through the trees, sudden WHUMP!!!!'s would alarm us every few seconds as huge piles of melting snow would fall from trees from above. Joane was splattered by a couple of these refreshing showers as she led the way. The trees gave way to elegantly, gentle

glades. The map suggested that these would lead directly to our M24, so we ripped skins and gracefully glided north. Hitting the M24, and zooming along it towards the next switchback, I thought of the many tedious ends to long trips: the endless slog of alpine valleys like the Matukituki or the grim grind of never-ending BC logging roads like Brew. Now the wind was in our hair as we hurtled towards the next zigzag!

But, good times ended. The road, once resplendent, became repugnantly flat. We followed LARGE, fresh bear prints for a few kilometres, shuffling forward and skating. A swift descent, the snowpack spluttered out about a kilometre from our destination. We were then greeted by our dearest friend: dense, overgrown, slender springy alder. Biting bullets, we marched to the car getting the thorough whipping we had been seeking all along.

From the outset, this trip was really a reconnaissance mission for the '2017 Third and Final Pitt River Hot Springs Overland Traverse Attempt'. We didn't succeed in soaking in the holy waters, but preferred being whipped by alder anyway.



Climbing and Mountaineering



The Alpine Head Jam. Jimmy showing off an advanced big-wall technique, the alpine head jam, on El Cap. Photo: Megan O'Brien



Approaching Pigeon Spire in the Bugaboos. Photo: Cora Skaien

Sunrise after a chilly night on the summit of the South Howser Tower, Bugaboos. Photo: Megan O'Brien

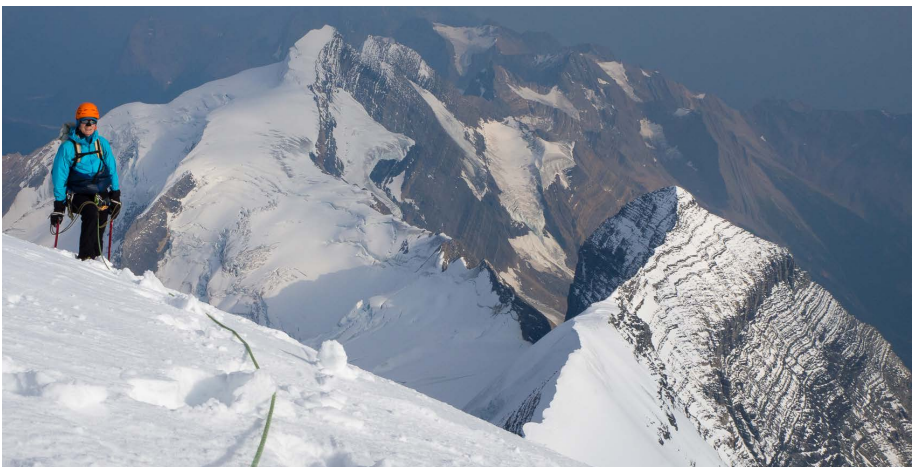




Left: Todd Mackenzie, Happy on Pitch 31 of the Nose. Photo: Veronika Schmitt

Right: Annie Maurer climbing at Panty Wall at Red Rocks over reading week. Photo: Cora Skaien

Bottom: Views from the top of the South Face looking back down the ridge on Mt. Robson. Photo: Nick Matwyuk





Top: Sky dive high five - Kelsey and Zack top out on the Sky Dive variation (10b) of Sky Ridge in Smith Rock. Photo: Nick Hindley

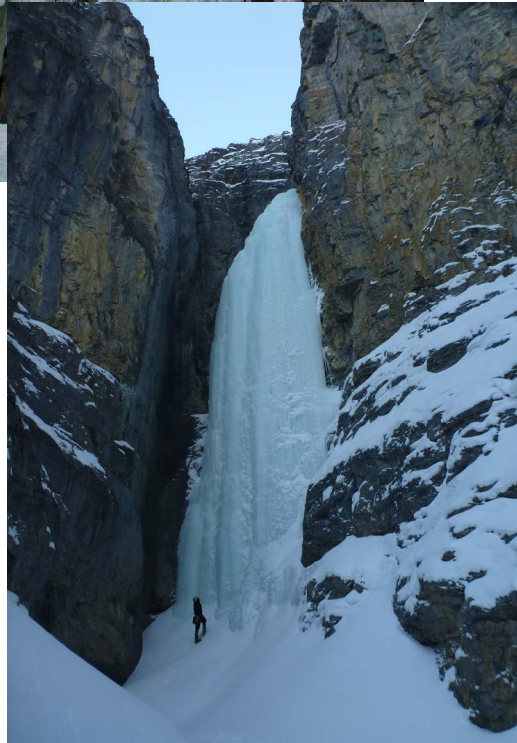
Left: Learning some ice technique during the alpine skills course. Photo: Sam McKoy

Right: A friendly visitor on the Chief's Memorial Ledge. Photo: Megan O'Brien





Top: VOCers learn to climb at the annual Daughter Of Ice in Marble Canyon. Photo: Nick Hindley.



Right: Julien Renard contemplates Chilkoot Passage in the Ghost Valley. Photo: Caitlin Schneider

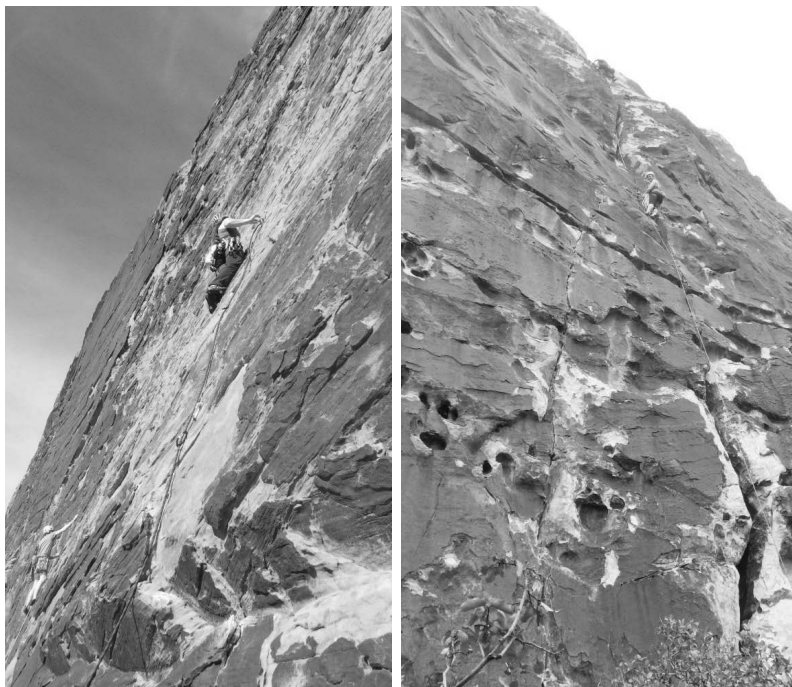
Red Rocks Reading Week Adventure February 13-20, 2016

Cora Skaien

From February 13-20, 2016, a group of eight VOCers made their way down to Red Rocks, Nevada for a week of climbing. This had become a bit of an annual traditional in the VOC, where a group goes down to Red Rocks during the Reading Week Break, and this year I decided to organize the group. In our crew for 2016 we had Jake Jones, Emmanuel Beraud, Annie Maurer, John McKenna, Mike Wathen, Cindy Gu, Lesley McDonell and myself, Cora Skaien. We decided to fly down and rent a car in order to increase the amount of climbing time. If we had driven, it would have taken 20+ hours of driving each way, which in itself could have been a wonderful adventure! However, flights to Las Vegas can be found pretty cheaply. Along with the flight deal, we acquired cheap accommodation and we stayed at El Cortez Hotel and Casino.

Red Rocks National Park has dozens of crags, hundreds of climbs and dozens of multi-pitch options. There are both sport and trad climbing opportunities at crags, but all multi-pitch routes that we knew of were trad climbing. Most of the locations we visited require a leader to set up top ropes, and top rope access was not an easy option. However, there were many crags with easier climbs that beginner leaders could feel comfortable with!

On our first day, we went straight from the airport to Panty Wall to do some sport climbing and familiarize ourselves with the area. Panty Wall was an excellent first choice because it had a range of difficulties from 5.8 and up for us to get used to the grading system of the area. It was super hot, and most days temperatures reached about 25 degrees Celsius, which is only two degrees below what the guide book suggests



Left: Annie Maurer climbing at Panty Wall. Photo: Cora Skaien

Right: Cora Skaien at the top of pitch 1 of Ragged Edges. Photo: John McKenna

as the record high for the area for that time of year. What we did not know at the time was that this was going to end up being our only day of sport climbing! The entire rest of the trip was trad climbing.

The next day (Valentine's Day!), we went to the Willow Springs Picnic Area and decided to do some easy trad cragging, from 5.5 upwards. This was a great area with a lot of nice, easy climbs! We ended up splitting into groups of twos, with Manu and myself paired together, Jake and Annie together, and Mike and John together. Cindy and Lesley joined us later that day as they flew in a day later than we did. Manu and I started on Tonto, a 5.5, which was a nice climb to warm up with trad leading and feel comfortable on.

What I liked about the trad climbing in Red Rocks, which I found to be different from Squamish, was that you are climbing a lot of face features where you have a crack for protection, as opposed to predominantly just using the crack for climbing. We then moved up and lead

a few 5.6s and 5.7s in the area before we jumped on Ragged Edges, a two-pitch climb with the first pitch being 5.7 and the second 5.8. Some areas were definitely run-out (i.e. few areas to place gear), and this was also our first realization that the grades in Red Rocks, although similar to those in Squamish, are a bit different. A 5.8 in Red Rocks felt more like a 5.9 in Squamish - which was luckily still within our capabilities. Jake and Annie warmed up on Ragged Edges and did great. Then Manu and I tackled it with me leading the first pitch and him the second. The last meter of the 5.7 is kind of nerve-racking as it becomes slick rock and a thin crack, but luckily for me, Mike was at the same anchor after climbing the climb next to me, and was able to allow me to cheat and clip my rope to a draw while I figured out how to climb the last meter of the climb. Manu did excellent on the run-out 5.8 that was next, which was not too difficult in terms of climbing, but was quite committing in some areas. Mike and John went off to do some harder routes in the area.

That night we wandered around Vegas in the historic downtown section and found a place for dinner. Gluten free dinner in Vegas consists



Left: Manu Beraud looks at the first pitch of Cat in the Hat. Photo: Cora Skaien

Right: Traversing 5.7+ pitch on Bird Land. Photo: Cora Skaien

of three eggs! I had been to Vegas before and knew what to expect while walking down the street, but the boys were mostly bewildered. Quite the cultural experience!

The next day (February 15th) we were to embark on multi-pitches! We stayed in our same groups and Manu and I headed off to do Cat in the Hat (5.6 trad), Jake and Annie headed off to do Birdland (5.7+ trad), and Mike and John set off to first do Birdland and then do Dark Shadows (5.8). Manu and I decided that we would alternate leads, 5.3-5.6. These all sound like really easy grades, but we learned very quickly on the first pitch to expect the whole climb to be a bit sandbagged. We felt a bit soft, but on our rappel down, everyone we passed started the conversation with, "This climb is a bit sandbagged, no?" However, it was still well within our capabilities and felt more like a Squamish trad 5.8 overall at its most difficult.

One thing that we learned quickly was that sometimes the belay anchors are hard to find, as Manu can attest with his numerous down climbing requirements when he had passed the goal. The second pitch involved a short bouldering section, followed by a 20-30 meter walk across rocks, then going straight up 15 meters or so. I highly recommend re-locating the belay. We did not. The entire time I was leading this pitch, I was pulling my rope as hard as I could with my hips and just trying not to get pulled off of the wall. The rope drag was insane! But from there, I made it to the belay tree which had slings and webbing left there as a permanent anchor system. Manu then lead the next 5.5 to a rock belay with slings and webbing. Then I was supposed to lead the next 5.3 traverse over an arête, but it was extremely exposed and looked terrifying, so I bailed and Manu led it, setting up a gear anchor in the crack system beyond the arête. Then Manu lead the last 5.6 pitch which has an initial section that is protectable, and then it turns into run out non-protectable slab with a single bolt in the middle. Manu climbed it like a champ! There were two very nice girls coming up behind me who I would hang out with at each belay station, and the girl who was leading all of the pitches took a massive fall well above this bolt while Manu and I were preparing for our rappel. She was so composed and jumped straight back onto the rock to climb without being flustered! She amazed me with her ability to brush it off! Once you are at the top of this fifth pitch, you can either rappel back down (most common approach), or scramble up several hundred feet of

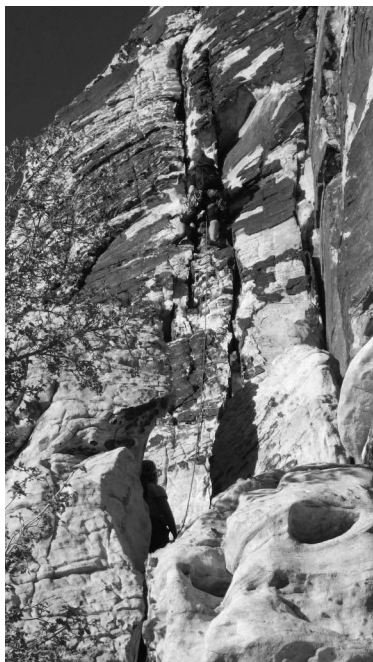
loose rock with portions that are at times exposed, followed by a very long and hard to find descent. We decided to rappel off in the end. We had a wonderful climb and soon rejoined the others to share in our excitement of our adventures of that day.

On February 16th, Jake and Annie embarked on Dark Shadows, along with Cindy and Lesley, and Manu and I decided to go do Bird Land, which the others had done the day before and had nothing but good things to say about it! Mike and John went off to do something harder, and had a wonderful day! Manu and I decided that similar to the day before, swinging leads on 5.6-5.7s. The first 5.6 was straightforward and lovely. The first 5.7 was confusing with many different crack systems, and I frequently had to down climb and re-assess. I did not like the aesthetics of this pitch, but I made it up eventually! The next pitch was a 5.7+ traversing pitch that had a lot of elegant, technical moves. Manu lead it like a champ, and I came up behind him and absolutely loved the pitch! There was a group ahead of us which was a couple (one from Scotland, one from Australia) and they were rappelling off of the last anchor down to us. They were very nice, but we had a heck of a time understanding the man's thick Scottish accent with all of the echoing in the valley! We waited until they rappelled off our anchor before we continued climbing, which was a good thing because when they pulled their rope, it got stuck in a rock a few meters beneath me. Apparently the same thing happened to Jake and Annie



Looking out from top of Angel's Landing, Zion National Park. Photo: Cora Skaien

the day before and the group behind them was able to help them out. But there was no group behind us... so we would need to be careful. I was lowered back down and removed their rope from the crack it was stuck in, and climbed back up. I then began leading my 5.6 pitch, which continued at a 45 degree angle from the belay (i.e. slight traverse with still going up) for a bit before continuing straight up. It was a lovely pitch and I greatly enjoyed it, although I did have difficulty finding placements that I felt good about for much of the journey. Manu then lead the last 5.7+ pitch which was mentally pretty scary to lead due to many committing moves well above the last piece of gear, and fewer gear placements than one might desire. This belay is a hanging belay from the top, and I seconded the route and was lowered due to lack of space for both climbers at the belay station. We then began our rap-pel off. We managed to not get the rope stuck on the third pitch like our new friends... but we did get it stuck on the second pitch. Manu climbed back up with the opposite end of the rope and then down-climbed, removing gear as he came. We then made it back to the park-



Left: Jake Jones leading the first pitch of Johnny Vegas. Photo: Cora Skaien
Right: Manu Beraud leading one of the pitches on Solar Slabs. Photo: Cora Skaien

ing lot to join the others.

The next day, February 17th, we decided to take a day off. Jake and I did some work in a café and wandered around. We found a really nice “Container Park” nearby which we had lunch at, and we relaxed. Mike, John and Manu went to the Hoover Dam and had a wonderful day, and Lesley and Cindy had a day of climbing.

Our plan for the next day was to either go to Black Corridor for a day of harder sport, or to do our big multi-pitch objective: Johnny Vegas into Solar Slabs. What we did not look at was the forecast... and unexpectedly, it rained that evening and the next day. To make matters worse, the rain was accompanied by strong winds. As a result, we could not climb. You cannot climb the fragile red rocks when it rains because the rocks will crumble off and you alter the routes dramatically (see more details about this in the guide book).

Thus, on February 18th, we took an alternate adventure day. Manu, Cindy, Lesley and John attempted to climb at a nearby location before bailing and heading to Death Valley for some sightseeing, whereas Jake, Annie, Mike and I drove to Zion to hike Angel’s Landing. We had an absolutely amazing time and Zion was unbelievably beautiful, despite the stormy weather we had all day.

On February 19th, we embarked on our great multi-pitch day. Mike and John went off to do Black Orpheus, while Annie, Jake, Manu and I did Johnny Vegas into Solar Slabs. There is a one hour approach, and we wanted to arrive early to ensure we had enough time in the day. We woke up at 4am to start bright and early, and I only managed to get about 2 hours of sleep. We ended up entering the park when it opened at 6am, drove the 40 minutes around the ring road, and did not arrive to the base of the climb until about 7:30 or 8:00am. Jake and Annie went up ahead of us, and Jake started on the first 5.6 pitch and a few small holds broke off while he climbed. I will note that there were groups ahead of us, and that we were not the only ones there and we did deem the rock to be dry enough. I lead the first 5.6 pitch on Johnny Vegas, and I was very slow. The pitch was lovely, but my body and mind were not in it. Thus, to speed up the process, Manu lead the next 12 pitches! What a champ! The climbing was lovely. Johnny Vegas is 3 pitches of 5.7 climbing, and then Solar Slabs is 10 pitches of around 5.6 climbing. We linked many pitches together when we could to save

on time, and there were a few near the middle which can be linked with a 70 meter rope (which we had -- refer to guidebook for recommendations). The climbing was a lovely mix of crack, slab and face climbing, with lots of interesting variation!

I should at this time disclose that I have a massive fear of heights when I am not attached to a rope... especially on slab. I should also disclose how much I hate slab. We began our descent while the sun was still up, which involved first finding the rappel station and rappelling 70 metres. We tied our two ropes together and did the rappel in one go, and had to down scramble a few meters before getting to flatter rock. At this stage, the sun set. At first, I thought this would make me more nervous, but it actually made it better because I could not see how steep things were! I was very careful not to point my head torch downwards so that I could only see the relatively flatter portion ahead of me. Unfortunately, at some point, we had very abrupt switch backs and I saw Annie walking along a steep drop and she said "We have to go down there." At this point, I had a panic attack and sat down crying. Despite my crying, I was still laughing and Jake could not tell if I was laughing or crying. He made good puns to cheer me up, like, "I sure am likin' that lichen!" The others convinced me that we had to down-climb the long slab portion and Jake stayed right behind me to point out hand and foot holds. Thank goodness he was there because he blocked my view of how high up we were! To calm myself down, I say things like, "You cannot be scared and shake right now, because if you do, you will fall and you will die." This realization calms me right down because I know that I need to be confident to survive... In the guidebook, the only mention of the scariness of the down climb is the last 10 meters which they say is a slippery slab slide. I could not believe it when we arrived and it was the least steep of our journey, and I ran down it in joy and kissed the rocks at the bottom! I had made it! Take that, fear of heights and down-climbing slab without a rope! The sun had been down for an hour and a half at this stage, and we still had an hour of giant boulder hopping down the creek bed, plus an hour hike back to the car. I was in my element in the creek bed, scrambling and route finding. Despite my earlier fear, I was able to contribute here and had a great time! This was most people's least favourite part of the decent, but it was my favourite part. We returned to the cars shortly before 10pm.

That night, John had booked a pub crawl and he left earlier (along with Mike) with Cindy and Lesley. He had a crazy night out on the town in Vegas with a wonderful Snapchat story. He got back to the hotel at 4am. The next day was our last day (February 20th), and we were all so exhausted from our adventure the day before that we decided to sleep in, take it easy and head to the airport early to relax and nap while we waited for our flight. We had a wonderful time overall and I cannot wait to return again!



Annie Maurer and Jake Jones celebrating at the top of Solar Slabs. Photo: Cora Skaien

The Nose That Did Not Sneeze

Veronika Schmitt & Todd Mackenzie

A comment from my friend: “I am glad you are climbing the Nose - whatever that means - I hope it does not sneeze!” Seriously? Who doesn’t know the Nose?! To my dismay, a lot of my colleagues have not even heard of Yosemite, let alone big wall climbing. I didn’t know much about big walls either until December 2015, when I finished my PhD and I set it as my new goal. No, that’s not true, Todd just told me he wants to climb the Nose with me, and therefore we got into big wall climbing.

We both had been trad climbing for a long time and felt ready for the first step towards big wall climbing: the acquisition and devouring of Chris McNamara’s book: “How to Big Wall Climb.”

The other steps are pretty straightforward and can be summarized as: buy a ton of gear, practice, and go to Yosemite! If this is not informative enough, that’s alright. Luckily there are a bunch of online resources including ‘The Best Yosemite Big Wall Climbing Rack and Gear List,’ and my friends online climbing resource www.vdiffclimbing.com. If you are not interested in how to place copperheads (you should be though), then just check out the cute copperhead and sky-hook drawings! I am not getting into training details here, because that would be boring, but I highly recommend that you do train before heading up a popular big wall. You really don’t want to be one of those morons that think that they just learn on-the-fly and ruin the ascent of many other climbers (we encountered several groups of this type). Jumaring might be straightforward, but jumaring past roofs or jumaring fast is not.

So, we climbed the Nose (5.9, C2), and it was a great adventure. We



Getting ready, Todd Mackenzie and the Big Wall Gear. Photo: Veronika Schmitt

spent 3 nights on the wall, which is one night less than we planned and that meant two things:

1. We had 4-day-old slimy and slightly sour tasting leftover burritos to eat.

2. WE DID IT!

Of course this was not a fast ascent, but considering that 50% of the parties trying to climb it bail because they are much slower than they thought they would be, this was pretty good. We never finished our climbing days later than 5:00 or 6:00pm and never started climbing before 7:00am, allowing us time for valley views, and relaxing and snacking on our comfortable portaledge.

Since this was only our fourth big wall ever, we never planned on crushing it. We'll be back for the sub 24 hour ascent later. Todd ended up leading 18 pitches and I climbed 13. The last two should have been mine, but due to the eagerness to get to the top and the intense waste of time involved in switching leads at a hanging belay, Todd continued to the top. I paid for my laziness: the last pitch was much harder to follow than to lead. But now, let's start from the beginning...



Veronika Schmitt On the Wall. Photo: Todd Mackenzie

June 13th, 2016

A common approach for multi-day ascents of big walls is to fix pitches on the first day. It means climbing a few pitches without overnight gear, rappelling back to the ground while leaving your ropes, then hauling your gear up to your high point before returning to the ground again for the night. The next day, you simply jumar up the fixed lines and start the real adventure. So we climbed the first 4 pitches to Sickle Ledge in the morning and set up three 60 m ropes for rappelling to the ground. Starting up the first pitch was a surreal experience with the full 900 metres of El Capitan looming above. After stuffing our haulbag with 20 freshly prepared burritos, 34 litres of water and some other odds and ends, we hauled and deposited it on Sickle Ledge. We estimated our bags to be roughly 130 lbs, but they would lighten in the days to come. We were particularly proud to haul the four pitches in only 1.5 hours, as it would have taken us at least double that at the start of our short big wall careers. To top it off, it appeared we would have the Nose to ourselves. Traffic jams are notoriously problematic and the cause of many failed attempts.

June 14th, 2016

After a sleepless night in our camper converted Subaru Forester, we drove into the park listening to our new favourite song (Kaleo - Way Down We Go) to get ourselves psyched for the adventure to come. We ascended the ~180 metre of fixed lines quickly and onto our grand

adventure. That adventure began with getting a yellow camalot stuck. Fortunately, I freed it after Todd wasted 20 minutes, declaring it hopeless. We opted for the classic pendulum into the Stovelegs to simplify hauling and then continued up the 120 metre hand-to-fist crack above. We learned a new technique here which involves placing two cams at the end of each daisy chain, that you then leapfrog up the crack. It is fast, secure, and will make your free-climber friends cringe in disgust. The wind picked up, blowing our ropes sideways and making communication problematic at times. We finished off our day on top of Dolt Tower (pitch 11) shortly after 5:00pm. In hindsight, we could have made it further that day, but we decided to take our time and enjoy the adventure. I had a surprisingly good sleep on our portaledge that night. Todd apparently did not as he was worried about the enormous amount of climbing still above and the increasing amount of commitment we would face as we continued upwards over the next few days on the wall. Of course he did not share his worries in case they transferred to me. Well, it would not have made a difference to me as I was already maximum worried, but how could he know.



Before a Pendulum (Pitch 7),
Veronika Schmitt and Todd Mac-
kenzie. Photo: Tom Evans

June 15th, 2016

The next day we woke up at 5:45am and started climbing around 7:30am. It was the day of the King Swing, a massive pendulum that has you running full tilt across the wall while trying to latch onto a small edge at the limit of your reach. To get to it, you have to climb up behind Texas Flake (a 35° chimney with one bolt in the middle and no gear) and then continue up to Boot Flake, an apparently completely detached flake, just sitting on the wall. I am glad I did not know about the detachment when we were on top.

The King Swing was of course

Todd's job, so he got ready by taking off his jacket despite the cold wind to show his bright green shirt to the audience in the valley below. And the audience indeed saw him and they cheered for each attempt at the swing and went wild when he stuck it. Tom Evans took a great picture of this from the valley and it can be found in his El Cap Report for June 15th 2016. It was quite fun to be watched, although later on when I needed to use the washroom, I thought being watched sucks. You can see pretty much the whole route when looking up from the valley with binoculars, but of course most tourists don't know where to look. Darkness was my friend for washroom breaks. I took over the leads after the King Swing, climbing two more pitches to finish off the day at the end of pitch 19. It grew particularly cold at the last belay and we were happy to crawl into our sleeping bags as soon as possible. Burritos were consumed and we were fast asleep with daylight to spare.

Sometime during the night we were roused from our slumber by the distant sound of metal on rock and the occasional flash of a headlamp on the rock from below. Then in no time, a pair of climbers appeared one at a time. "Hello, is our portaledge in your way?" – "No no. I'll just climb around you" – "You climbing the Nose in a day?" – "We are actually climbing El Cap three times in a day. We already climbed Zodiac and after this we'll climb Lurking Fear" – "Nice." We watched as Brad Gobright and Scott Bennett made short work of the Great Roof and continued out of view. We then continued our 10 hours of sleeping.



Veronika Schmitt Behind Texas Flake. Photo: Todd Mackenzie

June 16th, 2016

The third day was the Great Roof day. The Great Roof (pitch 22) is as very prominent feature on the route and can be easily spotted from the valley below. Whenever I looked at it, I got scared as it looked so steep and exposed. Todd climbed it, but as I had learned from few of the walls, following a traverse is often as difficult as leading it, and usually scarier. So I got scared.

Despite being mid June, the temperature was abnormally low and we were climbing in both puffies and shells and still shivering at the belays. Fortunately, it was my turn to lead and I continued up Pancake Flake, shamelessly aiding the whole thing. Todd would have done the same (even if he denies it now) in this situation (e.g. wearing all your layers, having no climbing shoes on, carrying all gear possible), so it's alright. The next pitch was a particularly awkward flaring corner, but at least the struggle kept me warm. We made it to pitch 26 (called camp 6), a fairly smelly place in the early evening. Even though smelly, I felt great as we had exceeded our goal for the day and were certain to top out the next day with only 5 more pitches to go!

June 17th, 2016

Top out day! The last 5 pitches were steep and exposed, and included the famous Changing Corners pitch. Looking down into the valley, the whole route was visible. Todd was super excited on the final bolt ladder and I got a photo just before he disappeared and topped out.

And then we were on top at 3:30pm! The only thing left for the day was to carry our gear down the East Ledges. It is a pretty difficult hike with several rappels, so if you have not done it before, do not try it in the dark, and always be aware of the possibility of core shots in the fixed lines!

To Todd's dismay we did not make it down on time for ice cream or pizza in Yosemite Village. Both places were closed after sorting our gear and showering. A delightful package of Mr. Noodles was the next best choice considering time and effort.

Adventures on Mt Rainier

June 2016

Caitlin Schneider

Mt. Rainier. Elevation: 4392 m. Is the highest mountain around, part of the Cascade volcano range and according to Wikipedia is one of the most dangerous volcanoes around, since its eruptions could cause major disasters to the surrounding area. All the more reason to climb it before the entire thing explodes.

There are a variety of route options up this huge mountain, ranging from full-on ice climbs to something akin to a glacier walk. But none should be underestimated. We, Julien Renard and I, picked a route a bit off the beaten path. This mountain is frequented by mountain guides and their parties. This means that those routes are super busy and can have a ton of traffic and traffic jams. So we decided on the Kautz Glacier route, which leaves from Paradise, goes up the trail for a bit and then crosses the bottom of the Nisqually Glacier, heads up the edge of the Wilson Glacier and then up the Turtle Snowfield to Camp Hazard. The camp has this name since it sits under the Kautz ice cliff and sometimes giant chunks of ice come flying down into camp.

We left Vancouver on Friday morning around 8:30am, thinking that this would leave plenty of time for the five-hour drive, and still be able to get our climbing permits and find a place to camp for the night. The drive took forever (the traffic was so bad we arrived at 4pm). The border guards decided to 'randomly' check our car and then steal all of the tastiest food. It seems that my grease covered jerky is 'moist' and Julien's dried sausage must have been imported from Europe... where else would you get good sausage?

The next morning we woke up at 5am, got ready to go and were at the ranger station in Paradise at 7am, exactly when they opened. The



The approximate route to the top, up the left side of the image.

Photo: Julien Renard

weather was awful. It was raining and sleeting, and there was no sight of the mountain. Not the best conditions to start our adventure. The ranger in the station had also mentioned that the summit attempts on the main route had turned back that morning due to weather and snow. Anyway, to maximize our chances, we decided to wait a day, since the weather was scheduled to improve. We hiked up a bit to see if we could scope out the route, but mostly we saw white and some snow blowing in our faces.

By the evening, the rain and sleet had come back and we really didn't want to sleep in the tent outside. Soooo.... we found a clean wash-room. Anyway...

The next morning was clear and beautiful. A lovely day to start the climb. We crossed the bottom of the Nisqually glacier without much trouble, and then I fell into a crevasse. Not all the way, Julien actually warned me and I tried to cross it at the proper angle, but it was hard to figure out where the edges were and I ended up stepping straight through the bridge. I caught on my backpack, so only fell through to my waist. We decided to rope up after that. We carefully crossed a few more before reaching the ridge.

Once we got on the ridge left of the Nisqually glacier, it was pretty smooth going. We stopped for lunch, met a few people coming back down who had turned back because of avalanche hazards from the

fresh snow.

We walked along, sometimes on snow and sometimes on rock, and finally tramped into Camp Hazard. At that point we were already feeling the effects of the altitude which were slowing us down considerably.

There was another team of five already up there who had spent the past three days getting to the camp. Three guys came into camp a bit after us. We chatted a bit and tried to sort out departure times in the morning to avoid traffic jams on the ice pitches.

The bivy spot was nice and offered beautiful views of Mt. Hood, Mt. St. Helens and even Mt. Jefferson in the distance. It was a nice place to have dinner, and we settled in for the night.

We woke up the next morning to questionable weather. Where were our clear skies!? Damn you weather man! Oh well. We set off just ahead of the three guys and walked out to the base of the ice.

The first pitch was a mix of snow and ice up to 45° so we decided to solo it. The new snow had hardened a bit but remained questionable, as far as avalanches go, so we stuck to edge of the slope, on the shitty ice. It was uneven and kind of dirty, and loved to just flake off when you swung. I was happy enough to have my ice tools with me for sure.

The second pitch was a bit longer and a bit steeper, up to 60°, so



Julien is somewhere out there. Photo: Caitlin Schneider

we decided to bring out the rope and start simul-climbing. We stayed on the far right side of the gully to avoid the avalanche hazard, and sometimes climbed through the ice cones that made up the edge of the ice cliffs. Some of them made nice steps to rest on. My calves were burning. The low angle should have made it easier, but I hadn't been on ice for way too long.

As we topped out on the technical pitches, we met the group of five, who had started at midnight, coming back down. They had turned around due to the weather and avalanche hazard, So did the party of three behind us.

Given the information relayed by the party of five regarding what was ahead, we chose to traverse right across the upper Kautz glacier to get onto the ridge between the Kautz and the Nisqually glacier. At this point we had shortened the rope between us so that we could stay in sight of each other. This route also took us through significantly more crevasses than the centre. Not that we could see that at the time.

We reached the ridge at the edge of the glacier and then traversed



The ridge of crevasses.
Photo: Caitlin Schneider

under some rock bands to more exposed slopes. All this time we were post-holing through the fresh snow, sometimes knee deep. Occasionally crossing the random crevasses. Post holing through fresh snow, with a big overnight pack, above 3500m is a brutal cardio exercise.

Further up, the ridge disappears and is replaced by a huge serac wall. This is the point where the route veers right onto the Nisqually glacier. This proved to be a tricky spot given the 20m deep crevasse running parallel to the ridge, which we had to cross. We wandered up and down a bit,

looking for a way through. The fresh snow and strong winds had created unconsolidated snow bridges and treacherous crevasse lips. The weather had opened up a bit so we could see for a few minutes. Which was nice, but it quickly closed back in, leaving us in a worse milk jug than before.

By this time we had been on the move for about eight hours, maybe more. We were still post holing through snow, trying to find a way up the Nisqually glacier, navigating around open crevasses. It is hard to know which way to go when you can only see a few metres in either direction. We made some best guesses, but it slowed progress. We were running on fumes, counting breaths or steps between rests.

On the GPS, we could see a flat spot near the summit and made this our destination. It was 300 metres closer and less elevation gain than the summit. We were tired enough that this made a difference, and it was a flat spot.

As we finished setting up the tent and the rest of Camp Exhaustion, the clouds parted and we were treated to views of the summit. It looked so close... but oh well. We settled into the tent and started making dinner. Then came the thunder... The storm rolled in and brought some hail, kind of cute little snow balls, which melted nicely in the pot. I think we were too tired to run away even if lightning hit close by, but thankfully it stayed far away and we just curled up to sleeeeeep.



Setting up Camp Exhaustion. Photo: Julien Renard



Happiness on the Summit. Photo: Julien Renard

Sometime in the night the wind picked up. Serious wind. Strong enough to blow the tent against my face. Around 4am we realized that the tent was being buried by spindrift. Julien trudged out into the fierce wind and gallantly dug us out. The wind was so strong we didn't really want to leave the tent even if it was past our departure time. I started getting worried about the structural integrity of my tent, so I sat up and used my back to support the wall. I fell asleep like that for a bit, woke up to find the spindrift in the vestibule had piled as high as my shoulder. I poked my head out to try to push it away a bit.

Eventually, it became clear that the wind was not going to go away. However, the sky was clear so we decided to go anyway.

Taking down the tent was a bit scary, as I was really worried it would break or blow away. But we managed by leaving the entire tent staked out and then taking the downwind poles out of the sockets first and then the upwind ones. The tent was then flat on the ground and we could detach the fly and then the roll up the tent itself. Whew. We were packed and ready to go.

Just as we were getting the rope sorted, two other parties came into view, they had left Camp Hazard that morning with day packs. Seems things go way faster when you can see and are not carrying quite so much.

We enjoyed the view from the summit for a bit, took some pictures and then decided that it was probably better to get moving. We were

going to hike down the guided route back to Camp Muir, as we figured it would be less stressful than going back down the Kautz Glacier.

It was less stressful, but I think that it was a bit longer. The entire route down was marked with little red flags and by hundreds of foot-steps, so it was easy to follow. The path down was actually non-trivial and more convoluted than expected. It's difficult to see the crevasses from above as they are all facing downhill, so we were happy to just follow the footpath.

The path crossed over some crevasses and wound its way past these gaping holes. Over a few sections of rocks as well. It was getting late and the snow was getting way too soft; there were a few sections where we needed to cross under some giant seracs. We just ran. Or in my case attempted to trudge faster. The views were lovely, though. The glaciers were impressive and the rocks had awesome layers in them from all times that lava had flowed down the sides of the mountain.

We finally came through the Gap and came into sight of Camp Muir. It's an odd collection of wood and stone buildings perched on the ridge above the Muir Snowfield. It seemed really quiet when we arrived, but slowly people seemed to trickle out of the woodwork. They gathered around a standing table and seemed to be swapping stories about their summit attempts and making dinner at 5pm. We took a quick break and then kept on truckin'.

The rest of the trip down the snowfield was uneventful. We tried to figure out whether it was better to post-hole new holes or try to step into someone else's post-holes. To be fair, they both kind of sucked. But we made it down. There were a few huge snow slides where people had been bum-sliding, but we no longer had our snow pants on, so we walked.

We arrived at the visitor centre around 7pm and then turned in our climbing permit so that Search and Rescue wouldn't be called. It was nice to see the car sitting where we had left it and we peeled off our socks and pulled on clean clothes. Now, all that was left was a long drive home and an uneventful border crossing.

It was a bit of an adventure, for sure, some solid type-2 fun, because I am already looking forward to the next possible sufferfest!

A Weekend of potential First Ascents in the Ossa Region

Nicholas Gobin

Artem Bylinskii and I had agreed to get out for an adventure the weekend of August 13-14, 2016, and I had been eyeing the unclimbed Ossa pinnacle for some time. We agreed to give it a go. While researching the objective, it appeared to me that the Northwest Buttress of Ossa was also unclimbed, and I figured why not try for *two* first ascents in a weekend? Artem was easily convinced.

Artem left Vancouver only 20 minutes behind schedule at 3:50am, picking me up in Squamish at 5:00am. We gassed up, got Timmies breakfast, and headed to the Sigurd Trailhead. We left the trailhead at 6:30am and were at the moraine by 9:30am, thanks to the awesome and efficient new BCMC Trail. We hiked up the moraine to get a look at the North Ridge. The “main” plan had been to circumnavigate the glacier on its east flank, then drop into the basin by the toe of the North East ridge, then gain the North Buttress from the basin. Looking at it from the moraine, it looked like we had a couple of options by which we could directly gain the buttress from the bottom and skip the glacier; adding 400 m of technical vert to the route. This seemed like fun, so away we went.

Similar to Rennie and Serl’s experience on Reaction Time (much higher up), the main problem was getting across the ~3 m wide moat. This took us 1.5 hours (from 11:00am-12:30pm). Artem had to lower me down overhanging snow onto a dodgy bridge, after which I jumped across and scrambled up to build an anchor. Artem then built a bollard to redirect the rope and I lowered him down. With no evident way to backtrack over the bergschrund, we were now committed!

I led the first pitch of run-out but easy (5.7) climbing on very good,

compact rock. In 60 m of climbing, I had only placed two tricams, a cam, and a dodgy ballnut. After Artem followed me up, we decided to scramble up slabs to the snow below the icefall. We went up the snow and turned right at a waterfall right below the icefall, scrambling up the waterfall was fun with a few tricky moves and a bit of slippery wet rock to gain the middle snow slope at ~1770 m. We crossed this one successfully as well, but both of the snow slopes in this section were tricky to get off of due to moats at the upper edge - not nearly as bad as the first one though!

We roped up again for two pitches of 5.7 climbing that followed a crack just left of the deep groove visible from a distance. The climbing was made harder on the first pitch by boots and overnight packs, and required excavating a bit of dirt to find protection, but generally went very well on featured, compact rock. After these two pitches, we scrambled up over two more snow slopes to intersect the West Ridge, easily scrambled through the notch problem, and walked onto the summit. We arrived on the summit shortly after 7:00pm and decided that even with over an hour of light left it would make a fine place to bivvy.

We enjoyed gorgeous views in every direction while I built myself a small wind wall and then cooked dinner. Night fell as we were eating dinner and we were treated to a great lightning show from a large thunderstorm in the Stein/Duffey area. The Perseid meteor shower was supposed to be just wrapping up but we were too tired to spend much time watching for it and soon were trying to sleep. I say “trying” because we both had decided to forgo real sleeping bags in the interest



Our route up the North Buttress. Photo: Nick Gobin



Nick on the summit block of the Ossa Pinnacle. Photo: Artem Bylinskii

of saving weight. I had an overbag and Artem used the rope plus an emergency blanket. Both of us were chilly in the night but still managed to sleep some, especially in the morning when we somehow slept in until 8:00am!

After breakfast on August 14th, we rappelled down into the notch between the main summit and the “East Peak.” A short pitch of low-5th class took us out of the notch, after which we easily down-scrambled the East Ridge to snow. We got out crampons and used pickets to protect a simul-climb along the snow to the base of the Ossa Pinnacle because the East Face below was all steep blue ice that would be impossible to arrest on. After reaching the pinnacle, we ate and ditched our packs. Artem led the first 50 m pitch up the West Ridge on blocky terrain - mostly good rock but definitely some large loose pieces. I took the glory pitch of the final 30 m scramble to reach the summit block at 12:30pm. Wahoo!!! An actual First Ascent of something pointy!!

We left a pin on the summit to lead back to the top of the first pitch, then rappelled off back to the base and our packs. We ate more, rappelled again off a snow bollard down to a rock step below. We found a great horn and used a short tail of tat to sling it. The next rappel was a 60 m rope-stretcher down a wet slimy waterfall to the snow. I couldn't believe our luck and how easily it was going, which is probably Karma chose that moment to reach out and smack us. After Artem rappelled he pulled the red rope, and it was well and truly stuck! We tried pulling and flicking it every which way but it refused to budge an inch. We

played rock paper scissors to see who would go back up - fortunately I won. Artem disappointedly racked up and started climbing back up along the ropes, with prussiks for pro and occasional aid.

I went down to watch Artem from a sunny spot, since it was a slow process. It took Artem just over an hour to worm his way back up the wet slimy waterfall. Once at the top he determined that we had simply made a really dumb rookie mistake - we were supposed to pull green! The first yank on red got the knot wedged into the tat, which was tighter than normal since we were using the end of a roll). Artem added a maillon to the tat to be sure this time and rapped back down. We successfully pulled the rope this time and were back on our way after a 1.5 hour setback. While waiting for Artem, I admired the crack systems on the face of the pinnacle we had just climbed and its shorter sibling. There are some great lines there on solid-looking rock for someone who brings rock shoes and good protection.

We roped up and easily walked down the glacier around some large crevasses. Then a bit of tricky down-scrambling down the skier's right hand side of the slabs brought us back to the moraine by 7:30pm. It took us 4 hours from there to get back to the car, and we had it in the bag! The kitchen at the Shady Tree was closed so we just celebrated with a beer before heading home and to bed.

The weather was stellar all weekend - warm and sometimes too hot on the snow. There was plentiful water all the way up the North But-



Looking back at the pinnacles after a successful First Ascent.
Photo: Artem Bylinskii

truss of Ossa, which was really nice in the heat. We brought pins, nuts, tricams, and three cams, but only really needed the nuts and tricams. Pickets and crampons were essential for the descent off the east ridge, but overall I thought it was a very nice route to descend, instead of taking the West Ridge and the long way around the mountain. We both had great fun and were pleasantly surprised by how smoothly the trip went, even including the rap-pulling-fail!

I'm fairly sure the pinnacle was a real first ascent. I'm a bit more hesitant to claim the north buttress as a first ascent since others have climbed or scrambled similar routes with vague descriptions, but it's possible that it too was a first. In any case it's a very nice route and is the most direct route up Ossa with ~800 m of steep climbing/scrambling; the longest such route on the north side of the mountain.



Stoke is high after Artem joined me on the summit after a first ascent!
Photo: Artem Bylinskii

All The Light I Did See On Bugaboo Spire

David Hurley

Drive highway 95 to the town of Brisco BC and you're not likely to be impressed. A post office, a general store, and a few ramshackle houses are all you'll find. However, if for some strange reason you feel compelled to turn down the old dirt road to the Brisco lumber mill, and continue past, winding ever deeper into the Purcell Mountains, you'll eventually come to the doorstep of the Bugaboos.

There are a lot of reasons why I was drawn back to the Bugaboos. It could have been the unchecked tick list and relative ease of access to immaculate granite. Perhaps it was the climbing community found at Applebee Dome Campground. Or maybe I just wanted to use the John one more time while looking out at Bugaboo Spire. Whatever it was, it drew my brother Matthew and I, two good ol' boys from North Carolina, into its grips in late July 2016.

Our plan was ambitious. In 7 days, we would attempt to climb the NE Ridge of Bugaboo Spire, McTech Arête, Sunshine Crack, the West Ridge of Pigeon Spire, Paddle Flake Direct, and the coup d'état Beckey-Chouinard. We decided that the best route choice for the first day would be the NE Ridge of Bugaboo Spire. Less than a year before I had attempted this route only to bail on pitch 2 when my partner became ill, but this year I was determined to see it through.

At 4:00am on July 25, Matthew and I set out across the Crescent Glacier for Bugaboo Spire. Being well aware of the afternoon storms that grace this part of Canada we swung leads and moved efficiently up the NE Ridge. At 10:30am, we were standing on the North Summit. Despite our comfort with the exposure we both felt it prudent to rope up while moving from the North Summit to the South Summit

and the first rappel. It was now 11:30am and, as we had hoped, the skies were still blue and the afternoon storm build up had not yet started. By noon we had made 4 rappels to below the gendarme and the last barrier between us and the scramble down the Kain Route was an exposed knives edge traverse and one final rappel. Then I saw it.

Looking west out over the Howser Towers there was a black wall of clouds moving with ferocity towards us. Matthew and I met eyes and without words knew that with nowhere to hunker down we had to get to the last rappel, reach the scramble section, and ditch altitude in a hurry. You know the expression, 'it's your lucky day'? Well apparently our lucky day ended at noon and our nightmare subsequently began.

Before reaching the final rappel it began to hail and rain sideways, thunder was echoing off the cliffs, and in a strange turn of events I began to hear mosquitoes...everywhere. It didn't take long for me to realize it wasn't mosquitoes, it was the sound of my and Matthew's ice axe, cams, crampons, and everything else metal vibrating. We found a flattish spot on the ridge, threw everything metal to one side, and hunkered down in a thigh size crack expecting to be incinerated. Then as quickly as it began it was over.

The relief was only temporary as another storm was building over the Howsers. With no luck finding the rappel and only minutes remaining until the next bout of lightning, Matthew and I decided to backtrack along the ridge to where we had seen another climbing party.



Looking back across the Vowell Glacier towards Pigeon Spire and the Howser Towers at sunset. Photo: David Hurley

Below the gendarme we found a bit more refuge and had the company of two seasoned Bugaboo guides with radio contact to the Kain Hut. It felt as if things were on the upswing. Then the mosquitoes returned.

In what was becoming an all too familiar practice the 4 of us began ditching our metal gear to the far side of the ledge. Just as I was about to remove the final #1 cam from my right side gear loop the sky boomed and flashed in the same instant. At that moment an intense sting passed into my right leg sending my body skyward and leaving my extremities tingling. Upon landing I looked to Matthew and the 2 guides for comfort but instead found 3 ghostly faces staring back at me. Lightning had struck.

The remainder of the descent back to Applebee went smoothly. Even the notoriously dangerous Bugaboo Snowpatch Col paled in comparison to the danger we had just faced. In the next 5 days we were successful in climbing McTech Arête, the West Ridge of Pigeon Spire, and the much sought after Beckey-Chouinard, a route which had been on my tick list since first learning to trad climb. I hesitate to say that I was struck by lightning. It is more likely that some electricity associated with the flash bang arched into my cam. Regardless, that day reinforced the objective hazards associated with alpine climbing and made me realize that even if your plan is nearly perfectly executed you can still be at great risk. In the end I survived to climb another day, though I am still waiting on my lightning associated superpowers to appear.



Matthew and I on the summit of Beckey-Chouinard.

Exploring Bugaboo Provincial Park

Cora Skaien

August 20th-26th, 2016

Bugaboo Provincial Park is located in the Purcell Mountains of southwestern British Columbia, and it contains many granite peaks over 3,000 m and granite spires that entice climbers from around the world. Some classic routes are the West Ridge of Pigeon Spire (5.4), the Kain Route up Bugaboo Spire (5.6), and the classic, 22-pitch Beckey-Chouinard route on South Howser Tower (5.10). Many other exciting routes also exist (Snowpatch Spire, Pigeon Spire, Bugaboo Spire, Crescent Spire, Eastpost Spire), including the recently established 5.14 finger crack on Snowpatch Spire established by Will Stanhope and Matt Segal (see “Boys in the Bugs”, Reel Rock 11). It is truly an awe-inspiring network of glaciers and mountains that will take your breath away! Many of the most famous routes require you to ascend the fairly steep Snowpatch-Bugaboo Col, which can be exceedingly dangerous late in the season when not in condition. If the col is out, an alternative is to take Bugaboo Glacier up to Vowell Glacier, which takes much more time and can involve some fairly technical navigation across crevasses.

From August 20th-26th, 2016, Carly Peterson, Natalie Makepeace, Artem Babaian, Jeff Taylor and I headed to the Bugaboos for a week of alpine exploration. Leading up to the trip, there were a few concerns amongst our group. The week before we arrived, a guide scrambling up the famous Pigeon Spire West Ridge route (5.4) had a boulder crush his legs. Additionally, a professor from UBC had also been scrambling in the interior and had taken a fall, and did not survive. The risks were clearly outlined for us, making me more cautious than ever. On a more

personal note, I had been nervous about whether I could still go on the trip given my knee injury from the beginning of June. Carly was also recovering from her recent shoulder dislocation, and had not been climbing over the summer leading up to the trip while she tried to prevent the threatening re-dislocation, making her and I almost one functional human being when combined.

The weather forecast for the entire region was not ideal, but we decided to go straight to the Bugaboos, once we arrived in the area, and then stay there as long as weather permitted. The forecast called for a heavy storm on Monday, but Sunday was supposed to be nice, and the forecast for Tuesday onwards was changing every few hours, rendering the forecasts unreliable. We knew from others who had been going to the Bugaboos, that this season was typified by afternoon storms nearly every day around 2:00 pm, and that we were not likely to get a string of good weather. We had been hoping to meet up with Nicole Barrette, who was already up there with her father, for a day of adventuring on Monday, but the weather forecast suggested that we might not succeed, and ultimately, we did not.

We headed out from Vancouver early on Saturday morning (August 20th) and drove all the way to the Bugaboo Provincial Park parking lot, stopping for meals as needed. We arrived at 11pm and decided to hike in at night while the temperatures were not too high. We had several friends who had gone earlier in the month, and they suggested that doing the steep trail at temperatures of 30 C or higher was extremely



Assessing the condition of the col, with many falling rocks.

Photo: Cora Skaien

difficult and not something they recommended. Although Kain Hut is only 4.5 km from the parking lot (and Applebee Dome is 5.5 km from the parking lot), the first few kilometers are mostly flat, meaning that you gain nearly all of the 695 m of elevation to the hut in the last few kilometers, and an additional 235 m in the final kilometer to Applebee Dome (for a total of 930 m elevation gain in 5.5 km total, most of which occurs in the last 3.5 kms). We left the parking lot at midnight and arrived at the famous Kain Hut just before 3:00 am. Due to our exhaustion and the darkness, we decided to camp in the Boulders campsite (300 m beyond, and a bit beneath the Kain Hut) instead of Applebee on our first night. I was happy to report minimal pain from my knee and felt optimistic for the trip moving forward, but the trail was difficult!

Carly and I woke up around 7 am when the sun violently hit our tent. I opened my eyes abruptly, and was reminded of an eye injury I had incurred a few weeks before at a pool party where I fairly severely scratched my cornea. We ventured outside on 3.5 hours of sleep to view the glory of the Bugaboos for the first time, and it was a beautiful sight to see! We went back to sleep and woke up with the others at 9 am, my eye no longer causing me concern. We decided to head out for the day and inspect the col. If it was in good condition, we would go and do Pigeon Spire that day before the storms set in on Monday; we currently had a blue-bird sky day. As we approached the col, giant rocks began to fall down the boot path that people had been taking up. We decided that the col was objectively too dangerous, and we



Carly Peterson, Natalie Makepeace and Cora Skaien celebrating their first objective in the Bugaboos, Crescent Spire. Photo: Natalie Makepeace



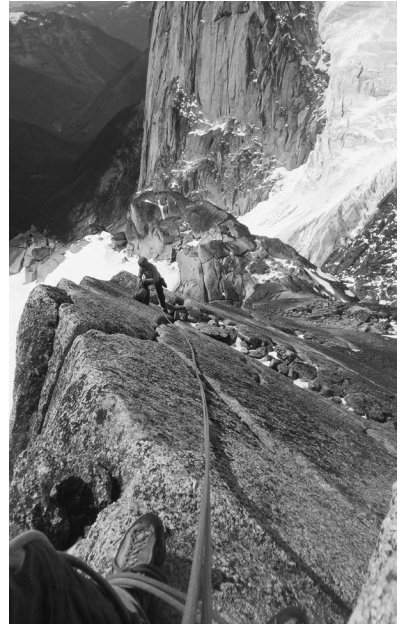
Snowpatch Spire and Pigeon Spire. Photo: Natalie Makepeace

chose a different objective instead that day. We would find out later that Nicole was almost taken out by one of the head sized rocks falling down the col, which caused many climbers staying at Applebee to decide to avoid the col for the rest of the season. When we talked to a few climbers later, they indicated that in the five days before we arrived, the col had gone very quickly from safe to very dangerous. We had just missed the window! Although, many people still did decide to do the col despite the risk.

We sought alternative objectives, but did not have a guidebook with us. There appeared to be an easy route up the col between Bugaboo Spire and Crescent Spire that was about 80-90 m high, and we decided to take that route despite not having any beta on it. From a distance, it looked very friendly. Once we arrived at the base, I instantly knew that I would not feel comfortable soloing the route, especially given my knee injury. Artem and Jeff were also a bit sketched out in their mountaineering boots at first, but decided to go for it anyway and proceeded with great skill. Carly and Natalie both gave the first few moves a go before deciding that it was a bit too sketchy for them to solo as well. We only had one 60 m glacier rope between the three of us, but it was decided that pitching it out was the safest option, with Natalie and Carly tying in 5 meters apart from each other on one end and me leading the pitches (I was the most comfortable with trad leading because of a summer's worth of practice, which injuries etc. had caused Carly and

Natalie to miss). Because we had to double the glacier rope (30 m total length now instead of 60 m), this restricted us to ~23 m pitches. Furthermore, we had only brought 6 cams with us for the trip because our hardest potential objective was the Kain Route (5.6), and we wanted to minimize weight. I soon realized I had failed to account for the fact that I would want 3 cams per anchor, and that I therefore could only place nuts on each pitch unless I was slinging a boulder for the anchor. If attempting Kain Route, I would recommend more cams.

The climbing was easy, and I placed one piece of protection every pitch (about every 15 m), and felt quite comfortable that I would not fall on the easy terrain. There was one point where I had clearly gone up the wrong crack system and encountered some 5.7-5.8 moves, which I was not super keen on given my limited gear placements. Instead, I traversed to the left, where the obviously easier route had been hiding from me, and had a scary moment while traversing slab where I knew that if I fell, it would be a ground fall. I made it across safely, built an anchor a few meters up and belayed up the others. It was clear



Left: Jeff Taylor belaying everyone across the crevasse on Bugaboo Glacier. Photo: Cora Skaien

Right: Natalie Makepeace preparing to climb up to Cora Skaien on the West Ridge of Pigeon Spire. Photo: Cora Skaien

that this was going to be a very slow process, but the exposure made us reluctant to solo the route, so we continued pitching it out. After one more pitch, Artem and Jeff had set a handline down for us with their 60 meter glacier rope from a bolted anchor at the top. We soloed a few meters to the handline and proceeded up with much better efficiency and then did the class 3 scramble to the top of Crescent Spire, where we first saw the beautiful views of Pigeon Spire and what lay beyond Snowpatch Spire. Later, we were to learn that the route we took up was in fact a 5.4, although it was commonly soloed. I felt less self-conscious about not wanting to solo it after finding this out.

We felt super jazzed about our first day out, and really excited to get on more objectives. Unfortunately, the weather was not in our favour and a snow/hail storm assaulted the area on Monday. We connected the vestibules of two of our tents so that we had an inter-vestibular space, and our doors opened to each other. We spent an entire day, nearly 8-10 hours, playing guitar and learning the lyrics and chords to such classic hits as Flight of the Conchords "Business Time", and Simon and Garfunkel's "Cecilia". These two songs were frequently belted out over the course of the trip. We were happy to have stayed in the Boulders campsite, where we were relatively sheltered from the storm. On Applebee, some very cold climbers we met later reported driving snow, hail, and strong winds.

On Tuesday, the forecast was for intermittent rain and things were pretty wet still, so we decided to relocate camp to Applebee and boulder around Applebee for the day. There were some fun crack and slab problems, and I sat around and played my ukulele.

The forecast suggested that Wednesday was going to be a beautiful day, with the weather deteriorating in the days following. We decided to get our alpine start and be out of camp shortly after 4 am to cross the Bugaboo Glacier and make our attempt up Pigeon Spire (West Ridge, 5.4). We crossed the glacier as a rope team of five, and intended to be two independent groups farther up the route. Getting onto the glacier posed a few problems initially, and involved some class 4 scrambling. Shortly before we stepped onto the glacier, while crossing a boulder field, a rogue boulder decided to come down and crush Carly's hand. We did not find out about this until a few hours later, when it was determined that her finger was quite possibly broken, and that Carly was in a considerable amount of pain. Eventually she indicated that her

finger hurt, and we found a “Fruit Source” fruit bar in one of our bags to use as a finger splint, giving her a fruit bar finger. Once we were on the glacier, we also had a lot of fun placing protection (ice screws) as we descended onto an ice bridge in a crevasse and topped out on the other side. Crossing the glacier, and seeing all of the beautiful peaks around me was honestly the highlight of the trip! The beauty was awe-inspiring.

We reached the base of Pigeon Spire to do the West Ridge (5.4), found the “world’s most picturesque outhouse”, and began our journey up. Because of Carly’s extremely unfortunate finger injury, she realized that she would not be able to continue. We were very sad about this, as we knew how excited she was for this specific route. Most of the 5.4 route is class 4 and 5 scrambling, with a single pitch of 5.4. However, the exposure is very serious, and if you make a bad step and take a fall, you could easily fall hundreds of meters. I quickly realized that the conservative mountaineer in me was not going to be comfortable soloing this route. Artem and Jeff were happy to solo and began on their journey safely, while Natalie and I weighed our options without Carly. We decided that we would pitch out the first steep section that we reached to feel out the route, and then solo or simul-climb afterwards. Because the moves were not very technical, I was quite happy to lead the routes, but was not comfortable soloing. The first pitch was a slabby face with a few cracks. Immediately after this into the next section is a squeeze chimney, which we decided to pitch out again after much discussion. Because we were unsure of the route, each transition was often accompanied by 30-45 minutes of discussion regarding whether or not to continue, or to head back. The squeeze chimney was definitely the hardest part of the portion of the route that we did, and the scrambling became much easier after this. We made it as far as we could before our turn around time of 2:00 pm with our painfully short 25 m pitches (same 60 m glacier rope, doubled up), shortly beneath the first false summit, which is where we also happened to meet up with Jeff and Artem on their descent. There were rap rings just above the squeeze chimney, and we tied two 60 m ropes together to rappel nearly to the bottom of the slabby section with the cracks. Unfortunately, the rope got horrendously stuck. Natalie and I tried for a long time to loosen it, but could not. At this stage, I was very weak from lack of food and the cold, and did not have the coordination to safely get the rope un-stuck. Luckily, Jeff was able to climb up and free the rope

(which required him to go all the way back to the top).

We descended the glaciers as a group of five, the same way we had come up. We had to place protection through the crevasse once again on our way down, and found a rap station for the section that we had scrambled up on our way in. We made it back to camp about 45 minutes after sunset, made a late dinner and went to bed. The next day, Artem and Jeff had plans to do McTech Arete (5.10a) if the weather cooperated, and given Carly's finger injury, us girls were considering going up Eastpost Spire via the class 4 scramble route.

Unexpectedly, I woke up at 4 am (Wednesday) in a large amount of excruciating pain in my eyeball. I started popping ibuprofen, hoping it would dull the pain. I had noticed the day before that my SPF 60 sunscreen had sweated into my eyes while crossing the glacier, and it had irritated my eye, but I assumed that the pain would reduce while I was sleeping. Was I ever wrong! I made my way to the water faucet and tried to flush my eye with no success (Note: do not do this!! There could be amoebas in the water if not sterilized which can worsen the situation!). I then woke up Carly saying that I might need to go to the hospital. My eye was in a lot of pain and I had already lost 50% of my vision in that eye. Carly helped me sterilize water, and proceeded to flush my eye with the sterilized water. Soon after, some kind strangers offered some saline solution, and we alternated flushing and sterilizing my eye with the boiled (and subsequently cooled) water and saline solution. Two other nice strangers provided allergy eye drops. Eventually,



Jeff Taylor summiting the West Ridge of Pigeon Spire.

Photo: Artem Babaian

we bandaged my eye with gauze and put sunglasses and a hat on me, and I accepted my fate of popping 400-600 mg of ibuprofen every 2-3 hours to simply dull the pain to a barely tolerable level while laying in the tent. Carly was also with me in the tent, due to her finger injury, and we convalesced while Natalie scrambled up Eastpost Spire, and Jeff and Artem explored some routes not in the guidebook (the weather was on and off rain, so they did not attempt McTech Arete in the end). Jeff and Artem ended up on some fairly interesting loose routes, and decided to name them in honour of Carly and I: Fruit Fingers (5.9) and Sunscreen in my Eye (5.6R). These climbs appeared to have some sketchy rock and pro.

I ventured out of my tent and was fortunate enough to come across a nice European couple who graciously donated some antibiotic eye drops to me that they had been carrying in case of eye infection. I began using these religiously, and 6-8 hours later, the pain began to subside. I was hopeful that the pain might reduce enough for me to hike out Thursday morning, and then we would head to the hospital. I was right! Carly and I headed down early because my eye was still bandaged, and my depth perception was reduced. We made great time, and



Fruit Fingers (5.9) and Sunscreen in my Eye (5.6 R) established by Artem Babaian and Jeff Taylor on the East portion of Crescent Spire.

Photo: Artem Babaian

eventually everyone else met us in the parking lot, and we headed out early to get me to the hospital in Golden. There, they were concerned that it might have been ocular herpes, an affliction that can lead to blindness. Therefore, we had to cut the trip short and drive all the way to Vancouver (the nearest ophthalmologist) to have my eye checked. I was dropped off at 3:30 am at the hospital and was scheduled for an emergency appointment early the next day (Saturday). Good news in the end: not ocular herpes! And eventually the pain, swelling and redness subsided, and my vision nearly fully recovered.

I was sad that I made my group leave early, and I was sad that Carly's finger prevented her from additional adventures. However, I had such an amazing week in one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen, and had such a great time with the amazing company that the group was! I think we all had a fantastic time, and know that we have to return again in the future to conquer bigger objectives in less injured states.

Mt. Robson

Aug 25-27, 2015

Nick Matwyuk

Mt. Robson, “The King”. No introduction is really required. It is the tallest mountain in the North American Rockies at 3954m. As I am from Prince George, the Rockies were my “playground”. My dad and I had gone on numerous trips to Mt. Robson during my youth. However, our trips were confined to hiking and skiing. Growing up, I was never interested in technical climbing and had dismissed wanting to actually climb Mt. Robson.

Fast forward a number of years and I feel technically competent for general mountaineering. Ice climbing was still something I hadn’t done. Thankfully, my wife, Lena Rowat, had done some in the past. I had been laid off from work, so I finally had some free time. Lena and I headed out on a couple of month long road trips. One of them took us to the Rockies where we climbed Castle Mountain by the Brewer’s Buttress route as well as doing some cragging and mountain biking in Canmore. We even got to meet up with Phil Tomlinson and Christine (his gf) for a fun day of multi-pitch climbing on side by side routes. Soon the weather seemed to align and we were stoked on Robson.

Sorting gear at our friend’s place, we borrowed a set of ice tools as well as some more ice screws. We also printed out information regarding the Patterson Spur approach route up the south side of Mt. Robson. It would allow a shorter and less technical approach to the col between Robson and Resplendent. After driving to the trailhead, we shouldered our packs and rode our mountain bikes to Kinney Lake on the beautiful trail with views of Robson. We spent the night near Kinney Lake as it would soon be dark. While I set up camp, Lena scouted ahead to find the turnoff to the Patterson Spur route. It is hidden at

the beginning for liability reasons. Once on the trail, though, there is adequate flagging and the trail bed is starting to form from traffic.

With a not so early start the next day, we left our bikes stashed and hiked the wonderful trail. It was in quite good condition with the exception of a couple of creek bed / mini landslide areas. After exiting the forest, you get views of Robson and Resplendent as you walk along gravel beds. There are a couple of creek crossings which can be exciting depending on the time of the year. From there you ascend up a headwall with krumholtz. We were surprised at the condition of the trail here. Much work has been done to make it a pleasant experience. Elevation is gained quickly and soon we were walking on glacial polished slabs, marveling at the views. We had a good view of the “yellow band” which is a rock band around Robson which is another alternate approach. It did not look appealing.

There are some creeks to cross as well as some tarns at a flat spot on the slabs. This would make a good campsite for summiting Resplendent while having more shelter and running water. After the slabs you ascend the Patterson Spur proper. It is a bit of a jumble of Rockies choss but not too bad. There are cairns marking a way, but there are lots of ways and most don't seem too bad. You gain elevation quickly and soon we were at the col. It was only midafternoon. We were shocked at the efficiency of the route. At this point, though, Lena was suffering from altitude sickness. We set up camp and soaked in the views. The weather had been stellar the whole day and the position of our camp at the col was second to none. There was even a group of 2 climbing the Kain Face as we sat in camp. Lena didn't eat dinner and just went straight to bed. We decided not to set an early alarm and just wait and see how she felt in



Lena racking up at the base of the Kain Face with Resplendent in the background. Photo: Nick Matwyuk

the morning.

Waking up at 6:00am, Lena felt fine. I was relieved and excited that we'd be able to give Mt. Robson a chance. Initially, I was worried about starting late, but as the route is out of the sun and there were no cornices above the face, I felt fine with the timing. The start of the route goes up from the col on some scrambling up to 4th class on decent rock. There is some exposure and the scrambling is pretty fun. We left the ridge too early and got onto the snow/ice. By doing this we got onto a steep ice face. In hindsight, it is best to stay on the ridge for as long as you can before dropping onto the snow. Our gear for this route had the leader using ice tools and the follower using CAMP Nano ice axes. Lena had aluminum crampons and I had steel crampons. As she is more experienced, on ice I let her lead. She took off with the ice tools and it didn't take long before I felt a tug on the rope.

We only had 1 x 60m, 7.5mm rope to save weight. As I got out of my belay spot and near the ice face I realized that it was a downwards traverse. Not exactly the best thing for following. I nervously started down the steep face while taking numerous swings to dig in the CAMP Nanos. At each stance, I would look down at the next ice screw and think of the pendulum that I would take if I fell. Upon reaching an ice screw, there was a brief moment of relief before I realized I had to take out the ice screw. As each screw is screwed into the ice, it needs to be unscrewed before moving on. This unscrewing is simple in nature, but scary because you should really unclip the screw from the rope first before unscrewing it. As I was now hanging off of one ice axe, I left the screw clipped in for as long as I could before the sling became a tangled mess. I then unclipped it and unscrewed the rest of the screw. Now I was set up for another terrifying pendulum before the next screw. Thankfully, nothing exciting happened and soon I joined Lena at her belay.

After that "optional" ice face, we headed out onto the snow slope towards the Kain face. There were crevasses here and there, but nothing significant. We were roped up though for safety. At the base of the face, there was a bergschrund to cross which wasn't too difficult. I belayed while Lena led all 4 pitches. It sure was exhilarating being up on the face with tremendous views. I had never ice climbed before, so that was a great experience. I did have trust in ice screws, though, and the ice itself was perfect for climbing.

We came across the tracks of the others on top of the face. They turned around before crossing the ridge feature to get to the South face. I was skeptical myself, but figured that we should try because we were there. I was concerned about avalanches or a cornice failure. While getting belayed out, I was able to find ice screw placements. This comforted me, and soon we were at the base of the South face. We simul-climbed the face with me in the lead and with the tools. This was fantastic. It is such a great difference to have proper ice tools. There were a couple of bulges which seemed more technical, so I put in ice screws.

When we topped out on the south face, we were still a little ways from the true summit. It was starting to get late, but after reasoning that we'd be going down in the dark anyway, we decided to press on. The weather had continued to be great and we had views all around, including down the steep north face toward Berg Lake. We took a summit picture before heading down. We simul-downclimbed the South face and belayed across the ridge again. At the top of the Kain Face, we set up the first rappel as a snow/ice bollard which we backed up with an ice axe at the start. The sun had set by this point. So, after putting all of our clothing on, we started the rappels. I would go down first, secure myself with a screw, clear away snow to solid ice, delicately place a v-thread, and set up the next rappel. As we only had 1 x 60m rope we did something like 9 rappels. It was surreal to be hanging out in space on an ice face with just the bubble of your headlamp and the glow of the stars. I got pretty good at making v-threads, although the further down the face we went, the more snow/ice I had to chop away to get to the solid ice. Luckily, we had no stuck ropes!



Views from the top of the South Face looking back down the ridge.
Photo: Nick Matwyuk

After clearing the bergschrund, we started our walk across the crevassed glacier to the ridge. It is here where we saw the Northern Lights. Oh my, what a display. It was the best either of us had ever seen. It filled a full quadrant of the sky from the horizon to the top of the sky and East to West. There were all sorts of colours, from greens and yellows to purples. I wanted to take my camera out, but didn't want to use any extra energy in case we ran into troubles later on. We did take a couple of breaks to view the display, though.

To gain the ridge, we decided to take the ice slope again, as it was dark and we knew that way worked. Lena led the pitch and I followed. It was much easier being the follower this time. Once back on the rock ridge we ran into a guide and his client from Squamish. It was 2:00am and they were starting up. Later they would report that the conditions were excellent on the route with bucket steps the whole way. Back at our campsite, we ate the dinner that Lena had not eaten the previous night and then promptly fell asleep.

We didn't sleep in much due to the powerful sun, but had a lazier morning as we packed up and soaked in the last of the views from the col. The trip down was uneventful but definitely cemented the fact that the Patterson Spur route is a great addition to Mt. Robson. Once at Kinney Lake, we went for a swim while taking in views of Whitehorn Mountain. Then we hopped on our mountain bikes and cruised back to the parking lot. Bikes are definitely worth it, as the trail is not so steep that you have to walk them much on the way up. Just be careful of pedestrians, as they have the right of way.

We could not have asked for a better trip. Everything worked out perfectly. It helped that we were based out of Canmore and that we were able to use the Patterson Spur. Now that I see that access, I would like to go back there again. Maybe with skis next time...



Nicholas Matwyuk

Summit Shot! Photo: Nick Matwyuk

The Meager Obelisk

Lea Zhecheva

How it started: “Weekend plans?” – Nick Matwyuk

Some email faff, obsessive weather monitoring and a trip change later, we were in downtown picking up Ben Singleton-Polster from work. I was really excited. My memories of Harrison Hut thus far only included rain, deluge, more rain, a helicopter and stories that most people thought I was making up. We parked at the usual spot, took the temporary trail (which is marked by four large signs, and ample flagging that even says ‘TRAIL’ on it, in case one is somehow confused), and then rejoined the old trail. I promptly sank into a mud hole of which I was really hopeful there would no photographic evidence of. But, what are friends for? To take pictures of you after ascertaining that you are not about to imminently die and then give you a hand out of the muddy hole.

We hiked to the end of the logging road where we bivied. It was an amazing place to sleep until it started to rain. This was kind of expected, albeit optimistically unhelped for, and we ran (Nick), walked (Ben), and stumbled (Lea), in various states of awokeness to the trees just downhill where we slept in various configurations trying to lie on the closest we could get to flat ground. The moon was as bright as my headlamp.

The next morning we got to the hut, admired the outhouse, had second breakfast or was it elevenses (at ten) and set off for the Obelisk.

The first pitch was decently terrifying. Nick didn’t seem fazed and lead it somehow, finding good placements in an almost vertical choss wall. To me it already seemed ominous when Nick was a shade less

than flying up it with ease. Ben and I spent most of our time hiding behind this rock that thankfully deflected all the toaster and shotput sized rocks coming down while Nick was leading (thank you Nick, thank you giant rock, thank you Nick again). Nick and Ben seemed fairly untroubled by the chossiness of all this, so I just sort of assumed this must be what alpine climbing is like, and that I'd better just get used to it. Nick made me feel better about the whole thing later when he said it's the most heinous choss he's ever had to deal with. Then Ben seconded it easily, and I cowered behind the rock alone. Then I seconded it. There's something really nerve wracking about getting your hopes up thinking that that solid looking boulder ahead will be a good hand hold, testing it, and having it crush your dreams as it comes down, or comes apart, or wiggles or otherwise inspires fear. The rational part of me knew I just had to exert the minimal amount of force as equally distributed as possible across all my appendages in order to move up. I wished I had more appendages. Or less force to exert. I think that pitch is the closest I've ever come to crying on a trip – almost, in happiness every time I got to a piece of rock that didn't give away, and almost, in terror every time it did.

I then led the second pitch – later dubbed the choss-arête. It was a short downclimb, followed by a semi-graceful crabwalk across an arête with nice views of the various rock avalanches that were falling down around us. I inwardly thanked Nick's route-finding again, since it seemed like past VOCers had rappelled down some part of this crumbling amphitheater to get to the Obelisk instead of coming up



Lea mid mud-extrication. Photo: Ben Singleton-Polster

the valley from below like we did.

Nick then graciously lead the 3rd and 4th pitches to the top. They were pretty glorious cracks and totally deserve to be climbed more. At one point you could see right through the Obelisk! It was kind of amazing being at the top, to say the least, and being so happy to have made it totally overshadowed all the terror of the first 2 pitches. No falls were had, and the rappel down was nicely uneventful. We searched a bit for the summit register as we had been told that the first ascensionists that there was one but we found none. We had an awesome dinner of 12pack-hot-dogs (Nick), salmon-cheese wrap #3 (Lea), and salty snacks (Ben).

The next day I took sunrise pictures, enjoyed being able to see around the hut, and went back to bed while Nick and Ben scouted the route to Overseer. I think the guidebook was really ambitious in its time estimations but they had a fun morning hike either way. Then we hiked down leisurely, ate all the black huckleberries, blueberries, thimbleberries, raspberries, and salmon berries we could get, contemplated the advertised “HOT SEX” at the hot springs, washed (purposefully) in Pika Creek in an attempt to smell better, agreed signage for the



Left: Nick climbing the obelisk, post chossy approach pitches. Photo: Lea Zhecheva

Right: Group semi-summit photo heading home. Photo: Nick Matwyuk

Obelisk lookout would be a great mission, and looked at mountains.

Right as we arrived at the highly promoted Temporary Bypass Trail, we saw Roland and Co. below where the new parking lot is being constructed. This was amazing and probably the greatest thing that could have happened at the time because the temporary bypass trail is as awful to walk as it is well signed, and Roland happened to be about to drive back to the trailhead. He even gave us a ride in the Jeep despite our aromatic presence, questioning the legal seat limit. It was an awesome trip all around.

An Appetite for the Alpine: Alpine Skills Course 2016

Kevin Boland

June 17-19/2016

Trail Mates: Sam McKoy, Artem Babaian, Martin Cermak, Kasia Celler, Else Bosman, Kelsey Miller, Luca Malaguti

What am I getting into? Everyone who steps into the wild likely asks this same question. Donning a pair of boots and taking that first step out the door, whether it be in youth or just a new experience, there is no other feeling. For me specifically, it was a blend of the thrill of adventure, and how in the hell did I get roped (figuratively and literally) into this!? A wise man once told me, all you can do is decide what to do with the time that is given to you. And thus, I am alive, feeling good, and better off for it.

Day 1:

The fun begins with a nice long drive (5:30 am start) up through Pemberton and the gorgeous Coast Mountains. Massive monuments of batholith granite tower over you on both sides. All blanketed in huge swathes of temperate rainforest overshadowed by some of the largest icefields in the world. Here you can treat yourself to the last vestiges of civilization and a good, hot Mount Currie Coffee brew before the wilderness. Driving just outside of the town along Highway 99 you reach the trailhead, seal up your gaiters, swing your pack over your shoulders, and start the long march. You find yourself immersed in a forest of growth and regrowth, mud and stone, and clear blue skies. Being new to the whole “let’s get out into the mountains and do stuff with really big backpacks” idea, this day was filled with character

building for myself. Through hours of ups and downs, I learned the ins and outs of traversing long distances over different terrain (and remembering to breathe!). As we ascended the final snowy ridge, I was glad to have Luca humming encouragingly behind me. If I recall correctly, a beautiful duet rendition of Ain't No Sunshine was sung aloud (my musicianship + his Italian vibrato = \$\$\$). We took a short break, lashed our climbing gear on, and took a direct route up to Vantage Peak. Here we conferred with Sam about basic alpinism safety, rope work, and rappelling. All of this, of course, was done with the stunning background that is Mount Joffre, Matier, Howard, and the like. One look, and I knew I was in the right place, doing something I loved with all the past hours of hardship forgotten. I even got the chance to bring out my nerdy, geologic side! It was then time to hop down into the valley, and pitch the shelters next to the babbling glacier stream and inhale a good meal. I got to know the crew better and watched as the sunlight reflection ran up the glacier in a softened hue of red. Thoughts of tomorrow's tiresome tasks were furthest from my mind as I dwindled on my place in this ancient bowl of granite. So ended my first day of alpinism.



The team on Vantage Peak.
Photo: Sam McKoy

Day 2:

Surprise! 4 am comes up really fast when you're having fun! Through my yawns, I just had to remember that it's all part of the experience. So I didn't let it interfere, especially when a big bowl of oatmeal with a pound of butter came my way. Today was the day when all doubts were cast aside, and it was either nut up or shut up. At this point, I should shout out to Kelsey (the most amazing, wonderful, gem of a being) who, graciously, denied my offer of service and hauled our stuff up the whole day. Kudos Kelsey, kudos to you!

Hiking up to the toe of the glacier, with the sun glinting off the snow and all that stuff, we went over key safety rules, general glacier travel manoeuvres, strapped on crampons (embarrassing moment considering I had never done it), roped up and started kicking steps. Or at least, Sam did while I just followed his lead. With every step came the empowerment of summiting a life goal. Of course, there was the occasional scare of falling into a crevasse covered by a snow bridge (but I'm visually impaired, so I wouldn't see it coming anyway. HA). Luckily, Sam knew what he was doing and expertly aligned us to safely ascend the rest of the Twin One glacier. I'll remember that for next time!

You know that feeling you get when you get your first A on a paper, or you're finally strong enough to beat your older sibling? That deep emotion centered within, and the moment of adrenaline-filled accomplishment that washes over you. Well once on top of a glacier, you're suddenly not cold! That feeling of smallness within the big world falls away in the presence of your existence on top of that monstrous mountain. Don't seek the mountains just for adventure. If you find yourself on top of the world, seek the knowledge that that lonely mountain has to offer to you.



Left: Ice Climbing on the Glacier. Photo: Sam McKoy

Right: Learning how to build an anchor. Photo: Sam McKoy

Over lunch, as expected, the weather took a turn for the worst. Thus, while admiring the incoming weather and surrounding landscape, we discussed hypothetical routes for summiting Mount Howard. It was then time to descend, but not without some shenanigans. We had a brief snowball fight with some hilariously crude jokes being thrown around. Before we returned to camp, we opted to check out some of the open air ice formations at the toe of the glacier. Here we tried our luck with ice screws and techniques for ice climbing. I think I'll stick with my feet on solid ground for now, though!

At this point it was raining, which was fine until it took forever for our water to boil for dinner. Mother Nature was taking our last night very seriously, as it continued to bucket water while the four soaked lads huddled under a very small tarp to inhale our pasta in a delicious butter, sausage and pesto sauce. We were all in our tents by 8 pm trying to warm up and dry our clothing. Again, I had to remind myself it's all part of building character, and it makes for a better story. That night, I got a solid 10 hours sleep.

Day 3:

Thankfully, we got to sleep in a bit this morning (7:30 am), but getting up early was still really nice in such a place. This morning was filled with technical talk on building snow anchors with pickets, ratchets, z-pulleys for crevasse rescue and self-arresting. The self-arresting just ended up being a giant snow slide mixed with snowballs, and us hooligans trying to toss each other off the slope. Our boots were soaked and heavy, but our moods were certainly not laden down. With some practice maybe I'll remember all of it, but I can say that what I did retain will forever be with me (on the mountain, camping, etc...). I am so thankful to have had the time, and the people to bring me to such a place and spend their precious time teaching a novice like me. I hope I wasn't too much of a nuisance...

As we arrived back at camp, the weather was starting to lift and spots of blue hope appeared above us. We packed up our gear and tents and began the long march back. Half of it was just glissading down the snowy ridges which was incredibly delightful. Nature threw us some last curve balls with some rain and more mud, but we troopers made it back to the highway without fault. I've always been taught to finish strong no matter what, and thus did my best to keep up (I even beat

my roommate back! Ha!). We changed out of our gear and drove back to Pemberton where we said our goodbyes and big thanks to Sam for taking us out and spreading his wealth of knowledge. The experience bestowed on me will not be forgotten. It was then a straight shoot toward Squamish where we stopped at Mags99 Cantina for some obnoxiously large and delicious burritos. Seriously, go there! It's literally the best things in life reincarnated.

We said our goodbyes and headed back to Vancouver. In the meantime, I rode on a wave of revelation all the way home and collapsed into bed. I am content knowing that I had a weekend like none I'd ever had before. But as always, it was the people that made it so memorable and for that I will always be grateful. Thank you Artem, et al. for giving me this opportunity and bearing with me. And a huge embrace for the others who were there next to me every step of the way. Don't be strangers!

Kevin Out!



Top: Ascending to Vantage Peak. Photo: Sam McKoy

Bottom: How good are these Z-pulleys? Photo: Sam McKoy

The Jervis Expedition: Three Weeks of Kayak-Accessed Mountaineering

Spencer Rasmussen

I know this is kind of a big deal to say, but I have to call it as I see it right now: I'm not convinced we can pull off the eastern half of this route. I don't think it can be done in the summer without some significant 4th class climbing, and the 'valley bottom bail option' isn't really an option... I'm not really sure where this leaves us. Let's chat in the morning.

This message from Stuart arrives in my inbox three days before our planned departure. Our route seems harder each time we look at it, and our doubt is beginning to overcome our bravado.

~

I was combing Google Earth for long trip ideas. Inspired by John Clarke and John Baldwin's Tahumming traverse and recent kayak-accessed VOC ski expeditions, my attention focused on winding alpine ridges within striking distance of tidewater. I noticed a horseshoe of glaciers and peaks at the head of Jervis Inlet, 100 km north of Vancouver on Shíshálh Nation territory. I dubbed the route the "Skwawka River Horseshoe," and a plan emerged: kayak 72 km up Jervis Inlet and ski 77 km to encircle the entire Skwawka drainage before paddling back. Three weeks, self-supported. No helicopters, no planes, no food drops.

I pitched the idea to Stuart Higgs. Stuart is a rare and special person: someone whose judgement is good enough that I trust his decisions in the mountains, but not smart enough to realize this is a dumb idea. He jumped at the idea. The potential of funding from the Neil Mackenzie Memorial Fund made the trip financially possible. Fortunately our application was selected, and our submission to Mountain Equipment

Co-op's Expedition Fund was also successful. Stuart's work situation forced us to change to an August trip, which meant swapping skis for mountaineering boots, but it didn't matter, we were going to the Skwawka!

The western half of our proposed horseshoe followed the North Powell Divide, a John Clarke route from 1984 that has been repeated at least twice using food drops and float planes to access the ridge. Returning to our kayaks on the east side of the Skwawka River would require navigating the challenging east ridge from Little Toba Peak to Mt Victoria - a traverse that has likely never been travelled.

Despite reaching out to logging companies, searching through old journals, and combing online trip reports, we found little information about our route. Google Earth was our primary guide, so we spent hours huddled over laptops studying the terrain.

The longer we looked, the more intimidated we became. The route seemed long and committing, we would be carrying two weeks of food, and should we run into an impassable crux, bail options seemed desperate. Things would be much more reasonable if we could rely on old logging roads in the Skwawka Valley. But their unknown condition, kilometers of valley-bottom brush, and potentially missing bridges pushed us to stay in the alpine. Therefore, our plan was to finish the western half fast enough to turn around and retrace our steps back to the kayaks if any obstacle on the eastern half blocked our way. But this means having to travel the North Powell Divide faster than any party before us. On top of that, we would have to bushwhack from sea level and complete it self-supported.



Spencer crossing a tarn below Mt Alfred. Photo: Stuart Higgs

With doubts fresh in our minds, we piled into a borrowed car and caught the ferry to Egmont. Hannah - Stuart's girlfriend - had taken 'significant other' to the next level, and had come almost directly from her night shift to be our shuttle driver: truly heroic. Three weeks of food and mountaineering gear fit easier than expected in our kayaks, and we were soon on our way. Clouds filled the inlet for our three-day paddle, and the water was mostly calm. I had heard so much about the nasty conditions supposedly common to BC's fjords. Unfortunately, the internal baffles on my sleeping pad had started ripping, which caused a line of micro-leaks. I can never really patch them properly so I knew I'd spend the rest of the trip sleeping on a mostly deflated pad. Three days later, we arrived at the head of the inlet.

The next morning we fuffed with gear and headed toward Lansmann Cr. It was high tide, a very welcome elevation bonus for climbing into the alpine. Maybe our trip wasn't fully self-propelled after all? We knew the large bridges at the head of the inlet were in, but almost nothing else. Quickly, the roads closed in with alder. There is no real skill required for this sort of bushwhacking, but you have to be sufferfest-ready. Close your eyes, keep walking and let a thousand branches whip your flesh. We knew that we may not complete a new traverse, but at least we'd found a new BDSM sub-genre.

In the late afternoon, the road ran out. The next kilometre took us 2.5 hours. The day was fading and so were we. But wait, there was flagging tape ahead of us! "Road Centre Line," it read. It appeared that our 400 m/h bushwhacking route might be a nice new logging road next year. Not the kind of motivation we needed... We eventually reconnected with a higher logging road and made camp on an old bridge.



Mt Alfred selfie.
Photo: Stuart Higgs.

The remainder of the road took us the next morning, and we were happy to find a trail continuing up the valley. Not one, however, made by humans. There were claw marks on the logs, and Stuart spotted hair on a branch. Grizzly, he said. We saw scat every ten minutes and put our hands close to feel if it was still warm. It never was, so we continued. Pepper spray was in the front pocket, and we yelled continuously to announce our arrival to our furry hosts.

We lost the Lansmann Cr. Bear Highway, and resorted to pulling ourselves up the slope using blueberry branches. After another camp and a surprisingly craggy forested ridge line southwest of Lansmann Peak, we were finally in the alpine. We did a bit of scrambling and pitched the tent on the glacier. It had been three days since we left the kayaks and we were hoping to complete the first half of the route in six. As we were in dire need of rest, we decided to take the next day easy. Or course we couldn't resist climbing Mount Alfred though. A perfect little snow climb on its west face and we were on top. We could see Jarvis, our bushwhacking hell, and even Mount Waddington to the far north. Mount Albert looked stunning across the inlet. Our suffering was all forgotten, and we basked in the views.

We scrambled down rock to the southeast. Back at camp, we decided to continue on the route. It was mostly downhill anyway, so that's basically like resting, right?

The descent northwest of Alfred proved to be a steep mix of heather, waterfalls and cliffs. We abandoned our fantasy of camping on the divide to the north that night, and set up the tent on a slanted rock slab mid-slope. I anchored the tent to a rock horn so we wouldn't slide off during the night. Stuart secured his thermarest inside with slings.

We finished the descent the next morning, and, a bit more bushwhacking later, we were on the divide. We made camp early and finally took a break during daylight hours.

By now, we were badly behind schedule, and our last hope for completing the west half on time was to fly along the divide. The terrain, however, had other plans for us, and eleven days of food didn't really feel much lighter than fifteen. This part of the route is described in John Baldwin's article "Great Skyline Traverses of the Coast Mountains", and I had read it dozens of times. I guess the line "this is gen-

eral mountaineering, not backpacking” never really stuck. On our sixth day, we had made less than half the distance we needed to go if we were going to get back on track.

The east half of the route came into better view as we travelled along the western divide. The route had looked tough on Google Earth, but now it looked even harder. Fourth class seemed like optimism, and it looked like a great place to get into trouble.

Some thinking happened: if we were to continue, we would arrive at the unknown east half with, at best, exactly half our food. Keep going past that, and bailing would mean an unknown bush thrash, days retracing our steps on empty stomachs or bankruptcy by helicopter.

For both Stuart and me, this was our first funded trip, and somehow that complicated decision making. The alpine community had supported us to try this route because they wanted to know if it can be done. We needed to give it our all. But for every person who was waiting to hear if the route would go, we knew there were far more waiting for us to come home safe.

It was decided: we would be turning around.

We continued on the ridge for another day, but truth be told, stoke was dangerously low. The bugs, even in the in alpine, were ferocious. Mosquitoes, gnats, midges, horseflies, no-see-ums... They flew in clusters so thick that the air turned black, like a plague summoned by the Lord.



Stuart in the thick of it, descending Mt Alfred. Photo: Spencer Rasmussen

Our new plan was to make it as far along the ridge as we could before turning around. Or, in other words, to carry heavy packs along rough terrain, then retrace every step. We would push it as far as possible.

“Maybe we should just turn around now and use the rest of our food to climb Albert.” I was not being serious. Not even slightly.

“Um, ya!” Apparently Stuart was. His eyes lit up, and he refilled with stoke that had been slowly draining from him.

Albert had caught our attention during our paddle approach, but since it wasn't on our route, we hadn't researched it and knew nothing about the access or terrain. We dimly remembered seeing a logging road switchbacking up its flank on the north side of the inlet. We reasoned that the road must reach the water somewhere, so we would just kayak until we found it, then follow it to the alpine. After a quick study of the map, we snapped a selfie at our far-point on the divide and started back toward the kayaks.

We managed to shave two days off our return trip. Keen to avoid the worst bushwhacking in Lansmann Creek, we crossed the bridge where we had camped on the way up. We were gambling that the logging road on the south side of the creek continued and that it was possible to recross to the north near the inlet. The bridge was out when we hit Jervis, but fording Lansmann Cr. was easy and the gamble paid off.

We decided the next day would be a rest day when we returned to the kayaks. Stuart's feet were destroyed. He seemed more excited to reunite with his sandals than with his girlfriend.

That evening, a helicopter arrived and hovered above the inlet. What the heck? After all our suffering with a chopper, now we are watching one being used to... drop a crab trap. Someone stepped out onto the chopper's rails, opened the gear hatch, and threw the trap into the sea.

The billionaires returned the next day and landed on the beach. They convinced the yachters staying at the small nearby dock to retrieve the trap with their zodiac.

When they pulled it up, approximately \$10,000 in flight time later, our airborne friends realized they had bought the wrong trap. It was, in fact, for prawns, and somehow no crabs had squeezed through it's

prawn-sized holes. Fortunately the yachters took pity on the poor, poor billionaires and gave them two of their crabs. The billionaires, gracious as they were, thanked the generous yachters by nearly flipping their zodiac as the billionaires motored back to shore.

We got to chat a bit, and it turned out the group was trying to construct a bitumen railway from Alberta to Alaska, and were spending a few days in Whistler greasing their business deals with opulent entertaining. They gave us beer though, so maybe plutocracy isn't so bad after all.

But seriously, it blew my mind thinking about how much money we could have, if we moved to a fair and green energy economy and stopped the rich from wasting money on shit like this.

We packed up the kayaks and left after dinner. We planned to simply kayak along the shore until we saw the end of a logging road. Unfortunately, we did not see it, or any other place to land for that matter. Dusk arrived, and we had paddled nearly to Princess Louisa Inlet. During the last minutes of light, we saw a dock and stopped for the night. Stairs led up to a fantastic, yet deserted, campsite. It was so level, it looked like you could drive a car on it. There were even electrical outlets!

The next morning, we ran into a fellow who did not think it was a campsite at all. In his opinion, it was a driveway for the ornate beach house he was checking on. Strange. We had indeed found the start of the logging roads, but we wouldn't be allowed to access them. Something about an "owner".

Instead, the fellow told us about a trail up from Princess Louisa. Another billionaire had flown in a team of New Zealand trail builders to construct private mountain bike trails. He now visits once a year and laps them with a helicopter. Maybe we could access the alpine that way?

While we didn't follow his advice, we did stop to take a look. The mountain bike trails start at 50.186149, -123.816892 but we have no idea why anyone would want to know that.

We continued along the shore to Club Malibu. Once a failed resort for the rich and famous, it is now a thriving bible camp. Turned out



Spencer at tarn below Mt John Clarke. Photo: Stuart Higgs

they also run mountaineering programs, and we chatted with one of their guides. The mountain bike trails would only take us to the mess of overgrown logging roads. If we wanted to climb Albert, we should really paddle to the end of Princess Louisa and take the public trail up through the park.

Our bible camp friend testified to the glory of this route. We were converted. After days of uncertainty, we finally had a new direction. Divine intervention? Perhaps.

The only problem was that people usually take four days to summit Albert, not counting the return. We had four days food left in total before we must paddle back.

The trail up from Princess Louisa was a revelation and soon we were scrambling over fascinating, sculpted granite. Another day's travel over more ridge line and mellow glacier, and we were looking down on a pass before the final climb up Mount Albert. It was just a bit too far for our remaining time, so we adjusted our plans yet again, Mount Albert was out.

We had two days of food remaining, enough for another two peaks. The next day we climbed slabs and mellow glacier up to a peak to the south east of Mount Tinnswood referred to as "Lactic Acid Hill" by the Malibu guides.

Then, on our last day in the alpine, we decide to climb Mount John



Stuart and Spencer back in Egmont. Photo: Hannah Zalmanowitz

Clarke before returning to the kayaks. The climb up the glacier on the north west face went smoothly and we soon found ourselves on top, reading heartfelt tributes to the late mountaineer. The summit register had become waterlogged and we tried to dry dozens of handwritten messages. It felt appropriate to finish our trip here, with deep respect for John Clarke's journeys.

We missed slack tide at the rapids between Princess Louisa and Jarvis the next day, and portage through the Malibu bible camp. The wind was fierce, 15-25 km/h, and we managed only a few kilometers before camping. Stuart developed muscle strain in his wrist and resorted to tying the paddle to his arm for the remainder of the trip. We fought against a headwind much of the next day. Jarvis would not let us go easy. Only on our third and final paddling day, did we get the wind at our backs.

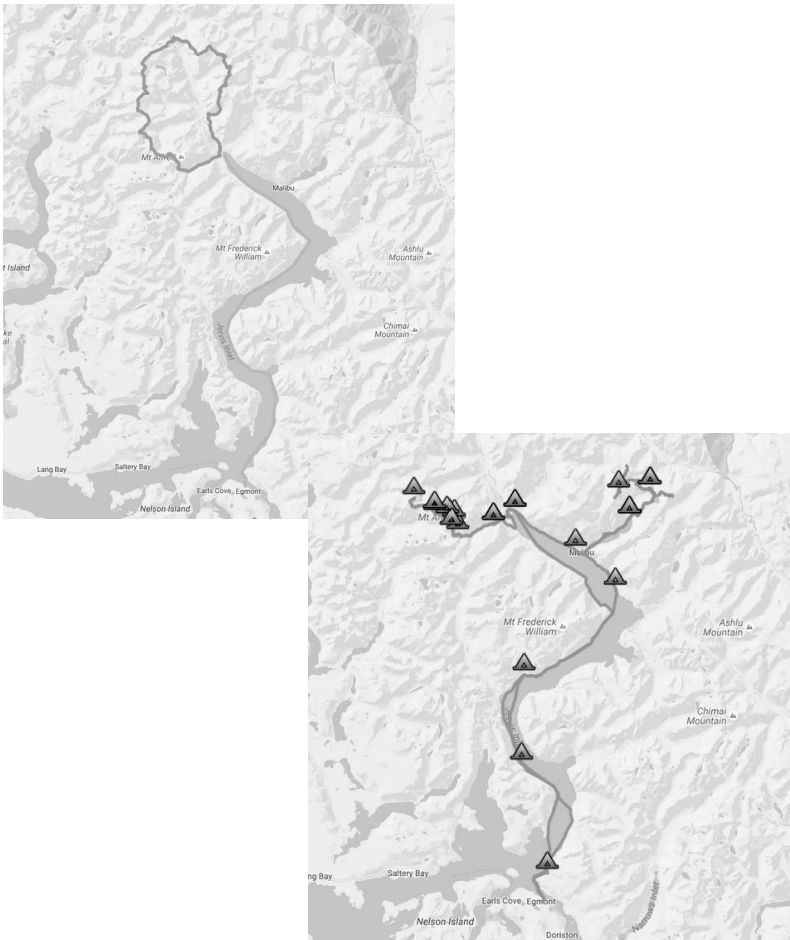
Hannah picked us up from Egmont with potato chips and hard iced teas. Hannah then traded a MODO car for my kayak, and she and Stuart paddled back to Vancouver over the next twelve days as a "vacation".

~

It was an honour to be chosen for the first year of the Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant. It's a pretty tall order to carry on his legacy of adventure, but I hope he would have been proud. The trip wouldn't have happened without the support from Neil's friends and family through the fund. Similarly, thanks are due to Mountain Equipment Co-op for their support through the Expedition Grant Program. So many of our friends and family supported us in this as well -- especially Hannah Zalmanowitz who shuttled to and from this crazy trip, Jess Ables for

lending her car, and Dave Rasmussen for driving a kayak to Vancouver -- and other members of the mountain community including Rennata Mannino; thanks! Thank you to the Shisháhl Nation, on whose territory the trip took place.

And thank you finally to the Grizzly bears for letting us use their trail, but otherwise staying away.



The proposed route (top) and actual route followed during trip (bottom)

Mt. Redoubt Traverse

Julien Renard

Mt Redoubt is located South-East of Chilliwack lake, across the US-Canada border. The Alpine Select description of this peak goes as follow:

Redoubt is a high, adventurous peak on the American side of the border. It is a demanding mountain to climb with a famous Beckey route up its north face. The rock is generally poor, a type of gneiss.

This elaborate description, coupled with enticing pictures, and the prospect of illegally crossing the US border, most definitely encouraged me to look further into the existing routes up this peak. A 5.9 route, called the Flying Buttress goes up the south-east ridge of the mountain and can be combined with a descent of the West face to form the Redoubt Traverse.

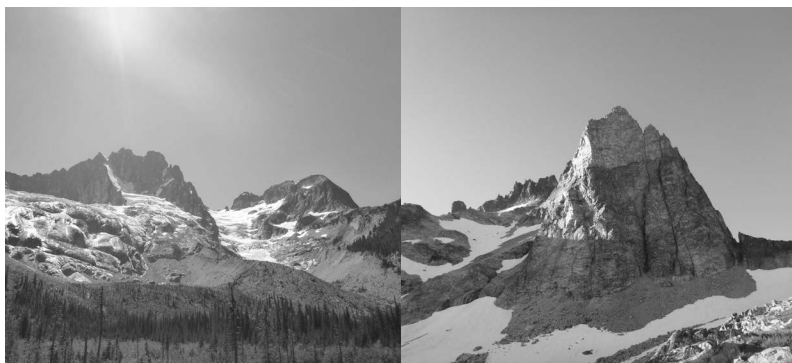
In August, Caitlin Schneider and I decided to try it out. Finding the trailhead required a bit of exploration the since guidebook description is slightly out of date, but we soon found ourselves on an old road leading to the border. I found it quite satisfying to simply walk past the border marker which does not particularly care if you have worked in concentration camps or are carrying imported sausages. On the other hand, Caitlin took it one step further and felt the need to urinate behind it. Whether this was part of some ancient ritual to be performed upon entering your own country or to mark our way home, I am not sure.

The trail onward is in surprisingly good shape given that it is unmaintained. It follows Depot creek for 8 km, all the way to Ouzel lake, with an impressive waterfall on the way. Before reaching the lake, we

left the trail and started bushwhacking to make our way to the Redoubt glacier and later to the base of the south-east ridge where the climb is located. As we downclimbed the south-east col to a camping spot overlooking Bear lake we got a clear, immediate, and somewhat concerning taste of what the guidebook meant by “poor rock quality”. Still, the weather was gorgeous, the view spectaculars and we felt quite optimistic about what was to come the next day.

Up and moving at first light, we quickly retraced our steps to the base of the buttress. The first pitch described in the book starts on the south side of the buttress and goes up a gully to a ledge 60m up. Rated at 5.6, I didn’t anticipate what happened next.

As soon as I started climbing, I realized just how poor the rock was, which all the boulders scattered at the bottom had only hinted at. The climbing was not particularly hard at first, and I even managed to place a couple of nuts for protection, but about 10 m up, a foothold broke, and I took my second lead fall on an alpine climb, ever. A nut caught me and at that point, more angry with myself than scared, I decided to push on. This quickly changed 15 m up when upon grabbing what looked like a solid jug, the whole bulge came apart, the rock delaminating like some pastry crust. I urged Caitlin to hide further in the gully to avoid the rock avalanche that was soon to come. Thankfully, I pushed the rock back in place and it stayed there as I tried to climb past it. At this point, about 6m above my last piece and after some sketchy traverse around a rib, downclimbing safely and bailing was longer an



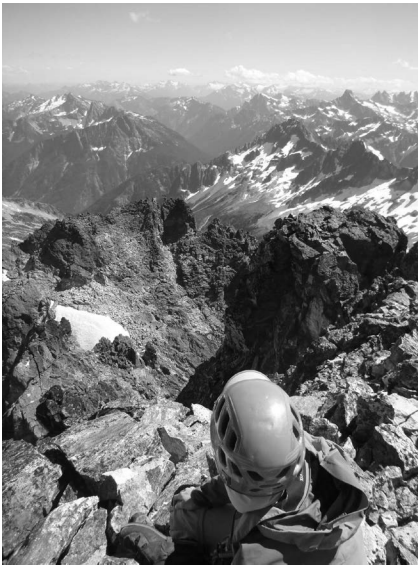
Left: Mt Redoubt north face. Photo: Caitlin Schneider

Right: Mt Redoubt south-east face. The scramble goes up left and the flying buttress is on the right skyline. The first pitch starts up the gully.

Photo: Julien Renard

option, nor was falling. Decent handholds became far apart and this made the climb a lot harder than 5.6. Thankfully, about 18 m from the ground, I reached a ledge from which I decided to belay Caitlin. The rock for the rest of the pitch seemed to be of better quality so we decided to keep going. While it is true that the rock was marginally better, it also proved a lot harder to protect and upon reaching the end of the “easy” 5.6 first pitch, my nerves were frayed.

The 5.9 crux pitch came next and involves climbing around precariously balanced (or so it seemed) flakes that were twice my size, up a crack system to a short roof. At this point, my alpine rack - consisting of nuts and tricams - proved widely inadequate to protect the fist-size flaring cracks in rock that had the consistency of compacted sugar. At the same time, the climb was getting a lot more vertical and serious. After another handhold crumbled in my hand like a piece of cookie, I had had more than my share of scary moments and pulled the plug. I downclimbed back to the belay and two expensive rappels later (some shiny nuts and tricams were sacrificed to the god of safety) we were back where we had started. Pulling the rope triggered a sizeable rock avalanche that managed to land a softball-sized rock on my foot. I won't be back any time soon, but to be fair, the route is not impossibly dangerous if one attempting to climb it brings a full rack of cams and bypasses this idiotic first pitch by traversing over from the col.



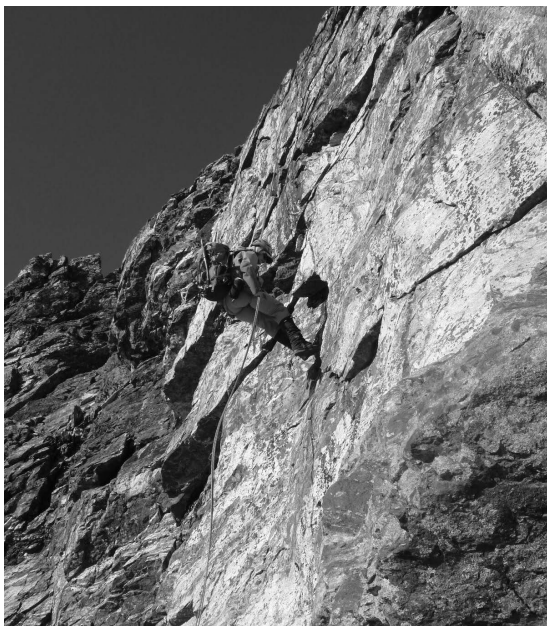
Caitlin taking in the panorama.
Photo by Julien Renard

With a lot of daylight left, we proceeded to go up the peak using the scramble route up the south face. This first involved a steep hike up slabby rocks covered by loose scree, but without much exposure. Higher up, as we got closer to the summit, the rock quality improved dramatically. There were many signs of previous ascents, but finding the easiest route up proved tricky. 30m below the summit,

we got to a fork that gave us a choice between a very steep gully with serious exposure or a traverse on the north face on you-fall, you-die terrain. We opted for the gully and a few low-5th moves on somewhat decent rock brought us to the top. We were immediately rewarded by the magnificent views around us, notably the sight of Bear mountain to the South, and its impressive north face.

We didn't linger on the summit for long since we wanted to complete the traverse by going over the west ridge to the col and down the glacier flowing North toward the valley we hiked in. This proved to be the most enjoyable part of the climb, offering Type I fun, third-class scramble in a spectacular setting. However, closer to the West col, the route became harder to follow, and the guidebook indicates that several rappels are needed to reach the West col. We couldn't find any trace of previous anchors and were concerned about rappelling down a blank wall. After some exploration on the top of the cliff, we spotted a possible line of descent and proceeded to rappel and downclimb some fourth-class sections to the col, fortunately without any mishap.

It was now 5:00 pm and Caitlin was fairly eager to go down the glacier right away given that, "The bottom is so close, it probably won't



Rappelling down to the West col. Photo: Julien Renard

take more than an hour.” Sure enough, four hours later we were still trying to find our way down in the dark, dodging crevasses and rappelling down glacier polished slabs. It was fairly late in the season and the snow - which would have covered some of the steep rock bands - was long gone. Nevertheless, we finally reached the terminal moraine, and by 10:00 pm, had found a lovely camping spot (i.e. flat and devoid of boulders) near the creek.

The following day saw us bushwhacking for a few hours through the swamps occupying the valley in order to reach the trail. Shortly after, we engaged the slog mode for the fairly scenic hike back to the car, taking advantage of the numerous berries along the way. So all in all, the guidebook description proved fairly accurate despite having only three sentences. Redoubt is definitely a fairly remote and adventurous peak to climb. A nice three-day outing if you plan on scrambling up it, and a serious climb if plan to go up the Flying Buttress. If you decide to go early in the season, the northeast face route, which is mostly snow and ice, might be more enjoyable than a rock climb.



Our lovely campsite with the North glacier in the background.
Photo: Julien Renard

Tales from Mount Tupper

Matt Kennedy

In alpine climbing, we seek the wonders of a treeless, snowy world. Wide vistas, incredible sunsets, and remote solitude are just a few rewards found in these unique situations. Of course, these rewards are most often hard-earned, necessitating precarious travel over loose, wet rock, terrifying exposure, sleepless nights, and violent weather. Luckily for Dakotah Fozzard, we decided it was high time for her first alpine climb. Unluckily, we encountered the full spectrum of beauty and fear, reward and hard work, typical of a true alpine adventure.

Roger's Pass was discovered in 1881, as a shortcut through the Selkirk Mountains for the Canadian Pacific Railway. It wasn't long before its appeal as a climbing destination was realized, and the first generation of Canadian mountaineers was ushered in. Now at the heart of Glacier National Park, traversed by the Trans-Canada Highway, the Pass is well known for its moderate alpine climbs, deep winter snowpack, and generally spectacular mountain scenery. What better a place for Dakotah's introduction to alpine climbing?

From a Parks Canada compound at the height of the pass, one mountain in particular begs to be climbed: Mount Tupper. Above the highway, its south face dominates the view. By late spring, the numerous avalanche paths threatening the highway have dwindled to thin streaks of snow surrounded by striking quartzite ribs. The classic West Ridge divides land from sky, and a gendarme known as the Hermit climbs the peak eternally.

Having come to appreciate fast and light more and more throughout the summer, we opted for one pack with minimal gear, a single 40m twin rope, and many gel shots and protein bars. Graded at PD, 5.3-5.6,

we anticipated few troubles on a forecasted bluebird day.

We left the truck at around sunrise, and sped up the trail's switchbacks. Before long, we were snacking in the astoundingly beautiful Hermit Meadows. From an alpine campground, the trail slowly peters out, becoming a labyrinth of cairns marking routes to various alpine climbs around the Swiss Glacier. We took a direct line up a short snow gully and gained the west ridge, where we walked the wide ridge crest and edge of the glacier until the ridge turned East.

From here, our juxtaposed position was striking. On one side, the towering Mount Rogers and impressive Swiss and Tupper Glaciers. On the other, the highway and visitor centre, already bustling with traffic and tourists, 1,000 m below. We continued along the glacier's edge, in and out of the moat for bits. As the ridge steepened, we took out the rope and simul-climbed up a first more technical bit. At a few points, we found shards of rusted metal. Old climbing gear maybe? Strange.

As the ridge flattened out again, we ran into a party of two who had been just in front of us. For whatever reason they were bailing, though it was only mid-morning. We discussed a distant boot-pack that ended in an avalanche below the Roger's Col - they saw it yesterday, as well. I later learned that the party who set the slide off a couple days before were OK, but it was our first reminder these mountains demand respect.

Continuing on, we encountered wildly exposed third-class terrain interspersed with fourth-class steps. Though technically easy, large quartzite blocks seemed precarious and it was a long ways down to



Exposed climbing on the way to the summit. Photo: Dakotah Fozzard

the glacier on one side, and further to the highway on the other. It was here that a UBC Botany professor would fall to his death a week later when one of these blocks pulled loose.

Passing below the Hermit, we discussed climbing it. Though only graded 5.7 in the book, an old bolt looked suspect, and there was little other protection. Maybe we would catch it on the way down.

The crux was next, a choice of 5.6 cracks, a 5.3 corner, or a chossy 5.3 chimney. Though the cracks looked appealing, we lacked the wider gear to protect them well. We opted for the corner, and found it felt tricky enough in boots. Past the crux pitch, we climbed exposed fourth and low-fifth class terrain to the flat summit block.

The view east as we approached the summit cairn was incredible. The Roger's Group to our North, and the North Face of Mount MacDonal and Sir Donald Range to the South were striking. The highway bustled 1,500 m below us. On the summit cairn, I found another piece of metal, labeled "-5 mm". Of course: these were shrapnel left behind from winter avalanche control. To think of the howitzer shells exploding and avalanches ripping down the face below us was an impressive thought considering the peace we felt at that moment. We signed the register, noting the naked man who had climbed the ridge in much less time than us.

As we turned to go, a black wall of clouds to the Southwest became obvious. Huh, had that been there before? Well, no matter, we needed to get out of there. We made several short rappels between sections of down-climbing.



Nature calls me from the summit. Photo: Dakotah Fozzard

The rain hit us just above the Hermit. Through sheets of pouring rain, we saw one of the most spectacular sunsets of our life. Now, in the dark, we pitched-out third and fourth-class down-climbs. What had been quick work before was now tedious and frustrating. The wet quartzite felt as slick as soap, and our fingers were numb. I aided up a short but drenched step. Behind me, the hex popped on Dakotah, resulting in a few scrapes and some curses.

As we neared the easier terrain at the bottom of the ridge, my headlamp died. “Don’t worry,” I exclaimed, “of course I have extra batteries!” I didn’t have extra batteries. We made it down to walking terrain without trouble, and the rain gave way to stars. Soaked to the bone, but in desperate need of drinking water, we were beat.

By the light of my phone and Dakotah’s headlamp, we made it off the ridge. Despite a long effort, we could find no cairns whatsoever. Dark shapes in the distance showed forest, while bright patches showed snow and glacier. With no better indicators, we headed in roughly the direction we thought to be correct, only finding cliff bands which we had not seen in the morning. Looking back and forth, we found no better option, and decided to down-climb to lower ground.

After a couple hours of bumbling around on scree and slabs we gave up. Some sleep would clear our heads, the morning light would show us the way, and some gel packets would taste awful but keep us alive. We wished we had brought some real food, despite the extra weight. Traffic on the highway seemed so close, and the lights of the visitor centre shone bright. With full cell service, we texted our emergency contact that we’d be spending the night out. Drinking snow melt, we wrapped ourselves in an emergency blanket and shivered until fitful sleep overtook us.

Crunch...crunch, crunch, crunch. We awoke with a start, and the packrat scurried away from between our heads. The emergency blanket was a bit chewed up, but our gear seemed untouched. We groggily piled everything on top of us, and began to drift off again.

Crunch...crunch, crunch, crunch. I was ready with the hiking pole this time, and whacked around blindly while shouting curses into the darkness. The packrat scurried a few feet away, just out of the poles reach, and waited for us to drop our guard. The next couple hours

were an infuriating repetition of this cycle. Eventually we couldn't take it anymore, and, though the night was still pitch black, we opted to continue on. Soon enough the light returned, and we found our boot prints from the morning, distorted in the snow. We turned auto-pilot on through the campground, and down the trail. This final stretch took forever, and I cannot remember more than a moment of it. We were back at the truck almost 24 hours after we had left it.

Though things didn't go quite as expected, I am glad at how we handled unexpected situations. I'm sure we could have done things differently to avoid a storm and extra night out, but I'm sure glad we did everything safely and had enough gear to make it out on our own. Our ascent of Mount Tupper's West Ridge was a great introduction to climbing in Roger's Pass – we enjoyed a classic climb on blocky quartzite, surrounded by stunning views, unpredictable weather, and an undeniable sense of adventure. Moreover, it was an excellent introduction to alpine climbing for Dakotah, demonstrating hard-earned rewards and unfamiliar, unexpected situations.



Top: Climbing below the Hermit Gendarme. Photo: Dakotah Fozzard
Bottom: Summit Smiles. Photo: Matt Kennedy

Mt. Hood Turn n' Burn

Carly Peterson

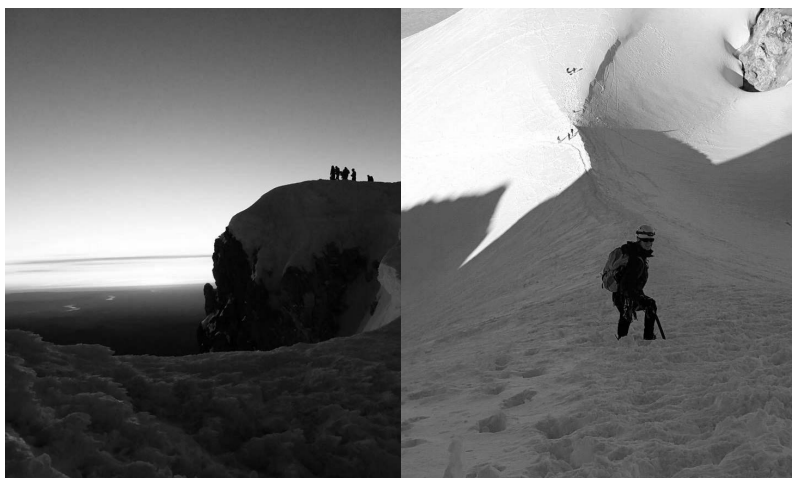
Despite having grown up less than an hour's drive from Oregon's highest point, I had never attempted the summit of Mt. Hood until last spring. Dmitri Oguz was keen to climb the Hogsback-Pearly Gates route on the south side of Mt. Hood in mid-April, while the monstrous bergschrund on the route was still filled in. After sounding out a few other potential companions, Dmitri, Anne Vialettes, and myself headed south on April 16th. The routes on Mt. Hood's south side are easily accessed from the Timberline ski resort, a seven-hour drive from Vancouver.

Conveniently, my parents were thrilled to act as our basecamp for the evening, giving us comfy beds to sleep in before our alpine start. Dmitri, Anne, and I stopped by Timberline to scope out our route before heading to Hood River for a chili dinner with my parents. After dinner and a short sleep, we headed back up to the mountain, and were hitting the snow just after midnight. I have yet to find an easier alpine approach than Mt. Hood. We got out of the car, organized gear, walked across the parking lot, and were on the route. Easy peasy. We walked up a CAT track next to the groomed ski run, past the stationary ski lift, and up the gradually increasing slope toward the looming peak just visible by the moon and starlight. The moon and stars were our guides.

Our route, the Hogsback, was just visible through the darkness. As we climbed, the path behind us filled with small clusters of headlamps, while the way ahead was dark. The slope gradually steepened, and the three of us chose our own switch-backing lines up the hard, icy snow. The most impressive feature in our relative vicinity at this point was

Illumination Rock - a pointy basalt spire climber's left of the main summit. Further up the open slope from Illumination Rock were Crater Rock and the Devil's Kitchen headwall. These features were my primary concerns for our chosen route, since the loose rock they shed when the sun warms them has a habit of bouncing onto our route, which was sandwiched between them. But, our early start protected us from this hazard. As we hiked on, the towering Crater Rock to our left suddenly extinguished the moonlight, and we turned our headlamps back on. We were also nearing several of Mt. Hood's plentiful sulfur vents. The night was windless, so as the sulfur reek intensified, my stomach grew unhappy, and my head began to ache. Dmitri was kind enough to share a Pepto tablet, which combined with the clear starry night, distracted me from the sulfur.

After slogging up steepening terrain, we reached the bottom of the Hogsback - a steep, narrow ridge of snow. In the gloom, it looked like a waterslide, only differentiated from the sky behind by the lack of stars below. Due to the popularity of the route, this part had become a giant, steep staircase. The most technical part of this route was the Pearly Gates, a 45 degree compact snow/ice gully about a 1.5m wide. Regular mountaineering crampons and a single mountaineering axe were sufficient. Having next to zero ice climbing experience, I found this bit fun, but not too hard. We carried a 30m rope and a few pickets,



Left: Sunrise summit crowd. Photo: Dmitri Oguz

Right: Carly Peterson and parties below give perspective to the steepness of the Hogsback. Photo: Bruce Peterson

but never removed them from our packs, as the Pearly Gates feature was protected at the bottom by a curving wall of snow-covered rock. We only encountered one party (of six) roped as a single team, and placing pickets every ten metres. They were really slow, so we were happy to be moving independently.

Once out of the Pearly Gates, we were five minutes from the summit. We planned to meet the sunrise on the summit, but we had moved a bit quicker than expected, and the first tinges of pink were poking up from the horizon as we approached, around 6:15am. After had we stood for nearly 20 minutes of shivering, the sun rose and poked us in the eyes with bright orange light. We explored the area around the summit as other parties made their way up. From the top of Oregon, you can see Adams, Rainier, and St. Helens to the north; and Jefferson and Three Sisters to the south. We were glad for our early start when we saw the congestion around the Pearly Gates on our way down.

The slog back down the route made me wish I had skis since as the sun warmed the snow, it formed perfect spring skiing conditions. To speed the descent process, I slid down on my bum, Anne on her shovel blade, and Dmitri on a sheet of bubble wrap. We made it back to the car around 9:00am in the toasty morning sunshine. Instead of gunning it straight back to the border, we stopped back at my parents' house for a nap and snack in the front yard.

After seeing Dmitri, Anne, and I climb Mt. Hood, my dad - Bruce - decided that after 30 years of looking up at it, he'd like to stand on top too. So after I finished my final exams a week later, I caught the train back to Oregon and taught my dad everything I could before his first mountaineering objective. The timing was ideal; the bergschrund and crevasses were still filled in, avalanche risk was null, the forecast looked great, and there were still steps kicked into the steeper sections. This would also be a good test for me, to lead an inexperienced partner on a familiar route.

The second time up was essentially *déjà vu*, except that I was hyper-aware of my father's every movement in this new environment. He placed complete trust in my decisions and intuition, which was a big responsibility, but he was very interested in learning and discussing the hazards and our choices along the route. I was a little concerned about how he would find the climb up the Pearly Gates, but he said it

felt like being Spiderman, and he loved it. We reached the summit just after sunrise and took a moment together looking out over the valley I grew up in. Sharing this experience with my dad was incredible. It was a tremendous opportunity to share a part of my life that he hadn't experienced before. This experience reinforced my gratitude to everyone in the VOC who taught and inspired me on my first steps into the mountains, opening a door that would change my life.



Top: Dmitri Oguz and Carly Peterson happy to be nearly finished with the descent slog with Mt Hood in the background. Photo: Anne Vialettes
Bottom: Carly and Bruce Peterson celebrate Bruce's first mountaineering objective. Photo: Bruce Peterson

Pedals



and



Paddles



Top: A rainbow of kayakers wait for a seal launch on Opal Creek near Portland. Photo: Caitlin Schneider

Bottom: Two lakes bike tour on the Island. Photo: Ian Johnston

Top previous page: Serene campsite along the Cowichan River. Photo: Clemens Adolphs

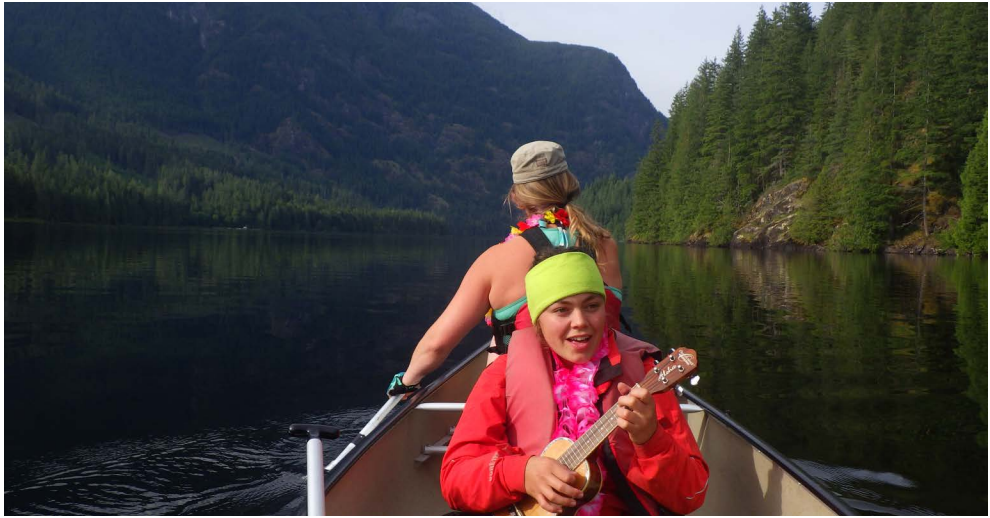
Bottom previous page: Boats at dawn on Lake Lovely Water. Photo: Brandon Everell



Spencer paddling Jarvis Inlet in Queens Reach. Photo: Stuart Higgs

Near the top of the 'Rest and be Thankful' Pass. Photo: Mike Cancilla





Roseanna plays the ukulele while Jake and Cora paddle up Goat Lake during the Powell River Canoe loop. Photo: Jake Jones

Looking back at the Port Mann bridge from an island just upriver of New Westminster after successfully paddling and biking 2 Lakes and 2 Rivers. Photo: Piotr Forsynski





Paddling up the Indian Arm Kayak Bonanza, with the old power house in the background. Photo: Maya Motyka

Caitlin takes a break to sip some cider while paddling down the River of Golden Dreams in Whistler. Photo: Piotr Forsyński





Stuart finds convenient water bottle refill station on Jervis Inlet.

Photo: Spencer Rasmussen

Piotr combines the pedals and paddles during the 2 Rivers 2 Lakes trip.

Photo: Krista Cawley



Powell Forest Canoe Route

June 19-22 2016

Cora Skaien

“What kind of trip can you do when you have hurt your knee and cannot bend it very much?” We decided that the answer to this question is a canoe trip! This answer was based on the assumption that portage routes would involve minimal elevation change and thus mostly flat walking.

Jake Jones and myself (Cora Skaien) had been planning to do the North Coast Trail and the Nootka Trail over the last two weeks of June. Unfortunately, I (in my typical fashion) injured my knee two weeks before the commencement of the trip, and thus could not do the hikes (I could not even use stairs in the city!). Three years ago exactly, I hiked the Sunshine Coast Trail and saw the Powell Forest Canoe Route on the same map, and Jake had also almost done the route a few weeks before with friends, and so it seemed like the obvious alternative. Our wonderful friend Roseanna Gamlen-Greene also decided to join us on our trip, so we rented two canoes (one two-man canoe and one one-man canoe). Initially, Simon was supposed to join us, but he was offered a job interview which required his presence in the city during our trip, and thus we lost a member of the team.

The Powell Forest Canoe Route is an established canoe route near Powell River that involves 55-60 km of paddling and ~10-15 km of portaging. The route is designed to be done in 5 days, but people sometimes shorten or extend the trip depending on how long of days they want. There are orange triangles marking exit points along the lakes, and also along the route through the larger lakes, making navigation simple. When you portage, you must carry your canoe over your head for the distance of the trail, and the condition of the trail really

impacts how difficult the portage can be. We ended up doing the trip in 4 days, despite our initial 5-day plan.

There are many ways to do a portage, and we tried a few methods as a group of 3 with two canoes. We decided that the best method for our group was to have one person portaging each canoe while the third person ferries the backpacks back and forth. Generally you do not carry your backpack while you portage so you usually hike back to get your backpack at some point if the third person has not successfully transferred all backpacks by the time the canoes are at the next lake (either as rests between carrying the canoe, or after you get the canoe at the end). This means you have to hike each section of trail at least 3 times, sometimes more. Another method we attempted was to have two people use the metal supports near the seats instead of the wooden yoke in the middle, which worked if people were of similar height but less so if not. One last method was to have people carry the canoe at hip height, and this was by far the least efficient method to portage, but necessary on some trails where there were too many fallen logs to navigate around otherwise.

The forecast leading up to the trip called for sun for two weeks. As the trip neared, the forecast began to call for rain but only on the day that we would drive out. We stopped at different places along the way and got to experience the “Sunshine” Coast’s pouring rain. After our



South end of Lois Lake, on Powell Forest Canoe Route. Cora, Jake, and Roseanna prepare to start their 4-day canoe trip. Photo: Christie Mitchell



Roseanna portages a canoe between Lois Lake and Horseshoe Lake.
Photo: Cora Skaien

first hike to Secret Cove, we decided to just head straight to the ferry and hang out in the car to warm up and then shower at my friend Ioni's place in Powell River. Ioni had been the one who first asked me to join on the Sunshine Coast Trail years ago, and he had since settled in Powell River, giving me the opportunity to visit him every time I pass through.

Day 1: Lois Lake to Horseshoe Lake

On Sunday, June 19th, we set out on day 1 of our trip. We rented our canoes through Mitchell's Canoe, Kayak and Snowshoe Rentals, which is run by a lovely woman named Christie. The cost of each of our canoes was \$170 for 5 days. There were options to rent lighter canoes for a higher cost, but we opted to be cheap. I would in the future recommend considering a slightly higher cost for a lighter canoe, given that we were only a group of 3 and one person had an injured knee and could not assist with the portage.

We met Christie at 8:30am and were on the water shortly after 10:00am to begin our journey North on Lois Lake. We stopped at an island for lunch before making it to the end of the NW point of Lois Lake (for a total of 8.5 km of paddling) to begin our first portage. This first portage was ~1.7 km long, very wide, well-maintained, and had many rest spots along the way. This section of the trail could easily

accommodate a cart if one was to attempt to wheel their canoe and items. This is where we were first acquainted with the pains of portaging, especially without padding on the yoke of the canoe. Thank goodness the terrain of the first portage was not more difficult! We were surrounded by huckleberries and salmonberries and decided to take an hour break to collect berries.

Many people stop at the end of this portage, at the south end of Horseshoe Lake. This camping spot is very busy because people can access it by a nearby logging road and it is a popular location for people to come out to fish and kayak for the day. As a result, we decided to push on through another 6.5 km of paddling to the end of Horseshoe Lake to camp.

At the end of Horseshoe Lake, you have two options: One, to head along the west side into Nanton Lake and pass through Ireland Lake to make it to Dodd Lake; or two, to head on the east route through Little Horseshoe Lake and Ireland lake to make it to Dodd Lake. The west route involves fewer portages, but 400 m more of portaging than the east route. The west route is also closer to logging roads, increasing the potential of running into other people who did not arrive by canoe. As a result, we chose to go along the eastern, less travelled route.

When you arrive to the campsite, you will see the orange marker way to the east, but you need to explore a bit west (left) to find the exit route that does not involve hauling your boat up a steep section of rock and logs. The campsite at the NE end of Horseshoe Lake



Jake relaxes on Beaver Lake. Photo: Cora Skaien

was quite lovely and we had a great evening of wearing our onesies, swimming, and using logs as boats. This campsite is equipped with a rope and pulley system to hang up your food, mostly to protect it from shrews. Although we were in bear territory, we were informed that bears were very infrequent along the trail and not of major concern. Luckily, we did not have any issues with wildlife for the entire trip. Unfortunately, the only wildlife we really encountered were amphibians.

Day 2: Horseshoe Lake to Dodd Lake

The next day we learned that the east route to get to Dodd Lake is not nearly as well maintained as the west route. This was confirmed by a group that came behind us that day, which had one member who had done the western route the year before. It even involves stairs, numerous fallen logs that had not been cleared, and a narrow trail not ideal for portaging. This is where we tried the portage method of two people holding the canoe below their waists. I had enough time to walk back and forth 3 times and retrieved all the bags, paddles, etc. before Roseanna and Jake successfully got the canoes through the rough terrain. One of our documents indicated that this portage was 1.2 km long, but it felt way longer than the 1.7 km trail we had done the day before. We reached Little Horseshoe Lake with all of our items after 5 hours of effort and were exhausted. We then had <1 km of paddling to get to the North end of Little Horseshoe, where we took a lunch and swim break.

We then did the next ~700 m portage, which was mostly along a logging road. Logging roads were nice in that they were much faster to portage with the simpler terrain, but had the downside that there were no canoe rests along the way. We made it to Beaver Lake very quickly and prepared the canoes for the next <1 km paddle. Unfortunately, we disturbed a wasps nest which resulted in Roseanna being stung 3 times and me once. Jake had already been stung on our drive out, so now we were all adorned with wasp stings. Something about these wasps made them particularly virulent, however, and Roseanna and I both had immense swelling and/or bruising from the bite sites, which persisted days later. Despite our bites, we pushed on and made it across Beaver Lake fairly quickly.



Cora paddles up Dodd Lake. Photo: Jake Jones

At this point, we were quite tired but wanted to push on to the end of Dodd Lake (another 7 km). This paddle felt quite tiring after such a long day, but we were rewarded by a lovely dock at the campsite on the north end where we cooked and ate dinner. Our donned our onesies once again, and we played ukulele, stretched and read.

Day 3: Dodd Lake to Goat Lake

On day 3, we began the first 700 m portage with much more experience and the knowledge that this would be the last day we needed to do any portaging. There were long gaps between rests, but at least this trail was well maintained and wide. We then paddled 2.3 kms across Windsor Lake, where I tried the single canoe for the first time and Jake and Roseanna paddled the double canoe together.

We had lunch on the north end of Windsor and then began our 2.4 km journey down to Goat Lake. This is the longest portage along the route, and the last one-third goes consistently downhill with uneven terrain. At this stage, I realized that my foot that I had sprained back in March and then had stepped on in salsa dancing a month before was still very damaged, and the downhill portion was quite painful. At least my knee held up! Jake and Roseanna at this stage had become pro portagers, and they pushed through the pain and struggle and made it down to Goat Lake. This was our most efficient portage. I took my

bag all the way to the end, while Jake and Roseanna took their boats between rests, went back for their bags, and then brought them to the rest past each boat. This way they were able to scout the trail while transferring bags, and then carry the canoe over. Then I came back and ferried their bags to the bottom from the last 1/3 point of the trail. Roseanna had to go back to get her bag for the last leg of the trip after her canoe was at the end, however.

This was the first night that we had to share a campsite with other people, as there was already one other group of 4 there and two more groups of 4 arrived behind us. The last group that arrived struggled to find a camping spot so pushed on to the next campsite. In the evening, after we ate dinner, we paddled up Goat Lake for fun, with all 3 of us in the same canoe. Jake and I paddled, while Roseanna serenaded us with her singing and ukulele playing.

For most of the trip so far we had experienced either overcast skies or sun. Shortly after we turned around to head back to camp, it began to rain, and this rain stayed with us for most of the rest of the trip. It rained all night, and off and on the whole next day.

Day 4: Goat Lake to Powell River

Powell Lake is a 28.5 km stretch that leads back to Powell River. No more portaging! Woot! Many people do this section over two days, and some extend it to do it in three days. We had been told that the winds can be quite bad on Powell Lake when the wind comes off from the ocean, and then blows in the opposite direction of travel. Christie recommended that we wake up early and paddle to avoid these winds. As a result, we woke up at 7:00am and were on the water by 8:15am. The water was calm and the rain was gentle at this stage. We paddled to the first campsite along the way, where we met up with the group that pushed on the evening before. They had a fire, and we joined in the warmth and had an early lunch at 10:30am.

We pushed on with the goal of stopping at the campsite at the start of the optional portage to Inland Lake to camp for the day. This site was harder to find because the orange marker had been completely sun-bleached and the campsite was only visible because we saw two

other canoes along the beach. It was 1:00pm when we arrived, and we were soaking wet from the rain and a bit chilled. Although we had intended to do the trip over 5 days, we were only ~8 km away from Powell River and decided that we would hike to Inland Lake along the portage route and then paddle back along Powell Lake to Powell River and stop a day early.

I would NOT recommend anyone portage their canoe up to Inland Lake, and we were very grateful that we had no intention of doing so. The trail is very overgrown, all the canoe rests were broken, and trees almost our height had fallen across the route. This would have been a very miserable portage. I do, however, recommend the lovely 700 m hike up to the lake.

When we got back on the water, the wind had picked up. We began paddling shortly after 2:00pm and the risk of motion sickness was great. I had to do a corrections stroke with every stroke to keep the canoe straight and fight the wind and waves. We lost a lot of momentum due to the conditions, and it took longer than we anticipated. We still made it off of the water by 4:15pm, and we were picked up by Christie (with a pick up and drop off fee of \$130, but logistics require it unless you have multiple vehicles and places to park them). We celebrated with warm showers at Ioni's, Indian food, and sleeping in beds.

Impressions:

We had an amazing time on our trip! It was similar to the Sunshine Coast Trail, however, in that there were many patches of clear cuts and active logging along the way which did detract from the natural beauty. The area with the smaller lakes was really nice because it was more isolated and looked less disturbed. I think this was a great first canoe trip with portaging, and feel inspired to do more canoeing, perhaps further North in the Yukon. I would recommend the trip overall, but would suggest that better natural beauty does exist elsewhere on other routes.

Thanksgiving on Wheels: Four Lakes Bike Tour

Lucy Buchanan-Parker

Over many years of cycle touring, I have developed a love for riding the unpaved, quiet roads of the world. For me, logging roads (and mining roads, country lanes, farm roads, and other country-specific equivalents) are the perfect middle ground between gnarly bikepacking trails, that are too technical, and boring paved highways with fast-moving traffic that don't allow me to relax. There is only one problem with the majority of logging roads in BC: they very rarely connect to one another.

Alberto and I spent a while looking for logging road touring possibilities in the summer of 2015 and eventually rode a route we believed to be one of the most accessible and worthwhile logging roads for bike touring on Vancouver Island, beginning roughly east of Nanaimo. The main criteria for this destination are that the road connects two places, and you can get to it from Vancouver without any highway riding.

When the time came to plan a bike tour for the VOC in Fall 2016, we were excited to revisit this route. We planned the trip for Thanksgiving long weekend, and thus the trip became "Thanksgiving on Wheels". Ian later named it the "Four Lakes Bike Tour" which has a nice ring to it.

Not deterred by the dismal forecast, five hearty souls set out on pre-coordinated buses to Horseshoe Bay to meet the sixth after the ferry ride to Nanaimo. Our group consisted of Alberto Contreras, Tom Curran, Ian Johnston, Ilia Capralov, Flo Rudolph, and me.

The rain could not make up its mind as to whether it wanted to be heavy or light as we started out, and much time was spent faffing over

exactly which rain gear to wear as we rode out of Nanaimo. The decision was made easier for Alberto since he had made the dubious decision not to bring his waterproof pants, and for Flo, who had already applied his waterproofing system of plastic bags on his feet, plus his gaiters. Soon the rain made up its mind to rain heavily for the duration of the day and we pedaled westward towards Nanaimo Lakes. We would pick up the Nanaimo Lakes Main logging road, which heads south over an 800 meter pass to connect with the eastern end of Cowichan Lake.

Due to Google maps' confusion over the roads and some last minute route changes, we were never 100 per cent sure of the distance or elevation gain of our proposed route, and our memories of the route from last time were fuzzy at best. Usually we were only able to recall the relevant information after it was too late. Although this may have been frustrating for our participants, it had the delightful effect of feeling like a whole new trip for us.

The rain was miserable at times but it minimized our desire to faff, which was good because we had a long day ahead of us. Luckily for all of us, we had Flo with us who had the ability to get stoked about absolutely everything, including eating dry uncooked oats straight out of a plastic bag. So we managed to keep in good spirits.

The logging road was in pretty good shape, as we remembered, although there was one steep and loose section that had 5 out of 6 of us walking. Soon we had reached the top of the pass. It was time to



Flo Rudolph enjoys dry coats. Photo: Alberto Contreras

begin the chilly descent and race against sunset to make it to the recreation site where we hoped to sleep. Some of us had skinnier tires, which proved less than ideal for a muddy and gravelly descent, so we took it easy.

We did not beat the sunset, but decided to press on anyway, which turned out to be a good decision since the campsite had already gone to winter mode and was free and uncrowded. It was fun to ride into the night, especially for Alberto, who had his new Zebralight H600 headlamp at full power to lead the way (he had to lead the way because if you were in front of him and turned to look behind you, you would be temporarily blinded). We pitched our tent at a lakeside spot in the dark and changed into dry clothes. It had stopped raining by that time and we were able to enjoy dinner in the relative warmth (being at 200 meters) before drifting off to sleep.

We aimed to set off early on Sunday but the realization that lakes at 200 meters are not actually that cold meant that 5 of us went for a swim in Kissinger Lake just as the sun peaked out from behind the clouds. It was past 10:00am by the time we got on the road and we proceeded to faff our way along the north side of Cowichan Lake. We arrived in the town of Lake Cowichan just in time for lunch and made a beeline for the supermarket. Knowing that we were headed to Tom's aunt's cabin that night, we stocked up on the makings of a Thanksgiving feast and set out along the Trans Canada Trail section between Cowichan and Shawnigan Lakes.

The trail conditions were more varied than Alberto or I had remembered, but we made good time on the trail, which was an old rail bed and was basically flat. None of us was interested in riding in the dark again so we stopped only to clear the occasional fallen log off the trail (does this count as a workhike?) and for photo ops on the railway trestles.

We arrived to Tom's aunt's cabin near the southern tip of Shawnigan Lake with plenty of daylight (but not enough that we were interested in swimming). Muddy outer layers from the trip were abandoned on the porch and once inside we started preparing Thanksgiving dinner in the luxurious cabin, complete with a full working kitchen, hot water, and electricity. It was around this time that Tom decided to reverse-test the waterproofing of his panniers by having a beer can burst inside it.

No beer escaped the pannier so he had to fish out several beer-infused items including his VOC Songbook.

Thanksgiving dinner came together remarkably quickly and easily and soon we all sat down to turkey sausages with caramelized onions, roasted root vegetables, green beans, cranberry sauce, instant mashed potatoes, and stovetop stuffing, with pumpkin pie and whipped cream for dessert. After a few hours putting the world to rights on a variety of subjects, we rolled out our mats on the floor of the cabin by 11:00pm.

Precision timing was needed in the morning to have a luxurious breakfast of scrambled eggs and bacon cooked by Ilia, send a delegation of three to swim in Shawnigan Lake, clean the cabin, and depart in time to make the Mill Bay Ferry – but in the end, it all went like clockwork. Soon we were riding on the comparatively busy Saanich Peninsula and saying goodbye to Flo who was heading to Victoria. A quick stop in Sidney for a hot drink by the ocean and we rolled into Swartz Bay, just in time to sneak onto the ferry to Tsawwassen.

In the final victory of the trip, we all managed to snag bike spots on the three busses leaving Tsawwassen after the ferry arrival, which our tired legs and sore bums appreciated very much.

I couldn't have asked for a better first Canadian Thanksgiving or first trip that I had helped to organize. I'm very thankful for the excellent company, sunny weather on Sunday and Monday, and the fact that quiet roads do exist in BC, if you look hard enough. Next time, I'll make a point to swim in all four lakes!



The team on the Kinsol Trestle near Shawnigan Lake.

How (it is) to build your first surfboard

Christoph Schilling

Now, I am actually not quite sure anymore on how I got the idea of building my own surfboard but at the time it seemed pretty reasonable. I'm a student, so the budget for literally everything is just about, well, nothing. Pairing this with the notoriously terrible Tofino surf conditions in the summer and the fact that a suitable long board would be even pricier, I decided to give it a shot. I started surfing around the internet, unfortunately not on real waves, to find what would be the best approach on this. And before you are getting the wrong impression here, I'm not going to do a technical write-up on how to build a surfboard. Let's be honest, I built a single one and there are plenty of people out there with a lot more experience and a pretty damn good manual on how to build a surfboard. I figured it's better to write about the experiences I had while building it, what problems I ran into and what seemed actually pretty straightforward.

This brings me to my first piece of advice, find a suitable source for instructions and follow those. Putting together different bits and pieces will only get you confused and I am telling you, everybody builds surfboards slightly differently, especially those built in a garages. People will tell you to do it their way and that might be good, but there are plenty of other ways as well. I found it's important to stick to one procedure, so you don't ending up missing steps, doing them twice or something like that. So pick one you like and follow it. I followed Stephen Pirschs' "How to Build Your First Surfboard" (www.surfersteve.com). Why? I read through it, it sounded reasonable and I liked the approach of not aiming for a perfect board but aiming for something that won't disappoint you in the end. Plus, he's this old surfer dude (sorry Stephen) that builds thousands of them and that made me feel

pretty confident that this would be the right choice for me. Second and maybe the most important advice is to use the necessary protective equipment. Really, epoxy, in particular, is very dangerous. So get the proper masks for glassing and sanding; don't gamble on this one.

So, you start reading and there are plenty of decisions to make... How long? What material? Which shape? And it just keeps on going. We all know that length is very important... on a surfboard. But it is also completely overrated. These days the fun board has become thicker and wider, and catches waves just as well as the long boards. So don't be too set on how long your board needs to be. And consider that basically everything in North America comes in eight foot lengths and not more unless you pay extra. Shape: If you can get a hold of a board you like, use it and basically make a copy. It will save you a lot of thinking and doubts throughout the process. The material you want to use really depends on your location and budget. If you can get a cheap polyurethane, go for it. It will be cheaper and easier to make. You can use polyester resin which is half the price of epoxy, easier to sand but a little less resistant to damage.

So here's what I did, I used polystyrene, epoxy resin and made it nine feet long. D'oh! Hold on a second, didn't I just describe the exact opposite. I did but there are absolutely no blanks available in Vancouver, hardly any in Canada and that makes shipping costs ungodly expensive. I called up a local EPS manufacturer and had them cut a block of EPS to my specs for exactly 33 dollars including taxes. The epoxy and fiberglass you can order from the States and because you don't need too much, it is actually not too bad, about \$150. Now there is the trouble with the length when you get to your stringer (the wooden board down the center of



Gluing in the red cedar stringer between the blocks of foam and of course wearing the proper PPE! Safety first! Photo: Annika Lennarz

the surfboard). You have to buy a 16ft board that needs to be planed down because it is going to be too thick otherwise, bottom line is another 75 bucks. I'm convinced you can get that cheaper somehow and it's a lot cheaper if you stay below eight feet. Then you need some bits and pieces, a lot of sand paper, buckets, and brushes and so on. Final count, 350 bucks including all the tools and supplies I needed. Hence, what material you use is either a financial decision or you just really want to build exactly what you had in mind. For me it was a mixture of all of these things, I really wanted a proper long board, I wanted to go full-on and I wanted to build it from scratch not using a blank. And finally, it turned out to be the cheapest solution, at least for where I live. I also wanted to create something new, so I did not copy a board. I downloaded one of the many shaping softwares and starting reading about volume, rail shape, rocker bottom shape. I had a blast. I wasn't even working on the board yet but already I felt like I am going to create something unique.

Having decided on a shape and size, it really helps to have access to a poster printer. You can then print your layout and rocker to full scale and have a genuine, great starting point. Gluing your stringer in is your first step before you actually start shaping your board. I cut the stringer to the approximate shape of the rocker first; otherwise you end up sanding a lot of wood. By the way, red cedar is perfect for the job and it is local, too.



From a rough outline to a fully shaped board and the first attempts on fiberglassing.

Photos: Annika Lennarz



Now once you get to actually shaping the board it is really all about the patience. The only 'power tool' I used was a hot wire cutter I had rigged out of thermocouple wiring and some old electrical parts in my lab. Worked great and saved a little bit of time on the rough sanding. You basically cut your block into a blank. After that, it becomes rather artistic in some way. Always sanding the whole length of your board, walking up and down and slowing watching your block turn into something that remotely looks like a surfboard. Stick to a sanding schedule, if you do ten runs on one side, do ten on the other. It might sound boring and exhausting, but actually it is more inspiring. It is definitely relaxing. So strangely, you don't get bored of it, you get addicted. This becomes more and more apparent the closer you get to your final shape. You are trying to feel the rails and the couverture of the board; you sand once and run over the rails with your hand to compare the sides. I am really not the esoteric kind of guy, the ones knowing me would properly describe me as a typical grouchy German who is all about cars and I f***** hate hippies, but really the whole experience turns into some sort of mediation and you feel like you never want to complete that part. Maybe also because the next step is the one where you can ruin it all. I hadn't done a lot of fibreglassing in my life and I was honestly worried. Looking at results online made me feel even less confident. So, I had a few beers and got on with it. And boy, was I surprised, none of the blistering or dry spots or any of the nightmares I had seen online. It turned out better than I ever expected. Why? I guess two reasons, first, I bought the fancy fibreglass and surfboard epoxy stuff, worth every penny. Second, I applied the same calmness to fibreglassing as I did with sanding. Don't get into a rush, yeah, it hardens quickly but there is still plenty of time to get into the rhythm, go up and down and slowly spread the resin into the cloth. It is kind of a stressful silence and if you can keep it up you'll be rewarded. You do your gloss coat and hot coat the same way and then go back to sanding and more sanding and then polishing. Do your fin box and leash plug; and this time, really stick to the manual and you'll be fine. Resist your desire of using power tools. The risk of ruining your board is not worth it. Hours later you'll be standing in front of your finished surfboard and it feels kind of unrealistic that you built this out of a block of foam, a little bit of wood and fibreglass. There are a few things you start to realize, building a surfboard is more of an art than it is an industrial process, at least I think it should be. You also do get a different view on the high surfboard prices from your local shaper.

Now, was it worth it? For me, it was maybe one of the most fulfilling projects I have ever tackled. It very much reminded me of building an engine for my little racecar back in Germany and stepping on the throttle for the very first time. Surfing your own surfboard is somewhat similar. The first time you walk down to the beach and your board touches the sand and water, it has something magical to it. It was a typical day in Tofino, the sun was out but there was this slight little bit of mist over the surf. I started paddling and was amazed by the speed with which I was heading towards the break. When I sat up in the surf and looked out on the ocean I couldn't wait for the next wave but also just wanted to stay there and watch. It might have been the conditions or the attitude I had that day but when I paddled into the wave I immediately stood up and it felt like the longest time I have ever been on a wave. It is a genuinely indescribable feeling, knowing that you, yourself, created this feeling, makes it an incomparable experience and worth every penny and hour you put into it.



The end of an experience and reward for a lot of hard work.

Photos: Annika Lennarz

A Bikepacking Adventure

Ilia Capralov

To be honest, I did not think that the trip would be popular since it is usually very hard to find people for a long expedition like the one I proposed on the Trip Agenda. When the trip was announced and it was already the time to start emailing people, I realized that three people from the interested list were joining me for at least the weekend part of the trip, which quite surprised me! These brave men were: Alberto Contreras, Martin Cermak and Marius Muja. Many thanks to you guys for joining and making this trip so much better!

The trip was designed using tracks from the trips of two great bikepackers. The Sunshine Coast part was provided by Skyler from bikepacking.com and the Vancouver Island part by Vik (forums.mtbr.com).

The first part of the trip took place on the Sunshine Coast. The route starts from Langdale, passes through Sechelt, and ends at Earls Cove. Almost 100% of the route consists of singletrack composed of multiple trails of a dense trail network along the Sunshine Coast. The second part of the route starts from Comox on Vancouver Island, follows the logging road to Comox Lake and after the lake, turns South-East to follow Beaufort Range to Port Alberni. Then the route takes Highway 4 and ends at Nanaimo.

I: Sunshine Coast

On Saturday April 30th we took a traditional route to Sunshine Coast: bus to Horseshoe Bay and then a 40min ferry to Langdale. Be-

ing afraid to miss the bus because all spots on the bike rack could be full, I arrived at the bus stop 10 minutes early. This latter precaution turned out to be unnecessary because 250 bus to Horseshoe Bay was empty. On the ferry we had a nice little pre-trip meeting since we had not had a chance to meet up on campus. During the conversation we realized that all members of the trip were Europeans: Marius from Romania, Alberto from Spain, Martin from Czechia and me from Moldova. Coincidence?

After we got off the ferry our GPSs were calibrated, tires were pumped, and the straps on the helmets tightened. In front of us lay the legendary Sunshine Coast Trail, the host for stages 3 and 4 of the world-famous BC Bike Race! As soon as we hit the trail, I realized that from now on I was no longer the leader of this trip since I was barely keeping balance on my bike. I couldn't keep up with the speed that Marius imposed. If someone ever told me that this trail is made for riding I would not have believed it! It was steep and studded with big and loose boulders that I had to avoid.

Marius knew the first part of the trail till Sechelt since he had ridden it before. This saved us a lot of time since otherwise we would have spent a lot of time finding our way and getting lost, especially with my crappy GPS that was refusing to work properly in the forest for the last few weeks.



Marius waiting for others to catch up. Photo: Ilia Capralov

After a few more minutes we hit quite a decent trail where I could relax a bit. Well, by decent I mean a classic mountain biking trail with roots, boulders sticking out from the ground and dirt. The nice thing about that trail was that the terrain was almost always passable despite all the boulders and roots. People who maintain the trail have built pretty robust looking bridges, cut the fallen tree trunks, and no loose boulder will slip under your wheel. Nevertheless, by the end of each day on the Sunshine Coast Trail I was exhausted. Riding this trail required constant attention and strong effort to stay in the saddle, no matter if you were going uphill or downhill.

Sunshine Coast trail was not only a good test for our cycling abilities but it also put your bike under extreme pressure. I think that one ride alone shortened the lifespan of my bike by a few months. On every normal bike tour, bikes break and you have to repair them, and there is a high chance that on the trip there will be one participant with the bike that breaks down all the time. On this trip this participant was me, yes, the organizer, the most prepared and responsible person in the group!

Before the trip, Martin and I had a discussion about the backpacking gear, whether it is a good investment to buy a saddle bag, frame bag and a front roll, or whether a traditional bike rack would be sufficient. I was arguing that since I rode my bike with just a rear rack on all my bike trips before and was quite happy with it, this trip should not be an exception. Also I thought that bikepacking bags are just a matter of fashion, especially in North America, since I have never seen them



The team ready for the start on the second day of the expedition.

Photo: Marius Muja

in Europe.

Oh, how wrong I was! From the experience of this trip I learned that a rear rack can theoretically be used on very technical terrains, but you shouldn't expect it to serve you for a long time if you ride mountain bike trails. My rack broke on the first day of the trip on an especially steep and fast segment of the trail. The bolt that was holding the rack from the bottom broke in half, leaving its tail in the frame, which made it impossible to take it out of there. At that moment I thought that this was the end of the trip since I had no clue how to repair it. But with knowledge and help from all the participants we were able to mend my bike rack. We used the two spare bolts from the frame (intended for the bottle holder mounting) and attached the rack to the holes meant for the fenders.

The thing that I liked about this route is that it offers a possibility to resupply in Sechelt, so you do not have to carry any food for dinner on you the first day. We were lucky to stop at Sechelt to buy food and beer right before all supermarkets closed. Being true Europeans, some of us were very impatient and started enjoying the fizzy drinks right in front of the liquor store. Maybe this could explain why we didn't make it to the Big Tree rec site that day and stopped at the quarry for the night. The starry sky, food cooked on the campfire and relaxed chatter made an awesome ending for a very hard day.

The next day was less technical but some uphill parts were pulling my front wheel off the ground. Alberto wanted to catch the ferry to Vancouver on Sunday, so he turned back toward Sechelt a bit earlier to take the bus to Langdale and then the ferry to Vancouver. Martin, Marius and I continued riding to Earls Cove.

We camped at the Klein Lake rec site the next night where we took a dip in the cold lake. This was my last day with friends. On the next morning our paths diverged, Marius and Martin went back to Vancouver. For me this was just the beginning of the trip--I continued my way to Vancouver Island, towards new adventures. Angry loggers, inexistent roads, and hungry cougars were waiting for me, but that's a story for another time!

II: Vancouver Island

This is the second part of The May Bikepacking Trip which I have done alone and mostly on Vancouver Island.

That day I had to take two ferries: Earls Cove – Saltery Bay, cycling 20 km along the Sunshine Coast and then the Powel River – Comox ferry which was doing only a few sailings that day. In order to make it to the morning ferry in Powel River, I had to wake up very early, way earlier than I would have wanted after such a hard day on the trail.

I didn't mean to wake up the guys that morning but after I woke up and started preparing for departure, Marius and Martin started to pack their things as well and got ready to ride with me to the terminal, which was very kind of them! We arrived at the terminal in less than 20 minutes. After the ferry had arrived at the terminal, we said goodbye and split up: Marius and Martin went down the highway to Sechelt where they took a bus to the ferry, whereas I took the ferry to continue my trip to the West.

The crossing from Earls Cove to Saltery Bay was one of the most beautiful sails that I had ever done. The ferry was almost empty, I was travelling with a few more people on board, so I had a feeling that I was sitting in the cinema alone, enjoying the passing islands of green forests floating in the ocean through the windows that resembled an IMAX screen.

The road between the ferries was pretty boring except for a nice short single-track that I found when I was already close to Powel River. After a particularly boring sail when crossing the Georgia Strait, my route crossed the even more boring Comox area in order to take me to Comox Lake. This is the inevitable part of any long distance trip; eventually you will have to come down from a mountain biking heaven in the mountains to the highways in the bottom with hot and polluted air; otherwise you will not get to the next biking heaven in the next mountain range.

After the last two days of intense pedaling on the Sunshine Coast trails and trying to keep up with the guys, I was quite tired and needed to decrease the load at least for one day. I decided to buy some fruits and veggies, go to the campground on the lake and enjoy the rest of

the day reading my book and eating fruits.

The campground on the south shore of Comox Lake, where I expected to get all luxuries of modern society, let me down. After three days of sweating and dreaming about the hot shower with shampoo I discovered a little box for the loonies in the shower cabin! Since I didn't have loonies and the campground office was already closed I had to enjoy swimming in the cold Comox Lake. As a bonus I got a bunch of idiots who organized a rally around their cars in the campground that night! Despite all that I managed to eat my fruits and finish the trial version of my book. Nevertheless, this was probably the last time I would be staying at a campground when a wild camping option is available.

The plan for the next day was to get into the valley to the south of the Comox Valley. In order to do that I had to follow the logging road along the lake and then climb a steep hill to get to the pass that separates Comox and the Port Alberni valleys.

The road was quite steep in the beginning but still wide enough and had a good surface quality, so it wasn't a big struggle for me. However, after a few kilometers I started noticing "No Trespassing" signs. I was coming across them more and more frequently until I ran into a "No Trespassing"-person, who explicitly conveyed to me that I "shall not pass". After I fruitlessly used all my communication skills to convince the "No Trespassing"-man to let me in, I had to turn back.

I went a few hundred meters down where I found a trail that wasn't



The Camp on the river bank. Photo: Ilia Capralov

shown on the map, but I decided to try it. It was rideable for the first 5 minutes but then I had to walk due to slippery rocks and steep uphill. The path ended up being a nice and beautiful detour. It opened to me what is probably the nicest view on the Comox Lake. I got back to the main logging road way beyond the outpost.

This was the only time I met a serious obstacle on my way to private property of local feudals, but the more I was riding in those properties the clearer I understood that there was a good reason for them to restrict access. Riding on active logging roads is quite dangerous. Not that I ever found something more dangerous than a regular highway in Moldova, but this is the first time I have to use this example to compare the level of hazard for a cyclist. I do not blame the huge trucks that carry huge, loosely fixed logs; it is rather expected that drivers of these trucks do not expect you on the road while they are driving along the road at high speed. So every time I heard the sound of an approaching truck, I got off my bike and pulled over. Despite all the dangers, I was more worried about the possibility that some of the drivers could report me to the police and I would be caught and kicked out of the private area. In reality I did not have to worry so much about this because everyone I met on the road over the next two days were either pretending that they did not notice me, or sometimes some drivers even helped me, as you will read further down.

At one point on the Comox Valley logging road, not far from its end, I had to turn onto a different road. When I reached the approximate turnoff location, according to my GPS, I spent quite a bit of time finding the actual access to that road. After missing the fork a few times, I started looking more carefully in order not to miss it again. When I finally found it, I understood why I could not notice it the first few times. The road was very steep, narrow and with poor surface quality, plus the terrain did not foreshadow the possibility of a road, so I did not even expect it to be there. I could barely imagine what vehicles the road was designed for.

It was clear to me that I was going to be bike-walking all the way to the top because riding on that road with the bags on was impossible. Even after pushing my bike a few hundred meters, I had to stop to take breath. I remembered how the day before either Marius or Martin showed me a trick that allows a cyclist to push the bike on super-steep hills. In order to do this, one should turn the bike in the opposite direc-

tion, stand in front of the bike, hold the handlebar and start pushing. This method allowed me to reach the pass in an hour, after which I could barely stand on my feet.

On the way down, despite a steep downhill, I was keeping a low speed because poor, clumsy bears wouldn't be able to notice me and run away. At that time, I wasn't carrying a banger or a bear spray, so it was quite spooky.

After reaching the bottom of the valley, I crossed some rivers and bushwhacked through the forest to finally get to a minor logging road.

I found a perfect spot for the tent on the edge of a precipitous riverbank outflowing from Elsie Lake. After swimming in the river and setting up the tent, I went into the forest to collect firewood since it was getting dark. While collecting, I had a weird feeling that someone was watching me and that there was some movement in the forest. I ignored this feeling since I did not hear any noise accompanying the movement and it was already too dark to make any judgments based solely on vision.

I brought the firewood to the camp and had already managed to make a fire when I heard a car stopping on the road near my camp. I thought that they must have been watching me until I did something illegal, like making a campfire, before arresting me. I saw a man coming in my direction but it was already too late to hide anywhere, so I decided to stay and see what would happen.

The man must have been one of the workers in the logging company, since no one else was allowed to get on those logging roads. When he approached me I could notice that he was struggling to hide a slight anxiety that was visible in his face even in the dim light of twilight.

"Hey there! Having a nice camping spot here!" – He greeted me.

"Um... Yeah! Hey! Is it OK if I stay here overnight? The next recreational site is 30 km from here and it's already too late... I can put down the fire!" – I was sure he didn't like my idea with fire.

"Oh, no, it's fine! Are you alone here?" – He looked around.

"Yeah! Just me."

“Hmm... Just wanted to let you know.” – He said. – “That I almost ran over a cougar a minute ago right near your camp.”

“Oh, w-well, is the cougar alright?” – I mumbled.

“The cougar is fine!” – He laughed. – “I am just checking on you if you’re still alive.” – He continued laughing.

I was a bit shocked by his words. I remembered the movement in the forest while I was collecting woods, and realized that that wasn’t my imagination. It wasn’t surprising that I didn’t hear anything, these beasts are very silent and sneaky. You never notice them before they jump on your back.

I had a few more words with the man and then he left.

“Well, have a good night! Stay safe!” – The man started walking back to his car.

“Good bye! You too!”

After the man left, I felt very unsafe and fear had entered my brain. It was already completely dark and I could only see the flashes of orange light from my campfire and dim shadows dancing in the forest. I realized that the cougar was scared off by the car and was roaming the forest some 10 km away from my camp. But the logical reasoning didn’t help to tame my fear, so my panic was becoming more evident every second. Finally, I fully surrendered to my panic. I put more firewood in the fire to make it brighter and started singing on old Russian song, not because I thought that Russian songs are scarier to cougars, but because that was the only song that I remembered at that time. After singing it a few times as loud as I could, I started a loud conversation with myself using different voices to make an impression of a large company of people. (I doubt that cougars are able to distinguish between the voices, but at least it helped me to calm down).

After I started to loose my voice, I calmed down a bit and decided to move into the tent.

On the next morning I was happy to realize that I was still alive and that I could continue my journey. My starting time was a bit late that day because I had to wait an hour for my phone to accumulate some charge from the solar panel. The road to Port Alberni was fairly

straightforward and very calm. Most of it was following an old railway trail in the valley, so the elevation gain was minimal. The trail was fully submerged under the green, dense forest, hence the temperature was quite cool and nice for riding. It is worth noting that since I had left campground on Comox Lake and till I arrived to Port Alberni I met only 2 people: the “No Trespassing” person and the kind man who notified me about the cougar.

After Port Alberni I tried to go further south but the Franklin River Road, the only road that could take me south to Victoria without going to Nanaimo, was absolutely unsuitable for riding. The Franklin River Road has a gravel surface and also carries quite heavy traffic that turns all the gravel into dust and lifts it into the air. I tried to break through the dense curtain of dust hoping that it would get better after the first fork but on the fourth kilometre I realized that all the traffic follows the same direction as I do, so I turned back. I was coughing heavily for the next few days after that endeavor. A heavy curtain of dust was added to my list of “what can go wrong on the trip”. Who would have thought.

Instead I decided to take Highway #4 (Port Alberni Highway) and finished my trip in Nanaimo and not Victoria as I had initially planned.

I spent the last night on the Loon Lake near a summit. It was a lovely place but since it was located so close to the summit I had a hard time finding running water, so I ended up boiling the water from the lake.



Overlooking Comox Lake. Photo: Ilia Capralov

The last day was a kind of “going-back-home” day, plus it didn’t involve any off-road biking, so it was a very laid back day. All the way to Parksville, where I took the bus to Nanaimo, was downhill, so I made it fairly quickly. Luckily that day was concentrated a bit with mind blowing old-growth of MacMillan Provincial Park and the jaw-dropping waterfall in Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park. Those two places were worth visiting on their own, so the day was saved!

A few words in conclusion:

Both parts of the trip had their specifics and their own spirit. Sunshine Coast involved more high-quality resort-like riding whereas the Island part was more exploratory and adventure-like. I left the Port Alberni – Victoria part unexplored, so in the future I hope to choose an appropriate time with low traffic and try to conquer that part of the route.

See you in the outdoors!

A Wee Urban Adventure

Krista Cawley
& Piotr Forysinski

Looking for something a little different in this Edition of the VOCJ? Looking for ideas to spend a day in the city doing something a little out-of-the-ordinary? How about a spot of urban whitewater kayaking?

And by that, I don't mean the Seymour or the Capilano Rivers. That's way too conventional. Think outside the box!

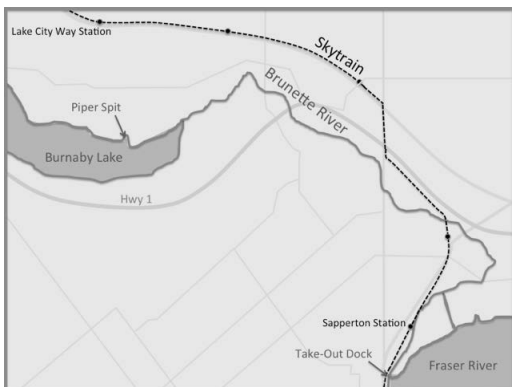
The Brunette River is the last tributary of the Mighty Fraser before it flows into the Georgia Strait, and it starts right in the middle of our great city, flowing out of Burnaby Lake through the Cariboo Dam. You can reach this major waterway at the Piper Spit on the Lake (park your vehicle here; remember to quack politely at the local waterfowl), and paddle across the lake to the Dam. Don't disturb the water lilies too much - be aware that getting stuck in water lilies in a boat constitutes an unpleasant, yet novel form of bushwhacking. The dam is best portaged on river left.

Once past the dam, use your throw-bag to lower your boat through the very prickly bushes back into the water. From here, paddle an exhilarating class I+ whitewater river run - best after significant rainfall, or perhaps better yet, after urban snowfall during a thaw. The run involves a mandatory mini-weir feature, and at least two wee rapids. The smelly rail bridge in the later, flatwater section of the run is definitely a highlight. Just before the Brunette confluences with the Fraser, it splits into two channels. Take river left through a built up waterway to "confluence" in style (yes, that is a verb).

Take out at a dock at the exit of the other channel, a little bit downstream on the Fraser from where you confluenced, and lock up your

boats out-of-sight under dock mentioned above. Take your paddle(s) with you (paddles walk away easier than kayaks), and walk up to the Sapperton Skytrain Station in full paddling attire – wetsuit/drysuit, helmet, gloves, PFD and all. Tap your Compass card as you walk into the station (they work now - yay - at long last! – even after you get them wet), and try not to drip muddy fishy water onto innocent commuters. Get off at Lake City Way, and schlopp your way back your vehicle at Piper Spit (because you still have muddy fishy water in your neoprene booties). Remember to retrieve your locked boats at the end of the trip. Enjoy!

PS: Paddling the Brunette River may not be 100% in accordance with local rules and regulations. Try this at your own risk – and make sure you respect all signage about nesting Western Painted Turtles on the beaches!



Top: The route.

Bottom: How to ride the skytrain in style.

Cycle Touring in the Hebrides

Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant 2016

Mike Cancilla & Lizzy Duguay

Mike

With excitement, we landed in Glasgow and watched the baggage coming off the plane. We saw being unloaded, two half destroyed bike boxes - our bike boxes - which we had last seen looking much fresher in Vancouver. Layovers in Toronto and Halifax had not been kind to them.

Concerns aside we were able to have our first Scottish conversation with the customs lady, “What are you doing in Scotland?” ; “We’re going cycle touring in the outer Hebrides.” ; “Sounds miserable!”

To counter this ringing endorsement and the abused nature of our luggage, we were picked up by our smiling friend Rachel and piled into her small car. Upon arrival at her flat, our bikes turned out to be in fine shape despite the aesthetic indications of the packaging. Rachel filled our day by graciously showing us around Glasgow and Edinburgh until we passed into a peaceful slumber on her pullout couch. Rachel has just finished her Ph.D on mountain huts (bothies to the Scots), a good friend to have!

The following morning we packed our panniers and pedaled straight off of Rachel’s street and onto Britain’s National Cycle Network. We were out of the city 30 minutes later. In those 30 minutes, we got lost twice, and I almost hit a man in my confusion over which side of the path I should be on. Also, clipless shoes claimed their first tally of the trip as Lizzy was unceremoniously dumped into the mud while stop-

ping, dragged over by the weight of the loaded bike and unable to unclip in time.

It was a beautiful day, we agreed that hanging laundry is really nice, and everything along the cycle network was very cute. We ended up doing 62 km that first day; a casual pace we wouldn't maintain throughout the trip. It seemed almost easy with fresh legs, good weather, and bike specific infrastructure. We wouldn't need to enter a road with cars until the next morning, near Arrochar.

After camping on the shore of Loch Lomond, we awoke to a fine 2nd day on the road, and we continued towards the port city of Oban. This morning we enjoyed our first black pudding. While stopping for breakfast, Lizzy crashed into a hedge in another tally for the clipless pedals.

Lizzy

Leaving Arrochar, we began to climb our first mountain pass which felt like the first real test after riding mostly flat terrain for the past day and a half. Chug-a-lugging along wasn't too bad, but it felt a bit uneasy since it was the first time we were on a major road with cars passing quite tightly. It turned out to be not too bad, and we were rewarded with a view of the valley at the top of the pass, named "Rest and Be Thankful".

A quick stretch/snack/photo break and then we were on our way to the real fun part; going downhill after gaining all that elevation! Well, it



Near the top of the 'Rest and be Thankful' Pass. Photo: Mike Cancilla

would have been great. I got scared shitless with the valley on the other side opening us to gusting wind, the lack of shoulder meant the cars were passing tightly on the winding road, and I started to get major speed wobble with a perhaps unevenly loaded bike. It was my first time riding with drop bars and I was not confident in the handling. I've had the pleasure of being in several high speed collisions leading to broken bones whilst skiing or biking, so I was sure these moments were leading up to a crash. There was no option to pull off or stop, and I felt the panic rising and was scouting for a patch of gravel and grass that I could steer into that would leave me less damaged than underneath a car. I held my mantra and was talking to myself loudly over the wild wind "just breathe, you're okay, just breathe, you're okay". Thankfully, I managed to keep myself from crash landing before the bottom of the hill. I pulled off into a parking lot clearing to potentially have a solitary breakdown, since Mike "Downhill Mountain Biking" Cancilla was cruising nearly out of sight, and definitely out of earshot down the road, probably grinning at the thrill of it all.

Not much time to be upset, since it seemed on this trip every moment you stopped some good natured friendly Scot would chat you up, and a hiker starting from the trailhead at the parking lot wasn't phased by my crazy eyes and had a nice little chat.

My trauma subsided, and I caught up to Mike. We cruised along making our way to Loch Fyne which I kept reminding him hosted both a brewery AND an oyster bar. Fyne Ales had some of the best beer we would encounter in Scotland (which isn't saying too much, but this beer was actually really good!). I learned that lochs (which I knew to be gaelic for lakes) also includes sea inlets! This addressed my confusion about why there was an oyster shop on a lake, and why this lake had seaweed and tidelines.

Riding on further we made a stop at the Campbell clan's castle in Inverrary, which was quite posh and included a cafe where we had tea with scones, clotted cream and jam. This snack would profoundly impact my trip as I would continue a quest to replicate it at every opportunity and yet never would it quite reach the decadent status of that initial taste. Note: didn't find any pictures of the club's own Ross Campbell.

We camped on the shores of Loch Awe after realizing this Loch was



Drying gear at a B&B in Oban. Photo: Lizzy Duguay

a freshwater lake and not an ocean inlet and had a restful sleep through the rain. This next section of road would prove a little tense since it was still a relatively major roadway that wound around corners, and the passing traffic made us feel a bit tense. We discovered a delightful cycle route from Connel that would take us to Oban. It took us through the most idyllic settings with quaint pastures and sheep, that route was a real treat to find! We rolled down the final hill into Oban feeling a little worn, but happy.

Mike

From Oban we were able to hop a ferry to the Isle of Barra in the Outer Hebrides. We were wowed by the Scottish ferries, they are comfy, friendly, serve whiskey, and sleeping is encouraged. Lovely! We settled into the tartan upholstered couches and watched the mainland recede into the horizon behind us. It was serene and refreshing. We had forgotten how nice it was to sit indoors for a long period of time, away from the wind.

Upon unloading there was a dark proclamation by the ferry employee, "Did you bring bug nets, there's midges, there's midges everywhere." Now, I thought we already knew how to handle midges from our time along Loch Lomond, but I was mistaken. These midges were the worst yet. They swarmed bare skin and were especially drawn to faces, I think this is because they sense the CO₂ you exhale. We left the ferry with a few other cyclists and then scattered, making good time to Vatersay, the southernmost point of the Outer Hebrides and home to

a beautiful hour-glass peninsula with white sand beaches looking both west, and east.

This part of the western Isles was incredible, and we had the best weather of the trip to complement the views. We cycled the small roads moving north, often with the prevailing wind at our backs pushing us along.

In South Uist, the weather began to deteriorate as we watched from a coffee shop and craft store but, we're used to cycling in a rainy climate, we thought. We got back on the road, but Scotland hadn't yet shown us what she was capable of. Soon we weren't needing to pedal downhill or uphill, as long as we were traveling North, and the rain was coming sideways with gale force. We were watching the weather reports closely, and they weren't looking good: winds up to 45 mph and 20 mm of rain overnight. After 20 km and declining comfort, we rolled into Howmore to the first of two Gatliff Trust Hostels we would stay at. We were incredibly thankful for the roaring fire and hospitality, and soon our morale returned.

Lizzy

After a restful night, we returned to the road. The storming skies at first light were so overwhelmingly beautiful that while gawking at the vistas, I forgot how to ride a bike and fell into the middle of the road. Mike and I both found this hilarious and thought it was a great start to the day! It was a long day of cycling with poor weather, but we saw



Lizzy is trying her best to hide the fact that we are miserable as we try to complete a loop of the Trotternish Peninsula in Skye. Photo: Mike Cancilla

standing stones, a chambered cairn, and locals cutting peat near the roadside. In the highlands, locals burn dried peat in their stoves, rather than wood. As we neared the 2nd Gatliff Trust Hostel in Bernerarry, the weather became increasingly violent leading us to hide out in a bus shelter to get our bearings. This would be the first of several bus shelter reprieves on our trip! Our friends at the last hostel made sure to show us their stunning blue sky/white sand photos of Bernerarry in case the weather wasn't so kind to us during our stay (which it wasn't), but good company, copious amounts of hot tea, and a bevvy of bike tourers made our stay in Bernerarry pleasant and cozy!

Onto Harris we went! This section of the ride was outstanding. It was a tough decision to choose between riding the wild white sand beaches of the west coast, or the moonscape rocks of the east coast, but we went for the east and were not disappointed! It was a rhythmic route, and we wove in and out of countless bays climbing the rolling hills and descending past tiny seaside lochs. It's called the "Golden Road" due to the high cost of building it in 1897. The rocks here are dated at three thousand million years old! I think this was my favourite riding section of the whole trip, although it's hard to choose! We also checked out the Macleod's church and tombs with 15th century engravings, and an artist's studio converted from an old Protestant Church where the artist's parting words to Mike were "Life is just a fart on the wind. That's all it is". Something to think about...

After spending the night in a campground with another neat old blackhouse, we took the ferry over to Skye. Mike approached a nice ferry worker who offered us the tickets for free; what a nice gesture of hospitality.

When we arrived in Skye, the weather was still not very inspiring and with our next destination too far away, we we had half a day on our hands. Mike suggested a "pleasure ride" with no panniers. "It will be nice", he said. "Only 20 km", he said. I wasn't sold on it, but threw caution to the wind and we climbed the hill out of Uig to do a loop of the Trotternish Peninsula. I was feeling pretty light and fast without a loaded bike, and it was only drizzling, an improvement. We cruised over to the impressive and looming cliffs of the Quaraig which were engulfed in fog and mist. It was all fun and games descending off the high inland plateau and back down to the beaches, but as we came around the bend to travel South back to Uig, we were struck with a full



Left: Exploring the fairy glen's near Uig on Skye. Photo: Mike Cancilla

Right: Filling some water in the Cuillin's on the way to Bell's Bothy.

Photo: Lizzy Duguay

gale right into our faces. This was the kind of weather where your nose is emptying onto the rest of your face, but you are too wet to care.

I've never been stopped dead in my tracks on a bike like that before. We were skidding around and peddling as hard as we could in our easiest gear, not covering any ground. Shocking!

We had completed about 2/3 of the loop, so we were left with a decision: take the long road back, with still uncertain weather, or continue the last 1/3 south, straight into the sideways rain. We chose the latter and walked/biked/dragged our sorry selves homeward, taking pit stop number two in a bus shelter to refuel with beer and crisps. After all was said and done, we sat in a pub looking out over the raging waves in the bay, feeling shocked. Mike's 20 km loop turned out to be 50 km, but all was forgiven after our pub food and a warm shower. We felt that Neil would have been proud of us.

Mike

The next day we dragged our behinds out of our tent and shared tea with a nice motorbiker from England. We must have looked appalling because an Israeli family at the campsite offered to make us soup. Alas, we had to decline because we had just ate.

We packed our bikes up with half dry clothes and hit the road toward Portree. We stayed a night and went on towards Sligachan the next day with the goal of leaving the bikes and walking into Bell's Bothy in Camasunary Bay.

Sligachan was a funny experience for us. It felt quite posh. We arrived and promptly exploded our gear all over their lobby while transferring from bike mode into hike mode. Regardless, they were nice enough to house our bikes in a shed out back, and act as an emergency contact if we didn't return for them. We were thankful because we were walking out into a storm on a route we hadn't traveled before.

The walking route to the bothy went well, the storm actually broke and soon the Cuillin's were bathed in sun. We arrived after four hours and shared a few drams in memory of Neil. Shockingly, my waterproof socks and sandals combination survived the 9 mile trek through peat bog and my feet stayed dry.

We got back on the road moving South through Skye and took a morning ferry from Armadale to Mallaig. Armadale had a lovely little artist scene to check out.

In Lochailort, we left our bikes in a bush and trekked into the Peanmeanach Bothy, recommended from our friend Rachel. It was lovely. We drank whiskey with some of the other guests and ate mussels which we harvested from the beach.

The next day we met the Mackenzie's for lunch. It was wonderful to meet some smiling faces. Their warmth and enthusiasm for our trip was inspiring and as we were pedalling away, we both had a cry think-



Sharing dinner in the Peanmeanach Bothy

ing about the circumstance that had brought us together.

Soon we were back on our way to Mallaig where we grabbed our train towards Glasgow, and the end of our time in Scotland. As we packed our bikes onto the train, I think we both were a little sad that our adventure was at an end. Traveling by bike offered us an opportunity to see Scotland and come to know a little about it through its people, its landscapes, and its history. We value traveling by bike to experience places at their own pace, not by moving through them, but by being in them. Scotland is a fantastic cycling destination with rolling hills, quiet roads, and good cycling infrastructure even if the weather is unpredictable. We hope that our adventures here inspire others to dream up their own goals, and experience Scotland on their own terms.

Some books we read before or on this trip:

Calum's Road - Roger Hutchinson

Lonely Planet - Scotland

A History of Scotland - Neil Oliver

A Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides - James Boswell

Island: The Collected Stories of Alistair Macleod

A book we should have read to prepare for this trip:

Cycling in the Hebrides - Richard Barrett

Waterways of Whistler

Exploration of Urban Waterways

Caitlin Schneider

So, if you have met Piotr Forsysinski, you may have heard about a plan to bike, row, and paddle a homebuilt raft around the lower mainland. Part of this route includes going through Whistler on the way from Howe Sound to Pemberton, and Piotr was wondering if it would be possible to paddle the raft through Whistler instead of biking. Our mission was to do some recon of a watery route from Alpha Lake on the south end of Whistler near Function Junction, through Nita Lake, to Alta Lake, and finally to Green Lake. Piotr had looked at Google maps and concluded that we should be able to paddle the entire way, since there were little blue lines connecting each body of water.

I had recently hurt my shoulder and was trying to get back into paddling shape, so this seemed like a good way to try out how well it was working. What could be wrong with some gentle flatwater paddling, right?

Piotr mostly had the route worked out, but we didn't really have the route back planned. I didn't want to leave the boats and gear unattended, while Piotr didn't want to bike alone, or leave his bike locked up somewhere all day. So in the end, we left Piotr's bike at my house and decided to hitchhike or bus back to the car.

We drove to Whistler and spent a bit of time checking out the Cheakamus river before finding the put-in to Alpha Lake, which seemed to be in the middle of an apartment complex. The lake was a lovely little place with a few families paddling around a little rock island in the middle. We easily crossed the lake to the other side where we could see a park and a bunch of people playing with their dogs. What we didn't see was a nice river flowing into Nita Lake.

As we paddled closer, we did see an outlet of the lake, it seemed to flow directly into the forest. We tried to keep paddling as long as possible but it soon became apparent that this would be totally impossible. The trees were quite thick, and hanging branches reached into the water, which at times was only about ankle deep. Logs also crossed the little creek and blocked all possible passage, except by hauling the boats over or around.

We got out of the boats and started walking up the creek, dragging the boats behind us through the bushes. Every trip needs a bit of bush-whacking, of course! Even a paddling trip.

We found a huge number of dog toys that had made their way into the creek from the park, and we tossed them into the boats as we went. Finally, we saw the blue sky above us and the beautiful open water of Nita Lake. This little pond is the smallest of all of them, and we quickly found the opposite shore. Here, we again, looked for a nice stream that flowed into Alta Lake, one of the most popular of the Whistler lakes.

The opposite shore, though, seemed to be a swamp... Again, we climbed out of the boats and prepared to drag our boats through a bit more bush. This time though, there was not a single drop of water, just mud and then, just bushes. Above the creek, there is a nice bike path that was a much easier walkway than the never-ending bush. The embankment was quite steep, but better than walking back through the mud. Piotr climbed up and rigged a haul line, since with one working shoulder, I wasn't in the best shape to haul boats in the vertical direction.



Bush wacking between Alpha Lake and Nita Lake. There was a blue line on the map, but not much of a river. Photos: Caitlin Schneider

On the bike path, we walked among the bikes, dogs and a few stand up paddle boarders. Upon arriving at Alta Lake, we carefully lowered the boats down the rocks and made our way over to a public dock. After a quick swim in the lake, we lounged in the sun, ate lunch and munched on chocolate. A few more fashionable Whistlerites joined us for a bit, but soon moved on.

Our next stop was the dog park, and, in an attempt to give away all the toys we had collected, we made a few puppies very happy.

Alta Lake is quaint and very scenic, but at the far end of the Lake was the section of the trip I was most looking forward to: the River of Golden Dreams.

You drive over this river every time you leave Whistler and with a name like that, how can you not want to paddle it? It actually seems to be a bit of the tourist attraction for incompetent canoeists, and we found a few signs telling us how to lean into trees, avoid branches, and other things everyone should know.

The river starts out meandering its way through saw grass, which reminded me a bit of the swamps of Florida. Soon we were forced once again to walk the boats around a salmon spawning bed, but then we found something I did not expect to find in Whistler. Beaver Dams! And BEAVERS! Well, I guess those normally come together.

There were more signs, sometimes on the dams themselves, urging people not to dismantle the dams, but to paddle over them instead. And paddle over them we did: it was great fun. Paddle straight towards a giant pile of sticks, and then slide down the backside. Wheeeee!!!!

We also found some actual beavers! The first one was just hang-



Taking a break with a cider on the River of Golden Dreams.

Photo: Piotr Forysinski

ing out near the bank. A brown ball of fur munching on a branch. He didn't seem to be bothered by us as we floated by, never stopped munching. The other beaver was actually in construction mode. He was swimming upstream towing a large branch covered in leaves. At first, as he rounded the corner of the river, he looked like some terrible river monster.

There were at least 6-8 beaver dams to paddle over, some larger than others, but all pretty fun. But in no time, we had paddled the River of our Golden Dreams, and arrived at Green Lake, our final destination. We were treated to a beautiful sunset over Wedge, doused in golden glow, and we watched a few float planes land on the lake as well. This is a bit disconcerting when you are in a kayak.

Something I had never seen was a motorized dock. It seems almost everyone on Green Lake has one, a 10 ft by 10 ft block of floating dock that usually includes a BBQ and a few chairs, as well as a 10 hp motor. Where do these guys go? Visiting each other? Do they have huge floating dock BBQ parties in the middle of the lake? I may never know.

Just after sunset, we docked at the little public dock near the far end of Green Lake. Now we needed to get back to the car... Since we had not set up any shuttle, I stayed with the boats and gear, while Piotr went back for the car. But the buses didn't seem to be running often, and no one wanted to pick up a tall Polish guy wearing swim shorts.

Two hours later... Piotr arrived at the dock, and I jumped into the car to warm up. Note, should bring more clothing next time.

In the end, exploring always brings something new. We did decide, though, fairly early on, that this would not be a good route to take the raft!



The view from Green Lake.
Photo: Caitlin Schneider

Indian Arm Kayaking Bonanza

Maya Motyka

Today, my group and I are embarking on our kayaking journey within the Indian Arm. The Indian Arm is a steep glacial fjord which we accessed from Deep Cove in North Vancouver. It stretches up north until it connects to the Indian River. Our plan is to paddle up the Indian Arm along the shore to a campsite called Granite Falls. This paddle will take a total of four hours if we paddle at a reasonable pace. When we reach the campsite, we have the option of continuing up to the estuary where the Indian River meets the ocean.

I roll out of bed on Saturday morning with my first thought being about the weather. I quickly go online and see a “mixture of sun and clouds”. As good as it sounds, I know that I live in Raincouver, and the weather changes faster here than anywhere else.

I quickly do a double, triple, and octuple check of all of the gear that I’m bringing, and stuff it all in my hiking bag for the long commute to Deep Cove. As a group, we did not have enough drivers for everyone, so a handful of us (including me) are lucky enough to begin our journey on a magnificent bus ride. This bus ride in particular, will probably be the most stressful part of this trip. I have to take two buses to get there, and the buses line up so that one leaves as the other arrives. Luckily, it works out in the end as myself and a couple of other girls walk off the bus with relief.

We all gather outside of the kayak rental shop to quickly make any final adjustments, and go over the standard kayak safety. A few of us run back to the cars to quickly drop off any extra baggage that we won’t be taking. When we all got back, it was time pack our boats. Then, when we finished packing, we put on our spray skirts. Considering most of

we are quite new to the kayaking lifestyle, it was very entertaining to see everyone's different ideas on how to properly wear a spray skirt. Eventually, Koby couldn't stand it anymore, and began to correct us. After some quick introductions, we hopped into our boats and cast away.

When we got in the water, the weather was quite acceptable. Not too cold and not too hot; we paddled in comfort. As we rounded the corner and waved our good-byes to the wandering tourists on Quarry Rock, a very popular hike in the area, I began to realize how far we had yet to go.

As we paddled, we started to catch sight of white jellyfish or as some of us remarked: cracked eggs in water. Although they were beautiful, we dared not stop for the fear of losing the speed we paddled so hard to gain. As the paddle went on, more and more of us got into a steady rhythm paddling and enjoying the magnificent views around us.

As much as I love watching the mountains and forests, it was also quite entertaining to observe the houses and properties as we paddled on. The farther and farther we went, the larger the gaps were between properties, and eventually you start to notice that no cars were present and that the only possible access was by boat. These properties made me dream of myself in these houses, and having the Indian Arm as my backyard: a perfect getaway.

As we neared halfway, we stopped at the rocky shores of Camp Jubilee for our lunch. As soon as I leave my boat, I turn around and see that our fearless leader Koby, decides to take a quick shower by doing



Packing up our kayaks. Photo: Maya Motyka

a full 360 turn in his single kayak. Although it did the job of waking him up, it still left him cold and wet for the rest of our lunch break.

As soon as everyone refueled, we hop back into our boats and paddle across to the other side towards the old, abandoned powerhouse that looks like a castle.

We kept on paddling until we hit 18 km and our jackets were dusted with sea salt. We made it to Granite Falls, our campsite. Before unloading, we decided to paddle further into the estuary that connects us to the Indian River. Due to low current, we paddled up the Indian River. We struggled through strong current in some areas, and I may have temporarily lost my water bottle during a battle with the current. Eventually, we got to a point in the river that not even our daring lead, Zack, could complete. We cruised back down the river where we found my water bottle and paddled back to the campsite. Our campsite was at a beautiful location with a breath-taking waterfall in the background: Granite Falls.

Once we all set up and settled into the campsite, we sat around and did a classic potluck for dinner. Our delicious entrees included anything from pasta to chili to stew. Our bellies were all full, but we somehow had space for amazing desserts. That is when it began to rain - nothing too dramatic - but enough to make it uncomfortable. The bad weather finally caught up to us.

For the rest of the evening, we all sat together and talked and laughed and shared stories before slowly, one by one, we sauntered off to bed. Some of us stayed way past our bedtimes, and didn't make it into our sleeping bags until a crazy hour of 9 pm.

My muscles thanked me as I snuggled into my warm sleeping with my fleece pants and down jacket. That night was one of the best sleeps I've had.

The next morning, we all woke around 8 am to find that all of the clothes we left to dry outside, were soaked. Luckily we had brought extras! We all made nice warm meals for breakfast before packing up and getting our boats ready to go. As we were lifting our kayaks back down to the beach, we noticed that one of the kayak hatches had a missing top. As much as everyone tried to look, we could not find it. It became the mystery of the missing hatch top. We decided to leave without it,

and let the consequences unfold when we got back.

Our paddle back was quicker due to the wind and tide being on our side, pushing us along, (or because of our strong muscles as I like to think about it). We all paddled hard and fast in order to get back early so that we can study, or to get to the fresh, delicious donuts at Honey's. We made it back in record time, in my opinion, of 1:30 pm. We gathered our stuff, packed our bags, and grabbed our donuts as we said a tearful farewell. Honey's donuts was the reward of the hard work we put into this amazing kayak trip. As I ate my doughnut, I stood at the bus stop waiting for the ride back home, thinking how memorable my first VOC trip has been. Cheers to many more.



Top: Paddling up the Idian Arm in high spirits. Photo: Maya Motyka

Bottom: Checking out the old abandoned power house.
Photo: Maya Motyka

The 2 Lakes, 2 Rivers Challenge

Krista Cawley,
with Piotr Forysinski

Day 1:

Bike from Vancouver to Alouette Lake with a canoe in tow (55 km).
Paddle up Alouette Lake to the Narrows campsite (9 km).

Day 2:

Paddle to BC Hydro water intake at the end of Alouette Lake (6 km).
Push bikes up and down to Stave Lake BC Hydro outfall (1.5 km, 350 m elevation gain).
Paddle down Stave Lake to Stave Dam boat launch (17 km).

Day 3:

Portage to Hayward Lake Reservoir, paddle Hayward Lake, portage Ruskin Dam to Stave River, paddle to confluence with the Fraser (10 km).
Paddle the Fraser River to Burnaby, Marine Drive near Boundary Road (55 km).
Bike to pizza by midnight (9 km).

“This loop... Alouette Lake, Stave Lake, Stave River, Fraser River... self-propelled... we could do it on bikes and with a canoe,” mused Piotr. “I’m not sure if anyone has done it before.” If you know Piotr Forysinski, this means an adventure is in store, and you had better be prepared for long days, a little suffering, lots of faff, and so much fun.

We called the trip the 2 Lakes, 2 Rivers Challenge – could we do a 165 km loop over land, lake, and river in a weekend? A rainy 3-day opportunity presented itself in mid-June, and having scouted parts of the

route on previous weekends, we decided to go for it.

Alouette Lake, Stave Lake, and the Stave River are linked by a complex maze of dams and pipes that provide hydroelectric power to BC Hydro. The three dams (Alouette Dam, Stave Falls Dam, and Ruskin Dam) were built in the period between 1912-1930 as part of the Hydroelectric Complex. By 1927, these dams were the largest source of power in the BC Electric system.

Early on Saturday morning, we loaded up dry bags and panniers onto our bikes, connected the canoe trailer to Piotr's bike rack, and began cycling down bike paths roughly along Lougheed Highway. We were careful to navigate between the numerous metal poles and obstacles that are only relevant to one towing a canoe. After crossing the Mary Hill Bypass, we pedaled up the PoCo Trail on the west side of the Pitt River, before passing through the farmlands of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. Local farm stands provided some excellent cheeses, bread, and fruit to fuel our journey, as biking with a canoe in tow feels like you are constantly pedaling uphill - even though the road is perfectly flat. The canoe feels a little wiggly and sometimes causes you to lose balance for no apparent reason. Piotr has the technique figured out and bikes effortlessly, but I guess I'm still learning the art of towing heavy things behind a bike.

Eventually, we left urban and rural zones amid stares of confusion and amusement from cars and passersby, and biked along the forested roads towards Golden Ears Provincial Park. Once at the bottom of Alouette Lake, our journey into wilder places began. Our first paddle strokes in the canoe were shaky at best, since it was loaded somewhat



Left: Trailering efficiently into Golden Ears Park. Photo: Krista Cawley

Right: On the shores of Alouette Lake, ready to switch modes of transportation. Photo: Krista Cawley

hastily with bikes, and the top-heavy load threatened to capsize our canoe, along with all of our plans. However, after figuring out the finer points of balancing a tippy canoe, we paddled away happily. Once evening arrived, we stopped at the narrows of the lake to camp for the night.

Morning dawned early, and as we packed our tent we looked onward, towards the steep hillside ahead and the short stretch of calm water separating us from it. We pushed off and paddled towards the rocky shoreline and steep bank covered in salmonberries, which we would use to pull the canoe and our bikes out of the water. Once on shore, we hauled our gear up and onto the BC Hydro service road at the intake for an underwater pipe, which carries water from Alouette Lake to Stave Lake. It turns out that BC Hydro roads can be steep – very steep. The short hop across to Stave Lake, which is 1.5 km and 300 m elevation gain as the crow flies, took the greater portion of the day as we pushed and pulled our way upwards, and then skidded downwards on loose gravel and dirt. We ended up hiking that hill three times: once to push our bikes up, once to pull the canoe up, and a third time, after we biked down the far side to retrieve the canoe and haul that down. It was late afternoon by the time we arrived at Stave Lake, happy to get on the water once again.



Left: At the far end of Alouette Lake. Shit gets real. Photo: Piotr Forysinski
Right: The key to a successful multi-modal self-propelled trip is efficient faffing. Photo: Piotr Forysinski

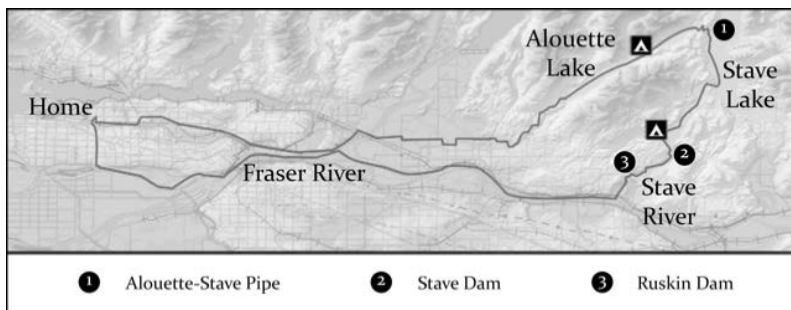
After transitioning back to on-water apparel and loading the canoe (a task which we were becoming more efficient at every time), we began the long paddle down Stave Lake, eventually ending at the Stave Lake boat launch at the top of Stave Falls Dam near 11pm. As we pitched our tent at the far corner of the day use area, a BC Hydro truck's lights shone on our bikes, and a young fellow walked over to greet us. "You know you're not supposed to camp here, right?" We explained our situation and our lack of other options, and upon hearing that we had come from Vancouver via Alouette Lake, by bike and canoe, his frown turned into a big smile and he granted us permission to stay. After a long day, we crawled into our sleeping bags, and dreamt of the challenges ahead of us to get back home.

On our last morning, we awoke early and packed up hastily in the rain. We were still quite tired from the night before, but we also still had a long way to go. The key to completion was efficiency: two portages stood ahead of us in close proximity, and in order to get to the Fraser in good time, we would need to transition quickly at each stage. The first transition at Hayward Lake went well. 30 minutes after we dismounted our bikes, we were loaded up and paddling away in the canoe. At the bottom of Hayward Lake, we pulled out on a sandy beach and switched into bike mode again. This portage proved to be more difficult, because of the recent construction on the Ruskin Dam. The Ruskin Trail was closed for a short section, which meant that we had to take a series of steep and narrow switchbacks up to the main road in order to get through. Easier said than done with a canoe! But after some grunting and pulling, we were happily rolling downhill and reached the Stave River at last. Here we loaded the canoe one last time, very carefully and diligently – a tippy canoe was not an option for the river paddling that was to come.

Soon after we launched, we paddled under Lougheed Highway and joined the mighty Fraser River. "We are confluencing!" we cheered. Sawmills and industrial yards lined the riverbanks, and we slowly began the transition back into Vancouver. We navigated the waters carefully, watching for currents that might catch us, along with tugboats, log booms, and other users of the river. We paddled under great bridges, like the Golden Ears, Port Mann, Patullo, and many others. In New Westminster, we turned right and into the North Arm of the Fraser, where a stiff headwind forced us to paddle hard just to maintain for-

ward progress down river. Eventually, long after the sun had set and our arms had become very tired, we pulled out just short of our intended take-out, somewhere near the bottom of Boundary Road in Burnaby, in Riverfront Park. We hastily loaded up and biked up Elliott Street as the clock ticked towards midnight. We were hungry!

As we pulled up to Fire Pizza on Commercial Drive in the dark and drizzle, Piotr asked, “What time is it?” It was 11:57pm. We laughed – the 2 Lakes, 2 Rivers Challenge can be done in 3 days – if only just barely!



Top: Stave River, nearing the confluence with the Mighty Fraser.

Photo: Piotr Forsyński.

Bottom: Map of our route, including campsites and dams portaged.

Club Life and Reflections



True teamwork. Sled dogs at the ready, while Ross contemplates a nap on his way to Efin Hut for Burns 'n Turns. Photo: Birgit Rogalla



Swimming on a Thermarest! Photo: Emily Kuang

Ross, Birgit relax after a morning well spent moving wood to Brew Hut.
Photo: Roland Burton

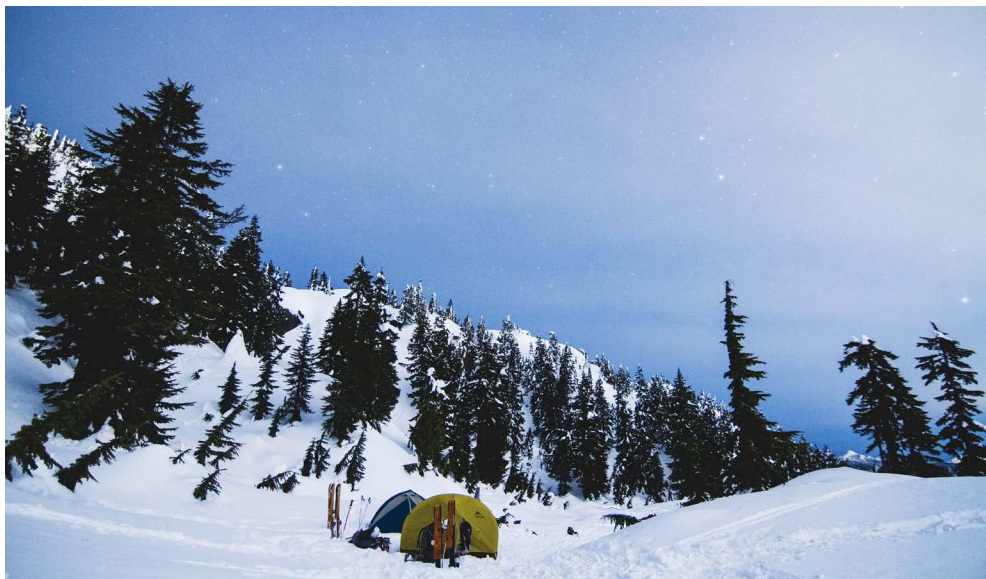




Ross prepares to destroy the slide alder on the trail to Lizzy Lake Hut.
Photo: Tom Curran

A club institution. Trucky Truck contemplates the next adventure.
Photo: Ian Johnston





Top: Some slept in tents, most slept in snowcaves, Winter Longhike 2017.

Photo: Brandon Everell

Right: Are we there yet? Kat learns more about type 2 fun during a long hike in Zion National Park. Photo: Artem Babian

Bottom: Sweet spot for dinner, on the 2016 Veenstra traverse.

Photo: Genevieve Savard







Top: The Milky Way shines down over Brew Hut. Photo: Joshua Ma

Right: New climbers learn the ropes at the annual Son Of Rock in Squamish. Photo: Nick Hindley



From the Desk of...

Devon Campbell

Garibaldi at Squamish Resort

Overview:

Last January, the Garibaldi at Squamish (GAS) Resort received its environmental approval from the British Columbia Government. The proposed resort is planned for construction on Brohm Ridge, just northeast of Squamish and adjacent to Garibaldi Provincial Park. It will be able to accommodate 22,000 guests and have an overall size of 2,759 hectares. The proponents, the Aquilini Investment Group, predict that the project will provide 2,400 direct full-time equivalent jobs and contribute \$50 million in tax revenue.

Just referring to the proponent's claims, this appears to be a fantastic resort only an hour's drive from Vancouver. Unfortunately, the resort's base elevation is only 650 meters, 250 meters lower than any resort in the North Shore. During the 2010 Olympics, snow had to be brought to Cypress for the alpine events due to a lack of snowpack. In 2015, all three South Coast resorts struggled to stay open during a dismal snow year. With the warming climate trend, weather conditions will be more unpredictable, and we can expect poor snow years on a more regular basis. A 1974 report from Sno-Engineering claimed that the ski terrain is not suitable for a commercial resort, due to inadequate snowfall and insufficient quantity and quality of terrain. The Aquilini Group's job creation and tax revenue forecasts will not be met if the ski resort doesn't attract visitors, especially considering the proximity of Whistler-Blackcomb.

Brohm Ridge is an ecologically unique area that can be irreversibly

altered by the development of a ski resort. It provides a migration corridor and critical wintering habitat for mountain goats, which avoid areas occupied by humans. The construction of the resort will result in the loss of 403 hectares of old-growth forest, with a further 438 hectares irreversibly altered. Groundwater extracted in order to meet the demands of the resort may lower water levels in the Cheakamus River side channels to a point that may result in the loss of crucial salmon spawning grounds. The development of this resort will cause permanent destruction of the environment, just for a mediocre skiing experience.

The resort's adjacency to the park border gives the potential for it to eventually expand within the park. Since 1966, roughly 32.8 square kilometers have been removed from Garibaldi Park and given to Whistler Blackcomb. This sets precedent for GAS to pressure the government into granting them operating area within the park in the future.

The VOC Response:

The VOC has been opposed to the Garibaldi at Squamish resort throughout the environmental assessment process, with a core objective of maintaining the integrity of Garibaldi Park's borders. We sent a letter to the environmental assessment office in 2008, mentioning concerns about negative effects from increased access and our concern of future encroachment into the park. After the environmental assessment was approved, concerns mounted within the club, so we decided to launch a campaign in opposition to the resort.

In the spring of 2016, we launched the #SaveGaribaldi online campaign to raise awareness about the negative effects of the resort. Our petition reached 1,000 signatures in just over 24 hours and our infographic had over 90,000 views. This captured local media attention, and we were featured on the Ubysey, Squamish Chief and News 1130. We were successful in raising awareness of the negative impacts of the proposed resort, and hope that our voice will have influence on the final outcome. Looking towards the future, we will contribute opinions during any public consultation processes and will support any initiative that permanently protects Garibaldi Park's borders from encroachment.



Enjoying the view from Brohm Ridge. Photo: Matt Kennedy

For the project to proceed, it must be approved by the Mountain Resorts Branch and either the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) or the District of Squamish (DoS) must agree to have it within their jurisdiction. The project does not fit in with either administration's long-term growth plans. The DoS is apprehensive about implementing the resort into its services and the SLRD is worried that this development could adversely affect Whistler-Blackcomb. Hopefully the opposition of the local governments can halt the construction of GAS, and finally end this debate that started in the early nineties.

BC Parks Campaigns

Since 2000, BC Parks funding has been significantly reduced, and the number of rangers in the province has similarly declined, even though the provincial government has added over 100 parks since 2001. Frustrations mounted and two campaigns were formed to show the province that British Columbians wanted change. The Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (FMCBC) launched the Fund BC Parks campaign earlier this year, while the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) continued their #Standupforparks campaign that was launched in 2014.

The Fund BC Parks campaign, launched by the FMCBC, asked BC Parks users to share photos of poorly maintained, dangerous trails and other infrastructure within the parks, and also encouraged citizens to

write letters to their MLAs showing their disapproval over the lack of funding. The FMCBC sent a letter to Premier Christy Clark advocating for an increase in BC Parks funding from the present \$31 million to \$60 million. This would provide adequate funding to maintain the existing infrastructure within the parks. Tensions built over the summer, as residents had a hard time finding available camping spaces, and social media was filled with photos and videos of severe overcrowding at Joffre Lakes. Almost two decades of neglect to the parks was starting to show, and the provincial government had to respond to the outcry. The province committed to hiring new park rangers, investing up to \$22.9 million in campsite expansion in parks and recreation sites over five years, and to providing an additional \$15 million to maintain and refurbish existing sites. The FMCBC was a leader in pushing the provincial government to adequately fund our parks, and they will continue to push for proper management of backcountry recreation throughout the funding allocation process.

CPAWS began their campaign to maintain the integrity of BC Parks back in 2014 when they launched one of the biggest environmental petitions in BC history, calling for the repeal of the Park Amendment Act. This act made it easier for the government to amend provincial park boundaries, and many environmental groups claimed that it has made BC Parks access much easier for industrial interests, specifically pipeline development. CPAWS is still fighting for the protection of parks, and is urging BC citizens to write letters to Premier Christy Clark and Minister of Environment Mary Polak with their support to increase the number of park rangers to 360 regular and seasonal positions, to increase funding to \$60 million to match pre-2000 levels, and to commit to an increase in long-term funding and campsite expansion.

I encourage all club members who support a well-maintained and adequately funded parks system to send a letter to their MLA showing their support to FMCBC's and CPAWS's campaigns.

The Kindness of Strangers

Cora Skaien, Nicole Barrette,
Birgit Rogalla, Caitlin Schneider

Over the years, there have been many times when club members have experienced Type 2, or even Type 3 fun, and all they've hoped for is some form of rescue. Sometimes, we come across people who lessen the burden of our Type 2 fun and make our lives a little easier. This trip report is dedicated to these wonderful people!

Sometimes, these acts towards strangers are performed by VOC members themselves. For example, at Battleship Islands, Roland Burton, having just crossed the Neve, was handing out 'Compeed' blister patches and a total stranger asked for a couple. Roland gave them to him and mentioned that he usually charges \$2 for them, but that he didn't expect him to have change up there. To his amazement, the stranger's wife showed up at Roland's house a week later with the money to show their gratitude.

Other times, these acts lessen the pain of our very own members. For example, Else Bosman recalls when a group of VOCers spent a whole day trying to haul a giant boulder out of the outhouse hole at Phelix using physics and cranks. A stag party lifted that boulder out of the hole while they were slightly more than a little tipsy that night. In this article, we will share some of our experiences about the people we want to thank the most.

Kindness of Strangers along the Neve Traverse

Cora Skaien

In March 2015, I embarked on the Neve traverse with Roland Burton, his wife Carla, Dakotah Fozzard, Matt Kennedy, Noah Besen, and Dan Rohn. I was trying to get more into backcountry skiing and had recently learned that I was a far better AT skier than I was a telemark skier. As a result, I was keen to rent some AT skis from MEC for the traverse, as opposed to snowshoes. Roland, Carla, Matt, and Dakotah were all on snowshoes, and Dan, Noah, and I had skis (Dan and Noah are really good skiers). I should note that 2015 was not a very good snow year, and by March, Garibaldi Lake was nearly thawing and the snow was fairly icy and crusty.

We hiked to Elfin on Friday evening, with the intention of summiting Garibaldi the next day along the way. I hiked in my ski boots to lessen the weight of my bag (no hiking boots), and this turned out to be a huge mistake. I had formed quarter-sized water blisters on the soles of my feet that night and could barely walk. I decided to skip Garibaldi and just do the normal Neve with Roland and Carla. I was in so much pain the entire traverse, and I greatly regretted my decision not to snowshoe. The snow was so bad that I ended up carrying my heavy rental skis for much of the traverse. At times, Carla had to carry the skis for me because my feet were so bad! Thanks Carla!

I was so relieved to make it to Sphinx (Burton) Hut on Saturday night, but did not know how I was going to make it back to the parking lot the next day. I told myself, just make your way across the lake and you can worry about the last 9 kilometers afterwards. The entire crossing of the lake was a bit nerve racking, as you could see the ice cracking beneath your feet while cannon-like sounds emitted from the thawing ice every few minutes. The lake was clearly thawing and there was no time to stop or worry about foot pain. We got to the other side of Garibaldi Lake and ate lunch. During the entire lunch, I realized that I had no strength or motivation to make it down. The trail between Garibaldi Lake and the junction to Taylor Meadows had minimal snow, and the snow that was there was compacted ice along the trail with boot holes in it. I was in no state to ski out, but nor was the trail in any state to let me try. All I could think was, "Please let someone else carry my skis for me!"

We started down the trail. In about 15 minutes, I had made it from the day huts at the lake to the foot bridge at the end of the lake. My feet were in indescribable pain and the combination of balance and

a heavy pack was too much. Two girls walked past and asked if they could help at all, and although I was grateful, I indicated that all my small, heavy items were at the bottom of the bag. As they walked away, my heart sank because that was my chance! I continued painfully moving at a snail's pace while Dakotah and Matt kindly kept me company. About fifteen minutes later, the two women returned and said, "We have decided we are trading bags! We will take yours, and you can take our day pack. You can meet us at our house after to pick up your bag." I could not believe how lucky I was! They took my bag and I met them at their house after to trade back. I cannot describe how grateful I was, because I was not going to make it down otherwise! The entire next week, the only thing I could wear was hut booties and I had to walk very slowly. The pain lasted weeks until eventually the blisters healed. I have never had such bad blisters in my life!

I started making a thank-you basket for them to show my gratitude, but never managed to finish it. Writing this article makes me think that I should get on that ASAP, even if it is almost 2 years overdue!

Kindness of Strangers in the Bugaboos: The Calgarians

Nicole Barrette

In August 2016, I was on my way into Bugaboo Provincial Park for a five-day trip with several alpine climbing objectives in mind. I was travelling with my 53-year old father, Paul Barrette.

This trip had been a dream for the past couple years. Six years ago, before I'd ever climbed in the alpine or even heard of trad gear, I had visited the Bugaboos with my father and a guide. We'd climbed the Kain route on Bugaboo Spire and the West Ridge of Pigeon Spire, though sadly the latter had been under complete whiteout conditions. That first guided visit had really opened up my eyes to the world of alpine trad climbing. I was hooked. I learned the basics of leading on gear the following summer and have been honing my skills ever since. I vowed that someday I would return to the Bugaboos with my dad and rope-gun him up Pigeon Spire in better weather.

Finally in 2016, the dream was becoming a reality. We were about halfway up the hike to Applebee Dome, 50 lb. packs on our backs, and

an amazing weather forecast for the next four days. This was it; I was finally going to get my dad back up to the top of Pigeon Spire!

Suddenly, my dad stopped ahead of me on the trail. I could hear cursing as I caught up and asked him what was wrong. He was silent for a moment, and then he quietly said, "I think I forgot my climbing shoes."

Well f!P%\$.

I looked at his hiking boots. I know some people are comfortable climbing alpine in boots, but my dad is not one of those people.

I tried to hide my disappointment, but internally I was already beginning to recalibrate our trip, as I knew that without shoes, we'd have to give up our main objectives. We continued up to the Kain hut, with our spirits dampened. At least we would still be able to hike and do some easier stuff right? We were here, and the weather window was not to be wasted.

We arrived at the Kain hut in good time and my dad decided to double check his pack before continuing up the last leg of the journey to the Applebee Dome Campsite. There were a few other climbers/hikers milling about the cabin and I struck up a conversation with Rick and Jeff, two climbers from Calgary that were on their way down. Meanwhile, my dad dug through his pack to confirm the worst: the shoes had definitely been left behind in Vancouver.

My dad was just beginning to repack his bag for the rest of the hike when Rick piped up, "Hey, what size feet do you have? I'm retiring the ones from this trip if you want them."

Rick pulled out a pair of worn but sturdy-looking rock shoes. "They don't have a lot of life left in them anyways and it looks like you two could use them more than me."

With a layer of socks, they fit my dad's feet perfectly. I couldn't believe our luck!

My dad offered to pay Rick for the shoes, but he refused.

"I'm just happy that they work for you, it would be sad for you to have to give up your goals just because you forgot shoes at home," he

said.

After thanking Rick profusely for saving the day, we continued up to Applebee dome. The next morning, my dad and I were up the Bugaboo-Snowpatch col before dawn. We climbed up the West Ridge of Pigeon Spire and had the entire mountain to ourselves as we stood on its summit. It was a special moment, made possible in part to the second-hand shoes on my dad's feet. Over the next two days we also climbed Crescent Spire and Bugaboo Spire, both under brilliant blue skies. It was a trip I will never forget, thanks to the kindness of a couple of guys from Calgary who donated their used climbing shoes to the cause.

Kindness of Strangers in the Bugaboos: The Polish

Cora Skaien

In August 2016, I went to the Bugaboos with Carly Peterson, Natalie Makepeace, Artem Babaian and Jeff Taylor (see Bugaboos article in this journal). When I woke up our first morning at 7:00am after 3.5 hours of sleep, I unexpectedly ripped some corneal cells off my eye-ball, forgetting about an injury I had acquired about 3 weeks before to my eye at a pool party where I scratched my cornea. I went back to bed and when I woke up later, the pain was minimal.

We had a few days of bad weather at the beginning, but eventually we finally headed out to do Pigeon Spire. We sun-screened up early in the morning and set out. As usual, the sun screen sweated off of my face and into my eyes. My eye was more painful than usual, and I chalked it up to being because the sun screen was SPF 60 and thus super thick. I kept trying to rub it out of my eye with no success.

Around 4:00am, I woke up in excruciating eye pain. I tried to sleep it off, but the pain escalated. I went to the tap and tried to rinse the sunscreen out with no success. I then woke Carly up to help me, and we sterilized water and proceeded rinsing it. At this stage, my eye was severely swollen and very red. Two guys camping next to us donated some saline solution to rinse my eye with. Unfortunately, the pain was not reducing. Another pair of men near us also donated some allergy eye drops to try out, which seemed to offer a slight bit of relief. We bandaged my eye up, popped 400-600 mg of ibuprofen in me every

three hours, and I went to lay in the tent (with Carly who was out of commission due to a finger injury), while the others went to enjoy a day of semi-good weather.

Later in the afternoon, I was stumbling to the outhouse when I came across Natalie talking to two strangers. I approached and the topic of my bandaged eye naturally came up in conversation. The lovely couple from Europe (Polish?) indicated that they had antibiotic eye drops with them because the female is prone to eye infections from her contacts, and graciously provided them to me. I began putting these in my eye every 2 hours (I was in so much pain, I did not care it was too frequent!). About 8 hours later, the pain finally began to subside and I was able to fall asleep. When we woke up the next day, we quickly packed up and left early to take me to the hospital, and I was finally in a state where I could have my good eye open and walk out. Without the eye drops, there was no way I would have been able to get out on my own and I was considering the logistics of a helicopter evac (for an eye!?!?!). It is amazing how incapable your entire body is when you cannot open your eyes and you are in that much pain. When we got to the hospital, the prognosis was not good and they said I was lucky that I came across the eye drops, which are the same ones they would have prescribed. In the end, it was not the worst case scenario and my eye has since recovered.

I was so grateful that so many people in Applebee were kind enough to offer help and donate saline solution, allergy eye drops and antibiotic eye drops. Without their assistance, my experience would have been far worse and I would have been incapable of exiting on my own.

Kindness of Strangers in Garibaldi Park: The Russians

Birgit Rogalla

This past July, Ross Campbell, Gabe Frame, Natalie Makepeace, and I did a circumnavigation of Garibaldi Lake. The first night we bivied in Gentian Pass and were rudely awakened by a bear that had gotten into our food cache. The bear did not intend to leave, so we scampered off instead. Having lost half our group's meals, we foresaw a hungry couple of days but we were intent to continue our trip. With meager breakfast and lunch, we went up Castle Towers and down to Sphinx

Hut to spend the second night.

As it was summer, we expected Sphinx Hut to be empty, but to our surprise it was occupied by three Russians: Vladimir, Natalia, and Victor who had crossed the lake on paddleboards. In every gesture, they made their kindness apparent. Imagine coming to a hut after a long day expecting it to be empty, but instead finding people who take care of you as parents/grandparents would. After recounting our story, they immediately cooked up trout caught in the lake earlier that day, using spices brought over from a market in Uzbekistan. In their words, they wanted to “force more food into the courageous bellies of the young mountaineers.” Through their stories, we could tell that they were quite the explorers themselves.

After dinner we went off to recon our next challenge: how to cross the stream flowing by Sphinx hut. We’d hoped to wade it somewhere along its length. Our hearts quickly sank as we realized it would be a swim, guaranteeing wet clothing, adventures for our packs, and just generally being cold. A discouraging start to a long day. Without hesitation the Russians suggested they would ferry us across the river on their paddleboards, even after we told them the early hour we were intending to cross. In the end, they even shared a bag of buckwheat with us, which turned into breakfast the next morning after an unplanned stay in the Garibaldi warming hut following a fifteen hour day. Thank you for making this trip that much more enjoyable and for reminding the cynic in me of the willingness from those around us to help.

Kindness of Strangers along the Stein Valley Traverse

Birgit Rogalla

Another example of strangers’ wonderful kindness was in August when Cassandra Elphinstone, Vincent Hanlon, Elisa Bjerre, and I set off on the Stein Valley Traverse. We took the Greyhound bus to Lytton and were dropped off in the center of this quiet, sunny, small town. We gathered our large packs and after filling up on water, started the numb 8km walk along the side of the road to the trailhead. As we passed the post office, a minute from setting out, a lady called after us. “You’re doing the Stein, aren’t you? If you wait a minute while I go to the post office, I’ll give you a ride to the trailhead. You’ll find my car

just around the corner.” And so, within a minute of arriving in Lytton we got a ride all the way to the trailhead by a lady who certainly made our day. She mentioned had a son and three daughters just like us, and “hopes somebody would do something similar for them.” I most definitely intend to.

Kindness of Strangers on the Berg Lake Trail

Caitlin Schneider

Late this summer, Julien Renard and I made an attempt at Mt. Robson, a beautiful picturesque peak in the Rockies. We went up an alternate route, which was more direct, but involved some sketchy unproctable scrambling on snow covered slab. Although we made it up, we didn't want to go down that way, so we opted to head down the standard route. This involved a much longer hike out down the Robson Glacier and then down the Berg Lake Trail, adding about 20km to the length of our decent.

We had tried to pack as light as possible, including skimping on food. Sometime during the first day, we also realized that we had forgotten some of our snacks in the car. So, as we were a bit light on the food and now facing a much longer decent than we had originally planned, we started rationing a bit.

Along the hike out we stopped around 5:00pm at the end of Berg Lake to eat the last of our snacks, but we still had a dinner left, so really we were fine. At the bottom of Emperor Falls, about 13km from the car, we stopped at one of the campsites to make dinner. That was tasty but not good for the motivation. After dinner, it seemed like a way better idea to just camp there and continue in the morning.

We started to explore the campsite looking for an empty tent pad. A nice older man noticed us nosing around and pointed the way to the empty sites. He also told us where the food caches where. To this I might have offhandedly laughed and commented that we didn't have any food to cache anyway.

We set-up our tent and had a lovely, thankfully bug free night. The next morning we ate the last few handfuls of our trail mix, and prepared to hike out to the car.

While brushing our teeth by the cooking shelter, a small group of older ladies converged upon us. “We heard you did have any food!” they exclaimed. “Would you like the Snickers bar? Or this granola bar? You really shouldn’t hike out on an empty stomach.”

Julien and I looked at each other in confusion. How in the world did these random people know we were out of food? We tried to decline a few times, and they were only satisfied when we had reassured them that we had indeed eaten something for breakfast. It turned out these lovely ladies were in the same party as the man who had told us where to camp, and he had heard my offhanded comment.

After a long trip, it was really nice to know that there are people looking out for your stomach, even when you don’t expect anyone to be listening. It was also wonderful to get back to the car and eat all the fresh fruit we had stashed there!

Trail Dreams

Knut Kitching

My stomach gurgled and my shoulders were raw with the rubbing of my pack. I hadn't been able to keep any food down in hours and I suspected that I'd refilled at a suspicious creek. My run was going sideways and I found myself preparing to bunk down where I was and wait out the darkness. I was ready to drop, so I found myself an open spot and set about to scabble with twigs and matches to light a fire.

I'd pulled on my layers and was just debating whether or not to risk drinking more potentially bad water, when through a haze of dehydration and exhaustion I heard night in the forest closing in. With the falling light, the sounds began. Or perhaps as I tried to tell myself, as the gloaming crept in my hearing was having to compensate. I stoked the fire with larger branches and listened in silence. Then as I sat, my back leaning against a tree, I heard footsteps. A steady tread coming down the trail – I seized a burning branch, leaping back when a gentle voice with a Scotch burr declaimed,

“What ho laddie! Is there a space here by your fire?”

I was too tired to question what I knew could not be true. Standing in the firelight was a tall figure in a slouch hat, sporting an impressive beard.

“John Muir, of Dunbar, Scotland, lately by way of California and the Sierra Nevada.”

We lapsed into a companionable silence as I sat and shivered by the flames, wondering how often bad water produced these sorts of lunatic visions. Muir stood up and fed the flames while the stars followed

their arcs overhead and the wind rose in the treetops.

I could hear that peculiar sound one can hear when the wind rises and their branches chafe against one another. My head was heavy and in a woolly fuzz of exhaustion, I remarked to Muir, his tall frame lounging across the fire, that it sounded as though the trees were in conference with each other.

“Quite possibly,” he responded, “there are more things in heaven in earth...”

The crackle and snap of pine sap in the fire hid the appearance of another form and my surprise at noticing a shadow fall over our little camp jolted me awake.

“Howdy fellas, room for one more, dusty traveller?”

The ever-energetic Muir left up in a fit of politeness but I was too exhausted for movement or speech and simply hailed the fellow with a wave. Here he was, my tired eyes told me, the father of George Hayduke himself, cloud-gatherer, anarchist and desert-strider Edward Abbey.

Muir and Abbey seemed to know each other and they had sat down together with some gruff mumbling about the rising wind and the unseasonable weather.

“I’m glad you’re here son, we’ve got a question we could use your help with,” Abbey said.

Muir seemed to ruminate on this and nodded his head slowly. Then raising his bushy eyebrows he said, “We’ve thought long and hard about this and surely we mean no offense against any view of the kirk you may yourself hold, but Mr. Abbey and I are agreed that when a man dies he returns to his maker and to the earth that bore him. Now Mr. Abbey here is of the mind that it would be best to live on as a coyote, while it was my great ambition to live on as a pinecone from those great groves of the Sierra.”

“Yes I’d have liked to be one of those mischievous bushy tailed tricksters. Keep the rabbits and the deer from eating too much of the fragile desert. Did you ever see the flowers in the spring in Arizona? So small and delicate, they make you want to go barefoot despite the

thorns, just so you don't crush them under your boot. Anyhow, I'd slink around, scare tourists, sow some anarchy and make sure that those who enter the desert understand that it was there before ever they arrived."

"You were always a meddler, Edward!" Muir doesn't laugh, but I can see he is smiling.

"Every man ought to meddle for himself, John. The wild places need protecting, you know that. But it's not enough to say leave well enough alone, folk need to be reminded with a set of teeth in their pants. The silence of the desert isn't the same without a howl breaking it occasionally."

"I fancied I'd become one of those great pinecones I used to find walking in California. I'd watch time pass and the seasons change. Feel the trickle of snowmelt and the thawing of the earth in the spring. The light of summer in the high country. And then one day I'd take root and grow again until I reached out towards the sky."

"And what did happen?", I said, "What are you now?"

And the two great beards shook with laughter and the last words I heard as sleep took me echoed in my mind, "We are the wind, son, the wind on the face of the earth."

Crevasse Rescue Practice

Julien Renard

Caitlin Schneider and I (Julien Renard) went to the Wedgemount glacier to practise crevasse rescues.

Are you confident travelling on a glacier? Can you self-arrest? Can you rescue people out of a crevasse?

While these are perfectly valid questions to ask before embarking on some mountaineering adventure with only one other partner, they can be a lot more ambiguous than one might suspect. In the context of the VOC, I believe many people would think back to their Glacier School trips, and answer yes to all of the above without really considering the limitations of their previous training (I am sure I have). Unfortunately, self-arresting on a two-person rope team when your 90 kg partner just fell through a snow bridge is a lot more brutal than when the last member of a four-person rope team runs backward to simulate a fall. Knowing the individual steps of setting up a rescue system does not mean you are prepared to set up the whole thing on your own, or that the system will work with limited manpower.

So during this extremely hot weekend in June, Caitlin and I hiked up to the Wedgemount glacier looking for deep enough crevasses to practice crevasse rescue for two-person rope teams. Hiking up with heavy backpacks from which protruded four ropes, three different ice axes and several pickets got us a few odd looks from people going up in running shoes. While there was still snow at the lake, a freezing level above 4,000 m was rapidly taking care of that. Given the snow conditions and the weight of our packs, we didn't want to go all the way to the huge serac field at 2,400 m and instead settled for the "ice cave" at the bottom of the glacier to use as our playground.

We set up our main anchor at the top of a $\sim 20^\circ$ snow slope going straight down the vortex, with an icy overhanging runout. The “victim” would be this big custom-made net bag filled with approximately 90 kg of snow. A few problems became immediately apparent. First, the innermost “onion ring” ice shelf that had partially collapsed into the vortex was creating a ledge 5 m below the overhang and the bag was not able to clear it. We spotted a notch in the ledge, a few meters on the side, and decided to give it a go after putting a redirect on the rope. Success! the bag plummeted to the bottom of the hole and despite the extremely isothermal snow, the anchor looked fairly happy to support the load.

The other and more serious problem came from the amount work and time needed to get the bag out.

Last year at G1, we practised self-arrest by having people jumping in crevasses and having three people to pull them out using a 2:1 pulley system. This worked well and would take about 20 s to get them out. Here, using a 3:1 system, it was a full body workout, and one of us needed to be right at the edge of the crevasse to pull the bag over the lip. We spent the rest of the day experimenting with different hauling systems, including a Mammut Rescyou system, and trying to find the most efficient way to get the bag out of the hole.

The following day, we quickly reset the anchors and hauling station and got ready to practice self-arresting when yet another problem became apparent. While the bag had had enough momentum to clear the ledge below the overhang when free-falling, dragging a climber slowed



Wedgemount glacier vortex of doom. The bag is hanging on a rope, near the bottom. Photo: Julien Renard

it down enough that this was no longer possible. As a result, we would find ourselves hopelessly pulled toward the crevasse for 5m before coming to a complete stop, as the bag gently landed on the ledge. A wee bit of frustration and expletives later, we came to the conclusion that we would just have to abandon self-arrest practice for this trip. There was no better location in sight, nor the time to reset the whole system.

After that, we practised building an anchor while in a self-arrest position. I would lift the bag a few meters and Caitlin would get in self-arrest position. I would then release the bag and Caitlin had to hold the fall, build an anchor and escape the system. The snow was deep enough that once you dug your feet in, it was not a problem to use your ice axe to pound in a picket or dig a trench to set up a deadman.

The last aspect of crevasse rescue that we practised was rappelling down to an unconscious partner and getting both yourself and the victim out of the crevasse (i.e. going over the lip of the crevasse). In this case, my partner was once again 90kg of snow loaded in the net. This proved to be extremely difficult. Due to the overhang, my rope was pushed against the icy lip and I was not able to push myself and the rope away from the wall. As a result, it became impossible to slide my prusiks up the rope. I experimented with various systems, including aiding on one of my ice tools to get my weight off the rope, which didn't work due to the rope stretch. I was completely stuck just under the lip and actually getting a bit worried given the amount of time spent under several tons of ice threatening to fall in the vortex. Saving myself was hard enough, never mind helping my unconscious partner dangling next to me. I could have used both my ice tools to climb over the lip but I wanted to see if there was another way, since you usually don't travel on glaciers with two ice tools. Eventually, replacing the top prusik by my micro traxion pulley, used as an emergency ascender, solved the problem. The micro traxion slides much more easily than a prusik and can be operated one-handed, even after I put my weight on it. As for saving my "partner", I set up the Mammut Rescyou system in self-rescue mode on "his" rope and operated the pulley system. This worked to some extent, but I still had to periodically position myself above the bag and move the rope away from the lip to relieve the tension on the rope and very slowly bring it up.

Here is a summary of the various things we learned.

Self-arrest:

Not enough data.

Based on previous experiences, it is, at best, very hard to successfully self-arrest in a two-man rope team. Maybe, as Christian Veenstra suggested, the rope should instead be seen as a brake to slow the victim down (hopefully before his partner reaches the edge of the crevasse). I would leave at least 20 m between me and my partner.

Anecdote: Not long after this trip, Caitlin and I went up Mt Rainier. While we were post-holing past giant crevasses that were easily 20 m deep, in a whiteout, exhausted by the fresh snow, the altitude, and our heavy packs, I had absolutely no doubt that neither of us had the slightest chance of self-arresting, if the other was to fall in a crevasse.

Building anchor while in self-arrest:

The soft snow made this very easy. On hard-packed snow, this would be quite different.



Left: Hauling station, with our 'victim' sitting on the snow.
Photo: Caitlin Schneider



Right: In Micro Traxion we believe. Photo: Caitlin Schneider

Hauling systems:

Pulling on the rope without a hauling system is an exercise in futility.

A 2:1 system is not any better.

A 3:1 system works as long as there is not too much friction between the victim and the crevasse wall. We (barely) managed to pull the bag while it was free hanging, but as soon as it reached the overhang, it was impossible to move it without having someone to pull the rope away from the icy lip.

The Mammut Rescyou 7:1 system works and is the easiest to set up and manage. It suffers from the same limitations as the 3:1 system. It is also heavy (400g), not versatile and somewhat expensive.

We also experimented with various pulleys while setting up the system:

Locking carabiner and prusik: Light, cheap, multipurpose and utterly useless without some dedicated prusik-minding person, which you obviously don't have on a two-person rope team.

DMM revolver screwgate biner and prusik: Much less friction!!! But still useless...

SMC Mini CRx Prusik Pulley and prusik. Quite light and cheap. The pulley did its job most of the time. It still happened once or twice that the prusik managed to go past the jaws of the pulley (we used 5mm prusiks and an 8.6mm Beal Cobra rope). Perhaps more concerning, the prusik once failed to catch the rope while I was relieving the tension to reset the 3:1 system.

Petzl Micro Traxion: Heavier than previous options, not as versatile and a lot more expensive. It also works flawlessly. The pulley is easy to set up, even when the rope is under tension. The cam never failed to catch the rope and, unlike a prusik, does it immediately, which matters when it is such gruelling work to bring up your partner 5cm at a time. The cam could potentially develop icing problems, but conditions did not allow us to test this.

Self-rescue / hauling your partner from the bottom:

As I mentioned above, in some conditions it is not possible (or so slow as to be completely impractical) to use prusiks to climb out of a crevasse. In that situation, the Micro Traxion can be used as an emergency ascender and proved to be very useful. Otherwise, you would need to aid climb using ice tools or ice screws.

If your partner is injured to such extent that you need to be next to them while bringing them up, I think that the Mammut Rescyou system is the only practical solution. Otherwise, you will have to haul them up from the top.

In summary:

Risks that a crevasse fall will have a dramatic outcome increase exponentially when you travel on a two-person rope team.

Self-arresting is extremely unlikely.

If your partner can't use his legs to assist you, hauling him out of a crevasse will take hours and will not be possible without the right gear.

Food for thought:

People (like myself and many others in the VOC) who learn about glaciers and crevasses on the BC coast are a bit spoiled by snow conditions. Around here, snow bridges are usually solid and easily spotted. It is easy to build confidence regarding your ability to spot crevasses and navigate on a glacier. As a result, you may even decide to venture on a glacier unroped. I have done this and will likely do it again, depending on the terrain and snow conditions. However, it is very important to keep in mind that in places where the snow is much drier, weak snow bridges can form that are only 5 cm thick and completely invisible. You don't even need to go to Alaska (<http://publications>).

americanalpineclub.org/articles/13201212989/Fall-Into-Crevasse-Traveling-Unroped-on-a-Glacier) to encounter such crevasses. Conditions in the Rockies are also favourable for such snow bridges to form. Caitlin and I recently came back from Mt Robson. While camping on the Dome, a relatively flat area around 3,000 m, we found perfectly hidden crevasses 15 m away from camp. The high winds and powdery snow can do wonders to camouflage them in only a few hours.



Top: The 90kg “victim” getting pulled slowly up over the edge of the crevasse. Photo: Caitlin Schneider

Bottom: Nicely hidden crevasse on Mt Rainier. Caitlin’s backpack prevented her from going down all the way. Photo: Julien Renard

A Moonlight Memorial Walk at Seymour

Elliott Skierszkan

January 11, 2017 marked two years since we lost Neil Mackenzie and Steffi Grothe, two wonderful and inspiring club members, in a tragic climbing accident on Joffre Peak that also claimed the life of Elena Cernicka. Many of our newer members never got to meet Neil and Steffi, but they are very vividly and fondly remembered in our membership by those that did.

The idea spawned of a moonlit memorial walk as a way to spend the evening together, and a small group of us (Anne Viaettes and her friend Jason (non-VOC), Noriko Okamoto, Ryan Mackenzie and me) got together for an evening ski tour at Mt. Seymour.

It was a cold and clear night and there seemed to be a plethora of snowshoers and ski tourers heading up to Seymour. Many had bright headlamps blasting, which I thought was unnecessary as the moonlight cast shadows on the snowy landscape. We had a very casual skin up immediately past Brockton Point, and stepped a little ways off the main trail to have a quiet space to share.

Behind us, the lights of the city flickered and the snowy peaks of distant Vancouver Island glowed in the distance. In front, the first peak of Seymour was brightly lit, as were the distant summits farther north, east and west. A lone skier's headlamp appeared as a tiny speck as he descended the First Peak. We stomped out a small flat resting spot. Anne and I had both brought out candles, which we lit, and shared warm soup and chocolatey snacks. We shared stories of Neil and Steffi. Of the two, I was closest with Neil, who is remembered for his cheery mood and good nature in good and difficult times, and love of all things alpine and Scottish. Steffi was remembered as caring and

always looking out for others around her, and was a leader among our membership. I was just getting to know and befriend her in the months before their accident.

The night was beautiful, with the bright moonlit mountains, city lights and ocean views. It was calm – barely a breeze – and surreal. I know that many of us were thinking of our friends, regardless of where we were. In remembering, we think of what we learned from them, of how they inspired us and changed us in little ways, and how their auras have made each of our own shine a little brighter. It was nice to share this moment with others.

When I think of Neil, Steffi and Elena, I also think of others whose stories I've read about but whom I never did know: Frank Koch (1955), Jean Sharpe (1962), Eryle Pardoe (1970), Julian Harrison (1983), Robert Driscoll (1998), David Persson (1999), John Millar and Guy Edwards (2003), Rachael Bagnall and Jonathan Jette (2010) and Tyler Lewis (2012), I am reminded of the message that the Jared Stanley Memorial Lecture brings to us: the importance of coming home because of the big hole we leave in our communities and in the lives of our friends and our families when we are gone.

I try to remember this on my own trips, for I wish us all to remain safe while continuing to pursue our passions for exploring the outdoors.

How the Faff Goes On

Music by: The Beatles

Words by: Lucy Buchanan-Parker, Vincent Hanlon, Birgit Rogalla,
and the Phelix Hut New Year's Day Crew

Desmond does his faffing at the parking place
Molly does it halfway up the trail
Desmond says to Molly, "Can we keep the pace?"
And Molly says this as she pauses to exhale...

[chorus]
(Ob-la-di, ob-la-da, faff goes on, brah!
Lala how the faff goes on) (x 2)

Desmond needs a break to put some sunscreen on
To prove he really is the faffing king
Molly takes her pack off 'cause it takes so long
And as he rubs the cream in she begins to sing..

[repeat chorus]

In a couple of miles they have stopped to eat a snack
With a couple of crumbs for the whiskey jacks
While Desmond and Molly faff (ha ha ha ha ha)

Happy ever after on the mountain top
Desmond takes off layers on a whim
Molly puts them on and Desmond has to stop
And in the evening they go for a naked swim

[repeat chorus]

And if you want to faff sing ob la di bla da!

Maybe I'm getting fatter

Christian Veenstra

Maybe I'm getting fatter (because my gear is getting lighter, and it doesn't seem like I'm getting faster).

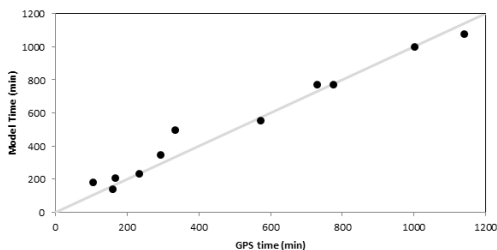
I've recently (well, kind-of recently) gotten into speed traverses. It all started in 2013 when I did the Neve solo, just to see how fast I could do it, and ended up clocking in at 5 h 38 min (with a long stop where I fuffed around failing to get water from Ring Creek). I didn't know it while out on the snow, since I'd done no research ahead of time, but this was only 6 minutes slower than the (then) fastest-known-time (FKT, an acronym I also didn't know at the time). The Neve FKT is now 4h 27m. A few weeks later, Skyler and I skied the Tantalus Traverse in a day, taking 17h 27m to the civilization side of the cable-car; I'm pretty sure this was the first time the range was traversed in a day by any means, and despite pretty slow conditions (my goal-time was something like 10 hours), our time still holds for the ski route (although Nick Elson and Eric Carter have now done the summer-route in 11 h 21 min). For both of those trips I was on "regular" telemark gear: 3-pin hardware bindings (non free-pivot) on 78mm waist skis. Total weight for skis (2,423 g), bindings (1,262 g), and boots (2,662 g) was 6.35 kg. Not heavy, but certainly nowhere near rando-racing weights.

Since then I've really lightened up. Rather than dropping \$3k on the high-end, full-carbon racing boots, I've basically just mounted XC bindings onto mid-pack rando skis and made a free-pivot adapter for them. Skis (1645 g), bindings (500 g), and boots (1219 g) weigh in at just over half my old setup, 3.36 kg. There were some intermittent setups, involving tele-tech, at an intermediate weight. Anyway...

I recently tried to make a model for all my fast-and-light trips. I had planned to try and figure out something involving elevation profiles and slope angles, maybe with a terrain/route-finding rating, etc. But it turned out to be shockingly easy - just divide the elevation gain by 550 m/h, the distance by 8.4 km/h, and add these numbers together as if they are not related. Accounts for everything - time spent navigating/eating/bootpacking, and how much of it was a gradual downhill, doesn't factor in at all. Ok, maybe not everything, but it's pretty close. If you look at the data (sorted by date) there are some obvious outliers on the fast-side (like the Neve)... but on those trips I basically didn't have to navigate as I knew the route well and could just ski. Note that I didn't include the Tantalus, because I don't actually have the GPS track and because conditions were very slow; the model predicts ~12 hours for it, in any case. I find it interesting that there doesn't appear to be a roll-off at long distances. There is clearly no correlation by date, or by extension equipment weight. Not that I'll be giving up on my fabric no-buckle NNN-BC boots... they are also very comfortable for walking.

Even though it would appear that I might not be getting any faster, I am very excited for the upcoming traverse season. So much snow this year. Hopefully I will have added some longer data points to the mix by the time this goes to press...

Trip	From GPS			Model	Difference
	Distance (km)	Elevation (m)	Time (min)	Time (min)	% Time
Neve	38.2	2004	338	492	-31
Laps at Black	7.9	1093	108	176	-39
Harrison to Brew	70.8	4474	1003	995	1
As above, including ski-out	79.9	4596	1143	1073	6
Spearhead with peakbagging	45	4060	732	765	-4
Semi Alcoholic	20.8	1755	296	340	-13
Owl-Tenquille	34.3	2792	574	550	4
Tricouni from East	5.7	860	163	135	21
Blackcomb Currie	47.7	3914	778	769	1
Laps at Brandywine	10.2	1156	169	199	-15
Semaphore Entrainment	11.2	1352	236	228	4



How many people does it take to replace a helicopter?

Ross Campbell, Else Bosman
& Roland Burton

This was the question of an optimistic Scotsman, Ross Campbell, at a time when the wood supply in the Brew hut was running low. The club had spent a lot of money to fly in firewood with a helicopter in 2014 and the supply was dwindling faster than predicted. It seemed unnecessary to fly in wood when we have a club full of young and fit, testosterone and estrogen driven, members who think they can replace a helicopter.

Stupidity laid an egg, but which came first?

It all began when an ominously titled e-mail arrived in my inbox from Roland Burton, regarding some ongoing situation at the Brew hut outhouse. Through a quirk of genetics (probably...) something goes oddly awry somewhere between my nasal cavity and the synapses of my brain; I have no sense of smell. In most circles this is considered a disability, but not in the VOC! The notoriety of this trait of mine led to me being nominated to empty the Brew outhouse back in 2014. Roland's e-mail, entitled "Brew Outhouse", suggested it was time "someone" ought to do it again. Darn...

Well, if I were going to Brew, I was not about to go there alone. However, the outhouse is a fairly confined space and no one else is likely to be blessed with my gift, so what should I get everyone else to do while I shovel shit? I had heard whispers that the firewood was starting to run low up there. I also remembered the many discussions last time round about how we did not need a helicopter, just lots of keen VOCers. Last time, it turned out talk was cheap, expensive heli-

copters were comparatively easy to rent, and so that is how the wood reached the hut. This time we would find out if we really could get by without the helicopter!

Birgit Rogalla and I headed up to the trailhead with Roland, keen to learn how to use a chainsaw and chop some logs for a later squadron of VOCers to haul up to the hut. Roland was able to teach us to keep our hands away from the sharp end, how the choke worked, the right amount of wellie required to get the darn thing going, and why you never want to put environmentally friendly oil in it. Chain-sawing was fun, if not great on the back, and before long we had assembled a sufficiently huge pile of wood under Amanda's tree that we left for home satisfied of a good day's work.

Troops assembled, can this actually work?

A second delegation of 24 VOCers went up during the last weekend of June 2016 to carry the precut logs. We all came prepared with extra big backpacks, backpack frames and sleds for heavy duty hauling. The action plan was as follow: 1) everyone had to dump their sleeping gear out of their backpack and load the later full with wood. 2) All the backpacks had to be weighed with a scale to document the amount of wood that left the trail head. 3) The trail was split up into 4 sections so you were able to offload wood when you were tired and hike back without weight, to keep up your strength. 4) Dinner was served at 6:00 pm by Noriko at the trailhead to feed the troops. 5) Depending on



Ross, Birgit, and a morning well spent! Photo: Roland Burton

the mental state you found yourself in, sleeping could be done at the trailhead or in the hut.

And so it was done, people stuffed their backpacks with big logs, about 8-12 kg each, so people could take on what they were able to carry. Some of the heavier packs were more than 30 kg! Some people hiked all the way to the hut in a single go, and some people shuttled back and forth between the checkpoints to get the firewood further up the trail. There was still some snow at the meadows and lots of snow between the lake and the hut. There were sleds to pull up logs on the snow which worked surprisingly well. There was also some swimming in the partly frozen Brew lake executed by some freestyle naked sledding. All the wood haulers were working hard, pestered by swarms of mosquitoes and heat. It was quite unbearable to stand still at any moment of the day, lest there were at least 20 mosquitoes biting any given limb. I guess they were famished for some human. The saddest image of the day appeared when I came back to the trailhead for dinner: there were about 15 people eating macaroni, all bundled up in rain shells with hoods on, exposing just enough of their mouth to eat their dinner, even though it was a nice warm summer night. I ate while walking up and down the logging road, which seemed to discourage the mosquitoes from biting, and later I sat under a tarp with 7 others to hide from the little buzzing suckers.

We decided that we would not be able to enjoy our night at the trailhead if we couldn't sit and chat, and that life would be better inside the hut. At about 7:30pm, we hit the trail again, this time with our sleeping gear, some small logs and the poo barrel to make the final trek of the day to the hut. We even used the sleds to push/pull 5 more logs up from the lake up to the hut before bedtime. We arrived at the hut at about 10:30pm, just after dark, to play some games. Our fatigued bodies were ready for bed soon thereafter.

The next day it was time for the final push to get up the remaining firewood to the woodshed. Not everybody was able to stay overnight so we had a much smaller crew on the second day. Most of the logs had made it up to the second checkpoint which was about halfway up the trail, but still before the lake. Everybody got back into a 'let's-do-this' mode to get as much wood up to the hut as possible or at least to form a pile next to the lake. I also managed to empty the outhouse (again) and install the plastic barrel in the hole to prevent the dirt and

rocks from the sides of the hole from falling into the poo hole.

Medical emergency day one, Roland's story

I've seen a few medical problems, but never one quite like this. Our patient had a lot of mosquito bites. We all did. She mentioned having had allergic reactions to bug bites in the past and things were starting to swell up, which is a not-uncommon reaction to bug bites. She decided that she was miles away from help, so she took her one single antihistamine tablet and called 911 and soon we were trying to describe where on the complex network of logging roads the ambulance should meet us. So, we drove the Jeep back through all the road washouts, and down by the highway where we found a nice big ambulance waiting for us. The ambulance attendants looked over the patient and told her that she should buy some more antihistamines. So we drove into Whistler, bought some more antihistamines, then rejoined the wood hauling people. Our patient caught her ride home Saturday evening, as she had planned.

So, what did we learn from this? If you expect you might need medicine, bring enough. Once you have called 911 and they dispatch an ambulance, you had better cooperate and do what they say; You are no longer expected to provide diagnostic or other advice. Ambulance attendants don't get upset if your emergency doesn't appear to be serious. For them, this is much nicer than scraping road kill off the highway.



Gabe showing off his wood-hauling prowess. Photo: Roland Burton

Suggestions for next time

Mosquito repellent or bug nets were extremely popular, as was sun-screen lotion, a hat with a brim, and dark glasses. And snacks. Bring lots of ropes for tying stuff to the sleds, if you are using sleds, or frame packs. There is no additional virtue associated with carrying half a ton of firewood for five kilometers, if you can cut firewood only one kilometer from the hut and carry it only one kilometer, so maybe we should do that next time. VOC people like to do crazy things, especially if they are actually possible. If you want to go swimming in Brew Lake, you might want to wait until the ice is mostly melted. Or not.

Final word from Ross

First, my sincerest thanks to all who came out over the weekend. You were all worked ragged, there's no way anyone could have expected more of you. I am sure we all slept well that night, I know I did!

We were also successful. We did not get all the wood up to the hut but the objective was to get half a tonne up there, and while our weighing and recording didn't go exactly to plan, the average weight of a log was certainly north of 10 Kg and we got close to 50 logs up there, so we achieved our goal. We replaced a helicopter! We also got 200 – 300 Kg of wood up to the lake that will hopefully find its way along to the hut before winter rolls in. And of course the outhouse is now empty and the poo barrel installed. If that is not a productive trip I do not know what is.



Ross proving he doesn't need logs to be an idiot... Photo: Else Bosman

Swimming in Cold Bodies of Water

Tom Curran

There's nothing as refreshing and exhilarating for me as a dip in a frigid body of water. There has always been a sense of renewal that comes with the panic caused by my brain starting to freeze.

Throughout this year, I was able to go on a number of cold swims (and even some non-cold swims, God forbid), but I was really able to push the limits in the fall. Over the Labour Day weekend I took a dip with a number of others in the creek by Harrison Hut. A week later I spent my weekend generally freezing as I went canyoning with Artem Bylinskii and Christoph Schilling in the North Cascades National Park.

At the end of September, on a workhike to the Lizzie Creek Cabin, I had the opportunity to swim in Lizzie Lake. This was some of the most treacherous swimming I've done. I was fairly warm after the up-hill hike to the lake, and I remember somewhat decent weather as we arrived at the lake. After failing to convince any of the others that swimming was a wise idea, I stripped down and went for it. What followed was seemingly endless knee-deep water with a silty bottom that made it hard to balance, complemented by many sharp branches from fallen trees. As I stumbled out to what I hoped was deeper water, the wind picked up and I got colder and colder. My commitment wavered. Would the water ever get deep enough to actually swim? Finally it did, and I circumnavigated a tree poking out of the water before exiting the lake. I maintain that I've never regretted swimming, but in this situation I would agree that those who had abstained had not missed much.

The next weekend, the Thanksgiving long weekend, I went on a bike trip to Vancouver Island, cycling from Nanaimo to Swartz Bay via a combination of logging roads, cycling paths, and beautiful railway tres-

tles. We gained and then descended hundreds of meters of elevation on logging roads on the Saturday. The main highlights in my memory were of me stripping down to my new bib cycling pants when there was a brief break in the rain, painful nipple chafing from my phone in my jacket's breast pocket rubbing up and down against my chest, and Florian pouring dry oats directly into his mouth as a snack. That night we made it to Kissinger Lake, just west of Cowichan Lake, and set up camp. In the morning, five of the six of us went for a beautiful (if cold) morning dip in Kissinger Lake. I especially like swimming in bodies of water I've never entered, so this was a highlight for me. The next morning, at Shawnigan Lake, just two of us went for a gorgeous morning swim as a fog hung on the lake. That swim was also special for me, as I have swam in Shawnigan Lake every summer as long as I can remember. I swam over to a familiar rock, and cut my swim a lot shorter than it would have been in the summer. It was a cold morning, and it took quite a bit of cycling to lose the chill from the lake.

Near the end of October, I went up to Tenquille Lake for some early season turns. There was discussion of swimming in the lake, but a nighttime lap up the hill seemed like it might displace the swimming. Luckily, this was not the case. At about midnight, myself, Kike Colomé, Piotr Forysinski and Krista Cawley set off for a swim. The snow was quite deep, and the lake farther than we had anticipated, leading Kike, who I believe was wearing sandals, to turn around. Piotr, Krista, and I persevered and made it to the lake edge, where we prepared for swimming while standing on the snow. It turns out snow is very cold on the feet.

We went in for a dip, and upon exiting were greeted with fine single malt scotch from Ed Estabrook, who was celebrating his birthday at the hut. While drying off, two discoveries were made: it is hard to dry off while it is snowing on you, and rocky streambeds are not as cold on your feet as standing on the snow.

The next weekend I explored an urban lake, Trout Lake, after a Halloween party. Only after this adventure did we find out that the lake had apparently been closed for most of the summer due to high fecal coliform counts....

For the first weekend in November, I went up to Steep Creek for some skiing, and enjoyed a swim in Darkside Lake. By this time of

year, conditions had conspired to make walking on (frozen) water easy, but swimming was a challenge. Nick Matwyuk led the way, walking back and forth on the ice for some time before finding an area under a tree where there was open water. I followed him, experiencing the low quality ice near the bathing hole firsthand (first-foot?) when I broke through the ice and my foot hit something below. Thankfully it seemed that no damage was done. My feet came close to freezing as I stood dressing after the swim, but it warmed my heart to see Kike, who had previously failed to swim at Tenquille, take a cold plunge.

Over the Remembrance Day long weekend, I went up to Keith's Hut for some skiing, but rain had come and washed much of the early season white stuff away. On the plus side, the rain helped facilitate what I believe was a first for me: on the Saturday Nick and I took a refreshing dip in the corner of the small body of water in front of the hut, while the next day we skied across it as we sought out what turned out to be the worst turns of the year.

As the outdoor waters froze over, I realized that high altitude, easily accessible swimming was coming to an end for the year. A few weeks after the swimming at Keith's, I had one final swim when returning to Phelix Hut after a run down Return of the King. I took a dip where the creek flows into the lake, and found great beauty in standing in the creek, surrounded by snow. Struggling up the snowbank to get back to the hut was slightly less beautiful, and doing up my boots would definitely have been a wise plan as I wallowed in the snow. I could feel some moisture sloshing around in my boots as I descended from the



Tom walking back across the frozen Darkside Lake after a dip.
Photo: Caitlin Schneider

hut, and upon reaching the car there was maybe half a cup of liquid water in one of my liners. Luckily I had the sense not to accept a bet from Artem Bylinskii to drink it.

Though that was my last swim of the season, I did manage to have some fun marking the New Year with five barefoot laps running around Phelix Hut, which managed to give some of the same satisfying bone-chilling invigoration as swimming. I look forward to the spring and more cold swimming to come.

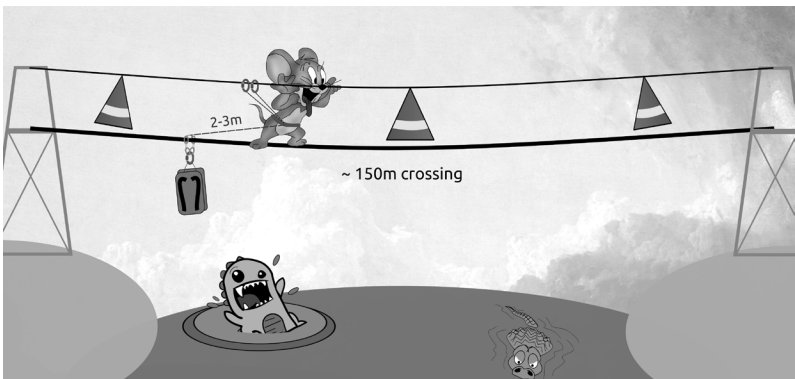
Crossing the Squamish River Cables

Artem Babaian

Myself and Jeff Taylor set out to climb Mt. Alpha in Tantalus Provincial Park a few days prior to Kevin Burtons and Matteo Agnoloni's epic (See 'A Tantalizing Series of Unfortunate Events' page 19). This is an excerpt from 'East Ridge of Mt. Alpha' published on the website a few days too late for them, but hopefully not for you.

...

We park the car at the gate off Squamish Valley Road and start our adventure. To access the South end of Tantalus Provincial Park, one has to cross the Squamish River, there are a handful of ways (some not exactly legal) of doing it. Me and Jeff cross quickly on the VOC stand up paddle boards but at the cable towers we meet two really strange characters, Tom and Jerry, who are committed to accessing Tantalus park by illegally crossing on these cables. Tom, a tall fellow, tries first, he puts on his backpack, attaches himself with a climbing harness and two personal anchors to the top cable and tries to walk along the lower



cable. About 15 m down the cable, before the first cone-pylon he realizes that his backpack was throwing him off balance and begins wobbling cartoonishly. He scurries back, slightly shook up from the ordeal.

Jerry tries a slightly different approach by taking off his backpack so that he can walk more balanced across the cable. He attaches himself with two personal anchors to the upper cable and wraps a short length of chain around the lower cable and attaches his backpack to this. He then clips into this lower chain as a tertiary-backup, which in case he fell he would be able to access both cables. Balanced atop the lower cable and using the upper cable as a handline, Jerry manages to cross quite efficiently. At each cone, the top carabiners could be clipped past the safety cones while leaving the other still attached. Crossing the ~150m took about 10 minutes. Tom, realizing this was a much easier method soon followed.



Tom and Jerry at Lake Lovelywater. Photo: Tom