

BMN HIKE REPORT

Dewdney Peak (Hatzic Mountain)

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by Mark Johnston



Looking out the window of the Ben von Hardenberg Memorial Cabin toward Sumas Mountain; particularly noticeable is a quarry scarring the mountain's otherwise forested slopes.

Ian McArthur photo.

In *103 Hikes in Southwestern British Columbia*, author Jack Bryceland says of the Williams Ridge trail: “The Grouse Grind? It’s a walk in the park, a stroll, a dawdle! You want a steep trail? This is it!” He might as well have been describing Dewdney Peak Trail. Over a distance of just three kilometres, this trail, also known as the “Dewdney Grind,” has a cumulative elevation gain of 1068 m. By way of comparison, the Grouse Grind, over virtually the same distance (2.9 km), climbs only 853 m.

Whether it was because of the hike’s daunting statistics or the overcast skies and chance of showers, just three of us showed up at our meeting place, the ICBC Driver Licensing Centre parking lot. We knew that when we reached the trailhead, we would be joined by a fourth member, Candice, who lives nearby and had proposed the hike in the first place. Although, in the meantime, her plans for the day had changed, she had kindly offered to accompany us for the first little while to ensure that we got off on the right foot.

After waiting fifteen minutes in case there were any latecomers, the three of us who had met at the Licensing Centre drove to the trailhead 100 m up the Norrish Creek Forest Service Road. We had hardly gotten out of the car when Candice drove up and parked behind us. Following an exchange of greetings, the four of us started up the trail. While none of us who would be continuing had hiked the route before, it soon became apparent that the trail had a good footbed and was well marked. So when it came time to say goodbye to our companion, we were confident that we wouldn't have any trouble finding our way.

Right from the start, we understood that this trail, eschewing switchbacks, wouldn't deviate much from the fall line. But despite its steepness, we found it to be very pleasant. The forest is quite open, with many sizeable Douglas-fir trees and a healthy understory. Because of this openness, we were able to look past the trunks and branches and see swaths of farmland in the valley below. This allowed us, even apart from consulting our altimeter, to gauge our progress up the mountainside.

After an hour or so, we came to the first of what would be several crossings of logging roads. In some cases we had to walk along the roads for short distances. We had some initial concerns about picking up trail on the far side of a road, but with a satellite map and well-placed rock cairns to guide us, these worries soon evaporated. At the second crossing, which also involved walking up the road a ways, we noticed a brilliant orange, cup-shaped fungus growing on the crushed rock of the road surface.

Orange fairy cup fungus.
Ian McArthur photo.

I later learned that this is orange fairy cup (*Aleuria aurantia*), a type of mushroom whose spores are contained in a tiny cell and at maturity are shot out with considerable force. *The New Savory Wild Mushroom* describes fairy cups as “edible and pleasant-tasting,” though it cautions that “cup fungi and their allies should not be eaten raw.”



We were about two hours on the trail, including stops to rest or study and photograph various features, when we reached the first of possible destinations, the Ben von Hardenberg Memorial Cabin.

**At the Ben von Hardenberg cabin.
*Ian McArthur photo.***

According to signage inside, this small cabin, perched at the edge of a clear-cut, was built by the people of Dewdney in 2005 to honour von Hardenberg, of Mission who was a young helicopter



pilot who lost his life while fighting a wildfire near 100 Mile House a couple of years earlier. The cabin is roughly square and sparsely appointed with a table, a couple of chairs, and a woodstove. It has a tiny solar panel for light and a rain barrel for water. Although there is a nice view from the cabin steps, we walked a few paces through bush to a picnic table and a more expansive view. Here we had an early lunch and spent some time surveying the Fraser River lowlands and distant mountain peaks.



View from outside the cabin, again looking toward Sumas Mountain. *Ian McArthur photo.*

We looked down on Nicomen Island and Sumas Mountain; particularly noticeable is a quarry scarring Sumas Mountain's otherwise forested slopes. We could see the eastern portion of Vedder Ridge projecting from behind Sumas Mountain, and International and Liumchen ridges rising beyond. We could also make out Mts. McGuire and Tomyhoi, but not their companion peaks, which were lost in cloud. Not all of our attention was directed toward distant views. We saw a raven flying overhead, then two more ravens, and finally a total of four ravens flapping and sailing. The four ravens seemed to be in two pairs, and we marvelled as they manoeuvred around and challenged each other.

As it was still fairly early in the day, we decided to carry on toward the next destination, Dewdney Peak. Leaving the cabin site, we dropped down to another logging road. While choosing between two forks, we saw a black-tailed deer scamper across the upper branch, maybe 50 m above us. Soon we were on our way up the same fork, but we did not see the deer again. We followed the fork to its end and then resumed a steeper grade. We were now climbing through a relatively young forest. From this point on we would be walking through an old burn area. About a hundred years ago a fire raged north up these slopes and some distance beyond. The trees that have come up since don't seem to be progressing very fast; their trunks continue to be of very small diameter. It is hard to understand why logging roads are encroaching on this part of the forest as it is not readily apparent that the trees here would have much commercial value.

We gained the top of a false summit, which is almost as high as the peak itself, and were then faced with a drop of some 125 m before we could approach the true summit. We decided to press onward. At the bottom of the drop, there was another logging road. We followed the road to a junction and turned left up a spur, which we walked to its end. Once again we were in the recovering forest. Despite its youth, it is surprisingly beautiful. There is a generous spacing of trees, and while the forest lacks understory shrubs, the floor is carpeted with florescent green moss. As we climbed yet again, we delighted to walk on the brown-needle-covered path over ground that was otherwise everywhere green. Finally reaching a high point from which the trail began to descend, we figured we must have attained the summit. We were in the process of determining a waypoint, when a party of two (plus a dog) came along and confirmed that we were indeed at the top. We knew that the summit was viewless, and also that if we were willing to head downhill a bit, we could get to a rock bluff with panoramic views. But given the time of day and the prospect of adding more elevation to our already considerable cumulative gain, we decided to turn back.

We retraced our steps over the false summit, but chose to stay with one of the lower logging roads and bypass the cabin. At a point opposite where, in the morning, we had left the roadway to strike out for the cabin, we located and started down "North Trail," an alternate route coming up from the Norrish Creek FSR. Having a slightly more favourable grade than "South Trail," by which we had ascended, North Trail made for a somewhat easier descent, the drawback being that we had to cross and recross logging road switchbacks. But we soon discovered a further advantage of North Trail: its wide-open views. After we broke free from the switchbacks, we descended through mature second-growth to the edge of a large clear-cut. From here we had superb views looking up the Norrish Creek valley and across to Raven Bluffs and the slopes of Mt. Nicomen. Looking down the Norrish valley, through the V created by Nicomen and Dewdney ridges, we could see the checkerboard pattern of

Fraser Valley agricultural fields. The clear-cut before us was splashed here and there with autumn's reds and yellows, and the upriver valley was also sporting fall colours.

After our long descent, we walked out onto the Norrish Creek FSR. We had about a kilometre or so to reach our car. Halfway along the road, one of our party made a sudden movement and flushed a large raptor, which flew ahead of us and perched in a roadside tree.



Barred owl. Ian McArthur photo.

It was a barred owl! We stopped to photograph it, and it cooperated by holding still for as long as we could have desired, its liquid brown eyes watching us carefully. This marked a serendipitous end to what had been a remarkable day of discovery.

With so many logging roads now impinging on the trail, I don't know what the ultimate fate of the Dewdney Grind will be. But apart from using it as a "grind," or "crunch," and way to stay in shape, it would be worth keeping this trail more or less intact for the interest and beauty of its forest. I understand there has been some lobbying to try and save the Dewdney Grind. Let's hope that effort is successful.