

BMN HIKE REPORT

Minnekhada Regional Park (September 30, 2017)

by Mark Johnston



The fruits of our search for the third geocache: a damaged cache box and its replacement.
Ian McArthur photo.

This year Metro Vancouver Regional Parks is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Although we didn't plan our hiking season with the anniversary in mind, we ended up scheduling a number of our outings in regional parks. At the beginning of the season, we walked through a portion of Colony Farm Regional Park. On our next couple of outings, we visited Brae Island, Derby Reach, and Kanaka Creek parks. Midsummer we drove to Belcarra Regional Park, where we hiked in one direction to Jug Island Beach and in the other as far as Admiralty Point. And now, at the end of summer, we finished our tour of regional parks with a trip to Minnekhada, where we hiked most of the perimeter trail and also many of the shorter trails.

Starting at the Quarry Road parking area, seven of us set out on Meadow Trail to access the dyke between Upper and Lower marshes. It was a cloudy afternoon, but we were hopeful we

might complete our half-day hike before the rains came. As we left the parking lot, we felt a drop or two, and when we reached the dyke, it was starting to spit. But we didn't expect the precipitation to amount to much. Keeping our hopes up, we walked out on the dyke and spent several minutes looking at the marshes. We picked out one or two beaver lodges in Upper Marsh. Then, turning our attention the other way, we were surprised to see that most of the surface area of Lower Marsh is heavily vegetated.

After completing our survey, we doubled back via Log Walk to the perimeter trail. Log Walk traverses a wet area between the marshes and the perimeter path. In the past it was necessary to negotiate the heart of the wetland by means of a sometimes rather slippery log, but now there is a nice new bridge to ensure a safe, dry crossing. As we walked across the wide bridge, we could see at its side the log we had once used.

Here and throughout the park, we noticed significant upgrades to the trails, many of which have been gravelled. With less need to be mindful of our footing, we had more time to concentrate on the flora and fauna. As we walked through the more open area near Quarry Road, we identified at least four kinds of ferns: deer, sword, lady, and spiny wood fern. We also saw a large toad.

Staying with the perimeter trail, we circled the upper reaches of the park and eventually came round to the junction with High Knoll Trail. During this stretch, our hopes that we wouldn't have to worry about inclement weather slowly faded. As we continued our circuit, it began to rain lightly, then more heavily. Although we were in denser forest, even the thicker canopy didn't shield us completely, and most of us resorted to using umbrellas.

Pausing at the start of the route to High Knoll, we were under no illusions that, should we continue uphill, we would have any views; still, all but two of us decided to proceed to the top. (Actually, one of those to continue was bound and determined to get to the top for reasons that will become clear shortly. The two who decided against proceeding had let us know from the beginning that they wanted a shorter day and wouldn't be doing all of the trails.) So, reduced to five in number, we began the steep climb up High Knoll. While for much of the hike we had been enjoying well-manicured trails, we found the trail to the knoll had not been improved in the least. Over time the trail has become quite braided, and no matter which strand one chooses, it is impossible to avoid having to step on or over bare roots.

At the summit it was raining fairly hard. A few of us braved the open bluffs to see what we could see. Despite the rain, we were able to make out a length of the Pitt River, the Port Mann Bridge over the Fraser, and, immediately below us, the expanse of Lower Marsh. But one of our members didn't bother with the views. He had indicated early on that he wanted to give some attention to geocaching, as part of his effort to complete the [ParticipACTION 150 Play List](#) of activities. So, while the rest of us visited the viewpoint, he, knowing there was a cache atop the knoll, busied himself with trying to locate it. Those of us who visited the bluffs returned to find our companion making progress and then being successful in his search.

Our next stop was Low Knoll. At this point the rain was beginning to ease, and from the knoll's rocky ledges we had a clear view of Lower Marsh. We also took note of kinnikinnick and polytrichum, which were growing along the back margin of the viewpoint.

One of our party suggested that we skip the side trail to Addington Lookout, but it turned out our "ParticipACTION-ist" wasn't through with geocaching! Apparently there was another cache near the lookout, and before long we were all pressed into service to try to locate it. This cache proved harder to pinpoint, but after a number of false leads, we finally found it a short distance up the closed trail that runs along the east side of High Knoll.

After our latest success, we retraced our steps to the junction, turned left onto the perimeter trail, and headed back toward the parking lot. But if any of us thought we were going home straightaway, we soon learned otherwise. The member attending to geocaching alerted us to one more cache ahead. First, when we reached the short side path to Minnehada Lodge, we climbed up on the viewing platform opposite and looked out over Lower Marsh. We spotted a couple of herons, one in flight and one well camouflaged in the reeds and grasses. Then, when we resumed walking, we were instructed to keep an eye out for a foot-high stump, at the base of which we would find the third geocache. While searching for a stump that fit the description, we turned up a damaged cache box and its contents, which were strewn over a wide swath of ground. Following that, a couple of us headed back to our cars. But after a concerted effort over a much longer period of time, the rest of our party finally stumbled upon the original hiding place and discovered that it had been furnished with a brand new cache box!

While our hopes for dry weather didn't pan out, our expectations of geocaching were far surpassed. Not only did we have fun searching for "treasure," the challenge of locating caches helped us appreciate the lay of the land in ways that we would otherwise have missed.