BMN Hike Report

Buntzen Lake Loop (May 21, 2012)

by Mark Johnston

In my announcement of our planned hike around Buntzen Lake, I stated: "On sunny weekends, [the lake] can be a very busy place, but we will avoid the crowds by sticking to the lesser travelled Academy and Lakeview trails." We needn't have worried; hike day—the last day of the Victoria Day weekend—proved to be both sunless and very wet, thus keeping the crowds at bay. Still, we stuck to our plan and walked the quieter trails.

Beginning on the Academy Trail, the four of us walked north along the east side of the lake. This trail runs through lush second-growth forest and then traces the edge of a power line right-of-way. Thankfully, as we left the forest's sheltering boughs and walked along the power line right-of-way, the rain tapered to a drizzle, so we weren't unduly soaked. We could look across to mist-shrouded Buntzen Ridge, but distant views of Mounts Seymour, Elsay, and Bishop were unavailable. Still, we found plenty to look at close-at-hand. The trail was lined with buttercups, and we discovered a number of clumps of red columbine in bloom. Also, beneath the power lines there was a thick growth of salmonberry.

From the end of the Academy Trail, we walked a short stretch of Powerhouse Road and then along the Buntzen Lake Trail. When we reached North Beach, we took a short break. We enjoyed looking down the length of the lake, but, as the rain was beginning to pick up, didn't linger for long. Instead, after a few moments' respite, we carried on—across the suspension bridge and up to the Lakeview Trail and better forest cover. Switchbacking steeply upward, we gained elevation quickly. Behind us we could hear the

roar of Swan Falls, and looked over our shoulder from time to time to glimpse its snow white waters cascading down the steep lower slopes of Eagle Ridge.



BMN hikers pausing to admire Swan Falls on the far shore of Buntzen Lake. I. McArthur photo.

Near the top of our climb, we took a short side path to a rocky outcrop where we had an obstructed view of the falls, North Beach, and the northern end of Buntzen Lake. Ironically—given the weather and my design to use underutilized trails—just before turning off to the viewpoint, we met a very large party heading oppositely—there must have been 16-20 hikers!

Other than that one large party, we had the Lakeview Trail pretty much to ourselves. The trail runs through gorgeous second growth, and, especially in its northern reaches, is partly defined by many interesting rock faces. It is also crisscrossed by a number of creeks, bearing the names of trees, shrubs, and plants in acrostic fashion (Sitka, Trillium, Umbrellawort, etc.). (As far as I can tell, the names have more to do with maintaining the sequence of the alphabet than actually identifying which plants are growing alongside any given creek.) As one might guess, the trail on this side undulates, dropping down to a creek, crossing, climbing up to a high point, then dropping down to the next creek, and so on. After several of these ups and downs, we had worked up a good appetite, and finally sat down beneath a trailside fir to eat lunch. One of our party commented that if someone had said to him that today he would be sitting in the woods, having his lunch in the rain, and actually enjoying it, he might have had trouble believing it!

After lunch, we crossed the west side power line once or twice, but mostly stayed inside the forest margin, eventually coming out on Pumphouse Road. As we made our way along the road, across the floating bridge, and back to our vehicles, we passed a number of walkers, most with umbrellas in hand. It was remarkable to see so many out in less than ideal conditions.

We finished our hike in about five hours' time. Despite the grey skies and steady precipitation, we had taken our time and enjoyed the rainforest at its rainy best!



Beautiful red columbine (Aquilegia formosa). I. McArthur photo.