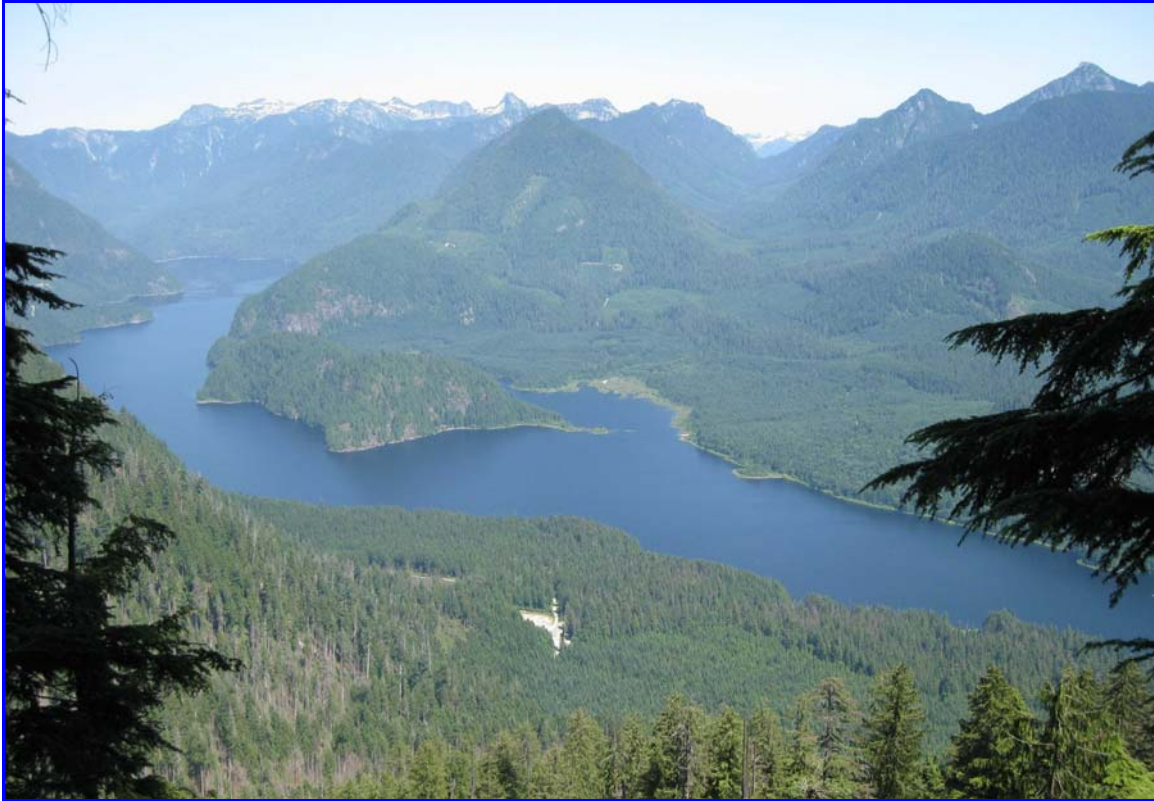


BMN TRIP REPORT

Eagle Ridge Viewpoints (July 11, 2009)

by Mark Johnston



Looking down on Coquitlam Lake from the "West Rampart" viewpoint. Photo by Ian McArthur

On Saturday, July 11, nine of us gathered near the top of Eagle Mountain Drive at the foot of the access road to the gas booster station. Our objective was an array of viewpoints at the south end of Eagle Ridge. The “East Bastion” viewpoints look down on Coquitlam Lake, dam, and river valley, as well as across to the peaks of the Coquitlam-Pitt divide. “White Rock Lookout,” which the Hikers have visited before, looks down on the “Cypress Lake Plateau,” out over the Fraser Valley, and on to the Olympic and Vancouver Island mountains.

With a Swainson’s thrush singing its breezy song, we shouldered our packs and started up the mountain. It was brightly sunny, and even at 8:30 am there was considerable warmth in the air. We used a series of mountain bike trails—some active, others in relative disrepair—to gain the Cypress Lake area’s road system, and followed a steep, rocky branch toward Cypress Mountain. Then, just before reaching the side route to the summit, we turned off in the opposite direction and dropped via a rough, flagged route to a picturesque pond not far from the Cypress Lake mainline. Now that we were higher up the mountain, we could hear the hermit thrush’s ethereal, flutelike phrases. We spent a fair bit of time at the pond, enjoying the scenery and taking photographs. We identified a number of plants growing along its boggy shore, including

sphagnum moss, sundew, and Labrador tea, the latter in bloom. It was also nice to see pondweed flowering.

After our break, we bushwhacked out to the Cypress Lake mainline. As we turned up the Cypress Lake road, we spied a bald eagle circling just overhead. We didn't have far to go to reach the lake. When we arrived at its shore, we paused for a few minutes to admire this, the largest body of water on the ridge, but didn't stay long. Cognizant of time, we pressed on, following an overgrown branch road toward the first of our viewpoints. We heard a Steller's jay's raucous chatter and passed another boggy pond—this one a bit larger than the previous one.

At the end of the branch road, we climbed up and over logging slash and then steeply up into the old-growth. In five minutes' time we had our first view: we could see Coquitlam Dam, the river valley below it, and look back down the ridge along which we'd come. Although it was lunchtime, we decided to push on past the tree-filtered "North Rampart" viewpoint to the finest of the East Bastion prospects: "West Rampart." At this point we were wandering through gorgeous, practically untrammelled old-growth. We found one or two very substantial red cedars, probably growing near the upper limit of this species' range in elevation. Our awe at the magnificence of the forest was perhaps briefly broken by our having to negotiate an especially steep slope, but was soon reinstated as we stood at the edge of the West Rampart's sheer drop-off and had an unobstructed view of lake and divide. From time to time we would see an eagle or vulture gliding below.

Following a leisurely lunch, we resumed our saunter through the splendid old-growth, also taking note of some striking granite outcrops. Eventually, we reached the more established route to White Rock Lookout, and after a careful scramble up a short, steep section, attained the viewpoint. Although there was some summer haze, we were able to pick out many familiar features. Equally exciting for a group of naturalists was our observation of a lone (black?) swift displaying its enviable aerial prowess.

When designing the hike, I had planned that we would leave the lookout and descend rather directly to Cypress Lake, but by group consensus we decided to head for the Halvor Lunden Trail instead, and then circle round via a connecting trail and old roads to a viewpoint variously known as "Vancouver Lookout" or "West View." It proved to be a felicitous decision. While we were snacking at the viewpoint, we saw a bird fly swiftly past at eyelevel. Two of us, noting its head and hooked beak, identified it as a small hawk or falcon, but one person, judging by its quick wing beats, thought it might be a band-tailed pigeon. I didn't know at the time but have since learned that a smaller peregrine would be about the same size as a band-tailed pigeon, and that the peregrine's flight is like that of the pigeon's, with rapid wing beats. So, I'm thinking we witnessed a peregrine falcon streaking past!

Our day full-to-the-brim with distant views of lowland and mountain and close encounters with a variety of plants and birds, we headed down, with only brief stops at one more pretty little pond and one last minor viewpoint. But the day would end on a sober note when, thirty minutes from our vehicles, one of our party slipped and sustained fairly serious injuries. While no one would have wanted such an outcome, it was gratifying to see our group pull together and be supportive until such time as Coquitlam Search and Rescue could assist our injured member off the mountain.

In the end our seeking a "mountaintop experience" also carried a poignant reminder of its inherent risk. Still, to look down on a sun-spangled Coquitlam Lake or observe the peregrine's speedy flight—it's a risk most of us will gladly take.