

## **BMN Trip Report**

### **Flora Peak (Saturday, August 14)**

**by Mark Johnston**



**A shot taken from the summit of Flora Peak, looking down toward the pass and along the length of Chilliwack Lake. The prominent peak on the left horizon is Mt. Redoubt; prominent on the right are Mts. Lindeman and Webb. Photo by Terry Puls.**

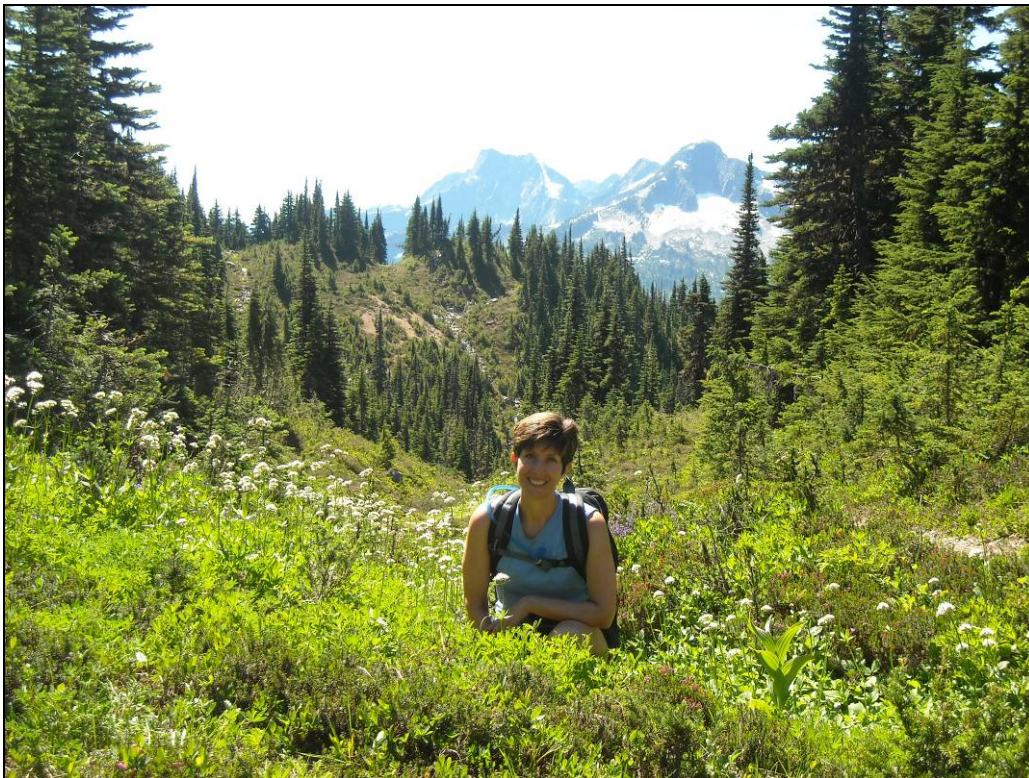
On a hot mid-August day, four of us set out on our most ambitious hike of the year: a climb of 1952 m (6405 ft) Flora Peak which rises above Chilliwack Lake and Valley. Having left Coquitlam shortly after 6:00 am and reached the trailhead by 8:15, we started up the trail at 8:30. The forecast called for temperatures in the Fraser Valley to soar into the 30s, so we were thankful that at this relatively early hour there was still a coolness in the air.

Initially, we climbed via old roads and then a favourably graded trail through stands of mature Douglas-fir and western hemlock, with a rich understory of salal. As we rose, we began to notice pines: mainly lodgepole, but also a few western white. Despite the forest cover, fairly early on we began to get views, especially looking across the valley to the

conical summit of Mt. Webb. Travelling at a photographer's pace, we also had plenty of time to savour birdsong—we heard nuthatches and chickadees—and occasionally spot a bird on the wing. An hour or so up the trail, we had our first view south over Chilliwack Lake. Below us a buteo soared on an updraft. Back in the forest shade, we took note of two or three gray jays which were moving stealthily from tree to tree.

Eventually, we left the trees and began a long traverse across open slopes. For the first time, we started to feel the heat of the day, although our elevation was a mitigating factor. But our toil under the sun was well compensated. We enjoyed spectacular views of Chilliwack Lake and its surrounding peaks which were still mantled in snow. Then toward the end of our traverse, as we crossed a stream or two, we began to see a variety of wildflowers, many still in the prime of bloom. Nonetheless, by the time we completed the traverse, one of our party decided he'd come far enough and, finding some shade on an otherwise exposed bluff, settled in to have lunch, do some photography, and wait for the rest of us to return.

In the meantime, another of our party had gone ahead toward the pass between Flora Peak and the unnamed high point to the south. The other two of us, now scrambling to catch up to him, came upon him suddenly, still shy of the pass. He was happy to see us, having moments before encountered a mother black bear and two cubs! It seems the three bears had at first moved away and then come back before finally vacating the area. Needless to say, the three of us proceeded very cautiously the rest of the way to the pass.



**Nearing the pass below Flora Peak. Looking back toward Mts. Lindeman and Webb.  
Photo by Terry Puls.**

At the pass we plopped down on a rock in the shade and had a bite to eat. As we ate, we pondered our route to Flora Peak's summit. There was no trail, and other than a piece of weathered yellow tape tied to a metre-high tree, no flagging either. The most direct route seemed to be blocked by a wall of rock, but the rock was somewhat broken and it appeared we might be able to make our way up through an obvious gap.

After lunch, we took up our packs and headed toward the gap. We passed a shady patch of red and white heather in gorgeous bloom and then scrambled steeply up loose rock and sand to the gap, but upon reaching it, realized that it was too choked with brush to allow easy passage. Rebuffed, we worked our way along the wall to the east until we reached a swath of trees sweeping down from what we discovered were open heather slopes above. Here, we found a piece or two of red flagging tape—one very weathered, one relatively new—to guide us through the thick trees and out onto the open slopes. Although we couldn't see any further obstacles up ahead, we still had our work cut out for us: the slopes were steep and a little slippery, and as we ascended, the summit seemed ever just beyond our attainment.

But persisting, we came at last to Flora's rocky summit, with its Geological Survey marker and rock cairn, and best of all, its panoramic views. Despite the fires burning in various parts of the province, the air was remarkably clear. East and north below us were Flora and Greendrop lakes. When we lifted our eyes, we could make out the mountains of the Silver-Skagit, as well as those along the Coquihalla. To the west we could identify many of the peaks on either side of the Chilliwack River. On our side: Williams, Foley, Welch, Laughington, Mercer, and Thurston; and across on the other: McGuire, the Border peaks, Slesse, Rexford, and Webb. To the south, Chilliwack Lake continued to shine like a jewel. Truly impressive!



**View from summit of Flora Peak showing on the extreme right the pass area with Mt. Redoubt prominent in the distance. Photo by Terry Puls.**



**View toward Williams and Foley/Welch peaks, from Flora Peak. Photo by Terry Puls.**



**View from Flora Peak looking across the Chilliwack Valley toward Mt. Rexford (left of centre) and Slesse Mtn. (centre). Photo by Terry Puls.**

Mindful of our fellow hiker back at the lower bluff, we took the requisite photos and began our descent. We picked our way carefully back down to the pass, and then

threaded our way through pocket meadows in beautiful bloom to rejoin our companion. En route, we saw a grouse, almost hidden in the shadows. Apparently, it too was seeking refuge from the alpine sun.

Our traverse back across the open slopes was, if anything, a little sweeter. Having scaled Flora's heights, we carried with us a sense of accomplishment as we gazed out over Chilliwack Lake.

Our descent through the forest seemed to take quite a while. The trail was now sunlit, and with each switchback the temperature seemed to rise. As on our ascent, we took our time, occasionally noting a particular plant or bird. We saw probably the same two or three jays, little moved from where we'd seen them before. By the time we stepped off the trail, somewhat rubbery-legged, it was 6:30 pm!

The drive home turned out to be overlong as well. When we encountered standstill traffic on Highway 1, we turned off at Clearbrook and travelled via rural roads as far as Langley. Then we crossed, in turn, the new Golden Ears and Pitt River bridges, and—to take one of our hikers to his house—the Coast Meridian Overpass!

All in all, it was a very memorable day. Even our companion who didn't make it to the very top was enthused, his appetite for the alpine thoroughly whetted!