

BMN HIKE REPORT

Belcarra Bluffs Viewpoint (September 17, 2016)

by Mark Johnston



Hikers standing in the rain at Admiralty Point. *Keith McQuiggan photo.*

We had planned to hike up Black Mountain. But in the face of steady rain, we were having second thoughts. Amazingly, seven of us had shown up at our meeting place, although two were clearly leaning toward bowing out. Agreeing that heading to Black Mountain was not a good idea, I suggested we try a local alternative. Having just read club member Steve Chapman's *Tri-City News* "Take a Hike" column, I volunteered to lead his "Hike of the Week" to Admiralty Point and Burns Point in Belcarra Regional Park. In the end four of us set out for Belcarra, the other three deciding to return home.

Arriving at the Belcarra Picnic Area, we started along the wide trail to Admiralty Point. Although our route was through forest, which provided some protection from the elements, we had difficulty staying dry. We found the use of umbrellas to be of limited value, and our jackets soon soaked through. On the upside it was enjoyable to walk a popular park trail in relative solitude.

Between the picnic area and Admiralty Point, we noticed a number of invasive plants, especially ivy and periwinkle. In the past squatters had homes here, but now only the plantings remain.

From time to time we popped out of the forest to have a look at the shoreline. We stopped at Cod Rock and again at Maple Beach. From these vantage points we could look across Indian Arm to Cates Park and Dollarton, and down the arm toward Burrard Inlet, Burnaby Mountain, and Capitol Hill. We looked out on a grey world: the water was grey; the sky was grey; and, as we peered through the rain, whatever distant features were visible seemed grey as well.

At Maple Beach we noticed a rather peculiar installation atop an offshore pylon. Looking out from the beach, we had a sidelong view of what appears to be a kind of house, quite large, more like an oversized doghouse than a birdhouse. To the left of the house, touching the back of it, there is another structure.

**Photo taken from Maple Beach
of the peculiar installation atop
an offshore pylon.
*Keith McQuiggan photo.***

From the beach it reads something like a doorframe, shaped like a keyhole. But when you view the structure from Admiralty Point, it is clear that the “doorframe” is also a type of house, perpendicular to, and quite a bit taller than, the “doghouse.” Both houses seem to have wicker roofs.



Our next stop was Admiralty Point. Here we found ourselves in close proximity to a great blue heron which was standing absolutely still at the water’s edge. Also, some distance from shore, a cormorant swam with uptilted bill.

Between Admiralty Point and Burns Point, we passed through an extensive area of blowdown. The December 2006 windstorm that felled thousands of trees in Stanley Park also pushed over numerous trees in Belcarra. I’ve passed through the area at least a couple of times since then, but what I noticed on this occasion is how the younger trees are growing up and hiding the former devastation.

At Burns Point we were able to look in a new direction. We could now look east past Carraholly Point toward Moody Inlet. But while the view was different, the weather remained much the same. The rain continued unabated and, if anything, was increasing in intensity. In heading to the point I had indicated we could, as Chapman mentions in his column, extend our hike by climbing to Belcarra Bluffs Viewpoint. But here, in the heaviest rain of the morning, I wasn’t sure whether anyone would want to entertain that option. Surprisingly, though, people were game to spend a little longer in the woods, so we decided to include a trip to the bluffs.

As we walked back toward Admiralty Point, we looked for a faint side trail going off to the right. When we located it, we saw that it was very overgrown. Although it seemed unlikely that by pushing through wet bush we would get much wetter than we already were, I was also aware of an easier line just up ahead, on the other side of a main trail bridge. The last time our club had climbed to the bluffs, we had started out on the faint side trail but ended up on the easier route. So, this time, staying with the main trail, we proceeded directly to the preferred route.

Before crossing the bridge, I saw something move among the wet brown leaves strewn across the trail. It was a salamander—its colour identical to that of the leaves! I must have looked up, because when I stared again I couldn't see it, and for a moment wasn't sure I had seen it at all. Then I saw it move again, and I called the others over to have a look. We tried to photograph it—unsuccessfully—before it dropped off the side of the path and eventually disappeared.

Once across the bridge, we located the easier line and before long were back on the familiar route toward the bluffs. The forest here is very open, with many large Douglas-firs, some 1-1.5 m thick, and a few big cedars. The groundcover consists primarily of sword fern. We encountered very little deadfall, and where trees had come down, we could easily pass under or detour around them.

At a place where the route begins to level out, we turned onto the steep, gravelly trail that trials bikers have signed “Wacker Push & Pack Up Hill.” This trail leads to the side path to the bluffs. As we started up the steep trail, we noticed that, parallel to it, there is now an alternative switchback trail. Initially we stayed with the steeper trail but eventually left it in favour of the switchbacks. As we continued to rise, we kept our eyes open for the side path. If we'd had any qualms about being able to recognize it, we needn't have worried, for at the junction we found a large sign declaring “Upper Viewpoint.” A short ways along the side path we came to a second sign. This one, its words engraved in metal, announces “Belcarra Lookout Trail,” and memorializes its builder, identified as “‘Lonesome’ Jack Elsdon 1939-2015.”

At the viewpoint, alas, there were no views, and, as it was still raining, we ducked back into the woods to eat our sandwiches. While we ate, the rain began to ease a bit. By the time we finished, it had lightened considerably. And, later, as we walked back along the park trail, it came very near to stopping altogether. We revisited Maple Beach and also took in Periwinkle Notch, which we had bypassed in the morning. We got back to the parking lot about 2:00 pm. Everyone seemed pleased with the outing. We had covered about the same distance as we would have if we had stuck with our originally planned hike, and may even have gained more elevation.