

## BMN HIKE REPORT

### Mt. Galiano (Saturday, August 27, 2016)

by Mark Johnston



View from the summit of Mt. Galiano, looking across Active Pass to Helen Point and Mt. Parke on Mayne Island, and beyond to Saturna Island. Pender Island is visible on the right. *Terry Puls photo.*

Every year or two we like to combine a little seafaring with our hiking. Last year we took the ferry from Horseshoe Bay to Bowen Island and hiked to the top of Mt. Gardner. This year we boarded the *Queen of Nanaimo* and sailed from Tsawwassen to Galiano Island; our objective, to climb Mt. Galiano.

On summer weekends, sailings to the Gulf Islands are often full and there was some initial worry that we might not make the boat. One of our members, checking with BC Ferries, had discovered that reservations for foot passengers were already full. Our best chance to make the sailing, she'd learned, was for us to be at the terminal an hour ahead of time. So I spread the word among those of us planning to go, and we all managed to arrive at the terminal early enough to assure passage on the vessel. While waiting to depart, we enjoyed watching harbour seals which were hauled out on a rock jetty. The sun was out, and it was promising to be good day.

Our fifty-minute voyage to Galiano was notable in a couple of respects. We sailed toward and then beneath an approaching cloud cover. And while the sea did not seem especially choppy, the ferry rolled from side to side, making it hard for us to stand and move around. By the time we disembarked at Sturdies Bay, we had lost the sun and were a feeling a little bit wobbly legged.

After pausing for a few words of introduction and a group photo, we walked up Sturdies Bay Road as far as Whaler Bay and then entered the Bluffs Park forest where trails allowed us to proceed in a beeline toward Mt. Galiano. The park's forest is very pleasant, quite open, with many mature trees—especially Douglas-fir—and a regenerating understory. As we made our way through the forest, we gained a fair amount of elevation.

**The hiking group, newly arrived on Galiano Island.  
*Brad Spring photo.***



On the other side of the forest, we crossed Bluff Road and picked up another trail which, though descending more than we would have liked, seemed to point us in the right direction. I had been uncertain as to which of a few possible routes we should take but could see that our present course was in line with the start of Grace Trail, one of three primary ways up the mountain. Our “choice” proved fortuitous since Grace Trail, which is an old road, has a favourable grade and its openness let us welcome and enjoy the reappearance of the sun. There are many nice maple trees along the road and their yellow leaves contrasted beautifully with widening patches of blue sky.

**Grace Trail is really an old road, and easy hiking.  
*Terry Puls photo.***

In time we re-entered the evergreen forest and joined the steeper Galiano Club Trail. We followed the Club Trail to the top, with one stop along the way to peer out between Garry oaks toward Trincomali Channel. Once on top we found places to sit down, have lunch, and take in the expansive views. Spread out before us were many of the other Gulf Islands: we could see Mayne and

Pender, with Saturna poking up behind; also, the whole of Prevost Island and much of Salt Spring. Pleasure craft plied the waters of Swanson and Trincomali channels, and ferries made regular passage through Active Pass. Meanwhile ravens flew by and vultures soared on thermals. As the late summer sun still had a great deal of strength, many of us sought out ways to mitigate its burning intensity. There are some very large old-growth firs atop the mountain and these provided the desired shade.

**View from the mountaintop,  
looking toward Prevost and  
Salt Spring islands.  
*Terry Puls photo.***



We could have spent twice as much time at the summit as we did, but we knew that if we wanted to make the afternoon sailing, we shouldn't stay too long. So, after a leisurely hour, maybe an hour and a quarter, and with a mindful eye on the time, we gathered up our things and began our descent. We planned to return by a different route. We started by taking the Galiano Club Trail all the way down to Active Pass Drive. Part way along we were thrilled to have a close up and extended view of a hairy woodpecker. Next, we walked along Active Pass Drive as far as Highland. We enjoyed the road's quiet atmosphere and had some nice views overlooking Georgeson Bay.



**Photo taken from the bluffs,  
looking across Georgeson Bay  
toward Mt. Galiano.  
*Brad Spring photo.***

Then at the end of Highland Drive, as we prepared to climb a short stretch of trail up to Bluffs Park, we happened upon signage directing one "75 steps" to a restored Japanese charcoal pit kiln. We decided to investigate, and discovered a tear-shaped structure made of stones. The earthen floor had been partially excavated to reveal a cedar-rail subfloor

(a design feature for maximizing airflow). Previously I had visited restored kilns on Mayne and Salt Spring islands. Charcoal-making was important in the development of Japanese industry, and Japanese settlers brought the technology to the Gulf Islands in the late 1800s. Kilns, like the one before us, were used in the production of charcoal for a number of BC industries, including salmon canning, explosives, and blacksmithing.

After visiting the kiln, we resumed our climb to the bluffs. Upon reaching them we continued along the bluffs and enjoyed further views of water, islands, and ferries. We circled round to Bluff Road and then walked mainly on rural roads back to Sturdies Bay. At the outskirts of the little village, some of us saw a pileated woodpecker, but others, focussed on obtaining ice cream, missed it.

Our trip home would be by means of a much smaller ferry, the *Bowen Queen*. We didn't want to miss it and made sure we bought our tickets in a timely way. As it turned out, we had lots of time to soak up the late afternoon sun before sailing, and on the trip home most of us chose to sit on the top deck and continue to enjoy the sun's now slanting rays.