

BMN HIKE REPORT

Burke Village-Munro Lake Trail (Saturday, September 6, 2014)

by Mark Johnston



The BMN hikers ascend to Munro Lake. *Chloe Tu photo.*

On a clear, sunny day, with a warmth that felt more like midsummer than the approach of fall, twelve of us hiked across lower Burke Ridge via the Munro Lake and Village-Lake trails. Meeting at the top of Harper Road, we left some of our vehicles there and piled into three cars for the short jaunt to Quarry Road and the start of our traverse. Our plan was to begin at the unmarked Quarry Road trailhead, work our way north toward Munro Lake, and then head west and south back to Harper Road.

After parking along the shoulder of Quarry Road, we spent a few minutes fiddling with our packs, then started up the steep trail to Munro Lake. This trail zigzags relentlessly. Its numerous switchbacks are well-graded, but in a few places trail cutting has disturbed the original alignment, resulting in some abrupt, eroded sections. We climbed first through open forest, with only moderate protection from the sun's gathering intensity, then entered denser forest and were happy on such a warm morning for its greater shade. Along the way we heard the Pacific wren's *chip*, chickadees' chatter, and the red-breasted nuthatch's "tiny tin horn."

We broke our climb by stopping at a couple of viewpoints. The first, which *Burke and Widgeon: A Hiker's Guide* refers to as "Lower Viewpoint," provides a better prospect than it has for years. One or two trees that blocked the view have been cut down, and now one can look across Pitt Polder all the way to Mt. Baker, which fills the narrow angle view. Several switchbacks higher, we spent a longer time at "South Viewpoint," a south-facing rock bluff that overlooks Minnehada Marsh, the Pitt River, and much of the Fraser Valley as far as the Cascades.

BMN hikers at the Munro Lake Trail's "South Viewpoint" looking out over the Pitt River lowlands.
David Mounteney photo.

As we reached the top of the switchbacks, we entered old-growth forest, which we would enjoy for much of the traverse. We were especially thrilled to see several large cedars and delighted in the luxuriant understory.

With the trail beginning to level, we came to the Munro Lake/Village-Lake trail junction. Although it would require a bit of backtracking to complete our crossover, it was an easy decision to take the short side trip to Munro Lake. When we reached the fragmented "lake," most of us had lunch at its southernmost pond, but a few hardy souls carried on past the other isolated pools to the farthest body of water. It was gloriously sunny, a light breeze ruffling the meadow grasses. A lone Steller's jay flew back and forth between conifers. Although we'd all brought adequate food, we weren't shy about supplementing our fare by picking and eating the ripe blueberries that were in abundant supply.



After lunch we retraced our steps to the Munro Lake/Village-Lake trail junction and resumed our traverse of the ridge. The latter trail is notorious for wet spots and mud but, thanks to the efforts of BMN trailbuilders, has been recently rerouted around the worst sections and now provides a dry, if sometimes "rooty," footbed. We passed through old-growth cedar and hemlock, never quite eating our fill of the sweet berries that were growing in profusion beneath the canopy. In an hour or so we reached the Village-Lake/Gunner's Trail junction. Half the group opted to continue on the former trail through the village and then head down the main road; the other half decided to follow Gunner's Trail, miss the village, and come out at a lower point on the road; there the two groups would reunite. Those of us who followed Gunner's continued in the old growth for a while, crossed MacIntyre Creek in a steep-sided gully, and made our way through a thick copse of young trees, finally emerging onto an alder-lined logging road. The road was

surprisingly wet in places, and the bedrock sometimes slippery, requiring care. When we reached the main road, the others were waiting for us.



Hikers at Munro Lake's farthest body of water, near the breached dam. *Ian McArthur photo.*

Rather than walking the main road back to our cars, we chose to use a number of mountain bike trails instead, following the colourfully named Sandinista, and Upper, Middle, and Lower Elevator trails. The first of these trails drops gently and has a soft bed; the others, as the name Elevator implies, are considerably steeper. We followed Sandinista down to the power line, now being twinned, where we had good views looking both east and west. After such a long time in the forest, it was nice to be able to look into the distance again. Looking east, we could see, as before, beyond the Pitt River all the way to the Cascades. Then, after taking in the view, we completed our drop via the trio of Elevator trails down to the Harper Road gate.

The “Lower Burke Mountain Traverse” makes for a very satisfying day hike. It has much variety: old-growth forest, mountain lake, viewpoints, historical interest. But other than a couple of hikers who were on their way down near the beginning of the Munro Lake Trail, we didn’t see anybody all day. I imagine the time will come when Burke trails become more popular, but for now one can find a fair measure of solitude on the ridge’s many paths.