

BMN HIKE REPORT

Pitt River Regional Greenway

Monday May 19 2014

by Mark Johnston



BMN hikers at the terminus of the Pitt River Regional Greenway hike. *Sharon Yao photo.*

Over the years we have hiked much of the length of the Pitt River, on both sides, but until now had missed walking on the lower east side. By means of this hike we would fill in that gap.

Eighteen of us gathered at the ICBC Driver Licensing Centre parking lot in Port Coquitlam and then caravanned to the end point of our hike, Kennedy Landing, on the Pitt River just below the railway bridge. Here we left two vehicles. Then we piled into our remaining cars and drove on to our starting point, Harris Landing, on the Fraser River at the foot of Harris Road. Our trip to Harris Landing took longer than anticipated. After leaving Kennedy Landing, we had to wait at the rail crossing for a freight train to pass; then after travelling along the Lougheed Highway and turning south on Harris Road, we found that we had overtaken the train and had to wait for it to pass all over again!

At Harris Landing we read the signboard, used the facilities, and generally readied ourselves for the 10-kilometre walk before us. A light rain was falling and those with umbrellas deployed them. At first we walked along the Fraser River foreshore, below the dyke. This part of the Greenway trail is lined with sizeable cedars and a few cottonwoods. We noted the contrast in trunks: the cedar's bark, reddish and fibrous; the

cottonwood's, grey and fissured. When we could see out through the trees, we were looking across the muddy Fraser to Barnston Island.

In about 900 metres we emerged into the open and mounted the dyke along which we would hike for the rest of the day. For the next couple of kilometres, we passed by the Pitt Meadows Regional Airport, paralleling a runway. While we were interested in the single-propeller aircraft that were landing one after another, we zeroed in on a sight closer at hand.

Common yellowthroat perched atop chain link fence.
Ian McArthur photo.



We hadn't gone far along the dyke when we heard a common yellowthroat singing. David was able to *push* it out into the open, where it perched atop a chain link fence and continued singing. Amazingly, the little warbler stayed put, and we were able to get a good look at its markings as well as observe the effort it put into its song. Although our focus was definitely on the yellowthroat, we were also aware of a house finch behind us, which was singing from a telephone wire.

Mostly the dyke is well back from the river, which is hidden from view by a fringe of trees. So once or twice we left the dyke to see what we could see. On our first such excursion we found ourselves opposite the Roberts Point Rest Area on Barnston Island and also able to look across the river to Surrey Bend Regional Park. As we approached the water's edge, a shorebird took to flight, flying low across the water.

Back on the dyke, we passed by a sawmill operation, with its piles of aromatic wood chips. But as before, our attention turned from industry to nature. Looking skyward, we noticed the air space above us was teeming with swallows and swifts. We picked out tree and violet-green swallows but did not make a certain identification as to the species of swift.

By the time we reached Ford Landing and the final approach to the Pitt River, we were wanting to stop for lunch and hoped to find a point of access to the Fraser to be able to sit and eat and enjoy a view of the water. But, alas, the landing was fenced, and we settled for sitting on the dyke and gazing, instead, across an extensive cranberry field and past other farms toward the mountains. The rain had been easing and now stopped altogether. We could look right up the Pitt River valley, with Burke to the left and Golden Ears to the right, though their tops were still shrouded in cloud.

After resuming our hike, we soon attained the confluence of the Pitt and Fraser rivers and left the dyke for a closer look. From this point on, the dyke is often quite close to the water and the fringe of trees not as impenetrable, so as we continued up the Pitt we had a few more opportunities to look across the river and notice Mary Hill and other features on the opposite side. Meanwhile, to the east we saw a number of farms, usually having a mixture of structures both new and decaying.

Old farm building with a green roof!
Ian McArthur photo.



But, as it had been throughout the day, birdlife was front and centre. Perhaps our most pleasing sighting of all was a small flock (five to six birds) of northern orioles. As the orioles moved through the trees, our careful observation was

sometimes rewarded with a satisfying glimpse of the bird's remarkable flame-orange colouration.

When we neared Kennedy Landing, views opened up just in time for us to watch the section of train bridge that opens to allow marine traffic to pass, beginning to rotate shut again. We also had a good look at the towers and cables of the automobile bridge just behind.

In a few more strides we reached the terminus of our hike, and all that remained was for drivers to return to Harris Road and retrieve our vehicles. Those of us who went to get the vehicles travelled by way of back roads (no freight trains on this route!) and had an opportunity to relive portions of the hike. Those who stayed behind were able to savour a few more moments of riverine views. I'm not sure why it has taken us so long to visit this portion of the Pitt, but based on our initial experience I'm sure we'll be back!

Other birds seen or heard: Canada goose, glaucous-winged gull, great blue heron, killdeer, bald eagle, northern harrier, Cooper's hawk, Anna's hummingbird, rufous hummingbird, northern flicker, barn swallow, northwestern crow, black-capped chickadee, American robin, European starling, cedar waxwing, Wilson's warbler, Brewer's blackbird, red-winged blackbird, song sparrow, spotted towhee, American goldfinch, black-headed grosbeak.