

BMN HIKE REPORT

Sea to Summit Trail (June 13 2015)

by Mark Johnston



View looking across Howe Sound, from near the top of the Sea to Sky Gondola. The deck of the Summit Lodge is visible on the right. *Chloe Tu photo.*

For the second time this year, trip organizers Rich and Janet led us on a steep climb that allowed for a descent by way of mechanical means. In May they guided us up Grouse Mountain, and we descended via the Skyride. This time they took us up the relatively new Sea to Summit Trail near Squamish, and we came down on the Sea to Sky Gondola.

On a beautiful sunny day—warm but not hot—eleven of us rendezvoused at Shannon Falls Provincial Park. (Nine of us had gathered in Port Moody to arrange for carpooling, and the other two had met up with us along the way and at the park). Despite the dry winter and spring, the falls were far from full, but were nevertheless flowing well. So, it was with the sound of the falls in our ears that we shouldered our daypacks and set out along the trail that connects Shannon Falls with neighbouring Stawamus Chief Provincial Park.

Part way, our route became coincident with the Sea to Summit Trail, which is not so much a purpose-built trail as a route that utilizes pre-existing trails for much of its length.

**The first crossing of
Olesen Creek.
*Chloe Tu photo.***

We crossed Olesen Creek on a high wooden bridge and joined the popular Stawamus Chief Trail at one of its many flights of stairs. Turning upward, we mingled with the trail's steady stream of humanity, hikers both above and below us.



After an exhilarating climb of some 185 m, we left the Chief Trail, recrossed Olesen Creek on an angular bridge, and began an up-and-down lateral traverse to the top of Shannon Falls. En route, we intersected the gondola right-of-way and had a look at our return transportation. Our traverse began innocently enough on a nearly level bench, but before long we were climbing again. As we switchbacked upward through a young forest of cedar and hemlock, we took note of a sprinkling of western white pines, often alerted to their presence by spotting their decurved cones on the ground. At the top of the rise, a side trail leads to a view of Howe Sound but those of us hiking more slowly took only the briefest notice so as not to fall too far behind. Again, a few minutes of walking on level ground gave way to another climb, the steepest so far. Initially, we were at least partly distracted by the presence of many sizeable, fire-blackened, old-growth Douglas-fir trees, but soon our attention returned to the task before us as we had to pick our way up a sharp incline, sometimes using our hands for balance. Once again there was a reward for effort: a fine view looking out over Howe Sound toward the mountains on its west side. But as before, it was not a prize that those of us at the back could take the time to savour.

Past the viewpoint, we lost a little of our hard won elevation when we dropped down into a canyon-like gully. But as we walked along the edge of an elongated pond, we were buoyed in spirit to hear the music of the falls. The notes grew louder and louder until all of a sudden we came out on Shannon Creek. Here, the creek plunges several metres into a small pool and then “hops, skips, and jumps” in three or four small cascades before disappearing over the precipice of the main falls. Above the picturesque little fall we found that the creek had formed a crescent-shaped pool bordered by a pebble beach. We paused here only for a few moments, but the pool's beauty was such that it could easily have been a satisfying destination in its own right.



Picturesque little fall above main Shannon Falls.
Chloe Tu photo.

We now embarked on yet another climb, one involving the use of fixed ropes but also offering the best reward yet: an open rock bluff with an unobstructed view of Howe Sound, Squamish, and the surrounding mountains. Our group finally collecting again, we spread out on the rock and enjoyed a well-earned lunch. We noted the milky green waters of the sound, laden as they are with glacier-scoured till, and marvelled at the skill of kiteboarders who were cutting through the wind-whipped whitecaps off the Squamish Spit. Across the way the Tantalus Range drew our eye, but we also looked frequently over our shoulder at Copilot and Sky Pilot mountains, which loomed half behind. A Steller's jay sat on a stunted pine and looked for handouts.



Lunch stop view of Howe Sound, Squamish, and the surrounding mountains. *Chloe Tu photo.*

The route we had been following from the top of Shannon Falls was created by master trailbuilder Halvor Lunden to link with Petgill Lake, and after lunch we continued on Lunden's trail for a little while longer. I had walked this trail some years ago when four of us were successful in following it all the way to the lake.

But as we walked it now, I failed to notice where Lunden's trail bends south and wonder whether the trail may have been lost through neglect?



On the upper portion of the Sea to Summit Trail.
Chloe Tu photo.

At any rate we found ourselves continuing straight ahead on the newly created upper portion of the Sea to Summit Trail. Our route now took us along old logging roads and past a couple of junctions with trails offering alternate, more favourably graded paths upward. Most of us continued on the shortest route to the top, but four of our party chose one of the alternate paths. Once beyond the roads, those of us on the shorter route continued up through lovely sections of forest and over open rock where we crossed under the gondola again. Earlier, after departing from Lunden's route, we had had a momentary glimpse of our goal, the Summit Lodge, appearing impossibly far away. But now that we were in our final steps to the top, we could see that the upper Sea to Summit was taking us no more than an hour to walk.

Once at the top, most of our group had time for exploration. Unfortunately for me, I had to leave almost immediately to get back for a dinner engagement. Still, before heading down, I was able to take in the view from the lodge area: Mt. Habrich and the

Sky Pilot group prominent to the east, Howe Sound to the south and west, the Squamish-Cheakamus divide to the north. The view is truly breathtaking. Clouds that had been increasing for a while now blocked the sun temporarily, adding to the mood. In the foreground, on the deck projecting from the lodge's downslope side, people were setting up for a wedding ceremony. One can certainly understand the attraction of the site as a place to exchange vows.

After saying my goodbyes I boarded the gondola for the ten-minute descent, the rest of our party leaving an hour or two later. From the lodge area there are a number of backcountry trails to explore, and I know at least some of us will be keen to return and try them!