

BMN HIKE REPORT

Stanley Park and Seawall

Saturday April 26 2014

by Mark Johnston



Some of the BMN hikers posing by the "Three Graces" cedars in Vancouver's Stanley Park. *Terry Puls photo.*

Although we live in a highly urban environment, we are fortunate that we don't have to leave the city to experience nature. This was once again abundantly evident when, on a pleasant spring day, twenty of us travelled to downtown Vancouver and, in the midst of its heavily built cityscape, enjoyed a walk in the grand green oasis of Stanley Park.

Eighteen of us rode SkyTrain to Waterfront Station (the other two making the trip by car and meeting us at Second Beach). Emerging from underground, we first circled Canada Place. From its wraparound deck we enjoyed views of the city, harbour, and North Shore mountains. It was cloudy and there was a slight chill in the air. Making our way round to the north side, we looked down on a sizeable raft of surf scoters riding on the dark waters.

Leaving Canada Place, we walked to the new convention centre and then along the seawall fronting Coal Harbour. Although our gaze was frequently drawn to the high-rise buildings of downtown or perhaps to the cloud-covered mountains across the inlet, we also found much to hold our interest close at hand. We studied half a dozen cormorants that were perched on pilings or, in one case, on a floating plastic drum. These were pelagic cormorants; we could clearly see on one or two of them the double crest that characterizes the bird when it is breeding. Besides the cormorants, we noted glaucous-winged gulls wheeling overhead and white-crowned and house sparrows poking about in the path-side shrubbery.

After passing under the Stanley Park Causeway, we finally reached the park proper at Lost Lagoon. While the open water of the lagoon was largely devoid of waterfowl, save for a few scaup, we did find a number of species on or close to the shore. On the grassy verge, adult Canada geese looked after two fuzzy yellow goslings.

Great blue heron wading among mallards and wood ducks at Lost Lagoon. Terry Puls photo.

Farther along, in a sheltered location at the water's edge, a heron waded among male and female mallards and wood ducks. And as we continued toward the western margin of the lagoon, we came across our first mammal, the highly adaptable raccoon.



Our walk along Coal Harbour and Lost Lagoon was purposefully slow—there was so much to look at and absorb—so it was essentially noontime when we reached our patiently waiting co-participants at Second Beach. So, after our rendezvous, we decided to make this our lunch stop. Sitting on a low retaining wall—or, in the case of our two teenaged members, the branches of a small tree—we broke out our sandwiches and other foods and enjoyed a well-deserved meal. The sun had come out and we basked in its warmth. The view across English Bay toward Point Grey was magnificent.



After a leisurely lunch we walked along the seawall for a spell. We kept to the seaward side of the Second Beach Pool and then continued along the waterfront as far as the steps at Ferguson Point.

Raccoon at the western margin of Lost Lagoon. Terry Puls photo.

Surprisingly, the number of pedestrians using the seawall was relatively low. The adjacent bikeway, however, had a steady volume of traffic. At the top of the steps, we took a few moments to admire the elevated view, then descended along the sidewalk to the Third Beach parking lot. Passing by the concession stand, we joined the Merilees Trail and entered the park's forest. Or I should say, *recovering* forest, for in December 2006 a fierce windstorm blew down a large swath of mature trees here, and the area is only just beginning to regenerate. But every cloud has its silver lining: When we left the Merilees Trail for the Siwash Rock Trail (allowing for a closer approach to the cliff edge), we found that the windfall has opened up excellent views overlooking the water to Point Atkinson and Bowen Island. While on the Siwash Rock Trail, we made a short detour to an old coastal defence platform that now serves as a lookout point giving a bird's-eye view of the distinctive sea-stack from which the path takes its name. We delighted to see a gull nested in the vegetation at the top of the stack.

Hikers at Ferguson Point.
Terry Puls photo.

One may think of Stanley Park as being of uniformly low elevation, but we discovered our trail had a steady uphill grade. Not difficult, but definitely uphill. By the time we reached Stanley Park Drive just south of Prospect Point, we had gained about 50 metres of elevation. Crossing the road, we turned back south and, leaving the blowdown behind, entered the heart of



the park's old growth. We were especially taken with the trees along the well-shaded Thompson Trail. A short distance down the trail, we saw a striking cedar having a long, massive trunk and two large upturned branches, the whole resembling a giant tuning fork. Farther along, we marvelled to see three large cedars growing in such close proximity that they seemed to be one tree with three branches, the "trunk" sporting a girth of 12-13 metres! These latter trees are apparently the Three Graces, although later we came across another threesome that could also lay claim to that name. Besides these, we found many other giants growing here. And our attention was not only on the trees. At one point, two bald eagles flew by at high speed, deftly twisting and turning through the tangle of trunks and branches.

Coming out at Lost Lagoon's north side wetlands, we walked around to the east side where we had an unobstructed view of the water. Here we paused to take a look. Once again, birding proved productive. We saw more mallards and wood ducks and added red-winged blackbird and fox sparrow to our growing list. Then, when we resumed walking, we stumbled upon a mute swan nesting beside the path. The bird seemed unperturbed by people's close approach.

The "Three Graces" cedars. *Ian McArthur photo.*

On our return along Coal Harbour, we had the further delight of now being able to see the tops of the mountains. Prompted by the younger set among us, we stopped for gelato, which gave us yet another opportunity to contemplate the views. Back at Waterfront Station, it was with some reluctance that we boarded SkyTrain to return home. It had been a wonderful day of sea, sky, trees, and birds—all in the company of like-minded friends!



Other birds seen or heard: American wigeon, common merganser, red-breasted merganser, rock pigeon, rufous hummingbird, flycatcher species, northwestern crow, black-capped chickadee, brown creeper, Pacific wren, American robin, yellow-rumped warbler, spotted towhee.