

BMN Trip Report

Lower Eagle Ridge (May 15, 2011)

by Mark Johnston



Noons Creek at outlet of Cypress Lake. Photo by Terry Puls.

When I woke up Sunday morning and looked out the window, I saw clouds hanging low and evidence of overnight rainfall. The weather didn't look very promising. So I was pleasantly surprised by our turnout of eight hikers, our largest group yet this year.

After waiting a few minutes in case there were any latecomers, we started up the manicured trail on the west side of West Noons Creek. At the top of the subdivision, we left the groomed trail and began switchbacking upward on a rougher path. This trail climbs steadily through a maturing second-growth forest. Here, the Douglas-fir trees are mostly of similar age, and are uniformly spaced and telephone-pole straight; they rise above a replenishing understory of salal. We saw one tree—now dead, though its bark is intact—that's at least a metre thick. Forty-five minutes from our starting point, we reached the prominent communications tower at the edge of the main power line right-of-way. We paused at the line-obstructed viewpoint but there were no views this morning. After enjoying a brief respite anyway, we made our way north along the power line, its pylons obscured by fog.

At the point where we could hear Mossom Creek ahead, we left the power line and ducked through an all-but-hidden opening in the bush to emerge on an old skid road. Now on the Mossom Creek Trail, we stayed with this route to gain most of the rest of our elevation. The forest here is densely treed and not much light gets through. We observed that many of the hemlocks have been infected by the mistletoe parasite and sport limbs displaying the familiar witches' broom pattern. But where light does shine through, there are patches of green. We were delighted to find a few trilliums in bloom.

Shortly after our second crossing of Mossom Creek (both crossings on bridges apparently built by mountain bikers), we came upon a giant, fire-scarred cedar snag. This tree, heavily burlled, measures up to 4 m thick! We took another break and spent considerable time trying to photograph the tree. The forest was dark with mist enwrapping the trees. Up the bank to the right, a stump with springboard-hole eyes and mouth appeared to be looking on with a bemused grin.

**BMN hikers posing beside a giant cedar snag on the Mossom Creek Trail.
Photo by Terry Puls.**



After a third crossing (over what I believe to be a tributary), we came to an important junction. A metallic sign which directs mountain bikers coming downslope to go left, asks, NEED MORE THERAPY? Straight ahead is the steep upper portion of the bike trail Massage Therapy. As the latter trail is the shortest way to the top, we elected to go up it. For some time, we had been hearing the varied thrush's haunting notes. As we continued to rise, I finally caught sight of one or two of these birds. The birds weren't still for long, flying up to tree limbs and then off into the murky depths. Near the top we took the time to study the sculptural signpost that introduces the trail. This sign, also metallic, is really two signs: one hanging from a crossbar attached to a tree trunk while the other is affixed to the trunk at the point where the crossbar attaches. The one hanging is picture-frame-like and bears the words MASSAGE and THERAPY across its top and bottom parts, respectively. The one affixed is a three-dimensional nuts-and-bolts sculpture depicting a female therapist attending to a male patient who is reclining on a couch or bed. Very creative!

Coming at last to the crest, we walked a few tens of metres along a side path to what I had discovered on an exploratory walk a couple of days before, is an outstanding viewpoint overlooking much of the Fraser Valley. Unfortunately on this day we were met by a wall of grey cloud. Besides that, it was raining lightly. We retreated into the woods to eat our lunch. Throughout our lunch we could hear the male blue grouse's persistent mating call: that distinctive, low, muffled, repetitive booming. Toward the end of our lunch, I noticed that the sky seemed to be lightening up. So after we finished eating, we trundled back out to the viewpoint and were amazed to see that the clouds had lifted somewhat. We could look across to Cypress Mountain and beyond it to Burke Ridge. Peeking over Burke were the snowy tops of Golden Ears, Edge Peak, and Blanshard Needle. Meanwhile, the valley was blanketed with low cloud and fog, but it appeared farther east that there were some breaks in the cover. Looking up, we could see the disk of the sun, veiled behind a thin layer of high cloud.

Leaving the viewpoint, we walked a snow-covered side road out to the Cypress main line. When I had discovered the bluff viewpoint a couple of days before, I had observed a coyote in the bush down below. As if to provide confirmation that coyotes are in the area, as we walked the side road, I found fresh coyote scat in the snow. On the main line we found evidence of other mammal activity: in this case, a beaver-chewed tree, still standing, but well-gnawed three quarters of the way around.



**Falls on Noons Creek.
Photo by Ian McArthur.**

To proceed further toward our planned destination of Cypress Lake, we were going to have to walk in fairly deep snow, but after some deliberation decided to continue. Two days ago, trudging through what had been very soft snow had been difficult and only partially mitigated by stepping in a bear's paw prints. But today the snow was harder, more compressed, and the walking was somewhat easier. Halfway along the right-hand branch road, we paused to admire and photograph a stream of water rooster-tailing off the top of a sheer cliff and plunging down onto broken rock at the base. Then we pushed on up the last bit of uphill and reached the lake which was still under ice and snow, though beginning to thaw at its outlet. We spent a quarter hour or so at the lake. The clouds were high and we could see the tree-covered slopes of upper Eagle Ridge.

On our descent we stayed mostly within earshot of Noons Creek. At first we followed the main line down, then we utilized the mountain bike trails Four Lost Souls and the

Dentist. Near the start of the Dentist, we made a short side-trip to see a spectacular falls of which I only became aware last year. After falling in one or two small cascades, its waters plunge 10-15 m onto a shelf in a rock-walled gorge and then another 5 m or so into a lower pool. Flattening out for a short stretch, they then make a final drop of 2-3 m. After photographing the falls from a higher point, we bushwhacked down to the bottom of the lowest drop for another perspective. This lower view gave us a greater appreciation of the narrowness of the gorge, which is bridged in places by deadfall.

Back on the trail, we crossed the creek below the braided cascade we had visited last year, and then left the Dentist altogether, following a nondescript path down through bare forest. In the low light this section of forest had an eerie appearance. The trees are closely-spaced, and the witches'-broom looked like so many grasping claws. At the bottom it was good to re-engage the creek waters and let the negative ions wash over us.

While it's always nice to have a sunny day, our experience proved once again the value of getting out in other types of weather as well. As a former colleague of mine told me: given one's dressed for the elements, he's never had a bad day outdoors!



Cypress Lake, still under ice and snow. Photo by Terry Puls.