

BMN Hike Report

Lower Seymour Circuit (Saturday, August 31, 2013)

By Mark Johnston



Atop Suicide Bluffs with Cathedral Mountain in background. *Terry Puls photo.*

On a brilliantly sunny day, 15 of us set out to explore the less-visited De Pencier and Suicide bluff areas of Mt. Seymour Provincial Park. Whereas a majority of hikers head up the main trail to one of Mt. Seymour's three summits, we would be hiking on trails east and west of the primary route, only touching on it when making the transition from one side to the other.

Our hike began innocently enough with a gentle descent via gravel road, then trail, toward Goldie Lake. But the gravel ran out, and for most of the day we had to negotiate a less favourable footbed. We passed by a beautiful pool and then detoured slightly to have a look at tranquil Goldie Lake. On this morning, we seemed to be the first to behold the lake, and we lingered awhile, enjoying the solitude. Back on our route, we passed by another pond or two, choosing our steps carefully on the sometimes muddy track.

Before long we came to the Perimeter Trail, its northward extension signed “Dead End.” But a couple of us who had walked the extension in recent years knew better, and so, ignoring the sign, directed our group to press on. What we didn’t realize, however, was the amount of windfall that now litters the first section of trail. We hadn’t gone far when we found ourselves having to clamber over, under, and sometimes make our way around numerous fallen trees.

We continued our descent, begun at the parking lot, until we reached a picturesque pond and just beyond it Percy Creek. We had to cross the creek without benefit of a bridge. The former log bridge had been washed to one side, and a newer plank bridge, inexplicably not on the trail but a little way upstream, was already looking pretty compromised, no doubt by winter snow load. With the water low, we crossed the creek without difficulty, but on the climb north of the creek we managed to get just as wet as if we had forded a waist-high stream. While the footbed here is relatively intact, the trail is becoming quite overgrown. When the bush is dry, this is no great inconvenience, but as on this morning when the bush proves wet, one might as well be walking in the rain. Boots soon soaked through and lightweight pants wetted and clung to legs. Still, for a little bit of discomfort, there was ample compensation: old growth forest, that backcountry feel, and an abundance of ripe huckleberries and blueberries. This is a marvellous ravine, and well worth a visit, although it can pose problems for wintertime travel. A sign near the top advises: IF YOU ARE LOST WAIT HERE FOR RESCUE.

Resting once along the way, we finally gained the top and then contoured around to a rock bluff with an outstanding view of most of the Fraser Valley and the Cascade Range beyond. We plopped down on the rock and basked in the sun, drinking in the view while giving our clothing a chance to dry out. A raven soared up from below and perched in a nearby conifer.

View from Brockton Point to De Pencier Bluffs.
Terry Puls photo.



A little farther along, we came to a second rock bluff with a similar but tree-interrupted view. And a short distance beyond that, we reached the summit of De Pencier Bluffs, with its prospects to the east and north. From here we had a grandstand view of Eagle Ridge and many of the peaks of Pinecone-Burke Provincial Park, as well as distant mountains east of the Pitt, such as Remote Peak. While we couldn’t see past nearby Seymour or Brockton Point, prospects to the northwest and west would be available later. Since it was approaching noon, we decided to make this our lunch stop.

After lunch we continued through the meadow east of Brockton Point and then scrambled up steep rock to our high point for the day. Now we could see not only what we had seen before, but also Vancouver City and Vancouver Island beyond. We could see the Olympic Mountains as well, in the hazy distance.



BMN hikers in deep discussions on Brockton Point. Terry Puls photo.

While we had encountered only a couple of people at the bluffs and two more at the point, we now mingled with the crowds as we descended on the main trail a ways. But soon we were back on the road less travelled, heading for Suicide Bluffs. The Suicide Bluffs Trail, one of Halvor Lunden's many routes, is an up-and-down affair. We climbed up to an initial summit, where we paused awhile in the afternoon heat. Then we dropped down and rose again to the main summit, where we had magnificent views to the west and south, the view of Cathedral Mountain being particularly dramatic. Then it was down and up again, this time to Viewpoint 1160 m, before one final drop and rise to Dog Mountain. At Dog Mountain we were back in the crowds, and so also on our return to the parking lot.

The hike proved to be more challenging than expected. The Perimeter Trail is in rougher shape than a year ago, and while we had advertised a net elevation gain of 260 m, the cumulative gain was more on the order of 600 m. That said, the hike is full of variation and boasts no less than eight outstanding viewpoints, any one of which would make a worthwhile destination in its own right. This might be one to keep in semi-regular rotation!