

BMN HIKE REPORT

Grouse Mountain via BCMC Trail (June 2, 2018)

By Mark Johnston



Nearing the top, hikers pose on one of the few remaining patches of snow.
Mahasti Salehi photo.

While the majority of people who head up North Vancouver’s Grouse Mountain do so by using the super-steep Grouse Grind, one may gain the top by using any number of other routes. We decided to avoid the crowds and take one of the older—and somewhat less steep—trails: the British Columbia Mountaineering Club, or BCMC, Trail. That was the plan anyway. When the three of us got to the base of the mountain, we discovered that the Grind was closed for “spring maintenance.” Hence all those hikers bound for the Grind would be using the neighbouring BCMC Trail instead. So much for relative solitude!

Setting out under cloudy skies, we soon found ourselves in a line of hikers that stretched right up the mountain. Although some were moving quite a bit faster than others, everyone was very respectful and no one, as far as I could tell, was stepping on his or her predecessor’s heels. Although the BCMC Trail doesn’t usually receive such a high

volume of traffic, it is a very old route and so well trodden that its footbed is badly eroded and broken up by hundreds of exposed roots. People have been trying to go around the worst sections, and this has resulted in numerous alternative paths that weave back and forth across the main trail.

Despite the fact that we were in a rather large company of hikers and walking a route that desperately needs a face-lift, we found much in nature to appreciate. As we began, we heard a black-throated gray warbler singing, and a little farther along, Townsend's warbler voicing its combination of "buzzy" and high-pitched sibilant notes. Then, as we continued to climb, we started to hear the varied thrush's haunting two-note song that seems inseparable from the temperate rain forest itself, especially on a cloudy, misty day.

About a quarter of the way up the mountain, we had our most memorable encounter of the day. Looking in the direction of what, to my ears, was an unusual phrasing (not the bird's characteristic call), we spotted a barred owl on the bare branch of a down-slope tree. We returned its stare for some time. We *did* hear the familiar *hoohoo-hoohoo* ("Who cooks for you?") call, but not coming from the owl before us, rather from another part of the forest entirely.

At a point where the trail starts to level off, we pushed through trailside tree branches and walked out on some rocks from where we could look out toward Point Grey and the waters of the Salish Sea. Here we heard a new bird for the morning, the red-breasted nuthatch. The sound of its song has been likened to that of a tiny tin horn, and while we sat and ate a snack, it blew its little instrument quite continuously.

The last section of the trail was quite muddy. No doubt the snow covering this portion of the path had melted only recently. In fact, there were still patches of snow here and there, although one could mostly avoid them. On the upper reaches of the trail, we also came across lots of biting insects.

We arrived at the chalet at 11:30 am, about an hour and three quarters after we had started out. We had hiked at a very measured pace, with lots of rest stops, so we were surprised to learn that we had made it to the top as fast as we did. When we emerged from the forest, it was raining lightly, so we headed indoors. But by the time we had used the washrooms, the rain had eased, and we decided to have lunch out on the deck overlooking Vancouver. As we ate, the sun came out, but only briefly. A junco picked at crumbs on the patio floor.

After lunch we followed the bear footprints painted on the asphalt walkway to the fenced enclosure where the resident grizzlies, Grinder and Coola, have their home. Only one of the bears was visible but, before we could position ourselves for a closer view, disappeared into the Bear Den, apparently to receive its food. We did, however, have a good look at two ravens that were on the ground in the middle of the enclosure.

Since there was to be a private function later in the day, the mountain was closing to the public at 2:00 pm. We bought our tickets for the Skyride and were soon on our way back down to the base. Managing to find places at the front of the gondola, we had a grandstand view of Capilano Lake, Vancouver City, and distant Vancouver Island. By now the sun was reappearing, lighting up city, sea, and sky, and on our drive home we remembered again that we live in a pretty special corner of the world.



At the top of the mountain, hikers check how big they would look standing next to a bear. They stand at least as tall as a black bear raised up on its hind legs, but both pale in size next to the grizzlies Grinder and Coola. *Mahasti Salehi photo.*