

BMN HIKE REPORT

Capilano Pacific Trail (October 20, 2018)

By Mark Johnston



Capilano Lake and views of familiar North Shore peaks, including the Lions and Crown Mountain. *Terry Puls photo.*

On yet another picture perfect October day—we've had an abundance of such days this month—ten of us set out to hike the Capilano Pacific Trail, which parallels the Capilano River, from Ambleside Park to the top of Cleveland Dam. Eight of us met in Coquitlam and carpooled to Ambleside. We met the remaining members of our party, who had driven to Ambleside earlier in the day to do some photography at the train bridge across the river.

After getting past the Park Royal shopping mall, we followed the river quite closely for a while. When not distracted by the residences and businesses on our left, we had, to the right, many views of the river's bouldery bed. We walked beneath a small bridge that provides access to the shopping mall and then the larger bridges that support Marine Drive. Continuing beside the river, we passed the mouth of Brothers Creek, which was of particular interest to some in our party who had hiked to the creek's headwaters in July. We found this section of trail particularly scenic with fall colours fully on display.

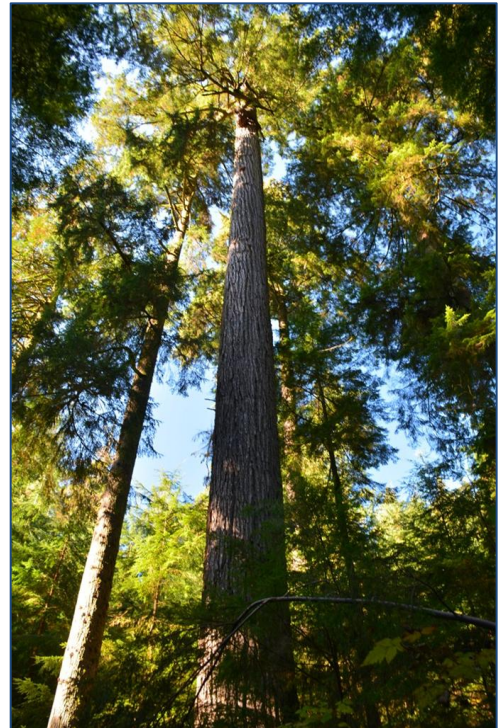
Half a kilometre beyond Brothers Creek, we left the riverbank and snaked our way past apartment buildings and up onto Keith Road, which we followed to its end at the Highway 1 bridges. Passing beneath the bridges, we continued on a gravel road, at first close to the river and then farther away, such that we were not especially aware of its proximity. But that would soon change.

We reached the back of the privately owned Capilano Suspension Bridge Park and observed tourists crossing the famed bridge as well as negotiating the elevated walkways through the old-growth canopy. Just past the park we left the road for a narrow footpath that undulates along the top of what is at this point a deep canyon. We stopped at First Canyon Viewpoint, a wooden platform perched precariously atop immense cliffs, to take in its vertigo-inducing view of the river. Here and for the next kilometre or so, we could imagine ourselves far from the city, as we walked through old-growth forest, crossed a number of splashing creeks, and had occasional views into the depth of the river canyon.

After the last of the creek crossings, we made the decision to depart from the Capilano Pacific Trail in order to check out the fish hatchery on the east bank. We used Giant Fir, Pipeline, and Second Canyon trails to approach the hatchery.

En route to the hatchery we paused to take in Giant Fir Trail's featured old-growth Douglas-fir, which, according to signage, had attained a height of 61 m. But since the sign was erected, the tree has lost much of its crown. Despite its shortened stature, it is still a worthy monarch, and we were glad we could admire it both on the way to and then back from the hatchery.

**The giant Douglas-fir.
*Terry Puls photo.***



As we crossed the Capilano River toward the hatchery, we paused again to take note of the salmon swimming upstream to spawn. But just ahead, on the other side, we came across an even more impressive sight. Upon approaching the weir that spans the river below the hatchery, we saw, at the bottom of the falling water, hundreds of salmon, several fish abreast, slowly turning in a wide circle. In some ways the knot of fish looked like an enormous tire. Also of interest was the fish ladder. Inside the hatchery building we were able to watch the salmon through glass windows as they “climbed” the ladder against a strong flow of water, one “rung” at a time.

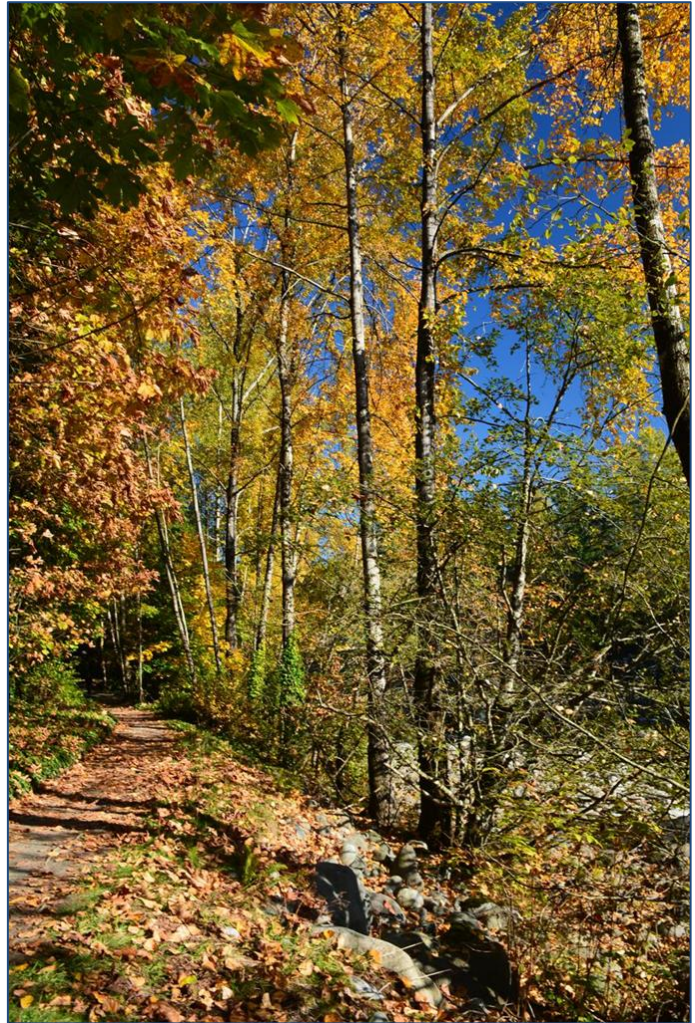
Our interest piqued, we could have stayed longer at the hatchery, but we did want to complete the Capilano Pacific Trail. So, after yet another stop, this time at Second Canyon Viewpoint, where we could look between sheer rock walls toward the impressive face of the dam, we returned to our north-south trail and soon achieved the top of the dam. Of course, here we had to pause again and look, oppositely, down the face of the dam to the receding river below.

On the other side of the dam, we found a spot on a grassy mound where we could both eat lunch and enjoy the mountain view. As we ate, we looked out over the lake toward familiar North Shore peaks: Hollyburn, Unnecessary, the Lions, Crown Mountain (especially its flat-topped west peak); also the ridge accessed by the Grouse Mountain Skyride.

A lovely part of the trail along the Capilano River.
Terry Puls photo.

On such a nice warm fall day, we would have loved to have spent a more leisurely time at lunch. But, keeping in mind that we had to backtrack the same distance we'd come, we decided we had better not linger too long. So, after a suitable interval, we reluctantly packed up and began our return. Initially, we varied our route a bit by following the Baden-Powell Trail west, up a rise, and then beginning our descent on the Upper Shinglebolt Trail, a beautiful trail that wends its way along natural dykes through gorgeous forest. Soon enough, though, we were back on the Capilano Pacific Trail near the northernmost of the creek crossings, and from this point onward we followed our outbound route to the letter.

On our return we made only one stop. After departing from Keith Road and dropping down to the riverbank, we walked out among the boulders to the edge of the water. Here we sat and drank in the beauty of the day. Some took photographs. Again, we found it hard to “break away.”



When we got back to Ambleside, foot traffic along the paved walkway had picked up considerably. As we threaded in and out of those “ambling,” we had a certain satisfaction that for us this last leg was not just a walk in the park but the ending of a day-long adventure that in some ways had seen us travel far beyond the urban scene.