

BMN HIKE REPORT

Lower Eagle Ridge and Cypress Lake (June 15, 2019)

By Mark Johnston



The still waters of Cypress Lake. *Terry Puls photo.*

On a cloudy “January” morning three of us met at Noons Creek Park. As we waited to see whether any others would show up, we mulled over possible routes and destinations. Keeping in mind that one of our party wanted to be back by 1:00 pm, we finally settled on hiking to Cypress Lake.

When no others turned up, we crossed Panorama Drive and started up the gas line right-of-way. The right-of-way is a wide gravel path, initially straight as an arrow, that divides bordering subdivisions. By walking it we were able to gain elevation in a steady and sustained way, and soon found ourselves above the subdivisions with mostly forest ahead. But before we got to the trees, we stayed with the gas line as it curves to the right and joins the access road that runs between power lines. In curving right and passing under the first power line, we came across salmonberry, and at least one of our party was tempted to pick his fill of the ripe berries. As we turned left up the access road, we heard the willow flycatcher’s unmistakable *fitz-bew*. I have learned that when walking beneath or near power lines at this time of year to expect willow flycatchers. They seem to love the open, sunny exposures.

Slowed only slightly by the tempting fruit, we turned off the access road and headed up under the second power line to the wood margin. We were now on the mountain bike trail known as Hammer Time. At the verge of the forest, we paused at a bench and enjoyed the view of a slice of the lowlands, including Colony Farm and the gleaming towers of the Port Mann Bridge.

After a brief rest, we continued our climb, first by the switch-backing Hammer Time and then by East Bound and Down. We were heading pretty directly north, but soon turned onto a newer trail, Shock Therapy, and began to traverse northwest. At an intersection with Manhandler to our left and Mossom Creek Trail straight ahead, we turned north again, at first paralleling and then crossing a tributary. Now on Massage Therapy we were in a part of the forest where there are many fired-scarred cedar snags, some of quite large diameter. On a grey day like today, the cedar snags gave the environs a rather spooky ambience.

As we hiked, we delighted in the almost continuous birdsong. In many parts of the forest, the trees are dense and the shrubs, ferns, and flowers few; but in other places sunlight has penetrated the canopy and plants are multiplying. But whether we were in more sterile or fecund parts of the forest, we were never without birdsong. We heard the Pacific wren's bubbling trill, which, as I have read and tested, averages about eight seconds in duration. We also heard the Pacific-slope flycatcher's up-slurred *tseep*, the buzzy plus sibilant notes of Townsend's warbler, and the beautiful "breezy, flutelike phrases" of Swainson's thrush.

At the top of the particularly steep upper portion of Massage Therapy, we took the short side path to the viewpoint we have visited on previous trips. Due to the cloud, our view was somewhat constrained: we could see a few middle ground features such as Grant Hill, but nothing more distant like the Cascades. The birding, however, was superb. Since the viewpoint is at the top of a cliff that is roughly a tree's height above the forest floor, we could look out horizontally toward the tops of trees. On our approach to the viewpoint, we had heard a robin (robins?) singing, and when we arrived at the lookout, we saw one perched atop a tree. It soon flew away, but then two cedar waxwings appeared in another tree, their crests, waxy red tips on their secondaries, and bright yellow tail bands all clearly visible. On a previous visit to the viewpoint, we had been entertained by a red-breasted sapsucker. Initially, on the present visit, we saw no sign of a sapsucker, but before we left, though my companions were facing away, I was fortunate enough to see this beautifully coloured woodpecker fly across my field of view into the forest to my left.

The flowers of bunchberry and Pacific dogwood look similar. Both members of the same family of plants.
Terry Puls photo.

Also of interest were large patches of bunchberry in bloom. This plant's four white, petal-like bracts resemble those of western flowering (Pacific)



dogwood; hence, its alternative name, “dwarf dogwood.”

Leaving the viewpoint, we followed a short connector road to the main logging road and then turned north again toward Cypress Lake. Along this road and also East Main, we had to negotiate numerous water-bars that have been dug into the recently decommissioned road.

Just before we reached Cypress Lake, we met two hikers on their way down. So, moments later, when we got to the lake, we were lucky enough to have the place to ourselves. We found a spot near the lakeshore to have lunch and do some photography. The water was perfectly still, and we amused ourselves with watching water striders skim about on the surface. We also thrilled to hear the hermit thrush’s “ethereal, flutelike” phrases.

With an eye on the time, we left “too soon” and began our return, at first on the logging road, and then via Four Lost Souls and Dentist mountain bike trails. We intersected the power line access road just up from Hammer Time, and soon were back on our morning route. As we descended Dentist, pools of sunlight formed on the forest floor. And by the time we reached the access road, the sun was fully out. We took note of a number of flowers growing alongside the road, including dandelion, foxglove, and oxeye daisy. We heard the orange-crowned warbler trilling and, back on the gas line, saw a northern flicker and a song sparrow.

We arrived back at Noons Creek Park at about 1:15 pm, a little later than planned, but no one was complaining. We had had a wonderful half day of companionship and exercise, enriched by a symphony of birdsong and respite by still waters.