

BMN TRIP REPORT

Deer Lake Park (May 21, 2022)

By Mark Johnston



Looking southwest across Deer Lake toward Metrotown. *Brian Wormald photo.*

After more than two years—and with appropriate health measures in place—we are finally resuming club outings. There seems to have been pent-up demand for such activities. Thus, for our second hike of the year, we had a fairly robust attendance. Ten of us turned out to circle picturesque Deer Lake, wander through Century Gardens, and climb the hill to the former Oakalla prison site to take in the panoramic view of the coastal mountains.

On a picture-perfect morning we gathered at the beach at the east end of the lake. The water was



**Looking west from the beach at the east end of Deer Lake.
*Brian Wormald photo.***

perfectly still. Adult geese and a few goslings paraded along the shore.

After waiting a few minutes for everyone to arrive, we began a counterclockwise circuit of the lake, starting along the boardwalk just north of the beach. We passed by an open meadow dotted with white flowers and then walked beneath a canopy of overarching cedar, willow, and alder. Beyond the end of the boardwalk, we

spotted a male-female pair of wood ducks just offshore. We walked briefly along Deer Lake Avenue in order to cross the outlet creek on the brick-faced auto bridge. As we crossed, we could study both the stream and the mature fir, cedar, and maple growing on its banks. Once across, we followed the wide gravel path back to the lakeshore. Song sparrows delivered their series of musical and buzzy notes, while, in the alders beside the path, chickadees chattered and sometimes sang, *fee-bee*.

When we reached the lakeshore, we resumed walking on the boardwalk. We looked out over the lake toward the wooded slopes opposite, behind which the towers of Metrotown rise into the sky. Toward the top of the incline, a grouping of trees with yellowish green leaves stood out among surrounding trees of darker, forest-green foliage. As we continued along the boardwalk, we took note of trailside plants too: lily pads and the fringe of spirea on the lakeside, cottonwood, willow, and alder on the uphill side.

Midway along the boardwalk, upon coming to the small dock, we left the lakeshore and started up the divided concrete walkway toward Century Gardens. Just a few paces from the boardwalk, we passed by a very impressive cottonwood, easily two metres thick at its base. About three metres above the ground, the tree divides into two trunks, one of which, after another two to three metres, splits yet again. There is a third trunk fused at the base and leaning away at a sixty degree angle. All in all, it is a spectacular tree.

Part way up the concrete walkway, a gravel path leads through a gate and intersects with the detour route around private property. On one side of the entranceway, a large banner proclaimed: "Welcome to the Eco-Art Zone." We went over to take a closer look. On either side of the entrance, there were figures fashioned from found branches and pieces of wood. On the banner side of the entrance, an antlered figure atop the stone gatepost assumed a beggar's pose. It was on its knees with an outstretched right hand. Multicoloured folk-art birds perched on its right forearm and left shoulder.



**Eco-Art Zone "lion".
Brian Wormald photo.**

On the other side of the entrance, a "lion" stood by the second gatepost. The lion was upright, standing on its hind legs, leaning just slightly forward, with its right paw grasping a cane. Beyond the figures, but still visible from the entrance, was a third creature, a "life-sized" dragon, also made from natural materials, in this case sheaves of willow and other flexible branches. The dragon was a good six to seven metres in length, its large head turned at a right angle to its body, with one purple-blue eye staring out at the beholder. If we had proceeded farther, we would have seen a rainbow-coloured mermaid, made of chicken wire and recycled plastic bags, lying in a bed of ivy, and, in the adjacent cedar copse, a variety of whimsical forest figures—including a winged horse—all fashioned from branches, twigs, and sprigs of foliage. There was also a crystal composed of prismatic plastic wrap. But we didn't proceed any farther. Instead, content with our look at the figures nearby, we carried on up the walkway toward the gardens.

Near the top of the walkway, we curved over to the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts, where washroom facilities are available. Our leader, Terry, invited us to wander at will through neighbouring Century Gardens, and instructed us to meet back at the entrance to the Shadbolt Centre in half an hour. Taking note of the time, we all went



Century Gardens. *Terry Puls photo.*

our separate ways, admiring the rhododendrons and other plantings, taking photographs, and simply enjoying being out on such a splendid spring day. When we reconvened, we returned to the lakeside boardwalk and continued our circuit. After 430 metres we departed the lakeshore a second time to begin the detour around a private residence. Our detour took us along the length of Price Street. Then, on the far side of Owl Creek, we headed back down to the lake and rounded its west end, on yet another boardwalk, through ecologically sensitive habitat. En route we crossed Beaver Creek.

Upon reaching the southwest corner of the lake, we embarked on our second side trip of the day. Keeping to the right of Oakalla Creek, we ascended the slopes of the former prison site, then walked west along the edge of what is now a subdivision. From here we paused at a number of vantage points with views over fields and lake and toward the snow-capped mountains beyond. As we gazed, our attention turned to two great blue herons flying across our field of vision from north to south, as well as to a bald eagle soaring high above. After paralleling the subdivision for 400 metres or so, we dropped down to a viewing tower. But unlike the

path's viewpoints, the tower's prospects are severely constrained. The tower is set amid ever-growing deciduous trees, and the only view left is of a very narrow slice of the North Shore Mountains.



**Looking northeast from near former Oakalla prison site toward Deer Lake and the mountains beyond.
*Brian Wormald photo.***

Moving on, we followed the tower's long, twisting, concrete ramp to the bottom and picked up the second of two trails heading back east. When we got back to our point of departure for this latest side trip, we paused for a snack. Maybe also to lengthen our time outside. We had started early and, even with our frequent stops, were well ahead of the promised return by noon. Then, too, some of us hadn't seen much of each other for a while. It was nice to be able to feel relaxed about our pace and have the opportunity to slow down and catch up with each other.

After our extended break, we walked the final stretch of our circuit without stopping. Our path was gravel, boardwalk, and pavement. We crossed over a number of small creeks. When we arrived back at the beach where we had begun, the scene had changed dramatically. Whereas at 8:00 the lake had been devoid of human activity and we'd had the beach to ourselves, now there were dozens of watercraft out on the lake and boaters were preparing still others for launch. The geese and goslings had stuck around, but a number of other waterfowl and birds were active as well. Mallards vied with human-powered boats for open water, gulls wheeled overhead, two bald eagles appeared high in the sky. Crows seemed mostly unperturbed by all the human activity, but one of them decided to give chase to the eagles. Song sparrows and chickadees, their notes rising above the many human voices, were also managing to make themselves known.

Since we were back well before the advertised finish time, some of us lingered a while longer. Now that we've broken the ice of this long and continuing COVID winter, perhaps we can find more opportunities to gather together safely and further our knowledge of the natural world.



Hikers practicing social distancing. *Terry Puls photo.*