BMN HIKE REPORT

Woodland Walk (June 4, 2022)

By Mark Johnston

Group in front of large Douglas-fir tree, above Woodland Walk Falls. ***Ian McArthur photo.***

For many years now we have organized a public hike on or near June 8 to celebrate the anniversary of the establishment of Pinecone Burke Provincial Park. Due to COVID, we did not hold walks in 2020 or the year following, but this year we decided to resume the tradition, though still limiting participation to members who are fully vaccinated. While in the past our numbers have been large enough that we found it necessary to split into groups, this time, with just seven of us, we were able to remain together.

As we gathered on Harper Road, just below the yellow gate, it was raining, maybe a further reason for our low number. Somewhere overhead a raven croaked. Ian said a few words about the nature of the hike, and we each introduced ourselves. Although most of us were known to each other, there were a couple of newer members present who have just begun to hike with us.

Introductions over, we made our way up the mountain bike trail known as “Garbage.” But as they say, one person’s trash is another person’s treasure. We delighted to see that this second-growth forest’s understory is continuing to fill in. Early on, Jeff disappeared behind the base of a tree and returned holding a rusted rail spike and a brake shoe. (He had placed them behind the tree for safekeeping.)

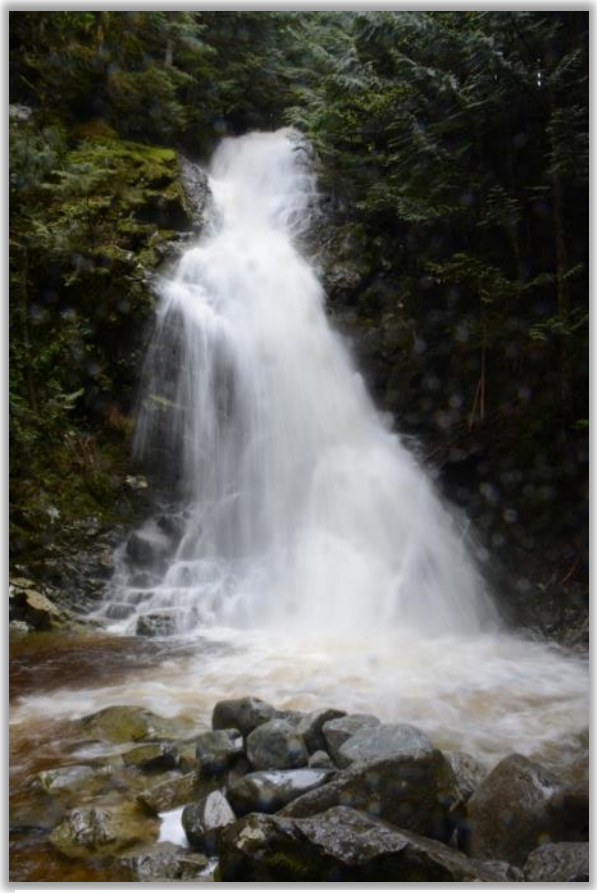
Displaying the artifacts for all to see, he noted their antiquity in that rail logging on Burke dates from a hundred years ago. A little later Jeff spotted and drew attention to a Pacific sideband snail (*Monadenia fidelis*). The sideband snail, with a shell reaching 35 mm in diameter, is the largest land snail in British Columbia. Typically, the snail has a dark band around the perimeter of its shell, hence, its name. The chestnut brown shell has up to seven whorls, each whorl also underscored with a thin black line. Although usually discovered among leaf litter, this snail—amazingly—can be found as much as seven metres up a tree! Our snail was very much on the ground, and that is where we left it, well-camouflaged among the detritus of the forest floor, relatively safe from predators such as snakes, shrews, and mice.

As we gained elevation on the Garbage Trail, and also as we walked the old road to the power line right-of-way, we heard Swainson's thrush sound its call note, *whit, whit*. Along the power line itself, we noted the willow flycatcher's sneezy *fitz-bew*. The latter bird likes drier habitat, and I have found that it tends to frequent cleared areas, such as right-of-ways. We also heard the western tanager's rather plain *pi-tic*, but did not see the colourful bird. When we entered the forest again, we began to hear new voices: Wilson's and black-throated gray warblers' spring songs, Pacific wren's bubbling trill and Pacific-slope flycatcher's upslurred whistle.

False Solomon's-seal. ***Ian McArthur photo.***

We botanized as well. We were able to separate four members of the lily family that at first glance might seem similar. We found false Solomon's-seal (*Smilacina racemosa*) and also star-flowered false Solomon's-seal (*Smilacina stellata*). The former's flowers are small, white, and arranged in a branched terminal cluster; the latter's, white and star-like, appear in short, unbranched terminal clusters. Also, s*tellata*'s leaves are set more at right angles to the stem. We further identified clasping twistedstalk (*Streptopus amplexifolius*) and Hooker's fairybells (*Disporum hookeri*). Both have branched stems, but the former has a distinctive axillary flower attachment, whereas fairybells is terminal flowered. Besides the members of the lily family, we found a few more flowers in bloom. Foamflower, bunchberry, and yellow wood violet winked from the trail margins. Broad-leaved starflower, though not yet blooming, was on the verge. Additionally, we spent time identifying ferns. We saw many examples of sword, lady, spiny wood, and deer fern. But we also found a small patch of oak fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*). This is a very beautiful fern—with delicate, lime-green, triangular, tripartite blades, horizontal to the ground—that can form an almost continuous carpet in some areas (for example, in the forest near Manning Provincial Park's Strawberry Flats).

When our attention wasn't on birds or plants, it was likely focused on the flow of water. Those of us familiar with Burke agreed that Pritchett Creek Cascades, Woodland Walk Falls, and Saw Blade Falls



Saw Blade Falls. ***Ian McArthur photo.***

all had as great a volume of water in them as we had ever seen. While we could safely view the Pritchett cascades from the power-line-road bridge, we had to take care in approaching the other two falls. This being the case, only a couple of us chose to descend the steep riverbank for a closer look at Woodland Walk Falls. And while most of us did drop down to the base of Saw Blade Falls, we found the spray so drenching and the air temperature so cold that we quickly retreated back up the embankment. Only when we had moved well back from the falls, did we find a place to sit and have our lunch.

After lunch we made our way back out to the power line right-of-way. The clouds had lifted a bit. We could look across the Coquitlam River valley and see Mt. Beautiful and Dilly Dally Peak. As we headed back beneath the power lines, we added to our bird list: orange-crowned warbler, black-headed grosbeak, (possibly) yellow-rumped warbler, spotted towhee, and bald eagle.

Easily our most notable moment came late in the day. We were almost back to where the Woodland Walk Trail intersects with Garbage Trail. A pair of hikers had stopped on the trail in front of us, and, as we approached, cautioned us that there was an owlet on the ground a few metres away. We looked toward where they pointed and saw the owlet holding very still between flutings at the base of a cedar. It was a barred owlet.

Early attempt to rescue barred owlet. ***Ian McArthur photo.***

Whether it had fallen from its nest or from some other perch, it was hard to say, but it appeared to be uninjured. The couple had used their smartphone to contact authorities who could tell them what to do about the isolated owlet, and had been put through to Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation Society, an organization with which our club is very familiar. They had received advice not to touch the baby bird with their hands, but to try in some way to elevate it to a tree branch. As long as the owlet remained on the

ground, so the advice went, its parents would not return for it, but if it could be made to perch well above the ground, then there was a chance the parents would come back. Other hikers approached, and soon one or the other of those gathered attempted to coax the owlet onto a scavenged fallen limb, which could then be lifted up to a low-hanging branch. This went on for some time, all to no avail. Finally, Ian managed to get the baby bird onto a flat strip of bark and then carry both bird and bark a short distance to where he could place them atop a high stump. We watched the owlet for a few moments, then left the area and continued our descent to the parking area. We didn't know whether our efforts would meet with success or not, but figured we had given the little bird its best chance.

Owlet on stump. ***Ian McArthur photo*****.**

This was a wonderful walk. It's too bad that we couldn't have included the wider public. But hopefully by the next anniversary we will be back to offering this walk both to club members and *potential* club members!

(As it turned out, Ian stayed on the mountain for a longer time in order to do some trail work. Later he returned to the stump to investigate. The owlet was gone. He noticed that there was some poop on the strip of bark, so it's clear that the little bird had not been completely famished.)