

BMN Trip Report

Three Brothers Mountain (Sunday, August 7, 2011)

By Mark Johnston



BMN hikers on the approach to Three Brothers Mountain. *Ian McArthur photo.*

On a picture-perfect warm August day, nine of us headed out to Manning Provincial Park. Eight were keen to hike up Three Brothers Mountain; one planned to wander at will and do some photography.

We arrived at the Manning Park Lodge well before 9:00 am, but took another hour to get to the trailhead largely because of encounters with wildlife. Initially our attention was focussed on the many Columbian ground squirrels that have burrowed beneath the lodge's front lawn. These tawny-coloured squirrels have been the recipients of numerous handouts and were not shy about coming up to us. We spent quite a bit of time observing and photographing them. Then, on the drive from the lodge to the trailhead, we paused midway at the Cascade Lookout to admire the view and were immediately distracted by one or two Clark's nutcrackers as well as a golden-mantled ground squirrel. These critters, too, were well-used to receiving handouts.

By the time we reached the Blackwall Peak parking area, the sun was well above the horizon. As I waited by the ridgetop trailhead for the others to join me, I watched a red-tailed

hawk—its tail brilliant in the strengthening sun—as it spiralled upward before disappearing behind the peak. Turning my gaze to the slopes below, I scanned the open areas for some indication of animal activity—previously, I had observed marmots from this spot—but didn't see any sign.

While our initial encounters were with wildlife habituated to humans, our meeting up with a spruce grouse had a decidedly wilder flavour. After a long descent through trees to Buckhorn Camp, we were enjoying a brief respite when a large party of Parisian eco-tourists showed up. After a few minutes, we noticed that the Parisians' attention had become focussed on something on the ground. They were gathered around it, gesturing and taking pictures. We made our way to where they were standing and discovered what they were looking at: a spruce grouse! After they left, we continued to observe the grouse. It became clear that the bird was not going to tolerate too close an approach. When one in our group knelt down to photograph it, it charged at him, causing him to jump back onto his feet! While it was not our intention to disturb the grouse, it was thrilling to be able to take a long, sustained look at this beautiful bird.

Western pasqueflower (anemone) in bloom.
Ian McArthur photo.

We had come to Manning Park, at least in part, to see wildflowers, and so we pressed on toward the expansive flower fields stretching from the upper slopes of Big Buck Mountain all the way to our objective. Even while in the trees, we were identifying a number of flowers but upon finally reaching the open meadowlands, our pace slowed and we stooped



down from time

to time to better examine a particular blossom. Somewhat surprisingly, the dominant colours were white and yellow; the fields lacked the full spectrum of colour exhibited when the summer bloom reaches its peak. I imagine this year's cool, wet spring/early summer, which led to a lingering snowpack, accounts for the delay. We were able to identify a few pockets of first wave flowers. We discovered western pasqueflower (anemone) in bloom, though a majority of these plants were now displaying a "mop top" of plummy seeds. (According to a BC Parks pamphlet on mountain flowers, some pasqueflowers move from bloom to mop-top phase in as little as two weeks.)

Western pasqueflower gone to seed.
Ian McArthur photo.

|

We found glacier (avalanche) lily, one of the first plants to bloom, still in flower. There were also white marsh marigolds and subalpine buttercups blooming. But it seemed as though the second wave was not yet fully underway. We saw Sitka valerian and fan-leaved cinquefoil (one white, the other yellow). Notably absent (except just below the rocky spine of the first Brother) was the showy crimson-coloured Indian paintbrush.

We lunched at the top of a crumbling cliff with a view north to the interior tablelands. Afterwards, we crossed a few patches of snow, switchbacked up through one of the day's better displays of subalpine colour, and picked our way carefully along the aforementioned spine to the top of the first Brother. Although we'd been having distant views for some time, we now had an unobstructed 360° panorama. Besides the view north, we could look east toward Cathedral Provincial Park, south along the route we had just come and on toward Frosty Mountain, and west toward the northern Cascades, including Hozomeen and Silvertip mountains.

Elephant head.
Ian McArthur photo.

On our return journey we continued to keep an eye out for birds and mammals or to stop to examine a shrub or flower. As we passed near our lunch spot, we saw half a dozen or more ravens fly by. In the same general area we noticed large patches of bracted lousewort (wood betony)—*more* yellowish flowers!—and managed to locate a few specimens of the related elephant head. This latter plant sports little purple flowers having not the bracted's hooked "beak," but rather a curved bill resembling an elephant's upturned trunk.



We got back to our vehicles a bit later than anticipated, but no one seemed to mind. To pay a visit to Manning's flower fields is an experience to be savoured, not hurried.



On the summit of the first Brother.
Ian McArthur photo.