

BMN TRIP REPORT

Coquitlam River (Saturday, November 21, 2009)

Mark Johnston



Hiking along the Trans Canada Trail down the west side of the Coquitlam River.
Photo by Ian McArthur.

For our final outing of the year, we walked along the Coquitlam River, tracing a figure eight by using three different crossings. Beginning and ending at the Patricia Avenue pedestrian bridge, we walked in counterclockwise fashion up the east side of the river, across the Eleanor Ward (David Avenue) Bridge, and back down the west side; then, in a clockwise manner down the east side of the river, across the McAllister Avenue footbridge, and back up the west side.

Ten walkers turned out for the close-to-home outing, three of us living near enough to the meeting point to begin our walk from our doorstep. Eight persons went the full distance; one turned back at the Eleanor Ward Bridge; and another completed only the first loop.

After looking at the rain-swollen, grayish-green river from the Patricia footbridge, we headed away from its swiftly flowing water and made our way along the calmer Oxbow Side Channel. It was raining on and off and a number of us made use of umbrellas.

During this portion of the hike, Don took the lead, especially keen to show us the recent salmon enhancement work at the corral site, consisting of a new, parallel channel and pond. Of particular interest was the pond's "beaver box," a box-like grate placed in front of the outlet to prevent damming. A number of the older ponds now have these boxes as well.

Eventually, we reached Oxbow Lake and then the bank of the main river channel. While walking along the next stretch, which is lined with cedars of varying ages, some of us peered through the trees to see a female common merganser riding the strong current downstream. North of a street still signed "David Ave" (but south of David's present alignment), we entered an area of mature cedar, hemlock, and Douglas-fir. Part way through, our eyes were drawn to a hemlock snag. Its trunk had been well-excavated and at its base there was a sizeable pile of woodchips—clear evidence of pileated woodpecker activity. Further in, and close to the Eleanor Ward Bridge, we were delighted to find some very large Douglas-fir trees. One fir, right on the trail, has a trunk diameter of at least 1.5 m at breast-height. Another fir, a little ways behind it, appears to be of equal thickness. After admiring the trees, we made our way up to and over the bridge, pausing midway across to watch the river negotiate a lovely, forested S-bend, then disappear. Below us, a salmon carcass hung from the bare branch of a west-bank alder.

As we started on the Trans Canada Trail down the west side of the river, the rain began to let up. Although we tended to walk this stretch at a steady clip, we did stop when one



or another of us pointed out something of interest. Candice directed us non-geocachers to a couple of well-hidden caches. Ian alerted us to an Adopt-a-Trail sign bearing the name of Coquitlam River Watcher Murray Clare. South of Salt Spring Avenue, we delighted in the stretch's fine mixed forest, especially noting the many beautiful bigleaf maples. Further along, we had an opportunity to study Grist Creek's channels and ponds.

A wet walk along the Coquitlam River.
Photo by Ian McArthur.

It took us only half the time to walk the shorter second loop of our figure eight. We followed the PoCo Trail on the east side of the river, and used the Westwood Trail to

cover some of the distance on the west side. As we walked along the PoCo Trail, we talked about taking a lunch break at Lions Park. When we arrived at the park, however, we found the covered picnic area closed off and the washrooms locked up. So, instead of stopping, we decided to forego taking a break and carry on to the end. After passing by people who were sleeping under the Kingsway Avenue bridge, a few of us turned aside to look at a fenced patch of rare streambank lupine (*Lupinus rivularis*). According to the posted sign, this species grows only in the Fraser Valley, this location being one of just four sites. One wonders how this beleaguered patch will fare in its asphalted, urban surroundings. Only a little farther along, we paused again at the west end of the McAllister footbridge where Don and Frank, two long-time area residents, reminisced about “Pig Hole.” According to them, the river at this point used to bend to the west and then come back around, creating a large swimming hole. The natural pool was near a piggery, hence its name. Frank recalled learning to swim there.

As we made our way back upriver on the west side, we took note of the many new townhouses encroaching upon the riparian corridor. Despite the incursion, we were still alert to any wildlife that might be present, and some of us saw a small flock of house finches flitting past. Although we were now on the home stretch, we made one last detour, taking the time to follow a rough trail from high up on the bank down to the riverside. We looked across to see a couple of mallards treading water near the opposite bank.

Part way across the Patricia footbridge, we took one last look at the river. It was good to stop and savour the view for a few more moments. It had been a satisfying half-day’s outing, and, for most of us, just the latest of what will likely be many more enriching visits to the river.