

## **BMN TRIP REPORT**

### **Cypress Creek (May 16, 2010)**

**by Mark Johnston**

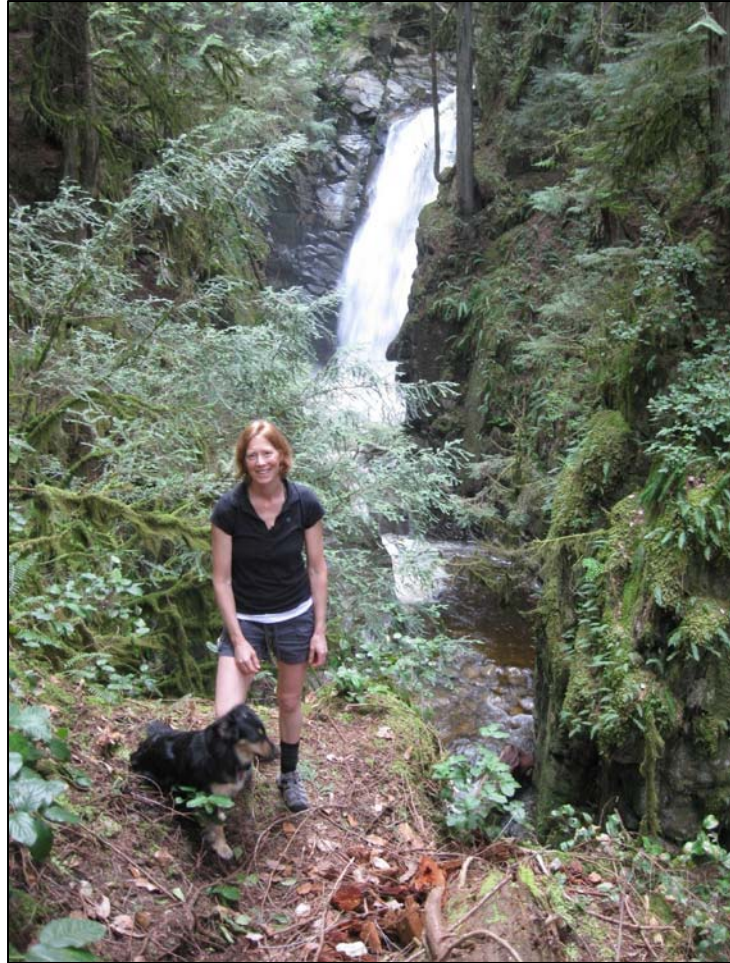


**Lunch break by Cypress Creek. (Photo by Ian McArthur)**

For three of us Burke Mountain Naturalists, the May 15-16 weekend was particularly full. On Saturday we took part in the BMN boat trip up Indian Arm. Then, on Sunday, we participated in a club hike in the North Shore mountains. On both days we enjoyed lots of sunshine, although on Sunday there was considerably more cloud.

We began our hike in West Vancouver's Cypress Falls Park. There were eight of us (plus Andrea's dog Jezebel). As we made last minute preparations in the parking area, we heard the red-breasted nuthatch's distinctive call, and some of us saw a coyote trot past the entrance to the clearing. Then, taking up our daypacks, we entered the forest and

made our way along an old pipeline route on a bench high above Cypress Creek. Within minutes, we caught sight of the lower falls, 10 m in height, its waters well-pulverized as they plunged between pinched rock walls. Above the falls we moved through a few groves of sizeable Douglas fir. We found one tree with a girth of more than 2 m. Further along, we took the short side-trail to a view of the upper falls. This falls is of similar height to the lower falls, but makes a more direct plunge into a pool below.



**Andrea and her dog Jezebel at the upper falls.  
(Photo by Ian McArthur)**

In contrast to the semi-wilderness of Cypress Falls Park, the rest of our hike had something of an industrial feel to it. We followed another pipeline right-of-way, then the paved Eagle Lake Road, and finally the Cypress Bowl Logging Road. Now on the Trans Canada Trail, we stayed with this old, one-lane gravel road all the way up to Cypress Bowl. For a while we could hear the creek, but soon were far above it. As the grade steepened, we were happy to take our time and do a little birding. We had been hearing a Wilson's warbler's rapid little chatter, and a few of us, after exercising considerable patience, were lucky enough to spot the little yellow bird as it alit near the top of a roadside alder, its round black cap clearly visible. A moment later, we heard a sharp *peek* and saw a hairy woodpecker land on a nearby trunk. Farther up the road, a couple of us noted a pair of chestnut-backed chickadees flitting from tree to tree.

Although two members of our group had gone ahead, the rest of us were drawn to explore an opening on the right. On the far side of the clearing, we came across a large log fixed at the edge of a sheer drop-off. Directly below, we could see a small dam. This was not the main stem of Cypress Creek but a western tributary. As Ian descended a set of wooden stairs for a better look—discovering that a pipe runs from the dam downstream—he inadvertently flushed a blue grouse, which I observed fly across the stream and land high up in a tree on the other side. The bird was quite close to—and appeared the same colour as—the tree’s trunk, making it almost impossible to see. Mike, looking through binoculars, was also able to locate it and we spent several minutes trying to point it out to the others until all had had a glimpse.

Shortly after our group reunited, we came unexpectedly upon a rather deluxe outhouse with latched wooden door and well-built staircase. While some of us were taking turns using the outhouse, a raven flew down and perched low in a tree right next door. It was a treat to see this large bird so close at hand.

As we entered the Cypress Bowl area, our route levelled and we began to get occasional peekaboo views looking down the valley and out to the Strait of Georgia. We could also look left toward the snowy peaks above. The bowl is only slowly recovering from the devastations of logging, and the trees are still mostly quite small. It was startling, then, to find along the way a giant red cedar, 2-3 m thick, its top broken into a candelabra of sharp points. At our most northerly point of trail, we turned off our route to examine Black Mountain’s relatively new South Lift. We briefly considered having lunch in the ski lift’s shade, but, even though the lift was not operating, a disquieting hum gave us pause. So we decided to press on to Cypress Creek crossing. This took longer than we imagined. Thus, when we arrived we were thoroughly famished. We plopped down on rocks beside the creek’s copper-coloured waters and had our long-delayed lunch. While we ate, we had a few moments of excitement when some thought they had spotted a small owl or hawk near the top of a young amabilis fir, but further observation revealed the small “raptor” to be a pair of closely bunched, upright cones!

After climbing out of the creek valley—we were now on a road originally used for transporting heavy equipment to and from Cypress Bowl—we turned down a power line right-of-way to begin our long descent. Heading southwest, we had a number of splendid views of the Strait, Gulf Islands, and Vancouver Island. As we descended, we sometimes veered into forest. At one point, we passed through a small grove of thickly-trunked cedars. Finally reaching a particularly fine viewpoint—complete with picnic table—we had a moment of indecision. Our map showed two ways forward. We could follow a rough trail steeply down the power line, or stay with the TCT as it turned southeast, and then pick up a switchbacking hydro service road for a more gradual descent. After weighing the pros and cons of each option, we decided on the power line route. Although this route appeared less substantial, it promised a speedier descent. But after starting down it, at a point where our trail bore sharply right into the woods and began to deteriorate, some of us had second thoughts. Reconsidering our way, we decided to play it safe and take the service road down. Portentously(?), our moment of indecision was marked by a few drops of rain giving way to rays of sun.

While the service road may have been the longer route, it proved to be aesthetically superior, the deciduous trees lining the road giving it the look and feel of a country lane. We stumbled upon a few scattered cones, curved and flecked with white, and looked up to see a maturing western white pine. Only at its lower end, where the road merges with the power line right-of-way, did it disappoint. As we walked this section, we were dismayed—though not surprised—to see two especially pernicious invasives taking hold: Scotch broom and Japanese knotweed.

We ended our hike as we had begun, by walking through Cypress Falls Park. This time we entered the park from the east, crossed Cypress Creek above the lower falls and finished on the pipeline trail. One or two people remarked that the falls appeared fuller than in the morning. Considering our day of discoveries, I imagine the same could be said of our souls.