

## BMN Trip Report

### Gambier Lake (Saturday, July 17, 2010)

by Mark Johnston



**Gambier Lake, looking north. (Photo by Terry Puls)**

On previous trips to Gambier Island, we had climbed to two of its high points: Mts. Liddell and Killam. This time we stayed at a lower elevation and visited Gambier Lake.

Although initial interest in this hike was high, in the end only three of us were able to make it. But our low number made the logistics a little easier. Under mostly sunny skies we sailed first on the *Queen of Coquitlam* from Horseshoe Bay to Langdale. Then we boarded the water taxi *Stormaway IV* for the crossing to Gambier. As on our outing two years ago to climb Mt. Killam, we were treated to an hour's boat ride, making stops at Keats Landing and Eastbourne, on opposite sides of Keats Island, before proceeding to Gambier.

After arriving at New Brighton, we disembarked and made our way up the gangplank to the wharf. We were full of anticipation until Terry drew our attention to a poster on the wharf notice board. It indicated that due to a small-scale logging operation, the trail we intended to hike would be closed daily from 6:00 am to 1:00 pm and again from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. It suggested that if one had any questions, you should contact Rocco at Helen's. Another poster advertised "Commotion by the Ocean 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Concert,” taking place later that day at the Gambier Island Community Centre. The festival was to feature ABBA and Neil Diamond tribute bands (the members of which, we found out later, mostly live on the island). As we left the wharf, we wondered whether we might be in for a change of plans!

A little further along, as we hesitated by a bank of mailboxes before turning north toward the lake, an older woman driving on a utility cart with two other persons stopped to ask us if we needed directions. Although we were only puzzling over whether or not we would be able to reach our objective, I guess we appeared lost. We let her know our predicament and asked if she could direct us to Helen’s. She smiled and said we were standing right in front of Helen’s place! At the woman’s encouragement we passed through the encircling trees and approached the house. We could see two or three people through an open kitchen window and called out to them, explaining that we were looking for Rocco. But none of them could tell us anything about him: whoever he was, he wasn’t staying there.

Deciding to carry on, we turned up the road toward the lake and, in a few minutes’ time, came to the community centre grounds where a few people were setting up for the afternoon’s concert. Although we were anxious to get on our way, it seemed prudent to ask them what they knew about the trail closure. As we approached them, a woman with a large black dog (a retriever/poodle cross) came toward us. Hearing our plans, she was ready to give us directions to the lake, but we indicated that our main concern was whether, due to the logging activity, we would be able to make it to the lake at all. She was under the impression Rocco had been selectively logging mature maples, but couldn’t imagine anyone would be logging today—all islanders would be at the festival! As we talked, we felt our spirits lifting again.

The first leg of the route to Gambier Lake is on a gently rising, well-graded road that has the look and feel of a country lane, with its treed properties and open acreages. After a turn to the left and brief descent, the road resumes a northerly direction, but now in an extensive older cutblock. As we walked along, we could look east across the clearcut toward Mt. Elphinstone on the Sunshine Coast. On this stretch we saw two band-tailed pigeons alight side-by-side on the upper branch of a young tree.

Beyond the logged area we passed crudely painted signs warning of the current logging activity, and noted stacks not of maple, but of fir logs. But not seeing nor hearing anyone working, we continued straight ahead. We crossed Mannion Creek and took our first break at the campsite beside it. The forest here, although second-growth, is particularly lush, and we lingered for some time, listening to the running water and abundant birdsong.

Soon after our break, we began to climb in earnest toward the pass between Mts. Liddell and Killam. In its lower reaches the road between the mountains is eroding and rocky, but higher up is more intact and nicely moss-covered. As we ascended, we could see on our right evidence of the new logging, and part way up came across a line of flagging tapes strung across our path, marking the far boundary of the trail closure. We

ducked under the makeshift barrier, happy to know that our earlier worries had been for nought.

**Beautiful “Wonson Lake,” aka “Lilypad Lake.” (Photo by Terry Puls)**

When our route began to level a bit, we stopped for another break. Maybe we should have waited a bit longer to stop because shortly thereafter we came upon a beautiful lake (or lakelet) at the headwaters of Mannion Creek. The Gambier Island Conservancy’s map shows this as “Lilypad Lake,” but a hand-painted sign nailed to a tree has “Wonson Lake.” Whatever its name, it is a beautiful body of water—larger than I had imagined—and worth a visit in its own right. Between the road and shore is a low-lying area, no doubt sometimes submerged. We noted the curving stems of now landlocked lily pads.



Leaving the lake, we reached our high point and began the abrupt descent to Gambier Lake. For some time now we’d been very aware of the mountains on either side. Then our road disappeared, and we were walking in little more than a rocky creek bed and eventually on rough trail. Although the descent is only a kilometre in length, it seemed to take an eternity. But at long last we caught a glimpse—through dense trees—of the lake’s blue, blue waters, and moments later were walking along its eastern side.

Halfway along the lake, we noticed scrawled in the mud at our feet the word SALAMANDERS and a number of arrows pointing toward the lakeshore. We could hear a group of people (campers?) at the north end of the lake, so, in hopes of finding a place to ourselves, we decided to follow the rough side-path past clumps of sphagnum moss to the lakeshore. We found a nice log to sit on. A trunk, anchored at right angles to the lakeshore but curving outward on the lake’s surface, would have provided very easy

access into the warm waters if any of us had been inclined to go for a swim. We found the lake to be large and beautifully set beneath Mt. Liddell and other more northerly hills and knolls. But what garnered most of our attention as we ate our lunch were the half dozen or more milk chocolate brown salamanders swimming on or just below the water surface on either side of the curving trunk. Sometimes a salamander would disappear beneath a lily pad and then later re-emerge. It was very entertaining!

After lunch, we walked to the north end of the lake and ended up chatting with a member of the large group camped there. We found him very amiable. He informed us that he and his friends had been coming to Gambier Lake for 10 years now. They backpack in, carrying tents, food, and a goodly amount of beer. I wondered whether they had backpacked in the relatively short distance from the top of the island. No, he said, they had come in from New Brighton, but, given their advancing years, would be happy to know of a shorter way. Despite their large store of beer, they didn't seem like a particularly rowdy bunch, and one had the impression they genuinely appreciated the beauty of the place and would be packing out their empties.

Although we were not anxious to leave the lakeside, we remained mindful of ferries to catch, and eventually shouldered our packs and began the long trek back. We hiked steadily, our conversation passing the time. When we reached Mannion Creek, we stopped for a mid-afternoon snack. It was lovely to sit one last time in the sun-dappled forest and listen to the moving water.



**BMN hikers at Gambier Island General Store. (Photo by anonymous passerby)**

As we made our way back through the cutblock, we became aware of a different strain: the sound of rock 'n' roll. Apparently, the island's music fest was in full swing. When we drew near to the community centre grounds, we were surprised by the number of cars and trucks parked by the side of the road, with more arriving all the time. A warm-up

band was playing on an outdoor stage, and there were several hundred people (no kidding!) milling about. Besides those piling out of vehicles, there were many others, carrying chairs and blankets, approaching on foot.

Although we had an hour at our disposal, rather than pay the admission fee and join the revelry, we elected to continue on to the Gambier Island Grocery Store to await our boat. We sat out on the adjoining deck—refreshments in hand—savouring the sun, view of the sea, and memories of a wonderful hike. Our return connections were as favourable as one could ask for. We left New Brighton at 5:05 pm and were back in Coquitlam by 7:00 pm.

This was a fabulous outing! Maybe, like our friends camping at Gambier Lake, the BMN Hikers should make this an annual affair.



**Transportation to and from Gambier Island: the *Stormaway IV*, here approaching the New Brighton dock, and the Horseshoe Bay-Langdale ferry, waiting at Langdale.**

**(Photo by Terry Puls)**