

BMN Hike

Taylor Meadows/Garibaldi Lake Loop (September 10, 2011)

By Mark Johnston



**Garibaldi Lake with Mount Price and Clinker Peak in the background.
*I. McArthur photo.***

Surprisingly, in all the years of organizing club hikes, we had never scheduled a trip to Garibaldi Lake. Perhaps we had shunned the lake because of its popularity, as we tend to go places less peopled. But the lake is popular for a reason. It is, quite simply, stunningly beautiful. In his book *Hiking near Vancouver* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1971), Dougald MacDonald describes it this way: “an exquisite lake fed by glaciers. The water is an incredible blue-green, opaque with the rock flour that glaciers have abraded from the mountainsides.” So when, in this BC Parks centenary year, we came up with the idea of focusing on our provincial parks, we decided that no tour of our parks would be complete without paying a visit to this spectacular lake.

When we planned the outing, we didn’t realize that the date we picked—Saturday, September 10—was that of the GranFondo Whistler bicycle race along the Sea to Sky Highway. After becoming aware of this, we agreed on an early start so as not to get stuck in slow-moving traffic. We left town at 6:15 am, and mostly avoided any delays.

Although we arrived at the Rubble Creek parking area by 8:30, the upper lot was already full and the lower one filling up rapidly. As expected, the nine of us would have lots of company. But while there would be many other parties on the trail that day, we found that most of the time we were hiking alone, unaware of the other groups. It was only when we stopped to rest that another party would overtake us.

It was a clear, sunny, and eventually hot day, but since we were beginning low in the valley, we hiked for the longest time in deep shadow. Following an initial switchback or two, we contoured slowly upward through mature forest. At first we travelled through Douglas-fir and hemlock; later we began to notice cedars. Many of the trees were of considerable size. The forest was quiet except for the fading sound of the creek below and the occasional *ank-ank* of a red-breasted nuthatch.

After an hour or so, we encountered more switchbacks, and when we had negotiated a number of them, finally began to get some sun. By the time we reached the junction where we would begin the loop portion of the hike, we were able to sit on sun-dappled benches to enjoy a well-deserved snack.



Taylor Meadows with Black Tusk peeking over the horizon.
J. Delgrande photo.

After our break, we chose the left-hand-branch trail toward Taylor Meadows and resumed hiking, now through alpine fir and mountain hemlock. Only at this point did we begin to feel the heat of the day, and

when a short while later we left the trees, the more so. We traversed Taylor Meadows and continued up into Black Tusk Meadows. It was not only hot but unseasonably hot, with temperatures soaring above 30° in Vancouver and not feeling all that much cooler here in the alpine. We saw a few flowers in bloom, but the meadows appeared dried out. Pressing onward to our high point for the day—at another major trail junction—we were feeling quite parched ourselves. We found a bit of shade and plopped down to have our lunch. But our effort was not without reward. Facing back toward the way we had come, we had a grand view of the distant Tantalus Range, its peaks still wearing a mantle of deep snow.

Following lunch, we took the right-hand-branch trail toward Garibaldi Lake. We passed three picturesque ponds and came to the top of the generous switchbacks by means of which we would descend to the lake. As we started down the zigzags, we began to have tree-filtered views of the lake's turquoise waters, but so meandering are the switchbacks that even after dropping down several of them we seemed no closer to our objective. But eventually we got down to the lakeshore and followed it around to a point opposite the Battleship Islands. Although there were a lot of people at the lake, we found a couple of unoccupied benches and sat down to contemplate the sublime beauty. To our left we could see the Black Tusk poking up behind a fronting ridge. Turning our gaze from left to right, there were the bare heights of Panorama Ridge, the snowy summits of Castle Towers Mountain and the Sphinx, and the blocky summit of Guard Mountain. Spilling down from the Sphinx, its namesake glacier appeared much receded from when I first laid eyes on it nearly 40 years ago.

Some of us continued along the shoreline a bit farther. A very large party of young people had staked out a spot on a weathered, somewhat warped dock. While I watched, one of the youths dove into the lake. During our time at the lakeshore, we noticed a handful of people take to its waters. I had been under the impression that the lake was quite cold, but later read that it's considered "very swimmable." Next time we'll bring suits!

One of the Battleship Islands in Garibaldi Lake, with Castle Towers in the background.
I. McArthur photo.



Lifting my eyes above the dock, I could see the volcano Mt. Price and its vent, Clinker Peak. Squinting, I was able to make

out a party of three traversing a snowfield near the summit of the latter. Apparently quite a few groups make the two to three hour ascent of Price, and my interest was definitely piqued. But not having planned for an ascent on this trip, we would have, like the swimming, to save it for another day.

Leaving Garibaldi Lake, we continued our loop. We passed by Lesser Garibaldi Lake, also turquoise-coloured. Although dubbed “Lesser,” this lake—except for its proximity to Garibaldi—would be a worthy destination in its own right. The lake’s outlet was not immediately apparent. While we did eventually find a surface outlet, the lake—according to an old survey of water discharges—also has subterranean outlets. In mentioning the survey and the subterranean outlets, MacDonald records a surprising observation: “I was amazed to see this lake in the spring of 1970. It had dropped at least twenty-five feet below the previous year’s level. . . . One of these outlets appeared to have enlarged into a major underground channel.”

**The fractured face of
the Barrier.**
J. Delgrande photo.

Pausing by the bridge beneath which a cascading Taylor Creek tumbles down toward Lesser Garibaldi Lake, we allowed our group to collect and then continued on past the relatively small, but still blue-green-coloured Barrier



Lake to a view of the Barrier itself. We stood or sat on a rocky outcrop opposite this impressive lava-rock wall, which was created when flows from an erupting Mt. Price met a large glacier. The present-day cliff’s fractured face is the result of a great landslide that occurred in 1855, which a park brochure speculates was “triggered . . . by some unrecorded earth tremor.” As we looked on, rock fragments broke loose from the unstable cliff, sending up swirls of dust as they slid and bounded down the face. We watched this ongoing display for some time.

Leaving the overlook of the Barrier, we soon reached the original junction. All that remained was to retrace the switchbacks we’d come up in the morning. With the sun’s rays slanting in from the west, the forest had an awakened beauty that had only been hinted at in the morning’s shadow. The lighting also permitted a greater appreciation of the trees’ significant dimensions. Winding our way downward, we arrived back at our cars about 6:30 pm, tired but thankful to have been witness to so much mountain grandeur.