

# BMN HIKE REPORT

## Barnston Island and Surrey Bend

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by Mark Johnston



A typical scene on Barnston Island: views of horses, fields, and toward Golden Ears Mountain.

*Terry Puls photo.*

Back in April 2000 we planned on doing Barnston Island as a cycle trip, but only the leader showed up for it. Now these many years later we decided to visit the island on foot, and this time people came out in droves—there were twenty-six of us! Figuring it would only take us half a day or so to walk the roughly ten kilometres around the island, we thought we would extend our time by going for a short walk in newly developed Surrey Bend Regional Park as well.

We had a beautiful sunny day. Leaving our vehicles at Port Kells, we boarded the ferry for the short trip across Parsons Channel. The ferry consists of a small barge pushed by a tiny tugboat, *Centurion VI*. The barge holds six vehicles and, depending on the number of cars, 28-50 passengers. Since there were only a couple of vehicles with their passengers making the trip, our large party was easily accommodated on the same sailing. The crossing took no more than five minutes, hardly enough time to get our bearings. To the north we had a good view of Burke Ridge with snow-capped Coquitlam Mountain poking up behind.

Once on the other side, we decided on a counter-clockwise loop around the perimeter of the island. We walked on the paved road that runs atop the encircling dyke. We had fewer views of the river than we might have supposed, as an outer fringe of deciduous trees blocked a clear prospect. But our views the other way, toward various farm buildings and agricultural fields, were mostly unrestricted. As we traipsed along, we took note of sundry birdlife and several kinds of domestic animals. Of the former we saw or heard song sparrows, white-crowned sparrows, crows, starlings, cowbirds, flickers, towhees, and rock pigeons. On the domestic front, we saw three horses at one farm and, at another, eighteen goats, some of which were chewing through shrink-wrapped hay bales to get at (apparently) last year's crop. Later in our circuit we saw three burros, a number of sheep and lambs, more horses and goats, chickens, and a herd of beef cattle.

Our longest stops were at either end of the island. At the east end we left the dyke and followed a rough path down to a sandy shore where we had a clear view of Golden Ears Bridge and the mountains beyond.

**View from the east end of the island, looking toward Golden Ears Bridge and the mountains beyond.**  
*Terry Puls photo.*



We took time to walk out on the strand for a closer look at numerous gulls, three double-crested cormorants, and four mergansers, all just offshore. At the west end we visited the Robert Point Rest Area. Here there are picnic tables and a toilet. This was our lunch spot. Again, we could walk down to the shore where we had a good view of downriver industries and mountains all along. We also observed more birds: gulls, Canada geese, and (possibly) a spotted sandpiper.

When we returned to the road, we looked across fields and past cattle and barns to distant Mt. Baker. From most points around the island, our views were almost exclusively rural. If we didn't know better, it would be hard to comprehend that we were in the midst of a sprawling urban area.



**The Barnston Island ferry.**  
*Terry Puls photo.*

Our return voyage was not as expeditious as the morning sailing. This time there were more cars on board and less room for passengers, so our group couldn't all go at the same time. Those of us who made the first sailing had time to admire the ferry captain's skill as he guided the barge back to the island and then returned again.

A smaller number of us remained to hike in Surrey Bend Regional Park. We accessed the park from the same Port Kells parking lot. We had a look at the brand new picnic shelters and natural play area, and then, while some stayed behind to enjoy the new facilities, seventeen of us set out on a hike along the treed foreshore as far as Centre Creek. We heard the trill of the orange-crowned warbler and delighted to see the carpet of false lily-of-the-valley. From the mouth of the creek, we had a view of the mountains from Grouse to Crickmer. After soaking up the view, we looped back through open fields and along a recently enhanced water channel to the picnic area.

Combining Barnston Island with Surrey Bend made for a most enjoyable double outing. Early spring seems the perfect time to do it. And although many choose to cycle around Barnston Island, a slower, walking pace has its own rewards, as one has time to savour the surroundings. We'll have to put this hike on a short rotation!

**Some of the recently enhanced water channel in Surrey Bend Regional Park.**  
*Terry Puls photo.*

