

BMN HIKE REPORT

Chatham Reach

Saturday, March 12, 2016

by Mark Johnston



The BMN hikers walking down the Alouette River toward the Pitt River. *Ty Orosco photo.*

Two years ago we walked along river dykes from the south end of Harris Road to just before the Pitt River railway bridge. The idea of the present hike was to continue along the dykes all the way to Sheridan Hill.

Fourteen of us gathered at our initial meeting place, the ICBC Driver Licensing Centre in Port Coquitlam. A light rain was falling. As we carpoled to our staging area, it began to rain harder. Some of us began to have second thoughts about going the full distance. But by the time we started walking, the rain was easing a bit, and when we turned north along the Pitt River, it stopped altogether for a while.

Our pace was unhurried, which gave us plenty of time to do some birding. We took note of song sparrows, robins, and a number of ravens. We saw a heron or two near the water's edge and three scaup (two males and one female) a little ways offshore.

Reaching the Alouette River, we turned east, past Pitt Meadows Marina, to access Silver Bridge. The Alouette appeared still, its surface showing only a very slight ripple. On our left, we saw numerous boathouses and pleasure craft. On our right, cattle grazed in an open field.



View from the north side of the Alouette River, looking south across the river. *Ty Orosco photo.*

Once across the bridge, as we walked back down the Alouette, our eyes were mostly on the tributary river. We observed a hooded merganser as it

made its way downstream. Later, we saw two or three Anna's hummingbirds, which were hovering around a feeder hanging from the eaves of a waterfront house.

Back on the Pitt we continued to add to our bird list. We saw two red-tailed hawks, also juncos and flickers. On the river there were common mergansers, double-crested cormorants, and mallards. East of the dyke, on ponds, were buffleheads and wigons.



Another view from the north dyke of the Alouette; it shows a few pleasure craft and one derelict boat. *Ty Orosco photo.*

As the day wore on, we began to look for a suitable spot for lunch. Up ahead, it appeared as though there were two benches side by side, perfect for our purposes. But when we reached the place, it turned out there was only one. Nevertheless, we decided to make this our lunch spot. Most of us sat at the outer edge of the dyke, and a couple of us enjoyed the comfort of the bench. It had been dry for most of the hike, but, ironically, when we opened our lunch kits, it began to rain. We were fairly close to the north end of Harris Road, where we had left some of our vehicles, and began to think about bringing the hike to a close early. But as we finished our lunch and reshouldered our packs, the rain let up, and we forgot all about shortening the hike.

Continuing north, we heard a marsh wren, noted two mature bald eagles, and watched a northern harrier as it flew across the river. After we got to the foot of Sheridan Hill and began to double back, we saw another harrier, this one hunting along the marshy shoreline. Other species—seen east of the dyke—included towhee and Steller's jay.

It was a bit of shock to see Sheridan Hill as it looks today. Over the years the gravel operation has been eating away much of the western portion of the hill. That side of the hill is now not only denuded but has been sculpted into a series of giant steps.

The view in the other direction was more inspiring. We looked across the straw-coloured foreshore and gray-blue waters of the Pitt toward Burke Ridge, blackish green, its top in cloud, with vapour drifting down the folds of its many eastside creeks. We could have fixed our gaze on such beauty for a long time.

When we got back to Harris Road, we squeezed into the few cars we had parked there and drove to Old Dewdney, where we had left the rest. As we headed back to the Tri-Cities, we were warmed not only by the sun streaming through the windshield but by memories of the sights and sounds of a day spent outdoors.