

BMN HIKE REPORT

Little Horn Mountain (Saturday March 28 2015)

by Mark Johnston



View from near the top of Little Horn -- Croker Island and the northern reach of Indian Arm.
Terry Puls photo.

We last visited Little Horn Mountain in April 2001. On that occasion the weather had been cloudy, even misty, but as we lunched at the rocky lookout, the clouds parted just enough so that we were treated to grand views looking down Indian Arm toward Greater Vancouver. This time we were once again facing a cloudy day, with the forecast calling for rain beginning in the afternoon. But

since the clouds were high and to some degree broken, we were hopeful the weather might hold and we would enjoy the views we had relished before.

Thirteen of us met in the parking lot near the warden's office at Buntzen Lake. After the usual round of introductions and a brief overview of the day's hike, we started along the trail on the east side of Buntzen Lake. This is a very well-travelled trail, but since it was still early, we had the path more or less to ourselves. On our way into the park, we had seen signage to the effect that the lake's water level was high and the beaches were flooded. As we walked along the lake, we had ample opportunity to take note of this. At South Beach a number of the forward-most picnic tables were marooned, while at North Beach the rising water had claimed the sand, the grass areas, picnic tables, trash receptacles, signs and the gravel access road.

From North Beach we continued along the roadway that fronts the northern extension of Buntzen Lake. In places the water came right up to the roadway. We paused near the beginning and at the end of this northern arm, first, to admire Swan Falls which was in fine display, cascading down the steep slopes of Eagle Ridge, and, second, to gape at the tremendous volume of surging, pulverized white water pouring down the Buntzen Dam's spillway. With the lake as high as it was, one might have thought that its water was being held back, so it was something of a surprise to see so much of the water being let go.

Passing the turnoff to the powerhouses on Indian Arm, we stayed with the road as if we were going to the tiny community of Buntzen Bay. Then, after some deliberation over the route, and following a significant drop in elevation, we finally located the well-marked beginning of the trail to Little Horn Mountain. Initially on a shaded spur, we soon gained the foot of a power pylon and had views looking east and north. Hardly pausing, we carried on up a steep path that led to us to edge of the transmission line right-of-way. Here we entered the forest, and our trail moderated a little. Although undoubtedly logged in times past, this section of forest is remarkably beautiful, with many mature Douglas-fir trees towering above a lush understory.

As we passed from the older forest into a younger, denser forest, we came to the first of a number of creeks. This creek, which we had found very hard to get across in 2001, tumbles down a steep-

sided, boulder-choked gully. On the previous outing we had met with a great volume of water rushing, cascading, dropping down the precipitous slope. One of our party had managed to inch his way across a slippery log that spanned the creek, and then the rest of us had followed, though choosing to half crawl on hands and knees. This time, although the volume of water was markedly less, we found the crossing still required considerable care. One or two surefooted members hopped from rock to rock and made it across; then they positioned themselves in such a way as to be able to extend a hand or hiking pole to aid everyone else in crossing safely.

**Hikers navigating their way across a series of creeks on the lower reaches of the trail to Little Horn.
Terry Puls photos.**



Moving on, we got over the second creek, which flows in a much shallower depression, without much difficulty, but those of us who had been on the previous trip were surprised to discover that we would have to ford a third and then fourth creek. Perhaps a bridge or two has

been lost in the meantime? We had no trouble with the third crossing, but the fourth was more challenging. Yet once again, with more confident members aiding those who were less experienced, we managed to overcome this last obstacle as well.

From this point on the “sailing” was clear. We were now on a logging road in very young forest. Beginning on nearly level ground, we soon began to climb very steeply. As we climbed we found numerous artifacts of logging days. Perhaps most interesting: we came upon parallel metal “ladders,” an axle-width apart, set in the roadbed and supporting an asphalt surface. Although the surface had deteriorated and the framework been disturbed, we discovered lengthy sections at least partly intact. We also came across wooden ties, a familiar feature of old logging roads, and metres and metres of rusted metal cable. Near the top of our climb, we began to see the telltale cones of the western white pine and, when we stopped for a bit of respite, were able to locate the first of what would be many specimens of this species. In fact, on the slopes of Little Horn Mountain, the western white pine grows with some profusion. This we discovered after leaving the road and walking the delightful trail that wends its way through an apparently old-growth forest to the top of the mountain. The forest here is very diverse, with large fir, hemlock and cedar, and a luxuriously green understory. As one nears the top, white pine is joined by another member of its genus, *Pinus contorta*. Also arresting are the massive rocky outcrops that seem to ring the summit area.

Approaching the top, we stopped first at a fine lookout providing a view of Croker Island and the north reach of Indian Arm. The tops of the mountains surrounding the inlet were in clouds, adding to the beauty of the scene. After we had had a good look at the view and snapped a photo or two, we proceeded along the rocky hogback to the summit, where we sat down for a well-deserved lunch. In the intervening years the trees on the mountain have grown higher so that the views are more of the peekaboo variety than they were before. Nevertheless, we had fine views looking up Dilly-Dally Creek to the peak of the same name and along the length of Eagle Ridge. A party of three occupied three linear humps of rock that fell away to the south. When these hikers left, we scrambled onto the rocks they'd vacated and could see distant Buntzen Lake nestled between ridges, look into Bedwell Bay, and take note of the numerous little islands in Indian Arm—among them Twin, Racoon, and Jug Islands. We also had views of Burnaby Mountain and other features of Greater Vancouver.

To return we retraced our outward route. Crossing especially the first and fourth creeks required the usual care but was without incident. We experienced a couple of rain showers, but the precipitation was relatively light and some of us didn't even bother to don a rain shell. The major excitement centred on Ian's resolve to swim in the lake. He is trying to swim in a natural body of water each month of the year. In January he swam in Port Moody Inlet and in February in Sasamat Lake. He was running out of time to complete his March swim, so today was going to be the day. He tested the water at North Beach by putting on running shoes and wading out to the signboard and garbage cans and then had plenty of time to think things through on the long walk back along the east side of the lake.



Flooding at North Beach on Buntzen Lake. *Terry Puls photo.*

At South Beach, when it became apparent that he was definitely on his way in, a small crowd gathered to see him off. He waded out to a partially submerged picnic table, sat at the table for a minute or two, then climbed up onto its top and jumped in. Needless to say, no one joined him!

Back at our cars we said our good-byes and began the drive home. We were feeling the satisfaction that comes with accomplishment and looking forward to our next outdoor adventure.