

BMN HIKE REPORT

Lower Burke Mountain (October 15, 2016)

by Mark Johnston



One of numerous streams that recent rains had brought to life. *Keith McQuiggan photo.*

We had quite a bit of interest in the scheduled hike, which was to be along the Coquitlam Lake View Trail to the fine viewpoint overlooking our drinking water reservoir. Unfortunately, with a rain warning in effect and a forecast calling for winds of up to 100 km per hour, initial excitement waned and it appeared that we wouldn't have any "takers." I drove to the meeting place fully expecting to cancel, but the one other person who showed up seemed eager to go for a hike, even if it should be different than the one we had planned. We knew that if we followed the Coquitlam Lake View Trail, we would have a very difficult time crossing Pritchett Creek. Recent rains would have filled the creek to overflowing. Instead, we set our sights on the Woodland Walk, with thoughts of making our way to Saw Blade Falls.

As we started along the Lower Elevator mountain bike trail, we had an inkling of what was in store. The mountain bike track parallels a small stream, but on this day the small stream was a rushing creek. Whereas on many occasions one can easily hop across the stream, today we were happy to have the option of crossing by means of a sturdy bridge.

At the top of Lower Elevator, we turned onto the Lower Woodland Walk. When we came to Pritchett Creek Cascades, we found this watercourse, too, to be a raging torrent. I thought of the many times we had guided the public to a ford just above the cascades, and how on a day such as this we wouldn't have been able to cross safely. But now, as with the previous stream, we could cross via a sturdy bridge. We paused midway across, transfixed by the plunging waters and soaking up more than a few negative ions.

Shortly after crossing Pritchett Creek, we headed up into the trees on a newer stretch of trail. When the twinning of the power lines disturbed the original alignment, this trail was built to connect with the Woodland Walk's Upper Loop. In this part of the forest and along the Upper Loop, there are many large cedar stumps, remnants of the logging activity of a century ago. We came across one large stump that has an interesting whorl to it, and stopped to take a photograph.

As notable as the many stumps, were the numerous streams come to life. The forest was filled with the sound of running water. We crossed stream after stream and, while under ordinary circumstances, we could have jumped across most of them, today, we sometimes had to go off trail to find a way to get to the other side.

**Coho Creek in torrent at the top of
Saw Blade Falls.
*Keith McQuiggan photo.***

When we came to largest of the streams, one that is bridged, we found that a tree had fallen along and across the bridge. Some of the branches kept the trunk of the tree—which was about 0.3 m in diameter—from resting on the bridge deck. Not wanting to step into the fast-flowing water, we had no other choice but to cross the creek on the bridge, which involved stepping over the trunk and “swimming” through the branches.



As we were walking the Upper Loop, it began to rain lightly. Once it had begun to rain, it never let up. But thankfully, it remained a gentle rain, and we could mostly disregard it.

Near the end of the Woodland Walk's Upper Loop, we joined the Viewpoint Loop Trail toward Saw Blade Falls. Like Lower Elevator, the Viewpoint Loop parallels a small stream. But as with Lower Elevator's stream, today the Viewpoint Loop's stream was flowing strongly. At the top of the loop, we had a look from the viewpoint, but clouds obscured any distant views. Then we carried on to Saw Blade Falls. Before we could see it, we heard its roar. As we approached, it was clear that the falls were fuller than I had ever experienced them before. We dropped our packs and picked our way carefully to the base of the falls. The volume of water pouring over the cliff was truly astounding. The thundering, plunging, dashing waters hid nearly every square centimetre of the rock face behind. Some of the water, striking an upper ledge, shot out in a great rooster tail before falling to the pool below. To the left of the main falls, a ribbon of cascading water rushed down the steep embankment and into the pool. "Pool" hardly describes what was really a boiling, roiling cauldron of white water and foam. We looked-on in awe for several minutes and then somewhat reluctantly retreated back up the trail to a relatively drier place where we might eat our lunch. But we remained close enough to have a tree-filtered view of the falls and listen to its percussive sound.

After lunch we retraced our steps to the viewpoint—still no view—and then continued along the Viewpoint Loop Trail to Woodland Walk Falls. This falls (more of a series of cascades) was, like the one before it, full and loud, and we thrilled to hear its own resonant sound. In this part of the forest, we also had a good look at two very large "trees," one living and one now a stump. The living tree is a Douglas-fir that anchors the steep bank above Woodland Walk Falls, and the stump is a cedar that measures an incredible 4.88 m at its base.

Our return route was along the Woodland Walk's Lower Loop. As with the Upper Loop, we had to search out ways to cross the streams. This often meant hopping from one mostly submerged rock to another, but somehow we managed to keep our feet dry.

We got back to our cars at about 1:30 pm. Although it had been raining for the last three hours or so, the rain was light, and hadn't been a bother. We were thrilled to have been able to get out and enjoy the cascades and falls at their fullest, and will certainly keep in mind for the future the pleasures of an outing following a period of heavy rainfall.