

# BMN HIKE REPORT

## Mt. Strachan

Saturday, September 8, 2012

by Mark Johnston



**BMN hikers standing just below the north summit of Mt. Strachan, with views toward Gambier Island and the mountainous Sechelt Peninsula. Terry Puls photo.**

After meeting initially at Eagle Ridge Field, nine of us, including two middle-schoolers, carpooled to Cypress Provincial Park. As on a previous trip to the park many years ago, we had to pass through a film set to get to the trailhead. Then, it had been *Dudley Do-right*; this time, we were channelled past a scene of devastation: a line of bombed out cars and trucks!

Under a clear blue sky we took a few minutes to read the BC Parks signboard, and then started east along the Baden-Powell Trail. Almost immediately, we left the cleared slopes of the ski operation and entered the remnant old-growth forest of cedar, hemlock, and amabilis fir. Soon we found ourselves passing through a beautiful stand of yellow cedars. In her guidebook *Best Hikes and Walks of Southwestern British Columbia*, Dawn Hanna refers to this grove as the Road Stand. Despite the uninspired name, the grove is magnificent, with trees ranging in age from 270 to 1075 years.

We made slow progress along the Baden-Powell Trail: partly because we were enraptured with the beauty of the forest, and partly because we were helping ourselves to the abundant berries growing along the trail. Just before reaching the east fork of Cypress Creek, we met a party headed west that had encountered a black bear. We weren't surprised. With such an abundance of food, it was a wonder there weren't more bears around. However, since our plan was to turn northwest before crossing the creek and double back on the Old Strachan Trail, we carried on without undue concern. In fact, given our safety in numbers, I was kind of hoping we would see a bear!

The Old Strachan Trail passes along the west side of Hollyburn Ridge. It was the original route to Mt. Strachan but fell into disuse for many years. Then master trailbuilder Halvor Lunden rediscovered it and, along with members of the BC Mountaineering Club, reopened and marked it. We hiked along the recommissioned trail with a sense of appreciation for all those who have worked so hard to ensure that this grand forest remains intact. We marvelled at the Hollyburn Giant, a fireplug of a tree, its broken top just 20.7 m high but its trunk having a thickness of 3.2 m!

**The Hollyburn Giant.**  
*Ian McArthur photo.*

We also noted numerous hemlocks of impressive dimensions. I was hoping for a glimpse of the record-sized mountain hemlock we'd observed when our club passed this way before. But too many years have gone by, and although I had a general sense of its location, I couldn't be sure of where to look.

Just beyond the col between Strachan and Hollyburn, we paused to take stock of our surroundings. To the east we had a nice view toward distant mountains. Our route lay to the west, through a meadow with a picturesque pond. Although trees are beginning to reclaim this opening, they are still mostly small, so as we walked through the clearing, we had an unobstructed view north toward our objective.



On the other side of the meadow, we began to climb in earnest. We came upon the well-known wreckage of a light aircraft and stopped to examine the debris. The plane, a Royal Canadian Navy T-33 training jet, crashed against the mountain in November 1963. We found wreckage in two different places, but the piles of debris are close to each other. Although there is a fair amount of twisted metal on the ground, one suspects this may be only part of the remains.

Leaving the plane wreck, we continued up the ever-steepening trail. On occasion we even had to use our hands. But persisting, we finally reached the gently rounded south summit. By now the sun was overhead, and it was hot; but we found a bit of shade by the summit cairn and plopped down to enjoy our lunch and the well-earned view. We were sitting at the top of a moderately sloping granite pavement. There were a few trees behind us. On the far side of the pavement, there was a fringe of vegetation and then a sheer vertical drop. We looked out over much of Howe Sound's archipelago: immediately below was sprawling Gambier Island; to the left, Bowen and Keats; to the right, Anvil Island. Beyond the islands, we could see the mountainous Sechelt Peninsula, and farther away still, much of Vancouver Island. We could also look east past the Lions and Sky Pilot group to Mt. Garibaldi.

Although the views would have been reward enough, we were also entertained by three whisky jacks, looking for handouts. Ian gave each of the two middle-schoolers a few nuts so that they could feed the birds. They held out their hands tentatively at first but soon were completely absorbed with feeding them. We were vaguely aware of ravens both overhead and perched; one of our party also reported seeing a female northern harrier.

Some of us would have been content to remain on the south summit, but others were determined to climb the slightly higher north summit as well, and in the end all decided to tag along. We had to lose about 60 m of elevation and then regain all of that and more to reach the second summit. But it was certainly worth it, as views mostly unavailable from the first summit opened up before us. While retaining the views we'd had at first, we could now look east over an even wider expanse of eye-filling mountain scenery, and south over much of greater Vancouver, the Gulf Islands, and southern Vancouver Island. It was truly breathtaking!



**View from the north summit. It looks toward (left to right): the Lions, Sky Pilot group, and glacier-clad Mamquam Mountain. *Terry Puls photo.***

We stayed on the north summit as long as we could, but at about 2:30 pm decided we should begin the trek back. We dropped several tens of metres into the col between the summits, and then re climbed the 60 m to the south summit. When we reached the summit cairn again, rather than retrace our steps, we headed for the top of the Sky Chair, followed the T-33 and Collins ski runs, and picked up the Old Strachan Trail again. This time we veered off on a shortcut route that joins the Baden-Powell Trail near its crossing of the north fork of Cypress Creek. Coming down the ski runs, we had easy walking and nice views of Bowen Island, Black Mountain, and Vancouver. The shortcut trail provided a soft footbed as well as a different perspective of the forest.

When we reached the Baden-Powell Trail, we paused to rest. It was nice to sit down, but maybe our stop had as much to do with a certain hesitancy to leave such rich mountain scenery behind. Not surprisingly, as we drove down the mountain, some of us were already making plans to return.