

BMN Hike Report

Ridge Park and Lower Slopes of Eagle Ridge Saturday, March 8, 2014

By Mark Johnston

For our first hike of the year, we planned to stay close to home by sampling some of Coquitlam's Ridge Park trails and extending our trip by walking along the Interior to Lower Mainland Transmission Line—now being twinned—toward the Coquitlam River. The forecast was not particularly promising; it called for periods of rain beginning in the morning. But when, after awaking, I looked out my kitchen window, I could see the cloud ceiling was fairly high and was hopeful we might have an hour or two of dry conditions before the storm set in.

The forecast didn't seem to be a deterrent as 13 showed up at our meeting spot, Panorama Heights Elementary School. After the usual preliminaries, we crossed Panorama Boulevard, climbed two sets of concrete steps, and started up the well-graded switchbacks toward Ridge Park.

The group ascending to the heights of Ridge Park. *Chloe Tu photo.*

En route we had good views to the east. Below us was Lafarge Lake; in the middle distance, Grant Hill, Sumas Mountain, and Vedder Ridge; and on the horizon, the Cascade Mountains, their tops obscured by cloud.

On the tenth switchback we entered the forest and after a couple of more easy zigzags, began to climb more steeply. The wide track narrowed and



became rougher. We carefully forded North Hoy Creek at a point where, upslope, the creek comes tumbling down a series of short steps, its silvery waters brightening an otherwise drab second-growth forest. When safely across, we turned left and resumed climbing.



Hikers viewing the limited view at the Ridge Park viewpoint. *Caroline Guo photo.*

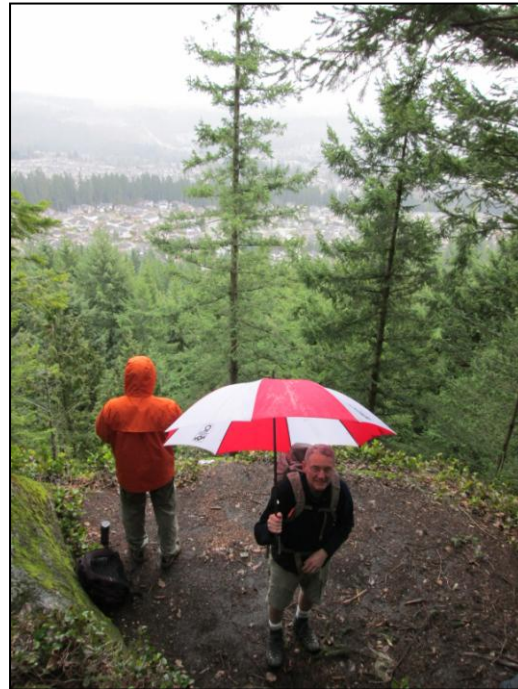
Where the trail begins to level, we left the maintained trail for an unofficial route that provides access to the park's best viewpoint. When I first came across this viewpoint fifteen or more years ago, it seemed as though very few parties were visiting it. The route into it was not well marked and there was a profusion of vegetation around it. But in recent years

access has been improved and, regrettably, much of the vegetation cleared away. There used to be a nice little natural "bench" to sit on, but it has long since disappeared.

**The view...such as it was.
*Terry Puls photo.***

Apparently, someone decided he preferred a level clearing to one with "furniture." As we had arrived at the viewpoint just as the wind was picking up and a light rain beginning to fall, we were not of a mind to make ourselves too comfortable anyway. On this day, the better views were behind us and we hastened on deeper into the forest.

Both lower down and here at the top of the park, we noticed that a City contractor had thinned the densely growing trees. The City, concerned about fire, has undertaken this work to reduce the amount of available fuel. Whatever one makes of the possibility of fire threatening nearby homes, an unintended benefit of the work has been to open up the forest to greater sunlight which will lead in time to the restoration of a more diverse understory.



After we left the viewpoint, I was surprised to discover that as a result of the work—another unintended consequence?—there is now a wide chip-mulched track connecting with the ridgetop trail. This new track runs parallel to the older, rougher route, now largely disturbed. It was nice to see that a couple of contorted cedars were left alone. One cedar, of moderate age, bends back toward the ground before resuming its heavenward reach.

Back on official trails, we hiked along the height of the ridge and then dropped down to emerge on Parkway Boulevard. We passed by a few houses, noting chickadees and a lone junco foraging in a front garden. Then, leaving Parkway, we used a dedicated path to cross the Westwood Plateau Golf and Country Club's course and access the transmission line right-of-way. By now it was raining steadily and those of us with umbrellas were happy to deploy them.

Heading east along the transmission line, we noted the widened right-of-way and saw new towers under construction. Curiously, a small crew was raking the ground in the newly cleared corridor. One would have thought a small bulldozer would have been more effective!

When we reached Plateau Boulevard, we had to make a decision whether to continue along the right-of-way to a viewpoint above the gravel pits or to abandon our secondary destination and return to Ridge Park. As the rain was getting heavier, we opted for returning to the forest and whatever cover it offered from the elements.

On the return, crossing North Hoy Creek. *Chloe Tu photo.*

Turning downhill, we passed through North Hoy Creek Park. This little park, surrounded by houses, is misnamed since the creek that flows through it is not the northern tributary but rather the main stem of Hoy Creek. In the heart of the park, we heard a Steller's jay giving its raucous call.



After walking a few residential streets, we re-entered Ridge Park and circled round to the switchbacks on which we had begun. Given the weather, we expected to be the only party using the park's trails, but that was most certainly not the case. We were surprised by the number of people walking in the park, but gratified to see so many out enjoying one of our backyard natural areas.