

# BMN HIKE REPORT

## Grouse Mountain via Mackay Creek (May 16, 2015)

by Mark Johnston



On the Mackay Creek Trail. *Chloe Tu photo.*

At the start of the May long weekend, five of us gathered for a return trip to the North Shore mountains, this time a hike up much visited Grouse Mountain but by a route that sees relatively little traffic. Our leaders, Rich and Janet, were familiar with the trail; for the rest of us it would be a new path.

It was a cloudy day and as the ceiling was fairly low, we wondered whether, higher up the mountain, we would have any views. Our plan was to hike the Mackay Creek Trail to Simic's Trail and then proceed along the Cut ski run until we reached "The Peak of Vancouver." Parking at the base of the Skyride, we headed east along the power line right-of-way toward Mackay Creek. As we walked, we took notice of dame's rocket and buttercup in bloom and enjoyed occasional views of Greater Vancouver. As it would turn out, these would be our only distant views until our descent via the aerial tramway three hours later.

Just past the bridge over West Mackay Creek, we left the power line, climbed up the gravelly bank and entered the forest. Initially we stayed quite close to the rocky creek bed, but soon our trail veered east, away from the creek, and after awhile we came within earshot of the East Mackay tributary. Never approaching as closely to this branch, we stayed high on the ridge between tributaries and gained elevation steadily with a

minimum of switchbacks. The forest was open, with a generous spacing of trees and very little groundcover. As we climbed, we enjoyed listening to birdsong, picking out both warbler and varied thrush airs.

**Hikers nearing the Cut ski run.  
*Chloe Tu photo.***

We took our first water break just a few steps below our trail's junction with the Baden-Powell Trail. Shortly after we had started out, we had seen a pair of hikers with a dog; now, after consuming some liquid and turning to resume our hike upward, we saw a lone hiker heading west on the B-P Trail. Surprisingly, until we neared the Grouse Chalet, we would see only one other pair of hikers, a couple that would pass us when we stopped a third time much higher up the mountain. Crossing the B-P Trail, we soon came to the old BCMC Trail (which was also the original route of the B-P Trail) but did not deviate from our uphill course. We were aided on this part of the hike by a series of moderately graded switchbacks. While happy for the somewhat easier grade, we were still more than willing to stop for a second break near some large granite rocks.



When we continued, we began to leave behind the lower elevation trees for those favouring a higher altitude, namely, amabilis fir and mountain hemlock. Wisps of vapour threaded between branches. In this transition zone we found a number of trees that appeared broken, likely by wind, and considerable human-caused debris, including rusting metal and shards of glass. (There were one-time cabins in the vicinity, so some of the debris may be attributable to that.) In the middle of this rather forsaken part of the forest, we found a large, comfortable log and took one final break, the aforementioned hikers catching up to and then passing us. They were on a quest to find the last remaining piece of an American fighter jet that had crashed into the mountain in the 1950s. At the time there had been a concerted effort to remove the scattered wreckage, and most all of it was taken away, except for one of the jet's engines. One wonders why this engine (which, on another hike a few years ago, I had stumbled upon) was left behind. Perhaps as a memorial, which at any rate it has now become?

More interesting to us at the moment was the low, muffled, booming of the male sooty grouse in courtship. We had been hearing this sound for some time, and when we resumed our climb, the booming grew louder and louder. Finally it seemed that we must be in close proximity to one of these birds. By focussing our attention we were able to pinpoint the sound as coming from the top of a large fir. Soon the youngest member of our party, a high school student, spotted the bird on an upper branch. It was perched very close to the trunk and all but obscured by the foliage. Contributing to our difficulty in seeing the bird was the poor light in the now mist-enshrouded forest.



**Walking up the Cut ski run.**  
*Chloe Tu photo.*

Reaching the Cut, we decided to stay out on the ski run. We were clearly in cloud but still hopeful it might lift to reveal the city below. Alas, no such luck. But we did get to see a female grouse, this bird in plain view on the ground just a few metres from us. Clearly, Grouse Mountain is aptly named! We also heard and eventually saw a northern flicker. We heard the woodpecker drumming on one of the metal towers of the ski lift, looked

hard to see it, and then watched as it flew off down the slope.

If the weather had been more cooperative, Rich might have guided us still higher up the mountain, but as it didn't appear that it was going to clear anytime soon, we settled for walking the service road to the chalet.

**Approaching the Grouse Chalet.**  
*Chloe Tu photo.*

There were relatively fewer visitors than on a sunny summer weekend, so we were happy to come in out of the cold, find a table in the chalet, and enjoy our “bag” lunches. It remained for us to take the Skyride down, and when we dropped below the cloud level, we finally had our views: Capilano Lake particularly prominent.

The Mackay Creek Trail has much to recommend it. It is much less steep than the usual routes up Grouse, taking twice the distance to reach the top as the Grouse Grind or BCMC Trail. For the most part it has a soft footbed, without the erosion, roots, and rocks of the other paths. And maybe best of all, it offers almost unlimited solitude, having just a few hikers compared to the better known routes with their hordes.

