

BMN Hike Report

Mount Elsay (Sunday, September 8, 2013)

By Terry Puls



Approaching the summit of Mt. Elsay. Terry Puls photo.

This is a hike that has been on BMN's "more difficult hikes" list for many years now. So after waiting such a long time, we decided that September 8 was going to be the day we got this hike done. The weather forecast called for mostly sunny skies, and with hopes of enjoying the anticipated views that this peak has to offer, three of us set off from the Tri-Cities for Mt Seymour Provincial Park. Upon arriving at the parking lot, we were greeted with low overcast skies, but we were still optimistic that the clouds would burn off as the day went on.

The three of us headed up the ski runs as we thought this would be the quickest route to Brockton Point and the start of the trail up Mt. Seymour. We were treated to a bountiful crop of blueberries on which we were able to munch as we hiked up towards First Peak and then on to Second Peak. Once we gained the Second Peak of Mt. Seymour, we stopped to have a quick drink and snack before carrying on with our hike. At Second Peak, the skies just seemed to open for us; we were now above the clouds and were able to identify many of the surrounding North Shore mountains. We had views of Crown Mountain north to Cathedral and all the peaks in between. These views were very short-lived though, as a few minutes after the clouds had lifted, they rolled right back in again. As we carefully descended from Second Peak towards Third Peak, or the true summit of Mt. Seymour, we kept a watchful eye for a taped route heading off towards the west. This would be our route to Elsay.

After doing some searching for flagging and a metal marker on a tree, we determined we were now on the correct route, and began descending into a forest with some very impressive old-growth trees. We continued on this undulating trail until we reached a large rockslide. We could hear the pika's shrill cry warning others of our arrival to their territory. We had a quick break here and when the clouds suddenly lifted for a moment, were able to see the large snowfield that forms at the base of Runner Peak. Once again the views were short-lived, so we carried on. Eventually we came to the area from which we would return via the east side of Mt. Seymour. Farther on we came to a sign showing a route to Mt. Bishop and 1 km to our destination, Mt. Elsay. From here our route climbed very steeply through the forest (this had to be one of the longest 1 km in my memory). Soon though, the forest began to thin and we broke out onto the rocky alpine area below the summit of Mt Elsay. We made our way to the large rock cairn at the summit and took a well-deserved lunch break.



On the summit of Elsay. Ian McArthur photo.

We chatted with a few other hikers who had also made it to the summit, and commented that the sun sure felt strong even behind the clouds. We were hopeful that the sun would be able to burn through the clouds so that we could enjoy the views. We were teased with a few breaks in the clouds and noticed a circular rainbow forming on the clouds below us, but after spending some time on the summit waiting for the clouds to lift, we knew that today would not be the day.

We took a few photos and started back on our return journey. As the route we were doing was a loop, we headed back a short ways and then picked up the route that would take us back to our cars via the east side of Mt. Seymour. We began our descent down the rockslide, enjoying some mountain ash that had begun to change colours for fall. After what seemed an eternity descending down over boulders and crossing a meadow area, we picked up the Elsay Lake Trail and continued on our journey back towards the parking lot. We continued around the east side of Mt. Seymour, reaching an area known as Wes's Staircase. From here we had approximately 300 m of elevation gain to bring us back to the main Mt. Seymour Trail. Along the climb up

Wes's Staircase, we came across a grouse, which led us up the trail. We followed the grouse for a good distance before it jumped up onto a rocky perch and eventually flew back to a nearby tree. Once we gained the main Mt. Seymour trail, we were happy to know that there would be only one more uphill section this day; we just needed to gain Brocton Point and it would be all downhill from there. We moved along, crossing over Brocton Point and re-entering the downhill ski area. We decided it would be quicker and easier to use the downhill ski runs to take us back to our cars.

Now that this was completed, I felt a great sense of accomplishment. I have wanted to scratch this mountain off my list of hikes-to-do for a long while; now no longer will I have to torture my family every time we have a view of Mt. Elsay by saying, "One day I will climb that mountain." Now that day was September 8, 2013, a day I will not forget soon!!

There is one other point I would like to make regarding this hike: as my statistics instructor once told the class, all statistics are is a bunch of numbers that lie and one has to look beyond what is presented to fully understand what these numbers really are saying. In this case, the statistics for Mt. Elsay are an elevation gain of approximately 500 m over 16 kms; however, in reality the cumulative elevation gain is much closer to 1500 m.