

BMN TRIP REPORT

Soames Hill Regional Park (April 19, 2009)

by Mark Johnston

On Sunday, April 19, the BMN Hikers visited Soames Hill Regional Park on the Sunshine Coast. The weather was cloudy but dry. Eight of us took the 9:20 am ferry from Horseshoe Bay as foot passengers and arrived in Langdale about 10 am. As our ferry eased into its berth and the vessel's loading door opened, we had a good look at our objective: a forested knob rising just beyond the government wharf.

After stepping off the boat, we walked the length of the ferry compound and then cut across the numbered lanes to head along Gibsons Highway. As we did, we could hear the lovely song of the white-crowned sparrow. At the edge of the compound, we spotted one of these birds perched atop a wisp of an evergreen and stopped to enjoy its performance and take a picture or two.

As soon as we reached the unincorporated area of Hopkins Landing, we turned down to the seafront and walked along the pebbled beach toward Soames Point. A few of our party played the child's game of trying to walk on the driftwood logs that had washed up against the embankment, without touching the sand beneath them. One by one, the log-walkers dropped out, but Ian, sometimes resorting to throwing down bits of wood as "stepping stones," was able to make it two-thirds of the length of the beach before coming up against an unbridgeable gap! Others of us paid attention to the birdlife offshore: several goldeneye ducks, a couple of Canada geese, and a rock dove (aka pigeon) on a wooden piling.



**BMN hikers posing around a giant Douglas fir.
Photo credit: Ian McArthur**

Whether it was the distraction of the game or of the birds in the water, we managed—as we would soon discover—to overshoot the public easement, and ended up exiting the beach (unwittingly) through private property. By the time we realized our mistake, we

decided we were too far along to turn around, and since neither people nor dogs intercepted us, continued on up to the highway.

After a short walk along the highway, we finally reached an entrance point into the park. Although it was possible to head straight for the summit, we decided on an initially more gradual, circuitous approach and headed southwest away from the heights toward the heart of the woods. The forest consists of rather evenly-spaced mature Douglas-fir trees with an undergrowth of Oregon grape or, especially around the summit, thick salal. We took our first extended break at the foot of an enormous fire-blackened fir, its fissured trunk some 2 to 2.25 metres in diameter.



Mark looking toward Gibsons from the lowest of several viewpoints on Soames Hill.

Photo credit: Terry Puls.

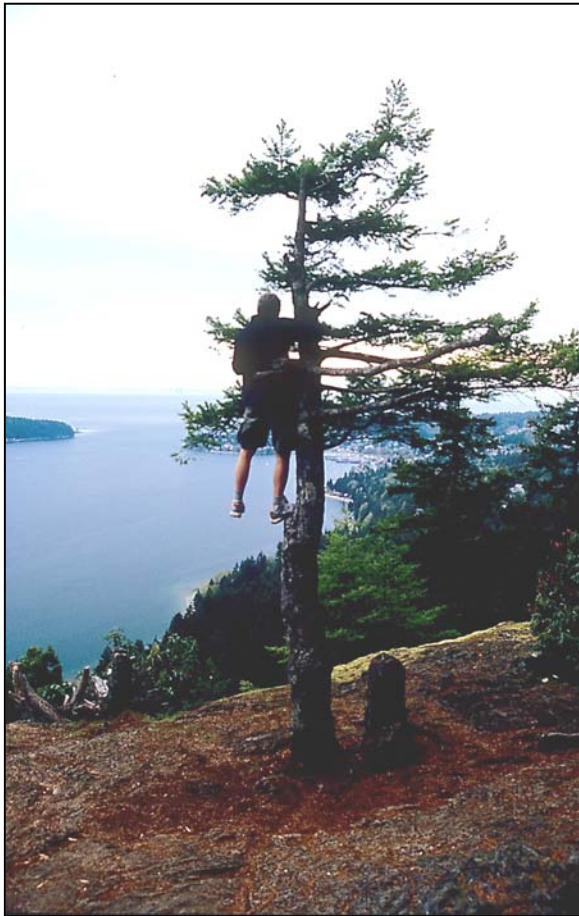
When suitably refreshed, we re-shouldered our packs, turned a corner, and proceeded northeast more directly toward the summit. As we walked, we enjoyed listening to the winter wren's bubbling trill. Joining an old road, we turned toward the park's main entrance for a short distance, then resumed our course toward the summit. Now we began to climb in earnest by means of a recently-rebuilt, solidly-constructed flight of wood-and-earthen steps. We marvelled at the human effort that must have gone into framing the steps and then hauling up the gravel to fill and level each stair.

Just past the top step, we turned aside for a fine, tree-filtered view overlooking Gibsons' harbour area. A little farther along, and a couple of viewpoints later, we reached the highest vantage point: an open, spacious, rock bluff with an unobstructed view of southern Howe Sound and its islands. While eating our lunch, we gazed across the water to Bowen and Keats islands, and

just beyond them to Worlcombe, Pasley, Hermit, Little Popham, and Popham islands; then on across the Strait of Georgia to the hazy outline of the San Juan and Gulf islands—from Orcas to Gabriola—and yet beyond them to the gentle peaks of southern Vancouver Island. We could see the Roberts Bank coal loading facility and also watched a tug towing a log boom as it plied the waters of the strait.

Before leaving the summit, a couple of us investigated a lesser-travelled side trail which appears to give access to the hill's true - but viewless - high point, but soon peters out in knee-high salal. Turning back, I flushed a pair of juncos from the thick underbrush.

We descended by an older stairway more or less in line with the way we had come into the park. Part way down, while those of us in the lead waited for the others to catch up, it was nice to hear the red-breasted nuthatch's distinctive *yank-yank*.



Never to be outdone, Ian tries to get the best possible view of Howe Sound from Soames Hill. Photo credit: Terry Puls

Brushing past salmon- and huckleberry, we regained Gibsons Highway. As it was now a few minutes past 2:00 pm, we had to make up our minds whether or not to try for the 2:30 ferry. At first we quickened our pace, but on second thought contented ourselves with catching the 4:30 boat. This gave us time to try to locate the missed easement as well as spend more time on the beach.

Despite looking intently, we once again overshot the easement. We went as far as Cartwright Road before finding a public path down to the lower Point Road. Finally, backtracking along Point, we came across the desired easement. The easement's upper end is obscure, merging as it does with a private drive marked with a DO NOT ENTER sign. However, we should have been able to spot the lower end: it is marked with a fairly new slab-style memorial bench.

Down on the beach, three of our party sat on the bench, the rest of us on driftwood logs. We talked among ourselves and from time to time looked out over the water. A (probable) common loon was

just offshore toward the ferry wharf, and a kingfisher flew silently by toward Soames Point. When we left the beach an hour or more later, half a dozen gulls soared and banked over our heads.

Back on the ferry we managed to find eight seats together, allowing us to happily relive the day and plan future adventures.

Note: Other species of birds seen and/or heard included scoter [on the morning crossing], hummingbird, flicker, crow, raven, robin, varied thrush, towhee.