

BMN TRIP REPORT

Woodland Walk Trail on Burke Mtn. (June 12, 2010)

by Mark Johnston



Some of the hikers in front of “Saw Blade Falls.” (Photo by Ian McArthur)

For a number of years, we have marked the anniversary of the establishment of Pinecone Burke Provincial Park (on June 8, 1995) by leading a public hike along the low-elevation Woodland Walk trail. This year’s hike was on Saturday, June 12.

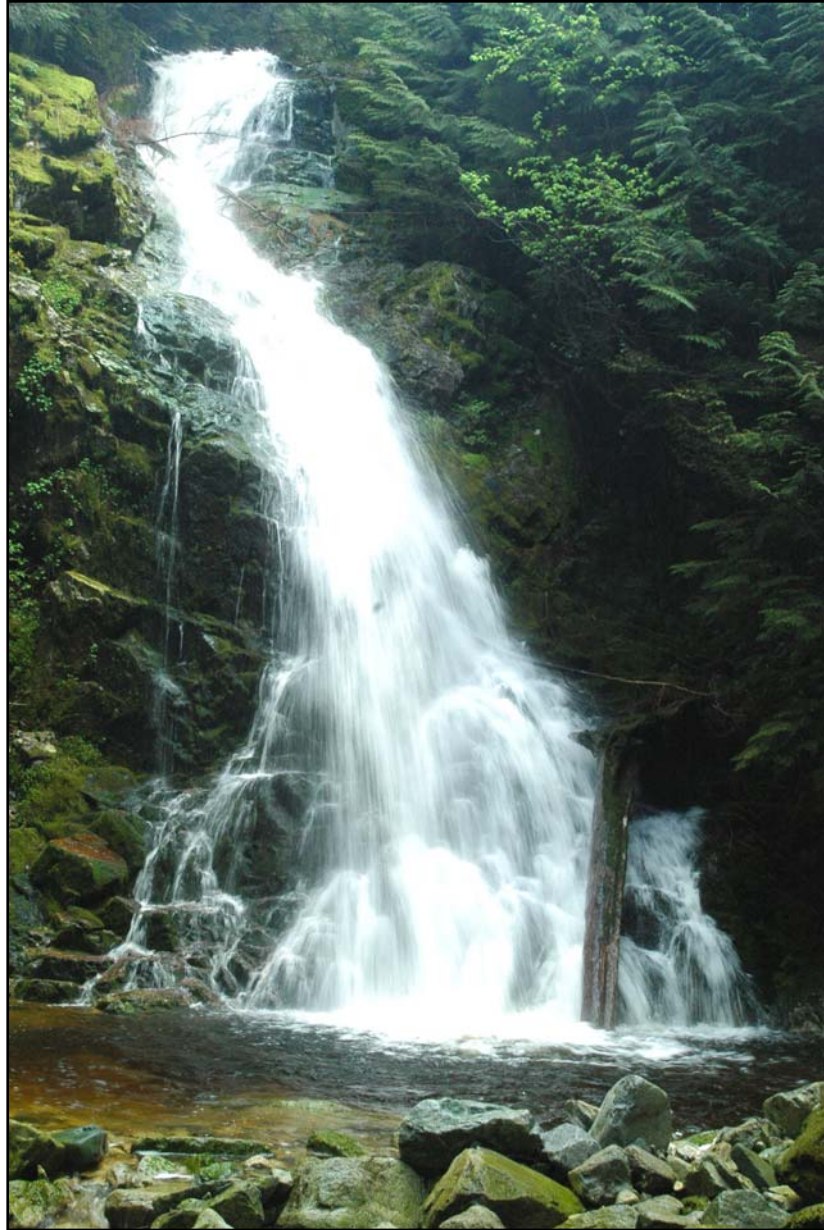
Even well before our 8:00 am meeting time, a small crowd had gathered. So, while others were still arriving, Don started up the trail with a group of 24. I was part of this group. Several minutes later, Ian set out with a smaller group of 11.

We had perfect weather: mostly sunny, some cloud, a comfortable temperature. The lower Burke forest never looked better, awash in the luminous yellow-green of new spring growth. We moved at a measured pace, Don stopping us from time to time to fill us in on the natural and cultural histories of the mountain he knows so well. Others of us helping to lead pointed out birds and fielded questions about plants. Early on we heard the varied thrush’s ethereal song. Later, as we crossed the power line, we saw and/or

heard a number of other species. We heard Wilson's warbler, saw a yellow-rumped warbler fly from the drooping top of a hemlock, sighted a cedar waxwing close at hand. I've discovered that this time of year, power line corridors are very reliable places to find willow flycatchers, and this right-of-way was no exception. For as long as we were on the power line, we heard this little bird's distinctive *fitz-bew*.

Our goal, as on previous public hikes, was the series of small falls and cascades on Coho Creek. Here, the former bridge across the creek has been reduced to little more than a single log, making further progress difficult, but an impressive old-growth Douglas-fir continues to anchor the near bank. Upon reaching the creek, we paused for a lengthy break as people scrambled down the bank for a closer look at the cascades or searched their packs for something to eat.

As some were finding it a bit cool in the shade, Don gave us the option of following a rough trail steeply up the stream bank to the rock bluff viewpoint we had discovered a couple of years ago and included as part of last year's public hike. All were agreeable, and after the short climb stood or sat atop the bluff enjoying the sunshine and views of the southern portion of Coquitlam Lake, the river valley, and a slice of the Fraser lowlands. Those of us who hadn't eaten or had only begun found this a more congenial place to finish our lunch.



Saw Blade Falls. (Photo by Terry Puls)

What came next was undoubtedly the hike's highlight. Thanks to our maintenance crew's very recent efforts, a flagged route through sparse understory leads back to Coho Creek, and Don was most eager to show us what lies at the end of it. Stepping carefully, we made our way through the forest—my daughter's sharp eyes picking out a frog among the detritus—and eventually onto an old skid road. As we approached the creek, we heard a thunderous roar, and turning up the creek on a newly built sidehill trail high above it, we caught sight through tree branches of a spectacular 25-30 m falls. At the end of the sidehill, most of us negotiated the steep, somewhat greasy path down to the catch-pool. From this vantage we had an unobstructed view of what we're calling "Saw Blade Falls" as it spilled over its precipitous cliff and into the basin below. We were all mesmerized. (The name "Saw Blade" comes from the fact that there is a ruined mill above the falls.)

As we left the falls, we met Ian's group approaching, and then carried on by a less steep path to return to the Woodland Walk trail. Back on the Woodland Walk, we had further opportunity to enjoy the lush new growth. We did not see an abundance of flowers, but did note buttercups and foamflower in bloom.

Although I cannot speak for everyone, the people I talked with seemed genuinely thrilled with their "walk in the woods"—even though it may have been a bit more challenging than advertised. And while for us BMN veterans, strolling along the Woodland Walk can at times seem like "old hat," the extension of the route to take in Saw Blade Falls adds a whole new level of excitement and awe. I know I for one will never again look at this hike in quite the same way.