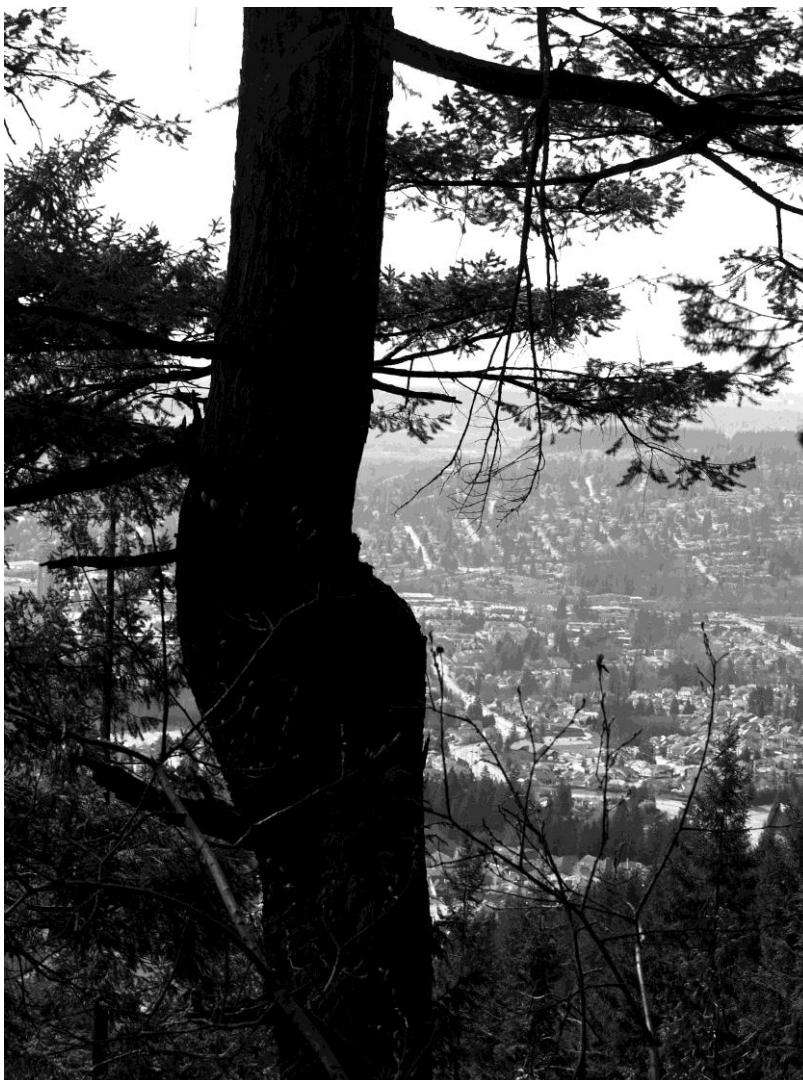


BMN TRIP REPORT

Coquitlam Parks and Greenways (Saturday, March 20)

Mark Johnston



Looking south from Ridge Park viewpoint toward Ranch Park and Chineside neighbourhoods (photo by D. Mounteney)

On the first day of spring, we began a new hiking season with a close-to-home outing that took advantage of a series of interconnected parks and greenways. Our hike followed my standard, in-season-out-of-season walking route: the Coquitlam Crunch Trail, a portion of Eagle Mountain Drive, the access road and perimeter trail of Eagle Mountain Park, trails in Ridge Park, and the Hoy Creek Trail.

While it is possible to do the walk in about three hours, our group—given the clear skies and rising mercury—was content to spend a leisurely five. Of the eight of us, six went the distance, and two, having less time available, turned back at the large beaver pond on Scott Creek near the end of Eagle Mountain Drive.

The relaxed pace allowed for both birding and botanizing. As we began our climb up the Crunch Trail, we heard the winter wren's distinctive trill. Then as we progressed up the power line corridor, we saw or heard a number of other species, including black-capped chickadee, towhee, song sparrow, and junco. At one point, we saw a flicker in undulating flight, its wing and tail linings flashing red.

Coming at last to Eagle Mountain Drive, we were happy to pause and examine a clump of coltsfoot (*Petasites speciosa*) growing by the side of the road. Coltsfoot is among the earliest spring flowers, and, true to what the guidebooks say, our plants' flowers were in advance of their yet-to-unfurl leaves. Farther along the road, we readily identified a flock of bushtits, but took a bit more time to decide that the sparrow we were looking at was indeed a song sparrow. Then at the end of the road, we had a look at the beaver pond and bid goodbye to those in our party who required a shorter day.

The rest of us travelled farther up Scott Creek, and, after pushing through a fringe of alder and hemlock, enjoyed a short respite beside its gently flowing waters. Where we joined the creek, seepage flowing into its waters changes their colour. We saw that above the seepage, the creek runs clear; downstream, it is ochre-coloured. We also noted on the opposite bank a giant cedar stump—a reminder of the forest that used to be.

We decided we could wait to have lunch at a viewpoint, so, turning away from the creek, we made directly for Ridge Park, our high point, and its fine, but relatively unknown, lookout. Thanks to the December 2006 windstorm which resulted in numerous windfalls, the park's forest admits much more sunlight than before and is rapidly developing a generous understory.

At the viewpoint we made ourselves comfortable, feasting not only on our lunches but, visually, on the splendid view of the eastern Fraser Valley as far as the Cascades. We observed a red-tailed hawk spiralling upward. A few moments later, Don called out for us to look, our raptor's tail had changed colour! Of course, we all looked and saw a bald eagle gliding past!! Elsewhere in the forest we heard a pileated woodpecker "laugh" and the nuthatch's "tiny tin horn."

Emerging from the forest via a series of newly constructed switchbacks (completed in November 2009, they begin in the forest and continue down an east-west power line), we were treated to a crow chasing a Cooper's hawk. We also saw a hummingbird, which was perched atop a young, trailside hemlock. For some of us, our first spring hummer.

It remained for us to walk down the main stem of Hoy Creek and back to our cars. Salmonberry's pink flowers were in evidence, and false lily-of-the-valley was beginning to green the forest floor.