

VARSITY OUTDOOR CLUB JOURNAL



67TH EDITION
2024 - 2025

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
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A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

(2024-2025)

ADAM STEELE

WHEN I FIRST STUMBLED ON THE VARSITY OUTDOOR CLUB IN 2021, I had no idea what I was getting into and what this club would come to mean to me. By that time, I had spent almost a year in pandemic-induced Zoom school, pretending to be a university student. What the hell was I doing here? Would I ever get to meet people and belong at UBC? I wasn't hopeful. Enter a copy of John Baldwin's *Exploring The Coast Mountains On Skis*, and I soon learned about a mysterious hut maintained by a group of students at none other than the University of British Columbia. I was intrigued. I didn't know it at the time, but my first VOC trip (after Rock Party, of course) would be to that very hut—a workhike, to the storied Julian Harrison hut, where we removed a bridge from a rushing river while an early autumn snow fell. I remember striking up a conversation with Lucas Braun amongst a sea of friendly, eager, soggy faces, not knowing just how much moments like these would matter in my years at UBC.

Since then, I've had the privilege of experiencing many more wonderful trips and conversations like that very first. After an insanely full 2023, 2024 in the VOC has been another doozy. We students proved ourselves once more and rebuilt yet another hut; no small task when you consider the added challenge of a 6 km canoe approach to Sphinx Bay, and a bureaucratically-induced pushback of work deep into the autumn months. Despite the challenges, neither weather nor water could stop Huts Coordinator Anton Afanassiev and a veritable army of VOCers from proving their mettle in the rain and snow. This wasn't all, however: Whether carrying a truckload of firewood into the alpine by hand (Fiona Landwehr and crew); building an outhouse—pit and all—through an atmospheric river (Hannah Saarimaki, John Sherk, etc.); or having firewood stolen, donated, and airlifted all on less than 24 hours' notice (Jacob Grossbard et al.), the VOC showed us the limits of what we can accomplish while also being full time students (it's a lot). In many ways, this is the VOC as it always has been, but in many other ways, the VOC community has continued to grow and show itself in new ways over the past year.

Traditional trips have been well represented on the trip agenda. Rock Party (this time with live music courtesy of Blank Vinyl Project) was a roaring success, and Glacier School was a miserable, rainy mess which nonetheless ended with sunny skies and a new cohort of VOCers being introduced to the wonders of Type II fun (and also crevasse rescue). Groundhog Day was observed with a pilgrimage to Jeff's house (a new tradition which will hopefully endure), while the old tradition of clubroom slideshows has been revived thanks to Noah Wyse and his commitment to building the VOC culture. Beginners and intermediate members alike

have had opportunities to build skills and experience in the mountains with trips like Intro to Backcountry, Steps to the Neve, Brew Debacle, and Mother of SkiMo; while safety is the name of the game, this hasn't stopped us from occasionally epic-ing, with plenty of stories of Type II (and more) to go round. The clubroom has continued to be a space for connections new and old, and has taken on a musical feel with the addition of guitars and weekly jam sessions thanks to Quintus Zhou.

2025 marks ten years since the VOC lost Elena Cernicka, Stephanie Grothe, & Neil Mackenzie. While most current club members did not have the pleasure of knowing these VOCers, we have been blessed to know something of their spirits through those who loved them and who keep their memory alive. Burns & Turns and the Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant have evolved into yearly traditions which pay homage to those who have gone before us, and on this anniversary year, we take one more step to memorializing a respected member of the VOC community. After consultation with friends, family, and club executive, I'm pleased to announce that the as-yet-unnamed VOC Brew Hut will from now be known as the Stephanie Grothe Memorial Hut. Steffi was a treasured member of the VOC community, and through this dedication we intend to create a lasting testament to her love of the mountains and commitment to getting people into the outdoors.

We strive to make the VOC as approachable and inclusive a space as it can be, whether in the clubroom or out on trips. We've shown our ability as VOCers to reflect and make adjustments, especially through the work of the IDEA Committee, but the work continues to make the VOC the truly open and inviting community we intend it to be. Conversations recently have turned to reconciliation, and the realities of recreating on unceded lands. Included in the pages of this journal is a long-form engagement with the topic by Noah Wyse. I suggest every one of us takes the time to read this work, to engage with it honestly and critically, and to carry forward its invitation to think deeply wherever you may go.

The VOC is all about setting out to see what we can achieve while we're in school, that has absolutely nothing to do with school. Undoubtedly, this enriches us and teaches us more about life than our degrees ever could. While there is much to be said for working hard in the academic world, I am quite partial to the unconventional path of minoring in VOC—spending time in the clubroom swapping tales of the mountains, on sleep-deprived weekend car trips, carrying firewood to huts, or fixing roofs—this is where so much real growth and learning takes place. If you are new to the club this year, I invite you to take a chance on this wild wild community and see where it takes you, and what it teaches you for your life. It certainly took me further and taught me more than I would have ever guessed.

As this journal gets released in May 2025, we look forward to yet another epic undertaking as the Brian Waddington Hut gets new walls. Easily our most visited hut, the decades are taking a toll on this structure, and it's time to give back once again so that many more VOC memories can be created in the mountains. If, while reading any of the stories contained in this or previous journals, you wonder what it takes to make your mark in the VOC historybooks, I tell you, you've got it right there within you! Curiosity and stoke go a long way in the club, and

I encourage everyone to keep a close eye on the trip agenda over the summer for opportunities to get your hands dirty.

This year has gone by so quickly, and what I've put to paper here feels inadequate to convey all that this club means. I joined the VOC looking for community as a misplaced and potentially lonely second-year, and the club has given me volumes more than I could have expected: in friends, in new skills, in unforgettable experiences... richness in every imaginable way. I think of those early days and how humbled I felt as I got to know the club, and how I have come to know it well, and how even more profoundly, I am still humbled by the VOC. I owe a big thank you to Sonia Landwehr for showing me the way and encouraging me to run for President, and for taking weight off my shoulders on so many occasions over the past year. Thank you finally to everyone in the VOC for showing us what belonging and community mean for these few short years we have at UBC. I encourage everyone to get involved in the club and make their time here worth it.

“With VOC love,” for all those who came before and all who will come after,
Adam

Some extra bits and musings

There is a long list of people I would thank for their efforts and contributions to the club over the past year, but ultimately all for the same reason - the VOC doesn't work unless we do, and countless people truly devote themselves to making this club happen. No members of the VOC community embody this more faithfully than the Quartermasters. Dutifully running gear hours every week, through assignments and midterms and all the rest, Quatermasters are the main point of contact between the club and members. For many a keen VOC'er looking to get out for a weekend in the mountains on a budget, a quartermaster's kind advice or discerning input is the start of a lifelong relationship with the outdoors. The work you put in weekly set the tone for the club, the relationship between membership and exec, you are the true heroes, thank you. Additionally, I would like to thank the exec team for making this club such a delight to contribute to, as well as Anton Afanassiev, Duncan MacIntyre, Jeff Mottershead, and Sonia Landwehr for their steadfast support.

Something impactful that Noah said:

The VOC defines the beginning of many peoples' outdoors experience, the start of their relationship with the land, let us foster a relationship of love and care, not opposition and entitlement. We are the second largest club on campus, we have international membership, what we embody stands for something and it sticks with people, let that be something good, formative, and productive. The VOC is a place to learn, and a place to give back, it is a powerful and energetic place. Use that energy for something greater, give back more broadly, engage deeply.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

SONIA LANDWEHR

LAST YEAR IN FEBRUARY, I met with Alex Beauchemin at a cafe while he was in the middle of editing his journal (VOCJ66). While I listened to him rattle off the frankly absurd number of hours he had been working on what would become a truly beautiful journal, I reminisced about hearing my roommate, Mona Yu, list off similar sentiments when she was preparing her lovely journal the year before (VOCJ65). At the cafe, I enjoyed a sweet treat, blissfully unaware of the fact that slightly over a year later we would be doing the same thing – still over a sweet treat, but this time with the roles reversed.

Having graduated last year, I was obviously not supposed to be the journal editor, but as things have tended to unfold when one has been unofficially dubbed the club's Useful Person (read: I have no boundaries and can't resist another VOC project), here I am. As I picked up the project in May, this journal had to be completed in a rush, for the sake of simply getting it out. So, if you're wondering why your entry is missing pictures, or why this year's journal looks suspiciously similar to last year's journal, this is why. I apologize for slashing pictures, but to save time, I allowed myself a certain limit of photos *as space allowed* per report. There was no real process that went into my choices, but I will say that I felt equally awkward choosing a selfie as I did *not* choosing the selfie for an entry's sole allotted photo.

Despite the rush, this was a lovely project to take on. After all, I did also run for Journal Editor the year I was elected President, so this was a great opportunity to live out that path. The journal has been one of my favourite little facts about the VOC to tell people about, and now that I have compiled a journal myself, I feel particularly honoured to have met Karl Ricker, former VOC President and the journal's founder, last year. Another fun fact: Karl still requests a journal or two to be mailed to him each year – I hope you find mine to be up to scratch.

I absolutely could not have done this so quickly, or perhaps not at all, without Alex's template from last year; his support, along with that of the exec team, carried me through. Thank you also to Tra Mi Do Le for jumping in and handling ads, I'm excited to see what you do with VOCJ68.

To all of you, but most especially journal editors of the future, I wish you luck on your written endeavours, and hope that no matter where you write, that you have a supportive friend and a sweet treat to help you take this on.

Without further ado, I hope you enjoy VOCJ67.

THE 2024-25 EXEC

ADAM STEELE (HE/HIM) PRESIDENT



BRIANNA RAGSDALE (SHE/HER) EDI COORDINATOR



LUCY PERKINS (SHE/HER/HER) VP



ALEX BEAUCHEMIN (HE/HIM) MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

ZACHARY WIRTH (HE/HIM) TRIPS COORDINATOR



PETER GLEDHILL (HE/HIM) TREASURER



ALLEN ZHAO (THEY/THEM)
PHOTO COORDINATOR



SONIA LANDWEHR (SHE/HER)
USEFUL PERSON/JOURNAL EDITOR



LUCAS BRAUN (HE/HIM)
LEGACY COORDINATOR



ELIAS BOWMAN (HE/HIM) VOCENE EDITOR



MELISSA CHEN (SHE/HER) SOCIAL COORDINATOR



EMILY WOOD (SHE/HER) WEBMASTER



KEVIN MCKAY SWAG MASTER



SRI CHAITANYA (HE/HIM) SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR



CHLOE GARZON (SHE/HER/ELLE)
EXTERNAL RELATIONS



ANTON AFANASSIEV (HE/HIM)
HUTS COORDINATOR

NICK AYERS (HE/HIM)
CLIMBING COORDINATOR



JADE QUINN-MCDONALD (SHE/HER)
WATER SPORTS COORDINATOR



HANNAH SAARIMAKI (SHE/HER)
TRAILS COORDINATOR



ERIC DAIGLE (HE/HIM)
ACCESS COORDINATOR



JAMES MALTMAN (HE/HIM)
HEAD QUARTERMASTER



NOAH WYSE (HE/HIM)
HEAD QUARTERMASTER



QUARTERMASTERS

ADAM FRENCH
(HE/HIM)



JOE MEYER
(HE/HIM)



MEGAN SCHENK
(SHE/HER)



JOHN CONLON
(HE/HIM)



FIONA LANDWEHR
(SHE/HER)



JULIAN LARSEN
(HE/HIM)



MOZI LU
(HE/HIM)



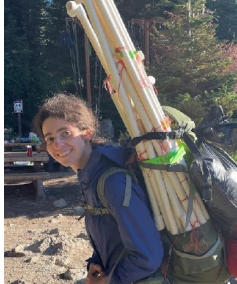
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A YEAR IN REVIEW FOR THE IDEA COMMITTEE

BRIANNA RAGSDALE

Why does VOC need an IDEA Committee?

FOR ANYONE UNACQUAINTED WITH THE ACRONYM, IDEA stands for “**Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Action.**”

In the VOC, an example of ‘inclusion’ is walking into the clubroom, and being greeted by people who make space for you at the table and bring you into current conversations. ‘Diversity’ might include celebrating beyond Eurocentric holidays and having visible people of colour among VOC leadership. ‘Equity’ looks like holding space for women and queer individuals to build skills in a safe environment. ‘Action’ can mean applying for grants or providing scholarships to lower financial barriers to the outdoors.

Through ongoing dialogue and various initiatives, the IDEA Committee helps the VOC continuously evolve and uphold its commitment to creating a culture of respect, belonging, and equal opportunity for all members.

What is the IDEA Committee up to?

I’ve organized the IDEA meetings this year. For context, I’m a mixed (South Asian – Welsh) white-passing woman who’s super stoked about getting people outdoors. I have a collaborative leadership style (it’s not a top-down approach), so with the IDEA committee, we created a framework for intersecting barriers to the outdoors.

Last year, we had many discussions on the intersecting aspects of identity, such as gender, race, ability, class, and age (to name a few). We were inspired to design a VOC-wide survey to get a broader sense of community needs. Results indicated a need for more beginner-friendly trips and financial support. This helped the IDEA committee identify intimidation and financial constraints as two factors among the top limiting barriers to the outdoors in our club. This year we continued implementing initiatives to address these barriers.

To address the financial barrier, IDEA is supporting the following:

1. AST Scholarships: 5 scholarships of \$200 were awarded to members facing financial barriers to engaging with the outdoors to get their avalanche safety training certification.
2. Grant applications for skills, gear, and certification scholarships (responses will also be used in future years).
3. Campus Partnerships: Collaborating with other student groups to provide non-members with opportunities to experience the VOC without the financial burden of membership, gear, or trip costs.

To address the intimidation barrier, IDEA is supporting the following:

- Women & Gender Diverse Overnight Snowshoe Trip (in collaboration with SISU)
- Sensory Friendly Aviary Climbing Sessions (in collaboration with the Aviary)
- Women & Gender Diverse Backcountry Ski Day(s)
- Intro to Being Outdoors Workshops, held each term (in collaboration with UBC Surf Club)
- Women & Gender Diverse Watersports & Backpacking Series (in collaboration with UBC Sailing Club) - coming this summer
- Pacific Spirit Plant ID Scavenger Hunt (in collaboration with UBC Botany Club and UBC Recreation)
- Beach/Forest Trash Clean Up Days
- Mother of Mud - Women & Gender Diverse Caving Trip
- Stanley Park Bird Walk (in collaboration with UBC Birding Club)

This year, the IDEA committee aimed to continue changing the future of UBC outdoor spaces by creating community within community. Making safe spaces for beginners and specifically for historically 'othered' groups. These initiatives are just the beginning of many steps the IDEA committee plans to take to address barriers to getting outdoors.

I want to take a moment to appreciate the people who came to IDEA meetings this year: Elizabeth Chu, Katie Sattler, Peach Trippell, Sunny Das, Tejas Vijay, Rebecca Alloway, Mozi Lu, Melissa Chen, Kerra Delasantos, Sri Chaitanya Bonthula, AC, Lucas Braun, Quintus Zhou, Megan Schenk, Isa Maudsley, Allen Zhao, Matt Tomlinson, Adam Steele, Rafe Ingvaldson, Em Lion, Lucy Perkins and everyone else (you know who you are) who supported IDEA.

Thank you for being the change you want to see.

Dear future VOCers,

Much work still needs to be done.

More Women & Gender Diverse Events

Women and gender-diverse folks need more skill-building events at both beginner and intermediate levels. This isn't just about representation, it's also about creating future leaders in the outdoors. We learn well from seeing people like us in leadership roles, teaching, and mentoring. The more women and gender-diverse leaders we foster, the more knowledge is passed down. We must prioritize this. More mentorship. More training opportunities. More spaces where women and gender diverse folks can gain confidence, build skills, and see themselves as experts.

Actively Promoting Dialogue about Settler Recreation

Encourage ongoing dialogue about our relationship with the land we recreate on. Rather than just acknowledging this, we should actively seek ways to foster a more reciprocal relationship with the land and the communities who have stewarded it for generations. This means learning and engaging with Indigenous perspectives, and being intentional about how we move through and impact these spaces.

Expanding Financial Support: More Grants = More Opportunities

We need to secure more funding. Grants make it possible for people from different financial backgrounds to access the outdoors. We should continue applying for them. They require expertise, effort, and a considerable amount of time to apply, so it could be beneficial to designate a grants team lead on the IDEA committee. Beyond scholarships for training and gear, we should push for trip subsidies and partnerships that allow non-members to experience the VOC without financial barriers.

Making the VOC More Accessible: Bring More Voices In

We need to actively make space for more perspectives. It's 2025, and the VOC is not a fully accessible space for people with physical and cognitive disabilities. We **MUST** do better. Accessibility is not just about listing wheelchair-friendly trails on the wiki; we need to collaborate with students who have lived experience, partner and build relationships with other campus groups working on accessibility, and ensure that adaptive athletes and outdoor enthusiasts have a say in how we shape our club. Nothing for them without them. Physical and cognitive accessibility should be a larger part of our conversations moving forward. More research needs to go into how the VOC can support/contribute to adaptive outdoor sports.

Reaching out to disability advocacy groups, Indigenous groups, cultural clubs, LGBTQIA2S+ groups, and beyond is a way to expand the conversation and create shared opportunities in the outdoors. We should continue supporting initiatives that encourage and celebrate the wide range of diversity within the club: age, gender, cognitive ability, body size, and ethnicity, to name a few. It's important to stand against inequities within and outside of our club and act as leaders in the broader outdoors community. An example of this looks like continuing to encourage the sharing of pronouns in the VOC.

Facilitating More Actionable and Engaging Discussions

Right now, it's difficult to balance taking action and having deep, meaningful conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoors. Important ideas come from listening to people's experiences, but those conversations take time, and they can often get overshadowed by the logistics of planning initiatives.

A more effective approach could be to hold two types of IDEA meetings to involve more perspectives and create space for both discussion and action:

1. **Conversation Circles:** A dedicated space for open dialogue, where we could invite outside perspectives and club members alike to share experiences, discuss barriers, and explore ways to make our community more inclusive. These conversations should be intentional, not rushed, and separate from logistical planning, so we can fully hear and understand what's going on.
2. **Action & Initiatives Meetings:** A space to translate ideas into concrete steps, focusing on implementing solutions, organizing events, and addressing the barriers identified in discussions. This ensures that our ideas don't just stay as discussions. But lead to change and accountability.

Strengthening IDEA's Presence in the VOC

- Work with the VOC social media coordinator to spotlight EDI initiatives happening in the broader outdoor and Vancouver community.
- Incorporate EDI-related films and content into slideshow nights.
- Recommending books from diverse perspectives to the Archivist to include in the VOC library.
- Encourage Quartermasters to acquire gear that fits a diverse range of bodies and abilities.
- IDEA Meetings being summarized in exec meetings and posted publicly.

Let's Make This Happen

We have the momentum. Now we need to keep growing, learning, and unlearning in a communal commitment to making the VOC a space that truly reflects the diversity of people who want to go outdoors.

If you have any feedback or want to get involved, please contact the EDI Coordinator (contact information can be found in the Member List on the VOC website).

A NOTE FROM THE PEER SUPPORT GROUP

YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD ABOUT US OFTEN, but the Peer Support Group has been around for many years. The PSG was created to ensure that our community is safe, supportive and comfortable for all VOCers.

There are seven members of the peer support group dedicated to maintaining this environment within the club. We encourage everyone to approach any of our peer support members if you have felt uncomfortable, or have witnessed a situation of discomfort, harassment of any form or felt lack of safety on any of our trips that you wish to discuss and seek a resolution for.

Resolutions can vary from simply having a misunderstanding cleared up to helping provide support for resolving any issues between two people in a safe environment. The PSG is not an entity with executive power. Rather, we are individual members of the community, and you can get in touch with the PSG by contacting any or multiple PSG members.

We like to emphasize that the club is a community. We strive to maintain a positive environment and a zone of personal comfort for all of our community that is free from harassment and discrimination in all its forms as defined in Canadian and British Columbia law, be it based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality or religion.

When a member brings up an issue with us, we meet to discuss the incident and respond within the limits of what we are qualified to do, and otherwise refer to appropriate resources such as AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre, Access and Diversity, UBC counselling, and Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills (if the report is about someone's questionable knots and rope skills!).

In the past years, many VOCers have been involved with the PSG. Many of them have been exec members at the time or in the past, but the PSG functions independently of (and, if needed, in coordination with) the executive team. If you have any concerns about an executive member (or even a PSG member), you can still bring them up with the PSG, your concerns will remain confidential.

Fostering a healthy community takes intentional effort, empathy, communication and respect. It also takes courage to bring up things that make you uncomfortable. We would be really happy if more members know that we exist as a resource, and that you can come to us at anytime, and that we will do everything to the best of our ability to help.

Cheers,

Your PSG:

Eric Daigle, Marie Sandler, Settare Shariati, Declan Taylor, Allen Zhao, Stefanija Rekasius, and Quintus Zhou

A scenic view of a mountain landscape. In the foreground, there is a gravel path and a small, young evergreen tree. A low stone wall runs across the middle ground. The background features a valley with dense, autumn-colored shrubs and a large, rugged mountain range with snow-capped peaks under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

SPHINX HUT RESTORATION



A WORD OF THANKS



An alphabetical and extensive, but by no means comprehensive, list of names of those to whom the VOC is deeply grateful for their involvement in this project. We feel that we were able to scrape together a fairly complete list but any names not listed were forgotten purely due to a lack of documentation. So thank you:

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*Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) Whistler Section
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Section cover photo *Jeff Mottershead*

Above Tongue and groovin'. *Ryan MacDonald*

Below *Quintus Zhou*



THE BIG BURTON HUT RESTORATION

ANTON AFANASSIEV

WITH EXCERPTS FROM

LAST NIGHT AT BURTON: GATORADE IS A SPICE BY RYAN MACDONALD

&

FIXING ROLAND'S HUT BY DUNCAN MACINTYRE

September 23 - October 7, 2024
Sphinx Bay, Garibaldi Park

DISCOVERY

Anton

IN MID-JUNE, I got a report that the roof of Roland Burton Hut was leaking. Some people had noticed water stains inside the hut. No big deal, I thought, as I asked if anyone was planning to head up there anytime soon. I figured that a small can of rubber sealant and a careful inspection would take care of any leaks. Luckily, Joanna Gower was eager to lead a workhike in early July to try and patch the problem (along with Simon Tsianikas, Parham Zarei, Julia Jancelewicz, and Luzie Hugger). Unluckily, that workhike revealed that the roof was in a sorry state and wouldn't hold up for very much longer. This roof was made of an outer shell of sheet metal, a layer of tongue and groove (boards that can slide into each other to hold shape), insulation, and then plywood. The sheet metal was full of holes. The tongue and groove was waterlogged and rotten. The roof had stood strong for 50 years but was now on its last legs.

And so the email chains started. The first thought was to buy some plywood, sheet metal, and other materials, and fly them up on a BC Parks flight in a few weeks. We could then spend a few weeks building the roof in pleasant summer conditions. Turns out this flight wasn't happening, so that idea was out. At this point, Jeff Mottershead had hopped in on the discussion. He was scheming a design for a new roof that would last another 50 years. Given the age of the hut, none of the original design documents had survived, so we had no measurements to reference. Cassandra Elphinstone volunteered to lead a small contingent of VOCers (Shu Yu Fan, Tom Curran, and Gabriel Csizmadia) up midweek to take some precise measurements for Jeff. They succeeded admirably in their task, putting together a detailed set of photos showing the damage along with measurements. Worryingly, they also found that the gothic arches supporting the roof had begun to delaminate. If we wanted the roof to last 50 years, we would have to address the arches.



Above Jeff's arch creation jig. In later discussions with the original builders of Sphinx, I learned that Jeff had essentially recreated the jig they had originally used. That jig would be passed from club to club for use for several huts. *Jeff Mottershead*

PREPARATION

Jeff set himself upon the monumental task of redesigning the hut and crafting new arches. At the same time, he would also address the flooring joists and ground beams. The floor joists had very wide spacing, causing the floor to sag. The ground beams had been sitting in the wet soil for 50 years. Why replace just the roof if the floor won't be any good in 10 years? The floor needed attention too. While he did this, I would work on coordinating helicopters and people. We chose the end of August as our project date, expecting good weather and lots of availability from student VOCers not in school. Trips were posted, arches were bent into shape, helicopters were booked, and people were ready. Things looked primed to go. Alas, when organizing a complex trip like this, something always goes wrong. That something was getting permission from BC Parks. Since the hut was originally constructed in 1969, it had existed before the current BC Parks permitting process and an agreement had never been formalized despite efforts in 2019. The scale of the project brought this issue to attention, and BC Parks told us that we could not proceed until we received a Parks Use Permit (PUP). Problem: the median PUP takes 180 days to be reviewed and we had already spent tens of thousands of dollars and committed hundreds of man-hours. Besides that, another winter of snow load on roofing in that condition may have caused irreparable damage. Crisis mode.

Luckily, the night we were informed of the PUP requirement was also the night of Jacob Grossbard's birthday dinner. This dinner had in attendance a collection of five past VOC presidents. We had a crisis meeting over some slices of cake and decided the best way forward was to talk to BC Parks about the urgency of the situation so that we could still move on the construction and not let the hut

fall into disrepair while waiting for the PUP. Thankfully, once BC Parks got a better idea of the project, they were very helpful and willing to work with us provided we met insurance and other requirements. Their responses were quite fast, but projects like this tend to be timed very precisely. You can't expect people to take time off work if you can't tell them for sure if they're going or not, and helicopters need to be canceled well in advance. So, by the time authorization came, too many pieces of the puzzle had moved. We would have to push back our start time. We would build from Sept. 23rd to Oct. 7th. It would be cold, the weather would be bad, and people would have classes to attend. It would be a harder construction than expected, but we were confident we could do it.

DEMOLITION AND SUPPLY DELIVERY

And so September came around. Preparations rolled into high gear. The plan was for a small demo crew to go up on the 23rd to rip the hut apart for the heli that would come on the 24th. Jeff, Jacob G., John Sherk, and I would stay up there until the project was done. Others would rotate in/out based on their availability.

Ryan

In late July, after abrupt and considerable unpleasant disruption to my life, I decided the best thing to do with myself was to pick up the pieces and move to Australia for two-plus years with around sixty days to prepare. Despite the crunch, I was sad that I was unable to contribute to the Phelix rebuild in '23 and I hoped to contribute to re-roofing Burton this summer, so I dutifully set aside a block of my remaining time in Canada to go up there. Park politics resulted in the trip being pushed a month to almost-October, which in combo with a scheduling conflict in the attendees meant I could only go up for five days instead of the entire project.

Which meant I would have to *haul ass* to feel I contributed sufficiently. This is my last workhike for the VOC for the foreseeable future, after all. Knowing it was due to start snowing mid-week further incentivized the ass-hauling.

Below The last shot of pre-demolition Burton. *Ryan MacDonald*



MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

So Monday saw myself and Duncan MacIntyre crawling up Rubble Creek heavily loaded – he with enough gear to survive the full project and myself with my gear pack and a further 16 kg of demolition tools in a front-pack which would have been spread amongst the three of us. Jacob had come down with a cold, and remained home till Friday. We made pretty good time up the switchbacks, albeit by the lowest lake I was taking a break every 500m – wishing I was ten years younger again and realizing backpacks were not engineered to be worn in reverse when fully loaded. Don't get old, folks, it's a poor life path.

Duncan

We saw lots of people on the Rubble Creek trail. We passed most of them multiple times—we'd walk past them quickly, burdened as we were like mules, and then they'd pass us back as we took our break. Most people doubtless thought we were weird. Doubtless they were mostly right.

R: We made it to the boathouse around 1:00 pm and had about 45 minutes of faff realizing we didn't have the combo for the canoes, until Duncan had a lightbulb moment and said they were probably scrawled inside the boathouse wall – and they were. A delightful 50 minute crossing of the lake, flat as glass, with bluebird warm skies, and we were at the hut around 3:00 pm. Oh, how optimistic we were thinking these conditions would last!

D: We landed at a picturesque beach. We soon realized that we were 300 metres too far north. Ryan dropped his extra bag and we commenced the light bushwack to the hut, glad to have finally arrived, albeit later in the afternoon than we had hoped. We explored a bit, and Ryan located an excellent gravel bar southeast of the hut where we could all pitch our tents. I returned to the canoe to retrieve the tool bag and paddle the canoe around to the mouth of Sphinx Creek, a much better landing site. Ryan, meanwhile, eagerly got to work. He said he needed to demonstrate that his honorary membership was justified by taking apart the roof in less than 24 hours. I was less motivated to work, but before long I joined Ryan in prying off the metal sheeting, helping as he taught me, but not accomplishing nearly as much as him. Certainly I didn't match the gusto with which he tore things apart. By gusto I mean yells, exclamations, and expletives.

R: As soon as the bags were dropped I got to work – we had been given a single instruction by Jacob: *"Pull everything apart, nothing is being reused, get as much debris out by Helicopter as possible."* As I don't waste time with a firm goal in sight, I spent the next four hours ripping the roof off by hand. Sheet by sheet, and then plank by plank, screaming a whole lot of pent-up frustration into



the mountains whilst Duncan alternately looked up from his own hammer alarmed and asked if I required any assistance.

There are, I think, few better ways to overcome three months of emotional distress than unrestrained structural demolition under a hard deadline. It was exceedingly cathartic, given the memories I have associated with this hut which now haunt me. Sometimes you need to tear things down to build a better tomorrow, right?

By the time night fell at 7:00 pm, there were four sheets of tin remaining and two thirds of the original tongue and groove siding. We retired to cook a quick dinner, and Duncan opted to sleep in his tent after seeing the mouse population. I retreated to the attic, opened the window, pulled up the ladder, and discovered that the mice access the hut by crawling in and out of the walls in the attic, vertical surfaces offering zero barrier to them. They were respectful of my personal space, thankfully, and now I hold the dubious distinction of being the last person to sleep in the original Burton Hut while it was still mostly intact.

As I drifted off, I thought about the effort which went into building this hut in the first place, how well built it was to have lasted 55 years in this environment, and about Roland Burton – the only VOC'er to have a memorial hut named after them, despite continuing to be very much alive into the present day. In a club which thrives and exists through the contributions of its members, it says a lot about Roland's impact on the VOC to have achieved that kind of legacy. I hope he is able to get up and see Nu-Burton when it is finished, and know that it is going to carry on.

D: That night, I slept in my tent, but Ryan was determined to be the last person to sleep in the original Burton Hut. I slept well. Ryan did not. Some animal (perhaps a wolverine?) had lots of fun noisily playing with the handle on a bucket labelled “food up for grabs”.

A: Back in the real world on Monday night, Jeff and John had started staging materials for the helicopter the next day. This involved unloading a flat-bed truck in sequence along the Rubble Creek staging area using a Jeff-constructed crane apparatus. I arrived at around midnight and helped unload until around 2:00 am. At this point, Jeff would drive back to town and reload the truck for the next round of staging. This sort of work schedule would be a small taste of what was to come.

Jeff had been concerned about Rubble Creek bandits coming to steal our wood, so John and I watched the wood in shifts until morning. After all, if they had been willing to steal Jeff's moldy trail runners, it makes sense that they might want to steal \$20,000 in lumber and metal. Alas, morning came around and we had no

Above I pulled that Hut apart. With my own Two Hands. *Duncan MacIntyre*
Below The demolition. *Aaron Lee*

bandit encounters. The helicopter crew rolled up with a fuel truck. Jeff, Alex Rigby, and Dave Mackenzie rolled up with the flatbed and the second load of wood. Apparently, Jeff had gotten a whole 2 hours of sleep that night. After some minor faff concerning not having enough slings for all our loads, the helicopter started flying. There was about 14,000 lbs of material, so we were in for 14 flights. With a round trip time of about 15 minutes, and some faff re-attaching slings by the crew up top, this took a while. When the crew up top wasn't working with the heli, they were vigorously working on tearing down the rest of the roof. After all, helicopters are expensive, so we might as well load up the return trips with loads of waste.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

D: Morning came and with it came sunshine. Good! The helicopter would be able to fly. We had brought along extra food in case it did not. All the same, we were relieved that we would soon receive luxurious supplies (fresh fruit!) and that the hut construction would continue without delay. The first heli load was scheduled for 9:00 am, but we got an InReach telling us that it was delayed. Excellent, more time for demolition!

Before too long, the first heli load arrived. Then the second. Then the third. There were fourteen loads total. Our day involved watching for the helicopter, standing away from drop areas, unfastening loads, refastening slings, wrapping up material from the old hut to be carried away in a humongous net, and doing it all as fast as possible while simultaneously continuing the demolition. Ryan and I maintained utmost efficiency in our multi-tasking.

You can understand the concept of heli rotor wash, and watch videos of it, but you can't really understand rotor wash until you feel it. It is like a sudden, unexpected wind that wants to kill you. It is something you anticipate but that still surprises you. It defies organization. It renounces order. It eschews predictability. Most importantly, it foils all attempts to keep old insulation, bits of styrofoam, and even metal sheets from blowing into the bushes. (Future crews: put old insulation in contractor bags and put heavy stuff on top so the rotor wash doesn't blow it all away!)

After the helicopter left us for the last time—alone and desolate—we set to work waterproofing. Torrential rain was forecast for the next day. It was left over from a typhoon or something. Luckily, our friends back at the heli loading site had sent lots of tarps to cover things with. We were somewhat perplexed by their InReach instructions to protect the hut but not the building materials. Weren't we getting rid of the old hut anyway?

R: Sometime around 2:00 pm, an old VOC'er Will Beattie showed up unannounced and scared the bejesus out of me. I thought he was BC Parks coming to observe us. He had packrafted over and proved an incredible asset for the next few days. Will

quickly set to work cutting down the longer siding pieces with a sawzall, and we managed to fit most of one side of the hut plus all the sheet metal into the nets.

We discovered to our displeasure that the attic had been insulated with spun fiberglass at some point, which is where the mice had been living, and it was a sewer. We got as much out as we could before the last helicopter departed, but not as much as I would have liked while it was still dry.

A: The crew was getting to the mouse poop soup and the styrofoam insulation. It was getting everywhere. They asked us to pick up a vacuum over the inReach. Down on the ground, we were somewhat puzzled about whether we needed a vacuum and considered not getting one. Boy, am I glad we did. On close to the last load, we tossed our packs and the vacuum into the sling. We figured we could hike faster with minimal gear.

Soon the helicopter finished. One small problem – it started raining. John and I had left our warm layers in our bags. Jeff had no rain layers and no warm layers. The higher we got up the switchbacks, the rainier it became. By the time we had gotten to the boathouse, it was a downpour. Quintus Zhou and Aaron Lee had been waiting a while and were found in one of the warming shelters. With little time before sundown, we scrambled into our canoes and set off across the lake. Despite paddling vigorously, I was freezing the whole time. I'm sure the others were not much warmer. When we finally reached the other side of the lake, it was already well past dark. This made finding the inlet to Sphinx Bay somewhat challenging. We paddled the wrong way up the coast for about 10 minutes until we realized we had gone too far and turned around. After paddling the other way for a while and cursing our mistake, we finally found the inlet and landed our canoes.

D: Just as supper was ready, VOCers arrived! Smiles were on all faces as Anton, Aaron, Jeff, Quintus, and John stepped out of the darkness. The three who had sent up their bags by heli had no rain gear and were soaked. The hut became crowded and steamy. We ate the lentil bolognese. It was good. I had prepared ten portions, and there were only eight of us, but it was the correct amount of food if not a little scanty.

Emma Ghelfi's menu was delicious and a highlight of the trip. It heavily featured legumes. For most people, this merely resulted in some gas. (It was a good thing we weren't sharing tents.) For Anton, this meant preparing a lot of his own meals because chickpeas and lentils "are not Anton-friendly" due to a medical condition. This resulted in some amusement for the rest of us as we watched him eat foods like "backcountry ceviche" (tuna covered with green Gatorade powder) and various other foods that featured Gatorade and/or hot chocolate powder in unexpected ways. If we were to write a trip cookbook, it would have two kinds of recipes: delicious meals (from Emma) and bizarre meals (from Anton). It remains

an open question whether the categories overlap. Jeff's one foray into mixing Gatorade and hot chocolate resulted in something "not recommended".

As the rain began to intensify, some newcomers went off to hastily set up their tents. Others opted to sleep in the little that remained of the hut. They had an interesting night. The tarps covering the hut blew off several times in the night, leaving its "inhabitants" exposed to the wind and rain. Being in the hut, Anton wasn't in his tent, so it decided to blow away and go on a journey of its own. As Jeff optimistically said, it wasn't any worse than the 1.5-hour sleeps he'd been getting in the preceding nights as he prepared the helicopter loads.

THE START (THE RAINY TIMES)

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

A: We woke up bright and early the next day. I can't speak for the others, but I felt like I had gotten zero sleep. We set about eating our one breakfast option: oats served from a 10 kg pail. Granted, we had a variety of various things to put in it: cinnamon, sugar, apples, etc. As we ate, we discussed our tasks for the day. These would be finishing the demo by removing the remaining tongue and groove and any insulation. Soon, talk became action. We suited up in our rain gear and got up on the second floor. The rain was heavy and it was near zero. Within 20 minutes of starting, I heard Ryan say, "I think my rain gear has completely wetted out." "Same here, same here," I thought.

R: Wednesday devolved into one of the wettest days I have ever had the displeasure of enduring in the 14 years I have backpacked in the coast mountains. It was torrential, relentless, my rain gear was soaked through within the hour. As it turns out we were being hit with the edge of a tropical cyclone or something. Lovely!

D: It was not long before we were all completely soaked. I realized that my rain pants were not actually waterproof as everything below my butt became drenched. The worst was the boots. They were frigid and soaked and there seemed to be no hope to dry them at all in the coming week. To make matters worse, now that the hut was dismantled, there was nowhere to go to get respite from the weather. This was perhaps the most demoralizing moment on a VOC trip that I've done—and that's saying something!

A: We ripped boards, grinded stubborn nails, and scooped insulation. The latter was perhaps the most unpleasant of the tasks. The insulation was mixed with mouse poop in a 50/50 ratio. The rain was turning this mix into a heavy soup that we were all standing in. The vapour barrier laid on the floor would create bubbles of soup that would threaten to burst onto everything downstairs if we didn't drain them. It was quite a grim task. Our main tools for this fight were the vacuum and

the hut shovel. As the vacuumers vacuumed, they found mice, both alive and dead in the soup. It was quite a relief when the last of the insulation was gone. Of course, we would find bits and pieces of it all over the hut, our stuff, and the containers of food over the next few days.

D: I did not feel at home in construction. I tried to help as I could, as taught by the many excellent and amiable teachers present, but I still felt like a fish out of water. (Except I was completely wet, so I definitely wasn't out of water.) I was exactly like Bilbo Baggins. I too was not yet a burglar (or, in my case, a hut-builder). I too wished only for my warm home and a singing kettle. I too was not going to get it. I too kept working.

At some point, Aaron and I decided we'd better clean up the mix of insulation and rat poop on the upper floor. It was greedily absorbing the rain and dripping down into the kitchen. In some places, the rat poop was 30 cm deep. This was 30 cm of not insulation, not garbage, but just rat poop. In some places there appeared to be green lentils mixed in. We weren't sure if they were lentils that the rats had stowed or if they were just more poop that was older. At least we were entertained as every now and then a live rat would peek out before scurrying back into its hideous refuse.

We stuffed the more insulation-rich parts into contractor bags with our hands, protected only by permeable work gloves. We scooped up the more rat-poop parts with the hut shovel. (Keep this in mind next time you're shovelling snow.) The more liquid parts—which tended to flow onto our boots—we vacuumed up with the shop vac.

We were soon covered with the stuff. The worst, though, was not the appearance of the concoction, or how it felt on our gloves, but the smell. It smelt acrid. After all, the mixture had been festering in the rain for a day. I wore a fabric Covid-era mask. Aaron wore a buff. It wasn't enough. Like the immune system learns to detest a pathogen, my nose learnt to detest the smell of rat poop. For the rest of the trip, I could detect the aroma in the hut, and indeed I could not spend more than a few seconds in the hut without feeling sick and finding my legs forcing me outside.

A: Sometime well after noon, John set up his orange MEC tarp to create a food and cooking area. Over the next few weeks this tarp would be our only reprieve from work. The unfortunate thing about the setup was that it hung very low. To be under the tarp meant being hunched over. The lack of chairs also meant that we would sit on boxes – again, hunched over. And when we worked, the angles were often awkward, so most of the time we would be hunched over. This meant that our backs just hurt constantly. But that's an aside. That lunch, we would have another of Emma's recipes, and we would finally break into our stash of gatorade powder. I

started this off by making gatorade tea – just gatorade and hot water. This is actually pretty good, I'd recommend it. We also started on our supply of tuna cans. These came in one size – 1.25 kg (drained weight). Little did we know, these two things would soon be combined...

D: The food bins had been covered in rat sewage, so Anton reorganized the food and poured the sewage off the lids, then wiped them with hand sanitizer so that we could safely (?) use the lids as cutting boards. We cooked up some falafel mix to put in wraps with our fresh carrots, peppers, cucumbers, and onions. I was surprised by how good and warming it was. The falafel mix was also lightweight and easy to prepare. I'm going to have to add it to my backcountry supplies on my next big trip.

R: Anton and I removed the bolts holding the arches to the original base frame. Folks, "they don't make it like they used to" is a common refrain, but the fact that we could crack the nuts off those bolts with crescent wrenches after 55 years of being flooded annually is *mind blowing*. They were mint, threads were barely rusted, were these all replaced at some point and nobody left a memo?

A: As the old tongue and groove came off, we started putting the new stuff on. With tongue and groove, the next piece's "groove" has to slide into the old piece's "tongue". In theory, they should slide together perfectly. In practice, not so much. Sometimes quite a bit of force was needed. Some tricks we developed included standing on it, sometimes even sitting on it, and then hammering it in with smaller pieces of tongue and groove. After enough tongue and groove was on, we started putting on the first layer of Roofnado. Think thick sheets of rubbery material with glue on the bottom. You can put screws through these sheets and water won't seep through. We were actually quite productive this day and managed to get most of one side tongue and grooved and Roofnadoed, with a start on the other side too. Feeling good, we retired for dinner and bed around sundown. This timing would prove atypical.

R: John proved to be an incredible asset to the project, his knowledge of construction an excellent pairing with Jeff's mentally-prepared plans for how the hut was to go together, and an almost bottomless source of energy. I know that his instant jumping to any task set a great example for myself and kept me moving even as the weather continued to degrade.

We called it quits around 7:00 pm for dinner, soaked beyond all belief, and enjoyed a Mexican bean soup prepared by Quintus. I put gatorade powder in

Top Noxious poop soup. *Aaron Lee*

Middle New tongue and groove going in. *Aaron Lee*

Bottom Ryan and Duncan ft. Roofnado. No forced smiles here. *Aaron Lee*





my hot chocolate. Anton upped the ante: he prepared gatorade cocoa in his Spam tin with added coconut cream. The laminated menu was three sheets to the gale around us and “*Gatorade: The Undiscovered Spice*” was the direction our food was now firmly headed in.

D: That day felt like a marathon. I was glad when night fell and I could finally get dry. It felt wonderful to have a quick frigid swim in Sphinx Creek, put on dry clothes, and feel not warm but at least warm enough in my sleeping bag. It was a windy night. My tent was completely fine and I slept well, but those who did not have freestanding tents had a harder time. Quintus’s tent collapsed three times. I am now convinced that the extra weight of a freestanding tent is totally worth it.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

R: Thursday opened once again optimistically dry, even sunny for a few hours to taunt us before it began raining again, and by noon was full-blown snow squalls mixed with sleet. Anton, mad lad that he is, put Gatorade powder and Allspice in his breakfast oats.

A: I woke up to Jeff loudly exclaiming, “Good morning everybody!” I replied, “Good morning Jeff!” For the next two weeks, this would become my wakeup routine. I got on my soaking wet rain layers, wet boots, and wet gloves and surveyed the weather. A slight improvement, except that it was now snowing. Throughout the day, we would watch the snow line slowly creep down towards us.

An aside I should mention is that on arrival, out of habit, I had hung my bag of personal snacks in the hut. This bag contained my toothbrush. This bag was not waterproof. This bag was directly below a stream of poop soup water. I did not dare use my toothbrush, and so my oral hygiene was deteriorating despite finger brushing. After a breakfast of oats, I gave in and asked for a new toothbrush over in Reach. The Friday crew would be coming up tomorrow with a much-needed ladder and hopefully a much-needed toothbrush.

This day, a lot of the work was the same. We finished the tongue and groove on the other side and Roofnadoed as much as we could. Then, we got a start on raising the next support arches. These were hefty, 40 lb chunks of wood with a weird balance point. Inside, we measured out spacing for footlong structural screws on the old arches. We would raise the beam, hold it up, align it with the old beam, and then hold it there as we made small adjustments. Eventually, Jeff was satisfied and we would drive the structural screws in. These were very satisfying to drive – pure impact driver action. On this day we also learned the importance of steel-toed boots. One of these arches got dropped on Jeff’s toe from a height of

Top Arches going on, sunshine teasing us.. Aaron Lee

Middle Snow... Aaron Lee

Bottom Awkward angles on the joist hangers. Jacob Grossbard

about a foot. Toe-crushing in normal boots, no biggie with steel toes.

D: Thursday was also wet, but I somewhat improved my situation by inserting plastic bags between my socks and my boots. My feet still got soaked but they weren't quite as cold. The only time the weather caused a serious safety hazard was when it began to snow and a layer of slush built up on our already sketchy scaffolding. The slush was slippery. Luckily, it melted before too long.

R: We consumed an entire 1.25 kg tin of tuna for lunch. Anton made what could only be described as dirtbag ceviche by mixing lime gatorade power and canola oil into his tuna. Something along the lines of "gatorade tuna: better than you'd expect" was refrained. Severe weather in a harsh alpine environment, it *does things* to people...

A: Sometime after lunch, Will left, having to get back to the city. Or perhaps he left after seeing my latest Gatorade creation: tuna seasoned with Gatorade. Not bad – just don't add water, then it's quite bad. He kindly took one of the canoes over so there would be less shuttling to do for the Friday group. After Will left, we managed to get a few more arches up before dinner and then called it a night.

R: I love that about the VOC, how old members will show up at the most random moments and join something with gusto – it's why I stick around.

By evening we had the last tongue and groove installed on both sides, the last of the vapor barrier installed, and the hut was once again waterproof. Not bad for 28 hours of labor (168 worker-hours across the crew size!). Unfortunately, the hut was thoroughly soaked in liquid mouse poop inside, so it remained unusable for human purposes. We retired to the cooking tarp, enjoyed some curry, talked about the history of the VOC and what makes it so cool. Anton built a bridge to get to our tents, and we all fell into bed exhausted... Just in time for the last arm of the storm to slam into us. My tent attempted to make a hasty exit towards Whistler multiple times, trekking poles brutally assaulting my face just as I'd drift off despite the rocks I'd piled on the pegs, and torrential rain lashed from several sides at once. Coupled with some recurrent nightmares, very little sleep was had on my part until around 3:00 am.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

Sun. Glorious, warm sun and a forecast that it was due to stick around all day! Over breakfast I was informed that my primary reason for having to depart on Friday was no longer in the picture, and I was more than welcome to stay until Monday. I vacillated back and forth for an hour but while listening to Jeff explain the plan for the day and being unable to comprehend it conceptually – I had to accept that after

the preceding four days of going hard my brain was mush, my fingers were swollen to twice their normal size, I had no remaining dry or clean gear, and my schedule in the real world was already tightly booked out until my flight to Australia on the 15th. I couldn't move any of those commitments without cell reception.



So Aaron and I packed up, helped raise the new apex beam, and helped get the first three arches in place on the east side. I left behind my candle-lantern, feeling the crew could use the cozy ambiance and hand-warming properties if the weather turned foul again next week. Around 11:00 am we said our goodbyes and loaded into the lake, towing the spare canoe behind us. We had a beautiful, warm, bluebird crossing of about an hour with a steady beam reach from the west, glorious views behind us of the snow-dusted Sphinx Glacier.

We met up with the Friday crew, forgot to give them the boathouse key (Jacob caught me breathlessly five minutes up the lakeshore), and hauled ass down Rubble Creek. Aaron, heavy-hauler in training, carried a contractor bag with 50lbs of wet fiberglass down strapped to his own pack and did not take a single break on the way or complain once. What a legend!

On the way down we ran into a hiking group with children who commented on the contractor bag, and when I mentioned it was insulation they asked if we were VOC. The woman at the lead mentioned she had met her partner through the VOC, her young son with her had painted the outhouse a few years ago, and they were keen to hike over Gentian Ridge and lend a hand. Like I said earlier – us VOC'ers, we pop up when you least expect us.

Ryan's Conclusion

This is the last that I'll have to do with the VOC for a while, with work now taking me to the other side of the world indefinitely and further travels in the planning beyond that. By the time I return to Canada I'll be nearly forty years old – well into the Ross Campbell & Jeff Mottershead echelon of membership, leaving me unclear what form of participation I'll have when that future arrives. It is heartwarming to reflect on the impact the VOC has had on my life, from the folks I've lived with for years, to the many lifelong friendships I've built, to some of the most epic adventures I've had. Maybe I'll write something about that aspect of the club in the future. Paraphrasing something Jeff said to me this week, there are many alpine clubs – but I will always be VOC.

Demolishing the Burton Hut down to the skeleton and helping get a good chunk of the new structure assembled within the limited time I had available was, I think, an excellent capstone to my eight years of activity in the club – and on a personal level to the work I've put into turning my life around this summer from a really brutal low point. Friday marks the last time I'll be up in our snowcapped coastal alpine for a long time, and despite the horrific weather it was one of the best weeks with one of the best work crews I've ever enjoyed going hard alongside.

At the current pace, and with the quality of individuals up there, I suspect the hut will be buttoned up for winter ahead of schedule. I deeply look forward to making it my first alpine destination when I return to the country: lazily carving down the Guard-Deception col again, with the last light of the winterspring sun

painting pink and orange across a dry, warm, cozy hut which will no doubt now outlive me – a legacy of club volunteer spirit which will see trips well into its second century thanks to our collective efforts this year.

UPDATE 10/06: Feeling I had insufficiently suffered relative to the rest of the hut crew (and seeing there were very few drivers lined up on the day of the pre-trip for this) I dutifully joined up with HMVDITTRAH: Burton Edition and hauled somewhere between 90-100lbs of tooling & trash down from the lake in three packs, along with an all-star crew of 16 other haulers. NOW I can hang up my boots and head off into the sunset.

Friday (contd.)

D: With the new crew came new weather. I had been seriously contemplating leaving the project early, on Friday, rather than on Monday as planned. There is a point where suffering through work in the rain and wind does not feel worth it. On Friday morning, however, the weather forecast predicted no more rain until Tuesday, so I decided to stay. I'm very glad I did. While the forecast was not completely accurate, the weekend was mostly dry, and it turns out that construction is much more fun in dry, sunny weather, and I was happy with the contributions that I made.

Ryan and Aaron were replaced with fresh unspoilt blood as Melissa Chen, Nolwenn Deschamps, Connor Jakes, Katie Sattler, and Jacob joined us, along with the ladder they had carried up. (Jacob was now feeling better, but he said he had made the right decision about staying home. We were quite glad he hadn't been at the hut to spread his sickness to everyone else.)

A: Friday was an exciting day. We would get a whole new crew of people, our much-needed ladder, and a much-needed toothbrush. We would be at our strongest yet. Feeling like we would want to get lots of work done today, I wanted to make the most effective fuel possible for breakfast. This fuel should contain protein, carbs, and electrolytes – tuna, oats, and Gatorade. A combination that would be dubbed "tunagato-oatarade" or "tuna-oatarade" for short. It looked like a pink slop. It tasted bad and it was hard to finish the large bowl I had made. In truth, I don't remember what day I discovered tuna-oatarade, but the essential experience is the same regardless of the day.

THE FIRST WEEKEND CREW ARRIVES (THE SUNNY DAYS)

SEPTEMBER 27 - 29

After the central beam was in, we could start adding roof arches on the other side. The weather was also sunny for the first time, making work pleasant. Our hands were still swollen and our boots soaked, but the feeling of the sun on your skin tends to make you forget all that. As arches went up, we waited for the weekend

rotation to come up. We were wondering how they would fare getting the ladder up the switchbacks. It turns out that Melissa had an excellent system that involved balancing it on her pack (*photo by Connor Jakes*).

Sometime around this time, we started realizing the hut was as Jeff likes to say "higgledy-piggledy", i.e. the dimensions were skewed, so the arches would not be perfectly aligned. This would be a problem for a later day, as for now we needed to get enough arches on to jack up the hut and address the flooring.

The group arrived in the late afternoon and helped us put up arches before dinner. We then got a briefing of the plan for the next day. We would finish raising arches, allowing the structure to be strong enough to be jacked. We could then jack up each side, and slide a new ground beam under the hut. This ground beam could be fixed in place, and the hut lowered onto it. We would repeat this for both sides. Then, we could raise the hut again, and now that the ground beams wouldn't be 50% rot, we could set the hut down on supports, making it safe to go under the hut.



D: It was now time for the heaviest construction materials we had brought: three massive wooden beams. We lifted the beams into position with our hands, a winch, and jacks, one beam going upon the crest of the roof and the other two under the new arches. Next, we added structural supports underneath the hut and framed the walls of the hut with Douglas Fir boards. Each framing board required two brackets and 28 nails to secure it in place. It was a lot of nailing. I learned that hammering in nails is harder than it looks. All too often, nails bend, and you're left with a dilemma: you can either try to get them straight and hammer them in or else remove them with a cat's paw and start over. I spent a lot of time struggling through both horns of the dilemma. I quickly realized that Jacob was framing the hut at least three times as fast as I was. Jeff and John were faster still.

Jeff works like a waterfall: ceaseless and always pounding. He starts shortly after dawn and ends well past dusk, taking only three twenty-minute breaks in the day to eat large quantities of food, without apparent care as to whether the food is delicious or bizarre. As someone said, "If we just gave Jeff a wrap every now and then, I bet he'd never stop working at all." We did not test the hypothesis.

I do not work like a waterfall. One time we were working well past dark, prussiked to ropes and hammering in nails where no hammer is supposed to fit. Around 11:30 pm, I realized that I had just bent five nails in a row. My rate of contribution was negative. The longer I stayed out, the more harm I created. So I went to bed. Even then, VOCers kept hammering away in the dark by the light of their headlamps, racing to get work done before the rain started up again.

A: At this point, I'll take an aside. On a big project like this, not everyone can work on the main job all at once. There are lots of non-construction, but important tasks around the camp, like cooking, cleanup, etc... Without these tasks work would eventually grind to a halt. Chief among the tasks is cooking. I did not do much cooking this week, but I am very grateful to those who did (shoutout Duncan, Quintus, and others who stepped up). Today, I got the solar charging setup going with Connor's help. This would save us from running the generator more than we needed to. We disinfected the entire hut with bleach. It was now somewhat safer to touch. I also arranged bags of trash and picked through our pile of old tongue and groove. During this task, I spotted a furry friend: a stoat. This stoat would become somewhat of a daily fixture for me. I was pleased to learn that stoats kill vast amounts of mice. A few days prior, I had built a temporary bridge across a creek. This creek needed to be crossed to reach our tents every night and used to be a death-defying rock hop. Now it was a death-defying limbo across wobbly bits of tongue and groove. Connor made a significant improvement to the bridge setup, making it non-death-defying. Lots of small tasks like this would happen every day at camp.

This day however, our fates would irreparably change. The next day's plan involved having everyone hammering in roof joists – a labour intensive task that could take advantage of our increased numbers. What did that mean for us today? We would have to finish our work under the hut and lower the hut before the start of the next day's shift. There was a lot of work to do. First, there were about three lengths of tongue and groove to fit. Second, we needed to shim gaps between the tongue and groove and the new ground beam (done by hammering thin pieces of wood into gaps). Third, we would install new floor joists. This would effectively double up the support the floor would receive. We then secure the joists to the rest of the hut structure. Finally, we lower the hut. Quite a handful.

Turns out installing tongue and groove from the bottom down is harder than from the top up. You have to fight gravity to keep the board in place. Katie and I created a great system where we would lie on our backs and hold the board in place with our legs. This system worked well, and it only took a few hours to get all the remaining tongue and groove in. As this happened, Jacob and others would start shimming.

The tongue and groove effort got finished just as the sun started setting. We couldn't resist and all went to watch the sunset. After a 10 minute sunset break, it would be all hands on floor joists. There would be a team under the hut positioning joists, a team outside the hut handing joists, and a person inside the hut screwing them in from above. Having no regard for the health of my back, I of course volunteered to stay under the hut. My back did not like this, but we got all the joists positioned.

After a late dinner (10:00 pm?) we decided that there was no use in all of us being dead tired tomorrow. Myself, John, Jeff, and Jacob would stay on for the night shift, and others would get up early the next day. We would finish securing the joists to the rest of the hut with a combination of nails through Simpson Strong Ties and big screws. Jeff's speed at hammering really shone here. As we did the other tasks, he hammered most of the strong ties in without a break. This is not an easy task in a confined space with awkward angles.

We actually managed to finish all the work sometime past midnight. I guess we still had a lot of energy at that point. Then, came the lowering. Lowering was a tedious process of jacking, removing supports, moving to the other side and repeating. It was also only a two person job. I contemplated going to bed, but I'm glad I didn't. Just as we were doing the final lower, I heard a nasty crunch under the hut and yelled out for the others to stop! Turns out the ground under the hut was no longer level and some big rocks were threatening to destroy the joists. I'm glad they didn't. We hadn't brought extras of most of the materials. Not wanting to rejack the hut, we carefully worked from the outside, pushing dirt and rocks around with shovels and the rock bar. After half an hour of toil, we felt it was sufficiently level to continue. Thankfully, we were right. The hut was lowered and the

below-hut work was done. We were ready to keep working on the roof tomorrow (it was 2:00 am, so actually today).

The next shift can only be described as toil. The roof arches would need to be joined together with joists. 10 joists between each pair of arches, going from the ground up. These joists would attach to the arches with more of the dreaded Simpson Strong Ties. These took something like 16 nails per side. Nominally these nails would be 10d, but we had run out. However, we had a big box of 16d. These were wider and longer. They would bend the metal of the tie as they went in, ringing like pitons. They would also bend themselves as they went in due to the awkward angles (upside down, right next to the joist, etc.). For every set of nails we would hammer in, we would invariably spend 15 minutes or more battling with the ones we bent. The pry bar would become a good friend to us. Hammering continued throughout the whole day today. After dinner, we couldn't just stop. The crew would be leaving tomorrow, so we figured may as well get a bit more done that night. We hammered until midnight or so. At that point, exhaustion, soreness, and the generally swollen state of our hands kicked in, leading us to quit for the night. We had worked admirably, getting the majority of the roof joists in place.

THE SECOND WEEK (THE LONG DAYS)

SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 4

D: Eventually, Monday came, and it was time for me to leave. I was looking forward to returning home and being warm and dry, but I was also sad to leave the beautiful hut and project, with only four people staying behind. Knowing that rain was coming again tempered my desire to stay any longer. Still, it had been a superb feeling, working with my comrades to build a hut that we hoped would shelter outdoors-people on their adventures for decades to come, if not for the next hundred years.

Melissa, Connor, Nolwenn, and Katie left the work site around 10:00 am. Quintus and I paddled across the lake with them, located some supplies hauled in by Joseph Chiao the night before, and paddled them back to the hut. By "supplies" read white gas, bleach, and beer. Anton was very happy about the beer. After we left, only four crew members would remain: Jeff, John, Jacob, and Anton.

I went for a final swim in the lake, then Quintus and I cooked up a last luxurious lunch of bacon, pancakes, falafel mix, and fresh veggies. Surveying the garbage to be carried down, I chickened out of carrying one of the heavy contractor bags with wet insulation. My garbage hauling was limited to one small steel beam.

Quintus and I left the worksite for good around 4:30 pm. Eager to get going, we quickly paddled across the lake and then began hiking down in the dusk. As we got to the Barrier Lookout, it was just getting dark enough that we would need to put on our headlamps, so we decided we might as well stop for a

quick dinner of dried salami, cheese, candies, and trail mix. We then continued to the car in darkness. Quintus performed admirably despite feeling a cold coming on. He drove me home to Richmond. We got there at 11:30 pm.

A: After the group left, the joists were finished up by about 1:00 pm. We had been closely following the weather, and there would be a storm moving in the next day. Problem: the next step involved putting in insulation. Once the insulation is in, you don't really want it to get wet, i.e. we would have to finish enough of the roof to cover it before the storm. This is no trivial task, especially with four people. We would need to insulate, create horizontal and vertical framing over the roof, apply two layers of plywood, and then apply a layer of Roofnado to seal everything in. We could already tell it would be a long day. We didn't realize yet just how long...

Insulation went quickly, just over an hour. Framing went slower. By the time the sun set at 7:00 pm, we had hardly finished all the vertical rows, let alone the horizontals. When wood is springy, it is a huge pain to get a nail through it. When you stretch wood over a curved hut, it has to be springy. Hence all the framing was springy. Nails kept popping out. It was a pain.

Sometime after sunset, most of our headlamps started dying. Turns out headlamp batteries don't last forever. This led to the invention of the "moon tower" (look these up, it's how small towns in the U.S. used to be lit at night). Our moon tower used a Milwaukee light ski-strapped to a long piece of board.

Sometime near 2:00 am, the framing was done. We could now attach plywood. We would hammer in the first layer onto the framing we had just laid. Our nails would need to land along the studs where the framing crossed each other. The problem here is that we didn't mark the expected locations on the plywood. So, there was a lot of guesswork involved. Sometimes 2-3 nails per stud would be needed until we got a solid one. Jacob filmed a short time lapse at 120x speed, which you can see in the web version of this report.

The second layer of plywood would be screwed in. This was a small mercy. It is much easier to drive in screws than nails. Jeff would apply PL premium (very strong adhesive) to a sheet and then we would screw it in. This was once again complicated by a complete lack of marking. As we worked, it slowly became lighter and lighter outside, until we no longer needed the moon tower.

At 7:30 am, the last piece of plywood was up. We were dead tired. Jeff offered us a choice: Roofnado now, or tarp things and do it later. You can't leave a job undone, so we chose to Roofnado. Would it feel right to sleep on a job with only one step left?

We worked fast to get the Roofnado on. Thankfully, it's a straightforward process. Hold it onto the plywood. Tack it. Take the backing off. Repeat. As the last piece came on, we felt drops of rain. The rain was almost a relief. Imagine if we had worked this hard to beat the rain and it hadn't even rained. Around 8:30

am our job was done. We were utterly spent. We had all worked for at least 24 hours. Jacob thinks 25. Jeff might have worked 26 since he likes to get up earlier. With the last of our strength, we headed to the food tent to eat some snacks. Afterward, we headed to our tents to sleep out the rain.

After a much-needed sleep, we lazily rolled out of bed sometime in the late afternoon. You can't sleep forever, eventually, you'll get hungry. We headed to the food tent to make breakfast (lunch? dinner? I'm not sure which is the right term). Jeff was missing. Eventually, we surmised that he had canoed to the other side of the lake to pick up supplies. A few days ago we had realized that we were missing a number of structural screws. Also, we were running low on white gas and would need a bunch to run the heaters and dry out the hut. Luckily, Adam Steele (our in-town inReach contact) found Joseph willing to help. Joe had school to do though, so he would have to head up late. Adam gave him a ride to the trailhead, and at around 11:00 pm the previous day he hit the trail with about 16L of white gas, the screws, and a gallon of bleach. As a little gift to us, he even included an 8 pack of beers, brownies, and some hand warmers! As we were working a night shift, Joe was too. On the way up, it seems that some of the white gas cans ruptured and started leaking. Joe applied some tape and stashed it for us to pick up. Eventually, Jeff returned with Joe's stash. We would chat for a bit, pick up some garbage, and then head back to sleep. Today would be a zero-day for all but Jeff.

The next day we got up, ready to work. After all, we had one more side of the hut to do. It was the same story with the weather though. A storm would be coming in the next day, and we would need to get everything done before then. This time we had a few things going for us. First, the joists were already done. Second, we would mark the plywood this time. Third, we had done it once before and it would be faster this time. I'll save myself the trouble of writing about the same thing twice, but it did go much better this time. We finished at about 3:00 am, which feels much better than finishing at 8:30 am. Actually, I felt lucky to be working late that night. It was a very clear night, and the stars were out in spectacular form.

As the clear skies may have hinted, the weather turned out pretty good that morning. No sign of a hideous storm. Upon checking the inReach forecast, we saw that the storm had actually shifted one day into the future. Today would be a good day to work outside, and we couldn't waste it. Reinforcements were due to arrive tomorrow (Friday) and we wanted to get as much done as possible before they arrived. Today would be the flashing. Flashing is a layer of metal that goes on the front and back of the hut. It prevents moisture from getting on the sides of the

hut, but also allows air to flow through, allowing for the insulation to breathe. But first, breakfast. Today, Jacob would make pancakes. I would emulate him unsuccessfully on account of having none of the ingredients, and instead, I ended up with a crumble and a Gatorade simple syrup to go on top.

The flashing was a welcome relief from hammering. There was a lot of cutting and holding things in place. Generally precision work rather than brute force. Still, after the flashing was cut it took quite a while to get it on the hut. There are two layers of it, it goes on in a certain order, and it should be well aligned. Finally, the air gap between the layers would have to be mouse proofed. I guess we could have foregone this step, but I doubt mouse poop soup is quite as good an insulator as pure fiberglass. To do this, we would simply stuff wire mesh into the gap. We worked into the night to finish, but nowhere near as late as the other days.

Below A full view of the flashing. *Jacob Grossbard*



Friday was due to be crappy weather for most of the day. Thankfully, we still had an interior to finish. We had torn off a lot of the paneling and insulation during the demo due to it being covered in mouse poop. We had also disassembled a bunch of the furniture. Our thought process was that this would be easy work that would take a few hours, and by the time we finished, the weekend crew would arrive.

We started by insulating. We only had a bale of Roxul to cover all the gaps with, so we had to be efficient. The bale had been manually hauled up by Anya Boardman in the days before, so it was extra valuable. This insulating task made the air itchy. It was a welcome break to go out in the rain and look for the missing panels. We had cut some useful panels into shims already, so the search was only partially fruitful. No matter, we had the skill saw and lots of extra paneling. We didn't quite have enough Roxul for the whole hut, so we had to get creative and re-use the old insulation in some places. After insulating, we made a very expensive vapor barrier out of scrap Roofnado. Unfortunately, this too was not enough for the whole hut. We re-used the old vapor barrier, which combined with an excess of tuck tape worked pretty well.

As the day dragged on, and we had no updates from the "support crew" as Jeff called them (I called them the "relief crew"), we started to realize that they wouldn't make it up that day. This made my morale drop a touch. Thankfully, I received a promotion at work to the ever-important "gap manager". My new job would be to fill air gaps in the loft, walls, and anywhere in the hut. This kept me occupied for a while (read until 11:00 pm). By then, our respective tasks were done to a respectable level given our limited resources. It was time to assemble the hut furniture. To our sleep-deprived minds, this was a monumental challenge. The furniture was built in situ, so it was very long and had to be assembled in the correct order. It didn't help that most of the legs were held in with singular bent nails and would threaten to break with the smallest movement. Sometime past midnight, we started on the cooking area. We were wholly unsuccessful, spending more time debating which piece went on top and which went on the bottom. After not having made progress in one hour on a 30 minute task, we called it a night.

THE SECOND WEEKEND CREW ARRIVES

OCTOBER 5 - 7

The next morning, as usual, I awoke to Jeff's "Good morning everybody!" Jeff must have noticed the lack of enthusiasm in my "good morning." I was forced to repeat it again with more cheer. But this time the cheer was real since Jeff revealed that he could see the canoes with the weekend crew coming in. I got out of my tent just in time to greet Tom Curran, Ross Campbell, Haley Foladare, Daniel Schmidov, Jacob Ticehurst-Wong, and Stefaniya Rekasius. Seeing this fresh crew



Above Stefaniya Rekasius

did indeed make me feel relieved. The odds of finishing by Monday had increased substantially. We got together for breakfast to discuss the plan for the weekend. I learned that back in the real world they had heard about tuna-oatarade and assumed we were starving (rather than consuming optimal nutrition). Everyone on the weekend crew had brought their own food.

The main task would be applying the sheet metal roofing and finishing the flashing. After breakfast, we set to doing just that. We had a shortage of harnesses, so I gave mine up to Tom. He was fresh and would be more useful up high than me. There was some panic on the first sheet when we realized that our screws were too short to penetrate from the ridges of the sheet metal into the plywood. Jeff had pre-drilled all the sheet metal along the ridges. However, some brainstorming concluded that we could just go through the flat part of the sheet metal instead. Jeff would later come back to fill these holes in an epic "day trip."

For now, the roofing wouldn't be my domain. Instead, I planned to finish the interior. We still had a number of tasks left. These included shining up the aluminum cooking surface, finding all the trim and cutting the pieces we couldn't find, and of course filling mouse sized gaps by any means necessary. Throughout the course of the day, I set about these tasks. People would come in and help out when they needed a break outside. Daniel and Jacob TW helped with the table, and later in the evening, Haley would help with the door's weather stripping. But mostly I took on the role of gap manager. My job was eliminating all mouse-sized gaps. If you see strangely shaped blocks of wood sticking out of strange places in the hut, that's probably my work. I can't say my gap management looks all too great, but you work with what you have.

There was only so much work to do in the hut, so come night-time, I was sufficiently satisfied and retired from both of my roles: interior manager and gap manager. I then joined Daniel and Ross on the ground. The crew had put a bunch of sheets up already. I would alternate between three roles. First, helping

Ross carry over sheets and get them up to the up high team. Second, helping Daniel push the sheets into place so they could be screwed in. My back was in constant distress by this point, so occasionally Daniel would give me a much welcomed back massage while we held the sheets in place. Finally, Daniel and I would drive some of the lower screws. While all this was happening, Stefanija and Jeff were working on the flashing for the rear of the hut. Parallel processing. It need not be said that finishing the sheet metal took until 2:00 am.

Unfortunately, Sunday came and the new crew would have to leave. With great faff, we figured out the optimal canoe strategy that would allow people to keep working as long as possible. Stefanija, enjoying the immense suffering on the project, volunteered to stay one more day. After spending some time working on the rodent-proofing the hut and finishing the flashing, it was time for the crew to leave. After doing a quick photoshoot with all our Milwaukee tools, I gave everyone parting gifts. Much to their chagrin, the gifts were either extremely bulky or extremely heavy. Stefanija, being a rower, would go with them and then shuttle canoes across so we would have enough boats to leave on Monday.

THE FINALE

The rest of the day was spent finishing the rodent proofing. Again, this generally consisted of putting mesh in places rodents like to go through. It was quite satisfying when at the end of the rodent proofing, our friend the stoat tried to gain entry into the hut. It tried very hard for about 10 minutes and failed. It was even more satisfying to later see a mouse try the same and fail.

As the day became late, construction started slowly shifting to cleanup. I saw that there was a lot of usable construction material left over. It would be a shame to let it go to waste, so I decided to address something that had been bothering me both of the two previous weeks. To get to the outhouse in the rain, you have to walk through a three-meter-long puddle that was several inches deep. So, I built a boardwalk over it with Stefanija's help. This recycled quite a bit of material.

As day became night, the cleanup generally moved radially from the hut. We would walk out, retrieve junk, cut it up, and pile it neatly behind the hut. The radius from which we would retrieve junk would generally shrink over time. This was quite satisfying. This progressed for a while until Jeff and Stefanija finished the last of the flashing and the roof cap. Anticipation started building. The end was palpably close.

Around 2:30 am, the moment came. Everything was done, everything was cleaned up. There was just one finishing touch left: the tall, shiny marker at the top of the hut. Jeff did the honors. We popped a bottle of champagne. Life felt

good. We felt accomplished. That night Jacob, John, and I would stay in the hut. We had sent our tents away to make more room to carry down tools the next day. To celebrate more, we cracked some of the beers Joe had carried up for us. I got about a quarter of a can down before I fell asleep mid-conversation.

The next morning I woke up with a substantial headache. But I couldn't complain too much. The hut was done. We took a moment to revel in our creation.

A moment is all we could take though. Work never ends, and we still had hundreds of pounds of tools to carry down. We loaded up ridiculously heavy packs, trying to fit in as much as we could. You know your pack is bad when you need help standing up with it on. Jeff had probably the most ridiculous pack I've seen. He had all his overnight gear, all the leftover food cans, a generator, a jerry can of gas, flippers, and assorted tools. I couldn't pick his pack up. After a fairly uneventful canoe across the lake, realizing the length of the trail ahead of us, and the weight of our packs, we tried to eat as much food as possible to save weight. Of course, this made little impact.

About five minutes in, I realized just how much of a sufferfest this was going to be. I'm sure the others felt the same. We gritted our teeth and walked. Eventually, we made it to the cars. We were relieved for two reasons. The first being that we could take off our packs. The second was that nobody had smashed our car windows. After a back-stretching session and a gear distribution, we were done. Done. We drove to A&W and ate many many burgers. When I got home, I fell asleep almost as soon as I touched my bed. Working towards the goal of finishing the hut felt good, but being done and in my own bed felt even better.

In closing, I'd like to make a few remarks.

1. This was a huge project. Many many VOCers contributed in many many ways, big and small, all important. Thank you. It wouldn't have been possible to do this without the support of so many of you.
2. We received monetary contributions from the ACC Whistler Section, the FMCBC, the AMS, and a number of individuals. These too were essential to making the project possible. Thank you.
3. Next year, we will have to redo the walls at Brian Waddington Hut (Phelix). This should be the last of the major hut projects for a while. Three hard years in exchange for many easier ones. I encourage the reader to keep the upcoming project in the back of their mind and come to help out when the time comes. The reward is a lifetime of memories.



Above Jacob G and John leaving in a very full canoe. *Stefanija Rekasius*

Duncan's lessons learned for future construction projects:

- Having an extremely competent person like Jeff design the hut and manage the project is invaluable.
- Construction is much more pleasant in good weather, and wherever possible we should only build huts in July and August (Of course, we did not do the Sphinx project now by choice).
- There will inevitably be times when additional construction materials must be purchased because of unforeseen needs. It would be wise to plan a few “resupply trips” of day-hikers in advance to bring up needed materials every three days or so. That way, the team at the hut could InReach requests and people back in Vancouver would not need to scramble to find hikers to carry up the material.
- If you plan on removing insulation, bring N95 masks.

Duncan's comments concerning food:

- Delicious, nutritious, easy recipes are great for morale.
- It is nice to have a break from legumes.
- Gatorade powder is awesome. Bring lots.
- When there is shared food up for grabs (e.g., apples) advertise it.
- Set up a nice kitchen under a tarp away from the work site. It's worth the effort. You'll use the kitchen a lot.
- If you bring cans, bring a can-opener. (Haha guess what we forgot!)
- Buy the groceries a few days in advance so you have time to pack everything. Packing everything into plastic bins is a two-person job and requires a lot of time. Bins are heavy. Stuff adds up.
- Sort the groceries into different bins based on the kind of food and label the outsides of the bins. Otherwise it's hard to find things.
- Bring up lots of white gas with the food. A half-dozen people will use a litre of white gas per day.

RED HEATHER DAY TRIP

JEFF MOTTERSHEAD

The VOC gets a mix of trip reports ranging from quite impressive to people managing to somehow epic pretty hard on a day trip to Red Heather through a combination of poor planning, taking too much junk, and being softer than they thought they were. What makes the VOC great is that there's lots of support and non-judgemental advice for the beginners from everyone, including those that are doing the hard trips.

With that, here's me getting my ass handed to me on a Red Heather day trip.

SKIPPING THROUGH THE ON-TRAIL and lazy glacier stuff, I arrived at the Neve Hilton just before noon. In the 70s, the VOC built the Neve Hilton, a poorly placed hut east of Mt. Garibaldi, that even after a dedicated shovelling-out effort for a few years, was crushed by snow. I've been to the remains a couple times before but this was my first encounter with the remains of the outhouse. Not surprisingly, it's quite close to the hut, but it's behind a bit of a ridge which hides it from sight, at least in its collapsed state.

Things started to go awry after the Hilton. Up until then, it was all bare ice and flat enough that crampons weren't needed. One leaves the rock that the Hilton is on a couple hundred meters higher than when they left the ice. There was fresh snow blanketing the glacier up after the Hilton, and the ice was substantially steeper and more crevassed. I'd need to wear crampons and probe every step.

Constant probing is slow, but the bigger problem I'd made for myself is that I'd grabbed the wrong crampons. The ones I'd packed weren't mine, but were the ones Devlin used to use when he was really little, and they didn't have enough range to fit on my foot properly. My sole was on top of the front rests, my toes were crunched, and the front points were under the balls of my feet. This didn't feel great, but it was sort of workable, so I kept going.

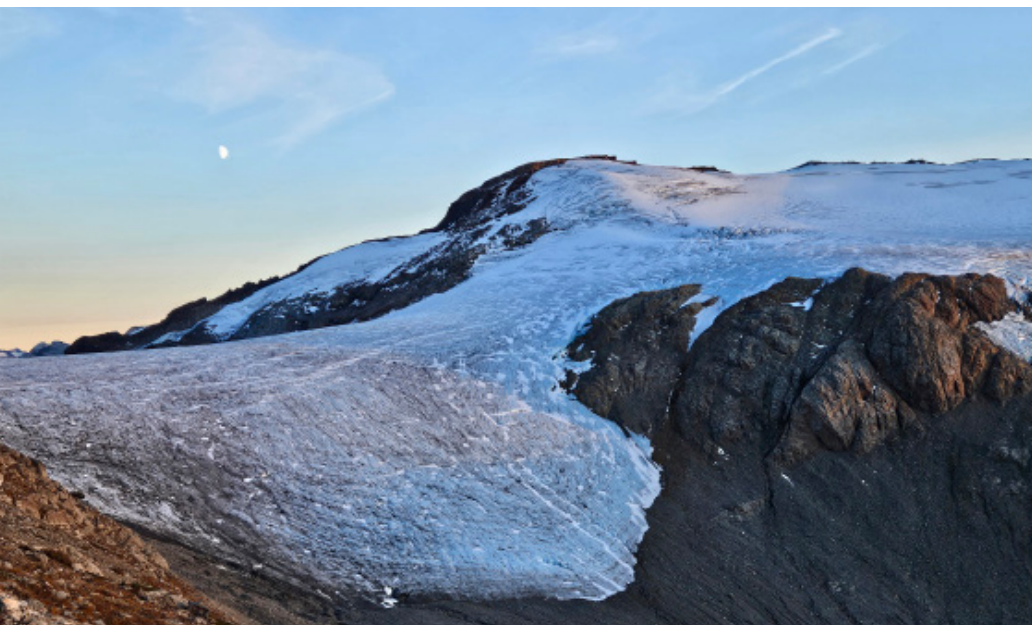
Probing every step is both slow and tiring for the arms, but it is also absolutely necessary for solo early-season travel. On top of the many times I discovered a hidden crevasse where I was at least suspicious, I also found about ten total surprises.

Past the Shark Fin, I decided to cut to the east of Glacier Pikes and get onto the Phoenix Glacier, in the hopes that I'd be able to cross into Sphinx Bay between Sphinx and Deception peaks without dropping a bunch of elevation. This didn't work out, as the top of the col looked like it might not go, I didn't want to confirm that as it got dark. I ended up going down to not too far above lake level and then up between Guard and Deception. The first bit of this was at a fairly nasty angle, steeper than the angle of repose, formed when the glacier undercuts a slope made from consolidated till. I've never liked being on terrain where everything is loose, and everything that I dislodge bounces to the bottom. It wasn't nearly as bad as some of the undercut till I've been on though and after about 100 m gain, it rolled off to angle of repose or less.

Coming down the Sphinx Glacier was a bit of an adventure. The ice was smooth and slippery, and it steepened up enough to be somewhat thought-provoking. Self-arresting with poles only probably wouldn't go so well, and bouncing down until it mellowed out wouldn't be fun, so I was watching my step. Then all of a sudden one of my undersized crampons separated. The heel-toe adjustment bar disconnected and I was on one foot waving my hands around trying not to tip over. Nothing was broken. I just put the crampon back together again and hoped that it wouldn't fall apart again. I feel if it wasn't plugged into the last hole in the bar, it'd probably not have those problems, but they were substantially too short, even on the last hole. I was a bit jazzed, but made it to the bottom without incident, making cautious, little steps.

In retrospect, it would have probably taken less effort to go lakeside around Guard. I'd heard that it was bad, which is why I was looking to come over a col, but bad is relative.

Below A nose of Sentinel Glacier.



There's a significant creek through the middle of Sphinx Bay, and I've waded through it a bunch of times, but given that I was a ways up the bay already, I thought I might save time by crossing the creek upstream of the big moraine lake, where it was likely fast and narrow enough that I could just jump from boulder to boulder to get over it. That worked out, but by going that way I'd signed myself up for a major alder thrash. If it wasn't dark, it would have been an obvious bad choice, but it was dark and I didn't remember the alder being there. It wasn't even 9:00 pm when I entered the alder and despite a full-bodied effort, it took me until midnight to get up to the mound of rock known to the VOC as the Trash Pile. 0.182 km/h, apparently.

Once I got to the Burton Hut, I didn't feel that wiped out, but given that I still had a bunch to do, I was going to need to bivy somewhere, and inside a hut with a catalytic heater seemed like a way better idea than Polemonium Ridge or Helm Glacier. The heater helped for sure, but I hadn't brought a lot of clothes so I didn't get much sleep. It gave me time to think about the decisions that got me here. The previous week, because of an error on my part, when we rebuilt the roof on the hut, we had about a thousand holes in the roof that were still waiting for screws. I'd told everyone at the hut to not worry about that, because I'd be up the next weekend with more screws and would fix it. We all had a fair bit to carry down, and I did my fair share. All of my ratchet straps had been taken by an earlier group taking supplies down, so I had to get a duffle bag, a partially-full jerry can, a generator and my flippers strapped to the outside of my pack with cord. Everyone else had similar challenges, so I shouldn't complain too much, but about 4 km from the trailhead, something shifted and the pack started listing about 20 degrees to starboard. Since getting in and out of it without a picnic table was a real chore, I tried to compensate by adjusting my straps wonky to the other side, but it only did so much. I didn't really need to turn my head to see the brain of my pack, and by the time we got to the bottom, I was missing a fair bit of back skin and was feeling lazy and weak.

At the end of the hike down, I asked Anton for the canoe key, so that I could easily get across Garibaldi Lake to the hut, but we were both tired and managed to forget to make the transfer when he dropped me off at my place. Oh well. I could still find time to get the key during the week, so I emailed some people to see if they wanted to canoe across the lake with me, finish the hut, and maybe get onto Sphinx Glacier too. After getting turned down a few times, my back skin started to feel better and I decided that canoes were lazy and weak and began to hope that none of the other people I'd asked would say yes, so that I'd be able to go around Garibaldi Lake on foot, because that's what the cool people do.

Going around Garibaldi Lake and finishing the hut as a day trip is realistically as much or more as I could handle, but because I am a really dumb guy, I talked myself up to going across the Neve, finishing the hut, going around the lake, up over Clinker, Brohm Ridge, Cheeky Ridge and back up between Gargoyles and

Columnar to rejoin the Red Heather trail at Elfin.

Back at the hut, the day broke with me tired, cold and sore from being curled up on plywood all night. I got all the screws in and remounted the solar panel, finishing at about 2:00 pm. In my mind this was going to be a few hours, but I guess that's consistent with the pattern of everything taking twice as long as I'd budgeted.

I'd brought six batteries with the impact driver, and I used up a grand total of half of one of them, so five of the batteries in my pack were just for extra exercise. Oh well. The pack still felt much better without the sack of screws and the solar mounting stuff in it.

Normally when I am going to or from the hut overland, I get in or out of Gential Pass via the Helm-Gential Col. I decided to gain a bit of extra elevation



but save a kilometre of walking by just going over the Gentian summit. I think this could be faster if, on the descent, I'd scrambled out to my left instead of coming straight down Gentian. I ended up with ice that was steeper than I wanted to deal with in crampons I didn't trust in front of me, and boxed in on either side by totally loose glacial till, which wasted an hour or two. I was thinking that if I had my skis with me I'd have been happy scraping down, but the nearest pair of skis I had was still at the bottom of Garibaldi Lake as both my attempts at recovery had failed.

I ran out of daylight as I got to the Panorama Ridge trail. I decided that I was too lazy and weak to make it back to Red Heather on foot and I'd just hike down the switchbacks and bum a ride. I got down at 11:30 pm. Only two people were in the parking lot when I got there. I tried offering them \$100 to take me back to the Diamond Head/Red Heather parking lot, but they declined. I kind of suspect that they were too young to drive anyways.

It was becoming clear what the crux of the trip was going to be. Squamish appears to have a bunch of taxi companies to choose between, but I've learned from calling all the numbers and asking for a cab that you just get the same dispatcher for all the allegedly different companies, who gets increasingly miffed that keep asking him for a cab when he doesn't intend to give you one.

I looked at the Google driving directions and it was 45.9 km. I felt I was too lazy and weak to just walk that, and my feet weren't happy with the amount of time I'd spent in undersized crampons.

I called Squamish Taxi. I knew for sure that if I asked to be taken up to

Below Guard from Gentian.



where I wanted to go, I wasn't going to get it, because there's no amount of money you can give them to drive on gravel, so I just asked for a ride from Rubble Creek to Quest University. The dispatch dude told me that they had plenty of in town work to do, so the driver would give me a call when he felt like it, at least 45 minutes. I told the dispatch dude that I'd start walking to keep warm and would advise the driver to my current location when he called, and he said that was cool.

As the kilometres went by, it was becoming clear that the chance of getting a cab was getting vanishingly small. Around Culliton Creek, I decided that while I'd been walking long enough that I was well within my rights to call the taxi again, I didn't want to give them any money.

By the time I got into town, I was really wanting to sit down for a bit, rest my feet and have some warm food. It was raining, and in the name of fast and light, I didn't bring any rain pants or a stove, just 1100 screws, a chunk of aluminum angle, and an impact driver and six batteries. As the intention was to do a day trip, I'd just brought snacks and Gatorade powder. That's totally fine for a day trip, unless the day trip ends up getting into the third day.

Back when we were putting the roof on the Burton hut, we'd been eating off a pre-prepared menu. There were certain things that we had in large quantities. A five-gallon pail of oats, a bunch of Gatorade and eight giant tins of tuna that were 1.88 kg gross weight, 1.25 kg drained, each, for a total of 10 kg drained weight. We didn't quite get through the oatmeal (although I touched the bottom of the pail while digging out oats on the last day, and missed the Gatorade targets pretty badly, but we did finish the tuna, and I certainly pulled my weight there. Getting through the tuna, half the Gatorade and most of the oats required mixing tuna and Gatorade with almost everything. Anton had dry Gatorade powder on tuna. "It's good. It tastes like ceviche," he says. One breakfast Anton was calling everyone to eat with "Tuna-oats!" and he wasn't bluffing. Of course there was Gatorade oatmeal, known as oatorade, on a few instances. When we got the roof on, we opened up the champagne and to celebrate in the right spirit, I had champaignorade. As our three staples had all been mixed together as binary combinations, I felt I owed it to Anton's creative spirit to entertain the group by downing a heaping bowl of thick tuna-oatorade. There were no half-measures there, with enough gatorade powder to make a few litres, and a cup-and-half each of tuna and oats. It wasn't any better than you might be imagining.

Back to plodding along the highway at the outskirts of town, I'd gotten myself in a state where if a tuna-oatorade food truck were to show up and offer \$100 for a kilogram, I'd have taken it in a heartbeat.

I was getting splashed by the increasing pre-dawn traffic, so I got off the highway and onto Tantalus Rd. There was this glorious building, with an even more glorious covered entrance. It's still under construction in the Google photo, and the benches aren't installed yet, but you'll have to take my word that there are benches under it now. I sat down, out of the rain, and started looking for a cafe that

was open before dawn on Thanksgiving.

I closed my eyes for a second, and when I opened them, I was still seated, but the day had broken. My left hand was totally asleep from propping up my head and my phone was still in my right hand. Two ladies were looking at me, fairly concerned. I tried to explain things, but they clearly weren't Neve types. I offered them \$100 to take me up to Red Heather, and they said that they'd love to take the offer, but they had to work. I think they were telling the truth, as opposed to just making an excuse because I was a sketchball, because they had the keys to the commercial area of the building I was in front of, and entered it with a cart filled with janitorial supplies.

Whatever. I decided to walk to the 7/11, get some rolling crap, and crank out the remaining 16 km.

Fortunately, there was an Executive Plaza hotel with a restaurant between me and the 7/11. I'd seen the restaurant when I was googling earlier, but it was advertised as an oyster bar, and I couldn't imagine an oyster bar open early Thanksgiving morning. I hadn't realized that it was attached to a hotel, though. It was a big place, with fancy tables and fireplaces. I was the only customer there and it took a while to get noticed. The breakfast menu wasn't oysters. I ordered a bunch of stuff.

"Is someone else coming or do you want that on one plate?"

After a couple breakfasts, all the sugar packets and the little pitcher of cream for the coffee, I was feeling cranked to eleven again and walked to Red Heather. Around the Red Heather chain-up area, I got this amazing series of texts from Squamish Taxi.

Hi jeff

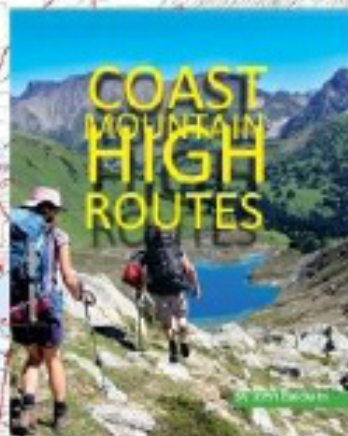
This is cab driver from squamish
green taxi

I m just confirming if you still
need ride from rubble creek.
Please confirm

Monday • 1:11 p.m.

I walked from 1130 pm to 7:30 am
and got to Squamish, so no, I
don't need a cab anymore.

I think it's pretty bold to ask someone who was outside if they still want a taxi ten hours and fifty minutes after they asked for one, because if they were to say yes, you'd likely have a pretty irate passenger. I'm also impressed that after my reply, they didn't respond with a "sorry bro, sucks to be you" or anything.



Coming spring 2025

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In Memoriam

-

10 Year Anniversary



10 YEARS



On Sunday, January 11th, 2015, Stephanie Grothe, Neil Mackenzie, and Elena Cernicka set out on an endeavour to climb the majestic Joffre Peak via its central couloir. Unfortunately, they did not come home. The friends had an indelible impact on the VOC community and their legacies extend to present day.

The VOC continues to honour the legacies of Stephanie and Neil. The Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant was awarded specially this year, the winning trip reflecting the magnitude of the 10th anniversary. Brew Hut is receiving a new name: the Stephanie Grothe Memorial Hut, in honour of Stephanie's beginner friendly values, and given that so many VOC beginner trips go to Brew Hut.

We hope to do them proud.

January 11th, 2025

10 years on...

We're still here, we still remember, we always will.

Signed,

Piotr Forysinski

Krista Forysinski

and many unnamed others

Section cover photo Manning Park *Matthew Drenth*

REFLECTIONS ON THE TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY

SAM VIAVANT

SHE DIED TEN YEARS AGO.

I didn't get any premonitions. There were no weird feelings, no sense of something being off. My life stayed normal until Monday morning the day after, when the radio on the bus mentioned that ice-climbers had died. I sat in the office not getting anything done, searching and searching and getting more worried. I talked to her friends and sent an email to her account, saying I hoped she was okay and we couldn't reach her and we were getting worried.

By 4:00 pm, the truth was out. Over the next hours, people learned one at a time and joined an impromptu gathering. By midnight we were a group of thirty, shocked and sad and numb, giving each-other whatever comfort we could. A trip soon afterward became a huge memorial that everyone joined, sharing tears and stories and whiskey until close to dawn. And in the months after, everyone continued to process in their own way. I wrote an essay saying that,

Nature isn't spiritual. The 'connection' we feel isn't an interaction of conscious minds. It's activity within our minds. When lightning knocks us off a ridge, it's not anger. When sun peaks through a storm, it's not kindness. When wind softens to a caress, it's not intimacy. When rocks fall where we just stood, it's not a warning. It's an example of how we could have died—but it's not intentional communication.

I went on to pay tribute to what mountains gave us:

In an age where sitting is the fastest way to travel, we move with our bodies. In an age of screens, we share time with people. In an age where we earn our living pressing buttons, our lives depend on physical competence. In an age of learning from marks on paper, we experience the world around us. Mountains let us live as Homo sapiens. As humans.

But I added that we shouldn't have illusions. Mountains were just really big rocks, inanimate matter that could never love us back or prevent our deaths. And then... life went on, as it had to. Gradually, I started to do more trips again. And then I took two years off and just traveled around, living super cheap, climbing, and hiking. I had already been planning to, but the knowledge that I could die any time made it urgent to just go. After I got back I had a third-life crisis wondering what to do with my life. There was stress and uncertainty, and then eventually I found my feet. And through all of the change and growth, the memories of my friend ebbed and flowed. Gradually, I thought of her less and less. After the sixth anniversary of her death, I wrote that:

I see the mountains we hiked and the cliffs we climbed, but the images are faded, like old photos weathered by sun. I hear some of the words she said—but mostly, our conversations have blurred. In place of sounds, there's only a vague sense of how I felt as we spoke together. And even the feeling isn't as fresh. There's a distance to the memories, something that dulls the pain of her loss; and something that dulls the joys we had together.

Worst of all, I'm realizing how much less often I think of her.

I didn't plan to move on. I didn't want to move on. It happened too slowly to notice, like the aging of an athlete or the growth of a tree. It happened over the two thousand, two hundred and nine days that have passed since she died. The distance grew a tiny bit with every morning I rushed to work. It grew as I filed my taxes and ran my errands and navigated the problems of life. And the distance grew when good things happened, too. It grew with the hugs of new friends and the skin of new lovers and the tastes of new foods. It grew little by little, too slow to see until now, when I started to write this essay.

To be honest, it feels disloyal to realize how much I have moved on. It feels disloyal even though I know she would have wanted that for me. I would have wanted the same for her, if it had been me who'd fallen down that mountain. I don't believe in life after death—and I would have wanted my friend to find peace in the new world where I wasn't there. I would have wanted new conversations to stretch her mind, and new friendships to stretch her heart. I would have wanted this—and if it had happened I would have sunk into her past, like rain settling into the ocean depths.

Today, writing about it again, some of the sadness is back, and some of the memories. But I also find myself thinking of the time I haven't appreciated. I got to have 10 years that she didn't. And... I've wasted too much of it. Being on social media when there wasn't anything important, because I didn't want to

turn the dopamine off. Agreeing to things I didn't want, because that was easier in the short term than saying no. Asking for advice when I knew what to do, because it was hard and I wanted a way out. The minutes turned into hours, and the hours into months. Before I knew it, I was 10 years older.

The point isn't to be hard on myself: I did a lot worth doing in those 10 years. Making mistakes is human. And trying too hard to optimize your life can make it miserable. It's not always a waste to sit alone on the couch, drinking tea, reading fast-food novels the third time. Sometimes that's what the soul needs.

But regret can be healthy if it leads to a better future. And what strikes me most is that I've wasted a lot of time. I could die tomorrow. And if I do, one of my last thoughts would be that I didn't live my final years the way I wanted. Going forward, I need to protect my time. Less screens and news and small talk. More hugs and fires and long, deep chats. Less late nights, reading when I've lost focus and I'm just trying not to go to bed. More early mornings, jogging into the sunrise, rippling with life.

And Steph—I don't believe there's still a "you" that can read this, and I know you didn't believe it either, but I know you would have agreed with the sentiment. You lived fully, more than almost anyone I knew. And if I'm wrong about death, if a part of you is still conscious... then sending a breath of wind from a ridgeline, and a flicker of flowers on a breeze. Sending a stir of sun from a glacier, and a glint of stars from the sky. And then, sending a hug, and smile, and a little trickle of tears.

You're still missed, and I hope you always will be.

TEAM BAD IDEA LOSES A MEMBER

REPRINT - WRITTEN 2015

ARTEM BYLINSKII

With the heaviest of hearts we bid farewell to Neil Mackenzie. He passed in a tragic mountaineering accident along with Stephanie Grothe and Elena Cernicka, falling, roped-up, down the entirety of the Central Couloir on Joffre Peak. The true circumstances of their demise will never be known and I will not speculate or draw lessons on their actions. I am sure their decisions were sound and that they proceeded with utmost safety.

I did not know Steph or Elena that well, but Neil was one of my closest friends. Oh, how crushing it is to say “was”. His audacious delusional optimism is unmatched and is what bonded us so tightly. I could not personally come up with an idea daft enough, that he would not get psyched. Whatever plan or objective came up, the more obscure, ridiculous, far-fetched the better, he would be the first person I called. In every discipline. In our way-too-short-a-time together we’d gone rock and ice climbing, mountaineering, resort shredding, backcountry touring, canyoning, rafting, and drinking.

No trip together was of the ordinary. That will stand out forever. Going climbing in the sport climbing mecca of Skaha, we’d seek out the only dirty slimy trad climbs. Attempting to climb the semi-frozen Shannon Falls to have them literally fall on us. Plodding through waist-deep powder up the Triple Couloirs on Dragontail peak, all the while embracing the whipping spindrift and scratchy tool placements. Being too cheap to pay for resort skiing at Lake Louise and skinning up and around the side to poach. Biting off way more than we could chew trying to summit Currie and ski the Pencil in a day, then having Neil flown out by helicopter and the “day” lasting close to 35 hours. Sending a canyon first descent, accidentally, on just his second time canyoning, in a rainstorm, no less. And on just his first time rafting, tumbling through Hell’s Gate on the Fraser River on a homemade cataraft, which to this day remains the greatest wildest water I’d ever seen. Not to mention celebrating Robbie Burns day by playing cricket on a frozen lake and thinking of drinking white gas once all the whisky ran out. Just to name a few.

I am deeply saddened by how little time we’d actually spent together. A trip every weekend and a weekly night crushing pints at the pub is swell over a

lifetime, but insignificant over only a year and a half. Even whilst dirtbagging it for a year on a different continent, we continued scheming. We had grand plans and grander ambitions. Everything from questionable weekend adventures, to buying a boat and starting a business together. And just like that – gone. In an instant it all collapsed.

I am at a loss for words. More so, I am in a very complicated state of denial. The tragedy happened the day I hiked in to climb in the remote valley of Cochamo and unplugged from the matrix. I came back 3 weeks later and was inundated with a barrage of emails of sorrow, sitting on my backpack in the middle of a shitty port of a shitty town in the middle of nowhere. All alone. I managed to call some friends back home on a shoddy internet connection, but by then they'd already had 3 weeks and the memorial to cope with the matter and drown away their sorrows. I was thus forced to catch up to their emotional state and missed the shock and grieving periods. Somehow, without having the chance to deal with it, cry in someone's arms about it, or being surrounded by it, doesn't make it real. Maybe it will only hit me that moment when I conceive another delirious plan and ring up my partner-in-crime to only hear a dialtone. I dread that moment.

People invariably suggest that "at least they died doing what they loved". That's bullshit. Let's not sugar coat it. They are gone and that sucks. No matter how you cut it. No matter which fucking angle you look at it. It SUCKS. I will never get to adventure with Neil again and that blows my wickets. But will I stop adventuring – not a chance. The loss of life brings our whole discipline into question. What's too far? What's too high? What is too much risk? What reward is worth that risk? Everyone has their own limits and this accident should not affect them. They did not cross any line or push any boundaries and the climb relatively benign. It was a freak accident. That does not shake the foundations of what we do. The longer you are in the game, the more people you know who no longer are.

I will carry on Neil's torch and proliferate his spirit. We coined ME-GA-STOKE together and I will forever more charge into battle with that cry. As our friends gathered at the Phelix hut to give our fallen comrades a proper send-off, I gave him my own by crashing through the waters of the Futelafeu. With every succeeding rapid, I yelled harder and louder. Every roaring wave brought back a different memory. The splashes hiding my tears. A strange emotional seesaw of two most opposing extremes. But mega-stoke will persevere, as they will in our hearts.

Adieu my friend, adieu. I'll see you in hell.



CLIMBING AND MOUNTAINEERING



ICE-SCAPE TO BRANDYWINE GLACIER: AN UNOFFICIAL GLACIER SCHOOL

STEFANIJA REKASIUS

May 4 - 5, 2024

PRE-GLACIER SCHOOL:

I'd like to start off this report with a huge thank you to Jeff Mottershead. Thanks for teaching us the ropes – literally and figuratively – on glacier-traversing and for babysitting 11 eager 'kids' for a weekend.

The first part of this trip started two weeks before the actual trip, with online lectures on glacier terrain, glacier formation, rescue skills, knots, and more. Since not everyone was able to make it to the first one, Jeff ran the lecture twice. It was super helpful in getting some basics down before reaching ice and snow.

The second part was dry-school at Trimble Park a week before the trip. Jeff generously donated some accessory cord so everyone could have at least two prusiks. We then took turns in partners prusiking up and down the ropes that were thrown over the swingset. We also worked on various knots including the clove hitch, munter, super munter, and munter mule. While we were there, some scouts came to the playground and said "cool" more than I can count. After everyone was comfortable with both the knots and prusiking, we started rescue practice. Jeff walked the first group of three through a demonstration and then the rest of us split into groups of three or four to practice "crevasse" rescues. In very rookie fashion, none of us brought headlamps, and ended up finishing the rescue practice in the rain and dark.

GLACIER SCHOOL DAY 1:

The morning of the trip, my car group had a bit of faff including Maiya Callister getting locked out of her car with her gear, stopping at VPO in Squamish for Tim Warkentin to pick up some skis, and getting a bit lost on the Brandywine FSR. (Side note, VPO Squamish is amazing and so much better than the Vancouver location!) After missing a turn on the FSR, we called Jeff to help us out but got back on track quickly. After all of the cars reached snow on the FSR, we parked and got ready to skin up. Some spots were a little more rocky than snowy, so we carried our skis or split boards a bit, but never long enough to A-frame (thank goodness).

Section cover photo Kananaskis Country *Evan Wong*

The skin up was pretty mellow and chill. We reached a creek crossing with not a lot of snow bridges so we walked a bit until we found one strong enough to get across. Shortly after we took a mini lunch break, with the most intriguing lunch being Kathleen Griffin's baguette, brie wheel, and sausage. We then continued with Jeff breaking trail (with his 110L pack, which was insane) until we got to a recent avalanche debris. Although this was glacier school, it was through the lens of ski touring, so we got to practice digging out a probe from the avalanche debris. Let's just say digging through debris is quite a bit harder than through fresh snow, so it was great practice. Then we headed up again and on a steeper part, Skye McDonald caused two mini loose wet avalanches, but he slid not even a metre.

After a bit more trekking uphill, we got to a great spot to practice rescues. We split into two groups of three and one group of five. I was in the group of five and Jeff walked us through how to complete a rescue using a snow bollard. Although we had practiced crevasse rescues earlier that week in the park, it was much different when we had our skis and packs on. As it was the first time we had done a rescue in a group of five and the first time in snow, it took us quite a bit of time, but we made it work.

The two groups of three then demonstrated how two rope groups can work together to help the person in the crevasse. Not only was it much simpler but also much faster than the other techniques we had tried. Then all of the groups split up to work on dead-man anchors. In my group, Marie-Océane Caillere went over the edge first, and although we completed the rescue much faster, she got so cold that Jeff gave her his puffy to keep her warm. Then it was my turn to jump off the edge. This was right after I reminded Jeff of the old TV ad for Life Alert, so when Tim Warkentin came to check on me, I used the slogan "Help I've fallen and can't get up." During this rescue, Jeff explained how to use pulleys in the 3:1 system.

After having practiced rescues for about five hours, we headed up to the glacier to make camp. We ended up doing some switchbacks and walking the ridge as it was getting dark. Then we set up camp, dug out our tent pads, and created wind walls. After a late dinner that was more like a midnight snack, everyone went to bed. At night it didn't go much below 0°C, and the winds were calm. I slept like a baby, probably due to being tired from all of the digging and not having Brock Commons dorm construction noise.

GLACIER SCHOOL DAY 2:

Although the group's wake up time was 8:00 am, Skye and Callum Abraham went out for a morning ride. We went back to camp just as everyone was waking up and as it started to snow! I never thought I'd see snow in May, so I was very excited. Breakfast was then cheffed up at the campsite.

After breakfast, Jeff taught us how to use snow pickets, and ice screws to create v-threads, but unfortunately the snow was too soft to hold any weight. We

then got to practice some self arresting, and for the sake of practicing we did so without our packs or skis. We dove down the slope sometimes feet-, sometimes head-first, and in various other orientations. Unfortunately, during one of Tim's self-arrests, he tore through his jacket.

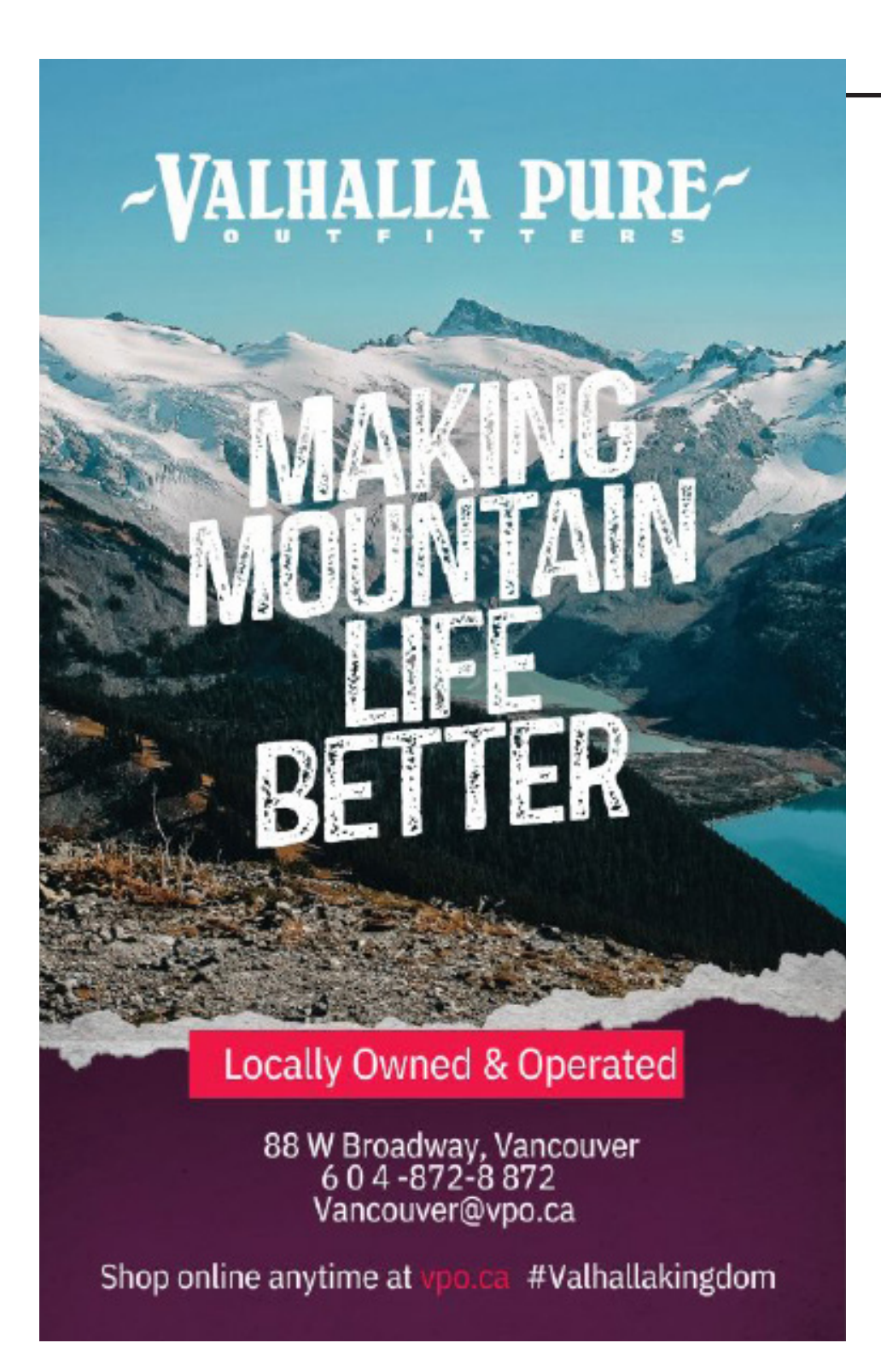
After doing that for a while, we went down to camp and split up into rope groups of two, three, and six to practice glacier travel. Jeff taught us how to switch leads in the group emphasising the need to minimise slack in the system, and how to make a blind man's cane out of our probe with the probe bag to make sure that we don't walk off a windlip or into a crevasse during white out conditions. Jeff then showed us some more cornices and explained how and where one should set up camp on a glacier. Being part of the group of three, Kathleen, Marie-Océane, and I were tasked with demonstrating finding where to set up camp and probing the entire area out. Spoiler alert: it's a lot of probing to make sure you're not sleeping on a crevasse.

When we got back to camp, we had lunch. James Kissane unfortunately forgot his but Jeff kindly offered up a sandwich. Jeff then surprised most of us by saying that we could be G1 assistant instructors in the fall if we got on a glacier at least one more time this summer. He then showed us two ways on how to do a seated belay while the other roped up member is skiing down or climbing up a steeper section. We would have liked to use this technique during a steeper descent that Jeff wanted to try, but because of white out conditions we all went down the more mellow line into the valley. Going down was a fun time, since when is skiing not fun? At one point, some of us couldn't see where the others in the group went, so we had to wait a couple minutes for it to clear up a bit before continuing.

Once everyone regrouped near to the bottom of the valley, we continued our descent over some more avalanche debris and some small hills. When we reached a flatter section, we transitioned back to skinning. Not long after, Maiya and I decided to not use skins since the snow was slushy and grippy enough to just climb up. This made the short downhill sections so much more fun without having to think about the added friction from our skins.

Since a VOC trip isn't complete without me falling, I of course hit a rock and fell on a rocky section near the cars. I wasn't the only one who fell on this trip, but that just makes it all the more fun. Unfortunately the snow had turned to rain part way down so when we reached the cars we were soaked, but everyone was still in a cheery mood. On the way down the FSR we saw a black bear chilling on the side of the road. It was the first time I saw a bear not in a zoo, which was kinda cool.

All in all, I feel as though this glacier school was a great introductory trip to glacier travel with skis and split boards. Another huge thanks to Jeff for instructing and answering all of our many, many questions!

The background of the entire advertisement is a scenic photograph of a mountain range. In the foreground, there's a rocky, scree-covered slope with patches of snow. In the mid-ground, a dense forest of evergreen trees covers a valley. In the background, majestic snow-capped mountain peaks rise against a clear, bright blue sky. The overall tone is crisp and vibrant, emphasizing the beauty of the mountain environment.

~VALHALLA PURE~
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Above Climbing “Screams from the Balcony” with the giant North Face of Mt. Temple looming behind. *Evan Wong*

Below I belay Noah as we eye the magical chandeliers of ice dangling from the cave wall. *Evan Wong*



BOW VALLEY BLUES

JULIAN LARSEN

June - August 2024

Canadian Rockies

Participants: Julian Larsen, Nick Ayers, Evan Wong, Noah Macdonald, Sonia Landwehr, Avery Soule

In the spring, I had heard whispers from Nick Ayers and Evan Wong about a big Rockies trip. Evan had a photoshoot for Monod Sports in Banff and had a list of objectives that he wanted to get done for this shoot. As summer approached and I failed to find a co-op job, I reached out to the two of them and decided I would join for this epic trip. In early June, Nick and I set off in his mostly functional Jetta for the long drive out to Calgary. Nick was convinced that his car would overheat so he demanded that we leave the heat on full the entire drive to cool off the engine. This meant that we had windows down the whole drive, and the noise was loud enough that listening to music was pointless. I couldn't drive stick, but I specifically trained the week before so that I could do at least some of the driving. In Revelstoke, we switched seats, and I started to drive around town. I asked Nick for directions, but he fumbled around and couldn't tell which way I was supposed to go to get back on the highway. After doing a couple of loops around the block, I stalled at a stop sign and Nick jumped out of the car immediately and said "Out! Out!" I was confused that he was so worried about a single stall, but if he wanted to drive the entire way, who was I to argue? Eventually, we made it to Evan's place and set up for the next two weeks.

The trip had many adventures, but as I'm not keen to write a novel, I will summarize a large chunk. Some of the days we climbed with other VOCers including Noah Macdonald, Sonia Landwehr, and de facto VOCer Avery Soule. We had a few good weather days spent sport climbing in Canmore and Lake Louise. Some other sunny days were spent on multi-pitch climbs including an easy romp up "Keel Haul Wall" on Kid Goat Buttress, a terrifying and sandbagged completion of "Direttissima" on Yamnuska, and a lovely ascent of "River Run" on Tunnel Mountain. Now onto the real debacles...

EARLY SEASON WOES

As it turns out, June is not always summer in the Rockies. This year was colder than the last few, and so lingering snow was about. More surprising, though, was the arrival of new snow, which not only blanketed the mountains but accumulated in the valley bottom including Canmore and Banff. When Nick and I originally drove through the Bow Valley, we recognized instantly that some of our objectives were too snowy to climb—and that was before we got an extra 15 cm. It was most of the second week that this unfortunate weather came, and the climbing attempts during this time were when the real Type Two Fun presented itself.

Some of the days it snowed, we tried to find overhanging cliffs where we could shelter from the weather. Nick and I ventured to Grassi Lakes where we were pelted by rain and snow all day, but some of the climbs were still dry. Unfortunately, it was still extremely cold and miserable, so we left less than satisfied. Another day, Evan joined us to go to Echo Canyon, where we all tried an excellent climb. However, it was once again freezing temperatures and we all moved too slow to get much done.

SCREAMS FROM THE BALCONY

After a successful day with good weather sport climbing at the back of Lake Louise (starting before sunrise), Evan had planned for Nick and I to do a multi-pitch trad climb called Screams from the Balcony. This necessitated another early wake-up, and we started the hike around sunrise. The hiking trail to Saddle Mountain turned quickly to snowpack, and we delicately tried to avoid post-holing. Shortly after, we split off from the trail to go towards the base of the climb, but staying on top of the snow became virtually impossible once off the main trail. Every second or third step would send us plunging past our knees, adding to the difficulty already presented by bushwhacking. The heinousness only increased until we found ourselves routinely chest-deep in snow, pulling branches to try and drag ourselves up the slope. None of us had adequately prepared for this, and I only had ankle socks with no gaiters. Everything was thoroughly soaked and to make it worse, we felt periodic sprinklings of rain.

Eventually, we made it to the base of a scree slope. We would have to traverse through the forest to the other side of the mountain to get to the base of the climb, and we unanimously agreed that would be terrible with so much snow and a large chance of precipitation. But instead of bailing, I suggested we go up the exposed scree which leads to the summit, and then rappel in to investigate and potentially climb the top pitch which was the hardest and best of the climb. Nick and Evan agreed, so up we went. At the top, Evan rigged a fixed line on a tree quite far back from the edge and rappelled into the top anchor to avoid traversing the loose scree along the wildly exposed cliff edge. After following Evan I rappelled to the base of the top pitch, and it was probably the most exposed rappel I have ever

done. Not only was it the 5th pitch on a climb, but it was a cliff-band high above the valley, and it was overhung. I realized that it was too overhung to reach the anchor, but luckily the blasting wind blew me around and I grabbed it while swinging into the wall.

The first half of the pitch was bolted due to its lack of cracks, but this did not feel like a sport climb by any means. The first bolt was a good 5 metres left and 5 metres up from the belay. The next one was another 6 m above that. Nick had originally requested to lead the pitch but after seeing the predicament, he happily gave it to me. When he pulled the rope, the end fell down at least 30 m and cracked like a whip. The sound was so loud that Nick and I thought there had been rockfall. When we pulled the rope up we saw that the end had exploded, so we had to switch which side we were leading on. While we fuffed with the rope, god rays emerged from the storm clouds above us shining directly on Mount Temple. Evan called to us urgently, "CLIMB! What are you doing!?". Unfortunately, we missed the perfect photo moment and gloomy views prevailed again. Also unfortunate was that the climbing was 5.11 immediately off the belay, which worried me as I didn't want to take a factor 2 fall. I climbed shakily and over-gripped past the first two bolts, freaking out a bit over the exposure as cold wind blasted me from the side. The second bolt was just above a roof, and with the fear building up I almost panicked. While clinging to the bottom of the roof, I told myself that I had to lock in. There was no bailing. I was already run-out. I just had to continue. After that, I clipped the second bolt and it was amazing and fun climbing to the top, including a couple more small roofs and an amazing finger crack in the trad gear section. Evan was disappointed that his rope didn't go as far down as he would've liked for his shots, but he still got some absolutely amazing photos.

Just as I topped out it started to snow. Nick and Evan were both shaking uncontrollably from the cold (I had climbed in three jackets). While I was stoked, Nick had to follow in the midst of a small blizzard, and frequent stops were needed to warm up his hands. We eventually all made it back to the top of the mountain where we had left our bags and started to pack up so we could get off the mountain before the weather worsened.

As we were packing, we spotted a tick... then another... and another. Soon we were finding them everywhere, so we stopped our packing and dumped everything out again. We stripped down in the freezing wind to do tick checks on our bodies and then painstakingly checked every piece of gear before putting it into our bags. We had to stop and repeat this while holding the bags in the air, because we found ticks crawling up the sides of the bags on the first attempt. This whole situation was a bit of a nightmare; we had encountered a few ticks in the Rockies, but this was next level.

After thorough checks, we started booking it off the mountain. Unfortunately, the snow had gotten even softer throughout the day despite being freezing

cold, and we started trudging through waist-deep snow as we traversed a slope that we thought might get us down easier. During this time we got pounded by wind and snow as storm clouds rolled in. When my pants had become completely soaked, my shoes sloshing with water, and my feet numb, I decided that it would be safer to just book it down the slope and be back in the trees than traverse in these terrible conditions. I turned and attempted to run downhill, resulting in basically a slow-moving small wet-loose avalanche that I rode to the bottom. It was not ideal, but better than frostbite and getting stuck in even more exposed terrain. From there we trudged through slightly less deep snow before making it back to the car. We splayed our gear out under a tree near the parking lot to do a final tick check, as Lake Louise tourists looked on at us with confusion. After another bodily tick check in the washroom stalls, we were back in the car and free from misery.

GRAVITATIONAL WAVES

On the last day Evan was free, he and I knew we had to do something. The weather forecast was terrible and it had snowed overnight. Regardless, we intended to attempt another multi-pitch on Mount Cory called Gravitational Waves. That morning Canmore was shrouded in clouds and blanketed in wet melting snow. Evan and I were there to pick up a bike which we would use to get to the base of the approach for our climb near Banff (yes, it was a convoluted approach). In Banff, we suffered through the cold bike ride and I put my hands in my pockets as much as possible; my gloves were still wet from previous misadventures.

After a fairly long bike and a lot of searching around, we “found” the trail. By this I mean we found a reasonable way to get through the forest and up the mountain until a bit of a path became visible. As we gained elevation up the steep slopes, the amount of fresh snow on the ground began to increase, and the trees were raining down melt water constantly. We started to break through the fog and caught inspiring glimpses of the limestone towers surrounding us, as well as the picturesque valley below. The scrambling was difficult with snow coating the holds, but we made it most of the way up, spotting a large cave aptly named the “hole in the wall”. I ran up to check it out while Evan decided to ignore it and start up the next bit of scrambling. The cave was super cool and had good photo opportunities, so I asked Evan to join me. That was easier said than done as Evan realized down-climbing this particular scramble was very difficult, but with some effort, he made it to the cave as well.

After a while, we got our shots and then quested back up the scramble. After passing a piton and noticing it only got harder, we decided this was likely not a good way, and in retrospect might have been the lower pitch of a 5.7 route. We slowly down-climbed the wet, snowy slab and traversed further to try a different scramble option. This one was similarly difficult, but with trees every couple of metres to mantle over and reset. We made a ledge traverse until the route was in

sight, but at this point, we were far behind schedule and ominous clouds were on the horizon. Neither Evan nor I wanted to end up in a situation where we would need to go down the scramble if it started raining, so we thought we might try to top out on a nearby easy-looking arete to make it onto the regular summit trail. This arete turned out to be the worst rock I've ever climbed. After placing one piece of questionable pro, and having flakes buckle underneath my weight, we decided it was time to bail. We rapped off a tree into a gulley to avoid the wet upper "scramble", and then made our way back to Calgary...

THE ULTIMATE REDEEMER

After our colossal failure in Lake Louise, Noah and I decided the only way I could salvage this trip was with an ascent of the Greenwood-Jones on the North Face of Mount Temple. This massive route goes up a towering 1500 m face on the 11th highest peak in the Canadian Rockies. Completing this monster would be the main highlight of the summer if we could only get a good weather window. Unfortunately, a steady stream of afternoon thunderstorms hammered the mountains nearly every day. We eyed up Noah's birthday as our best shot at sending the route. The day before we decided we needed to celebrate his birthday a bit more traditionally, so we had a barbecue. The only difference was that this barbecue would be part way up the infamous Mount Yamnuska on a large ledge called Barbecue Ledge (the name gave us our inspiration). Noah and I climbed up an easy route with absurdly heavy packs carrying an abundance of food, beverages, and of course a barbecue. Evan carried up another heavy pack around the backside of the mountain with gear to rig a rappel and take some photos of our celebration. After an amazingly successful barbecue (and a confused couple of guys who climbed past us), we were excited for our big climb the next day. Moments after we started driving towards Mount Temple, I began checking the updated forecasts: worse, same, worse, terrible. Noah pulled the car over to confirm, and after some deliberation, we decided not to climb atop the highest peak in the area during thunderstorms. Another bail for the books...

NOT QUITE A FAILURE

On the drive back we considered our options and decided on another huge climb whose name doesn't convey its menace: Fluffy Goat Butt Face. This 21 pitch 5.11c sport multi-pitch is not as big or committing as Temple, but it is nonetheless a huge undertaking. We drove one hour from Calgary, and then lightly bushwhacked for three hours in the dark to reach the base. By this point, we were soaked by the dew on the tall grass, and both of us had gotten lackluster sleep. Noah in particular had gotten next to nothing, so he napped for 30 minutes on the scree before we roped up. The first four pitches were quick and easy until we hit the first 5.11. Much of the climbing was cryptic and technical face climbing on small holds, which I thorough-

ly enjoy, but is not particularly conducive to fast climbing. Most belays were hanging, and our feet quickly began to suffer. Noah had chosen tighter shoes, and with his existing toenail injuries, it was becoming very difficult to climb. Due to this I took all of the harder leads as we quested up the massive and exposed buttress. The rock was mostly “good” quality, but keep in mind, this is the Rockies, where good quality means only half the holds break. On a 5.11 roof crux, I took a whipper after my hand came off the wall holding a 30-pound block. Climbing an alternate way on the second attempt I made it past (can it count as an onsight still?). By 3:00 pm we had made it to the base of pitch 14, where Noah took another nap on a small ledge. After he woke up, we decided to bail. Noah was certainly not feeling the best, and we still had a third of the climb left. We estimated if we tried to continue it would be a 20+ hour day—something that we had predicted from the start—but that I didn’t feel like putting Noah through in this state, on his birthday. We rappelled down and made our way back down the indistinct and overgrown path to the car to cap off a slightly successful day. Evan laughed that we had another bail to add to the list, but given that we had 13 pitches of successful and fun climbing, I think it was not quite a failure.

ICE CLIMBING IN AUGUST

One more good day was really needed to make this trip a success, so Noah took Evan and I out to Booming Ice Chasm. This cave maintains a temperature of -2°C year-round, making it accumulate and retain ice flows even in August. Any trip involving Evan is bound to revolve around a photoshoot, and that means some serious extra shenanigans. In this case, it was carrying a huge strobe light and doing all sorts of interesting rigging.

We got up early in the morning and made the long drive out. After several hours on the highway, we pulled off the pavement and Noah opened a “gate” that was more like disassembling the fence. We made a surprising distance on the road in my Mitsubishi Lancer, before continuing the trek on foot. We bashed straight up the mountain and traversed the cliffs to start gearing up at the entrance of the cave. Putting on winter layers in the summer sun is an interesting experience, to say the least. Noah went first to rig ropes and anchors. We had 210 m of rope that we hauled up (yes, our packs were HEAVY, especially Evan with his camera equipment). All the rope was fixed from top to bottom so we would have an escape option if something went wrong. The entrance to the ice cave begins with a tight constriction on ice-coated rock. When you emerge into the cave, sound echoes around the glittering icy walls booming as it intensifies (hence the name). Bulges of perfectly smooth and solid ice undulated down the chasm and about halfway down, a large chandeliered flow emerged from the wall to the side. The whole environment was quite spectacular, and we were all stoked to do some ice climbing. A lot of faff with the strobe light occurred but eventually, we climbed about halfway

up the cave to where the vertical ice fall was. Evan's plan was to put the strobe behind the ice fall so it would glow in the photos. I set it up almost inside the hollow pillar as Noah set up for a lead shot. When Evan triggered the strobe, my entire field of view lit up with the power of the sun and blinded me. "HOLY SHIT!" Evan exclaimed as he looked at his camera. I went down to belay Noah, and we acquired the money shots. After we were satisfied with the photos, we climbed out in celebration. Finally, a true success.

ANTI-REDEMPTION

I was going to leave the next morning, but Noah and Evan convinced me to stay a couple more days because of promising weather. A few days later I found myself about 12 km from the car in complete darkness. While stashing gear, Noah and I heard the huge thunderous noise of a falling serac which seemed to shake the earth. Luckily, our climb was off to the side of the fall zone. We started bashing up some heinous scree on a moraine, aiming in the direction we thought the climb was based on yesterday's view. After a while we wondered why we hadn't gotten to the base yet, until suddenly the wall appeared just metres in front of us. The climb was supposed to be just left of a small waterfall, and we could see one just beside us. We tried to match it to the topo, but had difficulties. After about 30 minutes of looking around we pondered, "If this isn't the right waterfall, which one is it?" I looked at the photo of the face from the previous night and saw a prominent waterfall in the center of the face right below the seracs. Noah and I panicked at the thought that we were below the seracs, and began to run away as fast as possible. Once sufficiently far away, Noah mentioned that the waterfall was likely the "spiciest" water we've ever drank. We decided it was best to wait for dawn so we could see an outline of the mountain before trying to search any further. When that moment came, we realized we had been right all along, and we were never in danger. We went back to our initial waterfall and looked at the photo again. The reason we couldn't find the corner beside the waterfall was because the waterfall had grown to engulf the entire pitch. Noah tried climbing further left but the slick quartzite made it look like he was trying to climb on soap, and he eventually bailed on the attempt. With the sun fully rising at this point, we no longer had any margin of time. That, along with the possibility of other pitches being this wet made us decide on an emotionally destructive bail. After making it to the mountain with good weather, neither of us had predicted another bail until right before it happened. We turned around and marched our heavy gear back to the car. Sometimes trips don't end on a high note.

CONCLUSION

All in all, this was still a great experience, but it clearly had at least as many downfalls as it did successes. Sometimes things are out of your hands. In an alternate universe, I had an incredible time in the Bugaboos, climbed Mount Temple, and

got back to Vancouver in time for a few more objectives to cap off the summer. I'm sure lots of others have had unexpected injuries, weather, etc. get in the way of a dream itinerary too. The best you can do is make the best of it and hope for better next time. I wrote most of this report mid-trip, while the events happened. The initial name was supposed to be "Rockies Redemption", and it often looked like it might stay so, but in the end, I decided to go with Noah's suggestion of "Bow Valley Blues". Someday I hope to get a real "Rockies Redemption", so one day, while a VOCer is reading this by a cozy hut wood stove, they'll have to check the archives to find the sequel...

Below Climbing above Lake Louise. *Evan Wong*



YAMOPHILIA

NOAH MACDONALD

YAMOPHILIA (NOUN)

A love of or obsession with the mountain officially known as Mount Laurie (better known as Mount Yamnuska: a name borrowed from the Stoney Nakoda name *Îyâmnathka*, meaning “flat-faced mountain”).



YAMNUSKA (abbreviated as “Yam”) is the birthplace of Canadian traditional climbing and the great training grounds where most Rockies climbers cut their teeth and hone their craft. It is the first mountain that greets you on your right as you drive into the Rockies from Calgary. A motorist might be forgiven for not thinking much of the peak; it isn’t particularly tall, and its face is dwarfed by the much larger cliffs to its Southwest (on Goat Mountain).

However, Yamnuska’s nearly 3-kilometre-wide cliff face boasts a collection of over 200 climbs ranging in difficulty from low-fifth to 5.14b. There are slab climbs, cracks, and burly overhangs. Some lines are pure choss, while other routes are solid limestone worthy of a top-tier French sport crag. It is a paradise that offers anything a trad climber might want, provided they are willing to warm up with 500 metres of elevation gain to reach the base of the cliffs.

This article is my love letter to Yamnuska. In telling the stories of some of my favourite (and most interesting) climbs on the mountain, I hope to inspire others to test their nerves on these storied routes. At the very least, I hope to pass on some key lessons from my time on Yam and tell some entertaining stories in the process. I don't claim that this selection of routes or experiences is representative of a typical experience on Yam; I have climbed many routes on the mountain that produced much less interesting stories. While I love climbing routes where nothing of interest happens and everything goes smoothly, it makes for a boring story. Instead, this is a collection of some of my more memorable moments on the mountain.

I recognize that not everyone will be familiar with the climbing jargon commonly used when discussing climbing on Yam. Here is a glossary of key terms:

Choss: Loose or poor-quality rock that is prone to breaking.

Fixed Gear: Permanently installed protection, such as bolts or pitons. In other words, all protection except that which you place yourself.

Runout (*noun*): A section of a climb where protection is sparse or non-existent, increasing the risk of a long or dangerous fall.

Runout (*adjective, describing a route/pitch*): Offers few (good) gear placements for protection.

PG13 / R / X: Protection ratings added to the grade of the climb indicating how runout/dangerous it is:

PG13: Sparse or difficult-to-place protection, with sections where a fall would likely cause injury. The typical Yam route is PG13 by most other areas' standards. PG13 on Yam denotes a slightly higher degree of risk than you might expect.

R: Very sparse protection, with the potential for dangerous falls that could cause severe injury or death.

X: No trustworthy gear to stop a fall, and possibly compromised anchors. Soloing, but with a rope.

Piton: A metal spike hammered into cracks in the rock as protection. The advent of "clean climbing" ethics and modern gear saw the elimination of pitons as a way of protecting popular routes. However, pitons still have their niche. Alpine climbers (and Yam climbers) continue to use them to protect routes that might otherwise be too difficult to protect. Current norms around piton use are complicated; Yam climbers might get angry if someone used pitons on a popular route and thereby damaged the rock, but it is generally accepted that climbers can use pitons on dangerous and rarely-travelled routes like *Freak Out*.

Sandbag: A climb rated easier than its actual difficulty (e.g. a route designated 5.8 that feels more like a 5.10a).

DIRETTISSIMA [5.8+ PG13]

ROUND 1: The first time I tried this route, we were rained off the wall. A storm that had not been in the forecast snuck up on us from the other side of the mountain. We had no time to react; we only realized we were caught in a rainstorm once the first drops hit. Three pitches up, we needed to bail. By the time we reached the ground, the route had turned into a flowing waterfall despite the mild nature of the storm.

Key Lesson: The sum of many drops of water is a waterfall. Gully features are especially terrible in storms; light precip can be funnelled by terrain to create much stronger flows than the volume of rain would lead you to expect.

ROUND 2: Eager to try again, I volunteered to guide a less experienced friend up the climb by leading every pitch. The climb went smoothly and felt substantially easier than my previous attempt. The gear on pitch 1 was easier to find, and I felt more comfortable running it out when needed (either to mitigate rope drag or because there simply was no good protection). We dispatched the climb easily enough, but noted that it felt much harder than 5.8. This isn't necessarily a bad thing; some of the moves on the upper pitches were amazingly fun for the grade. In my view, the most difficult moves on the route were hard specifically because the route was so polished. The passage of generations of climbers has made several sections incredibly slick and difficult to climb. The 5.8+ might have been assigned because the climbing is far more gymnastic in the cruxes than most other 5.8s, but the route was also becoming more difficult over time.

Key Lesson: Climbers often talk about how grades are “subjective.” I think they should also talk about how grades are dynamic. Routes graded long ago, especially in the Rockies where the limestone can easily change through polish or rockfall, may become harder or easier with time. Do not be overly trusting of guidebooks or commonly assigned grades! Go into every route expecting the unexpected, and knowing that a Yam “5.8” may not present the same experience as a 5.8 in Squamish.

ROUND 3: The original 34 climbs in the first Yamnuska guidebook are called the “Kallen 34.” Most Yamophiles attempt to complete the list as a tour of the classic lines on the wall. One such route is a variant of Direttissima called “Shuftee” — after climbing the bulk of Direttissima, Shuftee splits out left in the upper pitches to finish on the other side of the summit.

Julian Larsen and Nick Ayers—two other VOCers—were visiting the Bow Valley for a few weeks and were eager to climb on Yam. I was eager to climb Shuftee while the beta for Direttissima was fresh in my mind. I persuaded them to join me (having failed to talk them into climbing the much scarier route, “Balrog”) and we

set off back towards the base of Direttissima.

We moved quickly on the approach to the base of the wall, shaving 20 minutes off my previous time. At the base, Julian volunteered to lead Pitch 1. Unfortunately, I did not notice that he had declined to put all of the quickdraws on his harness. He later explained that he had assumed he would not need literally all of them (I had insisted on bringing a rather large number, for good reason). He soon regretted this decision as he ran out of draws midway through the pitch. Since the upper portion of the pitch protects with pitons (with few good cam placements), he found himself severely run out despite the presence of fixed gear that he otherwise would have been able to clip.

45 long minutes after starting, he was at the top. Nick and I seconded the pitch. Unfortunately, Nick had aggressively stuffed gear into Julian's backpack at the base of the climb, which caused Julian's 3-litre water bladder to burst. Aside from my 1 litre Nalgene, this was all the water the two had brought. Nick got soaked, as did our jackets. From a stance a few metres up the pitch, he frantically asked to be lowered back down to the ground, where he tried to chug the remaining water as it soaked our gear even more.

Key Lesson: Water bladders can explode. Since water is important, you ought to be careful of how you pack bladders if you elect to bring one instead of a Nalgene (or other solid water bottle). Dehydration should be a major concern on climbs where no water is available on-route and where bailing may take time.

I quickly dispatched the second pitch before turning the sharp end over to Nick. His pitch was only 5.6, but involved difficult route-finding (there are three possible variants to the pitch) and a significant amount of loose rock. He gingerly made his way up the long pitch in a 45-minute long lead. When we joined him at the anchor, both he and Julian agreed that I should dispatch the remainder of the leads to get us to the top faster. They are both strong climbers, but Yamnuska is hard to manage if you are not accustomed to the tricky gear and suspect rock. Climbing both safely and efficiently requires significant mileage on Rockies-style limestone trad routes, regardless of pure climbing ability. Without our water, we needed to be on the wall for the shortest possible duration. Hence, I would lead. Our lack of water also ruled out climbing Shuftee. It was harder, sketchier, and unknown to me. In contrast, Direttissima was a sure-fire line as I had climbed it merely days prior. The responsible decision was obvious, so we changed our line.

Key Lesson: When things go wrong, be adaptable. Getting married to the idea of a single route or style of climbing introduces an element of risk. Being willing to change objectives or modify existing plans will help keep you safe.

The rest of the climbing went smoothly, and we topped out before long. Our decision to bail on Shuftee (and to refrain from attempting Balrog altogether) had been the right one; an unforecasted thunderstorm hit as we finished the descent hike. Our relative speed also meant that we made it back to the car without anyone suffering from significant dehydration. I dropped them back at Evan Wong's grandfather's house in Calgary (where they had been staying for the duration of their trip to the Rockies), and bid them farewell. Later, Evan reported that he came home to the two of them "absolutely destroyed on my grandpa's couches." When asked what had happened, they replied, "Noah and Yam happened." Perhaps next time I will offer to slow down on the approach.

THE TONGUE (LEFT SIDE) [5.9] + WINDY SLABS (UPPER VARIATION) [5.7R/X]

ROUND 1: Seton Kriese (a now-graduated former VOCer) and I first investigated The Tongue on June 9th, 2024. The first piece of protection on the first pitch looked to be an old piton alarmingly high off the ground. Even more concerning, no gear placements above were obvious from the ground; committing to the first pitch would require delicate face climbing, clipping an ancient piton, then continuing up a loose corner without gear into the unknown. The grade of the pitch was supposedly 5.9. I think it may win an award for one of the most sandbagged 5.9 pitches on Yam. After a few false starts where I started up the pitch before downclimbing back to the ground, I lost my nerve and walked away. Our backup climb was The Toe—another one of the rare Yam routes that ascends a pinnacle feature somewhere on the face instead of continuing to the top. While The Toe is an excellent climb, I will leave our ascent of it out of this trip report for the sake of brevity.

That night, I promised revenge on the pitch. Resolve is easily found in the comfort of home, far away from the visceral emotions that dance in your stomach while you navigate a potentially-lethal lead. With a clear head I knew I could lead the pitch, and that my problem had been a mismatch between my expectations and the demands of the lead. I was expecting standard Yam 5.9, and not the 5.9+R that had been presented, which in turn meant that I had failed to get into the necessary headspace to prevent the fear from creeping in. And of course, fear is the mind-killer; I find recovering from being scared more difficult than I find preventing myself from feeling fear in the first place.

ROUND 2: Austin Goodine was keen to give the route a try. But when we got to the base of it, I realized I could not fulfill my promise to him—or myself—to dispatch the first pitch. I had forgotten my climbing shoes in the car and would need to climb in my trail runners. Even in climbing shoes, the pitch looked scary. In running shoes I would stand no chance on lead.

Luckily, Austin is a strong and bold climber, and he volunteered to take the first pitch without complaint. He danced his way up the face and clipped the

piton, before firing up another few moves. A 0.75 cam placement behind a block served as the second piece of pro. After placing it, he went to move off of the block behind which the cam was placed. Unluckily, the block exploded, and the cam ripped as he fell. Austin came to a stop inches from the ground, held up by the only gear remaining in the wall: the single fixed piton. I didn't need to lower him for him to stand up; by switching from a seated to an upright position, he was already touching the ground.

"Getting back on the horse" is not an easy thing to do. I would have bailed at this point. But Austin is tough as nails. He expressed surprise at the fall; it was his first fall on Yam despite being an experienced Yamophile himself (Yamnuska has a "no falls" ethic on lower-grade gear routes, given the often questionable protection). But despite this, he had no trouble getting back on the climb and sending the pitch on his second go.

Key Lesson: Within reason, "getting back on the horse" and dispatching a lead, even after a terrible fall, is a good way to develop mental resilience. This must be consciously balanced against safety considerations; developing mental resilience is critical to bold climbing, but there is such a thing as being too bold and crossing the line.

The rest of the climb was less memorable. I led pitch two in a nail-biting lead, made challenging only by my inadequate footwear. Austin brought us up most of pitch three, building an anchor right below the summit tower. I finished off the route by leading the off-width section of the final pitch.

We still had plenty of time left in the day. Since The Tongue does not reach the top of Yam (and instead climbs a tower on the side of the face), our original plan had been to rappel the top pitch of the line and finish climbing up Yam proper via Extender (5.11a). Unfortunately, my shoe-snafu made that an unlikely proposition; climbing 5.11a trad in trail runners is not yet in my range of comfort. Instead, we decided to rappel and hike over to the West end to climb an easy classic that neither of us had yet been on: Windy Slabs.

We rappelled down the right side of the tower. To my dismay, the rappel was awful; some of the anchors are poorly placed, and the amount of rockfall generated by pulling the rope was shocking. Reaching the ground was a relief. However, our peace did not last for long. I never would have expected it, but the scariest moments of the day were yet to come.

Windy Slabs by the standard variation is a ramblly, traversing 5.6. It is not a particularly choiceworthy route, though it has a certain mountaineering-type quality about it that makes it pleasant nonetheless. We thought that the beta would be obvious; follow the slabs up and left towards the BBQ Ledge (a feature that marks the top). Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately for purposes of making the climb interesting), Austin accidentally went questing off into a variation of the line

that offers substantially less gear. After a slightly longer-than-expected lead, it was my turn for the sharp end. I set off up prickly limestone slabs, which soon turned into a steep and chossy corner. By the time I finished the 60-metre pitch, I had placed perhaps two pieces, neither of which were particularly inspiring. I was still climbing in my trail runners, which had made the experience a rather horrifying one. That said, I had a great deal of fun (in a twisted type-2 sense of the word “fun”). I would recommend this variation to Windy Slabs if you want to make the most of the line.

Key Lesson: An easy grade does not make for an easy route. This is especially true of route-finding in the alpine; the line between climbing a straightforward 5.6 and creating a core memory on a spicy lead is often razor-thin.

FORBIDDEN CORNER [5.9+ R / 5.10C VARIATION]

I met up with Evan after he finished a sunrise trail run. Our route of choice—Red Shirt—appeared wet when viewed from the parking lot. We therefore switched plans to our backup route: Forbidden Corner. I had already climbed it once during the summer of 2023, and the route had gone remarkably well. The route was the perfect next step on Yam for Evan. At this point, his only other route on the mountain at this point was C-Route: a fun 3-pitch climb on the East end of Yam that we had climbed not long before.

We soloed the first half of pitch one, and roped up on a large ledge. I quickly dispatched the remainder of the pitch and brought Evan up. I then set up on pitch two. The previous time I climbed the route, I had taken the 5.10c sport-bolted alternative line, which seemed more appealing. This time, I wanted to sort out the 5.8 corner. Unfortunately, I couldn’t make heads or tails of the terrain; the closest thing to a 5.8 involved pulling an unprotectable boulder problem above a ledge that would hurt to land on (read: it may be lethal). I chickened out and backed off, offering the sport 5.10c pitch to Evan.

Below Climbing through a waterfall on the upper half of the route. *Evan Wong*





Above Celebrating after a marathon 16 hours on the wall. *Evan Wong*

Here, I fucked up. I forgot just how much distance there was between the final bolt and the next anchor; the pitch was very much mixed. But I remembered it primarily as a sport-bolted pitch. Evan therefore declined to take any trad gear before he set off up the pitch. Before he knew it, he was wildly run out (read: 7 metres above the last bolt, with another 10 metres to where we suspected there might be an anchor). I radioed up to him that, per the topo, there ought to be an intermediate piton anchor. Unfortunately, no such anchor existed.

Key Lesson: A good chunk of the topos in the Yamnuska guidebook are flat-out wrong. Pitch distances are often inaccurate, and freeze-thaw cycles, climber traffic, and retro-bolting efforts mean that fixed pitons and bolts are not always where you expect them.

Luckily, half ropes offer many benefits. Among their advantages is that you can untie from one, then lower the end back to your belayer to receive a care package of cams. After pulling off this tenuous rescue operation, Evan tied back into the second rope and set off—properly equipped—to finish the pitch. Whoops: sorry for the gear beta sandbag, Evan!

Key Lesson: If you learn to use them, half ropes are often superior to single ropes. Longer rappels, reduced rope drag, redundancy in case of ropes cutting, lower fall forces, and usefulness for rope rescue techniques all count strongly in their favour. I have “rescued” a leader by having them repurpose one of the ropes as a tagline to retrieve crucial gear (e.g. dropped/forgotten gear) multiple times now. Forbidden Corner is just one example.

The subsequent pitches up the “forbidden corner” feature make for blissful climbing. But before long, the beautiful corner comes to an end with an unlikely right-

ward traverse. Here, my memory failed me, and I couldn't remember how far to continue before traversing out to the right. We contemplated one possible sequence, but rejected it due to difficulty; the moves seemed closer to 5.11 than 5.9+. Luckily, Evan dared to push upwards into a loose section of the corner, and found the traverse above it.

Soon after came the portion of the route that gives it the "R" grade designation. A blank limestone slab offers no real protection for 20 metres. After clipping an old piton at the top, you traverse far left before hauling into a corner system that feels much harder than the stated 5.6 grade before reaching an anchor. Overall, it was one of my most enjoyable leads of the day.

Any happiness we may have had from climbing runout 5.6 was soon quashed when we noticed an unforecasted storm system moving in. I quickly dispatched the crux pitch on lead before the rain began, but Evan was not so lucky. A mix of water and graupel started to pelt him as he traversed into the section with the hardest moves, causing him to struggle. By the time he made it up the pitch, we were both fairly exhausted, and the route had become problematically wet.

We were one pitch from the top, but an actively flowing stream of water now covered the way. I did not feel like climbing up a 5.7 flowing with water, so I improvised an escape to the right. I swore the moves felt like runout 5.11a on lead, but that may have been a product of fear and fatigue; Evan dispatched them relatively easily on top rope and repudiated my claimed grade. Regardless, the route was complete. In repeating a climb I had already dispatched with ease, I had managed to find myself in a mild epic.

Key Lesson: Conditions matter, and mistakes compound. Familiarity is not sufficient to prevent things from going wrong: don't get complacent.

DREAMBED [5.11B]

Instead of giving up on Yamnuska after our less-than-stellar day on Forbidden Corner, Evan set his sights on a grander route: Dreambed. As a photographer, his vision was to shoot someone leading each of the noteworthy pitches on the route top-down. This would require him to lead each crux, then untie from the ropes and have one of the other climbers lead the pitch as well. It was an ambitious plan. I roped Seton Kriesse into our scheme, and off we set.

ROUND 1: I was to lead the first pitch: an easy 5.10a. For whatever reason, the pitch felt impossible to me. I flailed for much longer than I care to admit before giving up three-quarters of the way up the pitch. We were off to a terrible start.

Evan took the lead in my stead and quickly got us to the top of the first pitch. I tied in again for the second pitch (and technical crux). While the lower climbing felt better, I noticed that my climbing was far from precise. My poor

climbing caused me to whip at the crux when I misplaced my hand on a key hold. As I fell, a sharp bit of rock on the side of the hold cut through the skin on my thumb. I asked to be lowered down to dress the cut, as I would not be climbing 5.11b while slipping on my own blood.

Again, Evan took over leading, with Seton belaying him (while I rappelled down and attempted to extricate a yellow totem from pitch 1 that I had gotten stuck on my lead). In an impressive performance, Evan dispatched the pitch. Meanwhile, I began to vomit. The mystery as to why I was climbing so poorly had been revealed: I was sick. I returned to the ground and radioed up to the others that we were calling it there. We left that day without the send (and without the cam).

ROUND 2: The following weekend, we were back with a vengeance. I dispatched the first pitch easily. Evan led the second pitch, then dropped the rope for me to lead it as well. The scariest moment came after the crux, where you're looking at a large swinging fall into a corner if you were to mess up the last difficult move before easier terrain. That Evan climbed this pitch with a backpack full of camera gear and a static line boggles my mind.

Pitch three was purely my lead. I made a mistake in sequence and ended up taking a small whip. A second try brought me to the top. Evan and Seton both fell seconding, making me feel a bit better about my mistake. The sequence is slightly misleading when reading it from below, but relatively easy when you figure it out.

Pitch four was supposed to be my lead as well, but I couldn't convince myself to commit to the starting moves, since it appeared to risk an ankle-breaking ledge fall if you made a mistake, and I could not tell if I was on-route. Evan offered to give it a go, and found a better line further to the left; good thing I didn't commit to the line I had been staring at! In another wildly impressive lead, Evan sent the pitch.

Seton took over for the traverse-y 5th pitch, offering Evan and I a chance to rest. Evan then took over again for pitch six, before dropping the rope for me to lead as well. This pitch contained some truly remarkable climbing on solid limestone, and in my view is one of the best pitches I have climbed on Yam.

Seton led pitch seven as well, which offered surprisingly tricky moves for the grade it received (5.9). This again let us recover for pitch seven, where our double-lead strategy saw both Evan and I leading the glorious final pitch to the top. With all the photography shenanigans, the climb stretched out for a shockingly long time. In the end, we took a full 16 hours car-to-car. Hopefully, we will one day return to put down the line clean (with no falls) in a fraction of the time.

Key Lesson: Photography sometimes complicates things. Pack lots of snacks when doing a photoshoot.

EASY STREET [5.6 PG13] — (BIRTHDAY BARBEQUE)

Easy Street was both my first-ever multi-pitch and my first-ever trad climb. I have returned to it a number of times over the years, and every time, a (rather unoriginal) thought has occurred to me. The climb terminates on a ledge referred to as the BBQ Ledge, named as such because it is large enough that you could unrope and have a barbeque. What if I actually had a barbeque on it?

For my 24th birthday, I decided to make it happen. The day before my birthday, I invited Julian and Evan to join in the shenanigans. I borrowed Will Raleigh-Smith's 100L haul bag and my mother's camping BBQ, then purchased four steaks, one pack of Korean Short Ribs, two portobello mushrooms, a pepper, and some Grizzly Paw soda. Everything (plus climbing gear) went in the pack.

Once upon a time, when I first started trad climbing, Easy Street did not feel all that easy. Some of the pitches are rather run out; I recall being scared on lead there. Now, Julian and I flew up the route with ease. He placed a few cams and clipped a few pitons, but otherwise practically jogged up the route. I followed with the backpack threatening to pull me off the wall every time I shifted my weight. While I led a single pitch, Julian hated the backpack enough that he requested to lead the remainder of the route. I agreed and resumed my role as the team's pack mule.

While we were climbing, Evan Wong was hiking via the descent route. Unfortunately, he chose to follow a GPX track that I had sent him. That GPX showed the location of the ledge (which is why I sent it), but I had unfortunately chosen a track where I had taken a line of descent down the scree, rather than the hiking trail. Evan trusted the file a bit too much and ascended my line of descent. Unfortunately, this meant that he had to climb more than a hundred metres of atrociously loose scree with a backpack weighing in excess of 50 lbs. Whoops.

We met Evan on the BBQ Ledge. He soloed the start of the upper 5.8 exit pitches to set up a fixed rope from which to shoot from above. As we barbequed, he ascended his fix line and shot some incredible top-down photos of the barbeque (he was sponsored by a certain alcoholic beverage company, and needed to take some photos for their advertisements). hilariously, these photos were later posted and then promptly removed from that brand's social media; perhaps a feast on a cliff was slightly too unhinged for marketing purposes. A few other climbers topped out on the BBQ Ledge while we cooked. The incredulous reactions were satisfying, though we felt guilty that we didn't bring quite enough food to share. Turns out that climbing Yamnuska with a 100L haul bag (or ascending scree with a very large backpack) builds a rather significant appetite. *Photo in Photo Contest Section.*

FREAK OUT [5.9+ R]

The name speaks for itself. Freak Out is a Yamnuska test piece that demands mastery of bold, runout, and chossy climbing. The grade is "only" 5.9, but the "+"

designation indicates that it is a serious sandbag, and the “R” makes it clear that the route lacks adequate protection, even in the context of Yamnuska climbing (virtually all Yam routes would be at least PG13 elsewhere).

For years, I had discussed the climb with Will Raleigh-Smith (a former VOCer). We knew that if we could climb Freak Out, we could venture into harder test-piece big-mountain routes deep in the Rockies with proof that we possessed the relevant competence to succeed. In a sport where earned confidence is key to keeping yourself safe, we knew that a send of Freak Out would help us keep our heads cool during sketchy leads elsewhere.

Key Lesson: Bold trad climbing requires earned confidence. If you are blindly confident, you will find yourself in situations you do not have the skills or strength to deal with, and end up injured or worse. If you are insufficiently confident, your resolve will crumble when it absolutely must not, and despite possessing the skills and strength, you will nevertheless end up injured or worse. You must therefore acquire confidence honestly by pushing your limits in responsible increments. Pushing boundaries involves venturing into unknown terrain, and so you are necessarily taking a risk. The trick to growth, then, is to understand your own risk tolerance. How far and how quickly can you specifically push things given your own competencies and dispositions? You ought to rely on analogies to other areas of growth in your life that don't have such high stakes to try to understand how you respond to pressure and new challenges. If you understand this, then you can set yourself onto a path of growth in high-stakes adventure sports.

Unfortunately, the timing never worked out for us to get on it, and we let the dream sink into the background. While I pitched the route to several other people, none were interested. This route has a serious reputation; even experienced Yam climbers are reluctant to get on it. However, my string of rejections ended when I pitched the idea to Philip Setter. After climbing the Cheesmond Express on Ha Ling together (another chossy test piece), Freak Out seemed like it would be trivial. The Cheesmond Express had involved runouts exceeding 30 metres above old fixed pitons. Freak Out would be easy by comparison.

ROUND 1: The plan was for Philip and I to swing leads, with him taking odd pitches, and me taking even pitches. We packed a triple rack (with pitons) and set off to the climb. It is easy to find, as the climb stands alone on the wall, with no routes immediately beside it. A proud, steep crack runs up a sector of chossy yellow rock. Philip's first lead was somewhat comical. He declared that the rock was pretty good, then promptly and unexpectedly ripped off a large block. He also cursed extensively as he tried (unsuccessfully) to avoid the rodent feces that coated most of the best holds inside the crack. An hour and a half later, he had sent the pitch.

Pitch two was supposedly the psychological crux of the route. You set out around a corner onto stacked dinner plates, and quest up some runout corner systems until you reach a piton belay capped by a small overhang. I found the dinner plates rather straightforward. The standard Rockies “downward” press made them feel rather easy, if a bit precarious. I paused once above to be certain of my direction as I did not want to quest up the wrong corner only to find myself in much harder terrain without a means of escape. The topo made things rather easy though, and I found myself at the belay alcove. I pulled the roof above to verify that I had not stopped short. Seeing no obvious alternative belay, I downclimbed and supplemented the anchor with some gear of my own. Pitch three involved some of the spicier climbing of the day while leaving the belay. Not far above, Philip managed to place a pecker piton, which made the climbing feel a great deal safer. Unfortunately, I could not extricate it as the second, since we were sharing a single hammer, and he had placed it too well to be removed by hand (or with a rock).

Pitch four was the crux. A series of traversing rightward steps force you to haul on dubiously attached flakes and jugs. The climbing is steep and runout. Even if the gear held, it tended to be far enough to your left that a large pendulum would result. A fall on this pitch would be very bad. Steep moves bring you to a remarkably good crack system to the top, where trees are available to make a belay.

Despite many of the holds not being attached, the climbing is genuinely rather good. The route is shockingly steep for the grade and there are a variety of movement types. I thought the value in this route would lie exclusively in proving to myself that I could keep my head together well enough to lead it. Instead, I found a high-quality climb with classic-level movement. If not for the rodent feces, significant runouts, and the fact that none of the holds are attached, it would probably be the most popular route on the mountain.

ROUND 2: Having loved the route so much, I offered to lead Will up the climb before I left the Rockies to start law school in September. This time, I brought a double rack instead of a triple. Each pitch felt easier the second time, so instead of the leads approaching or exceeding an hour, I dispatched each pitch somewhere between 15 and 30 minutes. I even managed to retrieve the piton that I had left on my previous ascent, returning the climb to its proper run-out status. In Will's opinion, a good amount of the gear would not hold as the rock is just too poor. Despite taking quite a bit of gear, it is not necessarily reliable. Treat this route with a healthy dose of respect. The spiciest part of this second ascent came right before I pulled the final crux on pitch four. Despite testing all my holds, I ripped out a block in my left hand and nearly fell. Luckily, my choss-climbing technique saved me; by ensuring each hold was solid before moving off of it, and never trusting a new hold *too* much, I managed to catch myself without falling despite ripping the hold as I began to weight it.



Above Gearing up at sunrise for a long day on the wall. *Evan Wong*

Key Lesson: There is an art to climbing choss. Tread carefully, and never trust something without testing it. Try to push “down” on a hold, rather than pulling “out.” Hit holds, and listen to the sound to evaluate how solid it might be. Pay careful attention to how the rock is attached, and what prevents it from coming out if it does not appear to be fully integrated into the wall. Always ask what will happen if your newest hand/foothold were to blow. Could you catch yourself?

Below Thin, technical, and balancey moves on the 5.11b crux pitch. *Evan Wong*



NO SHORTCUTS TO FULFILLMENT

THE CAMELS-TUPPER TRAVERSE [V, TD-, 5.9]

EVAN WONG

July 31, 2024

Participants: Evan Wong, Julian Larsen, Noah Macdonald

[Adapted from a speech I gave at the 2024 Banff Mountain Film Festival]

BIG DAYS IN THE MOUNTAINS have always had a strange pull on me. I find fulfillment like nothing else sweating it out with my friends on big multipitches, trail runs, and ski tours. But I didn't truly understand how fulfilling a big day in the mountains could be until I started alpine climbing this summer.

Colorado-based writer Corey Buhay probably put it best when she wrote *"Alpine climbing will bring you wild adventure, access to pristine landscapes, and routes so long that they will make you cry."* I'd be lying if I didn't admit to feeling like crying at points on this climb.

It all began when I received a text from my friend Noah Macdonald: "Hey Evan, I know you have Wednesday off, Julian Larsen and I are going for the Camels Tupper Traverse in Rogers Pass if you want in!"

This summer, Noah had become one of my closest friends and a regular climbing partner. He's one of the most experienced and knowledgeable alpine climbers I know, but most importantly, a spirited and uplifting friend on any adventure. Julian is a close friend from UBC Engineering and an absolute crusher of a trad climber. With those two on board, I couldn't help but say yes.

Noah and I met Julian in the Illecillewaet Campground the evening before the climb, and we promptly settled in for a few restless hours of sleep. Our alarms went off at 3:30 am, and before I knew it, we'd car dropped in a random ditch on the Trans Canada and were forging up steep avalanche gullies. Sunrise that morning was swift and striking – thick cloud cover prevented all but a small defined band of orangey glow from touching the peaks of the pass. Just as quickly as the sun had appeared, it was gone, and we'd also hit our first of many wayfinding difficulties. We'd been following a faint goat trail for a while, but it had dead-ended into a wall of trees, and we spent some time searching for a good way through. Eventually, we admitted defeat and gave into bushwhacking, pushing aside trees so thick you couldn't even see your knees.

Finally, we reached the base of the cliffs and started up a stunning 4th-class ridge towards the summit of the 1st Camel. As an adventure photographer, chasing unique places and experiences has always been at the heart of my work,

but in this time of constant social media stimulation and popularization of outdoor spaces, I feel it has become easy for adventures to feel inauthentic and unfulfilling compared to what you see online. However, for me, big missions like this have always felt like an escape, a means to access hard-to-reach places and create imagery completely organically. So, as I crested the summit of the 1st Camel and laid eyes on a landscape I'd never seen in photos before, I felt like I stumbled upon exactly what I was looking for. The Swiss Glacier in all its glory, a thousand feet below us, thick, low-lying clouds rolling in and out, fleeting patches of sunlight uncovering new peaks, and massive spires appearing out of the mist before our eyes. I was absolutely blown away.

Continuing along the ridgeline, spoiled with some of the best views I've ever seen, we found our first crux – a drenched 5th-class downclimb. It likely would've been fine if it was dry, but didn't look safe to do unroped in its current condition. Noah then uttered the words Julian and I had been dreading: "Let's build a choss bollard!"

The night before, Noah had warned us that there was potential for rappels to be off choss bollards. In short, to build a choss bollard you tie a piece of cordelette to a small boulder, and then pile a bunch of other small boulders on top – not the most confidence-inspiring rappel anchor to say the least. Thankfully, we did a good job building it, because we all fully weighted the anchor at some point on the rappel.

From there, we continued on mostly easy (but loose) terrain to the peak of the 2nd Camel. Once at the peak, the highlight section of the ridgeline appeared through the rolling clouds – a massive, ominous-looking tower that we couldn't see the end of. The excitement levels were building. However, once we reached the base, our excitement quickly faded as we realized there was nothing on the tower that even remotely resembled the guidebook description, which told us to climb the "obvious dihedral" at 5.10a. I'm sure the three of us said "obvious dihedral" about a hundred times in the following half an hour. After weighing our options, some considerably sketchier than others, we decided our best call was to continue along the bottom of the towers and hope to gain the top somewhere else. Quickly, we found a featured corner and Noah, in his trail runners, led the pitch at around 5.9+.

As Julian followed the pitch, he yelled down "Evan the cracks here are completely drenched and literally all of Noah's pro is just falling out, he basically just soloed that pitch in trail runners." After hearing that, I did a little more exploration and found a better way up, and soon we were all standing on top of the ridgeline.

Our route finding here was simple – choose the easiest way to stay on top of the ridge – which led us up and down over many, many gendarmes (big rock spires found in the alpine). At one point, I found myself straddling, unroped, the

top of a gendarme, desperately reaching for an anchor just out of my reach, 1000 feet of exposure just a foot behind me. I'll never forget just telling myself over and over: "Don't lean back, don't lean back." Despite no shortage of sketch to this point, this was a moment where I truly felt a tinge of fear, which is not something I feel all that often. But it was also a moment where I felt truly alive. I love fear in the sense that it's impossible to fabricate, and impossible to just ignore. I find adventures with true moments of fear are also the ones where I feel most connected to the landscape and most fulfilled when I take a couple of deep breaths and push through. I guess it's no surprise that I feel especially connected to the infamous Mt. Yamnуска as well. The ridge stayed quite narrow for long stretches, the exposure on either side was just mind-numbing. There were so many incredible rock features, slightly sketchy terrain rappels, and loads of fun and interesting 5th-class soloing to roped 5.9 sections.

Seemingly out of nowhere, we found ourselves on the peak of the 4th Camel, staring down the massive east face of Mt. Tupper – the longest climbing section on the route. I remember commenting, "I can't believe we've been at this for 14 hours and we still have six 60 m pitches to climb." We began our descent to the base of the gully between the 4th Camel and Tupper from an exposed point seemingly floating over the highway. It was awe-inspiring to see the peaks of Glacier National Park basking in soft, late afternoon light.

Three long rappels and some downclimbing later, we were roping up under Tupper. For the sake of speed, we had been doing a fix-and-follow strategy for the roped pitches on this climb. Noah would usually lead (he climbs the fastest and is comfortable placing the least protection out of the three of us), I would follow normally on Noah's rope and drag a fixed line behind me, which we would set up on anchors for Julian to top rope solo. This way we could have two climbers going at all times. Halfway up the mountain, the previously thick cloud cover finally started to give way to some blue skies, and for the first time in hours, we were graced with the warm touch of sunlight. These are the fleeting slivers of light that I live to chase – the ones that you can't predict and don't expect until they dip their toes in front of your lens. I savoured every bit of those mere minutes with perfect light.

We hit the summit of Tupper moments before blue hour ended – relief, exuberance and exhaustion took hold. Five technical peaks bagged. Solemn reality set in when I realized, we still had five hours of rappelling, downclimbing, and hiking to do. This was a brief moment of weakness when I felt like crying. The first part of the Tupper descent actually has bolted rappels, which felt like such a novelty because the rest of our day was as far from bolts as you can get. We downclimbed for what felt like an eternity and I dug deep to keep the sharp focus needed to be safe on exposed 4th- and 5th-class moves. About halfway down, I started feeling lightheaded, so I called for a quick food and drink break. Turning our headlamps off to save battery, the Milky Way took centre stage in all her glory. That night was

one of the clearest and brightest I'd ever seen, so I did my best with some handheld photos, but it was so windy I had no hope of holding my camera still.

Some hours later, we neared Hermit Meadows Campground, our final checkpoint and the exhaustion finally started to set in. Deliriousness was rife amongst the group. Julian hilariously commented that he felt three drinks deep, and Noah had gone completely silent. I myself plopped down and begged Noah to break out his giant bag of Sour Patch Kids. The final stretch from the campground to the parking lot was an easy 3 kilometre hikers trail – we were so close it felt like you could almost touch the car. It was also on this stretch that my patience finally wore out. Every switchback we would took I would look down the trail hoping to see the bottom, but instead seeing nothing but a never-ending pit of shadows. I think I openly complained at every corner “how the fuck are we not down yet.”

After what felt like another 24 hours, we popped out into the parking lot, and I felt the comforting cold red metal of Noah's RAV4. My watch read 22 hours and 50 minutes – my biggest day ever.

When I look back on this climb, I'm reminded that in life, there are no shortcuts to fulfillment. Anything worth doing is going to require us to put our head down and suffer, just a little bit. Every tough moment, from the cold-sweat fear of straddling the top of a gendarme, unroped, to deliriously stumbling down the Hermit Meadows trail 22 hours in, added so much meaning to my photography and my experience on this climb. You see, I gave a piece of myself to the landscape, to my friends, to my photography, and what I walked away with, was an adventure where I earned every second of the memories I created and captured. So when people ask, why would you ever sign yourself up for a 23-hour day in the mountains? Because it's where I find raw and genuine fulfillment.

Below Julian approaching the summit of the 3rd Camel. *Evan Wong*





Above Noah and Julian scrambling sunlit ridgelines towards the first of many gendarmes on the Camels. *Evan Wong*

Below Fix and follow. Julian top rope soloing an exposed 5.7 pitch. *Evan Wong*



THE GREENWOOD JONES

NOAH MACDONALD

THE NORTH FACE of Mt. Temple provides one of the more dramatic views along Highway 1. It rises 1300 metres from base to summit, providing a world-class backdrop for visitors to the Lake Louise area. Often likened to the North Face of the Eiger, the face boasts an impressive collection of TD- and ED-graded lines. I've been all over Mt. Temple; I've hiked the tourist route to the summit, climbed the 50-Classic East Ridge, skied the Cobra Couloir, and attempted the Aemmer Couloir, but I had yet to climb a proper line on the north face.

Two routes on the face drew my attention; the Greenwood Jones (V, TD, 5.10a) and the Greenwood Locke (V, TD+, 5.10c). Of the two, the Greenwood Jones is easier and safer. It does not require you to climb under seracs (whereas the approach to the Greenwood-Locke in the Dolphin Couloir is threatened by the apartment-sized seracs of the summit glacier), the climbing goes free at a purported 5.10a (instead of 5.10c), and it is easier to find all the pitches in condition. Friends-of-friends who had climbed both also reported that the Jones was a far more pleasant and fun outing than the Locke. All of this information played into my choice to pursue the Greenwood Jones as my first route on the face.

Below The North Face of Mount Temple. *Noah Macdonald*



ATTEMPT 1: WEATHER WINDOWS & WATERFALLS

August 18, 2024

Participants: Noah Macdonald, Julian Larsen

Julian and I spent the better part of August fitfully checking the weather, making plans, and promptly abandoning those plans. After an upsettingly high number of false starts, we finally saw a marginal weather window. After talking ourselves into believing that it was good enough to justify an attempt, we set off from Calgary on August 17th. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), our attempt was shut down long before we could discover if our weather window would hold.

Bright and early on the morning of the 18th, we reached the base of the route. It was supposed to be marked by a waterfall to its right. We arrived at a waterfall, but could not find the 5.4 corner of the first pitch. Fear began to creep up on us; there were only two waterfalls in this area, and the other one is threatened by apartment-building-sized seracs overhead. If we had found ourselves at the base of the wrong waterfall, it meant that we were, in essence, playing Russian Roulette with the unstable seracs. It didn't help that we had heard one of the seracs topple on the approach; the roar of falling ice was fresh in our minds.

After some delirious cross-referencing of visible snow patches with photos of the face, we (incorrectly) determined that there was a high likelihood we were in the wrong spot, and furiously scrambled leftwards to escape the imagined threat of seracs above. Soon, we decided to lose some elevation to gain a better view of the face. With a quick check of the map and the benefit of the slight light of dawn, we realized that we had, in fact, been in the correct place, and returned to our original position, having wasted more than an hour. With the benefit of morning light, we realized that our mistake was our failure to look at the waterfall itself. Pitch 1 was not to the left of the waterfall; it was the waterfall. The pitch was beyond soaked, flowing with a steady and powerful stream of water.

To the left, a steeper wall offered a way up. We roped up and attempted to salvage the climb. I hesitantly made my way up the wet quartzite in my mountaineering boots, placing a handful of pieces of gear before reaching a distinct crux move. Not knowing if the terrain above was harder, I lost my nerve, and decided to call it; we had already wasted plenty of time, and conditions were clearly suboptimal. Given how hard the start had become, and not knowing what awaited us above, it did not make sense to continue. We pulled the plug, packed our kit, and began the long march out of Paradise Valley back to the car.

Failed attempts like this one hurt because they come at a steep cost. The opportunity cost of spending a weather window on the wrong objective is not insignificant when usable weather windows are uncommon. Attempts also cost money: gas ain't cheap. But they serve as an excellent reminder that alpine climbing requires bailing; learning to enjoy the bail experiences is important for staying

safe in alpine climbing.

Julian, having been visiting from Vancouver, drove back home on the day of our bail. That meant I needed a new partner, and Katie Graham answered the call.

ATTEMPT 2: THE ELECTRIC EPIC ON THE “EIGER OF THE ROCKIES”

August 23, 2024

Participants: Noah Macdonald, Katie Graham

CHAPTER 1: THE APPROACH

We set off from Lake Louise Village, biking up the steep road toward the Moraine Lake turnoff. Katie effortlessly pulled ahead of me as I struggled to keep up. I felt my heart rate climb into zone 2, then 3, then 4. The effort forced me into a standing position, and then off my bike entirely.

It was only then that I noticed the problem; my bike was offering significant resistance. The rear brake pads were rubbing against the wheel. We paused at the Moraine Lake Road turnoff to remedy the problem, but, unfortunately, neither of us knew how to fix it sans tools. My solution? Disengage the rear brake entirely. With my brakes disabled, we cruised to the Paradise Valley turnoff and continued without problems.

From Lake Annette, during the early hours of August 18th, we made our way toward the North Face. I chose a more-optimal line up the scree than in my previous attempt, and we made significantly faster time over less heinous scree towards the base of the face. From afar, it appeared that the first pitch corner was wet, but not actively flowing. Unfortunately, this was a trick of the dark, and closer inspection revealed a small but problematic stream filling the corner. Pitch 1 was still out.

CHAPTER 2: THE CLIMB

Luckily, the sketchy wall to the left of the waterfall was now dry (and I was too stubborn to turn back a second time). I led the pitch taking a line that felt around 5.10b; on top rope, Katie managed to eliminate the crux traverse and climb the line at a slightly easier grade.

After the lower cliff band, the route transforms into mild 3rd-class scrambling. We crossed the stream feeding the waterfalls below and aimed to get into a broad gully feature to the right of the rib. The route steepened gradually, stepping into 4th class, and then 5th class at a chimney feature on the left side of the broad gully. Here I suggested we rope up. For the sake of simplicity (and because the terrain was still rather easy) we chose to simul-climb on a single 8 mm Mammut cut-protect rope.

While easy, these lower pitches surprised me with how chossy they were.

In my mind, quartzite is usually quite solid. The nearby East Ridge, for example, has some of the finer quartzite scrambling and low-fifth climbing in the area; that the same quartzite band on the same mountain offered detached blocks and a kitty-litter scree surface baffled me. My bafflement turned to adrenaline and fear when one such block dropped out from under my feet when I shifted my weight. It felt like someone had pulled a lever that opened a trap door beneath me, and I watched in horror as the fridge-sized block I had released cascaded downwards. Fortunately, our line of ascent was not the same as the fall line, and the falling pillar left both Katie and our rope unscathed. I had somehow managed to avoid whipping by catching myself with one hand on a jug and my shoulder pressed into a corner; my shirt ripped, but we were otherwise unscathed. While ripping holds is nothing new for any Rockies alpine climber, the fact that the block pulled somewhat unexpectedly left me feeling shocked. I had kicked it, and though I heard a hollow sound, I had figured that it was large enough that my delicate and deliberate movement would not set it off. To learn so violently that I had miscalibrated was a good reminder that I should not overestimate the stability of a block based on its size.

The rest of the lower buttress was uneventful, though containing more interesting and difficult climbing than I had anticipated. Whether this was due to poor route-finding or Rockies alpine sandbagging, I'm unsure. I know I have a tendency to beeline for "fun" looking pitches/features instead of following the path of least resistance. Regardless, after two long (and one medium-length) pitches of simul-climbing, we switched to pitched climbing. The climb had steepened, so we broke out our second rope and I set off lead after lead, ending each pitch at around 60 metres. Many good belay stances were to be found.

I know some trip reports mention difficulties in building secure belays, but a few knifeblades, peckers, and tricams helped me build bomber anchor after bomber anchor. The only problem I encountered was rope drag; the route sometimes traverses around large blocks, through significant changes in steepness, or across the edge of the ridge, causing significant rope drag regardless of whether you use a single or half ropes.

After climbing the famous chimney pitch, I figured we had about 7 pitches left. Unfortunately, I was operating under the assumption that one additional pitch led back to the crest, where I would find the famous chossy traverse pitch that precedes the limestone headwall. I was spectacularly wrong; it took three nearly-full-length pitches of sustained climbing (subjectively 5.8 or 5.9, but supposedly easier) to reach the traverse. Was I off-route? If I was, I can't imagine the actual route is preferable; my way had some incredibly fun quartzite on good rock.

At last, we reached the dreaded traverse. I had a bit of rope left, and didn't see many satisfactory anchor options, so I set off. Midway across, I set up

a two-piton anchor in the only good rock I could find and belayed Katie up. The ledge was shockingly low angle; the traverse barely counts as climbing. At its hardest, it is perhaps fourth-class. My next pitch was short, and brought us up a corner to a three-piton belay. From here, trip reports had made me fear that the route finding would be difficult, and the climbing loose and runout. This was luckily not the case. A 5.8 corner with a fixed piton led to easier ground out right, taking a few pieces of good gear. A short runout over somewhat (but not terribly) chossy 5.easy brought me to a few more gear placements, and before I knew it, I was at the base of the limestone headwall where an inviting vertical crack provided a perfect stance with good gear for an anchor. The pitch had been just short of 60 m, and compared to earlier pitches it felt reasonably solid and protected. A Squamish-only trad climber might find it heinous, but an experienced Rockies climber who is solid at the grade would find it trivial.

At this point, my arms were cramping. Not from the actual climbing, mind you; rather, the rope drag was bad enough that pulling up excess rope and belaying at the top of every pitch was tiring me out. I popped some electrolyte pills and racked up for the last three pitches of the headwall.

P1 (Felt 5.9): A surprisingly good pitch. There is an intermediate anchor; I almost attempted a much steeper line to the left but noticed a better way out to the right before committing to a hard move. Don't make that mistake.

P2 (Felt 5.10a): Perhaps the best 5.10 pitch I've climbed on limestone. A steep move brings you into a corner system. Underclings and good feet move you across left and up in a blissful sequence of moves. The exposure is also unreal; looking down yields more than a thousand metres of exposure separating you from Lake Annette. I wish I could do this pitch again, and again, and again.

P3: (Felt 5.10c): The famous and aesthetic first move feels 10a, to be sure, and the pitch is not dissimilar to other sandbagged Rockies alpine "5.10a"s. But if this pitch was bolted at a crag, 5.10a would be laughable. The crux involves a delicate and crimpy traverse rightwards over a slab into a corner system over rusty pitons for protection. Don't whip; who knows when those pitons were placed! Another pitch that would earn classic status on its own.

We topped out and spirits were high. We had climbed the technical rock on the Greenwood Jones! I strongly suspect that this was the first all-free ascent of the route by someone with a broken finger (an x-ray on August 16th confirmed that my left index finger—originally dislocated/fractured in February—remained broken. My schedule of constant climbing had failed to let it heal).

It was a perfect day on a beautiful rock. I had been searching for a route

that could offer the same sort of all-day fun that I had experienced on the Beckey Chouinard in the Bugaboos, and I had found it here on the North Face of Temple. Then, our luck ran out.

CHAPTER 3: ELECTRIC BOOGALOO

The glacier and upper East ridge had occluded a storm. It was only when we started to breach the upper segments of the upper NE Ridge scramble (the “top out” of the Greenwood Jones) that we could see the menacing clouds. A worried urgency replaced our attitude of jubilant ease as we reached the toe of the glacier. It was here that Katie noticed that she was missing a crampon. Presumably, it had fallen off during the climb. How and when? We were unsure; all we knew was that the surviving crampon had been clipped with a carabiner, whereas the other one had merely been lashed on with straps. Worse: it was her right crampon that went missing, and the glacier mostly consists of ascending side-hilling with your left side upwards on the slope. This meant Katie would have her downhill foot skating across bare glacier ice, with the consequences of a fall being an un-arrestable slide off the North Face to the valley 1300m+ below.

With crampons on our feet and axes in hand, we set off across the glacier. We did not make it far before my fears were confirmed with a buzz; all the metal on me had begun to hum in the static field of the electrical storm. We needed to take cover immediately. Going down was not an option, since it was no more sheltered than our current location. Instead, I figured we needed to take shelter in a crevasse, and told Katie as much. I rushed ahead to the nearest crevasse, and to my surprise, found an entrance to a natural snow and ice cave hidden in its side. The size of the cave was perfect for two people, if a bit cozy.

Two hours later, when the thunderclaps eased into the distance, I poked my head out. My first foray out of the cave was unsuccessful since raising my ice axe in the air was sufficient to get it buzzing. I retreated and waited a while longer. The menacing clouds had passed and so had the buzz, so we broke our makeshift camp and set out for the summit in the dying light. As we entered the clouds, the sun set, causing a dramatic loss of light. The winds almost immediately picked up in the clouds. We fought onwards, with Katie heroically battling the steep glacier ice with a single crampon and ice tool.

As we approached the summit, the buzzing returned. I figured we were close enough that it would be faster to retreat off the other side; returning down the steep glacial ice to the comfort of our snow cave would take far too long. Katie and I pushed on, stopping only to rip off our crampons at the transition to rock. The scree on the scramble route facilitated a quick descent; we stopped below a large boulder that provided a small degree of shelter, stowing our crampons, removing a few layers, and grabbing small snacks to eat as we moved.

Luckily, the rain had not started in earnest. Once we passed below the

4th-class scramble crux, a slight drizzle began. We continued on and dropped to skier's right when we hit Sentinel Pass; we had cached gear at Lake Annette (and our bikes were at Paradise Valley trailhead) making the traditional exit via Moraine Lake unviable.

Unfortunately, the rain picked up as we continued losing elevation into Paradise Valley. The lightning returned with the rain. Each strike would light up the moraines, reminding us that we were uncomfortably vulnerable on open terrain. The thunderclaps that followed were frighteningly loud. Most concerning of all, the gap between the thunder and lightning closed to an uncomfortable proximity; at its closest, the time between light and sound was just under three seconds. With the speed of sound being 343 m/s, I would wager the lightning was within a kilometre of our position.

The psychological state brought about by this kind of approaching storm is hard to describe to someone who hasn't experienced it. Mortal urgency is the best name I can give it; we descended with speed, seriousness, and single-minded focus. We needed to get to the trees. The moraines seemed to stretch on forever, but eventually, they came to an end. We were rewarded by a noticeable increase in the amount of rain; very quickly, we were soaked. My hardshell likely needed a refresh in its DWR, because it almost immediately wetted out. It was only by moving continuously that we had any hope of staying warm.

The trails of Paradise Valley did not fare well in the storm. Large swathes turned into streams, and other stretches turned into small ponds. Katie was wearing canyoning boots and neoprene socks, so she had little problem with marching through the swamp. My mountaineering boots resisted well for a while, but soon enough filled with water.

The rest of the march out was a story of becoming progressively colder and more miserable. By the time we reached the bikes, I was scared I would get hypothermia; I was violently shivering (even having wrapped my emergency blanket around myself) and seriously considering ditching the pack and sprinting down to the car to heat myself up through exertion. The thought of braving the chilling winds that would result from biking downhill was frightening. Ultimately, I did decide to bike back down (I wanted to get to the car as fast as possible). Katie led the way through the downpour; visibility was terrible with the rain in our eyes and the darkness of a stormy night.

Getting to the car was a mercy. After stripping out of our wet layers and driving to a nearby gas station, we exchanged gear and slept a few hours before driving off in our respective directions (Katie to Golden, and me to Calgary). The epic was over and we had survived.

WASPS, CHILI MAC, AND REFLECTIONS ON THE NEVE

ELIZABETH CHU

August 31 - September 2, 2024

Garibaldi Park

Participants: Elizabeth Chu, Sean McKay, Jeff Mottershead, Adam Steele

OVER THE LABOUR DAY WEEKEND, I had the opportunity to join Jeff Mottershead, Adam Steele, and Sean McKay for a summer traverse of the Garibaldi Névé, where we would also do an improvised glacier school. As it turns out, it's a lot to be doing both in one go.

On Saturday morning Sean, Adam, and I headed up to the parking lot of Valhalla Pure Outfitters in Squamish to meet Jeff and sort out gear. We then headed up to the Rubble Creek trailhead before loading everything from Sean's car into Jeff's and heading back to the Diamond Head Trail parking lot. I admired the summer views on the trail, having only ever been in the winter. People gave us strange looks and asked about our ice axes, to which we patiently explained our glacial objectives.

After lunch, we headed up towards Opal Cone, crossed the bridge over Ring Creek, and diverged from the trail towards the Neve. The valley became less vegetated, then suddenly opened to a vast glacier. The hot air temperature and cool glacial surface reacted forming a mirage, like a hot road in the summer. As we headed towards the Neve Hilton, we chatted about other glacial fascinations – is a glacier a mineral? We paused to look down at a waterfall that disappeared into the abyss beneath the glacier and took a moment to appreciate the unique sound. We crossed the glacier into scramble territory. I was pretty tired at that point, both mentally and physically – not a great state for an inexperienced scrambler. Slowly I made my way up, until we reached the remains of the squished Neve Hilton hut. From there, we continued a bit further passing some red snow (source: super cool algae), before finding our camp for the night. I wondered how the hell Jeff had done our long weekend within a day.

I was excited to attempt, for the first time, a homemade dehydrated meal of chili mac. For those who have yet to be blessed by the taste of this scrumptious meal, chili mac is what the name describes – macaroni and cheese with chili. It's hearty, cheesy, warm and comforting. Conveniently it can all be made within one pot, making it a popular camping meal. I'd been fortunate enough to have access to an extensive dehydrated food room for my summer job, but I had also only made

Chili Mac for upwards of five people, making a single serving was a new challenge. I'd also recently patched five holes in my sleeping pad and yet to properly test it. All I could do was hope it would hold up and keep me off the ice. Thankfully, the sleeping pad went well and we had another night when I could try again with the chili mac.

On Sunday morning we practiced a plethora of anchor systems and improvised belaying before roping up to head over the glacier, weaving around crevasses and learning to navigate turns as a rope team. Over one snow bridge, Jeff and Sean had marked an 'X' over where not to cross. Despite avoiding the 'X', I still managed to step waist-deep into the snow. I was fine but it emphasized the importance of probing.

Before lunch, we found an ideal spot to practice self-arrests, and threw ourselves down the glacier. Overcoming the mental hurdle of doing that the first few times was tricky. I nicked myself in the neck with the adze but thankfully there was no further injury.

After lunch, we practiced crevasse rescues. Adam went into the crevasse and I self-arrested while Sean set up the anchor. Holding a human and overnight pack on my hips while using my upper body to self-arrest was the most stretched out I'd ever felt. All I could do was lie there, waiting for Sean to set up the anchor and pulley system. Then it was my turn to be in the crevasse, then Sean's.

On the surface, there was a lot of trouble minding the prusiks in the 3:1 pulley systems. However, in wilderness medicine, they teach you to talk through what you're doing to your patient, even if they're unconscious. For future reference, I think it is a key step to communicate to the person in the crevasse what is happening on the surface. Due to the prusik issue, Jeff decided he would later tinker with his pulleys to make a more effective prusik minding device.

We descended to a beautiful valley, where I looked back in awe at where we'd come from. Adam shared some Swiss chocolate, a delicious and wonderful surprise that elevated the already awesome moment.

We continued towards Warren Glacier and stopped near the Shark Fin to practice using ice screws and making V-threads – a 'water mining expedition' as Jeff put it. As a Leave No Trace advocate, I was flabbergasted to learn that people leave behind rope in the V-threads.

We decided that we would walk off Warren Glacier and take the south side of Lake Garibaldi to the switchbacks, avoiding an overnight epic on the Sphinx Glacier. We found a spot to set up camp in the valley that was nicely sheltered from the winds coming off the glacier. I used a different method to cook my chili mac that night – it was better but needed improvement.

On Monday, we headed towards the lava fields of Clinker Peak. As we walked away from the glacier through alluvial plains, we passed patches of vibrant wildflowers which only added to the views of the distant Tantalus range in front of us. The val-

ley walls were jagged and the ground was sparsely vegetated aside from some patches of alder and willow. Most of the time, these trees grow low and densely around riverbeds to protect themselves from the harsh conditions of the valley. This makes them an extremely fun maze of branches to navigate.

I was thinking out loud as I maneuvered through the branches and Jeff called out “You did say you love a good bushwhack”. And I do! I love hearing myself giggle as I try to trudge through the brush, and I love the feeling of accomplishment I get when I reach the clearing on the other side.

Then, after climbing up a nice stretch of boulders, we entered the forest. We were working our way up a steep bit and I suddenly began to feel a welt-like pain on my arms. I looked down and saw wasps. Fuck. I started running uphill but the stinging only continued. Running did not feel like it was helping but someone told me to keep going. Eventually, I made it to where Sean and Jeff were waiting and felt something hard hit the top of my head. It was Jeff killing a wasp. I caught my breath and tried to collect myself as I took off my pack to assess the damage. Adam continued upwards, leaving a wide berth around where the wasps had been.

I took out my first aid kit and downed some antihistamines and ibuprofen before slathering myself in Benadryl cream. The wasps had gotten me on my arms, shoulders, head, and butt. Thankfully, I hadn’t noticed any on my legs, but we all felt it was best to continue trekking uphill to take my mind off it. I had painfully eaten my previous words – my whack through the bush quickly became not lovable, though I’d argue wasp stings do not make anything good.

At that point ‘miserable’ was a great way to describe how I was feeling. It felt like nails being hammered into my body, my butt felt like it was on fire, and I felt absolutely dishevelled. All I wanted was to be submerged in an alpine lake.

Earlier, I had asked Jeff what motivates him, but now I was grappling with my own motivations. I reflected on my summer and a bit further back. I thought back to where I had been two years ago: on a plane headed to Fairbanks on my way to my first backpacking trip. I didn’t grow up around any sort of elevation, so as I looked down seeing the snow-capped mountains for the first time, I was amazed, in awe, and a little bit scared of what I was getting myself into. I told myself that if I enjoyed backpacking, I would get to BC to explore those mountains one day. On that trip, I saw my first glacier. So I decided that here in the present, I was going to continue up the mountain and live out sixteen-year-old me’s dreams.

Presently I was also getting really itchy. There were some gnat-like bugs in the forest and I asked if they were biting anyone else. Everyone said no — turns out I was just mildly breaking out in hives. I told Sean I was going to keep an eye on them. I tried not to be an “are we there yet?” menace but my motivation only went so far. I asked what the distance was until we got to Garibaldi, or at least to a place where I could see the lake and regain some more motivation. They took out their phones to check and reported no GPS signal. I wasn’t necessarily looking for

an accurate answer. I just needed some number to keep in mind for motivation. I asked for a fake number and got a hesitant variety of answers which helped a little.

We reached a point less than 100 m away from the col and pondered whether to stop for lunch or continue. I decided there would probably be a false summit of sorts and my motivation would further dwindle. A break would allow me to replenish my adrenaline and refuel, plus the views were phenomenal, so we stopped to eat.

After taking acetaminophen, I felt better, and we continued again. As I suspected, there was a false high point. Clinker is a volcano so we had to dip into the cone a bit before climbing back up the other side. But I was stoked to be in a volcano and it looked like we were on Mars. The other side of Clinker looked like it had been covered in giant sand drip castles. We continued down the lava fields on the other side; the views of Garibaldi raised my spirits. After a short, treacherous, but wasp-free bushwhack we found a beautifully defined trail on the ridgeline. We followed this trail to the Garibaldi campsite and went for a swim. Sean, Jeff, and I practiced ascending over the rafters in one of the huts while Adam inquired with a ranger about Burton Hut. Down the switchbacks Adam and I exchanged riddles and drove Jeff insane. He reminded me that I'm a terrible person because I left him without an answer to a riddle back in December. I had to remind him that that's how riddles work.

After gear and car switcharoos, we returned home late at night. A warm shower, lots of Benadryl, and my cozy bed awaited. I counted up my stings: I totalled 25. Random bruises only topped that number.

In physical recovery and mental reflection, I'm incredibly grateful for this opportunity, and despite the hiccups, I thoroughly enjoyed this trip. I loved learning glacier travel skills and the views were exquisite. I'm still learning to go with the flow, this weekend proved that it's important to keep an open mind. It seems the more I get to explore and look out at the distant mountain ranges, the more I want to explore. It also seems that the more I get out on cool trips, I meet more cool people. On that note, I'm thankful for the people who made this trip possible – mostly Jeff, but Adam and Sean too, of course.

Reminders: things will work out to be okay, get comfortable with being uncomfortable and know that you can do hard things. Enter situations with an open mind, and never stop striving to meet your goals :)

CHILI MAC RECIPE

Last year in the dorms I struggled with food options for camping. I didn't want to succumb to an \$11 pre-packaged meal. So most of the time I resorted to Mexican style rice with beans or tofu. Luckily, about a week prior to this trip I had just begun subletting a new place and had a few days to futz around in the kitchen. I

had found a dehydrator in one of the cabinets and was stoked for the opportunity to develop some single-serving backcountry recipes. The Labour Day trip came in perfect timing for me to perfect my backcountry chili mac recipe. But it turns out the dehydrator I found is actually a steamer. Not exactly helpful for extracting moisture. So I had to improvise with my oven... if you are the lucky duck owner of a dehydrator, good for you.

This recipe yields two meals and can range from however homemade to store bought, or vegan to carnivore as the chef prefers.

INGREDIENTS:

- Canned (or homemade) chili. Low/no fat.
- Mac and Cheese

I used boxed and took advantage of the already-dehydrated cheese.

Optional add ins:

- Spices, fresh cheese, hot sauce, true lime, etc.

PREPARATION:

1. Prepare the two sheet pans with parchment paper.
2. Cook the noodles. Strain and rinse once done. Do not add any fats (butter, oil, etc.). Set the cheese packet aside if using a boxed recipe.
3. Thinly spread the chili onto one sheet pan and the noodles on another – one layer is best, there shouldn't be any stacking of noodles or chili contents, use more pans if necessary.
4. Dehydrate for 8 hours at 150F
5. If you're using an oven that doesn't go that low (mine only goes to 170F) find a way to prop open the oven door slightly for airflow. I was able to turn one of the sheet pans 90 degrees to keep the door ajar. Sticking a wooden spoon in the door also works.
6. At 8 hours check the crispness. Add more time if needed. When adequately crisp, take out of the oven and let cool
7. Put into two bags – one bag for noodles and the cheese packet and one bag for chili.

I also added spices to the chili bag (salt, garlic powder, onion powder, cumin)

WHEN CAMPING:

- Boil water
- Put half of the chili in, soak for a few minutes. Then add half the noodles in
- Once both are at desired consistency, add in the half cheese powder and any other hydrated things you may want.

CHASING DREAMS ON MOUNT SLESSE

JULIAN LARSEN

September 7, 2024

Mount Slesse (Chilliwack, BC)

Participants: Julian Larsen, Nick Ayers

THE YEAR IS 2014. I've always liked the small hikes I've done with my family, so for my birthday, my dad decides we should hike Mount Cheam. It's a Chilliwack classic, a rocky peak that you can see from almost anywhere in town. Although I've done some small, forested hikes, I've never really hiked into the alpine. The road is long, steep and covered in deep water bars, but we eventually make it to the trailhead, already in the subalpine. The trail quickly breaks into open meadows, with breathtaking views like I've never seen. As we hike to the summit, an impressive fang looms in the distance across the valley. The mountain looks almost impossible to me, so steep and imposing. From the summit of Mount Cheam, I take in the 360-degree views and decide that I like the mountains a lot more than I ever knew. The way down provides more views of the mysterious fang. Back at home my dad confirms it is Mount Slesse. I'd heard of it because there is a school named after it in Chilliwack, but since it is tucked behind mountains and difficult to spot from my area of town, I've never really known what it was. My dad talks about how there was a major plane crash that struck the mountain in the 50s; it all captures my imagination, but the thoughts drift away in a few days.

A few years later I joined the outdoor education program at my school, and while on the summit of Elk Mountain, the fang of Slesse emerged again. My teacher calls it "a climber's mountain", one that doesn't have an easy way to the summit. He says that people from across North America come to climb the famed NE Buttress, a rock buttress that climbs almost a kilometre from the treeline at its base. I'd never even thought about or seen anybody rock climb before, but this definitely left me awe-inspired. Later that year, I got to try a bit of rock climbing and that gets me even more interested.

THE YEAR IS 2020. I've graduated high school in the midst of lockdown and haven't seen my friends in-person for months. I hike all the time at this point, and the summer lockdown has had me hiking almost every day. Experts are starting to agree that outdoor activities aren't going to spread COVID, so I finally meet up

with my friends at the trailhead of the Slesse Memorial Trail. The top of the trail ends at a cairn with a propeller from the 1956 plane crash. At this cairn, the giant face of the Eastern side of Mount Slesse stands so high that you stumble backwards when you look to the top. I decide at this point that the next time I come back here, it's going to be to climb. I joined the VOC in September, but given the pandemic I never ended up doing anything. When school is back in-person the following year, I immediately sign up to learn to climb at Rock Party. Not knowing many other people, I initially struggled to find partners to try climbing with. Eventually in the spring, I decide to suck it up and start going to the Aviary alone in the hopes of finding partners.

NOW WE COME TO THE PRESENT. I stare at the propeller cairn once again, its image framed by my headlamp in the dark of the early morning. I venture across the wide slabs beneath the wall, searching for the gap that leads over to the start of the route. We eventually make it to the base of the towering East face, which disappears far past the extent of our headlamps. We begin our traverse onto the NE buttress just as the faint glow of dawn starts to silhouette the eastern skyline. Nearly 10 years after hearing about this mountain, I've finally learned all I need to climb it. Nick Ayers and I had been talking about doing it since spring, and I had spent hours the day before researching and combining information into my own document. The beginning goes smoothly, and we fly up the route. Unfortunately, thinking there was no way we had already made it to a certain traverse ledge already, I continued up 2 or 3 pitches higher on the buttress completely off-route. Luckily there was recent bail gear from somebody else who had clearly done the same, and we got back on route, though now having lost a lot of time. We continue to cruise through the rest until about two-thirds of the way up, where I once again reach hard terrain, spot bail anchors above, and decide to traverse right. Clearly, I went too far as I get into difficult terrain with worse rock, but we still make it back on route—just a bit delayed. From here the rock becomes steep and juggy, but increasingly loose. Luckily, my adventures in the Rockies this summer had taught me to dance through choss without much issue. We passed one party that was doing the route in two days, and had slept overnight on a large ledge. With the summit in sight, I start to climb faster and faster until I pull over the top and then belay Nick up. It should've been a time to celebrate and take in the views, but the summit is not the end of a day up Slesse. Some lament that the descent is the true crux of the route, and reaching the summit might only be halfway through your day. Knowing this, we waste no time and start getting ready to leave. Luckily, I had climbed Crack O' Noon and the nearby Mount Parkes the weekend prior, so I knew a lot of where we would be going. Although we do most of the descent relatively smoothly, it is still long and technical, so it takes a good while. We also take a few paths that are not the fastest, and our general fatigue is starting to really set in. By the time we get to the familiar descent around Mount Parkes, we have been awake for well over 18 hours, having woken up in Chilliwack

at 1:30 am. Without my route-finding mistakes, we likely would've been close to the car by now, but instead the sun is setting, and there is still a lot of rappelling and trail to slog down. This section is easy to figure out since I had done it before, but physically it was starting to get challenging. With sore feet, lack of sleep, and minimal water, we marched down the trail swatting away the moths that dart at our headlamps. Many outdoor trips end with some relief at finally making it back to the car, but this one was certainly among the top. Nearly 20.5 hours after leaving the car, we were ready to go home and sleep.

So, did this route live up to the dream I had pictured since long before I started climbing? Well, it was certainly an inspiring line with plenty of cool climbing in an amazing position. By all metrics, it is a classic route that is worth doing if you have the skills and have done the research to complete it safely. Despite this, I find myself more satisfied by what I've accomplished in pursuit of this goal than by the goal itself. The inspiration of this peak helped push me towards climbing, and the goal to complete this route made me learn new skills and develop new goals in the process. Whether your goal is to summit a mountain, climb a route, or do a certain trip, there is value in aspiring to something beyond your current capabilities, because you never know where it will take you.

Below [Life's a Freeze at G1] And we're off. *Isaac Borrego*



LIFE'S A FREEZE AT G1

STEFANIJA REKASIUS & CHLOE GARZON

September 14 - 15, 2024

Stefanija's point of view:

THIS YEAR'S G1 did not disappoint with its crazy weather, but as with every trip it started indoors with a pre-trip and ropes skills. We practiced our ascending (and descending) in the Aviary, various knots and hitches, and crevasse rescue systems.

The following weekend, we made the short drive up to the Brandywine lower parking lot where the shuttling began. Unfortunately, Hannah Bates' car fell out of commission on the way up; Brandywine FSR: 1, VOC Cars: 0. While waiting around, Adam Steele and Katie Sattler had a matching kombucha photo shoot, and Noah Wyse and I learned we had the exact same boot and crampon set up. As the shuttling took a long time, we decided to start heading up from the trailhead to Brandywine in smaller groups. We quickly ran into a thick fog and played a game of "Choose Your Own Adventure" trying to find the trail. Once we got to the glacier, people commented on how much it had receded since last year. We then made camp in the howling wind and rain which turned to freezing rain, then to hail, and finally into snow. Most people were hunkering down, warming up and trying to dry out in their tents, but a couple of us decided to bag Brandywine Peak since we thought we might as well even if the weather wouldn't get better. Fortunately for us, as we reached the peak—like in a movie—the sky started to clear up, and we were welcomed by beautiful views.

Chloe's point of view:

Snippet 1 (The Pain): *Everything is cold and wet and our tent is perilously placed upon a spine of rocks cutting into the Brandywine Glacier. My tentmate, Simone Goldberg, and I had just finished setting up our tent amidst gailing winds and chilled fingers. I'd heard from a friend that the previous Glacier School also had insanely brutal weather and half of the group had actually bailed rather than spend the night. Finally huddled within the (somewhat) warmer confines of our tent, Simone and I were wondering if this trip would end with the same fate. I had known the weather was going to be bleak on day 1, and had been prepared for some heavy type-2 fun, but my shivering body was having a hard time seeing how this would be considered fun at any point. Somewhere between the heavy body shivering and fantasizing of warm toes, we realized the wind had stopped. We opened the tent and miraculously the weather had cleared. The sun was shining and it was the most beautiful bluebird afternoon to learn some glacier skills. I've never been so happy to feel the sun on my*

skin. We began to gear up and I smiled, soaking in the golden rays between slitted eyes and taking in the views of the now visible glacier framed by indigo blue and snowy peaked mountains in the distance.

Since the weather quickly turned to a bluebird day, everyone started to get ready for instruction. As we were walking down from the summit, we heard the entire camp calling out Jasper Lincoln's name as everyone was rounding up. Ironically Jasper had a radio, but no one called him on it. In the meantime, Liam von Fischer, who was working on his ski-turns-every-month challenge, had boot-packed up just for a couple turns, but said that it was very worth it. Ivan Fediaev joined in. Sri Chaitanya and I then started teaching our group how to walk in crampons and in rope teams in addition to ideal vs. necessary gear. We went through basic glacier terrain management, and how to swap rope team leaders. With Anton Afanassiev, James Kissane, Sean McKay, and Alain Zhiyanov's groups, we went over how to make T-slot anchors, how to use pickets as anchors, attempted to find enough snow to teach snow bollards, and more. We then practiced some more crevasse rescue systems by hauling a spare backpack. Jacob Grossbard and Hannah found a very cool ice cave that we then went to check out. Their group also found a very deep crevasse they rappelled into. Afterwards, we headed back for some dinner, mulled wine, and hot apple cider.

Snippet 2 (What is the meaning of life?): After an amazing afternoon of learning to walk in crampons (you walk on slippery ice, but you don't slip), to NEVER step on the glacier rope, ice-axe 101, T-slots, ice screws, and hauling systems. Our glacier group (which was quite large due to the merging of two smaller groups) decided to summit Mt. Brandywine for sunset. We hiked up with views of Mt. Fee and spiny dragon-back mountain ridges. The other side of the glacier was imposing with deep crevasses that cut through the snow and ice like dark black cheshire cat smiles. We laughed and talked at the top, pondering the meaning of life and taking in the expansive views of mountains which peeked out from the sea of clouds far below us. We hiked back for dinner at twilight, head torches on, nimbly scrambling back to where we'd stashed our bags just before the steeper ascent to the summit. Here we had the perfect view of everyone else down at camp getting back from their own learning days and congregating for dinner. Small ants pattering about, a tent city aglow with multi coloured light contrasting the falling night and specks of stars starting to appear above them.

The next morning, many of us woke up early to see the sunrise at the summit of Brandywine. The sunrise did not disappoint! From the summit, we looked onto the other side of the Brandywine glacier and saw some huge crevasses, so a couple of groups went to the other side and did some cool crevasse rescue practice there.

Snippet 3 (We go beyond the col): Our glacier group, led by Lucas Braun, Elizabeth Chu, Ivan, and Brianna Ragsdale, decided to venture to the other side of the glacier

(remember the one with the really imposing crevasses?) to practice haul systems and see if we could learn via doing (i.e. someone would actually go into the crevasse and we would rescue them). The other side of the glacier was vast, offering more amazing views and more complex terrain. We practiced route finding and navigated the crevasse field ensuring to stay spaced out and crossing crevasses perpendicularly. The ice was beautiful within the deep crevasses, bright sunlight shone into the blue depths eventually fading to black. Aja Ayers gallantly offered to be lowered into one of the crevasses and had an epic time hanging out as the rest of us were scrutinized for our speed, memory, and execution of the most efficient hauling system. This side of Brandywine was more protected from the wind, and we all got pretty steamy having to de-layer for the more intense hauling rescue simulations. With the rendezvous time fast approaching, we roped up again to head back across the col to pack up camp and head back down to the cars. It had been a great day, and as we took a short break to remove our crampons before passing over a rock outcrop, we all happily munched on some suspiciously monochromatic sugar-laden snacks provided by Ivan. The rest of the walk back was filled with nonsensical stories and laughs. We were leaving the glacier, but not forever. We'd be back; we were glacier people now.

The second day, Sri's and my group decided to head back to the main glacier and let our group practice leading the rope teams. We did more crevasse rescuing practice and went over how to use ice screws in anchors. This time instead of using a bag, both Sri and I were hauled by our students. One of the coolest scenarios was when I was hauled out of a huge crevasse with ice falls on three sides. We then did some more exploring and found a crevasse filled with glacial water that was deeper than our probes would go. After finding a good slope, we did some self-arresting practice and played a bit of baseball with our ice axes.

Afterwards we headed back to the campground, had a quick lunch/snack, packed up, and headed back down. It was such a sunny and beautiful day that most of us forgot the crazy mini storm we experienced the day before. On my way down I joined Jacob and Hannah in a berry-picking adventure. This was probably the first time I felt fuller after a hike than when starting it.

Back at the upper parking lot, the car shuttling faff began. Surprisingly Jeff Mottershead was there with his son Devlin who also got some turns in; Liam wasn't the only one with the idea. Jeff graciously helped with the car shuttling as well. Anton was also determined to break one of his records on how many people he could fit into his car. He fit 12 people with multiple heads poking out windows. It definitely made for a good laugh seeing everyone get out of his clown car. Unfortunately, Elias Bowman's car did not have such a funny ride; right before driving off, his rear car window shattered, so we cleaned up all the pieces as best we could. Brandywine FSR: 2, VOC Cars: still 0.

As with many VOC trips, the weekend ended off with dinner at the samosa place in Squamish, with everyone a tad sunburnt and ready for more glacial trips!

COUSIN OF CAVE VIII

ALEX LEVY

October 25 - 27, 2024

Participants: Nick Hindley, Jacob Grossbard, Haley Foladare, Alex Koen, Megan Schenk, Stefanija Rekasius, Lindsay Smith, Alex Levy, Eros Rojas, Aske Kondo, Anton Isak Larsen, Max Holstegge, Ivan Fediaev, Elizabeth Chu, Matt Wilson, Kate Phillips, Zach Osterlund

IN MY OPINION, the trip officially began at our stop at the liquor store when Meg Schenk burst out laughing after seeing a sign that read “Enter to Win Skyy Vodka” but was graffitied to say “Enter to win Skibbidy Vodka.” Brainrot would continue to be a recurring theme throughout the trip. After leaving the liquor store, we were stopped during a road rage incident in which a driver brake-checked Ivan Fediaev’s car into a complete standstill in the middle of the highway. We thought we were going to have to fight him.

We arrived at the campsite in pouring rain at 11:00 pm. The lead car (Nick Hindley) made many wrong turns so we had to turn around and backtrack at least three times. Ivan’s 2001 Toyota Corolla made many expensive-sounding noises going over large rocks and deep holes. We weren’t sure if his car would make it. We arrived at camp and quickly set up our tents in pairs before going to sleep.

We got up early the next day and quickly set out to find our first cave. The forest was ripe with mushrooms and vegetation. It was clear this place didn’t get many visitors. We split into two teams: one with just boys, led by our fearless leader, Jacob Grossbard, and one with just girls + Alex Koen.

The first cave was a great warmup. It wasn’t outstanding in any regard, but it introduced us to crawling, being wet, and being muddy. I also caught a cave cricket for my BIOL 327 entomology collection. The cave ended at the top of a 5 metre waterfall and upon reaching it, we turned around.

The second cave introduced us to squeezes. This cave had a winding maze of narrow tunnels taking us in all directions. We crawled up, down, left, and right. I felt like a hamster inside a tube maze. This winding path ended in the “Birth Canal”, a 6 metre horizontal squeeze section. The opening was shaped like an egg: an oval with a narrower side and a wider side. On my first attempt, I couldn’t fit my torso through the start. However, after watching Matt Wilson make his way through, I shifted my body further to the wider side, deflated my lungs, and was able to get through. I had to position my arms so that my right arm was pointed forward above my head and my left arm was back by my waist, kind of like swimming freestyle.

I used my forward arm to pull myself forward and my back arm plus my toes to push myself along. There were areas where I needed to exhale hard to keep moving forward, but I knew that others made it through so I wasn't afraid. It would've been impossible to turn around so I had to keep going. I reached the end and let out a sigh of relief. Afterwards, we exited the cave and returned to camp for lunch.

Now that we were acquainted with caving, we set off to a cave known as *Emilia* to do what we came here for: ascend and descend underground waterfalls using the single-rope technique. Due to heavy rain leading up to the trip, the water level and flow rate in the cave were much higher than normal. This would introduce problems later. Immediately after entering *Emilia*, we knew this cave was different. We were greeted with deep rushing water flowing right through our path. There was an air of caution and nervousness among the group as we approached our first descent. Due to the high flow rate of the waterfall, Jacob advised us not to use a device for the rappel, lest we slip, invert, and dangle upside-down while being waterboarded. Instead, we wrapped the rope around our arms, over our shoulders, and shuffled down.

The third and final descent proved to be the scariest. The last waterfall was around 20 metres tall and the rope was anchored to bolts on the ceiling and hanging a meter from the ledge at the top of the falls. After unclipping from the handline and clipping my device, I had to swing on the rope to start my descent. I was scared as it was my first time using a figure-8 and I had no idea how much friction I needed to prevent falling. The descent was practically blind. My head was directly under the waterfall for most of it making it hard to see, hear, and breathe. Not to mention that the water was a frigid 5°C. I blindly made my way down using only my feet brushing up against the wall of the cave to orient myself. To my surprise, Jacob was at the bottom holding the rope, waiting to give a fireman's belay if anyone needed it. This added level of security made me feel much safer.

Once everyone made it down, we ventured to the end of the cave to find a small pool. We took a swim and our guide Zach Osterlund let us know that there was a "cool cave" on the other side of the cave wall. All we had to do to get there was make our way through a 3 meter underwater tube known as a duck-under. However, he advised us not to attempt it since he had never seen the water level this high in the cave before, stating, "I just wanna say I do not think this is a good idea, putting it on the record". I'm never one to back down from a challenge so while holding on to Ivan's hand, I stuck my legs into the tube to feel where the roof would rise and open up to air. I couldn't feel where it opened so I let go of Ivan's hand and tried to swim through. After a few seconds, I got a massive brain freeze and panicked. I tried to swim up for air but I bumped my head into the ceiling. I was confused, dazed, and disoriented. I thought "Why can't I see which direction to go?" I realized my eyes were closed so I opened them, but it didn't help. All I saw was sediment lit up by my headlamp. I frantically swam in a straight line hoping for

the best. I felt the coldness from the water creeping into me through my wetsuit. It felt like the cold hand of death was reaching inside of me and grabbing my heart. After 17 excruciating seconds, my chest brushed up on the shore of the pool and I stuck up my head, gasping for air.

After I was shaken to my core, our fearless leader Jacob swam into the murky depths and disappeared. We made no plans, had no safety measures, and had no way to communicate with Jacob. After a minute of failing to resurface, we started to worry. Did he make it to the other side? Did he get stuck in the tube? Why isn't he back? Is he dead? We poked around the tube trying to feel for a body. We also shone our lights underwater in case he couldn't figure out which direction to swim. After a few minutes of worrying, Zach told us if Jacob was stuck down there, he'd already be dead so it wasn't worth worrying about him anymore. It seemed satirical but with a grimly serious undertone. To our relief, Jacob emerged minutes later, calm and collected.

Now it was time for us to ascend the 20 meter waterfall. Anton Isak Larsen was the first to go. He made it look easy and was up in under ten minutes. This set our expectations for the difficulty pretty low. Next up was Max Holstegge. The ascent was much harder for him and gave me a glimpse of the struggle ahead. After making it past the first half of the ascent, we watched as he was thrown around by the force of the water, struggling to ascend. Ivan and I severely underestimated the difficulty of what we were watching and joked, "Put the fries in the bag, bro." Max spent roughly 30 minutes ascending and became so cold he spent the entire next day in a heated van. Around this time, Ivan's attention span needed a recharging so he took out two phones to watch Family Guy funny moments compilations and play Subway Surfers at the same time. I shivered at the bottom of the falls for two hours waiting for Matt Wilson, Zach, Eros Rojas, and Ivan to ascend. When it was my turn to ascend, a foolish sense of arrogance clouded my judgment. I was convinced I would be the fastest one up. How hard could the climb be? Ascending felt easy when we practiced in the Aviary.

For the first third of the ascent, the waterfall was angled so only my waist was submerged. It was more challenging than expected, but doable. The proximity to the rocks and the angle of the rope made ascending more difficult as I had to balance my feet on the rocks while also operating the devices, unlike the hanging ascension we practiced in the Aviary.

The second third of the ascent pushed me to my limit. The rope was hanging directly under the waterfall so this entire section was completely submerged in water. When I looked up, water would slam into my face and I couldn't breathe. With every inch I pulled myself up the rope, I grew more and more exhausted. Water poured down onto me, blinding me. My hands probed the cave walls, desperately searching for a concave section to hide from the water and rest in. I found a hole and stuck my head in so I could finally breathe. However, once I stopped moving, I started shivering uncontrollably. I knew my muscles needed rest to keep

going, but if I rested for too long, I might succumb to hypothermia and die. I decided to go back into the water and keep moving. I only managed to pull myself up a few more feet before I lost function in my hands and arms due to the extreme cold and exhaustion. At this point, I was hanging on the rope in the direct flow of the water knowing that I needed to let my muscles rest to keep ascending. But, if I rested for too long, I would become hypothermic. I chose to rest and accepted the possibility of death by hypothermia. I felt sleepy and helpless. I was unsure what would happen but I was powerless to change my fate. Moments after this grim realization, there was a tug on my rope from above. It felt like the hand of God had reached down to pull me out of an icy grave. Help had arrived and I wasn't going to die alone in a cave. Zach and Nick had set up a pulley system and pulled me up from the top, saving my life. They told me they started pulling me up when they heard screaming, but I don't remember screaming.

When I was at the top of the rope, I was so cold I couldn't move my hands and needed help unlocking my carabiners to get onto the handline. Once off the rope, I looked over and saw Ivan huddled up and shivering. He had a thousand-yard stare. Ivan later told me he began the process of taking off his ascender, preparing to descend, moments before he was rescued. He was being choked by water and didn't think he could make it up. He described the feeling of being rescued as akin to being revived by Mercy from Overwatch. I asked Zach how hard this ascent was in comparison to others. He said out of the thousands of ascents he's done, this was one of the top ten most physically challenging. Overall, out of the nine of us who descended that waterfall, four of us needed a rescue.

After getting out, we made our way back to camp, set up a nice fire, and played "Sock Wars". The second day wasn't as eventful. My group explored some chill caves and the girls descended *Fishy Hole*. Overall, CoC 2024 was a 10/10 experience that made me appreciate the fragility of life and deepen my respect for the power nature commands.

Photos *Alex Levy*





READING BREAK ROCKS (AND THE EPIC ON EPINEPHRINE)

JULIAN LARSEN

November 9 - 15, 2024

Participants: Julian Larsen, Evan Wong, Nick Ayers, Julia Cranston, Ivan Fediaev, Mikkel Bjerrum, Avery Soule (Smith Rock only)

READING BREAK WAS COMING AROUND, and everyone was excited for the somewhat annual trip to Smith Rock. The crowded club room was filled with excitement as eager climbers talked about plans at the pre-trip. Only one thing stood in our way, the fickle weather of November...

As the days drew closer the forecast oscillated from bad to worse and a number of people abandoned their trip plans. Others among us began discussing other options. Could we escape the storm further south? It was mostly a hypothetical, we only had five days without classes and Smith Rock was already a long enough drive. We hung on to the hope that Smith would be good, but so much talk of further flung destinations had us all inspired. Evan Wong, Nick Ayers, and I slowly prodded each other, all secretly wanting to go on a bigger trip, but not wanting to commit without group support. We were looking at multiple places, but Red Rocks was the only place with an absolutely bomber weather window. During my gear hour on Wednesday I met Mikkel Bjerrum, who I found out was also planning to go further south with Ivan Fediaev's car group. The next day, less than 24 hours before leaving, we had done enough prodding, and all committed to the trip. We called an emergency meeting in the clubroom, where I frantically explained the logistics and areas for climbing in Red Rocks. Last year, I flew there to climb for the same week, so I had already done most of the research for areas, routes, approaches, food, and camping.

The last-minute plan was as follows:

1. We drive to Smith in our original car groups.
2. We climb in Smith for the first two days, which looked like good weather.
3. Nick, Evan, Julia Cranston and I pile into Julia's car on Monday morning and

Top Nick being belayed by Julia up "Dark Shadows". *Evan Wong*

Middle The unbelievable chimney on Epinephrine. *Evan Wong*

Bottom Climbing the splitter "Yin and Yang". *Evan Wong*

race Ivan to Las Vegas.

4. We climb in Red Rocks for four more days.
5. We embark on a 20+ hour drive back to Vancouver going straight through the night.

SMITH ROCK

Phase one of our trip was in full swing, and on Saturday morning, VOCers awoke at camp to the morning glow on the beautiful volcanic formations surrounding the aptly named Crooked River. People split into smaller groups going to different parts of the park, and I joined Evan and Avery Soule to start off the day with Monkey Space, a route up the incredibly cool and similarly named formation: the Monkey Face. This ended up taking the entire day (which I did not expect from a 3-pitch climb) for the following reasons:

1. We started late, and the days are short in November.
2. The first pitch is indeed an actual trad climb (none of us brought gear).
3. Evan decided to lead a 5.11 pitch with a massive and heavy cragging pack (because he wanted to rig the route for a photo shoot).

This alone could constitute a mini trip report, but I don't want to risk turning this trip report into an endless ramble, so I'll let the reader extrapolate that a lot of faff was had. At dinner I asked Evan if he had learned anything from trying to lead with his bag, he responded: "I need to get strong at leading with heavy packs." - not the lesson I'd had in mind...

RED ROCKS

Race to Las Vegas

After a second day in Smith, and a heartfelt goodbye to those we left behind, it was time for more Rocks. Ivan's car had assured us they would make it to the Red Rocks campground before us, so a 13 hour race ensued. We got off with a bit of a head start, so we thought they had been left in the dust. Over eight hours later we pulled into a town called Austin in the middle of Nevada, which looked straight out of a Western movie. To our surprise Ivan's Corolla pulled in just metres away, and we stepped onto the curb outside the saloon, facing each other down, ready for a standoff. Fortunately for both of us we didn't have guns like the rest of the Americans, so instead we had a bit of a laugh and after a few minutes got back on the road. A couple hours later, not knowing if we were ahead or behind, we sent a photo of my tent in the campground from the previous year (though they didn't know that), as a confusing and effective taunt. In the end we did make it to the campsite before them, but only by about 15 minutes. Julia promptly fell asleep in her car, so the other seven of us all piled into the Corolla for dinner at Panda Express.

Epic on Epinephrine

If Smith Rock is an oasis for climbing, then Red Rocks is paradise. We spent the next couple days trad climbing some splitter cracks at Kraft Mountain, sport climbing on juggy Patina plates at Calico Hills, and doing an absolutely classic 5.8 trad multi called Dark Shadows (highly recommended).

The ultimate prize however, is a route called Epinephrine. Epinephrine is possibly the most classic 5.9 in the whole of North America. It is most well-known for its perfectly smooth sided chimney pitches, which are incredibly unique and high quality. The rest of the climb, which is lesser mentioned but still ultra classic, is hundreds of metres of vertical gym-like face climbing between 5.8 and 5.9.

After Mikkel suffered a cactus related injury (mildly horrific), it was decided that four of us would go for Epinephrine on the third day. Nick and Evan would be the first pair, and Ivan and I, the second. Knowing the immense popularity of the route, we left at 3:00 am, hoping to beat the crowds. After a questionable drive on the desert access road with Ivan's Corolla, we began the approach. We quickly passed a group of three, and one of them loudly exclaimed: "Are we just gonna let them pass us?". We rushed to beat them but in the dark our lack of solid approach knowledge was damning. When we made it to the base the group of three had beat us, and another pair was already ahead of them. We set in for the long haul, hoping they would be fast, bail, or let us pass at some point. The first pair appeared to get lost on the first pitch, unable to find the anchors for several minutes. Not a great sign. Then the group of three set off, and having only climbed about ten metres up, the leader calls in on their Rocky Talkie: "I'm gonna take a shit on this bushy ledge, don't follow me for a bit". At this absurd statement (why wouldn't they do this on the ground before starting?), we knew we were doomed.

After waiting at the base for an hour and then giving them a bit of a head start, Nick started leading the first pitch. In a matter of minutes he had caught up to them, but the anchor was full, so he kind of just sat around beneath the line. Evan asked if he could follow, but Nick said the anchor was too full for another person. This would end up happening at all of the first three anchors, and then happened to Ivan and me as we followed as well. The first pitch was a surprisingly run-out slab that should warrant a bit of a warning for budding trad leaders. The second pitch had a small but fun chimney that serves as a warmup for the mega chimney of the third and fourth pitch. At the anchor at the top of the second pitch, a reasonably sized ledge allowed Ivan and I to sit down. Little did we know the groups ahead would slow to a grinding halt as they entered the main chimney pitches (3 and 4). As we sat on a ledge below the chimney, several other parties got to the base, waited for people to start moving, and then promptly turned around to climb something else when no progress was made. One party from Calgary shared in our frustration, loudly cursing the top two groups for not bailing. At the belay ledge we all started finding ways to pass the time. Ivan had been getting videos of himself playing Sub-

way Surfers and watching downloaded TikToks while on outdoor adventures as a joke, but this time he was so bored that he was doing it legitimately. Nick and Evan began singing Christmas carols, as I tried to rigorously determine the rank of Sour Patch Kids flavours from best to worst. During this time, I watched a pair of climbers on a nearby route climb a full five pitches before disappearing out of sight. The sunken cost fallacy was brought up more than a few times amongst us, but surely, SURELY, the climbers above us would give up at some point, right? They were only barely finished the third pitch and at this rate would be on the climb for several days. During this time the group of three also got a cam and a rope stuck. The rope was only freed when Nick got it out for them.

So why were we still waiting? Well, we only had four days in Red Rocks, and Epinephrine is the must-do ultra-mega-super-classic. I wanted to climb Levitation 29 the next day, so bailing and doing another route at this point would've been too long of a day if I wanted a good rest. We decided we would likely just do the chimney pitches because of how unique they are, by which point it would hopefully still be a reasonable hour, and we could go get some proper sleep for our final day.

At long last we began going up the start of the main chimney (pitch 3) one by one. It was a spectacular feature, a deep, wide slot hidden behind a sandstone tower, with perfectly smooth walls. It's what you might imagine the idealized chimney climb would look like, no holds, no zig zags, just two smooth parallel walls. The first pitch of this massive chimney had two cracks in the back, which allowed for ample protection, and a bit of crack climbing when the body compression became tiring. Due to a couple cam retrievals, Nick and Evan had taken to calling me "the cam wizard". Since I had so much time to wait, I tried furiously to get a cam unstuck that the group of three had left behind. After about 30 minutes I had made significant progress, and all 4 lobes were moving, but I was so tired from the awkward hanging position and my knuckles were bleeding from all the abrasion in the crack that I had to give up. Once all four of us made it to the top of pitch 3, morale was low, and nobody seemed stoked to start leading the next pitch. While the chimney was incredible, the sun was only a couple hours from setting, and there were still 10 pitches left, followed by a long scramble and descent. We didn't make a firm plan, but it seemed the group was mostly on board to do the next pitch and then rappel back to the base.

It was at this point that we finally saw our mortal enemies who had ruined our day so thoroughly. At an anchor midway up pitch 4, the leading party and the group of three decided to combine their ropes so they could do the required 60 m rappels to the base. They laughed and giggled as they descended past us, which only made me more bitter. Normally I like to be positive and give people the benefit of the doubt, but laughing and joking while ruining the day of potentially dozens of people who wanted to do the route today? I must admit, I felt true hatred in those moments. Trying to encourage Nick and Evan to start up the next pitch, I reiterated

a joke we had been saying: “You can’t fall out of a chimney, right?”. At this moment the leader of the group three was rappelling and laughed rather aggressively at me, before stating “I’m a 5.12 trad leader, and this was HARD. Good luck making it all the way up this pitch.” If I didn’t feel hate toward him before, I surely did now.

Pitch 4 was a similar difficulty to the pitch before but had no cracks in the back of the chimney. Instead, a couple of incredibly spaced bolts were the only form of protection in the chimney. While none of the moves proved too challenging, there were maneuvers that were just committing enough to be a bit nerve-wracking when the last bolt or gear is 10 metres below you. It was once again a great bit of climbing though, and not ridiculously hard like Mr. 5.12 had assured us. To my surprise, when I topped out on the Black Tower, Nick was out of sight, and Evan was about to follow up the next pitch. “WE’RE GOING TO THE TOP!” Evan exclaimed. While I also felt the excitement of having our path unobstructed, I felt a bit of disappointment knowing that this meant tomorrow, our last day, would be a write-off. A worthy trade off perhaps, but only barely. Nonetheless, I blamed Mr. 5.12 and accepted the decision.

We had heard less about the rest of the climb, but it was equally amazing. Imagine a 5.8 or 5.9 in the Aviaary but going seemingly forever. Small cracks and some bolts provided ample protection and perfect jugs were just common enough to let you climb them the whole way, but just spaced enough that there wasn’t a confusing jumble of hold options; it was essentially a perfectly set gym climb. The sun was already setting when we made it out of the chimney, so the majority of these upper pitches were climbed in the dark (but with a full moon and bright city light pollution). We made it all the way to the top of the climb in only a few hours, less than we had spent at one of the belay stations behind the other groups. We were all ecstatic, but also tired. It had been a long and frustrating day, and none of us had brought enough food and water for such an epic. The expansive lights of Vegas dominated the horizon as we scrambled our way across and down the ridge to descend. In a couple hours, we made it back to the car at 10:30 pm. By the time we had gotten dinner and made it back to camp we were probably approaching 20 hours since waking up, a much bigger day than we had planned for.

The next day was as much of a write off as I expected it to be. While the others were somewhat functional, I was not. We went to a steep overhanging sport crag, which in my state was far too physical, and I couldn’t even do my warm-up. After a couple hours we went into town to have showers and then began our drive home. We had thought about staying another night in Red Rocks, but Julia was feeling good and wanted to drive as far north as possible that night. In the car I tried desperately to get to sleep, but probably only got a few minutes every hour. Heavy wind and snow blasted us through most of Nevada, and by the time we made it into Idaho, Julia was tapping out. We pulled off at a rest stop, but it was so cold and miserable outside that Nick said he’d rather drive through the night than camp

there. We drove through the night, going through canyons and mountain passes with more heavy snow and wind. Evan took the graveyard shift, using a caffeine pill to pull off an incredible effort. When the sun rose we regained some energy and made it to Vancouver, capping off a 22 hour drive that I would not like to do again soon.

My take on Epinephrine:

So why did the groups in-front of us epic so badly on epinephrine?

1. Group of three: This group mentioned a few times that they were strong climbers, so how did Mr. 5.12 get shut down? Well in short, having strong fingers has zero benefit in a chimney. If you are going to do Epinephrine, you should have at least used true chimney technique on a climb before - a super popular route is not the place to try it out for the first time. On top of this, they clearly had very little multi-pitch experience. Being strong does not mean you suddenly know how to efficiently belay a three person team or do transitions quickly.
2. Leading party: This party was simply inexperienced and 5.9 was likely around their regular limit. Epinephrine is not sandbagged, but many of the pitches are PG13 in my books, and the chimneys in particular are a totally unique style that you need to practice beforehand. There's also a good chance they had never done a climb this long before, and again, due to popularity, this is not the route to be attempting as your longest climb.

Why couldn't we just pass them?

1. With five people ahead of us, passing both parties would've been a huge maneuver, especially since there were four of us.
2. The group of 3 thought they were really good, so they wouldn't let us pass, even though they were too slow to pass the group ahead of them.
3. The chimney was constrained enough that we couldn't just go around. The others would have had to step to the side at belay stations and let us by if we were to pass in the chimney.

Should you climb Epinephrine?

Yes, but only if you're ready. Practice chimneys beforehand, do climbs of similar lengths, and be comfortable on 5.9 PG13 (i.e. runout). If you're very confident in these three skills, and the same thing doesn't happen to you that happened to us, it'll be one of the best days of climbing you've ever had.

BUILDING CLIMBING AT UBC

RICK PRICE

RICK PRICE

Rick was an active VOC member from 1966 to 1970. He has lived in Squamish for over fifty years, enthusiastically enjoying its many outdoor opportunities. Rick met his wife, Diddi, in the VOC; they have two adult daughters and two grandchildren, all of whom are enthusiastic adventurers. The positive influences of the Varsity Outdoor Club apparently span generations.

Rick recently published a memoir describing his many years of adventures in wild places. This story about buildering is an excerpt. If anyone is interested in knowing more, or acquiring a copy of the memoir, Rick can be reached at rickpr@telus.net. He loves to hear from readers.

BUILDING CLIMBING AT UBC

I entered UBC in the fall of 1966, rapidly achieving mediocrity as a student for reasons that will soon become clear. I was, however, having a great time with the Varsity Outdoor Club (VOC) learning to climb on the Stawamus Chief, in the mountains, on Wreck Beach gun towers, and on UBC buildings.

Building climbing was attractive because it could be done during evenings and between classes – or, for that matter, instead of them. It offered practice at cracks, downspout laybacks, chimneys, and overhangs. It also held the compelling appeal of being illegal. To succeed, you needed to combine the technical skills of a climber with the evasive instincts of a felon. What I lacked in the former, I am proud to say I made up with the latter.

One night, early in my career, we climbed the residence building for the school of theology. We were partway up when a theology student stuck his head out a dorm window and spotted us. He withdrew momentarily, and apparently sounded the alarm.

A vocally abusive horde erupted from the building and commenced hurling sticks, stones and some truly shocking language at us. The vocabulary was rich, creative and not overly ecclesiastical. Perhaps they had so far studied only the Old Testament. It was one of our more dangerous climbs, and it certainly shone a re-

vealing light on those seeking a life in the service of the Lord.

One of my occasional building climbing partners was Mike, who was an engineering student. His deepest loyalty, however, was to the VOC. This became important when we decided that the engineering building [now the Leonard C. Klinck building] needed to be climbed. There were two reasons for its virginal status. First, climbing it meant dealing with engineers, who would undoubtedly be just as obnoxious as the theological students, and likely more resourceful. Second, the building was a four-story concrete monolith, lacking artsy architectural features that could provide opportunities for the creative climber.

Mike and I spent a fruitless evening looking for lines of weakness. Then came a small *aha* moment. Adjacent, and separated by only a narrow lane, was the campus steam plant. It was almost the same height and had several features that inspired cautious optimism. Thanks to a convenient down-spout, we soon found ourselves on top of the steam plant, gazing across a twenty-foot gap to the roof of our fondest objective.

A day or two later, Mike returned with a plan. A reconnaissance had revealed that a well-designed grapple could hook itself safely under the edge of the roof flashing. Furthermore, Mike was currently taking a metallurgy course, providing him with access to suitable materials and implements; the opportunity to earn course credits for constructing a burglary tool only made the project that much sweeter.

A dark and misty night found three of us once more on the roof of the steam plant. We tied a rope to the grapple, and Mike whirled it around his head a couple of times before flinging it across the gap. It made a shocking noise when it landed, so we crouched down and listened. No response. We pulled until the rope became tight, but it suddenly released and swung back. On the second try, though, it held tight. We tested it again, and then anchored it on our side while Mike prepared to swing across on a Tyrolean traverse. This involves a simian-like maneuver, hanging upside down suspended from hands and feet. We were, however, markedly less adept than any chimpanzee.

Once across, Mike refastened the line to something more substantial and the rest of us scrambled over. Unfortunately, though, one of our chief fears came to pass: an engineering student passing below sounded the alarm. Before long a loud and profane mob of red-jacketed Neanderthals had assembled on the ground below. They seemed surprisingly lacking in appreciation for our amazing feat of der-ring-do and skill. Given that the building was now surrounded by an angry mob, our options for getting off were more than somewhat limited. We knew full-well that it was only a matter of time before some of them decided to avail themselves of the interior roof access.

Just as it looked hopeless, though, we discovered a deep open well down into the middle of the building. It was about fifteen feet square, and provided win-

dows for rooms that would otherwise be interior. In fact, one of those windows, just one floor down, was open.

We set up a quick rappel and I slid down so fast (pre-harness days) that I could smell my pants smoking. Pulling the window open wide, I swung into a large, multi-unit washroom. I leaned out to give a thumbs-up, and then looked around. We were in luck: there was not a urinal to be found. We had ended up in the only women's washroom in a mostly-male building.

Mike knew the building layout well, so was able to stash our climbing gear. The building was pretty much empty, what with all the excitement outside. We made our way down to the ground floor and slipped into the crowd that had gathered to wait for the highly-anticipated arrival of the rappellers.

After discussing with some hyped-up engineers what might be done to teach those VOC pricks a lesson, we made our way back to the clubroom, where another successful evening of "buildering" was celebrated.

DISCLAIMER

All events mentioned in this article are fictional and hypothetical.





SKIING AND WINTER MOUNTAINEERING



BURNS & TURNS 2024 (MINUS SOME TURNS)

STEFANIJA REKASIUS

February 17 - 19, 2024

IT ALL STARTED in the wee hours of the morning the Saturday of reading break... (Okay, I'll stop trying to sound Scottish now).

My car group had surprisingly very minimal faff for the morning of a VOC trip. So, to spice it up, driving up to Brian Waddington Hut we turned to the Tantalus look-out to enjoy the great view of the sunrise. Then, we took a mini-de-tour to get back on the road going north but still arrived at the Pemberton McDonalds early. There, we met up with about 34 excited VOCers, some wearing kilts and some who attempted to make kilts with tea towels. Surprisingly, every car was on time and then we left in a car train towards Phelix.

That was where the lack of faff ended. When we reached the winter parking lot, we were supposed to go up in predetermined groups to make getting up to the hut easier. However, due to limited snow, about half of us were on skis and half were on snowshoes or spikes. We got it mainly sorted out dividing into snowshoers and skiers and started hiking up around 11:00 am. From there started the many transitions of skinning, A-framing skis, or carrying skis up the logging road. Once most of the skiers got to the woods we decided it was simply best to A-frame our skis and microspike it up. Unfortunately, I didn't have my shoes and had to hike up all the way in ski boots. Let's just say blister tape was one of the best things I brought.

When my group reached Phelix and the frozen lake, we were so glad to see that there was more snow than expected, although Cabin Hill was definitely going to be a no-go. We started planning where we could ski to make the most out of carrying up our gear. The last group got up to the hut around 6:00 pm. right in time for a beautiful sunset view of Phelix. Of course, most of the snowshoers/hikers got to the hut much faster since they weren't bootpacking. They had already settled into the hut and tents, and some were making a snow shelter. Having reserved 80 spots in the hut, we scared off all of the other groups and were the only ones in the hut. Everyone then started making their amazing dinners (most commonly

Section cover photo Whistler backcountry *Liam von Fischer*

instant mashed potatoes, rice with veggies, toasted marshmallows, or 12 boiled eggs as brought by Mozi and Peter Lu). Some started planning their objectives for the next day but most simply relaxed, enjoyed the stars, and went to bed early, getting ready for a full day Sunday. It definitely felt amazing being at Phelix and seeing it covered in snow (even though there wasn't much of it, as seems to be the theme this winter) was stunning.

Sunday morning we were welcomed by beautiful conditions of blue skies and no wind. Many were quick to get up and sorted into groups for some excitement. One group went on a more mountaineering-focused objective up Mount Gandalf; many went to do some laps near Mount Frodo; some stayed in the hut to relax; and an ambitious group attempted to go up Mount Shadowfax and Mount Taillefer. I was part of one of the groups skinning up to Frodo. The skin up was quite mellow until we reached the Peregrine West Col, where things got a little spicy – but everything went smoothly overall. Then we left our skis and hiked to the Frodo summit where we had lunch. After enjoying the view we hiked back to our skis and started skiing down. The first group that started to ski down triggered a small loose avalanche so we adjusted our run to be more in the path of our skin track. After enjoying our ski down most of the way, we transitioned and skinned up some more for another shorter run. Everyone enjoyed it as there hadn't been a lot of snow yet this season, so we took a lot of pleasure in every jump, 180, and speed. On our way back to the hut we noticed that someone drew spirals and smiley faces in the snow. We also met up with a group of snowshoers out for a sunset stroll. The sunset was amazing for the second day in a row!

Back at the hut, everyone was explaining how their days went and we learned that as a whole, we had triggered three small avalanches, but everyone was okay. Then Ross Campbell, our amazing trip leader, started to chef it up making haggis and vegan haggis for everyone. It was really good, although the black pepper was a bit too spicy for some of us. Ross also recited the *Address to a Haggis*, and although he explained the meaning beforehand, most of us still didn't fully understand. Then Elias Bowman recited *An Ode to Climate Change*, explaining how the climbing season is longer now and polar bears are learning how to swim. Chloe Garzon and Emma Ghelfi recited an *Ode to Backcountry Food*, which highlighted the fancy avocados, ramen, and french toast that the VOCers had been making so far.

While many of us were out skiing or snowshoeing, some of those who stayed in the hut created not only a dance floor on the lake for the Ceilidh, but also a skating rink on which we later played a version of human curling. We also found out that tele-boots are the most slippery on the ice, more so than hut booties.

Between having everyone in the hut, and the cooking of the haggis, Phelix definitely felt like a sauna. When Ross invited everyone onto the lake for the Ceilidh, the cold fresh air was more than welcomed. It was then time to test the

strength of the ice. Safe to say, the ice held and no one went swimming. Ross taught us five dances and sometimes it felt like Ross was just making up dance moves, but it still got everyone laughing. More than once, I was laughing so hard with my partner Eden Perry that I had to stop. One of the dances was a VOC special, but definitely felt more like us just fooling around. Other than everyone bumping into each other and not knowing what to do, everyone was having a blast. Then, Ross asked if anyone else had any dances they'd like to teach. I decided to try to teach a Lithuanian traditional dance – let's just say teaching dances is much harder than expected, but it definitely was a great time and left many out of breath.

Afterwards, the party truly began. When everyone got back to the hut, Ben Wahl took out the guitar, and Elias took out the jaw harp and started the jam session with the amazing choir of VOCers. Singing from 10:30 pm-1:00 am, we went through most of the song book with some favourites being *Barrett's Privateers*, *Northwest Passage*, *Home*, and *Loch Lomond* – a Scottish Song led by Ross. Having played around on a guitar for a couple months but never having played for others, I asked to play a couple songs. Later, when I heard the video of *Viva la Vida*, I cracked up. Throughout the night, Ross kept telling us that we should finish singing, but it was such a fun time and we didn't have a care in the world. Everyone in the hut definitely heard us and we probably kept up more than a few people until we stopped singing. Ironically most of the singers were those sleeping in tents instead of the hut so I decided to wait before climbing up to the loft to avoid angry glares from those who were trying to sleep.

The next morning was definitely a lot slower than the previous but slowly everyone got ready and groups left the hut between 9:00-11:00 am. Going down was yet again slower on skis than spikes. Starting out with skis was definitely fun, but due to the limited snow coverage in the forest, we decided to once again A-frame our skis to avoid ruining them. Once we got out of the forest section, we were beyond excited to ski down the logging road. Those few moments of speed and skiing Frodo definitely made me happy that I brought my skis.

As with most VOC trips, there were some shenanigans and faff waiting for everyone to unite back at the cars. Flavia Caprez and Joshua Lafond actually got back to the parking lot quite quickly and prepped strawberries with caramel and chocolate for the rest of their group; Settare Shariati and Julian Larsen decided to work on their tans; my car group decided to play with a kendama and a deck of cards; and Elias used his ice axe to break through the layer of ice in his Nalgene that was left in the car. Everyone made it back to the cars well by 3:00 pm and we started back the drive to Vancouver and back to reality. Some of us (myself included) were not ready to do schoolwork so we joined the Glendining + Sloquet Hot Springs trip or the Keith's Hut ski trip and did not think about school for at least a couple more days.

And with that, another successful Burns & Turns is in the books 'On the Bonnie Bonnie banks of Loch Lomond/Phelix.

TAKING OUR SKIS FOR A WALK: AN ATTEMPT ON MT. GLENDINNING + SLOQUET HOT SPRINGS

JULIAN LARSEN

February 22 - 24, 2024

Sloquet Hot Springs (North-West Harrison)

Participants: Julian Larsen, Duncan MacIntyre, Stefanija Rekasius, Xi Liang

AFTER A LONG STRETCH OF assignments and midterms I had one goal for reading break: absolutely forget about school. This necessitates a VOC trip or two, so I signed up for Burns and Turns followed by a trip to Sloquet Hot Springs with a summit of the nearby Mt. Glendinning. Burns and Turns was a blast, and as one of the few people who didn't bring skis to Phelix, I felt quite smug passing the suffering skiers on the low coverage trail. If only I knew what would befall me later that week...

Unfortunately, when I got back from Phelix, I still hadn't got a car spot for the second trip, and rainy weather meant climbing would be limited. Luckily, just as I started to despair, Duncan MacIntyre contacted me letting me know a car spot had opened up for Sloquet. After my experience at Phelix I thought we would surely be going for the summit with only spikes and maybe some snowshoes and crampons.

Why would I think this? Perhaps it was because the trail for Glendinning starts at only 300 metres elevation. Possibly it was because it isn't actually a trail but a bushwhack up a slope in a remote valley. Maybe it was because Stefanija Rekasius (who was the third summiteer of this trip) had been on Burns and Turns with me and knew the horrible state of the snowpack as well.

As it turns out, none of these were not good enough reasons to leave the skis at home, because Duncan and Stefanija insisted on bringing them. Thus, the seed of suffering had been planted.

Besides Duncan, Stefanija, and I, our only other participant was Xi Liang, who promised good company at the hot springs and during our long travels, but was quite content with not joining for the mountaineering portion of the trip. The four of us packed into Duncan's SUV on Thursday morning and started the long drive to Sloquet Hot Springs. This consisted of driving to Pemberton, and then driving south almost the same distance but on logging roads which cut deep

into rainforest until our destination just shy of Harrison Lake. When we got to the campsite, we checked in with a local named Mark. When he saw the skis in our vehicle, we told him our plan and he was very much not convinced. In fact, he started to talk to us like we had never been camping before because I think he concluded we were stupid. Perhaps he was right, but perhaps stupidity makes for a good story and some solid Type II fun. That night we enjoyed a good soak in the hot springs and prepared for the 4:00 am wake up the next morning. Our discussion about potential risks and evacuation plans made Xi a little anxious he might not see us again.

4:00 am never really feels amazing, especially when you sleep in a tent, but there's definitely an excitement from the sense that something big is about to happen. So, on Friday morning we shivered around the table at camp eating oatmeal and feeling this excitement together. Xi, despite not needing to wake up early, decided to join us on the first couple kilometers of logging road before we began the bushwhack. And whack bushes we did, mostly with our skis which constantly got stuck on branches, rocks, moss and dirt, suddenly halting our steps at any moment and throwing us off balance. The slopes got steeper, and we started moving slowly as cliffs appeared above, blocking our path and leading us to scramble-like sections and no-fall zones in the forest. This culminated in the crux of our route, a steep gully which ended in a near vertical step up a horrible tangle of branches. I went up this section first, struggling to get my skis through a tight space under a log with a maze of branches to get caught on. Loose dirt meant the footing was useless and I pulled myself up by grabbing branches. This burly maneuver somehow reminded me of caving as I "birthed" out from under the log and branches.

After about five and a half hours of carrying skis, we finally caught our first glimpse of snow. Success? Not exactly. The snow was only in small patches where there was no forest, and under the trees there was nothing. To make matters worse, we had not come very far. As a matter of fact, bushwhacking up a steep slope with skis was rather slow and we had only gotten to about 800 metres elevation. Since the bottom is at 300 metres, and the peak is at 2053 metres, that means that we had... (checks math) absolutely no chance of summiting. Spirits were low and talks of bailing were proposed, but I had one goal and one goal only: prove Mark wrong. Who was the campground manager to question our abilities? I would get at least one turn, and it wouldn't be on some measly patch of slush.

We decided 1:00 pm would be our turnaround time, so we pushed on as fast as possible hoping we would at least make it to the alpine. Eventually we made it high enough for consistent snow, but it was melting out and hollow underneath, so our feet often punched through. Stefanija in particular fell into a couple sub-snow creeks, drenching her shoes. Unfortunately, 1:00 pm arrived and we had only made it to about 1300 metres. There was no alpine bowl or powder slopes, but a somewhat covered boulder field and an alder lined creek bed.

After transitioning into skis, I made the first turns of our trip: three or four shaky turns down a boulder field on wet concrete snow, before I had to dismount to cross a creek. Stefanija followed, and then Duncan started on his telesskis. On his third turn, the bindings on one of his skis broke apart. He also noticed that his VOC rental boots were cracked, which couldn't be very good either. That was all the skiing Duncan got to do. Perhaps it's a good thing we didn't get better conditions since his skis probably would've broken anyways... Alas, Duncan put his hiking boots back on and began walking back down, while Stefanija and I took our skis on and off trying to get a few turns here and there in the alders. We got a dozen or so more, meaning the trip was 'cough' obviously worth it.

The way down was basically the way up but worse. On the way up, the A-frame of our packs acted like a ship's bow, parting the waves of branches (it got stuck a lot, but I like the simile). On the way down, the skis make a V shape that acts like a net, catching every branch, log, and thicket that gets in the way. This meant that we weren't faster on the descent, and we made it back to the crux of the route just as it was starting to get dark. The crux became even more difficult on the way down due to the aforementioned orientation of the skis, and all three of us struggled heavily on this section. One boulder got knocked down the gully and nearly removed Stefanija from our party. Suffice to say there was much suffering in the dark forest as we continued our bushwhack, and when we met the logging road again, we rejoiced and took a bit of a break.

Plodding along the logging road, we finally got close to camp, when we saw a light approaching. Xi ran towards us yelling that we were actually alive. Xi had seen a helicopter fly low over the logging road in our direction earlier in the afternoon, and now at 8:30 pm he was understandably worried. Luckily, we were fine though, and after some late dinner we went to the hot springs again for a relaxing soak. At midnight, we left the hot springs and ended our over 20 hour day.

The final day, we did more hot springs and then headed out. We got to the exit, but nobody was there. I would not let my moment of triumph go unrecognized, so I waved down Mark, and showed him a video of Stefanija skiing. His reaction was subdued, which was disappointing because I had dreamed up a much more grand and satisfying moment in my imagination. We decided to attempt the road south by Harrison Lake on the way back which went well and meant that we had effectively driven a big circle around the five biggest provincial parks on the South Coast.

This trip was one of absurdities, but that pretty much fits with this absurd winter. We hadn't achieved our goal, but I wasn't disappointed. At least we took our skis for a walk to see the mountains.

IT'S NOW OR NEVE: REFLECTIONS ON A SINGLE PUSH TRAVERSE

LUCAS BRAUN

March 24, 2024

THE BUILD-UP

The Garibaldi Névé traverse needs no introduction. This 41 kilometre gauntlet has been run by many a VOCer, often before they really know what they're getting into with ski touring. The high alpine icefield demands ideal conditions to cross, lest you end up fishing for crevasses in a whiteout (which has been done many times as well). It has long been a goal of mine to cross it, though the weather never lined up. With the sorry state of the lake during this year's El Niño (as Jeff Mottershead can attest to), I sort of wrote the Névé off completely. It would have to wait yet another year.

Then, two things happened on Thursday.

First, my dog Toby died. He had been a part of my life for 12 years and was one of the best ski buddies anyone could ever ask for. I remember him as a puppy running in and out of the trees with endless energy as we humans struggled to keep up on our Nordic gear. He was there as I grew up and began to ski longer and longer days, always game to romp around in the snow and lead the way. I thought that dog could go on forever. Even when he got slower with age, he was still the happiest dog with a wagging tail on those X-Country trails. That morning hit hard when I received news from my parents that Toby had passed.

But shortly afterwards I received other news, within a massive email chain of VOCers planning a Névé traverse for the weekend. The lake was frozen and there would be a weather window on Sunday for a single-day push. I looked at that email with fear and trepidation. I had only ever hiked up to 31 kilometres in a day and had never skied more than 20. Yet a single push of this traverse demanded a full 41 kilometres with 2000 metres of elevation gain. I also vividly remembered a Taillefer attempt I did with Anya Boardman, Tom Curran, Kai Schwartz, Jacob Grossbard, and Haley Foladare over Burns and Turns. That attempt was only 12 kilometres in distance, yet I found myself pretty bonked following it. Did I really have what it takes to do the Névé? Declan Taylor and Anya Boardman, my companions from a summer of Arctic fieldwork, would be pursuing the weather window

with Zoe Neudorf, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at 4:00 am on the Sunday in question. I was sitting in the clubroom around lunchtime that Thursday, mulling over whether I should commit or not, when Declan came in, and gave me some much-needed encouragement. With that, I rallied and threw my hat into the ring.

We all met on FaceTime that night and began planning for the weekend. We expressed some of our concerns for what we were about to do and I told Anya and Declan about Toby and how I needed a win that weekend. Doing the Névé, an objective I had long dreamed of, with some of the most amazing people I have ever gotten to know, would definitely be a win. Thirty-eight subsequent emails confirmed our logistics: Cassandra Elphinstone, Tom Curran, Ross Campbell, Natalie Makepeace, Shu Yu Fan, and Eric Daigle would traverse North to South starting on Saturday. Our group, and a second group of Lucy Buchanan-Parker, Alberto Contreras, Alex Rigby, David McKenzie, Julien Renard, Veronika Schmitt, and Caitlin Schneider would do a South to North day trip on Sunday. The car faff seemed daunting but we were optimistic.

RED HEATHER TO GARIBALDI GLACIER

At 4:00 am on Sunday, Zoe, Declan and I drove up to the upper Diamond Head parking lot. The night was clear and a full moon illuminated everything around us. We waited there for Lucy and Alberto to arrive with their car group to work out shuttle faff. Once they did, we set a brisk pace up the skin track to Red Heather. We arrived after 50 minutes to see Anya outside the shelter, drinking coffee and watching the sunrise shine on the Tantalus range. Within another ten or so minutes, all four of us were off. The morning was gorgeous as we made our way down Paul Ridge to Elfin Lakes, arriving around 8:50 am in good spirits and eager for another 30 kilometres of skiing. The way to Ring Creek from Elfin followed a meandering skin track through sparsely gladed forest. It eventually crossed some rather obvious avalanche paths off of the Gargoyles. We crossed these one at a time before reaching an island of safety and seeing the skin track ahead covered by avalanche debris. We decided it would be faster and more fun to transition and ski down to the Ring Creek Bridge, rather than try to follow the skin track up the valley hoping for a crossing.

We skied down the avalanche path one at a time, aiming for the bridge. The snow was still boilerplate, so we had no real concerns for a wet loose slide. Declan went first, and on the last pitch down to the bridge, took a tumble crossing the deep and frozen-solid skintrack. He was smart, however, wearing a long-sleeved shirt. Zoe followed suit, and then Anya. Finally, I made my way down, and in the same place Declan fell, I also caught an edge and ate shit. I was not as smart as Declan and had elected to wear a short-sleeved shirt. My left arm got scraped up pretty badly on the ice as I slid down.

Declan was there quickly to help me wash the wound and tied a triangular bandage around my elbow to hide most of my scrape from the sun. We also filled

up on water from the creek while we were there. We could see Lucy and Alberto's group coming down from the avalanche paths behind us and, eager to keep a lead on them, we started skinning up the west flank of Opal Cone to the Garibaldi Glacier. We set a pretty good pace getting to the col, careful not to spend too much time under the flanks of Opal. The snow was hard and the travel fast, but as the sun got higher in the sky, we started to feel the solar oven turning on.

GARIBALDI GLACIER TO SENTINEL BAY

At the top of Garibaldi Glacier, we had a leisurely lunch/snack. With the first big climb behind us we took our time and enjoyed the panoramic views from Nch'kay to Mamquam. Declan and Anya had both done the N  v   before, each with Cassandra in a whiteout (February 2020 and 2022, respectively), and they were especially amazed by the presence of mountains around them, rather than the interior walls of an alpine ping pong ball. Lucy and Alberto's group caught up to us and stopped there as well. They gave me some updated first aid which was much appreciated. As we ate, we saw a few groups approaching us across the glacier from the N  v   highpoint. Eventually, we realized it was Tom, Cassandra, Ross, Natalie, Shuyu, and Eric. Alongside them were a few VOCers that they had recruited at Burton Hut. I had a few laughs with Emma Ghelfi, one such VOCer, who had set out to Burton for the weekend, and ended up doing the full N  v   traverse spontaneously. We exchanged a few more words with them and then set out for the high point.

As we kick-turned up the slope to the high point, the sun was a raging furnace, which wasn't helped by the reflective glaciers. We all were sweating bullets. I found the heat really punishing and could only muster a few steps at a time before I had to stop and breathe. Alberto had to stop several times as one of his climbing skins fell apart. Anya and Zoe mastered the slope by getting into a high-energy conversation about paragliding, and by being much fitter than Declan and I.

After a grueling hour or so, we were up at the high point. Before us was a clear view of the Sharkfin, with the Table and Black Tusk behind. We ripped skins and started to make our way down the North Pitt Glacier along the Sharkfin wall. To our west, Nch'kay had a few climbers making their way up its face. We skied down a narrow ramp with crevasses lining either side and passed to the east of the Sharkfin. Then, we skied down one at a time onto the Warren Glacier. From there, it was a short but stiflingly hot climb up to the col beneath Glacier Pikes. At the top of the col overlooking Sentinel Bay, we ran into another non-VOC-affiliated party. They asked us if we wanted something to help with the impending lake crossing. We asked what they meant.

"We have some magic mushrooms if you want some," they said, holding up a little ziplock.

We politely declined and watched them ski down to the bay. We transitioned, took some photos, and made our way down as well. The skiing was magnificent. A five centimetre layer of fresh snow lay on top of a slightly sun-warmed crust, and our idyllic turns marked themselves across the white glacial canvas. At

the glaciology huts, we ran into Lucy and Alberto's group, and I found a delicious sunbaked granite rock to lie on.

At around 4:00 pm, Declan urged us to keep going. I had downed a five-hour energy drink at the top of the Glacier Pikes col and was starting to feel some adverse effects in response to the caffeine, but I figured that moving would be a good cure.

SENTINEL BAY TO RUBBLE CREEK

The lake crossing was a moment for reflection. On the long expanse of flat, your mind rambles as your body finds its rhythm. Zoe raced on ahead, attempting to skate-ski the lake. Anya kept pace on skins with Declan skating at a more relaxed pace for quite a ways. I was probably a couple hundred meters behind the two of them. We had skied the Névé, an objective that I had spent two years of my life thinking about and months of my life actively researching, planning for, and training for.

I thought about Toby, my little ski buddy. I felt deeply on the walk across the lake, that this gift from the mountains – the perfect weather, the perfect conditions, the perfect crew, and the perfect day – was also a gift from him. That he had given me one last epic ski. I was so glad that I had listened and said yes to that email chain.

We regrouped with one kilometre of lake slogging left and made it to the Garibaldi Lake warming shelters. Our shroom friends from earlier were there enjoying the sunlight and staring across at Sphinx Bay. Without much further ado, we made our way to the switchbacks. The outflow was wide open, as was part of Lesser Garibaldi Lake, so we took the summer trail to Barrier Lake which thankfully, was solid. The trail was impressively off-camber and post-holed to hell which slowed us down some in that short section. However, the sharp glare of the high noon alpine sun was fading into a soft afternoon glow. The trees were drenched in old man's beard lichen which was catching the golden light and the snow was still soft from the heat of day. Conversations had dissipated into whatever brought each of us resolve: complaining about the skin track, complimenting the light, singing, or just breathing.

I was exhausted. My feet were blistered to all hell and my stomach was still reeling from the energy gel. The switchbacks weren't as heinous as I've heard they can be, though we walked the last four kilometres in the dark. Anya serenaded me with some of her famously improvised songs, which made the parking lot a very relieving sight. Miraculously, each group finished within a couple of minutes of each other, with Cassandra and Tom's group reaching the Diamond Head Parking around the same time. We were able to meet in Squamish and exchange cars and goodbyes.

Stats:

41 km, 2000 m of gain, 14.5 hours

TOURING TETRAHEDRON (BIKE + SKI TOURING)

HELENA SVERAK

March 30 - April 1, 2024

Tetrahedron Provincial Park, Sechelt BC

Participants: Helena Sverak, Kai Schwarz, Mirtha Gamiz

IT WAS THE WEEK before the Easter long weekend and a ski touring VOC trip to Tetrahedron Park that I had planned going on had just been canceled for reasons of snow conditions (a common theme of the 2023-2024 season). However, my weekend was cleared, my new ski boots needed breaking in, and the forecast was all sun. Luckily for me, my bike racing and VOC friend Mirtha Gamiz reached out on Tuesday and we chatted about bike or ski plans – we settled on doing both. The idea of Mount Baker was thrown around, but we decided that a three-day bike-ski (skicycle?) tour to Tetrahedron would be a perfect way to test out a combo setup. While seeking out info about Tetrahedron, we also recruited VOCer Kai Schwarz, my former roommate and fellow gravel biker, to join in. The most helpful info about Tetrahedron was on the Tetrahedron Outdoor Club private Facebook group where people post hut reservations and conditions updates. It seemed like there was going to be plenty of space for the three of us. With a team and a dream, we had two days to figure out our setups. I will admit, I had never been bikepacking before and only had my cyclocross bike, but luckily I had the first day of the long weekend to figure it out.

We all approached the setups in slightly different ways but with some common themes: we strapped our skis and poles along the top tubes and attached the skis to a rack, strapped our ski boots to cargo cages on our front forks, had our avi gear and backpacks on the back rack, and then had the rest of the food/gear in the front, or in Kai's case, back panniers. A key point that we learned was that equal and stable weight distribution was essential. Kai's bike had almost all the weight in the back and the skis were placed above the rack, which resulted in some pretty crazy frame wobbling. He handled it like a champ though, and we have him and his film camera to thank for all of the amazing pictures! For bikes with no mounts like mine, I got a Thule strap-on rack that was rated to 10 kg, but over time it slipped and I had to strap it to my seat post and carry my backpack on the way back. The way to go for mountless bikes seems to be loading up the thru-axle with the Old

Man Mountain kits. If/when I do this again, I'll get their rear rack, which can carry much more gear (technically, Tailfin makes even nicer racks, but they cost a ton of money, so that'll have to wait until I have a real job). Being so limited by the weight my racks could carry did mean that I packed as light as possible, though my bike was probably still at least 30 kg. Regardless of the specifics, I would highly recommend biking around a bit with the setup before leaving for an actual trip to figure out these details.



We left Vancouver at 5:00 am to make the 7:30 am ferry, but the biking was much more doable than we thought and we made it in time for a coffee stop before boarding. After the quick 40-minute ferry across, we started the 50 kilometre ride to Tetrahedron. We took the road to save time and we got to the entrance of the park around noon, at which point 1000 metres of gravel climbing in 10 kilometres was the only thing left to bike. The gravel road was in decent condition, but the biking got tricky when the gradients started getting over 12 percent, maxing out around at least 20 percent. A decent amount of bike pushing ensued as we dragged our loaded bikes up (Kai weighed his bike to be over 45 kg). But after about two and a bit hours of sweating, we made it to the top. We stashed our bikes in the forest, transitioned to skis, and made our way to Edwards Lake Cabin.

The Tetrahedron huts might be the most well-maintained huts we'd ever seen, with firewood, wood stoves, sleeping mats, tools, and more. We shared the first night with a group of six at Edward, got some good laughs about using our cycling shoes as hut booties, and after a lovely lazy morning, made our way to Mount Steele. We dropped off our overnight stuff at the hut (which was even nicer than the last one, with hut slippers, cards and cribbage, and toilet paper in the outhouse, and we had it all to ourselves), and made our way up Steele. The view from the top was magnificent, and we got some good lines down sun-warmed snow.

After a cozy dinner full of sharing our various food options (honourable mentions to the Dollarama fruit gummies and cookies, Kai's loaded potato mash,

and Mirtha's backcountry shepherd's pie with ketchup), we played Go Fish and settled to sleep in the toasty hut, or in Kai's case, sleeping outside because the weather was so nice. The following day, we got up before 6:00 am to make sure we could be skinning out by sunrise at 7:00 am, as we were very uncertain about how long the various legs of our trip would take. The snow did, unfortunately, end up being as crusty as the night before, which led to much awkward skiing/skinning down, but we still made it out to the parking lot in under three hours. Our transition took an hour, and we were off on the bikes. Luckily, the gravel wasn't too loose, so it went smoothly. At the bottom, we transitioned to our road setups and were on the road by noon.

We made it to Sechelt in about half an hour and had lunch with some cyclocross friends we ran into by the Thai food truck. We rode to Langdale, and with lots of extra time before the 5:00 pm ferry, we went to the Persephone Brewing Company and had a pint. We reflected on just how incredibly pleasant our entire trip had been, with no hiccups, no mechanical issues, all of the timing according to plan, lovely weather, company, and conditions. We are all type II fun people who don't mind a sufferfest, but this trip was basically pure type I fun. We rolled down to the ferry at 5:00 pm, unloaded at Horseshoe Bay by 6:30 pm, and pedaled back to Vancouver by 7:30 pm to catch the sunset over the Lion's Gate Bridge. At this point, it was almost comical how nice the trip had been, and we made one final stop at Prospect Point to bask in the sunset before making our way home.

Bikes and skis together are a great time, especially with a good bit of planning. We gave ourselves lots of time for potential problems but didn't run into any, so we had downtime to enjoy the beautiful scenery and each other's company. The Tetrahedron Outdoor Club maintains the best cabins we've ever seen and the park has fantastic views. I'm lucky to live in a place that allows for such adventures and even luckier to have experienced people like Kai and Mirtha to do these shenanigans with. Until next time! (Next stop, Baker??)



BAKER: A BIKE-N-SKI

DECLAN TAYLOR

April 17 - 20, 2024

Mt. Baker Wilderness Area, WA

Participants: Jacob Grossbard, Zoe Neudorf, Declan Taylor

MARCH 2020

On that infamous weekend when the world shut down, and I was still so new to skiing, I was skinning up towards Pump Peak. We were laden with crevasse rescue gear on a strange modified Glacier School (after G1 had been completely rained out that fall), to learn how to travel on glaciers. Mount Baker soared above the delta to the south of us. Nick Heatherington, one of our generous G1 instructors, told me about his experience skiing it. He reframed Baker for me, as a place I could actually go and climb (if I got good enough), not just some theoretical beautiful summit in the distance. I've spent every subsequent glance south on a clear Vancouver day thinking "Damn, I wanna ski off that thing."

MARCH 2024

The snow started to arrive, finally, after a trying El Niño winter. Jacob Grossbard and I had gotten out for a few big ski days already and naturally, talk turned to silly self-propelled trips. Riding our bikes to and from Mount Baker to ski off it was high on the list. We also had just met Zoe Neudorf, who had equally ridiculous bike-to-adventure ambitions, and was looking for big missions in a training effort for the Wildfire fitness test. At some early point in the process of falling helplessly in love with Zoe, I had told her about our Baker dreams. Jacob and I are prone to talking about an idea for one-three hundred years before getting around to doing it, so it was really her stoke for this trip that got us in gear.

10 APRIL, 2024

There was a window in Zoe's exam schedule (Jacob and I were fun-employed) that was looking ever better with weather. The week before we were due to leave, we did a day trip up Pump Peak to test out riding loaded bikes. There was some miscommunication in the degree to which this was a shakedown ride and I arrived at our rendezvous point half an hour late with winter overnight gear, where the others only had skis and crevasse rescue stuff. It was a very sweaty climb up the Seymour

road. We skied, we self-arrested lots, we built some haul systems, and most importantly, snacked. I also sadly lost my favourite Nalgene down a gully.

16 APRIL - VANCOUVER, BC

Jacob, Zoe, and I rendezvoused at Jacob's house to pack bikes the night before. Zoe arrived after finishing her last exam; we spent much of the afternoon walking from store to store looking for HobNobs (tip: don't try NoFrills or Whole Foods around Cambie). I managed to ride close to 50 km that "rest" day after a late-evening trip back to Kits for a pair of ski crampons. Sleep didn't come easy, with levels of excitement through the roof!

17 APRIL - VANCOUVER, BC TO GLACIER, WA

Typical of our time management, we were finally pedalling away at 9:00 am. The ride to the Heliotrope Ridge trailhead is loosely done in four sections. Wherever you may be in Vancouver, if you can get yourself onto the Central Valley Greenway, you'll enjoy a reasonably protected, quiet, and scenic ride to the Port Mann Bridge. Once over the bridge in Surrey, section two is a long ride to the US-Canada border on the Fraser Highway. The ride is a loud, stinky huck through the urban-sprawl pancake hellscape of the Lower Mainland. It's a frustratingly straight line with a frustrating number of red lights made only partially better by the continuous presence of a wide shoulder and a stop for Wendy's french fries somewhere just past Langley.

At Sumas, you cross into America and things are immediately better (do not extrapolate this comment beyond the bounds of this route description). The riding is quiet, through farms and then on a gorgeous two-lane road that winds its way up into the foothills of the Cascades. We stopped in Maple Falls en route to refill water. The Crossroads Grocery clerk, a serious old head with a bandana holding back long silver hair, told us that we needed to detour up Silver Lake Road for what was sure to be the best water we'd ever tasted. He looked like he'd completely missed the end of the seventies, the sort of person you can only imagine traveling by horse or motorcycle, probably smoking darts while doing either. "Just around the corner" was a spring where water flowed right out of the hillside, he said, it was all he and his wife drank. Sure enough, we found a pipe a little over 1 km up the road with clear water running straight out. With bottles filled from the fountain of eternal youth, we continued on our way.

When you hit Glacier, our grocery stop for Doritos, chocolate milk, bananas, and a 24 oz can of Rainier, you turn onto a paved(!?) logging road, the fourth stage of the ride. We camped at the bottom of the road, scampering down a hill onto a gorgeous cobble/sand bar by the river. After a pile of snacks and 8 oz each of chocolate milk and beer, we were ready to dig into an ENORMOUS pot of Japanese curry. Tired and full, we watched the spring sunset drain from the sky and happily crashed before the next morning's ride.

18 APRIL - GLACIER, WA TO HOGSBACK RIDGE

After a quick breakfast, we set out determined to tackle the scary steep climb. On paper this is essentially akin to riding up Seymour, but we were doing it on 100+ lb bikes, and encountered sections of much steeper grade. I learned that while a 1:1 gearing ratio was sufficient, it was not particularly enjoyable. Early into the climb I also had a stunning mechanical: my front thru-axle had somehow dislodged itself on the threaded side of the fork and my wheel slipped partially out while I was riding. I screamed as I slammed the brakes, only to learn that shrieking is a less-than-effective alarm bell for riders in front of you. When I looked up, my pals had disappeared round the next corner.

I took the wheel out and everything seemed fine, save for some wear on the paint over the carbon of my fork. When I reassembled things, the threads held, but the wheel was way out of the dish. Somewhere in this process the reducer that holds my axle in place disappeared. Zoe came down to check on me. The tension of clamping everything together was enough to keep the wheel spinning, I called things good enough, and rode on. Jacob had a flat further up, and we stopped for a snack (leftover curry from last night really did the trick).

There used to be a washout in the road—now thankfully repaired—that provides an ample stretch for practicing in rim-deep ball bearing gravel. Because there is no longer a washout, however, the top of the road was full of cars! We finally got to the snowline and promptly yard-sailed a truck worth of belongings onto the shoulder. There was a guided party engaging in myriad forms of faff and, upon seeing us pull out skis and ice axes, remarked to each other *There's always someone more hardcore than you are!* We liked that.

Into the trees went our bikes and onto our feet went our skis. And off and on and off and on... the snow was patchy for a while and then almost immediately required ski crampons. We camped on Hogsback Ridge and wondered aloud about where the guided party might be hiding. Dinner, sunset, huddle-cuddles while endlessly melting snow; we did all the things that make winter camping in the mountains wonderful.



19 APRIL - SUMMIT DAY

The night had been windy and cold: Zoe spent much time shivering in her rather ill-performing -15°C bag. Jacob was bivvying and fared only marginally better in his fancy Gore-Tex-faced bag. My -20°C seemed sufficient, for which I was incredibly grateful. We had a quick no-cook breakfast and tried to get moving early, but there must be some unseen law of physics that prohibits hustle when one is cold and eepy.

I led the first steps up the Coleman glacier while Jacob and Zoe nibbled Trader Joe's caffeinated chocolate behind me. We experienced the absolute extremes of temperature. Whenever there was the slightest breeze in the shade, it would be freezing. As soon as we skied into a shard of early morning sun, we were shedding layers as if they were strangling us. Ski crampons were essential throughout much of the climb, and the coverage was fantastic. We questioned why many of the other climbers were skinning roped up—it was unnecessary given that there were only open serac pits and otherwise bomber bridges, but it also seemed to us that there'd be almost no chance of self-arrest.

From the Colfax-Baker col we skinned up the progressively more exposed WSW ridge of Baker. By this point we were surrounded by other climbers. If the conditions are right for a summit, I don't think you will ever feel isolated up there. We stopped and took a long crampon faff. It was Zoe's first big bootpack; I admired her confidence, and felt appreciative for my own learning journey as we talked through appropriate ice axe and crampon use. Just below 3000 m you leave the ridge and climb onto the Roman Headwall. This epic 40° SW face of the mountain falls away above enormous crevasses and offers stunning views of nearby peaks and the ocean beyond.

The top is the steepest, and we had to punch through a steep icy con-



vexity before the face mellowed out; from there it is a long skin up and across the huge summit plateau. At the end is a little bump covered in many people; the true summit. We waited our turn to ConQuEr tHE mOuNTaIn and then celebrated our unique triumph and magnificent efforts with a photo taken by someone else presumably doing exactly the same thing.

Vancouver looked remarkably small out in the vast expanse of the Fraser River delta. It was cool to picture us as three (dozen) tiny bumps atop the iconic volcano shape we see rising above the horizon from Vancouver. With that picture in mind I really wanted to ski off the summit, like a little pebble rolling all the way down that long hillside.

I ripped skins, and made three of the shittiest sastrugi turns possible in front of a bunch of fancy ski mo bros, nearly biffing it twice. There, at the bottom of the bump, I lifted my chin as high as I could, and proceeded to endure a long sastrugi skate up and over the summit plateau to get back to the face. Jacob joined me in this silliness, Zoe observed but did not engage in our antics.

We had lunch atop the Roman headwall, in perhaps too exposed a place, as the icy pitch rolled away from us in a rather dizzying way.

We each took a different approach to dangerous convexity at the top of the headwall. Closer inspection revealed that the steepest patch had been scraped to blue ice by repeated sideslipping and the sheer volume of skiers. Zoe boot packed a ways down the steepest bit before putting on her skis. Jacob exchanged a pole for an ice axe, reckoning that he could self-arrest a fall this way. Feeling confident in my jump turns and knowing that I do them far better when I have a solid pole plant, I skied normally. Each of us executed our plan perfectly.

Skis on, we hooted and hollered the rest of our way down the Roman Headwall, getting some fresh corn turns on the glacier below. Back on the Coleman Glacier, we alternated between fast swoopy corn turns and careful moments to consider where the serac falls, oft disguised as convex rollovers from above, might lie. Those turns were moments of pure joy. With the crux successfully climbed and skied, all that was left to do was enjoy ourselves.

We broke camp and skied back to the trailhead, following an avalanche gully that conveniently shortens the trail. We were out of water, waiting to hit the first running stream, and totally overheated. Zoe in particular seemed like she was getting particularly desperate; later on the trail she confided that she hadn't taken off her thick fleece pants all day because it would involve taking off her ski boots, which would hurt too much. Jacob and I turned to each other in shock... *there's always someone more hardcore than you.*

We camped in a lovely mossy bit of forest near the trailhead, and enjoyed the most anticipated meal of the trip: ramen packs with instant mashed potatoes mixed into the broth. I was so hungry that I have no idea what this would taste like in another situation, but it hit the spot right then and there.

20 APRIL - HEADING HOME

We woke up at our transition point with only one thing left to do: ride home. The steepest parts of the FSR were taken with plenty of breaks so as to not burn the mineral oil out of anyone's brakes. The gentler half of the FSR and the meandering descent out of the mountains was probably the most fun I've ever had on a bike. We had frequent tailwinds and grades that took much but not all of the work out of pedalling, the sun was shining, we all kept laughing and smiling at each other. It was one of those moments where you feel strong and accomplished and happy; the weightless afterglow of good times had in the mountains.

Somewhere around Aldergrove en route home, we were refilling water in a Starbucks. Jacob remarked to me that everything felt too easy on this trip, too type 1. I suggested a gratitude practice instead of hoping for something bad to happen, but it was already too late. We walked outside to see dark clouds to the north, and a cold wind picking up. Y'all better ride quick, some storybook character said to us getting out of his truck, there's a storm a brewin'!

By Langley we were getting hammered by winds so hard it felt like we couldn't move forward. At the edge of Surrey the rain started, and by the time we got to the Port Mann bridge we were in a torrential downpour. While the biblical lashings Jacob summoned did their best to remind us how fleeting good times can be, we made our way into Burnaby Lake Park, grateful to be off the Fraser Highway for good, and debated our perspectives on type 1, type 1.5, and type 2 fun. Somewhere in the park the rain let off for good, and by the time we reached Vancouver, we were on the other side of the storm. Ahead of us, the sky burned orange with the setting sun, and trains of crows streaked east back to Burnaby. We turned around to see a spectacular double rainbow projected onto the back of the storm we'd just ridden all the way through.

Do it all again, I would not change a thing. Loved ones, long roads, wide views. It's incredible to look back on an adventure like this, and think about the half-decade of learning, skill progression, and relationship building that led me here. That storm was a dramatic end to what was otherwise an incredibly type 1 adventure. It felt pretty cool to be up on Brockton a few weeks later and look over to Baker, knowing we'd gotten there on our bikes, and skied off the top.



TAKE THE MISTY

ALEX BARTH

May 8 - 11, 2024

Participants: Thomas Morrissey, Alex Barth

ON MAY 6TH, Thomas Morrissey contacted me that his original partner for a long-planned Misty Icefields traverse had to bail due to emergency circumstances, and that he was now looking for a new partner. I was initially apprehensive about committing to something so involved on such short notice, but it turned out to be too enticing to decline (Thomas's incessant nagging helped). This left me with approximately 24 hours to plan and pack for a (planned) five day trip. Thankfully, Thomas had the beta nailed down, so all I had to do was make a trip to Real Canadian Superstore to acquire 20,000 calories. We were soon headed to Pemberton to make the long drive down the In-SHUCK-ch and Lillooet West FSRs.

For context, the Misty Icefields are a region in the east of Garibaldi Provincial Park, and have a reputation as one of the most remote areas in Southwest British Columbia (SWBC). The traditional route involves a water taxi up Pitt Lake to access the south end, and John Baldwin recommends spending several weeks to complete the traverse. However, Thomas had the innovative idea of truncating the traverse slightly, and exiting via the Terrarosa glacier to Sloquet Creek in four days. This route hinged on crossing a cliff-ringed lake at the head of the Stave River, located at 999 metres elevation. Despite the modest elevation, Thomas assured me that extensive Sentinel Hub research guaranteed that the lake would be frozen until late May. This greatly simplified the logistics, but we still had to shuttle 50 kilometres of logging road between the starting and ending points. Thomas, being both a miser and an absolute beast, volunteered to ride my mountain bike across this distance in the middle of the night instead of driving a second vehicle. This took a bit longer than expected, and he eventually joined me at the tent on Chief Paul FSR at 4:00 am, when I had already been sleeping for six hours.

Needless to say, we got a bit of a late start on the first morning. The access to the Misty from the north, while much simpler than from the south, involves traversing a rolling subalpine ridge that seems to go on forever. After many hours of forest slogging, ups and downs, and brutal heat, the views began to open up as we approached the ascent of the Icemantle Glacier group of peaks. It was already late

afternoon, but the alpine views gave us a second wind and we managed to reach the summit of Greenmantle Mountain around 7:00 pm and set up camp just down the ridge. We had paid the price of admission and were now entering the meat of the traverse.

The objective for the morning of day two was an intimidating one: Mount Pitt, the tallest peak in the area. It involves a substantial amount of out-and-back from the regular traverse route, and some moderately technical terrain. After being forced to descend almost all the way to Snowcap Lakes, we transitioned to ascend Rollercoaster Ridge. From the name, you can probably guess what we were in for. Each bump we went up and over got progressively steeper, and the heat wave had stopped any real refreeze from occurring. I watched Thomas cut some ridiculous switchbacks with constant sloughing, and decided the conditions were likely to deteriorate throughout the day and with many hours of steep terrain ahead of us, we aborted the attempt. Although we had missed out on the biggest peakbagging objective, we were now set up very well to finish the rest of the traverse.

We reversed our tracks to Snowcap Lakes, which is a beautiful spot and well worth spending more time at, but we were traversing and couldn't afford more than a short break. Ahead of us was the start of the real Misty Icefields, a long climb up to the glacial plateau of Snowcap Peak. The narrow summit offered maybe my favorite view in the Coast Mountains, with the McBride Range dominating to the north, the impressive east sides of Mamquam, Nch'Kay, and Castle Towers to the west, and several craggy peaks to the south and east. It was a privilege to experience such a unique and rare position. Skiing down the south side of the massif, I was impressed by how glaciated it was given the elevation and aspect. This area receives enormous snowfall and the glaciers are massive. We had now reached the heart of the traverse, the Misty Icefield itself. This glacier terminates in a massive lobe that is impressively flat. We spent several hours of foreshortened slogging until making camp higher on the glacier.

On the morning of day three, the snow had firmed up nicely, and we made a quick ascent of Stave Peak before skiing down to the last major icefield, the Stave Glacier. At this point we were well ahead of schedule, so we dropped our packs to do some peakbagging. First we went for Katzie, and I let Thomas go ahead since I was dragging and didn't like the look of the steep summit pinnacle in the conditions. Thomas found an acceptable route up and we met back up to summit Nebula Peak, a pleasant ski. We were then ready to make the long ski down the Stave to the lake, which we would cross the next morning when it was most frozen. This portion of the trip involved the most complex glacier navigation, but we easily skirted the first icefall. At the top of the final icefall at the toe, we got a good look down the valley and it looked disappointingly dry. We couldn't see the critical lake, but a smaller lake upstream of it was totally thawed. It looked like we were screwed. Fortunately, Thomas had a backup route in place (that we had discussed beforehand). It relied on recent SWBC peakbaggers beta on the route up Sloquet

Peak, enabled by recent logging. Unfortunately, to access Sloquet Peak we would have to cross the Stave River, but Thomas was confident it would go. We turned around and slogged back up the glacier, cutting our losses. A side bonus of this route change was that we got to summit Corbold Peak, famously the only summit achieved by the Roland Burton et al. party that were first to do the traverse in 1972. From there, we skied down to a camp at Pukulkul Lakes, surrounded by rugged and steep walls.

The next morning, we made a short climb to another lake where we would descend to the Stave River by a creek that Thomas identified as being low-angle on the map. This proved to be pleasant with nice trees and good snow coverage all the way. We reached the river a bit too far upstream where it was still a canyon, and had to do a few barefoot creek crossings to follow it down to a spot where it looked safe to swim. This is where the debacle began. The river was nowhere near fordable, so we would have to set up our rope to ferry loads across. Thomas swam across with the loose end to rig it up at a 45 degree angle to work with the current. Unfortunately, he then realized he couldn't get back. With poor communication, I had to pack his pack for him and ferry across with both. Despite our 5-to-1 tensioned static line, the rope still sagged enough to completely submerge our packs, which were not packed with this in mind. Upon the other side, Thomas swam back to retrieve the rope and then we assessed the damage. Fortunately we had a rocky beach in the sun to dry gear, but unfortunately neither of our phones would turn on and we had no paper maps. At this point though we just had to go up and over one pass and Thomas had a good memory of the line. We spent a few hours drying out then started up the drainage on the back of Sloquet Peak. The creek eventually became a canyon and we were forced up and left until we were well above the creek. With no maps, there was some worry that we would be cliffed out and unable to descend to the pass. However, eventually the cliffs mellowed out and it turned out we had probably taken the optimal route anyway. We had reached the pass in good time and were excited by the prospect of reaching the hot springs that night instead of camping out again. We had now rejoined the established Sloquet Peak route and followed the hard traverse to reach the logging road. On this descent my toe started to hurt quite a bit, and when I took my boots off to cross a creek it was dark purple. I later learned that it was minorly broken, probably in the river crossing. Fortunately once we reached the driveable end, Thomas, ever the hero, volunteered to run the 8 km to the Glendinning trailhead where the car was parked and come back to retrieve me. We made it to a horrendously crowded Sloquet Hot Springs past 10:00 pm, and barely found a spot to camp. This was a stark contrast to our previous four days of solitude but the soak was worth it. The next morning came and all we had to do to get our disheveled selves home was drive 100 kilometres of logging road to Pemberton and then all the way back to Vancouver.

After this trip, I learned that a spectacular aurora had been visible in SWBC during our trip. We never saw it, as we slept from 9:00 pm-5:00 am every

night and never went outside in the dark. It would have been quite the sight had we known about it, but that's the reality of ski traverses in this style and I'll take the trade off.

Notes and lessons learned:

- You don't have to be super fit to cover a lot of ground, you just have to keep moving. I wouldn't have thought myself in the best shape coming into this trip, having spent most of a year recovering from knee surgery. I thought I'd need five days to do this trip, but with 12 hours to move the meters added up and it went easily in four even with side trips (though without Mount Pitt).
- The Misty Icefield might be a bit more approachable than you think. We have certainly not solved the access problem, as the lake route would need to be done in April and the Sloquet Peak route, while it involves less elevation gain and easier bushwacking, is challenging due to the river crossing, but it was overall easier and shorter than I would have expected from the reputation. In addition, some recent research revealed a ridge route to Fire Lake that may be the golden ticket for those seeking to avoid Pitt Lake.
- Wear your shoes on serious river crossings: they might get wet anyway so you might as well protect your feet. Also, if you come unprepared with no ziplocs or drybags, put your phone in the middle of your compressed sleeping bag, it was the only thing in my pack that stayed dry.
- Old school navigation backups are maybe not a bad idea on longer, more committing trips.
- Checking the satellite after, the lake was indeed showing blue around the edges, so we probably made the right call. On the last clear imagery nine days before it looked solid but that was probably too long ago to rely on.

Approximate stats: 80 km, 6000 m

And now, a special bonus for journal readers, the lyrical version of this trip report and inspiration for the title:

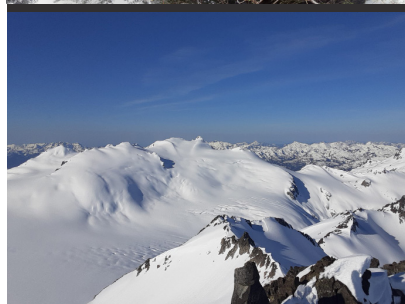
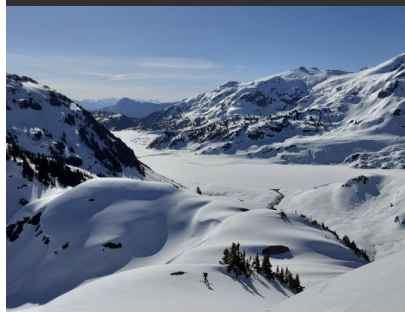
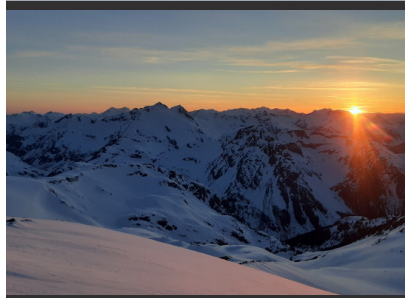
“Take the Misty” (To the tune of “Take it Easy” by The Eagles)

Well I'm skinning up the snow
Wish I could lighten my load
I got four icefields on my mind
You wanna do a traverse?
You got to drop the car first
With a midnight 50k bike ride
Take the Mi – sty
Take the Mi – sty
I may have heatstroke but the views out here are
pristine
Hurry up while you still can
Before the snow's too soft to stand
Yes it's a wild and remote land
On the Mi – sty

We were camping by some boulders
Up on Greenmantle shoulder
Such a fine sight to see:
It's Mount Pitt, such a nice
Chunk of rock and ice,
With the summit tempting as can be
Now here's the ba – d news:
We had some i – ssues
Down on the Roller Coaster Ridge with all the wet-
loose
Might've lost that round
But lookout now we're Snowcap-bound
We're gonna knock some miles down
And take the Mi – sty

Air guitar solo (obnoxious levels of twang for full effect)

On the ski down to the Misty
The snow coverage was shitty
But we made it there eventually
It was mind-numbing flats
'Til we decided to camp
And could finally dry our swampy feet





Above The summit of Snowcap Peak, an unfamiliar side of Mamquam Mountain at right.

We went up Sta – ve Peak
We went up Ka – tzie
Where the summit snow was steep but not too nasty
But we soon were to find out
That some lakes were freshly melted out
Time to pivot to the plan B route
Out of the Mi – sty

Now from Pulkulkul Lakes
We skied down to the Stave
River flowing with a freshest roar
The swim across was dope
But we had to use the rope
To get our packs onto the other shore
All-time lo – w stoke
With both our pho – nes soaked
We had to navigate from memory like the old folks
We still made it out alive
To Sloquet Hot Springs and their party vibes
Just “two wild and crazy guys”
Who skied the Mi – sty

(ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh)
We fuckin’ skied the Mi – i – sty
Oh you gotta take the Mi – i – sty
repeat as necessary

Lyrics by Thomas Morrissey, composed en route on the Misty Icefields

All photos by Thomas Morrissey, courtesy of Alex’s still dead phone.

Previous page top The terrain on the approach ridge just after breaching treeline.

Previous page middle top Sunset from just below Greenmantle Mountain, with Mount Pitt at centre left.

Previous page middle Snowcap Lakes from Rollercoaster Ridge.

Previous page middle bottom This was just the beginning...

Previous page bottom Katzie Peak is the small pinnacle above the Stave Glacier.

BIGGER THAN IT LOOKS

SIMEON FAEHNDRICH & THOMAS MORRISSEY

May 17 - 30, 2024

Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park

EARLY IN THE MORNING of May 17th, we left Vancouver armed with skis, crazy carpet sleds, nine days of dehydrated food, and plans to explore that weird little triangle at the far northwest corner of BC occupied by Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park. The area had been on Thomas' radar for a while as having a nice combination of fairly large unclimbed peaks and reasonable proximity to a highway. The only available beta, outside of topo and satellite maps, was *a)* a vague approach route that we knew had been skied in 2011 and *b)* a list of peaks that we knew had been climbed in 2003 (with no associated route descriptions).

The drive up was a long haul: two 16 hour days which we broke into four hour shifts, with mental stimulation provided by Spotify and by the >20 bears (and various other animals) hanging out on the road shoulders. We also had our work cut out for us to eat the entire unabridged contents of Simeon's fridge, which he had emptied just prior to our departure. By the evening of the 18th we had found a place to park near the Dalton Cache border crossing.

Upon leaving the car on the 19th, our first major obstacle was the Klehini River, which we had to cross in order to begin an ascent of Jarvis Creek/Glacier. A few hundred meters above the Jarvis-Klehini confluence we found a series of wade-able braids. On the far side of the river, we stashed an inflatable boat in case the river increased in size over the course of our trip. We then had to carry our fully-loaded packs a few more kilometres (across gravel and through alder) before finding continuous snow just above the toe of Jarvis Glacier. Here we broke out our skis and transferred 20 lb food bags onto sleds. We then made slow-and-steady progress up the slush-covered glacier as the afternoon grew progressively wetter, whiter and windier. We camped at 1100 m.

On the 20th we got a slow start after sleeping in to wait out a mild overnight snow/rain storm. We lethargically dragged our sleds through the flat light to a deep cirque at the top of the glacier. At this point the clouds began to lift around us, gradually revealing huge ice-encrusted walls and the steep snowfield which we'd have to ascend next. After 30+ steep kickturns we were able to yank our sleds up a narrow band of safety between wind slab on the left and rockfall on the right, and reach the col at the top of the cirque. Here, we finally found ourselves at the eastern

edge of the Buckwell Glacier.

The cloudbase was still rising so we decided to try climbing Mount Bigger (2579 m), which was somewhere up in the clouds to our north. We skinned up onto some chunky avi debris, then quickly punched a bootpack up a rockfall-prone gully and into the clouds. After a flatter section, more steep booting was required to ascend to a notch in the SW ridge above 2400 m. The icy sastrugi proved to be fairly gripping for Thomas, who had forgotten his crampons in Vancouver and was consequently forced to chip steps the old fashioned way. Above the col, softer snow eased the technicality of the travel, although the steepness did briefly reach 50 degrees on one or two rolls. Finally above the clouds, we watched in awe as they broke around and below us, revealing more and more of this serrated, icy world. We put skis on at the summit at the comically late hour of 9:00 pm, but at this latitude we still had plenty of remaining daylight. Some conservative skiing led us back down our ascent route, and we finally crawled into sleeping bags around midnight, with no headlamps needed.

Based on pre-trip forecasts, we expected the 21st to have good weather and it did not disappoint! After breakfast, we plastered on sunscreen and chapstick and headed for the base of Buckwell Peak (2721 m), whose summit we could see from camp.

The upper east face was split by an attractive couloir which went to the top, but the complex jumble of seracs below made this route rather unappealing. We figured we would have a better chance of success climbing the northeast ridge, assuming that we would not be stopped by any cornices. Simeon led some crusty kickturns up to the base of the northeast ridge (2300 m), and Thomas led a bootpack that went left of a 'schrund and then left of a cornice to gain the upper ridge. The summit block was massively corniced on the north side and exposed on the south side, and we chose to bootpack to the summit, staying well below the ridgecrest until the very top. Some of the snow on this final pitch was quite soft but with some effort we were able to excavate solid steps deeper in the snowpack. At last, we stood atop the highest point in the Alsek Ranges, with blue skies, no wind, and mountains stretching to the horizon in every direction. In the eastern foreground, we had a nice view of Mount Bigger from an aesthetic angle. In the distance, we could pick out Mount Fairweather to the southwest and Mounts Vancouver and Hubbard to the northwest.

We figured that the most prudent ski route would simply be to retrace our ascent. Back at the base of the mountain, Simeon finally got to enjoy the full-length sit-down lunch that had eluded him the day before. Back at camp, we had a celebratory tortellini dinner with plenty of olive oil. We got an updated forecast via inReach and learned that the next two days would have marginal weather. Rather than sit around waiting for the summits to clear again, we decided to use these coming days to drag our sleds further into the icecap.

The morning of the 22nd brought firm snow and a high cloud ceiling. The

glacier below our camp was just steep enough to ski down with skins off, resulting in a fast 10 km. At the conjoined heads of the Tsirku and Tkopec glaciers, we turned west to find ourselves at the edge of an incomprehensibly large icefield. This is the part of the trip where we really started to notice how our sense of spacetime was warped by the uniformly immense scale of the terrain. We would start skinning past what at first appeared to be a small rock or snow feature, only to find that we were still passing the same feature half an hour later!

The visibility continued to decrease throughout the day, but the snow stayed hard and the brisk wind stayed at our backs. We passed any dull moments by trading song lyrics and poetry recitations. We eventually began a very gradual uphill toward the Peshak Glacier. The visibility was now low enough to make things a bit spicy: Thomas skied off a 2 metre windlip with his sled in tow, leaving him unscathed but in poor spirits for the rest of the day. Our route continued to a 1700 m pass which we navigated haltingly in the inconsistent visibility. At this point, we had skied 30 kilometres and decided to make a somewhat early camp near 1200 m at a fork of the Peshak Glacier, staking out a tarp over our tent in preparation of a wet night.

As predicted, the 23rd was quite damp, with a steady supply of wet snow melting onto the tent and tarp. We had a slow morning reading and snacking under the tarp while we waited for the whiteout to ease. When we finally started skiing at 2:00 pm, the isothermal slush was so deep, and the air so warm and humid that our lungs, legs, and pores were all operating at full capacity. A brief side trip through slush postholes, 'dino eggs', and muddy shale brought us to the top of a relatively short but still notable peak at 2027 m. We had to wait 25 minutes before a brief sunbreak offered safe passage down to the glacier flats below. We navigated by repeatedly rolling snowballs below us in order to discover any microterrain hidden by the flat light. One more transition to skins and we made it up to a campsite on some glacial flats under an impressive 1000 metre tall wall.

We woke at 6:00 am on the 24th to clear skies and executed a relatively fast morning routine in our excitement for a big push to climb the ultra prominent 'Basement Peak' (2702 m). One final pass granted access onto the Towagh Glacier, the top of which covered the northwest flank of our objective. We decided to skin roped up through the icefall at the left edge of the lower northwest face, which actually went quite smoothly. More low-technicality snow brought us up to the base of the summit block at 2450 m. Here, we were treated to our first views to the southwest, where the vista was dominated by the awe-inspiring Mount Fairweather and its coterie of surrounding peaks. The icefields between us and Fairweather were coated in a cloud inversion, and one branch of this inversion had begun slowly chasing us as we ascended. A brief bootpack up some icier snow and a few more kickturns and we were on the summit... or were we? The true summit appeared to be a snow-covered cone-shaped rock on the far side of a short section of exposed, corniced ridge. Luckily we were able to find some solid snow to build a ski anchor

on our side of the ridge, and then take turns belaying each other 30 metres across the backside of the cornice to touch the top. Next, 1000 metres of skiing sent us down into, and eventually through the clouds back to the Towagh Glacier flats at the base of the peak.

Now began our long trek back toward the Haines Highway. We didn't want to simply retrace our steps from the way in, so we instead began to make our way down the Tisatka Glacier. The lower portion of this glacier was mostly covered in a patchwork of snowfields and rock outcroppings. A creek flowing on/under the glacier had carved out little sections of ice canyon which more or less bisected the valley. As we neared the Tisatka-Tkope confluence, we had to take our skis off a few times given the lower elevation and increasing amount of exposed rock. We followed some wolf tracks for a while, and eventually sighted the maker of these tracks trotting across a gravel bar below us. We found a flat, windy campsite on a sandbar just before the confluence.

On the 25th, the main task was to ascend the Tkope River and Glacier from 700 m back up to icefields at 1200 m. This may not sound like a very long day, but it sure felt long. The spacetime warp was in full effect, with each faint, foggy landmark being so massive and/or distant that their position never appeared to change, giving us the impression of skinning on a treadmill. The low elevation also meant that there was plenty more trailbreaking in deep slush. We could tell this was one of our least-eventful days because Thomas finally started running out of songs to sing to pass the time. We eventually made it back to the icefield near the top of the Tsirku Glacier.

Upon leaving camp on the 26th, we had a few hours of nice vis' across the remaining flats. After a 700 metre climb with some longer periods of whiteout, we reached a col above the south edge of the upper Herbert Glacier. We had just enough visibility to see the beginning of what we thought was the most feasible route to the top of nearby Peak 2352, a summit which we suspected of being unclimbed. We dumped our sleds and made our way up behind a gendarme, across a sidehill, up a steep gully (on boots now), up a steep-and-deep snow face, across a bridged 'schrund (the rope came out briefly), and up a sastrugi-encrusted ridge to the top. We got to the summit in a whiteout, but just as we were about to head down again, we got a brief gap where we could see the tops of the clouds around us and a glimpse of glacier far below us. We took a long break to chip all of the ice out of Simeon's Dynafit boots before inserting the removable tongue for the ski down. While we claim no naming rights over the area, we like the name 'Shaa X'wánl'óot' (Tlingit: "boot's tongue mountain").

The clouds appeared to be burning off, so we decided to go for a second peak, this one on the SW side of the col where we had dropped our sleds. Of course, just as we started up this peak, the clouds and snow came back with a vengeance and forced us into stop-and-go, guess-and-check travel. After booting up to just below the summit ridge, we traversed gingerly across a final arete of low-density snow. After a final push, we stood on the summit just as the clouds finally began to break



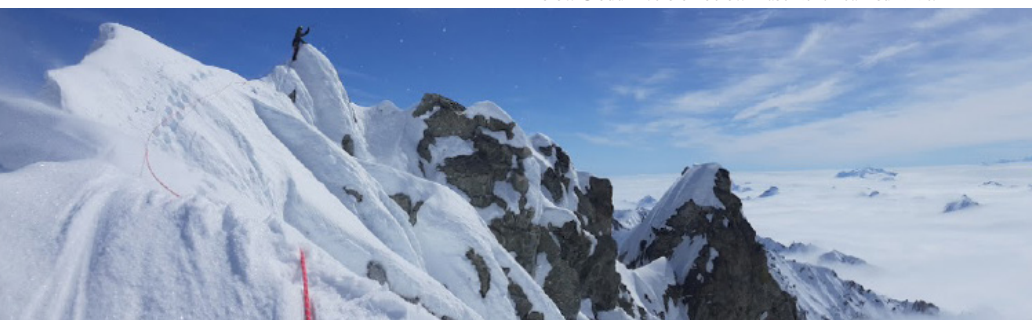
up again. This sudden transition from blurry whiteout to clear sunshine inspired the name ‘Shaa Wakdáanaa’ (“eyeglass mountain”). We got some nice turns on the way down! We continued down the Herbert Glacier to camp near the base of Mt Henry Clay. We stayed up late making a mediocre chocolate milk dessert.

On the 27th we skinned up a snow ramp from the Herbert Glacier to a col on the shoulder of Mount Henry Clay. We wanted to climb to the summit but the whiteout at the col was so severe that we couldn’t find our way down the other side, much less up to the peak. We ended up huddling behind a snow wall for two hours until we finally caught a glimpse of light ahead of us that we followed down to lower, less cloudy terrain. A combination of skiing and freeheeling got us back to the toe of the Jarvis Glacier where we took off our skis for the last time. We then commenced choss wobbling, alder clambering, and gravel trudging back to the Klehini crossing. The alders had leafed out in the past week, so it felt like the world had been reborn in our absence. The Klehini was running slightly higher than on the way in, but we found a better place to cross so that we didn’t have to deploy the boat. At the highway, we threw our packs in the car and motored down to Haines where Simeon swam in the bay, and where we were able to find decent food even after 8:00 pm.

The drive back took a bit longer than it had a week before; we were probably both a bit less motivated to step on it. We still made it back to Vancouver at noon on the 30th.

Our Alsek expedition was both an unforgettable experience and an objective success. Even though there were many days of bad visibility, there were also windows of excellent weather, which cannot be taken for granted in this particular part of the world. More importantly, the snow never fell more than 5-10 cm in any one storm. Combine this with the warm temperatures, and we never had to deal with storm slabs. Importantly, we agreed that we were still friends after nine days of mandatory proximity, which also cannot be taken for granted.

Above Near confluence of Buckwell and Tsirku glaciers. ‘Shaa X’wánl’óot’ and ‘Shaa Wakdáanaa’ on the horizon.
Below Cloud inversion below ‘Basement Peak’ summit.



SKIING BAKER IN JULY

STEFANIJA REKASIUS, JOE MEYER, IVAN FEDIAEV

July 2 - 3, 2024

Participants: Lewis Clarkson, Ivan Fediaev, Julian Larsen, Joe Meyer, Stefanija Rekasius, Nick Voth

STEFANIJA:

All it took for this trip to happen was for Ivan to ask on the Discord if anyone wanted to ski Mt. Baker in July and five of us eagerly responded that we wanted to. Who wouldn't want to ski in summer, and on one of the most pronounced mountains you can see from Vancouver?!

We decided to go up the Coleman-Deming Route. Recent reports mentioned cornices falling off the Colfax Peak which is right next to the trail, and we knew that avalanche conditions would be higher starting around mid-day given the recent-ish snowfall and warm temperatures, so we decided on a 10:00 pm start since we were unlikely to get much more sleep and none of us wanted to get caught in an avalanche. We debated if this could even be considered an alpine start since we weren't technically starting in the morning, but it was close enough.

On July 2, the Vancouver car left at 4:00 pm. The border officer was so confused on how we could be skiing in July until we explained that we were hiking up and skiing down. His response was, "Oh, you're those kinds of people," and we just smiled not knowing how to respond. We got to the trailhead around 7:00 pm, where we A-framed our skis and attempted to get a little more sleep before the ascent. The Chilliwack car arrived at around 9:30, and by 10:00 pm we were off.

The trail was really well maintained and easy to follow even in the dark – even the creek crossings. In one spot we opted for a faster, slightly overgrown bypass up the side of one of the creeks. Around 2 hours after our start, we finally reached snow near Hogsback Camp and were grateful to get our skis on our feet instead of on our backs.

Skinning felt so much faster than bootpacking, but at roughly 1:00 am we entered a cloud that left visibility relatively low. While in the cloud, we mainly stayed on the GPS track and only swerved around a couple crevasses. We would have reached the summit at 4:00 am if we had maintained our pace, but the fatigue

from hiking overnight soon hit before we had even reached the infamous Roman Wall, a roughly 300 meter 35- 45° slope just before the summit.

JOE:

Finally at around 3:00 am, we poked our heads out of the cloud layer in what has to be one of the top 5 moments of ever being in the mountains for me – maybe even better than getting to the top. While we were making pretty good time, it was hard not to open the GPS every couple of minutes – the mountaineering equivalent of ‘are we there yet???’. Watching the stars sprawl out above us, illuminating the broad glaciers covering Baker on the left and Colfax Peak on the right is something I will always keep with me.

Unfortunately, not long after that, the continued nighttime cooling of the glacier and steepening of the terrain made skinning a tad sketchy. As I didn’t have ski crampons I made the rookie mistake of switching to crampons too early; the top layer of snow was frozen enough to be sketchy for skinning but underneath it was a postholing nightmare. I switched back to my skis, and managed to find a doable route up, but not without wounding my pride. I vowed to buy ski crampons before doing any more spring condition ski mountaineering.

STEFANIJA:

Although there were generally good footsteps already on the Roman Wall, it took us between 2-4 hours to complete. My debacle happened going up the Roman Wall. One of my crampons was too big, and there was ice stuck by the pin not allowing me to adjust it. After a few times of having to stop and put the crampon back on, I decided to just clip it to my harness. My other crampon fell off as we were close to the top; unfortunately it was too steep to stop and put it on so I had to climb only stepping on pre-made footholds. Luckily there was soon a good ledge where I stopped and got the ice out of my crampon and adjusted them. Afterwards, it was smooth sailing. Seeing the sunrise above the clouds definitely kept me going as it was one of the most beautiful views I had ever seen!

JOE:

The Roman wall was a bit of a death march. We’d gotten up to a ledge before the proper ‘Roman Wall’ and regrouped before continuing for the final bootpack. The whole ‘being up for almost 24 hours straight’ thing wasn’t treating me so well; I took one of Nick’s caffeine pills. Against my better judgement, I slammed the whole 200 mg thing back; there was no room for subtlety.

The first 20-30 minutes of the bootpack, my body felt weeeeird. My brain was exhausted and in a cloud, despite my body struggling to sit still and my heart thundering in my chest. I could see Julian way ahead of me and was curious where everyone else was, but I vowed not to look back for fear of being forced to admit that I hadn’t even gone half way. Eventually, the initial 200 mg dose and shock of

being moving again wore off, and I managed to find some enjoyment in the feeling of kicking my crampons in, trusting them and making progress. Finally, I crested the final steep ledge and meandered up to where Julian was waiting on the false summit. Nap time.

IVAN:

Going up the Roman Wall was without a doubt by far the most excruciating slog I've been through in the mountains. This was because of several poor decisions whose consequences all converged at this point, the first one being my complete and total disregard for nutrition. My dinner back at the parking lot was simply an entire box of pasta without any sauce or toppings. In addition to a terrible dinner, I decided to only pack trail mix. Despite my questionable dinner, I was able to cruise the skin up, powered by two cups of instant coffee and a top up of half a caffeine pill provided generously by Nick midway through. Although I started strong, my energised self started crashing at the Roman Wall and the lack of sleep that I was able previously to ignore started to weigh heavily on my eyes. Since the camera I brought started to run low on charge, I searched in my bag for my power bank. I managed to knock it towards where we came from, and it instantly slid away into the darkness like a hockey puck on an ice rink. I was not happy as I had just bought it and it hurt my ego to lose it that quickly. Not finding it at the time, I decided to just fit my crampons to my ski boots. The wind also started to pick up at this point so I reached into my bag to fetch my gloves only to find that they were also missing. This was not the condition to be in at the crux of the route. I was tired, demoralised, and my stomach was also sitting heavy with all the nuts and candy I had been eating along the way. Lewis kindly offered me one of his sandwiches which I think saved me from total failure. We set off and I quickly fell to the back of the group, starting to feel worse with every step. I started counting my steps and tried to hit at least ten every time before stopping and catching my breath. I'd never been above the clouds and witnessed the sky transition from total darkness to sunrise with gorgeous hues of pink and orange covering them all. Slowly but surely I kept going and eventually got to the summit, more than two hours after the first person in our group made it up. After a bit of rest, more real food, and hydrating I started to feel better. The group behind us managed to find my power bank which was a much needed morale boost.

STEFANIJA:

After reaching the false summit we had a little nap break and then walked to the true summit where we found a tent pit that became the ultimate rest spot as it was completely sheltered from the summit winds. During our time at the summit, a guided group of four reached the summit coming via the Easton Glacier Route having camped nearby. We were then joined by Lewis and Ivan and got the necessary group summit picture.

At around 8:00 am we decided that the corn softened as much as it would at the top before snow near the bottom would be too mushy, and with that, we got ready to ski...in July! The Roman Wall was facing South West so we started off with some pure East Coast skiing. Having learned to ski near Montreal, skiing on ice was a fun memory of home and made me value the amazing snow we have in BC even more. Unfortunately not all of us had great luck skiing down the Roman Wall. First, Ivan's water bottle fell out of his pack and straight into a crevasse below. The second casualty was Nick's ski which popped off and slid towards the crevasse. At one point it started to slow down at a lip, until it finally tipped over the edge and fell into the same crevasse that Ivan's water bottle fell into. From there, Nick had to attach his one ski to his pack and walk down, which turned more into a run to keep up with us.

IVAN:

This was one of the dumbest ways I've gotten injured. Basically on the way back down, there is a part where a small uphill leads to the ridge of the Roman Wall. My genius idea was that if I gained just enough speed going down, I could get past the uphill without having to side step up, but I vastly underestimated how fast I would get on icy snow. Joe was ahead of me on top of the ridge and at the speed I was going at, I knew he was going to become a bowling pin and I, the bowling ball. I stopped as hard as I could and hit the ground, with my left hand bearing the brunt of the impact. One of my skis popped off and was pointed down towards where Nick's went; fortunately I was able to grab it before it got a mind of its own and joined his for eternity in the Easton glacier. I don't remember exactly what Joe said, but it was something along the lines of "how about we don't". My left hand felt pretty bad, especially my thumb which felt like it had been badly sprained. I noticed later in the parking lot that it was really swollen, as if I stuck it in a beehive. When getting it checked out at a hospital afterwards, I was asked how I injured it and saying "skiing" in July was met with surprised reactions. It ended up being a ligament injury, also known ironically as "skier's thumb". I went out a total of four days this ski season and I got injured on two of them, which means a 50% injury rate.

STEFANIJA:

Once in the bowl, we finally reached decent snow and good slopes which made carving easy and allowed the turns to be amazing! The few crevasses that we passed on the way up in the dark were now visible and avoidable in the sunlight. Getting closer to the bottom also meant the snow got slushier and it very much felt like summer skiing. Towards the Hogsback Camp the terrain became a bit rockier and Joe and Lewis got slightly cliffed out. Our transition to bootpacking was a tad slower as sleep deprivation was starting to hit along with the post-ski blues. At 12:30 pm, we got back to our cars and got ready to go back to reality. Climbing Baker has been amazing, and I don't know how long it will be till I don't look at Baker and think "Wow, I did that!"

IVAN:

The funniest moment for me on this trip is looking at Joe trying to pack his stuff in the car with the most bloodshot eyes imaginable and visibly struggling to coordinate. At one point he told me “I don’t know what plans we have, but I would like to be home. I have a pre-trip that I need to run”. I respected his commitment and hoped that he would have enough brainpower by then. Stefanija at this point is the most coherent and energised, probably because she didn’t have any caffeine. I graciously transferred driver status to her once we got off the FSR, after almost destroying my engine running into a shallow mound of pebbles.

Top left Views of Colfax from the Roman Wall. *Julian Larsen*

Top right Joe ready to ski. *Ivan Fediaev*

Bottom left Nick with his ski (singular). *Ivan Fediaev*

Bottom right Some good skiing. *Ivan Fediaev*



THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SLING

NOAH MACDONALD

November 1 - 3, 2024

Participants: Ethan Somji, James Maltman, Noah Macdonald

This trip report is divided into two sections: an actual trip report with details of our shenanigans, and a separate entry with beta on our “new”^{*} routes.

**We fully acknowledge that these routes are rather close to the hut and have almost certainly been climbed before. We can only propose them as first known ascents in mixed-conditions, and even then, “known” has to be qualified with “known to us.” Our trip involved going out and climbing lines without any prior beta, and we’re stoked to share the story as a way of generating enthusiasm around the spirit of adventure in the club.*

TRIP SUMMARY

James Maltman proposed the idea of chasing mixed gullies from a base camp at the Brian Waddington Hut early in the year, and I promised we’d keep an eye on it. When I later proposed running Daughter of Drytool on the weekend of the 2nd-3rd of November, he pointed out that the weather was too nice and suggested we spend the weekend in the Tolkien Range instead. I agreed, and James roped Ethan Somji into the group. Thus, the Fellowship was born.

Friday, November 1:

We drove out on Friday after class finished. The Phelix Creek FSR was drivable (without snow) to the summer parking, though the water bars were getting bigger; I counted 18 large water bars and three small ones. Some of the water bars may cause trouble for lower clearance vehicles; the bigger ones caused my trailer hitch to hit the ground (I drive a Toyota RAV4). Embarrassingly, we noticed at the trailhead that my car was low on gas: I had forgotten to fill up in Pemberton. We later sent a message via inReach to Kaylie Robinson to save us by dropping off some gas at the winter parking. Thanks, Kaylie: you’re a lifesaver.

The approach itself from the summer parking was straightforward (taking just over two hours), though we had to break a bit of trail through fresh snow, which started near the trailhead and got progressively deeper nearer to the hut. Skis were still unnecessary though, and would have hurt more than helped.

We built a fire to dry our gear and witnessed the fearless mice scurry around the floor despite our presence. The efforts of the volunteers who carried all the wood up the previous weekend were much appreciated.

Saturday, November 2:

We woke up at 8:30 am and climbed the NS Couloir. Afterwards, we built another fire to dry our gear. Again, the mice were a highlight; we felt impressed as we watched them scurry across the ropes and onto the gear we had hung up to dry. If you bring food, do not trust it to be safe just because it is suspended in the air; it turns out the mice are better climbers than us.

Unfortunately, one of the mice fell into the pot of water we left on the table after we went to bed on the night of the 2nd. James woke up to the sounds of the mouse desperately splashing in a futile attempt to climb the smooth metal walls of the pot. In an intended act of mercy, he emptied the pot outside the hut. Unfortunately, his action was not actually all that merciful; we found the mouse frozen in a block of snow the next morning. RIP mouse.

Sunday, November 3:

Just in case the absence of gas in my car was the product of a problem with the car (and not just my forgetfulness), we decided to start/finish the day earlier so as to be back at the car at a time more reasonable to request a rescue if it refused to drive. We retraced our steps up the bottom section of the NS couloir and found an appealing-looking (though short) mixed pitch on the wall to the right. We climbed it and named it Lembas Bread.

ROUTE BETA

THE NS COULOIR (M4-)

From the hut, work your way back around the lake to the 2nd slide path on Mt Shadowfax (8min walk). Ascend the lower slopes through a talus field, up into the heart of the couloir. As the couloir steepens, it splits into two couloirs; take the (climber's) right option at the fork.

P1 (M4-): The first pitch starts with an M3 boulder problem. I chose to solo this step, but threw down a rope for Ethan & James. Next, wallow through some steep snow before tackling the M4- crux step. Belay above from a small tree near the right side of the couloir (I supplemented this with a knifeblade piton beside it).

P2 (M2): Above, a thin layer of steep snow hides low-angle chossy mixed (M2); James prudently protected this with some questionable gear as he excavated the pitch from the unsupportive snow on top. Once this was done, however, I felt comfortable soloing the pitch. More steep snow brings you to granite outcropping on the left. Belay from a two-knifeblade anchor (note: we did not leave the pitons in situ. Bring your own).

P3 (One move of M3): More snow brings you to where the couloir broadens. Continue upwards towards an obvious weakness up and right. One tricky mixed step interrupts otherwise straightforward snow wallowing; Ethan and I soloed this part, but James wisely asked for a rope. Trees offer many options for a solid belay.

Further up, there are smaller sections where you can increase difficulty by avoiding the path of least resistance and climbing mixed “boulder problems.” This makes the climb noticeably more engaging and enjoyable. More terrain of this sort (and more snow wallowing) leads to the summit of what Gaia labels “Peak 2132” (Coordinates: 50.63735, -122.67338) – a subsummit of Shadowfax. To descend, make your way towards the true summit; the low point on the ridge offers easy access to the left-side branch of the couloir system. Walk down the couloir; it offers little by way of difficulty, and no rappels are necessary.

Alternatively, a motivated climber could traverse/ascend to the true summit via another obvious couloir. We declined to do this, having topped out the logical extension of our chosen line.

The difficulty of the route will likely vary considerably depending on the amount of snow in the couloir. Any more snow than what we had would make the route into a trivial snow climb. As we found it, there was a touch of mixed climbing, but not enough to warrant a trip for the average mixed climber.

*The NS Couloir is very close to the hut and would certainly be skiable in proper winter conditions. We are confident that it has been travelled many times before. What we do not know, however, is whether it has been climbed in mixed conditions. The name we gave the route is mostly for our own reference (hence why it’s a silly descriptive name and not a proper LoTR-themed name); we are not so naive as to think that the couloir was untouched ground and that we have legitimate naming rights.

LEMBAS BREAD (M4, 10M)

Approximate Coordinates: 50.63539, -122.67469 (Elevation: 1894m)

Recommended Rack: Single rack of cams 0.2-3, medium-sized nuts, lots of slings.

On the first notable cliff on the right-hand side of the NS Couloir (a significant distance before the fork), an obvious corner crack looked like it might offer reasonable mixed terrain. Leading the line took significant effort, as it required significant snow-excavating to reveal pick placements, turf, and gear placements. But the crack left little to be desired; it took cams and nuts very well, and made for some satisfying tool placements. Turf on ledges offered other opportunities to get good sticks. If more fully frozen, the grade may be easier; in colder temperatures, this would be an amazing Scottish-style turf route. Despite the pitch only being 10 m, we all had so much fun that we left feeling completely satisfied. Hence the name: Lembas Bread. Three (out of three) stars: very worthwhile at the grade.

**RESPONSIBLE AND
PRUDENT BEHAVIOUR
(THE NORTH FACE OF SKY PILOT)**

NICK AYERS

IN LATE NOVEMBER 2024, Noah Macdonald and I were feeling somewhat mountain deprived. We concluded that the cure for this affliction was to go climb something. After some deliberation, Noah proposed we have a crack at the north face of Sky Pilot. Unbeknownst to us, this was to become a bit of a saga. It took three attempts over two months and some (questionable?) responsible and prudent behaviour to get it in the end. In perfect conditions, the face goes at WI3 M2, but for our ascent we concluded that WI3 M3 R was fair. In addition to finding some great climbing, we learned that I am fine at skiing uphill, and abysmal at skiing downhill.



ATTEMPT 1, NOVEMBER 29, 2024

We drove up to Squamish on Friday night, with the aim of starting early Saturday morning and being back by mid-afternoon. However, that would require plans to go smoothly (they didn't). We encountered our first issue in my parent's basement in Squamish. I had rented ski boots from the VOC for the approach, but I had planned on using a pair of Noah's skis as they would be lighter than club ones. Problem was, we hadn't fitted the boots to the bindings yet. Apparently, my rental boots were a little larger than Noah's and the bindings were about 0.5 mm too small when maxed out. Oh well, I guess I'm skiing freeheel then. What could go wrong?

At 3:00 am, our alarms went off and we set off up the Shannon Creek FSR in Noah's RAV4. We managed to park at the gate about 1.5 km from the gondola summit and began skinning straight from the car. Sadly, the gods of new ski boots were displeased, and about 5 km into the approach Noah's heel imploded. Interestingly enough, the same thing had happened this summer when we had attempted the north face of Mt. Athabasca. So far Noah and I's bail rate on north faces due to Noah's heel implosion was 100%. So, we turned around and skied out, which was a somewhat invigorating experience without my heels attached to the skis.

At about 8:00 am, we got back to the car and drove out in a subdued mood. Given that we had all our alpine climbing gear, we decided to head up north to do some roadside drytooling at Crack Scratch crag. Bashing my brand new ice tools into rock for their first use was mildly soul crushing, but it was a valuable learning experience, 5.3 rock isn't necessarily 5.3 with crampons and tools.

ATTEMPT 2, JANUARY 18, 2025

This time around, we recruited reinforcements. Julian Larsen and Evan Wong decided to join us for attempt two. So again, on Friday evening, Evan, Noah, and I hopped into Noah's car and headed north to meet Julian, who was working in Squamish. This time, we came armed with a secret weapon – Julian had found some gummy bears for sale at the Squamish Nesters and had purchased 5 kg for \$10. No way we bail now, right? This time my boots fit my skis, and we were all feeling good. Things were looking up.

At 3:00 am, we woke up and headed out the door, and then immediately proceeded to get lost on the FSR that we had no problem with the first time. Sadly, there was more snow and ice this time and after some scary fishtailing on the way up we concluded we couldn't make it to the gate. We parked on the side of the road about 2 km from the gondola summit and began skinning on some spectacularly slippery ice on the logging road. Once we reached the gondola summit, the road became a lovely groomed track, but that didn't last forever. After the nice groomed road we encountered some "5.11 skinning", to quote the Zenith Mountain Guides conditions newsletter. It turned out that none of us were 5.11 skimmers, so we ended

up kicking steps and slithering up some shockingly steep icy snow in the trees to get into the alpine. Once in the alpine, the skiing was straightforward, but reasonably steep. All told, it took about four hours from the car to make it to the bottom of a very intimidating looking face.

We transitioned from skiing to climbing gear, then Noah began to lead the first pitch. He stopped on a lower angle section about 25 m up and proceeded to build an anchor with 4 screws and both his ice tools. Apparently the “ice” was just alternating layers of snice, snow and ice. Great for secure climbing, less than great for protectable climbing. Unsure of whether to continue or not, Evan and I began cautiously questing up the pitch while Julian watched from the base being sensible. About halfway up the pitch I came to Noah’s fist screw; it wobbled in a very suspicious fashion. At this point Evan and I realized the truth of Noah’s earlier words; we would have to downclimb the pitch to bail, since the anchor wasn’t exactly high quality. Given this, and the fact that we were a group of four, we made the responsible and prudent decision to bail for the second time. However, it wasn’t a total flop, as we encountered a wild inverted rainbow while downclimbing (Photo by Evan).



After Noah, Evan and I had all cautiously downclimbed pitch one, we made the discovery that I cannot ski to save my life. Much to the others’ amusement, I employed the falling leaf technique on the chunderly blue run down the moraine from the stadium glacier. Then it was time for the “5.11 skinning” section.

About 30 minutes of extremely tense side slipping later, I made it to the bottom in one piece, minus some ego. The ski back to the top of the gondola was uneventful, but the ski from the gondola to the car wasn’t. Two-inch thick ice on

road does not make for good skiing terrain. Julian and Noah managed to make it to the car, but Evan and I gave up and walked the last section (likely faster than Julian and Noah skied).

Next came the sketchiest part of the entire saga. Somehow Noah had managed to get his car up an extremely steep icy section of the FSR in the dark (without chains, too)! So we put the chains on and prayed we would make it out alive. Crawling down the ice was difficult; we kept slipping then regaining tread then slipping again, growing ever closer to a pile of unpleasantly sharp boulders at the bottom of the hill. Somehow, we made it to the bottom in a reasonably controlled manner and drove out, glad to be alive.

ATTEMPT 3, JANUARY 28 - 29, 2025

After two bails, and with a rapidly closing weather window, Noah and I were feeling a little bit concerned that Sky Pilot might have to wait until April or next season even. Given that we had two days of good weather left, and I had labs on both days, we began to despair. That is, until we reached the responsible and prudent conclusion to climb it overnight. I jokingly texted Noah saying that we could do it overnight on Tuesday and be back in Vancouver for my 1:00 pm lab on Wednesday. Unsure of whether I was joking, Noah's immediate response was "I'm in." Well, I guess we're going then. So at 8:00 pm on Tuesday evening we drove up to Squamish for the third time and proceeded to miss the key turn on the FSR yet again. Shaking our heads and holding in laughter, we parked below the hill of terror from last time and began walking at 10:00 pm. The ski up was uneventful, other than constantly wondering what the hell we had gotten ourselves into and trying to think of a fitting title for this trip report.

Upon arrival at the bottom of the face, we promptly realized we could see nothing since we had chosen a night with no moon for our ascent. After several extremely grainy long exposure photos were taken, we located the base and switched from skis to crampons. Noah began leading the first pitch at about 1:30 am and was soon out of sight. Once 60 m of rope was out, he built an anchor and belayed me up. Excitingly, the ice was much better and this anchor was three bomber screws in solid ice, good stuff. We transferred gear and Noah, being the far stronger ice climber, led off again. Once this next pitch was complete, Noah spent a long time assembling an anchor at the top, mildly concerning. "You're on belay... maybe don't fall on this one" came Noah's call. That's encouraging. I set out on the pitch somewhat apprehensively but soon settled into the rhythm of relatively easy, but extremely careful climbing. It turned out the ice at the top of this pitch was a film of ice over snow, thickness unknown, but at least 13 cm. The anchor consisted of three dubious ice screws, Noah's tools and the VOC spectre (that scary looking ice pick thing that hangs on the cabinets above the gear repair bench).

Pitch 3 was the crux, it started out with some steep snow overlaid by ice about 1 cm thick, unprotectable of course. Noah got two solid screws at the base

of a rock step, then traversed for a while, then quested up a steep M3 step, without any protection worth mentioning. Following up this pitch was invigorating, given that our anchor was a “tree” (Noah’s words, read: frozen shrub) and the climbing was easy, but tenuous. After this my nerves were rather shot, and given that the next pitch was 60 m of 60–70 degree snow with a short ice step, the belay was rather unpleasant as Noah’s excavations created a constant stream of spindrift pouring down on me. Oh, and the anchor for this one was literally just Noah sitting in a hole between the snow and rock. Needless to say, I didn’t fall. The final technical pitch began with some more steep snow, followed by some 1 cm thick ice overlaying powder and then a final M2 step, which was highly enjoyable. As I was following this pitch we were treated to a magnificent sunrise, and my spirits improved drastically. From the top of this pitch we simul-climbed the remaining several hundred metres of steep snow to the summit ridge.

Cresting onto the ridge was a phenomenal experience. Looking off the other side we could see an inversion over the Howe Sound and to the east, the sun was just peeking over Ledge Mountain. But given we wanted to descend the east face we decided to get a move on, before the snow softened too much. By the time we reached the summit, the east side was in full sun, which was not ideal. Given this, we elected to descend via the summer route on the west ridge. Aside from a couple easy rock/mixed steps, the descent was entirely on snow, which made the usual scree much more pleasant. That is, until we hit the stadium glacier and had to post-hole around the entire mountain to retrieve our skis.

After ski retrieval, we again realized that I am a poor skier, especially after climbing all night. The pre-descent caffeine pills were wearing off as I sideslipped and whimpered my way down the skin track. Thankfully, I had mastered the technique on our last attempt and this ski descent went much smoother. Once at the gondola, we indulged in some \$16 poutine and answered questions about what we were doing with the scary looking sharp things on our backpacks. After a final icy ski down the road to the car, we gratefully took off our boots, almost 16 hours after leaving the evening before.

All told, the overnight hit and run strategy was certainly a responsible and prudent course of action. It allowed us to take full advantage of the weather window, although we took too long for me to attend my Wednesday lab. The highlight of the entire experience was certainly on the drive back to UBC. We were stopped at a light on Beach Ave, and google maps directed that the fastest course of action was to get out of the car, walk across a park, get back into the car, and keep on driving. So keep that in mind, portaging is always an option if you don’t want to wait at a red light for 30 seconds after your adventures are complete.

THE VOC PIZZA DELIVERY COMPANY ON SEYMOUR

TOJI NAKABAYASHI

December 7 - 8, 2024

Participants: Toji Nakabayashi, Jamie Boyle, Erik Reimers, Frederik Skamris Holm, Tereza Machackova

EARLY SATURDAY MORNING (11:00 am), I get out of bed and don my uniform. The armor of a food delivery warrior. I check my messages and notice I got an order for a large pizza for an address with no number, just “Pump Peak.” Fair enough. I gather all my equipment for the day and head out to pick up my extra large Dominos pizza and meet up with my ride.

A merry band of five headed towards this Pump Peak with a pizza box under our arms (they didn’t give me the insulating box smh). We hike along the mountain climbing slopes of thick snow (maybe 1 or 2 cm). Skinning up the icy route with no poles (only box in hand) proved difficult, but they never said the delivery life would be easy. The weather called for rain and snow, but we reached the peak to a beautiful view of the sun over the clouds. A tough delivery it may have been but the views are worth it. We get to the peak of the pump and rejoice as we have accomplished the mission to deliver.

But tips of the cash form we did not get, they paid us in sunsets instead. As it was getting dark, the deliverers decided to take cover and set up shelter far away from home. Bellies filled with pizza and legs warm from dancing salsa, we head to bed at the early mark of 7:00 pm. The winds howled and snow poured overnight, snapping a trekking pole and tearing a small hole in my tent. My Danish friend and I fended off the snow as it piled on our now horribly saggy tent throughout the night. But as daylight hit, we again got a fat tip of views which made up for the night). 1 for 1 so far on the VOC food delivery service and hope to deliver ‘em all and become the delivery champion.

CREATIVE WRITING



Windmelt ridges in winter

Hoar crystals

extending

windward

Mountain ranges

The sets of

waves

line shore pines

in the breeze

Pine cake

trees:

Is this a beach?

Of Madness and Sorrow

Is the sorrow in the wind's bellowing
Or is it bubbling from your soul
Speak the silence you keep muffled, my friend
For what of our madness thinks the snow
Give ear to the infant in the cradle
Let it die, let it die
Such is the cry of the world
Leave it to the wild

Zihan (Quintus) Zhou



Above Lorin Jacot, Ed Riley, and Quintus Zhou touring near Brew Hut. *Ekam Juneja*

Previous page Negative Thirty *Em Lion*

Section cover photo (left) Favourite wildflowers *Sonia Landwehr*

LHÙ'ÀÀN MÂN

KLUANE LAKE REFLECTIONS

ANYA BOARDMAN, ALEX BEAUCHEMIN, ELIAS BOWMAN

Summer 2024

Lhù'ààn Mân (Kluane Lake), Yukon

APPARENTLY WHEN YOU get hired to do fieldwork, you actually have to do fieldwork. Even if you're based out of Lhù'ààn Mân *Kluane Lake* for three beautiful months of summer, surrounded by tall mountains that murmur possible adventures and sparkle under a sweet and barely setting sun. Even if your research station is in shouting distance of more ridges and valleys than you could explore in a single glorious lifetime.

After 40 days of focused field data collection, and mid-way through our field season, Alex, Elias, and I had perhaps lost some professionalism and certainly some sanity. When we learned that our research PI had won a national prize for haikus as a child, we felt it was time to put our scientific minds aside in favor of some creative endeavours.

Prior to the spring of 2016, the run-off from the Kaskawulsh Glacier melted in an even split between two rivers: the Kaskawulsh River which runs east, and the Ä'äy Chù River that flows north into Kluane Lake. In June of that year, however, the glacier retreated enough for the balance to shift. In a matter of months, 97% of the water was running into the Kaskawulsh, and the Ä'äy Chù became just a steady stream through a massive dusty delta. The water level in Kluane Lake fell by one meter. Now, katabatic winds off the icefields bring dramatic dust storms to Kluane Lake.

None of us knew Kluane Lake before the 'river piracy event', but still the dust felt like an out of place newcomer, coating the leaves of the shrubby boreal forest and drying out our eyes and lungs. Against the purple storm clouds that often marked hot summer afternoons, the dust storms were striking silver giants, flying out from the mouth of the now-dry valley to dance on the tumultuous surface of the lake. It was beautiful and strange, meeting a place after such a transformation; understanding that the mighty mountains and ancient glaciers, for all their magnitude and presence, were as in-flux as the currents in a river, as moveable as dust.

We sought to capture this complexity, of course, the story of a living-breathing-melting-drying-moving landscape, in our poetic art. That, and our conspiratorial urge to abandon all scientific pursuits for a massive fucking trail run. And also the fact that pika vocalizations (one of the subjects of our research) sound suspiciously like Cardi B's "Money".

Behold, from the journals of the Yukon's Early Career Polar Scientists:



Pirate river where
Did you take all the water
Dust dust dust dust dust

Big pirate river
More for you and less for me
Water there, dust here

Glacier why did you
Retreat so far away? Now
We long for water

Dust is on my face
And in my eyes. The landscape
Knows river is gone

Bullethole bagels
Rosemary salt sesame
Butthole midnight sun

Coffee grounds fallen
Fresh on croc and on my sock
Strangely warmth is nice

Six AM fun run
Compromise utility
Good light is at three

August twenty six
The date holds promise for those
Who plan hiking coup





Six hour run means
We will escape here by two
Slink, into fitness

With trepidation
The runners plan their escape
Sheep mountain at night

Meep meep meep eep eep
Embrace the inner pika
Calling out for life

Friendly Yukon you
Bind us by deep remoteness
Cardi B, Pika



LETTERS FROM MX. MANNERS

ELIAS BOWMAN (VOCENE EDITOR)

MX. MANNERS IS THE VOC'S LONG-STANDING ADVICE COLUMNIST. PEOPLE WRITE TO THEM WITH ANY QUESTIONS THEY HAVE ABOUT THE CLUB, AND MX. MANNERS ANSWERS IN THE NEWSLETTER - THE VOCENE. REACH OUT TO YOUR FRIENDLY VOCENE EDITOR TO BE ADDED TO THE EMAIL LIST IF YOU HAVE NOT HAD THE PLEASURE OF RECEIVING THE VOCENE.

VOCENE - BACK TO SCHOOL

Dear Mx. Manners,

I am a recent convert to the VOC and I'm already struggling to get on super full trips. With so many people, how am I ever supposed to complete my dream hike and learn all these new skills?

— A worried newcomer

Hi worried newcomer, that's a familiar spot - the VOC has a lot going for it, best friends, big trips, and great vibes, but we've just surpassed 1500 members and it's hard to run trips for that many people. The general thought to ensure your spot on a trip is to be prepared to register quickly to the committed list for every trip that you want to go on.

For big busy trips like Rock Party, Glacier School, etc. you'll want to be refreshing the page ready to hit that commit button, like you're buying tickets to a Taylor Swift concert. So tomorrow morning when those Rock Party tickets go on sale don't say I didn't warn you when they are gone in 10 seconds flat.

Another technique is to try and increase the number of trips that are running - lots of people are eager to go on adventures, and at its core the VOC is just a way to make friends. If you have the ability to go on a trip but just need partners, consider leading the trip yourself. If you feel worried about the prospect of leading a trip all by your lonesome and need a hand or advice, reach out to the exec team or talk to a quartermaster and they are sure to point you in the right direction.

Yours in faff,

- Mx. M

VOCENE - HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

*Dear Mx. Manners,**I volunteered to help Alex at the dreaded Clubs Day. As the official face of our club, I find myself drowning in the chaos of too many attendees at our table. How should I keep my cool, when talking to the potential future leaders of the club in front of me.**- Overwhelmed Boother*

Hi overwhelmed boother, our club is often stuck between aggressive sticker-givers and blatant free-snack bribery, and yet the VOC continues to shine on club day. How this miracle happens is because of our ragtag team of boothers like you! While the adoring masses can be hard to handle, it's important to remember that when you're representing the club you are officially the coolest person on campus. Even if you feel like a beginner in the club or insecure about your skills, representing the club makes you a certified mountain climber, extreme sport expert, and sponsored by expensive ski companies. More seriously, presenting the clubs to others is an awesome opportunity to talk about all of the things that you love about the community of the VOC. Make sure people know there's a space for everyone in the club, from absolute beginner to grand pappi Rock 5 instructor. Don't worry too much about covering every last thing the club does, your speech doesn't need to be some well practiced seminar, all you need to do is engage your audience and explain to them why they would enjoy the VOC (because who wouldn't?). If you're still feeling overwhelmed, take a little break and sit behind the table, try starting more of a conversation instead of a speech, or at the very worst consider resorting to interpretive dance.

Yours in faff,

- Mx. M

VOCENE - SPHINX REPAIR SPECIAL REPORT

*Dear Mx. Manners,**What do you do when no concerned VOCers send you their trials of tribulations in a given week?**- Definitely not Mx. Manners*

Hi Definitely not Mx. Manners, when I have no content, the river simply does not run. If you want more answers to your trivial questions you must first send me your trivial questions. Please email all of your wacky inquiries to vocene@ubc-voc.com with "Mx. Manners" in the subject line to be featured in our next friendly neighborhood advice column.

Yours in faff,

- Mx. M

VOCENE - ATMOSPHERIC MIDTERMS

Dear Mx. Manners,

What's the difference between these interested and committed lists that I keep hearing about?

- Fake VOCer (at the advice of a Past President)

Well well well Fake VOCer, good thing you asked, the interested and committed lists are one of the most important things to understand about the VOC! For a VOC trip there are 3 levels of signed up: interested, committed, and going.

Interested - you can sign up as interested at just about any time, this is a great way to show the trip leader or your friends that you are thinking about going on a trip. At this point you have not committed to doing anything and you also do not have a spot saved for you on the trip.

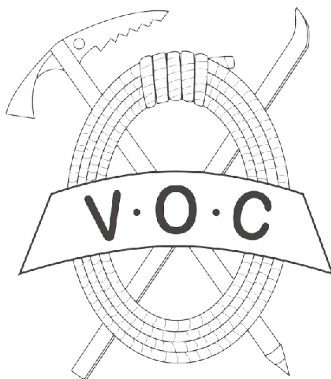
Committed - you can sign up for committed as soon as the registration for the committed list opens, which will be listed on each trip description. For many trips this list fills up quickly, as this is where you actually claim a spot for yourself. Think of this as akin to buying a concert ticket - if you want to go, you should be early and ready! Set an alarm!

Going - even once you're on the committed list you aren't guaranteed a spot on the trip, until you go to the pre-trip and confirm with the trip leader that you will be attending. At this point, the trip organizers can sign you up as going, and you're well on your way to whichever adventure.

Hopefully that makes some sense, and if you have any further questions, send them to the VOCene, as one sad, lonely, lacking-in-prompts VOCene editor will be very happy to answer!

Yours in faff,

- Mx. M



VOCENE - NEW YEAR, NEW ME, NEW VOCENE?

Dear Mx. Manners, With so many VOCers home for the holidays, away back in another province, be it the East Coast, Southern Ontario, Canadian Prairies, or a Nation across the pond - What do you recommend clubroom-sick members do for the next couple days?

- Mountain Missing Member

I'm sorry Mountain Missing Member, I can understand your frustration. The holidays are a beautiful time, full of cheer, downtime, and surely some frustration. Wherever you are, this is the perfect time for reflection - take time to think about all the special things you appreciate about the world, the people around you, and your home for the holidays.

Cry quietly how you miss all of your friends in the club, and scheme up the best possible adventures for the coming year.

And always remember, you can still cross country ski on the prairies.

Yours in faff,

- Mx. M

VOCENE - SCHOOL CANCELLED?

Mx. Manners, I listed that I'm looking for Tele skiers on my dating profile and included the best picture of my feet, but so far I have had no matches - what am I doing wrong?

- Lovesick Lonely VOCer

Ah yes, the age-old dating dilemma: why aren't more people swiping right on my extremely specific and mildly concerning niche hobby?

Let's start with the obvious—leading with a foot pic? That's more than a little bold. Even in the best conditions (and let's be real, Tele skiers don't get "best conditions"), that's a high-risk maneuver. Are we talking a tasteful alpine shot of boots in fresh pow, or some horrifying close-up of your sweat-crusting toes after a 10-day hut trip? Because if it's the latter, the only match you're getting is with someone's trauma therapist.

And "looking for Tele skiers" on a dating profile? Love the enthusiasm, but you do realize you've narrowed your dating pool to approximately six people, all of whom are currently busy adjusting their bindings or ranting about how "Tele just feels better, man." If you want to attract a fellow free-heeler, consider emphasizing your questionable life choices, resilience of your leg muscles, and willingness to suffer. Bonus points if you subtly imply that you own a 4WD vehicle that can make it up an unplowed logging road.

Yours in faff,

- Mx. M

ODE TO THE BEGINNER

DUNCAN MACINTYRE

Given at the annual Burns and Turns, February 16, 2025.

When I am old and bachle,
I'll remember with much glee
All the people that I met
In the VOC.
While I am fond of everyone
Or nearly everyone that I know
There is a certain group
To whom my heart does go:
Hark! The humble beginner. The joke, the farce, is he?
And yet he has the heart of mine, for he
Is the heart of the VOC.

Find me a beginner who has not fallen in a burn
She emerges dripping, pulling herself up by bush and fern
And still she continues around every turn.

Find me a beginner who has not marvelled at the snow.
Falling on every mountain, frozen breath of God does go
but all the non-beginners march on as if they do not know.

Find me a beginner whose spirit was not raised
When uber-cool members somehow are not phased
To help and teach him, he, a beginner—they must be crazed.



Find me a beginner who has not trundled through a murgh
 For eight hours now he's drookit, chitterin—if only he had fur
 But on this crag companionship is to him an anchor.

Find me a beginner who has not lent her friend a hand
 Seeing his wearied face as he is conquered by the land
 She gives a simple smile to say, I'm with you, and you can.

Find me a beginner who has not wondered at this club,
 These crazy VOCers who have ski straps, fishing glove,
 And desire to do not what is known, but what will be a flub.

Find me a beginner, who to Phelix Hut has come
 Has not found it the hardest thing that he's ever done
 But also the only thing he's done that is truly fun.

I dinna ken where this club'd be without our novice rabble.
 No debacles, no slowings down, no lily-dipping paddle,
 No newfound resolution, no raw humanity—
 Without the beginner, there'd be no VOC.
 They make members into mentors and outings into quests.
 And so, Burns Supper Visitors, VOCers, Honoured Guests,
 Now you know I'd be remiss, indeed a mighty sinner
 If I did not deliver this Ode to the Beginner.

PHOTO CONTEST









Above

Landscape Category Winner

5040 Summit in Mid August

by Alex Levy

Left

Landscape Category Runner-Up:

Terminal moraine of the Kaskawulsh Glacier,
Kluane National Park and Reserve, Yukon.

by Alex Beauchemin

Section cover photo Nch'kay Ben Sommerfeld



*Portrait Category Winner:
Island Style Dawgs Out by Alex Levy*



*Beyond the Tripod Category Runner-Up:
Drifting into the Deep by Ekam Juneja*







Left

Cellphone Winner

Nick Ayers on Mt. Andromeda

by Noah Macdonald

Below Left

Beyond the Tripod Category Winner:

Freeze and thaw *by Isaac Borrego*

Below Right

Portrait Category Runner-Up:

How many things can Anabelle attach to her Glacier School pack? *by Isaac Borrego*



Above

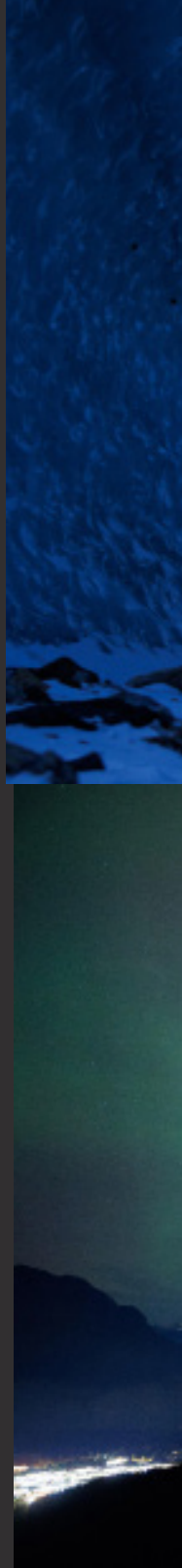
Overall Winner and Action Category Winner:

Noah Macdonald prefers his glacier ice gently overhung
and sculpted to curved, architectural perfection. Best
served with views of iconic Rockies peaks.
Jasper National Park, Alberta. *by Evan Wong*

Below

Action Category Runner-Up:

Julian Larsen pulling on crumbly granite crystals and
looking for non-existent footholds in the wee hours of the
morning. Why? A chance to climb beneath the best light
show in the world.
Squamish, BC. *by Evan Wong*







Left

Fauna and Flora Category Winner:

"Oh shit, it's raining"

by Luis Dias



Right

Flora and Fauna Category Runner-Up:
Curious Sea Turtle decides to dive bomb me
by Joshua Ip

Above

Club Activities Category Winner:

“The climb terminates on a ledge referred to as the BBQ Ledge, named as such because it is large enough that you could unrope and have a barbeque. What if I actually had a barbeque on it?” Noah Macdonald, Julian Larsen, and I celebrating Noah’s birthday in style – by climbing a 100L haul bag up Mt. Yamnuska and roasting steak, peppers, portobello mushrooms, and Korean beef ribs on the aptly named BBQ ledge.

Kananaskis, Alberta

by Evan Wong

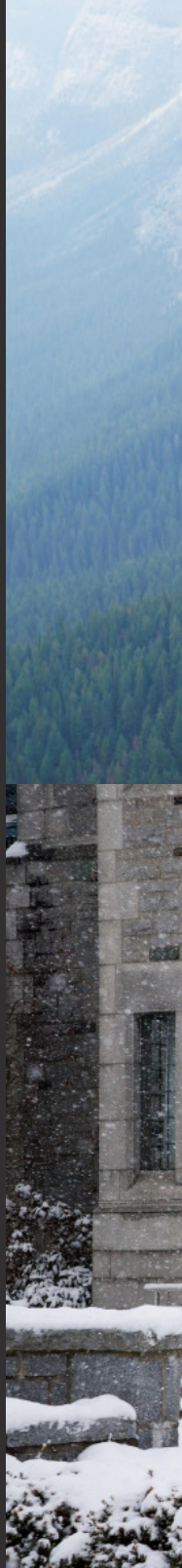
Below

Club Activities Category Runner-Up:

Snow day transformations – IKB stairs turned kickturn technique training facilities. Noah Macdonald touring to his Monday morning meetings.

Vancouver, BC

by Evan Wong







HIKING AND SCRAMBLES



BELLA, WHERE YOU BEEN LOCA?

AIESHINI UDUMULLAGE & EMMA GU

January 27, 2024

Participants: Johnson Liu, Lara Solie, Matt Solie, Ningyu Zhang, Sarah Sinn, Amelie Korzec, Elaine Zhou, Kathleen Griffin, Michal Sanocki, Benjamin Collins, Kenrik Yap, Kerra Delasantos, Elliot Suen, Sophia Chu, Aieshini Udumullage, Emma Gu

DEAR ALL,

This is a tale I will carry with me like my favourite book, worn at the edges from being told so many times. This is a story I will tell my future children and grandchildren till the day I die. I will point to the pictures on the wall and tell them your names.

The adventure started early at 6:00 am on January 27th outside of Place Vanier where I met Aieshini Udumullage. Vanier lay still and quiet with lazy sleepers save for Aieshini and I, shivering against the January weather. While we waited for King Johnson Liu's grand arrival, we unearthed a hidden thread between us: we went to the same elementary school in Winnipeg before moving to BC. What are the odds? It was a small moment, yet one that set the tone for the rest of the day. Our car gang consisted of Johnson Liu, Lara Solie, Matt Solie, Kathleen Griffin, and Amelie Korzen, who all made us feel so at ease with their humour and boundless energy. The plan? Snowshoe to Park Butte Fire Lookout in Washington, hence the trip name: Park Butte Lookout (Beginner Friendly!).

As we neared the border, Amelie and Aieshini realized that they brought apples and faced the dilemma of either tossing them out or eating them on the spot. Toss them out? Never! Of course, they decided to scarf them down. Amelie, in a display of commitment, absolutely inhaled her entire apple *including* the core. Aieshini, on the other hand, didn't have it in her and a kind border guard became the custodian of the apple core.

Upon crossing the U.S. border, Ben Collins (our trusted scout in another car group) informed us of the weather conditions. Snowshoeing was unfortunately off the table, but a Plan B was born after the two car groups convened at Joe's Fine

Section cover photo Sky Pilot *Felix Dorn*

Coffee to discuss further plans. In the making of Plan B, Aieshini and I zoned out, contributing nothing but silent admiration for everyone else. Finally, we decided to explore Deception Pass State Park.

First stop: Hoypus Point Trail. While waiting for Johnson's friend's car group, we spotted a very cool bird and munched on Johnson's goldfish crackers and pepperoni sticks. Once the car group arrived (in it, Ningyu Zhang (aka John), Kenrik Yap, Elliot Suen, and Sophia Chu), everyone introduced themselves and off we trekked on the muddiest trail known to humankind. Clean shoes? Forget it. Vibes? Immaculate. Everyone was getting to know each other, sharing snacks, and vibing! Johnson's endless bag of goldfish became our communal lifeline.

I (Emma), am a liar who loves to tell people fabricated stories. On this trip, I believe I have successfully made Ben one too. As Ben and I bonded over our love for Amsterdam, we began to convince everyone that we were childhood friends from there (neither actually from Amsterdam) who miraculously reconnected on this trip. I think Kenrik was the one who took the longest to realize this wasn't true...

Post-hike, we walked down the Deception Pass Bridge stairs to enjoy the view and saw ducks swimming with the current. Some of us got separated on the way back up. After a minor panic, the lost were found back in the car, waiting for us. Classic.

Rosario Beach was where time slowed. We spent time collecting and skipping rocks, swinging on the swings like kids again, and taking in incredible sunset views. Matt and Elliot captured amazing photos and videos while the rest of us stared in awe. Meanwhile, Johnson—the enthusiastic friend he is—for whatever reason, kept encouraging us to stare deeply into John's eyes because according to him, "John is very shy". It was strange, but we love a good staring contest.

(Quick side note: the drive through Washington in between all of our stops was surreal. With the moody weather, winding roads, and fog-draped trees, we were living out our Twilight fantasy.)

After all these pit stops, our collective hunger led us to the Horseshoe Cafe where the highlight was a massive piece of fried chicken with a knife stabbed through the center. We all thought the food was amazing and regained our energy. At this point, I knew the trip was coming to an end and I didn't know how I was supposed to recover after experiencing the best day of my life.

Yes, everything about this trip had been fun, but the star of the show? Trader Joe's of course. You saw it coming. At the store, I managed to influence nearly everyone to buy their freeze-dried strawberries. By the time we left, our bags were bursting with every Trader Joe's snack imaginable. Good things always come to an end, so eventually, goodbyes were exchanged and we headed back to Vancouver (with no apples in the car this time).

You know when you meet a group of strangers and you feel like you have



Above Hoypus Point Trail. *Elliot Suen*

known them for a lifetime? This is how I felt with everyone on this trip. Some trips carve themselves into memories not for flawless execution, but for the moments of spontaneity and the people you meet along the way. This was one of them. It may not have gone according to the original plan but that's what made it unforgettable. I think Aieshini and I can both agree that this trip opened our eyes: It doesn't matter what the activity is when you're with the right group of people—anything will be Type 1 fun.

Below Swingin' and vibin'. *Matt Solie*



MUD, MOSS, SAND, AND STONE

BECOMING THE REAL MUDDY BUDDIES ON THE NOOTKA TRAIL

ANN-CATHRIN MULLER

May 4 – 10, 2024

Nootka Trail (North to South)

Car 1: Duncan MacIntyre (organiser), Sri Chaitanya, Diana Laschewski, Ann-Cathrin (AC) Muller;

Car 2: Flavia Caprez, Diego Fernandez, Xi Liang, Anneke Dresselhuis, Laura Romer

MAY 4TH

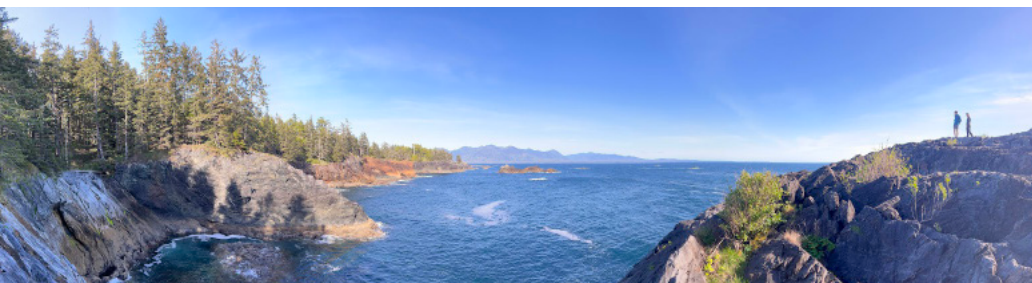
As soon as we reached Horseshoe Bay, some of our group members became familiar with a quintessential BC Ferries experience – where on earth did we leave the cars? After being confused by the number of washrooms on the side of the queues, we finally found Xi Liang's car, and could happily return to ours before the boarding process started. Phew, we did not want to be that group everybody hates before even being on the ferry.

Reconvening our car groups on the ferry, we stood in wind that literally blew us away, so we returned to the covered area and got to know each other better. Arriving in Nanaimo, we agreed to meet again at the Upana Caves (after devouring fish and chips on the docks in Campbell River, of course). After just a few more hours of driving through the very picturesque Strathcona Provincial Park, we were just seconds away from reaching the cave parking lot when we encountered our first bear on the side of the road. For some of us, this was our first ever BC bear!

Exploring the caves was an absolute blast. We compared the functionality of our headlamps, discussed whether the holes in the huge map could be bullet holes and wondered what we'd do if a bear were to hide in a far corner of the cave. Not wanting to reach our rec site in Tahsis too late, we decided to continue our drive. While our car played the excruciating game of 'Whose Triangle Is It,' the other group delved into discussions about childhood trauma, the meaning of birth order, and romantic histories. So fun.

Our wonderfully prepared dinner by the legend that is Anneke Dresselhuis (you will be hearing more about their creations throughout this report) served as a perfect end to an already exciting first day.

Below Sri Chaitanya



MAY 5TH

With our water taxi leaving at 7:00 am, we had an early start. We started out the boat ride somewhat enthusiastically, singing Moana songs and enjoying the beauty of Nootka Sound. However, the closer we got to the open ocean, the less excited we got (even though we still enjoyed ourselves quite a bit). The water literally fell onto us, drenching every single piece of clothing we wore, including our packs. Sri Chaitanya's camera was also affected pretty badly, making us all think it could not be saved (disclaimer: somehow Sri fixed it). For context, even our awesome skipper (water taxi captain) Chris was quite distraught by the high waves – but we made it.

Our first day's trek started off on a beach with an enormous shipwreck, which felt somewhat apocalyptic. Knowing we'd have to beat the high tide, we continued walking, eventually having to cross a very large creek. For some reason, this didn't convince us to simply wait for low tide – no, we decided to continue. We were literally knee-deep in mud and waist-deep in water, and therefore covered around 100 m in one hour – we would therefore officially like to also call ourselves 'Muddy Buddies' (thank you Julia, of the Juan de Fuca trip, for this awesome name). Continuing through the rainforest, we eventually reached our first campsite on a gorgeous sandy beach. The weather did not give us any slack, with cold winds and rain stopping us from drying off or simply warming up (which for some reason didn't stop us from going swimming) – being woken up several times at night by the heavy rain, we all hoped we'd experience at least some sun throughout the rest of the trip.

MAY 6TH

Continuing the trail on the many different terrains (forests, rocks, sandy beaches, rocky beaches etc., this trail has it all), we were all still longing for at least a few sunbeams. And surprisingly, it worked. Even though it was still quite cloudy and our clothes didn't fully dry, we saw patches of blue sky and felt the warmth of the sun on our skin. Arriving at the second campsite, Sri and I almost jumped for joy. People had built a cabana and installed a tarp – the simple things that now felt like luxury. But that's not even it! The campsite was next to a huuuuge waterfall, which we were already discussing sliding down until we noticed how strong the current was. This didn't keep us from running into the ocean and then dipping into the river. This was exactly what we needed after the adventure of the day before. Life slowly creeped back into us, giving us the motivation we needed for the next few days.

MAY 7TH

The next day was pretty much only spent on beaches. While being annoyed at every single pebble that fell into our shoes and the simple exhaustion from walking on such awful terrain, we soon switched to the many logs on the side of the beach. Sri and I played a long game of The Floor Is Lava, which made the whole escapade a lot more fun. Discussing our mutual love for gummy bears and the constant hope



Above Anneke looking cool as ever. *Sri Chaitanya*

to see some whales (disclaimer: we didn't), we walked and walked and walked. The eagles circling above us in the sky, we couldn't believe it, blue skies and turquoise ocean set the scenery for a wonderful day on which our tents and clothes finally dried. Since we had been hiking so much over the past few days, we decided to run a stretching/yoga session on the beach together – while also assigning family roles to all of our group members (shoutout to the beloved family dog).

We were unbelievably grateful for the simple presence of sun and warmth, and very much enjoyed the ability to finally make a fire and have some marshmallows that night.

MAY 8TH

The next day, we decided to cover two days' worth of distance. We hiked through muddy forests, along more beaches, and did some very light scrambling on the famous west coast rocks. Passing by Maquinna Point, we agreed this was probably the most gorgeous view of the entire trip. After some back and forth on where we wanted to set up camp and a quick dinner break (good old instant meals), we reached our final campsite in the dark. Since we were so far away from light pollution, the stargazing that night was simply incredible. We tried identifying some of the constellations and discussed the possibility of life on other planets. Knowing we'd be able to sleep in the day after, we all went to bed full of excitement for the full night's sleep ahead of us (Sri and Duncan MacIntyre cowboy camped with deer watching over them).

MAY 9TH

Since we had covered this day's distance the day before, we were able to chill as much as we wanted. While some people simply stayed at the campsite playing an enormous game of 'Up and Down The River', Duncan and I decided to hike back part of the trail to explore some sea caves. We were a bit underwhelmed by the actual caves – but still enjoyed scrambling on some big rocks while discussing British

and Canadian politics. On the way back, we couldn't resist running into the ocean in a little, wind-free bay with clear water and a view of the Yuquot village in the distance, which we then explored with the rest of our group once we got back.

Walking around the village seemed almost surreal – strolling on cement, standing underneath a roof and even seeing other human beings in the distance.

Anneke's lentil curry hit the spot once again (we all started to think they were secretly enrolled in culinary school), and gave us a wonderful last night together. Watching the sun go down behind the trees, we started reminiscing. How would we even summarise everything we'd experienced on this trip? This trip report itself only gives a tiny insight.

That night, four of us decided to cowboy camp, knowing this would be the last night on this gorgeous island. Looking up into the stars one last time, we were all sad to be leaving the next morning.

MAY 10TH

Before we left for the village, we took a wonderful group picture together seconds after Duncan led a beautiful performance of the Moose Song (he definitely had too much juice).

After having a few minutes in Yuquot to explore their lighthouse and docks, we boarded our water taxi and headed back to Tahsis. This time, the skies were clear, and the water was still. On the way, we saw more eagles, seals, a huge amount of otters and another bear. It was the perfect end to our adventures in Nootka Sound. We met up again in Campbell River to have lunch together – for some reason, we picked a place in a casino. When I tell you we were overstimulated after having spent a week on a remote island...

Below Finally not walking on tiny pebbles anymore.. *Diego Fernandez*



Meeting up again on the ferry, we knew this was truly the end to our trip. Trying to see whales once again, we enjoyed the sun on the deck and simply relaxed (well, except for a quick performance of Cotton Eye Joe). After saying our goodbyes, we headed back into the bustling city of Vancouver, with our trip now officially coming to an end (where we were treated to Northern Lights that same night, which truly perfected this week).

Here are some insights from the other participants:

Flavia Caprez: “Nootka was endless beach walks. Being soaking wet and squeezing four people in a two-person tent just to get warm. Eating steaming pasta in the rain around a non-existing fire. Sunbathing in our bikinis just a few days later. Setting up tents in the dark and eating trekking meals at a beach without water. Connections to people and friendships that last far longer than this trip.”

Laura Romer: “Nootka was a chance encounter of nine lives conspiring to experience the Wild West coast of Vancouver Island. It was a shared silence. Marching across the sand and ducking under mossy tree branches. A warm familiar huddle around a campfire. The fruitless search for whales. Little pebbles stuck between your toes and wolf tracks all around. In the middle of nowhere with the dearest friends you never knew you had until then.”

Duncan: “I thought a week would feel like a long time, but when we reached the end, I wished we could turn around and stay in the beach wilderness longer.”

Sri: “Going on a trip with strangers is always an adventure – after all, they’re just friends we haven’t met yet. This trip was no exception. From getting drenched before even reaching the island (honestly amazed how my camera has survived this long), to wading through sulfur water, running laps in the rain out of pure boredom (and survival), every moment tested us. At one point, I was tired of walking on rocks and yearned for the sand, only to immediately regret it when you did cross over. It might sound like this trip was all a sufferfest, and some parts of it were (I’m sure AC recapped both the good and bad brilliantly above), but you know what they say: diamonds are made under pressure. By the end, we weren’t just travel companions anymore; we were like diamonds in a cherished family heirloom, each unique yet bound together to create something beautiful and enduring; we were family. (Yes, even with a furry friend)”

Huge shoutout to Duncan for organising this trip. We all very much enjoyed it and hope we didn’t drive you crazy with our constant questions and needs. Thank you for everything!

THE GIFT OF LIFE, AND THE LESSON OF DEATH

JOSEPH CHIAO

June 30 - July 2, 2024

Participants: Sam Viavant, Joseph Chiao, Parham Zarei, Tom Curran, and Cassandra Elphinstone

IF YOU ARE THE AMS OR MY MOTHER STOP READING THIS.

I should be dead right now. At the least, I should still be battling for my life in an ICU. Instead, I somehow walked away with a dislocated shoulder and some lacerations on my limbs. It's been a month since the fall, and I still struggle to comprehend how lucky I was. I am not a religious or superstitious man (I study math and physics), but I do believe that fate was giving me a second chance and a lesson that day. I wish to extend this blessing onto you guys, so you can learn from the mistake and hopefully never be in my situation. To that end, let me explain what happened.

To begin with some context, I live and breathe for long hikes and scrambles. I started my outdoor life scrambling with my dad as a kid, and have always been excited when the terrain becomes tricky. The act of scrambling has never fazed me, nor has anything bad ever happened. I had heard stories of people hurting themselves or dying while scrambling, but for some reason I had never thought that the same could happen to me. For me, it was kind of the same attitude as driving; we all know that people die on the road every day, but we still get in cars without ever thinking about it.

The trip was a traverse from Tenquille Lake to the Phelix Hut, and the route looked incredible. The scene, the lack of civilization, and the ambition of the route, all made me anticipate this trip more than anything else. The group was composed of the trip leader Sam Viavant, me, Parham Zarei, Tom Curran, and Cassandra Elphinstone. With three days to complete the traverse, we set off on Saturday in high spirits. However, we didn't cover as much distance as we had hoped to on the first day. We decided that Sam and I would charge ahead to attempt to complete the traverse, while Tom, Cassandra and Parham would head for the car parked halfway on the traverse (at Hope Creek) and would drive around to pick us up from Phelix Hut.

With limited information of the route, we made a couple navigational mistakes that led to unnecessary gains and losses of altitude. This extra effort annoyed us. Having to push to accomplish our already gruelling long day (projected to be around 14 hours), we were both eager to avoid any upcoming ascent. When we were faced with the choice between longer easy terrain or following the ridgeline, we didn't even hesitate. I have yet to let a ridgeline stop me in my life, and this one was going to be no exception.

As soon as we started on the ridgeline, we realized that this might be more difficult than we anticipated. The first part was a large piece of granite, with cracks running across as holds. This part, while manageable, was a low class 5 climb. Note that we weren't carrying any alpine climbing equipment other than rock helmets and ice axes, so we were essentially free soloing at this moment. A fall here would mean dropping for hundreds of meters, and most likely death. Despite the low chance of a rock fall, I decided to put my helmet on due to the challenging terrain. We made it across without any problem, though being quite slow. The next pitch was slightly easier, but the rock was a little more scattered and some rocks were moving. Having had experience with this kind of situation, I continued on while carefully testing each of my holds. I went up the pitch no problem, and now it was time to descend.

The first couple of moves were ok, a little tricky but I managed. While testing each of my holds, I had to skip a couple of rocks that weren't solid. Finding one that I thought was solid with my left hand, I held on to it while shifting my right. No problem, the hand holds seemed solid, time to switch my foot. It was at this moment when I felt the rock in my left hand giving out, and just pulled out like a jenga brick. As the rock moved, the entire wall became unstable, and all the sudden I had nothing to hold onto, and the fall began.

(I had no grasp of time after this moment due to the adrenaline rush, so what I thought was ten minutes could easily have been an hour long, and vice versa. Take the measurement of time with a grain of salt.)

I couldn't see the bottom from the top, so I thought the fall was about to send me to the base of this mountain. Knowing that, I immediately thought that I was dead. I've had plenty of experience falling while rock climbing before, but this felt different. There was a sense of desperation in the first few moments of the fall. I tried reaching out with my left arm, grabbing onto a rock, but it just fell with the rest. After that attempt failed, my desperation disappeared, and there followed a strange sense of peacefulness. I was falling backward, unable to see what was about to come, I just waited. So many thoughts went through my head in the few seconds of my fall. My first thought was that this is it, this is the mountaineering accident that takes me out. I had long joked of this scenario with my closest friends, but it was now coming true. Then I thought about the fact that my mom just lost her grandmother, and what this must do to her when she finds out that her only son is

dead as well. But I wasn't worried, I was just relaxed. The seconds felt longer than they were. I was waiting for the impact, for something that breaks me in half, or my head to hit a rock. There was no panic, no stress, just calm and acceptance.

I estimate that I fell somewhere between 15 to 20 meters. Bounced off the walls a couple times, and there was evidence of the impact on my helmet and pack.

By some miracle, as I bounced my body rotated to face the way that I was falling, and the next impact was on my pack. The impact slowed me down enough for my brain to kick into autopilot, and I somehow arrested myself, stumbled up, and ran towards a safe spot. The next thing I remembered was standing next to a boulder, my backpack a couple meters behind me (I have no recollection of dropping it), and Sam yelling at me to stay where I was. Immediately, I felt something wrong with my left arm, something was horribly out of place. I looked up and down my body, trying to find something broken, believing that there was no way that my body had made it out in one piece. Sam came up and tried to help me with my left arm. As he was trying to diagnose the issue, my shoulder just slid back into place by itself. I must've been on such an obscene amount of adrenaline at that moment, as there was no pain through my shoulder whatsoever. Looking down, there was a deep laceration on my knee, the white stuff beneath exposed, and blood seeping out. That could wait, because I was still looking for more serious injuries. After testing out all my limbs, and checking my chest and abdomen, I realized that I might be fine after all.

After patching up my knee and a quick rest, we started assessing our next move. We realized that the best option was to backtrack and meet up with the other group, so Sam went ahead and shuttled my pack to a safer location while I waited in a slightly more sheltered location. On the way out, we had to descend some steep

Below Glacier lilies blooming everywhere. *Joseph Chiao*



slopes on snow. Knowing that I wouldn't be able to self-arrest if I fell was probably the scariest part of the whole thing. The fact that I was still a bit shaken didn't help either. Eventually, we made it out to a stable location.

We spent the night at a very nice meadow. Flowers were blooming everywhere, and mountains stood in the background. Cassandra administered first aid on my injuries, demonstrating some of the finest backcountry first aid skills I've seen. On the hike out, everyone volunteered to take my weight, preventing further injuries to my shoulder. At the Whistler health care centre, the X-ray showed that I didn't break any of my bones, officially putting an end to this ordeal.

After reviewing the incident, I pinned down the critical causes that led to the incident. The first being my confidence in scrambling. Up until this point I had yet to realize that part of the skill is the ability to call off a challenge. Sometimes it simply isn't about technical skill, it's about luck. To me learning when to call it quits was more difficult than pushing on. I guess this is a hard lesson that I eventually had to learn. Then there was also our frustration due to the earlier errors. Navigational errors in the backcountry are almost inevitable when traveling through unmarked terrain, even with the help of GPS or other navigational methods. Sometimes you simply cannot see over the terrain, or the contour map just isn't detailed enough. When we arrived at the summit before the ridge, I was hoping to move faster to catch up on the lost progress. However, sacrificing safety for some relatively minor gain in time just seems like a stupid thing to do in hindsight. The lesson here is to not let frustration get in the way of good judgment and be more conservative when you don't want to be. Moreover, we misjudged the terrain. For much of our trip, we were traveling on loose snow or scree. A couple kilometers before the ridgeline, the ground turned to granite and became relatively more secure, which gave us a massive boost in confidence towards scrambling. However, rocks are rocks, rocks break, and rocks fall. I definitely had too much misplaced trust in the integrity of the route. If the rock remained unstable throughout, I might not have felt comfortable going through the region without a rope. This taught me to evaluate rocks as what they are in the future. Just because they got better, doesn't mean it's a concrete wall at the climbing gym.

It's been a month since this happened, so I've had a little time to put some thought into it. I questioned whether the fall really had the potential to be life threatening, or perhaps I am just overreacting to this whole thing. But either way, the momentary thought of inevitable death has totally changed my perspective on risk management. Perhaps what happened was a good thing, this fall might have saved me from more serious injuries in the future. Also, having prevented head injuries, I will never hesitate to put on a helmet again. This experience didn't turn me away from the mountains, in fact I want to head back out there as soon as my body allows me to.

GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE HIKERS ON CYPRESS GLACIER

KATHLEEN GRIFFIN

July 27 - 28, 2024

Cypress Glacier via Roe Creek

Participants: Sean McKay, Stefaniya Rekasius, Kathleen Griffin,

Goldilocks the bear (non-VOC member, special guest)

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a little brown bear whose fur sparkled gold in the sun. For this reason, she was called Goldilocks.

One hot day, Goldilocks went to Roe Creek for an adventure. She followed some footprints down an old FSR and after a while, she came to a large boulder field where she had never been before. She climbed up and up until she got to a glacier where it was nice and cool.

Soon, she came to a campsite, which was completely secluded at the bottom of the glacier, and because she was tired and hungry, she looked around. She hoped that there were good people staying there who would give her something to eat and that she could rest for a while.

Goldilocks didn't know it, but this campsite belonged to three VOCers. The three hikers had headed to Cypress Peak, to practice their glacier rescue. So when Goldilocks came to the campsite, nobody was around.

She waited for a while, but nobody turned up. She looked around, there were three packs in a row. And sitting on a rock were three bowls of steaming ramen. And in the tents there were three beds. Goldilocks pondered, "Surely the people will come back soon to eat their ramen."

She decided to try on the packs while she waited. So first she tried on the small pack, but it was way too tiny. Bears need a lot more storage capacity than Stefaniya Rekasius does. Then she put on the big pack, but this pack was ridiculously heavy, Sean McKay must have been collecting rocks in it. After that, she tried on the middle-sized pack, and that was just right. Kathleen Griffin must be the exact same size as a small grizzly bear.

The sun was nearly setting and there was still no one around. After all that pack lifting, she was hungry looking at the bowls of ramen on the rock. "They probably aren't very hungry hikers," thought Goldilocks to herself, "or they would

have come back already to eat their dinner.” The noodles in the bowls smelled so delicious with mushrooms and spinach, that Goldilocks decided she would taste it. She took Sean’s spoon and tasted the noodles from the blue bowl, but the broth was much too spicy. Then, she took Kathleen’s spork and tasted the noodles from the yellow bowl, but this broth didn’t have enough flavour. After that, she took Stefaniya’s spoon and tasted the noodles from the last bowl. This ramen was just right and tasted so delicious that she ate it all.

After eating, she felt sleepy, so she inspected the tents. There was a Durston X-Mid with one bed and a MSR Hubba Hubba with two beds. Goldilocks first climbed into the X-Mid, but Kathleen had forgotten her poles and used sticks instead. Goldilocks didn’t trust the stability, so she went to the other tent. She lay down on the comfy Big Agnes pad, but the sleeping bag was way too cold. Stefaniya must have forgotten she was sleeping on a glacier and brought her summer-rated bag. After that, she lay down on the big bed that belonged to Sean, and it was just right. The bed felt so good that she stayed there until she fell into a deep sleep. While Goldilocks was still sleeping in the big bed, the three hikers came back down to the glacier. As soon as they looked around, they knew that someone had been in their campsite.

“Someone has tried on my pack,” said Stefaniya.

“And someone has also tried on my pack,” said Sean.

“And someone has tried on my pack and taken it with them,” said Kathleen. Then the three hikers went to the cooking area to get their ramen.

“What’s happened here?” said Sean, “Someone has tasted my ramen and spat it out.”

“And someone has also taken some of my ramen and tipped it over,” said Kathleen.

“And someone tasted my ramen,” said Stefaniya “And they tasted so much that now it’s all gone.” Then the three hikers went to check on their tents. First, Kathleen looked at her tent.

“Someone has been in my tent and left the door open.” Then Stefaniya looked at her bed.

“Someone has also been lying in my bed and left the bag open.”

Then Sean looked at his bed, and there was Goldilocks, wrapped up cosy like a teddy bear.

“Someone has been lying in my bed,” Sean exclaimed, “And she’s still there!”

“Oh, dear me!” cried Goldilocks. She tumbled out of the sleeping bag and into the vestibule. The fly was unzipped, and she jumped out before the hikers could stop her. Then she ran as fast as she could back home, all the way down the boulder field and back to the forest.

P.S. just kidding... partly.

UP AND DOWN AND ALL AROUND: A *MOSTLY* SELF PROPELLED JOURNEY

JOE MEYER

August 5 – 7, 2024

A circumnavigation of Garibaldi Lake had been on my list for at least a year. However, seeing as I have no car, and I wanted this to be a solo trip, I would have to bike to the trailhead. Rather than biking the entire 110 km or so from my house to the Rubble Creek trailhead, I took the Squamish Connector from downtown Van to Squamish, shortening the total distance by a good 65 km or so and removing the most dangerous parts of the Sea to Sky for bikers.

DAY 1

Upon seeing a weather window starting Monday, I hurriedly rebooked and commenced a frenzied morning of packing and shopping in order to be ready by a 1:50 pm departure. I thought it would give me enough time to bike to the Rubble Creek Trail, hike up to Garibaldi Lake, then up and over Mount Price into the Garibaldi Wilderness zone. I failed to factor in the unreliable punctuality of the Squamish Connector... I was on the bike almost an hour and a half later than I'd wanted to be.

My first lesson was that there is a whole lot of elevation gain between Squamish and Rubble Creek, something that goes unnoticed when in a vehicle. The bike ride up was quite a trial; at one point less than a half hour in, I already had doubts springing to my mind about the trip. "You can turn back any time you want :)" my consciousness was annoyingly reminding me. Although after stopping for a quick break, and absolutely guzzling some H₂O, I was feeling much better. Maybe it was the lighter pack, the hydration, the break? (Hint: I only realized this when biking back, but it was because the first 10 km north of Squamish on the Sea to Sky is one continuous fucking hill).

Once I'd gotten past this initial crux, I was able to enjoy the ride. Not that it was a walk in the park, but there was less suffering and more pretty views. Speaking of which, biking the Sea to Sky would have been an absolute blast if it weren't for my heavy pack and cars whizzing by. Highway 99 is something I don't appreciate much anymore since I drive up and down it all the time, but the views are absolutely gorgeous. Not that it'll ever happen, but it makes me seriously want a proper bike lane going all the way up to Whistler. The last hill up Daisy Lake Road

to the trailhead proved to be just a little bit too much for me; I'm not ashamed to admit that I walked my bike up the final few hundred metres.

After stashing my bike and consuming some calories, I started up the Rubble Creek Trail, which had its typical day trippers. There were some reasonably prepared seeming people, although most were in varying states of dejection. On two occasions I was asked how far it was to the parking lot—less than 100 metres past a sign which told them exactly that.

I motored up as best I could and made it to the lake just as the sun had gone down. Unfortunately, probably too slowly to make it into the wilderness zone safely. There was naught to do but hike on, however, so hike on I did. Headlamp donned, I continued. The trail up to Price turned out to be quite difficult for me to follow in the dark, the boulder-hopping bits were a particular challenge since there weren't many cairns and the flagging was intermittent. Thankfully, the trail became clearer for a while, and I managed to get into a rhythm before the steep scree/dirt/loose rock section preceding the summit, making it to the top at 11:00 pm in the pitch dark where I set up my bivy for the night. There was no way I was making it into the wilderness zone. I would've had to descend the steeper and unmarked section down the back side of Price tired in the pitch darkness (curse you Squamish Connector!!!).

In all seriousness, despite Mount Price being a solid bivy spot, this is definitely illegal and I don't recommend that anyone plan on camping where I did. I would hope, however, that any governing body which may happen to be reading this in the future would recognize that it was the safest option available to me save turning back before the trip even started. It would not have been safe to descend the backside of Price in the dark with my exhaustion, and turning around would have left me biking the Sea to Sky in the dark (I did have bike lights obviously, but still) with no place to stay in Squamish.

DAY 2

I woke up to the sunrise in the morning, not wanting to move whatsoever. I hadn't slept very well. Although, after finally dragging my groggy self out of the damp sleeping bag, I finally had the motivation to get moving—there wasn't really anything else to do. Some minutes were wasted trying to find the "right" way down based on the GPX track I was following. I eventually just gave up and followed what seemed to be the path of least resistance, which worked out fine. The GPX track was from folks who had done the circumnavigation the other way around, leading me astray a couple of times since the most obvious looking way up is often not the safest/easiest way down. What followed was a section of mildly heinous bushwhacking. Take this with a grain of salt though, as bushwhacking is neither my preference nor my specialty. However, I survived—the promise of gorgeous alpine ridges always egging me on.



Finally, Table Meadows opened up before me, and I exited the 'schwack for the time being. As its namesake suggests, the very angular looking rock structure called the Table dominated the view. I walked along its flank, finding a route that allowed me to boulder hop rather than bushwhack to the ridge, while staying far enough away not to be in the line of fire for any of its well known rockfall. I'd picked up my own personal posse of mosquitos in the boggy marsh of Table Meadows, and they were hell-bent on ruining my boulder bash. I sped up, assuring myself that once I reached the top of the ridge, a refreshingly cool breeze would send them careening away from me...

I was wrong, but reaching the ridge was worth it as it marked the beginning of one of my favorite stretches of the route. Tremendous views opened up across all the peaks surrounding Garibaldi Lake and Sphinx Bay, and all the glaciers sprawling further back into the park including the Neve. The rock was solid, and was fun to ramble over. I was welcomed by heather meadows and scraggly bent subalpine fir at every turn. Unfortunately, my alpine fantasy could not last forever as I had to descend to lake level, cross a creek, then head back up the Guard-Deception col in order to continue my journey.

Once completing the plod up the Guard-Deception col it was just before lunchtime, which I hoped would give me time to scramble both Guard and Deception and make it to the Sphinx Hut before 5:00 pm. I shoveled some food down my gullet, my fanciest course being dry Gatorade powder followed by a swig of water. The weather was looking a tad foreboding with dark clouds weaving around the nearby peaks, although it was not yet bad enough to turn around.

GUARD SCRAMBLE

The first part of Guard was a quick scree jaunt to the scrambly bit. The route finding started out relatively straightforward through some loose class 3 or 4 terrain.

I reached a towering piece of rock (gendarme?) that seemingly obscured my path moving forwards, and the route finding difficulties began. I'd made it up but would have to descend to continue the route. I don't remember seeing an easy way down, so I backtracked slightly and began a downclimb to climbers left. It worked, but I don't know if it was the best way. This was the most scared I'd been on the trip yet, down scrambling unknown and loose class 4 rock. I checked every rock that I put even a tiny amount of weight on and was sending some moderately sized pieces down off the mountain. After passing this difficult part, the name of the game was climbers left, as I made multiple jaunts in that direction to avoid sketchy/impassable terrain. More solid class 3 and 4 terrain and somewhat straightforward route finding had me at the summit with time to spare.

Coming down, I'd resolved to find the same gully I'd downclimbed before, or find something easier. I downclimbed it well enough earlier, and sent down a lot of the looser stuff which I figured would make the climb back up pretty straightforward. It probably would have been if I'd actually found it, but I second-guessed myself and ended up descending too early (I think). This left me in an even more difficult section of loose 4th class scrambling. I was less than enthusiastic, but kept my cool; the moves I was making were not especially difficult or strenuous. The only way I was going to get into real trouble would be to freak out, make a mistake, and put weight on something that couldn't hold me. There were multiple small ledges that I found were safe to put my weight on after clearing them of small rocks. I eventually made my way back to the "route" I'd followed on the way up—being very careful to avoid ankle-breaking rocks in the boulder field—and made it back to the col.

DECEPTION SCRAMBLE

Deception, overall, was a more enjoyable objective than Guard. I found the route finding to be easier, and there were more fun scrambling moves. From the col until nearly the elevation of the summit is fun class 2 boulder bashing on bomber granite boulders/slabs. I knew when I reached the proper scrambling section, which was a string of false summits I had to get over/around in order to get to the true summit, hence the name "Deception". I resolved not to be Deceived. Starting out, the obvious and only route forwards deposits you by an airy and fun 4th class ridge; thankfully the rock in this section wasn't as loose as Guard. Hearing about all of the deceptive subsummits, I didn't even try to go up them. There seemed to be a pretty reasonable route that ducked below, sticking on climbers right. This worked miraculously well, and I avoided some very sketchy looking terrain higher up and made good time.

The name of the game with Deception was to stick climbers right. Eventually, it looked on my GPS like I was getting very close to the summit, and I didn't see any obvious ways to continue down to the right. There was a very fun and airy

ridge/arete feature that led directly up to the summit! Deception turned out to feel a bit less sketchy, the route finding seemed more straightforward and it was less loose. I let out a whoop of celebration just as I was reaching the to—oh shit this isn't the summit... I looked across a very sketchy section of loose shit that I'd have to downclimb directly below another summit feature that looked like it was at a very similar elevation to the one I was on. I checked my GPS and realized I was not at the very top, assuming whoever made the map had any idea of where the top actually was. Based on the very scientific method of my eyes I deemed it likely that I was standing on something that was maybe a metre or two shorter.

The last section was the sketchiest of the Deception scramble, and was not possible to bypass. I'm unsure as to whether I was actually correct about which was the true summit, as the scramble over to the other peak clearly hadn't been walked on recently at all. It was extraordinarily loose and there were rocks sitting on the most obvious hand/foot holds, which I cleared off in order to make those holds usable. I was at 100% focus, and with a measured pace made my way to the summit (the actual one this time)!

On the way down, I followed roughly the same route I had come up with no issue. I may have been a bit higher in elevation on the traverse section but it went just as well. Once again, I had to be very careful not to turn a knee or something on the walk down through the boulder field below Deception. Over the next few minutes, my walk became a plod. I was very tired from not sleeping well the night before, from the early wake-up and intense day, and from needing to be 100% focused in exposed terrain. I thankfully made it back to the col well before 3:00 pm, the time I was aiming to be heading down by.

DAY 2 CONT.

The plod continued, first on the snow directly to descender's left of the Guard glacier, far away from the crevasses. I ended up passing a very cool glacial cave, although I opted not to go into it for fear of an unlikely collapse. The final crux of the day was the river crossing in Sphinx Bay. It was very deep and fast moving, so I stripped from the waist down and waded out into the slowest moving section I could find. My feet were in numbing agony as I was forced to step heavily on hidden rocks, and I almost fell over multiple times with the water sluicing by. After many grunts, swears, and gritted teeth, I finally made it to the other side. My already sore feet were absolutely pulverized, and morale was rather low. Summoning what energy I had, wondering whether I'd have the gumption to continue walking the next day, I forced my way past vast thickets of alder before finally making it to the hut. Whew!

I was expecting to be fully alone until reaching Panorama Ridge, but discovered four researchers who were doing field work by the hut! They had arrived just a few minutes before me, and were about as surprised to see me as I was sur-

prised to see them. I was, however, not in a particularly chatty mood considering the trials of the day, so I dropped my stuff in the hut and b-lined it to the lake. It was time for a swim, one of the highlights of the trip. It's amazing the impact jumping into an alpine lake has on my disposition. I went in being fried, pondering why I was putting myself through this, and almost wishing I didn't have to hike the next day. I came out happy as can be, excited to see what the rest of the trip had in store. The researchers were kind enough to offer me some of their food, and I chatted with them over dinner. They were full of great stories.

DAY 3

I woke up bright and early to sunlight streaming in through the hut window, and considered my options. I could stay in the hut another night, potentially climbing Castle Towers as a day trip. I could also pack everything up, camp wherever I wanted, going for Castle Towers if I felt like it because I had the time. The option I went with though was to just hike out that afternoon, trying to climb Castle Towers along the way. Doing it this way saved me the stress of getting to Squamish in time for my bus ride the day after.

The bushwack to the ridge north of the hut was definitely annoying. It was super steep, in places steep enough that I was crawling up the ridge on hands and knees. There was also some alder to navigate, although contrary to the feelings of many hikers and skiers, the alder was actually helpful this time as I could use it to pull myself up particularly steep sections. I'd also learned from my mistakes the previous day and preemptively applied bug-spray, which proved to be an A+ decision. Soon a swarm of Mosquitos showed up, conspiring from behind my back how best to suck my blood.

When I finally reached the ridge line, I breathed a sigh of relief; that was the last of the bushwacking for the trip. The clear views of Gentian, Castle Towers, and Sphinx Bay rejuvenated me even more than the knowledge that the mosquitos plotting my downfall had all been blown away. I was realizing that this route, while it has its fair share of shitty bushwacks, was balanced out by 10-out-of-10 alpine ridge walks, boulder hops, and heather meadows. All with terrific views of the towering peaks and resplendent glaciers that blanket the park.

Slopes of flowering heather and granite stretched out before me all the way up to Polemonium Ridge. Castle Towers was looking intimidating, majestic, and inviting all at the same time. Considering the time I was making, I was definitely going to go for it.

I dropped most of my gear at the top of Polemonium Ridge and started the scramble to Castle Towers. The route is well cairned, and almost entirely on Gaia GPS so I never was in danger of going off trail. It starts off with a dusty but safe descent, which has a potentially optional but IMO very fun move at the bottom. Then it's one long boulder bash for the rest of the way (to the west-peak—the true

summit which I was hoping to reach requires class 4 scrambling). I love boulder hopping, so this was a great time for me, but those who are less boulder-inclined should be warned!

Unfortunately, I reached a steep strip of snow that wasn't possible to navigate around. I wandered, looking for an alternate route, and considered how dangerous it would be to climb/descend the snow at its safest point. After some waffling, I decided against going for the summit, despite how close I was. I had only trail runners, no ice axe or poles, no sturdier shoes, and I had quite a bit of difficulty trying to kick steps in. It was definitely possible to make it without injury—maybe even likely—although “I did something that likely wouldn't have resulted in a serious injury while in the mountains by myself” is not the kind of thing that I would be proud to have done.

With the weight of a decision unmade off my chest, and the need to keep pushing my pace gone, I was able to fully relax. Despite not making it to the top, I reflected on how lucky I was to be sitting there at that moment, seeing the things I was seeing, and feeling the things I was feeling. I had a snack and chilled out for a while before heading down.

The descent was uneventful until I ran into another human! He was doing Castle Towers in a day, and was far more prepared than I was (sturdy shoes, ice axe, crampons). Despite the sun hoodie and sunglasses, the dude looked familiar somehow. I couldn't place it until a few minutes after I'd passed him, realizing “damn, that dude looked like Matt Gunn.” Don't ask me how I know what Matt Gunn looks like because I'm not sure, but after getting back to society and googling to be sure, I'm basically 100% sure I ran into him while I was coming down Castle Towers on a random Wednesday. What are the chances??

The next spicy part of the day, besides getting my ass covered in mud after slipping on a muddy part of the trail, was after I reached the top of Gentian Peak. All the trip reports that I'd read said to descend the scree on the north side of Gentian. I ended up starting down the incorrect way multiple times before realizing, I have to go down THAT? The descent was 45 degree-ish scree, dust, and loose rock. It was (and I don't say this lightly) extraordinarily unpleasant, and I was very glad there was no one descending above or below me as someone would have inevitably gotten beamed by a cantaloupe-sized rock.

I eventually made it out of the scree and was greeted by a magnificent tarn. It felt like the tarn was placed there to be a balm in the soul of all those who had to descend the unholiness that was the north slope of Gentian. I took a quick but phenomenal skinny dip before rallying myself to make the final ascent of the trip up to Panorama Ridge.

Even though it was less than 48 hours after I'd started, it was a shock to be around so many people, all loitering on top of Panorama Ridge. It was a weekday! Don't you have work or something? The descent back to my bike was, you guessed

it, a slog. It started out as a beautiful slog, but a slog nonetheless. I was realizing that of the 6-odd times I've had to descend the Rubble Creek Trail, hiking or skiing, it has never not been a slog.

I was dreading the bike, to say the least; everything hurt and spirits were relatively low after the Rubble Creek death march. One thing I've realized though, with the whole bike and hike thing, is that the bike out is never as bad as expected. I always seem to find a second wind, perhaps because biking is just plain fun. There were a couple of annoying uphill but it was gorgeous downhill for most of the way. There was no need to stop at the Tantalus lookout pullout on the highway, because the whole damn ride was one big Tantalus lookout.

As I was finally pulling into Squamish, I was hit with a massive wave of catharsis, the struggle was worth it but over, and the goal from months before was achieved. I inhaled a greasy meal and a delicious beer or two at a pub and slept in the dirtbag/overflow area of the Mamquam River Campground, catching a morning run of the Squamish Connector back to Vancouver.

So...would I do it again?

The Garibaldi circumnavigation? Probably not. I don't know if it would be worth it to do all the bushwacking and scree bashing to be somewhere I'd already been, not that I wouldn't wholeheartedly recommend it for folks looking for a challenge.

Biking up the Sea to Sky? I think so, with some improvements. First of all I'd pack lighter—I was already packing very light but could've gone without a stove, book, journal, and piece of clothing or two. I'd also find a way to get everything on a rack and panniers because biking with an overnight pack—while doable—sucks.



BYOC: BRING YOUR OWN CHEESE BACKPACKING

MARIE SANDLER

September 14 - 15, 2024

Semaphore Lakes

Participants: Marie Sandler, Clara Duwel, Silvija Grava, Joseph Chiao, Ryan Dowd, Altai Battulga, Aieshini Udumullage, Matthew Jarvis-Cross, Ellen Scott, Morgan Tidler, Joanne Ho, Sudha Kotapalli, Duncan MacIntyre, Ann-Cathrin Muller, Luke Mantle

FIRST, LET ME PREFACE this report with a warning, that it contains many mentions of cheese. Unlike baked goods, this isn't a "may contain traces of cheese" situation, but rather eight distinct cheese types intermixed with terrible yet grate cheesy puns.

The idea was conceived in May, on a wet hike in Lynn Canyon when Altai Battulga pulled out a wooden cutting board, an assortment of cheeses, fruits, crackers, and salami in the middle of a hike. I realized this would make for a great VOC hike, so come August I posted the BYOC "*Bring Your Own Cheese*" *Backpacking to Semaphore Lakes*. I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of cheese enthusiasts who expressed interest in this trip. It seems that we need more cheese trips.

We left early on Saturday morning. Keeping to the culinary theme, Duncan MacIntyre, Altai, and I had an extensive conversation about different types of teas, where I insisted on a good English Breakfast. Altai told us about the milk teas of Mongolia, which apparently have meat, and at least to me sounded a lot more soup-like than tea-like, but I am sure are delicious nonetheless.

The forecast was chilly and rainy for the weekend, so we were filled with false hope when we saw blue patches in the parting clouds on the drive up. Unfortunately, arriving at the trailhead we were disappointed by the rain. Regardless, our group of 15 cheese-loving VOCers was full of at least 15 cheese wheels worth of stoke. We quickly hiked up to the camp, excited by the cheese that was to come.

Ryan Dowd, who had woken up over an hour before his pick-up time, apparently baked us a sourdough loaf from his own starter and had gotten up early to warm it up so it was fresh. He impressively carried it in his fleece and some ziplock bags. Joseph Chiao and Ellen Scott, who beat us all to our camp spot, set up several tarps for us to feast under.

THE FEAST

In the chaos of fitting 15 people under a tarp in pouring rain, we laid out a beautiful spread of manchego, emmentals, boursin, havarti, gouda, cheddars, blue cheese

(which disappeared especially fast), and of course brie. The spread was decorated with some grapes, sun-dried tomatoes, olives, homemade hummus, various crackers, and of course, Ryan's sourdough!

Someone insisted this trip deserves the Kitchen Sink award, but several of us insisted that cheese is 100% an essential. Others argued that the ten cans of beer Joseph brought up were the real essentials here, and the cheese should still be award-winning.

As we finished up eating, Clara led some dances to warm us up, with moves including "Roll the Cheese Wheel" and "Eat the Cheese." As we danced, the rain started to calm. We could not brie-lieve it! A break from the rain and wind. We hiked over to the waterfall, and scrambled up. Upon our return from our adventures, some braver folks went for a swim, insisting that it was still summer! The rest of us enjoyed staying warm and eating dinner. The moonlight was very bright that night, with the moon reminiscent of a wheel of cheese.

On Sunday, some folks woke up at an early 5:00 am to scramble Locomotive. The rest of us, type 1 fun enjoyers (at least for that morning), got up at 7:00 am and strolled over to the bear caches for breakfast. The weather was perfect—not so hot that our cheeses turned into a fondue, but warm enough to get our stoke levels up to way past the initial 15 wheels of cheese. Perhaps, stoke levels were even at 20,462 pounds of cheese (the world's biggest cheese wheel). We all hiked towards the ridge leading to Locomotive, and appreciated the views of the rain clouds, so distant from us, covering the mountains in a gorgeous mist. Upon returning, we attempted to finish the cheeses (mostly successfully with the exception of a block of cheddar and a gouda, I believe). Altai's cheese axe came in handy.

This was followed by a quick photo shoot, both of the whole group and of the outhouse throne facing the trail directly. Thank you to all the participants for being so enthusiastic about cheese! I had a very gouda time.

Below "VOC" (vaguely) or Varsity Outdoor Cheeses. *Joseph Chiao*



MANIC MAMQUAM

LUCAS BRAUN

September 28 - 30, 2024

Participants: Zac Wirth, Emi Ikemura, Timmy Wong, Lucas Braun

LUCAS

CLARKE OUTRIGGER NO MORE

Our initial plans for the September long weekend involved a very different objective; one that we had been hoping to do for at least a year: the Clarke Outrigger Traverse. In the preceding weeks, we anxiously watched the road conditions of the Elaho, hoping against hope that they would be drivable in Zac's humble minivan. A large washout approximately 22 km up the Squamish FSR was our chief concern, yet, it seemed on track to be cleared by the time the weekend rolled around. Unfortunately, Wednesday brought with it a metric ton of rain that triggered another landslide at the exact same place as the first one, dashing our hopes against the wall. We needed a new objective and quick, to which I suggested Mt. Mamquam.

Zac

Darling Lake

We were hesitant about driving the minivan up to the Watersprite Lake trailhead, but with only a little bit of bashing, we made it all the way to the end. On the way

Below Lucas overlooks the vista. *Zac Wirth*



back, we did see a Corolla at the end of the road, so do with that information what you will.

The start of the hike was rather uneventful on the Watersprite Lake trail, but eventually, we turned left onto the slightly overgrown Darling Lake trail. A few kilometres of wet brushy trail brought us to Paranoid Creek, the first real obstacle of the trip. After some deliberation, Timmy went for the ol' shimmy across the wet log that spanned the creek, while Lucas, myself, and Emi decided to just walk through the creek Yukon style. Now with wet feet, we grinded up the surprisingly well-maintained trail through beautiful old-growth forest laden with massive bolete mushrooms all the way up to the ridge. Once there, late-season blueberries and black huckleberries lined our short descent to Darling Lake.

Manic Peak

After a lazy lunch and setting up camp, Timmy, Lucas, and I set off for the nearby Manic Peak. We opted to climb it as a loop above our camp and were rewarded with fun class 2 scrambling up boulders all the way to the rocky summit. At the top, we were able to point out all the famous Howe Sound peaks and the nearby Misty Icefield, reminiscing about trips past.

FUN IN THE SUN

7:00 am on Saturday came around, and you could not see ten meters in front of you. We all groaned, and through the artful communicative form of tent yelling decided to sleep in another hour. At 8:00 am, you could not see twenty meters in front of you, a remarkable improvement from before. A patch of blue sky brought forth exuberant cheers that quickly turned into momentum. At 9:00 am we were having breakfast and packing for our summit attempt. A light dusting of snow covered everything, including the 700 m talus face we had to climb to gain the glacier. However, the sun was teasing us, and we decided to make a go of it.

UPPER DARLING LAKE

On Sunday morning Zac, Timmy, and I went to the upper lake while Emi held down the fort (and slept in). It was like a postcard straight out of Patagonia. The glacial blue lake had a thin layer of ice covering it, which skipped rocks very nicely. We gazed at the pinnacles of rock surrounding Darling Peak that towered ahead of us, and then made our way up onto the granite slabs surrounding the lake to gaze down at Howe Sound. Skypilot loomed ahead, and the Chief stood out as a tiny lump above the water. Paul Ridge and the Elfin Lake shelters sparkled in the distance, with the obvious lava flow from Opal Cone separating us from them.

After taking in the view, we began our hike back down to camp, and then the slow trudge back to the Watersprite parking lot. Thus ended our gorgeous three-day stint in a corner of the coast that I cannot wait to return to (after we make our way to the Clarke-Outrigger).

LIFE COULD BE A DREAM: MACDONALD PEAK AND MOUNT WEBB

ELLEN SCOTT

October 5 - 6, 2024

MacDonald Peak & Mount Webb, Chilliwack, BC

Participants: Joseph Chiao, Cole Gauthier, Ellen Scott, Andrew Carriere, Maya Tomin, Felix Thimm, Beth Templeton, Frederik Holm, Lauren Holloway, Anaru Walke

IT WAS JUST AFTER 8:00 am on Saturday when I hopped into Andrew Carriere's car after a hectic morning. I had rushed to make banana bread for my car mates, realized it wouldn't have time to cool, and abandoned it to my roommate. Despite this, we were only five minutes behind schedule, which, by VOC standards, was a half hour early. Cole Gauthier sat shotgun and somehow managed to supply Bob Dylan tracks throughout the whole car ride. Maya Tomin, Joseph Chiao (our trip leader), and I sat stuffed in the backseat.

We arrived at the trailhead 15 minutes ahead of schedule and waited for our second car to show up. 20 minutes later, Lauren Holloway pulled up in the same car I had seen her reverse into a concrete block two weekends prior at Rock Party. The rest of our crew, Anaru Walker, Felix Thimm, Frederick Holm, and Beth Templeton, pulled their backpacks from her trunk. After a quick pre-trip photo, our small group made its way to the trailhead. We got off to a strong start, moving at a fast pace as we crossed a few bridges before starting the long switchbacks up the mountain. After about an hour and a half on the trail, we paused for a quick snack break. Lauren spent the break trying to convince Felix that cheddar cheese came from orange cows, while the rest of us munched on our trail mix and Clif bars.

After refuelling, we continued up the mountain and across slippery wooden bridges that I definitely didn't fall on. At about 1:30 pm, we made it up to Radium Lake. We had been planning to camp here before Joseph decided the col looked cooler and would make for an epic camping spot. Many of us were dreaming of taking a refreshing dip in the lake to cool off during the hike up. However, when we saw how shallow and murky it was, we decided lunch was a better option. Most of us pulled out our cold pizza or cheese sandwiches. Anaru pulled out a full jar of peanut butter and a full jar of jam that he had decided to haul up to make his sandwich as he "didn't want it to get soggy."

After lunch, we started up the last few hundred meters of elevation to the

col between Mt. Webb and MacDonald Peak. The last section was covered in snow and very slippery without our spikes on. Thankfully everyone made it up to the campsite, where we quickly got to work. Joseph shovelled out tent spots for us as we started setting up camp. Those of us with microspikes put those on and prepared to climb MacDonald Peak. Anaru and Beth hadn't brought any but Beth decided to join us for the first section of the climb and Anaru opted to climb Mt. Webb, which had a lot less snow.

We started up the mountain together, following rock cairns to stay on route. We made it to the ridge, where an incredible view was waiting for us. In the distance, mountains spread out for miles, and Mt. Baker looked majestic in the late afternoon sun. As we continued along the ridge, getting closer to the last push to the top, the peak loomed in front of us.

I started to have doubts about doing this last scramble. I had only been scrambling once before and the way to the top looked full of fun surprises like deep snow and loose rocks. Nevertheless, I decided to test my boundaries and keep going until it looked too dangerous. We made progress slowly. Less than a hundred metres from the summit, things got interesting. The route we had chosen involved a difficult move up a boulder with a fair bit of exposure. Knowing my own abilities, I decided to stay behind while some of the others went up. Luckily, Joseph found an easier route to the top, so I followed him to the summit. Or what we thought was the summit. The true summit was a little farther but the route to get there looked seriously out of my league. The others joined us at the false summit a minute later. After a quick discussion, Lauren, Frederick and I stayed behind at the false summit while Joseph, Maya, and Felix pushed for the true summit.

We got some amazing photos of the surrounding mountains before deciding to descend as it was getting dark. After carefully sliding down most of the snowy scramble, we arrived cold and wet at the ridge. Putting on our headlamps, we started the last descent to camp, where our dinner and warm sleeping bags were waiting for us.

The next morning we awoke to the sound of rain. We had planned to summit Mt. Webb for the sunrise but it was looking like the weather wasn't on our side. Luckily, things cleared up around 6:30 am. Joseph grabbed the bag he had packed the night before and we started up the mountain in the dark. On the way up, Joseph dropped his headlamp and it stopped working but luckily the sky was already brightening fast. We hurried to the top and got there in time to see the entirety of the spectacular sunrise. The mountains around us were pink instead of white. The sky was streaked with orange.

After taking plenty of photos and being joined by the rest of the group, Joseph pulled out the instant coffee and I pulled out my Jetboil. We made a cup of coffee and passed it around the group.

After an hour on the summit, we were all pretty cold and ready to head

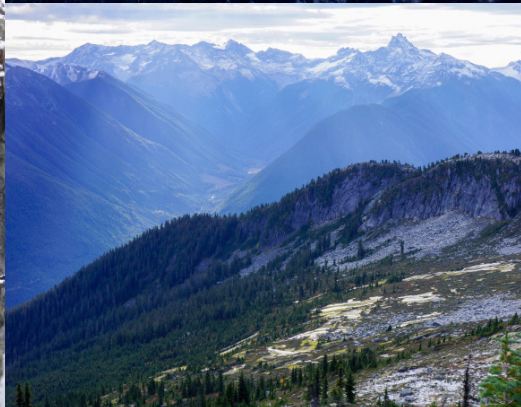
back. Getting back to camp, we started packing up. Things moved slowly. We weren't anxious to leave our beautiful spot behind and get back to everyday life. At about 9:30 am, we started the long descent back to the cars. We stopped at the lake for a break then continued down. We made such good time coming down that the group decided to swim in Chilliwack Lake. We dropped our packs and hopped in the chilly water. A couple sitting nearby dared us to swim across the lake, but luckily no one in our group was that crazy. After our swim, we dried off in the sun before putting on our packs for the last time and hiking up to the parking lot. After many goodbyes, we got into our cars and drove off.

As someone who didn't grow up with mountains, I am constantly impressed not only by the beauty of the mountains but also by the courage of the people who explore them. I have met some of the most incredible and inspiring people through the VOC. I am always grateful to have the opportunity to learn from them and laugh with them in the place we all share a common love for: the great outdoors. When you're with the right people and in the right places, life really can feel like a dream.

Left Looking up at the peak. *Joseph Chiao*

Right top Mount Baker at sunrise. *Ellen Scott*

Right bottom View from our camp spot. *Ellen Scott*



LAKE LOVELYWATER

TRISTAN LEFFERTS & AARON LEE

November 3, 2024

Participants: Aaron Lee, Eliska Moravkova, Duncan MacIntyre, Ferris Nimmon, Frederick Jacobsen, Tristan Lefferts

Tristan:

OUR DAY BEGAN at 5:30 am as we huddled in a sketchy dark street behind Totem Park. Soon enough, Duncan MacIntyre came to pick us up, and the first years piled into his car. We made a quick stop at Tim's in Squamish for breakfast and caffeine. After driving in circles near the gate, we parked and began the trek towards the Squamish River, dodging massive puddles. Then it was time to set up the ORU kayak. Aaron Lee seemed to know what he was doing and kept faff to a minimum. Some parts of the ORU looked like they were being held together by only duct tape. Oh well – what could go wrong?

It took several shuttling trips to get everyone across. After a mostly uneventful crossing (and some wet shoes), we tucked the ORU into the bushes and began hiking up a creek bed adjacent to the trail. We continued up the trail, occasionally pausing for water breaks. We saw a huge variety of mushrooms (some edible) and ghost pipe, one of my favourite flowers.

The ascent continued, getting steeper, until we reached a snowy point, where it somewhat plateaued and continued towards the lake. We followed the trail markers through the trees, and, despite a couple of falls in the snow, we eventually reached the suspension bridge that led to the cabin and the lake.

After some debate about swimming in the lake and a bit of hiking around the rim of the lake to find a good spot, we enjoyed a (very brief) dunk in the lake, followed by lunch. After lunch, Aaron and Duncan lingered to admire the lake while the first years checked out the (locked) cabin and decided to erect a snowman. While the concept started out relatively innocently, a simple suggestion to make the base more stable turned it into something a bit... different. We named the

snowman Willie.

The way down through the snowy part was very slippery, and a couple of members ended up mostly just sliding down, abandoning any effort to try and walk downhill in the snow. After the snowy section, we continued the mostly uneventful downhill hike back to the river. As it began to get dark, we turned on our headlamps. We reached the river around 5:30 pm and were lucky enough to glimpse a school of spawning salmon making their way upriver. Finding the ORU in the bushes, we began the ferrying in the dark, which took about an hour. We carried the ORU back to the car and returned to UBC wet, tired, and satisfied.

The ORU proved to be an excellent method of crossing the Squamish River: The ORU was less fatty than a cable crossing, drier than using stand-up paddleboards, and safer than both. The only caveat is that the ORU might not work well when water levels are extremely high or during strong winds. Oh, and it's being held together by duct tape.

Aaron:

I've been meaning to visit the Tantalus range for some time now and Lake Lovelywater seemed like the appropriate objective given my mountaineering skills not being up to snuff. But even if this was the most approachable objective, for me there were still many unknowns: how do we cross the river, how tough is the trail, where does one park? So, what better way to tackle these unknowns than with some first-time VOCers?

Running this "beginner friendly" trip by more experienced folks garnered some laughs. The consensus was that Lake Lovelywater was barely beginner-friendly. But I felt with some suffering and determination, anyone could reach the lake. So, on this premise, I gathered some super stoked first years (Ferris, Frederick, Eliska, and Tristan) and laid out our plan. At some point, my stoke faltered and I nagged Duncan to come along for his calming presence.

Overall, the trip went WAY better than I anticipated. I think its success is attributed to awesome people, the terrain, and the ORU kayak. It was hard to believe that this was the first VOC trip for most. We all moved at similar paces and were generally onboard with shenanigans that the group would come up with. The stoke was so high we felt bold enough to swim at the lake despite the presence of snow. I tip my hat to the first years for their enthusiasm. Regarding the terrain, one should know the stats for this hike. From the river to the lake one travels 14 km with 1100 m of gain (it ends up being 21 km for some reason, which may be due to the distance from parking to the river). This is equivalent to two back-to-back Grouse Grinds. Sharing this at the pre-trip seemed to deter some people. But personally, the trail did not feel like two grinds at all. There were some sections of sustained climb, but they were interleaved with rests. Snow did present some route-finding problems at the end, but we pulled through.

The ORU was an experience. Hauling it onto the bus and figuring out how to assemble it made the kayak feel more burdensome than helpful. However, once fully assembled, it would float well enough to meet our demands. Assembly and disassembly took 20 minutes. It could support two people comfortably, three people if everyone sat really still (the gunwale sat 2 cm above the water). One person could paddle against the current for shuttling. I think we can confirm the ORU is the most efficient way of crossing the Squamish River as a large group.

Learning Points:

1. Cars should be parked outside the yellow gate even if it's possible to drive around the gate. Respect the Squamish Nation's gate.
2. Mentally prepare for the ORU capsizing. Righting it and bailing it out in the river sounds like a bad idea. I would opt to swim ashore, drag the ORU with you (so make sure you have bow/stern lines), and empty it on land.
3. The ridge to Alpha Mountain looks epic, but is really steep.
4. If you lead by example, some people will follow. Consider your actions wisely.





PEDALS AND PADDLES



SPRING TEA PARTY IN THE GULF ISLANDS

FELIX DORN

March 30 - April 1, 2024

Participants: Elizabeth Chu, Alex Beauchemin, Peach Trippell, Silvija Grava, Flavia Caprez, Anneke Dresselhuis, Joanne Ho, Jamie Ranney, Siv Joerup, Robin Vinod, Omar Mogni, Felix Dorn

Channel your inner Sir David Attenborough for the full experience!

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

On this beautiful Easter Saturday morning, twelve VOCers awake in the early hours of the day. They know what to expect, having thoroughly planned this three-day journey well in advance. Still, they are eager to experience the wonders of nature that they are about to explore. The usually busy streets of urban Vancouver are kind to them on this day. Most members are ahead of schedule as they arrive at the Tsawwassen ferry terminal. This is a great time for the group to gather and become acquainted with each other. Soon, the ferry sets off. Out in the sunshine on the upper deck, the leader, Elizabeth Chu, reminds the group of the schedule and begins to share her profound knowledge about what this trip is all about: the world of kayaking. She offers advice on technique and best practices. The other participants listen closely. In preparation for the unforeseen event of members accidentally capsizing, multiple possibilities for action are being pointed out. For an even better understanding, co-leader Alex Beauchemin gracefully demonstrates the possible strategies in an imaginary kayak. Bystanders may only see a person performing different movements on a blue bench out on the deck, but in fact vital knowledge is being passed on. Shortly after this beautiful display of hands-on teaching, the ferry is about to reach its destination: Sturdies Bay on Galiano Island. The group has brought one of the cars along as a cost-cutting measure to avoid the necessity of a professional shuttle service to get to the west side of the island. A few self-propelled round trips later, the group finds itself in Montague Harbour, only a ten-minute drive away from the ferry terminal. They meet with the personnel of their chosen establishment: the Gulf Island Kayaking tour and rental company. After financially acquiring all the equipment needed, some time passes. Everyone is trying to pack their belongings into the kayaks which turns out to be more difficult than expected by most. The word “faff” is being used repeatedly to the delight of some and the

Section cover photo Haida Gwaii Fiona Landwehr

dislike of others. Finally, Elizabeth and Alex get the go-ahead after discussing the planned route with the facility's local guide. It is about one o'clock in the afternoon as the dozen motivated young adventurers set off.

First, they must cross the Trincomali Channel to get to Prevost Island. Luckily, there is no sign of ferry traffic at this time. The seven kayaks calmly make their way, always staying close together. The group is starting to settle in with the rediscovered feeling of an upper-body workout. As they follow the shoreline in the southeastern direction, Mother Nature offers a first glimpse of her treasures. Colorful starfish of all different shapes and colors are being admired as a bald eagle investigates the twelve little creatures from above. After about two hours the group goes ashore in a sheltered bay near Portlock Point. Refreshments and laughs are being shared as most members take a walk through the woods to explore the local lighthouse. Shortly thereafter, the group is back on Pacific waters. The timing of the break was crucial. They will need all their energy and focus to cross the Swanson Channel on their way to Pender Island. The channel is home to multiple oceangoing vessels, easily recognizable by the "BC Ferries" label on their side. An encounter could be lethal. As the passenger liners pass through in regular intervals, the group waits for an opening as Elizabeth and Alex talk to the ferry personnel over the radio. As soon as they get permission, the group sets off and quickly makes its way through the danger zone. Only twenty minutes later they reach the opposing shore in safety. Shortly after, they witness a sea plane landing right in front of them. What a spectacle! Calmly continuing their journey in a southern direction, they are left in awe as they pass by luxurious estates towering over the shore to their left. At about five o'clock in the afternoon, having paddled more than 17 kilometres, the group reaches its destination for the day and comes to a halt in Shingle Bay. Soon, the kayaks are being unloaded and brought ashore to keep them from being pulled out into the ocean by the tide.

After setting up camp in what can only be described as an incredibly beautiful location right by the beach, Elizabeth tries to motivate other members of the group to join her on an evening walk to explore the area around the camp-



ground. However, most participants prefer to stay at the campground and relax from this eventful day. Only Alex and Felix decide to join and follow her example of active recovery. What started as a stroll through the woods almost turns into cardio training, as the group of three sets a notable pace. On their way, they greet nearby horses, as well as a donkey, and find controversial literature that was left outside ready for pickup. Mount Baker makes an unexpected appearance on the horizon when they reach Hope Bay. After uniting Elizabeth with the part of the island that undoubtedly was named after her—Mount Elizabeth Park—they start making their way back to the campground as the sun is setting. The evening walk that suddenly turned into a twelve-kilometre exploration of North Pender Island even included a two-minute hitchhike on the way back. With their heads full of dopamine and bodies out of energy, they soon fall into a deep sleep.



SUNDAY, MARCH 31

The sun is rising and gently wakes the outdoor enthusiasts. One by one they stream out of their tents to follow their morning rituals, similarly to a beehive coming to life. Pancakes are being made under blue Sunday skies. The colony is well rested and ready for its biggest day of the whole trip. More than 27 kilometres are on the agenda; people start to get moving. Tents and personal belongings are being packed up as all the different dry and wetsuits paint vibrant splashes of color into the scenery. The kayaks are being launched an hour later than originally planned, but the cheerful mood stays unaffected.

First, the group has to make its way back the same way as the day before. They cross the Swanson Channel once more, this time feeling already a lot more comfortable. Every double kayak seems to really have found its rhythm. Even though everyone can feel the physical work that was put in the day before, a sense of routine has set in overnight. Mind and body have adjusted to what they are being asked to do. Near the Portlock Point Lighthouse the group takes a small break on the water. A light head wind and currents are causing waves that make the going just a little bit tougher. Continuing to paddle along the shoreline of Prevost Island,

they decide to briefly go ashore to relieve themselves from a certain biological pressure, but also to enjoy a rest and a quick snack. After this short ten-minute break, they soon pass where they had crossed the Trincomali Channel the day before. This time, however, they continue their way in the northwestern direction. Before crossing over to Saltspring Island they regroup and discuss their options for lunch. The collective decision is taken to continue paddling for the time being and stop on Walker Hook, a peninsula in the distance easily recognizable by a prominent sandy beach. This section is where the mental strength and endurance of the group is really getting tested. The beach does not seem to come any closer as time goes on; their stomachs are now rumbling with hunger. But there are still some positives to be found in this misery, one of them once again being Mother Nature. Only a few tens of metres in front of the leading kayak appears the massive body of a marine mammal out of thin air. There is a lot of speculation as to what they are seeing: either a well grown seal, or even a sea lion because of the sheer size of the specimen. Either way, the kayaks in front decide to slow down and leave enough space to not disturb the mammal any more until it disappears again. This special encounter distracted most members of the group enough to momentarily forget about the physical exertion that they are facing. Soon after, the group reaches the shore of Walker Hook. Exhaustion and relief are the only two things that matter at this time. It is already 3:30 pm but their destination, Wallace Island, is well in sight. Having nearly made it all the way, they allow themselves an extensive lunch break on the beach. This is a moment of peace and quiet as everyone enjoys their food trying to regain their strength. When they feel a bit more alive again, they decide to depart and set their eyes on Conover Cove on Wallace Island. They arrive at 6:00 pm with a profound sense of accomplishment and humble pride. After carrying the kayaks ashore and setting up camp on a meadow that feels rather wet and muddy, they get treated to a stunning sunset.

The following dinner puts the trip's source of inspiration into practice. In true VOC fashion the group indulges in a fabulous potluck that in particular includes everyone's favorite kind of tea. The air is filled with laughter and merriment as people enjoy crêpes, fried vegetables, and chocolate, amongst other things. Even some impromptu hand-drawn cheese art can be admired. Unfortunately, there are raccoons in the area that are not shy to investigate some people's personal belongings. One member, Peach Trippell, seems to be particularly gifted in discovering the wrongdoers and driving them away, earning her the nickname "Watchdog" in the process. After then storing all the endangered items and cleaning everything up again, the group and its watchdog go to sleep in peace.

MONDAY, APRIL 1

For their final day, the group decided beforehand that they will go for an alpine start—quite ironic considering the altitude needed for sea kayaking. Nevertheless, people start waking up at around five in the morning. Following a rather quiet

breakfast, the now zombie-like creatures pack up all their belongings and eventually launch the kayaks.

It is around 7:45 am when the group starts paddling. They are rewarded for their efforts with perfect conditions. The sun has just risen. Not a single breath of air meets the water's surface. An incredible silence introduces this new day to the world. The group paddles in what can only be described as untroubled serenity. For a good hour, conversations are being kept to a minimum. It seems as if everyone is on the same wavelength trying to experience this dreamy atmosphere for themselves. As they approach the shore of Galiano Island, the group's interactions start to pick up again. Near Retreat Cove, some members of the group decide to go ashore. Low tide has revealed some local sea caves, whose structures are even more impressive when being explored in person. Following this fun period of quite literally being in touch with Mother Nature, the group continues to paddle along the shoreline in the southeastern direction. At one point, they meet another group similar to their own. These specimens however are taking a break on some rocks, basking in the sun. The thick, leathery, yet shiny skin of their naked bodies joyfully plays with the sunrays' reflections. They flap their fins in pure relaxation, almost waving to the dozen of visitors as if they wanted to give them a warm welcome to their territory. The group watches their newly made friends from a distance and gives them a wave back as they continue their way after a short period of time.

Already at 10:45 am, they arrive in Montague Harbour back where their journey started only two days ago. They definitely made the fifteen kilometres of paddling for the day look easy. Over the past three days, they managed to rack up close to 60 kilometres on the water. From now on they can call themselves experienced sea kayakers. The time to unpack and shuttle everyone back to the ferry terminal passes drastically quicker than just two days ago and soon, they find themselves waiting for the ferry to arrive. They pass time by eating pizza, playing games, and sharing deep conversations as they explore the harbor in Sturdies Bay. Once on the ferry, they start to recall all the best stories from this adventure in the Gulf Islands. To top it off, Alex gets the better of the ferry personnel as he independently redefines the appropriate amount of ice cream that fits onto the small cone that he just bought.

It is safe to say that this delegation of the VOC had just experienced some astonishing couple of days in the outdoors of southwestern BC. They enjoyed making new friends and got the chance to share the "stoke" (as they like to call it) for self-propelled adventures. Proud, happy, and full of gratitude, they split up to go their own ways as they get off the ferry.



TWO MONTHS ON TWO WHEELS: SOME REFLECTIONS ON CYCLE TOURING FRANCE

JOHN WRAGG

June 4 - August 30, 2024

A Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant trip.

Ahh Paris. The Eiffel Tower, romance, baguettes, fine wine, and a bubbling excitement for the Olympics. But alas, I was in Charles de Gaulle Airport feeling sick to my stomach, with a bike to rebuild, and 70 kilometres till I reached my first check-point before night came in a few hours. What had I gotten myself into?

This trip had so many twists and turns, detours, roadblocks both mental and physical and more. I thought I'd share some of the most helpful tips, tricks and lessons learned to help you in your future bike travel adventures.

TIP 1: SPEAK THE LOCAL LANGUAGE AND THEN TALK TO PEOPLE.

While not always possible to learn the local language, my goodness it's tremendously enriching when you can.

Lost in farm country in the Swiss Normand Alps, time was running out before I ran out of daylight. I had bombed down this hill to get to a river which should have saved me some time to get to my accommodation. Only, the road/path that was supposed to get me through to the main road didn't exist, despite Google Maps trying to force me through impenetrable hedges and houses. My bags laden with bottles of cider, I was not about to reclaim the hill I came down. I physically would not have been able to ride up the 10-degree slope on my loaded bike. There was a narrow gravel road that supposedly got me back to the road following the north bank of the Noireau River, but I wasn't about to trust Google Maps a second time when it was the reason I was in this predicament in the first place. The Swiss Alps lived up to its name with all its hills. I was nearly defeated. Even a 3 kilometre detour over the passerelle Arromanches felt like a Herculean task. Looking down at my phone to find a way out, I realised I had no data or cell service. I was stuck in this gulley with only myself to rely on. I peered over the tall fence, and just my luck, I saw a lady leave her door with a basket full of laundry.

"Bonjour!" I cried out.

She was turning all about, unable to find where my voice was coming



from. “*Je suis en haut!*” (“I’m up here!”). She’d probably never had a conversation yelling over a high fence with a lost cyclist. I explained my predicament and she was able to guide me to this narrow gap between the properties that had an overgrown path with the prickliest of shrubberies. Now lost in their field, I saw her husband stooped over a little fence he was building. Feeling beaten, I sheepishly asked how to get out of their field and back on the road. In a thick country accent, he gracefully pointed out to me where the bridge was 100 metres away and wished me good luck. This was my first legit realization that I could not count on people knowing English and that I couldn’t count on technology. Back on the road, I was so proud that I was able to clumsily navigate myself out of that situation with my language skills. These events were a sobering revelation that mental fortitude is also a skill that needed to be worked on, to keep me thinking straight in stressful situations. This was also a side lesson in that shortcuts only make for long delays, but they also make for good stories and learning experiences.

In Bordeaux, I was hosted by an extremely generous man named André who took me on a tour of his neighborhood and rode out with me part way to my next destination when I had to leave. We had a profound discussion on route planning and must see locations on my way to the Mediterranean. I told him I would love to see the old castle city of Carcassonne but that I just couldn’t find any good spots to sleep the night there. On Google Maps I had scouted some potential locations in the mountains, but I wasn’t about to gamble on myself being able to cycle up a mountain route at the end of a day. Having gotten to know me over the day and judging me to be a decent person, he called up an old work friend that lived a couple steps from the old castle and secured me lodging for that night. I think because of my French ability in being able to form a connection and being able to express my needs and desires in an eloquent enough fashion, people were willing to go above and beyond to help me. More than they would for any old tourist.

TIP 2: KNOW YOUR PRIMARY GOAL

There is so much to do, so much to see, so much to eat on a trip, how could you possibly do it at all? Don’t try and do it all, and risk burning yourself out and feeling disappointed in yourself. My fourth day in, I already had to take a rest day. My knee ached beyond belief; I could hardly move. What a waste of a day! I thought to

myself. Eating breakfast in the living room of my host, I thought about how going into this trip, my primary goal was to engage with French people and speak French with them, using cycling as a means to achieve these interactions. My goal wasn't to see castles, visit museums, and eat in restaurants – albeit nice things in and of themselves. I decided to make the most of this unlucky injury. Pierre, my host's young son, was playing in the garden, and I decided to join him. I quickly noticed the water guns were out on the front lawn. I filled them up, gave one to Pierre, and we waged war against each other, bringing battle once again to the fields of Normandy. After a solid soak, Pierre and I picked fruit from the back garden that we brought in for a pre-dinner snack, berries, cherries, and apples, to accompany fresh crepes. After the dinner, we were glued to the TV as the French election results came pouring in. Looking back on this day, there were no chivalric castles, mighty mountains, or salty seas. It was good conversation, and a sharing in local culture and customs, and I couldn't have asked for anything more from that day.

In the Loire Atlantique, I still could not shake off the knee pain incurred early on. However, this led to one of the more memorable moments of the whole trip. I had only planned to stay a night with my host, Michelle, in their house at Saint-Père-en-Retz. I was telling the family that had assembled for a yearly familial reunion that my knee had been killing me. Rather than continue on, they suggested I join them in fishing for mussels and oysters by the beach the following day. Feeling homesick, and a bit lonely as a solo traveller, hanging out with new friends at the beach was exactly what I needed, and frankly, what I wanted out of this trip.

Despite numerous injuries that ultimately could have killed the vibe of the whole trip, I decided to turn this difficulty into a strength of the trip, changing my perspective entirely and centering myself on this primary goal, to salvage memories that will inspire or remind me of my strengths in future trips to come.

TIP 3: PACK LIGHT AND PRACTICE MAINTENANCE

I found that these two tips coincided closely with each other on this trip. In total I had four flat rear tires, and I believe the weight on the rear of my bike was a reason for having to constantly deal with flats as I didn't have a single puncture in the front, which you would think would get pierced first by a sharp object.

Even if my suspicions were incorrect and that the weight had nothing to do with the punctures, I still had to take off the bag attached to my rack by Voile straps before I could even begin the work. I think if I went tubeless this wouldn't have been a problem, because a lot of the flats were caused by tiny leaks rather than a large puncture.

Due to fatigue and the pain mentioned previously, I truly wish I brought even less stuff – and many of my hosts who were cycle tourists and bike packers themselves thought I was travelling light. On so many occasions I opted not to take a more fun route because my legs were telling me that if we didn't take the chill flatter route, we just wouldn't make it. I nearly missed out on the Alps because I was genuinely too tired to cycle into them. But I was lucky. Two weeks before my

trip I encountered a family waiting for the ferry to Powell River who were speaking French. Looking for opportunities to practice, I struck up a conversation and told them that after I finish up on the Sunshine Coast, that I'd be in France. They ended up giving me their phone number and address and told me to come see them if I was in the area. The day before departing Lyon, I had to make up my mind: go north, which is the easier route along the river, or take a detour to the Alps, which would have been much more of a commitment. I messaged that family saying I didn't think I had the energy to make it to them but if they were close by I'd love to see them. Coincidence had it that they'd be in Lyon anyways and that they would drive me to their place to stay with them for a while. I felt guilty for taking a car ride, but I'm sure glad I did. Being able to ride to Chamonix and then getting the downhill ride out of the Alps into the valley was breathtaking. Looking back, if I didn't have to carry so much I might have been able to ride there on my own, feeling more accomplished and legitimate. I might have had the strength to tackle Mont Ventoux, a famous tour de France climb. Even back in Sète, I abandoned the Mont St.-Clair climb 25 metres in because it was far too much of a challenge for me that day, even though I had only been riding on flat roads the whole day.

Shave weight like your trip depends on it, and you'll be glad when you feel more capable and spirited through your rides; you'll likely also save time on rear tire mechanicals.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Two months on two wheels taught me that I was more capable than I thought I was, that I was stronger and more resilient than I ever knew. From the rainy rolling hills of the north, the hellish heat and humidity of the south-east, and the majesty of alpine storms to the west – I rode through it all. From crippling food poisoning where I was on the verge of calling it quits and flying home early, to my first imperial century going farther than I had ever thought possible, I experienced the tremendous highs and deep lows of solo travel. Thank you to the Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant for helping make this trip possible.

May the wind be always at your back.



EUTSUK

COLIN RODGER

A Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant trip.

THE MORNING FOG LIFTED and our Cessna 185 skittered up off Nimpko Lake and nosed northwards. A little white bird in a big blue sky. Looking down at the flatness of the Cariboo Plateau, resource roads threaded together relentless scars of logging and mining, fires, ranches, and farms. Our flightpath traced the pattern of abuse delineating the eastern boundary of Tweedsmuir Park South before emerging with relief over righteous wilderness, flying parallel to the Rainbow Range towards Eutsuk Lake in Tweedsmuir Park North. Proper deep bush by any metric. Sun in the eyes and smoke in the nostrils. Sun and smoke in the forecast too – it was a real wildcard factor for this expedition. Another unknown was our canoe. The original vision of strapping my own canoe to the plane's float and solo paddling had been quashed by Transport Canada's regulations along with the prohibitive cost of any flight this distance. Instead, through a series of concerning emails I'd located a canoe of dubious condition stashed at some old cabins fronting as a fishing lodge. I'd also recruited an old comrade, Justin Polgar, the kind of friend who will agree on short notice to paddle some big water in a beater canoe to access uncertain alpine objectives while relying on fishing for food. The pilot found our drop point in Pondosy Bay and as he taxied away we found our canoe. She was a little jaundiced, and didn't have any tumblehome or bow flare to speak of, but she was watertight. The first paddle strokes brought that funny feeling to my chest. We rounded a corner and I had to wet a line. It's hard to know if the lure hit the water or the trout first. The ferocity of the tug on the line wrenched me into the majestic present. We were *there* and the urge to experience it all was intense. Immersed in the beauty of the land and water, time stretches out and moments lengthen. Impressions of those weeks of paddling, angling, and alpen-slithering around the Western reach of Eutsuk do not compress neatly into a few lines. These photos and captions are fragments only, hints of the realness of the place.

We paddled west from Pondosy Bay. Hungry for mountains, still-soft muscles propelling ole' Jaundice along the southern shore, each bend bringing new vistas.

We drank in the scale and volume of it all, watching the interplay of wind and water. The palpable depth and dynamic essence of the lake, the open spaces too, and the winds that came unchecked between the mountain peaks and down



across Eutsuk's surface. Making a crossing would be a serious endeavour.

We found our paddle rhythm the second day, bending forward and drawing the blades deep, flick and slice the recovery and repeat. Gliding past dense greens the bleaching of an old caribou kill stood out on the rocky waterline.

Looking back east from our second camp we watched spores of smoke fruiting into mushrooms. Five separate heads that shifted, compressed and grew.

The next day Westerly met us. We pushed into the headwind, stimulated by the adversity, counting the strokes and taking on water while crossing from one rocky point to the next windbreak. Just before shelter was where the waves stood up most, slapping off rock shelves and colliding against rebounding swells. I used a bailer while Polgy scouted the next effort. When the rollers got too big, I called the timing and we turned in a trough and ran with the crests, surfing in towards a cobble beach pounded out of the bedrock. The wind built and pinned us down for a day and a night. A sickness passed through me, adding delirium to the uncertainty of waiting and turning me inwards. I wondered if it was beaver fever. I wallowed in my discomfort before recognizing its source—the pervasive anxiety I so often allow to proliferate. I let my little worries scurry away, and felt the weakness cultivated by indulgent city living leaving me. The next morning a mirror calm surface allowed us entry into the west end.

The water had more glacial influence here, glowing turquoise when the sunlight entered. We paddled alongside a residual glacier-iceberg and carved off some ice for our rye. We set up camp beside a river mouth and feasted on fish.

We used paddles to whack our



way along an obsolete trail into Musclow Lake and pried our way into a boarded up cabin. Inside was an immortal aluminum Frontiersman canoe with a square transom. I used a handsaw and axe to clear windthrown trees and launch the relic. Circumnavigating the lake, we paused halfway to eat three trout apiece. On the return leg while eye-balling Mt. Musclow, a screaming marmot jolted us. Several hundred meters of scree upslope of the marmot, a black hole into a melting glacier beckoned.

Inside we found a psychedelic green domed tunnel, possibly a worm-hole, and we scampered up compulsively. We emerged partway up the mountain, through an elliptical hole melted through the glacier to a view of Mt. Haven and beyond.



The next objective was the focal point of Mt. Stranack, a granite face with a braiding waterfall we'd seen through binoculars at the far end of Surel Lake. We'd already hiked in once to test the silty water for Char or Bull Trout. Jaundice was hefty and had no yoke, so I alternated resting her middle metal bar on my C7 and T1 vertebrae. It became a hardman portage, as most do. We paddled the length of the lake, parked Jaundice in a thicket of mosquitoes and blackflies, and started gaining elevation. It was bushwhacking and bug slapping alternating with bog-hopping. Eventually we reached a watershed and followed it up the mountain. Bare feet gripped surprisingly well on the wet granite and the progress became pleasurable. Polgy misstepped, went neck deep into a pool and popped back out all inside of two seconds. When the gulley diverted north we exited into the subalpine and stair-mastered up to the beckoning granite slab. The scrambling was good, easy moves with the odd moment of exposure. Topping out we looked down into a huge alpine bowl bejeweled with a tarn large enough for Nessie. The contents poured out over a smooth lip and cascaded down into a branch of the watershed we'd followed up.

Polgy picked a route and we downclimbed beside the waterfall. Stepping down a wet slabby stretch I slipped and the bear gun slung on my back swung loose. I caught it and recovered but bent my knee in a creative direction. There was a tense minute, waiting and gauging the damage, knowing succor would not be forthcoming here. The knee was mobile and the play was to keep rolling with the adrenaline. We regained a watershed and swung and bounced down the overhanging saplings. It was the birch surfing boogie for kilometers. Emerging into the lake like a couple mountain goat turds flushed downstream, we waded the shoreline to locate ourselves then cut through brush to regain Jaundice. After paddling back across Surel to our trailhead it was Polgy's turn to put the big yellow lady on his

Below Polgy and horizons.





Above Entering the west end.

shoulders and heave her home. I offered rest breaks every couple minutes to test his resolve. He took a new strategy and bent double, letting his lower back take the strain. The sight and sound of an angry canoe floating choppily downhill a meter off the ground will stay with me. Credit to Polgy, he never put it down. After a swim we put some ice in the last of the whiskey and toasted Neil, a kindred spirit I never met, but who surely also knew the sweetness of big days and slim margins.

With a handful of days left we headed back east. Pushing off from shore we entered the steep Westerly swells and rode them, coasting along crests and taking on water in the troughs. From a camp in St. Thomas Bay we trekked up a ridge of Mt. Chikamin. We ate a bear's share of red and orange salmonberries on the ascent and picked our way through towering Devil's club. The meadows above the treeline opened into sprawling arrays of alpine flowers. I collected a Chikamin bouquet by taking pictures of each variety. We pushed upwards into cooler temperatures until my knee turned us around. The descent, and truly needing to use poles, put a hurt on me which only the beauty gained helped soothe.

Our final push was from St. Thomas to Pondosy Lake. We fished obsessively, taking turns trolling heavy setups which created massive drag to paddle through. In the narrows between Eutsuk and Pondosy we cast into the rapids and hooked into some kingly hogs.

In the stomach of a perfect eater caught by Polgy, I found a bat, the cause of much contemplation during our three course fish dinner. Here is a math problem: if Colin and Polgy ate roughly two pounds of trout each per day for twelve days, how many bats did they eat?

Time regained its familiar consistency and the final day on the lake was spent alternately anticipating comforts and wondering if leaving so soon was really necessary. We did leave of course, the bushplane roaring down and scooping us up. It was a real shame too because the fishing was just getting good.

THE CATHEDRAL IN THE SKY

AARON LEE

July 21 - 22, 2024

Participants: Joe Meyer, Tristan Russell, Vanessa, Aaron Lee

This trip takes place on unceded Coast Salish land.

EARLY JULY 2024, the powers of the internet assembled a motley crew to bike'n'hike a North Shore mountain. Four VOCers would embark on this quest; they were none other than Vanessa, Joe, Tristan, and myself. We considered a couple objectives—Crown, Coliseum, Lynn Peak, The Needles. We ultimately settled on the objective of the most questionable legality: Cathedral Mountain. Being well aware of this, we considered the spirit of this law. It was determined if we kept our footprint within the watershed (and everywhere else) to a minimum, our incursion should be acceptable. So, plans hatched, rucksacks packed, and we converged onto Rice Lake at 12:15 pm on July 21st.

The cruise down the Seymour Valley Trailway was uneventful. Huckleberry bushes lined the path brimming with berries. We gaslit ourselves into thinking they weren't edible—a thought I would quickly dismiss on the way home out of hunger. The Paton Peak trailhead marked our turn onto a steep, gravelly road. We found some success shifting into low gears, but the hill's grade and our heavy packs proved too much. There were a couple good places to stow our bikes along the way, but considering our bandit friends, we opted to lock our bikes near the end of this gravel road.

Some lock faff later, our bikes were secured around a tree and we dove off into the forest. The trail welcomed us with a steep crawl through some mostly open forest. We conversed about fruit (?), butterflies (??), Acadian French, and mind-blowingly quick trail runners who were already returning from Coliseum Mountain. Soon, we found ourselves perched atop Patton Peak where the sun burned mercifully, fuelling a nice thermal (?) breeze. After finding the trail again, we dove into denser forest as we rode the saddle between Paton and Coliseum.

My brain turned off here, meaning the trail here was probably hot and steep with dense forest obscuring views into the distance. Sometimes, Cathedral Mountain would poke through the trees to spur us on.

My brain turned back on as the trees fell away. Welcome to the Coliseum, a grand swath of granite from which you can see for days. Joe and I opted for a quick dip in the swimming tarn. Vanessa and Tristan replenished their water from the drinking tarn. Here, we had our first encounter with “water stick bugs”; they look like sticks, but they move if you watch carefully. I’m not an entomologist, but Caddisfly larvae seem to look most like what we saw. Being conscious of the time, we pushed on toward Burwell. It was an uneventful hike to the top, but my legs were starting to feel it. At around 7:00 pm, we arrived, set camp, and prepared dinner. Food was a wee laughing point for me as my food for this trip consisted of two loaves of garlic bread, three cucumbers, and water. But one’s mood can’t be dampened at sunset with views of Cathedral mountain unobstructed in all its glory, light smoke shrouding distant mountains for aesthetic appeal. Joe seemed super stoked and scampered around a little.

Soon, we were all fed and ready for bed. Tristan and Vanessa had tents, Joe and I had sleeping mats and enough self-loathing to



ensure the bugs got to eat dinner too. The bugs, seemingly shocked by our generosity, left us mostly alone.

Sunday morning brought us the gift of a beautiful inversion. Being unable to sleep in, I found myself mesmerized as Cathedral sliced through the clouds as they flowed into Palisade Lake. One could imagine themselves as a rock in the Ice Age watching glaciers carve valleys that make up the North Shore today. Unfortunately, unlike most glaciers of today, this glacier of clouds only seemed to grow. By the time we set off toward Cathedral (7:30 am), we were barely above the clouds. Descending into the clouds felt like hiking into a dream. The cloud also conveniently obscured *cough* the “No Trespassing” signs.

As expected, the trail past Burwell was quite vague. We would mostly follow orange ribbon and sparse cairns. The journey was mostly straightforward, though the clouds made it harder to get spatially situated. There was some light scrambling, but nothing technical. The whole morning we anxiously watched the clouds in hopes it would clear up. It did not clear up. Instead, three gnome-hats emerged from the mist and we sat at the summit with diminishing optimism. It would seem the mountain knows how to keep a secret from unhumble eyes.

We began our descent at 11:00 am which went quite smoothly. The clouds started to clear up offering small windows of the mountains around us. It was enough to convince us Cathedral was worth revisiting on a clear day. We linked up with Vanessa on Burwell, as she had started feeling under the weather and enjoyed a relaxing morning at camp. From there we steadily trod our way down. As we passed Paton Peak, Joe forged ahead looking to get home early for work tomorrow. When our quads and knees started to burn, we broke into a light jog to minimize the duration of suffering. The relief of finding our bikes again was quickly replaced with the burn of fried legs - it would be a long bike ride home. Fortunately, the huckleberries along the Trailway provided a welcome distraction from the burn.

All in all, this journey was 65 kilometres by bike and 18 kilometres by trail to touch the clouds at 1737 m above the sea.

THE NEXT STEP WITH RIVER CULTURE

KAYAKING

JADE QUINN-MCDONALD & LUCY BUCHANAN-PARKER

September 22 - 23, 2024

Participants: Callum Abraham, Lucy Buchanan-Parker, Ross Campbell, Leon Chen, Alberto Contreras, Si Crawford, Elise Legarth, Lily Sibthorp, Jade Quinn-McDonald

THIS INTERMEDIATE WHITEWATER kayaking course ran from September 22-23 in Squamish. With the support of the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORCBC), eight keen kayakers convened on the Paradise Valley section of the Cheakamus River for two full days of paddling.

Prior to on-river days, participants met up on Friday, September 21 at Jericho beach to get acquainted with each other and whitewater boats. Most folks were able to roll – everyone was able to wet-exit (flipping, pulling your spray deck, exiting your boat, and emptying it on shore). Lucy B.P., Alberto, and Ross are experienced sea-kayakers, Elise Legarth was a competitive kayak polo player, Si and Lily have rafting experience, Leon is a pack-rafter. The medley of experience truly made for a dynamic learning environment where students could share their expertise. After ample salt water up nasal cavities, we parted ways to journey North.

BC Rivers Day falls on the third Sunday of September. To spread the love of whitewater the ORCBC granted several events over the weekend some funding—including our course! Most participants car-pooled up on Friday night, joining Rock Party people at the Mamquam River Access Society campground. This cross-over definitely made for fun filled apres-kayak nights, and we were very grateful to share space with climbers and DJs alike.

Saturday morning was spent getting to know our skilled, supportive instructors and outfitting boats in the Cat Lake parking lot. After a review of flat water skills, we were off to the river! Early autumn is often a dry time for boaters. As such, we were limited in our choices. We opted to head to the Paradise Valley section of the Cheakamus River, a classic Squamish run for beginner and intermediate paddlers. After shuttling logistics were taken care of (half the battle), we scarfed down lunch and talked safety. Mock-throw-bagging and river jargon covered, we got on the water. We worked on eddy turns, entering and exiting the current, and a couple folks got to practice (unintentional) wet-exits. After playing on standing waves and learning to read the river, we were all tuckered out.

Sunday morning, we met at the take-out of the Paradise Valley run to take another crack at the river. Stuffing into cars, drivers, and passengers alike eagerly followed Russell's boat trailer up the dirt road to the put-in. We wasted no time briefing and a relatively small amount of time faffing. Today, several students successfully combat rolled – flipping and righting themselves with the sweep of a paddle and flick of a hip. The first run was chock-a-block full of tips and drills from our diligent instructors, who were always quick to T-rescue if required. We eventually came upon an inflatable paddle board wedged in the center of a rapid. Anticipation overwhelming us all, we learned about mechanical advantage in real-time as our instructors, Russell and Erik, missioned to remove it, albeit unsuccessfully. Arriving at the take-out close to 2:00 pm, we decided that one more lap was in order. But this time we would simply run the river with little to no instruction. The last feature we faced before taking out for the second time was a powerful eddy that shot paddlers back into the main flow, creating a 'cyclone' of sorts. The cold water must have gotten to our heads, for better or for worse, because this feature became the inspiration for the parody below:

Escape (the Cyclone Song) **to the tune of Escape (the Pina Colada Song)**

[Verse]

I was tired of the river
We'd been on it too long
Tried to go down the rapids
But got my line all wrong

Then we came to an eddy
Looked like it wasn't that bad
But according to Russell
There was fun to be had

[Chorus]

If you like recirculation
Like getting caught in a drain
If you don't get your edge right
If you flip, you're to blame
You could be swirling there 'til midnight
On the currents of fate
Go try your luck in The Cyclone
See if you can escape

Adapted by Lucy Buchanan-Parker

Right Lucy Buchanan-Parker punching through a rapid. *Russell Henry*



BONKS, BLUEBERRIES, AND THE BONNYCASTLE

AARON LEE

October 12 - 13, 2024

Participants: Cameron Varcoe, Aaron Lee

This is a story about two VOC/UBC Sailing club members banding together on a Sea-to-Sky weekend for the books. Trying something new and ambitious with an unclear chance of success was very much the spirit of this trip. May that spirit extend into this trip report.

It was early in the morning, before the sunrise,
When two VOCers were up packing supplies.
They were bringing a kayak, and hiking boots,
they loaded their car, and began to move.

The vision was legendary, they felt unprepared,
For this adventure, they had never dared.
As they paddled away in morning light
Their plan was to bushwhack up a mountain, with no trail in sight.

It was a grueling paddle as it had been a while,
but upon reaching the estuary, they broke out a smile.
It was time to stretch their legs and shred the FSR,
and race the Sun for the summit was very far.

At first it was easy,
the forest was clear.
It was almost too easy,
they started to fear

Soon enough, the going got tough.
The terrain got steep, with cliffs 'n' stuff.
But up was the only way, so up they went.
Little did they know, this was the start of their torment.



There would be more cliff,
and dense trees
Resistance was stiff,
so they had to breaststroke free.

One step at a time, they pushed forward. Until at last,
they reached the lake.

Feeling bold, the two continued.
Onwards and upwards, there's still light to be used.
"Let's gain the ridge" they said,
"We'll be there before sunset" they said.

Of course, they were very wrong.
The Sun set quickly and soon was gone.
They were left scrambling in the dark,
bushwhacking at night - not for the faint of heart.

There are no pictures for the ordeal that unfolded,
but words there are
Our VOCers were battered,
but knew they were not far.

There was climbing, crawling, swimming, falling.
Cocooned in darkness and branches, guided by head-
light.
their energy fading, their legs were shaking,
but the blueberries on the way convinced them to fight.

In an instant, the trees dropped away.
They had reached the alpine.
But this night, it's here they'll stay.
Moonlit mountains assured them all is just fine.

Sunday plans were big and bold
"Let's have some fun", themselves they told
"Circumnavigate the lake by running the ridge,
but be sure to be home when the day gets old".

So the boys got up at the crack of dawn,
tore down camp before they could yawn.
They broke their fast in the warming light,



donned their bags and prepared to move on.
Time stood still as the Sun rose.

The Raven swooped in calling "It's time to go!"
"You humans have big feet, but they're real slow"
"It's just a sunrise, it's nothing abnormal,
unless you want to stay here, continue your scuttle"

Our VOCers got to their feet
and summited in a heartbeat
just as the Sun flowed into the valleys

They hopped on their way
basking in golden rays
along swaths of granite and heather.

The views of the lake
they could not forsake
as they waved to paddlers in the Arm

There would be up-scrambles
and down-scrambles
and good scrambles all over

But as they descended the stone shoulder
the forest took over,
and they were back in the dense, dense green

It was time to bid farewell
to the lake and the mountain,
and to re-enter vegetation hell

Thank you mountain for the sights, and the shelter, and the food, and the water.
May your kindness and splendor be known forever.

There was one silver-lining in the forest of gold
Where the water once flowed
there would be a "road"
which this picture clearly showed

On the way down, the terrain was mean
There were slippery slopes and fathomless ravines.

But some careful sliding and occasional blueberry rappel
made the way down go relatively well.

In the blink of an eye, the forest went by
and our VOCers found the waterfall.
As they progressed though, their pace slowed to a crawl.
The bushes had grown tall, something had gone awry.

“We’re probably off-track, but I’m not bothered by that”,
said the one checking the map.
“I can see light, the end is in sight!”
so they bashed on with renewed drive.

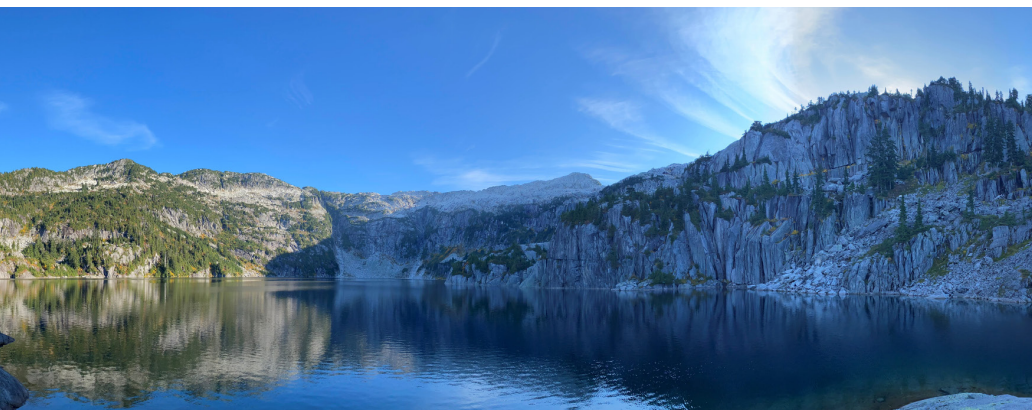
They charged to the open canopy ahead
just to find a soggy bog instead.
Thankfully for bogs, this was just the one.
Fuelled by fatigue they pushed ‘till they were done.

Eventually, they found the FSR. To the forest say, “Au revoir”.
They raced with haste down the trail.
They found trouble with a man called Chuck, in his big old truck,
but soon they were ready to paddle.

At first, they started strong, but the paddle felt very long,
They were spent when they reached the shore.
Though it was the end of this wearying weekend,

They would, without hesitation,
without further question,
pursue bushwhacking adventures some more.

The End (of me trying to speak in rhymes).



Trip Report but in coherent(?) words.

It's October 7th. My brain materializes a "brilliant" plan to finagle some UBC Sailing folk to join the VOC Say Nuth Khaw Yum Park paddling trip and go hike some mountain. Less than a week's notice is a great recipe for success when seeking crewmates, so I go full (respectful) pirate mode. I manage to get the-one-and-only Cameron onboard through pirate mode. We plot a course to paddle, hike to, and bushwhack up Mt. Bonnycastle.

The story starts at 6:30 am on October 12. We loaded borrowed kayaks from the UBC Sailing club in the warming light. One hour driving time and one hour of bag-Tetris later, we began our paddle. Prime paddling conditions with minimal current and wind, golden morning stillness. Wearing wetsuits made us very warm. There were many moon jellies in the water. Four hours of paddling time later, kayaks were stowed at the mouth of the estuary, and we started hiking at 1:00 pm.

At this point, we recommend hikers turn their brains off and follow these directions:

1. Hike 4 km down the Stawamus/Indian River FSR.
2. Hang a Roger onto the Hixon FSR, continue for 2 km.
3. Continue right on the Hixon FSR (left goes down the Young Lake FSR), assert dominance over cars by stepping around the log barrier, continue for 5 km.
4. Turn brain back on when you cross a bridge over Hixon Creek.
5. Hang a Larry where the forest looks nice at any point before you crest the hill after the bridge. The forest after the hillcrest is less nice.

Our bushwhack began at 3:00 pm just past the first creek after the bridge. The forest was clear, we found an old road that provided occasional easy passage. Our game plan was simple: Just go up bro (i.e. follow a creek up to the lake). This tactic made navigation relatively straightforward once we found the right creek. The cut-block forest we wandered into was noticeably nastier, and in hindsight easily avoidable. We found some cliffs, but they were passable and in hindsight also avoidable. The forest up to the second cliff band was generally good; it was either open understory, or abdomen-height blueberry bushes. Forest after the second cliff band required proper breaststroke technique; the forest was composed of dense blueberry or short, dense coniferous trees.

LEARNING POINTS: Creeks are good handrails to ease navigation. <http://www.bcforestmap.com/> is a useful resource to gauge passability based on forest age. Remove loose items from your pack's exterior, they will disappear in the bush. Tape your shoelaces.

We make it to the lake at 6:00 pm after over three hours of bushwhacking.

Sunset colours were truly stunning. We decided to push the ridge. We follow a boulder field up. It turns into a bouldery stream. Easy passage but lots of elevation gain. My legs got fried at this point; Cameron seemed unphased and motored on. We found the juiciest blueberries which felt like power-ups and kept us going.

The stream dissolves away. We're in a bowl feature with a treed ridge to our right. This ridge will eventually lead us to the false summit we spend the night on. The sun has now set in earnest, so headlights come out. The way is a mix of easy, semi-exposed scrambling and fighting through thick trees. We discovered route-finding in the dark, in a sea of branches, is difficult as one can illuminate terrain no further than the branches in one's face. As such, we manage to find the steepest (most efficient right?) route up the false summit. There were delirious thoughts of sleeping right there on the side of the mountain, thoughts of cowboy camping at the summit.

At some point, we falsely summit and pitch camp. The moon bathes Meslilloet and our surroundings in ethereal light. Bonnycastle-proper loomed to the east. The Five Fingers and Judge Howay silhouetted the horizon. We stood there looking at the city lights and the stars and wondered "What are we doing here?" FSR to "summit" took over five hours. Sleep sounded very appealing.

6:40 am, October 13th: we wake up, the sun is just heating up the sky with a gradient of orange to blue above the mountains. The air is crisp. Very lazy, slow start to the day. Leisurely eating food, conserving the little water we had left. We could have gotten on our game and started packing, but we just froze and watched the sunrise. I checked the time, it was already 7:20 am. We quickly pack up.

It doesn't take long before we summit Bonnycastle. The sun is flowing into the valleys below, God rays stream off the Five Fingers. Over the next hour, we scamper along the ridge wrapping around Lake Barnes. It's slab paradise and easy route-finding. We move fast to allow time for the bushwhack and paddle that lay ahead.

Coming off the ridge sent us back into some dense trees. We found dried up water-tracks offer easier passage through the bush. Several cliffs presented themselves, they were all circumventable. We replenish our water at the lake and looked for a good place to start our descent. Terrain around the lake outflow was quite cliffy. Best point to cross was at the very start of the creek.

We mostly follow the fall line and water tracks. This made bushwhacking down much easier as the vegetation/branches were mostly pointing in the direction of travel; it felt like we could flow downhill. Unsurprisingly, our tactic of being water funnelled us into some sizable ravines. Luckily, the ample amount of blueberry bushes provided solid holds. Before we know it, we run into the cut block so we cut towards the creek. We crossed the creek below the waterfall this time. No cliff bands on the west side of the falls which was nice.

The bushwhacking felt tougher on the way down even if we were in the

same bouldery area east below the falls. We took a 90 degree turn in search of better forest. We did not find said forest and ended up cutting to the east-most stream (which was one big stream with many small streams running next to it) and followed it down. Forest got denser as we went. Some sections felt swampy. Terrain flattened out and the canopy cleared a bit suggesting roads ahead. This clearing was actually a bog. We emerge from the forest at the crest of a hill. Maybe 300 metres down-road of our entry point. In these 300 metres, the forest got significantly denser. Avoid the forest past the hillcrest.

LEARNING POINTS: Water tracks are basically trails on the descent. In slow forest, making progress is faster than precise navigation given you have catching features.

We fly down the FSR uneventfully with one exception. 1 kilometre from our kayaks, we are stopped by security on the road. They ID us. We learn that the FSR is closed for construction. We start our paddle at 3:00 pm and have prime conditions again. We wonder if we will catch the big VOC trip. This hope is dashed as we start crashing. My brain goes into sleep mode. We regress into the watery pain cave. 6:00 pm: The sun is setting as we make it ashore (or I should say as we got washed ashore).

LEARNING POINTS: Keep some food and water easily accessible and not under hatches. FSRs are not always open; check FSR Map of BC for FSR status before going. Find out whose land you are on; it is important to acknowledge native land and ask for permission before passing through.

I closed this trip with a long-forgotten feeling of liveliness. I couldn't help but ask why the trip sparked such a feeling. Was it the process of discovering what I'm capable of? Or the result of feeling capable or confident? Was it accomplishing something I've set my mind to? Was it the feeling of control as I forged my own path? Maybe my motives were more ulterior; I'm seeking the approval of others or trying to impress or I'm looking to stand out? Maybe this feeling simply stems from spending time with a friend? Or from being in nature as opposed to being cooped inside?

Recently, I've found I've attached my liveliness to the ability to be outside. As a result, school and work have become really unappealing. The underlying reasons for this situation I have yet to deeply examine. Maybe it's a matter of maturity or foresight or gratitude. There are many questions and not enough answers. In the meantime, I encourage everyone to truly ask: What do we seek in the outdoors?

Trip Stats: 45 kilometres hiking & 37 kilometres paddling round-trip, 1700 metres elevation gain, 14.5 hours moving time.

SAY NUTH KHAW YUM

KAYAK TRIP 2024

ED RILEY

October 12 - 13, 2024

Participants: Elizabeth Chu, Rhiannon Henley, Lucy Perkins, Le Tra Mi Do, Ann-Cathrin Muller, Anabelle Parrella, Ed Riley, Simon Tsianikas, Cecily Downs, Joanne Ho, Erin Chong, Justine Ng, Lydia Dunkin, Tejas Vijay, Mateja Clifford, Elyse Truebridge, Jin Xu, John Sherk, Patric Gerard

SINCE ARRIVING IN VANCOUVER at the end of August from Edinburgh, Scotland, I have tried to go to as many VOC events/trips as possible with the hope of meeting people that share my outdoor interests. After Rock Party and a backpacking trip to Brew, this was to be my third trip with the club—three completely different activities in as many trips! Though I have spent plenty of time outdoors at home in the UK & Europe, including with the Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club (Edinburgh's equivalent to the VOC), this was to be my first kayak overnighter.

After finding a boat partner, choosing a car group, and paying for the kayak rental at the pre-trip, everything was in order for a great weekend kayaking up Indian Arm and back. The plan was to start at Deep Cove on Saturday, camp at Granite Falls and retrace our steps (paddles?!) on Sunday. The forecast was predicting blue sky and minimal wind all weekend so we were in for some great views and paddling conditions!

Once everyone had arrived at Deep Cove, it was time to pack the kayaks and get on the water. I admit my anxiety rose slightly at this point as I hadn't realised I'd have to split the contents of my rucksack into quite so many constituent parts... I only had two big dry bags and two bin bags. In the end though, I managed to fit all my contents into something vaguely waterproof and as long as we didn't roll the kayak, I was confident all my stuff would stay dry.

After we'd launched from Deep Cove, the first point of interest was the 'Seal Hotel'! This is a small outcrop close to Deep Cove where an abundance of seals gather/sunbathe/chill above the water.

We then continued paddling, all the while admiring the impressive real estate that lines the shores lower down the Indian Arm. After just over an hour and a half of paddling, we hauled our boats onto the beach for a break and refuel. Sushi and Oreos were just some of the things being eaten for lunch!

Two hours of paddling later and we arrived at Granite Falls, a spectacu-

lar waterfall next to which we'd be camping. Understandably, the first thing some people wanted to do was rip their wetsuit off and put on some comfier clothes and go explore the waterfall and campground. However, a few of us (me included!) donned our wetsuits again and got back in the water to learn how to roll the kayak and try to get back in it while in the water. Let's just say there were varying levels of success! This was great fun, especially since the water wasn't as cold as expected! Elizabeth Chu and John Sherk kindly offered up their solo kayaks for people to practice in.

We then ate dinner under John's tarp and shared some potluck items ranging from crushed Nature Valley bars to iced-in-situ pumpkin and chai loaf! Simultaneously, plans were hatched for a sunrise paddle up to the estuary at the top of Indian Arm for the following morning. Alarms were to be set to 6:00 am with a plan to be on the water by 7:00 am (realistically 7:30 am in the end!) Some people like complete silence when sleeping, but I for one slept well with the constant noise from the waterfall in the background.

The next morning, some of us got into drier wetsuits than others and we set off on our sunrise paddle. Paddling up in the direction of the Wigwam Inn (this place has a storied history as I found out after the trip (look it up!)), we saw multiple seals and a vast number of moon jellyfish floating near the surface.

Upon returning to the campsite, we packed our remaining gear and set off on our paddle back to Deep Cove. The paddle down the Arm was largely uneventful, but we did see some things we hadn't seen on the way up, such as a waterfall and its nearby starfish population.

Some hours later, after stopping for lunch at the same beach as the previous day, we all made it safely back to Deep Cove where most of us headed to the much-hyped Honey Doughnuts.

Thanks go to the people in the group with past kayak experience who took on the responsibility of leading a small sub group each, and Lucy and Elizabeth for leading the trip!





A photograph of a rugged mountain peak under a blue sky with wispy clouds. A large glacier flows down the lower slopes of the mountain. In the foreground, several colorful tents (red, green, yellow, and blue) are pitched on a rocky, snow-dusted area. The text "CLUB LIFE, WORKHIKES, AND REFLECTIONS" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

**CLUB LIFE, WORKHIKES,
AND REFLECTIONS**

TO THE UNCLIMBED PEAKS

LUCAS BRAUN

IN APRIL OF 2024, Anya Boardman, Declan Dawson Taylor, our friend Mats Bjorkman (who was visiting from Sweden for a conference on tundra plant ecology), and I ended up spending three nights at Phelix. It was a wonderful ski trip filled with many beautiful memories, however one sticks out to me in particular. On our second day, we lapped each of the cols that tower over Long Lake, and at the top of the Gandalf-Frodo col we stopped to have lunch. A clear panorama of mountains stood to the west before us, rolling out of sight. Declan radiated with excitement looking out at the range. At the time, he and Jacob Grossbard were in the process of charting a ski traverse that would connect each of the VOC huts from Burton to Brian Waddington. The crux of the route would be from Harrison to Phelix, as it would involve navigating parts of the Lillooet Icefield and the remote ranges and peaks that loomed ahead of us. His stoke for this plan was infectious, and we all looked at these mountains that few ever stepped foot in with a sense of awe.

A question dawned on me at that moment. One I had never really given words to yet had been percolating around in my head for quite some time. I asked it there. The following is my recollection of how the conversation went:

“Are you guys summit people, or pass people?”

“What?”

“Like, if you had to choose between being on a summit and being in a pass, what would you choose? I think I’m a pass person. There’s no feeling to me like gaining a col or pass for the first time and being greeted by the view on the other side. It’s like opening a door to a whole new world to explore.”

Declan and Anya mulled it over for a minute before responding.

“I’m definitely a summit person,” Declan said. “Being on a summit is unreal. The idea that you are on the apex of everything around you with nowhere else to go. It’s like being on top of the world. You guys should try to summit Cayoosh

Section cover photo Brandywine Brianna Ragsdale

if you can. You can see everything from up there. You can even just make out the ocean.”

Anya responded in agreement with me.

“I think I’m a pass person too. I definitely like traversing somewhere and seeing new places more than summiting something. I feel being in a pass is part of that excitement.”

I confess I don’t quite remember Mats’ response, though I imagine it was filled with his signature brand of blunt, dry humour.

There are a few moments in life that will stick with me. Little snapshots that if I could freeze, I would try to keep myself in them forever. This was one of them. That col on that sunny April day with my three friends and I, alone and dwarfed by the mountains.

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, my dad was my main conduit into the mountains. On nights before going on a day hike, he’d pull out a guidebook and pick a hike from it (and sometimes task me with finding one). No more research was required (aside from checking the weather, of course). I rarely, if ever, learned the names of any of the Rockies we explored. I never made a mental list of peaks I wanted to hike or climb. If it was in the book and looked achievable, we would go and do it that weekend. Many times we would not complete a hike. We attempted Burstall Pass in Kananaskis four times over at least four years before we finally got to ‘the top’. It was simply enough to exist in the mountains. To wander up a valley beside an alpine creek bed or to meander along a rocky ridge; those were the objectives. The peak at the end of the trail was a fun bonus, but ultimately insignificant. Over the towering valley walls were some immeasurable quantity of other valleys and other peaks. The Rockies feel that way sometimes; like you’re moving through gouges in endless upturned earth, with some mystery hidden from view. Moving and being in such a grand landscape evoke a feeling that you simply will never see it all. I think that’s how I became a pass person.

When I joined the VOC, I began planning my own trips with a bit more intent. I learned peak names from the knowledgeable people around me. I learned to research what every hike or ski or climb promised; what each crux was, what to prepare for, and what alternatives to consider. I began curating a Caltopo map of traverses I wanted to walk, lines I wanted to ski, and peaks I wanted to summit. I began making lists.

I think everyone in the VOC has a list. It’s a natural outcome of doing any sort of pursuit, let alone outdoor ones. There are so many objectives to be ‘completed’. So many landmarks to measure ‘progress’. So many test pieces. You talk to any second-year ski tourer about what they want to do this winter and the answers are all the same (I’m the most guilty of this):

“Aw man, I have to send Aussie this winter.”

“This is my Spearhead season!”

“Gotta get on Baker.”

“I hear you can see the ocean from atop Cayoosh!”

“I want to go to the Coquihalla when it’s not rainy and awful so the drive doesn’t feel like a huge waste of time.” (That one might be specific to me actually).

It’s almost a cliché at this point to bring up how this objectification of the mountains is a byproduct of our capitalist-colonial-westernized (insert other buzzwords) worldview. I chuckle to myself when I read someone in a 23-year-old VOC journal give the same sort of rant you’d expect from your standard poli-sci student today. The more things change the more they stay the same. Yet clichés are based on truth. A mountain loses its personhood in a list. It’s a checkmark, not a living breathing entity to enter a relationship with. I mean, what’s the big deal with that?

Well for starters, mountains kill people. A lot of people. They are energetic beings, capable of creating their own weather on the fly. Capable of sending down avalanches that crush small towns. Anyone who has driven through the Frank Slide in the Crowsnest Pass has driven over the bones of over 90 lives snuffed out by what the Blackfoot and Ktunaxa historically called “the mountain that moves”. That kind of power needs to be respected.

But less drastically, one who views the world as a list watches their world get smaller and smaller with each checkmark. And as I went on in the VOC, I started to feel this shrinkage. Being in the mountains wasn’t so important as dreaming up which mountains to explore next. The magic I felt from going to Red Heather for the first time was replaced with almost a sense of boredom from going for the fourth. Days where nothing was summited didn’t exactly feel like failures, but there was a sense of disappointment each time it happened. The days that were successful felt a bit hollower. My most ‘objectively’ successful day in the mountains, (when I climbed Mt. Lyell in Yosemite) was a grand old time, but left me thinking after I had finished: what now?

‘Completing’ one thing only led me to think about the next thing. Getting out into places that for my entire existence had been so life-affirming and healing became somewhat of a chore. When you get to the summit of a mountain, where else can you go but the next one? Seems rather Sisyphian to me.

That’s not to say I haven’t had incredibly profound and amazing ‘objective’ driven days. The Garibaldi Névé Traverse I did in March with Anya, Declan, and Zoe Neudorf was one of my favourite days on this planet. Lyell was still an

amazing test of my capabilities as a solo novice mountaineer. These things were technically ‘checkmarks’ on a list, but led to experiences that were so much larger than any list could possibly contain or predict. But the list mindset as a whole poisoned me a little bit. I couldn’t bring myself to be super excited going into G1 this year, because there was no ‘objective’ to check off. I had been to Brandywine three times already (the first being in the same league as the Névé for how profound I consider the experience), and while I was really stoked to teach people some glacier skills, I was not stoked to endure another rainstorm on the same cold exposed alpine ridge that we had been on the year prior. When the weather lifted, I had a fantastic time once again. However, I believe having an objective-driven mindset made it much harder for me to see the joy in sitting in a rain-soaked tent that I had once had.

But that April Phelix trip was different. For three nights, Mats, Anya, Declan, and I only had one objective: to exist in the mountains for four days. Goodbye Alpine Starts! Hello waking up at 8:00 am and having nice leisurely breakfasts. Goodbye, 10 km+ days! Hello, lapping the same cols a few times then turning in for the night. Goodbye, frantic camp set-ups and take-downs! Hello sitting outside in the sun for a few hours and simply staring across the lake at Mt. Taillefer. It was the most type 1 fun overnight trip I’ve ever done in the winter (Burns and Turns being a close second). And it was made better when Tom Curran, Cassandra Elphinstone, Sam Viavant, and alpine superstars Nick Matwyuk and Lena Rowat along with their son Charles showed up on the second evening.

The next day a group of us summited Mt. Peregrine and skied Return of The King under its corniced north face (on the way up, we passed Lena on her way back from a solo lap of the line in her flowery ski dress). The day after that, Declan and I followed Nick and Lena’s beta on a new ski out from the Gandalf-Frodo Col down to Tolkien and the Phelix Creek drainage (another banger ski line that we had a blast on). All in all, everything about that April Phelix trip was awesome, and we did some ‘objectively’ rad shit with some of the coolest people ever. Yet, none of us set out with these objectives in mind. We were simply there to be in the mountains with friends. And that mindset opened up the door for so much more.

CHRIS MCCANDLESS WROTE in a journal as he lay dying in Alaska that “happiness is only real when shared.” It’s a simple axiom, and not one I believe is worth dying to learn. So I try to live by it as much as I can. But sometimes things aren’t as simple as that. Sometimes you need to re-internalize the same lessons. It seems the same attitudes that disconnect us from the mountains and reduce them to checkmarks can also do the same for us with our friends. The summer of 2024 that I spent working in Yosemite was mostly a positive experience. I think it was foundational to my development as a human being, and I absolutely do not regret doing it. But many parts of it were hard. So far from home, from Calgary, Vancouver, my family, and

the VOC, I felt like things weren't resonating like they normally do. Chasing these ideals, these objectives, these job opportunities, these peaks, can blind us to what's really around us, and where the joy lies. You don't always notice it until it's gone.

I was becoming a summit person. Chasing each peak, and forgetting about the last ones. But standing on that col in April with my friends as we looked at rows and rows of peaks, the distinction between summits and passes was made clear to me. I don't see it as a binary. A person can prefer summits to passes, and still hold a pass-driven mindset. For the pass person, there will always be something higher than you. Something to ground you. Something to move towards should you want to, but you don't have to. For the pass person, peering into another world is enough. You still get a similar view, but you decide how you turn around, and where you finish. You go just as far as you want. A pass person is not precluded from summiting. Yet a pass person can look to the unclimbed peaks ahead of them, and leave them there. They can listen to the mountains, to themselves, and to each other, and not feel a pang of disappointment should one of those three beings say no. The only objective is to walk. To see new things. To exist in the mountains.

Becoming a pass person after being a summit person isn't easy. Yet I plan to start by giving thanks. Thanks to the beautiful people and places that give me so much joy. By savouring each moment and sensation. And by letting the silly lists in my head remain what they are: silly. Besides, the Spearhead is probably overrated anyway (still gonna ski it this winter though).

ROCK SMASH: THE THIRD TRI-ANNUAL PHELIX SHITFEST

STEFANIJA REKASIOUS

October 18 – 20, 2024

Participants: John Sherk (Boss), Hannah Saarimaki (Big Boss), Anton Afanassiev (Mini Boss), Stefanija Rekasious (Miniature Boss), Lucas Braun (HR), Ketan Desai, Erik Reimers, Nolwenn (Nono) Deschamps, Andrew Carriere, Simon Tsianikas

Oh, the year was 2024

How I wish I was in Phelix now,

A letter of marque came from the prez

To the scummiest group I've ever seen

God damn them all,

I was told we'd build the perfect outhouse

We'd dig one pit, shed no tears

Now I've a dislocated finger on a Phelix pier

The last of Phelix's outhouse pits

Okay so that was my attempt at a spoof cause this was just such a funny trip. My adventure actually started Friday afternoon when I was planning my weekend. Originally, I was supposed to be on the Iron Chef trip which got canceled due to inclement weather, so during 1:00 pm Friday rounds, I texted Lucas Braun asking if the Phelix Outhouse trip was still happening and if I could join. He said there was room but that we were leaving that day. So, after work I quickly biked back, got a quick run-down from John, packed my bag, ran to pick up some steel-toes from the clubroom (thanks Fiona Landwehr!), got picked up, and we headed to Phelix!

As with any trip north of Pemberton, we of course stopped in the Pemberton McDonald's for a quick dinner break. We then drove up to the summer parking lot, set up tents, and a tarp between the two cars' trunks so we could more easily divide the gear in the morning. The next morning, we all woke up and loaded up our packs with power tools, screws, 2x4s and more. Lucas, Hannah Saarimaki, and Erik Reimers left at 6:50 am content with the idea of having to do two trips. Anton Afanassiev, Ketan Desai, John Sherk, and I really wanted to only do one trip so we started packing more strategically. Ketan, Nono Deschamps, and Andrew Carriere

left at 7:20 am, I left at 7:50, and John, Anton, and Simon Tsianikas left around 8:20.

After a very rainy walk up and a bit of drying out in the hut, Hannah, Lucas, Erik, and I used the map with marked possible outhouse locations provided to us by Maiya Callister and started to dig. The first hole that we started to dig had a ton of rocks so we decided to try a different spot. This spot and a following third attempt filled up with water immediately, so we went back to the first hole and resigned ourselves to digging out lots of rocks. By then, Ketan, Nono, and Andrew joined the party and we switched off with the shovels and rock bar. After quite some time, we got concerned that we had yet to see Anton, John, and Simon so we decided to InReach them. They didn't respond so we started to think about someone going down but then we saw them come up 5.5 hours later! This was mostly because John was carrying up the plywood for the outhouse sides.

Hannah then worked on making the cribbing, and John, Simon, and Nono were working on dismantling the outhouse. The rest of us were tasked with digging the hole, with Anton and I "in-charge" as mini boss and miniature boss. There was quite a lot of digging around huge rocks but it was such a fun group with of course, a bit of goofing around—hence 'shitfest'. As we had been digging for quite some time, we tried to keep it light and funny, so in addition to our creative names, Anton and Lucas started to talk like cavemen. My favourite line was "I Anton, I strong, I smash rock, rock go bye bye". In addition to some very funny other sayings, we decided to liven it up by using a sledgehammer and just kicking rocks to try and get them loose. This was accompanied by multiple sayings of "We need to continue digging because we have to put food on the table for Timmy and Susie" by Anton, Ketan, and Lucas, as well as multiple mentions of our situation being Penal-Colony 2.0 by Anton. Multiple jokes were also made by how we should make a double-decker or side-by-side outhouse.

After eight hours, we set up a tarp over the hole and took a dinner break. There we met non-VOCer Seth and explained the outhouse project. As a joke, I suggested he join us in digging the hole, and he said yes which was very beneficial! Unfortunately, when we got back to the hole, there was a bit of water around it but we assumed it was just from the heinous downpour and a bit of snow that we were getting. We then took turns having one person digging in the hole as it was about a metre deep, playing music as we dug. There were a couple of larger boulders that we had to pull out with the help of a rope: two of us pushed the boulder while five pulled on the rope. Anton also tried to drill a rock with a 1-inch bit to break it, but was of course unsuccessful. After a lot of digging and around a 1.5 m deep hole, we brought over the cribbing and put it by the hole just past midnight.

The next morning, we woke up at 6:30 am and had a very productive start (including napping at 7:15 am still in the hut). We continued the outhouse disassembly and got the cribbing cut to the right size. Hannah graciously stepped

into the pit, which had gotten more than a little bit of water overnight. She used a sawzall to cut the cribbing around the rocks. Unfortunately, this caused some sections of the cribbing to be a bit less stable, so we screwed on some spare 2x4s to keep it stable.

It was finally time to move the outhouse! It was mostly disassembled as the outhouse would have been too heavy to move otherwise. We still had to put up the scaffolding to make it easier to tilt the outhouse and it took all ten of us to move it. We then had to make a base on which the outhouse could stand. To do so, Anton sawed some 4x6 studs to the appropriate length. Then we had to compact the soil around the cribbing so that the base wouldn't sink in unevenly. We then put the base over the hole, and made adjustments to ensure that the base was level, because no one wants to be trying to poop while they're falling backwards...

Since it was after 3:00 pm on the final day, we decided that we would leave it there. Wrapping up, we undid the tarp, moved the outhouse past the last boulders, placed it onto the base to help it set, and screwed on the tarp so it wouldn't fly away. The Phelix Wood Haul group the weekend after would need to stand the outhouse up again and reconstruct it. Knowing that, we put the outhouse pieces in order of which ones they'd need to use first.

Then was the time for the great gear divide. Having won the competition for heaviest pack going down after Sphinx (not including Jeff's insane pack), I was glad there were many more people and much less gear. This round, I think Ketan won the heaviest pack if you include the rock bar he was carrying. We then started making our way down the trail, and got back to the cars just as the sun was setting.

The next weekend Hannah and John came back and were successful in finishing the outhouse. So was the third tri-annual Phelix Shitfest successful? In regard to making a good outhouse hole for the next half decade, no, but smashing rocks, yes.

Anton's Perspective:

Drive big rig to trailhead. Carry many smash tools to dig hole. Bag heavy. John carry heaviest. That why John boss. Arrive at hole. Big Boss say dig. Big Boss protect from bandit so I dig. Smash big rock. Hole dig. Food on table. Boss and Big Boss use magic spin tool. Spin tool make heavy wood from one piece to many pieces. Carry wood to hole. Put wood on hole. Why cover hole? Not understand. Hard to dig more when hole covered. Oh well Big Boss say do. Go to big rig. Carry not so heavy. Move fast. Maybe dig hole at big rig. Actually go home. Drink 24 beers.

FALL HARRISON HUT WORKHIKE

ZIHAN (QUINTUS) ZHOU

November 9 - 13, 2024

Participants: Duncan MacIntyre (trip leader), Lyra Gui, Julianne Bonnefoy, Sophie Wigman, Joseph Chiao, Sara Bellman, Timm Rohweder, Quintus Zhou

THERE WERE MANY UNKNOWNs going into this trip: How far up the FSR can we drive? How's the trail? Is there a trail? But looking at gorgeous pictures of Harrison Hut and the approach stats, I knew it would be a fun time. Never mind Roland Burton's prediction that we were all going to die.

The first incident of the day was a flat tire on Duncan's car a few minutes after we passed the 2 km gate on the Lillooet South FSR. Luckily we both drive Mazdas and I had a full-sized spare.

After driving through the open 24 km gate, we took a left onto Perkins Main, which had the majority of our drivable elevation gain. We were delighted to find that the road was clear of snow all the way up to the top. We encountered a large boulder blocking the road about three-quarters of the way up. After many unsuccessful and poorly coordinated attempts to move it by hand, Timm remembered that we're a bipedal species with opposable thumbs and began using a big stick as a lever. This worked brilliantly. The road conditions deteriorated after this point, mostly due to the overgrowth of alders. Fortunately, trees are softer than cars, so we performed trail maintenance by driving over them. Eventually, we encountered some bigger stumps, so we spent about 30 minutes removing the bush with a hatchet, saw, and battle axe, until we decided that getting to the hut was more important than clearing the trail. We parked at a wide spot and continued on foot.

OLD (UNMAINTAINED) HARRISON TRAIL

Walking along the road, we came across a ground fire. I suggested putting a tarp over it to create a steam sauna but Joseph insisted that we do the workhike instead of having a spa day. The coordinates were marked and later reported to the government. The end of the road leads into an annoying but short section of cut-block bushwhacking. We had our first encounter with devil's club, but it was not terrible, especially compared to what was yet to come.

Once in the forest, the old trail was in amazing condition. We suspected that large animals were keeping the trail well-trodden because snow-covered sections on day two had frequent urine-stained patches along the trail. About 1.2 km into the trail, we entered the first cut block. The bushwhacking began. Some cut blocks were reasonably restored, with a clearly marked route and steps cut into larger logs, though they were still slippery and hazardous. Other cutblocks were not restored at all.

Thorns, loose rocks and logs, deep holes, slippery creek crossings, and sections with no visible trail markers made our pace painfully slow. We decided to split up the group due to a difference in pace. Joseph, Sara, Timm, Sophie, and Juliane went ahead, doing some serious trail-finding and marking the route with orange tape. Duncan, Lyra, and I took up the rear.

A few hours later, it started getting dark, and we were nowhere near the next road section. It became increasingly apparent that we were unlikely to find a campsite on this trail. The newer cutblocks had no flat bits, the older cutblocks were too overgrown, and the unlogged areas were too steep (which is probably why they weren't logged). At one point we found a ridge with a small clearing that could fit tents. It would have been a very uncomfortable night trying not to slide off our slanted sleeping pads. The lead group made the call to keep going. I think it was a good decision.

We decided that Joseph and Sara should run ahead until they found a suitable campsite, then Joseph would run back to help Lyra carry her pack as this was one of her first backpacking trips.

The last of us finally arrived at the road section around 10:30 pm. We sat around Joseph's tarp discussing our plans for the next day and then went to bed. It was a cold night with little sleep for most people.

DAY 2

MAINTAINED TRAIL

We split into two groups again. The first group would take all of the construction materials and begin working on the hut while the second group would carry more of everything else and move at a slower pace. The trail now felt like a paved road compared to the bushwhack the previous day, though our pace still wasn't as fast as we expected due to the slushy snow and heavy packs. We saw lots of bear prints and urine-stained snow. Apparently the wildlife also liked the trail.

We had lunch with an assortment of shared foods—brownies from Joseph, candied salmon from Duncan, and gouda from Timm (the gouda might've actually been shared at the hut, I just remember having some good cheese at some point). My VOC snowshoe snapped in half on one side shortly after I put it on. It was still usable but a bit painful because it twisted towards the broken side. Crossing the final creek, it was difficult to discern solid ground from snow bridges as we hopped from boulder to boulder. Joseph and Duncan went for an unintention-

al swim. We finally reached the hut at 4:30 pm. They promptly removed their wet clothing, started a fire, and dried off. The second group announced their arrival on the radio at around 6:00 pm, well after sunset. I went out to greet them at the creek and to make sure that no more people went swimming.

HUT SHENANIGANS

Shortly after a nice warm dinner, Joseph and I went out to look for the ladder. It was not found despite our best efforts at excavating around the hut and both outhouses. We eventually gave up and moved to testing various other methods of summitting the roof. Ascending a rope with two prusiks was too difficult against the slippery metal surface. Fortunately, Joseph had brought gear to set up a 3-to-1 hauling system. We would drape a rope across the apex of the roof and haul people up from the opposite side. This system ended up working well, though our rope eventually frayed due to friction at the apex. We then realized that there was a ladder sitting right in front of us inside the hut: the ladder that goes to the loft. I slept through the night warm and cozy next to the fire while a blizzard raged outside. The downstairs bench was quite wide, so it made for a more comfortable sleeping arrangement than squishing everyone in the loft.

DAY 3

After everyone had gotten what they needed from upstairs, we unscrewed the loft ladder and took it outside. It wasn't long enough to reach the top, but it significantly reduced the height we had to haul. I tried to anchor the ladder by jumping on it so that it would get stuck in the snow, but this broke the bottom step, adding another fun repair project for later, along with fixing my snowshoes.

Duncan took the first shift on the roof since he was the most familiar with the hut and understood what needed to be fixed (see his report on the website for repair details). We took turns hauling him up, holding the ladder, and staying in the hut. Joseph was on lowering duty with the only other harness.

Below Joseph passing phone to Duncan for pictures. *Juliane Bonnefoy*



People in the hut organized things and took inventory. We noticed that the hut already had many of the tools we brought up, including a hammer and lots of screws. We also did not need the three Dewalt batteries we carried up—we didn't even get through the first one.

Duncan found it painful to kneel on the cold metal roof, so Sophie and Julianne constructed a bomber pair of knee pads using cardboard and ski straps. I tried to pass Duncan a screwdriver by tossing it up to him but, after three unsuccessful attempts, it got buried in the snow and was never seen again. I excavated the entire area without any luck.

We had lunch around noon. All the work inside the hut had been completed by this point, so people were getting into some mischief throwing snowballs and trying to summit a frozen boulder. The storm clouds finally cleared, revealing the vast valley below and the furrowed glaciers at the edge of the Pemberton Icefield. It was a chill time hanging around the hut and the blue sky made it all the more dreamy. Besides enjoying the immaculate vibes, people on the ground also made quick work of filling the roof panel gaps with sealant tape. Sophie and I decided to install the new latch on the outhouse door so that it could be kept shut from the outside but we discovered that Duncan had forgotten the latch at the car along with the VOC journal. We improvised using a U-shaped nail, some flimsy string, and a long screw. The hand-placed screw was a bit slanted and was later improved by Joseph.

Halfway through the afternoon, Joseph took over repairs on top of the hut and I put a harness on so I could lower him. Not long after, the storm clouds rolled in again. Idle people quickly found themselves sitting around the fireplace but, not wanting to waste firewood, they deliberated about how long they should wait before starting the fire. It finally got going around 5:00 pm and we had a nice warm dinner inside the hut. The smell was amazing. Everyone had creative menus. For example, Duncan brought whole oranges, a big bag of fresh snap peas, and whole raw eggs. Every meal he'd take out a new surprise item from his bag and share it with everyone. Joseph went back to work on the roof after dinner with Duncan's help while everyone else stayed cozy inside. I had a jam sesh with the surprisingly nice hut guitar.

Construction for the day finished just past 9:00 pm and the ladder was finally brought back inside. Sophie and I fixed the broken step with a piece of scrap wood we had sawed to length earlier. Since the impact driver bit for the long screws was attached to the screwdriver that I lost, we had to drive these screws by hand. Sophie was way better than me at this and did most of the work.

At the same time, the smell of popcorn and cheese powder filled the hut as people were cooking up Sophie's dried corn kernels in a hut pan. After the ladder was screwed back into the hut, we made it upstairs and discovered that the source of the leak might've been found as the sealant we put in the roof now rested on Joseph's sleeping bag. It appears to have dripped through the screw holes.

Joseph wanted to stay up a bit later and write an entry in the hut journal, so we swapped sleeping spots. We decided to keep the fire going all night to dry out the hut, which turned out to be a bit fruitless as we got it wet again the next day.

DAY 4

LEAVING THE HUT

The final day greeted us with a gorgeous sunrise. We took a group photo outside after breakfast and prepared to leave in three groups. Lyra, Sophie, and I left first to break trail; Timm, Julianne, and Sara caught up not long after; and Joseph and Duncan stayed for two more hours to finish up roof repairs and clean up the hut. I had a lot of fun getting a taste of the coming ski season by semi-controlled falling through knee-deep powder. The trail was pretty with the sun peeking through the trees. The storm had transformed the slushy nightmare into a winter paradise. Joseph and Duncan didn't get to take as leisurely a walk though. They had to run down the trail with no breaks to catch up with us, arriving at our meeting spot five minutes after everyone else. Here, an important decision was made: we would walk down the closed FSR instead of the bushwhack. Given the treacherous conditions, we felt that this was the only safe option. As we hiked out, we admired the dramatic landscape while also watching for rockfall hazards, stopping for breaks only in safe areas. We got to the 24 km gate half an hour after dark and set up camp off the side of the road around kilometre 23.

Duncan and I planned to wake up early the next morning to hike the 500 m of elevation gain back to the cars. But it started pouring rain, making the idea of cooking breakfast at camp unpleasant, and Joseph decided that he didn't want to sit in a tent for the rest of the evening, so he convinced Duncan, Timm, and Sara to hike with him to the cars now so we'd be able to pack up quickly the next morning and hopefully have a nice breakfast in Pemberton. I tried to stay awake to answer their radio calls but the warm sleeping bag was too much. I turned the volume on the radio all the way up so they could wake me if needed. I drifted in and out of sleep, checking in a few times, and two hours later I heard the beautiful sound of dinosaur juice being combusted as I turned off the radio and fell sound asleep.

DAY 5

BACK TO CIVILIZATION!

The next morning, I woke up to find my side of the tent in a puddle. I promptly just threw everything in the trunk. My car didn't start at first but I had a portable jump starter so we got it moving pretty fast. We made our way into Pemberton just as Mile One Eating House opened. We spent two hours there with lots of laughs and way too much food (which we finished). Joseph bought the table and apple pie after breakfast. I was way too full but how could I say no to pie?

Back in Vancouver, we had hotpot at my place to celebrate returning alive and proving wrong Roland's prophecy. Queue the Shire theme.

THE ART OF BAILING

NOAH MACDONALD



Above Questing into the unknown on Husume Buttrass

CONTENT WARNING: This article involves discussions of death in the mountains. Skip section 1 to avoid the heaviest discussion of the subject.

1. INTRODUCTION

People often describe certain skills as an art. In this sense, there is an art to cooking, public speaking, or climbing an offwidth. It means that there is no strict set of rules that one can follow to master the skill; there is an element of style or judgment, often peculiar to the individual, that manifests in their practice of the skill. You usually know when you see someone performing well (or poorly), but it may be difficult to figure out the “essence” of the art for the purpose of teaching others. Despite this, I want to discuss how we might all become better at one particular art that I spend a regrettably large amount of my time contemplating: the art of bailing.

The art of bailing is unlike most other arts. Successfully practicing it requires frustrating your other goals. It requires technical know-how. Control over your emotions is a must. It is an art that is practiced when threatened with danger. Most importantly, it is an art that you must strive to master if you want to travel safely in the mountains. This is because staying safe in the mountains requires more than being able to recognize danger. As a practical matter, managing risk requires you to come to terms with your motivations for being in the mountains, and to interrogate the philosophy and psychology that determines when you turn

around because of danger (or push on despite it).

This article is an attempt to explain my perspective on bailing. I start in **Section 2** by explaining a particular framework for viewing mountain sports that places bailing in a role of significance. Specifically, I argue that we ought to view mountain sports as games, and that there is a game-within-the-game (the “bailing game”) that plays a key role in determining what counts as a success when we embark on trips designed to “achieve” in the mountains. I then discuss (in **Section 3**) how to improve at deciding when to bail. Giving good general-purpose advice on when to bail is nearly impossible, so the scope of this part of the project is limited. In **Section 4**, I talk briefly about bailing techniques and argue in favour of habitually spending more time learning to bail safely. Getting good at climbing is one thing; getting good at descending is another (and more important) thing entirely.

I do not think that mastering the art of bailing is itself enough to stay safe in the mountains; injury can occur by failing to perform in circumstances where a bail is otherwise unnecessary (e.g. if you fall on a pitch that ought to be within your level of comfort). Improving strength, technique, and mountain knowledge is also necessary to ensure that fewer circumstances warrant bailing. But short of staying inside and never venturing out into the mountains, your next best defence against disaster is knowing when to call it quits.

The VOC is famous for somewhat dangerous shenanigans. I personally contribute to this culture, as can be seen in the shockingly large number of epics I wrote about in other articles within this journal. But I credit this to my unusual willingness to suffer my way up a climb and my propensity to select climbs that lend themselves to unusual difficulties; I spend a great deal of time evaluating whether or not I am facing the sort of difficulty that warrants turning back. People who have climbed with me can attest that I love a good bail. For every two climbs I complete, I bail on at least one other. In discussing the art of bailing, I hope to offset any of my unintended glorification of risk with a level-headed discussion of decision-making in the mountains.

This topic matters to me. The list of VOCers who have died in the mountains is larger than it should be. Several of my own climbing partners (or my climbing partners’ partners) have died in the mountains. Danger is more than a word. Actions have consequences. No one is immortal. I would say that this is not a game, but that would not be true. Our game is a version of Russian Roulette that offers just enough control over the probabilities for us to ignore the click of the trigger. The main difference is that, unlike Russian Roulette, it is not only the suicidal who are rationally permitted to play; mountain sports offer far greater upside, and hold the potential to involve far less risk.

2. CLIMBING (AND BAILING) AS A GAME

When we venture into the mountains, we do so to play a particular kind of game. The game may lack an opponent and a paper rulebook, but these are not the fea-

tures we should care about. What matters is that we are engaging in a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. Drawing on Bernard Suits' definition of a game (from *Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*), we can identify four key concepts that are necessary for a game:

A game involves actions that conform to [1] **constitutive rules** (the rules that limit what behaviours count as playing the game, thereby creating obstacles for the player), performed in order to achieve a [2] **prelusory goal** (a specific achievable state of affairs that a player is trying to bring about, which is separate from the rules of the game). You can contrast the *prelusory* goal with the *lusory* goal, which hardly varies across games: it is the goal of winning the game. While you can technically achieve the *prelusory* goal without following the rules, you will not have achieved the *lusory* goal. For example, you can top out a boulder problem (the *prelusory* goal) using a ladder (which is forbidden by the constitutive rules), but you would not have "sent" the boulder. We are therefore restricted in the means we can deploy. We call the permitted methods of pursuing the *prelusory* goal the [3] **lusory means**.

We may pursue the *lusory* goal for yet further goals (e.g. to have fun, win money, achieve status, etc.). But none of these are essential to the nature of the game itself. In order to play, the player must adopt the [4] **lusory attitude**: a willingness to accept the obstacles created by the rules. Rejecting the *lusory* attitude might help you achieve the state of affairs that defines the *prelusory* goal, but it might come at the expense of the value of the game as a whole. Boulderling with ladders would make for a rather dull sport.

Different mountain sports involve various *prelusory* goals. Mountaineers take reaching the summit as their goal, and sport climbers aim to reach the top of a route and clip the chains. Not all means of achieving these goals are permitted. Landing on the summit with a helicopter or pulling on draws is against each sport's constitutive rules. Sometimes, there is ambiguity in the rules. This is where we find debates about "ethics" in climbing; often these debates are not about "ethics" *qua* moral philosophy, but are instead about aesthetic considerations, or arbitrary rules that serve to unify the sport into a well-defined practice that produces more value than if the rule (despite its arbitrariness) had not existed. Adopting the *lusory* attitude requires us to care about these rules, even if they are arbitrary or contrived. The sport climber who always pulls on draws will likely get less value out of their "sport" (if it even makes sense to call it that) than someone who constrains themselves, just as the basketball player who deploys a ladder likely will not get the full benefits of the game. Remember, the *prelusory* goal itself is somewhat silly. Who cares about a ball going into a basket, or standing at a local highpoint on the globe? These states of affairs themselves hold relatively little value. But adopting them as goals while voluntarily constraining oneself with constitutive rules seems to produce a tremendous amount of value.

Winning a game requires playing by the constitutive rules; failing to fol-

low the rules is to fail to play, and one must play in order to win. If I claimed to win a marathon by driving to the finish line, you would point out that crossing the finish line is not itself enough to have competed and won. This is similar to, but distinct from, losing the game. Losing the game entails failing to achieve the lusory goal. With some games, it may be possible to win the game without achieving some prelusory goal. For example, imagine an elimination round at some tournament where the higher-seeded competitor going into the round wins by default. Both competitors then fail to “score” (e.g. achieve the game’s prelusory goal) and so they tie. The higher-seeded competitor would then succeed in achieving the lusory goal (winning) without having succeeded in achieving the prelusory goal (“scoring”).

My attitude towards bailing involves reframing the decision to bail as part of a game. I call it *the bailing game*. While this game has its own constitutive rules, it also plays a role within the constitutive rules of the mountain sports I play. It is therefore a game within a game. Specifically, it places limits on our lusory means, thereby restricting when achieving the prelusory goal of mountain sports (e.g. standing on the summit) will “count” as playing the game. The rule is simple: if you lose the bailing game (or refuse to play), you cannot achieve the lusory goal of your mountain sport either. Put simply: **your send only counts if you also win the bailing game**.

What does it take to win the bailing game? You need to either [a] **achieve the prelusory goal of bailing**, or [b] **complete your mountain objective in the absence of circumstances that warrant a bail** (I will provide a rough analysis of what “warrant” means in the next section). Put differently, continuing when you should not means losing the game. Bailing *always* means winning.

Under this mentality, you cannot win *game 1* (your mountain sport) without being in a state of affairs where you have also won *game 2*. Getting to the summit by luck, in spite of risks that should have motivated you to bail, means losing *game 2* (the bailing game), and by extension *game 1*. This is because winning *game 2* is a prerequisite for winning *game 1*. Remember: the rules of *game 1* allow victory only when you complete your goal without ignoring circumstances that warrant a bail. Again, put simply: **your send doesn’t count if you should have bailed but failed to do so**. To the player of these two games, there is a preference hierarchy of outcomes:

- The best case involves winning both games and completing your goal.
- The next best case involves bailing when bailing is warranted, as you win *game 2* without foregoing an opportunity to win *game 1* (as persisting in dangerous conditions cannot possibly result in winning *game 1* per the rules of the game, even if technically achieve the prelusory goal).
- The third-best scenario involves bailing when it is not strictly required. Remember: bailing is always a win, so can and should feel proud of winning *game 2* whenever you bail.

- The fourth-best scenario involves winning neither game. You'll note that this scenario happens both when you bail too late (and thus have failed to bail when circumstances warranted it, despite eventually bailing) and also when you complete your goal when you ought to have bailed.
- The absolute worst-case scenario involves losing both games, such as when you die or are injured: not only do you lose this game, but you lose the rest of the value you might have found in life (dead people play no games).

Intuitively, this is the ranking that we ought to have in the mountains if we want to live a long life. We are allowed to feel proud and satisfied even when we do not “succeed” so long as we make good decisions, and we are not allowed to feel proud even when we “succeed” if we have made bad decisions.

The bailing game is easy to understand but difficult to internalize. Understanding that bailing is *always* winning is easy to say but hard to *feel*. Adopting this mentality is, in my view, critical to sustainable mountain sports. You need to care about the bailing game, and by extension, winning it. It must change the way you view your objective game. Merely providing a description of the bailing game is probably not enough to do the work of making you truly care about it. Instead, I hope to persuade you to care with a comparison to Russian Roulette.

When I ask people about why they take on risk in the mountains, they often justify undertaking lethal risk with a cost-benefit analysis. They tell me that the rewards outweigh the risks. But when I ask those same people if there is a sum of money that would motivate them to play a round of Russian Roulette, many say no. At first glance, this might seem somewhat strange. If all we cared about in the mountains was reducible to a question of risk and reward, then there is no category-difference between stepping onto a possible avalanche slope and pulling the trigger in Russian Roulette. The risks might be different (a fraction of a percent versus 1-in-6 odds of death) and the payoffs might differ (money versus bliss), but the core of the gamble is the same. Your life is staked against reward.

The problem with Russian Roulette is that the game is played by wholly accepting risk; your life is staked on fixed odds. Mountain sports, by necessity, involve accepting some degree of risk. You can never reduce your odds of death or injury to zero. But to play responsibly means being *responsive* to the risk and therefore to fight against it. While this does not require us to give up mountain sports entirely, it does require us to integrate into the process a way of raging against the danger: something fundamental to the game that asks us to do more than tacitly accept the danger. Put differently, it is not necessary to flee risk. But it is necessary to take up the fight against it as a core objective. The bailing game integrates the fight against risk into the fundamental rules of the game at the same time that it authorizes a degree of risk. In so doing, it balances the necessity of experiencing risk with an active engagement in risk mitigation. The exercise of agency involved

in the bailing game is what can set mountain sports apart from Russian Roulette.

3. WHEN SHOULD I BAIL?

The core of the bailing game is bailing whenever circumstances warrant it. This is, unfortunately, the conceptual crux of the issue. What warrants a bail?

The problem with trying to create a “rulebook for bailing” is that there are nearly infinitely many factors that together constitute your circumstances in the mountains. Obvious variables include weather, route conditions, fatigue, the difficulty of the terrain ahead, supplies (e.g. food and water), and your proximity to rescue. Less obvious ones include your knowledge of the route, the likelihood that you are overestimating your own abilities, the present difficulty of retreat relative to the future difficulty of retreat, and the current and likely future social dynamics between you and your partner. We can also analyze these variables at different levels of abstraction. Weather is made of many sub-variables, like sunlight, cloud cover, ambient air temperatures, changes in temperature over a period of time, precipitation, wind, and so on. Some will be relevant in certain circumstances, and others will not.

To make matters worse, these variables interact in ways that produce emergent effects; you cannot simply tally the number of “bad” variables and bail when a threshold is met. Fatigue, loose rock, and a large volume of terrain is a recipe for taking a fall – the three together are much worse than the sum of their individual parts. These interactions are complicated and idiosyncratic: you cannot understand the effects of one variable without an eye to many of the others. Evaluating when to bail is an art and not a science.

The first step towards mastering the “art of bailing” is mastering the art of evaluating risk factors and understanding the circumstances you find yourself in. But this is not enough. Once you understand the nature of the risk you find yourself in, you need to understand how it measures up against your personal risk tolerance. Unfortunately, risk tolerance is poorly understood in the mountain sports community.

One misunderstanding I often hear is that risk tolerance is “subjective” and “up to the individual to determine.” In one sense, this is true – individuals are rationally permitted different levels of risk tolerance (e.g. parents ought to tolerate less risk, given their moral obligations to their children) so in a way it is “subjective” in the sense that it varies depending on the subject.

The individual is also best situated to evaluate the facts that determine what their risk tolerance ought to be. I am not privy to enough details in your life to make the evaluation for you, so as a practical matter each person must determine it for themselves. But it does not follow that every person’s risk tolerance (*qua* psychological state) is appropriate; if a new parent decided that free soloing a 5.14 was an acceptable risk, you could rightly declare them as misguided.

Risk tolerance is instead a dynamic evaluation of costs and benefits that takes into account uncertainty. You are not allowed to turn a blind eye to risks; when you suspect that a risk might exist yet decline to learn more, you are eschewing a sort of responsibility. The proper level of risk that you might tolerate is determined with reference to the costs and benefits of the circumstances, qualified by your responsibility to learn more and your best evaluation of the factors that introduce uncertainty into your evaluation of both upside and downside risk. Again, the variables here are numerous. Figuring out the appropriate level of risk for any given objective at any particular moment in your life is an art and not a science.

At this point, I could attempt to provide a conceptual model of what warrants a bail that merges an analysis of risk with an analysis of rational risk tolerance. This probably will not be practically useful. I could also try to give “directional” advice (e.g. “bail more!”). This is the conservative thing to do. Bailing more means more safety, right? But that would undermine the point of this article, which is that we *can* responsibly engage in risk-taking behaviour. We all accept risk, and for many, growing in mountain sports involves actively breaking free from an overly risk-averse attitude and mastering their fears.

At this point, it is tempting to either despair or dismiss my entire framework. If we cannot write a rulebook for bailing, and I cannot didactically explain when to bail, then is the bailing game nothing more than “vibes”? In other words, if no independent referee can ever tell you whether you won or lost the bailing game, what is the point of playing?

That something is difficult to measure or articulate, or that a threshold appears fuzzy, does not mean that it isn’t meaningful, or that we should not try to evaluate it. It is difficult to quantify the impact of how choosing to spend a weekend skiing with friends will help or hurt your future happiness (it might make you happy and relaxed, or it might make you fall behind catastrophically in your studies). That does not mean that we cannot make the choice, or give up trying to determine if it is a good idea. That it is hard to know also does not entail that there is no right answer. That humans are fallible is no reason to give up trying: just as people are better and worse at managing their time (despite no one being perfect), people can be better or worse at tailoring their risk assessments to their personal risk tolerances.

The way to improve—now that you have a conceptual framework for understanding what it is that you’re trying to improve—is the same as for any other “fuzzy” or abstract skill. Humans often learn best through stories and experiences, so expose yourself to as much discussion of risk and risk tolerance as you possibly can. While there are many ways to do this, I would suggest pursuing three in particular: mentorship, mileage (in the mountains), and media.

[1] Mentorship. By going into the mountains with people more experienced than

you, you can pick up a great deal of know-how concerning hazards and decision-making. The art of noticing salient variables that increase risk and discussing how they interact to create your idiosyncratic circumstances for that day is easily developed through this kind of collaboration. Be warned, though: competence and aligned risk tolerance are not the same thing. Someone more experienced than you may have a higher or lower risk tolerance; do not assume that their risk tolerance is the “appropriate” one, and that you need to conform to their level of comfort.

If you do not have the opportunity to make it into the mountains with more experienced people regularly, talking to them outside of mountain contexts can help as well. Share your own stories, and listen to theirs. Deliberately move the conversation in the direction of risk assessment: pick their brains, and invite them to comment on your thought processes from past trips. There is an element of fear that often pops up here – we do not like to be judged for being imperfect, or for making bad decisions, and so many people tend to struggle to be open about their decision-making. Overcoming this fear of judgment is critically important. Internalize the notion that people respect and respond to critical thinkers who show honest interest in self-improvement and that this is often more than enough to offset judgment about past bad decisions. The greatest negative judgment is often towards those who persistently make the same mistakes, endangering themselves and others without trying to improve.

[2] Mileage. Put yourself onto objectives where there is a chance you might bail. Then, be conservative and trigger-happy on the bail decision. You will not improve your ability to evaluate risk if you never challenge yourself with some degree of risk. Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from poor judgment. The trick is making sure that you err on the side of caution, and try to avoid sticking your neck into the proverbial guillotine by tackling a challenge with too many unknown-unknowns. Try to run your more ambitious plans by other people before you go to make sure you’re fully informed of the risks you might face. Some people don’t like to do this because they feel like they’re “spraying” about objectives they have yet to complete. I think that attitude is a bit silly; I find that discussing my future objectives helps me acquire beta and advice that I otherwise never would have found on my own.

[3] Media. Read articles & trip reports (in the VOCJ, CAJ, AAJ, online blogs, etc), watch YouTube videos or movies, and listen to podcasts. Hearing from many perspectives, especially those outside your immediate mountain subculture, will help you pick up on common themes and failure modes in risk assessment.

4. BAILING SKILLS

Climbers often spend too much time focusing on learning the skills to ascend a wall, but rarely spend enough time learning to descend. There is a lot to learn; you can fill books with the techniques involved in bailing (I highly recommend Andy Kirkpatrick's book *Down*). But while a large number of the key skills involve rope-work/gear, many of the most crucial skills are psychological: lowering the emotional barriers that stop you from bailing are just as important as understanding how to safely rig an bail anchor. To drive home the importance of getting proficient at both "soft" and "hard" bailing skills, this section will highlight a few pieces of advice that emerge out of my own experiences with bailing.

THE SHARKFIN | SOUTH RIDGE [5.8X*]

*(*I cannot find any beta on this route, nor did I personally complete it. This grade is my best guess from a visual assessment.)*



G2 (Glacier School) usually involves one day of instruction and one day of pursuing a glaciated objective. In September of 2023, we camped out at Brohm Ridge, so I elected to pursue the Sharkfin as our objective. Only one student (Sebastian Sotomayor) was keen to join me, so we set off on the second day as a lone pair. We reached the base of the ridge without incident but quickly discovered why there were no trip reports on the feature. The volcanic rock is genuinely terrible; the Sharkfin is for all purposes a large cairn composed of detached blocks delicately balanced atop one another. I soloed up one pitch with the rope, slung an assortment of larger blocks, and belayed my student up the pitch. The second pitch looked to be a 5.8 boulder problem on a cliff face ever so slightly overhanging the west side of the ridge. I decided that this was a wildly inappropriate objective for G2, so we made the decision to bail. I offered a belay to Sebastian, then disassembled the anchor and down-soloed the route.

Key lesson: Downclimbing is a key skill; you will not always be able to

rappel off a reliable anchor, especially if you need to bail mid-pitch. Practice down-climbing in the gym. This will give you a better understanding of your own limits, and build the skills needed to downclimb harder grades safely. As a general rule, whenever I am on an “adventure climb” (e.g. a route with tricky route-finding or anchors of unknown quality), I will never climb a pitch that I cannot also downclimb.

PAC MAN COULOIR / GRAND DADDY COULOIR



On December 29th, Evan Wong and I attempted a double-header couloir day up the Icefields Parkway in Alberta. We had been staying out of the Rampart Creek Hostel, and wanted to ski a few classic lines on our way back to Canmore at the end of our trip. The obvious two were *Pac Man Couloir* off Bow Summit, and the *Grand Daddy Couloir* on Bow Peak. Conditions looked safe enough (moderate avalanche risk in the alpine, with no recent snow). Unfortunately, we found wind slab at the base of the couloir. We tried to evaluate if it was limited to an isolated terrain feature, but could not find any safe way around the touchy sections of the snowpack. The decision was obvious: bail.

Key Lesson: *Set backup plans. Bailing is more tolerable when you can do so at a lower opportunity cost.*



After a quick drive to Mosquito Creek Hostel, we began skiing again. Grand Daddy went smoothly in comparison, though the snowpack was radically different than we had expected. There had been reports of a size 3 avalanche ripping through the couloir merely days prior. There was no evidence of such a slide; there was minimal debris covering the fan at the base, and the snowpack revealed layers that I would have expected to be “cleared out” by a slide of that size. This put us on edge. Whenever your field observations radically differ from your predictions (informed by the avalanche forecast, recent conditions reports etc.), red flags should be going off. This is true even if conditions are better than predicted because it means that you were missing something going into the trip. If you do not know what you are missing, there may be other unknown hazards that have yet to reveal themselves.

***Key Lesson:** Keep the conversation about risk going even when things are looking good. Always compare your mental model of relevant risks to observed conditions. Do not grow complacent.*

CIRRUS MOUNTAIN | POLAR CIRCUS [WIS]

On January 3rd, 2025, my friend Anton Korsun was leading the first pitch of the upper section of Polar Circus. Despite temperatures below -15°C , liquid water flowed over the surface of the ice, freezing over everything it touched. We needed to bail. He made a V-Thread in the ice, but elected to leave tat (spare 6 mm cord brought specifically for this purpose) instead of threading the rope. If you put the



rope through a V-Thread while liquid water flows on the route, it will permanently and irrecoverably freeze into the ice (at least until warmer weather thaws the route). His party had made this mistake while descending off of Les Misérables [WI6+] a few weeks prior, and he was not about to make the same mistake again.

***Key lesson:** Buy and bring tat on every climb where there's a chance you need to bail without bolt anchors. I strongly recommend 6 mm sterling cord for summer climbing: it is lighter, stronger, and more supple than any other brand as of February 2025. 7 mm is overkill (in my view) but technically makes for stronger V-Threads given the extra surface area, so it may be worthwhile in winter. Do your research and make decisions based on your personal risk tolerance. I tend to buy cord in bulk when I find it on sale, and consider it a consumable expense like gas; I never feel guilty about leaving it behind. I try to clean up old tat whenever I can to make my environmental impact neutral.*

Once he rejoined me at the belay, we set off down the route. We decided to rappel the Pencil instead of walking around as we had when we climbed Polar Circus the previous year. This involved rappelling a short step of WI3, then rappelling from a tree down a long free-hanging rappel next to an anchor at the base of the pillar. Unfortunately, when Anton went to pull the ropes, they became irredeemably stuck. The ropes had twisted around each other; pulling one end of the rope only “cinched” the rope over the other strand, meaning the harder you pulled, the more resistance was offered.

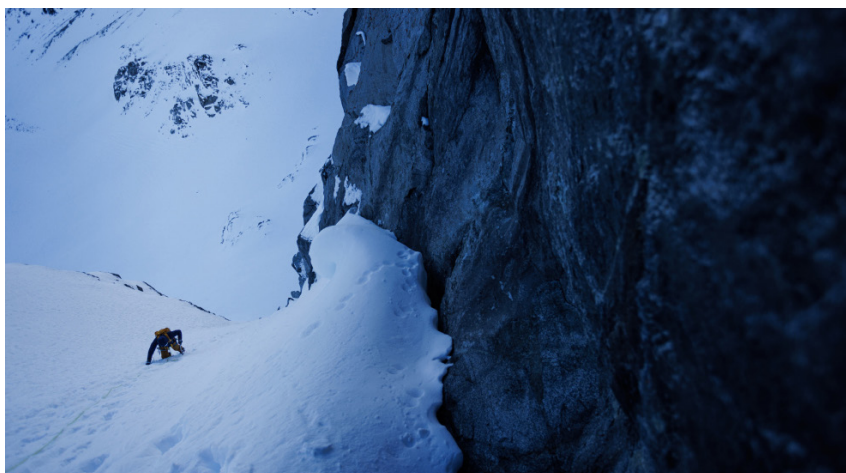
***Key lesson:** ensure that the ropes are “seated” parallel to one another against the rock as you rappel and that they do not twist over one another. It is really easy to let them get twisted as you take off your belay device; it is this moment in particular where you must exercise caution.*

Luckily, the Pencil could be bypassed to the right, and we did not need to solo a WI6 pillar to retrieve our ropes. After attaching the rope to the lower anchor, we walked up and around to where we had started rappelling. Anton down-soloed the WI3 step, then released the rope from the anchor and soloed back up the step. To protect the step without a rope, we chained together most of our quickdraws and spare tat; this way, he could clip his personal anchor into various points of this impromptu-mega-daisy-chain as he descended/ascended. Was it sketchy? Yes. Did it work? Better than free soloing without protection.

***Key lesson:** You can use your gear in “off-label” ways. Think about how you can use gear in multiple ways: for example, Dyneema slings can be used as a prusik in a pinch. If you do not think about how to use your gear in strange ways outside of the mountains, it can be very difficult to improvise solutions for the first time when you are under pressure in an emergency situation.*

This was our last hiccup; the rest of the descent went smoothly. Before long, we were back relaxing in a hot tub in Canmore.

HUSUME BUTTRESS | TURF'S UP [WI3+ M5*] / 29 FOREVER [WI3 M4*]
**(don't quote these grades; I remain uncertain of their accuracy.)*



On January 25th, 2025, I had planned to attempt a route on Husume Buttress (Blackcomb) with Julian Larsen and Evan Wong. Our beta consisted of a single vague blog post and a 1996 CAJ article. Unfortunately, snow and ice conditions near Whistler were more grim than we had realized. After climbing a pitch of M3, we arrived at the actual start of the route; there was so little snow that the walk-up to the base of the climb was now a full pitch on its own.

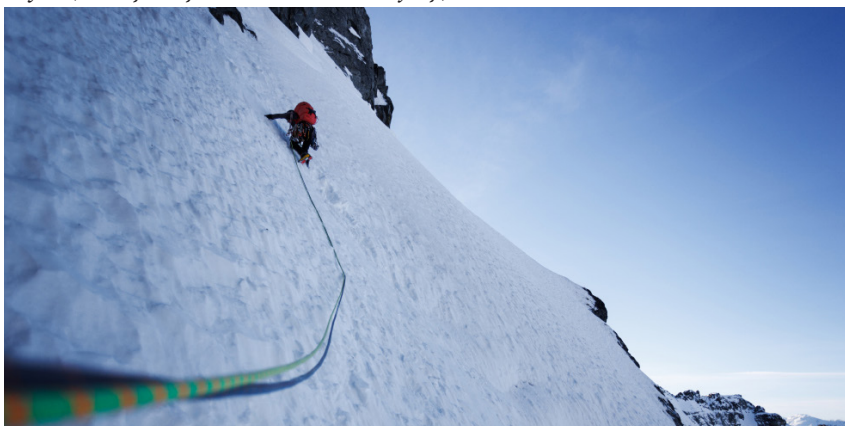
We wanted to succeed on at least *something* (as we had been shut down on the North Face of Sky Pilot the previous weekend), so the plan was to bail if things looked too grim, then boot up the Husume Couloir and climb the connecting ridge to the top of Spearhead Peak. Unfortunately, our stoke for genuine mixed climbing was a bit too high. The normal route did not look like it was in, so I went questing up an alternative gulley further out to the right that I suspected might link back into the route higher up. It did not. After a bouldery section of M5, I had to climb 10 metres of thin, unprotectable 80° névé up a corner to reach a horn that I could sling. The climbing was shockingly delicate; your feet needed to be placed perfectly to not blow, and the tools were more for balance than anything. After a nauseatingly long and cerebral lead, I finally reached the horn and placed a hex in a crack beside it.

What followed was a confused and uncertain conversation about whether or not we should bail. It was unclear if we could possibly go fast enough to succeed on our backup objective should we bail now. If we wanted to persist on climbing up the buttress, I could either push as far as possible up the corner I was currently in, or I could leave the corner and search for yet another alternative route up a snow ramp to the right. After much back-and-forth, we settled on the last option. I would

bail off the corner, then try leading out to the right.

There was already bail tat on the horn, but it was placed awkwardly over the top of the horn. A more secure way of placing the tat would have been to weave it beneath a constriction on its back side, such that the tat could not possibly fall off. I replaced the tat with some of my own and descended.

Key Lesson: *Don't always trust existing tat. It might be placed sub-optimally or it may be damaged (by the sun or some kind of abrasion). I know someone who relied on pre-placed tat only to have it explode during their rappel, causing them to fall (luckily, they survived without injury).*



Unfortunately, my subsequent lead revealed nothing easier. Julian and Evan followed the pitch before we decided to call off the search for a viable line and descend. This involved downclimbing steep snow to another anchor (our upper anchor used three cams in a perfect crack, and we were not about to leave those behind). We used the lower anchor to do one rappel back to our skis. The last remnants of sunset vanished as we skied back to the car, and we left feeling somewhat disappointed that we had failed to bail early enough to succeed on our secondary objective.

Key Lesson: *When you set backup plans, watch the clock and have cutoff times in mind going into your objective.*

5. CONCLUSION

Not every sub-topic in climbing needs to be discussed in detail. Many thousands of hours have been spent philosophizing about various non-issues in climbing; many people would benefit from thinking less and climbing more. Bailing is not one of those non-issues. It is important to think about the attitudes and skills involved in bail decisions. You need to foster a healthy attitude towards bailing and choose partners who both know when to bail and who are willing to operate at your desired level of risk tolerance. In short, you must learn to love the art of bailing or choose to pursue safer hobbies.

26 TIPS FOR LEADING SUCCESSFUL VOC TRIPS

DUNCAN MACINTYRE

A WHILE AGO, I started thinking about what makes for good trip leading. I finally got around to writing everything down (now you know what I do when I'm kept awake by caffeine late at night).

I'm sure some of this may be controversial. You may well disagree with my general approach, and you may be right. I know some of the best trips I've been on did not follow these ideas. These suggestions are not necessary for a successful trip. However, I wonder if they might at least be helpful for someone who is new to running trips and wants things to go smoothly.

So what do you think? Do you agree or disagree? Am I thinking about leading trips entirely the wrong way? Are there things I missed? If so, please email my agent, Mx. Manners...

BEFORE THE PRE-TRIP MEETING

1. Post on the trip agenda a month in advance

The further ahead you post, the more participants you'll get. You can certainly post a trip only a week in advance, but fewer people will sign up.

2. Give as much detail as possible on the trip agenda page.

You want as much detail as possible for two reasons. First, the more info you give participants, the better they will be able to grasp whether the trip is a good fit for them. If the trip is not a good fit, it's best if they figure that out now. Second, writing out the details makes your life easier. A detailed trip agenda page doubles as an outline for the pre-trip meeting. You're going to have to prepare for the pre-trip meeting anyway. You might as well just put in the work now.

A good trip agenda page will probably include:

- Short introduction—why should you go on this trip?
- Skills and experience required.
- Pre-trip meeting—where and when.
- A map with the intended route (links to AllTrails, CalTopo etc. work great).
- An itinerary that says where and when you will go (e.g. meet at the Pemberton McDonald's at 8 o'clock).
- Expected driving time.

- A link to a weather forecast.
- A list of the gear everyone should bring, with a link to the gear hours page.
- Links to trip reports and beta, if there are any.
- A reminder that you aren't a guide and that participants are responsible for their own safety.

3. Set clear required skills and don't make exceptions.

Decide what skills people need. Put it on the trip agenda page. Stick to it. You don't want woefully unprepared people who will cause problems on your trip. Unless that's the kind of trip you're going for.

4. Schedule a pre-trip meeting on a Tuesday or Wednesday before the trip.

Assuming your trip is on a weekend, it works well to hold your pre-trip meeting the Tuesday or Wednesday beforehand. This way, people will have time to rent gear after the meeting. You don't want to have the meeting too soon though, because then you'll have people contacting you wanting to join despite having missed the meeting.

5. Send an email reminder about the pre-trip meeting the day before it happens.

Otherwise, no one will remember. I speak from experience...

AT THE PRE-TRIP MEETING

6. Determine the participants at the beginning of the meeting.

This way, people who didn't make the trip don't waste their time.

7. Use your trip agenda page as a meeting outline.

Now your prior work pays off! Talk through everything on the trip agenda page. Of course, you may want to talk about other things too. What you don't want to do is just talk about random trip-related stuff without a plan, because you'll inevitably forget something important.

8. Assume people know nothing.

Unless you've verbally checked with people that they have specific skills, don't assume that people have any outdoors knowledge at all. For example, if you're running a beginner-friendly trip to Phelix Hut, tell people that they should use a hiking backpack, not a duffel bag, and that there aren't any showers or cooks at the hut. These misunderstandings have happened before. Don't let them happen on your trip.

9. Tell everyone when the gear hours are.

That way they're more likely to actually go and not ask to borrow your gear because

they missed all of the gear hours.

10. Plan who will bring safety gear and safety skills.

If you have a first-aid issue on your trip, you will be glad if you already know who has first-aid training.

11. Be safe but minimize extra gear. Light is fast and fast is safe.

Plan to bring what you need to be safe. Don't plan to bring lots of heavy, unnecessary stuff "for safety". You'll just move slowly and hold everyone up and get caught out in the dark and create safety problems. Again, I speak from experience.

12. Determine emergency contacts.

There are two strategies. As the trip leader, choose one, then discuss.

- Option 1: Everyone has their own private emergency contact who is told to call the police if they don't come back. Everyone gives their emergency contact a trip plan—maybe that nice trip agenda page that you made before?
- Option 2: You have a single emergency contact for the group who will call the police if you don't come back. That person has everyone's name and phone number, as well as the trip plan.

13. Tutor everyone on how to get the map for the trip.

If you tell everyone, "Yeah, here's a GPX file, put it in your favourite mapping app before the trip," only half the participants will actually do this. The rest will forget or not be able to figure out how. You need to walk everyone through the process. If anyone doesn't have a mapping app yet, help them download your favourite mapping app and get the map set up for the trip.

14. Discuss contingency plans.

Discuss what you will do if things go wrong. For example, if the weather forecast turns bad, is there somewhere else we could go instead? If someone gets injured, is there a shorter option we could use to get out of the backcountry?

AFTER THE PRE-TRIP MEETING

15. Email everyone a summary of the meeting. (We all forget things.)

16. Expect people to bail.

Some people bail because they decide your trip is too scary. This can be a good thing. If someone is not suited to a trip, it may be better if they bail than if they come and potentially cause problems. Ideally, you'd like them to bail sooner rather than later, which is why you give lots of details on the trip agenda and at the pre-trip meeting.

Other people will bail because they get sick, have to study for a midterm, or found a trip that's more fun than yours. That's OK. It always happens. But definitely mark them as bailing on the signup page so there's no confusion about who is actually coming on the trip.

17. Manually assign people to cars in a spreadsheet.

Sometimes, trip leaders ask participants to sign themselves up for a car group in a spreadsheet. In my experience, this usually leads to inefficiencies, with people who live close together going into different cars.

It's better if you ask participants to put their name, phone number, and address in the spreadsheet. Afterwards, you can sort everyone into efficient car groups.

18. Assume that people will not bring essential items; bring extra.

People forget headlamps. That's why I usually bring three. If you bring extra ski straps, you will soon become everyone's best friend.

ON THE TRIP

19. Know how many people there are.

Count everyone at the start so you know whether you've lost someone.

20. Stick together in a large group with a sweeper, or break into smaller self-sufficient teams.

On some trips, where route-finding is simple, it makes sense to allow people to spread out, with an experienced person at the front and an experienced person at the back. Then everyone can go at their own pace. The experienced person at the back is called the "sweeper". Their job is to help out anyone with problems and generally maintain good morale among the slowest people. It's useful for the sweeper to communicate with the person at the front by radio. As the trip leader, you can rent radios during gear hours.

Another option is to break into smaller teams. Three to five people is a good number for communication and decision-making. Make sure each team has appropriate gear and skills to be self-sufficient. You should usually avoid teams of more than six people. With larger groups, it's tricky to consult everyone when making decisions, and people tend to wander off.

There are sometimes dangers that warrant sticking together. Knowledgeable Sources report that in Grizzly Country the Prudent Hiker keeps to groups of Six or More.

21. Take food breaks.

During a long day, it can be tempting to keep pushing into the night without stop-

ping for dinner. After all, wouldn't it be nice to eat dinner at the campsite rather than in the middle of the trail somewhere? Unless you have only very easy terrain, however, it's usually worth it to stop and cook food at the usual dinner time. After eating warm food, you will feel much happier, travel much faster, and be much less likely to make stupid mistakes. The same logic applies to snack and water breaks. This is not just a matter of comfort, but of safety.

It is especially important to remind beginners to eat food and stop for dinner. Beginners will sometimes forget to assess whether they should eat because they're just kind of going along with things.

22. Check in regularly.

A simple "How's it going?" shows people you care. It is essential to create an atmosphere where participants feel like they can discuss how they are feeling. The last thing you want is participants afraid to speak up.

23. People come before the objective.

Sometimes you have slow people, broken gear, bad conditions, etc. that prevent you from completing an objective. That's OK. Make the best of it and don't let any disappointment show. Never allow your desire to complete an objective trick you into making a decision that compromises safety.

If your goal is to bag a certain peak or ski a certain line, you should set a high bar for requisite skills, experience, and fitness, and communicate this as frequently as possible (on the trip agenda, in a reminder email, at the pre-trip meeting etc.). That way you're less likely to have people slowing you down. But even then, people come first.

24. Crystallized ginger and electrolyte mix are your friends.

Crystallized ginger calms an upset stomach and gives salt and sugar. Electrolyte mix is good after exertion and after vomiting. Both are lightweight.

25. Have fun.

Remember, you're doing this because you enjoy it. Don't worry about having a perfect trip. Everyone on your trip will be grateful for what you're doing, so get out there, don't worry too much, and have fun!

AFTER THE TRIP

26. Publish a trip report.

Write it yourself, or find someone else to write it. Just get a #!& trip report on the VOC website. You will get to immortalize that awesome thing that happened—and pass on beta to future trip leaders.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF THE VOC: EXPLAINING THE WHY AND IMAGINING THE HOW OF DECOLONIZED OUTDOOR RECREATION

NOAH WYSE

OUR PRESENT IS A SPACE of incredible social change: the abundance of conversations regarding social topics and our generation's willingness to accept them is deeply inspiring, despite the ever present struggle and opposition. My intention in writing this is to start a conversation many of us may already be having with ourselves or small circles. To question the culture of how we recreate outdoors, to appreciate our space and consider how we can make it better, for ourselves and those to come. In addressing these topics, I hold discussion with my own experience, what time on the land means to me as an Indigenous person, the perspective that it offers, and the power of that perspective in directing the potential of this club. As a largely settler community we have a responsibility to examine our presence, and a moral responsibility to use what privileges we have to represent goodness. The VOC exists to empower people's adventures, and as such, we have the duty to do so in an accessible and equitable manner. This doesn't just mean access to gear but access to an inclusive community where it is safe to learn as a beginner or expert. I believe through decolonizing, or perhaps rounding out the values of recreation in this club, we do good work in fostering an environment that is more inclusive to anyone, including and beyond our white male majority. Beyond this perhaps selfish (to the club) regard of our own inclusivity, by interrogating our settler presence and carrying out action accordingly, we use our privilege as an organization to stand for something good and actively take part in creating a better future. By forming connections with the Indigenous Nations upon whose lands we recreate, we are engaging thoughtfully with our presence, working to reconcile past wrongs, and forging a relationship upon which to build a better future.

I will begin with introducing myself, and then acquainting you with the club and the foundations of outdoor recreation in North America. We will examine the impacts of outdoor culture as it is now. We will engage with Indigenous land use ethics, and where settler and Indigenous ethics come into contact and conflict. We will then imagine a future under the mutual benefit outdoor recreation provides both settler and contemporary Indigenous communities, and the power the

VOC holds in being a site of this imagination. I will conclude with a discussion of steps forward. In writing this I don't seek to empower generalizations or speak for diverse Indigenous communities, rather share my views and observations, and paint a picture with hopes it motivates the VOC as an organization to do more for these relationships: it is our responsibility. The purpose is not to say that what we are doing or what we are is bad, but to engage in imagining a better future. How things are is not how they have to be. I implore you all to read with an open heart and open mind, and allow that openness to permeate our community.

T'oo yaxs'y 'nisim.

INTRODUCTIONS

These topics of contact and conflict between settler and Indigenous rights, culture, and identity are deeply intertwined with my own story. I am Gitksan, Wilp Giskhaast (Fireweed Clan). My family comes from Bear Lake, and in recent generations has called Hazelton home; we have lived in forests and mountains of this land long before it was called BC. I am also white, coming from a long line of European settlers who were at the forefront of westward expansion leading lives very close to the land on a colonial-mythologized frontier. I am deeply privileged to hold this diverse identity, to live and grow within the richness and wisdom of Indigenous Culture, and experience the privilege I gain from my whiteness and suburban upbringing. These privileges (as well as the hard work of myself and my family) have exposed me to a world where I can fulfil any role I desire. My whiteness allows me to see myself in our majority of white male politicians, adventurers, learners and leaders and, though I do not experience them in their fullest form, my culture bears me witness to these inequalities in a deeply visceral way. As such, I walk the line between the two worlds, with space in both and neither.

It is in this position of perceived isolation that I have found a connection to the land to be my medicine. I grew up in the Fraser Valley, far from my home community, but still close with the local Stó:lo and Indigenous Community. I have sat in longhouses, witnessed ceremonies, danced in powwows, harvested cedar, within each I have felt an outsider, my perceived isolation, but deeper still my heart is made full and with each witnessing I weep. In my culture I have never been able to sing or drum, nor been a particularly skilled dancer or artist. I have found my expression of and connection to culture amongst the trees, navigating the chaos of my mind and spirit with lessons learned on meandering trails and whispering twilight wind. I have found peace amongst the hills and rocks and trees and ferns that embrace me as kin, that I embrace as kin. Through recreating upon the land I have grown from a very broken child to a man that can do his own maintenance.

My identity beyond my Adaawx – my family's story and how I fit into it – has me enamoured with the roles of partner, friend, and family member; dirtbag skier, climber, and aspiring alpinist; Head Quartermaster and history major. I believe in the responsibility to act as a learner and leader within each of these roles.

In knowing me, I ask that you trust my experience and knowledge, to approach my words with openness. In discussion, in disagreement, I will offer you the same.

COLONIAL HISTORY BUILDING THE NOW

I was recently enjoying the trees that border the construction at the Beaty Museum and came across a sign describing the founding and history of UBC, and next to the coat of arms, was a photo from 1920 of a Varsity Outdoor Club trip to Grouse. It gave me pause. In her book *Unsettling the University*, Sharon Stein discusses the colonial origins, land theft, and imagining that UBC is financially and literally built upon. To see our club symbolically intertwined within this history was a reminder of blinders we allow ourselves in critically examining our presence.

The Varsity Outdoor Club was formed in 1917 as the Mountaineering Club. Our roots, representing a spirit of ingenuity and adventure, are equally intertwined, however, with colonial sexism and Christian patriarchal control (VOC History, ubc-voc.com). Moreover, our foundations as a club are deeply dependent upon stolen land and harmful myths of wilderness intertwined with colonial white supremacy. This is not to argue that our club, or university even, is a racist colonial institution, but to garner a complete and critical understanding of our past so we may direct our future accordingly. We unquestionably descend from structures that perpetuate white patriarchal dominance, and this history permeates our present, even when it is more subversive. The history and ethos of outdoor recreation in North America, which is to say the history of the VOC, is defined by the philosophy of Wilderness, an untamed and untouched frontier, like first tracks on a perfect pow day. This is a myth built upon the intertwined ideals of *terra nullius*, the doctrine of discovery, and John Locke's concept of property, all of which were weaponized against the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas and used to justify the ongoing theft of land. The Doctrine of Discovery is built upon 15th century papal bulls, decrees made by the Pope, in regards to the treatment of newly "discovered" (by Europeans) lands and peoples. It positions the spread of Christianity and the gain of profit as the primary goal of European exploration. *Terra nullius* is the concept of "empty land"; it is defined by perceived use, continuing that ideal of profit. The philosopher John Locke furthered this concept by allowing title of property to be defined by development. Both of these are built upon a capitalistic Eurocentric vision and understanding of use and development that perceived Indigenous use of the land as sub-optimal and therefore less deserving than settler use. This is wrong. Simply put, Indigenous peoples were able to establish complex, advanced, and thriving civilizations, (largely) without the ecological devastation that marks European urbanization, development, and resource extraction. *Terra nullius* created the romantic myth of the frontier, of wilderness untouched by civilization to be tamed by intrepid explorers. This concept justified westward expansion through violent land grabs and genocides. The image of wilderness would be made true through assimilation and extermination of people who populated the land. This

is the notion that created the national parks system as we know it, and established “green colonialism,” which prioritizes western concepts of conservation over Indigenous ways of life – which centre conservation and care for the land. This is all to say, the concept of wilderness and nature we hold is built upon colonial erasure and violence, and the separation of people from land.

In the context of the VOC, this has presented the Coastal Mountains as our canvas upon which to draw new lines, to construct our image of adventure within wilderness. Our history of hut building embodies this notion of the frontier by capitalizing on “empty land” to create a fortress of urban comfort. This comes from generations of urbanization and separation of people from land, which has further fostered an ethic of antagonism when looking to the mountains, leading to a mindset of conquering, an objectification of the land, and a glorification of suffering. Not to say these mindsets exist as purely bad, but through choice language we can direct these attitudes to conquering ourselves rather than the land. In the VOC (as well as mountaineering culture as a whole) we hold that idea of a “sufferfest” and “type 2 fun” as quite sacred, which is a brilliant statement of our desire to do hard work, but also deprioritizes joy and has harmful implications on inclusivity. In parallel, the concept of conquering prioritizes a goal over the experience in addition to objectifying and antagonizing the landscapes we so appreciate. This all carries a theme of entitlement and self importance when we play upon the land. Moreover, this sense of entitlement over humility can cause summit tunnel vision that persists in the face of risk and danger, impacting critical decision making.

The ethic of Leave-No-Trace summarizes the entitlement to and objectification of the land: it must be understood that we are always leaving a trace, that we cannot excuse the damage we cause when using a trail through the woods or skiing down we are always leaving a trace of our presence. Rather than this being something to be hidden behind a false ethic, allow it to be a moment of understanding between self and land. Through being on the land you are leaving your mark and taking an experience and energy with you: now consider how you can return that gift.

I’d again like to emphasize that this is not to say the VOC exists solely as a colonial structure extracting from land that we have no right to: we are brilliant community, full of open, kind, and ultimately good people. In being that, we have a responsibility to share our kindness, community, and privilege that is time in nature. This aligns with the goals of the VOC, to empower everyone’s adventures and make the outdoors accessible. In expressing gratitude to the land and experiences gained upon it, we make a promise to give back. Through reciprocity we are looked after; in reciprocity we pay that forward.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONS WITH THE LAND AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

Indigenous ways of being centre a holistic understanding of life, that everything is interconnected. As such, Indigenous religion, science, economics, pol-

itics, and culture are all intermixed, and moreover Humans, Animals, Plants, Rivers, and Land are all understood as equal Peoples deserving of respect. This speaks to the connection between Humans and Nature, which is not fostered in urban society: a connection of equality, mutual dependence, and kinship, of reciprocity. By treating the land as equal we step softly and humbly; we engage with the land as it permits. This ethic of equality is evident throughout culture: communities are structured to highlight each individual's gifts as contribution to the group, story gives deep reason and appreciation to the gifts of nature, and language reinforces the agency and personhood of the natural world through highlighting equal “animacy” within all living things. Now consider how these deep cultural understandings impact how someone moves through terrain; consider the intimacy, the sense of belonging. It is a relationship I struggle to articulate, something best felt, rather than rationalized. Within the poetry of Chief Dan George I have found many of these truths put beautifully. The well known novel by Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, also holds these relationships and ways of being and knowing in conversation with western society; it is a brilliant read, and an incredible listen as an audiobook. I implore you to seek out these knowledges and allow them to converse with how you perceive the world.

CONFLICT AND CONTACT BETWEEN THOSE IDEOLOGIES

The close relationship between people and land leads to outdoor recreation being a unique concept within Indigenous cultures and communities. Much of life revolves around being on the land so the specification of outdoor recreation at minimum is unnecessary and at worst is a colonial intervention. Moreover, the colonial history, as described before, that permeates the culture of outdoor recreation prevents it from being a safe or accessible space for Indigenous Peoples today. As we take steps towards reconciliation and recognize the violence of stolen land, Indigenous peoples reconnect, or openly connect with sacred sites: thus, outdoor recreationists and Indigenous Peoples meet. These contemporary contacts, while not always negative, are flashpoints within both cultures, movements that define the perception and relationship going forward. We as a settler colonial body of outdoor recreationists must be aware and responsible in how we navigate these contacts so we can heal a deeply harmed history. The following examples, centering climbing, showcase conflict, consequences, and allyship. In reading, consider who's entitled to the land, where power lies and is leveraged, and what the wider impacts are.

Tsé Bit'aí, or Ship Rock, as it's called in Steck and Roper's 50 Classic Climbs, is located within the sovereign Navajo Nation. It is one of many desert towers with a storied climbing history and through the famous Fred Beckey “absolutely no rock climbing” photo, became an icon defining climbing as counterculture. Its significance within our subculture is, however, dwarfed by the significance this, and other desert towers, hold to the Navajo. In translation, Tsé Bit'aí means

“Winged Rock,” in reference to its origin as the vessel that delivered the Navajo to this world; the story goes on to describe the erosion of the vessel, trapping the people that remained upon it to starve, and their spirits to remain. For fear and respect of the dead, the Navajo never attempted to visit the summit. Because of this spiritual significance, as well as the responsibility potential for injury places on the tribe, climbing has been banned within Navajo Nation borders. There is an ongoing myth that paints this as a flexible rule: however there is no legal way to climb any of these towers without contacting and being granted permission by the Tribal government. Despite this, climbers regularly make ascents of the many towers within Diné Territory. This is intertwined with the countercultural appeal of climbing, which simultaneously can appeal to underserved communities and be weaponized against the same communities. We as climbers must recognize ourselves as people largely privileged by and within the systems that be. When we leverage our anti-establishment ethics against underserved communities, we further entrench the white hegemony that dominates the VOC and outdoor recreation.

Bear’s Lodge (Devils Tower National Monument) is an igneous monolith protruding from the plains in the Black Hills of Wyoming. The whole area is deeply sacred to the multiple nomadic Nations that visit the area, with the tower itself being a focal point of ceremonial gatherings. The name of “Devils Tower” was placed upon Bear’s Lodge in 1830 after a potentially intentional bad translation. This act of renaming served to disconnect the sacred site from the people who remained within its vicinity, as well as tying a spiritually significant site to the Devil, further vilifying the Indigenous people. In 1995, the Park released a climbing management plan that included a voluntary seasonal closure for the month of June in response to joint lobbying by the over two dozen nations that hold the site as sacred. The voluntary closure has proven outdoor recreators unwillingness to honour the wishes of local bands. Even in a compromise favoring recreation, Bear’s Lodge has seen increasing numbers of ascents in June, with nearly four-hundred attempts in June 2023.

Most recently, Australia has seen the proposed closure of sixty-three percent of the crags in Arapiles, a historic climbing area that Alex Honnold compared to the Yosemite of Australia for its significance in Aussie climbing culture. The closure was carried out by Parks Victoria in response to the ‘discovery’ of cultural sites near the climbing areas. This is intertwined with the recent leveraging of power carried out by Indigenous land management groups which has been vocally opposed by the climbers after it led to the closure of many crags at Grampians (another popular and historic climbing area). This friction between climbers and Indigenous groups highlights the entitlement many of us carry when we recreate upon the land we see as public, and has boiled over into vocal hate and racism. Locally, we witness this same discussion regarding the seasonal closure of Pipi7iyekw (Joffre Lakes area), where tourists and recreationists engage in creating myths to invalidate the closures and perpetuate an entitlement that is an extension of a colonial

hegemony and ultimately white supremacist worldview. Respecting the wants and needs of alternative ways of life, especially when it carries no serious impact upon us, is just being a good neighbour.

These are issues I believe we can all comprehend both sides of, the feeling of our (settlers) right to recreate and our (Indigenous Peoples') right to culture and territory. The significance of these sites to Indigenous peoples is not just in spiritual practices, but in cultural survivance, and that is unquestionably greater than any preservation of recreation or 'climbing culture.' But to close off or privatize access does not sit well with me. It is to exercise the same control that has been forced upon us, a colonial way of viewing our own land as our property. We are the stewards of the land, not owners. When these contacts continue to come to inequitable resolutions, whether that be easily ignored seasonal closures or sweeping bans, it only results in tensions building, leading to more conflict and resentment. When we impose our entitlement to recreate as greater than Indigenous title, when we prove our unwillingness to respect bans, we head down a path of opposition rather than understanding. That is a path that begets more conflict. By walking down the path of understanding together, we strengthen a bond built upon mutual appreciation of the land. This can only be achieved by adjusting the way we recreate and treat the land: by offering respect, we will receive it. Bears Ears National Monument – which includes the classic climbing area of Indian Creek – through a joint effort by Local Nations, recreationalists represented by the brand Patagonia, and environmentalists, became a protected area now co-managed by a coalition of local Nations and government land managers. This is a standard to strive for, the intersection of recreation and Indigenous presence and stewardship.

PURSUING OPENNESS THROUGH DECOLONIZATION

By pursuing mutual understanding with Indigenous Nations we as settlers have much to gain. Decolonization, to me, is about uplifting cultures that do not fall within the colonial European hegemony that defines our western world; it is a process of learning, not an end goal of Indigenous superiority. Through this process we build ecological knowledge, holistic wellbeing, and increase inclusivity, ultimately building a socially sustainable future. Moreover, by being critical and shifting our understandings of recreation, by being more respectful when we recreate, it becomes harder for arguments to be made that we are disrespecting sacred sites through recreation, resulting in more conversation and less conflict. Through educating ourselves on alternative philosophies and ways of life, we better equip ourselves to move through the world. Indigenous ways of being encourage self care, pleasure, discipline, community, gratitude, and social responsibility, all concepts we are continuously reminded of the importance of, but fail to engage with. By internalizing Indigenous philosophies we open ourselves a world of holistic care. We discourage the consumerism that is both rampant and spoken down to within outdoors communities. In prioritizing working with the land rather than against it,

we foster more joy within outdoor recreation, creating a more inclusive space than the dominant macho-bro culture. Through decolonization we create a space not only more welcoming to Indigenous peoples, but by extension, Women, the Queer Community, People of Colour and diverse backgrounds: people whose lives are already full of enough struggle to not want to pursue it within the outdoors. If we are to say we are all entitled to use the land, we must allow all to be represented upon it. This goal is achieved through decolonizing outdoor recreation. By decentralizing a conquering attitude towards the land, by practicing gratitude for the experience, not just the summits, and by uplifting joy, we increase safety, preventing undue epic-ing in the quest for the summit. When we train our humility on the land, we become better, kinder, and more open people at home. In looking after ourselves, our own joy and pleasure, we can better deliver those feelings to those around us. Through understanding interconnectedness we build community through reciprocal care, and not just between humans, but building that relationship with nature. There is so much to be gained in pursuing a deep understanding of Indigenous ways of being, and there is so much more to give after reaching that understanding.

EMBRACING OUTDOOR RECREATION AS AN ACT OF RESURGENCE

In holding this principle of reciprocity, what does outdoor recreation offer Indigenous communities? This is a topic I will gladly pontificate endlessly about; in fact, I have in last year's VOC Journal in an essay titled "Radical Resurgence Through Climbing Mountains: The Intersection of Indigeneity and Alpinism." To summarize, I believe Indigenous participation in outdoor recreation creates a space to reconnect with the land, develop new skills as outlets, offer a countercultural path for youth, and ultimately take up space where we feel most connected with each other, our culture, and the land. Through increased representation outdoors we are put in a position to lead by example, to have our voices heard by the other people who use the land. When we learn to embrace the fact that we are not the only people who engage deeply and intimately with the land, we can show others the way to give back. Again this has positive social and ecological consequences. We become more than token minorities to be used to address white guilt, we become heroes in our own stories. We transcend our struggles and traumas and reconnect with that which we have been forcibly removed from, we enact a radical resurgence and imagine a grand future without compromising on our values. When welcomed in spaces, our wisdom may be heard in a way it never was, but to be heard we must also listen. While it is difficult, we will receive much for doing so, and more importantly to listen is our way, and that is something we should hold dear.

THE VOC AS A SITE OF CHANGE

Understanding the application of this broadly, let us now apply it to our community of the VOC and examine who makes up our community, and which

community we are a part of. We are situated in the greater context of UBC, a colonial institution working to engage with the process of decolonization. We have access to a wide breadth of scholars and academics seeking change, and as such we are supported in engaging in these postulations. Moreover, we have a vibrant and diverse Indigenous community two floors away from our clubroom. This is a relationship we can and should continuously nurture, engage with, and learn from, and in return offer what we can – be that our platform, opportunities, or knowledge. Within the VOC, our culture is made up of experienced knowledge holders and eager learners, and we can leverage the skills of both to achieve these greater goals of inclusivity and decolonization. As a club we hold a collective of knowledge, be that of geography and history or hard skills learned on the mountains. This bank of knowledge has largely surrounded a settler worldview and history, but that does not have to be the case. Instead, the knowledge we can pass on while walking on the land can be that of story, of place name, and we can use our role as knowledge holders to uplift Indigenous histories of land, and allow them to become well known. This is, of course, permitting we tell stories we are able to tell, and not encroach where we have no place. Our secondary knowledge of hard skills, of skiing, climbing, backpacking, kayaking, biking are all places where we can directly give back to Indigenous communities by empowering them with our knowledge, should they be wanting. We can be a mode of offering accessible outdoors education – it's already what we do with trips like Glacier School, Rock Party, and Steps to the Neve. Let us offer this knowledge more broadly to these specific communities whose territories we recreate upon. Looking to our learners, allow us to view them as the future, because they are. Let us be responsible and cognizant about what values we pass on to the next generation. The VOC defines the beginning of many peoples' outdoors experience, the start of their relationship with the land – let us foster a relationship of love and care, not opposition and entitlement. We are the second largest club on campus, we have international membership, what we embody stands for something and it sticks with people – let that be something good, formative, and productive. The VOC is a place to learn, and a place to give back, it is a powerful and energetic place. Use that energy for something greater, give back more broadly, engage deeply.

By engaging with my words I hope we have walked a path of learning together, and it is a path that is ongoing, but when the lesson is felt, and our hearts are open, what comes next? What follows is a list of actions I believe is the way forward. This is not a checklist, but a place to begin thought and conversation. My hope is that it is a list that will grow infinitely, and will change as the present demands so long as the heart and intentionality remains. I will leave you with this.

My hands go up to all of you for hearing my words, for greeting me with openness; there is much work to do, and we will do it with joy.

T'oo'yaxs'y 'nisisim. I thank you all.

ACTIONS

Place Name Map

- Utilizing the maps that decorate the main wall in the VOC Clubroom, I would like to engage in a process of unmaking and renaming, highlighting the multiple names of geographic features from the multiple Nations that view it differently.
- This extends into an accessible catalogue of Indigenous place names highlighting the stories behind places as well. Understanding there are some stories we are not able to know, tell, or hold, we will pass on what we have permission to.

Extending this goal to a repository of Indigenous Mountain History

- We already serve as a library to the exploits of settlers recreating upon the land, how can we expand this knowledge to include Indigenous histories?

Indigenous Plant Names and Uses

- Could be an educational trip in pacific spirit or beyond.
- Also contributes to our want to uplift Indigenous knowledge, could we have this in our library as well?

A more comfortable clubroom

- Not decolonization specific, but I believe that by shifting from our sterile overhead light, prefab furniture, and random piles of broken gear and huts stuff, we make the clubroom a more welcoming place.
- Major reorganization of the clubroom.

Trips that feature Indigenous outdoor activities

- Canoeing, snowshoeing, kayaking, lacrosse, what else? Could we go fishing?
- Cold dips, understanding cold water baths have deeply sacred meaning to the local peoples, so not to overstep.

Uplifting Indigenous and Subaltern Voices

- What we repost on social media.
- Who can we give a platform to?

Forming Connections with the Four Nations we frequently recreate upon the territories of

- St'át'imc, Skwxwú7mesh, Lil'wat
- xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam)
- Engaging in a personal relationship, getting coffee and keeping up to dates with events within these nations, seeing where we can contribute.
- Invite community members into our spaces, how can we be more welcoming?

- Free hut access for members of Nations.
- Free educational trips for members of Nations.

Shifting club culture to highlight Indigenous ways of being

- Moving away from a language of opposition and conquest.

Indigenous Mentorship Program

- Teaching hard skills in a one on one environment.
- Create an environment of reciprocal learning as best as we can, while not exoticizing Indigenous knowledge.
- Climbing, Skiing, Backpacking, Kayaking, making it open to application in whatever the individual is interested in.
- Free rentals.
- Mentorship is a wildly important concept in Indigenous and Climbing culture, leverage that.

Facilitating regular discussion

- This is already happening at exec, how can we make this more open to the wider community?
- How can we include more Indigenous people in these conversations?

Supporting organizations that are working towards similar goals

- Raven Trust, ILSA (No longer exists), Indigenous Women Outdoors.
- If we cannot support financially, how can we offer support?

Land Acknowledgments

- Having these as well written signs at huts that motivate thought and reflection.
- Having these regularly done at pre-trips to set a tone of respect when going on the land.

Cooking Indigenous Food for the backcountry

- Bannock (because it's so damn good), Pemmican, etc.

Dive into Indigenous works, read books, listen to words, ongoing engagement with these concepts

- Having Indigenous literature in our library.
- Reading/listening/watching lists.

Doing our best to have trip leaders set a good example both outwardly to the wider community and within the VOC.

